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**SPECIAL
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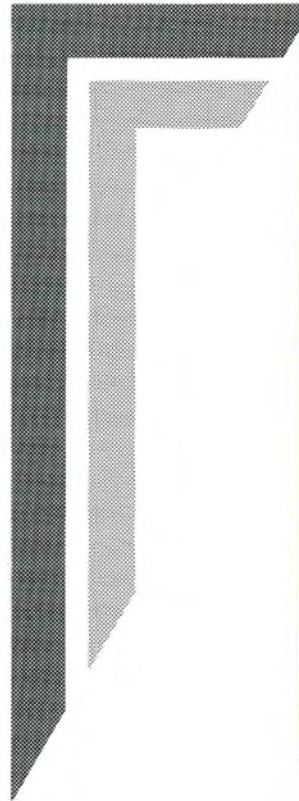
**LITERATURE
AND
CULTURE**

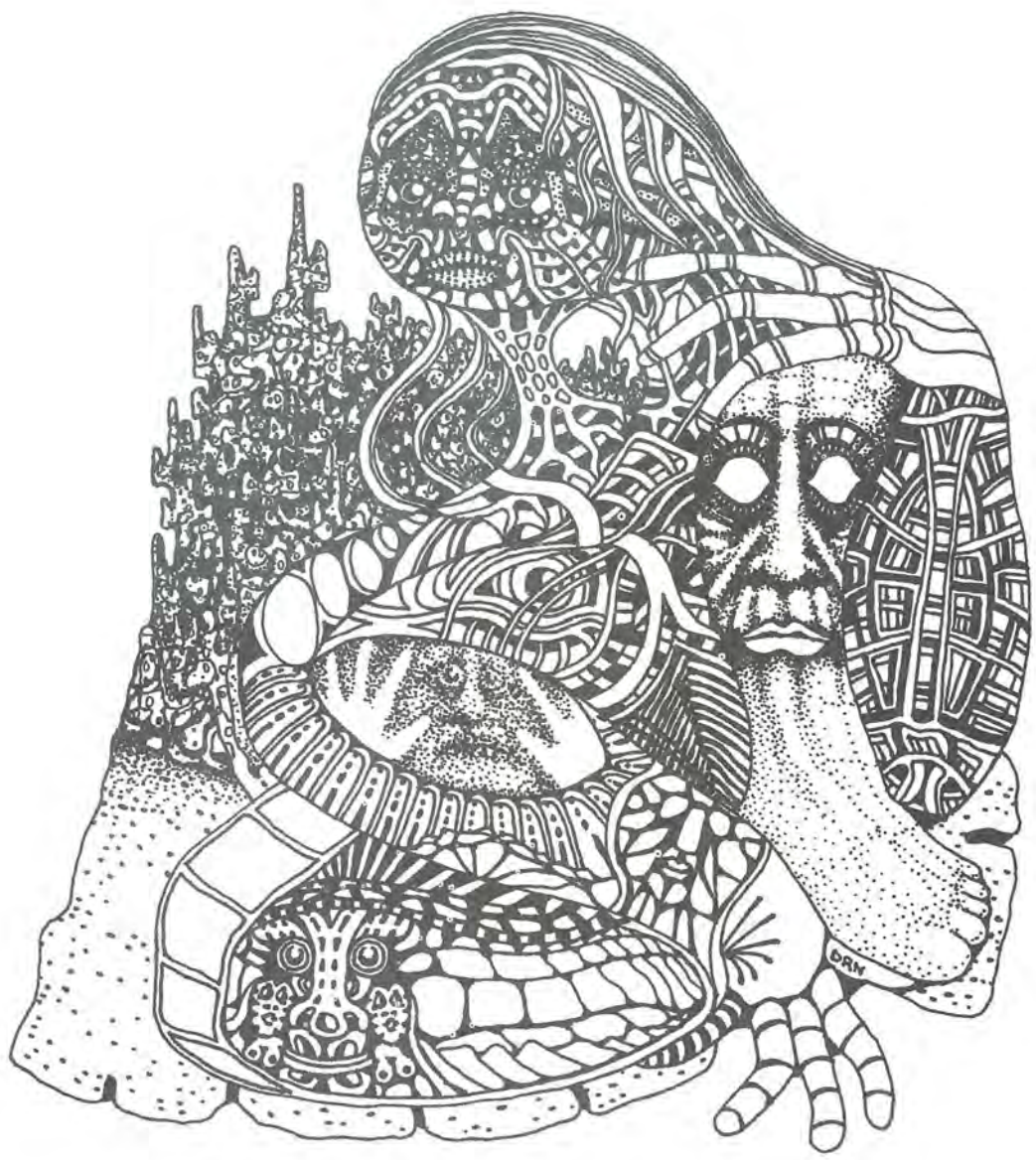
**LITERATURE
AND
SCIENCE**

**KEVIN HART:
NEW
POEMS**



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DANNY CALEGARI

The Intermediary



IT HAS ALL HAPPENED SO STUPIDLY, to my mind: one moment, Meretsky standing there, brushing from off his helmet the chalk-dust which has turned his face and stiff overcoat prematurely grey; suddenly, a shout from a welder a few stories up, a falling steel beam, and Meretsky stretched out on the concrete, his head split cleanly – segmented like a grapefruit. So stupid; there is no sense in feeling shocked or dismayed about it. You take your helmet off for five seconds and someone drops a steel beam on your head.

We none of us knew Meretsky well. I was as close a friend to him as any man on the building site, and I didn't have any strong feelings for him. He was a difficult man; he had to provoke people. No doubt he didn't do it deliberately, but he rubbed people the wrong way. There had been the time he had arrived at work clutching a paper bag full of Dobostorte his wife had made for him. Dobostorte! Hungary's national cake, shaped something like a high-rise apartment block, filled with chocolate cream and topped with a kind of caramel lid, much like an éclair and just as rich. That day it reached forty-three degrees in the shade; out in the sun it must have been nearly sixty. In his perversity Meretsky choked down these cakes one by one, all day long – we laid bets that he wouldn't be able to finish them. He stuffed the cakes into his mouth, crumbs coming out of his nose and caramel and sweat smeared all down his cheeks like plaster eyebrows which had come loose. I suppose it was his favorite, he'd managed somehow to coerce his wife into baking Dobostorte, and he was damned if he wasn't going to eat it all. And of course, as the afternoon lengthened into evening, we all became tired and hungry, drained by the heat. After ridiculing him all day, laugh-

ing at him to his face, we asked Meretsky for some of his Dobostorte. He wouldn't give it up. So the fork-lift driver – an oaf called Brian – took his paper bag away from him, gave him a clip about the ears for good measure, told him he was a “dumb Hungarian bastard”. Meretsky was Russian and everyone knew it, even Brian knew it, but he called him a “dumb Hungarian bastard” all the same. There wasn't much of the Dobostorte left in any case, not enough to go around, so Brian beat Meretsky up, made him promise to bring more tomorrow, sent him home with his ear and his tongue bleeding and a couple of teeth missing.

He never took much of an interest in his work. I asked him what professional work he had done in Russia and he said “construction work, the same as here”, so I suppose that he was merely lazy. His wife had been a professional cook but now she looked after the children. Two children, identical twins – both girls. I have no respect for parents with twins. It seems indecisive somehow, as if they weren't able to decide whether they wanted one child or two. He was always complaining about the twins. They used to run cat hair through his comb to make him think he was going bald, or turn on the washing machine while he was listening to the radio so that it would pick up and amplify the electrical signal. He would complain to his wife and she would tell him off for not being more assertive. Somehow their duplicity always frightened him, he would tell me; they were uncanny, there was some magical quality about them – something primitive or taboo. I used to think it was hilarious – he would work all day and be teased and taunted by a gang of men, then he'd go home and the teasing and the nagging would start up again, this time from a gang of women. On the

train, he used to tell me, he could relax. On the train, to and from work – an hour and a half in each direction from Frankston to the central business district, another fifteen minutes by tram if we were working on a project in St Kilda Road. Once, he told me, his wife wanted to move to Footscray, but he managed to dissuade her. And what would he do on the train? I asked him. Nothing: he would stare out the window at the buildings and the power lines, he would sit with his arms and legs crossed and do nothing. For three hours a day he would turn off, like a television or a toaster whose cord comes unplugged, and stare out the window. Not listening to the people talking in the carriage, if there were some girls discussing their boyfriends or their period cramps, not watching what was going on outside, if there had been a car accident or some kids throwing rocks at the train; just sitting there, so completely disconnected from the world that he couldn't remember the names of even half of the stations that he passed through twice every working day.

He lies there, as dead as the silence that has fallen on the whole crowd. All his workmates silent, stupidly silent – they stand about, they glance furtively at one another, trying desperately to suppress the urge to whisper or giggle, and suddenly I feel a surge of resentment. I resent them all, with their awkward paralysis. I resent Meretsky for being dead and I resent his wife and his daughters, who will be so distraught, so destroyed by something so ordinary. There was Meretsky, he was a husband, a father. It needn't have been him, anyone would have done as well or better, but he had been the arbitrary choice, and now he was arbitrarily dead.

I, of course, will have to be the one to tell the family. And propriety dictates that it must be done in person. Why? I consider it. The last thing these people want is to have to share the nudity of their distress with a complete stranger, and worse, an unsympathetic stranger. Surely it can be done over the telephone? Or by letter? There has been nothing solemn about the death, why the demand for solemnity now? I imagine Mrs Meretsky coming to the door, her daughters chasing after the cat up and down the hall with a pair of scissors. I imagine her, in a blue dress for some reason. A blue dress, with white gloves and a white hat, all dolled up to go out to a restaurant, a Hungarian restaurant. Will she col-

lapse on the floor? Or shriek? Or call me a liar? Or laugh in my face? Or do nothing?

I set off for Flinders Street Station. How will they live, the family? Are the twins at a private school, taking music lessons perhaps – the double bass – a share in a holiday house in Lorne? Did Meretsky have life insurance? A ridiculous question – Meretsky didn't even have a bank account; he received his wages each month in a sealed paper envelope and this envelope arrived, still sealed, in his wife's hot little hand when he returned home that evening. And somehow, during the intervening period, a hundred dollars would disappear from the sealed envelope and find its way into Meretsky's wallet. She never caught him. I still have no idea how he did it; I don't imagine I am likely to discover his secret now. Was he an amateur magician? But he was unnaturally clumsy, he couldn't carry a hod without tipping out a brick or two. By what cunning loophole might this pettifogging hundred dollar bill have achieved its liberation? In the solitude of transit, did the hundred dollar bill, like Meretsky, experience a beatific vision and its fetters melt away like ice-cream? Did this hundred dollar bill, in its elevated state, transcend the boundaries of its paper prison, and make its escape into the sunlit world? What Meretsky spent the money on is of no importance. He had no imagination when it came to spending money. He would lose it on a horse, perhaps, or buy a new pair of overalls. Once he bought me and the crew a few rounds of drinks: Brian got drunk, of course; he started a fight. We were all tossed out of the pub, naturally, and Meretsky was warned not to return. The spending of the money was not important, it was the hiatus, the interlude, the moment of reverie when the bill would pass through his fingers, alone on the train . . .

A woman in a blue dress, white gloves and hat boards the train, seats herself down across the aisle from myself. "So, Meretsky is dead", she urges, in sensuous tones, "Now you have me all to yourself." I am speechless – after all, you'd think she'd call her dead husband by his Christian name. She stands up, crosses the aisle and parks herself on the seat next to me, rubbing herself up against my body like a big blue cat. I clear my throat and glance about the carriage. Somehow, at the last station, all the passengers have managed to disembark without my notice.

ing, I protest to the woman that I am married, and in any case on an important errand from which I must not be distracted, but she will hear none of this. "Can you deny me?" she exclaims, "Will you neglect a widow's cry for solace?" and she drags me by my trouser buttons to the floor. I have her dress down about her ankles: I should have a pair of surgical scissors to cut away her underthings, as doctors will do in the event of a car crash. With a struggle I remove her bra, and put my lips to her nipples which are as hard as buttons. She is soaking wet between her legs. I stare down with a sense of stupefaction, as if I am staring at the Atlantic Ocean. My hand between her thighs which are warm and soft like sticks of freshly baked bread, she gasps and the train comes to a standstill: we are at a new station, some passengers alight and stare incredulously at our horizontal coupling . . .

. . . perhaps Meretsky's reveries were of a different nature. I scold myself for fantasising about his widow: I won't be able to look her in the eyes now without smirking. Will she be so distraught at his death? What can she have seen in him, in the first place? What kind of woman can she be? Meretsky's face swims before my eyes: his skin in crinkly folds about his eyes and his purple lips, his neck bristling with warts, his dull brown hair as flat and as closely cropped as a cricket pitch. Not an attractive face by any means, more like something you would find while rummaging through the rubbish bins out the back of a seafood restaurant. Perhaps she is

equally unattractive and unappealing. A boring couple, with their boring children and their boring cat, and their boring relatives and friends and paper boy – Meretsky's death is probably the most exciting thing to happen to them in years. This will rouse them from their lethargy, revitalise their lives. They will take up golf, perhaps, or hang-gliding.

A fellow approaches me now as I leave the station. He asks me for a couple of dollars for a train fare. I hand him my ticket, and he seems upset. He walks away; I see him a few minutes later coaxing money from another pedestrian: someone should drop a steel beam on *his* head. For another half-hour at least, Meretsky's wife is not a widow, her children are not fatherless – longer, if I should be unable to reach them. The twins will stay home from school for a week, farmed out to relatives perhaps, glad for this unexpected windfall. Then a day in church and the drive out to the cemetery, and the next thing you know Mrs Meretsky has taken to wearing lipstick and those earrings – fake pearls, as big as crocodile tears. She loses a bit of weight, she has her hair done – and suddenly there's a new man in the house, and the twins are spreading mayonnaise all through *his* underwear. Life goes on for everybody, except Meretsky, who didn't know what to do with it anyway.

I stop dead in my tracks. I will have to go back to the building site – I suddenly realise that, on the train, I have lost the piece of paper with Meretsky's address.



Once again, our thanks to readers for their tremendous generosity, which alone keeps us afloat.

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Five Poems
KEVIN HART

THE DISCOVERERS

(René Char)

They came, men from the other side, woods-
men we didn't know, a clan
we never name.
They came in numbers.
They appeared at the line that separates the
cedars
From the old harvest field now watered and
green.
They were hot after their long trek.
Their hats shaded their eyes and they slouched
anyhow.
They saw us and stopped.
Plainly they hadn't expected to find us
On rich dark soil with fields all tightly-ploughed,
Not worrying much who saw us.
We looked up and called them over.

Their spokesman uprooted himself, then
another just as dazed.
We've come, they said, to warn you of a
cyclone, a fearful one.
We don't know any more about it than you,
Only what we've heard in stories and from old
people.
But why are we so strangely happy here, like
children again?

We thanked them and sent them home.
But first they drank, and their hands trembled,
and their eyes
laughed over the rims of cups.
Men of trees and axes, hard men, but poor at
irrigating land,
at building shacks and decorating them,
Men who wouldn't hear of winter gardens and
the husbandry of joy.

Of course, we could have convinced them and
won them over
For a fear of cyclones touches everyone.
And yes, a cyclone was about to hit;
But who'd waste breath by saying so and
upsetting the future?
Where we are, days look after themselves.

THE ROOM

It is my house, and yet one room is locked.
The dark has taken root on all four walls.
It is a room where knots stare out from wood,
A room that turns its back on the whole house.

At night I hear the crickets list their griefs
And let an ancient peace come into me.
Sleep intercepts my prayer, and in the dark
The house turns slowly round its one closed
room.

AFTER SAPPHO

Ah what a star, that boy,
The one who hangs around with you all day,
And gazes into your dreamy eyes,

Half-breathing in that laugh
That goes straight to my head. You know,
I see you on a tram, and I just melt:

'You come here often?' (groan). I'm dumb,
Can't look you in the eye,
Can't stop my heart from pounding:

My stomach tightens, a prickly sweat
Runs down my back;
I blush like – like a stupid kid at school,

And might as well be dead.

THE STORM

1

My garden falls quiet, falls in the darkest of
moods,
Not wanting me around this afternoon.

But as I turn to go
A thrill runs up the leaves' spines
And dirt smells sweet.

And then
The storm strikes:

With claws that slash my window.

2

Ah, let it have that washing on the line

And let it take the shed roof for a trampoline –
What do I care,
So long as I hear water whooping through
drains?

Let it frisk the tree for sparrows and their eggs

And let it pry into each crack in those loose
tiles
And tell me that houses fall:

I need to learn that nothing lasts.
Lord knows,
I have to learn it fresh each year.

3

But it is good to know, also,
That the soul is hail thrashing a stone wall
and not always a lake in moonlight,
And who in the world would show me that?

So let the storm veer out to sea:

Already it has given
more than I wanted of today,
Something I cannot put down

Now or ever.

SEPTEMBER RAIN

I'm fine like this, just fine, as evening comes
Like some sad Blues turned on next door
Played low,

No one about, only
Streetlights ready to welcome it
And rain nestling up to them,
a rain I hadn't heard till now.

It's Ella Fitzgerald singing 'The Blues are
Brewin'

And so the rain comes down, bringing
The evening on its back,

And people quickening along the street,

The day's focus going everywhere.

It's fine, just fine, sitting in my room,
down at the back of the house,
My books at rest for the evening;

And prowling down the hall,
A good long smell of frying onion, meaning
I can stay here some more,
not putting the light on.
The rain now in a great passion about
something,
And Ella getting hard to hear . . .

Outside, things riding on the surface of the past
And inside,

the taste of time upon my lips.
It's fine, just fine.

JUDITH RAPHAEL BUCKRICH

Past, Future and Present

*An interview by Judith Raphael Buckrich
with Sean McMullen and Lucy Sussex
about the present state of Australian science
fiction.*



SEAN McMULLEN AND LUCY SUSSEX are both science fiction (sf) writers of some esteem in Australia, and both have had long and interesting relationships with the sf world. Sean has written many articles about aspects of Australian science fiction which I have occasionally quoted from to supplement the interview. He has also completed an extremely useful bibliography of Australian sf writing from the earliest known work to the almost present. I am much indebted to him and Lucy Sussex for this interview.

We started the conversation by talking about Australian science fiction magazines. Magazines have played a large part in the world of sf everywhere. They have been the springboard for many very famous writers of course, but they have also been the arena in which trends and fashions have developed. They always include criticism, and often letters from readers or 'fans' about the work in the magazine or about another reader's letter. Thus the framework of science fiction culture is continued and changed. Perhaps one could say that in sf the writer and

the reader have a much closer and active relationship than in other literature. The sf magazines we talked about first are not the same as 'fanzines' which are totally made up of letters and criticism. Often sf writers are very actively involved in 'fanzines' and use them as a forum to discuss their concerns about the world and each other's work.

Let's start with the magazines. What are the main magazines around at the moment and what are the differences between them? What's the difference between what they publish and who are the readers?

LS: There are two, *Eidolon* from WA, and *Aurealis* in Melbourne. They're both quarterlies. SMcM: No, *Aurealis* has just gone to twice yearly. Not that it hasn't been successful but it doesn't pay enough for the two editors to go on spending so much time on it.

How long have they been going?

SMcM: Since 1990.

Who edits them?

LS: Stephen Higgins and Dirk Strasser edit *Aurealis* and Richard Scriven, Jonathan Strahan

and Jeremy G. Byrne edit *Eidolon*. *Eidolon* isn't as well distributed. They do a run of about five hundred. *Aurealis* is distributed through Gordon and Gotch so you can get it in the newsagents. *Aurealis* has a grant from Arts Victoria. And *Eidolon* got a small grant from the WA government.

Do you think there's a difference between the two magazines in their approach, or in what they publish?

LS: *Eidolon* is more interesting to look at in terms of design; they've got a more 'up-market' approach in appearance at least. *Aurealis* doesn't quite have that, but I guess that's just a monetary consideration. But I'm going to be an absolute heretic here and say they are very similar apart from that. They publish the same sort of work, the same people. And their audiences overlap.

SMcM: Yes, the differences are rather subtle. *Eidolon* doesn't pay, so most people who send their stories to them aren't trying to make a living out of writing. Whereas people like Greg Egan, who is a full time writer, will often send work to *Aurealis* because it pays. *Aurealis* publishes shorter stories so that the reader is getting value for money, and they publish a wider spread of writers of course. *Eidolon* will publish a twelve-thousand word story which *Aurealis* would never do. The first issues of *Eidolon* were paid for by the editors so they could really do what they wanted to. Whereas *Aurealis* lives 'close to the bone'.

LS: The editors of *Aurealis* are writers whereas the *Eidolon* editors aren't, isn't that right?

SMcM: No, they have written a couple of stories, except Jonathan Strahan. They've been not bad stories. But they're typically like the first stories most people write. Whereas Dirk Strasser has just had a novel published by Pan, and he's sold stories in the States and won a couple of prizes here.

LS: Those are the main sf magazines. There are other places where sf writers can place material here. There is some crossover with the mainstream literary magazines. Rosaleen Love has had work published in *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Arena*. *Australian Short Stories* has published Terry Dowling.

SMcM: Occasionally *The Australian* publishes sf short stories too.

LS: It is quite amazing, by the way, that *Aurealis* and *Eidolon* have lasted so long. Most Australian

sf magazines have died very quickly in the past. What about a magazine like *Sirius* from Canberra which is for sf readers but does not publish stories; what would that have in it?

SMcM: Reviews, interviews, feature articles, letters.

Are there a whole lot of magazines like this?

SMcM: That's the first one. It was inspired by *Mean Streets*. It's supposed to be an sf version of *Mean Streets*, which is very successful.

Mean Streets is about crime fiction?

LS: Yes. I don't know how *Sirius* will go. It seems to me there are rather more readers of crime fiction out there, than science fiction.

SMcM: It's a more concentrated market. People in general will say they like a bit of crime fiction to include in their general reading, but they won't say that about science fiction. I don't have any figures. I used to travel all over Australia installing computers, and I'd always check out the local newsagency. There was always a crime fiction section and science fiction section.

Can we talk a little bit about the history of magazines? Lucy, you've said twice now that magazines have often come to a quick end. Have there been a lot of magazines?

SMcM: Here's the first one of all. Wash your hands after you touch it. It's called *Thrills Incorporated*.

It's got a classic illustration on the front of a King Kong-like monster with a fainted maiden in its arms.

SMcM: It's much worse inside.

Are the stories all Australian?

SMcM: Oh yes, they're all written here. Horrible though they are.

This is fifties is it?

SMcM: It certainly is. Here, just like in the States, it was the artists who determined the content. They would do a stack of illustrations and then the writers would comply.

You said there was a period when there was nothing coming in from the States, so Australian magazines really sold. Why did that happen?

SMcM: Around the 1940s they banned a whole class of imports. This led to a very strange variety of magazines being produced here.

Was there anything being published here before then?

LS: Lots of utopias.

SMcM: Yes, there was one by Earl Cox illustrated by Lionel Lindsay. It was called *Out of the Silence*. It was published in the *Argus* in 1919.

LS: There was a whole tradition of non-realist

writing in the nineteenth century. And it was really only when the 'fan' magazines developed that sf split off and it went much more down-market after that.

SMcM: It's probably important to mention Desmond Winter Hall. He was born in Australia, and migrated to the US. He was Assistant Editor for *Astounding Stories* from 1930 to 1933 in the US. He wrote under the name Ainslee Jenkins and had a few stories published in *Astounding*. He later became editor of *Mademoiselle*.

So there was quite a tradition of Australian stories selling overseas?

SMcM: Yes.

LS: A. Bertram Chandler. When did he start?

SMcM: 1944.

LS: He was the first Australian to make a name for himself substantially overseas, wouldn't you agree?

SMcM: Yes, he was a sea captain from Britain who spent a lot of time in Australia. He wrote tongue-in-cheek submarine warfare stories really. He sold his first stories to *Man Magazine* in the 1940s. He came to Australia in 1956, and he'd sold sixty stories by then. He associated with Australia before that. He's had two hundred and one stories published, and forty-four books.

LS: He was on a ship moving between Australia and Britain all the time before he moved here, that was his milieu. His stories are often about a space captain. His *Rim* books were based on the Pacific rim.

When did the ban on imports finish?

SMcM: The act wasn't repealed till 1958.

And did everything immediately revert to its pre-ban state?

SMcM: Yes, the Australian magazines started to disappear but there was an instantaneous boom for Australian writers in the American magazines. Lee Harding was topping the polls. From 1960 onwards Lee Harding, John Baxter, David Ryan and Damien Broderick all came out. They were the young Turks then. Neville Shute wrote some long fiction then – *On the Beach* was written here, and Chandler started his *Rim* series.

LS: You see until the ban was over, Lee and Damien and all these people wouldn't have been aware of the British and American magazines.

SMcM: I don't know about that. I think they knew about them, but they were a bit diffident

about writing stories for them. But Parnell at *New Worlds* in Britain was quite an advocate for Australian short stories, and published quite a few of them. There were several Australians who made it in the 1950s anyway, Dal Stevens was one.

LS: He's quite well known as a mainstream writer too. He did very fantastical short stories.

SMcM: Yes. A lot like Peter Carey's early fable work. Sold to a lot of American magazines. And Bertram Chandler was selling a story a fortnight at one stage in the fifties. Then there was Norma Hemming. She was a brilliant woman who came to Australia in 1947. She was *Thrills Inc.*'s best writer. Her work was like Ursula LeGuin's early work, very much on reconciliation and things like that, unheard of themes in those days. She died of lung cancer at age thirty-three.

LS: Apart from Chandler, the Australians sold much more in Britain than in America at that time, perhaps the cultures were much closer in those days.

SMcM: Before we get onto that we ought to just mention the men's magazines. From the thirties onwards. *Man Magazine* has published more science fiction than any other magazine, about a hundred and fifty stories over forty years. *Australian Journal* published quite a lot, and the *Bulletin* published quite a lot back in the thirties. The *Bulletin* used to look like the old Gernsbeck magazines in those days, with technical advice and drawings about radios and things like that.

LS: There were many more magazines publishing fiction in those days.

SMcM: Yes, TV really hammered crime and sf. *Can we talk about the content of some of this stuff?*

SMcM: Well most of it was pretty dreadful. Here's an example by Stanford Heinkel (pen name Stanford Hennell), called 'King Rat'. It was published by Transport Press' *Scientific Thrillers* in February 1950. This is the storyline: "Solly Hessem has defrauded five million dollars (it's set in the USA) from honest investors and is having a holiday in a country retreat, accompanied only by his conscience. Doctor Thorpe, a distinguished brain surgeon holidaying nearby, breaks into his house while he is asleep, realises that this is the notorious Solly Hessem, and decides to set up a giant dummy rat in the ceiling to frighten Hessem witless. After that it gets a lot worse, but I shall spare you the details. Finally, on page 38, Hessem screams 'King rat ...

aaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!’ and dies of a heart attack.” Carter Brown’s early attempts, despite his scientific illiteracy, were quite entertaining. He wrote some set piece English country house things, called scientific thrillers, but they were pure crime. Many of the writers were crime or Western hacks who had no science background and it was sort of hopeless.

LS: Theodore Sturgeon said that ninety percent of science fiction was crap, but that ninety percent of anything was crap.

And this is what changed in the sixties too, wasn’t it?

SMcM: Yes, the overseas competition did drag Australia up a bit.

But it wasn’t just that that changed was it? Didn’t the whole literature change in the sixties? The kind of science fiction changed didn’t it?

wave. Some succeeded, some didn’t.

Who were the new wave writers in Australia from the late sixties onwards?

LS: Damien Broderick, I suppose.

SMcM: I disagree with that. Rather, he was intelligent old wave. He wasn’t consciously arty. He wrote conventional science fiction, but he wrote it well for the time. Lee Harding wrote different, and quite interesting stories. It was a period of surrealist science fiction rather than ‘science’ science fiction.

There was a social element, wasn’t there, that hadn’t appeared before?

LS: There had been a social element in the utopias.

SMcM: It was probably a bit more important in the late sixties.

What about the seventies?



LS: Oh yes. When *New Worlds* got a new editor (Michael Moorcock) about 1963, it suddenly became a lot more conspicuously literary. How many Australian’s would have published in the new *New Worlds*?

SMcM: It fell off rather badly. John Baxter and a couple of others got a few published, but they may have even been leftovers from the old *New Worlds*. John Baxter wrote a story, ‘The Apple’, about a huge apple that people were mining. The caterpillars were so big they were catching the miners and eating them. He wrote another one called ‘The Beach’, about people like lemmings on the beach going off and drowning. They were sort of surreal like that. (‘The Apple’ and ‘The Beach’ were both published in *New Writings* 10 [1966] and 13 [1968] respectively.) Some of them made the transition, some of them were very unhappy about making the transition. They tried to ape the conventions of the new

LS: I think the most important event in the seventies was the World SF Convention that happened here in Melbourne in 1975. This introduced quite a few new local writers. Ursula LeGuin attended and managed a workshop; the proceedings were published by Norstrilia Press and re-printed in the U.S. That started the ‘workshop period’, out of which came some anthologies of stories by new writers. It ended in the late seventies. But it took a lot of those writers a long time to get published. They took a while to grow up – and it was hard to get published.

SMcM: The Ditmar prize for Australian sf was established in the late sixties too.

Who established it?

SMcM: A committee that had come out of one of the conventions – Lee Harding was on it. It was named after Ditmar Jensen, who was a very active fan. People said that Australian sf went into a decline after that till the late seventies, but

it kept on growing steadily. A lot of it was sold overseas, like Cherry Wilder's work which was sold in the US. The '75 Convention put the writers that were already doing well, and the new writers, into the spotlight. After '75 sf was really affected by International Women's Year and Australia Council grants. The raised profile and the extra money meant that lots of new magazines appeared. Most of them were shortish in length and duration. But they provided a forum, and a lot of the young writers wrote for them. The ones who had come up in the workshops. Some didn't get beyond that, they just wrote one or two stories and that was that. The dedicated ones would probably have succeeded anyway. It's a lesson – if you protect, you need a certain

him. So for a while Australia had a reputation for producing very feisty well-written criticism. It was very uninhibited, and one of the reasons for that was that none of the critics had met the writers face to face.

It does seem interesting that so much attention was focused on Bangsund's and Bruce Gillespie's magazines, that so many of the best sf writers from LeGuin to Stanislaw Lem wrote to each other through these magazines. But what about the eighties? This was the period when Turner was working as a critic and a writer.

LS: This was a period when you could just about fit everyone who was writing into Bangsund's living room in Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda. In fact they were often all there. Broderick, Har-



amount of competition for the writing to be really good.

LS: I think I should mention here that it was in the late seventies that George Turner decided he ought to write an sf book. He had been a critic for a long time then. Damien Broderick was doing work again then, and John Baxter.

SMcM: David Lake also started to do well, to get onto shortlists for prizes.

Was one of the reasons for this renaissance, the work of people like John Bangsund with his quality fanzine (Australian Science Fiction Review)?

LS: Bangsund's magazine was a forum that had Turner and other people writing for it. It was about critical matters.

SMcM: It got a Hugo nomination in the US for best 'fanzine'.

LS: One of the first things Bangsund did was give George Turner a task to write about criticism. He wrote about the way Bester's work had been approached by critics. Bester was like a god then, and George wrote quite scathingly about

ding and Turner. John Foyster and Paul Collins lived in St Kilda too. Harding went into children's literature via *Displaced Person* (Hyland House 1979, winner of the Alan Marshall Award [re-write of an early short story]). George has kept on; Wynne Whiteford has kept on.

SMcM: There was a real explosion of writers in the eighties.

LS: The '79 workshop where Judy and I met was very successful in terms of the writers it produced. Then Van Ikin put an sf anthology together. Nostralia did a couple of anthologies too. So did Hale and Iremonger and Angus and Robertson.

SMcM: Paul Collins did some. The *Word Series*.

LS: It depended on arts council funding. It really gave people an opportunity to get started. Another thing that happened was that the mainstream gave more of a nod to non-realistic literature. Peter Carey's short stories were published at this time.

And David Ireland did Woman of the Future.

LS: Yes there were quite a few. Victor Kelleher's children's material started appearing too. I don't know how much it was the effect of South American magic realism. It became much more acceptable to write fantasy too. Helen Garner's latest book has an angel in it. There's a cross fertilisation going on. Greg Egan really started then too. He sold some stories to *Interzone* in Britain. Paul Voermans, an old workshopper, got his first novel published by Gollancz in London (*And Disregards The Rest*, 1991). And Rosaleen Love placed a book of short stories with The Women's Press in London (*The Total Devotion Machine*, The Women's Press, 1989). *Why do you think Rosaleen is publishing with a women's press rather than an sf one?*

LS: The Women's Press was willing to publish anthologies of short stories. They did one by Joanna Russ then too.

I'm trying to lead to something here. You (LS) are another sf writer who has been published in the mainstream. It is interesting that the two women sf writers that I know are published more in the mainstream, than the men I know.

LS: It's just that people think that what women sf writers write is less likely to be about monsters and ray guns.

SMcM: I do think that women sf writers are seen differently. Both here and overseas. And the places where they're published here do seem to be different.

LS: Leanne Frahm is published almost entirely in sf magazines. I was told that I wasn't writing sf, that I was writing 'fabulous' fiction, so perhaps we're not really perceived as sf writers. There does seem to be a mainstream acceptability of being a female sf writer. I don't know why, but I'm glad to reap the benefits.

SMcM: On a recent survey they showed that among male sf writers, many more read *Scientific American* and magazines like that, than the women. But on the other hand women are much better read in the literary sense.

LS: It seems to me that sf doesn't have much-cultural legitimacy in Australia.

Why?

SMcM: It's read by a really broad spectrum of people, but it's seen as something that only spotty little boys read. And that's quite in contrast to the stereotype of the readers who read crime fiction – they're just regarded as ordinary.

LS: It seems that people read a lot of sf in their

teens; a lot of writers and critics say that they did. But then they drop out to a certain extent. *Yes, I stopped reading sf when I got out of my twenties. It was as though I'd exhausted a valve. I am enjoying reading it again now.*

LS: I think what we need now is more people writing novels, and we need more crossover between the fantastic and sf. The market needs broadening here, and more needs to be sold overseas too.

Do you think there's a danger of the George Turner syndrome repeating itself? He is now very well known overseas, and not well known at all here.

LS: Yes, well that's already true for Greg Egan too. And Paul Voermans. No one has managed to do both, have they? Be well known here and overseas.

Except Damien Broderick perhaps.

LS: And Peter Carey. Still, I think that the future looks fairly rosy.

SMcM: Yes the market has widened, with all the fantasy and science adventure. The publishers are looking for accessibility and big audience is where we'll be in the future.

LS: What was that old dictum Harry Harrison used to quote? "Sf's no good they'll tell us till we're dead, and if it is, well then it's not sf."

The conversation finished here, a little unsatisfactorily in a way because I would have liked to talk more about science fiction and the mainstream. How they stand with one another. But I realized that was an entirely other topic, and needs yet another article to really do it justice. It is worth noting however that several writers were mentioned who would be regarded as mainstream writers – David Ireland and Peter Carey are perhaps the two most outstanding examples. There are many arguments about the validity of calling them sf writers, and much controversy about what sf really is. Yet I think the most important point about this controversy is around the area of the dismissal of certain work as being sf, and somehow therefore not worth looking at. Many of the writers mentioned in the interview have things to say about Australia, that are well worth looking at, and the fact that they are extrapolating from Australia in the present must surely in itself be of interest. Our greatest fears and hopes are after all bound up with home.

As well, there has been a great development away from the old adventure sort of sf that was

the bread and butter of the magazines to something much more interesting – a genre that involves thinking about science, social change and politics. Areas such as genetics which are highly contentious issues are being looked at very seriously indeed by some writers like George Turner. Of course there is still a lot of work around that is just for fun, and that will always be so because there is a readership for it. It does seem a pity however to put all of sf into a bag and then throw it out. There is such a variety of work, and some of it so pertinent and so well written that it should be taken seriously by any reader who is simply interested in good literature. The short stories and excerpts included here give a little hint of it, and it is to be hoped will encourage readers to look for these writers and some of the others mentioned in this interview.

THE SAD ANTHROPOLOGIST

I walk down a path in the Blue Mountains
Everywhere greenery and grandeur
Cliffs breast oceans of space
like the prows of giant stone ships
I walk down more steps than I'd care to walk
up,
arrive at the Scenic Railway
and gratefully climb aboard,
to be hauled almost vertically
through the living rock
to the top of the cliffs
where I find myself in a queue
leading to the overheated chaos
of a souvenir emporium
From a state of awe I plummet
into teaspoons and boomerangs,
pinball and video machines,
a cafeteria crowded with unhealthy food
that I buy and take outside
to a carpark full of stinking buses
Nearby is a sculptured fountain

Judith Raphael Buckrich is George Turner's biographer. She has written several short stories, essays and pieces for the theatre. Between 1987 and 1990 she lived in Budapest, Hungary where she taught Australian literature at the ELTE University.

*Paul Voermans is an Australian science fiction writer. His two novels are *And Disregards the Rest* and *The Weird Colonial Boy* both published by Gollancz in London. He has also been an active theatre worker.*

*Rosaleen Love has now had two collections of short stories published by The Women's Press, *The Total Devotion Machine* and *Evolution Annie*. She teaches philosophy at Swinburne University.*

Terry Dowling is one of Australia's most well known and prolific science fiction writers. He has won many Ditmar awards, and been nominated for Hugo awards.

*Lucy Sussex is the author of *My Lady Tongue and Other Tales*, the title story of which won a Ditmar. She also writes for children and edits nineteenth century women crime writers.*

representing the Three Sisters of geological
fame
in the moment before they achieved it
The sisters are all European curves;
the full breasts, hips and buttocks
of Norman Lindsay beauties
without the art,
made from some kind of pebble-mix,
fallen away in places
to reveal chicken wire
Water sprays from their wrists
like artery's blood
They strike exaggerated poses
on their chicken wire island
in the chlorinated pool
I take a photograph to remind me
of my embarrassment,
and look around at the work of my species,
so unconsciously juxtaposed
against the work of God
it breaks my heart.

LAUREN WILLIAMS

Starbaby



PERHAPS SHE WAS TO BLAME for what had happened. There were a few small things she never did get round to mentioning in the job interview. It's not supposed to be held against you these days, origins, gender, physical difference. So what if she possessed an interesting number of chromosomes (74) entwined in novel configurations? Or that she was of the sixth sex, though passing as female? Or that she had a father who was extra-terrestrial in origin?

They told her that difference does not entail inequality. That was what attracted her to studying psychology in the first place. Through psychology she thought she might find an answer to her problems, of how to function in this world through which, by accident of fate, she found herself having to move.

Zamia's father. It's his fault too. He dropped in one day from somewhere off the planet and met her various mothers for one mad moment of passion. Then he went back to where he came from. He didn't stick around to take responsibility.

"It was the year of the goat census", one of her mothers used to recount, telepathically, as Zamia played around her woolly legs, "and your birth mother Maria was down in the paddock counting us. 'Bessie', she'd say, ticking us off on her list, 'William, Billie, Betty, Bess, Lizzie, Liz...'" and so on down the set of relatives on the fifth side of your family, the side your birth mother will never mention, not as close relatives, and I can't tell you, Zamia, how much pain that causes us all here in the back paddock."

It was down beyond the lucerne patch that her various mothers met her father who had landed his space craft in a heap of manure and was trying to make first contact with a koala in a gum tree.

"He had long silver boots", Maria told her dearest daughter, "and a way with him that I found hard to resist. And now I've got you, dear little Zamia", she would say, as she put down the angora vest she was knitting, and snuggled her child to her warm and loving breast.

Yes, down on the goat farm Zamia had a happy childhood, and you would be forgiven for thinking that life on the farm might serve as a fitting prelude for entry into her chosen profession of psychologist, providing as it did insight into the workings of the human, animal and alien mind that would one day stand her in good stead.



The Department. You could say they were pretty unenthused when Zamia got the job. It was the boss who took her on, Trojan Brent. Remember the year the astronauts landed on the moon? And there were fears they'd bring some forms of alien germs back with them? Exobiology, that's the study of alien forms of life. The exobiologists said - Hey, perhaps there is alien life out there. You've got to take care, this first time. You can't be sure of anything. Better safe than sorry. So they made the astronauts stay

in quarantine for a week after they got back.

Zamia took the idea one step further. She said, "If there's this exo-biology, you've got to have a corresponding science of the alien mind. Exopsychology. The measure of alien forms of intelligence."

Now you could say that these two subjects are really the study of – nothing – nothing that is known to exist. Short on facts and long on wild imaginings. Where's the science in that?

"The problem with all this Equal Opportunity", said Dougal when Zamia wasn't listening, "letting women into the Department – they expect to be treated as if their mad ideas make sense."

This didn't cut any ice with the boss, Trojan Brent. He was initially very impressed with Zamia. But then, said Dougal, he would be, wouldn't he? Downwind from female pheromones Brent turned all soft and mushy, said Dougal, but Macintyre said Dougal was only rationalising his own lack of success with pheromone output.

"Really think there's life out there?" Brent asked Zamia, sniffing in her every word.

"Little green men with arms that swing to their knees", said Griffin, scratching under his armpits and aiming his monkey impersonation at Marlon.

Marlon twitched and sank low in his chair.

Zamia tried to think her way through the confusion. "Life is here. Why not there?"

"I want to get one thing straight", said Brent, "when you find intelligent life in space, you want to run it through an IQ test?"

"Are you now, or have you ever been a form of life which thinks?" Dougal wiggled a finger in Marlon's direction. Marlon crawled his left hand up his right shirt sleeve, along his shoulder, up to his brow, and dropped his head to meet it.

"That rules you out, Macintyre", said Griffin.

"Or are you", Dougal continued, "merely a form of life which only thinks it thinks?"

Marlon put his head on the table. He twitched some more. (He's the local expert on body language.)

"I think, therefore I think you think? Or in the case of Griffin, I think he doesn't think?" Macintyre laughed wildly.

"Having a good day, Macintyre?" Macintyre has his good days and he has his bad days and

most of the time people tip-toe round him because they can't work out if today's a good day or a bad day and better be safe.

"Drop on your head, Dougal."

"Have a bad day."

Zamia thought them all rather critical. Picky. Out to get her. Disinclined to over-exert themselves. Entrenched in their attitudes. Unwilling to shift their paradigms. High arousal thresholds. Or low ones. Hard to tell with Marlon. "The way I see it", she said, "the people out in space, they'll either have more brains than us, or less."

"You'll either be right or wrong", said Macintyre.

"If you're wrong, you'll look very, very silly", said Griffin.

"But if you're right, we'll look good. Win-win situation", said Brent. They voted in favor because Brent told them they had to.

The space guys went out into space, and came back and invented the teflon frypan. That was what Brent wanted, a spin-off into merchandising. The teflon saucepan of psychology. A nice little earner so he wouldn't have to worry so much about balancing the Department's books.

Poor Zamia. She was filled with the desire to find her father. It was a cliché of her trade, the ancient Oedipal yearning, that element of the human condition inherited from her birth mother Maria. "Daddy, where are you?" Zamia asked, "I never did get to know you."

She knew her birth mothers Maria the human, and Tizzie the goat, and Blinkie the koala, and she knew there was a gene or two from the eucalyptus tree in her somewhere, slotted in for its health-giving properties. (I should mention one thing she deduced about her father, was that he came from a planet where reproduction through do-it-yourself genetic engineering is the norm, with a *laissez-faire* attitude to making the best of whatever materials are closest to hand, and a *jouissance* and devil-may-care lack of concern for potential outcomes.)

Zamia took herself off to see the guys in radio-astronomy, the people who were sending out messages to the stars.

Minutes of Meeting:

1. They said they knew nothing at all about the subject.

Head of Department's reply: So what else is new?

2. They thought it would make them look stupid, joining in the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence.

Reply: Stupid is what we look already without even trying.

3. They ask, "What's in it for us?"

Reply: Ask not what psychology can do for you, ask what you can do for psychology.

4. They think it is New Age crap.

Reply: There's money in New Age crap.

5. They said the search for extra-terrestrial is unethical. Why go out there, when so many of this world's poor and starving have not a clue as to their own IQ?

Reply: That's a substantive ethical question. Shunt it across to Ethics Committee. Bound to hear back sometime, long after the work is finished.

6. They said that they came here to teach students, not to learn new things.

Action: Shape up or ship out.



THE SEARCH FOR EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL life – they do it in gaps of telescope time between the end of one experiment and the beginning of the next. They leap in and beam their messages into space. They think that if there is intelligent life out there it will reply.

It took a person like Zamia to work out why they weren't getting any answers. It's simple, once you see it. The message content was – mathematics! Hopeless mix of message with electronic medium! Messengers in this case hopelessly besotted with maths, so assume alien

life forms will be, too! What if, though, our higher maths meets their dumb bunny? Their poet laureate? Or their chief globmliz-herd? Message never gets through. 'I speak, you'd better listen', that was the premise of the search program. They should have known better. Shout too loud and people just switch you off.

"Nobody has to listen to what we say", said Zamia. "Got to lure them in. Bait the hook."

"Oh yeah", said Dougal. "You know what happens to bait? It gets eaten."

Zamia knew that her father had once been curious enough to come as far as Earth. Was it the call of Tizzie the goat? Maria her birth mother? The leaf of the eucalyptus tree? What made him come? What made him leave so soon? (But that was another question.)

Genes! That was it! Most of her parents were forms of terrestrial life. She needed the guys from biology more than she needed the guys from radio-astronomy.

That's where I come in, me, Jerry from genetic engineering. I got to know the nature of her quest. Perhaps, then, it was me. I was the one to blame.

She came to me because she knew that filling the ether with maths was not the answer. The guys from radio-astronomy assumed that life out there would be like them. She knew it was going to be more like her. She told me about her various mothers, and how her father had once found all five of them attractive, for various reasons which she (and I) could only dimly appreciate. The goat in her said, "What did he ever see in that koala?" while the gum leaf genes that coursed in the green-tinged blood through her veins, replied "Everything". The liver fluke was, we agreed, a bit of a mistake, an inhabitant of the goat that got accidentally included. Her birth mother Maria was chosen for her gentle loving nature, and the way she had with goats.

We would send out a call from all of them, a siren call to an interplanetary Odysseus, a sigh of longing from the good days now long gone, a message from deep within the DNA.

In between the radio-astronomers' signals we slipped our electronic version of the call of the wild. Genomic sequences. A whiff of a gum leaf, a slither of a liver fluke, a bleat of a goat, a mother's smile, a koala's furry embrace.

Time went by.

One day we got an answer.

Zamia: her version . . .

They gave me the old portable out the back of radio-astronomy near the reception dish. Far from the hurly-burly of the Department. Bliss.

One day I got an answer to my message. Unanticipated, this one. It came in the form of a small, black, extra-terrestrial goat which stuck its nose around the shed door, and looked at me with grey inquiring eyes.

How did I know the goat was not of this world? I didn't, not at first.

I did ask myself how the goat got there in the middle of the city. Didn't mean the goat came from outer space. Rummaging through the rubbish bin, trying to eat the decoder. Archetypal goat-like behavior. It stayed for a few days, then disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. Just as I was beginning to think I'd have to take it back to my mother's place, where a black goat of uncertain pedigree would not be very welcome.

It was the beginning of the visitations.

Another day I arrived to find a large black slimy flat thing oozing blood across the floor. It writhed for a while around the floor until I stamped on it. Shouldn't have done that. Oooh, no! After I scraped it off my boot it was impossible to work out what species of liver fluke it might be, or where it might have come from.

It was when the giant white koala turned up in the gum tree over the shed that I began to see the connections. These animals were coming in response to my call. These visitors were not of this earth.

Of course I couldn't keep the koala's visit a secret, even if I'd tried. It was the size of a small polar bear, doing its best, as I now realise, to make contact. From time to time it looked deep into my eyes, and emitted grunts which varied in pace and pitch. Jerry was thrilled to bits. "A new species, Zamia! We can name it after you!" Jerry's a nice guy, but he often does miss the point. I was not in it for the glory. It was my father I was after.

Trojan Brent came down to have a look. "I think it's trying to tell us something", I confided. Should have known better.

"Been over-doing it, have you?" came his sharp reply. How I wished I'd introduced him to the goat and the liver fluke!

The koala broke off a branch and stuffed the whole thing in its mouth.

The fire-brigade came, and the koala squad, and the RSPCA, and a cherry-picker, but by the time they'd worked out a plan of action the koala had given up. It dropped out of the tree, ran around a corner, and vanished from sight.

My plan, I was beginning to see, was fundamentally flawed. The problem with intelligent life in space, and it must be intelligent to a certain extent to know to come in answer to my call, was that there was really no way of making much in the way of meaningful contact, once it arrived. Let alone run a battery of IQ tests.

Then, I had to remind myself, my research bid was not the real object of the exercise. All the stuff on IQ was just a means to an end. If these replies had come to my message, my father must be getting close. All I had to do was watch and wait. The visitations weren't my problem.

THAT'S THE WAY THINGS WERE, for a while, in the gap between one thing happening and the next. It was a tranquil lull before the storm, I know that now. It was the last of the good times.

We always lunched together on Tuesdays in the Department. A bring-your-own sandwich affair, and if the day was sunny we went out to a table down near the shed, under the gum tree to which my koala friend had come. Spring was in the air, with that warm sense of the vibrant possibilities of life's renewal.



My father chose to announce his coming.

The door of my shed swung open. A small black goat bounded out and leaped around the grass. It looked deep into my eyes. I knew we just had to be related.

Then a large white koala the size of a small polar bear scuttled out and up the tree above our heads.

Marlon freaked. He can't stand sudden changes to his routine.

A giant liver fluke poked its top half round the door. With delicate twitches of its pointy end bit it seemed to be sniffing the air. It emerged, leading a procession of other giant liver flukes out the door. They didn't slither. They stood on their back pointy bits and hobbled and hopped out towards us. The sun made them shrivel up some, so they moved into the shade just in front of Griffin. There they stood, swaying gently, looking hungrily in the direction of his liver.

Griffin moaned. Marlon just kept twitching. Macintyre picked up a stick.

"I tried to tell you", I wailed, "but nobody would listen!"

Griffin edged slowly backwards, "I don't like their body language", he said through gritted teeth. The liver flukes hopped after him. Griffin whimpered.

Macintyre went hyper-maniac. He leapt up on the table, waving his stick in the air. "Up the tree", he yelled. "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

"You can't just say kill, kill, kill", Brent said to Macintyre. "It's bigger than you are."

"Oh", said Macintyre, freezing into catatonic inactivity, his arms raised on high.

"You can't just say kill, kill, kill", said Dougal. "Koalas are a protected species."

"What is all that wildlife doing in your shed?" Brent asked.

"I didn't put it there", I said. "It wasn't me. It came of its own free will."

Dougal poked one of the liver flukes. The whole row bent and swayed their points in his direction.

"Dougal, do you think that's wise?" Brent asked.

Then it happened. The moment I'd been waiting for. There was a puff of smoke and a flash of lights and a tall dark handsome man came out of the shed. He wore long silver boots, and had a way with him that the other members of the Department would soon find hard to resist. I knew it had to be my father.

There we stood, in the spring sunshine, a bunch of psychologists and an odd job-lot of aliens.

"I think they are visitors from outer space", I

explained.

"Crap", said Dougal.

My father extended a long silver tail and wrapped it round Dougal's neck, in what I now know is a mode of friendly greeting. "Grunchhh", croaked Dougal.

"Nobody ever pays any attention to anything I say", I said, extending an anxious hand to feel the base of my spine.

My father withdrew his tail and curled it softly round his boots.

"I don't like his body language", Griffin muttered. "Tail down. Bad sign in a dog."

Father raised his tail in the air and swung it round his head.

"What's that mean?" asked Brent.

It was Marlon's turn to get the full tail treatment. He gurgled softly and turned limp and white.

Brent asserted control. "I am the professor of psychology", he said. "I say, I do admire that tail of yours."

Father slithered his tail round behind Brent and squirmed it up his body, pinioning his arms. Brent opened his mouth to protest and Zip! my father slid his slinky tail into Brent's mouth, and, as far as I could judge, a fair way down his throat.

Brent turned green and gagging.

"Get away from me", moaned Griffin. "Get away!"

Macintyre was frozen in mid-air. The koala adjusted its position in the tree to take a closer look.

Marlon twitched. Brent gurgled.

It was the tail that got them all, in the end. My father never spoke. He just did what he came to do. A scraping from the inside of the mouth of the koala. A touch of slime from the outer coating of the liver fluke. Some crushed gum leaves. A drop of goat's sweat. Then the serious business began.

Incantations. Strange music of the spheres. Trance states induced in everyone except me. A previously unheard of use for a long silver tail. I watched the ceremony. It was a simple impregnation ritual, the way they do it on my father's planet. Weird way of getting pregnant, but then that's other cultures for you.

Now they're all expecting – Brent and Griffin, Dougal, Macintyre and Marlon. All the men are pregnant. That's my father. Fast, efficient, single-

minded about the purpose of his travels. He came, he saw, he fertilised, he left.

You might think that if a man found he was pregnant to an alien, he might seek termination, but no. They've changed, the men in my department, that's all I can say. Griffin has gone quite soft. Dougal has taken up knitting. They have entered a state of expectant watchfulness and waiting.

Of course, it didn't happen to me. The taboo against incest is a cosmic universal.

Now the entire department is expecting my father's children. Soon I shall have some quite close relations living nearby. Maternity leave – they'll have to shell out for it this year. And it's stopped Dougal fussing about Equal Opportunity, now he's had the opportunity to get pregnant.

It's not every day that entirely new experimental subjects come the way of a bunch of psychologists. They are going to make the most of it. Perhaps the world is not yet ready to believe that aliens caused the problem, but four male psychologists in an advanced state of pregnancy is unusual. There's plenty of scope for ground-

breaking work.

They plan a creche of their own, and there will be a proper integration of workplace and domestic responsibilities.

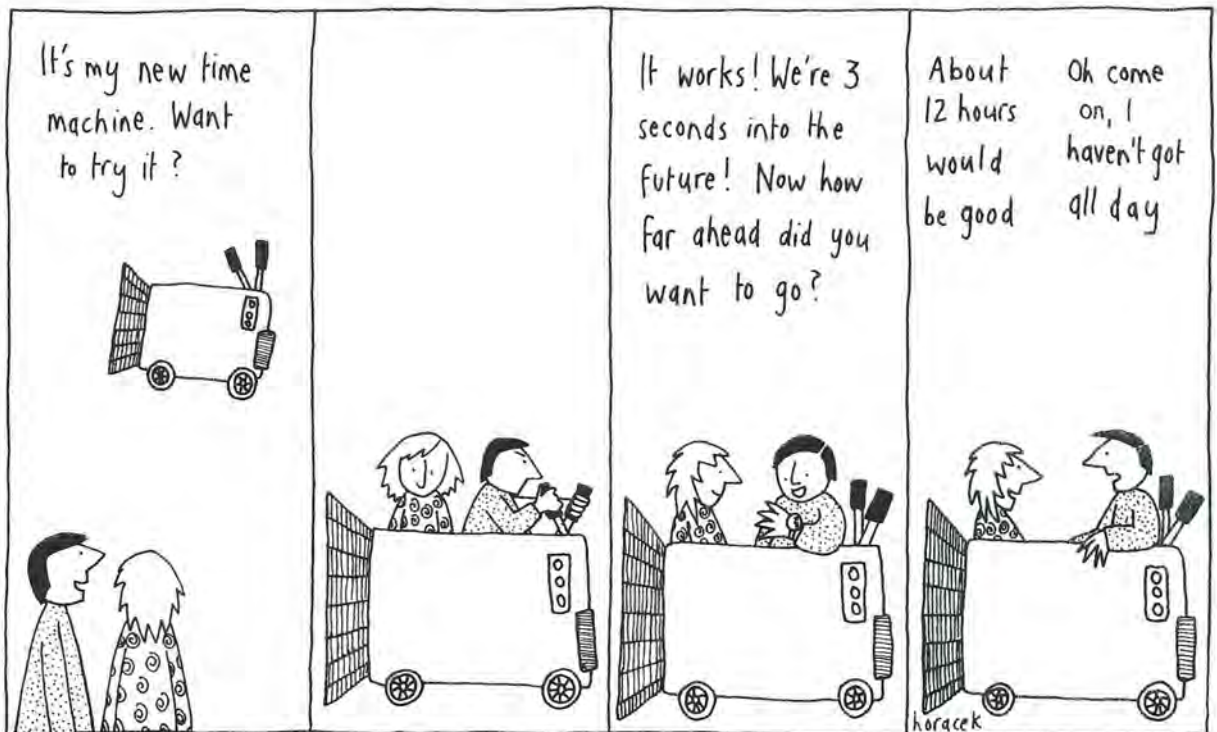
Brent has his way of coping with disaster. "Psychology meets biology!" he announces, "Genetic engineering for the bigger better brain! Mind control! Take this sequence here, the tailbone, add in a double dose of growth hormone from there, the liver fluke, and there you have it! The bigger skull! To house the bigger brain! The end of human imperfections! *Homo-super-sapiens.*"

What about me, in all this change? Alas, I did not escape unscathed.

In vain I protest my innocence. I am held captive in the creche. They do not lock me in. They know they have me hooked, with responsibility towards my unborn siblings. They have counted on the call of the genes, the power of the DNA. I cannot leave. I must stay.

It marked the end of my brilliant career. One man's topic of research is another person's life.

Psychology has ruined my life.



LUCY SUSSEX

The Lottery



IMAGINE A SMALL BOAT on a prehistoric sea. Imagine also, within it: a complex sculpture, part metal, part translucent scoops and tubing, occupying the prow; amidships, equipment and supplies, including a diving suit of a size to fit a small adult of the species *homo sapiens*; and finally in the stern the time-traveller herself. She leans back idly, one hand on the tiller, as the boat moves through the shallow waters off the ancient continent *Laurentia*.

The motor of the craft seems shockingly loud. There are few of the usual sea sounds here – no gull cries, for the evolution of birds, let alone their ancestors the dinosaurs, and before them the reptiles, is millions of years in the future. The coastline behind the traveller is bare rock, in a state of volcanic flux. The only life on earth is below the water; and it is mute.

The traveller muses on naming. Here she is, over five hundred million years in her planet's past, and the geological name for this era is the Upper Cambrian, that is literally, Upper Welsh, from the location of the first rocks from this time to be scientifically described by her species. Thus an age predating humans, predating language, received the Latinised name of ancient Wales. And several stratas above it, she recalls, is the Devonian, named for rocks in Devon, England.

She checks her location, sweating a little in the hot sun. Currently she is travelling above what will be the Rocky Mountains, but which now are submerged in a tropical sea, close to the equator of Cambrian earth. She glances around, looking for a line of breaking waves, and finds it – a reef. Her destination is close.

She approaches the whitecaps, and at a break in the reef edges her craft out of the wide lagoon and through to the open sea. Puttering cautiously along parallel to the waveline she

scans the dark, distant shore, then consults her maps and instruments again. Finally satisfied, she stops the motor, and heaves the anchor overboard.

The boat rests, rocking slightly, the only sound the soft plashing of the waves. The traveller stretches, then moves towards the machine in the prow. As she does so, a splash, small, very close, makes her glance over the side of the craft.

What she sees is a small bug-eyed creature, the size and roughly the shape of a mouse, floating on its back just below the surface. "*Sarotrocerus*", she breathes, "*brushtail*" – for this fossil was named for its long tail, which ends in a cluster of spines. As she watches, it flicks the tail, darting under the boat in pursuit of some smaller prey.

She glances longingly at her diving gear for a moment, but returns to the scoops and tubing of the machine. Finally satisfied all is in working order, she opens the drawstrings of a bag, to reveal a host of small red balls, lotto balls, but



not marked with numbers. Rather, each bears a pictograph in black, silhouettes of strange, tiny creatures. She takes a handful, three balls full, which she inspects for a moment, rolling them around her palm. "*Waptia*", she says aloud. "*Opabinia. Wiwaxia.*" All three are named in Amerindian, from the names of mountains near

where their remains were excavated. She dribbles these balls into the machine, then lucky dips in the bag, her hand emerging with a ball showing a spiky monster. She grins. "Sanctacaris", she says. "Santa Claws", for this animal was named by a paleontologist with a sense of humor.

When all the balls are in the machine, each a representation and thus representative of the life forms on Cambrian earth, she hunkers back for a moment. She is about to replicate an experiment that took place on this planet over five hundred million years, in which a cosmic lottery, involving movements of continents, glaciation, and meteorites, determined which species would be fruitful and multiply, and which would decline and ultimately become extinct.

Imagine the tree of life, although the evolution of a tree is millions of years in the future. No, imagine instead the sponges and algae growing on the ocean floor beneath the traveller. They branch upwards from a single stem, broad at the base, then tapering towards a single leaf at the apex. There is more genetic diversity, more branches on the evolutionary tree in the water beneath the boat, than there is on the whole of the traveller's earth, with its birds, fishes, insects, plants, fungi, Uncle Tom Cobley and all. But with time, branches die, the index of possibilities narrows, trilobites vanish, so do dinosaurs, until, five hundred and thirty million years later, the range of species on the planet represents only a bare handful of those living and breeding in the Paleozoic era, the age of the oldest life on earth.

In the Upper Cambrian, could the outcome of the Cosmic Lotto be predicted? The traveller intends to find out, by asking her assemblage of balls and scoops: which species will dominate the future earth?

THE FIRST STAGE IS to discover who will survive the Cambrian era. She moves levers, presses buttons, and the machine hums into action, rattling the balls through the tubes, sorting and selecting, by chance, naturally. Balls are spat out, to go into the draw for the next evolutionary round. She catches them in her hand: Sanctacaris. Ottoia, a worm. But little Sarcotrocerus, the aquatic mouse with the spiky tail, fails to emerge.

With a feeling of regret at the loss of that happy swimmer, she moves on to the next round. Two hundred million years ago, and the

Paleozoic era is ending, along with ninety-five percent of the species on earth. There is only a handful of balls still in the game. Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous eras pass, along with dinosaurs, woolly mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers. She has, in her palm, all the Cambrian ancestors of the life existing on her version of earth, the homo sapiens' earth.



"Who will inherit?" she asks, and puts the balls through again. Only one emerges, and she stares at the form depicted on it, before voicing: "Pikaia".

Her ancestor, her humble ancestor. She did not really expect a bizarre Cambrian alternative, like Opabinia – five eyes, and a frontal nozzle like the hose of a vacuum cleaner, except with fangs – but to find Lady Luck repeating herself, replicating the Cosmic Lotto, slightly shocks her. But she soon recovers. Before travelling back in time to her own era she has other work to do.

It is pleasant work, she thinks, as she dons her diving gear. She sits on the side of the boat for a moment, watching the sunlight on the waves. Then she dives down, following the anchor chain to the ocean floor. The reef is atop a submarine escarpment, and its vertical walls, some two hundred metres in height, are adorned with brightly colored sponges and algae, an enchanted garden. Something seems missing and she realises it is the fishes, for vertebrates have yet to evolve. But there is plenty of movement, though tiny, for most life on this earth is no longer than a few centimetres.

Most life, but not all. Something nuzzles her leg, and she twists around, thinking of sharks, only to see staring at her malevolently the predator Anomalocaris, at a metre long the largest Cambrian animal. Imagine utter weirdness, odd elements of other creatures jumbled together into an alien whole: a swimmer like a ray, but

with compound, stalked eyes, armed with huge spiny claws, above a circular mouth lined with teeth, a veritable *vagina dentatis*.

It circles her, claws opening and closing, and worse, that mouth too contracting, as if it munches her already. She turns too, facing the menace, while at the same time trying to gauge whether it is alone, or hunts in company. One claw grabs at her – she dodges behind the anchor chain, and *Anomalocaris* clasps metal for the first and last time.

It lunges at her again, and she feints with one arm, the claws reaching up to rend and tear her unprotected hand. *Now* she kicks out, her foot striking the monster in its abdomen. The force of the blow tumbles it head over tail, almost down to the seabed, mantle flapping wildly. Then stabilising, *Anomalocaris* beats a hasty retreat – it is a coward.

Wary of another *Anomalocaris*, she gazes around. The water is very clear and she sees that the ocean floor teems with life. She recognises *Opabinia*, like a minute nightmare, and others, mostly suggesting ragged claws in form. She swims above them, for a closer look, and abruptly encounters a troupe of *Marella*, creatures like a cross between a trilobite and a lace doily, balancing gracefully on their thin, delicate legs, feelers and long feathery gills moving slowly, possibly even rhythmically, in the ocean current. They appear to be dancing; but as she approaches they flee, as if she were a giant *Anomalocaris*.

She sighs, glances at her watch, then begins to search the ocean floor for a particular trail. The mud here is unstable, prone to slides, so she digs carefully. Her instructions were, even if her ball game replicated the Cosmic Lotto result – Vertebrates rule, OK? – to cheat, make *quite sure*. Thus she seeks her distant ancestors in the Cambrian mud. They are not numerous, but after an hour's work, her collecting jar is full.

Back in the boat, she sets her specimens carefully in the shade of the lotto machine, and starts the motor again. The day is beginning to wane, and as she continues down the coast, leaving the reef behind, heavy clouds appear, foreboding prehistoric rain. She steers tensely, checking her watch often. Eventually, a faint disturbance passes through the water. The boat pitches, and an instrument by her foot beeps, displaying a

red light. She grimaces at these signs of a minor earthquake, recalling the sloping ocean floor back at her collecting site. A mudslide has caught the weird, elegant creatures, carrying them in a roiling cloud down to deeper, oxygen-poor water. There, the small, complex bodies, by a million to one chance, will be preserved, soft and hard parts almost intact, within the geologist's delight her species calls the Burgess Shale.

She relaxes a little as the boat travels further south, into a region of *Laurentia* more geologically sound. It is almost dusk when she stops the boat again, and taking the jar, dives down to the Cambrian sea floor for the last time. This habitat is less densely populated; there are no *Anomalocaris*, nor *Santa Claws*, in fact hardly any predators at all. An ideal location, then, to release an inoffensive herbivore.

She opens the jar, and shakes her specimens out. The meek will inherit the earth – and you could hardly get anything meeker than *Pikaia*. Two creatures like fat slugs fall onto the ocean floor and immediately burrow into the mud. There is nothing distinguished or distinctive about them, except that down their backs runs the notochord, the forerunner of the spine. *Pikaia* are the ancestral vertebrates.

"So long Adam", she mouths. "So long Eve."

In the boat again, she removes her diving gear, and makes her last Cambrian journey, back to the machine that carried her to this ancient era. The moon rises, and she sees that its face, five hundred and thirty million years ago, is almost smooth and youthful, compared with the meteor-pitted visage of her day. That is one wonder, but another is that, as the sea darkens, phosphorescence appears, patterns of light dancing on the water. She watches, longing for the sight of *Sarotrocerus*, surfing on the gleaming waves, then becomes intent on the beacon of her machine, safe where she left it on the prehistoric beach.

She steers towards it, and as she does the storm breaks, and warm rain cascades over her. With the touch of the drops, something within her breaks. Rain and tears run down her face, as she weeps for the creatures she has glimpsed: *Sarotrocerus*, the agile swimmer, *Marella* the dancer, even *Anomalocaris*, beautiful, wonderful, but all unfortunately also-rans in the deadly game of life.

George Turner - One of Australia's Best Kept Secrets



I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON George Turner's biography since the beginning of 1992. He has had a strange and complex life, and since the 1960s has possibly been the greatest influence on Australian science fiction as a critic, essayist and writer. For those not familiar with his work, here is a little potted history including a few details of his life by way of explanation. It would be impossible to deal with all of his work in a few thousand words, so I will stick to his relationship to the great love of his life - science fiction. Like all great loves it is full of contradictions and marked by periods of neglect, partial attention and total passion.

His love of science fiction began, he says, when his father read and re-read *Alice in Wonderland* to him at the age of three. Some cousins remember him as being able to recite whole passages of it. George Turner remembers it as a foundation for everything to come. It is undoubtedly a remarkable, fantastic and complex work of the kind that many science fiction readers like, though this was the first time I'd ever heard of a three-year-old appreciating it.

When he was eight or nine, he started visiting one of his aunt's houses and there found the works of the great founders of modern science fiction - H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. After that there was no stopping young George who started to buy copies of *Amazing Stories* as soon as they arrived from the US at the newsagents opposite St Paul's Cathedral in Swanston Street, where he was a not-so-angelic choirboy. He was addicted to these, and would often take the risk of stealing money from wealthier relatives to buy them, for which he was regularly punished by his mother. (She was to play quite a part in his work in another way.)

Although he was already writing from the

time he was ten - or even younger - he did not send anything to a publisher till he was over forty. This was a novel called *Young Man of Talent* and it was immediately accepted by Cassell and published in 1959. It was a sort of war novel, but Turner has always claimed that the war was just a setting, that it could have taken place anywhere, that it was about people and their effect on one another at times of stress. In fact all of Turner's novels, mainstream and science fiction, are about people, society and politics. The degree to which one or other of these elements is emphasised is all that differs from one book to another.

Yet there was a great time gap between his mainstream writing and the science fiction. He wrote six mainstream novels between 1959 and 1968. For one of these, *The Cupboard Under the Stairs*, he received a joint Miles Franklin Award. His last mainstream novel was the much underrated *Transit of Cassidy* which he finished in 1968 or 1969, but which was not published till 1978, just after his first science fiction novel, *Beloved Son*.

The story of the intervening ten years is of utmost importance. In 1967 George Turner met John Bangsund who was publishing *Australian Science Fiction Review* (ASFR), a 'fanzine' of the better variety. 'Fanzines', for those uninitiated into the world of science fiction fandom is a magazine for fans. These fans are not quite the same as the better known fans of film and rock and roll stars. They worship not just individual writers, but the genre. The 'fanzines' are usually put together by these fans and they also contribute to them in the way of book reviews, letters and a kind of international information exchange about congresses and all the other paraphernalia of science fiction culture. John

Bangsund's fanzine was a little more serious than most and attracted letters and comments from the writers themselves. Eventually *ASFR* was taken very seriously indeed, and George Turner helped to make this happen.

Among his first contributions was an article called 'The Double Standard' in the June 1967 edition of *ASFR*. With little experience of criticism he confidently took to task the reviewers of science fiction about the quality of their reviewing. This was a subject he would continue to tackle for the rest of his life. In this article he set out to delineate the differences between reviewing and criticism, and to show by example how a book should be reviewed and why those who had reviewed it before had done it badly.

The article is typical of the no-nonsense style Turner would become famous for in the world of reviewing and criticism. He had spent a considerable amount of time discussing it with John Bangsund who had tried to suggest to Turner that there were 'books' and there was 'literature', and that a lot of science fiction was not 'literature'. Turner's reaction was that, "all books are literature – good literature or bad literature". He then went on to debunk a book that had been held sacred in the annals of science fiction – Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*. It took some courage to do this and he instantly gained a reputation for arrogance and ascerbity that has lasted to this day, probably somewhat unjustly, as Turner has certainly mellowed, especially after he started writing science fiction himself. He concluded that first essay thus – and set the scene for the following ten years at least:

It remains only to consider the position of *The Demolished Man* in the sf canon, and the conclusions are not sweet.

The book won a Hugo. One can only surmise that either the year was a poor one for novels, or that the judges were hypnotized by the snowstorm of style and movement. The book is a triumph of style over content and inconsistency. It was, unfortunately, the kind of book which encourages serious critics to regard sf as irresponsible and unimportant, and its readers as sadly lacking in discernment.

More deadly is the thought that readers liked it so well, and that editors exist to give

readers what they demand. If this is a sample of what they demand, then sf will be, for the majority, never more than a titillation of the emotions. While readers demand, writers must supply, all but the few who say 'to hell with the readers' and strike out in the direction of quality at all costs.

I have quoted this at length because I believe it reveals the idea that Turner had of himself, the kind of role he wanted to be seen as playing – the no-nonsense critic who didn't give a damn. Of course it is not altogether true that he did not care. Years later he was to come to regret not the strong criticism, but the style of it.

If he has mellowed, he has science fiction to thank for it to a degree, because despite its position close to the earth, it is quite accepting of difficult characters, and by its nature tempts you to participate in its unique 'clubiness'. Turner did get very involved in the subculture of science fiction, and mixed with more people than he had done in his whole (sober) life. (He

"Even in the army when most men found themselves opening up to a degree previously unheard of in their lives, Turner stayed a very private man."

had been quite a party animal as an alcoholic, but, according to him anyway, he didn't really get involved with people as a group, except to drink.) Even in the army when most men found themselves opening up to a degree previously unheard of in their lives, Turner stayed a very private man. He had one friend, and no one else got anywhere near him.

Science fiction turned him into a sociable man. Here was a situation where he could talk and be comfortable without feeling that his privacy was being invaded. He stuck with it, and let himself be pressed (again mainly by John Bangsund) till he agreed to write a science fiction novel himself.

This was *Beloved Son*. He started working on it in 1971, and finally finished it in 1977. It was

published by Faber in early 1978, and its publication was on the whole very well received throughout the world. John Bangsund put together a twenty-page document to mark his friend's entrance into the world of science fiction writing. It contained a long article by Bangsund, including letters between himself and Turner over four years about how the book was taking shape; some of the rejection slips by publishers who didn't want it; several reviews from high and low publications in Australia and England and the U.S.; a long critique by Michael Clark and an extraordinary review by Turner himself.

I mention all this to show Turner's standing in this little sf community in Melbourne even before he started to write sf himself, and what an extraordinary effect it created. *Beloved Son* is a dense, intense and philosophic book combining Turner's propensity to lecture (perhaps even hector) the reader, with some strong characters who are all intensely neurotic and totally incapable of any warmth – even when they love each other. All written at a manic sort of pace with frequent new ideas scientific and 'plotic' (there's no such word, but there should be).

The responses to the book were so varied that it is worth noting them here simply to illustrate what Turner himself knew to be true from the start, that reviewing is a subjective thing indeed. He probably had a good laugh at one or two:

It's good to see a science fiction novel set in the Melbourne of the future... (Arthur's) waspish tongue serves unerringly to lay bare the social fabric, so that he is a central element of the story... The product of a mature but cynical mind. (Geoff Muirden, *The Herald*, Melbourne, 6 June 1978.)

Here in this great blockbuster of a novel (375 pages, at least 150,000 words of pure SF) and from the hand of a complete unknown, [Turner must have loved that, after five mainstream novels all published in England] out of the blue, just like that, is a huge chunk of world-mothering creativity, a damp gust bringing rain to the wasteland of British SF. ... Don't expect me to give you a summary of the plot that George Turner needs 150,000 words for, not very many of them wasted..

.. The science is good, with a few minor quibbling points. ... Turner is not yet at home with common speech and it shows in a slight stiltedness such as we sometimes find in translations from a foreign language... Probably he's very young (and if so we have a genius on our hands). [Turner was 61.] (David Paterson, *Newsagent & Bookshop*, London, February 1978.)

As a novel George Turner's *Beloved Son* is primarily concerned with two things – creating a believable story with believable characters, and with being Australian. As a science fiction novel – a novel of speculation derived from present trends in ecology, biology, psychology and technology – it is concerned with the general matters that informed *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the *Chrysalids*... the nexus and focus of the book is relationship – specifically family relationship, but, just as pointedly, the parent-child, parentless child relationship of Turner's future to our present... Central to the book is the strangled father-son relationship of Raft to Heathcote. Turner's concern with identity, character, the close future and the plausibility of settings and events tends to clutter and clog the first third of the book; technological details and characters' motivations for quite trivial pieces of dialogue obtrude into the flow of the novel and block off the world that Turner is creating... Ironically, however, given the book's premises about identity, the most sharply drawn 'character' is the homosexual clone-brother Arthur, whose sexual preferences aren't allowed to cloud and determine who and what he sees and will understand. As a clone-brother Arthur is supposed to lack individual identity. But as Turner handles him, Arthur is an intelligent human being and shown to be so... On the surface Turner's Australianness is sometimes forced and sometimes natural – it produces both unnecessary jolts and unforgettable images of Australian summer and pathetic, destroyed Melbourne, or lovely interflows of dialogue about the meanings of twentieth-century 'gutter-slang'. Turner's prose is undelighted, unpoetic, without the apprehension of paradox and illumination. But the cumulative

effect of the novel, the real thrust of his Australianness, is the disturbing suspicion that here, where we live, the beginnings of his twenty-first century may well be shaping themselves. (Maira McAuliffe, *Australian Book Review*, July 1978.)

I have quoted this last review at length because I found it be such a good analysis of *Beloved Son* and, to an uncanny degree, of the work to come. Perhaps not so uncannily. Many writers have only a few particular things that concern them enough to write about over and over, and they usually have only one or two emotional 'problems' that they reveal themselves to be struggling with.

In Turner's case the things that concern him are, as McAuliffe points out, to do with the future, politics, the environment and most centrally, the way human beings may decide to deal with these things and the result of their decisions.

MORE IMPRESSIVE IS THE WAY that McAuliffe (and none of the male reviewers) picked up on the 'parent-child, parentless child' theme. Turner's attempts to deal with these things are evident in all of the science fiction work to some degree. (The first we see of these problems is actually in the last of his mainstream books, *Transit of Cassidy*, which is much closer to the science fiction work to come in its emotional vistas and its adventure/thriller feel, than to the mainstream works preceding it.) McAuliffe also says that "the strangled father-son relationship of Raft to Heathcote" is "Central to the book..." These areas of concern for Turner are the direct result of his own childhood. He and his mother (whom he says he never liked), were abandoned by his father when he was eight, and soon after his mother took up work as a live-in housekeeper. Turner was placed in the care of two old ladies as a sort of glorified boarder. The result was years of loneliness and an escape into fantasy through books, science fiction magazines and films.

McAuliffe also hit the nail on the head when she pointed to the fact that "the most sharply drawn 'character' is the homosexual clone-brother Arthur, whose sexual preferences aren't allowed to cloud and determine who and what

he sees and will understand." Characters like Arthur also appear regularly in Turner's work. Again this really began with *Transit of Cassidy*, in which the most astute character was a homosexual, a kind of outsider able to give the reader an 'objective' point of view. The homosexuality was not repeated again, but the use

"Turner was placed in the care of two old ladies as a sort of glorified boarder. The result was years of loneliness and an escape into fantasy..."

of odd male characters who were never involved in the messy normalness of committed relationships, and so were somehow outsiders, has remained a constant in Turner's work. In his last published book *The Destiny Makers*, the outsider has become the main protagonist.

McAuliffe is accurate about Turner's writing style too. "... undelighted, unpoetic, without the apprehension of paradox and illumination." She does not however pick up on the sardonic humor that is so much of what makes Turner's writing readable and enjoyable.

"On the whole *Beloved Son* was a success and it gave Turner confidence to go on..."

On the whole *Beloved Son* was a success and it gave Turner confidence to go on, something which he thought would not happen to him again after the failure of selling *Transit of Cassidy* in 1969. It was doubly delightful that *Transit of Cassidy* was finally published, by Nelson, at almost the same time. *Cassidy* had come second as an entry for the Alan Marshall Award in 1977, and Thomas Nelson who financed the award decided not to publish the winner, but rather to publish *Transit of Cassidy*. It was almost as though he had had to go through some kind of metamorphosis during

the sixties to become the person he finally became.

Several things had occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s which did in fact have a great effect on his life. The first, already mentioned, was his meeting with John Bangsund, who initiated him into the sub-culture of science fiction. The second was a brush with death in 1972 from a perforated stomach ulcer. Turner had nearly died from a bleeding ulcer in the early 1960s in Wangaratta and had gone 'on the wagon' for many years (with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous). He had begun drinking again at science fiction fandom parties and finally during the drinking season at the end of 1972 he overdid it totally. He was saved at the last minute, and has never had a drinking problem since.

"Another strange thing happened during this ten-year period – he fell in love for . . . the first time. He was fifty . . ."

Another strange thing occurred during this ten-year period – he fell in love for what he says was the first time. He was fifty when this happened, and it was all over bar the shouting in a year. He in fact disappeared for a whole year (according to John Bangsund and Bruce Gillespie). When he came back he was totally broke, without a job, and extremely distressed. Bangsund gave him some reviewing to do, and somehow he recovered, and somewhere around 1971 or 1972 he started working on *Beloved Son*.

It was also during this time that he met his closest friend, Jim Dunwoodie. Jim had a room in the same rooming house where Turner lived in St Kilda. They had started talking over cups of tea and found they liked each other, sharing the same sense of humor and sense of independence. Dunwoodie had nothing to do with writing or writers. He was a retired butcher from Ballarat, originally from Glasgow.

When Turner visited Britain in 1972, he visited Dunwoodie's family and friends in Glasgow. He visited Glasgow again in 1976. It was these visits that laid the foundations for his next

book, *Vaneglory*. *Vaneglory* and *Yesterday's Men* were not great successes critically or as sellers, but they were building in the detail of the fictional world that Turner has more or less stuck to since *Beloved Son*, and for that reason alone are worth mentioning here.

Vaneglory was set mostly in Glasgow. It was about a group of beings who looked exactly like humans, but who were in fact genetically able to live forever. It was set in an apocalyptic world in the near future (as are many of Turner's works), which was slowly dying from destruction of the biosphere and from radioactive dusting being used as a weapon of war. *Vaneglory* did not get good reviews, and was, I believe, much misunderstood, perhaps partly because of Turner's overuse of Glaswegian dialogue throughout the book.

It was still a good and exciting read, and it got one excellent review from John McLaren in *Overland*. McLaren put it succinctly:

The problem presented by the book, as by its predecessor (*Beloved Son*), is not one of technology, but of human destructiveness. The historic catastrophe . . . which lies behind both novels is brought about immediately by technological means, but arises ultimately from the same human impulses to control others, the same impulse to power, which governs the actions of the characters who determine Turner's plots. This impulse, in turn, is directed towards making the world safe – whether by means of security services which control all spontaneous impulses or by fake religions which direct them in the interests of the controllers. Behind the impulse in each case lies the fear of life – *timor vitae*, however disguised as *timor mortis*, or fear of death – which leads inevitably to either living death or total destruction.

Turner's novel therefore succeeds not only as a good science fiction yarn, involving us by its own awful plausibility, and as a prophecy, interpreting the present by extrapolating its central tendencies into the future, but also as a metaphysical study of the meaning of human life. (*Overland* 89 – 1982.)

McLaren, like McAuliffe, went to some trouble not only to look at the work but to see beyond it to Turner himself. He described Turner as "a

humanist writer who is nevertheless thoroughly at home with issues of good and evil" in the same review. And it is perhaps the truth of this definition that has made a wider recognition of Turner's work difficult. Science fiction writers and, to an even greater degree, science fiction readers, are not well known as humanists. Those who are, occasionally succeed very well. Ursula K. LeGuin is always the example that's given at this point. But she rose on the tide of the new wave in the 1960s in the United States, and that was a very 'humanist' time. As well, she was a woman, and presented worlds where the female was often the hero, thus making her work popular to feminists and other 'liberationists' of the sixties and seventies. Turner is not liked by feminists on the whole because his female characters are so difficult, and often even downright horrible.

"Science fiction writers and, to an even greater degree, science fiction readers, are not well known as humanists."

He himself has often said that he's really a sort of mainstream writer and certainly wishes to be judged by mainstream, rather than sf standards, but of course the 'mainstream' don't read him because they say they don't read science fiction.

THE THIRD OF THIS LOOSE TRILOGY, *Yesterday's Men*, is a strange book set in the future in Niugini. I say strange, because in some ways it harks back to his first novel, *A Young Man of Talent*, and not only because the two books share the setting of the jungles of that extraordinary country, but because both novels are about soldiers and war. Turner has often said to me that war is really the place where men grow up, that he believes that war, for men, is to some degree like childbirth for women. Well, there's nothing new about this. Stuart Hannabuss said this about the book in *British Book News*, August 1983:

Thoughtful and articulate, he interweaves

personal and planetary destinies in a tale of rediscovered violence. Set in a jungle and beset with intrigue and catastrophe, *Yesterday's Men* brings home the theme of man's manipulation of man round on itself.

Manipulation was also the main theme of *Young Man of Talent*. The two books are light-years apart in many other ways. Turner had, by the time he wrote *Yesterday's Men*, understood a great deal more about the subtlety of the human psyche, and the scale of the work is much greater because of its focus on the events occurring as world events, events that would affect everyone, not just the participants, who are almost just pawns in a game. Turner had become much more conscious of the world by this time, and much more ambitious in the scope of his work. Yet the players are no less pawns than the soldiers of the Second World War – they just know they are.

His next book was the autobiographical *In the Heart or in the Head*. It combined a parallel life of George Turner and life of science fiction, and is a gem as an overview of the latter, but hides more than it reveals about Turner himself. I believe that this was its downfall. Turner's intense reluctance to reveal anything about himself that would allow anyone closer than mere enjoyable acquaintance, makes it impossible to empathise with him. (He spent an entire two pages on his sexual relationships and their significance.) An autobiography must let you in a little at least. He is very hard on himself and on various members of his family but does not really give us enough information for us to make our own judgement, which is what one wants to do on reading an autobiography. Still it is an interesting work, if only for its revelation about how much Turner had given of himself to science fiction, and how much it had given him.

For me it was the next book that showed what a great writer Turner really is. *The Sea and Summer* came out in 1987. It won the Arthur C. Clarke Prize and the Commonwealth Literary Prize for the South East Asian Region. It should have won the Hugo, the Miles Franklin and everything else. And it should have been a best-seller in Australia, but for the lack of distribution and publicity. Michele Field in *The Australian* (10/12/88) said:

Both in Britain and the United States, sales of *The Sea and Summer* are racing. But what happened in Australia? It simply didn't get the reviews. The best review it got was from Van Ikin – eight months after it was published. By then it was already dead. . . Is the cold shoulder he received this year perhaps evidence of the 'tall poppy syndrome'? You cut an author dead just when his writing hits the big time? Before you pooh-pooh that theory, you should appreciate the fact that the novel was published in Britain six months before it was published in Australia – and Australian literary editors and reviewers were maybe deliberately ignoring an Australian novel already basking in the limelight.

The book tackles many issues, some of which are overpopulation, the greenhouse effect, political corruption and poverty. It is set in the far future with a few sharply different characters looking back at a near future in Melbourne. It is this near future that really takes up the bulk of the book. The story is about a family in crisis, except that the crisis is permanent and a symptom of the crisis the world is having. The characters are terrifying and likeable and annoying and never simple, just as the world they live in is never simple.

Turner's vision of Melbourne is itself gripping, especially to readers familiar with the geographical areas he is describing. This picture of the familiar altered only slightly is more startling than any alien world full of strange creatures, and much more disturbing.

Each of his books in turn seemed to be more exciting, and despite the lecturing undertone, more human. Throughout this time, Turner was involved in the science fiction scene as a critic, and often the father figure to whom young writers would send their manuscripts. He also gave lectures on science and the future to conferences and groups outside science fiction circles, indeed outside writing circles.

Brainchild and *The Destiny Makers* are his most

recent books. Both are, in very different ways, about genetic engineering, and both move along at the usual unnerving Turner speed, crammed with information and action. *Beloved Son* was a really huge seller in the States, and was notable for an extraordinary sex scene where nothing happens, except in the minds of the participants. Yet it is so hot you could fry an egg on it. (It made me wonder a little about Turner's experiences of sex.) His next book, *Genetic Soldier*, is already with the publisher.

George Turner has contributed greatly to Australian literature. His point of view is totally individual; he writes with a purpose. He writes because he cares. The big picture is always the world we are creating, and the small one the struggle of the individual to deal with it, and his or her ultimate loneliness in this struggle, despite, or often because of those who share the struggle. Turner has spent many hours deconstructing his mother, and his family life, and has often been 'trying to find his father' in the subtext. To what degree he has succeeded in these tasks only he will ever know. As to his readers, he has given the gift of the future or really the gift of the present. It is a simple truth that none can ever know the future; but understanding the present might help us to a better world.

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PAUL VOERMANS

Giving it Away



HE SAW THE CHANGE IN RICHARD immediately. He would go away with her, stay, wait, remain fondest friends in a treehouse at the Martian south pole, whatever the night decided. Yet only hours before he had seemed so fixed on his secret track, whatever that was. He would not give it away so easily. She muttered some mild provocation and waited for him to get himself together, chiacking the one-eyed dog. Possum's jaws snapped dull centimetres from Bernice's fingers while Richard packed each of his instruments twice, dropping one in the dirt and having to kill it. She hoped for a better dinner.

It was the very first skin-bronzing sunset of the season, a glory, she observed as they headed that way. No answer. Even without a constant drift Richard-wise, she told him, work was cruel enough at the moment. Oh, not terrible. Fussy. You had to keep an eye on profit-taking on the North African Currency Unit, say, which further complicated the Eritrean People's Company sell-off to TechPolis Africa, which produced better than expected results at the talks but this affected commodities and therefore the deal her company was doing directly with the Tokyo Salvage Authority for a piece of the Japan remains.

"Carrion eaters", she said, "ark, ark."

He nodded tightly.

"Thanks. I thought we'd go to *The Germaine Casserole*. Traditional service, none of the voodoo cure-all crap, seafood, dancing . . ."

They plunged into the shadow of a more densely wooded valley. She was glad she wore her woollen suit. Leaves crunched and clattered on the path with each step. Wistful birdcalls fell around them. Possum panted behind.

Richard remained visibly disturbed, perhaps by

the tramways band playing twenties social inactivist hits on the lawn by the Pentridge Village terminus.

Tongue cable
HIV my fun
Enak meltdown
Bright like sun . . .

The foregoer torch faded behind them as they entered the kampung.

While Bernice usually passed over this area going to work she seldom saw its teeming desperation close to. Its stench astonished her. A fug of excrement and spicy cooking, of sweat and machinery, plastics and bondates, she had grown up linking it with excitement and fear. Probably she hadn't crossed it by foot for a couple of years but the way her memory slammed back into childhood daredevil adventures surprised then depressed her with its power. *Running through the darkness from the kam-*



pung festa best clothes spattered with rich brown mud, sounds and images of silatkata dancers whirling through her and that boy he had been real with her . . .

She shouted over the instant din, just to break the muteness he chewed on like a coca leaf. "My idea of the Towny movement comes mostly from my lecturers, who were a ratbag bunch. I'd imagine your experience was different."

The sharp glance. "Different, yeah", he said. A man with no arms crossed the dirt path ahead. The noise crescendoed, followed by its explanation: a green horse clopped by, tailed by a dented assortment of honking electrics unable to pass but daring anyhow. Pedestrians darted everywhere, slowing traffic further, some even across the cars' bonnets. A tram rumbled up, clanged till the horse stepped aside, then whirred past shooting sparks.

The crowd flowed around Richard and Bernice, clipped, straight, clean, filthy, never touching them in spite of the difficulty of manoeuvring on the narrow way because Bernice and Richard wore village clothing. Richard said quietly into a lull, "I was just thinking, I was born not two kays from here."

"Really? I thought you were from Sydney."

"Yeah but I was raised here. All different now of course. Daimaru Hospital. Moreland Hoarding. Gone."

"Daimaru?"

"It wasn't as bad as they said. I went back in forty-nine for – anyway, you said yesterday you were curious about Underemployed politics, didn't you? Or was that just a stab at neutral ground because I'm such a hard bastard to talk to?"

"Got me. Tell me what you like though. I want to hear." She wanted to memorise every nuance. Lick every pore.

"Well you know I was in the first Soapsud in the city square?"

"Yeah? Exciting."

"Confusing mostly. I was six and the idea that I was being presented with my other little mates so the army wouldn't shoot was beyond me. I sang the songs like any others, like they were songs they sang at summer camps; I believed the animations of Crean – but then, I believed all the old Roadrunner cartoons the same way."

"Me too. And the animations we got of the demos as well, for that matter. The whole Soapsud Revolution."

"Reckon your parents knew the truth?"

"I think so. Infringement of bodyright was a crime among the upper classes way before it was put through parliament."

"I'd heard."

"So you grew up with heavy Townies then."

"State Polisisists, Federal Left Conservatives, the gamut of 'em. Giannopoulos was my godfather."

"My goodness, and you're a chemist?"

"Freelancer. Fish brains: heavy metals build up in 'em. There was never any money for anything but the movement, so we lived hand-to-mouth for so long I developed a healthy disrespect for the struggle. I spent a lot of time



on the streets. It was amazing I grew into anything but organ-fodder."

During the last ten minutes the sun had vanished behind the street's far side, the diffuse luminescence of slowglass windows and hormone candles rose as the dusk fell. A few Federal Regulation Points appeared as focused cones of powerful brightness further down the hill and these smooth pads were already being claimed by FRP theatre companies. It seemed Bernice had overcome her shock at the noise for she could hear tapdancing rattle from the FRP immediately behind her; Richard's grey hair glinted and his face got an unnatural pallor from the dancer's special effects. Night stalls were opening in the gutters, their white plastic satellite gates unfurled like sampan sails above the marquees. Day marketeers shouted it seemed from every direction about what items would die or go off if not sold today. They threw scraps to Possum as she hobbled ahead in her excitement at the changeover.

FOR THE FIRST TIME in Bernice's life the scarred, worn and clipped faces passing to and fro appeared to hold a humor and hope too quirky for her to grasp. You think you know, even take pride in your special insight into ordinary Underemployed folk, she thought, but that's a shield. When that goes you truly feel for others and it traps you because you can't do anything about their lives yet you can't shut them out so you're driven to do what you know will prove futile for the sake of remaining human.

Is seducing Richard my big push to stay human?

A tarot reader was setting up half a block away on the outskirts of the flowermarket (which never shut). Her rapidly shifting holos left afterimages which lent the next pulsing set of shapes a fluid magic: was that an empress of disks becoming a hanged man or was she merely doing acrobatics?

"Perhaps", she told Richard, "I can put my money into setting up a research lab, protecting the world from another plague. Do something worthwhile with myself."

He stopped. A skeletal puppet-seller bumped into Richard's back. The refugee took one look at Richard's face and apologised and made off around them, gingerly stepping by the happy pidgeon with his sack of protruding nightmare heads held high, obviously disappointed at the loss of a sale.

"How do you reckon you'll do that?" Richard was astounded but not unreasonable.

"I've no idea", Bernice admitted, flustered. "That would be the first priority, wouldn't it? That alone would be worth spending money on. Maybe you'd like the job."

"No fear." He walked on. "I'm just talking about this because you said before you wanted to know what I thought about the world. Another thing you might as well know is that my concerns are narrower than that. I told you I was squalid."

"You said your troubles were squalid."

"Same difference."

Now Bernice stopped. "Well what are your narrower concerns?"

"My wife and kid if it's any of your business."

He was furious. As the idea hit her she was hurt; already she felt he'd misled her.

"You made it my business when you talked about running off with me out of the blue."

"That's ripe. We both put our groins on standby this morning – or did you just lie?"

"I don't have to do this."

"No you don't. Neither do I." (Didn't she?)

"You never told me you had a family!" (Hadn't he?)

"Well now you know, dear."

"And you had second thoughts about me because of them after you left this morning."

"No. They were on my mind the whole time we were together. Fuck! That's not what I mean at all!"

A crowd had flocculated around them. Not that there was any possibility of anyone knowing Bernice. The pressure of their amusement told, however, and she longed to be elsewhere. Richard seemed filled with his family. Was this why he came on so intense? Domestic troubles? Surely not just that, it was so tawdry!

"Let's walk", she said. And when she touched his shoulder his flinch said nothing was so simple.

They walked. Above was purple flecked with stars. Now charcoal grills added light to the candles and windows. They passed the flowermarket's baskets of enhanced petals, and the famous Hundred Dinner Stalls and the many religious arcades – each added countless smells to the street. Entering a cluster of home hardware sellers Bernice saw turbines, solar panels, stripped houseminds, flopsy screens, nano canisters, maginnis lasers, line-of-sight puppies (Possum ignored them), batteries, water tanks, buckets of chips, vats of slickchannel fluid, peripheral air filters, surgical teapoys, megrim stunners, and of course whole alleyways devoted to megaspores and strayline ozone solacers for domestic use. Large illuminated sculptures of each item sold here clustered on the tram lines, alive against the dusk. Small children dipped their hands into containers full of every small thing, brown eyes wide with the notion that here lay ultimate wealth, they tugged on wires and played the old trick of wiggling fingers at certain points in the holo fields to bend faces or misspell signs until stallholders chased them in flocks back to the street. And in a way the children were right, this street was the permanent celebration of abundant ingenuity. The wealth of the mainstream. Theoretically you could build anything with what they traded here. It didn't matter that it was not the best the

race could do, it was the best *their* world could hope for, their golden years.

And the tarot woman was the only kind of card-reader visible. Bernice watched the mocks, trays, slivers, the occasional monkey, brick or pony change hands, interested in the illegal currency on a level beyond her anger. She waited for Richard to speak. Maybe he wouldn't.

It didn't mean they couldn't hump one another, she thought, and couldn't stifle a laugh.

"Bernice", he said, appeal in his voice.

"Yes."

"I have a wife and child. Yes. But they've both been out of my life for years. They're not the issue, I mean: they are and they aren't; you and I getting together means I give up on them, but that's not why I can't – it's already hopeless – I mean foolish to think of you and me even – I can't tell you what it means to me."

"Leave it till later then."

"I made no sense at all, ay?"

"Sorry about just before."

"I'm sorry too."

She put her arm through his. He took her hand and rubbed it, though it wasn't cold. His palm was dry and hard. They walked to the edge of Dark Town, where you could see tumble-down squats with fires in the front yards, bomb sites, ten metre holoed tiger snakes and so on floating in the air above some of the higher buildings marking totem areas – it was the simple no-go area that every large city had, not really dangerous but containing unpredictably shifting deadly parts like the infamous Disabled Parking Lot. Where the road vanished into rubble there was an FRP; Bernice slapped the red patch on the lamp-post and almost at once a flicker taxi descended hissing cold gas into the light.

From above and in the dark, the Central Polity looked almost new. Its accommodation towers were mostly lit; there were colored words as ads instead of sculptures; small vehicles rose from the roofs and swooped by. Aside from its predominant sex industry it was supposed to resemble the other kampungs, only in a vertical fashion, though Bernice had never dared enter it.

The Germaine Casserole, Persian rugs and polished jarrah, had adopted some irritating voodoo trappings since Bernice's last visit. Absurd prophylaxis. They were informed they'd

have to pay for an exorcism if they wanted "that devil dog" at the table. Richard was famished so Possum was exiled to the roofgarden; you could see her shape against the phosphorescent bay where she sat nosing the picture window, hurt. The head waiter offered them a fetish, but Bernice gripped his wrist, hexing him with a line about beans from Virgil: "*Mistaque ridenti coloscasia fundet acantho!*"

"This better still be a good restaurant", she warned.

It was. And the service was superb. A bottle of 2037 Verve Greatwest and succulent seafood flown in from all over the continent relaxed them both. It was hard to believe in the tangled lives fifty floors below. Over oysters kilpatrick then flame-grilled wild barramundi served with broollyflower, carrots and murrung root in an orange sauce, they each told stories, as it turned out, of legal transgression.

HIS FIRST PETTY CRIMES had involved a gang formed with seven others in their early teens. The Partial Mongos. As usual, sunspots (easily grabbed and hidden) and chips they collected for pocket money but, although getting chased by vendors and sometimes kampung police bikers was fun, most of them were too ambitious and soon they were too old for marketbrat pursuits. They collected in the wine cellar belonging to the Topend Club, a kampung lottery society, to plot major crimes. Or what they thought of as major.

TAB race takings were a favorite target. Pelf lotteries and charismatic collections ran a close second. Kidnappings, flickerjackings, blotting and bagging, blackmail and embezzlement, the Mongos planned them all. Brainstorming, drafting, research, reporting on surveillance, it was a life of high crime led entirely in the mind.

Until the Law Picnic.

Every year the Towny campaigners raised funds with a sprawling nosh party in Royal Park South, near the old zoo. Black money made on rides and races and drink stands was converted into 'donated' saleable goods then into straight credit when contractors on public sites took them at slightly under the odds, then were reimbursed by an embattled state government. Richard's best friend, Mick Ng, had boasted that he could get into the safe where the bundles of promissory notes were temporarily kept.

Richard, tired of Mick's boasts, challenged him to give it a try. Really. The argument that followed involved all of the Mongs in an elaborate plan to lure the Towny Treasurer's family out for the night so they could transport the safe to where Mick would crack the box (or not) at his leisure.

On the night before Richard's fourteenth birthday the Partial Mongs took turns watching through stolen octaviewers as the Southerly family stepped out for a free evening at Luna Park, set up by audiophone on a stolen card by Kirsty Harambopoulos, the gang's impersona-



tor. They waited until they reckoned the Southerlys wouldn't come back abruptly, then loosed Mick onto the front door.

In less than a minute they were in, the alarm was off and they had unpacked the necessary tools to detach the safe from the floor.

"Nanotech is a wonderful thing", said Richard. "Even thirty-odd years back a bunch of hoons like us could take what was used for one thing and give it a nasty new application. These were limited life beasts intended for stripping furniture. Murray Newby changed their orientation with a Powerpad and toothpaste and instant jelly crystals, which meant the little bastards disconnected the safe alright, but they didn't drop dead till they'd stripped every bit of

plastic bonding in the house. We hitched the safe on a trolley and ran. Chunks of the place were literally dropping off around our ears! They ate one kid's belt for some reason and he tripped and sprained his ankle badly as we were making our getaway. And they ate another kid's cheap plastic arms as well; boy, were his parents mad."

"Did your friend get the safe open?" asked Bernice, licking chocolate mousse off her index finger.

"Never. For all I know it's still in that wine cellar, filled with outdated paper money. I lost a mate that night. Really. Mick never did forgive me for calling his bluff."

"Let's get out of here", Bernice said suddenly in the middle of coffee and a story about her one and only salvage rip-off.

"What, no dancing?"

"We can dance at my flat at Toorak."

"What about the story? I love the way you can alter the real to tell the truth - nothing more exciting."

"Nothing?"

"Let's go."

So payment and Possum and a taxi interrupted. The flicker hopped over the building's edge and they fell past floors of tourists before accelerating through gusting wind toward the patchy Richmond Kampung lights and the softer glows of Toorak Village past them.

It took hours to tell him about the melt-down salvage.

Inside her flat atop her company's building, just high enough for a view of the dike lights around the city but barely above the rushing treetops, Bernice found confidence. Armagnac helped. They did dance. It was the age-old clutch and sway, to a foregoer song Bernice hummed in the rich contralto she had only ever used for her son.

Abruptly they stopped. And stood there. Possum humped by the open fire, chin on paw. Sap sizzled in a log, sighing softer and ever softer until all that remained was the lap of flames and the wind's hushed tumble in the eucalypts outside.

They stood uncertain but relaxed with it at last. Beyond the spirits and coffee his breath smelt faintly of the rock salt off the barramundi. His lungs took slow and profound air past dry lips open with a helpless quirk. His eyes, more

noticeably his bluer left one, that held the greater magnetism for her own gaze, swept across her being only partly urged by lust, but rather – like the minor trembling which shifted as his breathing fed it making hairs stand in its passage – wandering, in response to whatever mysterious thoughts and memories pushed decision and its backlash through his spirit, and as the wandering ceased and his vision came to rest upon her face those eyes evolved an air of ruthlessness confounded that was as much a pleasure for Bernice as seeing her attractiveness from outside herself, even if she didn't know the things that troubled him about the two of them together, because a man who did not harbor deep-felt qualms about love and a future had no place in Bernice Crawford's arms. So, standing, her thick hands rose to meet his large, weathered graceful ones, clasped, then pressed them to her waist. She let go and grabbed his legs and pulled him to her.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Yes", he said. He had decided. He had given it away. He had chosen her, but over what? He could tell her later.

Again they stood, heavy-breathing like adolescents. Again she let him make whatever this considerable decision was, make it repeatedly. She watched the resolve grow in him, either for escape with her or its savage other. She saw kindness win. Perhaps he didn't see her abrupt desire to change the world in as harsh a light as he had before. The raw dimension of wrath and bitterness (that might one day have bared its bloody fangs at even her) was hidden in the fire's shadows or smothered. He bit his lower lip as hard as a murderer. Blood and tears seeped out of him.

She began to remove his clothes.

Her right thumb pushed buttons through their holes, moving down his chest to his belt along soft grey cotton. He licked his lip and swallowed the blood but otherwise made no move. Singlet and shirttails both she tugged from his trousers as fast as possible; they seemed very long. She brought them together up from behind him, over his head and along the limp brown arms. It was a blue singlet. She raised one foot, tugging off the boot and sock, then the other.

Then with very little nonsense he dropped his trousers and stepped out of them.

She began to rub his Y-fronts. He seemed to

want to wait until his desire was confirmed, but then he grasped both of Bernice's upper thighs and heaved her off her feet with surprising strength for a man so slight (if tall), and they collapsed on the sofa's leather cushions, which sighed, the first loud noise since they had finished dancing. It made them laugh. Sitting almost on his chest she watched him, grinning, as if his ruthless element might return, as if spotting it might help, taking off her black silk blouse and humesson sportsbra in seconds. There, he could take in her podgy belly now.

He bucked her sideways against the couch and kissed her there. He kissed her waist, her inner arms, her breasts.



Desperately she kicked off her shoes. She struck back, licking and kissing what skin she could find until she ran out of breath. They sat cross-legged facing one another, still on the couch. Richard was swearing softly, amazed.

They did not bother to remove their remaining clothes, but enfolded and glided around each other with fingertips and wrists, knuckles and lips, and her trousers and his underwear and her pants were pushed aside and awkwardly they continued. There was no method. Bernice made sounds and Richard did not. They tumbled to the rug and Bernice accepted his sightless aspiration. She held him full of a sorrow so crucial to his being he hurt her but she continued. They kept touching through the spreading, humming knowledge, the childlike

playful lessons, gifts, dilly-dally, and ascent. Bernice felt she could see her skin all around, all at once, and it was *beautiful*, as it had never been and, sadly, might never be again. She had her eyes half-shut but she could see from both outside and deep within herself. The clarity was luminous, divine. And she drew him, finally unutterably colluded with him, taking total astonishment and giving it over and over, which lasted it felt for the whole night.

And in fact the fire had burnt a little low.

And they continued. Then suddenly she

laughed, remembering what she'd promised Richard in the restaurant and, an arm behind her neck, she whispered to him the rest of her tale, lazily, how her friend Barbara shifted the credit and how they bought land near Seoul and how she came to buy old Kleinmann out to make it Kleinmann Crawford and, talking, descended gently into sleep.

She couldn't have cared less, now, if his real Purpose in Pentridge Village had been to slaughter them all. She didn't even dream.

GARDEN LOVER

1

Lottie loves her garden.
It's neat,
has all the right colours,
does exactly what she wants.

Next door's garden
is the problem.
Those pine-trees, filling gutters
with needles, those branches
hanging over the fence.

She's entitled to slash them,
gets someone else to do it,
is forced to look at the result.
Like a damaged relationship,
stubbed limbs reproach.

2

Her garden is full of flowers,
ripe with life,
good enough to eat.
Edible roses, she reads
in a magazine. Petals in salads,
frozen in iceblocks,
added to sweets and wine.

How cruel, she thinks,
going into the garden
with secateurs.

MARGUERITE VARDAY

The Third Gift



IT WAS THREE DAYS BEFORE the end of the world when the wagons set out from Baben. They moved out onto the grasslands, a small lurching line, four battered old gypsy-whimsys drawn by worn-out nags from Bannon's stable.

Each wagon was driven by a grotesque.

On the first, huddled over the reins, was Crown-of-Thorns. Like the others, he was exhausted. His head was heavy, his throat terribly dry. But there would be water along the way. He knew that for a certainty, and his strange eyes glittered with anticipation.

Though he was tired, though they travelled through a windy grey land under a sky ribbed with grey clouds appropriate to the end of the world, it was so good to have this freedom again. The feeling of *déjà vu* was strong in him, and it made the corners of his mouth twitch into a smile.

On the second wagon was Poke the dust-man. Poke's eyes were like fires at the ends of long hallways. He was half-dead already, and it was too early in the journey for anything to give him peace.

The reins hung loosely in his desert hands. He barely held them.

The third wagon was driven by Joined, the double-man.

As always, they laughed, telling one another jokes, describing the countryside around them to Great Mother, propped up on her frame in the back. She had heard the jokes before, of course, but delighted in hearing every word again. She hung there heavily on her frame and gently taunted her 'boys'.

The third wagon was by far the happiest of the four.

In the final wagon rode Rainbow, Bottle-man and the Crazy. As always when he looked back,

Crown-of-Thorns saw no one at the reins. The wagon just rolled along with Bannon's nags following the wagons in front. Every now and then strange music and muffled laughter would come from within, and Crown-of-Thorns would weep softly because he was alone now.

But, of course, he wept also because of what he knew was coming. He rehearsed every gesture, every word. This was only the first day of their journey after all.

He was not like Poke. Poke did not need anyone. He was barely there. But when Crown-of-Thorns spoke to him, and the eyes came back for a time, the dust-man said he was happy and that things should go on just as they were.

On the morning of the second day they met Signpost.

The people in the wagons had expected him since first light, as if their watching for him would make him appear the sooner. Even Rainbow peered from under the canvas, and the Crazy hung from the tail-gate and craned his long jointed neck. Joined described every mile to Great Mother so she could savor the meeting and there were lights in Poke's eyes.

They had no clocks to read the day by, and the ribbed brooding sky did not help them, but it was past mid-morning as they came up out of a ragged valley flanked by towering stone crags and saw Signpost on his rise.

There were no birds anymore, but Signpost looked enough like a bird-thing against the sky as they rolled up the slope to him for them to Ahh with the memory of birds.

Crown-of-Thorns would ask the question as usual, a mere formality in these days when no one travelled and signposts lied. The grotesques had discussed it many times, but it was decided

that there was no reason to change this. And Thorns looked so impressive; he looked the natural leader, the one to ask the questions.

"Where does this road lead?" Crown-of-Thorns asked.

He already knew the answer, both flippant and profound. All the signposts said it now.

"Everywhere", the man-on-a-stick said, his arms pointing in the cool air.

"We are from Baben", Thorns told him. "Refugees seeking the Wells."

Signpost creaked as a light breeze lifted from the ragged valley below.

"There is nowhere to go", he said, in that same weary voice. "The world ends tomorrow."

Crown-of-Thorns smiled, because he knew otherwise. The *déjà vu* was so strong now.

"But we seek the Wells nevertheless", he said.

"Then this road serves as well as any other", Signpost said, and hung there silent, its job done.

Thorns lifted his arm then and made his theatrical gesture, the same one wagon-masters had always made. The gypsy-whimsys lurched forward, leaving Signpost alone on the slope, an echo of birds.

Now some of the terrible weariness seemed to disappear, and the people of the little caravan felt their spirits lift. Crown-of-Thorns and Joined shouted friendly insults and jibes back and forth to one another, and Great Mother added a few of her own, mostly to do with lewd uses for Thorns' strangely formed body. The Crazy laughed himself into such a state hearing these, that Rainbow had to sing to him. Bottle-man sloshed about all wet and shiny and played weird music on the organs of his body.

Only Poke did not join in. But he was happy, the others knew.

A little after noon the overcast broke and golden sunlight and broad sweeps of blue sky changed the land completely. In the paradox of emotions, the grotesques could now afford to face their various needs more openly.

As they rolled along through patches of sunlight and cloud-shadow, Great Mother began crooning the lullabies they all loved so much.

A silence fell on the others. Only the creaking of the wagons, the tinkle of chains, the easy snuffling sounds the nags made, accompanied those haunting songs.

On the front wagon, Thorns felt he could

weep again as the refrains came to him. The Crazy slept, an odd smile on his odd face. Joined smiled to himself. Rainbow hung wind-chimes along the edge of her tail-board and left a different kind of tinkling song behind them. Bottle-man pressed against the glass and looked out at the alternating bands of sun and shadow as they crossed the land.

Poke, the dust-man, withdrew his eyes for the last time.

When Great Mother finally stopped, the silence that came (though filled with Rainbow's chiming rods and bells) was a wounding thing. But a blessing too. So good to have, such songs as Great Mother sang, but oh, so hard to bear.

THE SUN WAS HALFWAY DOWN the afternoon sky when they saw Bezine. She was standing just off the road next to a real-tree, her white dress pressed to her body by the freshening afternoon winds, her wonderful necklace flashing in the sunlight.

Thorns smiled when he saw her, and sighed, though with what emotion he could not say. Certainly it was not because he had doubted she would be waiting there beside the road to the Wells. Their agreement had been a firm one, though of course they would continue to pretend this was their first meeting.

The line of wagons rolled to a stop so that Thorns was directly opposite the place where she stood. From under his fierce brows, he looked at her and smiled.

"Hello, Thorns", she said.

"Hello, Bezine", he answered in a tight voice. Then the tension made them both laugh, the sheer joy of it all.

The other grotesques (except for Poke) watched as their leader got down from his wagon and crossed to the lady in the white dress with the golden hair and the special necklace. They saw them take each other's hands, saw the laughter and pleasure between them as she reached up to the three slender glass vials threaded on a cord about her neck and broke one between her fingers.

"My first gift is for you, Thorns", they heard Bezine say. "At long last, it is the gift of absolute love!"

They kissed then in the softening afternoon light, his harsh body close to hers, the spines blue-black, her dress dancing in the wind and

her hair a streaming golden rain.

Now the first wagon was the happiest of the four, but with the sort of private quiet happiness that did not altogether exclude the others. To see Thorns smile that kind of smile again was their joy as well as his. Even blind Poke noticed it in his soon-to-be-gone way, though he never spoke a word.

The wagons rolled along, with Great Mother singing the little love songs she had kept for just such a time as this.

It was a magic hour for them all.

Then as sunset approached and they drew close to Bendallin Ford, Crown-of-Thorns got himself ready for the pevarricks and the hate-you's. He left the reins with Bezine, got down and walked ahead of the wagons, a new adamant blade in a scabbard at his waist and a Great Hand closed about his right fist in the manner of the best fighting-men of the day. (Thorns, a man of walking swords already, needed none of these things, but it pleased him obscurely, the way being a wagon-master, the last wagon-master, did.)

He enjoyed striding out in front, grasping theommel of Swordy and flexing the Great Hand. The spines of his body stood and shone now, for Bezine's gift of absolute love included a love of self too, all properly proportioned and in its place.

It was almost time for the second gift that Bezine had for them, but not yet.

Then, with the bridge in sight, the pevarricks appeared, six of them, heavy black creatures carrying fly-knives and shining with oil. They shouted out that the bridge across the Ford was theirs and made menacing gestures with their weapons.

Thorns flexed his Hand. The air buzzed with it. He drew Swordy.

The pevarricks grumbled among themselves and would have fallen back. But at that moment, at the other end of the bridge, was Clopi and his gang of hate-you's.

Thorns watched them assemble, dimly aware that in ages past these horrors were the have-at-you's who guarded this bridge, good loyal folk. In the years leading up to the world's end, they had changed, gradually, into the ha-at-you's, and were now the pathetic debased things huddled around their chief.

Thorns stepped forward, swinging his Hand.

The wagons followed on behind; he could hear them, could hear Joined urging them on.

The dangerous but cowardly pevarricks fell right back now, preferring to let Clopi have them first, content to scavenge afterwards in the manner of their kind.

Bezine's hand was already at her necklace, gripping the second glass vial gently but firmly in her fingers.

But she would not use it yet. She sensed what Thorns was feeling and wanted him to have this last confrontation for as long as possible.

For true, Thorns had always wanted to deal with Clopi, this dismal small-souled creature who loved to hurt others. But there would never be time. Thorns had other responsibilities beyond vanity, beyond futile honour and military prowess.

As the last of the gypsy-whimsys clattered up on to the bridge, with the shrieking hate-you's before and the muttering pevarricks behind, Bezine closed her hand fully around the second vial and crushed it. Blood ran through her fingers from where the fragments had cut her (she hadn't tried to avoid that this time - after all, she too had passion that needed release), and she remembered that final look Thorns had given her, a question really: Are you going to do it before I meet Clopi?, then his happy-sad expression as the vial shattered, and their surroundings became insubstantial, all part of a shimmering curtain of light.

Bezine's second gift took them, leaving an empty bridge and a hundred miles under their wheels.

The gift of the Wells.

Or close to. They travelled the last ten miles easily, through growing twilight, until they came to the place where water bubbled up through the rocks and there was grass again and bushes and a small forest.

When they got down from the wagons and began watering the nags, they discovered that Poke had gone. Not just in the eyes, but altogether.

It was Great Mother's suggestion to make that his body be left there, sitting on the wagon with the reins in his hands, and the others all agreed when she made it.

While the campfire was being made and their last meal prepared, Crown-of-Thorns took Bezine off among the real-trees. The others knew

what had to be done and let them go. They had waited so long for this moment.

Thorns led Bezine by the hand until they were out of sight of the wagons. He felt shy and nervous but also felt the incredible excitement. Tomorrow the world would end; now is what mattered, what always mattered.

He looked about him, anywhere but at Bezine standing near him. How well he knew this forest, every corner of it. So many times he had stood here, just like this, dreaming of what was about to happen.

The real-trees whispered, their hard brittle leaves rustled and clicked as they caught the last winds of day. When he listened hard, he could hear Joined and Rainbow singing around the campfire, and Great Mother laughing off beyond the trees.

He was treasuring these last sounds of his friends when Bezine pulled him down onto the sand. He made a small frightened sound; he had been so tense with anticipation.

Now all he could feel was the fire and ice, looking at her in the long merging shadows of that final twilight. They felt the *déjà vu*, the most eloquent language of eyes meeting. She looked at his gorgeous and hideous body; he saw her perfect one. Carefully, so carefully (Great

Mother would have been very amused to know how carefully), they became lovers in the sand as the shadows swelled up to become night.

Behind them, through the trees, there was feasting and singing. The Wells was quite possibly the last happy place there was. Even when Joined and Rainbow had exhausted their repertoire of songs, the Crazy and Great Mother burbled theirs, while Bottle-man sat in his jar, his face awash with brine and firelight, playing on his body.

And while Thorns and Bezine lay joined in the sand under a vast spread of stars, the feeling came to them both.

"Now?" Bezine said.

"Now", Thorns answered.

And while they kissed, while the music and the gladness and the sounds of the Crazy laughing came to them where they were cradled under the whispering trees on this last night, Thorns reached up and together, hand over hand, they broke the last vial.

And once again it had happened. The third gift.

Love and Place and . . .

Time.

It was three days before the end of the world when the wagons set out from Baben.



KEN BOLTON

A Singular Poet



John Tranter (ed.): *Selected Poems and Prose* –
Martin Johnston (UQP paperback, \$22.95.)

MARTIN JOHNSTON DIED in his early forties in 1990, in Sydney, where he had lived when in Australia. Even when for long periods absent, he was for others a part of that scene – a touchstone of a certain sort of ambition, certain sorts of standards. He had not published frequently in journals and the slim volumes that had appeared under his name were few and have become, by now, hard to obtain. This generous selection is a service to Johnston's work and reputation from the hand of his friend and fellow poet, John Tranter.

Tranter is to be thanked too, I presume, for this *Selected's* not laboring under the weight of the standard line-drawing portrait of the author with which UQP regularly consign their books to the categories 'musty', 'tired', 'enfeebled and irrelevant'. At nearly 300 pages the book is a handsome buy in other ways as well.

It is a large selection but not a *Collected Poems of Martin Johnston*. And its being very nearly so precludes one appearing in the near future. But it is the book that might secure Johnston's reputation sufficiently to guarantee continued interest. The book is divided into sections: the Poems (selections from his previous books *The Sea Cucumber*, *The Typewriter Considered as a Bee-Trap*, and many uncollected later poems); European Notes – observations, and notes towards poems, made by Johnston while travelling in 1988; Translations – of major Greek poets and of Greek folk poetry; a selection of Johnston's own essays and reviews; interviews with the author; finally, reviews of Johnston's work.

There is a longish and good introduction and there are introductions to each of the book's divisions. On a first reading these have the effect of hovering a little too protectively around the poems and poet. Johnston's undoubted singu-

larity, the notion or anticipation of it, is doubly reinforced. One becomes apprehensive. Still, Johnston *was* singular: the precociously talented child of bohemian expatriate writers, he was unlike other Australian poets, and anomalous to readers as well, for his erudition and unusual background. What was the audience for Johnston's work? Did it even exist? Or was it an imaginary, a 'virtual' one, with Johnston the curator and attendant of a museum culture, a range of references to which fewer and fewer had access and which linked tenuously to the present? Well, that case can be made. But one of the special strengths of his writing is the sense of difficulty with which the connections *were* made, and the sense of isolation and contingent individuation that this brought the poet and the

"Johnston was . . . aware of the degree to which one's associations and meanings are one's own"

poems. Johnston was only more aware of the degree to which one's associations and meanings are one's own and are made rather than given. And at the same time one's emotional life is hardly original. ("Sometimes it's hard to repress a snigger" he says, of the idea of one's work being so very original – or *in part*, for he might be laughing as much at his own insensitivity or bravado of just a line before.) The poem 'Grief' tells more soberly of this selfconsciousness, in a poem more formal but also, conventionally, more 'heartfelt'. Though perhaps the distance maintained through formality is a kind of dryness *about* the subject matter:

Grief breaks the heart and yet the grief
comes next.

Some lemon morning in a wash of rain
a brand-new horror comes to call again
and write a footnote to expunge the text.

The gall slips down and hardly hurts at all;
your scholarly rescensions of the past
prove to your satisfaction that at last
time counterloops and paradoxes pall.

I would have preferred the introductions gathered at the book's front and the work left more separate. The regular warm demotic of the editor's voice contrasts a little with the cool of Johnston's literary writing: the coach lengthily extols the pleasures of swimming – but when we approach the pool and dip in a toe, the water is another world. Though, editorially, no solution is perfect: had the introductions been gathered together, one would have complained of their bulk.

Another of the introduction's effects is to detach Johnston a little from his peers. It is an introduction, a life, given by one who knew him – but other poets to whom Johnston was close are not mentioned. I think of Laurie Duggan and John Forbes – with whom he was very much associated in the early seventies and through much of the eighties – or Gig Ryan, to whom he was close in the last decade. Of the four articles on Johnston reprinted here two are by male academics, and one each by poets Tranter and Chris Wallace-Crabbe. The combined effect is a little generalised and clubbily fusty. Ryan's piece should have been present. It was a recent article, well-written and, as I say, close – to say nothing of relieving the monotone of masculine opinion. The context of Johnston's work, as it is given here, seems to be that of a putatively puzzled Australian public, the ambivalence of such as Les Murray (who found Johnston to have "left out the poetry": his letter of rejection to Johnston is quoted), and the work of Tranter and Adamson. Equally, if not more so I think, a slightly younger formation provided the context of his work. They appear, with the author, in a poem 'On Aggression', in a "a group self-portrait", as Greylag Goslings – in which Konrad Lorenz is quoted on the birds:

The goslings fight, as do adults, using their
wings,
but as these are no more than tiny stumps,
their blows
fall short, for they aim as if their wings
were in the right proportion
to the size of their bodies

Time will sort out such elisions, and no doubt supply others.

These are small points. Such a collection, once first looked at, comes then to be used more personally: one turns again and again to various of the poems, the translations, the writing, and the introductions, necessary in any case, acquire their true proportion. Similarly, the peculiarities of Johnston's own kind of literariness (critics complained of his using too-big words, as well as of general obscurity) will mark him off less and less from other writers as time gives the rest of the seventies and eighties a degree of opacity and datedness. In fact, they partly disappear when the poems are read closely: the complaints are the product of lazy reading.

Only a few of the poems (such as 'Gradus ad Parnassum', 'In Memoriam', 'Cafe of Situations', most of the 'In Transit' sequence, which reads as playful emulation of the manner of the other goslings' wit) do the trick for me – which locates me, I guess. Though none of the poems here are undistinguished.

I find the almost intangible, retinal sensuousity which is described in some poems, irritatingly pointillist and sensitive, and destructive of clarity. At other times the effects are precise, unusual and totally memorable. There are terrific poems in this book. The cultural references are not so invariably high, but they do seem private, almost consolatory on occasion. Often the poems make large claims for the poet, invoking and suggesting continuity with the great wise dead of the past – who all live on – creators, poets, painters, philosophers. At various times it can seem an escapist and unworldly world view, or empty boast, at other times ambition and perspective. Here are some old masters, from, admittedly, an earlyish poem:

Master Alekhine lost himself in drink,
and crabbed old Steinitz played a game
with God

by cordless invisible telephone,
and Schlechter, the frail little Viennese
starved to death quietly in a room like
this:

they weren't the same. I drove to the bone
of this our murderous game,
they called me the Spinoza of the
chessboard.

And a later, calmer poem looks similarly at
the Life of Uccello.

Finally, only Johnston's poems can do the par-

ticular tricks that are theirs – "each the precise,
the only possible / delineation of a complex of
thinking and feeling" – though Johnston himself
was amused as he wrote these words. At their
best I find them – or the ones I so far like – to
be a useful kind of astringent: one meets in John-
ston's poetry much more a mind than a voice,
for example, which is as much a relief as the
strangeness of the mind is a pleasure.

*Ken Bolton is editor of Otis Rush magazine. His Selected
Poems appeared last year from Penguin.*

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE ON T.V.

I want to see sexy old people.

Sexy fat people.

Ordinary young people.

And I want to see pimples!

The reporting team to explain,
how,
from the manager down to the crew,
everyone making the ads
was mistakenly drugged:
for a whole three months –
they just had to bullshit like that!

I want to see the v.o.'s in the nude:
their simple, honest faces
as they shiver in the studio;

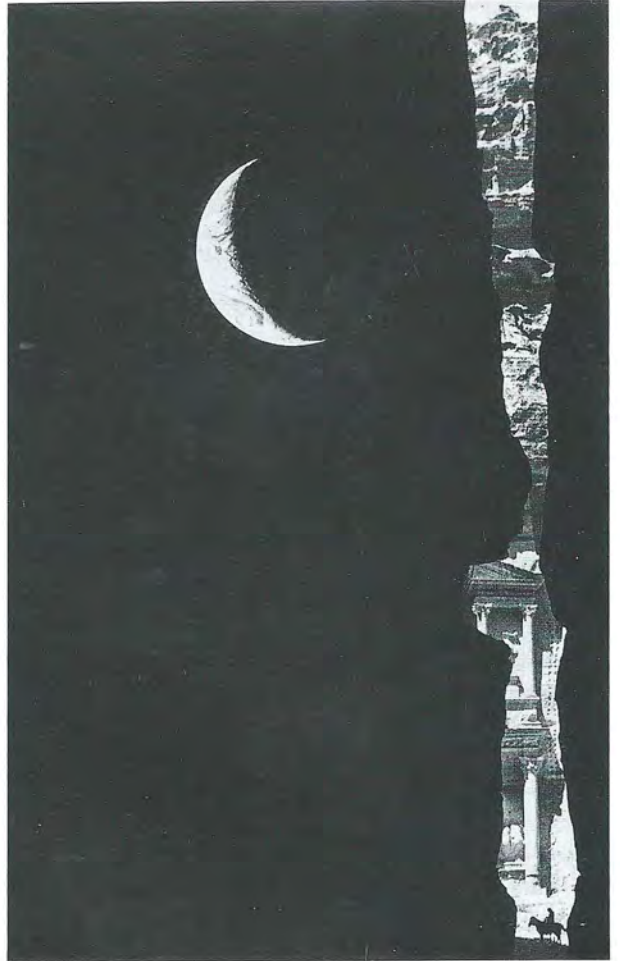
and then, past the anchor's rich gaze –
packing, and concrete, and shadows;
carparks and tree-blots;
a loose wash of sunset
that never strains hard for effect . . .

the people responsible
slamming a door on a camera –
lurching down halls –
a glimpse of a face
as the last one inside says,
"We've called up our lawyers.
I told you, we've nothing to say."

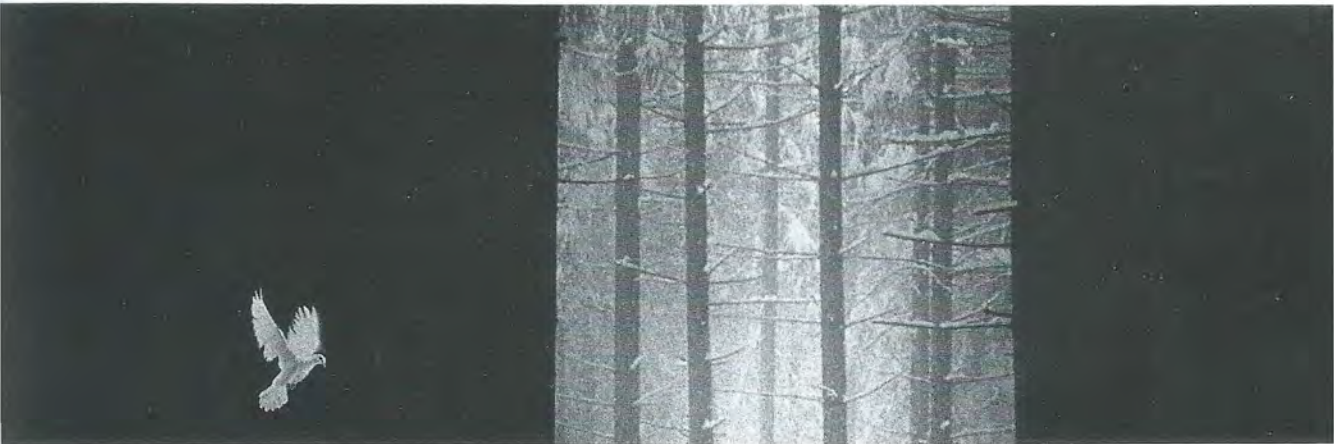
MARTIN LANGFORD

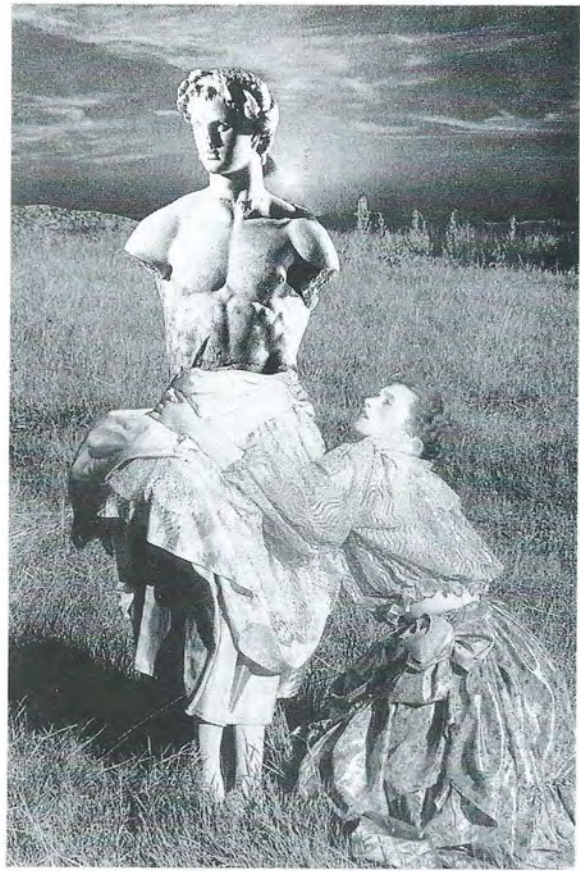


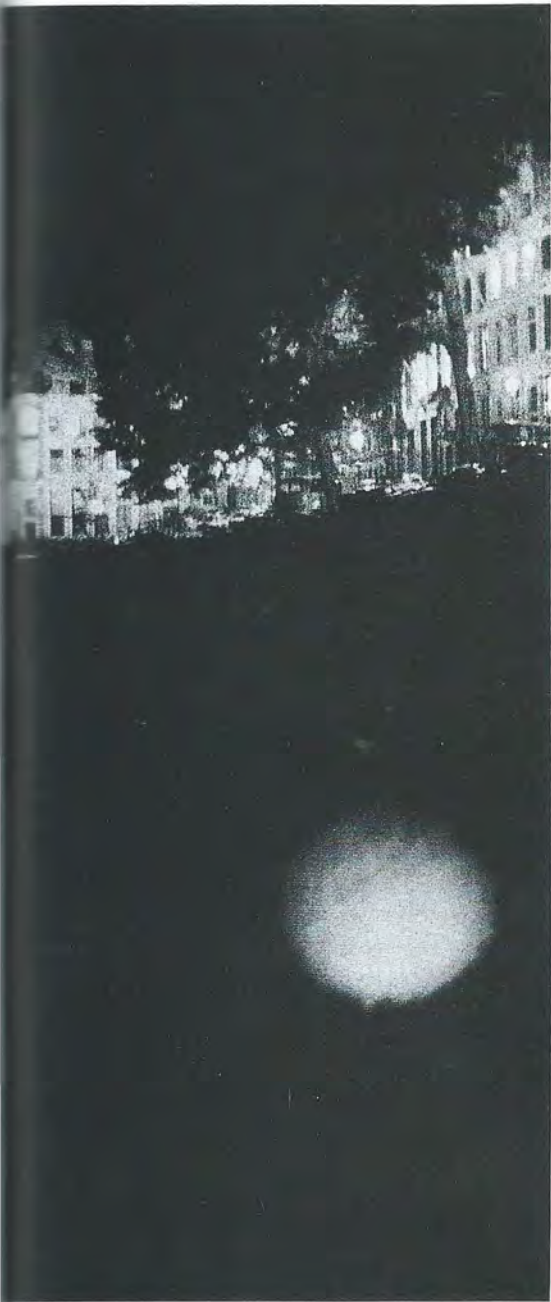
Outside of a Dog













PETER LYSSIOTIS

Outside of a Dog



"Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend.
That's because inside a dog it's too dark to read."

— Groucho Marx

ICUT OUT bits of pictures from magazines, put them beside each other and push them around a bit. Whoever said that the pen is mightier than the sword forgot the scissors.

What I do, what I would like to do, is to seduce the camera away from what others say is its destiny. In that sense, I am a thief.

The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, however, is *the* thief. The one who knows the safe's combination in advance. He wears a mask and works with economy and grace. No-one sees him at work, no-one notices him leave. He is a wealthy thief.

I was apprenticed to Cartier-Bresson. Eventually, one night, I too became a master thief.

Rousseau defined the thief as the first to put an enclosure around a field and call it his own. For *monteurs*, there are no 'closed' images, no 'owned' images. All images are open for plunder, for re-assessment, for re-alignment. When Leonardo Da Vinci wrote in one of his notebooks that "... everything becomes everything, everything can be turned into something else ...", he was declaring himself the patron saint of *monteurs*.

There are boundaries conventionally drawn between documentary (*actuality*) and fiction (*re-creations narrated with an eye to dramatic effects*). However, there are also hybrid forms of representation and fiction which question such boundaries. For example, in Haskell Weskler's film, *Medium Cool* (1969), footage of the demonstrations during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago is merged with the fictional story of a reporter covering the events. Here, dramatic images fictionalise the real, then pass that fiction off as reality.

In the 1940s, reality was a simple photographic image. The public followed World War II through photographs in *Life* magazine or

as images from *Movietone* newsreels. The viewed image was reality, both moving and informing the public, a public that still views Robert Capa's photographs from the Spanish Civil War and from World War II with reverence.

In part, the power of these images is conferred by our distance from them. They are our only means of 'seeing' these events, for we are viewing the images long after the events have taken place. We 'learn' to trust these images; we simply come to believe they are 'true'.

Even with an historical perspective, even with the knowledge that time has given us, we look at photographs of the American Civil War and accept them as true, though we now know that many of these images were in fact 'staged', the bodies arranged to create a more dramatic scene.

The war in Vietnam gave us 'instantaneous' photo-journalism. Every evening, on the television news, we saw 'events' as they had just occurred. What could be more real?

And now we are going even further into realms of subjective reality. We now deliver our faith into the hands of the newscaster, as well as having faith in images. The images are 'real'; but they must also be interpreted for us — Where are they? What are we seeing?

Television takes us even further into the realm of fiction. Programs now admit to recreating 'reality'. This is only apparently a step further, a development. In fact, we have come back to photomontage. Docu-dramas and recreations of crimes from police files, just as in Weskler's *Medium Cool*, blur the boundaries between documentary and drama. Called 'simulations', these re-creations are presented in the format of television news or documentary. They are designed to convey the feeling of events we have not seen, the power of which we might have felt if we had been *there*. Such photomontages provide us with

a sort of purchase on *reality*. Reality has become that which we *feel* to be real, which strikes an emotional chord within us.

When we look at any photomontage, the reality to which we become witnesses is an alternate one. We look at such 'blurred', re-formatted images and testify to their truth. Such images provide us with the illusions upon which the truth is based.

Do my images mourn the loss of authenticity, shared experience and history, or do they celebrate the loss?

Photographers, interested as they are in that hybrid realm somewhere between the documentary and its dramatised version, have been hard pressed to find any subject not already pilfered by the media. That's because most photographers resemble, in the end, those jeans that have been pre-shrunk for sale. The world of their photographs seems composed of spectacles whose relevance has been pre-exhausted. This is when photomontage comes to the rescue, by offering meaning to trivialised content.

The point of photography has inevitably changed. No longer can a photographer's task simply be to capture and present otherwise unknown snippets of our world and make them available to everyone. Now the photomonteur, like an historian, must learn to use material that is already available – advertisements, magazines and brochures.

The photomonteur, however, must re-present it all.

When I make pictures, I lay out images that have been culled from magazines. I push these separate images into a single, composite image. I'm never sure if I've hit a vein, or missed. Sometimes I know by the next day; sometimes it takes a year before I know.

Advertisements are the official art of modern capitalism. I take segments from advertisements, dislocate them, and relocate them, so their *other* meanings can be revealed. Perhaps I'm following Roland Barthes' first lesson – that nothing which seems trivial is meaningless.

Freed from its original context, the individual component taken from a larger image begins to realise possibilities concealed within it. My montages give these components a chance to fulfill their (anti-rational) potential.

Despite the 'seamless' style of some of my photomontages, I like to imagine that the sur-

faces of these images barely conceal the disorders/disjunctions that are grinding against each other, deep down below. In common with all montage, my work seeks 'to oppose the organic symbol with its material fragment'. It seeks to show that meaning does not come organically from within the given subject, but is instead created by its relationships to other seemingly isolated fragments.

How do I feel about re-using segments of other people's work?

There is a fine tradition at work here. The copying of artworks enabled apprentices to train and so, one day, produce original works of their own; works that would also, eventually, be copied. In other words, our concept of originality is narrow and outdated. The concept of originality inherent within Western aesthetic philosophies and art production is mocked by practice. And by the copying of copies – photography. Something entirely new does not necessarily speak of originality. The mixing of influences, the addition of the spark from one's hands and eyes, that is true originality.

As I say, my images are composed from fragments I've culled from popular magazines. More so than the original 'real' images, I hope my montages make you think; in the same way that ruins lead to a contemplation more profound than that of the original structure.

R. D. Laing, in *The Divided Self*, wrote that a sick person rejects everything that is extraneous to his or her image, those things which are just blurs in the mirror. I don't worry about a car crossing the path of my vision, or the wind blowing a branch into the corner of the frame. I welcome the blurs. Therefore, I am not sick!

There are hundreds of possible montages that could have been created using the material I have selected. But this is what I have come up with. You could also cut out these images, re-use them and make something new, something original. Try it.

When an idea is captured in the arrangement of these different bits of paper, the delight that flares is like the pleasure of seeing a puzzle solved, when one didn't even realise there was a puzzle. I enjoy the game.

Francoise Truffaut after seeing the film *Regle Du Jeu*, said that he wanted to return the next day "and see if it all turns out the same". In a similar way, I want to return the next day to

these images and see if *they* will still be the same ... to see if the various components are still arranged in the way I left them. Or if, during the night, they've slid into some new configuration.

Lately, Hollywood has begun to 'colorise' classic black and white films, such as *The Maltese Falcon*. Sometimes, however, I like to reverse this process, to take away the color and return to black and white, and in this way my images often gain an unaccustomed mystery.

Collectively, my images are not static, they are narratives – even when presented without a text. The force that motivates them is the process of finding a language, and then a story. In photographic sequences, as in film, one shot should dissolve into the next and, in this sense, I aim to 'liquefy' photographs by moving them into a narrative, a story. What's the use of one picture, if it doesn't lead us to another?

And when I do incorporate a text, as a sort of 'soundtrack', the images do not seek to simply illustrate or confine the text. Or vice versa. Rather, they should entwine and inter-play, as parallel visions. And always, there is a dialogue between the viewer and the components of the image.

Chinese artists have sometimes described

their brush drawings as wordless poems. I am aware that my own work shares a similar goal.

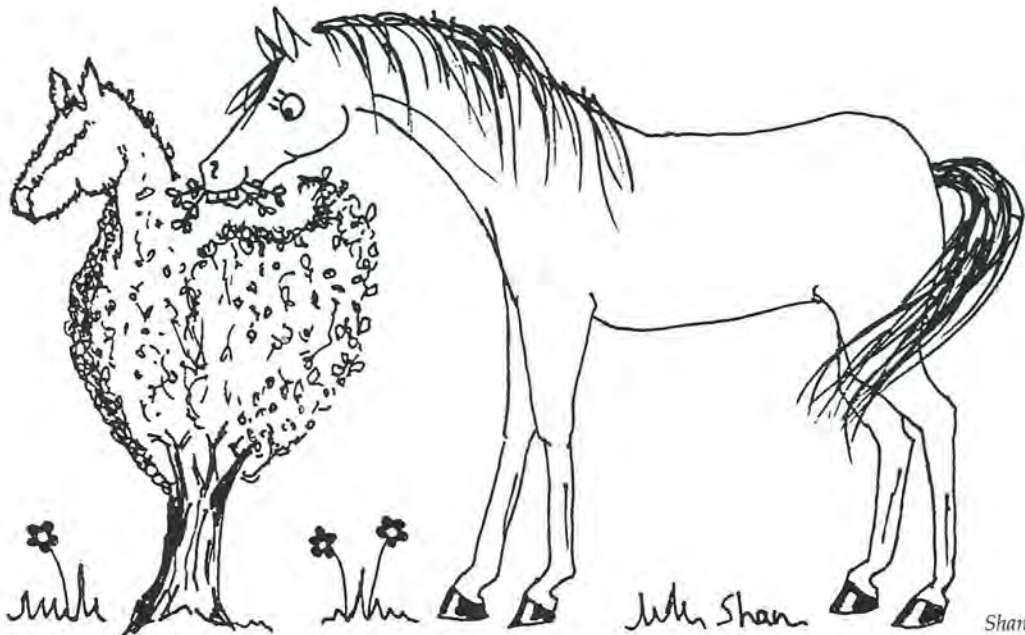
My work moves between documentary photography and photomontage, between black and white and color, landscape and propaganda, still photography and film, prose and poetry. It is always on its way from one point to another. I don't want it to stand still.

In every sequence of images, however, there should be a 'money shot' – an image that the viewer feels justifies their time, or the price of admission.

I want to deceive the viewer into seeing what can be; and my work to show the viewer the world in such a way as to make him or her think they alone have seen it.

Finally, one must not become overawed by mere technology – the camera itself. We see with two eyes, whereas a camera has only one lens. All photographs are deformations of the reality that we can imagine through our eyes. I refuse to accept the magnificent bribe which camera technology offers. Instead, I continue to rely on my eyes and hands, and on a pair of scissors.

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Shan Shmookal

DAMIEN BRODERICK
Writing in Tongues



EVERY NOW AND THEN, news of post-structuralism's success escapes from the academy into the 'real world' (as people beyond the seminar room are self-satisfied enough to dub the industrial or business workplace). The news is rarely considered good. In 1993, the weekly pages of the *Australian's* Higher Education Supplement became a field of contest between promoters of these particular ways of doing things with words – which were hardly new, after all, by the 1990s – and a mixed team of incredulous or wrathful antagonists. What came out clearly from such unequal debates, it seems to me, is that post-structuralist critical theory, despite the complacency or vulgarity of some of its foes, has become itself a stifling, sometimes ludicrous academic orthodoxy. And its language is foul.

Unlike its artfully limpid predecessors, contemporary theory is in no danger of being mistaken for clarity hiding mystery. Certainly any insistence on what once was termed *good prose* is immediately 'constructed' by *soi-disant* radical critics as the reactionary wail of class-enemies and defectors who hide oppressive dogmas behind an illusion of transparency. Intoxicated with transgression, postmodern aesthetes (but I'm one, too, in my way) frequently regard cogent style as the one impermissible sin.

Professor Ken Ruthven has noted "those recurrent standoffs staged by the Australian media between philistine journos out of their depth in the newer critical discourses and arrogant critical theorists who . . . behave like voluptuaries of the higher forms of incomprehension".¹ The clearest proof of this latter hazard is to show it in (rather sludgy) action. Here are some fragments from pages taken wholly at random out of Francis Barker's *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*,²

a remarkably beautiful title from so abominable a stylist:

. . . in the form of the dissolution of the naturalization of its apparency . . . (p. 105)

Here, . . . in the narrative languaging which we have seen to be its form, is the constituting introjection of the morbid aggressivity which is the shadow and, taken as the record of a historical structuration . . . (p. 109)

The narrative is a 'chronological' abstentiation . . . equally negatory – although in this register 'transcendentally' – in respect of its goal . . . (p. 109)

. . . the dispersal of this narrativity must too encounter a slippage towards inherent impossibility of fulfilment linked to the instability of the subject-object fixing. (pp. 109-10)³

Is it philistine to find Barker's sludge unreadable? His prose, unlike Michel Foucault's or Jacques Derrida's, is scarcely that of a volup-

" . . . post-structuralist critical theory . . . has become itself a stifling, sometimes ludicrous academic orthodoxy. And its language is foul."

tuary. Ruthven's phrase is adapted from Sir Peter Medawar, a reductionist scientist famous for his trenchant impatience with verbal game-playing, but even the great French prophets had trouble with each other's more stygian pronouncements. The notable American speech-act philosopher John R. Searle recalls that

Michel Foucault once characterized Derrida's prose to me as 'obscurantisme terroriste'. The text is written so obscurely that you can't figure out exactly what the thesis is (hence 'obscurantisme') and then when one criticizes it, the author says, 'Vous m'avez mai compris; vous etre idiot' (hence 'terroriste').⁴

Sometimes, then, the problem is not just with the words but with what the words are saying, if they are saying anything.

Let me try to convey how bothersome this discursive shift can be to a participant with different preconceptions. Not long ago I sat dumbfounded in a seminar as a handful of academic staff and twenty or thirty sharp-witted postgraduates listened with benign approval to the claim that AIDS is an *effect of discourse*. When my disbelief could no longer be held in check and I blurted out that I was fairly sure I'd heard somewhere that HIV was a virus, a quasi-life-form infesting the human immunological system, forty or sixty shocked eyes regarded me with no less disbelief. Hadn't I read Sontag? AIDS was a *syndrome*, a kind of social contract, a construction, a textuality. The positivistic medical approach implicit in my question was plainly arrant reductionism, too absurd, even vile, for further discussion. I realised slowly that what I faced was a heart-breaking flight from reality, dressed up in pathological terminology. The pitiful truth is that almost everyone infected with the HIV virus dies within a few years, however they deconstruct their plight. And however much you talk about it, you can't get AIDS without direct physical viral invasion of your blood, your tender membranes.

As advised, I at once read Sontag's opinions in *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. Her piercing intelligence, of course, had disposed in advance of just such preposterous cant. From the outset Sontag insisted that, like the cancer she had overcome through chemotherapy, this affliction must be treated by specific toxic medical interventions and not holistic claptrap.

There again, I suppose, if the text is radically indeterminate perhaps contrary constructions – reading against Sontag's grain – are not simply possible but imperative, and the more the merrier.

I sat in another seminar and heard a wryly clever scholar enumerate theories of Dracula and

vampirism, by the 1990s a fashionable topic from popular culture. Again, understandably, the rhetoric of AIDS was not far away: all that perverse erotic charge, sharing of blood, wasting and ruin. Neither was patriarchy, domination and submission, even the crisis of colonial empire. I was hardly taken aback to learn that a notable scene where a young woman sucks at Dracula's torn breast is at once a reverse figuration of the phallic or vaginally-dentated mother, a sexual-abuse victim forced into fellatio, a phallogocratic seizure of the power of lactation and the menses, a blasphemous troping on the Christian eucharist, and all of these simultaneously, because deconstruction's textual enthusiasm dotes on paradox and over-coding. I did not allow myself to give way to even a

"I realised slowly that what I faced was a heart-breaking flight from reality, dressed up in pathological terminology."

moment's scepticism until we heard that this exchange of vampiric fluids might be construed most rewardingly as a *semiotic information flow*, like a DNA transaction. Stifling my laughter, I looked about furtively. Thirty or forty young people in black skirts, trousers, heavy bone-crushing boots and pale faces listened contentedly to this delicious silliness, some taking languid notes, one or two nodding in sober agreement.

Is there a momentary temptation to align oneself with Arnold of Rugby: "Mere intellectual acuteness . . . is to me more revolting than the most helpless imbecile, seeming to be almost like the spirit of Mephistopheles"? Mere intellectual acuteness is a constant risk, one must admit, in any textual strategy of assault founded, as post-structuralism is, in Martin Heidegger's word-play.⁵ "Why is there any being at all and not rather nothing?", Heidegger asked (recalling Leibniz), unsatisfied with Kant's perfectly good answer that being is not a predicate but a pre-condition to questioning. To expand that summary retort a little: we can imagine a chair, or the colour red, or love, or the dimension of depth *not existing*. But I do not think we can

imagine the annihilation of some abstract category 'being' or even 'Being'. The closest we can come, I suspect, is the physics of the Big Bang, in which the fundamental symmetries of our spacetime frame are supposed (on some models) to have emerged from nothing as a kind of massively charged vacuum, which instantly started to break apart into a cascade of energy, fields and the laws determining their interaction.

Is that pregnant nothingness the same as Heidegger's Nothingness (*Nichts*) against which Being is meant to stand as an epiphany? It is significant, I feel, that recent attempts by Stephen Hawking and his colleagues to model a 'wave function of the universe' propose to do away even with that time-before-time, postulating a quantally-smearred initial state, a curved spacetime boundary that literally prohibits any escape from the substrates of this universe (even if it produces an infinity of 'baby universes' that extrude into their own separate reality via black holes).⁶ If such a mathematical program succeeds, it will help clarify the Kantian claim that 'being', 'is-ness', the existential copula, is finally no more than a convenience of language.

But can either theoretical or empirical advances address ancient problems of metaphysics? Quantum theory, asserts mathematician and theist Martin Gardner, "has shed *no* light on this question [the origin of 'being']". There is speculation that the universe started with a random quantum fluctuation in the false vacuum, but this vacuum has nothing to do with metaphysical 'nothing'. The fluctuation presupposes quantum fields and laws, and laws of probability. So the question is simply pushed down to a deeper level, but the problem of why there is something rather than nothing is as opaque as ever.⁷ This is unarguable for so long as we grant that universal 'nothing' – an utterly timeless, spaceless, lawless void – is genuinely conceivable.

I do not think it is. I assert that any sentence proposing it either confuses universal nullity with an absence (perhaps intensely poignant) of some more limited state or structure, or rests on a verbal trick along the lines of the pseudo-question "what sort of person would I have been had my parents never met and so had produced quite different children?" Such imagined offspring would have possessed, as Wittgenstein might have said, a 'family resemblance' to my

mother and hence to me, and to her imagined husband and hence to his children. But none of this is clarified by speaking about my actual *being* or imagined *nothingness* when musing on such conditionals.

In short: when we say "It is raining", this sentence no more reveals a portentous 'is' than an 'it' doing the raining. We could just as validly and completely state: "Rain now falls" or "Rain-fallingness 1.45 am in Brunswick".

Walter Kaufmann neatly summarised Heidegger's lexical approach to the ground (*Grund*) of Being:

He speaks of *ergründen* (fathom) and *Grundung* (foundation) and distinguishes between *Ur-grund* (primal ground), *Ab-grund* (abyss) and *Un-grund* (bottomlessness?) . . . The piling up of words with the same root – one of the most characteristic devices of Heidegger's style – induces a spurious sense of illumination, an unfounded conviction that something has been explained.⁸

Unsympathetic critics go further. George Steiner (who is more generous, for reasons that fail to persuade me) characterises their response to Heidegger's eccentric method, a response I would generalise:

[Even] a polemical discussion of Heidegger's method is merely futile. His writings are a thicket of impenetrable verbiage; the questions he poses are sham questions . . . To try to analyse Heideggerian 'ontology' . . . is to speak, or to speak of, nonsense – non-sense, in the most drastic connotations of the term . . . [His influence] is nothing less than disastrous, both philosophically and politically . . . This is not, I repeat, a finding that can be preemptorily dismissed or reduced to mere professional myopia. It is a critique and counterstatement which should be kept steadily in view, however problematic it makes the obvious dimension, the intense presence of Heidegger's example and writings in current reference and sensibility.⁹

Contemporary Theory, in many respects both a child of and a reaction against Heidegger, carries over much of his method of linguistic peregrination. Let us meditate for a moment on a long

paragraph of Jean Baudrillard.¹⁰ His mid-'80s essay *America* is described on the blurb as the "most accessible and evocative book" by "France's leading philosopher of postmodernism". The textual surface, as usual, flares appropriately like sun-blasted mica as he drives fast down the freeways of southern American deserts "where humours and fluids become rarified, where the air is so pure that the influence

"The textual surface . . . flares appropriately like sun-blasted mica . . ."

of the stars descends direct from the constellations" (p. 6). What follows is poetry, of a kind, but what is it *saying*, if anything? If, indeed, anything definite or assayable (like the farcical astrology of that last quote) can be found in its delirium:

Speed creates pure objects. It is itself a pure object, since it multiplies surfaces and territorial reference-points, since it paralyses time to annul space itself, since it moves more quickly than its own effect and obliterates that effect by outstripping it. Speed is the triumph of cause over effect, the triumph of duration over time as instantaneity, the triumph of desire over the superficiality of the boundary and of pure subjectality. Speed creates a time of closure which is never lethal; its only rule is to leave some trace behind. Triumph of memory over forgetting, an enriched, mnemonic intoxication. The profundity and irreversibility of an attenuated object in the complex geometry of the desert. Driving like this produces a kind of hypervisibility, opacity, or longitudinality in signifiers, simply by permeating them. It is a sort of accelerated rebirth, renewal by a compression of forms the delectable form of their appearance out of nowhere. Speed is the explosion of DNA. It is far from the mineral, no reflected image, and it already evades catastrophe, any squandering of time. Perhaps, though, its fascination is simply that of the plenum. There is absolute seduction here, for seduction requires disclosure. Speed is simply the rite that initiates us into saturation: an anticipatory desire for

forms to explode into motion, concealed beyond the very rarefaction of their immobility. Akin to the nostalgia for geometry that haunts living forms.

Now it is true that one intuits some remote glimmering of what Baudrillard means in this deluge of words, a hazy grasp that the notion of 'speed' has become an agile signifier in his phenomenological circus. His enthusiastic supporters, and there are many, would reject with anger and contempt any request for clarity, for reductive intelligibility. What we have just read, they declare, is 'thinking the postmodern' in the mode of hyperreality, and cannot be paraphrased or rendered into syllogisms with unam-

"To ask for lucidity is stupidly vulgar, not to say embarrassingly uncool."

biguous signifieds. To ask for lucidity is stupidly vulgar, not to say embarrassingly uncool.

ONE MIGHT WONDER, THOUGH, if this plea is altogether convincing. Are we not being called upon to take rather a lot on trust? Is this not just another version of what Steiner dubbed (in the persona of a sceptic) Heidegger's "mystical bullying"? (*Heidegger*, p. 12). Suppose we try a simple experiment and reverse the apparent polarity of some of these hectic sentences. Would the new passage abruptly be less profound, less magically poetic – even less self-evidently 'true'? Certainly that would be the case if we altered, say, "e equals m c squared" into "e equals m root c", or "Sydney is the capital of Latvia" into its denial:

Speed creates pure objects. It is itself a pure object, since it cancels out the ground and territorial reference-points, since it runs ahead of time to annul time itself, since it moves more quickly than its own cause and obliterates that cause by outstripping it. Speed is the triumph of effect over cause, the triumph of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of the surface and pure objectality over the

profundity of desire. Speed creates a space of initiation, which may be lethal; its only rule is to leave no trace behind. Triumph of forgetting over memory, an uncultivated, amnesic intoxication. The superficiality and reversibility of a pure object in the pure geometry of the desert. Driving like this produces a kind of invisibility, transparency, or transversality in things, simply by emptying them out. It is a sort of slow-motion suicide, death by an extenuation of forms the delectable form of their disappearance. Speed is not a vegetal thing. It is nearer to the mineral, to refraction through a crystal, and it is already the site of a catastrophe, of a squandering of time. Perhaps, though, its fascination is simply that of the void. There is no seduction here, for seduction requires a secret. Speed is simply the rite that initiates us into emptiness: a nostalgic desire for forms to revert to immobility, concealed beneath the very intensification of their mobility. Akin to the nostalgia for living forms that haunts geometry.

Is this not, after all, as agreeable as the original? A devotee of dialectical thought might be happy to concur that it must be, since all propositions incorporate their negations. For the rest of us, I suspect my demonstration deals Baudrillard's method a blow, perhaps a lethal one. For if a proposition 'A' strikes us as profound, beautiful and compelling, and a moment later 'not-A' has the same impact, it is worth checking to see if we are perhaps intoxicated rather than persuaded.

Some readers will dispute this account, claiming that Baudrillard's rich paradoxes and non-sequiturs are merely parodied and banalised in my second version. It is precisely because that second version fails to create conviction in us that the buzzy insight of Baudrillard's own words is confirmed. Perhaps so. All I can do, as a situated commentator within a set of discursive values derived as much from science as from the humanities, is to express my doubt that either version makes much sense (aside from the clichés that neither paragraph manages to avoid). By the way, the second version is actually Baudrillard's original. I hope you found my own contrary version no less profound, mysterious and hypertrue. But perhaps I have just lied

to you, and the first version is, after all, the correct translation from Baudrillard's French. Can you tell, by re-reading the fragments, which of my claims is more likely to be true? If you cannot, where does this leave us? (And what have I proved if this is the case?)

Elsewhere, Baudrillard's insights into science are no less thrilling, parlaying a misreading of quantum theory into self-parody:



... DNA *was* a universal and an invariant, but, once unmasked, so to speak, it has begun to change in order to throw the researchers off its track; it is deuniversalizing itself to muddy the waters ... We mustn't underestimate this capacity 'objective' processes have for playing hide-and-seek with science. You understand nothing of science, nor of its failures, if you don't take into account this ultimately quite natural evil genius. If all human and animal species change their behaviour under observation, why shouldn't the same thing happen at the level of molecular species?¹¹

It might seem that this is simply perversity, *faux* stupidity for art's sake. Baudrillard beats his critics to the draw: "it seems to me that explanation is the real crime ... deep down, I am at one with those who will never understand. A brute slumbers within me who sneers at such understanding and doesn't give a damn about

intelligence" (p. 201). Here is theory at its last extremity of insouciance.

The pun is mightier than the word/s. Don't quibble. (A quibble, the dictionary tells us, is a pun. The shortest distance between two puns is a straight-line.) Still, the deconstructor Howard Felperin once took for his own epigraph this radiant fragment from Kafka:

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony.¹²

Post-structuralists (especially the great patriarchal prophets, hovering always on the edge of glossolalia: Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard) burst into the temple. They savage the canon. They mark it with their reeking urine. They desecrate sheets and signatures. In time their terrifying charisma is stolen by bureaucrats, routinised and institutionalised (the grinding verbs fill their own forms). Aporia indeed.

Glossolalia has a long tradition in religion and the academy both. An innovator makes her mark as much by introducing a fresh lexicon as by convincing us of her startling point of view, her barrage of surprising evidence. Often this cascade of jargon is altogether justified, and cannot be avoided: we think with words, and new words, even new syntax, help us to think new things. But that very fact makes us vulnerable to its abuse. The generosity we evince toward those who offer us a renewed discourse should not be allowed to blur into the delirious enthusiasm, captured rather aptly in Mark 16:17-18, of modish converts: "And these signs shall follow them that believe . . . they shall speak with new tongues . . . and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them . . ." Swallowing a dram of Heidegger, Baudrillard and their ululating post-structural followers may

very easily teach you the use of new tongues but is likely, for all that, to leave you (as Althusser's marxism did for many theorists a decade or two back) with a nasty hangover.

Damien Broderick is writing Theory and Its Discontents, from which this essay is drawn. His forthcoming book from Melbourne University Press is The Architecture of Babel: Discourses of Literature and Science.

1. *Australian Book Review*, April 1993, p. 39.
2. Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjectivity*, Methuen, 1985.
3. My ellipses throughout, though I have done no great violence thereby to the delicacy of Barker's prose.
4. John R. Searle, 'The Word Turned Upside Down', a review of Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction*, *The New York Review*, 27 October 1983, p. 77.
5. The phenomenological background to European deconstruction is discussed in William Ray, *Literary Meaning - From Phenomenology to Deconstruction*, Blackwell, 1984.
6. This latter conjecture has been advanced by Professor Lee Smolin of Syracuse University; a simplified discussion is contained in John Gribbin, *In The Beginning: The Birth of the Living Universe*, Viking, 1993. Hawking's boundaryless universe is sketched in his celebrated *A Brief History of Time*.
7. *On The Wild Side*, Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 186.
8. Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* [1959] Anchor, 1960, pp. 345-6.
9. George Steiner, *Heidegger*, Fontana, revised edition, 1992, pp. 4, 59.
10. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner [1986] Verso, 1988, pp. 6-7.
11. Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*, trans. Chris Turner, Verso, 1990, p. 202.
12. Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 6. Regrettably, he does not source this quotation, beyond the story's title: *The Leopards in the Temple* (p. 45). Oddly enough it is also the epigraph (though in a variant translation) to W. K. Wimsatt's final volume of *New Criticism*, *Day of the Leopard: Essays in Defense of Poems*, Yale, 1975, p. 3; Wimsatt got it from the pre-deconstructive Geoffrey Hartman's 'Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure', *Yale French Studies*, 36/7, 1966, and Jacques Ehrmann's *Structuralism*, Doubleday Anchor, 1970, p. 157.

SUPPER SONG

The perfect utterance is not enough
The measured utterance The disembodied face
Baying at the moon
Is not enough You are not
And I am not enough To have been guided
Out of Egypt is not enough
Climbed to the pinnacle
Of ashes or the point of a pin is not enough
To have danced in the storm Danced
Inside the needle's eye Danced upon the
tongue
Of a fat flame is not enough
To have stared stared into the eye
Of the needle or curled into its thin comfort
Is not enough The comfort
Of blistering flame The slash
Of blistering ice in the jaws of dawn
Is not enough The knife
Turning gold in its glistening hand
Is not enough And the flung stone And the
lamp
At midnight
Sweating a thin song is not enough
No song
Is enough without the underwater tide No word
Enough without the groan under the earth
The dizzy sudden thought of a diving flight
Downward into the well of a dream
Down into the square cell
At the staircase foot No fever No magical flute
Is enough without the shuddering breath
No lie enough without its sober truth
No life without its death O pathos
Of the spheres

ALEX SKOVRON

THE SCREEN

for Ron and Pam Simpson

Midnight is yesterday,
The city has been put out for the night,
The crescent is seeking a place to settle,
But on the nineteenth floor one window burns:
If you drift in through the sealed aperture
You will come to the place
Between two rows of cabinets and files
Where he crouches at his workstation,
The fanlight hub of a great arc of consoles,
Gazing into the glow.
He will outstare it, he is proud
Of his quiet computeracy, proud of his faith
In selected absolutes and perfect pitch
At the keyboard; he is forever joking
About a macro for every word,
But he is not joking. He knows the past,
He has read about it,
Knows it is our fondest, our bitterest enemy,
He would macro the past if he could,
From his vantage the future comes first:
He regrets the mystics – foreknowledge
Is oxymoron, dead algorithm,
Already too late; it can never change
What has not yet happened (that is, the future),
Because everything is written and
Already has happened – he understands this
Deeply – and what has happened
Can never be altered. He is proud, faithful
And fully computerate. For the moment
He is alone at his beautiful devotion
And likes it that way.

ALEX SKOVRON

XMAS STORY

i saw two single mothers with unkempt children/
queuing for food parcels at the smith family/
 hanging
their heads/ in a way that could only invite
charity/

 not greedy/ quick to tell their children/
only to take one toy/ & boyfriends restrained
somewhere in the background/ in dark
 commission
flat loungerooms/ beer in one hand/ fist in the
other/

 & i saw slaughterhouse supporters in the pre
xmas rush with no conscience/ the fact
 implanted/
by the freezer cold glitter in the smile of the
industry/ that these animals enjoy dying for us/

there is no noel noel for the naked calf/ throat
ripped open/ now airborne for the first time/ since
the day it was born/ in the blue green paddock/

& the animals that stood by the baby in the
 manger/
in holy light & bedside straw/ accepting of the
fragile mother/ are consumed by us on the eve
 of
the birth/

 & those unfortunate enough/ to have the
lost dogs' home/ a few streets away/ will shut
the
windows/ on that side of the house/ on xmas
day/

to the grind of concrete paws & the yelping of
pale

frightened dogs/ & mad dogs cringing in the
backs

of their pens/ signs on the wire gates read:
desexed

loves children & car rides to the beach/

 & older cats/

used to territory sunbaking & habit/ too tired to
wear bells or for mouse catching/ rather than
 spoil
a family's once a year trip/ are waiting/ fluffed
up/
waiting for their chance/

 beneath the tree/ in a
pink wrapped gift box/ to be reopened again/ by
 a
new bright family/ on xmas morning/ feeble
 indignant/
until the end/ by the sleepy point of the needle/

i heard the smith family woman/ curt & uncaring
&

employed for that reason/ with a reference from
the DSS/ say overly loudly/ to the two tired
mothers: didn't you hear me the first time/ there
are no food parcels left/

 but each child is entitled
to more than one toy/ about the time she said
 this/

the children lost interest/ the oldest child
replaced

a broken manger with glitter on the roof/

 & a toy
manufacturer came through the door/ with a
dozen

bob-back-up clowns with bright red noses for
punching down/ but the kids weren't interested
in them/ nor were they keen on the brand new
pushbike/ donated by an elderly man/

 & they stood
in front of their mother as if to support her/
against the onslaught of charity/ & the dark eyed
mum faced the powers that be/ employed for too
long

by the smith family/ & she said: i know that it's
christmas/ but my kids don't want to play when
they're hungry

CORAL HULL

IAN SYSON

Approaches to Working Class Literature



*Towards a point
of departure*

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY THEORY often promotes the practice of self-reflexivity: the recognition by critics of their own speaking positions in relation to objects of scrutiny. It is becoming increasingly unacceptable to make the kind of analysis that pretends to objectivity. This is, in part, because of the common recognition (at least among many critics from the left) that analysis will, unavoidably, always be tied to a set of ideological beliefs and assumptions that are in no way universal or uncontested. In accepting this I am obliged to describe my own position in relation to my object of analysis, working class literature. But is it enough for me to make some kind of list indicating my ideological position and the theoretical works that inform and shape my literary criticism as prefatory remarks? There are crucial determinations and limits that have produced these positions that would be ignored were I to leave it at that. Furthermore, there are determinations of these determinations. Selecting a point of departure would seem, then, to be an arbitrary matter.

To leave it at this would, however, be an error which consigns this paper to the doubts and difficulties of relativism. The process of determination cannot be articulated through the metaphor of *mise-en-abîme*. No matter how rhizomic, fluid, chaotic, fractalic or semiotically overdetermined life might appear to some thinkers, the basic biological truth that in order to sustain their lives people must eat, and that eating requires the performance of a substantial amount of productive work, has a continued relevance to the vast majority of the human race. Moreover, if nobody does *any* work then nobody gets to eat – the consequences of which would clearly be disastrous for humanity. In recogni-

tion of these biological and social realities, humans have, throughout history, organised their environment and society so that the means of sustenance of human life (the means of production and reproduction) are developed, maintained, and improved, with whatever tools and conceptual frameworks that are available – tools and frameworks which are themselves subject to development, maintenance and improvement.

In the epoch since the Industrial Revolution, or since the late eighteenth century, this process has, in many anglophone and European countries, gone under the name of 'industrial capitalism'. What characterises this economic system is the ownership and control of the means of production and reproduction by a small class of people, the bourgeoisie or the ruling class.

“... the basic biological truth [is] that in order to sustain their lives people must eat, and that eating requires the performance of a substantial amount of productive work ...”

Another, much larger grouping of people, the proletariat, operates the means of production and produces surplus value – the capital from which the capitalist system obtains both its name and its momentum.

This system is basically iniquitous and unjust as well as often being barbaric – especially, but not solely, as it manifests itself in imperialist conquests. Yet, despite this, and despite the fact that it is a system that works against the objective interests of the overwhelming majority of the world's peoples, it is maintained and

defended – often by people in whose interests it would be to overthrow capitalism. In Robert Tressell's working class novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), Frankie, the young son of central character Frank Owen, can see this iniquity:

But you'd think their own sense would tell them! How can it be right for the people who do nothing to have the very best and most of everything that's made, and the very ones who make everything to have hardly any. Why even I know better than that, and I'm only six and a half years old.

In explaining this, Frankie's mother uses arguments that emphasise what Louis Althusser was

“... despite the fact that [capitalism] is a system that works against the objective interests of the overwhelming majority of the world's peoples, it is maintained and defended...”

later to name, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. Distinct from the 'Repressive State Apparatuses' – like the armed forces, the police force and the legal system (also ideological) which are all available to the ruling class because of its ultimate, though not direct, control of these state institutions – the Ideological State Apparatuses are more subtle means of obtaining obedience and loyalty from the proletariat. Through institutions like the education system – primary, secondary and tertiary – the family, the church and so on, capitalism's remaining in place has been constructed as being both desirable and inevitable.¹

Of the many institutions and discourses wherein significant ideological labor is performed, literature has often been of high strategic importance. Much recent scholarship has been devoted to explaining the hegemonic function of the discourse of literary studies. Many of these studies, however, have also been prepared to acknowledge that while “activities as apparently simple and fundamental as reading and writing are, in capitalist society . . . forms of reg-

ulation and exploitation” they are also “potential modes of resistance, celebration and solidarity.”² A novel like Tressell's is a particularly good example of oppositional literary practice, and is one that can facilitate further oppositional practices. Nevertheless, the fact that *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, along with many other oppositional texts, is rarely studied in university English departments tends to reinforce the notion that English departments have had, and continue to have, a role in the maintenance of class society. Indeed, as Terry Eagleton argues throughout *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, there is nothing arbitrary about the choices and selections that are made in departments of English and Literature the world over; but neither are the decisions completely aligned with the interests of capitalism.

Departments of literature in higher education, then, are part of the ideological apparatus of the modern capitalist state. They are not wholly reliable apparatuses, since for one thing the humanities contain many values, meanings and traditions which are antithetical to that state's social priorities, which are rich in kinds of wisdom and experience beyond its comprehension.³

In contemporary Australia, the educational policies formulated and implemented during the tenure of John Dawkins as Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training have come to place enormous pressure on humanities academics to orient their research and teaching practices more towards an economic rationalist approach than the kinds of radical practices that proliferated under the relatively liberal codes which had governed their site of labor certainly from the 1960s and prior to the 1980s.

These pressures are rarely, if ever, expressed in such direct terms. In the federal government's *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (1988) – better known as the White Paper – Dawkins allows a version of criticism to be an important aspect of higher education.

We want to be a society that understands its own political processes, enables all citizens to participate in those processes and does not accept without question decisions made on its

behalf. Higher education is the source of much of this understanding.⁴

Such high-sounding rhetorical flourishes do little to hide the fact that 'representative democracy' and the separation between 'society' and the 'political process' are not issues for criticism in this formulation. The real governmental emphasis is signalled in the following complaint:

Australia has a strong international reputation for the quality of its basic research, and it is imperative that this should be preserved and, where possible, strengthened. Simultaneously, there will be a need to improve our *poor national record* in applying the results of our basic research in an *industrial and commercial* environment [emphasis added].⁵

It is safely to be assumed that the White Paper is not referring to the poor record of revolutionary Marxist academics when it comes to the successful application of the conclusions of their research in an industrial environment.

Indeed, whatever spaces opened up for radical critique in the late 1960s and early 1970s are currently in danger of closing. Funding pressures on departments have also resulted in changing work practices that have eaten away at traditionally good conditions of employment. The academic unions, despite some militant gestures, have been largely ineffectual in defending those conditions. Boris Frankel, in *From the Prophets Deserts Come*, makes the ironic point that Dawkins has succeeded in giving the lesson which generations of Marxists were unable to teach to the majority of Australian academics.

Unfortunately, it was John Dawkins' educational policies which enlightened most teachers on the connection between 'the economic' and 'the cultural' – a public lesson which has left many in the education industry angry and demoralized.⁶

Ian Hunter has argued against this 'doom and gloom' analysis. As he suggests, the "metaphor of 'crisis'" has been used to describe "the state of the humanities in the wake of the restructuring of higher education." He claims that this metaphor is too strong and cites as justification "the fact is that since the changes there have

been significant *increases* in Australia Research Council grants to the humanities and in overall student numbers – albeit with lower funding per student."⁷ The first point, however, says nothing about the nature of the research that obtains this funding; the second contains its own critique. Indeed, in my site of labor (the University of Queensland) overall increases in student numbers have, in the absence of concomitant increases in staff funding, translated into drastic increases in student numbers per tutorial. It is not surprising that Hunter shoots himself in the foot so soon after the argument is put, given that it is both offensive and ludicrous to those academics who have seen their workloads increase and their class sizes expand since the beginning of the Dawkins era.⁸

Yet this assertion, of the level of primacy of economic factors and the relative precision with which they can be apprehended, does not mean that I am rejecting either the value of literary criticism or the need for critical self-reflexivity

"... whatever spaces opened up for radical critique in the late 1960s and early 1970s are currently in danger of closing."

on the part of a literary critic. On the contrary, in a period when the gap between rich and poor is widening on a global as well as on a national scale; when unemployment levels in all Australian states are 'normally' over ten percent; when the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is moving to the right almost daily; and when the dismantling of many of the gains made by the labor, environmental, Aboriginal land rights and women's movements is either occurring or the threat is on the horizon, then my own position is a cause for at least momentary self-analysis. Indeed, what *are* the institutional and social ramifications of a relatively well-treated (and funded) postgraduate student (potentially) on a *petit-bourgeois* career path examining the cultural and literary

practices of the Australian working class?

IT WOULD APPEAR THEN that I have set myself the task of choosing a starting point and accounting for the determinations of that choice while discussing some of the practical methodological problems related to considering working class literature – a field that is fraught with immense difficulties of definition. I will do this through an examination of some of the apparent paradoxes that I have been confronted with since beginning as an arts student at the University of Queensland in 1986.

I come from a working class background. I was born to working class parents in a small mining village in County Durham in England. My family emigrated to Australia when I was nine and I spent all of my teens and early twenties in the North Queensland mining town of Mount Isa where my father worked as a miner, my mother as a housewife and I undertook an electrical apprenticeship after completing school. Largely because MIM refused to re-employ me upon finishing my time, I worked sporadically as an indentured electrician in Australia and New Zealand for five years, before deciding to try tertiary education. But how do I know that this narrative represents a working class background? Or, more importantly, what makes me assert this? My self-definition prior to coming to university was rarely consciously made in terms of class; rather, it was made in terms of nationality, region, color, gender, occupation, individuality and so on. Occasionally I perceived myself as a worker with collective interests but only at particular times: for example, during industrial disputes in which I felt involved or in political arguments about the merits of unionism or the Australian Labor Party. Of these instances I can safely say that I saw society divided up into us (the workers) and them (the bosses). Ultimately, however, I normally interpreted my life in fairly individualistic terms. And no doubt this was a strong determining factor in my decision to 'better myself' at university.

One of the benefits of entering the university was access to those writings, especially in the Marxist traditions, that could help to better explain my life for me: they explained, first, my pre-university experiences in terms of economic class position and, second, how my ways of

recognising other groups in society, particularly gender, racial, ethnic and regional groups, were part of a massive kind of hoax perpetrated in the interests of a ruling class whose interests had never been in line with mine. This, then, is the first paradox: coming to university (historically a bourgeois institution whose main function was to educate the middle class) enabled me to develop a fuller sense of working class consciousness.

The main point to come out of this paradox is the notion of access. Documents exist that can help explain to, and develop for, working class people their own understandings of ideological control and political justice. However, access to them is usually prevented by a complex of factors ranging from a lack of knowledge as to what to obtain and then how to obtain it, through sheer lack of desire, ability or time to do so, to a downright refusal of access by the ruling class. And herein lies the second paradox. Prior to coming to university I was, like many people involved in literary criticism, a voracious reader of novels. The work of such authors as Dennis Wheatley, Stephen King, Wilbur Smith, Henri Charrière and company held a great attraction for me. But I had not read *one* of the vast number of novels that I could justifiably place in my own construction of the category, working class literature. Even during my Bachelor of Arts degree I only read a few books that could be described as working class novels: Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* (1936), Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929) and Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* (1950), the apparent spatial and temporal isolation of which constructed them as rarities rather than as examples of a substantial tradition. Then, towards the end of third year, I read three novels in quick succession: Robert Tressell's *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, Barry Hines' *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1969) and Betty Collins' *The Copper Crucible* (1966). Each of them affected me considerably because they connected with my experience in a way that other novels that I also found compelling, like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925) and Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* (1955), did not.

My relationship to the latter works was often a dishonest one: a kind of forgetting of the bits that mystified me or those that I found dull in order to latch an acquired New Critical compe-

tence onto identifiable structural and thematic joints. Nevertheless, I persevered with them partially because the ideology of self-betterment that informed my coming to university also demanded a denial of the resistances I felt to the various transcendental constructions of these arguably well-crafted texts. In other words, if I did not understand them then I 'bloody well should'. (I might add here that I am still convinced that there are very good reasons for reading these novels that lie beyond the limits of the New Criticism.)

Then there were these other and largely devalued texts. *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, set in early twentieth-century England, echoed many of the events and discussions I was a participant in as a tradesman working on building sites and it reinterpreted them in terms of the maintenance of class society. It showed, for example, the way in which shoddy work was not solely the fault of an individual tradesperson but also the result of larger social forces that place profit above creativity. *A Kestrel for a Knave*, set in post-war England, also showed the ways that the creative desires of an individual working class boy, Billy, are stifled within and by class society. The novel documents the forces that militate against Billy's desire to learn how to train the kestrel he has captured. One episode in particular illustrates the point I am trying to make about access. In this episode Billy is trying to borrow a book on falconry from a library. However, the education system and other determinants have left him so ill-equipped to deal with the library's requirements for borrowing privileges that he resorts to stealing the book from a bookshop. Billy's exclusion from the knowledge he desires can be read as being both cultural and economic; and to gain access to this knowledge he must break the law. After acquiring the book Billy shows a dexterity and intelligence, out of keeping with his incompetence in other areas of his life, in successfully training his kestrel. There is an ambiguity as to whether his acquisition of the book facilitates the training. But there is nothing ambiguous about the book's providing Billy with a way to articulate the skills he has learned. Perhaps the most powerful point that the book makes is at the end. Kes, the symbol of Billy's normally suppressed creative capacity, is killed by his older brother Jud, a brutal and brutalised young coal-miner, in an act

of retribution. Like Tressell's ragged-trousered philanthropists, Hines' working class can be read as being enlisted as a contributing force in its own suppression and oppression.

The Copper Crucible, published in 1966, one year after the end of the eight-month Mount Isa strike, had perhaps the deepest effect on me. Of the three, it was the most positive representation of working class struggle and, probably more affectively, it was set in my home town. It satisfied a strong regional curiosity in that it linked up with my experiences of the peculiar sense of isolation, the dust, the heat, the relentless quest to quench my thirst, and other aspects of living in Mount Isa. But it also represented other, more general and political, matters: the sexism, the racism, the police bashings. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the novel, however, was that it described the mine workings in which I had spent four years of my working life. The following passage is a particularly good example:

Down in the far black reaches of the mine, half a mile below the surface, tired and filthy men pulled old tobacco tins from their pockets, unrolled their watches and squinted at the time.

The ground rocked with the explosions of the first shots fired down in the stopes, and men with streaming, blackened faces climbed up the ladders from below. Air pounded through the huge ventilator pipes, and down the drive a booster fan screamed, drowning their voices.

They came in groups from the stopes and the grizzlies, wet with hours of accumulated sweat, and wiped their hands and faces on stinking sweat rags. Their lamps were gleaming and bobbing in the half-dark. The shift boss walked down between the rails, making sure that everybody was out. The men sat around on the landing, rolling smokes and yarning as they waited for the cage that would take them up nearly 3,000 feet to the surface and the sun.

The cage came hurtling down, sending a blast of cold, dead air over the waiting groups. The grille clanged back, men crowded in as the shift boss unlocked switches, threw levers that detonated the main charges, counting the blasts of shattering explosions. Like some architect of hell he

shattered the rock face, and, in a wild cacophony, liberated the wealth, the copper and lead veined ore the next shift would drag out.

The cage rose and fell again, more than a thousand men were carried, exhausted but elated, towards the glaring sun.⁹

My reading this represented a completely new literary experience for me. To have my own work experience represented was unusual enough, but for it to be done so in such a sensual (if not sexual) and poetic form was unique. On the whole *The Copper Crucible* retold, at times very accurately, a specific and substantial part of my life. Moreover, it did this in terms that dissipated the regional and occupational specificity of *The Copper Crucible* into the realm of general political issues.

To say this novel influenced my academic direction would be an understatement. It actually redirected me. My planned 1989 Honors' thesis on 'Marxist Criticism of *Ulysses*' I conse-

"To say [The Copper Crucible] influenced my academic direction would be an understatement. It actually redirected me."

quently rejected in favor of a thesis, 'Australian Working Class Women's Writing', that was largely informed by Marxist political and literary theory. The crucial move was from an examination of Marxist analyses of a book that has been established as an icon of literary worth (by most streams of academic criticism, even Marxism) to an attempt to integrate the methods and objects that had most appealed to me. This move entailed the displacement of an acquired privileging of the supposed stylistic, aesthetic and artistic superiority of modernist writers like Joyce in order to analyse the work of writers like Collins, Jean Devanny, Mena Calthorpe and Dorothy Hewett whose prose hit me at a substantially different experiential level. This is not to suggest that their works are characterised by a lack of stylistic, aesthetic and artistic sophisti-

cation; but rather that their literary value can only partially be articulated by reference to these qualities.

The task ahead of me seemed difficult because of a number of theoretical and practical problems. The major one was how to argue for the importance of these writers without adopting a position that wanted to incorporate their works into the Australian canon by reading them in mainstream literary (aesthetic) terms but also without making concessions to mainstream constructions of them that would reject their literary status in order to make some kind of sociological analysis. The former would represent a 'selling-out' of the class struggle encoded in these works, the latter a caving-in to those who see literature and politics as absolutely separate realms.

With regard to the last point I had found that I had plenty of strong critical support, especially within Marxism. Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Tony Bennett (to name a few) have all had a part in the undermining of this New Critical assumption. Bennett alone, especially, in his strident critiques of bourgeois aesthetic discourse (a cornerstone of New Criticism) gave me enough rocks to throw. However, the next problem was that when it came to working class literature these theorists (perhaps with the partial exception of Williams) were so busy examining the bourgeoisie that they were blind to the cultural productions of and for the class in whose interests I supposed they were working.

I found that their theoretical deliberations and equivocations over whether or not literature was an ontological category were important on a general theoretical level, but not very helpful for the task at hand. Indeed, it is deeply ironic that in 1974 just as Martha Vicinus, in *The Industrial Muse: A Study Of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature*, was starting to map the field of working class literature from within anglophone academia, academic Marxism was beginning to wonder if literature really existed. From Williams' important destabilisation of literature in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) to Eagleton's equally important deconstruction of literature in *Literary Theory* to Bennett's recent publication, *Outside Literature*, in which he redefines literature as "a socially organised field of textual uses and effects"¹⁰ — another way of saying: "yes, literature exists" —

the debate has turned full circle. And while this minimal narrative elides the enormous complexity of these developments, it is nevertheless true that these debates within Marxist critical theory have not contributed, in any substantial and direct way, to the analysis of working class literature.

I am not, however, coming from a position of anti-theoreticism in making this analysis – if anything, the above paragraph is meant to register an impatience with some strands of Marxist literary practices and their positions on working class literature. First, and simply, it is impossible not to be theoretical; second, these debates have occurred within Marxism because of the various social and institutional forces that have produced a dialogue with post-structuralism; third, my problem with the whole process is a theoretical one that comes from the question: what is the proper focus for a Marxist critic? Or, what does a Marxist critic do?

We could do worse than start with Karl Marx's suggestion that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it". While it is no simple matter to describe how to change the world, it is nevertheless possible to make a negative assertion in that no strategy for changing the world in the direction of socialism is going to be of much use without an understanding of the capacities and limits of the working class. However, even allowing for the assertion's political validity, it can still appear irrelevant to literary critics. This is because, even within Marxist literary theory, it is by no means accepted that working class literature exists as a substantial and identifiable body of works that can engage the established concerns of literary criticism. As a result, the Marxist literary critic can comfortably ignore working class literary productions for one of two reasons: either, they do not exist in great quantity or they do exist in great quantity but are generally of an inferior metaphysical quality. Marxist criticism can pat Robert Tressell on the back and get back to the real business of examining the great works of literature *and* theory. As the post-Marxist Bennett suggests, the major concern of academic Marxism has been to engage the bourgeoisie on its own ground and in its own terms. And this is one of the main reasons why the academic proponents of working class literature are few and far between.

A FURTHER PROBLEM IN MY SEARCH for intellectual support among the academic left came, paradoxically, from the emergence and development of Cultural Studies. The seemingly doomed trajectory of traditional literature departments – as announced by Eagleton in 1983 – encouraged many aspiring left-wing academics to move towards this new development in the humanities. I remember, as an undergraduate, being puzzled by the number of recent University of Queensland graduates who were off to Griffith University – an institution more oriented towards 'Cultural Studies' – to do Honors. When asked why, they explained that this department was too rigid in having particular compulsory fourth-year subjects, such as 'Chaucer', 'Shakespeare', and 'Milton', especially

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given that the way these subjects were taught did not allow them to explore the theoretical issues that came from their readings of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and company. Griffith loomed to me as the land of left-wing-academic milk and honey. But it soon became apparent, in my own readings of post-structuralist texts, that their escape-flight from one 'dogma' seemed merely to be landing them in another kind of limiting Barthesian, Foucauldian or Derridean orthodoxy. It appeared that the kind of Marxist method I was moving towards, that wanted to use words like 'real', 'concrete', 'history', 'tradition' and 'literature' without apology, was less likely to be accommodated at Griffith than it was at the supposedly conservative University of Queensland.

The recent works of the Griffith-housed Bennett and Ian Hunter – with their particular and controversial uses of Foucault¹¹ – confirm for me the existence of such a limit. *Outside Literature*, for example, contains the following self-positioning:

While, in thus rejecting Marxism's totalising pretensions, my arguments are post-Marxist in conception, they are certainly not intended as anti-Marxist – although I have no doubt some die-hards will see them that way – but rather aim for more selective and localised use of Marxist concepts and categories.

However, little purpose is served by my seeking to anticipate the reader's judgement on these matters.¹²

Despite its apparent humorous and even-handed tone this represents an exclusion of those positions that would want to characterise Bennett as an anti-Marxist – it would for example be quite a legitimate point to argue that the rejection of the possibility of totalisation is emphatically anti-Marxist. Indeed Milton Fisk makes a general argument of this kind that is also a refutation of positions like that adopted by Bennett.

Post-Marxists of this sort have simply bought the old objection that Marxism is reductionism and dressed it up as an objection to totalization. Marxists have long admitted that the kind of privileging they go in for allows them to appeal to multiple forms of causation . . . But multiple forms of causation are one thing, and privileging a framework that lies behind and hence modifies all of them is quite another. Such a framework need not itself freeze history within it, since it can provide the framework for the actions of those forces that lead to a new framework.¹³

However, to hold such a position as this (no matter how well-argued) is to be labelled a 'die-hard' by Bennett. Although he recognises no purpose in further anticipation of reader response he has nevertheless already disinvited a specifically positioned reader to read on. Bennett's position as an important representative of Griffith University's teaching and researching of cultural studies tends to extend the scope of the disinvitation beyond the boundaries of his book towards the School of Humanities at that institution. While it hardly needs to be said that there is more to Griffith University than Bennett and Hunter – Pat Buckridge, David Carter and Gillian Whitlock, for example, are important, though less visible, cultural commentators – it is

nevertheless true that there run strong currents of anti-Marxism and anti-humanism that tend to attract or repulse particular kinds of consciously left-wing students.

The paradox here is that the cultural studies movement, within academia, was largely grounded in and enabled by the work of British intellectuals like Richard Hoggart, Williams and E.P. Thompson (the latter two being both humanist and Marxist in their critical practices) who were all instrumental in reappropriating culture as a term that could also apply to the activities of working class people as opposed to the Leavisite construction of culture as the artefacts of an elite group. The infusion of particular mediations of post-structuralism into the cultural studies movement has produced an environment where working class literature cannot be discussed without severe, even crippling, theoretical constraints. This is not to say that there are not limits operating in the Department of English at the University of Queensland or any other department, but rather, that they operate in different ways. Indeed, I would want to argue that the *apparent* differences and tension between and within the relevant departments and/or schools at Griffith University and the University of Queensland offer a specific provincial variant of the way in which widespread limits to the study of working class literature and culture within academia are lost in the general huff and puff of the sometimes fierce polemical debate between the old (liberal) and new (post-structuralist) guards.

While it is the case that liberalism is by definition almost always the most suitable ideology for capitalism, Boris Frankel makes the vital point that recent developments in 'post-structuralist' theory also line up (albeit by default) almost completely with the interests of capital.

What is remarkable though, is that precisely during the period of the most aggressive promotion of market capitalist values [the last 15 years], radical political economy became unfashionable in academic institutions and other parts of society. Ironically, the celebration of greed and competition, instead of validating the relevance of a critical political economy, produced a great surge of 'culturalist' writings from economically illiterate post-structuralists and postmodernists.¹⁴

While not necessarily 'pro-active' in defending class society, the kind of 'wet' liberalism that has predominated in British and Australian English departments throughout this century has meant that literary criticism has, in the main, looked away from grass-roots, material political struggle. Yet the advent of post-structuralism has made little difference in this regard. Frankel is certainly clear about the interests being served by the application of post-structuralist and post-modernist methods in contemporary literary and cultural criticism. For him the essence of post-structuralism is a looking-away. Nancy Hartsock, too, asks what value particular versions of post-structuralism might have for women's liberation:

why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? . . . Just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of systematically and rationally organising human society become dubious and suspect.¹⁵

In the struggle for genuine human liberation, neither liberalism nor post-structuralism holds much strategic or long-term value. They represent the tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee of minimal progressive political impact literary practice.

I think that it is at this point that one of the fundamental problems of this paper can be introduced: the possibility of a relationship between myself – a participant in academic criticism, an activity which, for good structural reasons, has rarely addressed working class culture in terms that are sympathetic with that culture or with the interests of the working class – and a tradition of creative writing that is overwhelmingly written by people whose concerns often tend to be different from those of mainstream academia, usually about people whose concerns are also non-mainstream-academic, and that is addressed to working class people usually in order to make some kind of political point, even if that point is only to say, "you are part of a class". As Eagleton rightly points out in relation to literary ventures that come out of the working class, they "interrogate the ruling definitions of

literature [and, consequently] cannot so easily be incorporated by a literary institution quite happy to welcome *Sons and Lovers*, and even, from time to time, Robert Tressell".¹⁶ To borrow from the language of post-structuralism, how

"In the struggle for genuine human liberation, neither liberalism nor post-structuralism holds much strategic or long-term value."

can academic criticism constitute as its object that discourse which either represses mainstream academic criticism's existence and central metaphysical concerns or, at best, hurls insults and consigns it to its margins?

It might seem that I am ignoring some points of overlap between the two discourses in making this kind of analysis. For example, John Frow, in *Marxism and Literary History*, deals extensively with a number of the works of the Australian writer Frank Hardy, many of which I would place in the category of working class literature. Frow makes an argument that constructs Hardy's works as dealing with the kinds of problems of referentiality, signification and authority that are important concerns of post-structuralism. He sees the works written subsequent to *Power Without Glory* as commenting and re-commenting, *mise-en-abîme* fashion, on a crisis of representation generated by the effects of the book's publication. From reading Hardy's critical works, correspondence and interviews it is clear to me that Frow makes an important argument: Hardy was concerned with the theoretical issue of how most effectively to represent the class struggle. Indeed, I read the subsequently published *The Four-Legged Lottery's* dual narrative as an example of Hardy's attempt to apply his own understanding of Brecht's alienation technique to the novel form. But Hardy had another crisis of representation in that *Power Without Glory* nearly landed him in jail. In trying to represent the corruption in the ALP and the Catholic church – two of the crucial hegemonic forces of Australian capitalism – the archaic law of criminal libel was brought to bear on him.

That he was eventually found not guilty does nothing to hide the fact that *Power Without Glory* represented a threat to the ruling class. This is where Frow's argument is limited. His anachronistic concern to show the way in which Hardy's *oeuvre* deals with post-structuralist literary theoretical issues results in a repression of the centrality of class struggle to *Power Without Glory's* production and reception.

Given Frow's commitment to the concept of "the discontinuous, non-teleological dynamic of the literary system"¹⁷ there is also something of a contradiction in his author-centred and genetic construction of a Hardy *oeuvre*. While there is an identifiable trajectory in Hardy's work, I think that it must be linked eventually to his relationship with Australian working class politics and the various crises of the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia (CPA) rather than be seen as an individual writer's inevitable slide into the aporias of signification. This is because *Power Without Glory* is not simply the work of an individual; its physical existence in 1950 was the product of a number of networks with Hardy as the focal point. Without denying the amount of work Hardy put into researching the book, it is also a collation of hundreds of individual sources. For example, apart from information gleaned from interviews conducted by Hardy, sympathisers would write to Hardy with pieces of information of John Wren's activities. In the face of the politically pragmatic refusals from publishers and printers to disseminate the book it was also necessary for a number of people to participate financially and practically in its physical construction. Betty Collins, a member of the Melbourne Realist Writers' Group at the time, told me when I interviewed her in 1989 of the group's enjoyment of and their commitment to learning how to print, bind and cover a novel.¹⁸ As she pointed out, this is why many of the first editions are a bit shoddy in construction, with missing or upside-down signatures, bad covering and so on. This process complete, and because of the refusal of mainstream publishers to distribute them, the books needed to be shipped around to the bookshops that would stock them by a network of committed people.

Eventually, despite all the pressures brought to bear, *Power Without Glory* was written, put together, distributed and read; and these facts cannot be divorced from the various groups of

people that assisted in the process. But this assistance was not given by good-natured philanthropists wanting to give an unfortunate writer a fair go; it was given by people, many of them from the CPA and the Melbourne Realist Writers' Group, who were committed to working class politics and to what Hardy was trying to achieve in the face of opposition from a multiplicity of censorious forces. This is the context out of which a class analysis of Hardy's writing could start. His subsequent grappling with theoretical issues would then be read as being determined by his growing distaste for the Stalinist-inspired technique of socialist realism – as evidenced in his correspondence with Dorothy Hewett in the late 1950s and by his already noted interest in Brecht – and by his growing distance from the CPA – the denunciation of Stalin and the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 being important catalysts. The 1975 publication of *But The Dead are Many* would then represent an enunciation of Hardy's break with the CPA – a literary refutation of his 1952 publication *Journey Into the Future* in which Stalinist Russia is eulogised to the point of travesty.

Unlike Frow's, my analysis of Hardy tends to move in the opposite direction from the construction of an individualised *oeuvre*. The search for the social roots of Hardy's work reveals a number of influences and effects, an important one being the Realist Writers' movement: an at times Australia-wide organisation, that functioned from 1944 until 1970, concerned with the politics of literature by, about, and/or for working class people. This movement represented a forum for the discussion and production of working class literature. It was based on principles of collective criticism in workshops called Manuscript Nights at which aspiring writers could read their work and receive criticism from established authors like Dorothy Hewett, John Manifold, Frank Hardy, John Morrison, Judah Waten and other lesser-known members. Through the organisation's journal, initially called the *Realist Writer* (1952-1954 and 1958-1964) and later to become the *Realist* (1964-1970), these writers were able to be published. They also learned, through participation, the practicalities and vagaries of publishing. The journals' intended readers, working class people, were presented with stories and poems that tried to

link in with their own lives; but they were also introduced to literary-theoretical issues that came from the journals' regular articles on topics like Modernism, Symbolism, the Australian Tradition and the merits of Patrick White as a writer. In short, the movement was (within certain limits) an autonomous working class literary institution.

After learning this much about the Realist Writers' movement I now find it difficult to place many of Hardy's or Collins' works in any other context. And if I were to construct some kind of lineage starting with *Power Without Glory* and the politics of representation of class struggle it would lead to works like *The Copper Crucible*. Indeed, the publication of the latter was beset, and aided, by many of the same factors as the former. In fact Collins was so conscious of the *Power Without Glory* libel case that she asked a Queen's Counsel to vet the manuscript. As a consequence about twenty thousand words deemed potentially libellous were removed. Initially she had tried, like Hardy, to disguise the setting of the novel by setting it in the fictional town of Mount Irene and renaming the pubs and identifiable characters, but this was seen by the Queen's Counsel as too transparent. The general manager of MIM at that time, Sir James Foots – ironically the same person who became a patron of Freedom From Hunger after trying to starve out the workers of Mount Isa in the eight-month strike – is given the name Warwick Legge in the 1963 manuscript. In the published version Mount Isa is named, the pubs and various landmarks are given transparent names (e.g., Boyd's Hotel is called Floyd's); whereas the names of identifiable characters are changed beyond recognition – for example, James Foots is called William Davis. The novel, in this bowdlerised and therefore depoliticised form, was eventually accepted by Jacaranda Press and printed by Mirror Newspapers in Brisbane.

While the novel bears the marks of its censorship, it also bears the trace of its collective genesis. In 1959, at a Sydney Manuscript Night, Collins read a short story called 'The Handkerchief' which was based on her time spent in Mount Isa in 1957. She was urged by some of those present to turn it into a novel. So for the next six years she wrote and rewrote the novel under the influence of her activities as a Realist

Writer and within the various constraints of being a single working mother. But there was another influence that became obvious the more I thought about it. The passage of the novel transcribed above indicated an authorial familiarity with the mine workings but was written by somebody who in all probability had never been down Mount Isa Mine, because, before Valentine's Day 1974, company policy forbade women from entering it.¹⁹ Indeed, one of the characters in the novel is conscious of this problem: " 'It can't be much fun in the mine – a little hell down there, I should say', Coral said. 'Though I wouldn't know for sure, since no women are allowed down.' "²⁰ When asked about this, Collins explained the way in which *The Copper Crucible* was a collection of a vast number of inputs, many of them made with the express purpose of helping her to represent the workers of Mount Isa and their various struggles. The passage is Collins' inscription of several historically anonymous workers' descriptions of their place of work.

"As Frank Hardy suggests, 'History is always made by nameless people'."

As Frank Hardy suggests, "History is always made by nameless people"²¹ The same should be said of working class literary history. Bertolt Brecht's poem, 'Questions From a Worker Who Reads', has the same implicit complaint:

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?²²

Work and workers are, in dominant representational modes, hidden from history. Consequently, the reconstruction of working class literary history is largely an archaeological project. There is, however, no place for the naïve assumption that a fully preserved excavation will be performed; the history of human conflict has ensured the permanent erasure of many of the inscriptions made by subdominant groupings and classes. Yet their fragments and traces

remain. In my search for the point of departure from which I can ask the question: "what is working class literature?" this historical residue has moved steadily into place.

ENDNOTES

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2. Janet Batsleer, et al, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London: Methuen, 1985): 5.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983): 200.
4. The White Paper, 7.
5. The White Paper, 9.
6. Boris Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture* (Melbourne: Arena, 1992): 10.
7. Ian Hunter, 'Humanities Without Humanism', *Meanjin* 51.3 (1992): 479.
8. Even the White Paper recognises "that an increase has occurred in student loads since March 1987 and in 1988 and that cumulative effects of this increase will continue to have an impact on workloads for higher education staff", 134.
9. Betty Collins, *The Copper Crucible* (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1966): 13.
10. Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (London: Routledge, 1990): 284.
11. See, for example, John Frow, 'Rationalization and the Public Sphere', *Meanjin* 51.3 (1992): 514; and Tom O'Regan, 'Some Reflections on the "Policy Moment"', *Meanjin* 51.3 (1992): 529-30.
12. Bennett, vii.
13. Fisk, 'Poststructuralism, Difference and Marxism' *Praxis International* 12.4 (1993): 326.
14. Frankel, 11-12.
15. Hartsock, 'Foucault on Power', *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990): 163-64.
16. Eagleton, 216.
17. Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986): vii.
18. All unattributed but substantial references to Collins from herein derive from this interview.
19. David McDonald, 'Laying the Ghosts', *Mimag Mar* (1975): 15-19.
20. Collins, *The Copper Crucible*, 106.
21. Hardy, *The Hard Way* (London: Werner Laurie, 1958): 98.
22. Bertolt Brecht, 'Questions From a Worker Who Reads', *Bertolt Brecht: Poems*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre, 1976).

Ian Syson was an apprentice in Mt Isa and has since completed a doctorate in literature at the University of Queensland.



*Unable to master prose,
Estelle was desperate.*

Leigh Hobbs

CHARLES ROBERTS

Infected Queer: Notes of an Activist



ALL THAT YOU AND I HAVE in common is the illusion of being together. The only resistance to this illusion, by way of pain killers, analgesics, anodynes, is the desire to destroy isolation. Impersonal relationships are the utopia of isolation.

As matters now stand, I believe nothing is going to save my life, or the lives of all those infected with the virus. Despite what I read – despite what I hear – despite what I see – despite what I am told, I *know* that HIV is not a chronic, manageable illness, like diabetes.

Do not ask after my health (“How are you?” is an absurd and meaningless question which resounds with the moralists’ tocsin for salvation; it is a nauseant that is surpassed only by “How are you, *really?*”). Do not ask me what it is like having HIV, for the answer lies in a syringe of my blood – by injecting it into your bloodstream, you could experience it for yourself.

Let me tell you *what* I am: I am a pest; I am the plague. I am seropositive because the government of the United States of America did not believe the lives of faggots, junkies and whores were important enough to worry about educating on AIDS in the early 1980s.

How am I? I am cut off from the outside world. As if putting people into boxes weren’t bad enough, now you keep drawing lines and graphs – boxes are for hats and lines are for artists.

Who am I? I am doubly a minority. A suppressed and deprived minority, on the edge of exile. Suppression is dangerous. Damaged people are dangerous; they know they can survive. Sooner or later, prisoners of taboo will threaten the status quo of imperial authority with their symptoms.

I deliver a speech, entitled *It’s All About Pricks*, at the Canberra Institute (March 27, 1991), as part of a lecture series called ‘Language is a Virus: Sexuality and Representation Today’. I place a large dildo (à la Jeff Stryker) on the podium and, at various stages throughout the speech, I pause, take out from its packaging a hypodermic syringe, uncap it, and then pierce the dildo with it. I also run a tape recording of the voice of a doctor who is reeling off an analysis of my medical condition. The tape lasts approximately three minutes, and contains such information as my T-cell count, p24 antigen levels, medications, etc. When I finished speaking, a man in the audience stood up and ejaculated: “You say you’re fighting to live – but do you want to be a walking vegetable?”

*

Kenn was over earlier. He told me about the ‘Imagining AIDS’ project. We both have the same idea of taking pictures of ourselves in front of a clothes-line full of activist tee-shirts.

I started throwing up again. I’ve turned yellow. At the doctor’s, I had to piss in a cup – the piss was darker than it had been for some time. He tested the urine to find it full of bile.

I woke up last night around 2 am, itching very badly. I thought I was going to go crazy: not only was I itching like crazy, but I couldn’t get back to sleep. I have hepatitis A. How wonderful.

Maggie wants to know if I am going to remove my nose ring when I share the podium with Brian Howe, the federal Minister for Health, at the launch of ‘ACCESS: A Positive Diagnosis’.

Talked with Joe on the phone last night about

the seminar in Sydney on contact-tracing (convened, would you believe, at the Quarantine Station). He believes it is a waste of time because, not only does he *not* know the names of most of the people he has fucked, but he cannot remember what they looked like, either. He thought the best way to contact-trace his partners, should he ever test positive, would be to paste bulletins at all the appropriate beats . . .

Launch of 'Travel Safe', the new education campaign on AIDS by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health. To me, it looked as though a lot of money had been wasted on repetition. When are they going to say, in words everyone can understand (but some might find offensive): "When you fuck, use a condom!"?

Meeting with Wayne Berry, ACT Minister for Health. His department had told him there had been no requests for ddI in Canberra. Why is it I have met so many people through work who have to obtain their supply of ddI from doctors in Sydney? I am confident Berry can see through the posturing of his department.

There are about three or four people in this town who are doing everything. We are tired – some of us are getting sick. What is everyone else doing?

*

Letter to two friends (May 14, 1991):

Sorry that I have not kept in contact with the two of you for such a long time. Life has been hectic and I have been travelling around the country, doing heaps of political activism on AIDS.

– Which leads me to another story . . .

I wanted to tell the two of you quite a while ago that I am HIV positive, but I never had the chance to in an environment where I felt comfortable enough to do so (I don't think there is one). So now you know – Charles Roberts is HIV positive. Perhaps you already knew; if not, you would have found out through *Meanjin*. So, how is that for a story?

*

AIDS results in death every 00 minutes. Two ciphers in place of a number must suffice, for

the recurrence of death is so rapid it is pointless attempting to give an accurate figure. By the time you read this, the figure will be hopelessly out of date. Instead, I am leaving you with the task of finding out how many minutes (or is it seconds or milliseconds, now?) there are between each AIDS death. War is hell.

The first 100,000 cases of AIDS in the United States of America occurred in a period of nine years. The next 100,000 cases in the US will have accrued in only two years. War is hell.

As the US health care system, if it can be called that, has collapsed under the burden of its first 100,000 cases, what is going to happen in the next two years?

We are no closer to finding a cure, despite the expenditure of more than one billion dollars in the US alone. It is estimated that there will be forty million people infected with the virus worldwide by the year 2000.

"It is estimated that there will be forty million people infected with the virus . . . by the year 2000."

Earlier tonight, I was watching television. There was a program which featured one of the newer forms of victim to AIDS: the 'less-guilty-than-them' victim. The woman in the video began by telling us how normal she was – she should never have contracted *it*. First, she turned us into queers and junkies (*abnormal*); second, she turned herself, and others like her, into innocents (*normal*). Innocent victims, the less-guilty-than-them victims – and us, the *them* in their compound-adjectivalised world, the guilty victims.

Television. For a country that is supposedly a melting pot, why does the US break itself into so many compartments, much like the great American TV dinner?

Yes, I live outside the accepted norms of society. I am a rebel; I am antinomian. Antinomy keeps me among the living, keeps me living, alone with anger, rage and a few other 'good' things in my life.

We cannot afford to rest on our laurels while we are being killed off, one by one. We cannot

afford to rest on our laurels while we are being killed off in the hundreds. We cannot afford to rest on our laurels while we are being killed off in the thousands. We cannot afford to rest on our laurels while we are being killed off in the millions. We cannot afford to rest on our laurels, ever.

All that we really have to learn is to go forward fast.

For some, sexuality is an exteriorisation (*straight-acting*). For me, it is an integral part of my identity (*queer*): a *queer* queer (no acting here).

*

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the local Canberra ABC Radio news presenter, Elaine Harris, after having informed her listeners that Freddie Mercury of 'Queen' had died of AIDS-related illness, switched to a track by 'Queen'. It was – you guessed it – 'Another One Bites the Dust'. Apparently, she accidentally pushed the wrong button! Should I bring up this little gaffe when she interviews me on Thursday? Perhaps not, after all, the SMH took the trouble to inform its readers at the end of the piece that Ms Harris is blind – and we must make sure we don't insult blind people.

*

The weekend is coming to a close, with a warm and breezy evening. Through the open window, I hear the chanting and squealing of children at play. They are young, so young that I cannot

distinguish in their voices their sex nor the source of their enthusiasm; they seem enthusiastic about everything. The sound of their innocence against the rustling of the leaves of the trees nearby is uncommonly comforting to me.

I shouldn't have picked up the newspaper, for now my pensiveness is turning into an incipient despair; a tiny filler is entitled 'Lost hope': *Chicago*. *A tree of hope in the Malaysian rainforest con-*

"... having informed her listeners that Freddie Mercury of 'Queen' had died of AIDS-related illness, switched to a track by 'Queen'. It was ... 'Another One Bites the Dust'."

taining a compound that appeared to kill the AIDS virus during laboratory tests has been cut down and scientists have been unable to find a similar one, a researcher from the University of Illinois said yesterday.

*

I THINK WE ALL MUST SUFFER the kind of person who says after eating a piece of chicken: "I can feel the energy from the protein", or who points to a tree in a forest and says: "I find that one aesthetic". That is affectation – I can cope with that. What I cannot abide is ignorance. While doing my shopping today, I was approached by a woman who asked me if I were

Infected Queer

NOTES OF AN ACTIVIST

by Charles Roberts

Foreword by David Herkt

\$20

*AIDS is the solid wall between myself
and a puritanical world — Charles Roberts*

NOSUKUMO MEANS PETER BAKOWSKI JAVANT BIARUJIA IAN
C BIRKS ADRIAN D'AMBRA MICHAEL HELSEM GINA LOUIS
ANAIS NIN JIRI TIBOR NOVAK PHYL OPHEL JANETTE ORR
DAVID N PEPPERELL SUSAN RACHMANN CHARLES ROBERTS
JURATE SASNAITIS PETREA SAVIGE WENDY SCARF LE SCOTT
GRAHAM SIMMONDS PHILIP SIPP & PETE SPENCE IN ENGLISH

Nosukumo GPO Box 994-H Melbourne 3001

a Satanist. As you can imagine, I was taken aback, but I answered her:

"No, I am not. I do not believe in God and, therefore, do not believe in Satan, as you cannot have one without the other. Why do you ask?"

"I read somewhere that Satanists mutilate their bodies and wear rings in the holes they have made."

I was wearing an ACT UP singlet at the time, so, as well as my nose ring, she was able to see my tit rings, too.

"The piercings are just that, piercings. Are those earrings you're wearing a sign that you are a Satanist?"

*

Language is a case of knives which, when in the hands of a skilled knife-thrower, with just the right amount of bitch and edge, can inflict tremendous pain. (We didn't create the noun *bitch*, but we fags sure did coin the verb *to bitch*.) Language is a death factor but it should be a *life*

"Language is a case of knives which, when in the hands of a skilled knife-thrower, . . . can inflict tremendous pain."

factor. Language is as much a barrier to communication as it is a conduit for communication. That is why artists build their own worlds out of words or sounds or pigment or clay or movement. Artists (or, at the very least, greengrocers, housewives, hairdressers) should be in charge of ministries of information, not grizzly-whiskered bureaucrats or iotacist advertising executives.

I am thinking now of the Grim Reaper advertising campaign of the mid-1980s – the first major campaign about AIDS in Australia. The idea was not so much about reaching the 'general public' with information to minimise risk of infection but was more of a scare tactic that broadcast the message: "People with AIDS are nothing more than an endpoint – they are death incarnate." If only responsible authorities would stop using my eventual death with HIV in their communications as a deterrent for unsafe practices. Every time I hear "A tisket, a tasket, a

condom or a casket" I want to lash out with syringes filled with HIV infection. A condom is only one facet of prevention, and it has absolutely nothing to do with a cure.

*

I go on living as an act of optimism.
– Kosta Moutsakas

HIV is transmitted every 00 seconds. Again, like Fibonacci numbers used to calculate plague populations of mice or rabbits, the seconds multiply. Chimpanzees are studied; mice are studied. Pig-tail macaques: studied. There is a shortage on pigtail macaques. In any case, there are not enough chimps, mice or pigtailed to go around. Needles[s] to say, there is no shortage of people with HIV. It is simply a question of ethics: how to study us.

He did not leave a note. He just left. When I die, I will leave a note: *You don't have to cry; I didn't have to die.*

I will probably die from one of the many complications by which this virus inside my body manifests itself. But I don't have to die. I *will* die because not enough is being done to help those of us with HIV and AIDS. But I don't have to die of this disease. I will die because you will not get off your arse and fight with me to ensure I stay alive. I don't have to die yet even though we all must die (*memento mori*). I don't have to die.

*

Today is World AIDS Day: December 1, 1991. World AIDS Disaster Day. 1991 is almost over. What a shame – 1991 was such a nice palindrome. No more of those until 2002. Will I be living then? Not unless we all have the will to find a cure!

Our queer culture advances in stages: 1, visibility; 2, community; and 3, identity. The fabulous drag queens who began the revolution at Stonewall established our visibility; the AIDS crisis has helped establish a sense of community; and now cock-sucking faggots and cunt-licking dykes are identifying with the first two stages.

I have been told I am *brave* for disclosing my HIV status in my speeches. Brave? As if I had a choice. The notion of the *election* of sexuality is

untenable. To ask, Why do you want to be queer? is to elicit another nonsensical question in response, Why do you want to be straight?

Elaine Harris allowed me forty minutes' air-play to talk about whatever I wished to talk about. She brought up the 'Queen' gaffe herself, and said she was livid over her portrayal in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (the mistake was not hers; besides, what does blindness have to do with making mistakes?). I understood exactly what she was saying – *living with* as opposed to *dying of*.

Returned from a meeting of the National Treatments Project Steering Committee in Sydney. The plan Ross and Ian have devised looks fantastic – I think it will go a long way in turning this project into one which is truly national, instead of one that is merely based at ACON and, therefore, mostly a Sydney project (to be more specific, an Oxford Street project).

The AIDS crisis is over! It must be – how else could the Board of the AIDS Action Council take forty-five minutes out of a three-hour meeting to decide when next to convene?

Complaints rolling in over an ACT UP sticker placed on doors and windows of local businesses. Business people are concerned that families with children may have seen the word AIDS. Oh, poor children who might have been emotionally scarred by that nasty acronym. The sticker read: "Fight AIDS Not People With AIDS".

There was community and media backlash over the desecration of Melbourne's famous floral clock. Unknown members of ACT UP supplanted the beautifully manicured beds of begonias of this favourite-with-families Sixties' Swiss watchmakers' kitsch with simple white crosses representing the legions of people already dead and those of us living with or dying of AIDS. An attack on this pretty floral clock stirred Melburnians to anger – anger over uprooted begonias, not AIDS.

Larry Kramer, the playwright who founded ACT UP, said that the activist group fell apart because a "bunch of vicious crazy people" tore it apart. Because there was no mechanism for regulation it collapsed in on itself. Am I one of the destroyers? What eats at the heart of this activist group is that we haven't found a cure, a solution. When logic-driven men discover they cannot *do* but can only *be*, they retreat from their

connection to the world and become instruments of destruction.

*

I have come to discern a social and physical similarity between good and evil, love and hate, pleasure and pain, sanity and insanity. The voices and silhouettes of my complex life after dark. An equilibrium between writing (*purpose*) and living (*beauty*). Purpose is a means and beauty an end. Destruction comes of attempting to express difficult things in an inchoate, rudimentary way: compulsory testing, isolation, exile, imprisonment, death. Obscenity is the power to remove us from the community and desocialise us. AIDS is the solid wall between myself and a puritanical world. Don't shut me out because AIDS is cruel or indiscreet. I am already, being an artist, divorced from the world – every day I must set about rebuilding my world through words.

Cocteau said there *are* doctors capable of pity. Do earthquakes, floods and erupting volcanoes make their burdens seem lighter? I can't believe all this human misery is an insoluble mystery. I will not accept that the deathbed is glorious.

Because of all this talk over the past few weeks I have looked within – I am living on the verge of irrepressible joy.

How do you tell someone you do not have the energy for that soul to be a part of your life?

Once mutual respect is broken, our dreams begin to unravel.

(My theories were working quite well, until you insisted I put them into practice!)

*

Most of all beware, even in thought, of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, and a man who wails is not a dancing bear.

– Aimé Césaire

An American flag, with the stars turned into skulls and crossbones, is the Bush AIDS Flag. I have been out all afternoon affixing this sticker to poles, windows and doors all over Canberra. Herr George will not see his flag – could he care less, when he cares even less for the situation he

is in part responsible for?

Bush is in Melbourne today (January 3, 1992) for a whopping total of four hours. There was quite a large demonstration against him while he was in Melbourne, and two protesters managed to get into a room adjacent to where he was having lunch with VIPs.

Back to work today. Spent another day talking with someone who was recently diagnosed. Sad. How many more people will become infected and die before this pandemic ends?

The support group meeting last night seemed to go for hours and hours. I felt so tired I struggled to keep my eyes open and contribute to the discussion.

I am writing these lines after two days without sleep . . .

This account is from a book by Charles Roberts, a self-described "infected queer activist". It is soon to be published by Nosukumo.

OPHTHALMOLOGY

The sun's image
hasn't been detected
in an icy film
slivered from an eye,
but its eclipse
is permanent
in the cell's nucleus.
A dream has never
been observed
in yellow seeds
crystallised by sleep,
only the geometry
that bolts daylight's
rigid scaffolding.
Probing oceans
swelling in ducts,
the lens will never
magnify the soul,
only the edges of salt
that sharpen sorrow.

TOM PETSINIS

"Foreign languages are too bloody confusing."

(Confucius)

BY LOFO



El hombre
des
jeunes
filles
en
fleur



Er wollte
eine after shave!

Auf
keinen Fall
"Gute Fahrt"
wünschen!



femme
de
guerre

hors
de
combat

Je
suis
ému!



Madame et Monsieur de Katz
having a nice chat -

Ah!
voilà le chat!



WELCOME
BALD EAGLES!

Bist du sicher
die meinen uns?



Hi, Mancha!
Gee I wish
I had an exotic
name like
yours!

¡Hola Spot!
¡Ay! Me gustaria
tener un nombre
exótico como
el tuyo...



JAPANESE BINGO

Yes!
I have an
itchy knee!

IMAGINE: IF FOREIGN LANGUAGES EVER GET A GRIP ON OUR MINDS,
WE'D HAVE TO LAUGH ABOUT STUPID JOKES LIKE THIS.

slippage

JOHN BARRETT WRITES to enquire about the origins of the title of this editorial column, slippage. The estimable Oxford traces it back to the middle of the last century, when it meant the movement of subsidence of a large mass of matter. More recently, it has been used to refer to the "difference between the expected and the actual output of a system." This seems to be an exact expression of the sentiments of an editor contemplating the difference between the hopes and reality of any publication – the typos in the last issue of *Overland* were a minor example. A more recent Oxford example suggests the consequences: "His health had been giving way, and there were signs of mental slippage". Some unkind readers may of course suggest that the very act of proposing to edit is sufficient evidence of such condition. The Macquarie explains the meaning of the word in mechanics as the "amount of work dissipated by slipping of parts, excess play, etc." – undoubtedly editorial hazards. It can also refer to the consequences of paper slipping against the printer's block – a connotation that certainly helped slip it into my mind when searching for a convenient title. Primarily, however, it is the column that holds whatever slips out from the major contributions to the journal, an attempt to fill the gap between the continual ferment of the world outside and our ability to accommodate it creatively and intellectually within our resources of time, money, space and ability.

The most serious slippages noted in the last issue were the change of gender attributed to D. R. Burns, who remains resolutely masculine, and the multiplication of the name of Dorothy Hewett's novel, which is, of course, *The Toucher*, as singular in its number as in its interest. This should not deter *Overland* readers from buying

multiple copies of the book for their friends.

THE GUEST editor for the science fiction section in this issue is Judith Buckrich, who is also the incoming President of Melbourne P.E.N. P.E.N., whose initials can variously stand for Poets and Playwrights, Essayists, Editors and Novelists, was commenced in London as a lunching club by such luminaries as John Galsworthy, but in 1933 was shocked by the treatment of writers at the hands of the Nazis in Germany and since then has been an international organisation working for freedom of expression and supporting writers, students and academics who have suffered at the hands of their governments because of their writings. There are at present three centres in Australia – in Sydney, Perth and Melbourne – and a further one is being established in Brisbane. The Perth Centre is planning to host an international PEN conference in 1995. At a time when world attention has been on Australia's selection to host the Olympics, a festival of sport intended to promote international peace and understanding, it is important to remember that many of the governments that seek to promote their athletes at the same time suppress their thinkers. The spirit of the Olympics is undermined by countries like China, Turkey, Vietnam, Nigeria, Peru and too many others that refuse to recognise that freedom of expression is fundamental to human society.

BARRY OAKLEY has written recently of the difference between offensive words and offensive actions. Words cannot kill, the Holocaust did. But words can produce the fear and loathing that leads to holocausts, whether in Nazi Germany or contemporary Bosnia. Where we

allow language to do our thinking and perceiving for us, we allow it to impose its prejudices on us. Where we use it, as readers, writers and critics, we free ourselves to live more fully in the community. This is where science fiction has its importance. Bad science fiction, like bad work in any other genre, merely dresses our present ideas and phobias in strange garb. Good science fiction, by dealing with ideas at the edge of science and technology, accustoms us to the strange. By turning these ideas back on our own world, it shows this as strange, and thus empowers us to find new paths to community through the jungles of its possibilities. At a time when people are using technology to enable them to turn inward, barring themselves behind locked doors to indulge in private fantasies that exclude community, this task of literature remains urgent.

SINCE THE last issue of *Overland* went to press, the Australian literary community has been dealt several serious blows. First, we learned that Dinny O'Hearn had lost his valiant fight with cancer. His funeral filled the Newman Chapel to overflow, and was enlivened by the sight of a federal minister sitting on the steps outside with the other latecomers. This was in keeping with Dinny's life, which was characterised by a gift for friendship that knew no bounds of rank or status. With the friendship went a passion for every form of human conviviality, from sport to conversation to literature. To literature he was committed both as professional and as amateur: a professional reviewer, critic and teacher who brought passion to everything he did. His interviews on *The Book Program* combined his rasping insight with generous empathy for their subjects and appreciation for the value of their words. This program, which has made Australian writing known to an increasing audience, is his most visible legacy. As importantly, he will be remembered by students, friends, readers and even casual acquaintances for his ability to share his enthusiasms and enrich their lives.

WHEN OODJEROO of the Tribe Noonuccal died, so her sister has said, even the whales sang at her funeral. The gathering of the whales

off Stradbroke Island in the last days of her life is an important symbol of the unity of living things for which she had striven. Her poetry was awakened while she was still known as Kath Walker by pity and anger at the state of her people, and to the end of her life she remained a valiant fighter for their cause. It is a matter of shame for white Australians that at the time of her death we had still neither begun to pay the rent for the land taken from them that we enjoy, nor had given proper recognition either to their claims on the land or to the cost they have paid for our occupation of it. Yet Oodjeroo's anger did not become bitterness, and she remained confident in her vision of a community where whites would have learned how to live with blacks and to share their understanding of the land. Her epitaph could well be the closing lines from her poem, 'Let Us Not Be Bitter':

The past is gone like our childhood days of
old,
The future comes like dawn after the dark,
Bringing fulfilment.

IN AUGUST Jim Hamilton, President of the Victorian branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, died suddenly and unexpectedly. He was Secretary of the branch for ten years until 1977, when he was elected President, a position he held until his death.

Michael Dugan writes: "Jim Hamilton devoted a huge proportion of his life to the Fellowship, editing its Bulletin, answering correspondents, handling telephone calls and administering its awards. He was the epitome of a hands-on president and there is no-one who could possibly replace him. When Jim first took office the Fellowship had fewer than sixty members. It now has well over two thousand – an expansion almost solely due to Jim. Victoria's writers owe a deep debt of gratitude to Jim for the work he has done on their behalf."

John McLaren

Capsule

CAPSULE listings are free, and should be sent to *Overland* at least eight weeks prior to publication. (*Overland* is a quarterly, and appears in early December, March, June and September.) Copy sent to Capsule may be edited, and not all items are used.

THE 33rd Australian Science Fiction Convention will be held from April 1 to 4 next year. Write to PO Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, 3005.

THE Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) assists artists who are exploring the use of innovative technology in the realisation of their projects. In 1993 ANAT supported 12 applications from artists seeking financial assistance through the Art Research and Development Fund. They included Michael Douglas (Vic.), for the development of a hypothetical "Civic Vehicle" that would randomly circulate upon the tram track system of Melbourne. This non-passenger vehicle would consist of electronic hardware and software that would emit visual and acoustic data. Another project to win support was proposed by the "Mindflux" group (SA), to assist in the creation of interactive environments in cyberspace that can be modified by the user's brainwave activity. ANAT also publishes a newsletter full of news about the cutting edge of art and hitech. For more information, write to ANAT,

PO Box 8029, Hindley St, Adelaide 5000. Or phone (08) 231 9037.

THE Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), 8 Petrie Terrace, Brisbane, Qld., 4000, is showcasing the work of Japanese contemporary architects, presented by the Japan Foundation and Institute of Architects, from December 6 to 20. Phone (07) 368 3228.

THE Hazard Poets, a new series of Australian and New Zealand poetry titles, includes Jill Jones' *The Mask and the Jagged Star*, winner of this year's Mary Gilmore Award. The Australian series editor is Philip Mead. For more information, write to: PO Box 4094, University of Melbourne, Parkville. Or phone (03) 344 5483.

THE New South Wales Writers' Centre, which is located in the Rozelle Hospital grounds (enter from Balmain Rd, opposite Cecily Street), organises a wide range of public readings, workshops, classes, talks, exhibitions, and much more. The centre also publishes a lively newsletter, *News Write*, which lists events and is full of interesting news. For details, write to PO Box 908 Rozelle NSW 2039. Phone (02) 555 9757.

A SMALL gem quoted from *News Write*: Free coffee at the Cafe Littéraire. Monday to Friday 3-6pm, for "poor poets, underpaid writers and destitute bastards," at 324

Crown Street, Surry Hills.

ROBERT Harris was to judge this year's Ulitarra poetry competition, but died shortly beforehand. In future, the poetry prize will take Robert's name and be announced each year on April 1, the anniversary of his funeral. Here is Capsule's entry for next year:

I saw the worst minds of my
generation,
Feted, superannuated, fed
But poor dear Bob
Lies in a deep cold grave
Of talent and neglect
quite dead.

THE Harold Park Hotel, of 115 Wigram Road, Glebe is the place for live poetry readings in NSW. For details of *Writers in the Park* readings, phone (02) 692 0564.

BOOKCASE is a mail-order catalogue of self-published books, compiled quarterly by Bells Line Books and distributed widely throughout Australia. Advertisers, and those who would like to be on the mailing list, send an SAE to PO Box 56, Kurrajong Heights, NSW, 2758.

THE Victorian Writers' Centre, 156 George Street, Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065, organises a comprehensive range of readings, talks, workshops and other events of interest to both writers and readers. It publishes a regular and informative newsletter, *Write On*. For

details, write to the above address or phone (03) 415 1077.

MELBOURNE'S Fringe Network, located at 184 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 3065, is the umbrella organisation for all fringe arts in Victoria. The Network publishes an informative newsletter, *Fringe Network News*, and organises an annual arts festival. Members can use the resources of the Network, and are eligible for various discounts. For details, phone 419 9548.

THE Art Gallery of NSW's comprehensive Arthur Boyd retrospective exhibition will be on display from December 14 to February 27. Phone (02) 225 1700.

THE Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre, 11 Old York Road, Greenmount, WA, 6056, holds regular readings and talks, and organises residencies. The centre welcomes members and friends. It also publishes an informative newsletter. Phone (09) 294 1872.

THE 6th International Feminist Book Fair, to be held at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne next year, from July 27 to 31, is subtitled *Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Writing*. It is expected to attract about 250 publishers, with 200 international and Australian writers taking part. Overall attendance is expected to be around 20,000, including 3000 international visitors. The first two days are trade only, and the subsequent three days are open to the public - when thousands of books will be on display for interested browsers. Details: GPO Box 2681X, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000. Or phone (03) 663 3355.

LA Mama Theatre (205 Faraday Street, Carlton) is a venue for the performance of new Australian plays, for poetry, play and fiction readings and new music perform-

ances. Write for free newsletter to 205 Faraday Street, Carlton, 3053. Or phone 347 6948. The La Mama Poetica Christmas party reading on December 13, at 8pm, includes Barry Dickens, Sherryl Clark and Ouyang Yu.

SOME highlights of the Adelaide Festival, to be held between February 25 and March 13 next year, include Patrick White's play *A Cheery Soul*, the National Bunraku Theatre of Japan, new dance theatre directed by Ariette Taylor, an innovative performance of Henry Purcell's 1689 opera, *Dido & Aeneas*, and much more. This year's festival will have an Asian/Pacific/Aboriginal emphasis. Artists' week is from February 22 to 26; and Writers' Week from February 27 to March 4. Full program information can be obtained from: GPO Box 1269, Adelaide, SA, 5001. A limited number of discounted tickets for some events are available for those who book early.

AND if you're going to the Adelaide Festival, don't forget that the Adelaide Fringe Festival is held from February 18 to March 13. Often it's where you'll catch the *really* hot events. Write to Lion Arts Centre, Cnr North Terrace and Morphett Streets, Adelaide, SA, 5000; or phone (08) 231 7760 for program details.

IS fashion trivial, or does it say shitloads about human psychology and the semiotics of desire? You be the judge, at *Dressed To Kill - 100 Years of Fashion*, at the National Gallery of Australia, until February 27, 1994. Phone (06) 271 2431.

MELBOURNE'S Anthill Theatre is not only one of Australia's leading and most innovative theatre companies, it also publishes an excellent newsletter, *Ant News*, which contains some of our best local writing on contemporary theatre.

As well, Anthill offers a series of workshops on acting, writing for the theatre, improvisation and performance. For further information, write to Anthill Theatre at the Gasworks, 21 Graham Street, Albert Park, 3206. Phone 696 2452.

FIVE Islands Press, in conjunction with Scarp magazine, has begun a New Poets' Publishing Program of first collections of poetry. Titles so far are: *From The Other Woman*, by Jennifer Compton, *The Long Drowning* by Melissa Curran, *The Ground Slides Away* by Carolyn Gerrish, *Facing the Moon* by Andy Kissane, *To Die of Desire* by Nick Mansfield and *The Sailor on the Point of Going Overboard* by Ian Saw. Copies are \$7.50 each, or \$39.50 for a boxed set of all six titles. For further information, write to Five Islands Press, Wollongong University, NSW, 2500.

THE Australian Film Institute (AFI), apart from presenting its well-known annual awards for new Australian film, recently launched the first edition of its new quarterly publication, *The Moving Image*. The AFI also holds special film screenings. For further information, phone Melbourne (03) 696 1844 or Sydney (02) 332 2111.

THE recently launched incorporated organisation, WIFT (Women in Film and Television), which already has more than 1000 members throughout Australia, aims to "be a powerful advocate for an Australian film culture that encourages cultural diversity and the equal participation of women at every level". For more information, phone Jeanti St Clair on (03) 417 7391 or (03) 853 7722.

Compiled by John Jenkins



The Making of an Overclass

JOHN McLAREN

Janet McCalman: *Journeyings; the Biography of a Middle-Class Generation, 1920-1990* (MUP, \$39.95).

IN RECENT YEARS it has become fashionable to describe as an underclass those people who, through poverty, are supposedly excluded from full participation in the life of our society. Yet the poorest amongst us are precisely those who are most dependent on society, for public housing or emergency accommodation, for schooling for their kids, for hospital and medicine when they are, as their conditions frequently make them, ill. Their only exclusions are the vital ones from power over others or even over themselves.

By contrast, power is the only element linking the overclass of the wealthy and the privileged to the rest of society. But it does not make them happy. On the contrary, as Janet McCalman shows in this superb study of their life patterns, it makes them fearful, suspicious and resentful. "They believe in hard work, self-sufficiency and social responsibility, but, because they have not learned to take . . . they unconsciously resent the takers: . . . At a deep level, middle-class taxpayers see all their hard-earned cash being spent on hospitals they avoid, on people they would never have as friends, and on schools they will do everything they can to keep their children out of." Even those of them who incline to the left demonstrate the same distance from those they would help. "The middle-class Left has given the poor social workers; the poor simply wanted more money."

This sense of separateness, particularly by the younger generation who never knew the levelling effects of war or depression, is, for Janet McCalman, the greatest danger to the country presented by the public school children whose lives she examines with such loving care through this fascinating book. These are Judith Brett's "forgotten people" who responded to Menzies' wartime speech and claimed postwar Australia for themselves. Yet, as McCalman shows, they were better schooled than they were educated, and the privileges their parents had earned for them generated a lifelong sense of separation from the vulgar masses. Their separation and privilege do not in themselves make them a ruling class, but rather an elite of the higher servants who judge, heal, think and manage for the true rulers. In short, an overclass.

McCalman combines the disciplines of oral history and social survey to construct a picture of the lives of the generation of students who entered Melbourne's Genezzano Convent, Trinity Grammar, Scotch College and Methodist Ladies' College in 1934. The fathers of this generation endured the First World War; they themselves provided the frontline troops and their supporters in the Second World War; their sons were amongst the resisters in the Vietnam war. The women in the group lived from a time when their only roles were as wives, mothers or nuns to a time when their daughters were encouraged to make their own careers, and in several cases they found the opportunity to do so for themselves. They include intellectuals of the calibre of Hugh Stretton, Geoffrey Serle, Dorothea Cerutti and Ailsa Thomson Zainu'ddin. Between them, McCalman claims, they produced much of the Australia we inherit today, and their story is therefore of far more than

merely local or genealogical interest.

McCalman starts her story in 1934 with Melbourne's number 69 tram on its run from St Kilda through Malvern and Hawthorn to Kew, collecting students from their middle-class homes and distributing them to the Melbourne Grammars and Xavier, Scotch College, Methodist Ladies' College, Genazzano Convent and Trinity Grammar. She concerns herself with the last four of these. She and her collaborator, Mark Peel, surveyed 663 of their leavers in cohorts of those leaving in 1934, 1938 and 1950. Summaries of the results of these surveys will be published in full by the Melbourne University History Department. *Journeys* is based on these surveys and the remarks appended by the respondents, as well as on research into the school archives and interviews with eighty former students, mainly from the group who entered in 1934. McCalman's story is however far more than the chronicle of the lives of these few people, fascinating as they are individually. Rather, she has used these lives to write a history of contemporary Australia.

The book provides all sorts of incidental information, like the not altogether trivial details that during the Depression it cost almost as much to send a girl to MacRobertson Girls' High School as to Methodist Ladies' College, that the parents of Genazzano students were more highly educated than those of students at the Protestant schools, or that forty percent of the 1950 leavers from Scotch College have voted Labor, although usually only once. More important is the generally low educational standard achieved at these schools by most of their pre-war students. The schools were great, the contacts they provided were invaluable, but their education was deficient. This did not prevent them campaigning against the extension of secondary education within the state system, nor does it seem to affect the generally low opinion their former students have of today's state schools and school teachers. One might indeed say that the most evident characteristic revealed by the surveys is a general ignorance and fear of the world beyond the immediate bounds of their experience.

Yet this experience has itself been quite wide, and has certainly taken this generation beyond the world of its parents. They were brought up with a strong revulsion for the kind of patriotic idealism that their parents had taken into the

First World War, and went into their own war with no less determination but a far greater degree of scepticism about authority and idealism about human improvement. Some of this scepticism, this distrust of foreign motives, as well as fear of our Asian neighbors, was no doubt translated into the energies that went into Australia's post-war reconstruction, into the determination to build a self-contained and just, if hierarchical, society. Yet the fear of difference and the suspicions of Asia contradicted these efforts by the support they gave to a continuing military dependence on powerful allies. This contradiction produced the bewilderment they felt when their children had to confront the moral dilemmas of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. Yet they themselves were of the generation that laid the foundations of multiculturalism and eventually abandoned the White Australia policy.

They were on the whole a very decent generation, their virtues of honesty, independence and charity nurtured by the churches that were central to their earlier lives and whose values continue to influence even those who have long since given up formal attendance or belief. Not the least virtue of McCalman's study is the importance she gives to religion, not merely as a sociological fact but as a major force shaping Australian society at least until the Second World War. She shows how the various social creeds provided a social cement in the earlier years of settlement, only to yield to bitter sectarianism after the First World War, and finally to a genial tolerance towards the end of this century. Although the schools she studies in one sense constitute a common breeding ground for an overclass, their religious differences not only produce social distinctions but also generate quite a different atmosphere in each of the schools. This individual quality is perhaps the greatest distinction between them and their state contemporaries.

For all this interest in particular schools, however, it would be wrong to suggest that this book is less than its subtitle claims: the biography of a middle-class generation. Its major limitation is a necessary consequence of its chosen Victorian focus. Private schools were certainly more important in Victoria than in any other state, and their products thus determined the nature of the Liberal hegemony Australia suffered from

under Menzies. But the prosperity that this over-class inherited during Menzies' Liberal ascendancy was mainly due to the post-war reconstruction carried through under the leadership of Chifley by such state and parish school products as Nugget Coombs, Macmahon Ball, Eddie Ward and Jim Dedman. Their secular ethos of public service was not defeated by the private schools' ethos of public duty and private advancement. It failed on the crux of the religious anticommunism to which the private schools could offer no resistance.

The author shows particular skill in placing her biography of a class in the context of Australia's economic and social history, explaining how these shaped the perceptions and expectations of this generation. The schools of which she writes are today heirs only in name of their predecessors. Today they are efficient business enterprises using state moneys to offer private advantage in a system of competitive education. Their students are taken from the wider community for a much greater part of their lives than were those of whom McCalman writes. During this time they are subject to a much more technologically efficient form of education than were their parents, but at the cost of a morally debilitating demand for measurable results above all. The divisions they produce are deeper than ever, but it is doubtful whether they will ever again produce the compensating virtues that McCalman discovers among the objects of her history.

John McLaren was a postwar passenger on the 69 tram.

Not an Autobiography

BRUCE PASCOE

Martin Flanagan: *Going Away* (McPhee Gribble, \$18.95).

MARTIN FLANAGAN IS one of the best sports writers in the land, specialising in an oblique view of games through the eyes of its fallible individuals, the common person under the colors of the champion. It always seemed likely that he would write something outside the fourth estate.

The publisher goes to extravagant care to explain that this is more than a travel book and *not* autobiographical, but the book never convinces us that either is entirely true.

The story is engaging, very readable and most of the descriptive writing works well, but there are times, as when Flanagan takes excruciating pains to identify the book with Aboriginality,

"The story is engaging, very readable and most of the descriptive writing works well"

that the credibility is tested too severely. *Going Away* is far too removed from Aboriginal experience. It is about middle class post graduates travelling the world. "We made a pilgrimage to the asylum of Saint Remy." Self-conscious lines like that distract the reader from a yarn of far higher calibre than many more fashionable titles.

As this is a first novel, the reader is led to question the editing. When every second writing career begins with tales of school and youth, and many of those haunted by caricatured Christian Brothers and Sisters, is it a wise choice to allow another novel to sieve that furrow to dust? Any book which lauds the merry japes of university life will struggle to avoid undergraduate humor. Any book which follows the travels of a young Australian in Africa will include, inevitably, a dozen pages about bowel problems on crowded trains. This particular passage is very revealing about the character of the hero and includes some sharp observations, but on top of the drinking contest, football characters, fumbled first sex and youth hostel follies it is too much like another dozen ordinary novels which have appeared recently. When will the sixties finish?

I found the best writing was clubbed into unconsciousness by the favorite Australian literary clichés. There's a section where the Irish hero (has to be called Stephen) knocks around in Scotland and the writing works very well, but the whole effect is spoilt by gushy banalities: "Sapphire and I could make love, really make it," or "I might have thought I was going mad if it hadn't been for poetry" and "... I had my last view of Sapphire MacIntyre. Her naked

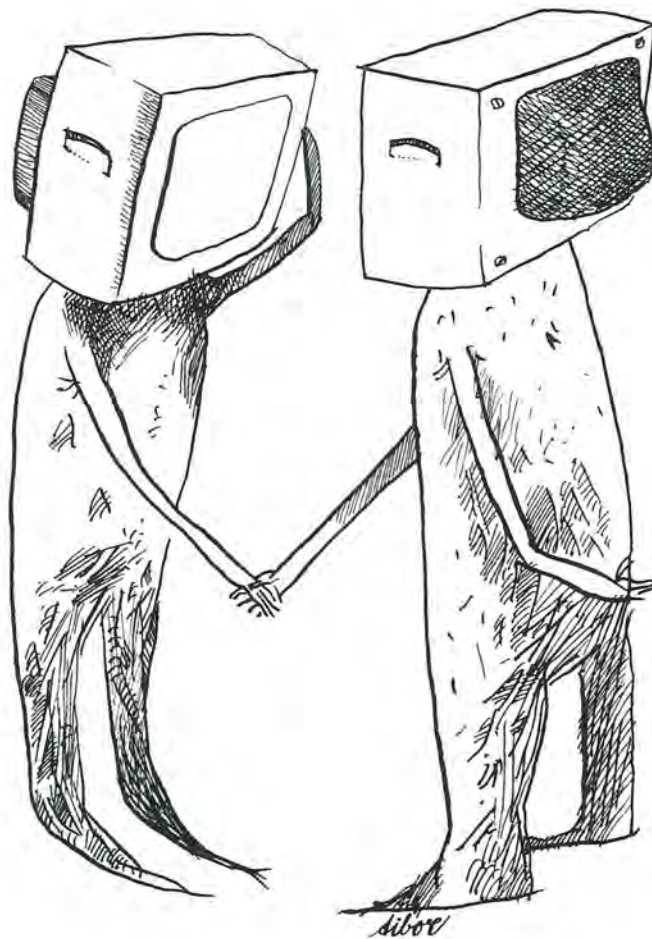
body was pressed against the window of her flat. I mouthed, 'I LOVE YOU', then turned away, lest she say something that would undo me." Lest! Undo! The Shakespearean legacy as a modern affectation.

When you finish the book and turn to the introduction, blurb and publicity notes to see if your frustrations are justifiable quibbles or arise from the fact that you're a grouchy old nark, you find no help. Tim Winton is quoted in the pub-

lisher's blurb as loving the book and a few lines later we're told Flanagan's writing is "reminiscent of Tim Winton's".

Going Away could have been a little gem with more discerning restraint on the part of both publisher and author. I anticipated more. Too many flash handpasses on the wide flanks for my liking.

Bruce Pascoe is a writer and publisher.





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