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103

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stories

TRICKSTER *Rosaleen Love* 2
A FATHER'S STORY OF A LOST CHILD *Bruce Williams* 13
LIKE I BIN CRYING SOMETIMES *Andrew Lansdown* 32

features

POLICE FOR THE PEOPLE? *Jim Cairns* 5
LETTER FROM BROKEN HILL *David Martin* 8
COMMENT *Judith Brett, John McLaren* 20
PERCEVAL – THE RETURN *John Yule* 23
THE SUM OF THE PARTS *Terry Harrington* 28
SWAG *Stephen Murray-Smith* 34
INTELLECT AND VIRTUE *Walter Crocker* 36
AUSTRALIA 1999: A PROPHECY *Keith McKenzie* 44
ANTIPODEAN LITERATURE: A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN? *John Docker* 48
OVERLAND COMPETITION 57
BOOKS *Gavin Ewart* 58, *Joy Hooton* 60, *Jennifer Strauss* 62, *C.J. Koch* 63, *Barbara Jefferis* 65, *Michael Sharkey* 66, *Susan Hosking* 67, *Max Marginson* 69, *Robert D. FitzGerald* 71, *John Knight* 72, *Angus McEwan* 74, *Barbara Giles* 74, *Nancy Keesing* 75, *Frank Kellaway* 76, *Graham Rowlands* 78, *P.G. Edwards* 79

poetry

John Croyston 4, *Stephen Hall* 7, *John Philip* 16, *Robert Drummond* 17, 19, *Daniel Neumann* 17, 18, *Mike Ladd* 18, *Eugene Dubnov* 18, *Kevin Murray* 19, *Michael Driscoll* 31, *Elizabeth Riddell* 40, *Thomas Shapcott* 40, *Alex Skovron* 41, *Eric Beach* 41, *Robert Harris* 42, *Irene Wettenhall* 42, *Geoff Goodfellow* 43, *Don Maynard* 43

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103

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ROSALEEN LOVE

Trickster

"What's it all for?" Alicia asked, the day she started work. The row of fossil skulls marched along the edge of the table, ranged in order from the most gracile at one end, to the most rugged at the other.

"It's called human research," she was told. "It's the science of human nature."

Alicia had her doubts right from the start, but she kept them to herself.

She was shown around the skull room. The table with the row of skulls stood in the centre. The rest of the bones were sorted into white boxes, each neatly labelled with names – ribs, humerus, ulna. They stood in stacks along the walls. Filing cabinets were filled with casts and reconstructions of missing pieces of bone. So much hard work, so much material, collected, collated, and reconstructed from a belief in the value of human research.

"You'll soon get used to it here," she was told. "It's a job, like any other."

"That's what I thought", said Alicia, glowing with life and love in the house of bones.

Alicia is formally introduced. "This is the skull from Cow Swamp." The skull from Cow Swamp sits in a pool of light, fixed upright to a frame.

Alicia inclines her head.

"And this is the skull from Keilor." Alicia is suitably grave. One must respect the dead.

"This is the skull from Green's Bush." The introductions continue. Alicia wonders how she will remember it all.

"It's easy, once you know how", says Rosie. She's worked there for years. Rosie Byrne knows her way round the skullroom.

"Everything is," murmurs Alicia.

Alicia learns the ways of the skull room. There are frequent arguments, for a start.

"What's it all for?" Alicia asks her new colleagues, those who could speak.

"It's so we know where we're going, that we have to find out where we've been." Plowright liked his origins clear, and his future predictable.

"We all want to know where we're going. We just disagree about where we've come from," Rosie explains to Alicia.

Alicia listens, and learns.

"It's who we've come from," says Anthony Torok.

Torok finds the bones a problem.

For Rosie Byrne, it was easy. The first man was a woman.

Torok disagrees. "What makes you so sure?" he asks.

"What makes you so sure it's not?" she replies.

Her colleagues think she's perverse.

Torok doubts whether the beginnings of culture can be traced to any one individual with an exceptionally prominent brow. "You can't say, here civilisation begins, here in Cow Swamp, just because we've got a few bits and pieces of bone to play around with."

"It's obvious, once you think of it," says Rosie to Alicia. The women work together in the skull room, calipers in hand and computers at the ready. "What's wrong is the idea. What's wrong is the ape man."

"It's obvious, once you think of it", says Anthony Torok. "What's wrong are the bones. The bones didn't change the world. The world changed the bones, just once, at one time, at one place."

"That place is Europe," says James Plowright.

"That place is Africa," says Anthony Torok.

"That place is Melbourne," says Rosie Byrne. "Cow Swamp, to be precise. There, *homo* became *sapiens*, saw the light, and then took off for Europe."

At night in the skull room, the bones rearrange themselves, a little, not much. The indentations in the skull from Cow Swamp deepen. The orbital ridges thicken. Scratches in the teeth enamel sink in, just a fraction.

Soon there will be a new theory of the origins of the human race.

The workers in the skull room assume the bones remain the same, and it is their theories which change. But that is not the case.

The bones know. It amuses them.

"There's always a margin of error", say the scientists. But they mean, a margin of error for them. They do not consider that it might be the skull which is playing fast and loose with their measurements.

Scientific truth is only relative, and the fact that scientific truth is only relative is the only thing that really is true. Truly? Yes, truth is never the whole truth, and that is the name of the game.

It doesn't matter, provided the skull plays fair. But the skull from Cow Swamp never learned the rules.

Rosie Byrne is increasingly delighted with the skull's activities. She sees teeth which are worn in a particular manner.

"Look," she says to her colleagues. "It's the way the teeth are worn."

"Yeah," they say. They have their own work to do.

"I mean, it's the way the teeth aren't worn." Rosie was all for the search after truth.

The skull sits in its frame, unblinking.

"The skull from Cow Swamp, it's a woman."

Her colleagues have heard it all before.

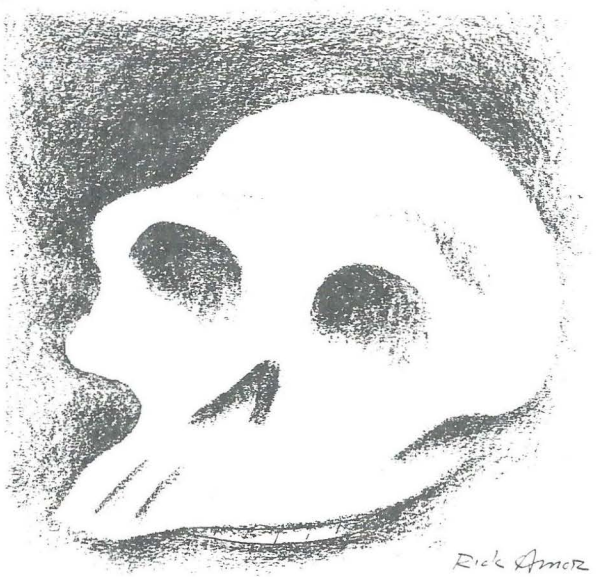
The first man was a woman. The skull was buggered if it knew.

The workers in the skull room believe the bones are legitimate enough. It is the claims made for them that are preposterous.

For the skull, all claims for legitimacy are relative. That's OK. It knows it's fiddling the evidence.

For the workers, there is the search after truth.

For the skull, there is the element of trickery. A forgery may, after all, be a form of art, and the end of art is to provide us with something from which we can learn a great deal.



The skull could promise them that.

Alicia dreams of life and love.

Rosie dreams of fame. She's sometimes worried though. What if she's right, but she gives the wrong reason?

Nobody's perfect.

The Fall of Man: that's a metaphor for the burden of animal instincts that survives as a leftover from the past. So that we may know instinctively that we are right, though reason cannot tell us why. In this corruption may lie our intuitive strength, or just corruption pure and simple. Inside the man of reason, there may lurk the fraud. Inside each skull there lurks the trickster.

But that's the tricky part. How can a skull be said to deceive?

"Such teeth," said Rosie Byrne when she next saw them. "Nice and unworn, a woman's teeth. It's a cultural thing," she explained to her colleagues. "The men chew kangaroo tendons, and their teeth get worn in a quite distinctive way."

Such teeth, all the better to eat you with, said Pleistocene man to Pleistocene marsupial. The skull knew more than it could tell.

Plowright kept his thoughts steady. He wasn't going to rewrite the entire pre-history of Australia because of a few new ideas. He was, after all, the boss. He had to keep the funds rolling in.

Rosie broods. Men of reason and men of business speak much the same language. Both after all, want profit, though one speaks of profit in the search for gold, the other of gain in the search after truth. There can be no loss in the search for knowledge, that's one advantage. For even the wrong question, correctly answered, can tell us something, even if it tells us we were wrong in the first place. That is, all told, a gain, for the worker has gained some credit. Though of course, she gains more, if she asks the right question, and receives the right reply.

In the skull room there is the goal of knowledge, and the goal of glory. In the search after truth, there may be some glory, but little truth; there may be some credit, though a loss is recorded.

Some say that the goal "to know" serves only the function of rhetoric, that what matters is only the cycle of rewards and advances. But that is a cynical viewpoint.

The skull changes, doing it slowly, and new measurements do not agree with the old.

"It's an unacceptable margin of error," Rosie is told.

She is puzzled, but cheerfully accepts criticism in the spirit in which it is intended. Or she says she does, while gritting her teeth and snarling at Alicia.

Oh the tyranny of the skull.

Anthony Torok smiles and does not overtly sneer.

Alicia is reading the papers, searching for another job.

In every court, there is a jester. In every circus, there is a clown. In every tribe, there is a trickster.

It buggers up the search after truth no end.

Rosie never gets to publish her discovery.

There is a court case, and the bones must be returned to the place they came from.

The bones are gathered up for cremation. They are taken to a river bank.

We must respect the dead. We must bury the bones.

They are burned according to old rites.

The workers in the skull room are liberated from the tyranny of the bones. Only they do not know it.

Rosie Byrne doesn't see it that way. She weeps for the end of knowledge. Then she dries her tears.

"It was a good job, while it lasted," says Alicia.

James Plowright finds a congenial job in the public service, and Anthony Torok joins a university.

The bones are going, the bones are gone.

Nothing remains.

At the cremation site, dust and ashes move, in a purposeful fashion. They form new shapes. Soon there will be new games played on newcomers to the search after truth.

There will be campfire sites, and middens.

There will be radio-carbon dating and spectroscopic analysis.

What does it matter, in the end? The activity called problem solving is all. The results matter less. Every problem which is solved will raise others in its turn, and so the search after truth will go on, indefinitely, into the future.

SILENT FILM

A dark seam stitches
caps, black hats, scarves,
wrinkled trousers, trailing
dresses, boots, lace-up shoes,
across a cold landscape.

Bearded faces looking nowhere,
crumpled faces looking away,
little faces looking up
arms extended, holding hands
on this strange country walk.

Others at railway stations
alight for unknown destinations,
follow the smoke rising
discreetly behind bare trees.

A change of clothes — flashes
of images of summer camps:
frivolities in dormitories . . .
clatterings in wood kitchens . . .
hikes through shaded hills . . .
and at dusk in sandals
open shirts and shorts
around an open fire
showing white teeth in song . . .
in the ascetic air the laughing
ache of hygiene . . .

These white bodies
hurrying across an open space
are awkward, angular, defy
experience; the black holes
of their eyes and mouths cry
incredulously of shame.

But these white bodies
are moving beyond modesty:
their nakedness
is everyone's humiliation.

The yard empties, the doors close;
they are losing their memories,
we are being left ours.

JOHN CROYSTON

JIM CAIRNS

Police for the People?

A discussion of Robert Haldane's The People's Force: a History of the Victoria Police (*Melbourne University Press*, $27.50).

The title of Dr Haldane's book must have been inevitable. The Victoria Police Force was, and is, a people's force, in that it has always had all the faults, failings and virtues of the people – working-class people. *The People's Force* is a history of the Victoria Police from 1836 to 1984.

The question whether a police force is a "people's force" or not should be the first question always asked about a police force. Especially and vitally it should be the question asked now, as the police force moves into the twenty-first century. If the question cannot be answered in the affirmative, then there will be a police state in the twenty-first century.

The book is not a history of famous events, people or crimes, many of which appear in it. Consequently it leaves many gaps, of which no one is more aware than is Inspector Haldane. Police and crime are always very close together. But far more has been written about crime than about police. Ned Kelly is known far better than any policeman, Squizzy Taylor far better than any but one or two. Crime is always more newsworthy than is prevention or even detection. Conflict and crime are the main attractions for the media.

The many thousands of men, and a few hundred women, who have lived and worked in the Victoria Police were and are working-class people. Policemen were able to "fight and drink" as much as any Australian. They were not well educated or well paid. The author speculates on the possibilities if they *had* been. There *is* a police force that is well educated, well paid and socially elevated. It is found in the courts, the churches, the universities and the clubs. It is the men there who really rule society. The other police come in only when rule breaks down here and there – generally in the streets or pubs.

And always the working class police come in with the social values of the rulers. They are the servants not of society but of its rulers. Society objects to the police it knows, but not to the others. The rule of the working-class police touches most of us. We know it in manner, style, now with gun and baton, now with sirens and flashing lights. But we never see the other rulers or their power. Yet the police we do know are like the others, a force which "throughout its existence", as Dr Haldane puts it, "has always been conservative, sometimes reactionary ... lagging far behind the general community in almost everything." And yet it is a "people's" force.

Dr Haldane has written a book in elegant language, beautifully printed and published with care by Melbourne University Press. The book owes much, perhaps more than we know, to a remarkable Chief Commissioner – I hesitate just a little before I say the best – Mr S.I. Miller. The title, *The People's Force* is a superb one for it is the theme and the hope of the book. What is needed in Victoria, and in every society, is a "people's force" – the force of what is good in people so that imposed discipline is not needed. It is not possible now, because that is not what the people are like. The author would like the police to be a people's force in this sense. But he knows it is not. However this book will have done more than all the judges', barristers', chief inspectors' and magistrates' reports to help it along that road.

Those who have written about police forces, have been unable to see that police forces exist in a class society, one in which all real power is held by those who own the economic structure. The law is a reflection of, and a protector of, their power. The working class will sooner or later break the law if it exercises any power at all. Police are against strikes but not against monopolistic price increases, against street demonstrations for peace but not against newspapers which peddle war propaganda. They will send 'fizz-gigs' into some Carlton boarding house where there are 'communists', but join a club in which there are many fascists. The Special Branch will record one but not the other.

Dr Haldane shows how the Victoria Police have wrestled with this kind of problem, how they have to some extent come to understand power distribution, and to know what is peace and what is violence when they see it. I am not sure how long the experience will last. However, it has been far deeper and more genuine in Victoria than anywhere in Australia.

One of the general or long term themes touched upon by the author is the functional purpose or activity of the police. The 'thin blue line' has been significantly thin. Its function, like that of the upper class, has not been dependent on force: it has been critically psychological. Law and order have been there because people know the 'thin blue line' is there, and that law and order and the 'thin blue line' were worth having. It is this function of the police that is the right one and the strength of the police

will depend in the end upon how genuine the integration of police and people is.

Here a beginning has been made in going further than the spontaneous, which may break down at any time, with work like Neighborhood Watch, Community Involvement Groups and Safety House. If ever a police force is to come near to its highest potential it will be in the development of this egalitarian function. It requires the police-person to *assume* no more power than the citizen, and the citizen to see that he/she needs to use no more. It is a matter of intent. People's force grows only in affectional relations; it is destroyed by separation and power over others.

The other function of the police is crime investigation. Here prosecution is the central aim. This is the world of the crime squad and the Public Prosecutor. It has not needed international drug rings, bomb-loaded motor cars or 'mad Maxes' to justify it. Spying, third-degree and trial by the media have always been there. Telephones have been tapped since there were telephones. In Victorian police history spying and the third degree have been checked, if not rejected. Chief Commissioner A.M. Duncan's view that "physical evidence is the best evidence", and his attitude to innuendo – "Leave it alone and go out and work for your evidence" – helped. Dr Duncan thinks there is little liking for underhand work in the police force. I do not think he is correct.

Police work will continue to consist of these two functions: the individual member of the force who "tries doors and treads the cobble stones at night", and the crime investigators. We may not be able to afford both. If so, the street function of the police will suffer, because crime investigation is more dramatic and more dramatised, and there will be more private police forces. Indeed, if our kids are to be safe, neighborhoods may have to organise them. They may help to create a police close to the people.

Present police obsessions with motor-cars and traffic will have to be curtailed. This is not to say that insanity on the roads need not be checked, but it is to say that doing so has the worst of effects on police relations with the public, and there are other means. The fainter the sound of the police sirens, the less fear of, and anxiety about, the police. Duncan even ordered bells to be taken off patrol cars, and claimed that police had no more right to drive fast than anyone else.

Nearly fifty years later, two issues which arose in my ten years in the Victoria Police continue to puzzle me deeply. Who actually shot Superintendent Brophy? I was close to the events, but I never heard an opinion, and the matter was never really examined. And what of T.A. Blamey? Most opinions of him are unflattering, and this book tells me that Monash had no more than faint praise for him. I can only say that I found him sympathetic, friendly and loyal, a man who stuck to his police when they were in trouble.

And the police themselves? The upper-class police always kept the lower-class police in shocking conditions. For this they got a force which, the Commission on the Kelly gang tells us, was almost as bad as the gang itself. A force which behaved as it did on the goldfields a generation earlier was valued no more than the "straw they used in their paliasses". This was the force that used the police hospital as a sly-grog shop and took money from the miners. The three biggest police operations of the nineteenth century were Eureka, the Kelly capture and the raid on John Wren's tote. Should we add the action against the great strikes of the 1890s?

Even by 1960 police pay and conditions – though much improved in 1946 – were, in Victoria, "still the poorest of any force in Australia and New Zealand and lagged well behind the general work force." I remember presenting the case for the Police Association before the first Police Classification Board in 1946 for an increase in police pay. My job was to produce in the witness box graphs across which lines were drawn through the years showing the levels of police pay, those of the "sixteen industrial groups", and those of other police forces. The line for the Victoria Police was by far the lowest and in fact had turned downwards compared to the others. The Board, appointed by the first John Cain, approved, I think, of a twenty per cent increase in police pay and a reduction in working hours.

Finally we have the police as they move towards the twenty-first century. In 1949, Victorian police activity was still little more than negative: the "protection of people and property against offenders." There was no interest in the prevention of crime, or in the explanation of law breaking in ways from which better methods of dealing with the crime could be worked out.

For the point is that the police have to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution. Apprehension and punishment is not enough. We need to know more about some of the strange fluctuations Dr Haldane points to. Why was there a significant decrease in robbery-type crimes in 1963–1968? Why did all crime diminish in the Whitlam years? Why was there a rapid increase from 1976 to 1985? And what are the 'root causes' of crime, in any case?

The police were puzzled by the opposition to the Vietnam war, but came to the conclusion that confrontation would "not work against one hundred thousand people." Thus the Moratorium in Victoria is mentioned by Dr Haldane as one of the seven issues which changed the Victoria Police. These issues include Eureka, the Kelly gang, the suffragettes, Blamey and the Labor Party and Bertram Wainer and abortion law reform.

And so what of the 'thin blue line' and the police state? Haldane disagrees with Ken Inglis's comment in *The Stuart Case* that "The line from Australia to the police state is long. It is nevertheless continuous." I agree with Inglis. Haldane says the road is discontinuous, lacks direction and that "most police never think of trying to follow it." Haldane is correct also.

But the road to the police state is followed without thinking. It is followed because it 'seems normal'. The police state today is not announced by the rantings of a Mussolini. Television provides the means whereby we are brought to see as 'normal' trial by media and by the upper-class police force of royal commissioners and

lawyers 'worried by crime', in which victims are picked off one by one. There are no working-class or women judges who challenge the submission of their groups.

Our choices are reduced when it is our subconscious that is worked on by the media and by our high-technology, affluent society. The choices are transferred to the media. One of these choices is the road to the police state.

The attempt to turn the Victoria Police into a "people's force" is the most significant effort seen in Australia to achieve this end. No group in society is closer to the people than the police, none knows more about them. None is better placed to prevent anti-social behavior.

But . . . the police do not have much freedom of action, however fine their motives. Nor do other traditional groups which once controlled power in the community. The orchestration is by the media, and it is in the direction of rising conflict. Unless we learn to control that, the "people's police" we get will be an Orwellian one, not a democratic one.

Jim Cairns is the author of Human Growth: Its Source and Potential. *Between 1935 and 1944 he was a member of the Shadowing, Special Branch and Consorting Squads of the Victoria Police. For ten years he taught economic history at the University of Melbourne, and for twenty-two years he was a member of Parliament, becoming deputy leader of the Australian Labor Party and Deputy Prime Minister.* Human Growth, *the only one of Jim Cairns's ten books still in print, may be ordered through Overland at* $9 *posted.*

TWO POEMS BY STEPHEN HALL

ECONOMY

With true economy a hole is never dug here
but some body makes a grave of it,
and if a foreign correspondent is at hand
a family of bodies, their jaws broken,
grinning like sprawling tourists, their hands
pruned of a few ring-bearing fingers.

In some places, in concrete blockhouses,
a body has been unable to find a hole
and curls onto the floor, a little
line of blood reaching for flies.

CADENZA

Rain cures the river as fingers
pattering a keyboard from the
sky of pure musical thought.

Watching, the life in the river
seems to stop, curled into the
reeds, the storm playing on it.

Like an audience delivered of
its tuneless routine, surrenders,
the river shivers its delight.

DAVID MARTIN

Letter from Broken Hill

This is the most proletarian town I have ever been in. And the loneliest. (Darwin is a sea port and no port can be lonely, Charters Towers is not so cut off, and Alice Springs is in no proper sense a town.) But the loneliness vanishes with the last bend in the road through the semi-desert. For the people who live here the emptiness around them does not exist, except when a sand storm blows in to remind them.

Coming in is like arriving at an oasis. It is too big for an oasis, though; 27,000 inhabitants cannot feel that they are oasis dwellers, especially if they do not walk out to where there is no water. The pastoralist motors into Broken Hill when he has to and the postman flies out to bring him his mail. The total landscape, the town and its mulga Sahara, is visible only from the air. Invisible and imaginary is the wall that encircles that tightly packed place. Do lovers ever go roaming on the other side, where flocks of sheep are wandering about like woolly ghosts?

There are only two bus routes through Broken Hill. As you drive along them the impression is strong that there must be more souls than the census reveals.

I have heard that some visitors say that Broken Hill scares them. I wonder why? Because it is levelling, a hive without drones or a queen? A couple of dozen houses stand out a little from the rest, there are a few more shade-giving trees in a few of the newer streets. Most houses can be bought for about $45,000, which includes the land. There are no boutiques, no glossy department stores and only one restaurant that would regard itself as classy.

I doubt that these things make fear. Fear rarely springs from what is *not* there. Perhaps it is that in such a town you have to rely on your own spiritual reserves. There are churches. There is a cathedral which does not look like a cathedral. I guess some of my friends would want to walk out into the hot scrub for consolation, for a more poetic or prophetic solitude.

All the same, this is not a Tuareg country with a democretinous heart. Certainly, the number of poker machine clubs could be a record for a place of this size, and often there are four pubs at the corners where streets cross. The Victorian glory of parts of Argent Street marks the precise middle of the precise uniformity of Wolfram, Beryl, Cobalt, Mica and Silica Streets, where nothing much pretends to glory, at least not for the architect. Two things can be said about these names. A good, rather proud idea: we are miners, mineral and metal people, aren't we? But it's too much of a hard material, too repetitive, to have to move about in all the time. Yet nothing can be frightening that is so unpretentiously itself, that functions as it should and does not strain to throw a shadow bigger than its stone.

When you look at the map you conclude that Broken Hill must have been planned. For all I know it may have been. South Broken Hill is one grid pattern, as if drawn on ruled paper in a single day, North Broken Hill is another, and slashed through the centre is the long, long line of the lode, a towering ridge with its poppet heads and slag heaps, some black, some faintly golden, and its own man-caused geological strata, clearly marked, as dramatic as can be, a continuous flat-topped pyramid, no less arresting in its way than Gizeh. You can see it best, along with the low hills around Broken Hill, from the rise near O'Farrell Street where the offices of the Water Board are. Beneath you in every direction are squares within squares within squares. Shutting out the south, right across, lies that tremendous symmetrically sloping wall of mineland. As high as three or four houses piled on each other, but slowly growing less and lower as the beetling machines on top, earthmovers, excavators, scoops, crawl along and through and down into its mass for one last reclamation, one further big mountain of cash.

I suppose it is not really planned. It could be just one of those ready-made chessboard coups of the surveyor's trade of which this country has hundreds, if not thousands, since ours was the last continent to be built over. If you look harder it does not present itself as planned, not even as do company towns like Whyalla. I see Broken Hill as the most unusual of Australia's three archetypal towns. Adelaide: planned from the top, or at any rate designed, in the last twilight of feudalism for a Protestant bourgeoisie, still handsome today, still verdant, still with its wealthy little creative core. Canberra: planned from the middle – but the top of the head – for the middle class; inventive in small things but uncreative and fun-free. At its worst when it strives to suggest the future by pre-empting time with queer little village touches, half in and half out of its period, a cross between an English golf course and an American lawn cemetery, but (they say) friendly to live in if you are the friendly type. It is the great existential Australian vacuum, fine

and even noble in its organic-agnostic state, but inorganically refashioned and made terrifying.

And Broken Hill? If it has a theme I have missed it. No theme, that's its theme. The people who built it didn't worry about such things. Out of that lode came whole banks full of money, but it was spent in Melbourne. Who would bother to tack a Toorak on to Broken Hill? No Toorak, but two or three compounds, mini-Tooraks for the technical higher-ups, kept trimmed and sprinkled and mown by the lower-downs, with their own kindergartens and that sort of thing. Officers' quarters!

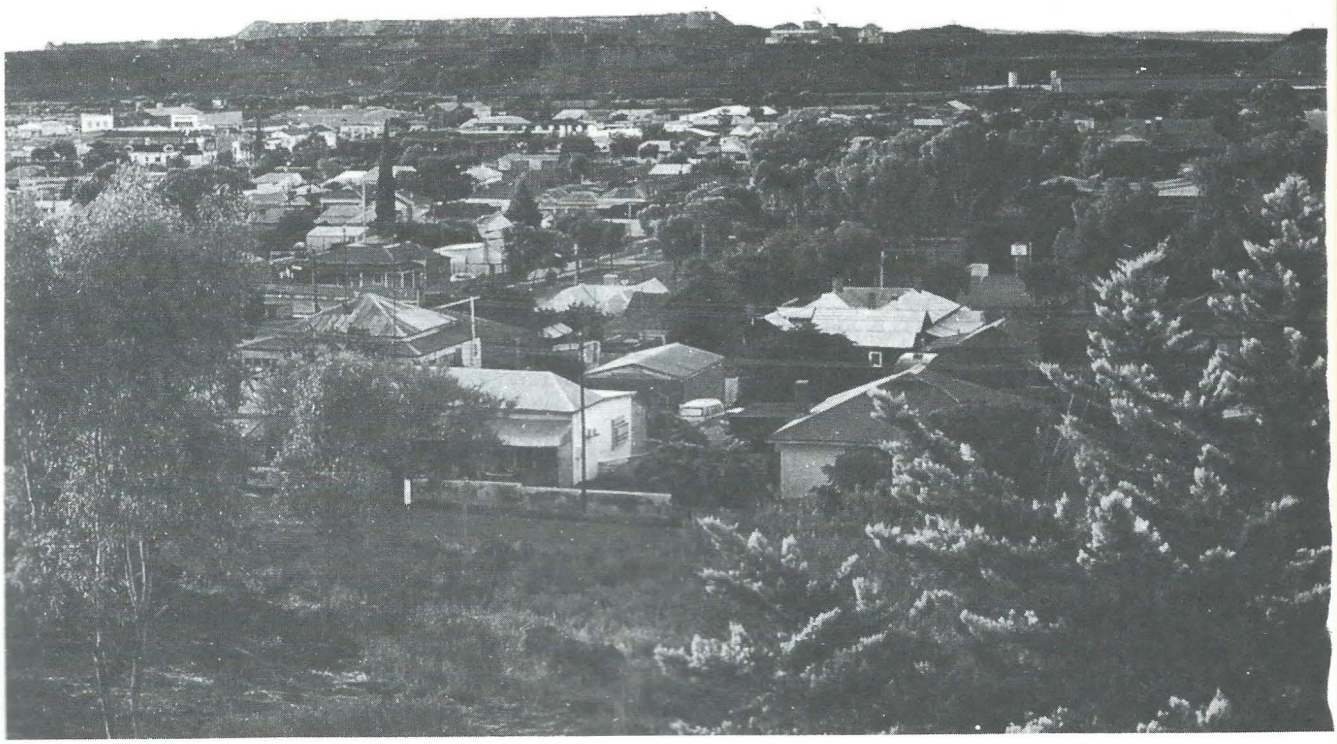
Broken Hill does not need what Canberra lacks, a square kilometre of chaos for order to grow around it, because the order which it has is not so confined. It does not require Adelaide's hint of elegance. It was not founded from Europe but from Collins Street. Here you just carry on where you belong, whether there's any grass or not, without a Torrens or a Molonglo. You do not fly out for the weekend.

Since it is the workers' property, does it not have a working class ethos, embodied, overseen, exercised and controlled by the Barrier Industrial Council? But nobody has yet nailed down what ethos that would be. Also, the BIC does not run Broken Hill the way outsiders think it does, or according to the famous legend.

There are still four badge days every year, and heaven help you if you cannot show that you are a unionist in good standing, or refuse to pay your fine if you are not. The Trades Hall with its ornate front and its high mansard roof could have come straight from Paris. A plaque commemorates Ben Tillett's laying of the foundation stone, but the unions do not govern the Town Hall. "The Hill" is not a city state independent of New South Wales, not a Principality of Yancowinna. Badge days, two-up schools and the Barrier Daily Truth are not sufficient to make it that. The BIC concerns itself with union matters, no more and no less, and since there are only one or two big employers, namely the mining companies, and since there have been no great clashes with them since 1920 (but of course plenty before) by and large the concern is staid and peaceful.

At least it was so until the autumn of 1986, when a new conflict erupted. The issue, for the workers: safety *versus* intensified exploitation. For the bosses: outdated work practices *versus* profitability. The quarrel could be sharp, but in Sydney the Labor Party is in office and the Industrial Commission has entered the argument. The whole atmosphere is different, traditions notwithstanding.

If Broken Hill does have a theme it is energy, sheer physical energy, but not of the driving, restless, romantic kind. Not the Saturday night energy of Glasgow which heralds a Presbyterian Sunday. I am told that Broken Hill's crime rate is below the urban Australian average. The BIC rule, that you must have been born in the place or lived there for eight years before you can compete for a job, makes for stability. Minorities do not stand out. What Aboriginals there are live scattered here and there. You see a lot of old men and women, pensioners, strolling



about forlorn, in a contented sort of way, not dressed to prove they are retired.

These respectable, confident, unshowy working people made a home for themselves a fair emotional distance from Bakery Hill. This was a wild enough town once, but the struggles rest in the past. Does it have a branch of the Communist Party? I never saw it mentioned in Tribune. Perhaps the angry unemployed young, if there are such, drift away, since there are scarcely any factories. The population has shrunk by some six thousand since its peak but one does not come across many vacant blocks or empty shops.

"I understand your metal is running out?" "Bulldust. They've announced it every bloody year since I was born. It's the great song of the stock exchange. To keep us fellows quiet. Would they have put up this huge 'Big W' supermarket if business thought we're washed up? They know how to do their bloody surveys. My kids' kids will still be working on the lode."

No big symbols, then, but no shortage of small ones. We trudge out to the cemetery, neatly sited in the last street at the ultimate edge where the houses suddenly stop. North Broken Hill is hilly, tiring to walk in. But the colossal necropolis is pancake flat, grassless and treeless, a reasonable tombstone waste if you don't expect unreasonable efforts. On the far side is a patch of Broken Hill's regeneration area. This is not afforestation but an expanse of low, salty, shrubby herbage, fit to survive on an annual rainfall of 225 millimetres. With fair success it stops the hinterland blowing in. Trenched earth – water channels? – and the plant cover denser than beyond the verge of the oasis where the land spreads towards the Darling, towards South Australia, towards Wilcannia, Lee Creek and the Simpson desert.

Charles, dearly loved son of Robert Gainer, who died June 14th, 1881, aged 3 years and 5 months.

Had he asked us well we know
We should cry o spare this blow
Yes with streaming tears would pray
Lord we love him let him stay.

Richenda, copying it exactly, is touched. She has not previously read an epitaph that argues with the Lord. 'Had he asked us . . ." He never does, that's the trouble.

Horace Sterling Taylor 1889 aged 31. Accidentally killed by falling down a mine at Silver King Mine.
A Unionist he lived on earth
A life of pure simplicity
Till God rewarded honest worth
In heaven's most glorious unity.
Erected by Barrier Colonial District No. 3
HMA of Australasia.

Simplicity below, unity above, and no uncertainty where Horace Sterling was going. On the headstone of a 41-year-old woman doctor:

You who mourn her passing, be comforted for she lies in the place she loved so well.

A doctor ought not to like cemeteries, but this one must have liked the people who lay where she would lie too, nor did the grave frighten her.

If there is one thing Broken Hill is not short of, it is painters. It has an attractive Municipal Gallery, the oldest in New South Wales outside Sydney, with a very decent collection, not to speak of the famous Silver Tree everybody seems to be so proud of. (Every leaf clearly distinguishable. At the base are silver sheep, emus, kangaroos, four or five silvery black men. Table centre-piece made for Charles Rasp, boundary rider, who thought he had located tin and had found silver. One of the syndicate of seven which launched BHP in 1885.) But there are twelve private galleries as well, belonging mostly to the artists themselves. In other towns they raffle chooks and loads of wood, in Broken Hill they raffle paintings, or sell them for good causes.

Mario's Hotel in Argent Street, another of those characterful structures, is crammed with frescoes and murals right up, and into, the domelike ceiling above the mighty staircase; they are crude, colorful, funny, bold and oddly arresting. Venus rises from the foam, marsupials leap, Aboriginals fling spears. The neck develops a crick, the jolly mind boggles: in all of Australia there is nothing to match it. Mario's, by the way, has some grandly old-fashioned suites with little private drawing rooms, a trifle dark but no doubt cool in summer, peopled by the shades of travelling squatters and of mining engineers with wing-collars and bowlers.

A group of artists revel in the title bestowed on it by the Women's Weekly: the Brushmen of the Bush Brochures depict them fraternally together, seated around a camp fire with their sketch books. Pro Hart, Jack Absalom, Hugh Schulz, Eric Minchin and John Pickup. This does not complete the muster. Sam Byrne, now dead, was a gifted primitive. Charles "Hoppy" Hopwood's work moves from the naturalistic to the impressionistic and the naive. That quality is found also, and pleasingly, in John Lindsay Gregory. There are still more, associated with the Brushmen through the Willyama Art Society, if I have it right. These artists learn from each other.

They generally paint the bush, not the miners or their streets. It may have something to do with what their clients want, but to me it remains surprising in so interesting a group.

The best known is Pro Hart. His studio gallery has his name in big letters on the white outside wall, in the shadow of which stand his two beloved Rolls Royces and his vintage cars. On the walls inside hang not only his own pictures but those of his friends. All these artists sell each other's work. Dickerson is there too, Arthur Boyd,

Lloyd Rees, Tucker, Fred Williams, John Perceval and Norman Lindsay. In between are pipe organs, a collection of antique silver baby rattles and various other odds and ends.

Busily and bulkily small, the painter walks about in a T-shirt. To a helper I think I can hear him sling off about bloody commos, *a-propos* of what I cannot say.

Hart is noted for his prolific versatility. According to himself* he sees this as a characteristic which he shares with artists like Picasso, who leave behind whole warehouses full of their work. I don't quite know what to make of that, nor of this: "You might call me the ocker painter. This country that bore me is an ocker country, rough, tough and rugged."

Ruggedness is not the ocker's mark.

At its best Hart's stuff is splendidly robust, direct and thrusting, even when it is delicate. But what he likes to paint he paints so often (country race meetings, dragon flies, and dragon flies crawled over by ants) that the beholder's eye ceases to focus. His favorite subjects don't always turn out well. Sometimes they are simply slipshod.

Looking at his Bushmen companions I ask myself, in my sceptical moments, whether the Australian bush has not been fixed for most Australians and for all time by Drysdale and Nolan. Can we still see it freshly, you and I, or do we only see "Sunday Evening", "The Cricketers" or "Moody's Pub"? Thin, anonymous, burnt-out human stick-insects in a sad, dessicated landscape. Yet, to be fair, someone like Hart can take it and turn it to a harshly grotesque but very funny joke. He has a lovely range of crazy, carefree, soddenly celebrating miners (Hopgood's are more whimsical). In them Dad and Dave look out from Ned Kelly's skull, with Giles the cartoonist behind the three, and a dash of Breughel.

Hart has worked in the lode. The miners called him Professor, hence the Pro. He still paints them like stockmen who lost their stock. He was raised in the bush and when he came to Broken Hill he felt a stranger.

I admire the work of John Pickup. Pickup admires Don Quixote who lives in his oils as a subject and an influence. "The Bride and the Pokie Face the Future". "Daisy Bates Meets the Breaker". Try to visualise a suggestion of a bride in white next to a humanoid pokie, and little Miss Bates and a little horseman, all on flaming hill-tops in a violently flaming sky, the rocks glinting metallically – the all too real and the parochial seduced to the universally fantastic.

Pickup is the ABC's manager in Broken Hill. He is in his fifties but his style remains fluid. More openly than the others, or less wisely, he seems willing to submit himself to the internal combat of the artist.

The Pickups own a hot air balloon and sometimes fly to Silverton, to the abandoned church which is their weekender. Broken Hill has unexpected advantages.

Small symbols. The day the discovery of the wreck of the *Titanic* was announced we discovered, in Sturt Park, the memorial erected by the citizens of Broken Hill to honor "the heroic bandsmen who, playing to the end, calmly faced certain death . . ." Unashamed of sentiment, the citizens have had cut into the stone the musical notation of "Nearer my God to thee". A few steps away is a garden plot dedicated to John Curtin's memory by the women's branch of the ALP.

The first object of the Barrier Industrial Council, laid down in its constitution, is *to advance the cause of Trade Unionism in Broken Hill and endeavour at all times by any and every legitimate means to procure for the workers the full fruit of their labour.* In the last of the objectives "legitimate" is defined in the negative: *Any body or persons . . . which by its aims, objectives, conduct, propaganda or otherwise advocates, assists or encourages the overthrow by force or violence of the established government of the Commonwealth of Australia or of a state or of a civilised country or government.*

This dates from 1923 when the IWW still had some slight influence. In short: bugger you, Lenin, and you too, Comrade Bakunin.

Twenty-five kilometres to the north-west lies Silverton, which pre-dates Broken Hill as a mining settlement. There the land is properly inlandish. I plod up the dry bed of a creek which could be an arm of the Todd. Soft brown-red sand to pad and plow through. Growing from it is the odd stunted tree. Bare kopjes rising from the Mundi Mundi plain and, farther away, the ink-blue smear of the Broken Range. Goats gambolling. A wedge-tailed eagle on a forgotten fence post. Not so forgotten, for a few people still live here. There used to be three thousand of them, and many of those houses in Broken Hill with walls of corrugated iron, of which hundreds remain, were brought down from Silverton for their second incarnation. They still look all right. Now they shoot films out here, and Bobbie Pickup, the painter's wife, runs a casting agency: good luck to her.

Mary Gilmore, when she was Mary Cameron and far from any damehood, was an assistant teacher in Silverton. Sometimes she must have crossed my sandy creek, watched by the great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother of my eagle. The last time I saw Dame Mary she was waving goodbye to me from her balcony at 99 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross. It already had the Pink Panther strip joint at ground level. From Silverton's lead, silver and zinc to the Pink Panther, the whores and the Wayside Chapel, in one poet's generation!

Today I can remember her only through the eyes of Dobell.

On the verandah of the Silverton Hotel fat and patiently stands a horse. Every now and then it pops its head in to see what can be scrounged. A permanent guest. In the bar over the fireplace hangs a notice – Bring Your Own Logs.

A short walk distant is a recreation ground for the unionists of Broken Hill. On New Year's Day 1915, two suicidal, patriotic Turks, icecream men, shot up a picnic train on the old Siverton Tramway and killed three people. The Turks died on Turks Rock. Shortly afterwards the German club in Broken Hill was burnt by Australian patriots who prevented the fire brigade from saving it.

* *Pro Hart's Silver City,* text by Eugene Lumbers, View Productions, 1985.

Silverton's main tourist attraction is the old jail. From Rottnest Island to Cooktown, you can't get away from jails. Jails are "historic", jails are something to take a snap of.

The piece of Broken Hill history I like best of all is the Gladstone Mining Museum. It's in a former pub, if you please, on the south side of the town. It's a beauty. The Vincents run it, wife and husband. A retired miner, he built it with his own hands.

The beer stopped flowing there in 1926. Eventually the six rooms of the hotel were cunningly turned into the sectional replica of a mine, with drives and stopes and a cage you can walk into, with even a side shaft where the blokes could eat. A taped commentary accompanies you for over half an hour. An unimaginable lot of sweat must have gone into all this. It is nearly as claustrophobic but a lot less bothersome than being conducted round the real thing.

But the end is close. The city itself is getting ready to build a similar "easy" mine for tourists, but grander, in the heart of the town at a cost of, one supposes, millions. Goodbye, then, to the Gladstone, its machinery and models, and to the bar counter you have to lift up to go through to the pit.

We tramp back to the north side through the squared-off streets, past the entrance to the South Mine area, across the rail tracks to the station where the Trans-Pacific halts. Richest ore body for its size in the world at one time, labor battles, mounted troopers, the old BHP. The Afghans and their mosque, such as it is. I can't sense much of all that now. I would have to live here a long time before I could.

People have wrong ideas about Broken Hill. What sets it apart is that it is so crowded. Small gardens, small yards to grow flowers in: water is dear. Some houses directly abut the street. It is different from Kalgoorlie, from Newcastle, from Wollongong. More concentrated, compact, muscular even. Not beautiful but damned evocative. But of what?

I am drilling for a mood, a meaning. Lawrence should have come up here from Thirroul, maybe without Frieda for a change. As a miner's son he would have understood this place. Its spiritual remoteness is more disciplined, less dismissively laconic than that other native void which so startled and enraged him. I am fond of arguing that Australia is like the Algeria of Camus, a land without altars beneath a high, hot sky. The sky of Broken Hill is hot and high, but Broken Hill is not another Oran.

It could be from the Borinage, Van Gogh's neighborhood, or a smaller Charleroi, where Simenon came from. Simenon would have known how to handle it as a novelist.

As to me, in my dreams – not in my nightmares – I often wander through a town that is very much like this one, where houses stand wall against wall, where no quarter can be distinguished from any other, a town comfortable and secluded but unconcealed.

In those dreams I never see what lies beyond the boundary. But it could well be half and half a desert.

BRUCE WILLIAMS

A Father's Story of a Lost Child

What is it? Kathryn again, one of her dreams. Nuisance. Does she have to scream like that? Time after time.

It's cold out of bed. My toes home-in on solid objects in the dark with uncanny accuracy. And the screaming! Stop it for god's sake. I'll be there, I'll be there.

I over-run the door and have to feel my way back. Fumble on the wrong side for the handle, pull on it instead of push. You'd think a bloke would know his own house. Does she have to scream like that? It's only a dream.

"It's only a dream honey, only a dream."

The room is lit for no reason and goes back to black. In the instant I see the bed, made-up and flat, three months empty, my books on the shelf. I hear for the first time the long, peeling screech of storm-rain on the tin roof.

I'd gone to bed with a quiet mind, sure all this was at an end. The heavy rumble rolls through me, fills my head, rolling in my head. The walls move.

As a child Kathryn slept a great deal. She was slow learning to talk, though she had sharp ears, and loved the sound of running water. She'd appear out of nowhere when a tap was turned on, and stare at the stream as if it were as clear as her eyes, not brown and brackish from the bore, or tin-tasting and stale from the tank after pumping. It wasn't until she was four that she was allowed to turn on a tap herself: a responsibility she took on with extreme gravity. When she was five, it rained.

The days were marked as the hills changed color. In the morning, red, like light through skin, fading to a dull rust by noon, then a hazy, sad blue against the amethyst sky of evening. An uneven shade would then push its way through the streets and dirt driveways, over the houses of the little town where Kathryn was born.

Occasionally there was a forecast for rain. We got to thinking the weather stations would throw in a shower every six months or so to cheer us up – or more likely to keep us there so there'd be someone for them to forecast to. And rain would fall: fifty miles east, a stone's throw west – anywhere but on our little dust-heap where we thought it really mattered.

When it finally did rain, when Kathryn was five, even the dogs went wild, and a couple shot through. Funnily enough, with all the barking and the noise, I didn't notice until she came in, soaked and shivering. I can still see her, can always see her, standing in the doorway, backed by the grey smear of falling rain, with the thin, sweet mist rising against it.

I'd never thought to teach her about rain. How would you? She'd heard about it, I know that for a fact. I went through all the books I'd read her, and nearly half of them made mention of rain. It wasn't my fault.

Kathryn stood in the doorway, quiet at first, though uneasy within the silence. Her eyes looked nowhere. Held out her hands, and I took them and pulled her to me. I hugged her until I felt the chill creep through my clothes. She was shivering, and I shivered. Kathryn was crying, then spoke in a low voice, a grown-up whisper, asking for her mother, long-gone. It hurt me that, crying for her. Strange the grudges you bear, and the things you forgive.

"Guess what?"

"What?"

"I bet you can see the sea from the top of that tree up there."

"I bet you can too."

"It's over there isn't it," pointing with a thrust of her arm between another spindly tree and a neighbor's distant chimney.

"Dead right, honey," and it was.

"I bet you can see it from up there."

"I bet you can too."

She ran off, and I went inside to put things in cupboards and check the gas and the lights.

It had been no mean feat getting a transfer from that hole, my one-man school: a good few years of forms and phone-calls. A dust bowl is no place to bring up a child. Surprising you have to learn a thing like that, but finally I did.

"Daddy, Dad, guess what?"

"You saw the sea." She couldn't possibly have seen the sea.

"No, no. No! We've got a river!"

"What sort of a river?"

"Oh, you know . . . a river with water. And a herd of them swans too. They flew away, but they'll come back won't they. Come on, look," she said, tugging at my belt, "Come on, look. Come on, Dad."

It wasn't even a decent sized creek, but it bubbled nicely and was banked with soft moss and the occasional

willow. All the best creeky things. In an area where the water widened and slowed, there was a blurred spot of sediment constantly turning over: a spring where water from underground came up to meet the stream in the living air. This caught her attention, and her tugging hand slackened and let go.

I hadn't noticed the spring when I was there last to look the place over, nor the smell. There was a slight bad smell, a sulphur smell. Not enough to really bother you in the moving air tasting of grass and trees, but noticeable. It struck me as strange that I hadn't noticed it the first time.

The creek had decided me on the place. It seemed to speak Kathryn's name. I knew she'd love it, and guessed at the games she'd play: racing sticks down rapids, catching things and letting them go, expeditions up the Congo and Nile. My own little River-Queen coming home crying because she'd fallen in. But she never came back crying from that creek, the little pool.

After the first excitement of a new home, after no more than a week or so, my daughter quietened down to normal. I used to think she would have made a good Victorian: she had a natural inclination to speak only when spoken to. Her new teacher liked her.

We'd come home from school, change and wash, and part ways – she to her dream river, and I to my desk and later the kitchen. Our paths would converge at dinner. What do you say to children? "Have a nice day at the Congo dear?" We both liked bed early.

"Have a nice day at the Congo dear?"

"What?"

"Pardon!"

"What?"

"Salt and pepper?"

"No thanks . . . Dad? Where does the river go?"

"What, has it been hiding?"

"Don't be silly. The water doesn't come back does it. It goes down the hill, and it can't get back up can it."

"No. It's always different water."

"It tastes the same, but."

"It tastes like water." She didn't look convinced.

"Where does the water go?"

"To the sea. It goes into the sea, and then it becomes the sea."

"I don't think it should. It's still the water from our river isn't it. The sea tastes different, doesn't it."

"Yes, it's the salt."

"Aren't there rivers in the sea?"

"I suppose there are, sort of."

"And our river's in the sea?"

"Yes honey," Kathryn looked solemnly into her plate. "Your dinner will get cold."

It's hard getting used to a new school, a new way of teaching: more children, and all the same age. For the first time Kathryn wasn't in my class. I'd see her across the asphalt, skipping, tossing a yo-yo, punching boys: the time-honored occupations of youth. I was tired getting home. The preparations and the cooking seemed to take longer. The air was heavier, is heavier, than in the dusty town where Kathryn was born: thicker with water. I didn't spend a lot of time with her. Sending her out to play was easy. She was always happy to go.

Kathryn also seemed to tire more easily, or at least she was tired more often. Perhaps her play had become more vigorous. The new school may have been more demanding on us both. More and more often she was silent at dinner.

She seemed to seek sleep as a refuge, which worried me a little, because she soon began to suffer from dreams. It became a routine. Late, but before dawn, she'd wake up crying, screaming sometimes. I'd rush in and, with a mixture of sympathy and annoyance, make what I'd assumed to be comforting goo-goo noises until she quietened herself down. When she was quiet, she'd look confused at me, almost in reproach, as if wondering why I'd come in to disturb her rest. I asked once if she'd like to sleep with a light. She said a simple "No" which made me feel foolish. I don't believe she was the least afraid of the dark.

One week-day morning – it must have been Tuesday, sports day – Kathryn was washing in the bathroom. She'd been in a while, and I needed a shave.

"Can I come in?" I said for some reason, turning the handle.

I stepped in, and had to catch myself up, grabbing at the door-handle. The tiles were under a thin sheet of water. Steadying myself, I saw Kathryn standing at the sink. The soap was in her near hand at her side. The other hand was on the basin edge. She was staring blank-faced at the tap running, the water overflowing. I don't think I'll ever lose my abhorrence of wasted water.

"Kathryn! You stupid girl!" and with more ferocity than I'd intended, glared at her and turned off the tap.

She looked up at me startled, almost panicked, as if she too had slipped suddenly and caught herself without thinking. She looked at me as if waiting for her mind to catch up with her body.

Looking at her face, thinking these things, I didn't notice her reach into the water and pull out the plug. The drain's gurgle and suck somehow robbed the situation of the significance it had begun to take on.

"Don't do that Kathryn. Open the window."

"Yes Dad. Do you know where my sports socks are?"

"If they're not in your drawer, they must be in the wash. You'll have to wear your grey ones."

I don't quite know how it happened, but in the final term I got roped into the annual school production. One in a long and noble tradition of pre-pubescent Pirates of Penzance. I had less and less time for her, and she seemed to have less need of me. We'd hardly have seen each other at all if not for her nightmares. The world's a small one for a busy man – I told myself.

The year went on, and the weather became continuously humid and hot. It always seemed on the verge of rain, whether or not the sky was clouded.

One afternoon the clouds were piling up, coming in from the sea. The pre-storm agitation hit me, and I began to wonder what Kathryn was doing.

For some reason these things affect you, the state of the weather. When the air's on the verge, everything seems in need of haste. I almost ran to the little creek, to the pool that was her favorite. By that time the wind was stronger

– still hot, but carrying the edge of the cold to come. The clouds were black at the line of hills, swelling white at the crest, like great waves.

I had to catch my breath when I reached Kathryn's pool, leaning with my hand against the crusted willow bark which had the look of dry, eroded earth. Kathryn had been swimming. Her clothes lay on the bank.

The air was heavy under the willow, and the exertion had tired me more than I'd thought. I looked at my daughter from within a growing dizziness. The wind pushed back and forth the long willow-whips that hung between me and the pool. The moving green mixed with the mist of my eyes. Kathryn was a white figure in the haze. She was sitting in the fast water where the pool narrowed down stream. The water rushed over her white body.

The sight suddenly angered me, but as if the rush of feeling took the last of my strength, I fell into the soft grass beneath the hanging willow. The wind whistled in the branches.

Rain woke me, or Kathryn calling. Still, in front of the green branches hit alive by heavy wind, she stood, wet through, fully clothed – shoes, socks and all.

"Hello Dad. You'll get wet. Come on Dad, it's raining."

"You're wet too."

"No I'm not."

She had to help me back to the house.

No more than two months later we said our last words together – off-handed goodbyes as she went to the pool to play.

I don't suppose my grief for Kathryn was deeper than any father's would have been. But it became strange in kind.

The family came together, and separated. Tears were shed, hands held. Kathryn's mother accused me with her eyes, to meet the accusation in mine.

Some days my feelings of loss were like a weight, physically tiring, and sometimes her absence was like a weight lifted. But always the sound of water would bring me back to her. I began to think of the dry wastes of my old home as a paradise of forgetfulness.

I had found Kathryn face-down in her favorite pool, on an afternoon of the finest drizzle. The slow, hanging spray moved in any shift of the air, and hardly made a mark on the pool's surface. Kathryn's loose shirt was dragging in the current. The stillness, the hush, was like a guilty silence.

I began to blame the creek and that tree of deliberate malice. The shallow pool had drunk the life out of her – and where was she now in the endless oceans of the dead?

There was an axe in my hand one afternoon. The hours at work were a blur; the day seemed to begin with the weight of the axe in my hand. I felt no need to hurry to the creek. I savored each step.

At the first stroke, I thought I'd have the tree down in no time. The bark looked thick, but it came away easily, exposing the pale, wet willow flesh. It would have been a simple thing for a real axeman, but I was neither fit nor skilled, and the handle twisted in my hand. I wasted time and effort tugging the axe-head out of the wood, which grabbed like sucking mud, because I'd angled the stroke in too straight. In less than an hour my hands were red and my arms aching. The willow still stood, with white sap oozing in the gash that had not yet reached the root of the trunk.

I lay down and rested in the soft grass, comforted by the exertion. I thought of Kathryn. In half-sleep the music of the creek seemed to bring my memories to life. Gradually they faded, and I found myself thinking only of the harmony of wind and water. Even the sulphur of the spring took on a pleasing flavor, like the smell of a familiar body.

I stood, and went to the pool's edge. On the surface the sky was shining in fragments of blue. Between the patches there was the dark of the weeded creek-bed.

"That's enough," I said, "It was an accident. You didn't mean to."

The rain won't stop. Nothing will stop the rain. But still I can hear her calling. A hole in the sky struck by lightning fills with thunder. It's an effort just to keep my feet. The house rolls as if at sea.

The window thumps in the loose frame. A gust of wind, another. There's a shrill crash as the wind breaks through, and I feel a sting in my cheek. The wind and rain fly into my daughter's room, soaking the carpet and her empty bed.

The clashes of branches, the squealing wind, the pounding on the tin roof – the full-throated yell of the storm – throw my daughter back into memory.

I lean out into the wind, my hair soaking, the taste of blood in my mouth. I can't even recall her face, under the incessant weight of the noise. The sky is lit in sudden light. The twisting trees, the seeking thrust of the wind, and the storm-cloud's black bulk rejoice in practised conspiracy.

I recant. I recant. I was wrong to forgive. There is no accident. There is no right, no revenge. The tree will stand, the little creek flow to the sea. There will be pleasure and indifference. And at the deepest centre, a tiny hate, a harbored hard seed of hate I shall tend and treasure until my last breath's escape.

FOUR COMET POEMS BY JOHN PHILIP

COMET 1066

Bright rotary hoe trailing harrows
this engine of fate rumbles over the Bayeux tapestry,
presaging the arrow piercing Harold's eye,
conferring on la langue francaise
three hundred unforeseen years
of simplifying rustification.

COMET 1301 AND 1986

The young Giotto saw it,
so gave the magi's star a beard;
went on to build the duomo
and the campanile
of licorice allsorts.

Nine passes later
the comet puts out
spacecraft Giotto's eye,
but not before the wandering engine sees
a soot-black jelly-bean
seven miles long.

COMET 1682

Increase Mather used it
to flagellate the sinners
of Massachusetts.
Pronouncing it a sign and agent
both of God and natural chaos,
he became sixth President of Harvard.

But at the other, older, Cambridge
Halley saw the self-same passage
knew it meant a world of order
rejoiced that Newton's laws were right.

COMET 1986 AND 1910

For my father

Complete in felt hat
and antique Holden,
this pierce-eye Norman
is less diminished than the comet
in its present bathos.

At thirteen he first saw it
flaring across Franklinford's black skies.
The local Mathers knew the Philips sinned,
nodded wisely at sister Lucy
screaming and dead in the kitchen fire,
at father killed by the falling horse,
at brother Jim bewildered
and stuck on French barbed wire.

THE BRICKIES

1

800 bricks a day / or you got the sack
The Dee Why Flash reckoned he could lay 200 more
& do a Maori war dance to boot on the hour every hour
Just for fun / the Colonel used to be a P.T.
Instructor in Korea / & he found it a bit hard with no hair
In the Queensland sun / he used to wear a hat after five
For slap dash & tickle / ridji dij / they said the boss
Carried a pistol / & maybe he was pretty cluey
"Little Venereal" & "Big Venereal" / pig-eyed brothers
from out the back / had placed pointed stakes in a pit
Near their front gate / rumor was they pinched caravans
That bricklaying was a front / & the laborors had to
keep it up
All day / MUD & BRICKS son / & on the hurry;
Hammers & bits of wood sometimes floated down /
from the top
Story / the formworkers were from Finland / they used to
guzzle
Eight pots of beer in the dinner hour & every pot was
followed
By a brandy chaser / dangerous bastards / & couldn't
speak English
So we renamed everything on the site for them / told them
That timber was called piss / told them that the hoist was
called
Shit / & did they cop it when the Jewish syndicate came
up from Sydney
To oversee their investment / picture sunburnt & hairless
Finns
Yelling out from the top / 'Send up Piss" / "Stop the Shit"
As the holiday makers strolled past on their way to the
beach
As the kids kicked stones on the footpath / as the scruffy
dogs
Chased the traffic / as the Jewish syndicate talked to the
foreman.

2.

The boys in the gang used to knock off every race day / 15
Minutes after lunch / & take bets for the T.A.B.; the head
Of the gang's old man owned the largest pub in town /
with a 2 up
School on Sundays / all the coppers were invited just to be
On the safe side. Thursday nights were pay nights / in the
Pub / you didn't get paid until you had drunk half your pay
In the old man's pub / but everyone thought it all right /
seeing
That the pub were sort of social workers / because
Thursday
Night was pensioner night / the old buggers would line up
Around a U-shaped bar / & get 2 free pots & a small plate
of savs
& the entertainment was on the house / one of the locals
used to eat
Glass / & his mates would race him / biting the heads off
live birds;
With bets taken / all around the U-shaped bar / to see who
Would be the first to renege; the boys in the gang decided
That they weren't going to be brickies anymore / once
they
Had won the pools / or Tatts / or the 'lotto / said they'd
Take it easy & open a massage parlor / & you know what?
They won Tatts / & the pros were brought in from
Canberra
To a renovated house with shag-pile carpet / & six months
Later the boys in the gang were broke.

There was more to live birds / than the boys in the gang
thought.

ROBERT DRUMMOND

AUSLIT 101

Austpoetry was a continent pioneered
by the Seven Larger Than Life. They cleared,
subdivided, put the trochees up
— of course, we'd have achieved that
but once the land's settled
may as well spend your days on the beach

make hip-hollows, adjust your pitch
among thousands sensible of the tide
and angle of the sun

The holdings inland
companies can run.

DANIEL NEUMANN

THE RETARDED MAN

Dragging snatches of songs out of doorways,
carrying phrases of music under his arm,
the retarded man
with a ghetto blaster
counts the shop windows at dusk
and replays them all
like a tape.

He is the moon with a crewcut
(frightened across the night
of our small community)
seeking comfort in a chocolate bar,
he waves to the man in the pizza shop
who raises his powerful hand from wrestling the dough.

At the sea end of the night
in the lighted cubicle,
he talks for hours into the phone,
on the other end of the line is a voice telling the time,
followed by three short bursts of tone.

MIKE LADD

WHEN I CAME BACK FROM JOGGING

When I came back from jogging, John Heath-Stubbs
(An expert ornithologist, mind you)
Remarked to me: "Some joggers in Australia,
The radio says, have lately been molested
By magpies." I was frightened and inquired
Further of him: "Why do you think, O John,
You great bird-expert, they attacked the joggers?"
"Because, I think," he answered, "they were looking
For some material with which to line
Their nests — and the dishevelled joggers' hair
Must have appeared to them to be just right."
"John," I inquired further, "I'm half-bald:
What do you think then — would these birds be tempted
By my scant bits of hair — will they attack me?"
"No," he answered, having thought, "I guess
Your head will not attract them — and besides,
The Australian magpie is much more aggressive,
Belonging to a different family —
The Piping Crows, or the Cracticidae."

EUGENE DUBNOV

SCENES FROM A LIFE

When — many years after he disappeared —
you go in search of Uncle B
ask first at Bertrand Russell House
where his family were wardens.
He's not one they acknowledge
easily, his mum saying "We sent him
on all the school excursions, I must confess
with too little money. He would have bought
nothing but biscuits," and Dad:
"I got him riding-clothes at his own
insistence (with my approval; he was always correct)
but I never heard of him anywhere near a horse"
while on the block behind the college
he peopled the weeds with stories of the gods.

Aeaea entranced him (much to the amusement
of Circe's friends at PLC)
— the island curved round him on his arrival there
rising inland a crescent of blossoming trees
crystals of summer. For the first time he knew
himself Odysseus, treading the latent glory
of his wandering.
The goddess couldn't keep him
long — he had Penelope to think about
and besides the sailors came ashore on his tracks
rasping for whores. No wonder
he carried a crew of pigs for years!

He worked his teaching bond in country towns
looked knowledgeably at horses (but they bite)
wolfed biscuits when no-one was looking
and played at trains on the buckled rails
of Aquinas Siding with rusticated priests.
Dusty as they were, they drew morals for him
e.g. the metals
are kept exactly apart by imprecise
ties of homely timber, never meet
bar infinity "which we have other names for"
— he'd stand for hours staring at the vanishing-point.

Then details fade. A fragment shows
he took the tin hare to an inland railhead
(of next year's kids half had his nose)
hitchhiked towards the Centre, sleeping
in wreckers' yards . . .
Somebody called that
out there was a bit of a legend.
Most put him behind
half the swy in Alice; others said
Stylites of the coolibahs, His Grace
last seen up a tree, raving blind
and a parcel of tame crows spotting out the land.

DANIEL NEUMANN

COOKING CLASS

The beginners' class sits in uneasy rows
Wary of the stage kitchen and avoiding eyes,
Sharing the guilt worn by those beyond
The virtuous circle of the foodmakers and the nurturers.

A scattering of forlorn men of a certain age
Still in shock that their wives have gone
Sit as bereft as Lear, doomed to wander in all weathers
With only fools for company
And missing their kids.

The office girls with thin engagement rings
Primly check the bright pans, ladles and whisks
Against the inventory of their glory boxes,
Anxious to have done with this initiation,
Eager for fulfilment and a fan-forced oven.

Time will see these women loosed from the thrall
Of wistful love: some will move in tears
Beyond their foolish men,
Who will in turn lock up their single flats,
With soup tins on a shelf and tealeaves in the sink,
To come to the cooking class. Here they'll sit,
Tethered among a new year's set of dreamy girls
Floating gently out towards their own painful wisdom.

The demostrator sweeps on stage
To stand floodlit before her marble bench.
Smiling and sibilant she deftly tears fronds, breaks eggs
and dismembers small animals.

KEVIN MURRAY

SAILING FOR THE HOMELAND

Surrounded by ocean / many of us have found our ship
& oh how we set sail as soon as possible /
with ancient maps &
family trees for the dark abroad / & here we come /
with cream on tum
from the island with the old heave ho & nothing
but our genitals
sailing out in dreams of lust /
cabins rotten with heavy sighs
granny granny don't cry / we've got the radio on /
we've got the sun
hat on / we've got the loot as we all set sail in a tipsy ship
going bow wow wow over waves & under clouds
shaped like wallabies
& you can sing this too /island, island, goodbye / island
goodbye to seals following alongside / it's all right /
she's fine mates
as we all set sail together /
in clothes too bright for daytime;
stripped of known legends / one in a tin hat /
two others dead
in the desert /
we dance in the abyss on pieces of glass on pieces
of ash on pieces of sand / continents await /
& you can sing this too
goodbye to your laughing birds / your itsy bitsy spiders /
your ducks
disguised as otters / goodbye / & here we come /
our orgasms glow in the dark
we come / to fuck all kings & bugger all queens /
our bodies not yet
the shape of our language & so in we sail
from out of the blue half awake
talking of sin / here we are great aunties & great uncles /
open up
your homes / open up your fridges /
there is much we have to tell you
your convict strain has come home at last;

ROBERT DRUMMOND

comment

Judith Brett, Editor of Meanjin, writes:

In his article "The New Heresy Hunters" (Overland 102), Christopher Koch reported that he had written to Meanjin through a solicitor asking that a particular sentence in Susan McKernan's article "C.J. Koch's Two-Faced Vision", published in Meanjin 4/1985, be withdrawn, and that Dr McKernan apologise for it. He added that his request was without result at the time of writing. I would like to clarify Meanjin's response to this request.

The letter Meanjin received from Mr Koch's solicitors did not specify the sentence Mr Koch cites in his article, but rather referred to unspecified "defamatory remarks" which it claimed Dr McKernan had made. It enclosed a two-page apology which it requested Dr McKernan to sign on the threat of beginning defamation proceedings. This apology dealt in part with the sentence Mr Koch cites. I replied to this request as follows:

> You will appreciate that in all periodicals discussing cultural matters there is a continuing debate about the interpretation of cultural works such as books, films or paintings, and that critics often argue for very different interpretations of particular works. Many would see such differences as essential to a healthy cultural and intellectual life. Sometimes the author of a work feels himself to have been misinterpreted by a critic or reviewer, and in many such cases he writes to the journal concerned putting his case, as can be seen in the correspondence columns of any issue of the Times Literary Supplement. We are thus somewhat taken aback that Mr Koch feels himself to have been defamed in what is, after all, an intellectual discussion about the interpretation of his work, one only among many which would be available to Meanjin readers, and surprised that he does not want to avail himself of the traditional means of pursuing intellectual differences by replying to Susan McKernan through the pages of Meanjin. It seems to us that in cases such as this where the author feels his work has been misinterpreted, a response from the author arguing his position is the appropriate way to deal with the perceived misinterpretation. We would be happy to publish such a response from Mr Koch in the next issue of Meanjin and hope he will avail himself of this traditional means of settling intellectual differences. The next issue is due at the printers in early March.

I am pleased that Mr Koch has chosen to avail himself of the traditional means of settling such differences, albeit through the pages of a different journal.

John McLaren writes:

Sean Regan has a well-deserved reputation as a polemicist – so his article "The Prison House of Cultures" (Overland 102) must be taken as a virtuoso exercise of this talent rather than as serious analysis of the cultural politics of either Fiji or Australia. Because he writes with authority, however, it is necessary to correct his more audacious rhetorical excesses.

Mr Regan speaks with one foot planted firmly in the grand Australian tradition of scepticism, but he unfortunately chooses to place his other foot in scepticism's unhealthy counterpart, defeatism. This leaves him, as the proverb would have it, with his arse over the barbed wire fence in between. Seeing foolishness everywhere, he cannot believe in the possibility of sense.

His article rests on a peculiar contrast between a republic and a nation. Quite properly, he points out that his republic has nothing to do with the philosophic ideal, but does not add that it has little either to do with the republics of history. The French would no doubt be amazed to know that France as a republic could not be a nation, and that any nationalist impulses they might have could only be fulfilled on a basis of mutual loathing for their antecedents. Wisely, Mr Regan explicitly declines to discuss the example of the United States, which is clearly both a republic and a nation forged from a host of disparate elements. Writing from that country, I can attest that its people's pride in their manifold origins is, perhaps, no less than their excessive pride in their present. We do not need to imitate their example in order to find in it lessons for our own policies. The major ones would be that equality does not come without constant effort, and that no single culture can be imposed. Nevertheless, a people confident in their origins can more securely tackle the problems of present divisions.

Mr Regan identifies the republic with multiculturalism, which he describes in terms of mutually exclusive and warring tribes. The tactic here is to assume the worst possible consequences as logically inevitable and to define the initial phenomenon solely in these terms. But the phenomenon of multiculturalism is neither a movement nor a doctrine, but an approach to Australian history and society based on recognition of the fact of our diverse cultural origins. Mr Regan's appropriation of the term Anglo-Celtic, itself coined to distinguish Australian society from Anglo-Saxondom, indicates that he is aware of this diversity, but one of the fruits of a multicultural approach will be to unravel this term itself to reveal the changing patterns of linguistic, religious and cultural allegiances which it embodies.

Two other elements of multiculturalism may be mentioned. One is the need to develop a policy of language teaching in the schools which will not relegate English to one among many tongues, but will enable all students to proceed with their education even if they lack proficiency in the national language, and will thus provide the intellectual basis for an eventual mastery of all aspects and registers of English, as well as of their mother tongue. Only so can the equality of rights to which Mr Regan gives lip service be made a fact.

The second is the recovery of some of the lost cultures of Australian history, such as that of the German communities which spread from South Australia in the nineteenth century and were forcibly repressed by the first world war xenophobia, or of the Italian communities of North Queensland, who supported communist politics between the wars and are now among the most enthusiastic adherents of Bjelke-Petersenism. The cultural origins of that gentleman in themselves need an investigation which goes beyond the confines of British institutions.

Mr Regan correctly identifies possible dangers in multiculturalism, but his Manichean denial of alternatives, the refusal to acknowledge shortcomings and blindness in the British tradition or the possibility of a middle way, aligns him with extremism of the same kind he appears to deplore. In the process, he is unjust not only to the non-British elements of the Australian culture and polity, but also to those of Fiji.

It is remarkable that, while Mr Regan comments that the Fijian constitution guarantees a non-Indian majority, he passes over the fact that it equally guarantees a non-Fijian majority. The critical element is the Chinese and European electorate, which may come to see that its long-term interests do not necessarily rest on a continuing alliance with Fijian communal interests. The interesting parallel with Australia is not the privileged position of native Fijians, but the denial to a group in each country of land rights which recognised both occupancy and their traditional culture and economy.

It is not surprising that Fijian-Indian literature is mainly concerned with the land question – South African writers seem similarly to emphasize the injustice of color bars. But a glance at *Pacific Perspective* would show that Fijian academics, including Indians, are concerned about many other issues – for example, the refusal of the Reagan administration, under pressure from mining interests, to sign the international agreement on the law of the sea which would give all Pacific island nations control over the exploitation of their own seabeds.

Mr Regan is right to identify the alienation felt by Fijian Indians, and to warn that a stupid and extreme application of muticultural principles could lead to Anglo-Celtic Australians being similarly alienated. He is however wrong to suggest that anyone is seeking to apply such a policy, and to fail to recognize that many Australians already feel alienated in their own land. The term multiculturalism – an unfortunate word – describes a belated attempt to acnowledge and understand this fact.

The main concern of Mr Regan's article seems, however, to be not with alienation, cultural or otherwise, but with accidie – his own. The Australian nationalists would have simply identified his worries as a clear case of shit on the liver.

Bound Nude with Bowler Hat, Hatchet, Sunflower and Bee.

JOHN YULE

Perceval – The Return

A big bare room. Four wooden tables, three kitchen chairs. Nothing else except some shelves in a corner. A man in shirtsleeves and braces is sitting on one of the chairs; there is a vacant chair facing him. On the third chair sits a pleasant-faced woman, waiting to be directed. A Harold Pinter set. I sit down opposite the man and start asking him questions.

This is John Perceval at 63. Behind him a story of such bizarre dimensions as to seem an operatic tragedy rather than real life: a brutal father whom his mother left when Perceval was six months old but whom the boy stayed with on and off for ten years; flight to Melbourne with the mother (from Western Australia) in 1935, only to be dealt another crushing blow three years later when, at fifteen, polio left him, after twelve months in hospital, with a permanently crippled leg. And then, like dawn after a tormented night, Max Nicholson introduces him to the Boyd family, who welcome this young stranger, recognize his talent, and give him domicile.

He builds a rewarding friendship with Arthur, marries the beautiful and gifted daughter of the house, Mary, and they have four children. His genius as potter and painter become widely acknowledged; his works bring high prices. It is the stuff of legends: the sun is shining, he has reached Eden.

And then fate strikes. A black spiral of calamity sets in: Arthur departs for overseas, Doris and Merrick die, Perceval's belligerence and erratic behavior increase. He begins to drink heavily. He challenges people's tolerance to the limit; and then beyond the limit. His marriage collapses (and later a second one), his health deteriorates and, the final blow, his ability to produce work flickers and fails. He is hospitalized at first temporarily, then permanently, his destiny taken over by others. The glamorous brawling knight is cast down, everything stripped from him. A veil of silence descends. Those who saw him in those times saw only a shadow of the person they once knew. He was taciturn, withdrawn, mostly uninterested.

And now, amazingly, he has pulled himself back out of that pit. Sitting in this bare room he looks as if he were the survivor of some immense catastrophe, stunned, half asleep. The room is part of an unfurnished flat he was using temporarily as a studio. I had arrived at the appointed time to find the front door open. When I called out, a voice from the interior told me to come in. He didn't get up to greet me, merely gestured at the chair. He stared at me steadily for a moment from under hooded lids, then demanded "Well, what are the questions you want to ask me!"

And now that I sat facing him I realized the figure opposite me was not really anyone I had known. There was something about his studied and implacable stillness which made him seem at a remove from our normal world: remote, self-contained, an isolated entity as if conjured from another realm lying parallel but inaccessible to ours. As the interview progressed this feeling intensified. This was a demiurge, communicating with but not joining me; there was no sense of agreement, no shared assumption. This man had made himself totally conscious of, totally on guard against, all assumptions shared with anyone else in a world he had once been part of, but now stood outside, cut off by his own choice. Cut off, but resolved to impose his mark, his will on us.

His first statement had made his attitude quite obvious: he was going to be totally in charge. It was not to be a meeting of minds, a dialogue – it was a contest. Every reply he made was brief, delivered in carefully measured words. The tone was final, oracular, irrefutable. He spoke didactically, as if to a rather dull child whom, amusedly, he had decided to instruct in these (to him) ultra-simple and unimportant matters.

The forty-eight drawings by Perceval recently exhibited at the Avant Galleries (March 1986) had taken us completely by surprise. It was an event of major significance because it was the first solid indication that this artist had re-emerged from a ten year period of non-production. So I asked him what had got him started again: was it something he had read or seen?

"No. It was opportunity really. You see, all those drawings have been done while I've been at the hostel." He didn't elaborate. The hostel is a half-way house as he begins to move out into the world again. Before that he had been confined to a crowded ward where he had no privacy. In a letter, Teura Maffei of Avant explains that when he did the first few tentative drawings she encouraged him to improve and expand the series, then took them and framed them. They were all sold on the opening day.

Would there be more drawings?

"No. I've done all I'll be doing there. Except one perhaps – that will need a bigger sheet of paper."

Why are these drawings so small? – the largest is only 26.5 by 17.5 centimetres, much smaller than his previous preference.

"Because they are more precise."

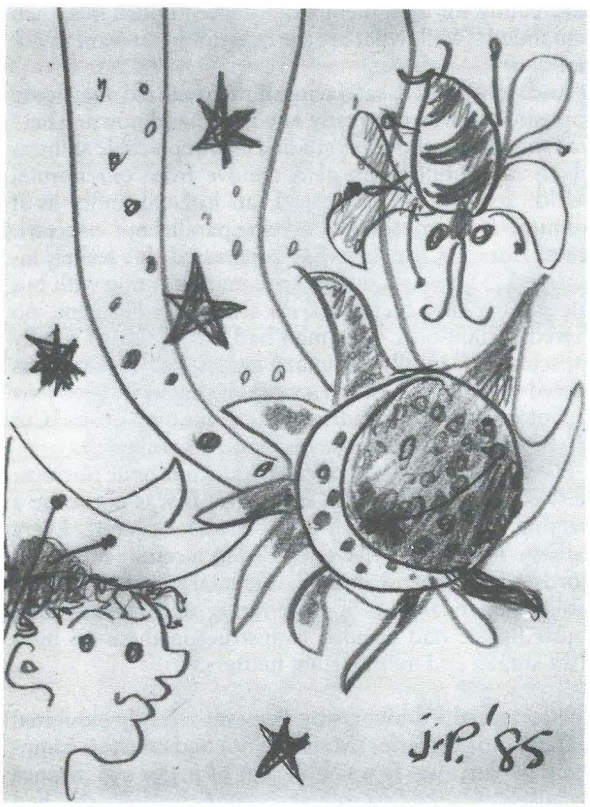
Would he be commencing a series of paintings now?

"Well, I should hope so."

The drawings, as is customary with Perceval, show strong decorative elements. So I asked to what extent was his initial motivation the sheer joy of putting lines together. His reply was startling.

"I get no joy out of painting." The voice was utterly flat, the face expressionless.

Observing my bewilderment – for there has never been a more exuberant and lusty painter in Australian art history – he now added casually, as if it were really too



Boy Dreaming of Sunflower, Halley's Comet and Bees.

obvious, too elementary to need saying: "Of course I thoroughly enjoyed doing these drawings."

But, I protested, you just said . . . my voice trailed off. I realized I'd fallen headlong into his trap. I'd forgotten whom I was dealing with. It was some twenty years since I'd exchanged more than two or three words with him and, though you never forget the man, you can forget the strategies. Perceval's calculated intent is to disconcert, to throw the other person off balance. He uses language not for truth but for effect: it's not that he lies, but rather that he knows just how flexible truth is – it can take care of itself. There was more of this to come. But there was one thing which was puzzling me in particular. During all that time in the ward, when he was not painting or drawing, what in the name of heaven did he do with his time! "Did you read?"

"No. I didn't do any reading. I haven't read anything since I was twenty-five. Before that I read everything. After that there seemed no point. And in any case I didn't have any spare time – it was taken up dealing with day to day affairs. Like, you see, this afternoon I was supposed to ring the Public Trustees [they have all his earlier paintings in storage]. Perhaps I will after you've gone. But I feel too tired now."

The hint was broad – but there were still things I needed to know (or thought I needed to know). So I changed tactics. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the exhibition – anything you'd particularly like to get across to the readers of Overland?"

He closed his eyes, his brow contracted. There was a substantial pause. Then suddenly he tilted his head back domineeringly, eyes still closed, and announced with theatrical emphasis: "Lloyd Rees – he's my idol now! These drawings were all done as a tribute to Lloyd Rees!"

This terrible, flippant irony translated what had been a rather awkward, pseudo-serious engagement into the realms of the absurd. And who could deny he was right? There is a basic futility to all interviews of artists (and articles on them). So I threw my notes away and tossed the last few questions to him at random: did he have any thoughts about current trends in art, the worship of de Chirico for instance, or the post-avant-garde movement?

"Oh," he exclaimed, the impatience now undisguised, the bitterness, the contemptuousness. "Oh, they're all lovely! They're all painting very well!"

And people (I was thinking perhaps of the people who had failed him, who had left him for dead), how did he feel about people now, people in general?

"People – what people? Oh, you mean the public? Yes, they're all wonderful. Oh yes, everybody's lovely. What more can I say!"

So we left it at that. He relaxed. We talked a little of the old days, of old friends – "Neil Douglas, he's a very estimable man" – of his children – "they all write to me and tell me what to do." Then it was time to go. He walked me to the front door and shook my hand. I don't imagine he rang the Trustees.

The drawings

Only an image put down with passion transfigures itself into genuine art. And we can only feel such passion about our deepest certainties, our fundamental convictions. If suddenly, as happened with this man, gigantic slabs of your life's structure disintegrate in front of your eyes, then your power to make art is to that extent broken. What we placed unlimited reliance on is wrenched from us and we are rendered as impotent as Samson without his hair. For several years Perceval had lain like this amid

the wreckage of all his enterprises, close friends dead or departed, love vanished, the magical haven of Murrumbeena buried forever under the sands and the vast Australian community around him, as always, sightless, unsympathetic and indifferent. He lay voiceless, inert, an aesthetic vegetable. No one imagined he would ever pull out of it. But he did. He has come back.

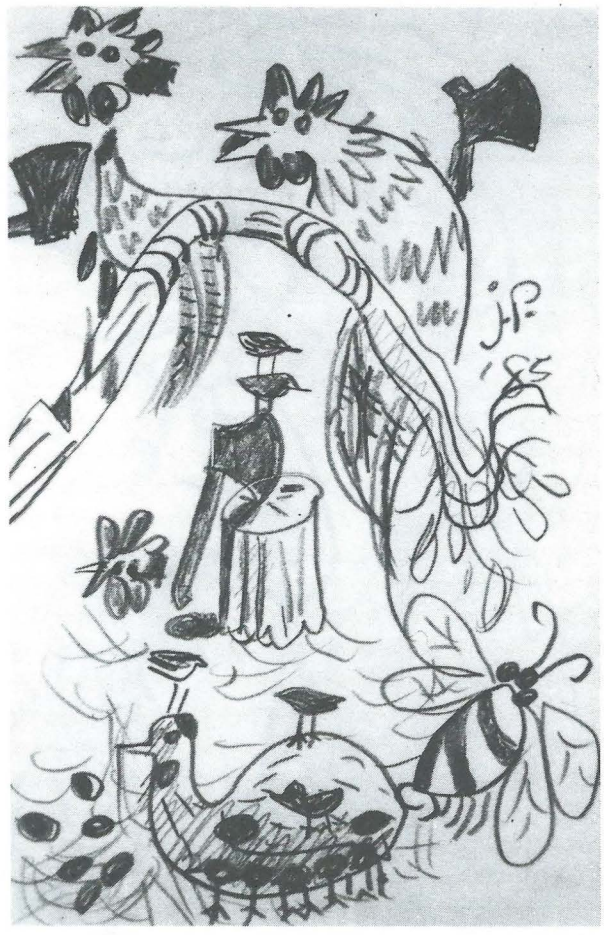
What has given Perceval the passion to create a new chapter in his art? Not anything in the broken palace whose collapse had so scarred him. In the present drawings there is only one fragmentary and half-concealed reference to anything belonging to the years 1943–1984. Otherwise almost the entire set of images and symbols are drawn from the two remaining, dramatically separated periods of his life – his early years, and his immediate present. It is only here he finds aspects of reality sufficiently unviolated.

So Perceval presents us with a pictorial space and syntax significantly different from what he had previously accustomed us to. It is now an ambiguous space half-realistic, half-symbolic and arbitrary: and if we were chasing sources there is an excellent example of this (with which Perceval would have been intimately familiar) in the National Gallery of Victoria. This is a small panel by Memlinc of "The Man of Sorrows" surrounded by emblems of the Passion. In it, as in Perceval's present drawings, a central figure (or doublet of figures) depicted in realist space is surrounded by symbolic objects arranged seemingly haphazardly, flat across the surface of the picture plane. In place of Memlinc's scourge, mocking soldier, hammer and nails, Perceval gives us a hatchet (or two), a bee, a bowler hat and something the catalogue calls a sunflower, although it looks remarkably unlike one in most cases. What are these symbols, and what meaning do they hold for him?

I asked him about the hatchet "Well, John Yule, that was because when I was a boy I had to chop the heads off chooks. I could never do it now. It takes me all my time to kill even a moth." The hatchet, a literal implement of death in the several chookyard scenes (but notice there is never a hand holding it), becomes in other drawings a symbol for spiritual death. What is the bee? One person I asked thought it represented confusion; another thought it might represent pain. Perceval himself evaded answering: "Oh that – it's a sort of private joke." It could also represent the destructive sting of sexual desire, or the universal predatoriness of the world as in those memorable lines Nolan wrote and Perceval would know:

> Among the flowers
> and visitors
> She moved,
> just like a bee
> Stripping souls
> of their accustomed ecstasy.

It may have elements of all these references in it. The bowler hat, seemingly added as an afterthought in many of the drawings and perhaps the least successful symbol pictorially, is easier. From his earliest days Perceval had an unbounded admiration for Chaplin. This is Chaplin's hat; and by one of those odd coincidences, his current dealer Teura Maffei shares this enthusiasm and is often to be seen wearing a bowler hat as she hurries around her gallery. Finally the symbol referred to as a sunflower is double-edged. Perceval is well able to draw a sunflower that looks like a sunflower, but this emblem looks far more like a colander: and in a large early drawing (No. 25, "Pottery Boy"), specifically included in the exhibition to provide the clue, we see its derivation. There on the wall behind the boy at the potter's wheel is a colander, used to sift the clay in the Murrumbeena workshop. So in its aspect as colander it refers to his creative days in the pottery; in its aspect as sunflower it refers to Van Gogh, whom he burningly admired in his early years, and whose imprint is clear to see in so many of his paintings.



Chook with Hatchet and Bee.

The drawings reproduced here illustrate these central themes. The main figures all belong to Perceval's immediate present, they are either himself or his fellow patients, male and female. The "Male with Bumble Bee

Male with Bumble Bee and Sunflower.

and Sunflower" is probably the most disturbing and certainly the most formally inventive of the works (everything draped on that one looping line left of centre). This malign, squat, leering hermaphrodite is in fact the artist's vision of himself, the artificer of the entire show – depleted, in bondage, the bee diving at his head (its sting already implanted in his nose and neck) and the colander-sunflower hovering close to sustain him. By contrast, "Boy with Halley's Comet and Sunflower" is one of the few wholly innocent and untroubled images, a pure celebration of wonder at the energies of the universe, those energies which Perceval's paintings themselves so frequently celebrate. The "Chookyard" drawing is as violent and merciless as anything Picasso has given us, but laced with Perceval's wild mocking humor. The sumptuous seductress with the impossibly sensuous lips, flaunting her bowler hats and wearing the bee stings as adornments on her thighs is a straight unbridled assertion of the surge and tension, the fire and threat of the life-force with all its challenges and traps. And her antithesis is the "Bound Nude" – emaciated, vacant faced, sexually deviant, knitting needles in her unkempt lifeless hair, falling sideways out of the picture and out of life, a confused, irredeemably lost victim of a soulless civilization.

The savage directness of these drawings is closer in spirit, if not in manner, to his 1940s work rather than to the lush massively tactile hedonistic products of the 1950s and 1960s – and this is refreshing. It shows a man impatient with further compromise. The casual virtuoso improvisations gracing each page, the throwaway bravado – though too hasty at times, too unrehearsed, too tainted with that uncritical worship of spontaneity which the theorists of the 1940s adopted without examining its destructive consequences scrupulously enough – are, we realize, the longer we look at them, window-dressing for a deep underlying torment and anger. The draughtsmanship is like a steel spring, energized, elegant, dictated from that inner canon of rhythmic dynamics unique to this artist. It is a violent half-mad world he shows us but the hand that depicts it is not mad. Each line is unerring, ruthless, unsentimental, incisive as a razor slash.

The drawings attack society by confronting it with its victims. The fallout from a materialistic, complacent, directionless civilization is more deadly to the spirit than any atomic cloud could be to the body. None of us are exempt. The blind low-level demand of Western communities slowly sucks the living breath from any person of sensitivity – and the more so the longer such persons expose themselves to it. There is no artist whose work has not been blighted to some extent by these exigencies. Perceval is in fact an aggravated case of all our fates. As early as 1956 he confided in John Hetherington that he spent seven-tenths of his time on marketing, on public relations. That is an utterly reckless proportion of time – and the penalty he has paid is appalling. We all can see in this man's story our own lives writ large. That is why his fate appals and fascinates us – and why his resurrection grips us with a hope we had almost succeeded in denying to ourselves.

It would be an easy mistake to see this tormented life as merely an isolated case history, as only the story of one man's bad luck or bad judgement. On the contrary his life is a symbol of each and every artist this century: it is just that in his case the situation escalated to near-melodramatic proportions, culminating in that long descent into chaos and night. And now he re-emerges from that death in life, clutching this wild posy of battered flowers. And that figure emerging from the ruins, weakened, his head still high, his voice still steady, that figure coming toward us is . . . ourself.

Nude with Bowler Hats and Bees.

John Yule is a Melbourne painter and writer. His book The Living Canvas *is to be published in July. We acknowledge the kind co-operation of Teura and Gilbert Maffei of Avant Galleries, Melbourne.*

TERRY HARRINGTON

The Sum of the Parts

A discussion of currently available general anthologies of Australian verse with special reference to The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse, *chosen by Les A. Murray (Oxford, $30.00).*

"Anthologies are necessary. They are also too often self-defeating. Mediocre collections smother the particular poems they contain, reducing them to a bland porridge in which everything tastes and sounds like everything else. Good anthologies set the familiar in a new and unexpected context, one that can shock us into reading with a refreshed and alert eye." [1] R.F.Brissenden writes here of eighteenth century poetry, but the same distinction can be made of anthologies from any age. Les Murray's recently published work, *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* is the type of collection Brissenden would applaud. While it has taken upwards of two years (by his own reckoning) to compile, there is a sensually refreshing and immediate 'new world' presented here. This is not a coffee-table effort of gilded verse, not the staunch conservative push of clique, and not a book of elect and elite. It's a book to be read, and will prove the point that anthologies are indeed necessary and, further, that good anthologies need sufficient time to research and produce.

Les Murray has cast his net into widely-scattered oceans, seas, straits, inlets, rivers, lagoons, billabongs and puddles. His catch sorted – the old flesh-wasteds and small-fry thrown back – we find displayed some fine specimens of various species and some odd-bodies that tantalize. The North Coast fishmonger offers what is fresh and in season.

Long regarded as a poet of 'integrations and convergences' [2], it is really no surprise to find that Les Murray brings together material from so wide a field. Many earlier anthologies tended to present scant material prior to the 1920s and a tentative, conservative selection of contemporary work. Judith Wright's *A Book of Australian Verse* (the book displaced by Les Murray's) is an example of this type. It is only recently that we have seen a break with this tradition, for example, Geoffrey Dutton's *Australian Verse from 1805: A Continuum* (1976) and Rodney Hall's *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981). Australian poetry is now being offered with broader scope. Les Murray has opted to extend and expand on this recent trend (note the Table of Comparisons below). In an article based on an interview with Fiona Capp, [3] Murray expands on his desire to make the anthology eclectic, and link it with the German tradition of including hymns and folk poems.

Murray recruits material from the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, some collected for the first time. He reinforces and enlarges on Rodney Hall's innovatory inclusion of Aboriginal song-poems, mixes in the oral tradition and many Anon-poems (also featured in Geoffrey Dutton's collection and Harry Heseltine's *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, 1970), and branches out extensively to embrace Australian humor – even to the point of presenting Barry Humphries, with "Edna's Hymn". We meet a greater diversity of people in Les Murray's collection than any other – the original settlers of the land, the four hundred tribes flourishing when 'civilization' arrived, the cheeky resistant voices of the convicts and complaints about the squatters (where are the oppressor's poems?), the drunks, overlanders, mothers, lyricists, the intelligentsia and the contemplatives. He incorporates not only city and country, but different rural settings. The variety it seems is only limited by the space allowed.

It has been claimed that recent anthologies have done little about women poets, but my comparisons indicate that there has been a sizeable increase in the female component over the last two decades. This has not only been amongst the living – the Odyssean anthologist, moving amongst the dead, has unearthed some significant female voices. But all poets should be grateful for the presentation of such variety. One does wonder, though, how the poets have been personally treated by Oxford. Barrett Reid has mentioned that he was surprised when in Canberra recently to find that John Philip was unaware his poem was in Les Murray's anthology, that he hadn't been asked, and he does not rate a mention in the list of copyright acknowledgements – despite his high standing nationally and internationally. Similarly, Francis Brabazon and Max Dunn do not appear in the copyright list, and a poem by Arthur Davies, well-known to a whole

Comparisons	A Book of Australian Verse Judith Wright (1955)	A Book of Australian Verse Judith Wright (1967)	The Penguin Book of Australian Verse Harry Heseltine (1970)	Australian Verse From 1805 Geoffrey Dutton (1976)	The Collins Book of Australian Poetry Rodney Hall (1980)	The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse Les Murray (1986)
No. pages of poems	231	275	385	320	377	380
No. lines per page	28	28	25	35	35	40
No. different contributors	67	74	116	142	100	231
No. poems	192	244	266	304	356	384
No. Aboriginal translations	—	—	—	—	12	32
% female poets	5	6	29	14	29	37
No. anonymous	—	—	—	24	5	21
No. poets with 5+ poems	12	17	16	15	28	—
No. poets with 4 poems	7	5	10	9	9	—
No. poets with 3 poems	9	8	9	14	12	57
No. poets with 2 poems	11	18	20	33	17	34
No. poets with 1 poem	27	24	45	57	33	124
Weight (grams)	360	480	320	1200	960	650
Volume (cubic cm)	611	756	600	2311	1686	1078
Density (no. words per cubic cm)	54	71	98	38	62	113

range of literary people, does not have its source acknowledged, nor are dates supplied for the poet. Such courtesies and scholarship should be routine.

Anthologists prepare for us what they think is fresh and vital, their image of Australian verse embodied in the collection. They can be forgiven for the sense of zealous ownership such a task must engender. Noticeably, though, most anthologies are much the same. Decision sways between the best-found poems, the so-called 'standard' pieces, and the freshly-found. Proportions have always plagued the worker in this field. Rodney Hall, in the introduction to his collection, does admit to being rather disappointed with what he found in his muster of Australian poetry – "I found that, by and large, the most gifted poets are indeed the ones who have become best-known" – and this emotion flavors his work with an unusually constrained note of conservatism. It seems that Les Murray has found more to interest him in his round-up. His work, more flavorsome and compact (a middle-weight with a density rating of 113 in the Table of Comparisons!), seems to be marketed with both the 'ordinary' and the 'practised' reader in mind (do either exist?)

One aspect of the anthologists' traditional range which has been criticized,[4] although with kid-gloves, has been the exclusion of verse from the wide variety of non-English-speaking cultures now domiciled in Australia. Rodney Hall does admit one poem each from Dimitris Tsaloumas and Antigone Kefala. Les Murray has been wise not to push this matter. While we are becoming more aware of our Aboriginal inheritance, we have not come to terms yet with recent European and Asian migrations.

Les Murray's detractors have deplored the absence of biographical information on contributors. It has been suggested[5] that the anthologist assumes the reader has this information at hand in a separate book. However, Les Murray has other reasons for spurning not only biographies, but historical overviews and commentaries as well: "The potted commentaries which most anthologies provide are scholarly and innocuous enough, but in some collections of verse they approach the quality of a police dossier, implicitly inviting the reader to judge the poet at least partly on the basis of political, religious or artistic views he or she is alleged to hold. All this takes the matter far from considerations of poetic achievement, and is a development full of tyrannical potentials."[6] It is clear here that Les Murray purposefully decides against anything which makes the reader lean towards the poet-outside-the-poem. The professional reader does not require these unnecessary 'signposts' and is simply left wishing for more poetry. Presenting the reader with the text alone leaves nothing for distraction, no other reference points, except the poems.

Lack of confidence in our poets stems from a perception of Australian poetry as a poor cousin to the English, and latterly an adopted nephew of the Americans. In 1955, Judith Wright wrote openly that the chief justification of the anthology, "especially in so relatively small and recent a field as Australian poetry presents, is that it can act as a map does, showing the course of rivers and the position of mountains, and giving, even in the debatable territory of immediate contemporary writing, at least some guide to possible routes of advance."[7] This insecurity stands in stark contrast to Les Murray's approach.

Murray freely disregards rank, including work of lesser quality. Is it for the sake of the common heritage, all things accepted in the "vernacular republic"? While he claims that his anthology is representative, it could be more aptly described as diversely idiosyncratic. By imposing strict limits of three poems a poet, Les Murray presents variety at the expense of comparison and individual depth. The nature and purpose of an anthology is brought to question here. I suspect Les Murray's intention is really that his collection should sit beside other collections, rather than compete with them.

Judith Wright, in the introduction to her collection, says that the Australian verse anthology's chief justification is to act as a map. Young poets must not travel the wilderness, it seems. Rodney Hall enlarges the potential territory, but still arranges his poets on conservative hierarchical lines. But Les Murray presents poems as if he is 'naming' sites – both black and white converge on place, and this collection can be seen as a reflection of a culture where poets are involved in an identification of homeland, both in a physical and spiritual sense, unique in recent Australian history.

What of Judith Wright's concern that writers need a map? This socio-cultural problem has evaporated to some extent in the last two decades as recognition has been adjusted to acknowledge spiritual forefathers, managers of the Australian environment for perhaps a hundred thousand years or more. Les Murray calls it quite rightly our "senior culture".

The acceptance of this inheritance by younger poets has already taken place, and it has given them forefathers to emulate as well as the follies of imperialists and oppressors to laugh about. The feeling from the latter section of Les Murray's collection and, to a lesser extent, from Rodney Hall's, is of poets striding comfortably into territories wild, perhaps occupied by others, but known.

The inclusion of Aboriginal song-poems does pose a problem for the anthologist, that of translation and transcription. Rodney Hall admits that "the Aboriginal songs in translation as we have them are shadows of great presences. But better the shadows than nothing." Les Murray is similarly challenged with bringing to life the presences in these shadowy works. Some pieces lack vitality – particularly the very short ones. This is not so of the longer works presented, the "Lalai (Dreamtime)", the "Native Cat Song Cycle" and the very impressive "Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone". These are immensely satisfying.

The presence of the Aboriginal poems creates a perspective more truly representative of the reflective Australian. The larrikin songs and sometimes sombre lyrics of people cut off from their fatherland, the romantic idealism, the more surrealistic forms, the bush ballads and 'modernist' writing, are all muted by an Aboriginal sensibility and dwarfed by their cultural achievements.[8]

In all anthologies there are unstated assumptions about what Australian poets are doing, and what the interested

population is looking for in a representative anthology. No one will ever be entirely satisfied, but the Les Murray collection strikes a strong note of accord with me.

While his balance may be too humorous and 'light' for some, there is no shortage of the ponderables we find in other anthologies. His emphasis on the comic and oral elements redresses a balance that had already swung far too much on the side of the serious. It would, of course, be inappropriate to see his collection as the final word on Australian poetry. But Les Murray is in many ways a character to suit the times – affable and witty, well-read, a denouncer of establishments and non-establishments alike, unpredictable, aggressive, yet appreciative of the humbler aspects of humanity. His anthology fits the man.

Terry Harrington's poems have been published widely in newspapers and journals. He lives at Foster, Victoria.

NOTES

1. R.F. Brissenden: "Public and eloquent verse worthy of the memory", Age, 19 April 1986.
2. Les Murray: "The human-hair thread", Meanjin no. 4, 1977.
3. Fiona Capp: "Les Murray – an interview", Australian Book Review, April 1985.
4. R.F. Brissenden: "Poetic Riches of Les Murray", Australian, 22 March 1986.
5. Susan McKernan: "The Murray guide to lively poetry", Bulletin, 11 March 1986.
6. Les Murray: Foreword to *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*, p. xxii.
7. Judith Wright: Introduction to *A Book of Australian Verse* (1955), p.1. It is interesting to note that, in the 1968 edition, she deletes this section and presents a more confident outlook.
8. There is an excellent, succinct discussion of this aspect in a review by Elizabeth Lawson Marsh: "The first anthology of Australian poetry", Meridian vol. 1, no. 2 (October, 1982).

GILES ON HIS RETURN FROM THE SECOND EXPEDITION (NATIVE ROSE)

Entering that glen after eighty miles of sand and heat
had been like entering a pool —
deep, translucent, proffered.
Flowers sprang from rocks, palms
leaned against the red and yellow of the gorge
and everywhere there was the sound of running streams.

Mr Tiekens lead the horses to drink
and I went off to collect some of the flowers,
none of which I'd seen before.

I didn't notice it
until I'd brought an armful back and laid them out.
It was tawny and infolded
and at first glance, so unassuming
it could've easily been missed
and would by now have been forgotten
except that of all the specimens we gathered
it alone has survived intact, colors undiminished.

Tonight as I look at it again,
this small flower
— more than anything I wrote
or could hope to write —
proclaims that journey's revelation:
uncatalogued and unnamed,
without genus or history,
it lies on the open page in lamplight
dormant, alchemic, luminous.

MICHAEL DRISCOLL

ANDREW LANSDOWN

Like I Bin Crying Sometimes

August 12, 1963.

My darling Ken,

I am no longer alone at home, which is why it has been so long since I wrote last. Ten weeks in fact. I have been so preoccupied with her that I have forgotten you for whole slabs of time. Sometimes I am glad to forget. Other times I long to remember every tiniest detail. I feel like that now. But I cannot focus on anything specific, so I will tell you about her instead.

Her name is Pearl. She is a Native girl, but her father is white.

It just occurred to me as I wrote it how silly that sounds. It would be just as true to say that she is a white girl, but her mother is a Native. But no one thinks that way – me included. We seem to want to think the worst of people – and we think that Native is Worse, so anyone with mixed blood is a Native. Well anyway, only the Natives would have her. Her father probably does not know to this day that a living, suffering person grew out of his moment of pleasure.

That is a bitter thing to say isn't it? See what I mean about thinking the worst of people? But I feel bitter – and ashamed – when I think of Pearl. I am not responsible for her life or her trouble, I know that. But I cannot help *feeling* responsible. Because I am white. That is probably why I took her when the Native Welfare asked me to help. But it is not why I let her stay.

She was nearly four months pregnant when she came to me. The Welfare people said there was no place for her to be looked after properly on the Wyndham reserve. She is only fifteen. Such a delicate, pretty thing. It breaks my heart. How is it possible that no one cherishes such a precious girl? Her boyfriend drinks a lot and makes a nuisance of himself. Her mother is an alcoholic. And her half-sisters would not take her. She is so pretty, they were afraid for their husbands. So I took her.

She agreed to come. At least, that is what the Welfare said. She will not talk to me about it. When I ask her, she just looks at the floor. Well, she has not run away, so I guess she agreed. But agreeing and wanting are not the same thing.

If I had not been told, I would never have guessed she was carrying a child. She was as flat as a breadboard. But she is starting to show now. I do not know how we will get on when the baby comes. I guess we will manage. Have to. That is what you find out as life goes on. You just have to cope, no matter what. Sometimes I feel like giving up, though. Sometimes I wish I could lie down in the wild oats at the cemetery and never get up.

I remember the first time we lay together in the tall grasses by the river. I am sure your mother knew what we had been up to. I still remember it as clear as yesterday. "You've got a seed in your hair," she said, taking it. I still blush, remembering it. It is lucky I did not end up like Pearl. But I guess it would not have been the same, anyway. I have always had people to love me – first my parents and brothers, then you.

I had a terrible time with Pearl at first. She would not talk to me. She is very shy, but she is also defiant. And she stole things. I have never heard of the like. Stealing and stealing!

To begin with, she stole my make-up. I would go outside, to hang up the clothes or something, and she would sneak into my room and take the lipstick or the nail varnish. I would come back to find her painting her nails or drawing circles on her knees and ankles with the lipstick. She even took my powder compact. She plastered her face so she looked like a ghoul, then broke the mirror-lid off and kept it and threw the powder-cake and puff on to my bed.

Bedroom, bathroom, vanity case, handbags – she went through the lot until she had taken or broken or used every item of make-up I owned. Each day a new mischief. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to stop her and I did not know how to endure it. I feared that if I confronted her she would run off, and if I told Welfare they would put her in a Home.

Then she began taking my jewellery. I never once saw her, but she never tried to hide that she had done it. She would come to the tea table wearing my ear-rings. Or she would place my brooches, rings and necklaces in circles or lines on her bed.

She even searched my dressing table drawers and found the bangle you gave me for our first wedding anniversary – the one with the line of poetry engraved on the underside. "How Do I Love Thee?" I felt so angry and hurt when I saw it on her little wrist! I wanted to hit her.

And then it hit me. She felt the same way. Hurt and angry. And I knew then that she was only doing these things because she was lonely and lost. It was the only

way she knew to cope. I write letters to you, and she takes trinkets. That is when I started loving her, I think.

I asked her then, "Do you miss Sam, Pearl?" Sam is the boy she was with. "Do you miss your people?" She just looked at me and tears came to her eyes, and she said, "He says this baby it belong to nother bloke. Whitey maybe. He make me feel shamed. If I go back, he starts his jealousing again. Drinking and jealousing. That's all. My sisters, they bin crying when I left, like I bin crying sometimes."

It was the most she had said in the four weeks she had been with me. I felt close to her then, and I thought she was softening towards me, too. But while I was out that afternoon she rummaged through my wardrobes and took the tie–pins and cuff-links you used to wear. She had clipped the tie-pins to her blouse, so they progressed over her bosom like the rungs of a golden ladder.

I think she was testing me. She expected me to go off pop at her like everyone else in her life. She would have felt comfortable with a confrontation. Something familiar. But I did something strange. Love is like that. It gives endurance, offers insight.

To stop the stealing without hurting or losing her, I decided that whenever she took something I would give her more of it – more than she could handle. I went next door to Cheryl's and I got all the trinkets she could spare. I came back with a shoe-box full – rings, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, lipsticks, old compacts, marbles, odd cuff-links – and I gave them to her. The next day, while I was out shopping, she smashed them all – in the back yard, on the path, with a brick. So I caught the bus straight back to the shops and bought a shilling's worth of toy rings and brought them back to her.

My brothers said they were concerned for me, having her in the house. They said I should get rid of her. But I told them, "No-one wants her. Don't you think she knows it? Don't you think she's hurting? She'll stop, when she feels safe with me."

For nearly two weeks I rounded up all the trinkets I could lay my hands on and gave them to her. She always took them without a word. After a while, she stopped smashing them. She was still stealing, but a least I felt as if I had some control in the situation.

Next, she started taking my handkerchiefs. The nieces and nephews still give me handkerchiefs for Christmas. I never use them, so I do not know why I felt so cross when she took them. Anyway, I called on everyone for handkerchiefs. I even arranged for the nieces and nephews to give me my Christmas handkerchiefs early so that I could give them to her, Cheryl was wonderful. She cut up an old sheet, edged the squares in different coloured cotton, and printed Pearl's name on each one in indelible pencil. Pearl burnt all of them in the chip heater. I never told Cheryl.

Then one morning nearly two weeks ago, I woke to find everything stacked neatly on my dressing table. My make-up, my jewellery, my handkerchiefs.

I found her in the kitchen. "Thank you Pearl," I said. She started crying – sobbed and sobbed. And she said "I'm no good to piss on. That's what Sammy says." "Hush," I said "He's a liar. He's a fool. What would he know?" And as I held her, I could feel the little lump of life in her tummy pressing into mine. And I thought,

"Soon, little precious, you'll have someone to love. Someone who won't hurt you – not for years, at least."

When your mother said to me that time, "You've got a seed in your hair", I remember thinking, "I've got *his* seed in my womb." I never told you. It seemed immodest then. But not now. How often did you love me? And yet no children. There are griefs Pearl will never know. But I must stop this, or it will turn to pity. It is exquisite, the way I feel, at this moment, writing to you. I imagine Church people feel like this when they take Holy Communion, the bread and the wine calling forth Christ. Sombre, but not at all sad.

Anyway, I was saying about Pearl. She has not taken anything since that morning. My brothers say it is too early to tell. They think she will start again. But even if they are right, it will not matter like before. I have learnt to love her. She can hurt me more now, of course – as people can when you love them – but she can never hurt me enough to make me give up.

The funny thing is, she has become quite sociable in a shy sort of way. Before, she flatly refused to go out with me. She would stay home by herself and I would half expect to find her gone when I returned. Now she tags along everywhere I go. She is as clingy as a shadow.

So you see, my darling, I am not alone just now. Pearl is with me. I sometimes wonder, Is anyone with you?

Love always,

Me. xxx

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of both the Shire of Kalamunda, WA, and the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Stephen Murray-Smith

swag

The eaves drip, the gum trees outside look depressed, the grass – thank God – has stopped growing, the fire is warm and I am sipping soda water, being under marching orders to lose three stone. Dorothy Hewett has just rung to say that she has taken up her three-month Alan Marshall Fellowship and is in residence at Sorrento, down near Point Nepean, where the delights of the winter Bass Strait gales are even more pronounced than here, halfway up the Mornington Peninsula. She's been in the wars and has to have an eye operation while she's down in these southern parts. John McLaren has severed his connection with Australian Book Review after a founding editorship of some eight years and a remarkable record of achievement; his going has caused some high local literary feelings. Tom Shapcott of the Literature Board has invited Barrett Reid and me to dine with him next week, a conciliatory gesture considering the nasty letters I have been sending him and his chairwoman, Rosemary Wighton, about some extraordinarily convoluted plans the Literature Board has dreamed up regarding the financing of literary magazines. *They* say it's to make everything more rational and lovely, *I* say it's the old business of when you can't think of anything else to do, harass the literary editors. A fairly average week or so in Australian literary life, as I see it.

At the university I am invited to a meeting of Antarctic bods and find, to my surprise, that the purpose of the meeting is to decide what to do with $30,000 left to the University of Melbourne for Antarctic research by Joyce Lambert, former wife of Eric Lambert. Eric wrote *The Twenty Thousand Thieves* and was active in Left literary circles in Melbourne in the early 1950s, about the time Overland started getting going. At one time we thought he was a serious rival as the Great Australian Socialist Writer to Frank Hardy, but Eric 'went rotten', as they used to say, and shot through to Europe, where he died in the snow outside an English pub. (He was a difficult husband; the naughty thought crosses my mind that perhaps that was why Joyce left her money to Antarctic research.) So we have this meeting where I am the only non-scientist. I try to tell the boffins that they will continue to suffer indignities until they enlist the historians and humanists to unravel the contradictions and discontinuities in our Antarctic policies, but they think I'm nuts, won't allow the $30,000 to be spent on commissioning a major study of our involvement in Antarctica, and clearly want to gobble it up for air-fares and the publication of their papers on lichens and glaciers. Perhaps there is some kind of a moral here for Oz-land.

I regain a little sanity and a slightly less jaundiced view on the world by taking a day off and driving down to the Gippsland coast to talk to boat-builders and fishermen and to pick up a one-fire stove wich I've been looking for for a long time, to install on a Bass Strait island. (Believe it or not, these things now cost up to $700, unless you can pick one up through a friend. Come to think of it, one of our previous stoves – they don't last long in sea air – was given to us by Joyce Lambert.) I admire the green hills of Gippsland and reflect on my wartime training down there, and think how good it was to have stayed alive all this time after all; and I delude myself with fantasies about how people with far less money than I am supposed to earn seem to live contented and happy lives. Yet while I'm down there I hear of the appalling inroads booze makes on many young lives – resentful young people with nowhere to go and nothing to do and no education to speak of. Busily employed in a middle-class Melbourne suburb, it's easy to ignore all this. Not down on the coast.

But when I get back I'm reminded of the joys of art and civilisation when I call on Joyce Wood to try and get her to draw a map for me – or, more accurately, for the historical society on Flinders Island. Joyce is a retired cartographer, she lives in a flat in Carlton with nice books and pictures, and she is a wise and wonderful and witty observer of the world. Generously she lends me her personal note-book, which contains such splendid material as a running series called "Adventures on the Public Transport" (one sub-heading reads "The Exploding Tram") and an account of how a friend of hers, dining in London and talking of W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, found the woman next to him saying: "My last memory of Gilbert is of his bald head at the bottom of the lake." She was the woman whom Gilbert died trying to save.

Here, from Joyce's note-book, is her entry for the "Select the Music for your Memorial Concert" Game:

Scottish Psalter: Psalm XXIV, "St George's, Edinburgh."
Handel: Pastoral Symphony, Messiah (quite short).
Dorian Le Gallienne: film tune, "Jinker."
Mozart: Something from "Cosi fan Tutte."
Bach: A movement from one of the solo sonatas for cello.
Buxtehude: Cantata *"Ich bin ein Blume"* (two male voices).
"The Road to the Isles" with pipes – perhaps the best tune ever written.
Beethoven: Setting of the Scottish song "Faithful Johnnie"; male and female voice.
Trumpet and organ: perhaps one of the superb Lutheran hymns, or "Sleepers Wake!"
Richard Strauss: something from the ravishing decadence of "Rosenkavalier".
Lehar: "Gold and Silver Waltz" – is there anything more exhilarating than a circular waltz with a good partner?
This lovely bit of fizz comes at the end of the programme.

So I return home to struggle with the last entries for *Right Words*, a book for Penguin on English usage in Australia, and wish that I had the sense to concentrate on more important things than whether people say *aitch* or *haitch*. But I pick up the Listener and am pleased with a story told there by Fritz Spiegl. The Archbishop of Canterbury is showing Winston Churchill around Lambeth Palace, and complaining at the upkeep. The Archbishop says: "You know, we have forty-two bedrooms." To which Chruchill replies: "How unfortunate, seeing you have only thirty-nine articles."

But I am cast down again at Spiegl's comment that a great many people, especially the young, would not understand the joke.

We learn that Conal Fitzpatrick, one of Australia's best-known younger poets, with an excellent publisher and uniformly good reviews, has sold only 250 copies of his *Wollongong Poems* (at least that was the figure last May). Fitzpatrick earned three times as much from publishing one poem from the book in 1982 than he has, so far, from the book's publication in April 1984. I hasten to add that he's not so much complaining as bemused by the experience. We have tried to cheer him up by telling him that Eliot's *The Waste Land* sold less than two hundred copies over many years and that Shelley, though much discussed, sold poorly in his lifetime.

There is much lip-service paid to poetry in Australia, and many prepared to recognise the vital service it plays in the renewal of language and of ideas. And presumably Les Murray and Bruce Dawe and Gwen Harwood and A.D. Hope sell well enough to encourage publishers to continue issuing their books. For the less well-known poet one answer seems to be to become one's own colporteur. We are told that, by insistent flogging from reading to reading and pub to pub, Geoff Goodfellow sold over 400 of his most recent book at $4.95, while Shelton Lea and Abalone Press have sold the same number of *Poems from a Peach Melba Hat* ($9), reviewed in this issue.

I notice, not for the first time, that large advertisements in the press for the new film "For Love Alone" fail to mention the small detail that the book on which the film is based was written by a woman called Christina Stead. Not so much an insult to a woman, I think (women were involved in the making of the film) as an insult to all writers.

Those who enjoyed Keith Hancock's fine piece "Testimony" in Overland 98, and they were many, will be interested to know that that article, together with a following piece of he same length entitled "Perspectives", has now been published under the title *Testimony*. It is available for $7 plus postage and packing from Executive Officer, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra.

We apologise to Daniel Neumann for identifying the three poems of his published in Overland 102 as by *David* Neumann. Daniel Neumann also has two poems in this issue.

Melbourne's New Theatre was founded in 1936 and this year celebrates its fifty years with a production on its own history, "Against the Stream". This production will have a preview at the Organ Factory on 10 August at a reception to mark the occasion, and the season will run for five weeks. The Organ Factory, in Page Street, Clifton Hill, is the location of the New Theatre these days, though its 1942–1959 premises in Flinders Street, built entirely by members' labor, remains a proud memory. An attempt to put on the anti-fascist play "Till the Day I die" in 1937 was frustrated by the intervention of the Nazi Consul-General in Australia.

New Theatre has a remarkable history, which will be demonstrated by exhibitions at the Performing Arts Museum and the Organ Factory. Information and items are still required. Enquiries to New Theatre, PO Box 124, Clifton Hill, Victoria 3068.

WALTER CROCKER

Intellect and Virtue

A Response to Warren G. Osmond's Frederic Eggleston: An Intellectual in Australian Politics *(Allen & Unwin, $29.95).*

Sir Frederick Eggleston was born in Melbourne in 1875 and died there in 1954.

During the seventy-nine years of his life-span the population of Australia grew from about two to ten million; the six colonies federated into the Commonwealth of Australia; following on the fateful and highly revealing Boer War were the two World Wars which ended the British Empire and West European hegemony, destroyed most of the monarchies and the old governing classes, and much of traditional culture; and in between the two World Wars was the Great Depression which shook the capitalist system to its foundations. During these seventy-nine years, too, daily life was subjected to such profoundly revolutionary effects as the coming of electricity, the motor car, the aeroplane, wireless, television, contraception culminating in the Pill, nuclear physics, the new biological sciences, and the new, latterly the overwhelming, power of the common man and his preferences, the phenomenon of populism feared by the Spanish philosopher Ortega Y. Gasset when he wrote his seminal book *The Revolt of the Masses* some sixty years ago. And whether God had or had not been abolished in Nietzsche's sense, religion and its inhibitions had certainly declined to a small minority concern.

No man of the sensibility and the intellect of Eggleston could fail to be deeply affected by such an environment. Moreover, he was near to the power centres and better placed than all but a few to know what was going on. There is a crying need for a biography of a man so interesting in himself and who made the notable contributions he did as a lawyer, as a politician and Minister, as a diplomat, and above all as a thinker and a writer. He published four books, wrote, in whole or in part, several which were not published, and poured out a stream of studies, articles, memoranda and letters, many unpublished, which would amount to many hundreds of thousands of words.

Dr Warren Osmond's biography, the product of a decade spent studying the subject, meets the need. A reduced version of his doctoral thesis for Sydney University, it runs to 310 pages and is supplemented by twenty-two pages of notes, a bibliography of eighteen pages, an index of six pages and eighteen photographs. The research has been most thorough and most probing; and though occasionally, certainly not often, and never on matters of basic substance, a reader might not accept this or that point, or might feel that there is even a gap in

background knowledge, for instance in the complexities and subtleties of social systems in Europe or Asia (a gap shared with Eggleston himself), the author brings to his judgements a mind of outstanding acuteness and balance as well as a warm sympathy for Eggleston. He has, moreover, the culture – which, alas, can no longer be taken for granted in Ph D's, or academics – required for understanding the causes and concerns which dominated and conditioned Eggleston's life. His grasp of the Methodism of Eggleston's family is only one such example. And he has a mastery of clear, strong, telling English which would have delighted Eggleston.

In addition to illuminating Eggleston the book throws light on the cultural history of Melbourne, itself a subject of great interest. Osmond rightly singles out "high seriousness" as Eggleston's dominant trait. High seriousness is the characteristic of this important book.

Eggleston was born into a Methodist family. The founder of which in Australia, his grandfather, was a clergyman who started off in South Australia. Family connections in England included the Moultons, well known in the law and in public life, one rising to the peerage, and family connections in Melbourne included the Oldhams, also well known in the law and in public life. Eggleston's father was a solicitor. The Australian Egglestons have now been distinguished in the law for over a century, and also in architecture. The name has become synonomous with a sense of public duty, of idealism, of disinterestedness and the moral absolutes combined with an indifference to *panache*.

Although one of the Eggleston sons, after practising Law successfully for a time, became an Anglican clergyman, Eggleston himself early lost belief, as did the Methodist friend of his youth, John Latham. He never lost, however, the moral values or the conditioning of Chrisianity. Like John Stuart Mill, a man he resembled in more ways than one, he was a better Christian in practice than many professing Christians. And, like Nehru, another tirelessly questing and rebellious rationalist, he moved towards a position of greater sympathy with religion in his later years. When the son wished to quit the comfortable law practice for the Church, the mother, a traditional rationalist, wanted to get him psychoanalysed. Eggleston disagreed.

Eggleston's mother died when he was a child of nine, sensitive, rather 'different' and rather 'difficult'. The stepmother who came on the scene in due course was neither comprehending nor congenial. This fate probably accentuated the trait of fundamental loneliness, and accounted for something like moments of lopsidedness, which marked him occasionally throughout life. He was never unsociable, still less a recluse, but his essential life was an interior life, and it was dominated by a passion for thinking and reasoning which would have been remarkable even in the Darwin or Huxley or Haldane clans. Eggleston took to smoking cigars and savoring wines of *grande cru* at elegant dinners but never to golf clubs, Rotary get-togethers or football frenzies. For all his philosophising in favor of democracy he was, in current jargon, an elitist – and to the hilt.

At times, from childhood onwards, he suffered from nervous troubles. One brother committed suicide. His nervous breakdowns ceased from when he married at the age of twenty-nine. This deliverance was due to his wife, Lulu Henriques, a remarkable woman of Jewish extraction.

At least some of us knowing the Eggleston circle fairly well always assumed that she was Jewish, but Osmond shows that, while her father was a Jewish apostate, her mother in fact came from a Presbyterian background. Lulu in any case had the familiar best qualities of that gifted people in full blow, notably a love of life, vivacity, exuberance, intellect above average and aesthetic sensibility. Eggleston himself had some affinities with the Jews to a striking extent, notably in mental energy and in a capacity for abstractions, philosophical and otherwise. The presence of Jews always seemed to kindle him; at times kindling him into disagreement, even into anger. He once remarked to me, "I love the Jews". Lulu, who bore him five children, gave him the stimulating companionship, the affinity in outlook, the support and loyalty, and the wifely criticism which enabled his unusual talents to flower and his courage to endure.

Eggleston did not go to university, something he always regretted. Throughout life, at times secretly, he lamented his "defective education", especially after encounters with certain English people. He served his articles in his father's law office and took the examinations for entry into the profession set by the Supreme Court. He did well in the examinations just as he did well as a tyro solicitor. He was of course not ill educated. On the contrary he was highly educated. But he was largely self-educated, largely the *auto-didacte*, and as the slightly pejorative connotation given to the word by the French implies, that does carry certain disadvantages.

Eggleston did well in his profession. He was favorably regarded for his competence and his conscientiousness. But for him his profession was never much more than a source of honest income; and he had doubts about part of it as strong as his doubts about capitalism. His endlessly enquiring, deep-delving mind was busy with other matters than the law, such as the public weal, the governing of modern society, and the eternal conundrum in one or other of its many manifestations, What does life mean? His reading was prodigious in scope and in discipline – nothing of time – killing desultory reading. And his writing was equally prodigious in output, for years mainly in addresses magazine articles, memoranda and letters.

Here is an outline of his career, and more particularly of its driving forces, which Dr Osmond explores in detail.

Almost from his youth Eggleston had been a Deakinite Liberal, and much of this Deakinite spirit endured to the end. He never lost respect for Deakin. He early became a close student of, and an advocate for, the British Empire though, being Eggleston, he wanted changes in it. This interest was intensified by Lionel Curtis's visit to Australia in 1910 on behalf of the Empire federation movement and of the Round Table group. Eggleston contributed to the Round Table for over twenty years. He had a flair for political journalism of the best kind. His

interest in Empire matters, then covering much of the globe, led him to an interest in international relations as a whole, including defence.

In 1911, at the age of thirty-five, he entered municipal affairs. Elected to the Caulfield Council, he played an active part. In 1914 he was elected mayor. But soon the first world war broke out and, inevitably, held the centre of the stage. In 1916, at the age of forty-one, Eggleston volunteered for active service and left for overseas as an NCO. He was not commissioned until towards the end of the war. He then joined Billy Hughes as a member of his staff at the Paris Peace Conference. Much as he was thrilled with the occasion and the possibilities he found Billy intolerable – in words he used to me, "Hughes was a liar and a paragon of the cad" – resigned and returned home. The examples he gave did not put that statesman in a rosy light. For the rest of his life he had no regard for the Diggers' Friend and not much regard for his Paris colleague, Garran.

After returning to Australia Eggleston decided to venture into the political world. He was elected to the Victorian Lower House in 1920. In due course he entered the Cabinet and for a time was Attorney General. As Minister he had close dealings with Monash, for whom he came to feel the same contempt as for Billy Hughes. He lost his seat in 1927. These had been difficult years for Eggleston, and difficult not merely because of his difficult portfolios. He learnt a great deal about the process of government and the essential nature of parliamentary democracy. Henceforth his convictions about the "endless bitterness and insincerity" of Australian politics were burnt deep in him. He probably learnt a great deal about himself too, such as that intelligence and uprightness of his kind were not sufficient qualifications for political success, and that his proper role was not the hurly burly of party disputation and manoeuvre but influencing opinion, especially the opinion of those who could influence events.

He soon found an outlet for his interest and energy, and for the prospects of influencing opinion, in the Institute of Pacific Relations. The IPR enabled him to discover China and Japan as well as the United States and Canada; and it extended his interests into international relations as a whole. He was the virtual founder of what is now the Australian Institute of International Affairs. In fact Eggleston pioneered the scholarly and scientific study of international relations in Australia. In the face of indifference and ignorance, even in the highest places, and of the provincialism current in those days, he lavished devotion, brains, time, and, directly or indirectly, money on this cause.

In those days, too, he resumed contact with the world of literature and the arts, his friendship with Tom Roberts being the catalyst, as had been his friendship with the poet Bernard O'Dowd thirty years earlier. He wrote two books of note: *George Swinburne* and *State Socialism in Victoria*.

In 1933 the Federal Government invited him to become Chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, a post that gave scope to his managerial skills. It was another promising job, and he carried it out with indisputable competence as well as with enthusiasm.

Lulu died with cancer in 1935, which added darkness to his spirits, already sombre from the threat of World War II. But he pressed on with work and with writing his *Search for a Social Philosophy*.

In 1941, two years after the outbreak of the War, the Curtin Government invited Eggleston to go to China to head Australia's first diplomatic mission to that country. This gave him a new lease of life. He saw something of Chou En-lai and much of Wilfred Burchett, though never drawn to Communism. In 1944 he was invited to go on to Washington to head Australia's mission there. He accepted with enthusiasm, the more because preliminary negotiations were now going on about the United Nations, the new form of collective security for the post-war world. The following year he was invited to go to the San Francisco conference which was to draft the UN's constitution. That great occasion was also much to his taste. But by then, already seventy, he was so hampered, at times immobilised, by his arthritis, his failing eyesight and other health disabilities, that he had little effect, and he decided to return to Australia.

Eggleston had seen, and suffered, almost too much for one lifetime: the end of the British Empire, the establishment of a new and untried balance of power, a new equation for the white races, new strains on society and family problems. But so long as there was life in him he would continue to hope and to struggle. With the help once more of Evatt, who was normally considerate to and appreciative of Eggleston, he was given a consultancy in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, with particular responsibilities as regarded the training of cadets for the Diplomatic Service. And he was made a member of the interim council entrusted with the task of setting up the Australian National University. By 1950 he had become too immobile to get up to Canberra and dropped out from both appointments, but his mind lost none of its drive. Until a few months before his death in 1954 he was still writing memoranda and drafts.

I saw a good deal of Eggleston in the two years 1950–1952. Every three weeks or so I made a trip from Canberra to Melbourne and spent a couple of days mainly with him. I had first met him as far back as 1928, at the instance of Sir Keith Hancock, when I was on my way from Oxford to Stanford. I saw him again in 1937 and 1939 when in Australia from Geneva, and I carried on a correspondence, sometimes with ascerbity, about the international situation, especially about appeasement and Chamberlain. After the war I resumed contact; and on heading the Department of International Relations in the ANU our interchange was almost continual for two years.

My visits to him in the modest house at Camberwell, occupied by his daughter and her family, were often at considerable inconvenience to me, but I went partly out of his pressing and his pleas of loneliness and being neglected (he exaggerated the neglect, in the way old persons do) and partly out of respect for him. His ideas on the new academic discipline of International Relations were stimulating, and I benefitted greatly from his knowledge of Australian history. His preoccupation with

theory resulted in some odd gaps in his knowledge of international relations. Thus he had no grasp of what was going on in the Middle East and its likely consequences, nor of the way Israel was created; and little grasp of how nuclear weapons would change the world, negating for instance his ideas about disarmament in the Pacific.

Among the costs of these periodical absences from Canberra was that, owing to his failing sight, he had a powerful light placed at the head of his bed so that he could read and write. The light, which he disliked turning off, almost blinded me after an hour or two. Another cost was his obsession with 'social philosophy', or rather with his version of 'social philosophy' and the amendments he was working out for his original book on the subject. He was particularly anxious that I turn the Department of International Relations at the ANU into a group working out a *philosphy* and a *science* of International Relations. I was sceptical about this and had to oppose it; indeed I was sorely puzzled about parts of his original search. On the other hand I deferred to his plan not to publish a book I had nearly finished giving a gloomy prognostication about the UN.

What Eggleston loved was going over the subject of 'social philosophy' again and again, arguing this point and that. He did most of the talking, not out of vanity or egoism but out of the fecundity of his mind and his sense of the importance and the urgency of the subject; a sense I scarcely attained to. I could endure the discussion for two hours or so but not for the six or more hours he wanted. This urge in him was satisfied in part by various visitors who for various reasons went out to Camberwell. Some of them were less than attractive; such as Orr, then a lecturer in philosophy at the university. A year or two later he was elevated to the Chair at Hobart, Eggleston's intervention reputedly having been a main factor.

Eggleston at this stage tended to value academics according to their reception of the *Search*. Most newcomers to the ANU staff were presented with a copy. Most, I fear, never got beyond a few pages. A few, bolder than their peers, criticised it briefly, but most sent short vague acknowledgements and then forgot it.

The most interesting of his visitors, and perhaps the most sincere, were Jews, mainly from Central Europe. They did read the *Search* and they did give Eggleston the argumentation he yearned for. Though I had neither competence nor the temperament for his theoretical approaches I valued what he was after, and felt that the least that could be said for him as a social philosopher was what the gifted anthropologist, Ruth Benedict, was reputed to have said, that he was "a talented amateur". In between my visits to Melbourne I was peppered with notes, letters or memoranda on this or that point written on yellow scribbling paper and becoming less and less legible.

I regretted these hours on social philosophy the more because Eggleston's range of experience in the practical world of law, government, politics, and Melbourne's social and cultural life was exceptional and from it I could have learnt much. When I could inveigle him into talking about Alfred Deakin and his group. Billy Hughes, the Victorian leader W.A. Watt (greatly admired by Eggleston), Latham, John Wren and his world, Archibishop Mannix, the Symes and other families, Keith Murdoch, certain judges and their vagaries, certain leaders at the Bar and their goings on, certain *causes celebres*, his love-hatred for England and for America, he was fascinating. Occasionally he showed a little resentment, never much, a little provincialism (for instance how he told the British Ambassador in China what he or Britain should be doing. He had slight knowledge of Europe).

A delightful interlude at these colloquies was the sight of his five year-old grand-daughter taking over the room, clambering over bed and chairs, playing with pens and enjoying herself to the full. Once when I commended his patience he replied sweetly, "She reminds me of my wife. Linnet has her nature".

My abiding memories are firstly of an exceptional mind working hard and powerfully to the end, and secondly of a man whose goodness, whose *anima naturaliter Christiana*, exemplified not only in his kindly face, in his instinctive courtesy to women and benignity for children, but also in his obliteration of all self-seeking. Only two men in my experience equalled him in this combination of intellect and virtue, A.D. Lindsay the Balliol Philospher and socialist, and Arnold Toynbee the historian. Eggleston had essential nobility.

Osmond concludes his memorable biography with the sentence: "The rationale of this book is to celebrate Eggleston's commitment to intellectual leadership, his consistent defence of liberal and humane values in Australian public life, and the equanimity with which he ... maintained a consistent commentary on the inadequacies of Austalian culture in his time." It is a justified coda.

Sir Walter Crocker, Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia for nearly ten years prior to his resignation in 1982, had previously spent his time mainly in foreign affairs, including some thirty years as an international official at Geneva and New York, and as ambassador of Australia. Among his books are Nehru, Nigeria, Australian Ambassador *and* Sir Thomas Playford.

HIS LIFE

He is writing out his life
and drawing up a map with flags and stars
in red and limited gold. Not much of that.

The autobiographer is hunched against his desk
remembering (seeing himself remembering)
how he was at four and twelve and twenty-nine,
first swinging on that gate, creak creak it groaned,
the dog beside him whimpering and out to sea
spinnakers flying. But then he never sailed
a whole day through
but turned the boat away from open water inward,
homeward.

And then he left the sea for the hills but in their shadow
lay huddled on his bed. The wind whipped by,
driving the apple trees.

He means to tell (for whose ears?)
how it was at four and twelve and twenty nine.
He was at the railway station —
tubs of geraniums, grit underfoot.
He ran along the platform calling to someone
who did not reply.

He is tired of his own story and will tell no more.

Instead he will write of his ancestor safe in the real past
who brought bay horses from Hamburg
to the rutted road he built himself.
It is his monument and his memory, his road.
His ancestor deserves the granite slab
with the name set in simple staring letters
on empty land under iron peaks.
That will do for a life.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

MORETON BAY ASH

Moreton Bay Ash: *Eucalyptus Tesselaris*.
As a schoolboy I passed the thin cluster
above the football field. They grew in sandstone
and were shadeless. Leaves thin nail-parings
of some greengrey giant that had forgotten us.
Up to my boy-height the trunks were jigsaw loose
and could peel off like the overripe skin
of the *monstera deliciosa* down near the taps.
An underskin pink, raw, flavorless.
Above that scab of tesselations, the smooth trunk
I was to dream of, later.

Smooth Moreton Bay Ash, tall in the hill paddock
behind our backyard.
We did not try to cut our names
we did not scratch our knees clambering.
We did not make a cubby, as we had
in the lantana grove. Once, only,
we built a gunyah of sticks under the ashtrees.
Under the ash-white light of Moreton Bay
we told what we could of native lore.
We tried to rub sticks. We drew heat
and a thin black hole. Later,
we climbed up the back stairs for our meal
as the tall Moreton Bay Ash brushed the light
out of moonshadow.

Across Moreton Bay the fires of winter
stream white smoke that hovers at a hundred feet
and then flattens on gully, hillock, hummock,
levelling horizons and lifting them.
We belong in the white ashlight of winter.
If I tear at a leaf I finger a drenched smell
that brings sweetness up from sandstone.
This taste robs ten thousand years.
In that forgotten gunyah I may not sleep,
but I've been allowed in.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

TALE WITHOUT A MORAL

for Peter Kortschak

Her face had never launched a conversation
her talk was Parisian chatter
her brain, though not unsharp, shrank from deliberation
but her body
was another matter

Some labelled her volcanic, it was found that
whenever she moved men trembled
her topography indeed was immaculately mounded
she was not at all
unpleasantly assembled

But there was something about her of the depressive
and sometimes a tendency to panic
a vegetarian, she could be quite alarmingly aggressive
and her pleasures
were all perfectly organic

She'd accumulated orchestras of lovers
to a man they rose or genuflected
and although her favorite was a Romanov philatelist
she retained the mark of one
widely collected

Towards mid-age her preoccupations narrowed
an early vanity found itself reborn
she began to invent herself all over again: a sparrow's
small necessity had
caught the worm

To the Jeu de Paume she daily discreetly went
willing a swollen fantasy to simmer
then home to assess the pose. Until in the end
the mirror made her thighs
and buttocks quiver

And then the plummet into chronic hypochondria
liaisons with the medicos were legion
and she'd diagnose disease in every Mondrian
and Modigliani: Death
was her religion

They say she died both beautiful and bitter
her face had gentled with time
to glow serene by the candlelight that lit her
bed, while turmoil
darkened her mind

At the graveside it was moderately cluttered
little was spoken, even less was said
it's reported the penultimate thought she uttered
was: Let me go now
but wake me when I'm dead

ALEX SKOVRON

MY DAD HAD NO MOTHER

grandad was going to leave her to him in his will
but dad was th first to die
they were both called john allen beach
great-grandad john allen beach was a photo of a swaggie
"humping the bluey" he wrote on th back
th 1890s depression trimmed his beard & he became a
bank-manager
grandad john allen beach volunteered for th
first world war
against th express command of his father
& came back wounded, his mother had to visit him,
in th hospital
in secret
I was th first eldest son in 400 years not to be called
john allen
dad said that for 400 years th john allen beaches
had run away from home to carry on their names
that that was th secret of th john allen beaches,
who had no mothers
of their own
my dad, john allen beach, never got out of army camp,
second world war
where he bayoneted bags, shouting th magic word
despite th fact that I was the eldest, & got th
war comics first
when th vietnam war came, I was a conchie
I read of men who followed their conscience: not th flag
men spat upon by history
my dad wondered out loud whether I felt less of a man
I felt like hitting him
y have to be careful if yr a pacifist — people pick fights
grandad john allen beach is 90 now, he gets his anti-war
& anti-nuclear
poems published in th raglan art news
never joined th R.S.L. has despised churchill
since gallipoli
my dad was for south vietnam & I was for north vietnam
my mother made peace between us
as she had between my dad & my grandad
& so on, for 400 years or so
my son, shane allen beach wrote to tell me that shane
was irish for
john
sent down a nugget he mined himself to cross his palm
with
gold
th boy's name is wilson now

ERIC BEACH

AGAINST DECONSTRUCTION

The great panjandrum writes overhead
it is his condescension to make a Muse
who glitters, chic and dominant
and auto-elect, a *grande chanteuse*.

The great panjandrum builds his walls
to second heaven (it shines from his mind)
as multitudes grasp at grammar's scope
and earnest probity there singly falls

the human individual — not much missed.
The great panjandrum and his Muse
instruct the deconstructed dolls
in stylistics for the great new halls.

This all takes place in middle air
but Paris colored everywhere
until about the world there stalks
his Muse with ever franker stare.

Meanings are not suspect, they're dismissed;
science in language needs an open view,
how very mere the meanings are
slips out in a follower's book review.

Yet omelettes need eggs: to liberate
all literature it first must be annexed,
the fusky Greeks expunged, a lonely pleasure
allotted as sole hallmark of the text.

His symbiotic mission is to make her
the silenced creatures she detests,
since so many slaves make no demagogue
but a race of men and women without chests.

ROBERT HARRIS

THE STATUES LIVE!

Deep in the basement
of the British Museum
the halls are lined
with Greek and Roman statues

Bodies of men and women
frozen from antiquity for eternity
all their questions
frozen with them

I emerge into daylight
only to go down again
to the trains
in the underground

Seated in a carriage
full of people
who are strangers to me
I am struck anew

That art and life
are indivisible
each informing
and renewing the other

These people in the train
belong to the museum
of the future perhaps
but for now

All that is human and alive
is here in this train
and in the British Museum . . .
the statues live!

IRENE WETTENHALL

IN THE DOORWAY

that one   the prisoner pointed out
   the one with the straggly beard
& tinted glasses
   he'd be a parking inspector
if he could write

that one   *came twelve thousand miles*
for a job with a uniform
   good value for ten quid

that one   knew about poetry
   knew   about prison poetry

that one said   *all finished*   as i left
   all finished   i replied
but he wanted to show   his talent

that one   gave my back a reading
in the doorway
   here i sit broken hearted
   paid a penny & only farted

so this one said   *very clever*
   to that one
before the thud & jangle

this one   walked away
   past the building under construction
   past the cameras
   past the three corner jack wire
   past the razor wire
then waited
   for the new electric gate to open
(BBB ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ)

this one
   thought about combinations
   balls & chains
   ropes & scaffolds
   rocks & hammers

& outside the doorway

this one
   thought about the old colonials

& that one

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

D. NOTATIONS: of death & insanity

MASK

lines of an old
face
lines learnt
from life

TOTENBRIEF

poro
may I call you
who shared my pain
tambu?

LET'S HAVE A BALL!

who'll go as
St Sebastian
with/out
arrows?

TO THE HON. MEMBER FOR

huff snuff & puff
muff fluff & bluff
but best of all
stuff!

LAUREATE RIME

moves from the area of my lamp
personal poems
becom/
oonbeams

DON MAYNARD

KEITH McKENZIE

Australia 1999

A Prophecy

The novelist Helen Simpson (1897–1941), born and educated in Sydney, went to Europe when sixteen, and did not return to Australia, except for two or three short visits. After some study at Oxford, chiefly of music and drama, she began a literary career, and before her untimely death wrote a dozen novels, some historical works, a little poetry and numerous newspaper articles. She was also a very successful broadcaster for the BBC.

Her first major literary success was the novel *Boomerang* (1932), which ran through three editions in as many months, and was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. This was followed in 1933 by an ambitious work entitled *The Woman on the Beast.*

This book consists of a prologue, three separate stories, and an epilogue. The stories, however, are closely linked in several ways. First, as the author explained in a foreword, the book "tries to interpret a contradiction, that the most hateful actions are, as often as not, performed for the best of reasons." The three stories also have in common the idea "that men are driven to persecute and betray, not by malice or folly, but by the good they passionately wish their fellow men." Further, the dominant figure in each story is a hermaphrodite who embodies the contradiction: "Johannes of the first story, St Esprit, the Grand Master, of the second, Mrs Sopwith of the third."

In a long account of the reading and thinking that went into the preparation for this book, Miss Simpson explained that she had begun with the idea of writing about Pope Joan; then, more broadly, about the influence of women in religion. On this subject she read about Mrs Eddy, Madame Blavatsky, and Mrs Aimee Semple Macpherson. Thus she was led back to the document which became her base and the source of her title: the Revelation of St John the Divine. The he/she of each story is an embodiment of Antichrist. In his vision St John "saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast" (Revelation: 17.3). He is not actually called Antichrist in Revelation, but the term occurs several times in John's Epistles. The woman's role, however, is plain enough: she is "drunken with the blood of the saints."

The action of the first story takes place in 1579; that of the second in 1789; that of the third in 1999. Why the spread over more than four centuries? Perhaps partly because the case for the contradiction could be made more tellingly if shown to operate over a long period of time. But there was a more compelling reason: the period in question – 1579 to 1999 – coincides almost exactly with the period covered by the "Prophecies" of Nostradamus. The latter date, as we shall see presently, is of particular significance in this connection. The influence, however, is pervasive; and there is a quotation from Nostradamus at the head of each section of *The Woman on the Beast.*

This French physician, astrologer, and seer (1503–1566) wrote 942 prophecies, each in the form of four lines of rhyming verse. Though they range over the whole period from his own day to the (expected) end of the world, fewer than ten include a date. Consequently commentators differ greatly in their attempts to identify the reference of each prediction. (Miss Simpson refers to, and presumably quotes from, the English version made by de Garancieres in 1692. My references are to the revised Corgi reprint of 1982.) The blurb on the Corgi edition announces confidently that Nostradamus predicted "air travel, the Second World War, the assassination of President Kennedy, the rise to power of the Ayatollah." The variety of interpretations of particular predictions can be well illustrated from prophecy I. 25, which in the original runs thus:

> *Perdu trouvé, caché de si long siecle,*
> *Sera Pasteur, demi Dieu honoré*
> *Ains que la lune acheve son grand siecle*
> *Par autre vents sera deshonoré.*
>
> (The lost thing is discovered hidden for many centuries,
> Pasteur will be celebrated almost as a god-like figure.
> This is when the moon completes her great cycle,
> but by other rumours he shall be dishonoured.) [p.34]

The Corgi editor will have this refer to Louis Pasteur. Miss Simpson, however, applies it to a 'Pastor', the fictional Portuguese Inquisitor of her first story. Nostrada-

mus refers to three Antichrists, identified by the Corgi editor as Napoleon, Hitler, and perhaps "the great Mongol king" of X.72, due in 1999. For her purposes, Miss Simpson identifies them with the hermaphrodite figure in each of her stories. She quotes Nostradamus's account of the birth of the androgyne (II.45) at the head of her second story "France, 1789."

The action of "The Indies, 1579" takes place chiefly in the Portuguese settlement of Goa. In the church are bones alleged to be those of St Thomas. They bring to Goa crowds of pilgrims (including many pagans), with great commercial advantage for the town. The Viceroy and the Archbishop would like to maintain this profitable traffic, but Grand Inquisitor Mor, believing the bones are not genuine, insists on putting them to the canonical test. They fail this test. The Archbishop concedes victory to the Inquisitor, pronounces a full-dress curse on the villains who had fobbed off the bogus bones upon the church of Goa, and has the bones burnt. The Viceroy is indignant. "Whose purpose have you served by this bonfire of yours?" he asks the Inquisitor. "There's our own people discontented and some of them killed – God knows how many – trade lost, religion none the better." After this episode the Inquisitor disappears, to the great joy of the Archbishop (who was obliged, of course, for the sake of appearances, "to disguise his joy as philosophic resignation"). The Inquisitor has in fact been kidnapped by a band of wandering magicians, who think something may be made of his brand of magic. In subsequent adventures he reaches the great temple of Johannes the androgynous Antichrist, in Cambodia, and is there the victim of a ritual killing. Some relics – a fragment of his cassock and some nuts on a string that had served him to number his prayers – are brought back to Goa. The Archbishop seizes the opportunity: the Inquisitor, whose name happened to be Thomas too, is with elaborate ceremony declared a saint and martyr. The pilgrim trade revives and prosperity returns to the town.

The second story, "France, 1789", deals with the early stages of the Revolution, up to and including the taking of the Bastille. This time the he/she Antichrist takes the form of M. de Saint-Esprit, who appears first as a spy, dodging about in various disguises, listening in streets, cafes, and public places, and reporting to the police. Later he is the Grand Master of a secret lodge with mysterious initiation ceremonies. He is reputed to have the gift of prophecy, having "foretold exactly every event of this past year in France – the very date of the States-General." The adventures of some private individuals are skilfully woven into the tumultuous crowd scenes. The main theme is illustrated in a variety of ways; there are many persecutions and betrayals on the part of both revolutionaries and royalists, but in most cases actions spring from good motives, not from folly or malice.

The third story, "Australia, 1999", differs from the others in a number of ways. As it concerns the future (sixty-six years from the time of writing), the author was not constrained by historical facts, but could let her imagination go in the creation of an extravagant fantasy. Or was it so extravagant? It may be worth noting that a religious cult which spread through the United States in the nineteen-seventies had this program, as reported by a former member:

> All the times [the leader] had spoken about military aggression. All the times we listened with our lids fluttering closed, as he droned on in his hypnotic way, punctuating with militaristic words, of battle, of charging and crushing, defeating, subjugating, annihilating, of taking over the government, the United Nations, the whole world.
>
> [E. Heftmann, *The Dark Side of the Moonies*, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 235.]

Well, Miss Simpson makes it all happen. The cult of the New Gospel, founded in Pharaoh, California, in 1974, by Emma Jordan Sopwith, had since then, chiefly by the use of advanced methods of mass destruction, spread over almost the whole world. The Irish, of course, had proved refractory, so the New Gospellers simply killed the whole population "by means of a series of cloudbursts ingeniously touched off." Rome also offered stiff resistance; for it harbored the Pope, whose name symbolised "all the obstinacy, all the blindness and tyranny of the old faiths." Rome, however, "was finally reduced by assault from the air in the spring of 1983." Other countries "yielded to persuasion", presumably of the same kind. The New Gospellers had destroyed all books, except the Bible and the works of Emma Jordan Sopwith. This was followed by a ban on all newsprint, which in any case had been rendered unnecessary by new devices. The spoken word replaced the written or printed word. "Humanity's wheel, coming full-circle, brought it back to the picture stage once more. The loud-speaker and the screen took the place of such litter as book-cases and pianos in the home." (This development has certainly occurred, even beyond Miss Simpson's prophecy: with color printing, television, and other video devices, both education and entertainment have become increasingly pictorial.)

After twenty-five years of the new regime only Australia still stood out against the New Gospel. Aware of the threat, the Australians had deserted their coastal cities and led a precarious nomadic existence in the interior of the continent. Mrs Sopwith dispatched a team of observers to Australia to spy out the land, with a view to the "conversion" of the benighted inhabitants. She was anxious to make the process a crusade, not a conquest, and this required what was euphemistically called "some readjustment of the facts." The facts were that Jane Cobbett (leader of the New Gospel spy team) was guilty of serious deviation while in Australia (she had for example been reading Milton), and was killed in a struggle with the New Gospellers, but the re-adjusted facts were that she had died as a martyr, and was a victim, not a rebel.

The "conversion" having been completed, and the whole world being under the control of the New Gospel, preparations were made for Mrs Sopwith's Jubilee, which fell due in 1999. This vast and spectacular performance was made to coincide with the end of the world. Here of course Miss Simpson comes back to her base in Nostradamus and St John. Most of the former's

prophecies were either intelligent guesses or the results of the special and mysterious powers of divination which he allegedly possessed. But prophecy X.72 is in a different category. (Miss Simpson quotes part of it at the beginning of her Epilogue.) It reads (in the Corgi version):

> In the year 1999, and seven months, from the sky will come the great King of Terror. He will bring back to life the great king of the Mongols. Before and after War reigns happily.

That the world would end with the second Christian millenium was a very ancient and persistent belief. Those who believed that the events described in Genesis were historical, and took place about 4000 years B.C. expected the duration of the world to be 6000 years – which would bring us to the year 2000 A.D. Nostradamus evidently shared this view. Sir Thomas Browne, writing in England in the seventeenth century, referred to himself and his contemporaries as "We whose generations are ordained in this setting part of time" (*Religio Medici*). And again: "That general opinion, that the world grows near its end, hath possessed all ages past as nearly as ours."

At Miss Simpson's culmination-termination, then, the trumpet sounds. Seven angels pour the wrath of God from the seven vials. There is a commotion among the stars. Blood, hail, and fire are dropping from the heavens. Behind all this are chapter ten of Revelation and prophecy II.46 of Nostradamus, which reads as follows:

> After great misery for mankind an even greater approaches when the great cycle of the centuries is renewed. It will rain blood, milk, famine, war, and disease. In the sky will be seen fire, dragging a tail of sparks.

The Corgi editor (in 1982) took the "fire" to be Halley's comet, which was due to reappear in 1986. (It did of course so reappear, but unaccompanied.) Garancieres commented that "By these prodigis it seemeth the Author intendeth to speak of the last day, and the forerunners of it." Miss Simpson adopted this view for her fictional purposes and put this prophecy at the head of "Australia, 1999".

Mrs Sopwith had also been made to copy St John in the organization of her world-wide realm. In St John's vision of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, there is a curious paradox. The city was represented as a vast golden cube, with sides some fifteen hundred miles long, but it was nevertheless an exclusively Jewish city; for its great high wall had twelve gates, the names on which were "the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation: 21.12). Mrs Sopwith, after the Destruction of the Books in 1982, set about renaming parts of the world "according to the list of the tribes of Israel." The English became the tribe of Gad; and the library of All Souls, Oxford, cleared of its useless books, became "Number Three temple of number twenty-seven Tent" of that tribe. The name of Dan, the lattermost tribe listed in the second book of Numbers, was "reserved for that recalcitrant southern continent, still rebellious and unmindful of its own best good."

Consideration of Miss Simpson's prophetic fantasy inevitably suggests comparison with Orwell's grim book. It is clear that both authors condemn totalitarian regimes, but for Miss Simpson religious fanaticism seemed likely to produce the most dangerous and oppressive kind. The two authors, however, approached their subject very differently. As critics have pointed out, Orwell imagined nothing new.

> His world of 1984 is the war-time of 1944, but dirtier and more cruel ... Totalitarianism, with its ceaseless witch-hunts, its secret police ... covers the whole world instead of only a large part of it.
> [Hopkinson, *George Orwell*, 1962, p. 33.]

It seems that Orwell invented the word "Newspeak", but the use of language it stands for is by no means new. There are examples in "Australia, 1999", to go no further back. The New Gospel bosses claim to have brought religious "liberty" to the world; the subduing of countries by heavy bombing is called "persuasion"; the total destruction of Ireland's population is referred to by a New Gospel speaker as the occasion when Ireland was "evangelised from above".

"Australia, 1999" is full of imaginative invention. The accounts of comprehensive and horrifying cruelties, however, are not meant to be taken literally; they are a sort of *Alice in Wonderland* stuff on a world scale. For Miss Simpson was not primarily a political or social critic; she was a literary artist, excelling in the writing of satirical comedy. Thus, we are not over-distressed at the drowning of the Irish or the gassing of thousands of Australians gathered in Sydney for the Feast of the Bridge. Shocking totalitarian excesses, no doubt; but the author's secondary intention was to make fun of Irish pig-headedness and Sydneysiders' pride in the Bridge. (She was herself more than half Irish, and a Sydneysider.)

Several other aspects of Australian life are satirized. Miss Simpson makes much of the hostility between the orange and the green, the Protestants and the Catholics, a hostility which by 1999 has led to actual civil war. (Not good forecasting, this; for since 1933 relationships between these two groups have improved, not deteriorated.) Australians are said to be half a century behind the rest of the world, because of their lack of culture. They are less suggestible than other people: "They argue, they differ, and say so." (These and a few other derogatory observations are attributed to Dr Cobbett. Probably representing the author's own views, they are hardly calculated to endear her to Australian readers.) Australian speech has a "curiously tilted accent and close-mouthed delivery – acquired, said the ill-natured, by much keeping of stable secrets." Racing, indeed, was "the one enthusiasm the warring tribes had in common." The novelist's account of a race meeting conducted for the benefit of the Catholic church is a splendid piece of comic writing. We forget all about Nostradamus and St John and Emma Jordan Sop-

with as jolly Father Moran calls the odds. Miss Simpson's husband, (Sir) Denis Browne, who was very knowledgeable about the turf, helped with the racing episode in *Boomerang*, and his hand is to be suspected here also.)

The portrayals of senior clerics are among Miss Simpson's greatest successes. One remembers the Bishop of Corazon in *Boomerang*, and the Archbishop of Goa in the first story in the book we are now discussing. The tussle over the bones of St Thomas, between the Governor and the Archbishop on the one hand and the dreadfully serious Inquisitor on the other, is presented in another piece of excellent comic writing.

As a whole, however, "Australia, 1999" is a fundamentally serious indictment of totalitarian rule. Unlike Orwell, Miss Simpson is most distressed by anti-intellectual, anti-cultural effects. The Burning of the Books was the New Gospel's worst offence. This is brought out especially in the sympathetic, almost tender, presentation of the two elderly Oxford scholars, Dr Endymion Cobbett and his friend Dorothy. The former had been a Fellow of All Souls. The latter was "a brusque old lady in hexagonal glasses, who in her day had ruled over one of the dead and gone female colleges of that town." (The detail suggests a portrait from the life.) These two reluctantly accept the compulsory comforts and restraints of the New Gospel regime. These "goods" include "a full stomach, ample leisure, freedom from anxiety as to the future, and the certainty of a painless death." (Euthanasia, it seems, was among the benefits conferred on citizens by the new welfare state. The elderly, moreover, were adequately pensioned; and workers – we are told casually elsewhere in the story – enjoyed a four-hour day.)

These material benefits were no consolation to Dimmy and Dorothy for the loss of their beloved books. Fortunately they know a great deal by heart. Dorothy invites Dimmy to "come round after supper to my hostel, and we'll get together in a corner ... and say poetry to each other. French for me. Latin for you." Love of certain aspects of the past, especially of its literature, is expressed in Dorothy's final words (which may also state Miss Simpson's own serious credo):

> "I thought you should teach people to look into the past as into a mirror, and see themselves there, in other dresses; and correct their awkwardnesses, their ugliness, that way. The mirror isn't there any longer, Dimmy; they've smashed it. They smashed it when they burned the books. We can only look forward now, and a damned hideous vista it is –"
>
> "Dorothy!"
>
> "– but short, thank God. For me, anyhow."

It would be foolish to assess the worth of "Australia, 1999" according to the accuracy of its various predictions. The author is merely saying that these are the sorts of things that may be expected from a totalitarian regime seeking to dominate the world. One cannot claim that the violent episodes are exaggerations: the fictional destruction of Rome and the fictional slaughter in Sydney can be matched by the levelling of Rotterdam and Dresden, and overmatched by Hiroshima. There was, it is true, no burning of books in 1982; but the role of books has steadily diminished in importance. Various new visual devices have pushed books aside, especially the books of time past. How many people now read the literature of Greece and Rome, or the English poets of the seventeenth century? As for the final catastrophe, there are no historical analogues. Comment on its accuracy will not be possible until after 1999 – and perhaps not then; for there may be no potential commentator.

All the stories in this volume show remarkable powers of invention. The style is lively, witty, and graceful. Miss Simpson had a keen sense of the ridiculous, in this respect resembling Anatole France, or even Byron. The latter – the only Romantic writer with a sense of humor and a capacity for satire – once wrote:

> My turn of mind is so given to taking things in the absurd point of view, that it breaks out in spite of me every now and then.
>
> (*Letters and Journals*, vol. 9, p. 123.)

Helen Simpson was just as serious as Orwell in her opposition to totalitarianism, but whereas he raged continually, forcefully and lucidly, she often laughed. Not, however, at Dimmy and Dorothy.

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Antipodean Literature: A World Upside Down?

JOHN DOCKER

Doctor: But there the maids doe woe
The Batchelors, and tis most probable,
The wives lie uppermost.

Diana: That is a trim,
Upside-downe Antipodean tricke indeed.

(Richard Brome, *The Antipodes,* quoted in Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down,* p. 89.)

Inversion involves a sudden, comic switching of expected roles: prisoner reprimands judge, child rebukes parent, wife rules husband, pupil instructs teacher, master obeys servant.

(Donaldson, op. cit., p. 6.)

I'm writing, with Ann Curthoys, a book on "television and carnival", or "carnivalesque": the overturning or 'inversion' of usual relationships in society and family, of power, authority, class, gender, age. In our book-in-progress we point to all sorts of inversions in television, British, American, Australian. A clear example is the Australian serial "Prisoner", where the audience is invited to sympathize with the women, the prisoners, as they resist the power, authority and repression of the warders, the screws. It's interesting that another play of Brome's features – like Ben Jonson's "The Masque of Queenes" – witches who turn 'normal' family life upside down. In some ways we can see the strong, rebellious characters of "Prisoner" as in a long female tradition of inversion in popular culture, witches as 'wise' and as 'outlaws': of 'women on top', as discussed by Natalie Davis in her remarkable essay on female inversion in early modern Europe.[1]

We compare such inversions in television to World Upside Down in carnival and other festive practices (Feasts of Fools, Lords of Misrule) in early modern Europe, practices which, critics have argued, strongly influenced European literature. We also look at the tradition of the fool-as-wise in European culture, in festival, in literature, in stage and film clowns. And we try to relate the figure of fool and trickster to television, for example, Fletch in "Porridge", Ted Bovis in "Hi de Hi", the Fonz in "Happy Days", perhaps the doctor in some of his manifestations in "Dr Who".[2] We are also interested in trickster figures as outlaws – the 'male' tradition in European popular culture that includes Robin Hood and Dick Turpin and Rob Roy,[3] the female tradition that features witches of various sorts.

Carnival and Melodrama

In *Rabelais and His World* the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin evokes possible relationships between conceptions and characters in Rabelais and festive forms in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In particular Bakhtin evokes carnival, which could occupy up to three months of activity every year; and he sees clowns and tricksters – 'wise fools' – as permanent representatives of carnival in non-carnival times. Carnival opposed all "official culture", ecclesiastical, social, aesthetic. Bakhtin points, for example, to carnival feasting as a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order", a "suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions", "hostile to all that was immortalized and complete". The plenty and abundance of the carnival feast offered its participants a sense of freedom from the iron cages of circumstance and want. The feast at once looked back to a Saturnalian Golden Age, and forward to a Utopian future where plenty, abundance, and equality would be universal.

Hope and equality are created in the very destructions of hierarchy – the ambiguity, the double movement of destruction (by mocking humor) and creation, that Bakhtin points to as a key carnivalesque feature. Carnival celebrates the body as "grotesque", its earthiness and sexuality puncturing the solemn and pompous, its apertures opening out onto the natural world, rather than representing the Renaissance 'high' art conceptions of the body as finished and "perfect".

Carnival sees the future as a "gay monster", where fate and destiny, time and history, are not closed and tragic and sombre, but open-ended; and indeed we could speculate that this conception accounts for the popularity of quiz shows of various kinds in this century, on radio and TV in Australia, from Bob Dyer's "Pick-a-Box" and Jack Davey's shows to Tony Barber's "Sale of the Century" or "The New Price is Right" or "Perfect Match". Carnival presents a living aesthetic of the unfinished, of life as always incomplete because growing and changing and transforming. It is an aesthetic that includes the sombre, but is not bound by it.

In Bakhtin's view, for an historical moment in early modern Europe, in Rabelais and Shakespeare and Cervantes, the folk spirit of carnival burst into 'high' literature itself. Later the humor of inversion and of World Upside Down is seen as aesthetically and philosophically inferior, as marginal. But, says Bakhtin, the carnival spirit in human society is indestructible, and the tradition lives on, after the Renaissance, in the 'lower genres' of "comedy, satire, fable, in the novel, in burlesque, and the popular stage".[4]

I want to see nineteenth-century melodrama as also carrying the spirit of carnival and inversion, as indeed a large bridge from the popular culture of early modern Europe to the twentieth-century popular culture that features melodrama so much, in Hollywood, radio, and television. Carnival and melodrama share lots of similarities. But before charting them, I first have to mount a formidable defence of melodrama, and here I will be gratefully relying on Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination.*[5]

Brooks argues that the very historical success of melodrama (literally music plus drama) in the last 180 or so years is premised on the death of tragedy in the eighteenth century as a vital form. Melodrama began its run in Paris towards the end of the eighteenth century. At first it was denied the right of speech (reserved for the official theatre) and hence began to develop the visual resources (of spectacle and action and special effects) and language (of look and gesture) that are still with us. Melodrama spread rapidly from France to England, the US and, we can obviously add, to Australia, where it thrives.

Brooks argues that a key feature of melodrama is its very explicitness. If good (the heroine and her allies) and evil (the villain and his allies) clash, they clash openly: every inner feeling is expressed. In melodrama every conversation is consequently a confrontation. Characters represent extreme attitudes, and since melodrama deals continually in situations of crisis (loss, separation, obstacles to and deferrals of reunion, reunion), their deepest attitudes are always being revealed for the audience. In this respect, Brooks says, melodrama is very like a drama of psychoanalysis, of dream and nightmare, where people's deepest fears and desires are brought to the surface and played out: rather as Freud argued about comedy in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.*

As a view of the world, melodrama is a search for the reality of goodness in the universe, goodness that will finally overcome the evil and caprice of fate (the villain). But, says Brooks, melodrama is no mere theatre of happy endings, for it is consistent with 'modern consciousness': it knows that any victory over evil is provisional, that evil wins most of the time, and that in the next play the villain will rise again. Brooks' book then goes on to argue that stage melodrama influenced 'high lit.' writers like Balzac, Conrad, Henry James, Dostoevsky.

Let's now add to what Peter Brooks tells us, developing his argument that melodrama has become the most popular form of the modern era. It spread from nineteenth-century theatre and serial fiction to Hollywood and popular radio in the 30s and 40s, and thence to TV.[6] In his *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* Raymond Williams says that the era of television has given us more drama for people to enjoy than in any known previous society: that such a situation is "without any precedent in the history of human culture".[7] And much of that drama, daytime and night-time, in serial form, is melodrama, the 'soaps'.[8] Why is this so? Why is "Dallas" the world's most popular program, watched in seventy countries across the globe? Why are soaps like "Dynasty" and "Knots Landing" in the US, or "A Country Practice" and "Sons and Daughters" in Australia, so popular? Why are comedies, like "Cheers", being drawn towards the magnet of melodrama, so that the 1984 end-of-season cliffhanger, where Diane Chambers and Sam Malone appear to be breaking up, is mentioned in world headlines along with the end-of-season cliffhangers of "Dynasty" and "Dallas" and "Knots Landing"?

For one thing such melodrama takes advantage of the very technical limitations of space and time that television imposes on it, and in this sense is very like the nineteenth-century serial fiction of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, the Collins of those wonderful detective and mystery novels *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White.* In his introduction to the Penguin *Woman in White* Julian Symons relates that when Dickens gave up "Household Words" he decided to start another periodical, "All the Year Round". In this he wrote in instalment form *A Tale of Two Cities,* and he asked his friend Collins to follow with what turned out to be *The Woman in White* (during 1859-60). The story was so popular that queues would form outside the magazine's offices to buy the next instalment, while cloaks, bonnets, perfumes, waltzes and quadrilles were called by the book's title – just as now "Dynasty" is inspiring the sale of dolls, perfumes, and dresses.

Yet Collins, like modern television melodrama, had to make the most of the limitations of serial publication. Each instalment had to meet the required number of pages, and had to end on a note of suspense. Meanwhile, Collins' work was berated by conventional 'high lit.' critics of the day as mere entertainment, as 'sensation' rather than 'art'.

TV melodrama has also to meet a required number of minutes. Like Collins, TV melodrama takes advantage of this requirement: it intensifies its drama not only between episodes, but between ads in its creation of moments of mystery and suspense, the cliffhanger. And TV melodrama is generally despised by critics in the 'quality' press, who sharpen their wit on its excess and extravagance. Apart from a good chuckle, why do they do this?

As Peter Brooks points out, while the stuffing has largely fallen out of tragedy, its prestige as a form lingers on. Melodrama is still readily dismissed in terms of the superiority of tragedy. Or, we can add, melodrama is dismissed as inferior to forms of the novel and drama like 'realism' and 'naturalism': realism, where characters are well-rounded and believable and actions are always credible in an everyday sense; naturalism, where, under the sign of the tragic, life is predestined by fate to a sombre end.[9]

What we have here are really two different cultures

with different aesthetic preferences, forms, and underlying philosophies. In high culture the tragic and sombre is seen as basic in the universe, and that which is not tragic or sombre in ending is shallow and not culture of quality. Popular culture, mixing the tragic with the comic and with hope, desires to see fate and destiny in the universe as open-ended; high culture prefers a hierarchy of forms and genres where tragedy, realism, naturalism are high on the pyramid, and provide the criteria by which we judge low forms like melodrama and melodramatic fiction.

In the nineteenth century, literary genres like melodrama and romance and Gothic were enjoyed by an ever-expanding middle-class and lower-class audience and readership, and despised by the proponents of high literature. In this century, it is perhaps the middle class who despise melodrama and other popular genres in Hollywood and radio and TV, as they prefer the hierarchy of genres on the ABC or BBC of tragedy, realism and naturalism, rational knowledge in the form of authoritative documentaries, and light comedy to draw in viewers to be educated and instructed – Lord Reith's blueprint of enlightenment for the world. It's interesting that ABC/BBC-watchers also like "Hill Street Blues", a rare American example of naturalism.

Melodrama, it seems to me, is a highly flexible and inclusive aesthetic form. Unrestricted as to genre, it can move easily between private and public worlds. In its serial form, in nineteenth-century fiction and twentieth-century radio and TV, it can explore the dilemmas and desires and traumas of characters at length. It denies the notion of personality as fixed. Rather, it charts the way characters go through all sorts of crises, changes, transformations: in this sense melodrama is very like ancient folk culture, with its interest in metamorphosis and identity.[10]

Melodrama is also a highly sensuous form. It invites pleasure and delight – just as did Dickens and Collins a century before – in the art of narrative, in inventiveness and fertility of story-telling: a delight in *culture* itself, in the drama and fiction that human beings create. It invites delight in responding to its extravagance and excess, its extreme situations and confrontations. And there is also sensuousness, an almost erotic quality, in the narrative shape of melodrama, its rhythms of calm and crisis, of suspense, mystery, cliffhanger, quieter moments, humor, and then cliffhanger again ...

In sum, I take melodrama to be a form of what anthropologist Clifford Geertz, when he decided to analyse Balinese cockfights, called "deep play"[11]: it permits the release and symbolic representation of a society's deepest tensions, fears, desires, conflicts, contradictions. Talking of anthropology, melodrama is also a form of 'inversion' [12]: its very explicitness, where characters continually confront each other, is a reversal of everyday rules of politeness and smooth social functioning. It's also frequently inversion in another sense. Characters like Alexis in "Dynasty" and J.R. in "Dallas" are shown as manipulative and destructive of all those around them (kin, friends, lovers) because of their pursuit of wealth and power.

And here we approach ways the popular culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might be similar to 'carnival' in early modern Europe: it frequently turns upside down the usual relations of hierarchy, of power, authority, and status. The very explicitness of melodrama, its externalization of extreme states, recalls carnival 'mask' figures and 'dramas'.[13] The 'face' in melodrama displays extreme feelings, language often ends in eloquent silence and gestures – like the mask and figures of carnival. But more: melodrama is like carnival in its very extravagance, its over-the-topness; in its interest in 'transformations' of usual, daily identity (in carnival in the mask, in melodrama in narrative strategies like amnesia or blindness or illness or disaster or plastic surgery, as in the Australian series "Return to Eden", a classic of the genre); in its serial form, with never a secure happy ending in sight – just as carnival and its drama kept on recurring; in its humor, and its delight in the extreme; in its reversal of everyday relations, since the mode of melodrama is not to conceal, but to confront. Melodrama, like carnival, is a public mode of nightmare and dream, an electrifying release of the repressed, cultural forms of the unconscious. And melodrama as a theatrical event incorporates the familiarity, informality, lack of cultural exclusiveness, and the flouting of usual social and emotional restraint that also characterizes carnival, both in its moments of high intensity and in the 'festive abuse' of its comedy.[14] There is 'collective enjoyment' rather than the 'individual discrimination' of middle-class theatre.[15]

Carnival and Australian Literature

Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* develops and transforms English fictional melodrama such as that of Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Written as a serial, its episodes having melodramatic cliffhangers as in Dickens and Collins (and so looking forward to television serials), its characters going through all sorts of transformations and 'metamorphoses', there is in *His Natural Life* inversion and World Upside Down everywhere: the relationships and qualities of prisoners and authority, convict and officer.

This last key inversion – a feature of Australian cultural history from the ballads to "Prisoner" – is shared by the stage play "Robbery Under Arms", Dampier and Walch's gloriously free adaptation of T.A. Browne's moralistic novel. The play abounds with carnivalesque inversions, not least, as Richard Fotheringham points out in his introduction to the Currency Press edition, in its deliberate references to legendary tales of the persecution of the Kelly family.[16] The audience is invited to view the trials of some of its heroes – Dick, Jim, and Aileen Marston – in the light of Constable Fitzpatrick's attempted sexual molesting of Kate, her brothers' defending her, and the subsequent hounding of their mother by the police. In "Robbery Under Arms" the police are shown as vicious and vindictive or, as in the case of the Irish troopers, idiotic.[17]

In another inversion, Warrigal the Aboriginal member of Captain Starlight's bushranging gang, emerges not as

abject and defeated, a mere victim of European colonial domination, but as clever and resourceful, a loyal friend in the gang. In one scene Warrigal, dressed as a woman, fools Miss Aspen, the comic spinster figure (very comparable to Miss Esme Watson in "A Country Practice"), and this supreme act of inversion, of World Upside Down, black man as white woman, which looks back to 'Women On Top' tranvestism in early modern Europe, invokes the overturning of usual relations between the sexes in the play.

"Robbery Under Arms" – like "Prisoner" – never rights its inverted world, and this is its most notorious difference from Browne's novel. Starlight and Dick are pardoned, not gaoled for long sentences of punishment and retribution, and the play leaves its inversions triumphantly and defiantly open.

The stage play "Robbery Under Arms" is a conscious development in terms of Australian social and mythological history of British mythic figures like Robin Hood and Dick Turpin[18] – tricksters and outlaws who successfully outwit sherriffs, squires and magistrates. In this respect there are clear differences from Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*. Clarke's novel is closer to the 'classical' early nineteenth-century melodrama: virtue is for most of the drama almost destroyed, its name goes unrecognized, and evil reigns triumphant.

The 'quarrel of the endings' is interesting here. In its serial version *His Natural Life* is like such 'classical' melodrama: happiness is (for the moment, until the next melodrama) provisionally restored, virtue and goodness regain their rightful place in the universe. In its 'tragic' version *His Natural Life* attempts to leave behind its status as serial melodrama and obey the call of 'high' literature in its claim that tragedy is the supreme form. Here we have a poignant historical example of the clash of different 'class cultures', the one educated and demanding a well-rounded novel with a sombre close, the other constituted by 'popular' audiences, delighting in a relaxed open-ended 'play' of forms and genres.

We can see the very lack of a tragic ending in the serial and stage versions of *For the Term of His Natural Life* – as in melodrama as a whole – as 'carnivalesque'. While melodrama is not necessarily infused with the comic spirit Bakhtin sees in carnival, the openness of its endings presents a similar view of the universe: fate and destiny are finally non-tragic, or not necessarily tragic.

Let's glance now at Louis Stone's *Jonah* as a carnivalesque, 'polyphonic' novel. In *Jonah* carnival and anti-carnival contrast and clash. The focus of the clash is within Jonah the character, and in this sense the novel includes the genre of moral fable, a kind of reverse of *Silas Marner* – Jonah's withdrawal from the carnivalesque life of the push and working-class street life and Paddy's Market into a narrow world of money and social ambition. Anti-carnival features in Clara Grimes, although she is a carnival figure herself, of death, of everything that denies the life of Cardigan Street. Her angularity of body denies the plumpness of Mrs Yabsley and Ada and the plumping up of Pinkey; her meanness contests the generosity of Cardigan Street; her distant correctness and decorum contests its inhabitants' love of food (at Paddy's Market) and of street theatre and spectacle and festive crowd life; her attitude to her home as enclosed gentility, cut off from the street, contrasts with Cardigan Street where domestic life and brawls spill constantly onto the road (for example, her middle-class elevation of the piano over the mouth-organ).

In short, Clara Grimes' 'official' culture clashes with 'unofficial' culture, and Jonah, in aspiring towards her and what she represents of what he's never had, follows an anti-carnival movement, withdrawing from the street and street life, confining Ada to a backroom, denying the loyalties and ties of friendship and kinship. The 'tragedy' for Jonah is that he ends up nowhere, bewildered, falling between cultures. He's left behind his carnivalesque working-class life, and he can't succeed at the middle-class game. The 'carnivalesque' lives on in Chook and Pinkey and the life of Cardigan Street: embodied in the very 'cinematic' qualities so well discerned by Dorothy Green.[19] The novel itself remains 'polyphonic', multi-voiced.

In Robin Klein's *Hating Alison Ashley*, a superb comic novel for children, World Upside Down turns on the needle of class, of class cultures and consciousness. Erica Yurken attends Barringa East Primary, where she is universally known as Erk, Yuk, or Gherkin. The school is in what is known as a "socially disadvantaged area", where Erica lives with her mum and two sisters, Valjoy and Jedda, and big brother Harley. If we could picture a young Mrs Yabsley, it might be something like Erica's mum, who

> really enjoyed being alive, and getting dressed up to go out. She went to Bingo nights, and dances, and Tupperware parties, and Parents Without Partners, which was where she met Lennie, who was her new boyfriend. Valjoy said she had a nerve joining Parents Without Partners when she'd already had two partners and a whole lot of boyfriends as well.

Boymad Valjoy is named after their mum's two sisters, and six year old Jedda is obsessed with horses and can call the races. The house is always "bedlam", with Lennie calling round and Erica's mum sitting on his knee, Valjoy and her mum having fights, and Jedda whinnying as she watched the TV racing results. The neighbors are "peculiar", and Erica's mum helps out Mrs McMahon next door who couldn't pay the rent.

But Erica feels ashamed of and despises her working-class suburb and family and school. She wishes to achieve a "brilliant career" in the theatre as a "famous actress", she secretly writes and is the family storyteller, rather like Louie in *The Man Who Loved Children*. Erica regards herself as so superior to all the other schoolkids, the "riff-raff" in the playground, that she plays ill and spends most of recess times in the sick-bay, becoming known as the school hypochondriac. Erica wants to escape from Barringa East, rather like Sybylla in *My Brilliant Career* from Australian rural society.

The middle class enters Barringa East Primary in the form of Alison Ashley, who has to attend because of rezoning. Alison represents the "elegance" Erica aspires to: her manners are perfect, she has a reading age of 14.6 years, she knows all the "rivers of northern New South Wales in perfect order". Used to feeling superior, Erica suddenly feels inferior, and begins to loathe Alison, believing that behind the new girl's polite, mask-like face hides absolute contempt for Barringa East Primary as "not much better than a council tip".

But – the drama of the novel – Erica is wrong. Alison has everything, except affection and interest from her cold, "elegant" mother in their oppressively neat house. By contrast, in visiting Erica's place, Alison is immediately offered friendliness and warm hospitality. The narrative is one of friendship overcoming all the obstacles, mainly in Erica's own consciousness, as she realizes, in the climactic scene, mixing farce and pathos, at the annual school camp play, that Lennie and her family are warm and supportive, whereas Alison's mother doesn't turn up "For the same reason she never does; because she's not interested in anything I do".[20]

Erica's movement of consciousness reverses Jonah's, in a sense making the one novel 'comic', the other 'tragic'. But clearly both *Jonah* and *Hating Alison Ashley* are in the 'urban tradition' of writing about 'lower-class' life described by Peter Keating in *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, the tradition that can be traced back through Phil May's cartoons and Dickens', London novels and Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821), widely dramatized in England and Australia, to Hogarth and Elizabethan and Jacobean low life scenes. It is a long cultural tradition which focusses on the contrasts and teeming vitality of urban street life, the mystery and fascination of diverse types, of the bizarre and grotesque. It is a tradition which values the variety of life to be found in cities, and which frequently sees the 'lower orders' as those who really enjoy themselves. Keating's 'urban tradition', with its carnivalesque inversions, is alive and well in Australian cultural history.[21]

We spin the wheel again, and it stops at a western, *North of Texas*, by the Australian, Marshall Grover, published by Cleveland Publishing Co. of Cremorne, Sydney, and distributed by Gordon and Gotch. *North of Texas* is not a psychological western. Its heroes, Larry and Stretch, two long tall Texans, are 'fixed characters', like detective-figures Terry in "Minder" or Jim Rockford in "The Rockford Files". Larry and Stretch are "tough-looking drifters", usually broke. They wander over the west running into people in the midst of some kind of crisis, of peril, danger, distress, threat, people who need help, which Larry and Stretch readily provide. They represent the seeking of truth and justice as against the dereliction of the Law.

From the evidence of *North of Texas* and *Pledge to a Doomed Man*, the other Larry and Stretch novel I've read, I'm starting to see why the western has been a popular and fascinating form, in fiction, on the stage, in film. It is an inclusive genre, rich in conventions, of melodrama, romance, detective, comedy, farce. As in melodrama, there is a play of opposing values and attitudes, of good as against the evil and death that the striving for wealth and power breeds; and as in melodrama, the narrative moves between cliffhangers, shifting very quickly from tension and intensity to comic moments and scenes. The western is also akin to that most ancient form, the traveller's tale, and to that modern form, the detective novel, where the two mythic heroes are wandering 'social explorers'. The western is, I think, also a form of folk literature: infinite variations of basic motifs and oppositions and kinds of narrative suspense. It's a genre so convention-laden that its language is often lovingly ritualistic to the point of self-parody: similar to the mixed elements of seriousness, humor, and self-parody in the nineteenth-century music hall songs, inviting at once involvement and detachment from its audience and readership.[22]

Marshall Grover has written some six hundred westerns, published both in the US and Australia, and sold in newsagents to, presumably, a minority 'male' popular culture readership: westerns which I think are very good and raise all sorts of issues to do with 'Americanization' and 'how do we define culture in Australia' and the vexed question of 'nationalism'.

What *is* a 'distinctive Australian culture'? I think it is a process of *transformations* and *developments* of whole sets of influences, European and American, like the carnivalesque and melodrama, into a distinctive 'culture in Australia'. But, if you agree with that, there is still a problem. If people in Australia enjoy, say, "Dallas" and "Dynasty" and Marshall Grover's western novels, is this 'Americanization'? Or are people responding to the power and delight of World Upside Down in popular culture, as they have responded to it since at least the Roman Saturnalia? They certainly respond to Australian examples of it, as in our fertile tradition of admired outlaw figures, convicts, bushrangers, female prisoners. And they respond as well to an international popular culture which features inversions of all kinds, often embodied (as we've seen) in fool and trickster and witch and other semi-outlaw figures like Marshall Grover's Larry and Stretch.

Isn't 'Americanization' far too crude a term, if we're talking about such an *international* popular culture, to which Australian culture amply contributes?

Then: 'nationalism'. If we look at nineteenth-century attitudes, as in some of the songs in Russel Ward's *Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, or in Lawson or A.G. Stephens or the Bulletin in general, what we find is *no* objection to culture in Australia continuing lines of culture of Britain or the US or France or anywhere elsewhere that is admired. What is objected to is English imperial contempt for Australian cultural production and producers. 'Nationalism' here emerges, not as a concern for an exclusive or unique Australian culture, but as a vigorous dislike of cultural imperialism.

I'm not, of course, claiming that all Australian literature should now be seen as 'carnivalesque'. I'm not striving for any monolithic view. I'm not trying to replace Radical Nationalism or New Criticism/Leavisism with

Carnivalism. I'm trying to point to a perspective, drawing at the well of studies of European cultural history, which might illuminate aspects of Australian cultural history, and which might give one way of relating literature to other dimensions of culture, to the history of theatre, film, radio, and television.

Miles Franklin, Henry Lawson, and the Hierarchy of Genres

In general, then, I'm arguing that we should recognize not a hierarchy but a plurality of genres. In these terms, we might take a fresh look at some landmarks of Australian literature. In particular, I would like to question what I take to be a consensus in Australian literary criticism – that its validity is as a 'high culture' institution interested in creating standards and rules of 'discrimination' and 'quality', and generally down on the 'low' genres, melodrama, romance, westerns, children's literature, detective, science fiction, popular verse, the serio-comic. I think this generalization would apply to the radical nationalists, who were very interested in the ballad tradition, but regarded authentic popular culture as belonging to the rural folk rather than to urban cultural phenomena like melodrama, vaudeville, variety, the new cinema based on melodrama, or, I suspect, romance reading. The historians of nineteenth-century Australian theatre have in the last few years been quietly questioning this consensus, and I want to support their work by indicating how these 'low' genres can be rescued from contempt and neglect and recognized for their strengths and potentiality.

In an essay by Susan Gardner on *My Brilliant Career* in Carole Ferrier's *Gender, Politics and Fiction,* Gardner seeks to account for why Franklin's novel has had such a diverse appeal amongst various classes, generations, and nationalities of readers, particularly women. Gardner argues that in structure the novel is chaotic, a mix of romance without a romance ending, a *Künstlerroman* about a would-be artist, and a *Bildungsroman* about the experiences and ideals and growth of consciousness and self-awareness of an "adolescent colonial girl", indeed, "a Wild Colonial Girl", as the title of her chapter has it.[23] I agree with Susan Gardner that the novel is chaotic, and that this is not to criticize it, and I would further argue that a great deal of the vitality of the novel comes from its being precisely a romance, with an exciting romance narrative structure, and from Sybylla being a 'romance heroine', comparable at once to the great 'romance heroines of English literary history like Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane in *Jane Eyre, and* to colonial romance heroines like Aileen Marston in *Robbery Under Arms*.

What are the characteristics of the romance heroine? And what of the hero? Since Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice,* the romance hero is generally rich, powerfully featured, arrogant and commanding in manner, and older and more experienced in the ways of the world than the heroine. The hero, that is, like Mr Darcy or Rochester, trails a Gothic heritage, but he is not a tyrant. He can be made to change, to soften, to recognize the heroine's equality, and he does this because, as Elizabeth says to Darcy near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, he is attracted to her for the very reason that she is independent and answers back and resists and is defiant and stands up for herself and won't marry for money. In romance there is an exchange between his offering of confidence and knowledge (worldly and sexual), and her teaching him not to be arrogant and regarding himself as the superior. In Freudian terms, if he appears at the beginning of the romance to be like a father and guardian, and she as the daughter, by the end she is often mother and nurse, and he the son: as in those symbolic moments in *Jane Eyre* of the first meeting, when Rochester falls off his horse and has momentarily to lean on Jane; or at the end, when, near blind, Jane becomes his 'eyes'.

The romance heroine is generally an orphan, like Jane, or a *de facto* orphan, as in Elizabeth Bennett or Sybylla's cases, with uncomprehending parents. Romance is about the freedom of the heroine to think and act and choose as an adult, unguided by parental advice: it is the moment of freedom from childhood, of ritual birth into adulthood. The romance heroine is not conventionally beautiful, but, like Elizabeth, she will have lovely, "bewitching" eyes, windows on to a consciousness that is always honest and direct. The romance heroine is usually contrasted to an anti-heroine, a Miss Bingley or Blanche Ingram, who 'figures' conventional femininity, who is glamorous and manipulative and wishes to marry the hero for his money and position and tries to win the hero by agreeing with him all the time – the very reason, as Elizabeth notes, that Miss Bingley bored Mr Darcy.

In the romance narrative pattern the love relationship usually begins, or apparently founders, in conflict between the hero and heroine, and indeed much of the pleasure of the genre lies in its conflict-dialogue. The hero will offer marriage, but because he still believes that he is the one, she the other, that he is in command, she to be dependant, because he wishes to treat her as a 'doll' or bird in a cage – images that occur in *Jane Eyre* and *My Brilliant Career,* as in Ibsen – she refuses.[24] Then follows a period of separation, and narrative suspense is created in the question, will there be a reunion between Darcy and Elizabeth, Rochester and Jane – Harold and Sybylla ...

And here *My Brilliant Career,* having created an exciting suspenseful romance narrative, suddenly at its end reverses genres and becomes an anti-romance. Harold has lost his fortune, and so comes as a social equal, rather like Jane's accession to a fortune and Rochester's loss of Thornfield Hall. As romance readers we expect not just a 'happy ending', but what that, philosophically, means, the cosmology deep in popular culture that there is hope in all relationships, that even the severest obstacles can be overcome – men can learn and change! – that fate is not closed. Harold had appeared the romance hero: when they first meet he thinks she's a servant, an inferior; they engage in constant conflict-dialogue, and he's intrigued and mystified by her independence of thought and ideals. But Harold can never really learn from Sybylla. He is puzzled by her independence, rather than ever meeting it.

The novel at its end, then, suddenly presents what we can call a radical feminist fatalism about men: men and their attitudes and consciousness can never change.

Yet overall, and at its end, *My Brilliant Career* does not, I think, conform to the ideal text favored by literary modernism and feminist literary criticism in partnership, the assumption that the most interesting literature is written under the sign of the tragic. *My Brilliant Career* is not an exemplary modernist-feminist text like Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where (female) life is predestined to failure, loss, and misery, where the heroine is a victim of unassailable male power, which can only be defied or escaped by madness, suicide, death, the harsh fate as well of late nineteenth-century feminist heroines like Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* or poor old Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or even young Judy in *Seven Little Australians*, felled by a phallic tree.[25]

For one thing, *My Brilliant Career* ends with Sybylla's fierce desire to reach beyond her present imprisoning world, and in this sense the novel is comparable to the ending of *The Getting of Wisdom*. For another, Sybylla is not a victim-heroine like Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but a seeker-heroine. In Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, the only ethnographic study of a romance readership I know of, Radway found that the American readers described with relish their favorite heroines as "extremely intelligent", "spunky", "independent", and "unique".[26] Sybylla, too, is gutsy, spunky, bouncy, irrepressible, like the international romance heroine. Her spunkiness as well has a colonial context, as Susan Gardner has noticed: Sybylla has many of the qualities of the heroines of Australian melodrama.

A feature of Dampier and Walch's play "Robbery Under Arms" is the romance of Captain Starlight and Aileen Marston. Starlight is older, more experienced, an educated gentleman from England (bearing the guilt of a brother's crime). As Aileen says, "You, a gentleman, and I only a bush girl", and she tells him: "Oh if I were only a man I would go anywhere. I have never been anywhere or seen anything, not even a church, a shop window, a soldier, or the sea ..." Their romance begins in conflict, with Aileen telling Starlight (whom she thinks is a Mr Beresford) that she doesn't like bushrangers; and she captivates Starlight by sending up his old-world courtly manner. She joins the gang, against Starlight's urging, and proves a worthy member, dashing in on a horse at one point to warn Starlight and Dick and Jim Marston of the troopers, or seizing Kate Morrison's pistol and throwing the vindictive betraying Kate to the ground. She also boxes the evil policeman Goring's ears when he attempts to molest her. Indeed, from the evidence of "Robbery Under Arms" and other popular nineteenth-century melodrama, women stood up for themselves in the colonies. Even Kate strikes Dan Moran, the traitorous and vicious bushranger who sides with Goring against Starlight and the Marstons, when he tries to take advantage of their alliance. And in Dampier's stage version of *For the Term of His Natural Life* Sylvia apparently stands up to Frere and slaps his face:[27] actions which give context to Sybylla's notorious striking of Harold.

The popular image of women as spunky, independent, and fearless is evident also from ballads like Charles Thatcher's "Gold-fields Girls" (in Ward's collection), and can be seen as a colonial development of popular ballads, street broadsides, and music hall songs in Britain that celebrate, in rural and urban lower-class women alike, their sexual directness and resourcefulness and standing up for themselves. We only have to think of music hall songs like Bessie Bellwood's "What Cher Ria" or Marie Lloyd's "I haven't missed my last train yet", and Marie Lloyd, we know, performed in Australia.[28] Aileen Marston, wild colonial girl proper, looks forward to the heroines of early Australian cinema, as in Franklyn Barrett's "A Girl of the Bush,"[29] as well as straight-talking independent characters like Vicki Dean, the vet in "A Country Practice".

Yet there are differences here with *My Brilliant Career*. For while Sybylla shares in the irrepressibility of the heroines of melodrama and popular song, she also possesses class attitudes that are strikingly similar to those of Jane Eyre. Just as Jane, as a governess, considers herself a lady and feels socially superior to the 'peasant' girls she teaches after she leaves Rochester, Sybylla feels herself superior to the M'Swats. There is pathos here as well, the dilemma of the artist who feels as a creative spirit superior to ordinary people, yet ever cut off from them. Sybylla is not a servant girl, as Harold discovers, and she evidently feels a class above peasants like the M'Swat family, just as she would probably feel superior to Aileen Marston or to Bessie Bellwood's cockney coster Ria, doing very well in the vegetable line.

We can, then, perhaps, see why *My Brilliant Career* is so attractive a novel, not least in its romance narrative. *My Brilliant Career* is at least three 'texts' in one, but each of them – the 'romance' between Sybylla and Harold, her desire to be a writer, her questioning of the boundaries of gender – work on a romance narrative structure. Romance is a love relationship with obstacles, and this is part of its historical flexibility as a form: the obstacles can be *anything* in a society, which the novel can explore, from Elizabeth's family in *Pride & Prejudice* to caste in Indian film romance-melodramas, to ethnic tensions in "West Side Story". In *My Brilliant Career* there are at least three narratives presenting obstacles and the suspense of 'will they be overcome?': the obstacles concerning Harold, the obstacles concerning gender restrictions on Sybylla, and the obstacles to her becoming a writer.

We can also begin, perhaps, to see why *My Brilliant Career* is so attractive to diverse readerships (and, now, film audiences). It can attract 'popular' readerships who can relish Sybylla's character as a 'romance heroine'. It can attract a specifically radical-feminist readership who are pleased by its anti-romance reversals, its judgement of men as irredeemable. Its ending can attract a readership that agrees that mainstream Australian society has to be defied or escaped from, actually or symbolically, the kind of 'Sydney' tradition I tried to evoke in *Australian Cultural Elites*.

Now: Henry Lawson. The airspace around this name is so turbulent, so dangerous for newcomers, that I want to send up a small, almost invisible kite. I take the current orthodox position on Lawson, particularly in the criticism and textual presentations of Brian Matthews and Brian Kiernan, to be something like this. In Lawson's work there is only a small core of 'good' writing, of true 'art'. Much is rubble. The gold lies in the 'spare', 'realist' 'sketch', especially those forged under the signs of the tragic, the sombre, the ironic, the macabre, the disturbing. The rubble, when Lawson's touch fails, is found in the verse as a whole, which is rhetorical, and in his fiction in lapses into popular genres of his day like romance and melodrama, genres that are automatically assumed to be inferior. These lapses are then to be explained by reference to Lawson's biography or psychology. The important thing for criticism to do is to arrive at a canon of spare sketches that we can say is the essential Lawson.[30]

To seek the essential is to suppress difference. I think, on the contrary, we should recognize a number of different Lawsons, that emerge in different genres and constitute interactions with various social, cultural, intellectual, and political contexts. Lawson's view of the city in " 'Dossing Out' and 'Camping' ", for example, seems to me to consciously relate itself to a particular tradition of writing about urban life in English and colonial culture, the tradition evoked by Peter Keating in *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* as the 'industrial novel', as in *Hard Times* or the Paddy's Market chapter of Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise* or Lawson's own concern with Paddy's Market.[31] This tradition, as Keating represents it in his collection *Into Unknown England*, also includes exploration of the abyss of urban outcasts, as in James Greenwood, George Sims, Andrew Mearns and Jack London. In a story like "Two Boys at Grinder Bros." the urban working class is seen as brutal, coarse, insensitive, an attitude which relates it to Jack London's later *The People of the Abyss* as well as looking forward to a recent TV series like "Waterfront".

I won't defend Lawson's verse here, though I think it can easily be analysed as part of a long and strong tradition of broadsides and protest poetry that is shared by O'Dowd in *Dawnward?* and that can be traced in nineteenth-century street ballads, in Chartist verse, Owenite hymns, Shelley's "The Masque of Anarchy", Blake's "London".[32] Of course it's rhetorical! That's its genre, its mode, and it can only be dismissed if critics maintain that chimera, absolute aesthetic standards for all poetry.

I want to conclude by saluting the challenge of Ken Stewart to the Lawson orthodoxy, in his lively essay on "The Loaded Dog". But I wish to greatly extend the challenge. Ken Stewart argues *for* the quality of the seriocomic in this Lawson story, and he defends it as popular art. Yet he still feels the need to corral "The Loaded Dog" as exceptional, to agree that there is a 'quintessential', a 'characteristic' Lawson where fate is seen as the hardness, the grimness, of things, in tension with bush sociability and gregariousness, the gregariousness that, as Stewart so memorably puts it, the dog canonizes and canine-izes.[33]

Stewart suggests that "The Loaded Dog" is of a particular genre, the apocryphal story and heightened folk yarn, and that the comedy of the overgrown puppy with the cartridge in his mouth might relate backwards to Dickens and the pantomime stage tradition and circus clowning, and forward to Tom and Jerry style animated cartoons. Tommy, the great big slobbering happy dog, is the "archetypal saint and fool", who destroys fate in the form of the nasty, selfish yellow cur and its mean, 'thievish' associates – just as, we can add, in popular melodrama such as "Robbery Under Arms" the family of 'good' characters finally triumphs over the selfish individualism of Dan Moran and his associates. It is a victory over destiny as unrelentingly harsh, and a victory of *communitas*, of gregariousness in "The Loaded Dog", or friendship and loyalty in "Robbery Under Arms", over all those forces that try to destroy it. At the end of each, a comic note signals these victories, however temporary.

But I also wish to argue that such a victory is not exceptional in Lawson. I'm not of course saying the realist sketches of the hardness of things aren't important or aren't powerful in their own right. I just want to point to the presence of various interesting stories which aren't 'realist', because they consciously draw attention to and slightly parody themseves as stories, as constructed narratives – they're 'self-referential' – and because they involve characters who are not psychologically well-rounded, but are more like the masked figures of carnival, in particular, wise fool, trickster, and rogue figures.

Let's glance for a second at the New Zealand story "Stiffner and Jim (Thirdly, Bill)". Here Jim, by putting an extra-long nail in the publican's boot, wins the chase against the enraged one-booted brute. Jim indeed performs the classic action of the trickster in early modern Europe, who tells the hangman he's doing the noose wrongly, and puts it on the hangman's head to show him how it's done properly. Jim and Bill defeat the publican, the representative here as in other Lawson stories, of the values of money and meanness, of the respectable morality of the town as against the Bush and what it ideally stands for: a space, of between and betwixt, where anything can happen and the usual rules of society can be questioned.

Then there's Bob Brothers, the Giraffe, of the story "Send Round the Hat", a beanpole of a man, a holy fool, a simple-minded 'Christ' figure. Like Molly in "A Country Practice" the Giraffe wears harlequinnish clothes ("a saddle-tweed sac suit two sizes too small for him"), and like Molly he enjoys the lovable fool's licence to be outside of society's usual values, to be a critic and questioner of conventional wisdom, of everything others take for granted. Bob is a foolish Robin Hood figure, collecting money not for authority but for a German wishing to return to his sweetheart, a sick Afghan and some prostitutes turned out of town. He's on an impersonal quest to save the world, and like Superman he has to choose between his public role and private fulfilment with the love of his life. "Send Round the Hat" is a long and complex story, fascinating because the conventions of the fool as innocent outsider allow many different social voices, different social attitudes, to be expressed,[34] attitudes that question both respectable

'town' morality as well as some of the attitudes of the bushmen, for example, union solidarity against non-Europeans. The story, in Bakhtin's terms, is polyphonic, its comedy modulating in and out of moments of pathos, very much like nineteenth-century music hall songs as well as colonial melodrama like "Robbery Under Arms". Great stuff.

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Notes and References

1 Natalie Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), chapter five. See also Ann Curthoys and John Docker, "Nothing but nasty people behaving nastily in a nasty situation: A Discussion of 'Prisoner'," paper for Australian Communication Association Conference, July 1983.

2 See John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who. The Unfolding Text* (London, 1983), and Roger Schlobin, "The Fool and the Fantastic", *Fantasy Newsletter*, no. 43, December 1981.

3 Cf. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 165-172.

4 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 10, 101-2.

5 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven and London, 1976).

6 See also Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park and London, 1967), chapter xxxv, and David Thorburn, "Television Melodrama", in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (New York, 1982).

7 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London, 1974), p. 59.

8 See Robert C. Allen, "On Reading Soaps: A Semiotic Primer", in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television* (Los Angeles, 1983).

9 See Ken Stewart's essay, "Theatre, critics and society 1850-1890", in Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage. A Documentary History* (Sydney, 1984). Stewart writes of James Nield's critical standard of "realism" and also interestingly reveals his own hierarchy of genres concerning "serious theatre" in the nineteenth century, for example, Shakespeare and Ibsen.

10 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981) chapter on "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", pp. 111-119.

11 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), chapter fifteen, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight".

12 See Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford, 1956), chapter five, "The Licence in Ritual".

13 J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 446-470. Goethe's observations are discussed by Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 244-257.

14 Re "festive abuse" see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 10, 16, 166, 187, and C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, 1959).

15 See John Docker, "In Defence of Popular Culture", Arena 60, 1982, pp. 84-5.

16 Richard Fotheringham, ed., *Robbery Under Arms* (Sydney, 1985).

17 Cf. nineteenth-century English street ballads about Irish members of Peel's New Police in Robert Collison, *The Story of Street Literature* (London, 1973), p. 45.

18 See Eric Irvin, *Australian Melodrama*, chapter 9, "New-style Robin Hood", and chapter 10, "Ridiculing the police".

19 Dorothy Green, *The Music of Love* (Melbourne, 1984), chapter on "Louis Stone's *Jonah*: a Cinematic Novel".

20 Robin Klein, *Hating Alison Ashley* (Melbourne, 1984).

21 P.J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London, 1971), chapter one. See also John Docker, *In a Critical Condition* (Melbourne, 1984), pp. 137-8, and David Dunstan's essay on the social exploration journalism of nineteenth-century Melbourne in Graeme Davison, David Dunstan, and Chris McConville, eds., *The Outcasts of Melbourne* (forthcoming).

22 See Peter Davison, ed., *Songs of the British Music Hall* (New York, 1971), pp. 24-5 and the Afterword.

23 Susan Gardner, "*My Brilliant Career*: Portrait of the Artist as a Wild Colonial Girl", in Carole Ferrier, ed., *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth-Century Australian Women's Novels* (St Lucia, 1985).

24 Cf. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 297 (chapter 24); Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career* (Sydney, 1974), p. 147.

25 As is the woman in Barbara Baynton's "Squeaker's Mate", a point made, parodically, by Brian Matthews at the 1985 ASAL conference, in his commentary on Barbara Baleful.

26 Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill and London, 1984), p. 101.

27 Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage*, p. 73.

28 Ibid., p. 137. See also J.S. Bratton, *The Victorian Popular Ballad* (London, 1975), pp. 103-4, 160-1, 184-5.

29 Cf. John Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen* (Sydney, 1981), chapter three.

30 I'm being grossly unfair to Brian Matthews, *The Receding Wave* (Melbourne, 1972) and Brian Kiernan, *Henry Lawson* (St Lucia, 1976), Introduction. See, however, Kiernan's introduction to the Lansdowne edition of the Works (1984).

31 See Kiernan's introduction to *Henry Lawson*, pp. xiii-xiv, xxi, and his chapter "Sydney or the Bush, Some Literary Images" in Jill Roe, ed., *Twentieth Century Sydney* (Sydney, 1980).

32 See Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London, 1974), and Terry Sturm, review of Hugh Anderson, *The Poet Militant:* Bernard O'Dowd, in Australian Literary Studies, iv (1970), p. 419.

33 Ken Stewart, " 'The Loaded Dog' : A Celebration", Australian Literary Studies, xi (1983).

34 Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 161-5.

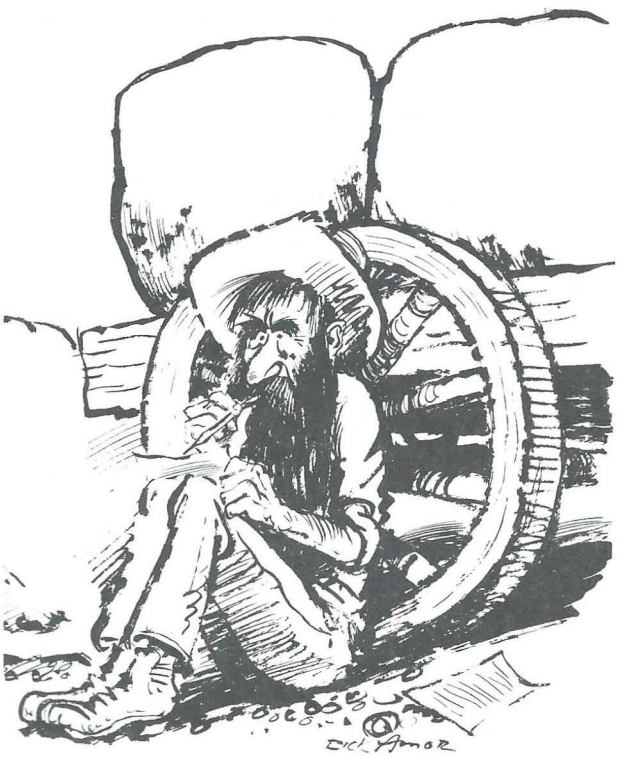
BLURBUS REDIVIVUS

In our last issue we set a competition for a modern publisher's blurb for an Australian book published before 1960.

The judges had no problem in awarding the prize to Tim Thorne, of Launceston, for his blurb for Christopher Brennan's *Poems 1913*:

This is not your average science fiction story. The adventures of the lonely alien who visits from star-cold and the dread of space are as erotic as they are exotic. His talented lady-love, Lilith, is the archetypal liberated woman, not only an accomplished organist and snake-charmer, but a powerful figure in international politics. Her intrigues in mystery-laden and strife-torn Middle Eastern locations such as Eblis and Ekbatan will really keep you guessing.

The pace quickens appreciably as the protagonists, seeking to define themselves by their multifarious experiences, are driven by some compulsive force from innocence through incense, opiates, vampirism and necrophilia, to the heart-stopping climax of a tram ride through Sydney's entertainment district.



THE BULLOCKY TO HIS CREATOR

Early this year Judith Wright announced that she would not allow her famous poem "Bullocky" to be placed in anthologies in future. She believes that the poem has been abstracted from its context in its original publication, where it appeared with poems about the Aboriginals, and has been taught in a way which suggested an uncritical praise of the pioneers by her.

We offer the usual prizes – a copy of the *Dictionary of Australian Quotations* or a copy of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* – for a poem to Judith Wright by the bullocky. Limit twenty lines or so, entries by 30 August 1986.

books

Variety and Vitality

Gavin Ewart

Chris Wallace-Crabbe: *The Amorous Cannibal* (Oxford, $11.99).

Before reviewing this book I read two of Wallace-Crabbe's previous collections, *The Rebel General* (1967) and *Where The Wind Came* (1971). These were the only two that the Arts Council's Poetry Library had in stock. I therefore missed out on *The Emotions Are Not Skilled Workers*, the most recent book and, I gather, the best so far.

Nevertheless, my remarks on the two I did get to read may have some value. *The Rebel General* made it clear that he was willing to try different forms, mainly lyrical – see "Sonnet (Homage to Mondrian)" with its very short lines, and one surrealist poem, also very short. Symbols and 'figures', as in Edwin Muir, seemed to fascinate him. Sometimes the rhythms were unsure, rhyme and not-rhyme alternated. Australian innocence (cultural) was one subject. Good poems included "The Portrait" (the falseness of Art), "The King" (a little moral tale or comment) and "Like Orellana" (mysterious landscape).

Where The Wind Came seemed more sophisticated. "Blood Is The Water" came out as bogus rhetoric, though based on an interesting idea – the making of a military dictator. The good ones seemed to me "The Joker" (self), "The Death of Rustum" (fantasy), "Getting Her Out of Bed" (invocation, of a kind, to the Muse), "Mark Antony" (historical fantasy – "every canal is choked with drowning oarsmen"). Better than good: "Other People" (First World War – with a touch of Gravesian grotesquerie) and "Signs" (Paul Klee; the artist keeps on keeping on and "redeems the time").

The title poem of *The Amorous Cannibal*, about eating a girl, is fantastic but quite effective; it also prompts speculation about the word "tidbit". The OED seems to prefer "titbit" (but perhaps this would seem facetious in a poem about a girl's body?), although "tidbit" is the old 17th Century form, and the preference in the USA. My Webster of 1875, however, gives both forms.

"Mind" deals with what the human brain makes of life, and of the Unconscious:

> Somewhere below
> a chafed sea sobs
>
> washing up the monsters
> through tanklike dark
> and a thousand fragmentary
> shades of green

This is his 'philosophical' side. There are others. "Recollection" exploits a style of songlike rhyming that might be called Old English:

> Suppose forgetting were the norm,
> gullies not scarps defined the form
> until
> contours corroded each turfed hill
> and all, and all.

On page 29 some Craig Raine has crept in:

> *Washing machine*
>
> Behind a glass pane
> the wardrobe's wet personae
> play at vertigo.

Why does "The Landlord of Himself" make me think of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*? Is it the Gothic flavor?

"The Fall of The West", as with such a subject it might well, begins with a very Audenlike stanza:

> Jig, barbarian, over these
> machicolated ruins;
> question your soothsayers what they mean,
> these bricky brac geometries
> and bushland scene.

Very ripe baroque Late Auden; with, later, a touch of Porter:

> was named for Boog who devised the manila
> folder . . .

This is a very enjoyable and satisfactory poem.

For Wallace-Crabbe as for Milton, "the mind is its own place". "Abhorring a Vacuum" shows this (we are "lived" by the genes and unconscious impulses):

Whatever has been writing this down gets out
from behind the wheel and
walks away.

To his credit, he uses words like "nimb" (= to outline as with a nimbus; the OED gives a "a nimbed lamb" as an example). He also, elsewhere, invents "parcrumpled". "Nub" is a first-class poem, mysterious and with the tone absolutely right; it has some of the feeling of an H.G. Wells story. Wells was good at dreams. "Exit the Players" projects the members of a committee as characters in "Hamlet", a brilliant idea and under control all the time.

"The Shadow Minister", with a slight feeling of Auden, veers more to left-handed Graves:

Who mislaid them? (the times of happiness)
I fear it might have been
the shadow minister
or gremlins in his entourage.

Those gremlins are first cousins to Graves' lollocks. The shadow minister himself would, in an Auden poem, be Death ("Archduke of fractures,/maelstrom, carcinogen/ and small betrayals").

And his credentials?
Founded the vortex
brown on the face of the waters;
flavour of presence
and overwhelming jonquils;
a strong left arm.

The last line sounds like Rod Laver (probably accidental) but it might also refer to Graves' statement that he wrote his "grotesque" non-love poems (his best poems, I think) with his left hand.

"Practitioners of Silence" (a very Australian poem) is one of the best in the book. "The Home Conveyancing Kit" is also Australian Norman Rockwell; but for the European reader the difficulties are few. He might have to ask around for "duco" and "reffo", but the subject-matter is familiar:

It was when the knowledge-mirror broke
that there lodged a jagged fragment
in everybody's breast
which cuts and hurts like hell.

He has a Porterian side ("The Good Spirit Bounces Back", "Puck Is Not Sure About Apollo", "Eating the Future" are Porter-type titles) and you need to know a little about Masaccio, Faure and Gaspard de la Nuit; or, at least, who they were.

I found "The Bits and Pieces" (twenty-six short poems) nice and light in tone and texture; there are other Rainey bits besides the washing machine already quoted: "Artichoke", "Emus", "Foot", "Jasmine", "Opener", "Quail", "Underwear", and these are satisfying. The description of galvanised iron as "our modern thatch" is very pleasing.

In general, the conversational tone works well for him, as in "Kia-Ora", in this instance bringing the Twenties to life.

There are a few weaknesses. Lines like:

There were still grand wines in the pantry
and vintages of the past
but the voice of the party crooned away,
"Nothing is going to last".

However true, this is far too like Auden's "Victor". Wallace-Crabbe has a lot of tact. He knows when to stop. "The Figure in the Carpet" refers to the Henry James thought that each human life has a pattern:

But you can't
quite make it
out from
the ground of
whatever has
supplanted burgundy
axminster and such;

This is not my own favorite way of writing poems, though it's refreshing after too many four-square British stanzas, but the thought is interesting. And, of course, this style *can* work:

while anything tearshaped
runs terribly slowly
down the sheer
pane.

Wallace-Crabbe has been described as "lyrical", and in the sense that Porter is lyrical I suppose this is true. He certainly doesn't write epics or descriptions of uninhabited landscapes. Heavy verse is not for him. There are, too, some poems that could be described as conventionally lyrical. "Amphibious" is one, but even here philosophy isn't quite kept at bay. "Still" is the nearest thing to a 'pure' lyric, and the nearest thing to a happy poem:

Pink top
magenta jeans
you rake the crop of aromatic
newcut grass to mounds
hedged in by hedges
vividly composed
as in a French film
of shimmering bourgeois
country highjinks.
Five years together,
birdcalling together
our harvest home:
beyond that squareclipped cypress
the dark green sea roars.

In its variety and vitality *The Amorous Cannibal* marks another step forward in its author's career.

Gavin Ewart, one of the best-known of British poets, lives in London.

First-Person Narratives

Joy Hooton

David Malouf: *12 Edmondstone Street* (Chatto & Windus, $19.95).
Nancy Phelan: *The Voice Beyond the Trees* (Hyland House, $14.95).

12 Edmondstone Street is a strong endorsement, if any is needed, of Malouf's stature as a prose stylist of the highest order. His sensitivity to the moods and rhythms of different people, places, things and times is nowhere better displayed than in these four autobiographical essays. With characteristic delicacy and tact and with no loosening of tonal unity, he moves from the small, prelinguistic world of the child to the populous expanse of India. The first and longest essay and the last and shortest concentrate on what he has called 'habitable' history, his own childhood; the central two deal with the 'visitable' histories of Tuscany and India.

All four are concerned with time, space and the nature of perception, but the first is most obviously a celebration of the power of memory. Here Malouf is probing at the tap-root, drawing on what White has called 'the purest well', and almost sensuously exploring the curious paradoxes of memory. Memory, of course, makes tantalising if treacherous promises to invest things, places, people and even the past self with a life that defeats the erosions of time.

12 Edmondstone Street has long since been torn down, along with the rest of South Brisbane, but the house continues to exist in the minds of its past inhabitant as an intimately known identity. More interesting to Malouf, however, is the creative link between mind and past, the potent experience of the act of recall itself and the curious insights that come when memory is set free to explore according to its own laws. It is the imaginative excitement of this experience that Malouf seeks to share with his readers in a co-operative approach that makes the book both intimate and impersonal, individual and representative.

The intensity of his power of recall of the child's sensual knowledge of the physical world, the recreated delight in material objects and the colors, smells and textures of childhood are reminiscent of Hal Porter's *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*, although there are differences. Malouf is more interested in the connections between physical and psychical shapes, in the links between objects and the creative pattern of a lifetime, even in the complicity of things in the life of contemporary mythologies, beliefs, loyalties, anxieties. At every moment aware of the body – that small hot engine at the centre of all these records and recollections ... with its own business of breathing, pumping blood, processing the fruits of the earth, he is fascinated by the links between the body's experience of outwardly mundane objects and the mind's deductive connections.

Of the two splendid brass jardinieres that top the family piano, for instance, the child selects only one for his "passionate attention", the one that is used as a receptacle for any half-lost item. A testament to the varied creativity of the world in its assortment of odd objects – "One baby's bootee a little rusty with age, the top off a Schaeffer fountain-pen, one cup from a doll's tea-set without the saucer, the gold chain off an evening bag, one grey kid glove without a button, half a *diamante* clasp, the slice of mother-of-pearl that is one side of a penknife handle; odd earrings and collar-studs" – the jardiniere is also a measure of the child's belief in "the world's infinite plenditude, its capacity to reproduce itself in a multitude of forms ... The spirit of accidental separation hovers over the jardiniere, but in so far as it is itself part of a pair, it speaks for completeness, for final restitution." It gestures towards a pre-linguistic harmony when the self had an invisible friend, a lost twin and suggests that "one day we too may be united: that he (or is it I?) will be found."

In the same way the boy is fascinated by the implied connections between the Side Door and its key (used as a home-remedy for nose-bleeds) and a burglar's invasion of the house and apparently instantaneous discovery of its secret connecting paths: "Do burglars, I wondered, have some sixth sense that allows them to see the threads between things as a luminous net?"

Things have complex lives and mysterious powers as do people, and this is presented not simply as a primitive animism, an historical oddity of the psyche, but as a continuing belief. The paradox of the strange in the familiar perpetually intrigues the child and then acquires another depth of 'strangeness' to the retrospective gaze. Nothing demonstrates this phenomenon more expressively than the family upright piano with its self-contained solidity and compelling disembodied language, its power to evoke limitless states of being and stirring events.

Other objects, however, have a tamer role, subservient to the time and hence subject to its erosions. The wireless, for example ("three feet high with three kinds of veneer and a speaker whose shape you can feel behind knobbly cloth", around which the family composes itself to hear the war news in a perfect period vignette, endorses the bourgeois values of that Protestant, British 'age of certainties', even as those values are abandoned for ever. This subtle interpenetration of past and present, mind and thing, symbolised by the child's crossing and recrossing of thresholds within the topography of the house, is one of the essay's most attractive features.

Malouf seems to be able to hold diverse modes of perception in productive tension, but the paradoxes of memory's blendings are what most intrigue him. What was awe-inspiring for the boy, such as his Lebanese grandfather's prestige amongst his fellow immigrants, is partially undercut for the adult by a critical awareness of the human costs of his patrician attitudes, which "saw nothing shameful in having his wife drudge sixteen hours a day in a shop, and his children, one after the other, go to work as my father did, selling newspapers at tram stops, running messages for people, saving up to buy ... horse and dray." And the parents' adult powers are retrospectively curtailed by the grown-up knowledge that their house, overshadowed by the authority and claims

grandparents, was really a house of children.

Even one of the grittiest of childhood's memories, of the fallen woman who is offered a temporary shelter on the outside verandah, is sharpened by the retrospective adult awareness of her condition and his 1970s recognition of her surprising modernity. The child has much to tell the man, but the man also has his messages and the constant movement between the shadowy world of the child and the daylight world of the adult is rich in insight. Most curious of all, perhaps, is the realisation that a complete journey into the past demands an act of unremembering of the modern body's experience, "a kind of dying, a casting off, one by one, of all the tissues of perception, conscious and not, through which our very notion of body has been remade."

The last essay of this collection, "The Kyogle Line", an account of a rail journey from Queensland to New South Wales when the boy was ten, is closely connected to the first. The border on this occasion is the physical one between the two states, and the boy looks forward to discovering a point where difference begins. The journey, in fact, provides a more powerful, disturbing experience of difference than the picturesque one he had courted. Suddenly confronted with the sight of three Japanese prisoners of war in a dark, cage-like van, he has a sharp experience of a "vast gap of darkness ... a distance between people that had nothing to do with actual space". A momentary confrontation, it is enough to set a different rhythm to his life, to commit him to a more extended and different journey. For the father too the vision is disturbing, reminding him of his own father's difference, which at one point during the war had branded him as an enemy alien.

The intervening essays, dealing with experiences of Tuscany and India, explore something of this extended journey. Although the contexts are different, the preoccupations are the same. In the Italian story the paradoxes of space and time are predominant; the Indian essay contemplates the mysteries of difference. They are linked to each other and to the collection as a whole by the theme of criss-crossed boundaries – old and new, East and West, Hinduism and Christianity, poverty and prosperity. Characteristically, Malouf is responsively open to the unpredictable and the unknown while maintaining his keen eye for connections. In the self-sufficient Tuscan village space does not count; there is no sense of geography and time is too continuous for contemplation. When the arrival of a film crew, complete with sophisticated technology, coincides with the first snow since 1929, life imitates art and the events are effortlessly absorbed into the village's experience of time as circular.

India presents a more baffling experience, although bafflement, like memory, never becomes self-indulgent. Here the narrator has a sense of being completely outside Western history, space is one of the most oppressive forms of privilege, capitalism is transformed in hundreds of individual, creative enterprises and machines, like people and animals, are somehow absorbed into the one stream of life.

Nancy Phelan's novel, *The Voice Beyond the Trees*, is also a first-person narrative, an intimate study of a single consciousness. The book also draws to some extent on the same material that provided the substance of the author's childhood autobiography, *A Kingdom by the Sea* (1969), although it is by no means a personal account. Apparently a revision of the novel which shared third prize in the 1950 Sydney Morning Herald novel competition, *The Voice Beyond the Trees* has much the same setting, if not the same period, as *A Kingdom by the Sea*, and uses some of its elements, but in a very different mix.

There are the same vivid descriptions of a Sydney bayside suburb (Moxham in the novel, Mosman in the autobiography) and the context of the story's action is an unconventional, well-connected family of part-Irish extraction, although this family is at least one generation removed from the one that Phelan describes in *Kingdom*. Reduced both in emotional health and in wealth to a shadow of their state before the premature death of the narrator's father, the Hamiltons are tolerated in Moxham as the "Old Residents ... long established, *declasse* shabby, owning battered mansions". Like the narrator of the autobiography, the narrator of the novel has a much-loved brother (John in the autobiography, Andrew in the novel) and a diffident but affectionate sister or sister in law (Sheila and Shirley). She is also forced to witness the inconsolable grief of another on the death of a marriage partner.

In the novel the experience is central and it is the narrator's mother who virtually 'dies' with the death of her husband: "her passion for him was her only incentive for living". In the autobiography the narrator's aunt, Amy Mack the authoress, fails to recover from the death of her adored husband, Lance Harrison, and the experience is more marginal to the central story. Both women enjoyed a life of activity and parties before the death of their husbands, and both become isolated and anachronistic figures after their loss, although the character in *Voice* differentiates herself by taking to drink. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to assume that the narrator's final comment on the rare individual who cannot survive without the beloved applies to both:

> They survive solely by the grace of love and perish without the chosen beloved, sometimes collapsing in madness or death. They never compromise, they give devotion once and for all and accept no second-best. In deprivation they reject life, scorning substitutes, palliatives, reclamation, with a single-mindedness that appears heroic seen in its proper background.

In both books the narrator is blessed with an acute sensitivity to music (especially Mozart) and to landscape. But with *Voice* we are in claustrophobic, weird, Poe-like territory; it is a picture in sepia. *Kingdom* recalls the bright colors of Streeton's Sydney and we are at the centre of a lively, extended family. Emma, the 'I' of *Voice*, is a lonely spinster, burdened with an alcoholic mother, economic dependence on an unpleasant grandfather, and her own physical disfigurement. As the study of an idiosyncratic, psychological condition and of its cure she is a testament to Phelan's versatility and empathy.

Generally the intermingling of time-levels so that the narrator speaks partly from a perspective of enlightenment and partly from within her previously alienated condition is handled with sensitivity. Occasionally, however, the focus blurs, and Phelan allows Emma's present consciousness to intrude as a censorious presence between the reader and appreciation of her loneliness. Occasionally the sinuous windings of Emma's journey, her alternations of mood become tedious or just inexplicable, or her meditations fail to integrate themselves, or border on the pretentious or the high-sounding. But on the whole Phelan records the agonies of this rather drab, pathetic self-absorption in an interesting way.

The contrast between the logic of events in Emma's misguided consciousness and their actual logic is mildly reminiscent of Jane Austen's *Emma*, an analogy that may be intended. Phelan's Emma is not a particularly interesting character but her story, shaped as it is by her preoccupation with ideas of death and love, transcends her. The account of her slow retrieval, partly by people who are basically commonplace but also basically good, and partly by forces within herself, is particularly convincing.

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"And Here They Rest in Place"

Jennifer Strauss

Vivian Smith: *Selected Poems* (Angus & Robertson, $7.95).

Vivian Smith's *Selected Poems* span four published volumes and some thirty years (1952–83) of his work to bring us to something of a contradiction. Almost at midpoint in the volume "There is no Sleight of Hand" seems to offer something of a poetic manifesto in its conclusion:

> Let candour be your guide
> and may your words rejoice
> in art's only reward
> to speak in one's own voice

Now a determined ironist might well claim to detect in the willed simplicity of this poem's abstractly incantatory, celebratory rhetoric, a not-altogether-fortunate influence from James McAuley. The fact remains, however, that the volume as a whole shows us Smith's achievement of a very distinctive voice; it also concludes with his turning to a series of translations of, and variations upon other and rather diverse voices.

To speak first of Smith's own poetic voice: its qualities are strikingly un-ocker. This is a voice not very idiomatic, supple and subtle in its musicality, lucid, with a quietness that suggests that he has been intent on following the advice attributed to Carlyle in the late poem 'Autumn Reading' – "absorb and grow and find your central stillness". The absence of modernist mannerisms, the commitment to fairly unselfconsciously personal poetry places him well within the mainstream Australian lyric tradition. It is personal poetry, but not confessional. One discovers very little of his specific political or religious ideology, of his occupational or sexual history; what is recorded is the percipient self face-to-face with "objects caught in light" ('Winter Foreshore'), with "the slow intactness of the world" ('Despite the Room') and the knowledge of "how things change, and how they hold" ('Back in Hobart'). Some poems – not his best, I think – deal with himself as poet, but for the most part Les Murray's appropriate classification of him as a meditative lyricist needs only the further definition that he is pre-eminently a lyricist of landscape and of place.

That may sound limited. One suspects Smith of mocking his audience as much as himself when he concludes 'Quiet Evening' with "I light a cigarette. I'm glad my mind's/so elegant, so various and clear." Conceding elegance and clarity with ease, we may pause on various, half-minded to dismiss it, were it not for the testimony of another poem, manifestly serious (and very fine) in which variousness seems to be valued beyond all those words – clarity, lucidity, light – otherwise apparently securely fixed in Smith's canon of values. This is 'Beyond This Point'

> Beyond this point there's only waste and sea;
> a vast absence; wind like a waterfall.
> The inhuman has such perfect clarity:
> pebble and bone, light on the old seawall:
> lucidity that leaves life scoured out.
> Light at its brightest turns to dark and dazes.
> Pebble and bone and triton shell's blunt snout.
> It's the abundant, varied, that amazes.

Smith's variousness lies in a complex sense of "the give and take of the world" ('Equinox') rather than in thematic or stylistic virtuosity. Attempts at stylistic variation are found in the weakest poems in the collection: 'Deathbed Sketch' is a facilely satirical sortie into Aust. Lit. infighting; 'Bus Ride' not only fails to transform a naively vulgar sexual fantasy by flowery mythologizing but produces thereby a singularly unconvincing dramatic voice. Since these two occur side by side in the collection, they may represent experiments wisely abandoned.

For it is his meditative lyrics of place that best express his sense of the range and process of life. His presentation of human figures, characteristically pictorial rather than dramatic, is nearly always elegiac and seems dominated by "the pathos of the past, the human creature" ('At an Exhibition of Historical Paintings, Hobart'). Of the four fine elegies from *Familiar Places*, two use literal place to 'place' their subjects, while the other two are poems about Tasmanian painters whose art is characterised in terms which obviously (though with no effect of vanity) relate to Smith's own work, as in this passage from 'Lines for Rosamond McCulloch':

> Your landscapes knew no people. They were home
> and liberation for the overburdened life,
> winds beating through the central hills.
> You used your pencil like a surgeon's knife

and gave the island back the images it gave –
tide country with a sea fence for a frame.
The last dry sketch *Small fish in small pool,*
and *Disappearing wreck off Cape Fame.*

If one had to choose a single anthology poem, it would be difficult to go past this one. Apart from the representative nature of its thematic preoccupations, it illustrates well the development of complexity in the rhythmic texture of his verse. In the early poems, lines tend to be self-contained units or, more often, to flow on in a way that has musical ease, but also an energy that exists in tension with, and gives a shifting effect to, the frame of the four-line rhyming stanza, something rather like "tide country with a sea fence for a frame." Later, he discovers the mid-stopped line and its use as a point, not so much of fragmentation or dramatization (the common modern uses) as of definition, as here.

This rhythmic development is intimately linked with a crucial quality in his work, a tension between closure and expansiveness, a tension of which the tonal one between sympathy and dryness, also exhibited here, is an expressive function. He often presents human acceptance of closure, of limitation, as a positive – involving not only an act of the intelligence but also a kind of discipline of the spirit, an abnegation of the arrogance of the perceiving eye. However if there is, for him, a characteristic "spirit's thirst" ('Alceste'), it is for extension. Gary Catalano in his recent Meanjin review identifies expansion towards the infinite as a characteristic effect of Smith's visualization of landscape; but the thirst for extension which is satisfied through the imaginative transformation of art seems more than simply aesthetic, as when he writes in 'For Edith Holmes: Tasmanian Painter':

I met you in the last phase of your art
when all your subjects felt your full control:
a line be[illegible] a branch became a tree
and wilting flowers revived in your clear bowl.

The effect of Smith's own elegiac art is two-fold. While closure is acknowledged and its human weight is felt, extension is also achieved. The other three elegies make this point in a final unalloyed use of the present tense. In 'Lines for Rosamond McCulloch' the interplay of past and present is subtle and moving:

I still see your workroom, the pear near the door
repeating the leadlight repeating the vine.
You left me an etching of Eaglehawk Hills
and said to me once, "I'm the last of my line".

The way Smith writes of these artists reminds us of something else about his art. If it is true that he seems to show us more about human feelings in landscape poems than he does in those earlier poems that speak directly of that elusive entity, the heart, it is by no means because he is addicted to the pathetic fallacy. His respect for the autonomous reality of those objects that "dance a meaning for the mind" ('These Wrens, This Wattle Tree') is not only explicitly stated, it is convincingly implied in the meticulous detailing with which they are evoked in the poems. The dynamics of the relationship between seeing and being seen are expressed in an interesting paradox. The gazes that "cling" in 'At an Exhibition ...' are not those of the living beholder, even as, in 'The Shadow', "Something in the landscape/attentive, stares at me."

The natural world has its own independent processes; it has too, an energy, a force without which that calm, that "inward clarity of days" ('Winter') which Smith values so much might seem too static, too easily won. He knows the possible negative face of calm, that the chill of "clear and static air" ('Winter') may be that of inhumanity ('Beyond This Point'), so that what must finally be said is "The moon/isn't it like our poetry/so dead/so clear". ('Variations on Garnier's Perpetuum Mobile). But knowing this, and paying also his dues to those "images of hunger (which) strike our lives/ the way that summer lightning rips the sky" ('The Edge of Winter') he is still the celebrant of clarity, for whom it is appropriate that light, clarity's medium, and the mediator between beholder and beheld, should be so recurrent and dominant a poetic image.

Much of what has been said remains true when we come to those translations and variations which form the final section of the volume. However, a new kind of tension is introduced, one between Smith's rhetoric of lucidity and a content which is elusive, syntactically non-sequential, discursively non-logical, in short perceptibly modernist. It is interesting work and it may well be that – to adapt 'Deathbed Sketch' – we need this kind of poetry in Australia, but the humanist in the reviewer would be sorry to see Vivian Smith stay in that exotic territory. We are still too much in need of the kind of poetry that will enable us to say of the familiar things of our life "And here they rest in place." ("In the Colonial Museum".)

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Tasmanian Exile

C.J. Koch

James McQueen: *The Floor of Heaven* (Penguin, $9.95).

James McQueen has an established reputation as one of our best short story writers, and with his last novel, *Hook's Mountain,* he demonstrated his power over sustained narrative. His new novel is his most ambitious work to date: not just in terms of length, but in its range of characters and narrative technique.

Mr McQueen has chosen to present his story mainly through alternating first-person accounts by his central characters: a simple enough device at first glance, but one which is very difficult to bring off successfully, requiring of the novelist the ability to create a distinctive inner life and tone of voice for each of his protagonists. That McQueen has succeeded is one of the principal strengths of his novel, giving it a variety of pace and tone. He has set himself another hurdle, which I notice has already run him into trouble with at least one reviewer: his principal

character, Jack Byrne, is a simple, country-bred Australian who not only exhibits many Ocker characteristics, but is disturbed to a degree that has given him a large chip on his shoulder. The temptation, for the reviewer of hasty judgement, is to imagine that the writer is as simple as his character, and to see this as an Ocker novel.

It's a good deal more than that, as McQueen's handling of the voices of the other characters – including Byrne's mother, Nancy – amply demonstrates. But it's true that McQueen handles what might be called Ocker characters and their dialogue with particular ease and comic flair. And no one portrays better the bottom levels of the city and the small town: the cheerless rented rooms, the junk-food meals, the sardonic jokes, the big hangovers and ruthless brawls. McQueen has probably seen more of the underside of Australian life than any other contemporary writer; both in this novel and his first – *A Just Equinox* – we are given convincing pictures of the prison of dead-end jobs, and of the actual hells inhabited by derelicts, winos on White Lady, and the drug-addicted in decaying houses. McQueen also portrays with great accuracy the essentially likeable types, both hard and paradoxically gentle, among unskilled Australian workers: men all too often caricatured by writers who simply don't know them – who observe them instead from the edges, like sheltered children watching their tougher companions in a school playground. McQueen has been where they are, and when he portrays a fist fight, it's with an exactness only made possible by a personal knowledge of the science.

There are some pretty raw fights in the Jack Byrne section of the book – especially in a remote mining settlement in North Queensland, where a spectacular bout for money occurs between a young, fit Dutchman and a broken-down prize-fighter called Jimmy, who dreams of retirement to a farm with his mate Vic. The thumbnail sketch of these two makes them memorable among the book's drifters and losers:

> Vic reaches behind him, lifts a tumbler to Jimmy's lips. Jimmy sips a little, lies back. "How am I?" he says.
>
> "Not too bad. A couple of ribs cracked, your nose gone again, a cut eye . . ."
>
> "We'll go south, eh?"
>
> "Yes, mate."
>
> "And start lookin' for a bit of land?"
>
> "Yes mate," says Vic. He gets to his feet, a big hard man, past his prime . . . "And you'll bloody well find it too, mate."

Jack Byrne is a Tasmanian, a former Australian Rules star who played for St Kilda; and the theme of the novel is one which is the subject of many jokes about Tasmania: incest. Jack the Bastard is the son of his own grandfather, Terry Byrne. The owner of a lonely pub in northern Tasmania, old Terry is a decent and upright man who was once seduced by his daughter Nancy; he spends the rest of his life tormented by guilt. The two live together in the hotel which they run; but although their union has been one of real, if illicit love, Byrne never allows it to be consummated again, and rears Jack as his grandson. When Nancy reveals the truth of his identity to Jack for the first time, he attempts suicide and is confined to a clinic. It is from this point, when he flees the hospital, that his adventures on the underside begin: an odyssey in which he drifts in bitter aimlessness; a flight ending in the appalling mining town of Carbine Creek, where all that is worst in Australian outback life seems concentrated.

Why did he cut his wrists? "*I just wanted to let that blood out,*" he says. It is Jack's blind search for a way of coming to terms with an identity that appalls him – learning to accept the 'bad blood' – that provides the story's main thrust. Jack is in exile from his native island, his family, his origins and himself: locked in a self he no longer recognises. He is unable to consent to his love and compassion for Petra, a woman as disturbed as he is, and the great regional differences of Australia underline his exile: for a Tasmanian, North Queensland is as alien a landscape as Peru.

In the end, Byrne will break out of his Tasmanian-Gothic circle of guilt, "and the new circles will change and in turn make new ones." The book ends in release.

Along the way, the tormenting links that have bound the main characters together are probed and seen to weaken: and the most interesting link, providing what is for me the best sequence in the book, is with the past: the story of Terry Byrne's father, the founder of the Byrne pub, who goes into the rain-sodden bush in the west of Tasmania at the turn of the century with a mate in search of a cache of gold. This sequence about the relationship between two none-too-scrupulous adventurers pursuing a dream in what was then a virgin wilderness has virtues in common with some aspects of both Kipling and Faulkner: McQueen has a similar ability to interest us in ordinary men stretched to the limit by practical difficulties and the hazards of nature, and to make these difficulties absorbing – his knowledge of prospecting and mining, as well as of the Tasmanian wilderness, giving the story authority. Jack Byrne, shrewd and implacable, maddening his mate Gogarty with his absolute self-sufficiency, is one of McQueen's strongest characters; and the tensions between the two men, building to a tragic climax, are brilliantly handled.

> He realised then, a fraction of a second before everything collapsed, what was happening – that the bank of the creek on which they and their machine stood had been slowly undercut by the flow of the creek . . . The tops of the booms began to dip towards the water.
>
> He opened his mouth to call a warning to Byrne, who seemed yet unalarmed, unaware. Then closed it again, thinking, serve you right, you know-all bastard, serve you right for all the shit you've poured on me, for all the donkey-work I've had to do . . . let your bloody marvellous machine fall in the river, and you with it . . .
>
> And then the bank finally gave way.

It is the survivor, Gogarty, who founds the country hotel, stealing Jack Byrne's dream and even his identity.

It's a dream that becomes a prison for his son, but which the grandson, young Jack, will finally escape, knowing that "I have found my place in the world, and it is not a narrow place like the valley." With this affirmation his story ends; and Jack the Bastard climbs out of a trap as petty and everyday as the rural valleys of Tasmania, yet grimly timeless as the fate that was wrestled with by the heroes of Greek tragedy. James McQueen's achievement in pursuing his story on that level must command respect.

Christopher Koch's most recent novel is The Doubleman.

Three Novels

Barbara Jefferis

Elizabeth Jolley: *Foxybaby* (University of Queensland Press, $19.95).
Kate Grenville: *Lilian's Story* (Allen & Unwin, $14.95).
Olga Masters: *A Long Time Dying* (University of Queensland Press, $19.95).

"Readers," the tutor-writer Miss Alma Porch tells her Summer School group, "can piece things together in rapid retrospect. Imagination in the reader must not be overlooked as endless pictures can fill the reader's mind from what the writer offers." And readers of Elizabeth Jolley's *Foxybaby* will do well to remember that expectation. A lot of the information they need is dextrously encoded, and there's scarcely a line in the book which isn't capable of two interpretations.

Foxybaby is the most philosophically intricate and coherent of Elizabeth Jolley's books. It is also profoundly funny, a mixture of ironies, verbal wit, send-up and slapstick.

Alma Porch has been appointed tutor to the school's Drama Group, whose members, all unskilled, are to mime the readings of her novel *Foxybaby* while it is video-recorded, accompanied by percussion sticks and double bass in addition to the punk rock Alma wants. What she wants is of little importance since the school's principal, Miss Peycroft (significantly Alma first believed her name was Pencraft), has taken over both direction and interpretation.

Given the nature of the school (A Better Body Through The Arts program) Alma's students tend to be fat, middle-class, middle-aged women addicted to flowery hats, more easily engaged in discussion of recipes, grandchildren and their constipation than of literary matters. They want reassurance that they are as good at what they're doing as everyone else in the group; they are convinced they'll be in Alma Porch's next book; they find her use of the phrase "she was pregnant" distasteful, and argue endlessly over acceptable euphemisms. Since they are on a diet of raw carrots, lettuce leaves and lemon juice, food plays a big part in their conversations. The only relief is provided by the school handyman Miles and his wife who, at a price, provide gourmet meals in the small hours. Miles and his wife are at the bottom of endless dodgy deals. Miles flogs whatever he can lay his hands on, including all the mirrors in the school and the video Alma is supposed to be using; Mrs Miles insists on being paid part of Alma's miserable honorarium because, she says, all the singers in her kitchen (on cassette) prevent her from working or from hearing what's going on in her own head. Miles also operates the school's ancient bus, which allows him to engineer a profitable line in road accidents.

The Principal believes that "Miss Porch has conceived and is producing a drama which integrates conceptual performance, art, contemporary music and the theory of human communication through a series of statements created through the co-ordinated efforts of the participants." Miss Porch believes that she is possibly going to be very ill, or is going mad, and that they are making nonsense of her work with their stupid mime; but she tells them that "The story will come together from these fragments. This is how a story is made, from little scenes and the thoughts and feelings of people . . . "

Alma's work becomes a play within a play, the story of a touching, dreadful and enigmatic relationship between a father and his drug-addicted daughter and her drug-affected baby. This girl is the Foxybaby – one of them. There are three: the girl, Alma's novel, Elizabeth Jolley's novel. The characters in Alma's drama begin to affect the characters enacting them, and beyond and beneath all this the book becomes a brilliant examination of the creative process – the ways in which the initial theme has to be illustrated and enlarged (and inevitably damaged in the process) by the addition of scene and character and dialogue and exegesis. At this level of *Foxybaby* we see both the satisfactions and the miseries of the writer's trade – the convictions of worthlessness, the little peaks of arrogant self-satisfaction, the miserable jealousy of writers who are younger, cleverer, handsomer. And at the end of it all there's a sudden movement into a new dimension, a twist that brings it into the realm of the surreal and sends you straight back to the beginning – if not to read it again at least to make certain that you haven't been cheated. You haven't.

Elizabeth Jolley's triumph is that she can think deeply and report her thought mockingly in a tone that is intrinsically female and noticeably feminist. There are some men around at the school, but they're either out sporting together in the bushes, or out of reach up in the attics. There are also some other tutors, with strange names (Elizabeth Jolley's names are always worth a second glance); a Russian scrap iron and pop art sculptor, a potter with a broken nose and two broken knees, a weaver whose students are busy threading leaves and sticks and dry grass through chicken wire. On one level they are part of the strenuous absurdity of the school; on another they stand for others out there engaged in the same sort of creative exercises, to whom Elizabeth Jolley gives a distant wave.

Alma Porch makes a statement about her own writing which we may reasonably take to be a statement about Elizabeth Jolley's. She says, "My course is entirely literary, concerned only with the drama of human conflict and the resolution of conflict and it has no commercial or political overtones. I am entirely ignorant of what is taking place in the markets of the world. And where I have written about a man hurting another man unneces-

sarily and deliberately, it has nothing whatsoever to do with homosexuals, politicians, governments, shire councils, education departments or the health scheme."

Kate Grenville's Lilian Singer was born in Federation year on a night of portents as dire as those seen on the night of Duncan's murder at Inverness. Winds howled, pigs flew. She is born to a limp mother and a rich and dominant father, a man of moustaches, excessive ear-wax, glossy and squeaking boots.

Almost everything Kate Grenville does in this book is done with that sort of nice observation and economy. She never bothers with routine descriptions, but can find the essence of a character or a scene in half-a-dozen words and a lateral observation of some sort. The same economy lights her dialogue. This dialogue does everything she asks of it, yet it is fed to us a word or two at a time, and all *italicised* which is, in itself, a limitation. Blocks of italics are daunting; Kate Grenville manages without two consecutive lines of it anywhere in the book.

The story of Lilian Singer is said to be based on the life of Bea Miles, who may or may not have lived the same sort of life for the same sort of reasons. It doesn't matter. Nor is it necessary to know anything about Bea Miles. The child Lilian is boisterous and bright and astonished by the way she sinks out of her parents' sight as soon as a son is born to them. He is more valuable, but not noticeably better understood. His ambition is to be deaf. He folds the lobes of his ears inwards to help the deafness along and collects hands and feet from newspapers, magazines and posters. *I am the only one who wants them*, he says.

Lilian's whole life is an attempt to get attention. She eats colossally to compensate for the lack of it, and thinks that by amassing flesh she lessens the pain of the constant beatings her father gives her. Efforts to get her to thin down during her teens are met by her argument that she would be a mediocre pretty girl and that she's too arrogant to be mediocre. She makes some good friendships with both girls and boys, but towards the end of her university course when her mother goes abroad pressures build intolerably between Lilian and her father.

Friends, fellow-students, lovers and would-be lovers drop away. It is her father who destroys her, first by his obsession with her, then by having her committed to an asylum when he can no longer keep control of her life. When she comes out of the bin some years later, her boozy Aunt Kitty has forced him to make her an allowance and she begins her King's Cross life with its friendships with street girls, hi-jacking of taxis, recitations from Shakespeare for a shilling. Towards the end she lives in a stormwater drain with a derelict called Frank and with Jewel who shared her asylum days, and believes she is carrying God's child, and is all prepared for its birth with a plastic bag of booties.

Lilian ends her life in a Catholic home, cared for by the nuns who, to get her out of the way when an august visitor is coming, *buy* her a taxi-ride round all her favorite Sydney haunts.

The least successful section of the book is the last part, after Lilian has hardened into tractable dottiness. The reason for this is simply that processes are always more interesting to watch than settled states. Nevertheless, this is a first novel of genuine distinction.

Kate Grenville's Lilian and Sydney's Bea Miles both liked to give advice, and one of Lilian's closing bits that Bea would have approved was *Do not worry about getting old gracefully, girlie, be foolish and loud if you feel like it.*

Olga Masters' *A Long Time Dying* is set in the Cobargo of 1935. It is presented as a novel, but it doesn't, in fact, have any of the characteristics of a novel. The first two and the last two chapters are about the same families; between them, as between book-ends, stand thirteen self-contained stories about Cobargo families. There are poor families and snobbish families, eccentric old women, illegitimate daughters, the town flasher, a widower looked after by a daughter, the mission priest. Because Olga Masters is a skilled observer and an eloquent writer these stories give a very credible picture of what a town like that was like in a time like that. Each stands separately and most can stand proudly as stories. But they are linked only loosely and geographically. There can be no forward movement in them and no development of character, since we are done with the characters a few pages after we first meet them, and because we are going to go on meeting new characters right up to the closing pages of the book.

The idea for a novel was probably there, since only in the courtship of Mary Jussep by Stan Rossmore in the two first and last stories do the oddness and the baffling characteristics of life push the stereotypes aside. There is evidence of haste in completing the collection, too. Consecutive paragraphs in one chapter describe these difficult feats: "She threw her face over her shoulder to him, smiling ...", and "Stan's eyes passed over it briefly, holding both his elbows lightly, then looking elsewhere in the room and upwards to the ceiling.".

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Old Tricks Transformed

Michael Sharkey

Shelton Lea: *Poems From a Peach Melba Hat* (Abalone Press, P.O. Box 202, Cheltenham, Victoria 3192, $9.)

A new book of poems by Shelton Lea is an event by now: he has been publishing for the best part of twenty years, and performing for years before that at Sydney's El Rocco jazz club and scores of other likely and unlikely haunts. Most recently, he has provided a focus for poetry at the Leinster Arms Hotel in Melbourne's Collingwood, and *Poems from a Peach Melba Hat* carries a plug for the Poets' Pub among its several end-paper advertisements. Rosemary Nissen's Abalone Press deserves credit for getting the book out – a collection of vintage and new poems from an underestimated writer of works characterised by

open-eyed appraisals of urban life, vagrant encounters, and a celebration of love, friendships, and life's small and shattering surprises.

Shelton Lea's poetry is distinctively his own: he takes chances others wouldn't, in writing love and nature up large, and his work comes off well and often with the goods. It's studded with stray flashes of rhyme, vernacular gusto, and a rhetorical phrasing that suggests a delight in archaic as well as contemporary speech. If you're curious about his consistent lower-case typography, he's kept it up beyond the faddish periods of most contemporaries' usage; Eric Beach is one of the few others to employ the convention over a long stretch. Lea, like Beach, E.E. Cummings, and Don Marquis' cockroach Archie the vers-libre poet, veils a *toujours-gai* romanticism behind a cavalier-seeming surface. Many of the works have sharp resolutions, which save some of them from a tendency to deck out truisms about erotic and other affections. The resilience of tone, and the deceptive throwaway closure, seem to me to be signatures of Lea's style.

In his already much-anthologised and popular "poem on a peach melba hat" familiar elements come together. The joyful anti-social ripostes to policemen, bar-managers and bus-drivers (all standing in as emblems of unquestioning conformity) are balanced against an old-world chivalry, an appreciation of beauty in unlikely places, and the bravura cameraderie of street-people. A world of irrepressible picaros comes to life in Lea's 'social' poems; survival is the point in his work, and drinkers, lovers, hustlers, prisoners and orphans become attractive figures for their vital efforts to keep an individual stance against mundane pressures. The price of nonconformism is recognised, together with the weight of routine, and an elegiac note acknowledges passing time and erased personalities. Shelton Lea's 'characters' are given correct weight in terms of their own milieu's values.

More than most contemporary poets, Lea encapsulates a Rimbaud-like frustration with dull conventions and at the same time urges wonder as a focus. These characteristics are consistent with his association with a Melbourne neo-Surrealist movement on his arrival from Sydney two decades past. The sense of the marvellous appears in various guises in his work, in recognition of a particularly mean character, or the beauty of Balmain women, the fine close-ups of gardens and trees, and in the re-investing of value in well-used words and phrases. In Lea's poetry, "leaves are etched with autumn", "beauty hovers endlessly across the flowers", the writer watches "the elegant penumbra of your smile", and "the broad back of a poem comes waltzing through the door".

In other hands, his vocabulary could be cloying or hackneyed, but Lea adjusts the senses of words with twists, cutting and folding references to fragile and precious materials or qualities with deflating contrasting sketches of 'surface' realities: it's refreshing to encounter:

> words to me are like a passport
> to infinity.
> if i can describe a star
> that is nth. billion miles afar
> as the incandescence
> of your eyes,
> then i am on my way . . .

In the best sense, Lea's poetry is illuminating – incandescent, hallucinatory, revelatory by turns. In "on a conspicuous absence" (not a particularly easy poem at every stage, to my mind) the process of getting at the brightness inherent in things is well illustrated, as Lea probes for the words to describe the state of illumination. The poem "i'm glad you're not an actress" sustains a tidy metaphor, to throw light on the lives of lovers and actresses; while for sustained precision and balance, "for joel" seems to me to be the book's masterpiece.

The collection is a pleasure to read; it reinforces a belief that all the old tricks can be transformed into a moving, vital experience: it does what Surrealism and Zen both aim for, without making much fuss about it at all.

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Home and Abroad

Susan Hosking

Helen Garner: *Postcards from Surfers* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, $5.95).
Morris Lurie: *The Night we ate the Sparrow* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, $6.95).
Julian Croft: *Their Solitary Way* (Angus & Robertson, $12.95).

Helen Garner writes, increasingly, with a fine sense of craft. Her short novel, *The Children's Bach*, was so perfectly spare, such an exquisite integration of observed details and selected incidents, that I, for one, finally closed the book with an audible sigh of satisfaction. Her short story collection, *Postcards from Surfers*, demonstrates further Garner's ability to refine subject matter so that meaning emerges from accumulated detail rather than exhaustive explanation or description. In *Postcards from Surfers* the title story sets the tone for the collection. The postcards, written cryptically to a former lover, are eventually deposited in a rubbish-bin rather than a mail-box and the narrator returns to accept a quiet reality, an ordinary life. But it is Garner's celebration of the ordinary that is so rewarding. The practised ritual of making a sandwich becomes an affirmation of life and a metaphor for continuity.

> He selects a serrated knife from the magnetised holder on the kitchen wall and quickly and skillfully, at the bench, makes himself a thick sandwich. He works with powerful concentration: when the meat flaps off the slice of bread, he rounds it up with a large, dramatic scooping movement and a sympathetic grimace of the lower lip. He picks up the sandwich in two hands, raises it to his mouth and takes a large bite. While he chews he breathes heavily through his nose.

In contrast to the stolid reality of her father, the narrator's former lover is a mere phantom, named but never known. Communication between father and daughter is naturally implied in daily rituals and unspoken words. It is a complex relationship, as indeed are all the 'ordinary' relationships (mother/daughter, aunt/niece, sister/sister) – in one sense vital and still evolving, in another timeless, unchanged, institutional.

Garner does not have to state truths about relationships: they are artfully extracted, from random incidents and conversations. In one story, "All those Bloody Young Catholics", a drunken monologue (or more precisely a one-sided conversation) gives shape to a personality and a past. In another, "The Life of Art", the pragmatic narrator brings memories and impressions of her friend to the reader, as one providing commentary for a show of unsorted slides. The final recollection in this brilliant story strikes a truth close to the heart of contemporary women:

> 'I'm lonely,' said my friend. Tears were running down her cheeks. Her mouth was too low in her face. 'I want a man.'
>
> 'You could have one,' I said.
>
> 'I don't want just any man,' said my friend. 'And I don't want a boy. I want a man who's not going to think my ideas are crazy. I want a man who'll see the part of me that no-one ever sees. I want a man who'll look after me and love me. I want a grown-up.'
>
> I thought, if I could play better, I could turn what she has said into a song.
>
> 'Women like us,' I said to my friend, 'don't have men like that. Why should *you* expect to find a man like that!'
>
> 'Why shouldn't I!' said my friend.
>
> 'Because men won't do those things for women like us. We've done something to ourselves so that men won't do it. Well – there are men who will. But we despise them.'

Typically, Garner does not allow herself or her characters to indulge in futile longings. As in the title story, the myth of the lover is dismissed and reality and true friendship once more embraced with dignity. "My friend stopped crying. I played the ukelele. My friend drank from the cup."

It is an extraordinarily difficult task to produce a collection of consistently good, let alone outstanding, stories. In this respect Helen Garner has done magnificently. Of the eleven stories in the collection only one, "La Chance Existe", strikes me as being unsatisfactory, forced. Garner is at her best, so far, when dealing with the significance within and beyond ordinary, urban, middle-class, contemporary living and relationships. This is her great talent. It remains to be seen whether this is also her limitation.

Morris Lurie's collection, *The Night we ate the Sparrow*, will immediately satisfy a taste for diversity. His characters are to be found inscribed in *Who's Who* and selling typewriters door to door. They are to be found in exile in a foreign country using their pension cheques to feed stray cats and dogs, and in fashionable restaurants paying bills that look like phone numbers. They are men, women, lovers, brothers, sons, slobs, drips, paranoics, playwrights and just ordinary people. And they live in London, in Kenya, in New York, in Paris, in Tangiers, here, there, everywhere and nowhere. And they are crass and tender, funny and vulnerable, ordinary and extraordinary.

The stories are of such consistently high quality that any selection here of individual titles must be arbitrary. In "Kicking On", the irrepressible Charlie, a larger-than-life character from Hong Kong, London, Kuala Lumpur, en route to Brazil, propels his friends through an increasingly drunken afternoon, beginning with a business lunch and ending in an expensive hotel room. The inevitable progression downhill, the loss of individual will and sense of time, and the faint nagging conscience, are brilliantly handled. ("I better phone the missus, I think, tell her where I am. Hell it's seven o'clock ... Must phone the missus! Must go home! ... My watch says it's either one or two o'clock. Whatever, much too late to disturb the missus.") In the end the difference between guilt and bitterness is immaterial. It simply does not matter any more.

While Lurie's comic talent is remarkable, he is seriously concerned with the complexities of human nature and personal relationships. In "Camille Pissarro 1830-1903" two brothers, linked together by cassette equipment at an exhibition in London, uncertain of each other after long years of separation, rediscover a lasting bond, forgiveness, a new consideration. Lurie, like Garner, reinforces traditional values, but his characters often have a hard time discovering or rediscovering these values. In "Kelso's Lady", Kelso, besotted by a young divorcee ("But was she gorgeous? Was she truly gorgeous?"), enrolls in "that curriculum of lies and deception, stolen phonecalls, cherished moments, falsehood and pounding heart, anxiety and joy, that is the regular course of the married man's affair." When his girlfriend is finally sprung ("the bitch, the slut"), Kelso must convince himself that he really wanted the truth, that the affair had to end.

> He bowed his head. The tears fell unimpeded now, fell on his hands, where they lay in his lap.
>
> O.K., said Kelso, O.K. That's enough now. That'll do. Blow your nose. Wipe your face. You don't need all those tears.
>
> Kelso blew, wiped, blew again.
>
> Better? Kelso asked.
>
> Yes, said Kelso.
>
> Good. Now go inside. Go inside to your wife.

The title memoir in *The Night we ate the Sparrow* (first published in Overland) is sheer delight. The narrator, twenty-eight years old, Australian, in London in the swinging sixties, is struck down by "a Biblical affliction, the lowest of the low. A boil." The story follows the painful history of his affliction, to the unsympathetic

doctor ("Buy some cotton wool. Clean up the mess") – to the incredulous friends ("He couldn't believe his luck. 'Nelly' he shouted. 'Did you hear that? Look at the way he's sitting! He's got a boil on the bum!", – to the hospital, crouched in the Volkswagen on all fours – through the horrors of the knife, for it turned out to be no ordinary boil but a pilonoidal sinus (hairy man's disease, also called Jeepdriver's Disease).

The splendid thing about Lurie's memoir is that here, at last, is an Australian writer acknowledging his cosmopolitan aspirations and laughing at himself. With this monumental guffaw, this bursting of the boil, there is a much needed release of pressure. The theme of cosmopolitanism has concerned Australian writers increasingly over the last few years. Writers who strive too hard to be citizens of the world can become or appear pretentious. Lurie is to be thanked for this timely lancing of a suppurating tumor.

Julian Croft has an enviable and deserved reputation as a poet. *Their Solitary Way* is his first novel, described in the promotional blurb as being "written by someone who was bored witless by Australia in the fifties and sixties". But Croft has attempted something far more ambitious than a mere cosmopolitan novel. This is a novel of conflict on several levels: personal, national and international. Central to the novel is the disintegrating marriage of Inge and Raymond. Much of their discontent springs from tension generated by differences in cultural background and outlook. Raymond is Australian, described by his wife as "only interested in cynicism and beer"; Inge is Swiss, coming from a country described by her husband as "the most conservative, almost the richest country in the world". Their private power struggle is enacted against a world background of social and political strife as they travel the globe from troublespot to troublespot.

> Arguments, perhaps even debates, as each tried to get the upper hand in democratic converse. But no one ever won; each side was convinced the other was wrong. He saw himself as the Government; she was the Opposition. She imagined herself as the village Gemeinde; he became the Federal forces in Bern who had locked up her brother Valentine when he refused military service.

One of the most satisfying touches in the novel is the scene of fragile reconciliation (short-lived, as it turns out) set symbolically in the artificial atmosphere of the Palm House in Kew Gardens.

Croft's novel is intelligent, and carefully thought out, but for me it does not work. The tension and symbolism are understood, but the characters do not come to life. The stage overwhelms the players. The tragedy of the individual human situation is lost against such a vast international backdrop, against such significant events. The huge and very important theme (tensions resulting from differences between Australian and European perspectives) defies containment in a slim work of seventy-five pages. Too many issues are raised and left undeveloped. The effect on the reader is something akin to jet lag. I find myself craving some evidence of the ordinary – some insignificant but humanising detail – even the merest hint of a festering pustule.

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Multiplication of Truth

Max Marginson

G.A Wilkes: *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (Sydney University Press, $35.00).

Seven years after the first edition and five years after the familiar Fontana paperback, comes a much revised edition of a landmark in Australian lexicography. By revising about a thousand old entries and adding about a thousand new ones, Professor Wilkes has now presented us with a large book, much the same size as the dictionary of Australian quotations which Stephen Murray-Smith gave to us in 1984. With this new edition, it would seem appropriate to say something of the dictionary's provenance.

In the introduction to the first edition, Wilkes stated, "This dictionary is planned, in a modest way, 'on historical principles'. It seeks to record the history of each word, through examples of usage. The citations are the most important part of the dictionary, as the evidence on which it rests." In the Historical Introduction to the Oxford English Dictionary, it is noted that following "Johnson's systematic use of quotations to illustrate and justify the definitions" it was Charles Richardson, in *A new dictionary of the English language*, who introduced the principle of historical illustration to English lexicography. The first part of his dictionary was published in 1819 and the complete work in 1836–37. In 1857, the Philological Society appointed a deliciously named Unregistered Words Committee which shortly recommended publication of a new English dictionary. This recommendation led in turn to the formation of a New Dictionary Committee which, by 1859, had laid down the principles which were eventually to be followed. The two most significant of these are noted by the editors of the OED as being

- The first requirement of every lexicon is that it should contain every word occurring in the literature of the language it professes to illustrate.
- In the treatment of individual words the historical principle will be uniformly adopted.

The first part of this "New Dictionary on Historical Principles" was printed in 1882 and the final part in 1928. A Supplement and Bibliography was published in 1933, while the second supplement commenced publica-

tion in 1972. It presently encompasses three volumes and has arrived at 'Scythism'. A fourth volume is promised and like the last one will no doubt temporarily impoverish its purchasers.

This potted recapitulation of the history and principles of the OED has a point. When Wilkes' first edition was published, two volumes (A-G, 1972 and H–N, 1978) of the new OED supplement had appeared. Wilkes was then and has remained, in correspondence with the OED editors. There is a clear resonance between the quotations in both dictionaries.

If we now go back eighty years we come across the pioneering work of another professor of English, E.E. Morris in Melbourne, *Austral English: A dictionary of Australasian words, phrases and usages*, 1898. By 1898, the OED had labored on to the letter G. Correspondence with J.A.H. Murray, editor of the OED, had led Morris in the early 1890s to compile his Australian dictionary on historical principles, and he illustrates usage with over four thousand quotations. It is uncertain to what extent Morris was a direct contributor of quotations to the OED, since he is not acknowledged as such, though his book is quoted in the later volumes and is listed in the bibliography. Morris is the clear forerunner of Wilkes, despite his academic isolation from the vulgar.

But the OED ignored vulgar words too, and can certainly be blamed for Victorian prissiness, since, to name only the most obvious case, Francis Grose's *Dictionary of the vulgar tongue* had been through four editions between 1785 and 1811. Its contents should clearly have appeared in a dictionary conforming to the two principles named above – every word in the literature and every word treated historically. The new OED supplement of course attempts to make amends, since it is now accepted once again that even taboo and obscene words can be printed.

Morris labored under difficulties in this regard. As John Currey shows in his 1982 reprint, Morris appears to have been a man of the conventional establishment. As well, and in spite of his frequently discursive comments on many words and phrases, he is bound solidly to printed sources. Very little of the taboo, obscene or merely vulgar appears in print in the Australasian literature of his time and before. The rich vein of vulgar popular colloquialism was not to appear in print until fifty years later.

It must also be said that, though Morris is Wilkes' major forerunner with a dictionary of Australian English based on historical principles, he did not intend it to be a dictionary of the colloquial in the sense that Wilkes does. A major feature of Morris's dictionary is the voluminous account of the names of Australasian plants and animals. In my view this was a justifiable bias, since at that time much of the taxonomy, both popular and systematic, of the natural history of our region was quite unknown in the older cultures.

Wilkes lives at a time which is free from most of these strictures on compilation. It isn't necessary to list plants and animals – a very large literature already does that. This in turn leaves his text much freer and so it becomes much more a dictionary of the colloquial – as indeed its title tells us. In addition, he lives in a time when writers are perhaps even freer of restrictions on what words they may use legally than were those of eighteenth century England. He is able therefore, to refer to a literature which is actually using much of the freedom long accorded private speech. The only major restriction in publication now is that of the libel laws.

But, in spite of these new freedoms, my reading of our literature and listening to our colloquial speech tells me that our writers have still a way to go before they fully reflect oral practice. Whether they should go all the way is another point. Wilkes has had the immense advantage of following Sydney Baker. Baker has put in print a great deal of oral material, not strictly within the purview of a dictionary based, however 'modestly', on historical principles. By definition, what Baker has printed is now in use!

I am glad Wilkes has seen it this way, and that on occasion he abandons the approach altogether and simply states "encountered in conversation" with the date. In the entries for the letters A, B and C, I noted 1938 *acre* (anus), 1937 *Chinese burn* (twisting of wrist skin), 1980 *chuck a heartie* (have a heart attack) and 1956 *crash hot*. These are all first encounters which have subsequent literary reference; I presume Wilkes heard them himself and trusts his notes or memories.

In the new edition there appears to be a lot more of what interested us before, but I have no intention of discussing individual entries. I have reasonable confidence in the scholarship of the author, and am also familiar with the disputes which arise when buffs of the colloquial discuss the 'true' version of rhymes, songs, limericks and sayings. I have no wish to be engaged in such arguments again. Some will dispute shades of meaning, but I have not detected any which arouse my disagreement. The biggest potential for criticism should be of omissions. It is to be hoped that readers of Wilkes's new edition will deluge him with supplemental material – after all, he has not had the comfort of a tribe of comfortably-living, intellectually-active but underemployed 'rural deans' to aid him.

You should be warned, however, that some omissions are deliberate. The new edition has two appendices. One is on rhyming slang, a form of colloquialism which I have always found much too rococo to be interesting. The other is of high significance. It is entitled 'Terms assumed to be Australianisms', and there are by my count 489 entries in it. I wouldn't be surprised if the average literate Australian has a hundred surprises waiting in this list.

Wilkes writes that he "can find no evidence that [these entries] are of Australian origin, or that they have acquired special senses in Australia, or that they have survived here while falling into disuse elsewhere. These are the requirements for the inclusion of a colloquialism in the Dictionary." Maybe. But I think that many will have doubts. I have spent some time in the United Kingdom, and there are many words in this list which I hear

every day in Australia, but have never heard used there except by Australians. "Whacko" for instance. Readers will want to make their own list of disagreements. After all, the fourth (almost an afterthought) criterion for inclusion in the dictionary proper is "items shared with English elsewhere ... which have become part of the Australian ethos". This *cannot* be decided on the basis of what literary quotations on historical principles are available. It can only be decided by folk experience, by tape-recorders and notebooks on the street and in the fields or paddocks. Appendix I poses more problems than it solves but it is bound to give you some starts and perhaps this is what Wilkes intended.

While in critical mood, I should also note another aspect of the book which I believe could be improved. Morris is overly loquacious in his comments on some words (e.g., there are nearly two pages on "kangaroo" before the quotations commence). Wilkes I find altogether too laconic for the most part. The quotations are often extensive, the definitions often minimal. In addition, the important etymological question is treated unevenly. Etymology (in the broad sense) can be particularly intriguing with colloquialisms, since it involves derivations within the one common language. Although there are some good entries, the general impression is one of derivation being sparse and of relying heavily on what is said in the quotations. In other words, I would have liked him to be a bit more chatty, rather in the style of Morris. His reticence is nowhere more apparent than in the preface to the second edition. There was clear room here, even a necessity, for an extensive commentary on the preface to the first edition and an exposition of the problems which the second edition posed. Instead, the second preface is of seven lines, which are entirely devoted to some supplementary thanks. It shouldn't be left to the dust jacket to tell us what changes have been made.

Finally, let me make some comments on "Wilkes" as a lexicographical adjunct. Of course the OED and its supplements are delicious to have, but it doesn't sort well as a workaday dictionary. The late Ian Maxwell once told me to remember that the OED is a dictionary of bad English and that it requires most judicious use.

I have always preferred for everyday use something much more selective. It remains to be seen what the new Shorter OED will be like when it is published, but meanwhile a combination of Collins English Dictionary (the Australian editor of which is ... G.A. Wilkes) and this new Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms makes an elegant and complementary pair. I like to have clear colloquialism and established usage listed separately. It is for this reason (or prejudice) that I have never liked the well publicized *Macquarie Dictionary* ("The National Dictionary") very much. This prejudice, I was interested to discover recently, is shared by the style notes of at least one important metropolitan newspaper. They say, "The Macquarie Dictionary is a good source of reference to peculiarly Australian words and usage. As a general dictionary of English, it often falls down on definitions that are skimpy and arbitrary."

I offer to all authors a quotation from one of the greatest of all lexicographers, H.W. Fowler. In writing a preface to his memorable *Modern English Usage*, this "harmless drudge" has given us one of the most perfectly constructed and useful sentences in the whole of our literature: "I think of it as it should have been, with its prolixities docked, its dullnesses enlivened, its fads eliminated, its truths multiplied."

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On its own Ground

Robert D. FitzGerald

R.H. Morrison: *Poems for an Exhibition* (Andor, 6 Bradfield Street, Burnside S.A., $12).

Throughout his still active writing career R.H. Morrison has tilled a broad field of subject-matters that range from mere bits-and-pieces of observation to built mounds of concrete thought. The word "Exhibition" in the title of this new book thus refers – at least as I see it – not to any special progress or development being put on show, but simply to the poems themselves which the book contains, each as a separate exhibit standing on its own ground, to be read and appreciated on its individual merits. There are here forty-eight of them, few longer than twelve short lines.

It has been put to me that Morrison's poetry has become somewhat neglected. Yet his sixteen or so previous books of verse and verse-translations – certainly those of them that have come into my own hands – are all well worthwhile for reading or study; and the publication of this new book should therefore surely be seen as an interesting literary event. Special notice should be drawn to the advanced style of the departure from contemporary fashion and to the unfolding somewhat of a fashion of its own.

This poet thus can, and frequently does, devise departures in style from regularity and convention, but departure always of kinds demanded, as it were, by the weights and meanings of what is being said. So, though no direct modernist, he does make copious use of vowel-rhymes and inverted metrical effects. Almost any page of this new production can provide examples. One need only open the book at random to find them. Here is a piece called "Guitar":

> You draw your music out of night's gardens
> and give it back to night through silver gates.
> It passes by the fountain on its way,
> and slows between the player's hands and heart.
>
> You take the moonlight from a silent square
> and carry it six steps across a chord;
> and it is memories of long before,
> and it is tone's estate bequeathed to heirs.

Before the dwellers in the square have woken,
night and its moon will give way to the sun.
Day sings between four fingers and the thumb,
rich in its own arpeggios of gold.

Looked at from one angle, that poem is seen as constructively saying just what it has to tell from its situation as an exhibit; then, looked at technically, all sorts of doubts may arise from differing points of view. For instance while I myself enjoy half-rhymes often enough, whether of consonants or vowels, my ear does not really hear them when the last syllable of one word finds its rhyme-partner in the second-last of another. Yet I find it very capably done here, though far from convincingly in some slightly longer pieces like some of this poet's sonnets.

Of Morrison's subject-matters in general one must express astonishment at their quality in view of their quantity: at the choice and range of materials and their assembling – whether as mere short "bits" or as "pieces" spreading out into more complex longer works. For any of them, either way as exhibits, one can only express admiration.

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Queensland: State of Authority

John Knight

Ross Fitzgerald: *From the Dreaming to 1915: A history of Queensland, vol. 1; From 1915 to the Early 1980's: A history of Queensland, vol. 2* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, $19.95 and $25.00).

In a large advertisement in the Courier Mail of 1 November 1985, allegedly sponsored by "2,060 Australian small businesses", the Queensland public was informed that its premier was "Australia's only true leader". He was praised for his support for "private enterprise, the life blood of this nation" and for giving business "the courage to invest, to create more jobs, to expand production". The advertisement attacked "the incentive-crushing socialism of Canberra"; it supported his "anti-discrimination approach" through "laws that stop militant minorities, such as union officials, from discriminating against the entire community through bans, strikes, protests and damage tactics". It urged him to further action: "The men and women of Australian business are with you and look for your lead."

This man is rated most effective premier by the Australian public. Yet he is responsible for the State with the highest rate for bankruptcies and industrial disputes in Australia. Queensland has also the lowest rate for average weekly earnings, overtime, private sector construction and new phone connections. Rather than creating new jobs, Queensland continues to experience high unemployment; nor has it been sucessful thus far in holding old industries or creating the new. Indeed, it has recently been described by my colleague Phil Day as having a "grope and hope" economy.

Unless something very like the notion of 'false consciousness' is granted some validity, this contrast between rhetoric and reality appears incomprehensible. But here it is useful to use Jacoby's metaphor of 'social amnesia', in which a society represses or loses its own past. That memory is here rejected for a set of myths constructed around a false vision of a golden past and a set of related conservative, ethnocentric and Anglo-Australian symbols, including 'our British heritage', 'the Royal Family', 'our traditional Australian way of life', 'Christian standards', 'the flag', 'patriotism', 'the family', 'the Bible' and so on. There is a complementary demonology replete with Canberra socialists, the Bill of Rights, the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, abortion on demand, homosexuality, conservationists, world without end. South of the border. While life remains great in the 'Sunshine State'.

It is a vision which is uncritical, unreflective, acontextual and ahistorical, and largely uncontested.

Against such amnesia Fitzgerald's work stands as a moral and critically reflective counterpoise. As he states in the prologue to volume one, a central theme is "the effect of a particularly European idea of progress upon the land, the flora and fauna, the institutions and the peoples of Queensland". A second and equally central theme comes from Fitzgerald's essentially liberal and intellectual ethos, and his consequent antipathy to an "illiberal intellectual climate". This antipathy extends to a Queensland conservatism which is seen as inarticulate, authoritarian, and lacking that paternalistic concept of 'social responsibility' or those aesthetic and environmental concerns characteristic of a genuinely conservative stance.

Indeed, Fitzgerald sees a continuing authoritarianism and repression rooted in the historical character of the Queensland psyche. Breaches of democracy and civil liberties are shown to characterise this state from its inception. He argues for a continuity between Labor and conservative governments in their handling of unions and strikes, their harsh and punitive legislation against both unions and strikes, their hostility to the left, and their electoral gerrymandering. "Confrontation rather than conciliation and a consistent belief in strong government and maintaining law and order" are presented as central and continuing tenets of the state in Queensland. Equally, the ethos of development and material progress is shown as supporting a continuing demand for social and political stability. In consequence, Fitzgerald claims, moral and intellectual issues have been ignored or down-graded. More properly, there has been a neglect of social and environmental morality, while Protestant and Catholic puritanism have equally supported a narrow and rigid prescription of lifestyle and sexual morality which is still evident in harsh censorship of films, raids on abortion clinics, and attacks on homosexuals and alternative lifestylers.

In this context, Fitzgerald is trenchantly justified in noting "the treachery of intellectuals and tertiary administrators", as witnessed since his publication by the granting by the University of Queensland of an honorary

doctorate to a premier who is arguably as anti-intellectual and as opposed to humanistic values as any leader of the past in Queensland. Understandably, Fitzgerald is less than popular in some academic circles in this state. (And not only in academic circles. The first issue of volume two was pulped and rewritten under threat of action from some who were named therein. And it appears that there is informal discouragement of its acquisition by high school libraries.)

This work is invaluable in showing the historical roots of the current gerrymander in the murky past of the Queensland ALP's rule. It provides a sensitive and sympathetic portrayal of the background to the hostility to landrights (and indeed to Aboriginals and Islanders themselves). It presents an extensive and justifiably partisan account of the State's treatment of its natural resources and environment. Its review of the continuing Queensland record of repression and legislation against civil liberties, dissent, strikes and strikers is excellent and depressing. It provides a valuable (and at times exhausting) account of Queensland's economic development. Equally it is a most useful political history of the state.

It's easy to criticise a book for what it is not, and what it does not do. This work is no exception. Here is no marxist analysis of the shaping of ideology and social practice by economic context. Rather, in many ways (despite its critique of the western doctrine of 'progress') it manifests a clearly liberal view of the world. Nor is it, properly speaking, an adequate social history of Queensland. And despite the wealth of statistics and 'facts' (particularly in volume two) it contains, it is arguably relativistic in assumptions (though not in tone). To some degree its selection of themes and coverage of issues seems arbitrary. The writer's justification appears to be that 'all history is a tale, told from a particular point of view' and his (valid) acknowledgement of an 'inevitable subjectivity' in selection and interpretation of evidence.

But what is strange, given the claim in the prologue to volume two that in addition to "the notion of progress and the attitude to the land and living things that it entailed ... the domination of males ... continued to articulate this materialist notion of progress" (p. xv) and the parallel statement in the epilogue that "women and indigenous peoples are consistently denied positions of power and influence" (p. 633), is the general silence in both volumes on the social, economic and cultural factors underlying this continuing patriarchy. Given the excellent, sympathetic and detailed treatment of Aboriginals and Islanders, and of the Land itself, this is surely inexcusable. Reference to the index of volume one shows no listing for women; in volume two there are nine references. A quick scan of the latter for individual women shows Senator Flo Bjelke-Petersen, Sister Elizabeth Kenny, Rosemary Kyburz, Patience Thoms, Roma [sic] Joyner and a few others. This really isn't good enough for the 1980s, nor for any attempt at social history.

Such criticism aside, the work is invaluable. Events since its publication are clearly developments of what it depicts; there is a continuity of thought and practice which is demonstrably 'Queensland'. Here I include the SEQEB dispute and its industrial and economic consequences (including threatened fines of $50,000 per day for individual strikers, and $250,000 per day for unions involved); the raids on 'abortion factories' and confiscation of their files; the proposed legislation of mandatory life sentences for drug offenders with as little as four marijuana cigarettes; the removal of licences from bars which serve "drug dealers, sexual perverts, or deviants or child molesters"; the proposed removal of the onus of proof from the police and the prosecutors in cases of drugs or child abuse; and the giving of equal time with evolution to creationism in State-school science. Mention could also be made of current moves to cull or remove all large crocodiles to commercial reserves. Or the despoilation of the Daintree National Park by an often untrafficable road which will enable the police to clear out the 'druggies' and 'greenies' who allegedly abuse its inaccessibility. Then there is the continuing religious and social fundamentalism exemplified in the refusal to allow adequate sex education in schools, and the consequent highest ex-nuptial rate of pregnancies of any State. Finally, there is the latest electoral redistribution in which the National Party could hold office on 36 per cent of the vote. 'One vote, one person, one value' has yet to become a significant item on the Queensland political agenda.

Against such events, consider the essentially moral but embittered tone underlying Fitzgerald's work, as exemplified in the following extracts:

> Politically as well as culturally, the absence of a flourishing educated professional class in early Queensland was significant. A corollary of cultural uniformity and anti-intellectualism was a latent authoritarianism uninhibited by a middle-class liberal tradition ...
>
> Above all, materialist values and an untiring quest for prosperity welded members of the white community, be they squatters or townsmen, [sic] into a compact and relatively uniform mass. (Vol. 1, pp.307, 308).
>
> Contrary to popular belief, the governing coalition [1984] does not represent conservative values; conservatism at least implies a paternalist concept of social responsibility and often an environmental or aesthetic concern which isn't at all evident among the Queensland hegemony. Even more than the rest of Australia, Queensland refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of dissent and pluralism. (Vol. 2, pp. 632, 633).
>
> The combination of the treatment of indigenous peoples and the environment, the denial of basic civil liberties, governmental intolerance and denigration of any opposition, and the lack of non-violent avenues for legitimate dissent, are highly explosive ...
>
> To those who in Queensland are still blind to the consequences of political authoritarianism and of pursuing a policy of unfettered economic growth which relies on selling the state to trans-national

corporations without a thought for the future of the land and its peoples one can only say, 'Dance on, dance on for soon will come a time of terrible retribution'.

It seems clear that such a combination of analysis, subjectivity, moral vision, and chronicle of facts and events is needed in Queensland at present. In the words of a South African writer whom Fitzgerald is fond of quoting: in such a society as this, to tell the truth can be a revolutionary act. It is to be hoped, then, that Fitzgerald will bring out a second and updated edition of volume two soon.

John Knight lectures in the sociology of education at the University of Queensland. With Ross Fitzgerald he is a founding member of the Queensland School, a group of academics and others concerned about current illiberal and repressive developments in Queensland.

Superstition, and Whether Weather

Angus McEwan

Nancy Keesing: *Just Look out the Window: Superstitions: odd beliefs and possibility of the truth about the weather and your fortune* (Penguin, $5.95).

Ever since our primeval ancestors first tried to link cause and effect, superstition has run parallel with religion in coping with life's ups and downs.

As befits the official medium of direct communication with our maker (or makers) religion has looked after the heavy issues of birth and death, conscience, morality, guilt and atonement, and its executive trustees have made sure we have paid in one currency or another for our transgressions.

Superstition has provided a convenient and relatively painless second string, a sort of do-it-yourself tool kit of beliefs and nostrums which wards off the misfortunes which would waste the time of a fully certified deity, with possibly counter-productive results.

So even in this secular age when education, science and free speech have eroded theocracy's monopoly of our destiny, superstition survives. These days touching wood is probably more popular than genuflection, besides being quicker. Furthermore, since it is concerned with personal rather than communal issues, superstition is relatively benign. My daily horoscope has not yet issued an exhortation to go out and kill someone. The same cannot be said for some religious creeds.

In her small book, Nancy Keesing has made a diverse but selective collation of superstitious beliefs, tales and folklore. As the title suggests, she includes tales about the weather as part of the melange. The weather, being a subject of universal experience and bewilderment, was (she explains) what first prompted the work, but relying as she has upon responses around Australia to broadcast and published requests, she evidently found it necessary to broaden the range.

Thus we learn not only that in Queensland throwing a frilled lizard into a waterhole will bring on rain (and certainly bad luck for the lizard) but that in Yugoslavia wearing one's underwear inside out avoids being bewitched.

With both examples Nancy Keesing offers no value judgement, but many a husband arriving late home will attest that underwear inside out can bring on a bit more than bewitchment.

Black cats, crossed knives, ladders, mirrors, the moon, numbers, talismans, colors – all get a mention with appropriate anecdotes, plenty of contradictions and the general message that whatever you believe will be correct some of the time.

All this is okay when leavened with a bit of humor, but the book also includes solemn tales about chain letters, sightings, ghostly happenings, warts, and even the Wattle Day League! Wisely excluded are the vast but well-tilled fields of cards, numerology and astrology.

It is perhaps a pity that Nancy Keesing chose to include the weather in her anthology. Even her title alludes to her belief that in weather forecasting personal judgement is as good a guide as one can find. This may be true when compared with quaint folklore such as the sighting of black cockatoos, and the subject of weather is as rich in silly superstitions as any of the others covered. However, in distinction from all of these, there do exist truly sound scientific explanations for some phenomena linked to weather such as a mackerel sky, the behavior of animals or rings around the moon. Although meteorologists do not rely on such tenuous portents, forecasting is by no means a black art. Readers might have hoped to find which of the old saws about the weather have some truth, and why.

Not here, alas, and what we have is really a chronicle of the deep seated human need to explain the inexplicable (at least after the event) and avoid personal responsibility for fortune whenever possible.

Victoria Roberts' whimsical illustrations very perceptively set the tone: "Take with a large grain of salt, and read by the light of the new moon".

Angus McEwan, for some years a meteorological physicist in Aspendale, Victoria, now heads the CSIRO Division of Oceanography in Hobart.

A Fine Flowering

Barbara Giles

Loris Edmond: Selected Poems *(Oxford, $14.95).*

The New Zealander Loris Edmond has written seven books of poetry and a novel in the space of a decade. This selection won the British Commonwealth Prize given by British Airways in 1985.

It is a remarkable tour de force, even more remarkable

when it is remembered that Loris Edmond began to publish at an age when some writers have laid down their pens for good. Living in a remote place with few intellectual contacts, and faced with personal difficulties, her urge to write went underground. It has emerged in this fine poetry, mature in style and substance.

Which of these poems could have been written by a young poet? "Boy", perhaps, and some of the more descriptive pieces, but the poems radiate as a whole a mature experience. They do not, however, admit to age, but to a full life, still packed with ideas, events, people, her main concern the adjustments we continually make in relationships. She can be very plain, in dressing gown and slippers in a "mucky, mild domestication", turned suddenly to bloody encounters by a newspaper paragraph. She can be lyrical, leaping, as in "September"; she does ecstasies well (very hard to do), in "Camping" and "Epiphany".

What will return to the reader again and again, however, is the truth and exactitude of poems which tell of daily living, of human shifts and means, expressed with graceful clarity, with wit and sharp observation. She is not afraid to 'grab' the reader with emotion shared, but she is not 'confessional'. We receive the full strength of feeling only by a kind of osmosis. "I cannot chronicle our love," she says, "nor yet keep silent, I am so entangled in its conjuring nets." The death of a child she refers to obliquely, only once saying flatly, "One of you is dead." The "Wellington Letter", addressed to a "gentle ghost," tells of life, not death, and seems to invoke more than one ghost.

At a time when an endeavor is being made to persuade us of the superiority of the long poem, of the paramount merit of being able to sustain an idea for page upon page, Loris Edmond shows us how effective the short poem can be. Most of the poems in this book are less than a page long, though her "Wellington Letter" shows us how well she can sustain an idea; she has perfected the art of much-in-little. Her 'occasional' poems go far beyond the occasion, as in the last poem in this book, "Pancakes for Breakfast":

It is simply the mist
standing light and quiet
on the morning water

and I too am suddenly clear
having for weeks been embedded
in days ...

but the mist is perfect ...

and I see how each other thing
gathers into its separate self
— the thin grass tufted on bog-colored clay
a raw egg someone has dropped
rolling its small yellow wave
(absorbed as the hen herself, squatting)

yes, the egg is complete
whether broken or whole
as I am
walking with a slow joy over the hill
to buy cream from the early-opening store
to be whipped in the kitchen
and eaten with Barry's pancakes.

Barbara Giles is a poet, reviews for Australian Book Review, *and writes books for children. She was for eight years co-ordinating editor of the magazine* Luna.

Triumphantly Living

Nancy Keesing

Maria Lewitt: *No Snow in December: An Autobiographical Novel* (Heinemann, $16.95).

In 1980 Polish-born Australian Maria Lewitt published *Come Spring,* an "autobiographical novel" whose manuscript had won the Alan Marshall award for 1978. It was a fine, moving and deservedly successful book telling of her girlhood during the German occupation of Poland and of how she, a part Jew, and some of her Jewish relations, contrived to survive. Since then she has published fairly widely (including two books for children) and her compassionate, sensible voice is important in discussions and publications concerning multicultural writers and writing in Australia.

No Snow in December, also sub-titled "an autobiographical novel", is a sequel to *Come Spring* though each book has an independent existence and stands by itself. However, after I finished the new work I felt impelled to re-read *Come Spring* and, in refreshing my memory of it, also discovered how intricately each book reinforces and gains resonance from the other – together they are an inspiring whole. Despite their often grim subject matter they are lively reading, for Irena/Maria, at their centre, is surely one of the most wholly alive of characters in recent literature. She is vital not only because, in the midst of war and the Polish holocaust, she survived, but also because whatever her memories of death, danger and separation, and whatever more everyday problems confront her after the war and her migration to Australia, she continues most triumphantly to live, not as an impossible heroine but as a woman whose fears may be major, but also may be minor, trivial, even groundless, and whose triumphs may be as domestic as painting a room or rejoicing in a baby.

Therefore, when her son Jozio (now called Joe) encounters blatant anti-semitism from a fellow student at Melbourne High her husband Julek (now called Julian) says, "You can't expect the young man to spend his life on gloomy reflections just because one of his school mates is an anti-semite. Even we had our share of joy in the Polish conditions, or have you forgotten? And Irena thinks, "that must be it. If we didn't have resilience, our life would be an endless misery. Hurrah for resilience and the Jewish sense of humor."

No Snow in December opens in 1949 as Irena in her mid twenties, with Julek and Jozio, arrives in Australia. For much of the book the story tells of what is often called "the migrant experience" – difficulties with money, jobs, local ways and customs, misunderstandings and, above all, the frustrations of foreignness of language and pronunciation. Of course no two 'migrant experiences' are alike, any more than are true-life love affairs or experiences in general.

Here it is not necessary to know, and pointless to guess, the precise borderline between autobiography and invention. However one character, Victor, a Polish Jew, becomes centrally important to the novel, and he may be a composite creation. Victor focuses contrasts, especially the ways in which Irena, her husband and most of their friends cope with nostalgia, loss, alienation and adjustment, whereas he is embittered, cynical, destructive of himself, cruel to his wife and unable to come to terms with either the pain or the joy of being a survivor, and alive.

And yet Victor, at least in Irena's pre-war memories of him when she was thirteen and he a few years older, became to her and her friends a charismatic idealist, a sort of hero figure who probably was not as wonderful as he seemed to adoring young girls, but who, on the other hand, was undoubtedly brave, or foolhardy – certainly enterprising.

When Irena meets Victor in Melbourne he has a second wife and baby daughter, but in every way the past dominates him. Irena mentions her new neighbors who are "Latvians or Lithuanians, I was told" and Victor reminds her of "how they behaved during the war. Helping the Germans, taking part in executions, the liquidation of ghettos, guarding concentration camps." But, Irena protests, her new neighbors "are about my age; they couldn't have." "In that case," says Victor "their parents must have." To which Irena opposes her life wish to his death wish, responding "I want to believe they didn't. I can't go on living like this, there must be some sense in life and something better to do than to search for Nazis all the time." Victor is relentless, and though warped by hatred, not wholly unreasonable. He has a negative for each of her positive arguments. She speaks of her freedom in Australia; he argues that our immigration policy owed nothing to "any great compassion for war victims" but "brought us here because they needed us to fill all the perpetually vacant jobs. The hardest and the dirtiest factory work, to build their roads, to extend the sewerage."

Eventually Victor drops out of touch and is almost forgotten until the penultimate chapter when his ill-used wife, Mila, after fifteen years of silence, writes a long letter to Irena from Israel. This powerful technical and emotional tour-de-force draws threads together. Mila is Polish, not Jewish. Her second migration from Australia to Israel was, in many ways, a torture to her. But her story is of devotion and courage and, at last, of a miracle, "Gradually, slowly, a good word here, a kind look, a smile, amidst silence and angry outburst" – and now, at last, "Victor is happy."

I could have chosen other threads to trace – Irena's mother and sister remained in Poland. Her mother kept all the photos sent from Australia "carrying her family in a handbag for a quarter of a century." Irena's children and grandchildren. Her clear-sighted assessments of people and events. *No Snow in December* is too dense a book to summarise adequately.

Nancy Keesing lives and writes in Sydney. Her most recent book is reviewed in this issue.

Writer as Naturalist

Frank Kellaway

Christina Stead: *Ocean of Story: the uncollected stories of Christina Stead,* edited with an afterword by R.G. Geering (Viking, $24.95).

In his "*Afterword*" R.G. Geering writes "*Ocean of Story* brings together for the first time most of the short prose writings that appeared in various places (journals, magazines and newspapers) outside the thirteen volumes of fiction published during her own life, along with other unpublished pieces found among her personal papers after her death."

Though the quality of the pieces varies, and a few are no more than unfinished sketches, there is nothing in this collection which is not lively and interesting.

The arrangement is as follows. Section 1 uses accounts of experiences in Australia before Christina Stead left for England in 1928, though all were written much later. Section 2, called "Apprentice Writer", includes an autobiographical fiction based on her first journey to England, a piece of straight reportage about All Souls' Day in France, a magnificent modern version of a Grimm folk tale and two pieces which derive partly from her experience at home. Section 3 is titled "Pre-war Europe". It contains a strange story about a Jewish socialist who tries to organise workers in a small country town, a tale about schizophrenia, and a third called "The Lost American" about a story-teller who sells out to the Nazis for pernod. Section 4 contains stories set in New York. There are seven solid examples of naturalistic fiction of great power and variety including "U.N.O. 1945", the first chapter of a novel, *I'm Dying Laughing*, about the McCarthy years, which has still to be published. Section 5, "Post-war Europe", again contains seven stories of a similar quality with the exception "Yack Yack", a tale about a dog which was extracted from or grafted into *The Captain's House* almost word for word. Section 6, "England", is all naturalistic fiction with the exception of "1954 Days of the Roomers", which is reportage written in 1975 to commemorate the founding of Overland in 1954. Section 7 is called "Biographical and Autobiographical". "A Waker and Dreamer" is about her father, David Stead. This piece also first appeared in Overland. It is as Geering says, "a clear-eyed and affectionate" portrait. He goes on, "it should be compulsory reading for . . . all those simplifiers of that masterpiece *The Man who Loved Children*

who stick labels like male chauvanist or political fascist on Sam Pollit, reducing a richly complex novel to the level of an exposure." "A Writer's Friends" also appears here and gives a very interesting account of people who helped her. "Les Amoureux", which has a strong story element, is about her life with her husband, William Blake. The title has a double reference. The remaining three pieces are about coming back to Australia, about women's intuition and a short satirical play about the obsession many people have with how well a book sold.

This arrangement by place rather than by the order in which the pieces were written follows the pattern of Christina Stead's life. She has often been criticised by enthusiastic nationalists like Miles Franklin for living out of Australia for so much of her life. Speaking of her relationship with her husband she says, "We never thought of having a home: home was where the other was." It is a simple, moving statement; she feels no need whatever to defend herself. Certainly this life led in many different countries increased her knowledge and range of subject matter.

The placing of the more directly autobiographical pieces at the beginning and the end of the book gives a satisfying shape to the collection. It is interesting to compare the more direct account of her friend Eric from Baltimore in "A Writer's Friends" with the character of Ben Cullen created in her story "Lost American". Which has the stronger sense of actuality? I believe the comparison shows the remarkable objectivity of her fiction. The other interesting comparison is between "About the House" and "Uncle Morgan at the Nats" with "A Waker and Dreamer". They appear to have their origins in the same area of experience, but in the first two the emphasis is clearly fictional, though one would be hard put to it to choose which of the three gives the strongest illusion of reality.

Ocean of Story is a book for Stead scholars in that it contains a number of pieces which are sketches for her important works of fiction. "About the House", already mentioned, is a preliminary sketch for her most famous novel, *The Man who Loved Children*, and "Uncle Morgan at the Nats", which Geering suggests may have been written later, is also closely related to that novel. The notion of lovers who are mirror images of one another is used in an interesting story, "A Harmless Affair". A similar triangle is explored in the novel *For Love Alone*, and the mirror concept crops up in both *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *Cotter's England*.

The volume will also serve as an introduction for many to the work of a fascinating writer. Not only does it show her great versatility, but the autobiographical material helps to illuminate the fictional stories in it. As well as the brief, scholarly account by her most discerning critic, it contains many of her own statements of her attitudes and practices.

The first words of the book tell where the title comes from. "I love *Ocean of Story*, the name of an Indian treasury of story; that is the way I think of the short story and what is part of it, the sketch, anecdote, jokes, cunning, philosophical, biting, legends and fragments. Where do they come from? Who invents them? Everyone perhaps." She goes on to say, "I was born into the ocean of story" and tells how her father, a young naturalist, used to tell her stories after her mother's death about his specimens which came from "the oceans around us and from ... Indonesia, China, Japan." He also told her tales of the outback, of the Aboriginals, of the land and of Captain Cook. It was this story-telling she believes which formed her particular cast of mind: "An interest in men and nature, a feeling that all were equal, the extinct monster, the coral insect, the black man and us." This profound and far-reaching point of view was also held by another great woman writer, Emily Dickinson, who wrote,

> A toad can die of light!
> Death is the common right
> Of toads and men,
> Of earl and midge
> The privilege.
> Why swagger then?
> The gnat's supremacy
> Is large as thine.

In Christina Stead's case it was one of the attitudes which led to that unusual degree of objectivity in her writing I have mentioned. "She used to say," writes Geering, "that she was a naturalist like her father," and this is perhaps the most important quality of her work. It is not at all that she is without moral or political points of view, but she never preaches. She observes and reports; people condemn themselves by what they say. "A Little Demon", "A Household", "A Routine" are splendid examples of this characteristic, which strikes us again and again. The irony is there but it is never contrived and hardly ever comes through comment; it always arises from what people do and say quite naturally. I think the closest she ever comes to comment is at the end of "Lost American" (Ben Cullen who collaborated with the Nazis) when the narrator says, "The moral which we drew was that sensualists should never mix in politics, though it was for the absinthe that he did it." A strange conclusion, almost an excuse. But this objectivity, this naturalist's eye, in no way inhibits imagination; but if any reader still doubts it let him read that splendid modern folk story here " 'O if I Could but Shiver'! "

Christina Stead was remarkably independent both as a writer and as a person. When other Australian novelists were writing about the country she was writing about the city. She ignored the strong nationalism fashionable in Australia to live and write overseas. She wrote, she said, simply because she was able to, and most of her life she had very little to do with the literary world. She was never hungry for fame, never wrote for money or aimed at writing a best-seller. This volume shows her powers vividly and gives a splendid impression of the sort of person and the sort of artist she was.

The poet and novelist Frank Kellaway lives at Tubbut, Victoria.

Three New Poets, Two New Presses

Graham Rowlands

Vicki Raymond: *Holiday Girls* (Twelvetrees Publishing Company, P.O. Box 109, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, $9.95).
Susan Schwartz: *The Unborn Child Speaks to the Sea* (Abalone Press, P.O. Box 202, Cheltenham, V. 3192, $7).
Jennie Fraine: *The Cast Changes* (Abalone Press, $7).

Vicki Raymond's first poetry collection, *Holiday Girls*, is a delight. She varies her tones across the range of her well-made, restrained pieces. And the range is impressive – witty angles to people and places, more serious observations and statements, environmental protests and almost-lyrics. Given this quality, it's easy to overlook some banality and slightness. The poet's unwillingness to let herself go, however, is a problem. And a paradox.

She opens with wit, puns, irony, insight and a sense of the ridiculous. Girls who will die on a holiday wonder:

> is that a hand of bones stretched out
> to take the ticket? Too late to look now.

Bathers off the Kentish coast are "preposterously swimming back and forth". The poet tells the reader not to talk about childhood, but to concentrate on the present. Peter Pan is addressed:

> Look at it this way, Peter:
> you are about to start
> a whole new career as a corpse.

An over-forty model positively enjoys her continuing work. A poem that's pro-people but anti-People has an ironic ending. Indeed, Raymond specializes in reversals of last words and lines.

The "Franklin River Poems" are the most impressive of her overtly serious poems. They're full of protest sentiment; not sentimentality. To write political art she doesn't need to change her poetic *structures*. All she needs is a slight change to the virtually seamless web of her *language*. Most unusual. Consider "Shouting":

> It is the voice that has shouted
> itself out against injustice
> that sings the sweetest,
> whispers the gentlest.

There's a distinction between an *intentional* almost-lyric and a lyric that doesn't quite work. Raymond has two poems about relationships where she discards her usual poetic perspectives. In one she wishes that, if she'd had children, they should have been like certain known children. In the other poem she farewells an older, newly-married couple. Although the poet's perspective is atypical here, unfortunately the language remains the same – too distanced for attempted lyrics. Paradoxically, however, with another of her slight tilts of language, Raymond can write the superb "Boveney Church":

> If I should ever forget
> myself so far as to marry,
> and in church too, it might
> well be a church like this one:
>
> so suited to departures
> into regions of mist, so flint-faced
> in promising so little
> and expecting even less.

All the successful poems in Susan Schwartz's first poetry collection, *The Unborn Child Speaks to the Sea*, are deceptively simple – whether lyrics, portraits or performance poetry.

Her poem to daughter, poem to foetus and poem to son sequence is a genuine celebration. Joyful without cuteness or sentimentality. Innocent without naivity. After all, there are murderous cats, dismembered flowers, a girlchild imitating an ape, an initially unwanted second pregnancy, a foetus as voyeur and two births – the imagined and then the actual – followed by only 'pretend' connection between mother and son. These poems use plain language, well-controlled rhythms and apt (if sparse) visual images. The book's title poem is outstanding and the short "First I bore a daughter" almost as good:

> First I bore a daughter
> she was cloned from me;
> now a boy has come –
> immediately other.
>
> My son
>
> place the word on my tongue
> taste it.

Several portraits are memorable. Schwartz observes the observing gynaecologist and distances herself from a cameraman dying as he continues to film. She notes the closeness and otherness of her own reflection, feeling the same way about her daughter and *her* reflection. She attacks male patronage of women writers. Her sisterhood with Sylvia Plath is intriguing, given that Plath didn't like having children – in her poems, anyway. Schwartz does.

Like Raymond, Schwartz sees no conflict between writing poetry for the page and performance poetry. By contrast with Raymond, however, her oral poems differ markedly from her other poems in structure, perspective and language. Schwartz combines repetition with insistent rhythms. "Wolves" vocalizes children's love of fearing wolves. "Voting for Ronnie" means the satirical opposite of what it says. "Eyes" lists varieties of eyes "for seeing/or not".

> watery eyes black eyes
> blackened eyes
> eyes that lick their lips
> ogling goggling gloating eyes
> eyes under glass
> third eyes absurd eyes
> reptilian eyes

shrinking sunken squinny eyes
for seeing

or not.

Unfortunately, Schwartz's collection contains its share of trite and/or slight poems. Perhaps that's the price to be paid for accessibility.

Jennie Fraine's first poetry collection, *The Cast Changes,* isn't successful *as a book*. However, it contains six poems of outstanding quality: "Impediment", "Separation", "Mt Kilimanjaro", "The Cast Changes", "New Approach" and "Learning", listed in their Contents order. If the reader starts with these he/she *will* read the others – which mightn't be the case if he/she begins at the beginning.

All six poems are about relationships. Consider them in their degrees of complexity. "New Approach" is stylish and possibly lighter than the others. Love is a black dog. Instead of using will-power against it, the poet bit it. The "pup" returns. She throws a stick. How? Where? The poet doesn't say. "Learning" is a social-realist coverage of early female adolescence. Mother has problems with daughter in whom father shows an over-fatherly interest. The girl spends more time with her peers, burning cigarettes through True Love heroines' paper eyes. "Mt Kilimanjaro" is a painful poem for any male who's suffered impotence with one woman because of another *and* any male who's suffered impotence because of the demands of a nonsexual challenge. Here the man's second woman is met at 12,000 feet and the mountain is the challenge. Unfortunately for the first woman, the man "mounts" it successfully. A chastening poem.

In "The Woodcutter" (in "The Cast Changes") the man-woman relationship is evoked via vivid landscape:

Who, this time, casts the spell
on earth and water and air?
Who stirs the fire? We who
feed it? The wind
in this wet, wide-awake world
is weighted, earthbound. The waves
roll heavy
and curl over like dug-in toes.

In "The Fisherman" (in "The Cast Changes") the view is via dope to landscape/dreamscape and via these to the relationship. There's insufficient space to do justice to the complexity of the other two poems. The 'you' of "Impediment" is a man, a snake, the poet herself *and* the possibility for suicide in the snake/rope. The imagery of "Separation" is even denser and more elusive – although the subject relates to "Impediment". Fraine addresses herself, ending:

Hold the knot in your throat.
Now, untie
(or cut) that.

To untie *or* cut.

Unfortunately, the collection contains too many slight, unrealized and awkward poems – particularly in the first section. Tougher editing would have omitted inferior work. Still tougher editing would have explained the need for a larger Acknowledgements. Really tough editing would have made the poet wait. It would be worth waiting a decade to read fifty poems as good as the above six.

The poet and critic Graham Rowlands lives in Adelaide.

New South Wales in 1885

P.G. Edwards

K.S. Inglis: *The Rehearsal: Australians at war in the Sudan 1885* (Rigby, $19.95).

In recent years Professor K.S. Inglis of the Australian National University has been delighting his readers and listeners with works on such varied topics as celebrations in colonial Australia, the impact of the telegraph between Britain and Australia, the design of war memorials, Australia's military traditions, and the origins of the cartoon character "the Little Boy at Manly". He has also stirred the historical profession by suggesting that one of the major histories of Australia being prepared for the bicentenary should adopt the so-called 'slice' approach. Instead of adopting the normal chronological narrative, the history with which he is associated will look in detail at particular years, jumping over the intervening periods. (Perhaps, in deference to modern technology, one might call it a 'freeze-frame' approach.)

All these apparently disparate elements are brought together neatly and skilfully in this book. The sub-title is perhaps a little misleading. It is not really about "Australians at war in the Sudan" in 1885, for there is little to say about the Sudan as an episode in military history. The British Empire was outraged to learn that one of its heroes, General Charles Gordon, has been killed in Khartoum by the forces of the Mahdi. The acting Premier of New South Wales, W.B. Dalley, offered a contingent of infantry and artillery to join the imperial force sent to avenge Gordon's death. They saw virtually no action, apart from a minor skirmish in which three were wounded. The only deaths came from illness (including one soldier who caught a fatal cold at the rain-drenched reception on the return to Sydney).

All this is but the centrepiece of what Inglis offers his readers. The book is in fact not a military history, but a superb example of social history *a la* Inglis. By studying in detail the events (and non-events) of one year, from the decision to offer the contingent to its return and aftermath, he gives a marvellously rich account of colonial New South Wales a century ago. He conveys the texture of the society as it was understood at the time, with its divisions between native-born and immigrant, between Roman Catholic and Orangeman. Inglis enjoys ironies, such as the fact that a contingent offered by a Catholic politician to prove the imperial loyalty of his co-religionists nevertheless included in its number the

'General Gordon Loyal Orange Lodge'. He also picks up the threads which link the events of 1885 with much wider themes in Australian history. A nineteen-year-old John Monash, for example, contemplating a possible Victorian contingent (which did not eventuate), speculated that the returned troops would be treated as heroes. In 1894 Robert Gordon Menzies was among the babies christened in honor of the fallen general.

The book is richly illustrated, so much so that some may be tempted to regard it as a light-weight picture book rather than as a scholarly work. In fact Inglis's use of illustrations is as important and as subtle as his use of words. His discussion of the way in which the "Little Boy at Manly" became almost a national symbol depends as much on the cartoons he reproduces as on his text. It is appropriate to note that, among the publication details at the front of the book, acknowledgements are given to the project co-ordinator, managing editor, designer and production manager. They deserve their credits. Perhaps if it were customary similarly to acknowledge editors and designers, the standard of book production in Australia would be improved.

This is not to say that the appearance of the work is faultless. The current vogue for eliminating capital letters is surely taken too far when institutions such as the Royal Navy, the Royal Engineers and the War Office are all presented in lower case.

The Sudan contingent was the first of the expeditionary forces that Australian governments, colonial and national, despatched to fight overseas for imperial rather than strictly national interests. By his title, Inglis implies that this episode was a rehearsal for both the South African War and the Great War. He also cites the dissenters of 1885, led by the redoubtable Sir Henry Parkes, as the forerunners of the Anti-War League of 1900, the anti-conscriptionists of 1916-17 and the opponents of Australian involvement in Vietnam. These are themes that Inglis adumbrates in his last paragraph but does not develop. The similarities should not be exaggerated. For instance, as Inglis notes, opposition to the despatch of the contingent was "individual and sporadic", a long way from the organised dissent of twentieth-century wars.

Like anyone who is extremely good at an art or craft, Inglis makes his distinctive style of social history look easy. It is not: anyone who tries to imitate his technique will run many risks, from antiquarianism to sheer irrelevance. Let us hope that the bicentenary history which he is editing will be as successful as this book. In the meantime we can be grateful for what may justly be called a jewel of a book – small, valuable, brightly colored, coruscating, and possessing a hard cutting edge.

Peter Edwards is the official historian of Australia's involvement in the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War, based at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. His most recent book was Prime Ministers and Diplomats: The Making of Australian Foreign Policy 1901-1949.

Labour History

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