

# overland

FEATURES  
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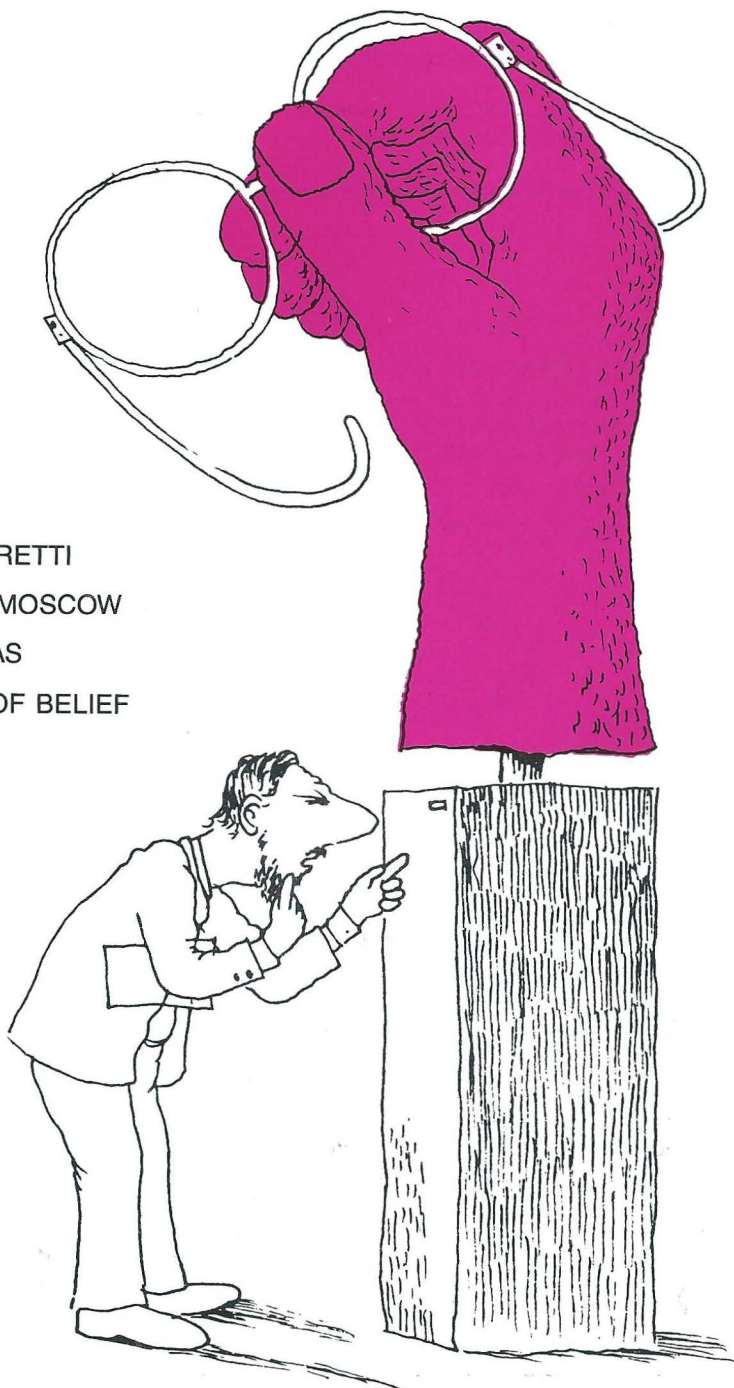
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KEVIN HART TRANSLATES UNGARETTI

ROY MEDVEDEV: LETTER FROM MOSCOW

JACK LINDSAY ON DYLAN THOMAS

JOHN FRIEDMANN: THE CRISIS OF BELIEF

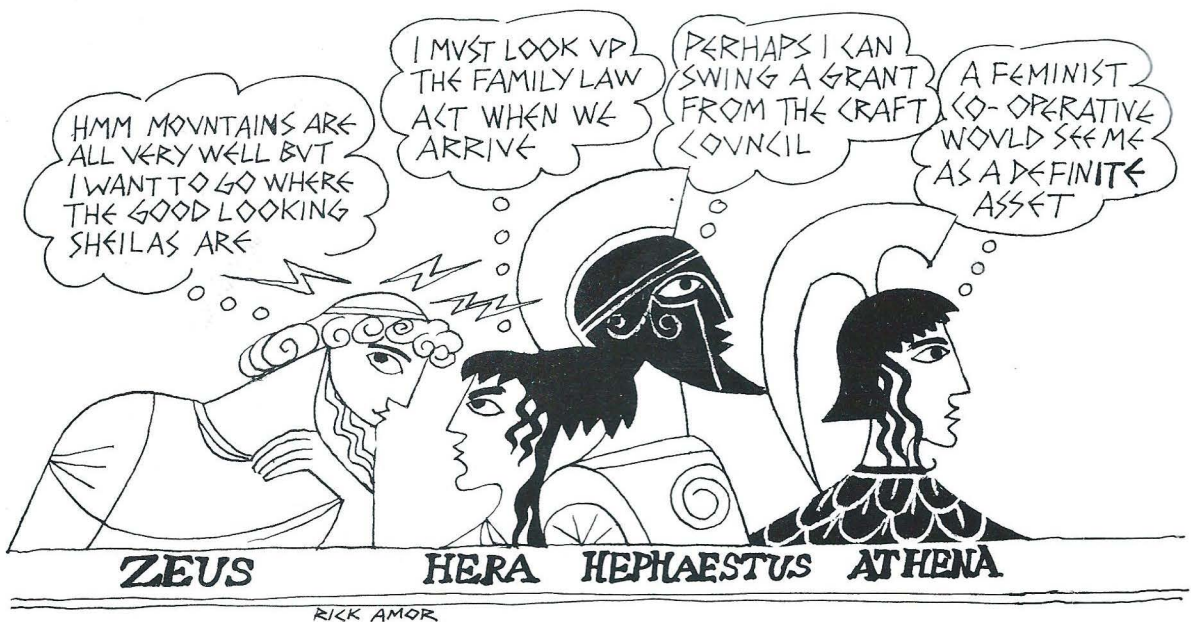


## Overland Competition

Parnassus was the mountain in central Greece sacred to Dionysus, Apollo and the Muses. Delphi is on its slopes. Owing to increasing environmental pollution in the northern hemisphere, alluded to nearly a century ago by Joseph Furphy ("the microbe-laden air of Europe"), the Gods and Muses have decided to emigrate to Australia, encouraged by our multicultural policies. They are looking for a site, a job-description, new names. Provide them with a brief working-paper to make their translation to the south as trouble-free as possible. Only an extract from such a briefing paper is required.

Usual prizes: A copy of *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* or of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*. Entries by 5 November.

The report on the last competition is on page 37.



## floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Our printer's bill for issue 102 was \$6370, and for issue 103 it was \$7207. On the latter our printers told us they made a profit of \$250, and we believe them. But ... a thousand dollars increase in cost over a three-month period! We are making frantic efforts to contain these galloping increases in costs, but you can see why we need your help. Total \$996.85 and many thanks to: \$200, V.L.; \$191.85, I.M. Estate; \$50, N.K.; \$34, G.T., H.S.; \$24, J.C.; \$20, O.P., R.C.; \$14, S.McC., C.H., M.D., I.P., J.D., D.P., D.O'H.; \$12, C.G.; \$10, A.W., J.McK.; \$9, M.S., G.B., M.D., J.McG., F.B., P.F., M.F., B.B., D.A., P.R., V.C., J.R.; \$8, J.P., R.C., D.J.; \$5, A.B., A.McG.; \$4, P.S., M.S., J.A., J.C., J.W., M.C., M.E., J.L., J.P., H.L., A.H., C.B., G.M., M.N., G.L., S.T., J.L., S.C., R.G., J.R., G.M., R.A., D.McN., M.L., M.M., D.W., A.P., D.D., G.M., J.E., W.K., J.B., M.G., G.S.; \$3, H.H.; \$2, E.Q., R.D., F.C., D.W., J.A., P.H..



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# overland

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September 1986

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ANN GRANAT

## Twilight Hours

"Have you been rushing? You sound out of breath?"

Margaret's calm voice washes over me on the telephone, without cooling. I want to smash the receiver down, I want to scream, I want to splatter terrible words into Margaret's well-manicured universe.

Instead, I mutter something about the heat and close my eyes. I imagine Margaret in this twilight hour in her large, cool house, a gin-and-tonic in hand. Her children fed and pyjamaed, her dinner-table prepared, in anticipation of Robert, husband and father. He is on his way, a modern messiah, manoeuvring the Volvo through the city traffic.

I am being unfair – it's jealousy. I am jealous of Margaret and Robert, jealous of their lives. They have order and control, the best of all possible worlds.

I could not imagine Margaret ever losing control. Her ancestors, solid Anglo-Saxons, carefully guard her against any untoward show of emotions. Unlike me, she has no melancholy middle-European ghost in her cupboard. My latest one, an ancient Austro-Hungarian aunt, quite recently jumped off a high baroque building in Vienna. For the occasion she wore a red silk kimono from the Thirties, with a large embroidered gold butterfly on the back.

I don't ever confide in Margaret, I don't unburden. From our first meeting at university, fifteen years ago, she pegged the boundaries of our friendship. We walk in pleasant meadows, but never venture into the hot, arid lands beyond.

The best she can do for me under the circumstances is another dinner-party invitation. The conversation will be light, the food Provençal. "Don't forget, drinks at seven."

I am touched that she doesn't ask me to bring a partner. Being an unmatched guest, the odd number out, will surely spoil the symmetry of an otherwise perfect dinner table.

A gift of loyalty I hope to take with grace.

The twilight hours have almost passed. For us, they are the worst. Things change in the twilight hours. The house is full of shapes out of control. Shadows extend

darkly. They threaten. They will swallow us if we let them.

Now that the evening has come I turn on all the lamps. Yellows, saffrons, reds – the small house is ablaze.

A strip of gold shows under his door, but there is no sound – my son locks himself into his room straight after dinner. He can barely wait to leave the kitchen table, where we sit opposite each other. He says nothing while we eat. He doesn't look at me. He swallows his food quickly without any show of pleasure. His face is guarded, locked against me. "How was school today?" I ask. He doesn't answer.

I keep up a false monologue, words burn my throat as they surface. Aimlessly, like ashes, they scatter and fall. Green rattan mats on the table, red roses in a vase, roast chicken with all the trimmings. These are my offerings to him, my penance.

At home he spends most of his time in his room with his cats. He has collected four since we came to live here, six months ago.

The sleek black Tom reminds me of Mac, the cat we used to have in the other house. This one has the same self-assured walk, the same smooth-soft coat, unblinking green eyes that go right through you into an invisible world beyond. When we left, Mac was twelve, the same age as my son, but ancient in cat-years. Too set in his territorial ways, he violently resisted our every attempt to take him with us. In the end he had to be put down.

The others are two tabby females, sisters from the same litter, and a ginger male in constant competition with the black. My son brought them home one by one, in spite of all my appeals and threats. He has given them names, but he won't tell me what they are.

My son is usually well home before me. He rides his bike from the local high school, just a few streets away.

The school where I teach is on the other side of Melbourne, in one of the western suburbs. My students are wary teenagers with bristly, multicolored hair and bad teeth. Restlessly they bide their time. They smash



windows and smear graffiti on walls. Most come from broken homes and have themselves been broken a long time ago. I was lucky to get the job in the first place – I had not taught for more than twelve years, but my qualifications were still all right.

For English I teach them survival skills, though they would rather be watching videos. This week we saw two – on werewolves. They loved the second one best because of all the blood and gore. It kept them orderly and calm.

My grandmother believed in werewolves. She even knew one once. I used to sit petrified on her wide black-skirted lap when she talked about it.

There was a man who lived in her village when she was a young girl. A farmer, an ordinary decent fellow, he ‘turned’ one night without warning, when the moon was at its most fearsome, its fullest. He howled so horribly that everyone in the village bolted their doors and put their lights out. My grandmother just managed to catch a glimpse of him through a crack in the door. He was a horrible sight: wild hair, fangs, red-hot bulging eyes and all. His wife, the fool that she was, let him in. “And what do you think he did?” my grandmother would ask, while I shivered. “He tore her into pieces, limb by limb. Then he disappeared. No one ever saw him again.”

No full moon for me. I ‘turn’ in the twilight hours, surely a time more appropriate to life in the suburbs.

Driving home from work this afternoon I was full of good intentions. In spite of the heat I felt almost serene.

I stopped to get some ice-cream, his favorite, the layered kind with the chocolate in the middle.

We would go to the beach, I decided – it’s only a few minutes by car. He has loved the sea ever since he was a toddler. He can swim way out into the deep now.

Last summer we went to the beach a lot. The three of us. On Sundays we would take a picnic lunch: fresh fruit, orange juice, sandwiches carefully wrapped in foil, and a bottle of champagne. Sometimes we would stay all afternoon. In this world of soft sand and ultramarine sky, my husband and I drank champagne. When we playfully clinked our glasses I thought we were celebrating life. I didn’t suspect we were sealing my betrayal.

I arrived home around six. The twilight hours had already begun. The day had paled from the heat, leaving behind a dull, discolored image of itself. Sprinklers hummed rhythmically on front lawns, cars pulled into driveways. Husbands returned home from work, families prepared for the evening. Sheltered by rituals of habit, they were unaware of shadows growing.

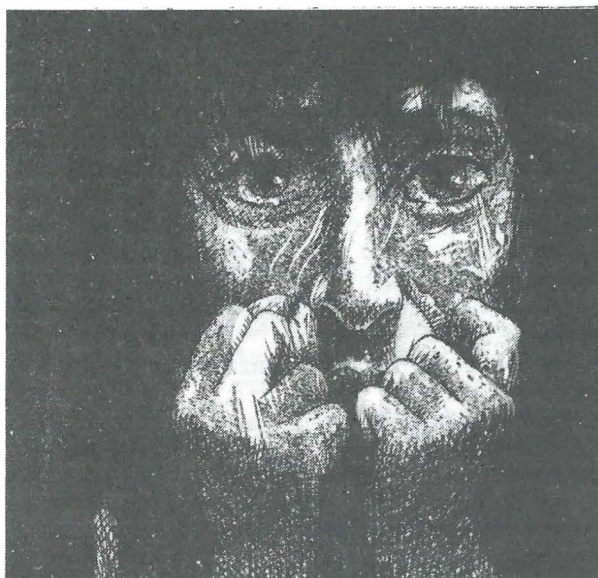
There was no sign of his bike. When I unlocked the front door, two of the cats dashed out from inside, the ginger chasing the black. They jumped across the side fence and disappeared. The two tabbies were asleep,

decorously curled up on my bed. My bedroom curtain was in tatters on one side, the scattered pink shreds glinting in the sunlight.

The house was filled with a pungent smell. He had locked the cats in again this morning. They had been trapped inside the house all day. His clothes were thrown all over the loungeroom, broken glass and cornflakes littered the kitchen floor, dirty dishes everywhere.

A trivial situation. Most kids are untidy; they don’t care, they easily forget.

Yet I stood in the kitchen, crying. I couldn’t stop the tears. They weren’t mine. They belonged to the other – to the one who lost control. Rough fingers pushed her forehead from inside, any minute her head would explode. She rushed to the bathroom for



painkillers, tore at the tin foil. She scooped water into her hands, gulped it down, almost choking. The tablets scraped her throat like stale crumbs of toast. She felt dizzy, nauseated, her hands wouldn’t stop shaking. She wanted to run, but the house trapped her inside. She ran from room to room, pushing up windows, throwing doors open. The hot, dry wind beat through, the old weatherboards rattled and creaked.

In a frenzy she tried to tidy up, getting rid of the glass fragments, the dirty clothes, the mess on the carpet. But it was useless. She couldn’t get rid of the fear, the dreadful anticipation.

She knew she was running out of time, the shadows were dangerously close. Waiting. She had to put the house in order, restore it to peace, before the shadows arrived.

Full of familiar objects from the past, illusions of another life, the house was one solid thing. It had to be kept whole, no matter what.

Her son came home. She heard him whistle for the cats, she could see him now in the half-light of the doorway: a tall, gawky boy with curly, dark, untidy



hair, carrying the black cat in his arms. The other cats pranced around him, rubbing against his legs in ecstasy.

He went past her without a word, his shoes leaving soggy, brown imprints on the carpet. "Look what you have done!" she screamed.

He ignored her and walked towards the kitchen with the cats in tow. She ran after him, barring his way, but he pushed past. Humming an insolent pop tune, he placed the black cat carefully on the kitchen bench and opened the fridge. He began to rummage inside it.

The pressure in her head exploded. Blinding red spots danced in circles, she couldn't blink them away. Her heart attacked her rib-cage like some trapped thing within. She recognised the howling sounds that came from her throat. They belonged to a wild beast.

She seized her son by the shoulders, ripping into his skin with her fingernails. She could feel his blood in her hands. She pushed him against the hard metal of the fridge, hitting him across the face, pulling at his hair, clawing into his chest. It went on and on, she couldn't stop herself. She couldn't see his face from the shadows that collected all around. His body felt limp, it offered no resistance. Suddenly she became aware of a shrill noise breaking through. It came from somewhere close. The phone. Releasing her son, she picked up the receiver.

"Have you been rushing? You sound out of breath." Margaret asked.

The twilight hours were almost over.

Tonight is Margaret's dinner party. I am alone, getting ready. He has gone. His father suddenly remembered him and claimed him for the weekend. He waited for his father all morning, standing outside with his overnight bag. I heard the car pull up and watched from behind the curtain. I saw my husband for a minute. He was suntanned and looked better than I had hoped.

She was with him in the car, but I couldn't see much of her. When I believed her to be my friend I thought her very beautiful. Large green eyes, enigmatic mouth, soft relaxed body. . . She is the sort of woman men want to look after. But underneath, like a cat, she is tough, shrewd and self-reliant.

The dress I am wearing tonight is of cool black silk. Sleeveless, with a large grey bird applied on the front.

The bird is in flight, wings extended, and gleaming silver eyes. I hope wearing a dress like that will give me confidence. At least it's a conversation piece.

I have driven only a couple of blocks when I hear a noise from the back of the car. It's the black cat. He must have climbed into the car through the open window and gone to sleep. He is a young cat, not yet unsettled by change; he seems to be enjoying this unexpected ride. Now he has nestled himself into the passenger seat, purring, yawning, licking his paws.

I could still turn back and drop him home, it isn't too late. The twilight hours are just beginning. But I keep on driving towards Toorak. Soon the street-lights illuminate high fences. Massive houses smirk behind landscaped gardens.

Everything feels solid here, permanently placed.

I know what I must do. "He'll make a lovely pet," I say to myself as I drive around to select a house. The white one with the balcony looks as if it might have children in it. The street is a cul-de-sac; there's no one around. I stop the car in front of the white house, open the passenger door, push the cat out and slam the door. I drive off quickly, without looking back. The radio is playing loudly. I try not to think.

I reach the main road; only a few more minutes to Margaret's place. The traffic is heavy here, people are impatiently tooting car-horns.

I stop for a red light. At a petrol station on my left I notice a man in a grey suit. He is standing there by himself, brief-case in hand, his expression preoccupied. His sand-colored hair is short and he's got one of those round, reliable faces. Suddenly, he looks up. He is waving at me, shouting something. He is running towards my car. I lean across and open the window.

"Don't look now!" he says. "Just open your passenger door for a second and drive on. There's a dead cat caught by the tail under your door."

I do what he says; I am numb with the horror of it. Yet, there is a kind of release.

I accelerate hard, I fly through the quiet Toorak streets. I long for Margaret, for lights, for small conversations, laughter.

Robert opens the door. "Come in. You look fantastic, what a dress!" Everyone else is already there; I am last. We drink, we talk, we laugh.

Next morning early, I hose the blood off the car.

JOHN FRIEDMANN

## The Crisis of Belief

The Vienna I knew as a child seemed to me to be an immense city; it was, as we learned from school, a *Mil-lionenstadt*. And what a splendid city it was, filled with palaces and parks, ancient cathedrals and stately man-sions. As a boy, I experienced the city as if it had al-ways been there, splendid even in its origins on the out-er perimeter of the Roman empire. I was still spared the terrible awareness of historicity, the fleeting nature of human existence. Only eight years before my birth, Austria had been reduced to a tiny Alpine republic, and many of the older generation had seen their life plans shattered at Versailles. Mourning their lost Empire of the East, they kept a sorrowful company with fading memories of *Felix Austria*.

My political initiation came when I was only seven years old. One early morning in February 1934, I woke to the boom of cannon fire which, father told me, was aimed at a group of armed workers who had barri-caded themselves inside the Karl Marx Hof, the most famous of Vienna's many housing projects. Some of father's closest friends had been implicated in the wor-kers' uprising against the fascist state, and when he visited them in *Konzentrationslager* surrounded by barbed wire on the outskirts of Vienna, I went along and stared and stared at these familiar friends who had visited our apartment so often and who were now in prison for a crime I did not comprehend.

That summer, I experienced another shock: Nazi as-sassins had shot the Austrian chancellor Dollfuss in cold blood. The attempted coup failed. But the dimin-utive Dollfuss was a martyr only to some. Father's friends remember him as a fledgling dictator whose private army of storm-troopers had massacred Vien-nese workers only a few months earlier. In 1934, life for a seven year-old was already very complex.

Four years later, German soldiers goose-stepped into Austria. I had become an ardent nationalist by then (and a socialist to boot, even though I was not quite sure of what that was) and in the weeks preceding the *Anschluss*, my schoolmates and I threw our ardent lit-tle hearts into the struggle for an independent Austria. But it was useless. Countries, we learned, could crum-ble like dry English biscuits. Hitler annexed Austria without firing a shot. When the so-called plebiscite was held, something like 98 per cent of the people voted

in favor of joining the Third Reich. With that vote, the Austrian Republic was demoted to the rank of a mere province. A German proconsul arrived from Ber-lin, and hallowed Österreich became the German Ost-mark. My school atlas was duly issued in a new edi-tion to reflect the change.

In September 1938, all Austrian Jews were rounded up by Hitler's bullies, Jewish stores were looted, syn-agogues desecrated. The code name for this tightly co-ordinated operation – *Kristallnacht* – has remained forever etched in memory. Father, too, was arrested. Leather-jacketed toughs with swastika arm bands hauled him out of bed at five in the morning. They ransacked our apartment looking for any incriminat-ing evidence. In the wake of this terrible night, many Jews would be sent to concentration camps in Germany on their way eventually to the gas ovens of Theresien-stadt, Belsen, and Auschwitz. But father was lucky. He returned, ashen-faced, after two weeks. A few months later, he was gone, on a round-about journey that would take him to the United States. The rest of the family followed him there in due course on one of the last ships to leave Genoa before Italy's entry into the war.

The world of my youth had gone up in flames. Those of father's relatives who had remained would perish like dogs. But I was a boy of only 14 at the time, and it wasn't long before I learned to speak English and become, by stages, an American.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was still President when I became a citizen in 1944. We were now a nation at war, and new dreams were being formed. To think of a better, happier future *after* the war became itself a legitimate war-time activity. The propagandists in Washington thought it would give us something worth-while to fight for. Democracy of course, would be vic-torious. There would be an economy of full employ-ment in which everyone would have enough to eat. Former colonial territories would achieve independent nationhood. We hailed the Four Freedoms, including the revolutionary freedoms from fear and want, and set our high hope upon the United Nations and the farther shores of the One World.

With the end of the war, these dreams would surely



come true, we believed. We would make them come true. It was this dreaming which gave meaning and direction to our lives. There was a sombre side, too, of course. The atomic bombs which had obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki cast a deathly pallor over the world, and atomic scientists, terrified at the horrible powers they had unleashed, set the clock at five minutes to midnight.

But overall, in our youthful enthusiasm, we held on to our faith that the world's problems would be made to yield, if only we persisted, to an enlightened reason. Properly applied, scientific and technical knowledge, we thought, would help to bring about a world of peace, justice, and plenty. For a short while, it seemed as though we might almost succeed.

In the following pages, I want to set down some of the beliefs of my generation, beliefs that would eventually come undone under the impact of historical events. I want to show what happened to our beliefs, and why. The thoroughness with which they were destroyed for some of us may be hard to grasp in its full significance. It was something altogether different from shedding the 'illusions' of one's youth. The image of the world we had built up in the mind and which sustained us in the very real sense as the substance from which we lived was being swallowed up by events, much as had the world of my youth. With little more than the clothes on my back I was cast out from that world. Now we are all of us outcasts, refugees from a world lying in shambles. And we have no country to which in our need, we can turn, no safe and promised land of exile, except for that which we shall dream for ourselves.

That is the reason why it isn't enough to say what the world looks like once it is stripped of all beliefs and hopes, and fond of illusions. The circumstances of our lives compel us to articulate as best we can another world towards which we would wish to find our way, to delineate the current crisis of belief and its causes. Whatever may be the cause, this understanding must be our common point of departure.

### *Belief in Unlimited Growth*

There was a time when we believed that economic growth would go on forever. Showering its blessings upon us all, it would eradicate poverty throughout the world and provide a more dignified human existence for everyone. A new measure of economic growth had been devised – the national economic accounts – and the aim of public policy was to make the gross national product, or GNP, rise steadily from year to year. So long as there was growth, we believed, the resulting increments of income would make it easier to attain the goals of social justice. The wheels of progress would be oiled. Inequalities would be reduced. And as material needs were satisfied, higher, more cultural needs could be attended to. Growth would lead to a new Renaissance.

These certainties were to be shattered. The first Club of Rome report in 1970, *Limits to Growth*, sent up a warning signal: ecologists and systems analysts expressed fundamental doubts about rising resource and pollution costs. The sudden jump in the price of petroleum which followed in 1973 dramatized the finite nature of the most fundamental of energy resources. The resurgence of world-wide hunger despite increases in the productivity of agriculture reinforced widening concerns with the compatibility between capitalist methods of production and human welfare. Trickle down did not work, or where it had worked required a special political climate which, by the 1980s, had vanished even in the industrialized countries. In the underdeveloped Third World that climate had never materialized.

There were technical questions, too, about the very measure which served the bellwether of economic progress. Did the GNP accounts furnish an adequate measure of net social benefit? Fundamental doubt was expressed on this score. Existing social accounts failed to measure the production that took place outside the exchange economy, primarily in the household, and which accounted for between one-third and one-half of GNP in the advanced economies. They showed as net gains in production a rising quantum of goods and services that had actually come to be required in the course of production itself and should therefore have been excluded as a cost, such as internal security, the services of industrial psychologists, legal services, anti-pollution equipment and social welfare. Moreover, high and rising unemployment, disinvestment in land, housing, and public infrastructure, the destruction of forests from acid rain and of coastal fisheries from chemical wastes, the devastation of old industrial areas from economic restructuring, all these costs and more, borne by the community at large, failed to show up in the accounts at all. If the appropriate corrections were to be made, it is more than likely that what now appear to be modest yearly gains in the national product would turn into negative rates of growth. That such is indeed the case may be surmised from the sense of dissolution, unease, and generalized apprehension that has become pervasive among urban dwellers in both Western Europe and North America.

To be sure, through certain political and military measures, the most powerful of the industrialized countries might succeed in assuring for themselves a livelihood at the expense of weaker and more vulnerable countries. But global exploitation had not been part of the original dream, which held that sustained economic growth was not to benefit the few but the many.

Today, as we look towards the future, we see military expenditures on the rise, the costs of raw materials and energy resources climbing steadily upwards, giant corporations determining the way we live, the quality of life diminishing even as the quantity of things produced continues to increase. So here, then, is a contradiction with which we had not counted. How might quantity and quality in economic growth be



brought into a new relation so that the quality of life might be improved for everyone?

### *Belief in Universal Development*

The post-war era saw the awakening of what would come to be called the Third World. It was an impoverished world harboring eighty per cent of the global population who, for the most part, followed agricultural pursuits, and whose means for self-development were few. But economists reassured us that success was within the reach of virtually every country, however backward and remote. The key word was industrialization. All that was needed to become industrialized, they said, was to increase the rate of internal savings to something like twenty per cent, along with temporary capital assistance to supply the pertinent know-how and skill.

The most popular development treatise of the time was by W.W. Rostow, an American economic historian, whose *Stages of Economic Growth*, published in 1960, became the ideological rallying point for western experts. Rostow hypothesised a long period during which certain preconditions would have to emerge within a country that was readying itself for the 'take-off' into rapid, cumulative growth. Once the take-off had been accomplished, several decades would follow during which the transition to the final state of high mass consumption would be completed. This period would be characterized by a series of structural "transitions," including the well-described demographic, sectoral, and urban transitions. As they occurred, they would inevitably give rise to social inequalities, but inequalities would be reduced as the stage of high mass consumption was being reached.

The suggestive power of this model was enormous. Critics might point to the possibility of 'breakdown' along the path towards 'modernity,' they might question the implicit policy prescriptions contained in the model, such as the primacy given to industrialization, they might speak of structural impediments to the achievement of cumulative growth, but the model held firm. Its promise was that, given the right combination of policies, every country had a chance to 'catch up' with the West. The United Nations declared the 1960s and 1970s as the Development Decades.

Today, as we look back over forty years of development planning, the results are far from encouraging. A few miracle countries have indeed been brought into the exclusive club of the industrialized nations. They include the ambiguous cases of Japan, whose modernization efforts date back to the middle of the nineteenth century, and tiny Israel, whose modernization was helped by massive infusions of capital from Germany and the United States. In addition, there are the 'newly developed nations' of South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, with their separate and rather special histories. But, arrayed against these stars in the capitalist heaven, there is the vast tragedy of Africa with its rising population and shrinking food supplies; the stag-

gering indebtedness incurred by the middle-income countries of Latin America which has made them prisoners of the world's banking system; the tide of violence that has engulfed Central America, South America, and the Middle East; and the collapse of a number of modernising regimes, most notable in Iran. Many parts of the Third World have become an armed camp supported by the United States, brutal dictatorships flourish, and the number of people living below subsistence is both massive and rising. The two largest countries in the world, China and India, are also among the poorest with incomes of less than \$500 per capita.

The picture that emerges is not a pretty one. One thinks of starving refugees from the Sahel in western Africa, of massive transmigration from Java to Indonesia's outlying islands, of similar migrations from the highlands of Peru, Ecuador, and Nepal which redistribute poverty from one intolerable situation to another. In the cities, sociologists note the swelling numbers of semi-employed, low-productivity workers in the so-called informal sector, while enormous squatter areas surround the villas of the rich who protect themselves against this sea of misery with barbed wire fences and private security guards. In the mountains and tropical forest lands of countries such as Salvador, Guatemala, the Philippines, Kampuchea and Afghanistan, tenacious guerilla wars are being waged in the name of people's liberation.

In 1985, then, the prospects for universal development seem remote. The multinational corporations and their bankers, dominating the global market-place, operate according to a logic which has little to do with the specific interests of poor countries. Some countries' hopes, such as China's, to catch up with western economies within a life time are likely to be vitiated by the probability that the world cannot sustain an unlimited expansion of productive forces. The economic determinism contained in the prevailing models of national development has led to false expectations, as deeper needs find expression in social movements for self-determination, liberation, religious revival, and cultural self-expression.

But if a universal development is no longer on the agenda of world history, what then? Human needs must be fulfilled in some fashion. Among them are the need to live peacefully, productively, and in intercourse with others. The eradication of dire poverty is among these fundamental human needs. But in an interdependent world, how shall we respond to human need when the universal model of development has lost its credibility?

### *Belief in the Great Consensus*

In the first two decades of the post-war era, America was governed by the Great Consensus. Forgotten were the soup kitchens and bread lines of the Depression



as rising GNP and full employment filled people's pocket books and created an affluence without historical precedent. More than sixty per cent of American households would come to own their own homes. Looking out from their picture windows in suburbia, they felt comfortable and reasonably secure. Their life was bought on credit, but so long as the pay-checks kept coming in and there were hefty increases from year to year, what need was there to worry?

Unlike Western Europe, class politics had, for the most part, been absent from the American scene. Labor unions liked to stick close to work-place issues and battle the 'bosses'. But few workers begrudged their bosses six-digit incomes when their own annual take-home pay climbed to nearly \$23,000. Just about everyone was agreed on the good life. As the sociologist Daniel Bell argued in his much-discussed book, *The End of Ideology* (1960), American society had finally outgrown European class-politics and ideological posturing. A Great Consensus held the Republic together, as rich and poor converged upon the mainstream of the middle class.

It wasn't long after this confident analysis that President Kennedy was shocked to 'rediscover' poverty in America and decided to launch his famous 'war' against it. At the time he took office, almost a third of all Americans were living below a poverty income of \$3,716 for a family of four. A fourth of them were black or belonged to other oppressed minorities. Many were single mothers. But when the decade erupted into one of the most turbulent eras in American history, it marked the beginnings of a new segmented politics that was carried forward not by political parties but by social movements that cut across class lines: blacks and Hispanics; anti-war activists, environmentalists, and women, to mention only some of them. Although they did not, for the most part, engage in a revolutionary politics – revolutionaries occupied only the fringes – they succeeded in breaking the prevailing belief in the Great Consensus. Life in America was no longer a matter of small technical adjustments or 'fine tuning' as many of us had believed. The adjustments now called for were of a structural nature: End poverty! dismantle the military-industrial complex! End racism! Abolish patriarchy! Stop despoiling the environment!

It was a contentious politics. The 1970s and 1980s led to further fragmentation. Unemployment rose to nearly ten per cent, and though it subsequently declined somewhat, the high rates reflected the severe readjustments that were taking place in the economy. From the mid-seventies onwards, the number of people in poverty started to rise again, reaching one-fifth of the total population in 1983, and a much higher ratio for black and other minority groups. At the same time, median incomes began to fall. Organised labor lost ground as well and was forced into fighting desperate rear-guard actions, for the most part unsuccessfully.

For the first time, there was talk of a permanent underclass in America.

In an increasingly divided policy, the traditional parties found it more and more difficult to put together winning coalitions. Americans talked an increasingly virulent language and showed little inclination to compromise on issues as they saw them. The main thing for activists was to gain access to the media. But for the great mass of people there was no genuine rallying points. Personal charisma was sold over TV like toothpaste, and news was turned into prime-time entertainment. A genuine politics was denied to them, however.

As we approach the end of the century, American society seems to have lost its centre. The Great Consensus has broken up. People are turning to their private affairs, to entertainment. The poor are disempowered. And the energy for a revitalized politics seems to be missing. How, we might well ask, under these conditions, can people be enticed back into active citizenship?

### *Belief in the Civilian State*

With the Great Depression, a new kind of state made its appearance in North America. The Roosevelt administration launched a series of far-reaching reforms from above that, although designed to save capitalism from itself, claimed state responsibility for the overall direction of economic life.

Following the war, many of these reforms were consolidated and expanded into the welfare state which became the dominant form of state system both in Western Europe and North America. Taken as a whole, they helped to define a clear public interest in such matters as old-age security, unemployment, housing, urban transportation, education, health, the quality of the environment, distressed regions, natural resources, and the development of science and technology. This comprehensive welfare system did not result from unilateral state action. Rather, it evolved as a pragmatic patchwork of state responses to an increasingly aggressive national politics of claims. The American people, it appeared, were prepared to tax themselves for services which they themselves were largely incapable of providing for themselves.

In devising welfare policies, from the early thirties to the late sixties, the state performed two major civilian functions. The first was counter-cyclical, whereby it would finance public works along with social programs during periods of economic downturn. (The second phase of Keynesian policy of retiring the public debt during periods of recovery was never effectively implemented). The second role was redistributive.

But, by the beginning of the seventies, the whole philosophy of welfare came under severe attack. In the



end, belief was all but obliterated, not only in the welfare state, but in the state's civilian functions overall. Two developments contributed to this assault on the ideology of a socially benign state.

First, in parallel with the welfare state, emerged a *warfare state* of gigantic proportions. Beginning with its build-up in World War II, the military-industrial complex played an increasingly determining role in American life. Successive high points were reached with the Cold War, the Arms Race, the hot war in Korea, Vietnam, the space program and, most recently, the Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars. The militarization of America led to an inevitable clash between military and civilian expenditures. The first attempt to deal with this conflict was, in effect, to by-pass it through large-scale deficit finance. This was President Johnson's strategy during the Vietnam era, and it led to spiralling inflation. A second strategy was subsequently tried (without, however, reducing the budget deficit): the cut-back of non-essential civilian expenditures by the state. What turned out to be non-essential, however, was virtually the entire panoply of welfare measures, except for social security, which the politics of claims had succeeded in institutionalizing during the preceding generation. The abrupt dismantling of the welfare state left the warfare state intact. In fact, under Ronald Reagan, the warfare state would flourish as it had never done before in peaceful times.

The second development undermining belief in the civilian functions of the state was a growing conviction in America that the large, bureaucratic state was unproductive, inefficient, heavy-handed, and inept. Contributing to this image were studies by social scientists who typically would rush into action whenever a new government program was launched, in order to 'evaluate' its results. They would race to publish definitive findings before the next Presidential election two or three years down the line. Not surprisingly, virtually all these studies found government programs to have been a 'failure'. Some, more dramatically, would argue that government intervention, instead of solving problems only made them worse.

This condemnation of the civilian state by the experts went hand-in-hand with a populist political rhetoric that would praise the virtues of old-fashioned individualism and accept as axiomatic the productive efficiency of corporate (private) capital.

With the decline of the economy, rising unemployment, and the resurgence of poverty in the late seventies, the state was forced to refocus public attention on the question of economic growth. In line with the general disparagement of the civilian state which had found widespread public assent, the government itself would argue now that its own maze of regulations and involvements were holding back a business-led recovery of the economy. In order to re-energize America, the story went, capital would have to be unfettered,

taxes on business would have to be drastically reduced, the economy would have to be decontrolled. At the same time, a stepped-up anti-Soviet rhetoric and an artificially induced anti-communist hysteria allowed government to increase the national debt to beyond a trillion dollars. Most of the increment was channelled in the direction of the Pentagon and its civilian suppliers.

The answer from the side of the political Left was ambiguous. One can understand why the majority of Americans would buy an argument that promised national strength, lower taxes, and the debureaucratization of national life. But the political Left would have a different response, one might have thought. Such was not to be the case, however. The warfare state, of course, was vehemently opposed, but the state's civilian role was not enthusiastically defended. While Marxists withdrew into their esoteric journals to 'retheorize' the state, the New Left joined in the chorus against Leviathan. As activists they threw themselves into a politics of localism and social movement. *Think globally, act locally* became the slogan of the times.

Significant though it is, the new localism is quite unable to cope with the big issues of transition. It not only lacks an economic vision but a clear sense of the public interest. Instead, it concentrates on certain trendy issues which, though in themselves important, are incapable of leveraging fundamental changes in society. What is lacking is a new conceptualization of the state. For neither Left nor Right has any other understanding of the state than the already discredited ones of social reform, welfare, and national defense.

How might a new policy then be defined? Given the capitalism reaching for global control and which, by virtue of this control, is posing an increasing threat to the legitimacy of the state, what new forms of the state will need to be evolved to deal effectively with the multiple crises of the current transition?

### *Belief in Salvation by Science*

In the decades following World War II the practical optimism of Americans raised science and its applications to new heights of social veneration. Scientists had 'unlocked the secrets of Nature' and helped turn them to profitable use. Science also meant power: it made America invincible. Scientists and engineers became the culture heroes of the age.

Social and behavioral scientists perceived of themselves as lagging behind the natural sciences, but they harbored similar aspirations: to unlock the secrets of human and social behavior and use this knowledge in helping humanity achieve its age-long dream of perfect happiness. New fields of professional practice sprouted in the post-war period: economic and social planning, policy analysis, operations research, systems analysis, organization development, futurology, and



more. In one way or another, planners believed that societal problems would yield to scientific understanding and the manipulations of technical experts. The dominant approach was mechanical. If there were too many people in the world, give them the pill. If they were hungry, give them the 'green revolution' of genetically modified varieties of grains. If resources became scarce from overuse, replace them with technical substitutes or develop new technologies for lifting minerals from the bottom of the sea. If people were unhappy, a little behavior modification might do a lot of good. And so it went.

Public acclaim of the social behavioral scientist was never very great, and the profession had some problems selling itself to its potential sponsors. Still, it can be said that in its tougher-minded, esoteric forms which involved mathematical modelling, long-term forecasting, simulations, and the like, it shared in some of the reflected glory of the scientific enterprise.

But the worm of doubt was at work from the very beginning, and it would grow larger and larger as the decades wore on. The story of this doubt has many facets and can be told from many different perspectives. Here are some of them.

One of the dramatic achievements of the "scientific enterprise" was the controlled chain reaction of atomic fission. But the energy released during this first successful experiment, in 1942, was applied to the physical annihilation of 200,000 civilian victims in the bombings of Japan. Thus, what was to be the most spectacular application of science to a human use proved in the first instance to be an act of horrifying destruction.

A different doubt about the beneficent effects of science came from a more philosophical quarter. Natural science proceeds through a structure of research that is atomistic, highly compartmentalized, and hyper-specialized. In this process, the view of the whole, the dense connectedness of things, is inevitably lost.

Social and behavioral scientists adopted much of the same procedures. And they too, lost sight of the whole. More specifically, they lost a sense of history and place; access to humanistic knowledge; and the ability, as scientists, to make both ethical and political judgments. The knowledge they gathered was not about living men and women in particular social settings, but about lifeless abstractions unrelated to a larger problematic. Conclusions based on such knowledge might have some meaning in the theories of social science, but the import of these theories for practice was open to doubt. In seeking applications for their science, planners might indeed be inventive, but the results were generally disappointing. Not all the blame can be laid at planners' feet, but a good part of the trouble derives from methodologies which are grounded in the positivism of the social and behavioral sciences on which they have come to rely.

The most important doubt, however, arose with the question of who would apply the knowledge generated in the course of scientific work. In the case of the natural sciences the answer was self evident. The principal users were the state and the corporations that had paid to obtain it. The former exploited the sciences chiefly for military ends, the latter for commercial purposes. In a business civilisation, the ultimate pay-off was profits and the military strength to defend the right to their private appropriation.

But the case of the social and behavioral sciences is not very different. The state wants access to this knowledge in order more effectively to control its subjects, and corporations want it to improve their sales. Clearly, neither form of application is liberating in any real sense.

But if knowledge is not liberating, if it does not set us free, what transcendental purpose does it serve? How can there be a rational belief in 'salvation by science' when the results of scientific work are used primarily to destroy, control, and manipulate people?

There are those who argue that it is not scientists who invent these uses or oppression, but social institutions. Apart from the fact that science is also a social institution and scarcely exists apart from its setting, and that science and technology must be seen increasingly as having fused into a single operation, there remains the larger question of scientific understanding that remains atomistic, compartmentalized, and hyper-specialized.

Science was not always this way, nor need it remain what it has become. Still, it is clear that many people, including practitioners of science and those who stand in line of application, have begun seriously to question the scientific enterprise as it exists. They ask about new ways of thinking about the world in both its natural and human aspects. They seek to rejoin the many fragments of knowledge into a holistic and ethical vision, no longer divorced from history, and place and ethics. Above all, they search for a knowledge that will be accessible to people in the process of their quest for self-empowerment and liberation.

### *Concluding Questions*

I have argued that our time is characterised by a general collapse of meaning. The home truths of yesterday still clung to in some parts, are no longer tenable in light of the experience of the past forty years. Economic growth is no longer thought of as the panacea that will shower its material blessings upon all of us for ever and ever. The dream of a universal model of development has been exploded by the realities of the Third World. In place of universal development, more and more people are living in dire need, and the semi-industrialized world is mired in the contradictions of



a lopsided development and growing violence. The great consensus built around the mythology of an ever expanding middle class has broken down, and the political community is more polarized than it has ever been. But because political leadership is missing, discontent is manifesting itself as a retreat into privatism for the majority and, for those who remain politically engaged, as dedication chiefly to local action. The civilian state, in its specific form of the welfare state, has become discredited in the minds of many, and there has been surprisingly little opposition to its dismantling by its enemies. Private business – capital – is reasserting its strength over territorial communities, and the state is increasingly attending to its military functions. The warfare state has replaced the welfare state. Finally, we have lost faith in the powers of science to provide us with a way out of the present historical impasse. As an instrument in the hands of the state and the corporations, science has contributed to destruction, control, and manipulation for the sake of shoring up the powers of the powerful. It has not delivered on its promise to liberate humanity from the ensnarements of its persisting ignorance.

The hegemonic ideology thus lies in shambles. But there is no alternative in sight. The situation is serious. People need to believe. Not believing, they turn into cynics and nihilists. They are frozen into inaction and will seek alternative means of release in sheer violence, privatism, other-wordly cults, the rigid verities of fundamentalist religion. They become ready to follow any leader whose rhetoric can reach the atavistic energies that lie dormant in the deepest recesses of their souls.

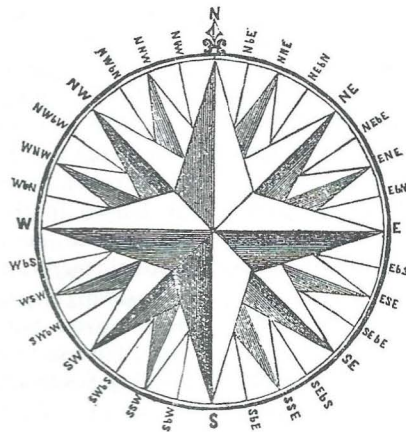
The danger signals are there for all to see. Residual hopes that the spectre of crisis will somehow resolve itself, and that we will return to a world of stable progress and ever encompassing humanity, are not going to be fulfilled. There are no ready solutions lying about. Nor will salvation come by way of science. What is needed is a new set of rational beliefs that will ex-

press new sets of power relations rather than the prevailing ones. Such a counter-hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci called it, must necessarily arise from outside the existing structures of domination. They cannot be merely thought, but must arise from the everyday practices of ordinary people as they struggle to carve out a small niche for themselves in the incipient chaos.

So I have no answers, only questions. And my questions, which I take to be beacon lights in the progress of citizen pilgrims, are these:

- How might quantity and quality in economic growth be brought into a new relation so that the quality of life might be improved for everyone?
- In an interdependent world, how shall we respond to human needs when the universal model of development has lost its credibility?
- Where the poor are disempowered, and the energy for a revitalized politics is missing, how can people be enticed back into active citizenship?
- Given a capitalism that is reaching for global control and which, by virtue of this control, is posing an increasing threat to the legitimacy of the state, what new forms of the state will need to be evolved to deal effectively with the multiple crises of the current transition?
- What new ways of thinking about the world will help us to achieve a unified approach to science that, while open to surprise is yet informed by ethical and political commitments and that will be accessible to people generally in their quest for self-empowerment and liberation?

*John Friedmann teaches at the University of California in Los Angeles. He has recently visited Australia. This article will form part of a book, Citizen Pilgrims: Pathways to Another Future, edited by Friedmann and by Leonie Sandercock.*



ROY MEDVEDEV

## Letter from Moscow

*Roy Medvedev, the Soviet 'dissident' living in Moscow, was born in 1925. He was aged 12 when he saw his father arrested on false political charges and sent to the arctic labor camp where he died. Roy and his twin brother Zhores grew up stigmatised as children of an 'enemy of the people' until 1956, when their father was exonerated. In that year, Roy joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and became active politically in the anti-Stalinist atmosphere of the time. Disappointed by the limited nature of the reforms, he began circulating his ideas by unofficial means.*

*Unfortunately, the political tide turned again, and in 1969 Roy was expelled from the Party. In 1970 he took part in a campaign to have his brother released from a mental hospital. Since 1972 he has devoted himself fulltime to historical and political studies and to writing despite searches of his flat, confiscation of materials, interrogation and threats. He has maintained a commitment to socialism, democracy and detente, and has remained optimistic that reform of the Soviet system is possible, if difficult.*

*This article was written for the Italian Communist Party's weekly review Rinascita, the editors of which kindly supplied the Russian original. It is translated and condensed by Dave Davies.*

Cultural life in our country in the 1970s fared even worse than the economy. While the rate of economic growth slowed to a standstill, our culture went into an increasingly obvious decline.

The main reason for this was undoubtedly the deterioration of the political and moral atmosphere in our society, the increase of pressure on intellectuals, the encouraging of a militant mediocrity and a fear of everything talented or new.

A number of our leading cultural figures emigrated for various reasons. More than a few talented writers and artists turned their attention to themes remote from current affairs. Some simply maintained a long silence. Great losses were also suffered with the passing of such cultural figures as Tvardovsky, Romm, Tondryakov, Shostakovich, Abramov, Simonov and Khachatryan.

Our culture suffered losses of another kind. A number of talented people who had deservedly won popularity and recognition in the 1950s and 1960s did not resist the pressures and went *with* rather than

*against* the current, betraying artistic truth to official embellishment. Such a compromise with conscience enabled many of these people to occupy top positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the artistic organizations, but did not allow them to create works of artistic value.

The departure of so much talent from our culture has not been accompanied by the appearance of new talent. The handbook of the Writers' Union contains more names than it did fifteen years ago, but I could name only one prose writer who won a national and world-wide reputation in the 1970s. That was Valentin Rasputin. From the hundreds of poets accepted into the Union in the past fifteen years I would have difficulty in naming one whose verses have struck a chord throughout the country.

Reviewing these past fifteen years, many leading people in Soviet culture are now expressing sharp criticisms. For example, the playwright Roshchin wrote in the daily Sovetskaya Rossia that "The main reason for the decline in drama is a general and not a literary one.



When half-truths, pomposity, ostentation and eye-wash abound, it is hard for the truth to break through. Year after year we are inundated with novels needed only by those who write them, by canvases for which the painters themselves feel no need, by films which are striking for their total absence of artistic personality, by songs which are impossible for singing and for listening. This art is like our retail trade: What you want we haven't got, and what we've got no-one needs. Such art makes one want to hurl the accusation that 'it doesn't belong to the people.' It does not touch the real joy or pain of the people."

The publication in the press of so many critical articles is evidence of the changed situation in Soviet cultural life following the April 1985 Plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee and the 27th Party Congress. But it is not only critical statements that are increasing. The whole panorama of cultural life in our country is slowly beginning to change.

At the end of the 1950s the changes in the social atmosphere were first reflected in poetry. In 1985, poems by Yevtushenko and Voznesensky were published and widely commented upon, but they were political rather than poetical works. Only at evenings with Okudzhava and Zhugulin in recent months have we been able to hear real lyric poetry.

Only two prose works have attracted the general attention of the critics in the past year: Valentin Rasputin's story "The Fire" and Viktor Astafyev's novel *The Sad Detective*. By any standard they are outstanding and sharply critical works which would have been rejected as "defamatory" until recently.

Soviet television has been more responsive to the change in the political atmosphere. In recent years mainly dull feature films, with repeats, were shown. As the writer Astafyev said recently, they make him want to take to the TV set with an iron. Films which would not have been shown previously are now being broadcast, including 'experimental' and even 'suspect' films.

New shows are appearing which would have been impossible a year ago. Great interest has been aroused by the new show "Problems-Searching-Solutions", in which top leaders in industry, agriculture and science answer questions put by telephone. Some questions put our Ministers and academics on the spot, because they are not used to answering to such a large audience.

The new show for young people, "Twelfth Floor", has provoked widespread comments. One episode was devoted to problems at school, with young people speaking about personal rights and freedoms in that context. Even punks, whose very existence in the Soviet Union was denied up to a few years ago, had a chance to speak. The Deputy Minister of Education who had to answer the students' questions did not feel too comfortable.

In the spring of 1986 the TV debate "Leningrad-Seattle" was shown. The Americans frankly said what they thought about respect for human rights in the USSR, about Poland, about the situation in Afghanistan and other matters. Their Soviet opponents led by Pozner countered by criticising the American way of life. If one is to believe our press, the Soviet side won all aspects of the debate, but the majority of viewers in Moscow came down on the American side.

In short, changes for the better are beginning to make themselves felt in every field of culture. However, if one can speak of leadership, then the undisputed leader in the cultural field is the theatre – above all the theatrical groups of Moscow and Leningrad, whose new productions have been the subject of commentaries in all newspapers and magazines in the country.

Why precisely the theatre? Undoubtedly the theatre is one of the most responsive areas of art. A play can be written and staged more rapidly than a new novel or feature film can be created. In the last fifteen years the theatre has lost fewer people. A theatre is a stable collective in which stable traditions, styles and schools take shape; they continue to work in 'good' and 'bad' times when the novels of excellent writers are not published and capable film directors have to find other jobs between pictures.

So it is not surprising that in the last five to ten years a significant grouping of talented young playwrights and directors have emerged, the 'new wave'. It was hard for them to work in the suffocating atmosphere of the latter years of the Brezhnev epoch. Drama posed rather than answered questions and used various 'styles', 'nuances' and 'multi-level plots', learning from contemporary Western dramatists. All this helped the theatre to rebuild itself relatively quickly when the social atmosphere changed.

Theoreticians of the cinema had predicted the decline of the theatre, particularly with the development of television. But theatre has not only been able to survive in the century of cinema and television, but also to advance.

Yet, the theatre has declined in the last fifteen years. Audiences, dissatisfied with boring stage productions as well as low-quality TV and cinema, fell away. Theatres were only seventy per cent filled, while in the Russian Federation overall attendances declined by one million from 1983 to 1984. This tendency reversed in the 1985-86 season.

Some fifteen new productions scored major successes. They include the play "No. 40 Sholom Aleikhem Street" by Stavitsky at the Moscow Stanislavsky Theatre, where the reasons for Jewish emigration from the USSR were presented for the first time, albeit in a distorted way. It is hard to get a seat at the Mayakovsky Theatre for Radzinsky's play "The Theatre at the Time of Nero and Seneca", where the



contemporary significance of the events of remote antiquity is understood by audiences.

The political drama "Only One Night", by Burlatsky, has also attracted attention. The intelligent and determined President of the United States, John Kennedy, and the charming, honest and upright Robert Kennedy, win a hard-fought victory over the American 'hawks'. Strangely, Nikita Khrushchov is not in the play, and neither are vital events connected with actions of the Soviet side.

Three plays in particular stand out as important events in both the cultural and political life of our country.

The first is "Silver Wedding", based on a play by Misharin and adapted by the chief producer of the MKhAT theatre in Moscow, Yefremov. The Ministry of Culture of the USSR delayed permission for the production for a long time, demanding a number of changes. It was included in the repertoire only after Politburo member Ligachov saw it. It was also seen by Gorbachov and other delegates to the Party Congress.

[Medvedev sketches at some length the characters and the plot, which is set in the USSR and includes abuses of power, corruption, careerism and repression of critics. He mentions a number of subtle and not-so-subtle historical and current references. The play ends on a 'positive' note, with the hero resolving to live and work in a different, more principled way. That is apparently what pleased Ligachov. -Trans.]

The second play goes even further than "Silver Wedding" in several ways. It is the staging of Valentin Ovechkin's book "Days on the Outskirts". [This was a significant book in Soviet 'village prose' - a literary trend in the late 1950s which depicted the squalor and neglect in the countryside in contrast to the previous idyllic pictures of rural life. -Trans.]

The play is entitled "Speak!" and was produced by the youthful Fokin at the Yermolova Theatre in Moscow. The first scene shows a poverty-stricken and lawless village in 1952 where the boss is local Party secretary Borzov, whose main job is not to grow or harvest grain but to take it away from the collective farmers. Borzov is replaced by a new Party secretary, Martynov, the former regime is denounced and village life begins to change.

The play is seen as contemporary rather than historical. Not all vestiges of the old order have disappeared. The new secretary still believes that all the main decisions must come from the District Committee. When the farmers want to replace an incompetent farm Chairman without heeding the Committee's recommendation, Martynov regards it as a "revolt". This play poses, perhaps for the first time, not only the question of the responsibility of the Party to the people, but the culpability of the Party for mistakes and poor leadership.

In the final scene, speakers at a Party Conference

read the texts of speeches written last year. A milkmaid becomes confused and Party secretary Martynov takes the paper away, calling on her to "Speak up! You have something to say - so speak!" But the milkmaid remains silent, she doesn't know how to speak up. At this point, dozens of actors cross the stage shouting one word: "Speak!" Until the people begin to speak up, changes will not occur.

The third play, "The Dictatorship of Conscience", is showing at the Komsomol Theatre. As in his other plays, the experienced dramatist Shatrov builds the action around the contradictions between Lenin's ideas and what happened after his death. It takes the form of a trial, a popular way of debating ideas among young people at the time of the revolution.

The 'prosecution' makes accusations against the socialist world and Leninism, while the 'lawyers' and 'witnesses' defend them and the 'judges' draw their 'objective conclusions'. Of course, Leninist ideas come out on top, but the very idea of doubting them and giving their opponents a say is sacrilege to the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Culture. Only intervention by Ligachov, Central Committee secretary Yakovlev and Gorbachov's aide Smirnov allowed Shatrov's play to remain in the theatre's repertoire.

Shatrov mixes up various periods and characters in his play. We see present-day formalists and bureaucrats, cynics and speculators, the character Verkhovensky from Dostoyevsky's "The Possessed" and the French Stalinist André Marti. But the playwright did not include any of the more repulsive participants in the Stalinist regime, nor does it refer to the limited nature and errors of many Leninist propositions. In that case, of course, the curtain would never have gone up.

The play includes a commentator who drops hints, makes clever remarks or simply looks puzzled. In the early performances he involved the audience in the debate taking place on the stage. But at one performance a member of the audience when called upon to speak said, "My grandfather was a socialist-menshevik. They shot him in the 1930s. Now we talk a lot about democracy, but experience shows that there can't be any real democracy unless opposition parties are allowed." After that incident audience participation was stopped. Unfortunately, "openness" [a word used by Gorbachov at the Party Congress - Trans.] does not envisage freedom of speech and opinion, or freedom for opposition, either in its current or Leninist meaning.

An interesting but carefully rehearsed debate is taking place on the stage. However, no one has proposed that such debates should take place in institutes, Houses of Culture, among young people or among adults. Once again we must conclude that the changes in our cultural life, although noticeable, are not too profound or substantial. We will be relying on a broadening and a deepening of this loosening process.



MICHAEL HYDE

## The State

*My sons and a mate came into the kitchen, cool as our traditional Saturday lunch, tomatoes and mayonnaise and basil leaves in brown bread, and said: "The cops just pulled us over Dad." The cops just pulled us over Dad... cops just... cops.*

Sixteen. I was watching American Negroes cattle-prodded in dingy Southern doorways of shops where they were always served last and still probably are. Electrocuting by burly beefs of mace-carrying, gun-killing Nazis. Plunging my fist, tight and white, into my smooth, stretched hand, I ripped the wicked wand from the barrel-chested pygmy and struck him, struck him again, struck-him down!

I also read Alan Paton's *Cry the beloved country*. There, I threw cocktails.

*I said to Jesse: "Where... what'd they do, love. Are you OK?"*

I was OK – but never completely OK – around cops. Cops in Russell Street, Strahan, Monash, American consulates, and South Melbourne lock-ups, where I saw many deeds of heroism in the face of fear. Where they sat me on a stool next to a confessed murderer who had the uncontrollable shakes of drowning tears in remorse and passion and fear, who fell off his chair, sideways in a crumpled heap. Where they faced me to the wall and smashed all my badges under their 1984 hammered heels and spoke close to my ear: "If you want a vision of the future, Winston, imagine the heel of a boot being stamped in a human face." Where I saw Vincent return from a beating in an upstairs room, holding his stomach, with a slash in his coat, an attempt to prove that he had a knife on his person. Where they took me up those same stairs they had led Vincent, hoping my brother saw me as they took me past an open door, saw my bruiseless face. And pushed me into a room where I sat facing another wall, while they paced and heavy-breathed their way up and down behind me in a narrow office, behind me while my face tensed for the blow and waited to see if my mouth would save us all.

And I still wonder how that wonderful Sandinista could say how he worried about his poor torturers, that they could be reduced to such slimy gutters – guards, cops who kept him with a sack over his head, beat him, hosed him down like they did to Dennis O'Donnell. Cops forcing their hard voices through their plated, lipless mouths.

*So Jesse said: "Course I'm OK. They wanted to know our names, where we were going, what we were doing tomorrow, where we lived."*

I wanted him to know his rights. I wanted him to know that when he exercised those rights that he was likely to get thumped. Name, address. That's all.

"I've done nothing wrong and I've got nothing to say." That's what we were told to say. That's what Peter kept saying. That's what the judge said was a sure sign that Peter was guilty.

That's what they said to Joe, my student, after they'd knocked him down in a Seddon gutter. After telling them that his name was Mickey Mouse. After telling them that his residential address was Disneyland.

Guilty. Because that's what you are if you've been thumped by a snorting-eyed jack. Thumped by a fist that's half the size of your street-wise body. Not street-wise enough though. Maybe more than street-wise.

Maybe freeway-wise. Soaring over the gutters, shaking off the plughole hair. Daring to say: Disneyland. Knowing the flesh shaking whamp at the end of the ride.

Now, rights as a main course are OK, as long as you realise that a side-salad of whamp will be served up, whether you bother to order it or not.

Whamp side-salad is what I wanted my kids to understand. Whamp side-salad is not what I and others quite understood when, in a chemical throbbing thrust we went through barricades and discovered an old fashioned serving of baton. Baton on heads, baton in stomachs.

Of course, Collingburn's stomach wasn't up to much. He thought that he knew all about side-salads.





He forgot about the hidden menu. They gave him boot in the stomach, which they served to him in a jump from the top of a desk, normally reserved for taking "Statements" The waiter was 205 pounds, which increased on impact.

Collingburn never ate there again. And the waiter became a head waiter.

So Collingburn died at the hands of the police while in the hands of the police. Russell Street Restaurant. Not a good place to eat.

*It was because of a murder down at Merri Creek that the police had been questioning my kids and a mate. The kids knew Merri Creek as cubby houses. As carp. As slippery grassy rides on sheets of tin.*

*Not as Murder Incorporated.*

*Policeman to Jesse: "Where you going this weekend, son?"*

*Jesse to Policeman: "To my Nana's."*

And that's exactly where somebody wanted to send me the night they stuck a gun at me through a bedroom window. To my Nana. Lying warm and fleshless in her grave.

That's where they sent John Pat and thousands before him. Black and dead, with a coroner's report of a thin skull as his marker.

When I heard the click of the gate it could've been a cat - or the cock of a gun. It didn't matter that I didn't have a thin skull. It didn't matter that I wanted to see my kids flash down the glint of grassy slopes.

The grey glint of gun barrels was what mattered.

So I flipped myself over my bed through the breathing air into the hallway, zig-zagging my way down the lined hall to my friend's bedroom where they lay snuggled. Normal.

What was waiting outside was decidedly un-normal.

My friend gave me a gun and I went out into the thin night of what I thought was my street. With an old one-shot rifle with no bullet in the breach and no attacker lurking.

But he lurked and leered in my brain as I snuggled next to my friends' normal bodies for days. He reared and snorted in my dreams as I lay in my bed behind my hard wood desk with a semi-automatic rifle on the floor, a small magazine of bullets snuggled in its belly.

On the bloodied banks of the Merri there was a man with a bullet snuggled in the back of his head.

*Jesse said to me that it was very important to say: "I'm going to my Nana's," because if he'd said "I'm going t' m' old junkie granma's joint," they would've thought he was some kind of little hood and they wouldn't have left him alone.*

*Which is clever. . . even more so from the point of view of coppers.*

And clever is what we had.



Minds is what we've got.

Brains is what Albert had when he insisted on defending himself.

Brains and courage is what Albert had when he leant on the clean rail of the dock. When he said: "Your Honor. I feel sorry for you. I feel sorry for you because you're over a barrel. If you sentence me, it will simply breed more rebellion. And if you don't sentence me it will show you and your law to be paper tigers and more people will join the fight. Your Honor, I feel sorry for you."

When he said that, he still had the taste of bloodied vomit in his mouth.

When he said that, it was clear that they don't like brains. (They prefer them with bullets.)

Although they don't call it brains. They call it brainwash.

That's what the woman screamed at me. That's what she reckoned I was doing to my twelve month-old son, sitting in a back-pack while I talked about the Vietnam War through a megaphone.

That's what they reckon when you take your kids on disorderly marches and to rowdy rallies to brainwash them about uranium and nuclear war and un-

employment and Esso and rivers and education and trains and trams and wages and conditions and prisons and Land Rights and rights... and Rights.

That's what they think in their grimy little nerve-endings, when Jesse comes in and says: "The cops just pulled us over, Dad?"

It's brainwashing to stop for a minute, in the slush of the Show, to decide whether or not to buy Shannon an A-Team showbag. The showbag of the Green Berets. I mean, what do they put in such a showbag? Miniature tiger cages? Headless dolls? Home of the wicked? Land of the wind-up rape?

Nevertheless I let him buy it. And shortly after, God spoke to me.

He rang me.

This time he appeared as a drunken, off-duty copper. "Is that you? Is it? Is that the bloke in the Herald who says things about cops? I tell y' what you are, you're a fuckin' dickhead, that's what you are. . . think you're pretty funny, eh! Well you're not - jus a fuckin' dickhead."

I was glad he rang.

Next year, no A-Team showbag.

Maybe, Lucky-Boy.

## LETTER TO SOCIAL SECURITY

I'm thinking of NOT WORKING  
after WORKING  
I tell you I can't WORK  
you know, if I'm  
WORKING.

On the way to WORK  
this morning  
the BRADMILL sign wasn't  
WORKING, not entirely  
It flashed up

BRADMILL  
KING GE

it flashed up

BRADMILL  
SHEET TO E S

it flashed up

BRADMILL  
EXACTO KNI W AR

it flashed up

BRADMILL  
STUBBIES S O TS

Someone is in there  
working the sign.  
I wrote it down  
resigned.

CHRIS MANSELL

MARJORIE JOHNSTON

## Letter from Moulamein

It had been another long day on the farm. But the thought of passing out in front of the television at the end of it had been sustaining – even if it was only country TV. Channel 11 had actually programmed a reasonable film for a change, and I had arranged to go and watch it at a neighbor's. Our cottage doesn't run to a television.

My host sat opposite me clutching his beer. Suddenly, he bellowed across the room.

"Isn't this a lovely film, darl'?"

I nodded assent but remained staring at the screen.

"I love a nice musical," he went on.

Meanwhile, Rex Harrison had a slipper thrown at him.

"You'd get Pete's slippers wouldn't you, darl'?"

Frank enquired, inspired by the scene.

"Pete hasn't got any slippers," I said flatly.

"Yes, yes, but if he did have, you'd get them for him, wouldn't you?" he continued.

"Well, no," I said, "actually, I wouldn't."

He took a long pull on his beer and looked at me.

"But you've got to support your husband, darl'," he insisted.

"I do support him," I said, "I give him emotional support."

"No, no, darl'." He reached for another can.

"You've got to get his slippers..."

"Look," I said, staring across at him. "I don't think you've realized yet. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a *feminist*."

There was a ghastly pause as he put down his beer and stared at me.

"Darl', darl'," he said, spreading his hands in protest and shaking his head. "Don't get me wrong. You're very, very *feminine*!"

We got up one hot morning, a Sunday, began loading a semi at half past seven. I stood on top of a haystack for two hours and loaded one hundred bales. The twine cuts into your fingers and the seeds and dust irritate

arms, legs and hands, causing a red rash. One of my bales had a dead snake in it. We loaded the semi ten bales high and put the tarps on it. It was my initiation into Riverina life.

The drought broke 'a week too early' in March. We lost ten thousand dollars on the hay-baling scheme overnight. All the hay-stacks were ruined by rain. In between heavy falls, they harvested what was left of the rice after the drought, and got ready to sow a winter crop. I discovered the definition of misery one wet July night when the seeder was bogged in three feet of heavy, sticky mud. With a length of spiked steel cable, I plunged into the fray digging down under the tow-bar of the air-seeder while Peter tried to lift it out of the bog with the linkages on the tractor. After two hours, the seeder came out but the tractor had got bogged in a 'sticky bit'. I retired then, but got married anyway.

I have discovered that women can fix things. I can now drive a semi-trailer, lift rice-bags, muster sheep, change the oil and pull the head out of our ute, drive a 250 horse-power tractor and not spin out on a wet road. Before I came here, all I had was my university degree.

The Riverina is the land of racism, sexism, capitalism, conservatism (not conservation), fascism and paternalism. Here, people think "When Angels Weep" the best thing since "The Betsy" and Harold Robbins the author they'd most like to meet. The dispossessed are referred to variously as "our black brethren," "the boongs", "the coons", but most usually as "the fuck-in' abos". Yet at a neighbor's house one evening two Aboriginal milling stones uncovered by a plough were proudly displayed on top of the video recorder.

Before I came here, I'd never been asked to a Country Party dinner. The local NCP branch were proud to have one of Joh's National Party boys as their guest speaker, and thought I might like to go along. It cost \$27 to go to the dinner at the local Services Club, held in a town where the ALP did well to get 252 votes in



the 1983 election. At election time, the Country Party set up outside the polling booths. They wear their best clothes and smiles and serve coffee at their table under a colored umbrella. You can buy jam and raffle tickets from them, as well as picking up a How to Vote National Party ticket.

In the Riverina it's 'illegal' to have women at two-up games. I was the only female at the one held last Christmas, and the ring-master told Peter to tell me to leave. He wouldn't tell me himself. Meanwhile, the old-timers went on gambling with fifty dollar notes, teaching me how to toss the pennies and saying "pardon my French" when they swore in my hearing. Out on the road, the local constable waited with the breathalyser to catch anyone driving home at the end of the day.

Life up here is dominated by the pub and beer-drinking. Distances aren't judged in miles but in how many stubbies you can drink while driving between A and B. Moulamein to Melbourne is a fifteen stubbie trip. We went to a race meeting at Booroorban one weekend. Everyone there drank stubbies, gambled and talked rice and sheep. That night, at the party, a group of drunks beat a goanna to death with a beer bottle to the cheers of most of the company. By the next morning, remnants of the crowd lay scattered around the Booroorban Hotel, sleeping it off in the dust.

The eternal topic of conversation is farming: this year's crop, last year's tractor prices and the weather. Usually, it's too cold for the rice and too wet for the wheat and it's always a better season somewhere else. There are great catastrophes to discuss too. Last year it was the mice plague; this year it's floods and grasshoppers. Or the government increasing the price of water by twenty-two per cent.

If something isn't going wrong on the farm, people will always whinge about the shooters. October is duck-shooting season. They come up from Melbourne in their jungle-greens and go out on the rice by day and by night. Strangers call in, six or seven of them squashed into one car, to ask if they can camp on the property. One lot burnt our boundary fence; another group shot the tyres of the tractor full of holes. Sometimes they shoot each other. Out on the rice, you can see the corpses of ducks floating around: shot dead - or poisoned by farmers.

Up here people live *on* the land, but not very many of them live *off* it. Thirty years ago, most farmers had a cow, vegetable garden, fresh eggs. The general store

in Moulamein baked bread every day on the premises. Now, the freezer is King and the only bread you can get is Sunicrust. At the take-away food shop, you can buy your dim-sims, hire your videos and play Space Invaders.

But not everything changes. Three times a week at three in the afternoon, I walk down the track from the house to the edge of the dirt road. My letters and postage money go under a brick in the twenty-gallon drum that is our mail-box. I stand there in the quietness, and wait for the mail-van to come into sight, hoping that today I'll get some letters from Melbourne. A special kind of excitement, three times a week, near Moulamein, New South Wales.

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DON CHARLWOOD

## The Canadian Connection

*8 June, 1986; Sydney somewhere astern. The pilot announces that we shall arrive in Vancouver an hour before our Sydney take-off. This kind of time distortion is a commonplace part of jet travel, but for us it brings a curious coincidence: we have taken off on our wedding anniversary; we shall land in British Columbia where we married this day forty-two years ago. I was returning then from RAAF service in England. We didn't plan to return on this day; it was a coincidence of airline bookings.*

*A curious thing happened as we shuffled on board this flight. Hearing the contrasting accents of a couple in front of us and noticing their vintage, I said to the husband, "You must have trained with the RAAF in Canada."*

*"Winnipeg," he replied immediately.*

*They are sitting now not far in front of us. He is Lloyd Laver, who for years after the war played cricket with Melbourne.*

There must have been a few hundred such World War Two marriages, between Canadian girls and RAAF men. Most of the couples settled in Australia; a few in Canada. The few include Bob Kellow, of the Dam Busters, and his wife, and Colin Walker, famed in those days for his epic battle as a Sunderland pilot against eight JU 88s. Col finally put his riddled flying boat down on a sand-bank off the English coast and assisted the wounded to shore. Then he swam back and recovered the body of his rear gunner who had been killed in the action.

*Sydney, says our pilot in blasé tones, is now two-hundred miles behind; we are climbing to 31,000 feet; flying conditions will be good. Already we are far above the few flecks of air-weather cumulus.*

Curious to look back to my first crossing of the Pacific. In September 1941 six hundred pilot and observer trainees travelled to war on the *Monterey*, a luxury liner of the neutral United States. We Victorians had not even been before to Sydney; here we were leaving there, ostensibly as civilians, two to a cabin, each cabin with

its own porthole and toilet. In Auckland we picked up a contingent of New Zealanders and suffered their departure hakas on the deck above our cabins. As the voyage progressed, neither they nor we were at all tolerant of our host's neutrality, nor were the dining saloon waiters tolerant of carrying servicemen of belligerent countries. As far as Suva we were shadowed by HMS *Achilles*, already famous for her role in the Battle of the River Plate.

In Honolulu the generous American Red Cross took us over and drove us to the sights of Oahu. Some of the local people expressed concern: they were vulnerable, they said, to Japanese air attack. We and the New Zealanders laughed over this. Typical Yank panic! Japan was thousands of miles from them; anyhow the war was in Europe. As far as Australia and New Zealand were concerned the Japs were of no real worry at all. Even if they did try any funny business, the superior British guns at Singapore would soon put a stop to it. Britain would always play her part by us, just as we would do by her.

*The captain is telling us now that we fly direct to Honolulu; that it will be 11 p.m. on 7 June when we arrive there, but we shall re-enter 8 June shortly afterwards. This announcement sounds like something from Alice in Wonderland.*

In 1941 it took the *Monterey* three weeks to cross the Pacific. We were scarcely granted a glimpse of San Francisco. We marched furtively through back streets to a 'sealed' train, watched by a few uneasy bystanders who undoubtedly saw in us threats of war to their homeland. North then to Vancouver through the first snow the Australians had seen, under a pallisade of mountains such as we had only imagined; they culminated in Shasta and Baker. In Vancouver our commanding officer split us into groups for training farther east. I found myself one of twenty-six men to go to the unknown city of Edmonton, capital of Alberta. That evening two monstrous locomotives hauled us up to the Fraser canyon into the Rockies under a full moon. We let down our windows and



leaned awhile into the freezing night, looking up at peaks that soared to the moon. The yelping whistle echoed off their high flanks. Next morning we emerged from the mountains and at evening came into Edmonton, city of a hundred thousand people.

*Lunch will shortly be served, says our pilot paternalistically, then there will be a movie. While we are waiting, Lloyd Laver swaps places with my wife, so that the four of us can reminisce.*

How poorly the RAAF kitted us out for the Canadian winter! Lloyd remembers how Australian Comforts Fund sheepskin jackets and RCAF overshoes saved us. But the hospitality of the Canadians; who can forget that!

*Our wives are talking about later years: their coming to Australia, the drabness of everything there after the war; the clothing coupons; the shortage of accommodation and of building materials.*

The twenty-six men of our course who arrived in Edmonton were told we would fly cross-country exercises in pairs; we would take it in turns to be first navigator; the second navigator would be our back-up. We must each determine now who our flying partner would be. Max Bryant and I decided to fly together. At twenty he was five years my junior, a brilliant, effervescent boy from Cowra. We were to be flown, we learned, not by RCAF pilots, but by legendary Bush Pilots who had been gathered in by Trans-Canada Airlines from all sorts of outposts.

That first day in Edmonton, as Max was passing through the administrative section, a warrant officer called to him, "Hey Aussie; I have a lady on the phone who wants two of you guys to go out to supper. Be in it?"

So it was that he and I met Mr and Mrs East in the home that was to become our home. We were vaguely disappointed that Mrs East was not a true Canadian. She was, in fact, a Melburnian who, thirty years earlier, had married a Canadian gold miner. He and three of his brothers and a sister had established their own mine in Western Australia, near Lennonville. They had done reasonably well. Some of them had remained in Australia: Neil East had put his money into a farm in eastern Alberta, taking his bride to a log cabin there – she, a nurse, had been accustomed to comfortable suburban living. Max and I were the first Australians she had met since leaving home.

When we got back to camp that night I said with mock prescience, "I've met the girl I'm going to marry!" Max approved of my choice of Nell East enthusiastically. "Make me your best man!" I appointed him on the spot.

But Neil East guarded his daughter like a lion. He was the most formidable man I had ever met. He had

explored in both Canada and Australia; he was the first man to plot his way with a sextant on a journey from Lennonville to the Warburton Ranges – this on a fruitless search for further gold. Gold was still in his blood at sixty-three. The prospect of it lured him away from Edmonton. To the detriment of my navigation, matters between Nell and me moved swiftly, aided rather than impeded by her mother. We might have married, but a piece of news filtered through from Britain to our camp: only one man remained alive of the course that had preceded our's by a year at Edmonton. Upon hearing that, I did not seek even an engagement.

*Lloyd Laver, looking back over the years, tells me that he met Peg at a roller-skating rink in Winnipeg. They had taken the great gamble quickly, both of them were only twenty. Peg came from a Ukrainian family and adapted easily to life in Australia, relishing the teasings of four brothers-in-law.*

*"Would passengers please put their seats in the upright position and lower tables for lunch."*

*Lloyd and Nell resumed their seats. On my other side I am wedged against a young Canadian who is travelling in shorts, singlet and runners. He says he has been playing 'grass hockey' in Melbourne. "A team of us went out from British Columbia. We were sure shown a great time."*

On the fall of Singapore our training course sought postings home. Malcolm McDonald, son of Ramsay, addressed us. We would be of more value to our country, he said, when we had gained operational experience in Britain.

Of our twenty-six men, two were medically repatriated; two were posted to commands other than Bomber Command. Of the remaining twenty-two, five eventually survived to take their operational experience home – where it wasn't much valued, anyway. This was about the average. Max Bryant was among the dead.

In 1944 I was posted home from England. There seemed no prospect of getting to Canada; besides, although Nell and I had kept closely in touch during my operational flying, we had rather gone our own ways when the pressure was off.

Our contingent of returning Australians raced across the Atlantic to New York on the *Queen Mary*. Once there our homeward journey was halted by Air Marshal Richard Williams. We were to ferry Liberators home, he told us, after training in Tennessee. In the meantime we had a break of uncertain length in New York.

As a would-be writer I began buying up reference books that had been un-available in wartime England. Loaded with a heavy case of them I tried to run with it and a kitbag for a Tennessee train. Within a matter of days I was a cripple. I went on with the training



course, lying down between bursts of navigation. In California, I was one of a crew to accept a new Liberator. "Dickie" Williams intervened. I was clearly unfit to make the flight; I would have to go home by ship. There was one leaving in two days and one a week later. Which would I prefer? My path had opened suddenly. "The later one, sir?" Then I plunged. "Could I have permission to go to Canada in the meantime?"

"Dickie" turned on me one of those looks he delivered from a great height, his chin elevating on his tortoise neck. To my surprise he said, "Very well, then." A few days later I telegraphed him from Edmonton for permission to marry. This too, he granted.

The formidable Neil East had relented. As he and his wife were now living in British Columbia, Nell and her crippled Australian navigator went there to marry. When we arrived she produced a doctor brother who, with seven injections, got me up the aisle. A few days later I was admitted to hospital for back surgery – a matter that led to a series of ribald RAAF messages.

*We and the Lavers pace the Honolulu terminal. There is nothing to do.*

*"How many grandchildren have you?"*

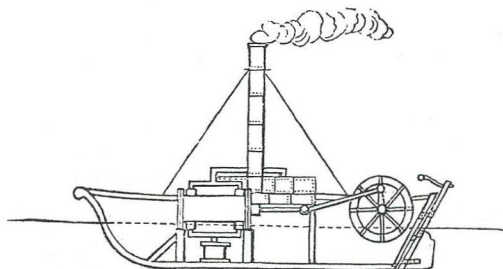
*"Five," they say. They are well ahead of us.*

*We are called aboard for the final leg and soon plunge back into the night. Breakfast will be served before we arrive, says the new captain. In the meantime the lights will be dimmed so that we can sleep. My Canadian bride of forty-two years ago sleeps readily enough, her head on my bony, seventy-year old shoulder, I stare into the dim cabin, full of thoughts of the past.*

The formidable Neil East came to Australia and at seventy-three built a house for us, we his slave-laborers. His wife came to Melbourne, too, and linked up with nurses of her training days. She saw the birth of our first three children then, on a return voyage to Canada in 1959, she died at sea, somewhere here between Honolulu and Vancouver. She, it was, who had wanted to talk again to Australians in 1941 and so had phoned the Air Observers' School. But only when Nell and I first arrived in Australia did we find more astonishing links through her: our grandfathers had been friends in the Melbourne of the 1860s; our great-grandfathers had been in business on opposite sides of Bourke Street in the 1850s. Neil East commuted between Canada and Australia until his death at ninety-six. Dora East, who had led me to my wife, led me also to a cousin of hers in Melbourne, who, more than anyone, guided my first attempts to write: A.A. Phillips, already something of a legend, already attacking Australia's "cultural cringe."

*Daylight has come again; the hostesses, like the hospital nurses, are waking people and pressing fruit juices into their hands. "After breakfast," says the pilot, "we shall commence our descent. The Vancouver weather is fine; temperature sixteen degrees celsius." His tone suggests there is nothing to it these days.*

*We and the Lavers are descending to the beginnings of our married lives, to our well-loved country-in-law. But only we are able to repeat the "Happy anniversary" spoken in Sydney sixteen hours ago. Here then is British Columbia where we married this day forty-two years ago.*



GARY CATALANO

## The Weight of Things

*The Poetry of Kevin Hart*

Intermittently at first, and then with a force and sureness which could well be the product of a visionary certainty, Kevin Hart's poetry has come to deploy a small number of recurring images. To read the 120 or so poems which are contained in the three volumes Hart has published to date (*The Departure*, *The Lines of the Hand* and *Your Shadow*) is to enter a world primarily composed of images which deal with stones, hands, shadows, sunlight, water, wind, mirrors, horizons, moons and clocks. Far from issuing in monotony, the frequency with which these mundane things recur has served to intensify the emotional tenor of Hart's work.

When read in the light of his two subsequent volumes, *The Departure* is a surprisingly varied first volume. Some of its poems, the most notable of which is the first of its three "Homages", are patently autobiographical in their impulse, others are occasioned by cultural artefacts like paintings or the writings and predicaments of certain philosophers, and yet others are initiated by that meditative urge which soon comes to distinguish Hart's output. This variety of occasions is matched by a corresponding variety of forms, for the poems in the volume range from a sonnet sequence and a villanelle, through discursive poems written in a variety of looser stanzaic forms, to brief Imagist-like poems and a pair of prose poems. For the most part, these dissimilar forms are handled with an equal authority and ease.

Having acknowledged this variety, it must also be stressed that *The Departure* makes a unified impact. If one puts to one side Hart's use of recurring images, there are, I think, two closely related predispositions which determine this unity and give to the volume its air of consistency. The first of these is Hart's preference for subjects which disclose either one of two opposed perceptual or phenomenological situations, and the second is his thematic preoccupation with one particular emotion.

Hart's attraction to a set of basic perceptual situations is significant. If he finally impresses one as a poet with a strongly dualistic imagination, he largely does so because it is his habit of mind to reduce all experience to the most elementary of schemas. The dramatic contrast between night and day is one of the forms this schema often takes in his work, as is the contrast between the distant and the proximate. In many of these early poems the objects of the poet's consciousness are so far away they can only be

perceived (and then imperfectly) by the eye; in others, by contrast, the objects are so close at hand they can almost be experienced within the confines of the skin. In the former situation we have things blurring and losing definition as they approach the horizon (the horizon itself is often the prime subject of these poems) and, in the latter, a densely knotted entanglement which shuts out all consciousness of distance.

There are a number of things which one can say about both of these situations. Each, it will be noticed, allows a *reversal* in the apparent size of things to take place. Just as its placement on the horizon will reduce the size of even the largest object and make it appear no larger than a fly, so a close-up or proximate view of a small object will magnify its size. Much of what at first appears to be inexplicable in Hart's poetry soon becomes more comprehensible if we keep such phenomena in mind. Hart's "visionary" eye, the eye which is able to see in a waterfall a river's attempt to stand up and walk away, is rooted in a keen appreciation of the elasticity of appearances.

These two perceptual situations are important to Hart for another reason, for they are also those most likely to induce or sustain the emotion of dread. Of all the emotions directly voiced or implied in the poems in *The Departure*, dread is distinguished by the extent to which its various manifestations and causes are explored. Poems like "I Dreamt Gallipoli Beach" and "A Dream of France" obviously link it with the experience of war; "Office Girl", a poem which makes use of a persona, deals with sexual dread; and other poems in the volume chart its onrush when a consciousness becomes aware of the threat or fact of death.

Interestingly enough, when Hart deals with the latter two types of dread his verse changes markedly. No longer seeking a meditative poise or a discursive clarity, he now attempts to record the abrupt and broken texture of *immediate* experience. Nothing like the opening stanzas of "Sickroom" will be found in Hart's two subsequent volumes:

Gets up to wash, and faints. The clatter  
of plates collects outside, an inch away  
from your head. No bruise. I heave you  
into my arms. All weight. The bed



flinches and shudders. You twist  
over. The sheets are hot you wince.  
I cannot leave. The nurse  
is coming . . .

Yet it is metaphysical dread which weighs most heavily  
with Hart here, and notably so in a group of five poems  
about philosophers which are gathered together under  
the title of "The Gallery". The concern is most openly  
stated in the poem dealing with Martin Heidegger:

True, I am filled with dread.

It pours itself into me,  
a slow, cold liquid.  
Soon, soon, I will be drained

and quickly emptied.  
The thought chills me.  
The only thing I have

is death: my years  
recoil as if they could see —  
something horrible —

an opening that closes  
as I approach, swallowing  
whatever light there is.

*The Lines of the Hand* marks a dramatic break with *The Departure*. Where the earlier collection is to some extent concerned with recording the surfaces of life and conveying the actual qualities of certain unique experiences, the second book departs so thoroughly from the literal world that only four place-names are mentioned throughout its pages. The various, populous and publicly-known world has been reduced to these four places: London, Brisbane, Prague and Pozieres.

It cannot be said, however, that the world of these poems is any less substantial than that evoked through his earlier poetry. Country-less as it may in general be, its existence is underwritten by the recurrence of certain elemental things and phenomena. The dust, stones, beams of sunlight and other figures in Hart's poetic world not only define the basic conditions of existence, they are also shown to be the means by which the spirit manifests itself in the material world.

This attitude is most clearly stated in the first of Hart's "Five Prayers", a sequence which was first published under the title of "The God Poems":

Master of energy and silence  
Embracer of Contradictions  
who withdraws behind death  
like horizons we never touch  
who can be One and Many  
like light refracting through glass —

stepping in and out of logic  
like a child unsure of the sea  
in and out of time  
like an old man dozing, waking  
in and out of history  
like a needle through cloth —

who we chase and bother with theories  
who hides in equations and wind  
who is constant as the speed of light  
who stretches over the Empty Place  
who hangs the Earth upon nothing  
who strikes like lightning.

"Five Prayers" is the penultimate poem in the volume and can be construed as a coda to the collection. Its invocatory address, its intimate and rapturous tone, and its use of repetitions are all features it shares with most of the other poems in the volume.

Another development which should be noted is the extent to which Hart's characteristic images have now begun to interact or correspond with each other. This is best seen in those poems in which the moon either figures or recurs. Of the twelve in question, six also refer to or contain the image of a clock. In some cases the latter image occurs only in passing, but in the four in which an explicit connection is drawn between these two things the gesture in fact forms the nucleus or prime matter of the poems. What is implied about the connection between moons and clocks in the opening sentences of "The Clocks of Brisbane":

Yes, the Town Hall Clock, big as the moon, shining  
over the Doric columns, the Square where a man  
walks, drawing in on a cigarette, watching the  
clock's hands draw together. The Vulture Street  
clock, with its grave Roman numerals, how it looks  
down on all the bars, the offices smelling of old  
typewriters. Or the clock at the Tennyson Power  
Station, hanging there amidst the factories, the  
cranes delicate as the husks of insects. That Post  
Office clock, its hands beginning to close, watching  
over Inala, now — when the moon is full and old —  
and when the moon is born again, new and un-  
seen . . .

is, just three pages later, openly stated in the sentences which conclude another prose poem, "The Street". Now the two objects are not just linked by similarities but are, in fact, *deputies* for one another:

At the end of the street I see the full moon, which  
doubles as a clock for the entire museum. It tells me  
that it is much later than I had thought, that I have  
stayed too long, that the museum is closed and I am  
locked in for the night. Nothing to do now but wait  
until morning, as all these dead have been waiting  
for years.

This process, whereby one round object ushers a second such object into the space of the poem and then

becomes conflated with it, is most thoroughly explored in "Pozières":

The moon shines over the field,  
it looks at itself from the bottom of the Somme;  
it enters the houses of Pozières  
and spills across the tables, white as salt.

Over the church with its burning candles,  
over the white-haired man still drinking  
the moon looks down.

This face is pure white,  
this face remembers nothing. And the people sleep  
and the moon enters their dreams:  
a clock that says it is all over now,  
a plate that says eat all you wish.

And at the bottom of the old man's glass  
the moon sparkles like a coin, but his face remains  
dark  
like the other side of the moon.

To my way of feeling, the measured ease with which these objects succeed and then deputize for each other implies that the process can be endlessly prolonged. The poems in *The Lines of the Hand* generate an energy which extends beyond their own determinate moment.

At least its second half, "Pozières" is basically an inventory which enumerates the various aspects or transformations of its central image. It is this enumerative activity or process which provides the impetus for many of the poems in *Your Shadow*, Hart's third volume of poetry. The book in fact begins with one such moment:

The lemon trees fatted with sunlight,  
the terraces laced with jasmine,  
the whisper of her white dress, —

these ten thousand things of the world  
that cling like honey.

and the frequency with which the subsequent forty-five poems go on to list the given realities of the world suggests that Hart has returned to the poetic territory which he had largely vacated in his second book. No matter how heightened they may be, Hart's poems are once again dealing with the world of common experience.

The surest indication of this can be found in the number of occasions on which these poems register sensations of weight. Whether it be those "lemon trees fatted with sunlight", the darting flies which make the poet feel "as heavy as (his) bed", or even the dead "lugging their shadows/like silent chains", we are repeatedly being reminded that we live in an obdurately material and physical world. The weight of things is a truth about the world which demands to be acknowledged.

Some of these acknowledgements, it must be admitted, are made in a spirit of resignation. On reading the follow-

ing lines from "Summers", an openly autobiographical poem:

The weight of borrowed money,  
the deepening gaze of a Queensland afternoon,  
the wanting to be older though never old.  
It could not work,  
and for a month we carried our love  
like an opened parachute dragging behind us,  
the sky so large  
as though the earth had shrunk in half.

it is evident that this weighty world of experience is nothing more than an unwelcome burden. Yet such moments are counterbalanced by others which characteristically discern in the same world a sense or promise of fullness. Burgeoning and ripening in time, "the ten thousand things of the world" indicate that Hart has finally won through to an ampler and more honeyed vision of life. Dread no longer dominates the emotional range of his work.

This ampler note is most openly stated, I think, in "Midsummer":

These are the richest weeks  
when light slows to heat, when all that grows  
fattens with the sweetest juices —  
and the cloudless sky  
so heavy, as though we walked through cloud.

The demonstrative way in which this poem begins is a feature it shares with other poems in the book. Yet where these other poems frequently modulate from the demonstrative to the imperative, "Midsummer" makes one gesture in that direction and then re-invokes the calmness figured in its opening lines:

... tomorrow, the new land,  
as though I have never touched you before:  
another day, as rich as this,  
the garden in blossom, the river's hush, the promise  
renewed through change: this world.

This sense of a more relaxed stance is evident in other ways. The images which stud the poems now flash more vividly than before and often occur without forewarning, and a fair proportion of them now invoke sensory modalities other than that of sight. The tactile sensations many of the poems register indicate that Hart's poetic world is no longer primarily defined in visual terms, as do the multitude of aural images now found in his work. One poem compares the voice of a race caller to a "loud typewriter" which "crams/each new second with more words than ever before", another (whose subject is Toscanini) likens the notes of a flute to "stones skipping water". This leads me to my final point.

In the past Hart's poems have rarely lived by virtue of their cadence. *Your Shadow* indicates that this is no longer true of his current work, for throughout its pages one encounters passages in which the images and aural



orchestration are equally impressive. Whether it be the opening stanza of the first of the four poems called "Your Shadow";

Fed by its eye, the falcon  
swims with the flooding wind, watching  
its shadow writhe  
like something left half-dead.

or the opening lines of one of his best poems "The Last Day":

With the last day comes  
a ploughman in Europe will look over his shoulder  
and see the hard furrows of earth

finally behind him, he will watch his shadow  
run back into his spine.

It will be morning  
for the first time, and the long night  
will be seen for what it is,  
a black flag trembling in the sunlight . . .

we are now in the presence of a poet whose technical sensitivities have begun to match his intelligence and distinction of mind.

*Gary Catalano is a poet and critic who lives in Melbourne. His most recent book of poetry is Slow Tennis.*

*Kevin Hart's translations from Ungaretti are on pages 52 and 53.*

## comment

*Jennifer Strauss writes:*

In his discussion of anthologies ("The Sum of the Parts", *Overland* 103) Terry Harrington states:

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.

His assertion is exemplified in a table which, inter alia, gives percentages of female poets in a number of anthologies from 1956 to 1986. It does indeed suggest a notable increase. It also happens to be erroneous. There must be gremlins in his calculator.

For the two editions of Judith Wright's *A Book of Australian Verse* (the dates of which, incidentally, are given not as 1955 and 1967 but as 1956 and 1968 in my copies) he gives figures respectively as 5 per cent and 6 per cent. In the earlier edition a count yields 11 females and 58 men, giving a percentage of 15.9; in the second edition we find 12 women and 66 men, a percentage of 15.4. For Harry Heseltine's *Penguin Book of Australian Verse* the figure should not be 29 but 16.6, there being 17 women to 85 men.

For Rodney Hall's *Collins Book of Australian*

*Poetry* a count of 19 women, 67 men yields 22 per cent not 29. Here anonymous poems and Aboriginal songs have been excluded from the computation and the same must be done for Les Murray's *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*, for which Harrington gives an astonishing figure of 37. Of the poets in my copy whose names enable identification by sex, 33 are female, 152 male, in other words 17.8 percent. Since in the case of the groups of Aboriginal poems two out of ten are specifically identified as women's songs, it may not be unreasonable to assume that the others are men's songs, but this is not clear and it seems better to exclude them, along with the anonymous poems.

I have not examined the Geoffrey Dutton anthology for which Harrington gives a figure of 14, because my patience is exhausted. The matter of the representation of women writers in publishing activities is a complex one and its spillage of social politics into the chaste arena of literary studies is understandably exasperating to many of the current incumbents of that arena. We need to keep clear heads and cool tempers. It may be that even accurate statistics will not lead us to any final solutions or understandings; but one as inaccurate as Harrington's can only serve to mislead.

*Terry Harrington apologises and admits error. Overland apologises also, and wonders if poets should be trusted with calculators. Apart from Jennifer Strauss.*

JOHN SENDY

## 'Bookshop' Morrison

Jack Morrison, manager of Melbourne's International Bookshop from 1936 to 1970, died in June, aged 85. Many readers will remember Morrison when he was at the Exhibition Street shop in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. With his friend, Roy Rawson, across the road, he supervised the sales of much of the radical and left-wing literature sold in Melbourne over a long period.

He was born in Barcaldine ten years after the famous shearers' strike of 1891 when armed shearers, and soldiers and police patrolled the surrounding districts and a serious clash was only narrowly averted. Though from Salvation Army parents, he absorbed the radical sentiments of those militant pastoral workers and, after finishing primary school, he became a stockman and drover on Queensland's western plains. Once, he rode his horse for eight hundred miles before getting work. He retained, always, the skinny-bummed lithe-ness of those who spend long years in the saddle.

In 1922 he joined the ALP at Julia Creek. Early in 1926 he went south to Geelong to work on the legendary 'T' Model Ford and to be sacked at an hour's notice early in 1927 along with hundreds of others.

In Sydney he worked as a builder's laborer on pick, shovel and hod, lumping the regulation eighty-one pounds of bricks, cement or mortar up ladders to the second floor, to be sacked again after missing several days' work because of flu.

He attended communist lectures by Jack Kavanagh, joined the Communist Party in 1927, and imbibed at study classes and meetings an austere, hard-lined brand of left-wing politics born of hardship, unemployment, a no-surrender spirit and an abundance of idealistic faith and fervor.

In 1929 Morrison married Audrey Allen of Geelong, and became a shop steward at a Sydney oil depot for the Storemen and Packers Union, and edited, in his

spare time, several issues of the *Worker's Weekly*.

When Friends of the Soviet Union formed in 1930 he became its first national secretary. He never abandoned his faith in, and active support of, the USSR.

In 1932 he returned to Geelong to be unemployed and an activist in the Unemployed Workers Movement as well as in the CPA. Then for a short time he became secretary of the first Geelong sub-branch of the Coachmakers' Union.

An unlikely person to become a bookseller of distinction? Perhaps. But he came out of a slice of the past when not only intellectuals read books, weighed ideas, argued concepts and dreamed dreams, but when not infrequently swagmen quoted Shakespeare, shearers enjoyed Lawson, Upton Sinclair and Jack London, and seamen still swapped copies of Ingersoll, Bellamy and Tressell.

Jack Morrison developed a deep and broad literary knowledge. And while schooled only to the primary stage, he could, according to his namesake the short story writer John Morrison, "teach a few academics how to articulate the English Language."

He was prominent in the Left Book Club and in the International Bookshop played a notable part in promoting sales of Australian fiction and scholarly work at a period when this was an unusual practice. He also championed the cause of the Australasian Book Society.

Morrison never wavered in his commitment to the CPA even when its influence waned greatly and even though he argued sternly against its leadership for relinquishing its pro-Soviet stand.

He retained to the end his spriteliness, alertness, political toughness and debating tartness: reading, selling left-wing literature, gardening, motoring and arguing. By any standards a remarkable man.



**SPEAKING OF**

Where are you Heather Bell?  
dead or alive with such fair curly hair –  
it would be fashionable now

what did we find in each other  
side by side at our scarred desks  
and then at recess sitting on the bench  
built right around the pepper tree's trunk  
sometimes slipping off the pink dry husks  
and sucking the sweet hot berries  
sometimes munching a vegemite sandwich  
or hanging upside down on the iron rail  
our cotton dresses flapping in our faces  
did you marry a farmer?

me? I fell in love many times  
in and out as if it was the sea  
and I still living as we did then  
at the beach  
I think you would have been more dignified

I could never pull myself up to the top of the rail  
as you could  
I had to fall off  
perhaps I had weak arms

do you remember the Ritz Cafe?  
with it's coleus plants I hated them did you?  
and we had milk shakes for a shilling there

you know I went back  
it's still there much the same  
but the coleuses have gone  
and they sell Chiko rolls now too

at Elder Smith's they have a computer  
I bought a piece of sheep's raddle there  
in memory of my Father –  
a stick of it always rolled around the back of our car  
often with a sheep mute and bound on the seat  
I wonder where he was taking it

did you hear the man who used to expose himself  
to us fell off the jetty and drowned  
I heard that with relief when I was twelve

did you ever tell your Mother about him –  
I didn't

I did though tell her of another  
who did rather more than that  
she made me promise not to tell my Father  
I remember how earnest she suddenly became –  
she thought my Father might kill him  
so I didn't speak of it again

I realise all my life  
I've been drawn to people like you  
dignified and moderate  
mild tempered

I dash around with a butterfly net  
trying to capture everything  
the past the present  
most slips through like air

do you remember Gresham Ebbs  
so blond with caterpillars crawling  
inside his shirt  
sitting behind him the back of my legs grew rigid  
when I saw one creep up his neck  
I still find men full of surprises

you had a small brother I think his name was Geoffrey  
I had three  
their names were Tom Bill and Peter  
at home they were called  
Tucker Wilberforce and Pierre

when things went wrong at school  
I always ran away  
now I have again

Queensland this time  
to a hammock on a wide white verandah  
I lie here in its net  
making swipes at the past  
capturing these few things  
the past that never returns or leaves

## THE WOMB

And in my sleep  
I invent you  
you touch me  
and we go like a shark  
through the waters of fear  
then we are calm  
I am consoled  
when I wake

you stand all night  
on my pillow  
talking talking to me  
and all day I walk  
talking talking to you

that is how I spend my days  
and nights with you

and I watch the little boats  
tug tug tugging  
at their moorings  
they can't sail yet  
neither can I fly

small daisies grow  
against this old stone wall  
a tiny prehistoric lizard  
slips into a crack  
nothing changes  
only names and dates

who wrote the script  
I wonder  
slowly like a disbelieving elephant  
I shake my head  
at what would beggar anyone's belief  
that we are younger  
than our children

babies splashing  
dribbling in the bath  
we don't need ducks  
to float  
we have each other here  
and water running on our skin  
is giggle splash and tickle

we are baby sister  
and little baby brother

you're my Father  
I'm your Mother

I'm your daughter  
you're my son

we are in the womb  
you know what rhymes  
with womb



TWO POEMS BY CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

**LINOTYPE**

Something bobs up out of the shallows,  
glistening, dumb as a seal.

I'd like to write a paean in praise  
of the generous O, letter of love,

or sing about A,  
the stiff two-legged beginner.

E turns out to be thin  
as a sweetsmelling lavender sprig.

Under these I will daub a poster  
in sudden praise of U

which is a glass to brim over with wine  
or cup my heart's blood.

Y has a tail and  
I have a tale, a heavy song

which goes dancing over the carrion  
crazed with daffodil joy.

**DOUBLE CONCERTO**

In my golden westward hemisphere  
the gods, they say, are literate,  
can tell us what their bold right hand is doing  
and grab time lost  
like a packet of sweet biscuits:  
really to experience pain  
rather than luxury or counterpane  
you need the wool of memory.

Over the other side  
of the Great Divide we keep  
a wide world's architectural proportion  
or theatre of state  
like a modern dance ensemble.  
A civilized fan of texture  
it is greatly taken with line,  
swimming at ease in oceanic space.

Inherently theatrical, alas,  
these twins are wearing a mask that I call Me  
which is leather, toothy and creased,  
with five o'clock shadow.  
Left has given it a clear name,  
Class Enemy McAesthete, but  
Right makes us of me as a belvedere  
from which to prospect these painterly olives and blues.

The lobes are symmetrical, like tits or the cheeks of a bum,  
and we all crave symmetry from zero to kingdom come.

## PRE-DINNER MEDITATION IN AN AEGEAN COURTYARD

*For Chris Wallace-Crabbe*

Clatter of silver and flash of glass  
ripple through the cooling air and thus  
the fish, Pacific-bright and gorgeous.  
Blood irises, bubble crystal beads,  
deep gurgle of larks in alabaster throats  
sewn up at the gut it floats pacific  
under the vine, with cloves and cinnamon  
and wheezing sage in old man's dreams.  
When this, the sudden hand:

swift

as swallow's crack across the face of walls  
splitting a moment in the garden.  
Voices stir. Voices surge at low water wash  
over the reef, and she comes down  
firm-breasted and disconsolate, the girl  
in black, arms full of sunset orchards.

She weaves no light in her hair,  
defies no parting on the stairs  
by a garden urn. This is the ochre hour,  
frankincense-burning time in vespertine  
Byzantium, the parchment path bone-rusty  
rising from fields in Spring  
above the valley of tears to roll  
down the icon hills through groves of sorrow  
into the sparrow-laden dusk.  
All shadows bend seawards in the breeze.

Seen later by her crazed lover  
one deserted two-o'clock  
in the stifling city. Called after,  
she vanished round the burning bend  
into an emptiness. A soothing name  
once traced by wrens on rainbow mornings,  
now a placid river lapping mud  
on mangrove banks. At summer's end  
she sings with the wind in cracks and,  
in winter, down chimneys.

Who's ever heard what I hear  
stalking across the roofs, the tops  
of trees? The grapes hang low this year.  
Gnats hover drunkenly  
over the table, get trapped in light  
and drop in bowls of soup, get sucked  
up nostrils. Rich, the juices glow  
through drifting talk of strange news  
among the guests. Their sun, it seems,  
has broken loose again and roams at large  
hugging the middle of northern skyways.

Too weary now for sterile vigils. This breeze  
is wholesome. Lighted time makes a sphere  
too smooth for roughened hands,  
too slippery. Only this morning, friends,  
walking together to the beach and all  
the way beside us the bloom of dead flesh.  
Only a dog, admittedly.  
Carcass maturing in the heat.  
But in the jasmine, my friends, the jasmine,  
the hibiscus lane stammering ahead  
cicada-mad?

Rinses his mouth with ouzo,  
spits. Dim sprays of lavender stir  
against the harbor lights, and lo the fish  
charcoal-refined upon its Rhodian platter,  
exquisite. So glad to have you here tonight,  
tonight. This hand is passionate,  
seeks fingerholes on weathered planes,  
the hump of upthrust spent, the corrugation;  
feels for the jerk of idol's grin, the track  
of Satyr's hoof or Griffin's nail;  
plumbs cracks. And looks in hollows, gropes  
for alibis lost over the brink of light.

DIMITRIS TSALOUMAS



VICTOR YE

## The Encounter

It was a windy afternoon, not too many passers-by as there were most afternoons. Cloudy and dusty. Ma had to shield his eyes. What a wind! He had come here on business from Pingbao City. A bus was coming and he took it. Relieved and relaxed, he was happy to escape from the storm, pattering on the hood.

He had not quite calmed down when he noticed the man. Is it him? And here? Yes, it was him. A glance at his silhouette was enough. And that black mole, the beady eyes, the big wild mouth! No change, no change in ten-odd years at all.

But there was some little difference in his appearance. He was weary, sombre, unhappy. Seated five or six feet away, with his head bent, he seemed to have dozed off. What a giveaway! Where was the arrogance, the force, the superiority? Ma found it hard to resist the idea that the man still had a say in his fate. How could he forget and forgive? All the past experiences, both fresh and frayed. But the wooden look! Where was the vigor and the driving force? So disappointed and disheartened! What has happened to that violent, arrogant soul?

Ma remembered the dark, pitch-dark dawn, the moment when he was seized from his bed and rushed into the streets to repudiate his crimes. This man had been at the head of the squad who pushed him forward. A terrible memory. A sort of hatred suddenly filled his mind though it was fifteen years ago, almost a generation gone! Many memories had withered and rotted away. Only that experience was still there.

The man did not seem to notice him. Yes, the long years. The mole, the whiskers, the dark complexion, the exhausted stare. How old was he? How old had he been fifteen years ago? Only twenty or so? Oh yes, quite a young man! What happened in that dawn, that chilly and windy dawn: "Listen, you bastard, if you're disobedient, you'll be doomed!"

That voice still echoed in his ears. Ma remembered the scene: the wind, the frost, the icy cold.

Their eyes met. The man lowered his head. Strangers, absolute strangers. Past, history. Everything had become history.

Those dark and bitter years. He had suffered as a matter of course, on account of his capitalist family and his ideas. The other had his worker's family and his radical ideas. What had he done? Ah, he remembered now.

It was some months after the Cultural Revolution. Ma was not allowed to join the Red Guard because his father had been once the owner of a flour-mill in a small town. Like the rest of the students from similar backgrounds, he was deprived of the chance of going out for 'revolutionary contact,' including the one of seeing Chairman Mao. He didn't really mind: it wasn't so pleasant to be crammed in a train-carriage full of Red Guards on their way to some place in the country. Yet what was intolerable was the worsening situation: women dared not go out after dark, supplies of food were short, rumors forecast armed clashes. It was time to get out.

It was an evening, he remembered very well, the evening he sat at a table and joined in a chat with two of his room-mates.

"Perhaps we can never expect the class to resume," one of them said, laying aside an English book. Both the fellows were liberals, refusing to join either side of the Red Guard organization, though they were from working-class families.

"How long can this go on?" said Ma. "Why do they want to make matters worse?" Just then someone poked his head through the door and cut them short. "What are you talking about?" It was the fellow from the next room, known for his advocacy of rebel violence. It was a bit too late for them to change the topic. They gazed at each other and said nothing. Silence prevailed in the room until the man withdrew.

The next morning, however, all the students were summoned for a meeting by the Red Guards' student organization. The head of the Red Guards spoke, the former Youth League secretary of Ma's class, a student with both ambition and ability.

"The situation is very good. More and more are taking our side in our revolutionary actions. They realise the importance of arming themselves so that they can defend against any armed invasion!"

Ma was tired of the way they spoke, just wanting to go home after the meeting. No matter what they said, he decided, he would never allow himself to be concerned with their affairs. Suddenly he heard something unusual.

"Yet someone has dared to incite ill-feeling against us rebels, to create confusion, to fish in troubled waters! Some spread rumors and even dare to slander our rebel leaders. We should never allow those bastards from the capitalists' families to do or to speak what they like!"

Ma was shocked. He turned his eyes towards the speaker and saw the wild force in his eyes. He felt fear. When the meeting was over and he was going to leave, someone came up and stopped him: "Ma, stay in your room and do not go elsewhere."

"Why?"

He had been through this before. This time he noticed the black mole below the big mouth and the beady eyes moving quickly.

"You don't know what for? Ask yourself for what. If you still don't know, we'll be able to let you know. You must be obedient." The eyes shone hypnotically.

"Black Egg, you're wanted." Another man came. Ma was somewhat relieved.

He knew little about this Black Egg. He knew he was either from the Maths or Physics department, and was said to be more blunt and less cunning than the other rebel leaders.

What would they do with him? Ma was a bit worried. After all, he was from a capitalist's family. That meant he was inferior politically to the rest of the students. He regretted his casual, incautious way of speaking. But it was not just him. Besides, what they had talked about was true. Didn't they know that? Didn't they realize that most of the people, including many students, did not want violence? Was he wrong to say so?

That evening Ma was asked to make a written criticism of what he talked about. He refused; he told the

messenger that he did not want to be critical of what he thought was right. But, he was forced to make a self-criticism, to deceive those rebels and to deceive himself. False, pretentious, empty. The history of those years was dust.

From then on no one in his class at the university wanted to have any words with him. Perhaps they were afraid that they might be contaminated. He had to lower his head everywhere he went, humble and obedient. At first he envied those with revolutionary families. Then, to his surprise, those with revolutionary families came to share his fate. He was informed one day that some of them were put under house arrest, including the Black Egg. His name was erased. The reason for his fall was obscure. Apparently he was trapped in a factional group which lost favor.

Ma had never met him again since then. Yet scraps of information, now and then, reached his ears. Black Egg was assigned to an urban secondary school with the help of some of his friends – doubtless his rebel comrades – unlike most of his fellow students who went to the rural areas. That was all he could remember, and that was more than ten years ago. What had happened since? Did he try to rise up again, or did he remain silent? What did he think of the current situation? And of his past experience as a rebel student? Interesting, a funny thing indeed. Changing and changed. Youth entered middle age. Those violent and stormy years, those vigorous, showy young people! All a flash in the pan, like a summer storm.

Noise. The bus stopped and more people got in. He couldn't see the Black Egg. He must have left the bus. He noticed the storm was over. On a sudden impulse Ma felt the need to talk to the Black Egg. He jumped off and caught sight of the Black Egg on the sidewalk.

"Excuse me," Ma said breathlessly.

"Yes?" Black Egg turned around and looked puzzled.





"I'm Ma Ta-Chen. Your fellow student in the university days."

"Oh I see." He seemed to be relieved. "I'm sorry, but I didn't recognize you."

"Well, we haven't met for the last ten years and I couldn't have recognized you if I hadn't been close to you in the bus."

Black Egg nodded without speaking, as if to meditate.

"How are you getting along these days?" he asked.

"Me? Oh, in a factory, a technician. How about you, married?"

"Certainly. My son is already ten. I'm a middle-school teacher."

"Still a teacher?" Being a teacher was no better than being a technician by social convention, a social status even lower than that of a salesman in the eyes of some people.

Black Egg didn't seem to be too happy with Ma's tone. He responded a bit angrily: "I'm nobody and can't expect to change my job without help from above." He sounded sorry for himself. Ma wanted to tell him: No, you were not nobody. You once lorded over me.

"Why not? You must have some friends in the government. Try and get an office job." Ma couldn't resist his ill-feeling against him. He's simply an idiot. He doesn't understand what he has done.

"Friends? How can people like me have any friends in power? It took me nearly ten years to get my wife transferred from a rural school to this city. But for the fall of the Gang of Four, maybe she would still be in her little hut in that school!"

Ma could hardly follow. Such an arrogant fellow with such complaints!

"You mean you've a lot of trouble with your wife's work?" Ma's eyes searched Black Egg's face.

"Too much trouble to talk about!" Black Egg said. "You've got to pay tribute to everyone in your way.

If you miss one Buddha, the whole business is spoiled." He paused and sighed.

For the first time Ma felt mixed feelings towards him.

"You can't always expect your old friends to give you the help you need," Black Egg continued.

Ma could not help some comforting words. "Anyway, you've settled down in a big city with your family. Congratulations." But in his heart he was aware of sharp feelings. He had had the same experience: the struggle to be transferred from a rural workshop to a factory in the city, with help from a relative in a government department. Yet his wife was still in a rural school. A woman with two young children and still at work! Shopping, cooking, washing. He tasted the bitterness and exhaustion of his wife after a day's work. And most of his own spare time was spent on technical books to make up for what he missed during the Cultural Revolution. He had little time to visit his wife and children. He often regretted his decision to come to the city. They agreed that Ma should come first. They cherished the hope that they could finally establish their home in a city rather than idle away their life in the country. Five years had gone by since then.

Black Egg and Ma gave each other a silent smile and turned away from each other. It turned out they had something in common after all.

The storm had cleared and the wind was gone. The plane trees seemed to straighten up, their young leaves green. Bustling and busy, clamoring and clattering, the city resumed its normal order. Ah, Ma thought, what a pattern our life has had. Like the weather, like rapid currents in the Yangtse River. These young vigorous faces, he thought, were dauntless, just as he had been. He envied those young, just in time for the fine weather.

"How can I be like them?" he asked himself.

*Victor Ye is a teacher in China.*

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

## swag

A few weeks ago we hired a rather bohemian room in Carlton – our poetry editor tried to open the window and it came to pieces in his hands – and invited half a dozen or so young women and men, known for their lively intelligences and interest in the kind of things Overland is interested in, to join the editorial board for a modest dinner and a long, sometimes heated but overall splendidly good humored, frequently passionate discussion on what the magazine should be doing and where it should be going. It was great fun. Everyone had their say. No-one liked everything that was said. We are going to do it again. And perhaps again.

The occasion was inspired by the thought that Overland is still largely being run by the generation that founded the magazine, give or take a few youngsters in their thirties or forties around the place. We do, it is true, have some very bright young people in their twenties working for and with the magazine, and that really is the point. How and when are these talents going to be more formally built into the structure and organisation of Overland?

No, we don't think we are falling behind the times. We remember that Max Beerbohm – was it? – said that the trouble about being up with the latest was that you so quickly became a fossil. I, for one, do not believe that people's minds atrophy from the day they turn 65 and that their proper destination is then an Eventide Home. I believe ageism in our society is as sinister a menace as racism and sexism, but far less thought about. Fred Williams once told me that no-one ever painted a good picture until they were 45, and that thereafter they would only paint three. I believe that if you were looking for the best in Australian writing, or anyone else's writing for that matter, you would find a great deal of it being done by those over fifty.

I was asked on the ABC not long ago why Overland still kept publishing "old people" like Judith Wright and Manning Clark. I have heard several people say that some of Judith Wright's most magnificent work

is in her recent book – which, incidentally, I have not seen a copy of in a bookshop.

But, for all this, and as Handel reminds us, we shall be changed. Who will be running Overland in ten or twenty years? How may we plan both to preserve continuity and the soul of the magazine, and at the same time recruit new talent with new ideas who will bring on new generations of readers after the present readers have died, leaving large portions of their estates to the support of the magazine? Well, we think we know some of the answers. Watch this space.

What was said at the meeting? Far too much to report, or even to remember coherently. One thing did seem to emerge, though, from our guests: that a lot of young people who have never opened a copy of Overland to check what it's really like have an image of it as an old-fashioned 'radical nationalist' magazine of the 1950s, overlaid with leftish politics of the 1940s and 1950s, and that our name itself, redolent more of Smoky Dawson than of Michel Foucault or Laurie Anderson, is no help. Interesting and unfair!

In the constant underground (from our readers) war to extent the sales and readership of Overland, we have recently written to a number of bookshops around Australia asking them to take a few copies for sale on the most favorable terms. Of about fifteen shops contacted, only one – in a suburb of Perth – agreed to take copies. Most of the rest completely ignored us. But Ian Buchanan, of Mulligan's Book Shop, 683 Sandgate Road, Clayfield, Brisbane 4011, did take the trouble to reply, and he has given us permission to print his letter, which I find quite moving:

We often claim that our customers are readers, and we privately and publicly pronounce that we are a "good bookshop". . . We have been trying to sell Australian Book Review for many months past and have failed miserably. I know that Overland does not correspond exactly with Australian



Book Review but I'm afraid that it's near enough to cause me to believe that we would not sell it either. If we were able to acquire these and similar publications and write off the cost, it would be very satisfying. Unfortunately we can't do it. As it is, about ten per cent of all our poetry and short-story collections (especially home-grown ones) represent donations on our part, and the recipients don't seem to think any the better of us for it. This is a sad litany.

I suspect that Ian Buchanan has a real point somewhere here, and that point is something to do with the way we all tend to kid ourselves, in the general publishing/media hype about Australian writing, that there's constant progress and development. I believe markets and sales, when everything including unsold copies is taken into account, are smaller and more fragile than we pretend. I suspect that there is something of an Australian literary 'bubble' afloat, kept aloft in large part by forces which are irrational in a severe economic sense. These irrational forces include the need to keep static installations turning over, the sacrifices of thousands in the book and writing trade who are motivated by ego and by idealism, and the desire of all of us to believe that what we want to believe is true.

This is not going to lead me into an attack on Australian philistinism. I think Australians are very good-natured about the pretensions of that small section of the population which believes it is the thinking and advanced and sensitive section with the ability to comment on and judge for the rest. I sometimes think that intellectuals and academics and writers need a bit more of the humility of Isaac Newton – not, actually, that he was humble man – when he said:

I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the sea-shore, and now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

Or, in what is perhaps the most utterly humble remark I have ever read of anyone's making, the Duke of Wellington's on the day after Waterloo. The indefatigable Creevey had got into Wellington's house in Brussels, and they discussed the battle. The Duke was obviously mulling it all over. Then he said: "By God! I don't think it would have done if I had not been there." The inference was that Waterloo was such a nicely balanced, close-run affair that, *for once*, his personal influence may have been decisive.

With this issue the cost of a copy of *Overland* rises from \$4 to \$5, and of a yearly subscription from \$16 to \$20. (The cynics tell us that we should have made it \$21, so that the kindly people who now send \$20 for a \$16 subscription would in future send \$25 for a \$21 subscription.) Our last rise was from \$3 to \$4 in May 1983, with issue no. 87, so we have held the price firm for over three years, which I think is a pretty good effort these days – especially as in this period we have published two very special issues, increased our already substantial payments to writers, and have been discriminated against (we believe) by the Literature Board. All the same, we are sorry. We'd like to *give* the magazine to you if we could. But our loss on last year's trading was, if you're interested, \$4793. This is not enough to put us out of business, but of course it's a worry. Incidentally, none of *Overland*'s editors draw a penny – sorry, a cent – of income from the magazine. I estimate they contribute \$100,000 worth of free labor every year.

Readers will notice a mix of type faces in this issue, for instance on pages 64 and 65. It looks unprofessional, I know, but it does make an interesting point. We are changing from our previous type face and size (p.64) to our new (p.65). Most of this issue is set in the new, but there are some items of 'overmatter' still in the old face. In these hard times it would be an extravagance to have these re-set simply to match, so here they both are. For the curious, we are moving from 9 on 10 point Sabon to 9½ on 10½ Times Roman. I think you will all see this as an improvement. We have wished to make this change for some time, but it was not possible until new machines were installed at our printers.

Lily Brett has, we notice with pleasure, been awarded the Mattara poetry prize for 1986. Five of her remarkable poems from *The Auschwitz Poems* appeared in *Overland* no. 102.

In these difficult times, with postage up yet again, it would be an enormous help if people could renew on their *first* notification, the one that comes in the form of a book-mark inserted in the magazine. (The inserted subscription form is *not* an indication that your subscription is due for renewal, but is placed in all copies of the magazine. It is there primarily to obtain new readers, though current readers may use the form for renewal purposes if they wish.) And would all please remember that we do not always post ordered copies at once – we have to accumulate a minimum quantity to qualify for concession postal rates.

## The Bullocky to his Creator

Some admirable entries. People seemed moved by the Bullocky's – and Judith Wright's – plight. Ailsa Barr ends with a strong statement:

Don't crush me bones; I think you'll kill a message;  
Whose Promised Land?

Perry Head's Bullocky adds:

ps Me widdershins av ealed up nice,  
But i stil get populous afor me ize.

We share the prize (a book each) to the authors of the following:

Now why she called me Moses, I don't know;  
the name is Cooper, though a cove I met  
along the Darling once preferred to go  
by the name of Mosey Price – but I forget

which way the Promised Land lay;  
to the West, no promise in the emus  
scudding past; and south, Barkindji way,  
no tucker much but old man kangaroos

to eke the damper out; a man's a mug  
to go in for the hauling trade, I guess;  
I wished at times I'd never felt the tug  
of trailing carrion. Life's not all a mess,

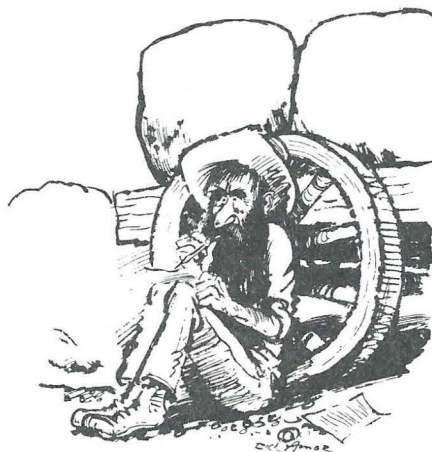
though; what I've seen beats Jericho  
and all them other worn-out bible sights;  
New England does me fine; I watch the snow  
fall over gorge-lips, watch Old Hughie's lights

across the bathylith to Armidale  
and down the Moonbis, where the possums call  
from midnight red-box, and the water-rail  
run skittering along the Styx's wall;

I wonder if the boyars round here though  
ensconced in their fine mansions, ever see  
the country that the Nganyaywana know  
as Beulah in their own mythology,

or if their sweet Diana-daughters' rhymes  
admit more than I see: the dancing's done.  
No romance in the bones round here, but crimes  
that lie exposed to strong New England's sun.

MICHAEL SHARKEY (VICTORIA)



What peace, that you now set me free.  
My grave's been troubled all these years  
by burdens that were heaped on it,  
far worse than flood or drought, for tears.

First the poem the way you meant it,  
suggested that I'd pinched the land;  
wanted it as fields and pastures  
for my far superior band.

Then the way the readers saw it –  
They made a hero out of me.  
Seemed lone handed I'd created  
all the wealth in this fine country.

Judith, please, don't take offence, but  
you were mistaken, as are they.  
For what I did, day in, day out,  
was simply working for my pay.

And yes, those fiends and angels came,  
and built the land all share today.  
But what was it that governed them?  
Tis not for you or me to say!

I agree, no longer to publish  
your portrait of Bullocky's heart.  
Misunderstood I've always been;  
now silent, no more sliced apart.

SUELLEN COWLEY (WESTERN AUSTRALIA)



PETER GOLDSWORTHY

## The Detroit of the South

*This is the third in our series of writings on Place. Previous contributions to the series have been by James McQueen and by Barry Hill.*

I've long harbored the dream of coining some new word or epithet that will enter the language: a "chunder", or "Lucky Country", or "over-the-top" or whatever, which will immediately be taken into common usage. My latest attempt is the title of my most recent book, *Zooing*. Unfortunately I have yet to overhear anyone – apart from immediate family members, attempting to humor me – use the verb "to zoo" in idle conversation. It doesn't meet any current vernacular need, I guess. The same applies to an epithet for Sydney – "The Big Avocado" – which I have managed to slip, seemingly accidentally, into every second book-review I write for the Sydney Morning Herald.

That graft, also, refuses to take.

I know a Russian pianist who migrated to Australia recently. It was suggested to her by the Department of Immigration that the Australian city that might suit her best, coming as she did from Leningrad, was Melbourne. I presume this was for the well-known climatic similarities – but there might be other interesting congruences worth exploring, mainly to do with Housing Commission architectural styles, or public service bureaucracies. Another phrase – "Melbourne, the Leningrad of the South" – immediately came to mind, and I have been sprinkling my letters with it, and dropping it into conversation, ad tedium, ever since.

Once again, with no returns.

Adelaide, the Athens of the South, is one epithet that *has* taken – at least locally, and admittedly sometimes ironically. Unfortunately, it is not my invention – it seems to date back to the Dunstan years. It might even be traced to the mouth of Pericles himself. I want to get on the band-wagon with my own improvement, however: Adelaide, Detroit of the South.

Adelaide is two cities, really – twin cities, Athens and Detroit, living uneasily side by side. The lines of division are not entirely geographic, or socio-economic – east versus west, inner versus outer, *eloi* versus morlock. Geography does play a part, but the mixture is a bit more complex – more a superimposition, perhaps, of one city on top of the other, like Schliemann's Troy IV on Troy III. The Formula One Grand Prix, for instance, is held on the Athenian side of the city – and patronised by many prominent Athenians, as well as Detroitois.

I see no point in adding a further escarpment to the alp of print written on the subject of Athenian Adelaide – the Don Dunstan-Gillies' Report Adelaide of opera, theatre, music, wine, festivals, parks and restaurants.

The Detroit is less obtrusive – or better camouflaged. But more than any other Australian city Adelaide rides on the car's back – or on its roof-rack. What's good for General Motors – and, more recently, Mitsubishi – is good for Adelaide. A hiccup in car sales nationally turns Adelaide into a City of Fear, if we are to believe our afternoon tabloid.

By the time ideas reach Chicago they've worn so thin you can see clear through them, the American novelist Saul Bellow wrote of his home-town. What is true for Chicago must be even truer for Adelaide. It took the Industrial Revolution approximately three hundred years to reach here – arriving in the mid-fifties, with the FJ Holden – and by then many of its nastier aspects had worn pretty thin.

The city, and the older suburbs, was largely built already, and the foundries and assembly lines had to be built around them, not vice versa. Much of the orig-

nal character of Adelaide has managed, and still manages, to survive industrialisation. It is probably the only mainland capital in Australia where this is possible. It's size is (just) manageable, levelling off at about a million people, having dropped from third to fifth-largest Australian city in the latest census. Its various bureaucracies and municipal councils are relatively uncorrupt, and people of good intent still outnumber the cynical and weary.

Stupidities abound, of course: the conversion of the Railway Station into a casino whose decor has been memorably described in the local monthly, the *Adelaide Review* by Peter Ward as "International Hood Deco". Ward has been waging quite a campaign in the *Adelaide Review*, aided by others of the calibre of Hugh Stretton, against various planning stupidities. But only in Adelaide, perhaps, would such a campaign be taken notice of – and even partly initiated – by a Lord Mayor.

Around the central city sprawls the Detroit: albeit, apart from the car-plants, a mainly suburban, and fairly green Detroit. This was the Adelaide I knew as a child, visiting from the bush to stay with my grandparents each school-holiday. My grandfather, a motorbike salesman and Australia's first bkie, had been condemned in the interests of his continuing health, to a Morris Minor by the time I knew him – but he still worshipped the Detroit side of the city: its factories, railway yards, warehouses, shipyards. I remember circumnavigating the entire new gigantic Chrysler plant at Tonsley Park in his Morris sometime in the early sixties – it might have been Chartres Cathedral, albeit somewhat flattened, to my reverent grandfather.

I first saw most of Adelaide through the window of that Morris, under his tutelage, during school holidays. What I saw bore little resemblance to Athens. Sunday drives were a great institution in Adelaide – it was, and still is, the most suburban of Australian cities, and that means Car. The various public transport systems are fine for getting into or out of the inner city – fine for getting from suburb to urb and back again. To get from suburb to suburb, however, is publically impossible.

The Car to my grandfather – like the Motorbike before it – was not just a means. It was an ends. The new designs each year, the baroque profusion of styles and shapes and modifications – all this was Art for Art's Sake, surely, inventiveness beyond any reasonable need. He didn't survive to see the Grand Prix – the greatest celebration of this beautiful useless art – come to Adelaide, but he would have loved it. He was a great fan of Car-Chases, and the Grand Prix is one almighty Car-Chase.

If film is the pre-eminent art-form of our time, then the Car-Chase is one of its central icons. Car-chase movies certainly still put bums on seats in Adelaide. While the Athenians watch "The Tree of Wooden Clogs" at the Trak or "Celine and Julie go Boating" at the Capri,

the Detroitois drive to see "Smokey and the Bandit", "White Lightning", and other films of the genre, built around a car-chase, which play continuously at the Blueline or Hiline or Valleyline or Parkline (et cetera) drive-ins. (Does Adelaide have more drive-ins per capita than other cities? I suspect so.) At any given time, a car-chase can also certainly be found by flicking the dial to one of the five TV channels – although admittedly, the tiny Fiats or Renaults on SBS may not be every Detroitois' cup of tea.

Grandfather's personal car-chases took place on Sunday afternoon – the true peak-hour in Adelaide, and probably the worst time to be on the roads. He loved passing bigger cars in his tiny Morris. He also particularly enjoyed racing locomotives to, and across, level crossings. While most people drove to the hills or the beach, or did a tour of the various Open Inspections around town, sticky-beaking inside other people's homes, my grandfather preferred to drive to the nearest heavy industry, passing as many cars and driving through as many level crossings en route as possible.

Sometimes he would stop at those level crossings and watch, as dangerously close as possible, the trains go past. He was a great fan of the Melbourne (Lenin-grad?) Express, but he also enjoyed watching freight-trains. The pleasure here was to count the trucks, always hoping to break his life-long record – sixty odd – seen once, at a level crossing, on a golden Sunday afternoon many years before.

He bought me an electric train one Christmas – an expensive Lionel, twice as big as anyone else's – but decided to keep it at his house.

Saturday afternoons he always groomed his car – as did everyone else in his street. The first gift I can recall giving him was a brush attachment for his garden-hose, to use on The Car. I remember those Saturday afternoons well, the street lined with cars being hosed down, or waxed, or vacuumed. Doves would always be making their soothing repetitive noises somewhere, neighbors would be burning leaves in gutters, or perhaps raking the gravel in their drives. Here and there, the Footy could usually be heard on someone's radio.

But the predominant activity was car-washing.

A single precious memory from childhood is the only education a writer needs, Dostoevsky claimed. Perhaps this is mine. The life-style would bore me now, no doubt – my own car is always filthy, a means of getting from point A to B, quickly, minimally – but the car-washing memories remain in a glow of contentment.

I have been to the opera . . . well, several times. I drink wine, and like eating out. I like the musical life of my city. I have not been to the Grand Prix, or to the casino. I guess I am an adoptive Athenian. But the essence of Adelaide remains for me, those weekend afternoons in suburban Detroit, the cars being groomed,



the piles of leaves burning in the gutters, the late afternoon sunlight falling thickly, richly.

I tried once to pin down my ambivalent feelings for all this in a poem called "Ratepayer's Ode". Is it permissible to quote oneself? In defence perhaps I can claim it's one of the few poems of mine I still like:

I walk through an afternoon  
of sunlight and neighbors.  
Along avenues of home-loans,  
almost paid.

Slow flies bump at my face,  
webs catch and itch.

The cosmetics of summer surround me:  
the detonation of fruit-trees,  
the green shallows of lawn.

A paperboy rides towards me  
throwing novels into every yard.  
I unwrap the headlines and read.  
It is science-fiction again.  
It is always science-fiction.

### SHRINE

This is the dictator's portrait –  
not good, too official and tall.  
The stillness is right, the set face,  
but his eyes looked inward, not out.  
They tried to reassemble his head  
but there wasn't enough for a death mask.  
These underpants show him more truly –  
washed, of course, but you see  
the faint stain of urine. It shows  
he was a man just like one of us.  
And here's his handkerchief, uncleaned  
as proof that he blew his nose  
when moved to tears, which was often.  
He was a family man, but strict.  
The kids in this photo are his.  
You'll note the girl's smile is uncertain.  
As a recluse she's allowed to live on.  
The unsmiling sons both went bad.  
One was a playboy, loved bulls –  
not bullfights, I mean he staged bullfucks  
for which he "recruited" old women.  
The university called him Caligula  
until his father had it closed down.  
His brother became a priest –  
acceptable until he spoke out  
against torture and for the poor.  
Both died in accidents – hit-run.  
The culprits never were found.  
Their mother? She's still in a nut-house.  
Towards the end the dictator was silent  
even when angry or festive.  
Perhaps like another great Caesar  
he was warned that Ides impended.  
It was dangerous to mention his sorrows.  
He always carried this whip –  
yes, the crocodile lash looks red.  
You could say he lived our lives for us,  
so a part of each heart misses him.  
We don't know quite what we can do,  
think what, go where, love whom . . .  
No, there's only one door to the shrine.  
We all have to go back to get out.

MUNGO MacCALLUM

BERYL LANGER

## Waiting For The End

— 1 —

Jake sits on the booster seat, his chubby fingers circling the cardboard tube which his two year-old imagination has turned into a rocket.

"Five, four, two, one, zero, bwast off!" he chants, giving her an angelic smile. "I'm in space Mummy."

Marion hates space. She is the only person she knows who was old enough to watch the moon-landing in 1969 but didn't. She used to find space just boring. All those bits of inanimate matter circling around into eternity seemed so pointless. Lately though, what with space shuttles and Star Wars, it seems to have left the planetarium and invaded everyday life. She sees it as a threat, part of the imminent barbarism which will make us look back on shopping plazas and video games as icons of a gentler, more civilised age.

The thought of her boys hurtling off to nowhere in a space capsule, surrounded by technology and nothingness, fills her with anger and helplessness. She will be able to do nothing. There they will be, plugged into computers, adrift in a world with no feeling, no families, no flowers. Or maybe dead, all of them ignited together in the one great flash that blasts Melbourne into the post-nuclear age.

"Would you like a Vegemite sandwich to take with you, Jakie?"

"Mmm. I would."

He is very precise, very vulnerable. His innocent trust in rocket ships and Vegemite sandwiches as part of a safe world controlled by Mummy and Daddy makes her want to rush out and join Mothers for Peace, but she knows that if she did she'd feel somehow out of place. There she'd be on Smith Street selling carrot cake and collecting signatures and wondering how it was that whatever the issue the solution was always street stalls.

She envies people their ability to commit themselves to that kind of absurdity, and act as if petitions and parades really made a difference, but try as she might she cannot join them. How could anyone really believe that putting up a sign announcing the suburbs as nuclear free meant anything in a world ruled by apocalyptic madmen?

She can't help seeing them as part of an ironic scene in a real-life replay of "On The Beach," with herself in a post-feminist version of the Ava Gardner role.

She and Mark are walking along the banks of the Merri Creek with the children, who are blissfully unaware of the impending tragedy. They are playing their usual games, hunting strange mysterious creatures in the wild fennel that grows along the banks. She and Mark are agonizing as usual, only this time it's about when to take the suicide pills. How much longer do they have? The children's routines have become incredibly precious, and she and Mark are overflowing with love and pain. They come to the end of the path, and there, beneath a THIS IS A NUCLEAR FREE ZONE sign, they decide to go home and take the pills that day.

The phone rings, saving her from the tragic finale.

"Hi. It's me. How's it going?" Mark's voice is filled with the casual cheeriness he affects when he's going to let her down.

"Hi." She tries to sound warm and relaxed, but she can feel her body tense in anticipation, and knows that her voice will inevitably take on a tone of injury and complaint. She wonders momentarily why she regards the prospect of the end of civilisation as we know it with such dread. "O.K. I guess. Jake's gone up into space with some Vegemite sandwiches, and I just had a riveting conversation with Julia about Cassie's fine motor skills. What are you up to? How did the seminar go?"

"Don't ask! It was terrible. A complete waste of time. I gave my paper, then they all started asking questions that bore no relation to what I'd said. It's like it's all been scripted a long time ago, and everyone just trots out their lines. It's so tediously predictable. What really pisses me off is that I know all that, but I still take it seriously, and worry about it, and go in there hoping for some kind of intellectual exchange. It's pathetic."

Marion makes sympathetic noises. She has heard all this before. Mark has worked in the Sociology Department for twelve years, and the bright-eyed enthusiasm he brought back from Harvard has long since faded. He has neither changed the world nor become famous, and his disappointment shows. He's on the editorial



board of a struggling left-wing journal, and his ascerbic commentary is much sought by public radio, but his curriculum vitae is bookless and at thirty-seven the role of promising young man is getting harder to sustain. He sees the corridors of mediocrity closing in on him, and has taken to ego-boosting affairs with graduate students to ease the psychic pain.

Marion's response to this development is a mixture of outrage that he could do this to her, empathy because she's considered lovers as a way out of her own doldrums but can't quite face the prospect of revealing her ageing body and sensible underwear to strangers, contempt that he could be so banal, and sadness that the fragile craft of their marriage has strayed into such murky waters. She's already lining herself up with the divorced and separated, wondering how the kids will deal with it, and what they'll have to cut back on if Mark's salary is to be shared between two households.

"Will you be coming home soon? I wanted you to pick up some stuff for dinner. Jake slept late and I haven't had a chance to get out yet."

"Well actually that's why I'm calling. There's a lecture I'd like to go to at five o'clock - some hot shot from England visiting the History Department. There's drinks afterwards, and a few people are going off to dinner. I'm sorry, I forgot all about it."

Marion feels her voice rising. It's not just that she knows he's lying, that he didn't forget, but just left it to the last minute so there'd be no chance of her organizing a babysitter and joining him. What really galls her is that he sees her as so out of it that the name of this visiting hot shot will mean nothing to her. She has become a faculty wife, to be ignored, lied to, patronised.

"You might have let me know earlier. I could have organized someone else to collect Luke - or have you forgotten that he's at the creche? Now I have to schlepp out to the university and back at peak hour, not to mention do the shopping, feed and bathe the kids, and cope with the trauma of bedtime without Daddy to read them a story. Jesus, Mark!"

"Look I'm really sorry, I guess I just forgot because of the seminar. Maybe you can get someone to come over and help you through dinner and bedtime?"

Mark specializes in the lame excuse followed by the sensible suggestion which puts the ball back in her court and makes it her own fault if she can't cope. It's not because he's not home, but because she was too stubborn or disorganized to get someone in to help.

"Oh sure! The world is just full of people who are waiting to come over at an hour's notice and help put the kids to bed!"

"Well you could at least try!"

Marion is furious. He's done it again. Managed to manipulate things so that she looks petulant and unreasonable. He can go off on his little adventure with a clear conscience, telling himself that if Marion wants

to martyr herself to the children, that's her problem. There's no way she can win this one, and she knows it.

"Don't worry about it," she says coldly. "I'll manage."

She slams the phone down before he has the chance to make any more helpful remarks, and slumps into an armchair, covering her face with her hands and repressing the desire to scream. Jake toddles over, and strokes her arm.

"What's the matter Mummy?"

"Nothing Jakie, nothing. Mummy's just having a little rest. Mummy's just a bit tired." She picks him up and cuddles him to her. "It's all right, Jakie. It's all right." "It's just that the world's about to blow up," she says to herself, "and Mummy doesn't know what to do."

Marion doesn't have time to try and figure it out, because it's getting on for four, and Luke will be wondering why no-one has picked him up. She hates going to the creche at the end of the day, the children all hovering close to the gate waiting for Mummy or Daddy to materialize out of the Range Rover. It reminds her of the lost dogs' home, and she always feels somehow guilty about rescuing her own child and leaving the others behind. The thought of Luke as the sad-eyed watcher of other children's joyful reunions pushes its way through her misery, and as she straps Jake into his car seat she notes with some satisfaction that she's still functioning normally, and that as long as she can do that the kids won't be damaged. She's seen too many of her friends break down with their marriages, too many children exposed to lethal doses of emotional fallout. Mark had once likened her kitchen to a field hospital where the walking wounded came to have their self esteem bandaged, but lately it seems to have slipped into the battle zone, and when she meets with friends she finds herself doing as much complaining as sympathetic listening.

The sticker that she has self-consciously fixed to the back of the station wagon because, although she's embarrassed by its tone of earnest self-righteousness she doesn't want to be seen as uncommitted, leaps out at her. *War is Dangerous for Children and All Living Things*. She and Mark are at war. There's no point in denying it, or hoping that it will go away. As she edges into the northbound traffic on St Georges Road, she reminds herself that love and war are seldom fair, and that when it comes to getting shafted it's always women and children first.

—2—

Marion pushes the trolley around the supermarket, Jake in the high seat up front, Luke clinging onto the back, in imitation of a garbage man. The recent invention of this game has put an end to his deep resentment at relinquishing the trolley seat, but brought with it new demands, new humiliations.



"Let's sing 'I am the garbage man', Mum," he says to Marion, swinging his body out from the trolley and colliding with a display of canned tomatoes. Marion watches as the pyramid collapses, and cans roll down the aisle.

"Shit Luke! Look what you've done! Why the hell don't you watch what you're doing?"

Marion knows that this is no way to talk to a tired four year-old, and wishes she wasn't, but she is. Luke's terrified face across the trolley shames her, makes her long for the beautiful maternal self that doesn't explode over trivia, but she's already in full flight, and can't stop.

"It was just by an accident, Mum. I didn't do it on purpose."

"No. I'm sure you didn't, but the fact is you did it. That's what matters. You did it, and now we have to waste time picking up cans when we should be on our way home. It's what you do that counts, Luke, not what you meant to do."

Marion recognizes this as a version of the speech she will make to Mark when he does his 'I didn't mean to hurt you' number, and realizes that she is venting her anger at the father on the son. It's not fair, and she takes pity on Luke, whose eyes are now brimming with tears. At the same time, she reasons, it's probably her duty to womankind to make it clear to her boys right from the beginning that good intentions just aren't enough. Otherwise there they'll be twenty and thirty years hence, mouthing 'but I didn't mean' cliches and assuming that as long as they didn't actually intend to hurt anyone they could perform the most unspeakable acts of deceit and cruelty and still expect forgiveness. Still and all, she reminds herself, it's only a few cans of tomatoes – hardly a matter for gender guilt – and she really should stop carrying on about it and get moving.

"Come on Luke, hop off and help me pick them up."

They start stacking the cans against the display, out of the way of passing trolleys. Marion is retrieving the last one when she realizes that she is under observation, and that the person standing beside the stationary trolley on the other side of the aisle is not examining the shelves but looking down on her. As her eyes travel up past the boots and faded jeans to the Italian leather jacket she recognizes familiar terrain, and feels her face flushing. It's Mark's friend Paul, one of the people she least expects or wants to see in the canned veg. section of Safeway. He's grinning at her, obviously enjoying himself. How long has he been standing there, watching her perform a scene from the *Diary of a Mad Housewife*? And what the hell is he doing in a supermarket anyway? Doesn't he know it's a place of sanctuary for women and children?

Paul Jacobson is one of those people who take enormous pleasure in the emotional crises of those around him, and when none are naturally occurring he is not

above instigating a few. He has a sixth sense for female unhappiness, and the ethics of a louse. Although one of Mark's best friends, his manner with Marion is subversive, alternately flirtatious and concerned, the kind counsellor and potential lover who understands her plight and offers rescue. Since his own divorce he has taken the view that the only good marriage is a broken one, and he is always on the lookout for signs of trouble in the relationships around him, ready to do whatever he can to assist in the process of mutual destruction. He wastes no time in seizing his opportunity.

"Hullo, Marion. Hard at work being the perfect wife and mother, I see!"

Marion gives him a withering look, an attempt to emulate Paddington Bear's hard stare, but it doesn't work. The image of herself in a duffle coat and battered hat makes her smile, spoiling the effect. That's the trouble with relating to the world through children's stories. They just don't provide the proper ammunition for dealing with people like Paul. Would that she could come up with a Dorothy Parkerish quip, but her mind is weary from wrestling with major problems like whether to feed the kids fish fingers or sausages, and she's just not up to it. Her smile encourages him to continue.

"Bit late to be doing the shopping isn't it? I'd have thought you'd be home slipping into something glamorous for the lord and master at this hour, not crawling around Safeway in search of the perfect tomato. What is this? Some kind of weird post-industrial ritual? A gesture of appeasement to the Great Can so that he won't visit botulism upon the Harrisons and their children's children even unto the fourth generation? Perhaps you'd like to come and talk to my first-years about it. I've just been lecturing on mythic survivals, and . . ."

"Give me a break would you Paul. It's been a long day, and I'm not up to mind games."

Paul is a man who hates to pass up an audience, however reluctant. He gives her a smile.

"You look as if you could use some company," he says. "I've finished my shopping." He turns his trolley to face the same way as hers, and grins at the children. "I'll walk around with you."

She'd love to be really rude, and tell him to go away in a way he couldn't ignore, but the habit of politeness is too deeply ingrained. She lapses instead into the ritualised banter they both use to guard against intimacy.

"Must you? I wouldn't have thought this was your scene really. You don't strike me as the no-brand type. I'd have said you were more Lygon Street, or even Toorak Road."

"Ah, but that's where you're wrong. One of the distinguishing features of late capitalism is that everyone's the no-brand type."

Marion knows what's coming next. There is no sit-



uation, however trivial, from which Paul cannot extract observations about late capitalism. Neither her silence nor the children's increasing rowdiness deter him, and as they round the corner into the next aisle, where aggressively plain cans and packages pursue the shopping dollar with enticing labels like DOG FOOD and TOILET TISSUE he is already dazzling himself with his own eloquence.

"It's part of the increasing depersonalization that's breaking down the opposition between capitalism and socialism. Individuality is like love. It's been trivialized and devalued to the point where people don't believe in it any more."

Paul is an expert on what people believe, though given the limited circle of his acquaintance, Marion has always wondered how he could possibly know. He seldom ventures beyond the confines of the campus and the small bookshops and restaurants that constitute the natural habitat of the Melbourne Left, and though widely travelled he tends to move in similar circles overseas. There is no point in questioning his certainty, however, and Marion no longer bothers. He has a total disregard for facts, and for the sort of mind that concerns itself with them, and is always going on about something he calls Discourse, the importance of talking things into being. Marion isn't quite sure what he means by this, but doubts its value as a political strategy.

"Try talking yourself into being after the world blows up," she had once said to him, but his only response had been a look of unutterable contempt and a crack about the banality of her mind. She finds it hard to believe that anyone actually takes him seriously. He seems like a caricature of himself, scarcely credible in a bad novel about academic life, much less in what passes for the real world. Yet here he is, discoursing on capitalism in the middle of Safeway at five o'clock in the afternoon.

"Once people stop believing that they can buy individual distinction with their soap powder, the whole system breaks down. Look at this!" He gestures with the elegant sweep of the hand that marks him as an intellectual and bears no trace of his suburban origins. "It's pure Moscow!" he says, "an Antipodean Friendship Store! Style is everything you see. The surface differences are breaking down, and once they go belief in the system gets harder and harder to sustain. This is the whole basis of the current crisis."

Marion doesn't think she has room for the crisis of capitalism at the moment. There's a limit to the number of crises she can deal with, and right now her main concern is to get the kids through the checkout before Luke starts screaming. How to get through the next three hours runs a close second. Then there's what to do about Mark, whether to play the tolerant wife and ignore his mid-life lapses or unleash her rage and take the consequences. Finally there's the bomb, and nuclear winter, and the total breakdown of all life sys-

tems which will make this afternoon look like a good time, should she survive to remember it. No, the crisis of capitalism is definitely not on her agenda, and she finds Paul's obsession even more irritating than usual. She's starting to get that beaten-around-the-head feeling that so often overtakes her in the company of Mark's colleagues, and somewhere in the recesses of her mind she makes a vow that next time, if there is a next time, she will steer well clear of intellectuals and find herself a nice boring professional man who's never heard of Marx and accumulates capital instead of analysing it.

"Look Paul, I've really got to go."

The children are getting increasingly loud. Luke is clamoring for cheezels. Jake is yelling "Get me out of here" and trying to climb out of the trolley.

"Oh, do you? I thought you might like to stop off for a drink."

Marion wonders yet again at the insensitivity of the childless. Perhaps he thinks she can file them away for an hour or two under E for Encumbrance.

"Thanks, but I've really got to get the kids home"

"Of course." He gives her a provocative grin. "Daddy will wonder where they are."

Marion restrains herself from making the obvious comment. She knows that Paul knows that Mark's interest in the kids' whereabouts is minimal, and she suspects that he also knows where Mark is, and with whom. He is baiting her, inviting her to complain about Mark so that he can commiserate, maybe even tell her what Mark's up to, encourage her to get out of the marriage, save herself, stop clinging to a dead ideal. Next to capitalism it's his favorite topic. She refuses to co-operate.

"Yes," she lies. "I said we'd be back by five. We're already half an hour late. We'll see you later."

She goes through the checkout ahead of him, and by the time he has paid for his stuff she is ready to leave. She gives him a casual wave, and drives off smiling to herself. It's a small victory, but immensely satisfying.

She wants to fight Mark in private, on her own terms, and the longer she can keep not-so-innocent bystanders like Paul out of it, the better. She doesn't want advice or pity, and has no wish to be the subject of this week's commonroom gossip. "Have you heard about Mark and Marion?" they'll say, and all the little bits of insight will be collectively pooled, all the private details confided to friends held up for public scrutiny. Her status will change. Mark's female colleagues, who have always treated her with the patronising disdain such women reserve for faculty wives and secretaries, will suddenly become supportive, and welcome her to the sisterhood of the oppressed. The men will become more predatory, attempting to 'explore new dimensions', or as the more honest language of less liberated times would have it, put the hard word on her. As yet to be determined others will become em-



broiled in their lives, and the whole process will take on a momentum of its own. She will, in other words, find herself playing the lead in a form of ritualised public drama whose main function is to add interest to otherwise tediously uneventful lives. They will be divorced, not because they necessarily want to be, but because it is the natural conclusion of everything that has gone before, and is expected.

—3—

The kids run into the house, and Marion starts unloading the shopping. She knows that she should be getting them to help her, starting to train them for co-operative living, but it's easier to do it herself. By the time she reaches the kitchen they're already fighting over Jake's tricycle, which Luke still sees as his.

"It's mine!" Jake screams. "Give it to me! Get off it!"

He is pulling at Luke's arm, trying to prise his hands free of the handlebars, and weeping with two year-old outrage.

"I'm just having a borrow of it," shouts Luke. "I got it first. It's not fair Mummy," he appeals to her, "Jake won't share with me. I got it first! It's not fair!"

Marion breathes deeply, and wonders if her desire for a stiff drink is a sign of incipient alcoholism. She decides to worry about that later, and pours herself a generous whisky. As she drops the ice cubes in, she attempts to reason with the boys, pleased with herself for not shouting them into a state of cowed submission.

She feels dangerously explosive, in need of an hour to herself in a bare white room – no furniture, no pictures, no people. Just thick white carpet and white walls, with French windows opening onto a leafy courtyard. She will lie there and listen to Glenn Gould playing Bach preludes and fugues. No-one will ask her for anything. She will be alone, but not lonely. When the music stops she will go into a simple kitchen and make Japanese food – noodles in clear broth and raw fish wrapped in seaweed. Then she will go into an airy studio and paint pictures which will be loved for the simple elegance of their composition and subtlety of tone. She will wear designer clothes, and have prawns and white wine for lunch. She will . . .

Her fantasy is interrupted by the sound of footsteps in the passage. Male footsteps.

"Oh Christ!"

She remembers the front door, the rest of the shop-

ping. Someone's walked in off the street, a random lunatic who will rape her in front of the children then kill all three of them in an orgy of violence. She knows it's irrational, but such things happen. How could she be so careless? She's always super cautious about the front door, never opening it until she has carefully scrutinized the person on the other side through the spy hole, only releasing the safety chain if it's someone they know.

She holds her breath, cursing herself for her carelessness, Mark for his absence, the world for its sanity.

"Do you know you've left the lights on in the station-wagon Marion? And the keys in the front door?"

Mark stomps in, carrying the rest of the shopping, fuming at her as usual. She's relieved that it's him, and would like to be pleased, but he's on the offensive, and she snipes back.

"Well, if you'd picked Luke up from the creche like you were supposed to I wouldn't be getting back from the supermarket when the kids should be eating already, and things wouldn't be in such a mess. I can't do everything Mark. I do my best, but there are limits!" She changes tack. "What the hell are you doing here anyway? I thought you were going to eat out with your friends."

Her tone of heavy sarcasm delivers a clear message, and Mark replies:

"Well I was! I was planning to eat with the History Department – you know, all those svelte sexy historians like Roger Jones and John Coghill. But the lecture was cancelled. Seems the guy did his back in on the flight over, and is laid up for the duration, poor bugger. Anyway, I had a few beers with John and Roger and came on home. Jesus you're paranoid, Marion! It's getting to be a real pain in the arse!"

"I'm sorry," she says. "I don't mean to be."

"Why don't we go out for pizza," he says. "It's too late to start cooking now."

"Hooray, hooray, we're going out for pizza!" Luke shouts. Jake joins in, running down the passage and demanding to be first into the car.

Marion follows, gathering up the kids' paraphernalia as she goes and wondering if it wouldn't be easier to stay home. It seems she's safe, at least for the moment. Not wronged, but paranoid. Is she? She feels like the character in the Hitchcock movie who thought her husband was planning to murder her, and interpreted all his actions accordingly. She was still alive at the end, but for how long?



## Noel Counihan

Noel Counihan's life as an artist spans fifty-odd years from the early 1930s to a few days before his death. Four books have been written about it: Max Dimmack's pioneering monograph published by Melbourne University Press in the early 1970s; Robert Smith's catalog of his prints, probably the best print catalog of the work of any Australian artist; Vane Lindesay's excellent book on Noel's caricatures and, but a week or so ago, Janet MacKenzie's sensitively written and beautifully illustrated book on his life and art.

So what is there left for me to say? How can I describe the many aspects of his art in the few moments at my disposal. It isn't possible. So let me first recall a few of his memorable images: that lonely woman in the 'out-patients' waiting room, that miner coughing, the Aboriginal girl holding her child, that miner working in the wet, the electrified wire against the sky, the huddled figure on a Beirut street. How shall we describe this art? True, once in a while the family will play cricket in the summer on the beach, South Melbourne will defeat Collingwood and we catch a glimpse of family happiness. But on any reading of it Noel Counihan's art is a sombre art. It seems always to be saying "This is the way it is," and questioning us "Must it be this way?" So that if we must use labels we might say that Counihan is both realist and visionary. But it's better to avoid labels. Labels are road signs for those who want to travel fast and see nothing. They provide an excuse for not looking, for not having time to respond to the artist's personal vision.

Counihan has been called a realist. Eliot said that mankind cannot stand much reality; perhaps he meant that womankind had to put up with the rest of it. But in fairness to Noel I think we have to say that he did his level best to stand it. Perhaps that's why his work is invested with a tragic sense of human loss and waste. There's another line from Eliot that describes him better, "In my beginning is my end." That note of passion and pain, the sense of moral outrage that emerges in his graphics of the early 1930s, is still there, but with all the authority of a life-time experience in that great

series of paintings of peasant life in Opoul. It's interesting that this communist should turn in his last years like Tolstoy to the peasantry for his images of timeless human survival. And it's odd of me, I suppose, to invoke Eliot to account for Counihan's art, but in the tough business of seeing things as they are, which is the business of all great art, political extremes often meet, as Marx realised when he read *Balsac*, and Lukacs realised when he read *Scott*.

I'm unhappy about putting a label on the man and his art. Noel was uncomfortable with labels, realist, social-realist, socialist-realist, humanist, that he was called upon to wear. But he endured them with a good grace, realising that it helped people to know the kind of artist he wasn't. He wasn't all that keen on artists who are continually mucking about with their imagination; I think he thought it a kind of mental masturbation. He sought for a firmer grasp on experience. But like most of us he grew more tolerant of other people's behavior as he grew older. What he was firmly aware of was that the subject, however close to his heart it may have been, did not make the work. It had to be shaped, constructed out of line, tone and color. (You could even call him a formalist in that regard.) He possessed an artist's delight in his materials, it was an enjoyment to hear him talk about the sensuous nature of paint, the satisfaction to be gained from working with a good litho stone. He was a sensuous man, and the erotic as often as not provided a humorous undercurrent to his conversation.

He respected women and the problems women are called upon to face. It sprang probably from his admiration of the way his mother managed to cope. Ailsa O'Connor once suggested that Noel Counihan probably produced the first Australian feminist painting, in his picture *The Wife*. Women certainly play a major role in his art, and they are not there merely as sexual objects. In that respect too his work marks perhaps a new step in Australian painting. I was with him a few days after he arrived in London late in 1949. We visited the National Gallery together. I shall not for-



get standing with him before the portrait of the Doña Isabel de Porcel. It was the first time he had ever seen a great portrait by Goya but he kept on talking about it as if he had known it for years, and in the process he made it a part of himself and his craft.

In such ways the radical in him deeply absorbed tradition. It made him a most uncomfortable man for modernists who believed they had been called to destroy the traditions of art and start all over again. Certainly he worked, and worked with greater success than has been realised; to change the direction of Australian art at the onset of the second world war, when it was in the control of men of fascist sympathies and aspirations far more deeply than those who did not live through those years can ever realise.

Counihan took what he needed from modernist art, but was not much interested in exchanging one style for another: naturalism for expressionism, say, and then convincing yourself that you had effected an artistic revolution. He was interested rather in changing and deepening the customary concerns of Australian artists. He sought to bring them into closer contact with the democratic traditions of Australian culture and expose them to the world-shattering events of the twentieth century. In the process there slowly emerged a tragic vision of life which he shared for a time with his friends Vic O'Connor and Josl Bergner, and then with the support of his wife Pat was able to continue and explore in his later years through the Cold War, the Vietnam war and the anti-nuclear struggle.

It was a tragic vision but not a pessimistic vision, nor does Noel stand in judgement over his victims. Because they are not weaklings, they survive. Yet you won't find much hope in Noel Counihan's pictures. That would make it all too easy for the viewer: provide him or her with a cop-out. So far as Counihan is concerned hope is not his responsibility; it is the responsibility of the viewer. He saw it as his responsibility to tell it as it is; not provide us with ready-made solutions.

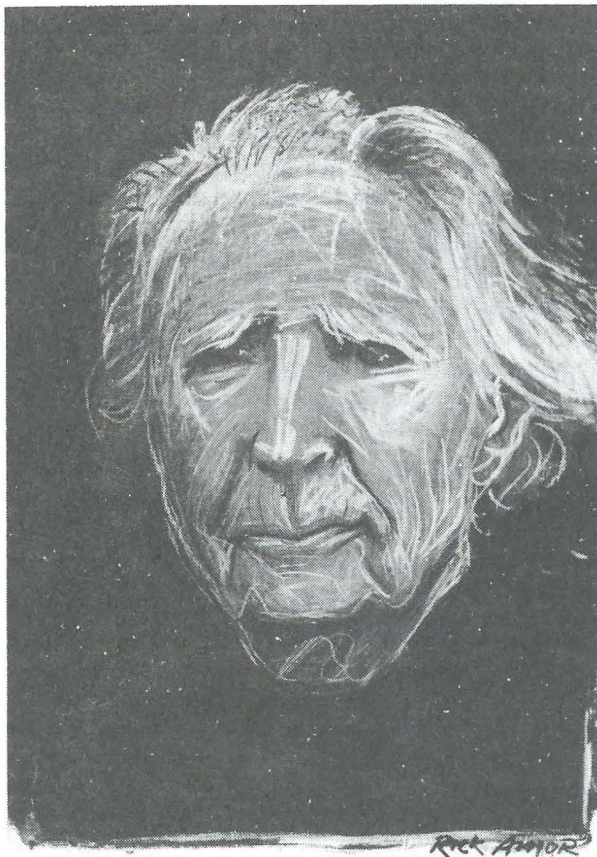
This more serious view of the role of art, in which he secured a place for the imagery of work, of deprivation, of victimisation, of exploitation, of the horror of war and nuclear extinction, seen as a life-time's work means that Noel Counihan was at the centre of an iconographic revolution in the art of this country that still continues. When it comes to the great human issues of the day our art is now not quite so trivial as it once was. For that we have much to thank Counihan for.

In his art Noel Counihan faced up to the great issues of his time. It is therefore no accident, surely, that to my knowledge he was the only Australian artist to meet Picasso in a common relationship on a matter of mutual concern; world peace in our time.

I would like to let him have the last word. In his interview with Rosslyn Beeby, whose fine obituary of Noel in the Age many of you will have read, he made a characteristic remark. "In human society," he told her, "the warmth is mainly at the bottom."

And I think I can see the twinkle in his eye and hear the little chuckle as he said it. He possessed a tragic vision but he could see the funny side of things. And I guess that's what he'd see if he were here now.

BERNARD SMITH  
*at the funeral*



My charlady mother, who spoke with pride of her war-time work cleaning the Melbourne office of General MacArthur, spoke too with a quaint philosophy. There was a ready expression of it for any occasion or event. Say to her "Isn't it a rotten day!" and she would reply: "Well - it's better than none at all!" During the Depression years I complained that the bread of my school lunch was hard: "Well - it'd be harder without any!" And, on the occasion of a sudden death down our street: "Well - roosters one day, feather-dusters the next!"

Dear old mum's words were recalled on the first Saturday in July this year when I heard that my artist-



mate Noel Counihan was dead – fifty hours earlier he had driven his car, with myself and his wife Pat as passengers, to lunch with old friends Joan and David Armfield in Eltham.

I had called first at the Canterbury house and, as usual when visiting Noel and Pat, there was the invitation to the large studio to view new works. Although he had suffered some nasty frights, and his health could have been a great deal better than it was, Noel continued working well. Propped up at eye-level, still wet, on the lovely old painter's easel that had originally been owned by Tom Roberts, a large head and shoulders study of a horse-breaker needed a few hours' painting for completion. Standing against one studio wall were three other portraits completed some time ago, of Noel, Judah Waten, and Alan McCulloch, from which two were to be chosen as part of the National Portrait Collection now being set up. And pinned to a wallboard, a color photo-print of Noel's last major painting recently sold to Canberra. The subject, "A High Mark", was dear to him, and one he came back to paint repeatedly – Australian Rules Football. These works usually depicted the key figure in a white jumper with a red V, once the colors of South Melbourne where Noel was born. Before his illness became too severe Noel, Lloyd O'Neil, book publisher and long standing sponsor of Noel's drawings, and I spent many charged and exquisite afternoons together at South Melbourne matches, joined in earlier years by Noel McLachlan, Ian Turner, Leonie Sandercock and other names from Melbourne's several universities. Curiously enough, I never heard Noel Counihan refer to our team as South Melbourne: his references were always to "The Bloods", an affectionate nickname derived from an earlier one of the 1920s, "The Blood-stained Angels" – an imaginative allusion to the club colors.

As with many of one's friends it is difficult to recall the occasion of the first meeting. Certainly Noel was known to me during the mid-1940s when I was designing stage settings for New Theatre, following on from Albert Tucker and others, at a time when Noel was producing illustrations for the theatre's publicity playbills – one memorable pen, brush and ink study drawn for Clifford Odet's "Waiting for Lefty", is in my collection, reproduced as a small poster.

An event that really started a forty-year association and friendship was on an end-of-summer night during 1945 when Rem McClintock invited me to a gathering of artists on the Left to celebrate the publication

of Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition*. Bernard was there, with Noel, Victor O'Connor, Yosl Bergner, Jim Wigley and, I think, Ambrose Dyson, all gathered to privately launch an historic work which, for the first time, critically examined Australian art from white settlement to the Second World War. A few years on we had a further bond as original contributors to *Overland*. Noel drew the cover illustration for the first issue in 1954.

In the 1960s I believed Noel became politically entrenched and doctrinaire – inflexible, I thought then. But he was a committed, thinking painter, and he had to solve very special problems. This he did.

That Noel had mellowed both in personality and painting style, and indeed subject matter on occasions, was quite evident during the 1970s. I spent a lot of time with him following a request from a New York publishing house to contribute the Australian biographical entries, with graphic samples of the work, to *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*. Of the twenty of so artists I selected for inclusion Noel was an early choice. As a consequence of this reunion I later suggested to Noel the idea of publishing a selection of his portrait caricatures. He was delighted and enthusiastically set to work, making our selection topical by producing some of the best work of its kind to be seen anywhere today. His caricature portrait of "La Stupenda" is a brilliant graphic statement both in concept and draughtsmanship.

These and other evocations, many shared with David Armfield, and some too with his potter wife Joan, pleased our time around the Eltham lunch table smothered with Italian food and wine. Part of it was the unwrapping of what we were to later learn was Noel's last triumph – a technically astonishing, large lithographic print of a subject reverting, not this time to that Australian game dear to him, but of another earlier love – an allegorical cartoon of "Capital" throwing a shadow of "Death", titled "The Shadow". "Capital" has just a hint of resemblance to a well known Australian financier.

In my introduction to the 1985 Hutchinson publication *Noel Counihan Caricatures* I wrote "Noel Counihan belongs to that small band of Australian artists of whom it can be said that everything they do, they do not only well, but supremely so."

Noel has left us some very fine feathers.

VANE LINDESAY

ALAN GOULD

## The Embassy

*From a novella*

Wicke and I both finished our exams at an earlier date than most, and there was a period when we had time on our hands. Rumors were abroad that the Springbok rugby tour of Australia was going to be followed by a cricket tour. It was more necessary than ever, Wicke urged, to wage the campaign of harassment, to show the authorities how divided the country still was on the issue of racist sport and, more simply, to make it difficult and expensive for government to bring all-white teams from the republic to Australian sportsgrounds. If Wicke had been frightened by the break-in episode, it wasn't evident. He wanted action on the cricket tour, and with very few of his cronies released from their exams, it fell on me to be his partner in the proposed acts of sabotage.

"Let's hit the embassy walls."

When a regime knows that it is unpopular in the world, it is a mystery why it appoints its embassies abroad with large surfaces of white wall. They beckon the militant graffitist. The walls of the Republic's embassy in Canberra are as white as the European swan, and were *virgo intacta* in November 1971, despite various melees that had taken place outside during the course of the year. For three weeks or so Wicke and I became militant graffitists. In letters that were four feet high we scrawled our messages, then scampered back into the protection of the scrub that surrounded the building on two sides. We were undetected first time, so we did it again. And again. With lunatic braggadoccio we even appointed a regular time for our forays. "You all right for Thursday at eleven?"

The stretch of wall we favored for our explicit texts was divided into two halves, one on each side of the embassy gates. On previous occasions I had chivalrously offered to do the riskier side, that exposed to the road and thus nearer to the unwelcome advent of any patrol car. It may have been on the third or

fourth time we decorated the place with our artwork that I opted for the stretch of the wall nearer to the safety of the scrub. Our message was to be a simple SMASH RACISM, with Wicke, handling the SMASH, and with me spraying on the RACISM.

I was most of the way down the length of an enormous C and about to curl upwards in an elegant serif when, out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed a figure running directly towards me. He was in a windcheater and plimsolls, and momentarily I took him for an athlete putting in some late night training. My next thought was "Damn", and my next was to hurl the incriminating spray-can as far away from myself as possible, hoping that this action would somehow enable me to establish my innocence. I was not given any more time for reflection. The late-night athlete banged into me, knocking me to the ground and sending my glasses flying. I remember sprawling about on the grass with this heavily breathing weight on top of me. He was panting, "Don't move, you bugger," and may have cuffed me a couple of times to emphasise his request. This part is hazy. I do recall seeing Wicke walk quite calmly across the road and stand just above the two of us.

"You need a hand there, Ray?"

And I recall how calm my reply was.

"No mate. Best if you made off."

The constable was evidently a little more excited, for he called out, "Stop, you. You're under arrest."

Wicke didn't think so. Nor did he stop. He took off like the wind. Long live the sporting opportunities of our private schools, for they saved his bacon that night. No sooner had he taken to his heels than a second constable came tearing down the fence line in hot pursuit.

"Use your 38 on him if you have to, John," my custodian called out to his sprinting mate. I had the



feeling at the time that this was said as stylish effect for my benefit rather than as a real injunction to engage in a shootout with the fleeing Wicke. He had hauled me to my feet and was using a walkie talkie set that he had hidden beneath his windcheater.

"Suspect apprehended outside embassy gates. Second suspect seen running off in the direction of lake, Constable Askey in pursuit, over." The reply that came back over the airwaves was an unintelligible laconic crackling. I stood with my still panting constable. He was holding me by my collar, and from a distance I suppose we might have been mistaken for lovers. The night had been quite warm and there were stars out, but I found myself shuddering quite uncontrollably.

"Now, chief, you can tell me who your mate was." My athlete was regaining his breath little by little, and he shook my collar to emphasise his invitation.

"I didn't have a mate," I said, somewhat forlornly.

"He didn't have a mate." The constable addressed this statement to some of the stars above his head. Then he turned to me. "Why do I have to get stuck with a prize booby like you, chief?" He shook my collar rhythmically and I undulated from head to feet a few times. "We both saw him, chief, so let's not waste time, eh?"

"I didn't have a mate."

It must be said that Wicke's flight was in the best tradition of escape literature, right down to the 38. We had left his old car, more a tank than a sedan, hidden in some bushes and saplings six or seven hundred yards from the embassy gates. From the time my policeman used his walkie talkie to the time several police cars had sealed off the area I estimated to be less than one minute. But Wicke ran that distance, evaded the pursuing Constable Askey and the converging patrol cars, got into his own vehicle, and escaped undetected. I remember watching the panting Askey coming back up the slight incline toward the embassy gates, then flopping with hands and knees to recover his composure.

"Lost. . . the. . . bastard."

I was whisked away to the police station. Here there was a duty sergeant and one or two constables coming in and out, but otherwise the place was empty. The neon lighting gave to everything, including the faces of my captors, a yellow two a.m. pallor.

We've got a charlie here who can't remember who his accomplice was, Sarge."

"Soon fix that."

I was processed in the usual way, and then sat on a chair and pumped by two policemen, my arresting constable and a large senior constable with a distinctly cheerless countenance.

"Who was the bloke with you?"

"I didn't have a bloke with me."

"Who was the bloke with you?"

"I can't remember."

My story was, I admit, inconsistent, and some rather unfavorable comments were made about my intelligence and my powers of recollection. The two officers were disturbed that their taxes should go toward supporting someone so mentally defective as I appeared to be through a university course. They also warned me that I would be charged with obstructing police officers in the discharge of their duties. I looked at my knees for a long time. They tried the names of various prominent radicals on me, Wicke's among them, but I gave away nothing. I too behaved according to the best traditions of escape literature. To a fly on the wall my performance may have been good theatre, but I was quaking. It was early morning. In the charge-room now there were only the four of us, my two interrogators, the duty sergeant and myself. Then my athlete left, and the senior constable of sour aspect continued with the questioning alone. The sergeant affected to take no notice of what was going on between the two of us. How easy it was to let a name slip out, just a name. Instead of promising this interminable and inane interview, my future would suddenly take shape. I would be granted bail, and allowed to step out freely into the night. But I kept these few syllables to myself. At length the senior constable rose to his feet, and said to me, in a tone of utter reasonableness:

"Well Raymond. I'm going to go into the next room for twenty minutes or so and leave you to think about who your mate was. And if you haven't remembered by the time I get back, well, I won't be responsible for what happens to you. Are you with me?" I continued to contemplate my knees, and he went out.

I sat. I waited. So this was it. The beatings of radical folklore did occur, and prospect of one now faced me. The duty sergeant went on intently writing. Clearly nothing untoward had been said within his earshot. While it is actually happening, a thumping need not be such an agonizing experience. I could not recall being so petrified by any of the treatment meted out by elder boys during my schooldays. But the threat of it, the opportunity to entertain its possibilities in the mind for a period, that is unnerving.

But in fact I had been given up as a silent witness, or, more likely, a mental defective. The cheerless officer of the law did not return. After ten minutes on my own I was charged with vandalism and resisting arrest. My bail had been raised, I subsequently discovered, by the president of the Student Christian Movement, sent by Wicke to rescue me and conduct me safely back to Dedman College. When I arrived, there were a number of people gathered in Wicke's room, despite the lateness of the hour. I was made a fuss of.

"Hero," proclaimed Wicke. "Hero," he said again in ringing Churchillian tones. He put a tumbler full of benedictine into my hand.

I had come through my arrest with flying colors, it seemed, and now that the tension of the watch-house was behind me, we swopped and embroidered our respective stories with a schoolboy glee at the daring and panache of our night's work.

I was too weary to drive across the suburbs to my student household, so Wicke surrendered his bed to me and he slept on the floor. When I pleaded guilty to the charges in court on the following morning and

was fined, he promptly paid the fine. I protested that I should pay half.

"There is no question of it. Yours the ordeal of arrest," he said, jutting his jaw out and summoning his 'oratorical' tone, "and mine the responsibility of paying the cost of the exercise." Then he turned towards the neighboring police headquarters and shook a fist at it, and began, "We shall fight them on the beaches. . ."

### BEAR DREAM

I slept and dreamed worms big as logs  
that turned on men and tossed the dogs;

I slept again and dreamed of bears  
that shone and wriggled in their lairs

and dug them down into the mould  
and followed rain up to the world

of worms like bears and fish like clouds.  
I hear you mutter "Why not birds?"

And oh, the bears at nesting-time,  
hemming the nests and chirping rhyme!

### TWO POEMS BY JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

#### MENTORS

*For Andrew Donald*

Are they from god? Are they lonely? These yelps let slip  
will savage me yet. You ask me to explain mentors.

There's their habit of walking round the corner, mid-phrase, scenting  
encounters, pronouncements you can finish yourself.

How they're seen ahead and moving, fleshed with purpose;  
the shadow growing, even when the mover's still.

Prepare to keep interviewing to fill the place.  
Tireless mentors are awarded a cross, or hemlock.

From god or God? Refer to the mentor in question,  
or to writers of text-books, rarely in the same building.

Store – rest sent – stone – stem – torn son – tensor –  
torment – storm – I tremble at mentors' omens.

To stand: you stand in the circle of your mentors.  
To walk: they leave. You have light. You walk alone.



FOUR TRANSLATIONS FROM GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI BY KEVIN HART

**SILENCE**

I know a city  
that each day fills itself with sunlight  
and for a moment  
everything there holds its breath

One evening I left

in my heart  
the cicadas stuck to their scratching

From  
the white ship  
I saw  
my city disappear, granting  
for a moment  
an embrace of lights, suspended  
in the troubled air

**JUNE**

When  
will this night  
die for me  
when can I step out of myself  
and simply look at it  
and fall asleep  
in the rustle  
of the waves finishing  
their forward rolls  
just before those acacias gathered  
around my house

When will I wake again  
in your body  
that changes  
like the nightingales' song

that stretches  
like the shine  
of harvest wheat

In the clarity  
of water  
the gold foil of your skin  
will be touched  
by frost  
and make you black, an African

Balanced  
on the beating slabs  
of the air  
you will be like  
a panther

In the moving  
blade  
of the shadow, your leaves  
will fall

Roaring,  
yet muffled in that dust  
you  
will smother me

Then  
you will almost close your eyes

and we will see our love  
lie down  
like the evening

Calm  
I will see  
my pupils die  
in the black horizon  
of your eyes

Now  
the clear sky has closed  
and now  
at home in Africa  
the jasmine  
closes

No sleep for me

I waver  
at a street corner  
like a firefly

Will tonight ever  
die for me?

## THE ISLAND

He came to a shore where ancient, abstracted woods  
Made evening last all year, descended  
And entered,  
Enticed by the ruffle of feathers  
Heard free above the piercing  
Heart-beat of the steaming waters,  
And saw a ghost as it faded  
And bloomed again;  
Turning to climb he saw  
It was a nymph sleeping  
Upright, her arms about an elm.

He wandered somewhere in himself  
From shadow to true flame,  
and reached a meadow where  
The shadows in the girls' eyes thickened  
Like evening at the foot of the olives;  
The branches distilled  
A lazy rain of arrows,  
Here sheep had fallen asleep  
Under the simple warmth,  
Others browsed  
The gleaming pall;  
The shepherd's hands were a window  
Polished by faint fever

## THE RIVERS

Rooted beside this withered tree left  
in this small valley  
listless  
as a circus before  
or after the show, I watch  
the clouds  
pass quietly over the moon

This morning  
I lay, stretched out, in an urn of water —  
still as a relic

while the Isonzo flowed past  
polishing me  
like one of its stones

I lifted  
my wasted body, whole now, and  
like an acrobat  
leapt out of the water

I knelt  
beside my clothes, stained with war,  
and like a Beduin  
bent my head  
to receive the sun

This is the Isonzo  
and here  
I saw, as never before,  
I am only a reed in the universe, bending  
in the breeze

that pain  
is standing against the current

I felt those hidden hands  
slip into the deepest part of me, bringing  
the deepest joy

I have gone through the ages of my life  
and these are my rivers:

the Serchio  
where my people have knelt to wash and drink  
since Christ was born

the Nile  
which has seen me born, and grow,  
and burn  
upon its plains  
with all that I will never know.

the Seine  
whose rushing current  
has shaken me, and made me see myself

These are my rivers  
I hear their voices in the Isonzo —

and these are my memories  
shining  
in each river, saying  
that it is night  
that my life  
surrounds me, these petals of shadow

TRANSLATED BY KEVIN HART



My brother Philip was a close friend of Dylan Thomas, who more than once said to me, "I love him more than anyone else." Constantine Fitzgibbon, in his *Life of Dylan*, says that Philip was "perhaps Dylan's closest London friend," but has hardly anything more to tell of him; Paul Ferris and the others do not mention him at all. That someone who was admittedly such a close and long friend should be so ignored is odd. Probably the reason lies in the fact that Philip did not cut any intellectual figure; but beyond a doubt Dylan felt wholly at home with him as with no one else. The reasons for this are worth considering.

The friendship carried on through almost the whole of Dylan's London period. In the note that Philip wrote for the Dylan memorial number of *Adam* in 1953, he stated, "I can claim the honour of having lived with Dylan in the same room; and because I knew him so intimately I cannot believe that he is dead. That fiery spirit can never die. Few men have I loved so dearly, and our friendship has been a long one, for we met shortly after his first arrival in London. I am wretched about dates and dare not even guess at the year. This was in the Angel and Crown, a pub in St Martin's Lane, which was then the centre of a group to whom we can only apply the outdated word 'Bohemian'." In those days Dylan "was shy, almost timid, and said little."

Philip goes on: "Cherubic, the eternal small-boy – although decidedly no Peter Pan – who chuckles at authority's downfall: that was one side of Dylan. And there were many, many others: the emotionally religious worshipper who never entered a church; the cynic who would weep noisily at a sentimental film; the condemner of practically all his contemporaries, who yet had a genuine humility – though he spoke rarely of his writings; save mockingly – when he was at work. He wrote in school exercise-books in a laboured, childlike hand; and I have seen him bent for hours over those books, often with a glass of beer or his children's sweet-rations, while carefully he wrote and then crossed out what he had written, hours – indeed days – being spent pondering on one word.

"Those who saw him only as a truculent braggart in pubs, a cigarette forever dangling from his bottom-lip, or laughed with him when his fat little body quivered with laughter – (for I cannot remember him ever laughing

loudly) – or watched him tense over the shove-ha'penny board, ready to lose his temper should he be beaten – he was an excellent player – knew only one side, the Panurge-side, of the man. They did not know about those hours of torment over his childish exercise-books scrawled with his childish writing.

"Only once did I catch Dylan reading a good book, and that was *Dombey and Son*, for he had a natural love of Dickens, one of whose characters he might well have been. Otherwise, he read only detective-fiction, and usually while he lay in bed. At one time, however, he must have read deeply, his knowledge of poetry being no slight one, and when with friends we used sometimes to play a game in which each wrote a parody of some poet – Shelley, Byron, Browning, and so on – Dylan's effort not only showed that he knew the man's work well but it was often an excellent poem in its own right. Deeply do I regret having lost a parcel of these taken from him one night in a pub."

The only time that Fitzgibbon mentions Phil and Dylan together is when he deals with Dylan's film-scripts in the later years of the war for Donald Taylor. One script, "which never progressed beyond the idea stage, was a film that Dylan and Phil Lindsay were to write together about the life of Dickens; they planned to use, almost exclusively, Dickens' own words taken from the autobiographical parts of the novels." The idea here was Phil's and he made considerable notes on Dickens' works for the purpose. I often heard the pair talking about scripts in pubs, including that on Burke and Hare.

Alan Maclaren-Ross in his *Memoirs of the Forties* tells of Phil and Dylan together at Strand Films. Phil is satirically depicted. Dylan says, "If you spot a little leprechaunish chap with a big bump on his forehead and dried blood all over his face, that'll be Phil for sure. He was born with a bump I believe, but the blood comes from falling downstairs. He's always falling down, Old Phil." The bump in fact was a wen, which had developed in the later 1930s. He is described as having "a large bulb-shaped head, with a big carbuncle on his forehead," and a nose "noduled with purple veins, clots of dark dried blood surrounded the carbuncle." (In fact he had only one such fall, with a brief show of wounds.) He was hiding, we are told, in terror from a tall woman armed with an axe.



I was in London at this period, seeing much of Phil and Dylan, and there was no such woman. Phil indeed for a while was evading a girl, but she was not in the least violent. Maclaren-Ross may be using his humorist's right to exaggeration; but it is more likely, I think, that Phil and Dylan were pulling his leg. I have mentioned elsewhere how Dylan, who, amused at his army-writings, had helped to get him into the film-job, had been appalled to find what a compulsive talker Maclaren-Ross was; and how I once saw him in Soho jump off a moving bus (no mean feat for him) in order to escape at all, from his ceaseless flow of chatter.

The link of Dylan and Phil lay in a very similar attitude to living. They both had tremendous powers of enjoyment and a capacity to extract a rich exhilaration from the small events of life, together with an inexhaustible thirst for beer. Dylan found his zest for life echoed in Phil as in no one else.



Luckily a chance has come my way to bring out the nature of the friendship in a more definite way than such generalizations as the above could hope to do. The Australian collector and bibliographer, H.F. Chaplin, has a number of letters written by Phil to our father, Norman, in which many references to Dylan occur; and he has given me permission to cite some of them here. Phil never dated his letters, but several of the ones here cited belong to the early war-years, while others refer to Dylan's Italian visit of 1947. I think that taken together they form a lively addition to Dylan's biography.

We may start with a passage in which it is Dylan, not Phil, who is being persecuted by a girl, though he ends by finding a good use for her. Phil refers to a friend who was "carting round a female who made a snatch at Dylan Thomas, the poet, my best friend, a podgy, merry little drunk at whom it is dangerous for females to make passes as he usually leaps on them growling, and rapes them on the spot. Dylan regretted that rape. She was always going to his place. But she had her uses. Dylan and his wife would leave her at home to look after the baby while they went to the pictures or a pub." Though the friendship of Phil and Dylan was in no sense an intellectual one, they had their arguments over writers and artists, as well as their agreements. "Not long ago Dylan and I went to see Ibsen's *Ghosts* and it was so awful, so ham, that we spent most of the night in the bar with Dylan's wife Caith. Getting pally with the barmaids who agreed with our opinion. We stayed there while frenzied intellectuals crept in hissing, Shush, Shush! every few minutes. As Dylan looks like a bookmaker's tout, Caith like a Queen Victoria who had reached the gutter, and I like something from a very cheap pawnbroker's shop, the intellectuals looked at us with horror."

"One of my eternal quarrels with Dylan is that he insists that Hardy was primarily a poet, and I say that he was a novelist. I submit to Dylan that D.H. Lawrence was a poet – his *Birds Beasts and Flowers* is a mighty work, particularly *The Snake*, *The Kangaroo*, *The Turtle* and *The Bats* – turned novelist, but I cannot see it with Hardy. Love his poetry as much as Dylan does, I yet feel that it was a secondary line with him, for many of his poems are short stories." Dylan, I may add, admired those poems of D.H.L. as much as Phil did, and I have heard him read them magnificently in his rooms. Such home-readings in the days before he took to radio quite lacked the heady showmanship that he put into his later public performances.

Once Phil mentions that he has been to an exhibition of Indian art, and after setting out his reactions he adds, "Only Dylan would have felt it as I, I am certain, but he wasn't with me and I was alone."

Of Augustus John, Phil writes: "I have never dared to tell Dylan the story of when he stumped into a pub one morning and seeing me without my mate, demanded to know where that brainless Shakespeare was that morning – he dislikes Dylan, who seduced and even married one of his females." Again, "Speaking of Dylan reminds me of the other night in a pub when a pleasant woman rushed over with a book of John's reproductions. I knew quite a few, some of the girls John has carted about with him, but



I was interested by the portraits of two close friends, Dylan and Tommy Earp. In both John has lengthened the face and he's made Tommy solemn and Dylan idiotically cherubic. Neither was the man I know. Dylan looks like a saint, this drunken young rogue who'd ravish a saint in public. Yet the features were accurate, and the painting was excellent. Do men like this see differently, for all John's portraits are lean and hungry looking?"

Elsewhere he says of Earp, "As a friend I know you'd love him and I have had very happy days with him, for his knowledge is wide, his reading vast, his wit is profound. To hear him and Bill Gaunt and Dylan Thomas is a joy, for each in their different ways has superb wit and gusto. As a critic I never bother much about Tommy but he told me in confidence that he's not allowed to review any show in the *Telegraph* unless they've put in an advertisement. And they say there's no corruption in the press."

In another letter it is not clear whether Douglas Glass has sent Norman a photo of Dylan or talked to him about the latter. "Glass has evidently given you an excellent picture of Dylan. The poor bastard is done for and I doubt if he'll ever do any more work. Fate has done him a stinking trick, for when he was struggling out of poverty and at last making a decent living, his old father – a schoolmaster whom he never liked – and his mother, who has broken her leg, have descended on him in the small cottage, and demanded that he support them. A pal who went to visit them said there is hell in the place. Poor Caith with the two kids being such a slavey to the tyranny of the aged couple, that she is unable to slip out even for one drink. Under such circumstances, having to support a wife, two aged parents and two children the poor bastard will have no time for poetry. He was luckier when he was poor, for then at least he was free."

Phil recognized how highly Dylan thought of Vernon Watkins. "I enclose a poem I clipped some time ago from *The Listener*. It's by Vernon Watkins and I am certain you'll like it. Vernon is no close friend of mine. He and Dylan are close friends – in fact I do believe that Vernon is the only living poet whom Dylan in his arrogance will even condescend to read . . . Vernon I feel, would submit even to becoming a wittol, such is his admiration for Dylan's work . . . It is curious that the two best poets living in England Dylan and Vernon should both be Welsh." Again, "How simply, yet how powerfully poetry can make articulate a thought. I wish to God I was any good at the stuff. I still write it occasionally but I am not vain enough to send it out, for what use is there in being a minor poet. I have only to read Dylan or Vernon to see how feeble it is and chuck it into the fire."

Elsewhere he mentions one of his own poems, "Luckily I was able to send Jack something. I wrote it during the Blitz. I was really surprised at how good it was, not as poetry, but as the record of an experience, for I wrote it after being up all night digging at a very dirty job where a workers' block got a direct hit. I'd knocked off at 8 in the morning – it was 8 to 8 the hours – and I was walking home, feeling pretty sick and too tired and yet alert to sleep. The walk was a long one, some miles, and I dropped into a workers' cafe, for tea and toast, and to read the papers. But I was obsessed particularly by the memory of

a wretched woman who had died in my arms while I was gingerly feeling her for broken bones, her head in my lap. I looked down and saw she was gone. So I tried to scribble out the impression and wandered through the day, unable to sleep, in pubs, adding and altering till I'd got something of what I wished. Even then I'd probably have tossed it away if in my uneasy peregrinations I'd not wandered to Chelsea and walked into Dylan and some others in a pub. And I showed it to him, expecting him to make some pleasant remark, for he's not the one to praise insincerely – he's honestly refused to read my novels because he doesn't like history, but actually he only reads detective stories and poetry, even though Caith likes my stuff and tries to make him – but to my astonishment he was quite sincerely interested. So I put it in my pocket and rubbed it over later, and posted it to Isobel. So therefore it alone of all [the poems] I've written has survived. And to think I once thought I'd be a poet."

Surprisingly the poem has survived among my papers:

### *Light Rescue*

These one recalls, wiping sweat, blood and muck away:  
Bloodcrusted hair and jarring breath, and groping hands,  
and moans,  
And whimpers. "I'll be brave, ah Christ, I'm brave" –

Don't say  
It. Don't. You grin and fumble flesh for broken bones  
And cheerfully swear, "You're O.K., mum." O.K.! You  
know

That death is drying that yellow skin, distending eyes,  
And yet you grin, "You're O.K., mum," they trust you so  
You curl ashamed, living, while in your arms there, he,  
she, dies.

Later you gulp your beer, waving tin hat for fan,  
And with your mates you laugh, but yet remember,  
Always you remember, always will remember, man,  
Woman, child, crushed brick, black wood with winking  
ember

As you rustled sparks from what was someone's hair,  
Boy's, girl's perhaps, for sex is hard to tell  
When bodies are charred, contorted. But you – you do  
not care,

You cannot care, relieving life for hell.

Part of the correspondence is taken up with attempts to convert Norman to a belief in Dylan's importance as a poet, and there are some interesting comments on "The Long-Legged Bait". "Yesterday I tried to get you a copy of Dylan's *Deaths and Entrances*, his last book, but not a bookseller had it. They all said it was reprinting. While being naturally angry at being frustrated I must confess I was glad that a book of poetry can sell out these days."

"I've just had a note from my bookseller to say he has Dylan's *Deaths and Entrances* . . . He is not an easy poet to read but I don't think you'll have any trouble in grasping his meaning. Two poems refer to a period of acute jealousy when Dylan went about almost insane with suspicion – justified I fear as, like his wife as I do, she is rather bitchy. She is indeed the perfect woman in that she has to perfection the fineness and badness of woman. Loving and kind, brutal and treacherous, and extremely



beautiful. I am extremely fond of her and Dylan's one method of keeping her at home is to put her in the family way as often as possible, that being the only way he can master her. Out of the episode emerged the long poem in the book, *The Long-Legged Bait*, which has real fury in it, for he is deeply in love with her. Almost all the fights he gets into, and they're pretty many, are caused by her for she has a passion for uproars. On one occasion she told my girl of the moment that I was sick of her, which was more or less true, although I should have had more brains to have confided in Caith. But she got the worst of that. My girl went dippy, of course, and threw me out of her house with the result that I had nowhere to stay. So I made Caith put me up, which could have been no pleasure to her as they lived in one studio. That was a mad period and it was really frightening in that studio when bombs threatened for it was almost entirely made of glass. Dylan was so wildly jealous that on nights when he had to go fire-watching he refused to let me sleep at the place so that I was forced to put myself on odd friends at odd times. But I love them both very much and miss them now that they are in the country."

"I've just picked up Dylan's *Deaths and Entrances* and will post it off with this. Glancing through it on the way home I was surprised to note that the form of some has been altered. I think I remarked that there was a series written in diamond and hour-glass shape. These have now been straightened out and to me it seems they have lost much. I think the virtuosity was wrong that prompted him in the first place to show off with unusual shapes, but it is even worse to abandon the virtuosity. Whether Church or Dylan did this I don't know but I suspect Church who secretly must hate Dylan who represents in life a Rabelaisian outlook that must shock his curate-soul. Church is a typical suburban poet who sees heaven in a wildflower and he could have no understanding of the profound sensuality in Dylan. You will find some lines delightfully of sex so frank that the average reader probably does not know what he's reading and gazes at it with bemused eyes. I wish you joy of this little precious book, although it is naturally uneven, at its best it is great . . . If your library by any chance has a copy of Dylan's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* you should get hold of it. My copy, naturally, has been stolen, otherwise I'd send it, and it's now out of print; but it gives some of the most delightful pictures of childhood and youth I know of, next to your own books. There is nothing whatever highbrow about it. It's just a collection of semi-autobiographical sketches and some are damned funny. Strange how the highbrows grabbed Dylan who is the least highbrow bloke I know, his interests ranging little beyond booze, girls, and shove-halfpenny. He looks like a pig and often acts like one. I think I told you what Augustus John said about him. It really is an excellent picture of him although I'd not let Dylan hear it for worlds; but he is profoundly intelligent in the real sense, intuitively and not by learning. There is a very strong ego."

Phil may have been mistaken about the re-ordering of the pattern poems. I have not seen any edition in which "Vision and Prayer" is not printed in diamond and

hourglass shapes. In another letter he mentions that he asked Dylan why he composed the pattern-poems. Dylan replied, "Just to show them I could."

After Norman had read the poems, Phil writes: "I agree with everything you say about Dylan and I'm very glad you like *The Long-Legged Bait* as it's the one that got me badly . . . It's the sensuality I love for he has a genuine passion and frenzied delight in women and it is good to find a normal man with gusto after the awful disillusioned homosexual period of my youth when poets seemed to proclaim their lack of balls. That Dylan has been accepted as the greatest poet here is to me a healthy sign, like women's fashions today with that return to femininity and sanity."

"I'm glad you like Dylan at last. I agree that he is maddening at first and has not yet quite realised his full strength. The trouble is that he has to work for films, a soul-destroying job, and has little time for real work. But he has a great lyrical quality, I feel. *The Two-Legged Bait* is difficult, but it exalts me. Of course I've never asked him for a key but I know him so intimately that I can hazard its meaning. It was written after an emotional upset when Caith took revenge on him and he really thought she'd cuckolded him – and I don't doubt she did, and rightly so – and the fury of the poem is an outburst of fury and rage. It's the kind of bravado we all yell at such times, that women are bitches, chuck your wife into the sea, out of the boat of security, whirl her on your marriage-line while other blokes bite at her, eat at her, over the sunken church, then when you think you've rid yourself of her you rush back to the security of the land only to find that you've failed. You have emotionally rejected her, tossed her to the sharks of lovers for what? You've still got your long-legged bait in your hand and you are more securely hooked than the fish to whom you tossed her . . . I feel that is the emotional theme. You have the drowned church of marriage, the flimsy boat of security on marriage seas, the line (an unconscious pun: one talks of marriage-lines), the monstrous fishes eating her and destroying her, and you have the doom of the heart, the bait in your hand. I don't suggest that Dylan worked out the symbolism like a cross-word puzzle and he would probably be himself surprised, if one attempted, as one could, to analyse the symbols as one would a dream. Once you submit to his imagery you understand the universality as *Halfway to Anywhere*. In a different medium [the symbols] might be your personal experience, but they are also mine. I think if you see it from this angle, as symbolic of a universal experience, you'll be conquered by it. I am no defender of symbolic writing, I rather dislike it because it becomes usually sheer sleight-of-hand cleverness, and Dylan is moving from this slowly to a more direct method. The great danger that lies ahead of him is his damned virtuosity. He is so clever that fireworks are easy. Although practically uneducated, I am often shocked by his ignorance (which he manages to conceal) of great works, he is the most intuitively intelligent bloke I know. Get him off sentiment and he cannot give a false valuation and he is almost too brutally right in his refusal to compromise. John's jeer that he is a brainless Shakespeare has far more truth in it than John realised,



and actually sums him up. Apart from his genius, he is one of the noblest blokes I know and has been as true a friend as ever I have found. But I don't think my love obscures my attitude to his work, although being so close to him emotionally, I probably get more from his stuff than most others. He is one of the few friends with whom I can live in silence, and we have gone about together at times, boozing, playing shove-halfpenny, or walking the country, not bothering to talk, yet able in a few words to divine the other's thoughts."

One letter gives a glimpse of Dylan drunken. Phil writes to Norman, "I agree with all you say about Dylan and have tried to discuss it with him, but he shrugs aside all such criticism with good humour. He is writing down actually but he doesn't care, for he is a good fellow who likes booze and girls, and if the highbrows give it [praise], more fools they. I remember at a party with him once when we were both pretty boozed and arguing, a little respectable bank-clerkish person rushed up and dragged me aside. 'Do you know who you're talking to?' he demanded. 'Of course,' I said, 'one of my mates.' 'It's Dylan Thomas,' he whispered. 'How dare a man of your age get a genius like that drunk.' I told him to ask Dylan but he was too devout to do that, so that I told Dylan with the result that it took about half-a-dozen of us to sit on him so that he could not have revenge on the insult. He's a lovable bloke who in life rejects highbrowism, but he's got to live."

Another letter returns to the subject of Dylan's pub-poems. "You are right in thinking, I believe, that Dylan will eventually chuck the fireworks in time. I know him well enough to realise that under the careless pose of to-hell-with-things there is a profound mind with contempt for highbrows. To hear him talk of his alleged admirers would astound them. When Edith Sitwell took him up he repaid her by taking what he could and clearing, although Edith is one of the few poets for whom he has any respect, and he makes excellent use of the cap-in-hand-gang by drinking their cellars dry and seducing—or attempting to seduce their wives and daughters. To him it has been a vast joke and he has been handicapped by too great facility. I've seen him in a pub when we've had a kind of rhyming contest, each of us adding a line in parody of some poet, write and throw away lines of sometimes astonishing beauty. I was surprised one day when I was lugging home a pile of typewriting paper which I'd pinched from a film-office and, running into him, we naturally went to a pub and while chatting he idly sketched on my parcel. I'm not pretending that the drawing was a masterpiece but I confess being startled by it, it was just a couple of costers dancing, but it was alive, and had he had any training, I'm certain he would have been a

fine artist. When I remarked that it was a jolly good sketch, he laughed, having been drawing almost unconsciously. My one fear is that he is doing so well at the moment at films and the B.B.C. that he'll create nothing, for he works with great care, rewriting and rewriting and most of his spare time goes like my own, in pubs . . . I never see him now. In this London I live a very lonely life as all my friends have luckily fled and my last experience of Fleet Street put me off ever visiting it again. There is no longer any meeting place as in the past when a visit to the Cafe Royal often meant a glorious evening of Dylan, and Bill, and Tommy Earp, and Gerald Kersch and half-a-dozen others, when the wit was plentiful and laughter almost continuous."

One letter was written when Dylan was in Italy. "I rarely go out and see practically no one, even Dylan Thomas has fled to Italy. That was a noble act of Edith Sitwell's. Dylan was offered a job in a U.S. University, and knowing his passion for booze and hoydens she rightly conjectured that he'd die of pox or chiroous (I more than doubt that spelling) if he went to so hospitable a country. So in some fashion she's arranged for him to live in Europe, and Italian little girls—I have it on the word of Norman Douglas, are enthusiastic and cheap, and their parents are easily corrupted, while the wine is good. The lucky bastard to be out of England, with his departure I am very much alone."

Then, when Phil went to watch a cricket match (presumably at Lord's) he ran into Dylan, "naturally near the bar. He's just back from Italy." A group wanted to talk highbrow to Dylan, but he was too interested in the match to join in. "Anyway he never does talk" highbrow.

These scattered passages in Phil's letters do indeed give a good effect of what his relationship to Dylan was like. Clearly he in part depicts Dylan in his own image; but there was sufficient truth in that depiction to explain why the two felt so close together. I should like to end with a story from a later period, after Dylan had gone to the Boat House in 1949 and Phil to an old house at Beckley near Rye. They then met only now and then in London. But Dylan, shortly before his final visit to America, felt a wish for a longer getting-together. He rang up to say that he'd like to come down to Beckley and stay for a while. Phil's wife Isobel answered the phone—Phil had a phobia about phones, perhaps derived from the days when he was dodging writs and debt-collectors. Isobel was busy and did not relish having to put Dylan up for some days, so she made some excuse for delaying him. After Dylan's death she somehow let the story out, and I can still hear Phil growling "That's the one thing I'll never forgive you for."

## JOURNEYWORK

Last summer left the land  
 the two stroke din  
 the dead silence after crows –  
 two black notes on a long white page

Golda and me had this thing – see,  
 hundreds of miles apart –

her dad  
 ex of the shipyards  
 welded schooners together  
 in the Port Admiral pub

and that old lady pushing the pram  
 (full of brown glass babies)  
 that's her mum  
 old gert,  
 resident of industrial wastelands –  
 everyone says she's mad  
 but she's sharp enough –

Golda worked  
 frying chips  
 burning donuts in a caravan  
 at shows  
 fisherman's markets  
 and outside the power station –  
 I'd picture her there in the steam  
 black hair flaming –

Golda knew a bloke,  
 we'd go out at night  
 spinning for gar –  
 sell it next morning  
 from the back of the boat,  
 the customers shivering in their Sunday clothes  
 (ya shoulda felt it last night lady  
 in the black  
 they were shards of ice  
 them garfish flying)

the dead silence after gulls  
 two white notes on a long black wave –

Tried tossing newspapers  
 onto a frozen square of lawn,  
 then a milk round –  
 they put the clinks out at night  
 and find the white in the morning,  
 (me picking up small copper faces in the dark).

After the accident  
 Golda shaved her hair  
 mum said she'd lost her beauty  
 refused to see me  
 for six months –  
 the gas blew up  
 welded her hands to her face.

She took up making nets  
 sitting at home,  
 square after square,  
 web after web –

Golda got us a boat  
 when the money came through  
 (now we trawl for a living)  
 that's it there, moored  
 behind the inlet to the power station,  
 the one called "Journeywork".

## SEA HEROES

Because people are always waving from quays  
 or arriving out of the haze on the channel,  
 ports smack of legend –  
 this one is quieter than others,  
 its heroism is private and suburban  
 the kind that occurs behind  
 drawn venetian blinds  
 in children's casualty wards  
 and on small craft a long way out in black.

Achilles boots ten goals for the Magpies  
 and Odysseus is a prawn trawler,  
 I like it for that – refusal to wax lyrical,  
 the hard, clear sight from the dock arm –  
 and the crane driver who can place  
 a ton of wood  
 on a five cent piece.



## THE GULLS OF BUNGAN

Lethal and sleek they stalk the sand,  
faster than cause, marked with their effects.  
Their eyes, precision-tooled, can be  
the piercing and the target all in one,  
circled in scarlet for the dart of sight to leave.  
Their beaks are dipped instant in blood,  
before their swoop has left the sky.  
Salt and harsh their song  
screams in victory before their prize is won.

NADINE AMADIO

## TO LAEL

that all these years have passed  
and you are still the same.  
"did you know that he was a disturbed child?"  
as if nothing had happened until intervention.  
christ knows what made me go.  
sense of movement  
dissaffection  
not belonging.  
shit, even then i was aware  
of difference.  
it wasn't that i was different to them.  
they were different to me.  
that ache, that longing in me  
was as certain as the sky.  
to wake each day in no-nod-rio  
and wonder at the source of self.  
you start with nothing, you can only build.  
time distorts.  
there is only truth in things  
and the only thing that remains with me is me.  
sure the jails have grabbed me  
and the errant turns of fate  
have prescribed for me the path i take.  
but how do you go bra, without the dance?  
what are you without imagination?  
where do your feet tread?  
in dreams?  
i come, see, finally like storms.  
there are rivers that we cross.  
storm drains.

SHELTON LEA

## EMOTIONAL EUNUCH THE PRODUCTION UNIT

Down once-wild, worn, sweet streets of Pyrmont,  
into the jaws of just one more empire . . .  
the giant man smaller than the buildings  
where he walked through rain and tear,  
dragging his chains like his spilled entrails . . .  
thirty-year-old stains of the Great Depression  
shadowed his heart.

Pissed off his face, off his food, off his head,  
totally, unreachably insubordinate, entrapped  
in absolute disrapture.

They called him by number and he fed the clock  
with a card pressed from his own flesh . . .  
his teeth rotted in the sugar-sweetened air –  
the air of captivity.

And when he smiled, his own children shrank  
and they staggered between confusion and trepidation  
following his footsteps.

In the twentieth year of servitude's erosion  
he could not go to work without crying . . .  
they finally had him – they had him good . . .  
he shared with his wife the valium sedative  
which his polluted temper had forced her to  
for refuge.

He quit. *But, reconsider*, they warned him. Yes,  
*reconsider*, they threatened. *Reconsider*, they grinned.  
He laughed his own self-condemnation when  
they offered him about ten bottles of beer a week  
if only he would stay, and he laughed when people asked,  
why did he refuse?

Every morning as he woke to the fact of his own life,  
he cried, for no man be free in realisation  
that even his dreams are invaded, and many taken  
away and no more heard of.

He no longer clung to sleep, but leapt out –  
out of his dreams, like a guerilla into the hours,  
those hours which are the skeletons left remaining  
of childhood defoliated.

He leapt up against the walls of his rage . . .  
nothing is sacred inside that bitter hatred  
where he sat eating with us  
off the floor of his cage.

BRUCE HANNA

DAVID FROST

## The Language of Liturgy

*Professor David Frost, of the Department of English at the University of Newcastle, recently resigned from the Anglican Liturgical Commission, after seventeen years' work on that body, as a protest against the effects the drive for 'non-sexist' language was having, and likely to have, on the language of worship in the Anglican Church.*

*Professor Frost has given this magazine permission to print the statement he wrote on this occasion. Overland itself seeks, and has always sought, to eliminate 'sexist' language, where practicable and sensible, from what is published in this magazine, and we have full sympathy with the general aims of groups concerned with this matter.*

*All readers of Overland are, however, interested in language, and while there has been much published on 'sexist' language in recent years, both within government and institutions and in the general publishing world, reasoned criticisms of the process of making language 'inclusive' are seldom seen. It is in the interests of discussion that we publish Professor Frost's article, not because we necessarily endorse all that he says.*

*Professor Frost wishes to make it clear that he is firmly committed to educational and social developments which increase opportunities for women, and that his own record in academic and personal life bears witness to this.*

*Overland will be pleased to print short comments on Professor Frost's article.*

At the time when I was working on the English version of the Psalms currently used in *An Australian Prayer Book* and in *The Alternative Service Book*, I had dinner with the poet W.H. Auden, who was similarly assisting the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States in their version of the Psalter. I took the occasion to twit him on their proposed version of Psalm 51 – “wash me, and I shall be cleaner than snow” – complaining both that it was an inaccurate translation of the Hebrew and that it attributed properties to snow that a chemist might jib at. Auden, blushing, explained that, because of pressure from groups on behalf of the Negro minority in the United States, it was no longer possible to use the color white as a symbol of purity. In their final version (1976), the Americans dropped the image of snow altogether. Alas, fashions shift: the pressure groups found other targets, and such color symbolism ceased to be thought so offensive. This was predictable, since the symbolism of light and darkness, black and white, derives from a basic perceptual experience, and is rooted in the language. By well-meaning attempts to remedy an in-

justice by tinkering with words, the Americans succeeded only in impoverishing their means of expression, and in producing a historical curiosity.

I cite this small instance, which is analogous to current attempts to purge the English language of so-called 'sexist' implications, because it illustrates the dangers in attempting language reforms, however well-intentioned such attempts may be. You may find that you have unwittingly limited your power to express yourself, that you have committed yourself to a change far more radical than you anticipated, that you aligned yourself with a passing fashion when you thought you were 'spokesperson' for a new age. Historically, prescriptive attempts to control the development of a language or to alter its course have rarely been successful. Even in totalitarian states, where a government has control of the media, of government agencies and of schools, it is uncertain how far an alteration in the meaning of words such as 'democracy' has been successfully effected in popular usage. The chances are that you will quickly become an amusing sideshow in the panorama of linguistic development.



## *The Language of the Church*

The Christian Church, though given at times to what I would regard as lapses into archaism, has in general and as a matter of principle communicated its message in the language of its day; and for the sake of the universality of that message it has tried not to identify itself with an elite or with a sectional interest. Where it has lapsed, it has been liable to revolution from within. By and large, it has accepted the language it found, and through it has tried to influence the hearts and minds of its hearers. Where it needed special terms, it has adapted current words or fabricated new terms from local materials; but I know of no instance where it has embarked on a major re-structuring of a language. It has tried to persuade men to change by appealing to them in a language they use, rather than attempt to engineer that change by altering the way in which they express themselves.

For me, then, the only relevant question for a Christian writer to ask is "What is the current state of the language?" Certain linguistic forms may well bear the marks of history; and it may be that the use of "man" to denote the race and "a man" to signify male, of "men" as a plural word signifying both males and females, and of the pronoun "he" when both sexes are intended, are usages which reflect the thought-patterns of European and Semitic societies where males were dominant. It remains indisputable, I believe, that in the writings of the past and in the practices of the present such usages are still standard.

At the same time, there is a variant usage, which remains a minority usage. It is, I suspect, less widespread than it seems, simply because instances of "chairperson", "humankind" and the like stick out as anomalies, whereas many examples of standard usage pass unobserved, just because they are standard. My impression is that the new words and the variations in grammar and syntax are confined to sections of a literate bourgeoisie, and that within that class they are not accepted as standard, even by a majority of intelligent men and women. Regionally, the variants seem most common in the United States, of middle frequency in Australia, and much less used in the United Kingdom. The neologisms still provoke opposition and mirth, as is evident from recent letters to the Australian. You may also recall the newspaper report that the Mayor of New York was forced to ask his council to reverse their decision to re-christen "manholes" "personholes", on the ground that reports of the change had made the city ridiculous throughout the world. Nearer home, the Board of Directors of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company divided between irritation and hilarity when it was announced by the lady Administrator that the Company would be holding a contest for children to determine the best "jolly swagperson". Until such usages lose their novelty and become accepted, I submit that the languages of worship should not employ

them – partly, because they are more divisive than what they seek to replace; chiefly, because they draw attention to themselves in a way that religious language should not do.

## *Prognosis*

If and when the practices under discussion look like becoming standard usage, the Church must recognize the fact and adapt to it. In a very good cause, it might even be appropriate for the Church to assist in tipping a balance. There are, however, a number of reasons why the move to eliminate so-called 'sexist' expressions is unlikely to succeed, and is not something we should at present permit to influence the language of our liturgies. As I suggested earlier, the odds are heavily against any attempts to prescribe what a language should be. Second, the forms suggested offend against the principle of economy, which (given the laziness of human nature) usually wins out: "God and Man" is a pithier and more forceful title than "God and Humankind", and "dustman" is easier to say than "dustperson". The elimination of "brethren" – which in modern usage has lost much connection with "brothers", and in the popular mind means only a religious fellowship – would similarly offend against the principle of economy, since it would necessitate either the invention of a new term or cumbersome use of "brothers and sisters". A third disadvantage of the proposed modifications is that expressive possibilities in the language are lost: the encounter between God and Man sounds more personal and direct than the encounter between God and Humankind; so that, if "Man" is unacceptable, we need to invent a new generic term which has the same force. Again, human laziness is likely to incline us to preserve an effective usage rather than invent a substitute.

A final reason why the attempted revolution is most unlikely to succeed is that the offending forms are too deeply entrenched in the language. "Man" in its generic sense forms a variety of compounds and derivatives. Are we to contemplate distinguishing "manslaughter" from "womanslaughter" (or from "childslaughter", if the children's rights movement has its say)? Will we "man" a ship, or will we "man, woman and child the lifeboats"? Will we promise to fight "womanfully" as well as "manfully" against evil? Will we have "womanikins" as well as "manikins"? Must we describe the higher apes as "woman-like", when appropriate? And should the word "woman" itself be eliminated as a term for the female, on the grounds that it clearly derives from the noun 'man', that it has been given a false etymology indicative of woman's secondary status as taken from "the womb of man", and that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it had the equally false etymology "woe-of-man"?

### *Some practical considerations*

The current language is the medium through which a verbal artist creates his effects; and like a painter who is forbidden certain tones and shapes, he (or she) must view with dismay any attempt to limit the possibilities at his (or her) disposal. To create effects of rhythm, emphasis, tone, sound patterns like assonance and alliteration, it may often be preferable to use, for example, "all men" rather than "all people". Slight changes in language can importantly affect the emotional coloring of what is said: "Blessed is the man who fears God" directs our attention to the individual's relation with God; "Blessed is the person who fears God" is less crisp and more abstract; while Evan Burge's preferred alternative, "Blessed are those who fear the Lord", talks about a class. Those who are not sensitive to the variations in flavor and emphasis in three such alternatives should perhaps not be writing liturgy, which is akin to poetry in the demands it makes on the linguistic skills of its practitioners.

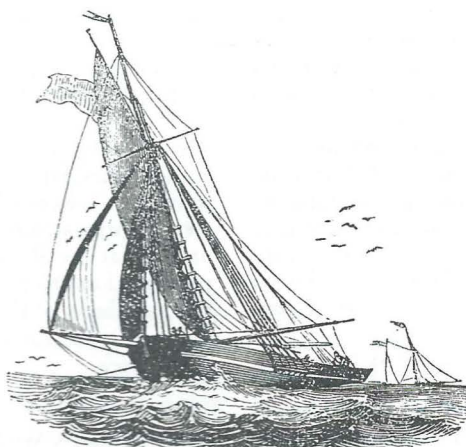
Even in cases where language could more easily be construed as exclusive, it is not always desirable to use the generally more satisfactory alternative. I myself normally prefer the expression "children of God" to "sons of God". However, in a collect which speaks of our imitation of Christ's sonship, it seemed more effective to point the parallel by praying that we be brought "to the glorious liberty of the sons of God" – and equally, it seemed necessary to avoid connotations of that libertarian sect calling itself "the Children of God". Since "sons and daughters of God" was too much of a mouthful, I availed myself of the con-

vention that the masculine forms may, on occasion, be taken as including both males and females.

### *Some possible ways forward*

1. I would find it impossible to assent to the letter of the recommendation from the Australian Consultation on Liturgy (ACOL), that we no longer use "man, men, he, sons, brethren, brothers, fathers" in their generic senses. However, I could heartily concur with the spirit of the recommendation, which I interpret as meaning that we should be sensitive to those instances where our language might be misconstrued as excluding women, and should then consider what action was preferable in each instance. If such interpretation were acceptable to the Commission, I would then recommend that we do not seek an easement from General Synod of its current instructions, since this would be to provoke misunderstanding and unhelpful debate. A synod is not the place to debate linguistic niceties.

2. In the long term, and if the minority usages prove to have staying power, I suggest that it will be necessary to monitor such usages to determine the point at which they become so widespread that it is appropriate for the Church to adopt them. The makers of the various Oxford English Dictionaries, as I understand, are now computerizing their records, and expect to be able to answer queries as to the relative frequency of words such 'mankind' and 'humankind', and also supply statistics on the usage of words like 'man' used in a generic sense. This would be a step in establishing a base from which we could act rationally.



MAN-OF-WAR TENDER.



# books

## Satire, Humor, Revelation

Frank Kellaway

Tim Winton: *That Eye the Sky* (McPhee Gribble, Penguin, \$14.95).

Peter Goldsworthy: *Zooing* (Angus and Robertson, \$6.95).

Barry Oakley: *Scribbling in the Dark* (University of Queensland Press, \$14.95 and \$24.95).

It is seldom a reviewer gets a whole batch of books all of which he enjoys and all of which he must praise almost without reservation. In the manner of a kid devouring lollies I will reserve the most enjoyable till last.

Ort (Morton) Flack, the narrator of Tim Winton's *That Eye the Sky*, is a remarkable, original creation. He belongs to that family of which Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin is perhaps the father. They are people whom the majority think of as simpleminded, even 'idiots', because their view of the world remains innocent, totally uncorrupted and unimpressed by accepted conventional ideas. The innocence of the Prince, a man in his early twenties, is developed and made credible by showing his profound understanding and respect for the attitudes of children. Ort, a boy of twelve, is far more isolated because he sees things in a way startlingly different from his friend Fat Cherry or his adolescent sister Tegwyn or the other children at school or the adults. His parents are shown sympathetically through his eyes, and his mother seems to catch glimpses of the real stature of her son.

Sam Flack, Ort's father, works as a mechanic and general hand at Cherry's service station. While taking Mr Cherry's money to town to lay it on the races, to shield his employer from the approbrium of being seen to gamble, Sam has a near-fatal road accident when his car is wrapped around a tree. The novel charts the effect of this on the Flacks and Cherrys as seen through Ort's very perceptive, imaginative eyes.

It is a novel about family love and it is easy to see it as being informed by Christian vision, though organised Christians come in for some rough treatment; their hypocrisy and cruelty do not escape Ort's clear-eyed gaze.

The prose is vivid and original, perfectly of a piece with the character of the narrator. The story ends with a

muted, carefully modulated, minor miracle which I found both convincing and satisfying.

Peter Goldsworthy's stories, *Zooing*, is a lively change. The prose has moments of unnecessary clumsiness, but the wit and the vigor of the ideas drives such small objections out very quickly.

There are ten stories, all of them satirical, covering a wide range of subjects: a mother coming home from teaching grade five to a child who asks endless questions; two young couples sharing a house who try to solve difficulties by applying meeting procedures; a boozy, sporting father who races and murders greyhounds; another father, a militarist who skites at the RSL club and clashes dramatically and hilariously with one of his sons; a woman doctor going round the twist performing abortions; a kid too honest for his own good, always getting into scrapes (innocence treated ironically here); the clash between allopaths and alternate medicine; a drunk who comes to stay with his young married brother; a girl on rotary exchange who has an affair with her male host; neighbors.

The etymology of the title *Zooing* is given in the last story, which takes the form of crackpot letters to the editor of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* claiming that the meaning of the word *neighbourly* has changed.

Zoo (zu:) vb. (often foll. by at). To stare or gaze fixedly, yet indifferently, as at an animal in a cage.

This is witty and characterises Goldsworthy's stance in some stories, but the edge of satire would be missing if the indifference were all-pervading. It is not. Certainly in my two favorite stories, "The Bleeding" and "The Unpleasantness at the Returned Military Officer's Club" (first published in *Overland*), he is very far from indifferent to the awfulness of the two fathers. "The Bleeding" is too hideous to be funny, but "The Unpleasantness" is inspired farce.

Barry Oakley's *Scribbling in the Dark* is a collection of short prose and literary journalism, including some reviews and autobiographical pieces



Part one, "Missionary Positions", starts with a piece called "Meeting the Great". Clive James and Margaret Atwood, Robbe-Grillet and Angus Wilson condemn themselves by their own words and actions. A later piece in the same section: "Toronto Days" presents many more writers at a conference. It is sharply observed and very funny. The section includes an historical review of Flash (Speed) Gordon comics, an autobiographical piece about becoming a novelist in which Oakley has a good deal of fun at his own expense, a spoof on criticism, "Fruit and Vegetables in Patrick White", a send-up review of Frank Moorhouse's book *Days of Wine & Rage* (from Overland), a satire on interviews, very funny unfavorable reviews of Vonnegut and Roth, a splendid review of Barry Dickins's *The Crookes of Epping*. This takes the form of an imagined phone conversation between Oakley and his grandmother to whom he's sent a copy of the book as a present, by mistake. It is almost as funny as the book it is reviewing and is, as well, a generous and convincing defence of Dickins. There are also a number of outstanding theatre reviews, including an admirably sane and perceptive defence of Barry Humphries. The section ends with an illuminatingly honest account of why Oakley gave up scribbling in the dark, i.e. reviewing theatre.

Part two is called "The Ice-cream of Memory", and contains all manner of personal reminiscence: childhood in St Kilda, school with the Christian Brothers, change in Melbourne, undergraduate life and theatre, work in advertising.

Part three, "If Only I'd Brought My Opera Glasses", talks about Rugby and Australian Rules, Melbourne and Sydney, holidaying *en famille* at Port Fairy, Christmas in London, the Yarra Bank, Tooronga Park Zoo.

There is not a piece in the whole book that is not enlivened by quirky, humorous observation. Some are strikingly original in approach. The touch is always light and deft. Oakley is incapable of an inelegant or infelicitous phrase. The man who emerges is witty, urbane, warm, generous and, in spite of his own fame, a genuinely humble person.

The trouble with three books of this quality is that the reviewer runs out of laudatory adjectives.

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## Dissertations on Twelve Texts

Gavin Ewart

Peter Steele: *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry* (Melbourne University Press, \$22.50).

Dons don't like simple poems, unless they are by William Blake. And even these, except verbally, are not simple. What dons like are poems that need explanation and clarification. On these they can exercise their ingenuity and their learning. One might say that this is the main use of dons – they explain; and also, as Auden wrote, they go out into the Bad Lands, where the Terrible Poems are, and bring back the good ones.

Peter Steele has selected twelve poems of some difficulty written by living, or only recently dead, poets. All of these poems are short, all interesting, all 'good' and worth rescuing. Only one of these poets is British (Edwin Muir) and this is perhaps as it should be. Eight are American. American verse, at the moment, is more interesting than British verse – and certainly more intricate. From Steele's point of view probably only Andrew Young would be worth looking at, as a genuine 'Metaphysical'.

This book, Steele says, "expresses and explores, a number of intertwining interests." Indeed, some wine does seem to have got into the typography. A bit later on an important line in Muir's poem is very successfully ruined:

Fall from the these beclouded skies

and there is a reference to "the designated or the undersignated." None of this, of course, is Steele's fault (the unwanted "the" in the Muir, oddly enough, makes the line scan). His twelve poems are "concerned with one kind of expatriation" but also "having other qualities which fitted them for attention in a book about modern poetry" – this turns out to be predominantly to do with the use of myth.

I am fairly well read in 'modern' verse, but I wasn't really familiar with any of these poems – though I must have read the Muir, the Jarrell, the Bishop and the Marianne Moore in their various *Collecteds*. There is nothing as famous as Eberhart's "The Ground Hog" (by now probably ex-famous). This is in fact a book for professors to teach from, or for very advanced students to read. It is entertaining and elegantly written and never over-dogmatic, and it will help everybody with the poems. Only occasionally the donnish jargon takes over – "asymptotically" (every student now has to know, or guess, that an asymptote is a line that continually approaches a curve but never gets there); that "propaideutic" has to do with groundwork or preliminary instruction; that a "tilde" is the diacritic mark in Spanish, as in *Señor*. However Steele doesn't use the word "banausic" – and for this we must be grateful; though he does use "ineluctably" where "necessarily" would do.

He gives us helpful information and helpful comparisons. Since most of the poems are direct allusions to myths, this is a good thing. Reader Response Theory and Reader Response Research (directed at finding out, for example, how many students think Sherlock Holmes always wore striped shirts or that Mr Weston looked like Arthur Scargill) is the opposite of this – though it may be complementary. Steele believes, more or less, that additional items of information add up to improved interpretation, and there's nothing wrong with that. Personally, I feel that Sherlock Holmes is as "living" a character as Hamlet and possibly known to as many, or more, people in English-speaking



countries. Faust, Odysseus and Don Quixote, Prospero and Caliban are only runners-up in the consciousness of the Common Man. But it's the mythic ones Steele goes for.

All these things being so, perhaps the best thing I can do is to make my own comments on Steele's twelve poems; though I realise that interpretation only approaches nearer to complete understanding and (a bit like the asymptote) can never quite get there.

### 1. Edwin Muir: "One Foot in Eden"

Almost certainly a poem about Scotland, seen from exile in the 1950s when he worked for the British Council in Prague. This is where you find

these fields that we have planted  
So long with crops of love and hate.

where

Times handiworks by time are haunted,  
And nothing now can separate  
The corn and tares completely grown.  
The armorial weed in stillness bound  
About the stalk; these are our own.  
Evil and good stand thick around  
In the fields of charity and sin  
[a rhythmical hiccup]  
Where we shall lead our harvest in.

The line "The world's great day is growing late" reminds me of Shelley's "The world's great age begins anew" – another "State of the Nation" poem. In the 1956 collection this poem appears between two others about Scotland. The end of the poem seems to be saying that sadness, injustice, disease and death, although naturally undesirable, do give rise to great poetry (Alfred Huxley's view in *Brave New World*):

But famished field and blackened tree  
Bear flowers in Eden never known.

### 2. W.S. Merwin: "Odysseus"

A good poem to read with this, and a better one, is Robert Graves' "Ulysses."

To the much-tossed Ulysses, never done  
With woman whether gown'd as wife or whore,  
Penelope and Circe seemed as one:  
She like a whore made his lewd fancies run,  
And wifely she a hero to him bore.

Steele says, of rum-ti-tum rhythms: "if it goes on and on at you, there goes your assent – you revolt against

the domination over you which it is trying to seize." True of Longfellow's "Hiawatha" but not of a short poem like Graves'.

I almost recommend to his attention a short story by a Triestine writer, Renzo Rossi, originally called "I chiari" (I know because I translated it), which later changed to "Gli uomini chiari" ("The Fair-Skinned Men") in his book with that title. This purports to be an account, by one of the dark aborigines of Ithaca, of the slaying of suitors. It makes it very clear what a swine Odysseus is, and the overlord Achæans in general, with their religion of cruelty and deception. This is strongly contrasted with the primitive beliefs of the islanders, whose gods are jolly, benevolent, happy and devoted only to bringing the fish and the fruit.

### 3. Jorge Luis Borges: "Matthew XXV: 30"

No comment. Except to say that this is one of the only two translations in the twelve (by Alistair Reid), and that all poems about the difficulty of writing poetry (W.S. Graham has been a chief offender) are a waste of time – particularly the reader's.

### 4. Elizabeth Bishop: "The Prodigal"

The best of the lot? Certainly the protagonist is the most truly an exile.

### 5. Marianne Moore: "The Hero"

A fascinating poem. The rhyme and rhythm are stringently broken at the mid-point in stanza three of the six stanza poem, with a 21-syllable line instead of an 18-syllable one. The earlier version obeyed the rules (Moore's). It's a pity she couldn't have worked in Cincinnatus and Regulus (later additions) and the rhyme. "Devout" now sticks out like a sore thumb. The Moslem idea that all works of man/woman should be somehow imperfect.

### 6. Randall Jarrell: "Jerome"

Steele's explaining helps quite a lot, not least in explaining "Grady" – a work by Jensen (who he?), psycho-analysed by Freud. Steele's praise of Jarrell seems both neat and apposite: "One notices, for instance, 'As the sun sets, the last patient rises', something done without Donne's flourish, but not necessarily without Donne's force."

"Each day brings its toad" may be a reference to the French writer quoted in Connolly's *The Unquiet Grave*, who said that every morning one should eat a toad, so as to ensure that nothing more unpleasant could happen to one during the day. This is a very fine

poem – mysterious like Yeats (“The Second Coming”) and statuesque like Shelley (“Ozymandias”). Jerome = Freud throughout (interchangeable identities).

7. Anthony Hecht: “Black Boy in the Dark”

A fine poem, very tightly rhymed. Does the epigraph from *Titus Andronicus* help? You need to know the play, for it to take effect. Some critics tell us more than we want to know. Do we need all this – given that this is a comparatively easy poem? We need some of it, for sure. It’s hard to imagine that there was ever a book titled *Lieutenant J.F. Kennedy – Expandable*.

8. Richard Wilbur: “A Voice from under the Table”

The most purely enjoyable in its images (perhaps because they are erotic). Archilochus as the drunken commentator. Bad misprint in first line: “How shall the wine be drunk or the woman know[n]?” Wilbur, like Hecht, is a poet who loves asking questions. The wit of Steele: “the by-now-monotonous oo-ing and ah-ing of low-grade romanticism – of Shelley on a bad day or a hit-song writer on a good one.”

9. Robert Huff: “Blue”

Rhythmically very straight, about a bomber pilot in World War II. The pilot is compared to Faust (Science that kills and saves), with what looks like a reference to Jonah and the Whale (“Here is no frightened crew to cast / Man’s lot into a fish’s mouth”). Blue is here a sinister color, not the blue of summer skies but of corpse-lights in churchyards, and the sadness of jazz. Steele’s commentary is mostly an essay on Faust, by way of Goethe and Marlowe. A very effective poem – but the essay is a bit asymptotic with regard to it (doesn’t have much bearing).

10. Ben Belitt: “The Repellant”

This one really does need some explanation for the simple non-American reader. First, it is dedicated to Melissa Hayden, star dancer of the New York City Ballet. You need to know, too, that Saratoga Springs is where they dance a summer season (July) when the New York season is over. You also need to know something of the history of the resort, something of ballet, even that Melissa Hayden danced Titania in the first performance of Balanchine’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. All of these things are referred to in the poem, and helpfully explained by Steele. The poem, I found, was too much of a display piece, though it had its own florid descriptive rhetoric. The mosquitoes (that call for the repellant) aren’t really instruments of the Prince

of Darkness – he was Lord of the Flies. Why is Titania “the Pythoness”, why is she “blazing with lice”?

11. Zbigniew Herbert: “Elegy of Fortinbras”

This is a translation – though this isn’t stated. Steele’s essay, naturally enough, is an essay on Hamlet as a character. The best point he makes is that Hamlet, so often regarded as somebody incapable of doing anything, is in fact very *active* throughout the play. He questions the ghost, he arranges the re-enactment of something very like his father’s murder, rejects Ophelia, kills Polonius, fights Laertes, escapes from pirates, arranges the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and so on.

12. Michael Kent: “Quixotic Sestina”

This (because, he says, he couldn’t find a suitable Quixote poem) is by Steele himself. It’s an Auden-style sestina, which prompts the following thoughts:

1. Sestinas, if you choose your key-words wisely, are easy to write.
2. Quixote = mad imagination, Sancho = sane commonsense, is not a difficult idea to grasp.
3. Sestinas are best adapted to expressing *claustrophobia*, a feeling of being hemmed-in. To use them for anything else is a waste of the form.

The essay is better than the poem; the comparison of Quixote to Carroll’s White Knight is particularly illuminating.

In all, this is a very interesting commentary on the chosen poems; and the poems themselves are of a high quality. Steele is a learned man, with an active and even athletic mind, free from the dogmas that, like the Eumenides, pursued F.R. Leavis throughout his life. If I carp it’s because critics (reviewers too) enjoy carping, just as dogs enjoy barking.

My final corrective comment must be that complicated poetry is not the only kind worth bothering with. There is also a comparatively straightforward “Protestant” poetry:

Who so beset him round  
With dismal stories,  
Do but themselves confound;  
His strength the more is.  
No lion can him fright,  
He’ll with a giant fight,  
But he will have a right,  
To be a pilgrim.

Gavin Ewart is one of the best-known of contemporary British poets.



## From 'Chow' to 'Chinese'

John Sendy

C.P. FitzGerald: *Why China? Recollections of China 1923–1950* (Melbourne University Press, \$26.50).

Ian F. McLaren: *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports & Documents* (Red Rooster Press, \$35.00).

E.M. Andrews: *Australia and China – The Ambiguous Relationship* (Melbourne University Press, \$27.50).

As a small boy I remember relatives gravely warning me against "The Chows" who ran most of the green grocers and sweet shops in our part of the Murray Valley about 1930. These strange creatures were "sly", "cunning" and "old devils" who would take one down if they could.

Then, as a teenager, my father, who had finished school after Grade 3 and yet became an anti-imperialist and a socialist, kept telling me of happenings in China which seemed new and vaguely exciting. As a young man I lived in China for three years from September 1951 to October 1954. For nearly forty years I have bought Chinese publications regularly. There were savage bouts with Australian Maoists in the 1960s, many of whom, a friend once observed, would enjoy Chinese shit so long as it was sweet and sour. Six out of a population of thirty-odd in our tiny bush community have visited China. Just across the creek Chinese ran a market garden during the heyday of the gold rushes of the last century.

For me China and the Chinese have always been there. So it is with Australia. China so often has dominated our thoughts and fears or influenced our policies: the yellow peril, the red threat from the north, and more recently trade and business arrangements and tourism for those tiring of the Gold Coast, Bali and Japan.

China has magnetism: mystery, antiquity, teeming millions, fascinating art treasures, history, revolutions and wars. China is different. It exerts an influence. Many who visit become partisans for the Chinese cause.

Before I went there thirty-five years ago China for me symbolised victory. It meant Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Chou En-lai, Liu Shao-chi, the Long March, revolutionary peasant armies which didn't confiscate, loot and rape, but overthrew despots. It meant the end of starvation, bound feet, illiteracy and gave, I thought, hope to hundreds of millions throughout Asia and the world. China did not disappoint me, at least for the time.

Later, for the world's young revolutionaries, China came to represent the *real*, non-stop revolution: youth in command, 'bureaucrats' anathema, communes everywhere, teachers and professors getting their comeuppance, intellectuals to the fields and latrines, the end of bourgeois and western culture and art, politics in command, everyone red and expert, trial by Red Guard mobs, and no more great leaders (except one, or four or five). Turgenev once wrote that the young like simple answers, even if they are illusory.

The euphoria and turmoil dissipated to leave China torn, dazed, disorganised, hungry, and the youthful and

not so youthful foreign adherents even more isolated, bewildered and ineffective. Once again fanatics and zealots had proved a curse. However noble ideals may be their practitioners, warped by dogma, power and fear of opposition, sully the flags they fly. China now licks the wounds of fifteen lost and awful years and, it seems, tries to repair and restore sanity, calm and dignity as well as food supplies, education, industry and science. Few would not wish them well.

Our foremost China expert, C.P. FitzGerald, in his fascinating recollections reveals how he became such an authority on China.

FitzGerald commenced studying China while a youth in England, at a time when few others did so. He studied the Chinese language at the London School of Oriental Studies in 1922. Interestingly, one of his teachers became a Chinese novelist, Lao She, the author of the famous *Rickshaw Boy*, *Teahouse*, and many other works. Lao She died, it is alleged, a few hours after being assaulted and beaten by youthful Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

In 1923 FitzGerald embarked for China. He had contacts and got employment suitable for an educated Englishman, supervising stores in the railway system not far from the northern port of Tianjin. His descriptions of the attitudes of the English towards China and the Chinese are both remarkable and amusing. In Shanghai they rarely if ever ventured outside the International Settlement. They knew little of China and lacked desire to learn. They did not speak Chinese or wish to. Perhaps their outlook is exemplified by this account:

The second day, when out shopping with Mrs Ward on the narrow footpath alongside a crowded street, we were approached by a coolie burdened with a very heavy load on his back, making for some shop. I stepped into the road to let him pass; 'never do that!' exclaimed Mrs Ward, gripping me by the arm. I thought perhaps I had failed to see a car which might have run me down, but there were none. (There were, in fact, very few in Shanghai at that period.) "Do what?" I asked. "Make way for a Chinese", she replied. I pointed out that the man, bent double under his load, could hardly see where he was going. "That does not matter", she told me, "no one ever gives way to any Chinese".

Fitzgerald found that the British, and foreigners generally, had no conception of intellectual developments among Chinese even when China was becoming a tinder box with nationalist and communist movements in command in the south and students eager for change in the north. He was in Peking when Professor Li Dazhao, one of the founders of the Communist Party who had inspired Mao to seek the marriage of marxism and nationalism, was seized and summarily executed by warlord troops.

FitzGerald got to know the old China, now largely gone. He spent some years in Yunnan, a southern mountainous province which borders Burma, Tibet and Vietnam and through which the Mekong and Salween



Rivers flow. At this time there were no wheeled vehicles in Western Yunnan where he lived at Dali, a small city over 300 kilometres from the provincial capital, Kunming. Several times he walked between the two cities, a haunt of a mere two weeks. In fact he walked throughout Yunnan, Guizhou and Sechuan Provinces.

These old China hands were great walkers. George "Chinese" Morrison walked alone across Australia from Normanton to Melbourne, a distance of 2,043 miles in 123 days, from December 1882 to April 1883, only some twenty years after the ill-fated expedition of Bourke and Wills. And then early in the century he walked from Shanghai to Burma. FitzGerald was of this mould. In late 1930 and early 1931 he undertook an adventurous and arduous walk from Kunming to Chungking and then sailed down the Yangtse to Nanking. He actually walked out of China in 1938, from Dali in Yunnan to Bhamo in Burma, a route traversed apparently by Marco Polo, several hundred kilometres through mountainous terrain. While in Dali he used to ramble on Cang Shan mountain, which he regarded, understandably, as a paradise:

My main recreation, other than poring over month-old newspapers in the evening, was walking on the Cang Shan mountain, which rises about a mile at most from the western wall of Dali. It is 14,000 feet, twice the elevation of Dali, if not rather more, and its lower slopes are pine woods, in which the richer Dali families have their tombs. Higher come bamboo and azalea, then much higher, great groves of magnolias, tree size; at last dense rhododendron bush. Among these grow a kitchen garden of fruits unknown at lower altitudes. Then the bare, very narrow rock ridge of the summit. These levels are cut with many rushing torrents, a clear cold water, with falls, still deep pools, and fordable shallows. Every sort of wildflower grew on their banks.

FitzGerald often came across evidence of the growing attraction of the communists. Sometimes he walked through country which the Red Army had traversed during the Long March. His Chinese peasant porters talked about this, at first in whispers. They were impressed by the good treatment they received from Red soldiers in contrast to those of other armies. The belief was widespread that if the communists won the civil war "things would be better." Wherever the communists governed they cleaned up, repaired and got things functioning. "Communist rule," says FitzGerald, "came to mean, to the average Chinese, competent government."

The book provides a treat for those who have read Putnam Weale's account of the Boxer Rising and of the siege of the Legations in Peking in 1900 in his *Indiscreet Letters from Peking* published in 1906. Putnam Weale was the pseudonym of Lenox Simpson, who had worked in the Customs service in China. Simpson was murdered in Tianjin late in 1930. The intriguing description of this strange and tragic happening has the stuff of a television

thriller: Chinese fortune tellers, a beautiful Russian girl, warlords and unknown gunmen.

Perhaps FitzGerald presents the old China too romantically, concentrating upon the enchantment, the differences, the unusual, as compared to the West. He does appear to shy clear of the seamy side to some considerable extent: the poverty, exploitation and brutality of the old regimes. These are referred to in *Australia and China* as "ruthless feudalism, and oppression, extortionate rents, usurious interest charges," and so on. And FitzGerald's former tutor, Lao She, in his short novel *This Life of Mine* has one of his characters describe it well: "To the rich, children are hope. To the poor they're a burden. When you're own belly's empty you can't worry about your children and grandchildren."

Nevertheless this attractive book has the charm and grace one would expect. There are interesting snippets about FitzGerald's personal life, but China is the subject. It captivated him and his book will captivate all readers with a China interest.

The works of Ian McLaren and E.M. Andrews deal with the history of substantial aspects of Australian attitudes to the Chinese and China; shabby and shameful for the most part, irrespective of dates, governments and issues, until as late as 1972, when the Whitlam government altered things.

More books are being published about the Chinese in Australia; at least ten in the past ten years. This must assist information and understanding about our past and our in-bred racist heritage.

*The Chinese in Victoria* is a reprinting of official parliamentary and other documents about the Chinese in Victoria from 1855 to 1900 and as such would be most useful in libraries throughout Australia. The racism, prejudice and ignorance of authorities and citizens is well displayed. As Ian McLaren writes in his introduction, the Chinese who came here in those years "met with hostility not merely because they came from China, but because they were so different in speech and habits, and in appearance..." This demonstrates the continuing Australian fear of the unknown and the new which marks and mars our existence and arises, probably, from our historical geographical isolation, newness as a nation and British dread of contamination.

E.M. Andrews analyses Australia's policy and attitude towards China in a readable, lengthy and fair manner. He concludes, after some 250 pages of argued material:

There have always been ambiguities in Australia's relations with China. In the nineteenth century the Chinese were needed to develop the country, but Australians feared them. During the 1930s and 1940s there was some sympathy for Chinese suffering under Japanese aggression, but the government was determined to appease potential enemies if possible. During the war, the two countries were allies of a kind, but each went its own way in pursuit of its own interests. Post-1945 the Labor



Party was divided, while the Liberal–Country party government simultaneously painted China as the great threat to Australia and indulged in considerable trade with her. Since then, the security preoccupations of the Liberals have made them more fervent supporters of China on the international scene than was Labor, which had originally recognised the People's Republic of China. The historian can look forward to more interesting changes in the years to come.

In fact Australia has had “proper” relationships with China for only a small portion of the eighty-five years since Federation. And even when the Japanese occupied Shanghai, Nanking and Canton, the Australian press still adopted a pro-Japanese stance. After all, Japan was ‘advanced’, more ‘western’ and an important trading partner. These were particularly disreputable foreign policy years with none but the waterside workers, the communists and a handful of ALP figures and intellectuals to care about the fate of China or display alertness to the dangers Australia faced. Those days saw Robert Menzies dubbed Pig Iron Bob for allowing, despite union opposition, scrap iron to be shipped to Japan. Australia's appeasement of Japan continued until she openly allied with Germany and Italy. The first Australian Minister went to China in June 1941, *ten years after the Chinese took the initiative in proposing an exchange of representatives* and some nine months after a Minister to Japan had been appointed. Andrews documents the sorry story in great detail.

It is significant in the light of subsequent developments that the early Australian Ministers to China proved enormously more realistic about the situation there than did their governments at home. Sir Frederick Eggleston (the first Minister) considered Chiang Kai-shek's regime to be “in many ways a fascist organisation” and, according to both Andrews and Wilfred Burchett, he was impressed by Chou En-lai and on good terms with him. He and his successors, Douglas Copland and Keith Officer (the first Australian Ambassador) argued for realistic policies towards China without much avail.

Five days after the Menzies government was elected in December 1949 Britain recognised the new communist regime, but Australia decided not to do so “at the present moment”. That “moment” extended for twenty-three years!

Andrews argues that the Menzies government was not just dogmatically pro-United States but genuinely feared for Australia's security, and was less bloody-minded during the Korean War than was Australian public opinion, manipulated as it was to a large degree by cold war, anti-communist rhetoric.

The ALP, striving vainly to regain office, largely shared a right-wing attitude on China recognition, and, apart from the extreme left, C.P FitzGerald, then a Professor of Oriental Studies at the Australian National University became the major public advocate for recognition and sensible attitudes. The ALP did not adopt any firm policy of recognition until after the 1954 split.

Liberal views for the 1960s are summed up by Andrews:

None of the Liberal politicians had ever visited China, or appeared to know much about it factually. Their opposition to the regime was part of their world view. They saw the threat of Communism and the need both to keep the ALP out of office and to get American capital to develop Australia as being inter-connected. China did for the government parties what the Jews did for Hitler – provide a tangible enemy that could unite people with differing motives: anti-communists, racists, the security-minded, pro-Americans, capitalists, Catholic right wingers. The fact that the Liberals believed their stance made them all the less likely to modify it.

But all the time trade with China increased with record exports of wheat and wool.

Meanwhile, the Chinese left line of the Mao-Lin Biao period flourished: the world countryside (the under-developed countries) would surround the world city (the developed countries) just as the Chinese countryside had been victorious in China; war could push history forward, nuclear weapons were merely a form of paper tiger. And revolution was advocated by Maoists everywhere as a more or less immediate prospect – dare to struggle, dare to win. All crazy, of course, but around the world men on both left and right believed it and acted accordingly.

The Chinese aggressive ideological line, encouraged in part by their hostility to Soviet ‘revisionism’, did more harm to themselves than to others, it weakened not so much the imperialism they railed against, as China itself. And many observers do not believe China to be aggressive in the military and expansionist sense, despite Korea, Tibet, the Sino-Indian, Sino-Soviet and Vietnam border conflicts. All these clashes involved, or were thought by the Chinese to involve, their own security and territory.

Renewed Australian relations with China only came with Whitlam, who declared his determination that the Australian people would be “encouraged to shed the old stultifying fears and animosities which have encumbered the national spirit for generations and dominated, often for domestic partisan purposes, the foreign policy of this nation.”

Fraser continued to foster Chinese friendship and went so far as to side with China against the Russians and swap China for the Soviet Union as a main enemy.

Andrews' *Australia and China* tells the story well. It is worthy of its subject and fairly but suitably critical of Australian and Chinese attitudes.

Today the trading, cultural and political links and exchanges are growing. Delegations flow between the two countries concerning a wide range of issues. Relations have never been better. Nevertheless, the other day I had a quiet drink in a pub. Four men nearby talked and joked about having acupuncture treatment from “the Chow” down the street. Hordes of “been-there-seen-that”,



sophisticatedly ignorant Australian tourists now swarm to China. Squads of the money-hungry go too, sharp-eyed for the main chance and the big deal. It's all right. The Chinese aren't real Coms. They are anti-Russian. The Americans like them a little. They are 'pragmatic' as we are. They buy things from us. In time they might even become more like us. I wonder, and I hope not.

*John Sedy lives at Kingower, Victoria.*

## Belief and Style

Kevin Hart

Robert Harris: *The Cloud Passes Over* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95).

Karl Barth never tired of telling anyone who would listen that there's all the difference in the world between Christianity and Religion. Whereas religion is a matter of man's quest for God, the essence of Christianity is that God is in quest for man. If this is so, it's quite possible to describe a good deal of poetry, regardless of its vocabulary, as 'religious'; but, by the same token, there is very little poetry that is 'Christian', even though it may employ a highly liturgical vocabulary. One of the many shadows cast by Barth's magisterial *Church Dogmatics* is precisely that religion is the Christian's most intimate, and therefore most dangerous, enemy. By the same reasoning, one could argue that the Christian poet's most subtle temptation is to adopt a certain 'religious' style, most often distinguished by the earnestness of its tone.

The temptation is faced by almost all poets who are converted in the midst of their careers. Some, like Eliot, succumb to it, while others, like Auden, studiously avoid it. Robert Harris is a recent convert to evangelical Christianity; and one of the interesting things about this new collection is that his conversion to Christianity is accompanied, in large part, by a stylistic conversion which is more than a matter of tone.

In one poem, "The Snowy Mountains Highway", we see the speaker reading the Bible at a make-shift desk. As he is quick to point out, there's a relation between his new reading and his writing:

There too I wrote about twenty  
belligerent sonnets; shedding, I hope,  
a lax, Frenchified English  
derived from reading the Symbolists  
in translation.

I assume this refers to Harris's earlier published work; and, indeed, if one looks at the very front of the book,

where most people list their previous collections, there is a blank page. St Paul tells us that without Christ we are as dead, and Harris seems to take him at his word.

This revaluation of literary values is seen, rather more pointedly, in "The Country of Kindness":

Kindness realises and comes outdoors,  
blossoms on lips;  
fragrant,  
frequently silent.  
I have read  
the marvellous poems which mocked it and  
denied it,  
they were trash beside  
the grief of a single infant.

It's unclear whether these "marvellous poems" are supposed to be French or English, local or international, or indeed the whole of modernism and post-modernism. But even if what's *said* here were true, the *saying* of it isn't particularly memorable; and this, alas, goes for rather too much of the collection.

A more impressive poem of conversion is "Isaiah by Kerosene Lantern Light". In these lines about the speaker's disbelieving friends, for example, Harris' touch is sure and light, even when adopting an apocalyptic tone:

These are the very same who will wait  
for plainer faces after they've glutted on beauty,  
a mild people back from the dead

shall speak the doors down  
to the last hullo reaching the last crooked hutch  
in forest or forest-like deeps of the town.

There's certainly nothing lax and Frenchified about this; if anything, it sounds like early Les Murray. Yet Harris' turning away from the world and from a certain style of literature (the kind which privileges *style*) is not all of a piece. The most successful poem here, "Ray", works with the familiar visitation topos whilst freely making almost every second post-modernist move in the book. "Why not come from hiding?" asks Christ. To which the speaker responds,

You're an archetype, I flung back. So  
go away. Or said, Nah. Listen, says Christ,  
listen be deaf you are deaf now you aren't,

listen. I will be back. Meantime keep  
that wisdom. It helps you. Do what? Oh,  
die.

The tone is very nicely controlled, especially that "Nah", but we're worlds removed from the pastoral diction of "Isaiah by Kerosene Lantern Light". More



generally, there is an odd vacillation in style in this book, and not only in the poems ostensibly about conversion and Christian experience. This does not counter individual successes, in either style, but it perhaps goes some way towards explaining why there are not more of them. After all, Harris' project of dismantling his former aesthetic is not something that can be done so easily.

What intrigues me, though, is why Harris attaches such importance to this project: the only clear relation between belief and style, as far as I can see, is that the Christian should try to avoid writing 'religious poetry'. Be that as it may, Harris is now gripped by a theme, and we can only wait for his style to work itself out.

*Kevin Hart teaches English at the University of Melbourne. His last collection of poetry was Your Shadow. His translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti's selected poems, The Buried Harbour, will be published in 1987.*

## Fantasies and Old Scores

Laurie Clancy

Patrick White: *Memoirs of Many in One* by Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray (Cape, \$17.95).

A new novel from Patrick White is always an event. On this occasion, it has to be said, it is both an unexpected and sad one. *Memoirs of Many in One* reads like a parody of earlier White, and particularly of that magnificent novel *The Eye of the Storm*.

The novel presents itself as the memoirs of Alex, an old woman who lives with her daughter Hilda but who frequently flees her home near Centennial Park to go on mad escapades all over Sydney. In between these, she re-lives her past life or lives, assuming a number of identities. The memoirs purport to have been edited after her death by Patrick White, who also offers occasional commentary on them, as well as notes, and who appears as the third most important character, an ageing, arthritic homosexual writer.

White has been increasingly interested in his later work in the question of the different identities (sexual and otherwise) a person can take up, and Alex is a champion here. In the past she has been the strangely blue-eyed nun Cassiani, mistress of the boorish monk Onophrious and thought by all the Greek villagers to be bewitched. She has been Sister Benedict, who escorts a group of schoolgirls on a picnic to celebrate the Feast of Kippers on the Friday before Epiphany. She has been her mother-in-law Magda, and Dolly Formosa. She has divested herself of her jewels in the Adolf Hitler hotel (!), Washington DC. "However they torment me I must find out whether the lives I have lived amount to anything," she muses, echoing a

thought that has already occurred to the reader.

As the novel oscillates back and forth between present and past we discover, however, that her present is just as spectacular as her past. She is arrested for kleptomania but escapes while the policeman's attention is distracted and takes refuge for the night with a couple of strangers, to whom she introduces herself as Eleanor Shadbolt. She brings home a filthy dero from the Park, insisting he is "the Mystic", before becoming frightened and kicking him out again. She gate-crashes the garden party of Lady Miriam Surplus of Come-by-Chance Hall and then disrupts it by riding a horse right through the guests and their tables. In the middle of a premiere performance of a play before the cream of Sydney's theatrical world she causes hysteria in the audience by aiming a pistol loaded with blanks at them, "firing at random into this covey of defenceless game which might have been put up by beaters for their Sovereign's pleasure at a Royal shoot."

As well as giving free reign to his fantasies, White also uses this extended piece of fictive self-indulgence to pay off a few old scores – at "parasite students and academics who eat out your liver and lights – your heart", at those who insist he has misread Jung, at theatre critics, at the Arts Council. White's creation of the easily recognisable K.V.H., theatre critics for the Sydney Morning Herald, is as juvenile as Jack Hibberd's Leonardo Radish.

There is often a fine line between great art and bad art, between the distillation and impersonalisation of experience that goes into the making of a major novel and the mere disordered confession of it. That is why mediocre novels are sometimes assumed – often quite wrongly – to be autobiographical novels. John Barnes made the interesting suggestion after *The Twyborn Affair* appeared that White might have been a better novelist before he became open about his homosexuality. The effort of sublimation can be a creatively healthy one, whatever strain it places on the novelist's psyche. Critics who attack White on the grounds of his neo-Romantic fallacy of finding wisdom always in the outsider or the apparently mad simply miss the point, which is that characters like Theodora in *The Aunt's Story* or Waldo in *The Solid Madonna* are profoundly convincing.

So too is Mrs Hunter of *The Eye of the Storm*, which most recalls this novel. Like her, Alex is a septuagenarian who has had a son and a daughter. She is a princess like Dorothy Hunter; she even gets to play Lear in a mad tour of Australian country towns. But where Mrs Hunter, domineering and egotistical as she was, fully convinces the reader of her authenticity, Alex is a mere peg to hang some rather silly jokes on. Like Lillian in Kate Grenville's novel *Lillian's Story* she is merely an eccentric and rather foolish old woman.

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## Proud Unionists

John Herouvim

Ann Stephen and Andrew Reeves: *Badges of Labour, Banners of Pride: Aspects of Working Class Celebration* (Allen & Unwin, \$17.95).

Trade unions have been a constant source of disappointment to people interested in some form of socialism. George Bernard Shaw described trade unionism as “the capitalism of the proletariat”. Lenin wrote that “working-class trade-unionist politics are precisely working-class bourgeois politics”.

While the symbolic depiction of trade unionism found in union banners does not, on the whole, impart a sense of Labor posing a revolutionary challenge to Capital, such banners nevertheless embody a significant stage in working people’s self-consciousness, self-definition and self-organisation within capitalist society.

*Badges of Labour, Banners of Pride* is about Australian trade-union banners. In it, Ann Stephen and Andrew Reeves identify two major historical periods in Australian trade union banner making.

The tradition began with the achievement of the eight-hour day by building tradesmen in Melbourne in 1856. It returned revitalised in the opening decades of this century, when new industries gave birth to new unions. The limited revival of the 1930s and 1940s merits a mention, but by that stage union banners no longer reflected “the mainstreams of union development”. This latter observation also holds for the recent reanimation of union banner-making.

The dominant theme in the banners was not class but craft. Stephen and Reeves note the almost total absence of union banners in the pictorial record of Australia’s most bitter strikes and industrial campaigns. In a pithy piece of imagery, English unions are shown parading their banners in 1864 to honor Garibaldi while, across the oceans, Australian unions unfurl their banners to welcome the Duke of York.

Despite the relatively recent historiographical convention that Australian unionists be depicted as thoroughly tamed and integrated dupes of kings, queens and capitalists, the entwined triple figures of 8, which for decades were the unique symbol of Australian unionism and the leitmotif of its banners, affirmed a vision of society in which the worker was a figure of worth and not a mere instrument of production. And while most union banners eschewed visions of conflict, portraying instead the productive process, the owners of capital were noticeably absent from, and thus implicitly superfluous to, that process.

This is not to say that the theme of social conflict and the assertion of workers’ rights were always left implicit. The reverse side of the banner of the Operative Painters’ and Decorators’ Union (Victorian Branch) displayed this quotation from Schiller:

The murmurs that go to make the Thunders roar,  
taken singly, might lull an infant to repose. United  
their crash would shake the eternal vaults of  
heaven.

A similar spirit informed the banner of the NSW Western District Coal-Miners Mutual Protective Association, as the book’s description makes clear:

Although this banner employs the British convention of framing portraits in an architectural facade of elegant arches . . . the central figure of the miner confronts [the] representatives of the church and state with their dependence on his labour. This class consciousness is underlined by the inscription below each portrait: “I Govern All” for the King, “I Pray for All” for the priest, but for the miner “I Work and Pay for All.”

Some banners can claim a weighty genealogy. Three Victorian coachmakers’ (vehicle builders’) banners, apparently no longer extant, were modelled on the design adopted by the United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers as early as 1834. This design itself derived from the Guild arms granted to the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Harnessmakers in 1667.

The uncertain fate of the Victorian coachmakers’ banners exemplifies the sad loss of most of the 800 Australian union banners which are known to have existed. For just as banner-making developed and prospered with the celebration of the eight-hour day, so did the banners fall into disuse with the decline of eight-hour commemorations.

The union banners were indeed banners of pride – pride in the unionist’s craft, his industriousness and his social usefulness. These themes were celebrated in a richly symbolic baroque style.

Though owing much to the British banner-making tradition, the Australian banners quite early began to display distinctly national symbols, such as sprays of wattle and waratahs and figures of Australian fauna.

The commissioning and unfurling of a banner was an affair of moment for a trade union and was preceded by considerable discussion. However, Australia was unable to support full-time banner painters, and the design might be executed by the union secretary or the president of the local Eight Hour Day Committee.

While no especially prominent painter or firm emerged in Melbourne, the Sydney scene was different. Here, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Edgar Whitbread, while earning his living largely from commercial artwork, produced a body of work which was, by Australian standards, prolific. He was the doyen of the banner painters. Accordingly, he received a uniquely Australian tribute when the NSW Labor Day Committee named one of the events in its annual charity race meeting in his honor.

The surviving work of Whitbread and other less celebrated painters of Australian union banners is assembled and presented in *Badges of Labour*. Reeves, an archivist whose area of specialisation is the Australian Labor Movement, first developed an interest in union banners while employed at the University of Melbourne’s Archives.

The book itself grew from an exhibition of banners organised by Reeves and Stephen for the NSW Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. In the introduction, Reeves writes that *Badges of Labour* represents “an exercise in



rediscovery". His subsequent relation of how this exercise unfolded conveys the excitement, disappointment and archaeological travail it has involved.

In view of the depredations which time and neglect have wrought on the banners, the authors' rescue work is impressive. Among their discoveries are a miners' banner, some seventy years old, which exists in a fragile state in the basement of the Sydney Trades Hall, and a Builders' Laborers' Federation banner which was painted in 1900 and which has been carried in recent May Day parades in Sydney.

Most of the surviving banners are held by an assortment of institutions which, unlike the University of Melbourne Archives and the NSW Applied Arts and Sciences Museum, have not yet undertaken conservation measures.

*Badges of Labour* is beautifully presented in a large format and contains seventy-five plates, twenty-six in color. The text is elegantly written, detailed and often fascinating, with an attention to technical matters which will reward those with an interest in the specificities of the banner-maker's art, without overburdening the lay reader.

The book also deals with the recent revival in trade union banner painting, discussing and displaying modern styles which represent a complete break with the didactic and allegorical forms of the past. It perhaps betrays my fusty romanticism that I find the modern banners flat, slick and, above all, soulless. They seem too bright, too sharp, too much like advertising billboards for a government campaign of some sort.

Despite the relative embarrassment of riches which Australian unions today enjoy, the resurgence in union banner making has been financially underwritten by the government. I am not sure whether this fact testifies more to the corporatist spirit of today's Australia or the widespread uninterest of Australian trade unionists in traditional forms of working-class celebration.

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## Kipling's India

Stephen Murray-Smith

Andrew Rutherford (ed.): *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling 1879-1889* (Oxford University Press, \$62.50).

Thomas Pinney (ed.): *Kipling's India: Uncollected Sketches 1884-1888* (Macmillan, £25 sterling, available on indent).

Rudyard Kipling presents a difficult, even an intractable problem in contemporary criticism. In part this is socio-political. Kipling had the good fortune, as well

as the bad luck, to record the British *imperium*, in India as elsewhere, at the height of its arrogance, self-confidence and achievement. He went through a gruelling apprenticeship as a journalist – the chief theme of these two books – and in part he saw his function as that of a *rapporteur*. He also had the genius and wit to understand that, in making literature, he had to start with what he knew and what he saw. So he got lumbered with guilt by association, as though Tolstoy might be called a militarist because he wrote *War and Peace*. George Orwell wrote that "During five literary generations every enlightened person has despised him, and at the end of that time nine-tenths of those enlightened persons are forgotten and Kipling is in some sense still there."

The reason Kipling is still here is that he *was* a writer of genius and, as such, and whatever his personal opinions, he saw through superficialities and veneers – much as he used them for 'color' – to the flaws at the heart of his people and his times. He was, if you like, the great critic of empire, the chronicler of the end of empire even when that empire never seemed more securely based. It could be argued that in a sense Kipling stands closer to J.A. Hobson or Lenin than he does to G.A. Henty. He saw through the heathen heart that puts her trust in reeking tube and iron shard; and the astonishing thing is that his message, half-understood, did enter into the consciousness of many of his readers. Kipling perhaps reinforced imperialist sentiments; he also undermined them. Amid gorgeous uniforms, waving pennons and the great positive traditions of British service to subject peoples, he glimpsed the hollowness and the cities of man that were built on dust. No doubt he did not *understand* it, but he sensed it.

The other critical problem with Kipling is that he too often fell foul of his own cleverness and his all too receptive ear. He was at the time vulgar and sophisticated. Orwell said that in his attempts to reproduce the dialects and vocabulary of the working man – especially the soldier of his day – are "embarrassing". Embarrassing or not, they now present, in verse and prose, a barbed-wire barrier to penetrating his literary intention. But more significant, I believe, is Kipling's allusionary technique. It was a sound instinct to write about what he knew, but Kipling was also influenced both by the content and form of other writers. Perhaps the most insidious influence here was Browning, whom Kipling had met as a boy through his extensive family network, and whom he admired. Browning was the great elliptical jokester of English nineteenth century verse, the great teaser. This was not an overlay on Browning's verse, but quite central to its magnificent purpose. Like all great writers, Kipling realised that God lives in the details, but he too often picked up the teasing and the self-conscious references and obscurities and used them as devices. This also stands between him and us, partly because the references are now remote, partly because he was writing for a more liter-



ate audience than any poet could be sure of writing for today.

These faults, if they are faults, emerge clearly in *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling*, which is not to say that this important collection is not a work of literary as well as antiquarian value. Andrew Rutherford has combed manuscript sources and rare editions to present us with over three hundred poems which do not appear in the definitive edition of Kipling's verse. They range from 1879, when Kipling was still a schoolboy, to 1889, when Kipling's Indian experience was over, and he was starting to become famous; the publication of "The Ballad of East and West" in December 1889 "marks the end of his apprenticeship to poetry." Kipling was still only twenty-four.

The poems exhibit, of course, callow brilliance and Kipling's (almost too well) greased pen. Some of the most effective, at least in conveying atmosphere, are the letter-poems he wrote to relatives with no intention of publication:

As I write in my sodden shirtsleeves, with feet  
put up on a chair  
Oh, what is 'two hundred' a month, and half-  
year 'rises' to come  
To a fellow with hairs in his pen, and lizard-tails  
in his gum;  
His ink putrescent and loathsome, a paste of  
corrupting flies  
His spectacles dimmed and steamy, and goggles  
over his eyes.

This is for the most part lightly-turned, ironic stuff: Kipling comments on Indian educational reformers that they come:

From the land that produced no Kants with a K,  
But many Cants with a C.

We see a young man flexing his muscles. We do not find him writing verses about the problems of being a verse-writer, nor do we find him lamenting the fact

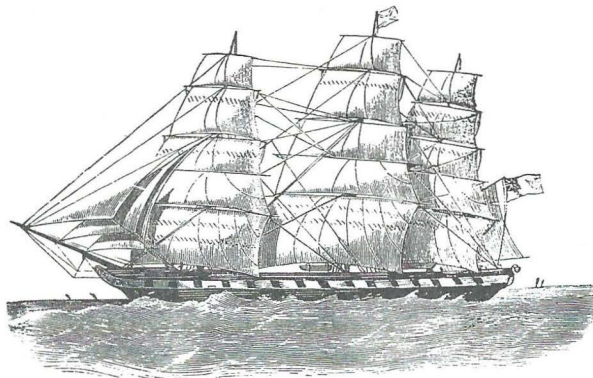
that he has no time to 'get it down on paper', but we do find him maniacally determined to transfer experience and opinion to print. This itself conveys a powerful message.

Thomas Pinney's *Kipling's India* covers much of the same chronological ground, being uncollected prose sketches from the Lahore and Allahabad years, of 1884-1888. Long thought irretrievable, Kipling's own guarded scrap-books surfaced in the University of Sussex library in 1976, forty years after his death, and revealed much of what had only been suspected.

These sketches of the life of the English in India are, like the poems, invaluable in adding to our understanding of the most important, non-colonial, transplanted culture that the British produced. The culture was in one sense, of course, infinitely superficial. The life of the white-clad women and children taking the morning air on any *maidan* was not of great moment to the dying beggar a hundred yards away. But that life, not a transplanted but a hot-house one, holds great interests within itself. Railways, engineering, military affairs, political relations with native Indian leaders and the rulers of frontier states, sickness and death, social life, horses, the inferior understanding and performance of the Indians themselves: it is all here.

Like it or not, we have no real evidence of the nature and significance of this existence other than that which Kipling has given us. And these two books have much expanded that understanding, as well as our understanding of Kipling. There is not much of high literary achievement in Pinney's book, though one or two of the sketches, especially one dealing with the old cemetery at Simla, are models for any writer.

The books are – like so many books coming into this country today – prohibitively expensive and unlikely to be bought by the general reader. But they expand our understanding of the work of a great writer, and they expand our understanding of the history of an important neighbor. Overland readers wishing to see them should be able to ask for them to be supplied through libraries.



INDIAMAN.



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