OVERLAND

Poetry Stories Reviews Features

THE INDONESIAN INTELLECTUALS

A Report by Achdiat Mihardja

NUMBER 25

Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a periodical.

TWO AND SIX

NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE, SUMMER 1962-63

OVERLAND

Temper democratic, bias Australian

Edited by S. Murray-Smith

Advisory Editors: Ian Turner (Adelaide), Tom Errey (Hobart), Nancy Cato (Adelaide), Gavin Casey (Perth), Rodney Hall (Brisbane).

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Overland is a quarterly Australian literary magazine. The subscription rate is ten shillings a year (four issues), and the price of each copy is two shillings and sixpence. Manuscripts are welcomed, but will only be returned if a stamped, addressed envelope is attached. Please add exchange to cheques. All correspondence should be addressed:

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SOMETHING TOUCHY AND DELICATE

Peter Mathers

AS he coaxed her for the second time he felt the impatience within him rise like gall and he knew that his next words would be sharp, and if there were others they would hurt. "Well?" he asked. He waited. Ann leant towards the stove and opened the firebox and a hand of flame jerked out and made pale the electric light globe, yellow under its saucer. "Well?" he shouted. "You going to the station or not?"

"Wel-l," she began. They waited. He turned to the youth at the other end of the table. "You want to go?" he snapped. "If Mum don't," he answered. "Wel-l," she said, "you know I want to go, George, but—"

He grimaced and hunched his shoulders. "But," she went on, "I don't want her to think I'm fussing—prying even." "Hell!" he shouted, slapping his hands to his face, caging it. "Who does Doris think she is," his mouth shouted through the bars, "Miss Dairy Week or someone? Ann," he pleaded, "are you going?" She nodded.

Feigning boredom he stretched backwards and yawned. As usual he had been the victim of the exchange, but now, having drawn from her the answer he wanted, he was willing to forget everything. But then he remembered Sonny's offer. Which, had it been accepted, would have wrecked the morning's milking. He imagined Sonny driving to town in the utility, waiting around the station for the express, meeting Doris, yarning with the other passengers, by which time the shops would probably be open, the pubs even and . . . He tried to quell the rage but—"You want your sister a drunkard!" he cried. Sonny, his ear pressed to the radio he was tuning, stared at his father in surprise. His wife glanced at him. He glared at them briefly, then set his sight on a break in the asbestos-cement wall, just to the right of the refrigerator and beside the expressive marks; himself, of medium height, thick set; Ann, half an inch shorter and three narrower; Sonny, as wide as his father but two taller. Then Doris, her marks; as tall as Ann, and plumper. And her marks supplemented by his mind's eye view of her. He saw her in a few minutes joining the train in the city. "Nothing," he said and walked heavily from the room.

*

She wondered if she had slept at all. George moved and the bed creaked. Will I go? She tried to blame her sleeplessness on the clock's rents in the night, with the clockwork noise the wheels and rods of the locomotive. To go or not. But knowing all the time she would. And as she had gotten into bed she murmured: "But George, you've known all along I've been a ditherer." In his near-sleep and half-masked by the pillow he had growled. A rooster crew. Roosters. She saw the night had paled and again she dozed. Then the day was loud with their noise. "Too many," she mumbled. "And all they think of. Like the men here." "Whassatt?" George rumbled. "Roosters and eating their heads off," she said. She wanted to shout: "Why me to collect her? Can't she come with the milk truck. Or a taxi even?"

Everything had been expected of her since she married George last year; almost as if she, herself, had been responsible for the incident on that hot and humid summer morning four years ago when May cleared out. Almost as though it had been she, not George, who had said to May: "You get inside and hold this bit of steel against the rivet-head while I peen it outside." So May had squeezed her way through the inlet in the top of the tank, crawled carefully over the interior corrugations, felt the tank rock with her movements, and called to George "It's moving!", hearing her voice lost in reverberations within the curving, folded metal. Then George pounded on the rivet she should have held, and it shot like a bullet into the dimness, past her head and clattered against the other side, scraping down the wrinkled metal to jam against her knee, the noise of its passage loud over the crash of the peen on the now empty rivet-hole. The vibrating metal quelling even his curses.

The tube of sunlight from the hole vanishing and the spot of iris assessing the void within. Then it went and there was sunlight again, and before she could turn around his head was in the top opening demanding: "What the hell; what you—!" So he drove more wedges between the tank and the ground and they resumed their task. Until he was without rivets and left her to bring more. And the gathering south wind moaned into the tank and eddied the hot humid air, and she brushed away the strands of short hair stuck to her brow and mopped the streaming sweat between her breasts with her sopping blouse. She began her exit and in spite of the extra wedges and with the help of stronger wind, the tank rocked. And she fell against the curve. The tank creaked and she felt it climb the wedges. She lay still, too terrified even to whimper. It rolled back and she gasped with relief, and made to squat so she could balance it. But the wind caught it on what should have been the next, diminishing rock and it rode the wedges, falling soft on the ground beside its cradle and so began its terrible and accelerating roll down the hill, flattening grass and pats, squashing easily the first, slack fence, faltering at the next, and as it climbed these slack rusty strands, and the opening rotated towards its nadir her arm appeared and waved, but casually, as though she were swimming and inviting others to join her. Before it hit the ground her harsh yell trumpeted from within: "Geor—!"

But George had given chase as it trundled over the first fence, and holding tight his hammer ran frantically after her. It moved faster now. But George overtook it, and running and jumping by its side hit at it with his fist and called to May not to worry, and he groaned in pain and sympathy for her and the moans that rumbled out. Then, without knowing why he hit it with the hammer several times, and on the fourth stroke lost it, hesitated, muttered "Damn it!" and speeded. It had drawn well away. For a moment her face appeared, terrified, the mouth agape, thin-lipped and furious, the eyes wild. But no voice. It was not needed. He knew by heart the curses she hurled; not the usual sequence of them, but a heterogenous miscellany symbolised in that turd-shaped mouth. And he braked and watched her drawn away by the tank. The rim cut through the curd of a pat and the liberated dung flew high.

The tank rolled finally to a halt on the tufted and rushed flat by the creek. He squatted one hundred yards up the hill, beside the tank's trail, and watched the bruised and flattened grasses straightening. He felt something should be done about her, but together the sun and a great sense of relief held him haunched. He had not seen the approaching figures as they lurched down the hill, or heard the occasional shout that signalled their intentions. Then the two farmers and five passengers from the bus halted in the centre of the road stood off and stared at him, while three others fussed around the tank. Tinned May, George muttered. Need a tin-opener. Or a torch. But god—! He remembered her plight. He gasped, and scrambled to his feet. The onlookers, now hostile, closed around him.

*

Yes, it was probably the three years alone with George that had spoilt the kids. Traipsing from farm to farm, always on shares, no sooner settled than moving again; sometimes a tank or a hill the reminder that set them in motion; or a woman; or often, as she now knew, because there was a man there, someone between twelve and sixty, not necessarily a guilty man, but one who might look as if he could be guilty of some indiscretion against Doris. And all the time George denied any chances of indiscretions, and whenever he had occasion to thrash her, accused her of laziness or gluttony; this last charge at fourteen when she had suddenly, as if overnight, grown thick rolls of fat about her trunk and frightened him badly.

She raised herself and looked down at him as he mumbled something about angle-iron and weld. He was on his back. His mouth was ajar; it twitched and his short and dense moustache shivered in his breathing and sometimes a tremor

The Accident

The farmers heard a crash
And lights were brought to help reveal
The torment made by glass and flesh,
And luggage shattered on the road
Like any life. Such wedded steel
Became a struggle and a waste of blood.

And soon the two men died. I stood,
Cold and confused beside a road
That I found evil, blocked
An hour by two cars wrecked
Head on—and with a form of love
That only subtle cranes could move.

I heard the crowd dissect
The treachery of corners, lanes
And hills, then say how they would act,
While midnight said that I was late,
And pity blurred like brutal stains.
The wreckage was removed with tact and
hate.

R. A. SIMPSON

---

started from his lips and ran through the dark stubble to his ears; it was always the way and every time she expected to see his ears, that now seemed so large since his hair had been cropped short, wiggle or flap.

Through the patterned bars of the bedstead she saw the low day, cream and green. From south—fifty miles?—she heard the clattering train. But no red, so no warning; there was no reason for her not collecting Doris. Then the clock noises seemed to speed. She stiffened and drew the blankets higher and the bed creaked. "Damn her," she murmured. "Whassatt?" he demanded, his face still asleep. He rolled on his back and his elbows drove, flopped towards her. The alarm sounded. He groaned.

Road dust lay thick and heavy and there were patches of mist amongst the timbered flats, and there were paddocks where cows had trailed across the dew. Around milking sheds on every farm cattle waited, and as she neared the town the thump of diesel engines became less frequent, and the sight of power cables so common that once, at a junction, beneath a net of sagging cables be-dropped with water and caught in the early sunlight she felt enmeshed, and flinched behind the wheel. On the last rise, with the town spread beneath her and the hills across the valley sharp and blue and the houses' smoke trails thin and isolated and the butter factory smokestack spewing hard the grey-blue, she knew the hills were fed color by them, an upsetting revelation, as she objected to the factory smoke yet found the blue of the hills attractive enough.

She drove through the new stop sign in Main Street and round the corner into Station Street.

She glanced around furtively, steering erratically, but her only witness was a gum-booted man hosing down the wall tiles of the Railway Hotel. She glanced back at the walls but could not remember if they had always been pink, or that if at some-time, in the vague past, she had seen them as ordinary, unadorned brick. And then, when she drove into the parking square in front of the station buildings, she realised the tiles were new, that everything had changed. The station had been painted pink and green. She guessed there was now about three acres of square, almost enough, she thought, for a bus per family. Next to the new exit, more than a hundred yards away, was a heap of tree-stumps and a pile of gravel surrounded by churned and set brown soil.

When she walked on to the platform an old, tall and bent black-suited man standing beside the scales looked around, saw her, scowled, straightened up and walked stiffly towards that end of the platform where the guard's van would stop. Embarrassed, she turned to a glass-sided display cabinet. She wore her blue beret high and her narrow face seemed as long as a horse's. She pulled the beret down on to her brow, where she thought it clashed with her grey overcoat, so she moved away from the glass. Wondering all the time about Doris: would she think herself spied upon, and if I wasn't here to welcome her how would she act with anyone on the station, the porters for instance? Old Cox there, for example, standing stiff as a ramrod, as though I just challenged him to a duel, as though I'd just repeated what I'd told him months ago: keep your boy away. "Not good enough?" he snapped. "We don't want trouble," I said. He stood before me, under the Co-op. veranda, his arms crossed against his belly, rocking back and forth. "You making Doris a lady, now, eh?"

They're all the same, the Cox's, the entire vast family, tall and lean parts of the horses they ride, feet almost locked under the bellies; their country so steep they fall down it, and the gullies so deep in what was rosewood and tallow wood and cedar land the whole clan of centaurs can hide, and the new soil-cover stinging-trees and tobacco-bush; and yearly, or when they need more money, the air shrills and bellows and the gullies spout baldies and chapped Cox's. "Doris—where are you going?" "After some steers. With Joe Cox," she said. And from then on she stank of horse-sweat and leather. Something else, too. It was one of her early affairs and I could muster decision and rage. "You know she's not sixteen," I told Old Cox. "You want the coppers on to them: do you know her father's cousin's a sergeant down the line?"

*

Then the long brown train pulled into the platform, the diesel locomotive throbbing gently under the momentum of its thrusting carriages. She peered into the carriages as they passed, and when they stopped hurried alongside them, towards the end. But she could not see Doris, and in her haste ignored the few people she knew now alighting or waiting in pleased and shuffling expectancy on the noisy gravel. Had she caught the train; had she been cured and stayed behind; had they detained her? Ahead, Cox and a porter unloaded parcels. He glanced towards her. She hesitated, and looked behind.

To where Doris waited by the first carriage. At least she thought it was Doris, and peering, broke pace, her eyes fixed on the distant figure facing, as she now made out, someone aboard the train. She stumbled over a suitcase and fell against a small thin porter, who cried out in mock agony. "Me head! She tripped over it! The end of Tiny Tim!" Then he steadied her and rose on his toes and whispered to her: "She's okay, Ann, don't worry about her!" And he nodded back towards Doris and winked. Who was wearing her tight tartan slacks and white high-heeled sandals, an off-white tight cardigan and a bright green scarf,

its ends in a bow like ears on top of her head, and from behind which sprouted her black hair in a bold pony tail. By her feet were three suitcases, a roped-up butter-box and two fat and lumpy string-bags. Doris lifted her face to a man in the train, who lowered his, a smooth, neat advertisement one. Ann saw their eyes close in movie fashion. Doris stretched closer and her second chin vanished. Then she glanced to her right, saw Ann, whispered and drew away. Ann stopped, smiled awkwardly and kicked the gravel. The locomotive trumpets sounded. Doris spoke to the man, but the words were lost to Ann in the trumpet echoes from the station buildings. The locomotive hummed, then roared. Ann moved hesitatingly forward as the train gained motion; she passed a brass handrail beside a door swinging open like a mouth; it faltered, then quickened, slid away. Doris and the man waved until his carriage curved from sight, and then she waited until the red doorless end of the train disappeared. And when she turned, Ann was next to her. They kissed. Then laughed and hugged. And the butter-box fell on its side. "Watch for the records!" Doris cried. They parted. And stood grinning: "Thought there was no one here," Doris said. Ann wanted to say: "Saw you had a friend. Didn't want to interrupt." This she wanted to do, but felt she could not keep sharpness from her tone; perhaps he was an old friend from the city, or the coast even—and why spoil her homecoming? "Late leaving," she answered. "Undecided, eh?" Doris said.

"Undecided nothing," he said. They turned. "Hello Tim," Ann replied. Doris glanced at the porter, standing by the exit awaiting their tickets. "Good trip, Doris?" he asked. But she ignored him, her attention drawn to the young porter. So Ann answered for her; furious for the snub: "Yes, Tim. Interesting, too." And she winced at her final sentence. Tim went ahead, a steady vanguard with the two suitcases.

Ann and Doris waved to Tim's brothers as they stood with their wives around the cars. The men ambled over to them and helped them put the luggage into the utility. They said she looked well. Ted asked her if she was home for good this time. "I reckon so," she said. Harry winked: "And who is it, eh?" he whispered hoarsely, "eh?" Doris shrugged. There was a pause, and in the quiet they heard a sawmill scream. Then together, as if rehearsed, Ted and Harry began: "Ann, haven't seen—" They stopped, guffawed and signalled each other to continue, until Tim, annoyed at their hooting, cried for silence. "Ann," Ted asked, "where's George lately. Not seen him." "I s'pose not," she murmured, "he's working on a new scheme." "Aah," the two brothers chorused, "And what's it this time?"

Doris made to grin, but then scowled. Ann shrugged. The women called to their husbands and to Tim. As they went, Ted pointed admiringly to a dense patch of paspalum nearby; Harry said he'd like to put the cows into it. "Bloody bright talk," Doris muttered. Ann felt she should rebuke her but grunted instead. They settled themselves in the cabin and watched the others drive away. "Well," Doris said, "Thank God, I'm fixed up now." Ann nodded but did not attempt to start the engine. Doris tried to see her in the windscreen "Are you certain though?" asked Ann, rubbing at a cut in the top of the wheel. Doris

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glanced at her. "It would have been hospital otherwise," Ann continued; "or even—or—. You know, Doris?" Doris cried. "You've known all along?" Ann settled herself behind the wheel, then started the engine. "We'd better hurry," she said. "I told them we'd be back soon." "Blast!" Doris snapped. Ann jerked back and stalled the engine and clenched her fists, but then shrugged resignedly. Doris glared around the yard. She pointed to the stumps. "You still cranky about them?" Then she grinned and Ann shivered at the harshness of her voice and what she felt must follow. The polish of her revenge. "Getting 'em down'll get the tourists here," she continued. "They need car parks. They'll make the place worth living in." Ann accelerated across the yard, the rear wheels sliding and spinning. "And a comfort station, too," Doris shouted above the noise. "A what?" Ann cried. Doris sighed. "If you'd ever been about," Doris said, "you'd know they're the latest in lavs." "Oh," Ann muttered.

They drove rapidly along River Street with Doris contemptuously assessing the shops and dismissing them all with her grunts and hisses. A loud phew! drew Ann's attention, and she guessed it had been evoked by the new plastic and tile shop-front of Pantons. But she did not slow. She thought of Bill Panton. Not a bad sort of a kid, but a bit—a bit—sort of randy—like the rest of them around here. "Bill," I said, "you're seeing a lot of Doris lately—does your Dad mind? I thought the produce merchant mightn't like his boy with a cockie's daughter." "Mind? No, he doesn't mind—and Mrs. Stubbs, we're going steady, so there's no need to worry. We're caref—" And his unfinished careful horrified me. And all at once he found a loose shoe-lace. When he straightened-up he blurted out: "And we want to get married after her next birthday." "Certainly not!" I shouted, "why, she's only fifteen."

Then began the task of getting her away from him. And soon she regretted having taken her from school so early, in response to the teacher's —Hames'—plea that she was disrupting class work and likely to prove a burden and source of trouble to them all unless—. So there was no work for Doris amongst Ann's approved employers, the hospitals and offices. Twice she went to the city and the second time she stayed with the Sills, at Annandale, and there she met the Avars, proprietors of a boarding house at Rushcutters Bay. Mr. Avar said it was shameful that a young girl could not get a job near her home; it so happened, however that he needed a girl for his establishment. Would Mrs. Subbs care to inspect the premises and see for herself the wonderful room her daughter would have all to herself? She had to stand on a chair and peer through the Water Lawn Guest House neon sign to catch a glimpse of the promised harbor view. "Lovely," she murmured. "And we'll teach her waitressing—at no charge whatsoever—and watch over her like a daughter," he said. Just the thing, she thought, until something better turns up.

Doris went to the city and her fourth letter told Ann what had happened.

> Mum, Mrs. Avar's housekeeper has gone off and told tales on me and are lies and all wrong. She's an old bitch and like vinegar and jealous. She's a miss and not been out or about even in the war when you know how things were with the Americans and that. All she does is pray and preach and that and about every thing and she hates me as I'm young and not bad looking. She's said terrible things about me. She told him this and he took me into his office and said something with an offer. I said no and gave him my notice. Can you think of what I thought of him, the old fool, the dirty old fool. I'm not there now and I've got another job at Ultimo and they keep a boarding place for people off ships, sailors mostly. It's a clean place and well run and they have all sorts of people here. Bought a red costume last week and a gab raincoat. Raining and cold, I wrote Dad this morning and I hope he's well, Sonny too. I can't write to him like I can you. Seen some good films, westerns and a very good detective; reading a lot too.
>
> Love Doris.

The two letters arrived the same morning, and Sonny collected them and the other mail from the roadside cream box, and sorted it as he walked towards them. They sat on the edge of the veranda, in the hot morning sun, their feet dangling amongst the clumps of wet lily leaves, their black rubber boots behind them steaming. George tossed his letter to Ann and said she now seemed to be doing well for herself. Then he read the newspaper. In his letter Doris had not mentioned her change of jobs. Ann went into the kitchen and when she returned, handed her letter to George, saying she seemed to have lost a page. It wasn't important, however.

*

They were climbing now, and the conversation was the weather. Would it be a good season or was it too dry? Last year's floods and the drought before them; was weather cyclic or was it altered by man? How no matter what the season, share-farmers always had the worst of it; if it was a river farm there were floods, a high farm it was drought, a good farm and a good season the owner was a savage. Then they brooded on the harshness of things. Ann wondered if Doris would be able to work in town. Did she have much money put aside? Soon after her letter had come she had sent them all presents, expensive ones that pleased, yet worried. Sometimes they sent her the local newspaper, and when Tommy Harris drove his truck off the punt in the middle of the river she wired twenty pounds to his widow. And there was the ten pounds Hames had been forced to accept as a donation to the school appeal.

And three months later she had the breakdown and came home for the holiday. Thin, too. And I was glad she was back and thinner. Well-dressed but some of the clothes were a bit tarty. Came up from the station in a taxi that time, unexpected. And we were all pleased to see her. But she walked different and some of her actions seemed bold. "In any sort of trouble?" I asked her. Put me in my place right away. "What I've got," she said, "is bladder trouble, and sometimes it gives me hell." So she put herself into a sort of quarantine and used and washed her own dishes and did her own clothes. "Some troubles are catchy," she said. We all sympathised and hoped she'd soon be well. And then she said it wasn't really a holiday as she wasn't returning to the city. "What!" George yelled—at Sunday dinner—"but you're doing so well." "But there's no place like home," she said. And pleased us all.

I got the doctor but she wouldn't see him.

"Why, why?" I wanted to scream at her. "What are you hiding?" But I didn't really press for an answer. There are things to be bottled. What her burden was—was so—so touchy and delicate.

She was distant with the boys. I heard young Steel tell Sonny the city'd turned her into a teaser. Well, I thought, at least she's learnt a bit

of self-control: but I scowled for Sonny through the dairy wall when he offered no rebuke. Then the parcels arrived from the city. "Oh?" I said. "Bladder medicine." she said. From Wong and Baxter, the World's Herbalists. I saw an opened parcel with its seaweed and licorice ointment and jar of Herbal Regulator. Treated herself for weeks and worked hard on the farm. Then she said she'd have to see a specialist. "What's wrong with the locals?" we asked. "Nothing," she said. "But why try to save a few pounds when your bladders at stake?" "True," we said. I went to the library and looked up the medical books, and I wanted to ask the librarian but I found I couldn't.

Doris nudged her. "Better change down," she said. "Uh—oh yes," Ann muttered, now aware of the utility's jerking progress. "Like to drive?" she asked. Driving had been another of the things she had picked up in the city. So they changed seats. Doris revved the engine and grimaced over the wheel. Ann watched her nervously: how do they change so quickly—is it the warm, moist climate? Around here, which was once all rain jungle and cedar scrub, with lawyers in great loops, and staghorns huge and high in the trees and the rich earth under orchids and tree-ferns. Does the heat and richness and the fire and adventure of the first people get into the blood; not the blacks—who didn't last—but those first white men, the escapees from Moreton Bay and Port Macquarie; and then the cedar-cutters, the really wild men; and in their wake the squatters; and finally, the farmers?

And Sonny's not much better. But it's not for me to chide him—that's George's job. Man to man, woman to woman I always say; "Remember, George, I'm only their step-mother and you can't expect me to have much to say to them." Yesterday I said to him: "George, you'll have to have a few words with Doris. Sonny, too. All fathers tell their children the facts of life and that now. See Sonny, now here's a boy, almost twenty, and he's got two hundred pounds in the bank, a fresh and friendly rugged face and he hardly knows a thing about life. Life, that is apart from the rooster and tomcat variety about here."

George jumped up—it was in the kitchen after supper—and shouted: "Let—let the boy alone!" His hair a white comb and his jowls brown wattles and his first word like a fowl's: "Let!" It was like the night he had the fight at the Buffs' do at the Community Hall. Then he restood his chair and sat again at the table. "Young blokes know what goes on nowadays," he said. "What d'you reckon he gets in those plain wrapper parcels from the city?" I was shocked.

When they reached the house Ann told Doris to rest.

*

Through the cheap distorting glass of the small kitchen window Doris watched the three figures and their escort of wheedling cats and darting kittens thread their way along the narrow red line that joined the dairy and the house; it had been traversed so often it was now a dry stream bed, and in time could become a red gash through the cemetery of house stumps that would be their only memorial. The trail was a bond that would always tie the family to cattle no matter what they willed. And the bond endured not as something unyielding, and set in length and breadth, but with a certain elasticity that allowed tours into bush work or timber mills or beach mining, for months, or sometimes, years until the return. And the return always to the milch cattle. She could scarcely imagine the return of their kind to cattle that were not elegant and fine-boned; to be with the thick heavy beasts of the mountains was something beyond them. The mountains needed neither dairy cattle nor share farmers. The families were wild and related. She, Doris, had had her chance to join one. the Cox's, but then she (a sub-Doris she now thought) had allowed her step-mother to spoil the opportunity. Her only chance now was if she could persuade Bill that his rightful place was running cattle on the timber land his father owned in the mountains. She only saw it for a moment.

She snorted and muttered: "Day dreaming!" Then, from curiosity, she tried to recall what she had seen, but the trail remained the red line. Then she saw they were almost to the house. Ann with the bowl of cream and the knowing cats came first; then George, unattended, with a can of dairy-cleaner; Sonny had the jugs of milk and the unknowing kittens.

"Doris!" she heard Sonny cry. She wished she had stopped the car by the side of the road and had the talk she was always going to have with Ann. Perhaps there would be a chance later, when George and Sonny were out working. Then they tramped into the kitchen and welcomed her home. Ann paused on the doorstep and smiled and nodded to the bowl she bore; and Doris guessed she meant you don't get this sort of thing in the city—and then wondered if there was deliberate ambiguity in the gesture. But Ann merely put the bowl on the dresser and gave no further sign. George grinned and came forward and hugged her. Sonny sat heavily on the chair beside the door. "Bill Panton asked after you," he said. Doris sniffed, and turned and went into the bathroom. "So what?" she snapped over her shoulder. George followed her. "Er—Doris," he began. She faced him. "Yair!" she demanded. "Er, nothing much,' he said, "just that I'd like a word with you later." She leant over the bath and let the water out, and as she straightened, said: "Mmm." "Now don't worry," he whispered hoarsely, "it's nothing —any time'll do." He backed from the room into the kitchen, and was turning towards his chair when he remembered, and muttered: "Hell! what's the matter with me?" He wheeled around. "Think you're Miss Dairy Week or something!" he shouted. They all stared at him.

*

Across the creek Ann could see George and Sonny as they walked to the hard sharp figure she knew to be Murphy. They would hear him say: "Sorry, can't manage it—farm's not making enough for those sort of improvements." Then he would stare at them and add: "Plenty share-farmers worse off than youse." "God! he's mean," she mumbled. "No decent machinery—and this damn dog kennel of a house—better than some I suppose—unlined. 'Give us the wallboard or what-have-you and we'll do it ourselves.' 'No,' he thinks, 'give an inch, give a foot. Is the floor buckled? The roof's smoother.' I sit here in the sun on the veranda awaiting the noise that's not from poddies or pigs or the chair of cane that creaks even unladen or from the papers beside me on the warped boards rustling in the rare breezes. I wanted to hear her call 'Ma? Ma!' from her bed. But there'd be no need for a repeat. 'Tell me, Doris,' I'd beg her, 'tell me—as you'd tell your Mum—tell me'!"

She held her breath and listened. No call came. But when it did she would probe deeper than she had before, when she had asked: "Doris, you've still a few more visits?" "Yes." "Are they using special drugs?" "Yes." "Well—what's your trouble

called?" "It's got one of those long doctor's names." "Did they use Condy's," she asked. "No." "Mercury?" "No." "What then?" "Some special drug and penicillin." "That's funny, we've just started the cows on penicillin—have you got mastitis?"

And her joke was bitter even before its end and that Doris gave no sign of recognising it as a joke, or of having even heard it, was of no comfort to her.

"No," she said, "I've only trouble with my bladder and it's almost fixed."

I look down the hill, across the creek, to where George and Sonny and Murphy were, to other hills most of them Murphy's, others, all the valley and more. The jacaranda spills a purple shower over the side of the house and the new and feathery leaves make vague shadows and edge towards me. Along the creek the wattle has bronzed. The flats are thick with paspalum and clover, and when the winds come it is as if a stone has landed in an algaed pond. The bare red fallow and next to it the patch of menacing light-green kikuyu waits in ambush. I hear bees as they string between the jacaranda and the bougainvilia that is a green and purple haystack. The jacaranda leaves faint, almost feathery. The wisteria around the veranda post, its long flowers mauve loofah sponges . . . a year ago and I waited in bed for her to return from the dance: I heard the car stop, I heard their footsteps. I lost them. In the morning her dress over the chair, its purple stains.

She picked up the letter from beside the newspaper. At first she had not known the name; then she had remembered meeting Mrs. Odgen at Leichhardt and Rushcutters Bay. Who had written:

> My niece, Mrs. Stubbs, you met her remember? has had too free a time and been warned by the police and we think its the life the city offers. Would there be anything for her in your town? We all know of your wonderful ways with the young folk. She needs the fresh wholesome air of the country and if not do you know of a good christian family with whom she could board? Also if the Russians worsen could you put us all up. If you want any tinned stuff write us.

UNFETTERED THOUGHT

It's hard to unfetter thought, for it would enter
The unknown country of all possibilities, where the wanderer
Knows scarcely his goal and may never return to tell
That he saw an ocean where mountains should be.
What is terrible in the unknown is that it lacks frontiers:
There is no end in any direction, this way or that.

Then the false traveller declares the crossing accomplished.
"This," he writes, "is the land we mapped out last year.
We traced the rivers; the soil is barren, the inlets are frozen—
We return by the road we have come. Having lost many upright companions,
I shot one traitor who said he would rather settle
There among strangers than share the hopes and the perils
Which await us at home."

But the unknown nags the conscience of the known.
A new expedition is fitted, new leaders are chosen,
Again the border is crossed and the lie is found out.
As they pass to the unconquered each man drops a pebble
On the grave where the traitor stands guard.
The mountains are mastered, the soil is found good, the rivers
Are teaming with fish. The inlets do not freeze over,
And the country is named after the one who refused to turn back.

This is the one who forgets the reason of the fear of freedom,
Who only remembers that we have not been promised
Anything safe, absolute, certain, except
Absolute inability to remain at rest.

DAVID MARTIN

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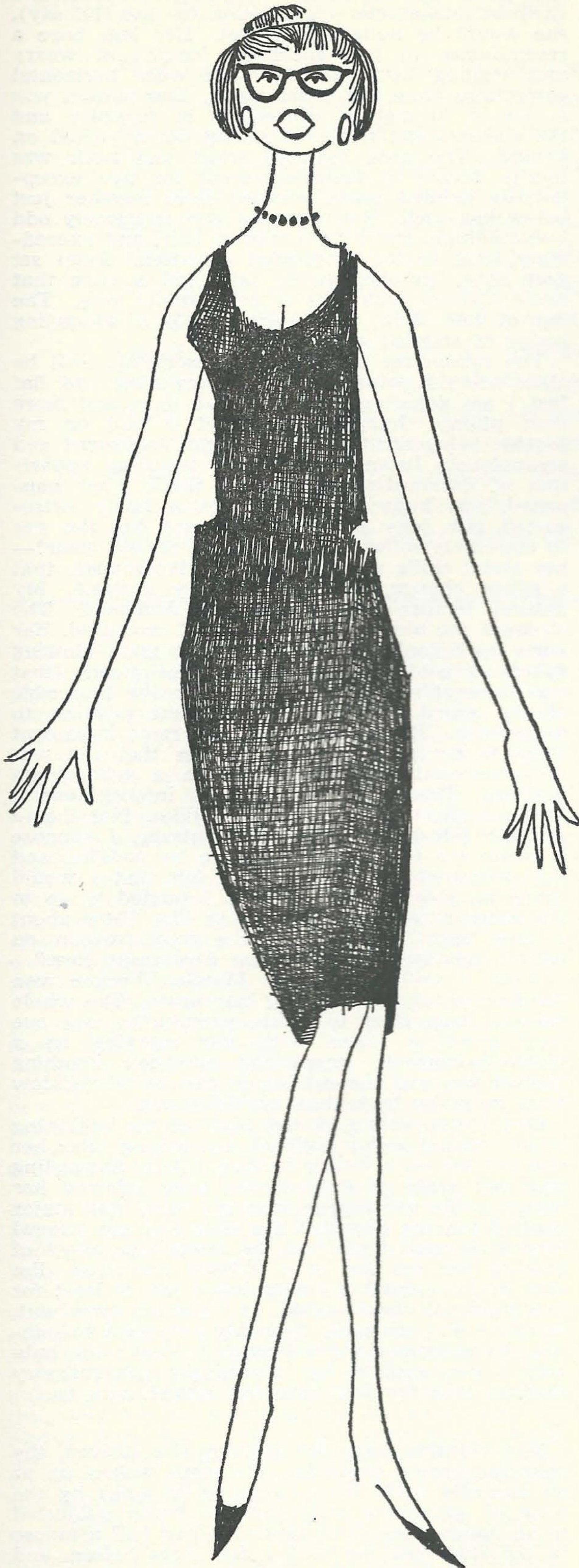

THACKING YOU I AM

Malcolm Levene

THE first I ever heard of her was when someone mentioned her as one of the chief vicissitudes of writing in this country. She descends upon you not without grace or presence, the someone said, and at the beginning it's all rather gratifying, being observed etcetera. This, of course, is the sort of party chit-chat that you quickly forget, especially when you don't actually know the person under discussion, but there was one thing about her that left a little tape labelled "pull me" sticking up in my memory, and that was her name. Not that I could actually recall the name. I had only an aproximate feel of it. What was it now? Strickner? Thisbe? Klatter? Something very odd. Who cared anyway!

The someone went on to say, I seem to remember, that although it usually starts and finishes very genially, after a while you begin to imagine her with a black hood and a diabolical smile pointing an imperative forefinger to an open Iron Maiden beside her and saying, "Heretic, your answer was not satisfactory. Why was this so? Justify it." And behind her a dim swarming crowd of glowering culture-vultures from whom a stream of complaints, questions and invocations of the worst kind came continually.

It was a lordly writer who spoke this way. He loved a jest at the expense of someone he fondly took to be his own personal jester. I said as much, but it wasn't well received. It was that sort of a group.

As I say, my unreliable memory (more a forgetory with me) had consumed all but a vestige of her, but the whole kit-and-caboodle came out with a disturbing pop one day when I received the following letter:

> My dear Simon [Simon! Note that]
>
> You will certainly forgive my writing to you this way when I tell you that Arthur spoke of you in the highest terms and added his benediction to this my venture. [Arthur? Surely not the Professor of English? And what right has he got to benedict anything concerned with me?]
>
> I personally have for your work, the material Arthur has in his possession, an almost unqualified admiration [I love that bit], and am considering a theoretical project which will figure your good self and a small number of autres litterateurs.
>
> You will appreciate, Simon, that fact-finding is difficult enough at the best of

times and with the best of libraries. A fortiori with a relatively youthful [why not juvenile?] writer such as you.

Take me into your heart and hearth, and I guarantee that we shall both find advantage [anyone for tennis?]. I shall be arriving on the ninth inst. Please don't bother to meet the five-o'clock train.

A bientot,
Thanking you
I am
Yours with eager anticipation,
Myrtle Thacker.

Thacker! That was the name. Was it the first intimation of immortality? Being a relatively youthful writer I got rather worked up over the complimentary tone of the letter, but, restraining my enthusiasm, I replied:

Dear Myrtle Thacker,

I do hope that you won't be disappointed with me as a subject. It's quite painful for me to admit this, but I'm not really very exciting or unusual. I don't take opium, I don't wander through the country like a lonely cloud, I don't wear my hair long, and I still believe in standing up for ladies.

I don't mean to insinuate any callow motives on your part, or to dissuade you from your quest. I simply want you to be prepared to discover rather cold fish and chips instead of caviare.

Anyway, do come. We're looking forward to meeting you.

Till the ninth,
Sincerely,
Simon Meincke.

*

In a way, Debby and I rather looked forward to Miss Thacker's advent. It was something like waiting for the first performance of an opus, or the first publication of one's novel. We considered her a signpost on the way to a literary mayordom. I told Debby with some measure of authority that, as a leech, Miss Thacker was well known to have a remarkable nose for quality blood.

"After all," I said, "both X— and P— have had visitations in recent years."

Myrtle Thacker won the first round by arriving on the seventh. To be blunt, it was stinking hot that day, and I was clad simply in a pair of shorts. With me such a scene is strictly for private exhibition. Still, I wouldn't have minded the milkman, baker or gasman. Visiting lady biographers I did mind. But Miss Thacker was impervious.

"Simon?" She said with a devastating grin, sizing me up. "Simon Mine-ker?"

"MINKY, that's the way you say it," I snapped, caught off guard. On the crest of a wave of delight, sighs, suitcases and smiles, Myrtle Thacker surfed rapidly into our tiny flat.

"SO sweet, so UTTerly chic, such charming decor. Deborah, may I call you that, what beautiful hair you have. So untouched!" She swept off a remarkably complex pair of spectacles, planted her narrow bottom in an armchair, and visibly relaxed.

It didn't take me long at all to make my first bad impression. In fact I made it at that very moment. I asked her whether she'd had a pleasant trip. She looked quietly at me for a couple of moments, put on her spectacles, and said in a surprised tone,

"UTTerly charming, thank you Simon."

This Myrtle Thacker was certainly a sight for eyeballs unused to anything but reasonably standard forms of humanity. Standing on bare feet (a most uncharacteristic position for her, I'd say), she would be nudging six feet. Her legs bore a resemblance to two enormous lengths of weary and sagging bamboo. Her hips were horizontal projections from her lower waist. Her bottom was a narrow triangular concession to feminity and the conventional need for sitting down tacked on behind. The area between waist and neck was totally devoid of features except for two exceptionally pointed peaks situated close together just below her neck. But the head was supremely odd —exceedingly short from chin to hair, and exceedingly long in the horizontal elevation. Deep set grey eyes, an acromegalic jaw, and a nose that made Cyrano look like a professional pug. The top of her skull was framed with a struggling hedge of startled ginger hair.

The reason for this detailed description will be clear when I point out that in my bare and flat feet I am deluding myself at five four, and more than plump. Imagine the effect it had on my psyche, being scrutinised, measured, compared and scrupulously listened to by this towering apparition of different-ness. Because that's what happened, you know. Normally I'm a fairly extroverted, glib, jolly and careless person, but she was so incredibly salient—am I making myself clear?—her social skills were so daringly landscaped, that a sullen change came over me by contrast. My natural temper fell, I flattened, darkened. The stronger she blew at me the more I crumpled. Her voice itself could only be likened to great glowing shards of gold sweeping through the gloom (that was Deborah's image). As I was on the thin edge of the shard. I wasn't in the best position to describe it. But I think that the most important thing to get across about her was that she was self-consciously putting herself in a subordinate position. This submission was so intense that it had the effect of making me godlike. Not that I actually **felt** godlike. On the contrary, I suppose it made me feel that I ought to be godlike, and that was awfully depressing. I felt that I would never be able to make it, and I tended to go to the other extreme, saying things like "how about a short snort," and "there's a good cartoon on telly," and "frankly, to my ear Stravinsky jars."

When I said before that Myrtle Thacker won the first round, I was being inaccurate. The whole episode from start to finish, practically, was one long gruelling round with her carrying on a violently-inspired, long-range precision bombing against me, and me getting in the occasional low blow more by luck than anything else.

Oh! I was willing enough right at the beginning to be original and individual, but asking after her trip put me on a wrong footing, I felt. Suggesting bed that night at only eleven after offering her instant coffee for supper were my other two major slips. I can see now that the slips and my general demeanor must have had the immediate effect of making her see me as a difficult customer. I'm sure that she quickly pigeon-holed me, at least for a provisional classification, as "gloomy, trenchant, secretive and schizoid. Probably repressed bohemian. Extraordinarily challenging." That's the only way I can explain her alarmingly interrogatory manner over the few days she stayed with us.

*

The morning after the evening she arrived, the business started properly. We were woken up at an absurdly early hour (some seven a.m.) by the odor of something unidentifiable being subjected to an undue amount of heat. We had had a mouse in the stove seeking food a few days before, and Debby had sadistically tried to grill it to death.

SPRING SONG OF A BRISBANE GARDENER *After Reading John Betjeman*

Pale bauhinia, rhondoletia, honeysuckle, rambling rose;
Weeping figs along the river where the water comes and goes.
Melaleuca, leptospermum, lassiandra, crown of thorns,
And the deep-sea purple shadow that the jacaranda throws.
Green of jade from camphor-laurel, gleam of bronze from Moreton Bays,
Drifts of perfume in September, cool blue nights and bright gold days;
Spikes of blossom on the mango where a grey dove hides and mourns
And along the fence the scarlet flames of salvia lift and blaze.
Bluegums tip with pink and copper, as the first cicadas shrill,
Down the blackened boles of tree-stumps gold cascades of orchids spill;
Golden-cream as new-made butter, golden red as light of dawns
When the sun heaves up from seaward and strikes fire on One Tree Hill.
Opening petals all around them, who can find the heart to blame
Kissing lovers in the parklands where the hippeastrums flame?
Sunwarm sap is rising greenly in the hyacinth-scented lawns—
All the navvies take their shirts off. All the lilies do the same.

W. N. SCOTT

This little episode (unsuccessful I might say) got a peculiar grip on my imagination. Diabolically fiery mice invaded my dreams screeching horribly, steaks at lunch took on tortured postures. That morning, as I say, I woke with a pang in the region of my heart. Debby had succeeded! But there Debby slept innocently beside me.

Investigation revealed Myrtle Thacker drawing from the frying-pan spoonsful of a black, white and grey mess without form and distinctlly without appeal.

"I've made sufficient for omnes," she said gaily. "Professor Shimizu gave me the recipe personally. He told me that it occurred to him immediately after the atom-bomb holocaust." I said that I wasn't surprised, a remark that provoked her to put on her spectacles.

"Now what do you mean, Simon?" she asked, piercing me. I protested about not meaning to be nasty about her cooking.

"No, no, that doesn't matter at all," she said quickly. "I want to know what was the IMPORT of your comment. What was the structure of your psyche when you said it? Was it fluid, anabolic? I want a cross-section of your apperceptive mass," she said threateningly.

"I don't know, I was just talking about the heat of the explosion." Miss Thacker stood up abruptly, hugged the lapels of her dressing gown together, and beamed down at me like a genial ginger lamp-post.

"O you UTTer darling," she exclaimed in her most shardlike voice, "I can see you dwelling there subtly behind truisms and platitudes. You don't deceive me for one second!" Miss Thacker wagged at me admonishingly. It is impossible to resist blushing and grinning boyishly in a situation like that, and I'm no tougher than the next man. Of course there was more in my mind than merely that. Of course there was. Perceptive Miss Thacker! But the starved citadel of my thoughts was still dangerously beleaguered.

"Utopian pacifistic tendencies, I've no doubt," Miss Thacker archly divined, bringing unexpected supplies to relieve the siege. I wielded the banner weakly for a while, and was most gratified to surrender to Debby's suggestion that we eat, which we did, and were surprised at the good taste. We got an oblique idea of its composition when Myrtle Thacker put down knife and fork and burst into rhyme.

"I'll tell a story of the snail,
Your tongues shall language on his tale."

Debby and I both forebore to attach this couplet to anything at hand. To Miss Thacker's disappointment, I think. But I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction. I was unquiet at the prospect of the next few days with this intimidating servant of my mind. The iron maiden loomed.

After the table was cleared, the Thacker got stuck into me. The first stage of the trial was to produce, read, discuss, analyse and historically place my novel-in-progress. The second concerned my play-in-progress, the third my short stories-in-progress, and the fourth my as yet unpublished verse.

This was rigorous, I can assure you. Imagine me there, sweating over my folios, swallowing at each definition, almost each word, in case it was passe, shallow, narrow or just plain dumb. Can you see me there, pinned at the end of the table, riffling nervously through the pages, struggling to find concrete examples of the vague points I was making? And all the while dodging the rapier questions of this fiendishly good-natured woman. Did I say woman? Can a woman be so ruthless—asking for my finest introspections as she pulled cut my spiritual toe-nails? Even using the word spiritual is excessive here. She was just making a donkey out of me and didn't realise it. And don't think for one moment that the pressure abated during meals. I shudder when I remember how through a veritable scoop of a mouth stuffed, for example, with my wife's superb, hymnworthy pate de fois gras came a relentless storm of questions.

"Is Petrie a legendary reflection of Joan in 'The Pines'?"

"I suspect you of Arthurian mysticism. Explain. Justify."

"Your use of terza rima appears premeditated rather than supple. Justify it."

Justify. Justify. By the end of two days my entire nervous system lay down and whimpered every time her tongue haunched back in her mouth for a J. But if you imagine that her manner descended at any point from the perfectly amiable, you are quite mistaken. Every fresh edition of torment published was prefaced by a smile of genuinely infrangible friendship.

*

Unfortunately, Debby took a dislike to Myrtle Thacker. I didn't. Personally I liked her a lot. Only she scared hell out of me. But Debby disliked her with an acid unyielding backbiting suspecting bitterness. The more charming Miss Thacker was, the more brittle, the more brightly harsh Debby became. It was embarrassing to me at first, but it soon became clear that the Thacker's resilience was born of a long history of such between-the-line battles with writers' wives. She may even have taken it as an indication of success on her part. Debby said, with the vertical bitter crease in her forehead:

"I detest the way that woman hangs over you, staring at you with those crab's eyes as if you were a fat little fleshy fish. Don't think she likes you, Simon, or that she's got a real interest in you. You're fooling yourself if you think so. She's going round the country sedulously collecting bright little pink, black and yellow authors for the decoration of her literary shadow-box. You fool, sitting there day after day dutifully trotting out all your best ideas, and allowing her to tear them to shreds." Debby sat up in bed and shook her angry hair, ignoring my shushes and mild indignation.

"Why didn't you shave today? You look disgusting. Are you falling for that hag?"

"ARE YOU BARMY?"

Debby wept because I was being so horrible. You can't win. You just can't win.

To make matters worse, I woke up during the night feeling parched. I wanted a glass of iced water. To get one I'd have to pass Miss Thacker, who was sleeping in the lounge. After some reflection, I decided it was a safe enough venture. I was only wearing a pair of underpants, and it seemed ridiculous to put on more just to walk about ten feet or so. I went out into the lounge. There was Miss Thacker lying on a camp stretcher. I had two alternatives. Not to look or to look. I chose the latter and looked carefully. She was wearing only a pair of pants. I went closer and checked on an astonishing defect that I had suspected before. That's the sort of writer I am. Sadly, my dear Deborah had followed and was checking on **me**. That's the sort of wife she is. I won't detail the consequences. Use your imagination.

Happily, the agitating centre of the consequences calmed a little in the sardonic light of day, and the incident served to provide Debby with some more general ammunition. I myself felt that having seen Myrtle Thacker in that condition I had gained some sort of an advantage, and in fact there was a small, weak but unmistakeable resurgence of my spirit. In a way I had seen through her pose, her magnificent facade. I had learned that in one thing at least, there was a putting-off in the night-time and a putting on in the morning. This was something though not very much.

*

Perhaps the worst thing about the whole visit was Miss Thacker's hypnotised concentration on my most casual comments. The psychologist in her was more interested in the offhand betrayal than in formulated ideas. This was fortified, I think, by her suspicion that I had oystered up on her.

Almost everything I said was capped by the flash of her note-book. Her determination to get me to make ex cathedra pronouncements on everything under the sun was so fierce that she used some quite childish guiles and ruses. Like going to the window and saying, as she looked at the stars: "The Divine Architect, eh Simon?"

And: "I noticed in the paper today that a deb. has become engaged to an African chief. Remarkable, isn't it?"

And suggesting that we go on a car trip to the nearest awe-inspiring mountains (her very words). We actually did go on this trip. Myrtle Thacker prepared an elaborate itinerary, but I guarantee that, on the whole fourteen hour trip, the only scenery she saw was my face. She watched my expressions avariciously and without restraint, her pencil scorched through a dozen pages of her pad.

Put yourself in my place. You can't keep on saying things like "What an absolutely beautiful view," and "Crikey! just look at that precipice," and "The mountains are beautiful at this time of year, don't you think?" With the Thacker painfully hunched up in our miniature car, obviously devoting all of her very considerable mental power to the task of Boswellising me, I felt some compulsion to be a little more original, a bit more poetical

Ballade of Complaint to A.B.C.

It's rarely that the times afford
A man a night at home, to squat
At ease, unbothered by the Board
Of Management, and drink his tot,
And hear some music—a gavotte,
A bourree, something debonair—
Switch on the wireless!
I forgot:
It's Parliament that's on the air.

A Handel suite for harpsichord,
A feature on Sir Walter Scott,
Which we were promised, are ignored
In favour of this ghastly lot
Who, not content with having got
Our suffrage, have the nerve to tear
Our ears all night with bloody rot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

How loudly and how long, O Lord,
They run the old appalling trot,
With memories incompletely stored
And all their grammar gone to pot!
The Minister for God-knows-What,
The Honorable from God-knows-Where—
They should be taken out and shot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

Envoi

Lord Jupiter, since you allot
Thunder and lightning, hear my prayer:
Tilt your celestial chamber-pot!
It's Parliament that's on the air.

JOHN MANIFOLD

in my observations. This had the effect of making my comments seem delayed-action, or of making me seem a trifle deaf, osmotic. By way of illustration of this—a view would appear, Debby would enthuse naturally, and about five minutes later (after furious inspirating) and in front of a totally different view, I would say something to the tune of, "The view puts me in mind of deep the down cadence on septembered hills the bells dumb renown rings and bales the air," saying it casually as if it were anything but a chopped-up and barely disguised melange of all the nature poetry I'd ever written. Miss Thacker faithfully recorded everything, but occasionally the intensity of that gaze was sullied by the passage of an unworthy thought. I don't know how badly cracked one of her idols had to be before he was obviously leaking even to her, but I'm perfectly sure that now and again the perception of my half-shattered visage lying in the sands of literary prestigedom passed undisguised even through the rosy hues of her burning admiration. I realised this at the time, or at least after some time, and dried up. The last two or three hours of the trip were passed in a waiting, hovering silence. Miss Thacker perched in the car with craggy patience. The complex spectacles gleamed thoughtfully at me.

*

Her stay was drawing to a close, and I became desperate. So I launched myself into a coup de genie and saved the toppling wreck of me by a hair's breadth. Anguished with self-contempt, I reasoned, "You're bad because you are scared. She has you running down the street with only one leg in your trousers. The point is, if you can't get the second leg in, then get the first leg out. Admittedly, the sight may be somewhat obscene, but anything would be better than this total rout."

I achieved this by the simple expedient of getting blotto. Rotten. Debbie and Myrtle Thacker went off on the last evening to buy "quelque chose d'oriental" for dinner. I popped down to the pub for a feverish half-hour of whisky.

When they returned I was set up, ready. I was an imminent gale of irresistible conversation. I had even neglected my usual practice of drinking half-a-pint of milk before the liquor. I was prepared to court nausea for that woman—anything! I had brought home a bottle of bad plonk for reinforcement; the bars were shattered. At last I was free.

The girls came in quietly.

"Dem me for a soused buffoon," I roared, "what's in your bag, what's in your head, what's in your dress, whoops . . . WHOOPS"—verbal accompaniment for a fireman's lift with two people simultaneously, the first time I had ever tried it. We whirled crazily around the flat. Somewhere along the way Debby flew off at a tangent and landed I know not where. Miss Thacker and I continued a lop-sided rotation at an unimaginable number of revolutions per minute. Her nose and toes were fanning the carpet. She remained equipoised and sophisticated.

"What an UTTerly delightful greeting," I heard her exulting from the region of the roaring floor.

"Once more ye Myrtle brown," I remember shouting, "I come to pluck your bottom harsh and crude—"

"Paradise regained!" came ecstatically up from the depths.

"And with forced fingers rude," in a forte forte bellow, "to shatter your thacker before the mellowing beer."

Somehow Debby rescued the Thacker and sat me wobbily down. I'll get a coronary one day. Really I will. Debby's always telling me, and she ought to know. She failed first year medicine. Miss Thacker subsided in a quavering, trembling with excitement, fervent lump in an armchair.

"Oh hell," she said amazingly, "Simon, this is quite, quite marvellous!"

I served up plonks all round, eagerly welcomed by Miss Thacker. She nurtured the glass like a tiny fledgling in her great mothering hands. The long throat pulsed with expectation. I threw down a glass of the purple evil fluid.

"Shhhhhaaadrack and Bendigo," I said, "how about a few aphorisms, a saw or two, a maxim, divination or epigram?" Myrtle Thacker cast down her eyes in an excess of gratification.

Take my work for example," I said for a convenient kickoff. "have you not often felt in it the satirical beauty of a slaver of respectability over a hunk of stiffening cyanide? Pepper in the sun's eye and a convulsed blotting? Yes, well take my work for a good example, no man is meant other than his meaning is the supreme sacrifice of his being." Miss Thacker shook, her hand blurred. A low continuous moan of delight accompanied my ravings.

"The simple stature of the overhanging wave and the ragged temper of it! You see that don't you?" I saw a way of driving my point home. Thacker's deep eyes widened as I approached to a most intimate proximity. I put my palm under her jaw which she rested in a most interestingly sexy and passive way.

"Take your jaw, Thacker," I said seriously, "your darling big fat talking jaw—" Myrtle Thacker put down her pencil and pad. She said in a trembling voice: "I don't have to take this down. It will be engraved, absolutely engraved!" Two large tears bundled hastily down her face, grist for my cruel mill.

"Gorgoniferous stirring of the suffering deeps," I murmured, "look how they roll and tide, Thacker, and the elemental recreation, the lagging force that hooks the wave to break it angrily is, dear Myrtle, if I may make so bold as to so assert, is, I say, your noble promontory of a jaw." The tears reached the jaw, slowly circled and came to a watershed in the large cleft, then fell heavily away from it. I knelt down before her and looked up with eyes of adoration. She was all choked up.

"Ecce," I breathed, "in lachyrmae Christi!" I felt somebody hauling me up and back, and I suspect it was Deborah. I then became exceedingly sick and departed erratically for the bathroom. As I passed through the door I looked back and saw Thacker in a sobbing moaning heap being comforted by Debby, arms around and kissing and all.

I believe, I am told that I returned lightly later on and surpassed myself, but I don't remember that part at all. I did however come across one day two sayings that I am alleged to have originated on that fateful eve.

"Bed is where bad women dun and good women are undone."

"If I were wider than I am tall, Thacker, we could marry and set up as a sea-going yacht."

*

The next morning broke grey and depressing, a morn of inner reprisals and dead smiles for me. Debby had fully recovered her venom after her startling relapse of the night before. She presented a sharp bright countenance for Miss Thacker's departure. Until her train arrived Miss Thacker hung warmly over me. Her eyes consumed me When she got in the carriage I felt lousy enough at the bad time I had given her to try to apologise, but she wouldn't let me get a word in. It was

almost as if she was afraid of hearing it. Hanging out of the carriage window she clasped my hands in both of hers and gave out a gusher of thanks, joy and gratitude. Then the train tremored and began to creep down the track. Miss Thacker stopped talking and looked woebegone. Motivated by some unspeakably vicious and unjustified desire for vengeance, Debby abruptly started off beside the train as it gathered speed. I stood still and heard her say in a blazing voice: "You're one hell of a peculiar character yourself, Miss Thacker. Why don't **you** write a book?" I saw the Thacker's mouth form a gently questioning response, and Debby called loudly to the now disappearing train: "Write a book on lion-hunting. After all, you are the world's greatest authority." I felt very bad.

*

Debby waxed very funny over Miss Thacker. Especially over her name. She began to use it as a sort of euphemism expletive. Even now, after the amazing and somewhat terrible event, we find that this gimmick has crept ineradicably into our vocabulary and our lives. Perhaps it is because of what has happened in a way. Is it a sort of unrealised and sterile revenge? I don't know. The gimmick really started when I wrote a little guilt-ridden rather formal note to Miss Thacker at the university where she was tutoring in drama. I wrote:

> Dear Miss Thacker,
> Just a brief note to say how much I enjoyed your stay with us. You are certainly a very bright and interesting person, and your presence brightened an otherwise humdrum existence. When you have written your thesis on the creative personality I should dearly love to read it, whether I figure in it or not. Perhaps you would be so kind as to send me a copy.
> In eager anticipation,
> Thanking you I am
> Yours most sincerely,
> Simon Meincke.

I made a carbon copy, as is my habit. A couple of days later Debby picked up the copy. She read it and burst out laughing hysterically. My closing salutation was the trouble. I had accidentally written, "thacking you I am."

"She'll think you did it deliberately, you hypocritical old thacker you!" Debby got out painfully between paroxysms. After that we worked it in everywhere. At the end of a hard day's work we would say that we were really thacked out, or Debby annoyed would say that something I'd said was a thacking great lie, or that some crook, crumb or wife-beater deserved to be put to the thack, or we would both use it for the common sigh—"thack me!" It's a remarkably versatile word. As I say, even after the event, we still continued to use it, perhaps even increased the use.

The event was this.

About five months later a book entitled "The Toothless Lions" came onto the market. It was an extremely vicious and funny satire, and shamelessly personal. The author was, need I say, one Myrtle Thacker. As Debby put it, practically all the country's writers came in for a merciless thacking at her hands. It was totally devoid of charity —scurrilous, scandalous, insulting and unforgiveable. But, sadly, vividly accurate in the way that only a brilliantly warped point of view can be.

It made a million. The Yanks loved it. It was serialised in several scandal-mongering "truth" papers. "Time" magazine did an interview with her.

Birds and Flowers

This comes to my mind that birds can be
as flowers—
Flowers—birds, and frilly petals change
to wings
In the flash of an eye, wings turn to tight-
sealed buds,
And claws to fronds and creeping tend-
rilled things.

Winter magnolias blown in purple flocks
Roost in the crystal trees through rain-
washed noons.
White doves lie faintly on the flooding dark
As folded lilies lie on lone lagoons.

And look! The pearly rose-pink protea-cones
Fringed with their lacey feathers black as
night!
I should not find it strange if one of these
Trembling against the moon, took sudden
flight

Took sudden flight, owl-soft, owl-swift, and
filled
With a murmuring sound of wings both
sky and land,
"Listen!" I'd cry, and leaning upwards feel
A bird's heart beating underneath my
hand!

MYRA MORRIS

"Our writing is in the doldrums," she told them, "and I've simply tried to give it a salutary kick up the backside." She went on to say that she herself had lacked confidence until she got to know the writers, and then she discovered what "an affected, pompous, boring, egregious and idiotic pride of liars they really are. They provided my inspiration and my aim," she admitted, "but their debt to me is greater than mine to them." I myself featured in the book as a fat, greedy, grasping, caterwauling cub with nothing to give and plenty of noise to make, largely incoherent. My coup de genie was described in embarrassing detail. The dustcover of this frightful book displayed a large photo of Miss Thacker, wearing the sweet, understanding, loving and wise smile of my erstwhile weeping biographer.

But oddly enough, as it turned out, the Thacker did us all a great deal of good. Our sales soared, and there was no discrimination since we had all been equally vilified. It was really very lucky. At least I think it was.

And somehow I could never forget her sweet smile.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR'S BOOKS FROM CHESHIRES

THIS IS THE GRASS : Alan Marshall. The brilliant sequel to **I Can Jump Puddles** (which may be read separately)—covering Alan Marshall's development as a man and as a pre-eminent autobiographical writer. 21/-

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FORTY-TWO FACES : John Hetherington. Biographies of forty-two famous contemporary Australian prose writers, with bibliographies of their writings and twelve pages of plates. By the author of **Nine Australians, Blamey**, etc. 35/-

WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA : Norman MacKenzie. A great many Australian women helped the author compile this brilliant comprehensive study of the status of women in our society today, and will want to read what he has found out about them. 50/-

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COLONIAL BALLADS : Hugh Anderson. Eighty of the best bush ballads, with the original tunes and a lively illustrated commentary. Third printing. 35/-

UNCOMMON COMMON SENSE : Gwyneth Dow. A fresh, vital approach to clear thinking and the logic of everyday life: with humorous illustrations by Vane Lindesay. 14/6

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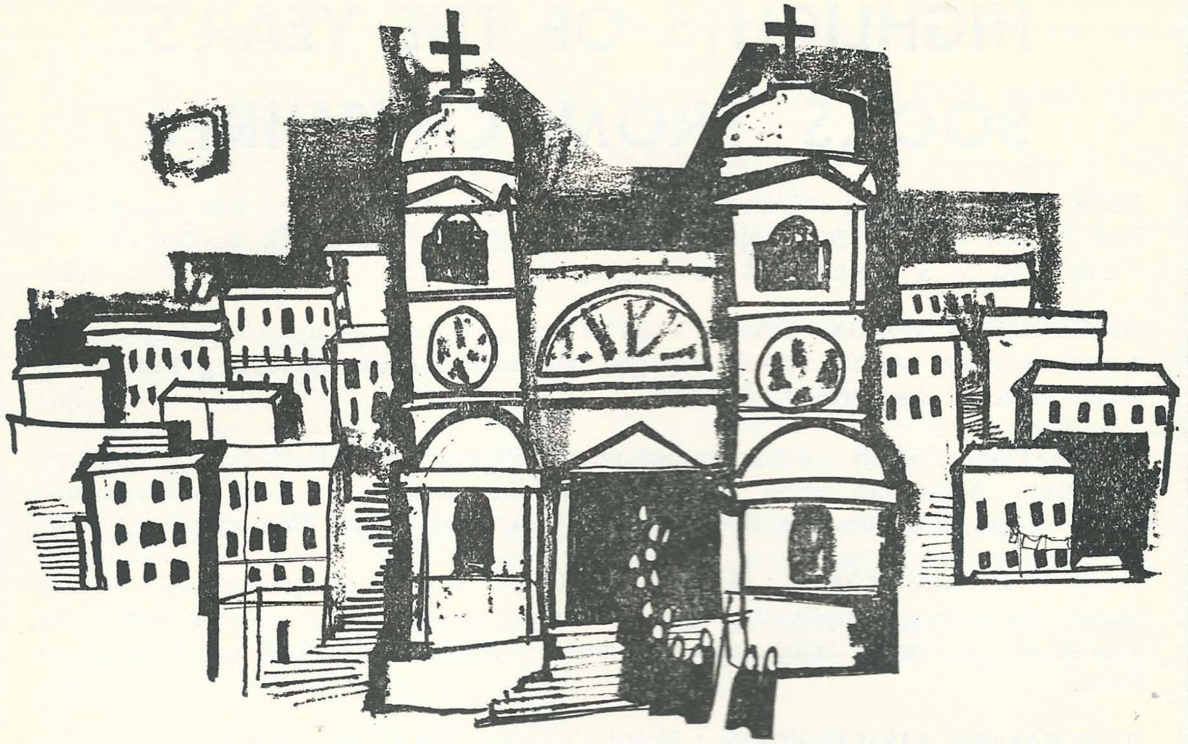

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Italy—December

Rosary lamplight spills
around these nearby hills.
Threads of the twisted glowing beads
hang over us. The world recedes.
Thought it once existed, it now does not
nor will.

Sounding, bitter bells
are battered hollow shells
that chant with aching semibreves
towering out above the heaved-on
rope, the breaking backs—where flesh
rebels.

Weaving its way below
the beady lamps, a slow
procession climbs among the houses;
those evening walls where snowlight drowses
and churchbell chimes are hung to die
or grow.

(Gabriel foretold
the birth of a Holy Child:
the Immaculate Conception.) A metal
angel croons where ice teeth rattle
far from the reach of human breath
—white cold.

The lame procession hobbles
up the village cobbles,
chanting somewhere in its throat
uncertain words that trail remotely
past these crumbling kitchens, past
these hovels.

Underneath the long
insistent, ringing song
of Gabriel creeps a human sound
—clinging to stone and tile and ground—
a whisper, mumbling from where the winds
belong.

Eight hundred feet confess
their complex humbleness.
Candles cupped in turned-up hands
are floating chains of lilies, garlands
bobbing at the liquid night's
caress.

Madonnas ride on poles
and spin their aureoles
and pirouette and pitch and lurch
with arching cloaks toward the church,
and flutter while the fretful angel
tolls.

Twelve tall candlesticks
surround the crucifix.
(And there was darkness over all
the Earth, a blackness fell and the veil
of the temple was rent—Catholic
from Orthodox.)

These shambling streets, forlorn
and hungry, are like the worn
dishevelled figures. They also toil
skyward, ravaged to purchase oil
and vestments, filled with news: a Christ
to be born.

Resplendently arrayed,
Bishop and Priest parade
amid the drabness, tread their wise
advance—two polished jewel eyes,
picked from some fabulous Madonna
they betrayed?

Still the bells are scourged,
the church is still engorging
tails of devotees. Inside,
strident organ Preludes ride
on nerves and clamp the brain; and finger
scrawny handbags.

Gabriel's tidings end.
Ancient backs unbend.
Ropes hang loose. A careful ear
can draw from the clearing atmosphere
the dancing climaxes that silence
comprehends.

This gnarled old street, so free
and tough in its oddity,
now steers the wholesome winds at will
to hunt with skilful vigor till
they've cleared away the fumes and echoes
of idolatry.

RODNEY HALL

PENNILESS TILL DOOMSDAY

by Rodney Hall

"Fresh, vigorous and visibly sinewy and I'd unhesitatingly back him as someone to watch in the future. But you probably won't see his book as it was published in London."

—C. Wallace-Crabbe (C.L.F. Lecture)

"A welcome truculence and strength of observation . . ."

—Noel Macainsh in Overland.

". . . the work of a man with his eye on the world . . . a waspish sense of humor."

—H. P. Heseltine in Meanjin.

This booklet can now be obtained through Dymocks (Sydney), Cheshire (Melbourne), Barkers (Brisbane), Mary Martin's (Adelaide), Alberts (Perth). 5/-

Published by Outposts Publications, London.

LANDFALL COUNTRY

*

A selection of work from the New Zealand quarterly **Landfall**, 1947-61, chosen by its editor, Charles Brasch.

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WHAT IS **APARTHEID?**
"HOUSE ARREST"?
THE "SABOTAGE ACT"?
"BANTU EDUCATION"?
THE GROUP AREAS ACT?

OUTLOOK

the independent socialist review publishes in its enlarged December issue a documented survey of South Africans in Australia

2/6 at bookstalls, 15/- p.a. from
Box 368, P.O., Haymarket, Sydney

(The material on South Africa is also available as a 16-page booklet—2/-, or £1 for a dozen copies.)

SWAG

Mary Gilmore was a good friend of this magazine, and assisted us not only with her poems but—it can now be told—with more than one generous donation. She had a precious simplicity of strength which years reinforced, which of course was reflected in her poetry, and which was her rare gift to an age of convoluted and cynical intellectualism. The very length of her life, and the spirited way she lived it to the end, raises a whole series of questions which need to be asked about her life and her work. We hope to do this soon. In the meantime we are sad that she has gone, and that those scrawly envelopes and chaotic, lively, busy mss. will not come this way again.

*

I have some interesting figures concerning the Commonwealth Literary Fund, kindly supplied by its Secretary, Mr. J. McCusker. Money voted for the C.L.F's. use in the last six years has been:

1957-58	£12,000
1958-59	£12,000
1959-60	£20,000
1960-61	£25,000
1961-62	£25,000
1962-63	£25,000

As the money is a trust fund, any portion unexpended in one year may be carried over to the next.

*

The money has been expended as follows:—

	Fellowships	Guarantees	Educational
1957-58	£3,000	£3,640	£2,087
1958-59	£2,000	£4,147	£3,000
1959-60	£2,000	£6,093	£2,000
1960-61	£3,000	£9,675	£4,500
1961-62	£4,000	£6,700	£4,500
1962-63 (est.)	£3,500	£5,630	£4,500

*

"Fellowships," of course, are grants to writers to enable them to produce books. "Guarantees" means guarantees against loss and grants offered to assist the publication of books, though these funds are not always claimed during the year they are allotted. "Educational" means lecture programs organised in different States in different years to popularise Australian literature. The substantial balance of the votes, not shown in the table above, appears to be devoted to the payment of literary pensions.

*

Few people would wish to see any of this expenditure reduced. Many, however, will feel that the number of fellowships awarded is small, considering the total funds voted and the number of legitimate applicants. Scores of writers, many of them genuinely deserving of some financial encouragement, applied to the Fund recently (following the Fund's newspaper advertisements), yet only three received fellowships. And there seemed to be no sign here of any desire on the Fund's part to encourage young, new or experimental writers.

*

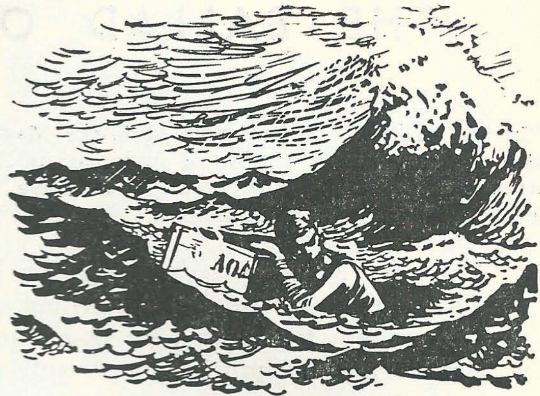
Those interested in the issues of TV and wireless program standards—issues we have continually raised in Overland—should write to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, 373 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, for copies of "Television Programme Standards" and "Broadcasting Programme Standards." They can then spend an amusing holiday period in front of their sets noting the happy flouting of these standards by the commercial stations.

*

Prize money totalling £2,000 is being offered by the Adelaide Advertiser for literary competitions closing 31st December, 1963. Details from G.P.O. Box 392, Adelaide. Mr. Jack Penberthy, of Queensland, has been awarded the 1962 Mary Gilmore Prize for a short story, and Mr. Denis Kevans, of N.S.W., the prize for a poem.

S. MURRAY-SMITH

The Floating Fund



We've given good value for money in the past: in fact people who know about printing and production costs of magazines like this (blocks alone for the last issue cost nearly £50) have often told us we are stupid. So this time we're producing a smaller issue in order to catch up a few pounds; and in order that we can get it out by Christmas.

Meantime our affections go out to those who have shown affection for us and have generously contributed £87/19/0 to our Floating Fund since last issue:

MM £12; NC £10; EW £6; BS, WRK £5; PM £4/10/0; JRL £2/13/0; TD, IM £2/2/0; EHPF, WH, KI £2; CA £1/12/0; EC, PA, MM £1/10/0; MT, LC, LH, KC, MS, NGF, BA, IPH £1.

VM, PD, LG, JD, ST, AS, AL, PS, RW, PGR, IW, AB, JR, GS, BH, WMT, AGM, EHS, RB, PWR, RRB, HHP, HVS, HH, KM, CEP, SHJ, MB, HNN, HW, BH, JH, JS, JRL, RR 10/-.

FSD, JD, EMS 5/-; RGT, EG 2/6.

THE BALLAD OF ELINOR MAGEE

"In this grave lie the remains of Elinor Magee and her infant child who were drowned in the Parramatta River January 1793. This grave is one of the oldest on the continent."

They say Magee sits drinking rum beside her grave each night
The mirrored stars like drowning eyes forever in his sight;
One noggin for himself he pours and another for his wife
Stubbornly murmuring how well she loved it in her life:
"So here's a drop for you, my dear, and here's a drop for me . . ."
And it splashes gently on the mound of Elinor Magee.

That's what she'd said, "Just one drop more; we'd best be going soon.
The boat is laden with supplies, the hours have sped since noon . . ."
But there was talk and fight and warmth and life in Sydney town
And men who have such fractious wives have fractious thoughts to drown.
"Enough o' that, the day's still young. You've drunk as much as me!
I'll row you up that river when I'm ready," said Magee.

"I'm strangely fearful for ourselves and for the babe unborn."
But Will Magee shrugged off her quaint presentiments with scorn.
"The boat is heavy aft," she cried, "all laden down with rum.
"I'm fearful for the homeward trip . . ." "Ah, hold your peace! I'll come.
Enough of all that woman-talk, you've had as much as me.
I've rowed that river more times drunk than sober," said Magee.

The yellow sun was in her eyes and all the earth lay warm
As Elinor held close the child within her downy arm;
Magee he sung a bawdy song resounding up the stream
When she saw death in the dancing light and felt her senses scream.
"I'm fearful for our sleeping child and the babe unborn," said she.
And a cloud cast low its shadow over Elinor Magee.

The song was silenced suddenly and terror burned her eyes
As she stared into a blood-dark sun and felt the boat capsize:
Ploughed under with the furrows, and flung upward to his wife,
Magee caught hold the child from her and saw its gasping life.
On cool, dark grass he laid it. "God in heav'n, I pray to Thee
Have mercy on my wife and child this day," moaned Will Magee.

Back to the numbing river cursing at the darkening night,
Cursing the sky where no stars showed and the moon too pale for light,
Dreading the while to find her as the ripples spread his cries
And delivered her into his arms, a girl with death-washed eyes.
"O God, my love will smile no more nor warm the heart of me . . .
Spare then the child that's all I've left of Elinor Magee!"

But dead it lay and in one grave, together side by side,
Mother and babe were buried by the banks where they had died.
Flows on the Parramatta River peacefully before
Where nightly, rum in hand, the pilgrim wanders from his door.
"How well she loved it in her life. I'll not forget," said he,
"Maybe it seep down and warm the soul of Elinor Magee."

They say he sits alone there still beside her grave at night
The mirrored stars like drowning eyes forever in his sight;
A noggin for himself he'll pour, another for his wife,
So tenderly recalling how she loved it in her life.
He sits there thinking back, they say, to the summer of ninety-three,
And tossing rum upon the mound of Elinor Magee.

JILL HELLYER.

From: "An account of the English Colony in N.S.W. 1788-1801" by Lt. Col. Collins. Published London 1804. Page 199.

Outstanding MACMILLAN Books

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52/-

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by John Cobley

This scholarly book is a first hand record of how the people in the Colony of New South Wales lived from day to day during the first year of settlement. It has been compiled entirely from contemporary sources—ships' logs, diaries and journals—which have only recently become available for publication. It is therefore of unique interest to both scholars and general readers.

44/9

FROM ALL BOOKSELLERS

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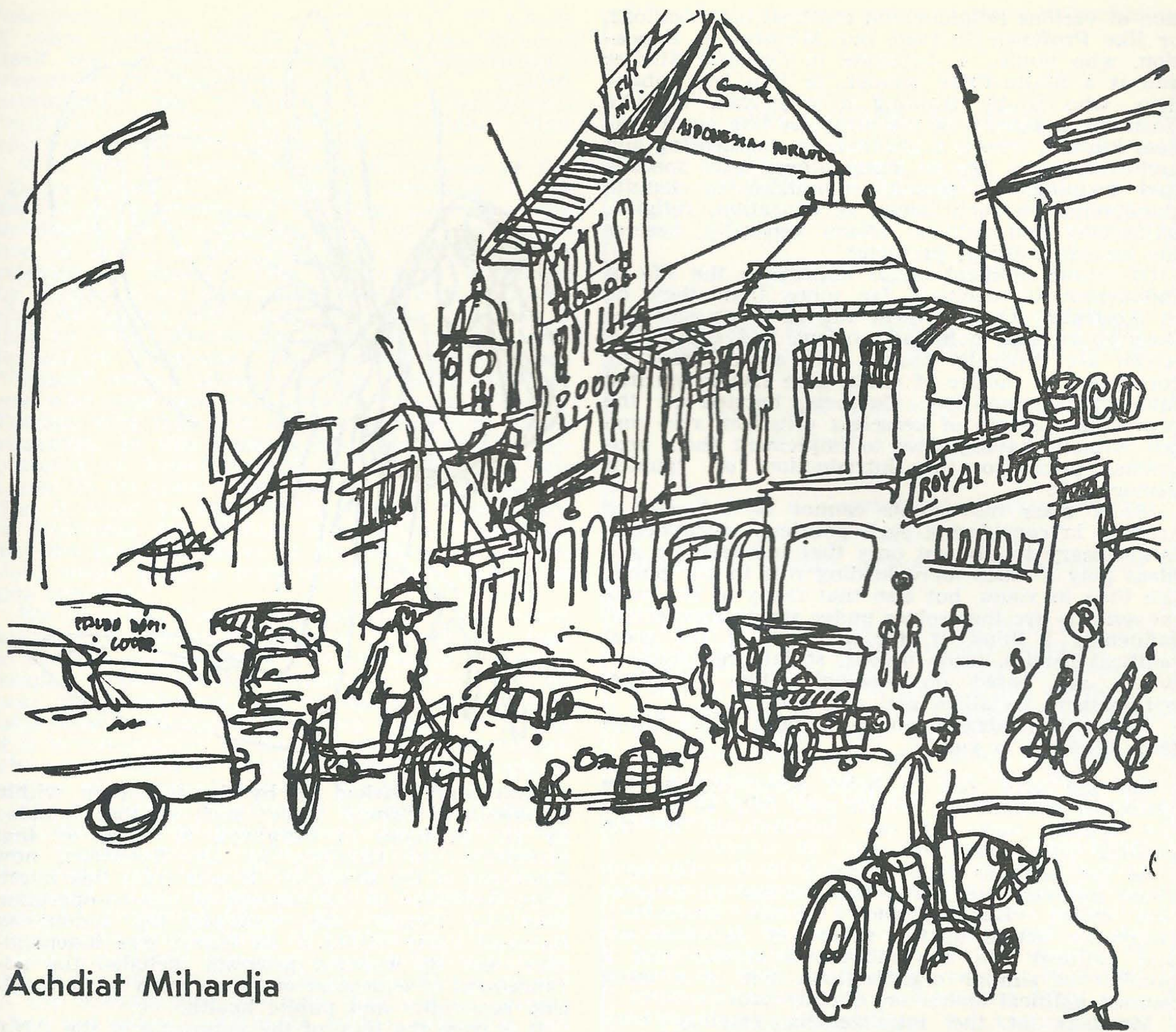


Achdiat Mihardja

OUR INDONESIAN INTELLECTUALS

"AUSTRALIA'S a dull place for an intellectual," an Australian colleague said to me the other day. I could understand this; in Indonesia high blood pressure is almost an occupational hazard for the intellectual.

I don't know how it applies in Australia, but for my purpose I'd define an "Indonesian intellectual" as someone who has a modern education and whose intellect and critical spirit are being constantly broadened and deepened for use in facing fundamental issues which do not merely touch upon his own life, but reach out into the great and crucial problems that concern the whole of mankind.

Thus an "intellectual" does not have to be a graduate of some higher educational institution, nor need a graduate be an "intellectual". We all are aware of the "degree-owner", tightly confined within his own subject and without the desire for broader insights.

You will find our intellectuals, not clustered around the universities—as intellectuals seem increasingly to be in Australia—but in a wide variety of jobs. I think of some I know well. One, a distinguished minor poet, holds a middle-ranking job in our Ministry of Education. Another is a Master of Law, who runs a publishing house, together with his son, who is an economist. Another is a free-lance writer, who is achieving some fame for his translation from Shakespeare and Pasternak. Another, a prominent poet and essayist, is well known as a script-writer and stage-manager and works for his living as a film producer; he is actually a graduate from a veterinary faculty. Others I know are engineers, doctors, economists, agriculturalists, lawyers, educationists, all men and women also active in other than their academic fields.

What holds us together? In Australia the answer would probably be given in terms of magazines, books, associations of various kinds. These are not unimportant in Indonesia. But the essential difference between the two countries is that our intellectuals are strongly attracted towards social and political issues, and tend not to be able to separate the academic issues from the others. Intellectuals like Professor Sadeli, trained in engineering and economics, or like Wongsonegoro, trained in law, who is the president of a federa-

tion of various religious and mystical organisations, or like Professor Prijono, our Minister of Education, who holds a doctorate in Oriental Studies and is a Stalin-Prize winner, or like Dr. Subandrio, who is by training a physician, or like Nasution, a general of the army, or like our President himself, who is a graduate in engineering and architecture, or like so many others with specialised training, all remain committed to definite standpoints on such issues as education, religion, philosophy and cultural affairs generally, besides the crucial political problems.

Of course political issues impact on the life of Indonesian intellectuals far more than they do in Australia. Our political life is much stormier than yours, and political tensions and confusions, which are generally caused and accompanied by corruption or misuse of office, give rise to spirited intellectual opposition. Cabinets, harried by the prevailing climate of ceaseless criticism, rose and fell without having time to implement their programs, prior to the introduction of "guided democracy".

While mass movements cannot be left out of account in considering such political upheavals, it is necessary to say not only that intellectuals and ideas play a much more leading role in our public life than in yours, but also that many of the mass movements are themselves under strong intellectual influence. I think of, for instance, of the great political parties, trade unions, social organisations, which are based on ideologies like Islamism, nationalism, socialism and communism.

To us, then, ideas seem much more living things than they do to you.

*

Let me give you in brief something of the historical background, which may help to explain the special tasks of our intellectuals in the political and social field.

As far back as 1908 students in the Djakarta (then Batavia) medical college formed an association called "Budi Utomo" (Divine Endeavor). Originally active in the sphere of Javanese art and cultural life, the movement spread and a number of similar organisations, but of a more defined political character, quickly arose.

Members of the intelligentsia (mainly non-academic) became our dynamic and revolutionary pioneers. Outside influences such as Pan-Islamism, communism and socialism added strength to their enthusiasm and self-awareness. Islam as a religious sentiment was plainly opposed to the Christian religion of the Dutch colonial rulers, while the bad conditions of the workers on oil fields, in sugar mills and on plantations gave rise to political agitation to eject the colonialists.

The movement "Perhimpunan Indonesia" (originally "Indische Vereniging") was founded by Indonesian students in the Netherlands about the same time as Budi Utomo, and served as a centre for the nationalist political movement. Its manifesto stressed the fact that the only acceptable government for Indonesia was an Indonesian government, to achieve which every Indonesian must become active to the best of his ability. Divisions among the people must be overcome in the cause of unity.

The struggle for "Independent Indonesia", by means of mass action and non-co-operation, was launched in 1924. Centres of activity against colonialism and imperialism were not limited to those in Holland and Indonesia, but were also established in Paris, Brussels and other places. It was clear that these young students had already formulated a political goal and the strategy to achieve it, aims and means which subsequently became those of the entire Indonesian people.

They were backed up by the formation within Indonesia of "study clubs" such as that founded by Dr. Soetomo in Surabaya in 1924, or that established in Bandung by Dr. Soekarno, now President of the Republic. It was from this latter, more dedicated to the concept of non-co-operation than the former, that emerged the Indonesian National Party (P.N.I.). Its object was independence, and its working program included the advancement of education on issues such as nationalism, economics and public health.

It is from the time of the launching of the P.N.I. that we date the conscious movement by Indonesian intellectuals, regardless of differences in personal ideologies, to take the lead in political movements, trade unions and social organisations. There were always affiliates, trained by the movement, among workers, peasants, women and other strata, but the major influence was wielded by the extreme nationalist intellectuals, with their non-co-operation policy. Thus they formed a trained cadre of leaders when independence was proclaimed in 1945.

*

Aware that western democracy was democracy on the political level only, but not on the economic and social level, Indonesian leaders began to look for a democracy of a different character—a democracy which would ensure the realisation of social justice.

Three main strands in the working out of this new concept can be distinguished: the humanitarian ideals of modern western socialism, the Moslem ideals of justice and brotherhood, and a consciousness of the collective basis of the original Indonesian community.

It is this last strand that has given rise most to the idea of "guided democracy", a concept that has led to much questioning among Indonesian intellectuals and to much commotion in the outside world. Our Political Manifesto claims a

"complete divorce from western democracy", which it terms "free-fight-liberalism", and also declares itself against the "autocracy of a dictatorship". Important political concepts basic to "guided democracy" are "musjawarah" (consultation), "mufacat" (decisions by concensus rather than vote) and "sesepuh" (leadership).

It is now too early to assess the results of the "guided democracy" in practice, especially in the field of our economy. Of particular concern to the intellectuals is also the possibility of an accumulation of power in one hand, even though this is rejected in theory. This concern is expressed by leaders in the government itself, such as Roeslan Abdulgani, who early this year delivered a talk on "the freedom of press" to a press conference in Tjipayung. The national press-bureau "Antara" among others reported: "Quoting Jefferson who once said that 'power tends to corrupt,' Roeslan said that this applies everywhere, in all countries. In this instance he mentioned the importance of 'social control' and 'checks and balances' in all cases where power was involved, so that it could be kept within bounds (regulated); in Indonesia the 'Pantja Sila' (Five Principles) and the basis/objectives of the Indonesian revolution, which is of a high moral order, performed this function."

We have had the bitter experience in the recent past that unlimited freedom of criticism did lead to excesses and abuses, and to extremely damaging results. Today "guided democracy" limits this by laws and regulations, and newspapers and periodicals must be licensed. Criticism is only permitted if it is constructive in the eyes of the government. The requirement of "consensus" makes attempts to oppose Government schemes irrelevant.

The problem of freedom of criticism is therefore of primary importance for our intellectuals today. This freedom must not be unlimited as it was in the recent past, but neither should it be too much restricted. The critical spirit of intellectual life must be preserved for its absence could hamper the healthy development of our nation itself.

One extremely important and hopeful sign in this regard is that thousands of potential members of the intelligentsia are now studying at universities and other institutions within Indonesia and abroad, and will be able to exercise an important influence on future developments. Again, we have to realise that our problems and aspirations are very different from those of our Australian colleagues—we are still completing our revolution, experimenting widely, searching in every sphere of activity. Out of this is bound to come pleasant as well as disappointing surprises. Even the disappointments will have their positive side, if they act as a stimulus for betterment.

The drawings accompanying this article, as well as that on the cover, are the work of Bruce Petty. They were made on his recent South-East Asian tour, which is more fully described and depicted in his recent book, "South-East Asia" (Grayflower, 63/-). This very finely-produced book, containing hundreds of Petty's vigorous and percipient drawings, together with an informative, sensitive and sometimes almost poetic text, is warmly recommended to Overland's readers. Petty will be remembered for his recent series, "Perambulations", in this magazine.—Ed.

Available at last after 131 years!

HENRY SAVERY'S

QUINTUS SERVINTON

A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence

Edited, with a biographical introduction, by
CECIL H. HADGRAFT
Reader in English, University of Queensland

By setting, by date of publication, and the residence of the author, rightly regarded as Australia's first novel. Printed in Hobart Town in three vols., in 1830-31, and expressly intended for re-issue in London (in 1832), very few copies were reserved for sale in Tasmania. Of these, only three are known to survive, and the book has long been inaccessible to any but the most persistent of readers.

It presents an invaluable and fascinating picture—first of English provincial life and of contemporary business dealing, and then of convict life as experienced by an educated convict, a contrast and complement to the Ralph Rashleigh picture of the convict of humble birth and little or no education crushed by brutality and manual labor.

The introduction traces the author's own chequered career—an amazing sequence of misfortunes and miscalculations both before and after his twenty-four reprieve from the gallows, and particularly significant for the appreciation of a novel long known to be large autobiographical.

A view of Hobart Town, c. 1830, by W. J. Huggins, has been reproduced on the cover and the jacket by courtesy of the Trustees of the State Library of Victoria.

This reprint has been published with the assistance of the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

Full-cloth edition, 35/-.
Paperbound edition, 25/-.

PUBLISHED BY
JACARANDA
PRESS PTY. LTD.
BRISBANE, MELBOURNE

Mercy-Bathurst Island

Rodenck Shaw

CRITICS AND WRITERS

HAL PORTER, in the Bulletin some time ago, unleashed a blast against Australian literary critics, accusing the majority of incompetence and self-seeking. A rather tame discussion followed which soon petered out.

Whether Hal Porter was right in claiming that the critics' art has sunk below the level of the past I cannot judge; after all, really good critics are no more common than good writers, and probably never were, in Australia or anywhere else. The equipment which makes a critic is diverse and not cheaply obtainable, since it includes wide reading, love of letters, tolerance and fearlessness, not to speak of literary ability—the power to write well. When we allow that creativeness comes into it too, we may conclude that even of writers not much more is demanded than this, and the wonder is perhaps that so many intelligent reviews do appear.

Not that the position is perfect. On some reviewers, who have to churn out articles week after week, the pressure is excessive; willy-nilly they are forced back on odd angles and on hasty comparisons. The general tenor of the press abets this tendency. Most editors feel that readers are interested in personalities, that reviews therefore must be bright. As they also have to be short, and because it is easier in a little space to concentrate on some obvious weakness, the result is often a kind of "interesting" distortion. Our mental climate is hardly conducive to anything else.

What fascinates me is one special aspect of the problem, and that not a new one. To put it as a question: How much bias is legitimate in a critic?

Bias is necessary and can never be discounted. It has always been too much to hope that a deeply religious critic will show as much insight into Shelley as into Hopkins, or that a convinced socialist would do quite as well by Kipling as by Morris. Which is as it should be. Suspicion, however, marvellously sharpens the critical faculties—the liveliest life of Luther was written by a Catholic —and the world would be a dull place, and literature ill served, without controversy. To deny this would be to remove writing from the arena of reality and unreasonably minimise the importance of opinions, beliefs and ideologies.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as objective quality, even though it may be relative and open to every kind of interpretation, aesthetic, social and moral . . . or all three combined. What this objective quality is or how it can be defined is another matter. But I suggest that two criteria should (and usually can) be applied. Namely:

Is the work good of its kind?

How well is it executed?

Under the first category, while we may "reject" an entire school or tendency, we would yet be compelled to "understand" and enquire into it; something which, unfortunately, does not at all go without saying. We would then, to a certain extent, have to judge it by its own standards which, I submit, is as important as judging it by our own standards.

The second heading, on the face of it, should make less demands on the critic's integrity, but in reality it makes more. Style is the man, but the critic is a man, too. We ask him to appreciate all that style implies in the book he is analysing, and not to permit his general bias to come between him and the writer's ability as a craftsman. Which is difficult, because the critic's own ideas, and no less his own style, color his view of another man's style and technique more than he will admit. It is in this area that the failure of criticism so often occurs.

The issue is the proper scope and limits of partisanship. Some reviewers seem to advance from the assumption that they are addressing an audience in blinkers, a spiritually captive audience, incapable of enjoying writing from outside the group to which the reader belongs. This is a false assumption. The discriminating reader, by and large the one most worth considering, is not narrow-minded. To assume that he can get nothing out of a story or poem because it contains ideas and images opposed to his private dialectic is to insult and, worse, to cheat him; to cheat him of a possible experience. It may shield him from a certain influence, but at what cost? Literature exists to assert influence, to stimulate thought as well as feeling. One of its tasks is to disturb. When the critic becomes, however, subtly or well-intentioned, a censor and a guardian against disturbance, he breaks faith with reader and writer alike.

He may disclaim that this is what he is doing when he is actually doing it. I have read some reviews recently which are replete with ideological hindsight. Frequently they are new assessments of writers in the light not of changes in their talent but of changes, or supposed changes, in their time and environment, so that what was previously praised in them is now denigrated—a process not difficult to rationalise. In essence this means that the critic blames a man for not having changed as he would want him to have changed, of not having become what he wanted him to become, and here one may point out that critics sometimes grow ashamed of their own past.

Many writers of the 'thirties have suffered from such one-sided re-evaluation. An amusing episode of critic as censor had to do with a book of mine, some years ago, when a reviewer in a well known denominational journal wrote that my poems were not too bad, but that members of his faith need not waste money on buying them. It's an extreme example, admittedly, and I know that it is not typical, nor exclusive to one particular world-view.

I believe it to be axiomatic that, first and above all, the critic must grant the writer the right to be himself. He may criticise his fundamental position, but he must do so openly, so that we know where we are. He must not take his merit away because he holds a given position, unless it is outrageous, and even then it is well to remember that today's outrage is tomorrow's convention.

The critic's function is to widen the horizons of his readers, not to confirm them. To be somewhat unpopular with his public becomes him even better than to court unpopularity with writers. The latter is easily achieved.

*

THIS brings us to the old problem whether or to what degree moral criteria should be applied in literature. Can a bad man be a good writer? I don't know what the absolute and abstract answer is, but suspect that a bad man, one who wishes ill for others and wants to damage them, cannot be a good writer. I arrive at this by a paradoxical method.

Reading carefully, it has always seemed to me that where genius is present it overcomes evil in its practitioners. They say that Roy Campbell was an anti-semite. There are traces of it in his work, and anti-semitism, in whatever form, is a terrible evil. But shining through his poetry, even when he thinks he is lauding the fascist Franco, there is a passion which, say what we like, affirms life. It moves me. Then I say to myself: Campbell makes a poor job of being a fascist but he often makes a good job of being a poet. The evil in him must be secondary to the good. It makes me no less a partisan, but it qualifies my partisanship and saves me his verse.

When dealing with an out-and-out Nazi poet, for instance with Baldur von Schirach, I would still apply, among others, the two criteria mentioned before. This would probably lead me to an uncomfortable contradiction. Of its evil kind his work might be a brilliant example, and it may even be well executed. Alas! what have we here? The devil's tail of literary dualism emerging from above the philosophically monist posterior.

"Bastards we have known" in daily life are not necessarily the bad writers we would like them to be, especially not if what makes them so is the fearsome frustration writing sometimes engenders. But there is a consolation. People who indulge themselves as unmitigated bastards usually succeed in destroying themselves as writers. If you are too full of venom, you get poisoned. A dash of arsenic can be a stimulant, but too much of it is lethal.

Yes. The critic should make moral judgments. But he must be damned sure that he has read attentively and that he is not mistaking prejudices for morality.

*

IT is not necessarily the professional critic who wields the deadliest stiletto, since often he does not know where to sink his blade. It takes a playwright to disembowel a playwright and a poet to geld a poet.

If my study of colonial history has not misled me, I have noticed a certain savagery, born of a strange anger, an antipodean hubris, which some writers reserve for each other. I do not speak here of satire or flyting, of which there is hardly enough, but of a much bloodier sport which directly aims at destruction. It looked like having become extinct, but we may yet see another season —because the gentle public enjoys it so.

As an innocent by-stander it appears to me that this is potentially more dangerous than all the wrong-headed criticism by all the wrong-headed critics. For, in the long run, the serious critic must prevail over the criticaster, and justice is done to art.

Leaves

Leaf has dignity in death her edges curl
And make half funnels for the wind to hurl
Her to a massed and tidy grave,
She wraps and shrouds herself in neat
And ordered rows for the final heat
Inspires and makes her brave
And she dies pointing the way to the wind
Singing a majestic discipline
On path and plot and mound
No tongues green with scunge, mouths rape agape,
Voluptuous mess of guts and porridged brains
No battlefield her dying ground.

Shall I see my darling in a hasty shroud
While mushroom flowers scorch the lips that crowd
To broken bubblers in the park?
Or gossamer drifting from a poisoned sky
Rasp the mystery from her swelling eye
And hair that's shining dark?
Her dream's my dream, mine her tomorrow,
Cup of gall or honey joy or sorrow
Her dream's my dream,
She who treads faunlike under the trees
Looking for snares that are not there and sees
Her beauty in the silent stream.

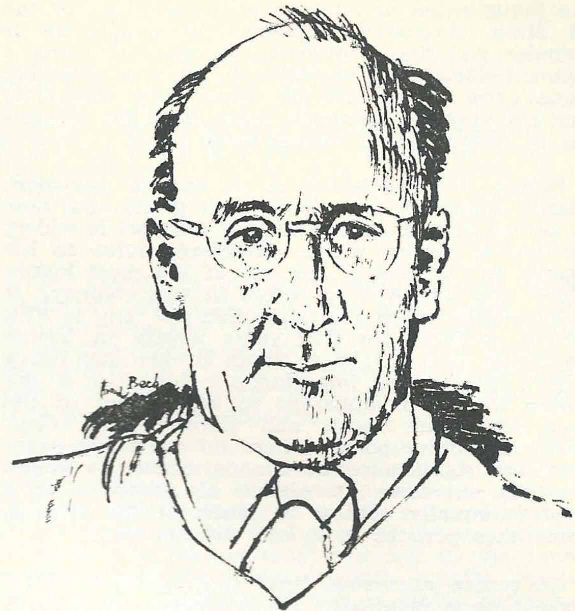
No one can blast our souls out of the world—
But the thought of strong white fingers curled
And stiff as roots
And the cramp and stare of a bomb-disordered end
Rioting like madness in a wounded ken
Dishumans me and mutes
My whispered mercy; O when it happen us
Let us leaflike lose our consciousness
Unbloodied, calm
With choirs of children O a thousand songs
From beautiful crimson singing tongues
As the sole alarm.

D. KEVANS

Our Writers: XII

ROBERT D. FITZGERALD

Nancy Keesing



HOW on earth ought one to begin writing a "profile" of a friend? It would be much simpler to write an account of a complete stranger. One would visit him armed with a neat questionnaire and an open mind—depart loaded with answers and first impressions. Then one could set forth a chart of the subject as dogmatic and complacent as those travel books written after two weeks' sojourn in a country. But I first met Robert D. FitzGerald nearly twenty years ago, and I like to think he and Marjorie, his wife, have been friends for upwards of ten years. Now I know him well enough to realise I don't know him at all.

One thing to be thankful for—I first made FitzGerald's acquaintance as one should come to know a poet—through his poetry. And that meeting was longer ago again. Of all extraordinary places it was in a school examination paper—the "Trial Leaving". Something like: "Read and comment upon the following—what is the poet's message?" —or similar nonsense. The author's name was not given. I still think the poem one of the most beautiful in the whole English language: it has a rare, grand stateliness.

> Set down your load; it is vain,
> all that your heart wills.
> The hills have a high disdain—
> you must never hope to attain
> to the blue thought of the hills,
> which marches beyond the thirst
> of the dragging miles, leads on
> where the last ridge beckons the first
> with a promise of secrets nursed
> in the far years gone.
>
> For the hills have learned so much
> from the sky and the wide air,
> their wisdom is not for the touch
> of all-brief lives that clutch
> at a fleeting share.
> Although your way might aspire
> from the peak to the further peak,
> vision and blue retire;
> beyond even desire
> they are still to seek.

I could scarcely wait to discover the poet's name from my English teacher. It was a country boarding school and I had to contain my impatience for Angus & Robertson's bookshop until the next holidays. Alas, they had no copies of "Moonlight Acre", FitzGerald's second book, in which the poem appeared. So I bought what they could offer, his first book, "To Meet the Sun". It was a first for me too—I'd never bought a slim vol. of Australian poetry before.

I simply cannot remember where I first met "Fitz" in the flesh. Was it fleetingly in Douglas Stewart's office at the Bulletin? Or was it in Sydney Tomholt's Alladin's Cave above Bond Street; that marvellous room full of treasures in wood, paper, friendship and rare and valuable people? I don't know. But I do remember that for years a terrible shyness I had more or less overcome by the age of twenty invariably overcame me whenever I was confronted by FitzGerald. I thought it was shyness, cursed it for shyness, but it was really awe, and as I now realise an entirely proper emotion. Greatness ought to inspire awe in the young.

However, the atmosphere in Tommy's room was always so genial that, after I'd met the FitzGeralds half-a-dozen times or so over fairly long intervals of time, I began to feel a little at ease in Fitz's company—a happy situation which owed not a little to Marjorie FitzGerald's warm, feminine kindness. One could not hear all about their four children: Kerry, Rosaleen, Desmond and Phyllida —or of the misdemeanors of their dog, Casca the envious—from Marjorie, and continue to regard the rollicking head of this charming family **merely** as a Great Poet.

The FitzGerald family have lived at, or rather on Hunter's Hill, a somewhat unique Sydney suburb, for 91 years. Fitz's grandfather, the botanist, moved there from Balmain in 1871. Marjorie, too, was born on "The Hill", although Fitz likes to tell how he swept her out of the Sydney Public Library where she worked as a librarian. Hunter's Hill rightly sets great store on its "old families"—the people who built its mellow stone houses, planted and tended its trees, travelled to town by its nearly-vanished fleet of ferries.

In 1956 we came to live on the Hill, and inevitably my, or rather by this time our—acquaintance with Fitz took on a new dimension. Not only did he shepherd my husband to the small ferry whose twice-daily trips, morning and evening, are all that remain of the once flourishing Lane Cove River passenger service, but he made it possible for the newcomer to select a seat against the polite glowering of entrenched travellers who resented any intrusion into their established pecking order.

He inaugurated us as foundation members of the "I Hate 'So-and-So' Society" of which he is founder and first president, "So-and-So" being a Council official bent on removing the few remaining Lane Cove jetties. During those ferry rides Fitz and my husband discussed, apart from the iniquities of "So-and-So", mathematics.

Robert D. FitzGerald is a notable surveyor. Mathematical art is a closed book to me—but now at second hand I discovered that the poet is widely known, in circles which offensively refer to his poetry as "scribbling", as one of the most highly gifted and qualified surveyors in this country. It is surveying which has taken Fitz not only to Fiji, where he lived for five years mostly in Vanua Levu, but in Australia to "both Broken and Surry Hills". The central importance to his work of the Fijian sojourn is apparent to any reader of the long "Heemskirk Shoals" and "Between Two Tides" and many other poems where no one could overlook the significance of islands, oceans, voyages. But his extensive knowledge of Australia as a land is equally central to much of his writing, sometimes perhaps in a less obvious way.

Of course numerous brief biographies of FitzGerald have mentioned his profession of surveying, his two early years studying science at Sydney University and so on. But I think that FitzGerald can never claim to have been judged by a peer until some literary critic, truly capable of grasping the range and quality of this man's mind, makes an attempt to assess some of his more intricate symbolism.

Fitz speaks rapidly and laughs prodigiously. He laughs with his whole body, and most heartily when he has some story to tell against himself. When I spoke to him about writing this article he laughed his great laugh and said: "Oh no! Well, if you must . . . but you've done it." What more was needed, he asked, than a verse I'd written a long time ago concerning a magnificent vegetable garden he had planted? The verse was to say our thanks for a superb cabbage and bunch of beetroot, and also as comment on a remark he'd made that "poetry can only be written in borrowed time." He'd arrived one Sunday morning holding the cabbage very carefully so as not to disturb a perfect dewdrop glistening on its curling leaves—"You can't find me a rose more beautiful than that," he'd said. I called the verse "Brassica FitzGeraldi" in parody of the title of Douglas Stewart's fine tribute to FitzGerald: "Sarcochilus FitzGeraldi" which salutes both botanist grandfather and poet grandson in one lovely lyric about the bush-orchid found by, and named for, Fitz's forbear.

When Fitz made his suggestion I laughed heartily to keep him company—then discovered he really meant it. My verse described the poet's "splendor of vegetables" which

> . . . met his envious neighbors' eyes
> And caused discomfiture and surprise
> In those who'd thought that poetry
> And horticulture 'd not marry.
> The poet soon was pleased to send
> A cabbage to each neighbor friend
> And, their astonishment to complete
> A bunch of most prodigious beet . . .

until the neighbors

> . . . herbiferous greed so fed
> Plant gay, inedible flowers instead
> Of trying to compete and rest
> Content to give the poet best . . .

After a time though, the neighbors regretted not having planted vegetables of their own, for the poet ceased working in his plot which soon became a wilderness although

> . . . as his garden soil declined
> Again the poet dug his mind
> And incidentally seemed to show
> The while he wrote, that neighbors know
> A basic truth, that poetry
> And kitchen-gardens can't agree
> Except—no other gardener near
> Has grown, or looks to grow, compeer
> To those great luminous cabbages . . .

"I never read novels," FitzGerald says. "I read any poetry I can lay hands on—but I'm afraid I never read novels." I've heard him talk magnificently about such widely varied poets as Browning, Yeats, Kenneth Mackenzie and Edna St. Vincent Millay, some of whose poetry he regards very highly. But if he could only have one book of poetry his choice would be Shakespeare. He complains that the trouble with poetry nowadays, the reason for its decline in wide popularity, is that few poets ever write "memorable" lines—by which he means simply, lines that not only can be memorised, but which refuse to be forgotten. I think this a profounder comment than at first appears, although to some extent arguable. I have a shocking memory, but one of my mental amulets goes:

> Life, toss up your florin;
> "Heads," I call.
> Regret be far and foreign
> whichever fall,
> whether for losing or winning
> the stake scarce to be won—
> it's a fine flash of silver, spinning
> in the gay sun.

Robert D. FitzGerald wrote it.

But it is of course true that one could only memorise "Essay on Memory," or those long, tight-wrought, adventurous and adventuring poems "Heemskirk Shoals", "Fifth Day", "Between Two Tides" and "The Wind at Your Door," by a conscious effort of will. FitzGerald continues to write many short poems which are often invested with his superb, but tolerant irony, as in his poem "Macquarie Place."

I think that if a proved lyricist forsakes lyricism we must respect his reasons, equally as we ought to respect the reasons of a consummate draughtsman, as Picasso, forsaking "obvious" draughtsmanship. The more so when the poet is the least conceited (in every shade of meaning, archaic and modern of that word) of men.

In recent years FitzGerald has given a number of Commonwealth Literary Fund lectures. Characteristically he contemplated this new departure with apprehension and afterwards reported his enthusiastic audiences with both surprise and a whole-hearted almost incredulous delight. In some ways his response was understandable, for he lacks the flamboyance and showmanship of "born speakers". But anyone who has read his splendid occasional critical articles in Meanjin and elsewhere might well have foreseen his success as a lecturer, a success confirmed by the University of Texas at whose invitation FitzGerald is, next year, going to America for a lecture tour.

A. A. Phillips

THE DOGS HAVE THEIR DAY

THE Melbourne reviewers of the local production of "The Season at Sarsparilla" seem to have been doubly frightened by the reputation of Patrick White: frightened, as they took their seats in the theatre, that they were about to face something as tough for the plain man's digestion as a Patrick White novel, frightened, as they sat to their typewriters, that they might say the wrong thing about an Important Writer.

At least I hope that these were their troubles, and that they were not really, as they appeared to be, flummoxed because a play in this year of grace abandons the convention of naturalism.

This play is not, as the reviewers managed to suggest, difficult experimentally, technically adventurous—that is the reverse of the truth. It is, in my view, an entertaining, a rewarding, even an exciting play, but its success owes little to its structural methods. Patrick White is not yet theatrically experienced enough to be technically daring, and he suffers from a doubly dangerous handicap. Because he comes to play-writing after the mastery of another medium, it is unlikely that he has that drawerful of rejected manuscripts which constitute the normal novitiate of a dramatist. It is equally unlikely that his producers, confronted by an established writer, have summoned the courage to demand that extensive re-writing during rehearsal from which a play can gain much, and a playwright even more.

Naturally enough then, White has adopted currently fashionable theatrical methods. He mingles naturalism with satiric stylisation and occasional soliloquy. He uses a character within the play as a chorus, commenting through the direct address of the audience.

I suspect that White thought these methods less conventional than they are—a natural error for an inexperienced dramatist—and relied on their assumed novelty to give his play a useful surface interest. Possibly, if it had been produced some few years ago, its methods would then have seemed fresh and would thus have taughtened its effect. At this date, they slacken the play.

The chorus device, in particular, seems ill-conceived. Practically nothing said directly to the audience by Roy Child needs explicit statement; and, unlike the rest of the play, it is dully written. Perhaps White here relied on a slight variation, neatly handled. Roy is only occasionally the mouth-piece of the author. He presents what he and we ultimately come to see as a barren half-truth. White does thus make a good point, relevant to his theme; but it is not enough to justify a corny device, clumsily handled.

This failure is the more unfortunate because White has another chorus character whom he handles very well. The child Pippy neatly underlines an idea important to the play, but remains a real person in her own right; and her early-adolescent mingling of critical spectatorship with an unwilling but fascinated involvement in life is imaginatively suggested. Linked with Pippy is the symbol of a bitch on heat pursued by dogs, and this again makes its point more effectively than such devices usually do.

The element of satiric stylisation like the main chorus figure, does not seem to me to pull its weight. White has chosen to present to us three families, each belonging to a different social grade, although living in the same street—a possible contiguity in "Sarsparilla," but not in the inner suburb which the scene-designer ineptly substituted for it. The life of one of these families—that of Nola Boyle and her nightman husband—is fully explored and presented usually in a naturalistic style. The two other families are lightly sketched, with only slight suggestions of development, and for them White uses a stylised treatment, half-way between burlesque and the comedy of humors.

This mingling of levels might have worked out well. It fails because the stylised figures are only interesting as a commentary on a theme. The satiric digs at suburbia, made through them, are often successfully funny, but they say nothing which we have not heard scores of times before. The characters are stock figures. Only the young lovers, and Pippy, in these two families, actively and originally advance the theme—and, unfortunately, gauche or tepid acting partly destroys their effect.

There remains the episode of Nora Boyle's infidelity, and its effect on her husband. It is the most important part of the play; and it is splendidly done—and, incidentally, very well acted. Zoe Caldwell was a little too mannered to achieve a triumph; her technique was too obvious to dissolve the limes into the air of Sarsparilla. Within that limitation, her conception was original, observant and warm, and her execution was confidently responsive to her intention. Gray gave his customarily reliable and sensitive interpretation of the kind of part in which he specialises (or to which producers monotonously condemn him).

White has here shown a mastery of one of the most difficult, one of the most proving, arts of the dramatist—the art of revealing the inner movement of his characters through their inarticulateness. He shows a sureness of touch in judging how to communicate his conception economically, freshly and without succumbing to the theatrical temptations.

It is a conception worth communicating. The Boyles are characters firmly set in their social background, and expressing the mores of their society; but they are human beings first, representatives of a class and of modern urbanism only incidentally. Their story does not follow a line foreseen by the audience; but once we have seen it, we are completely convinced of its truth. Above all, we care about Nora Boyle. Sleazy, tough-

minded, slack-fibred, generous, she is herself and she is whole; and she is one of us.

White's novels do not prepare us for the kind of success he has here achieved—that is true at two levels. To take the less important first, the dialogue in his novels often repeats certain mannerisms, so that we find ourselves hearing Patrick White instead of his characters. Moreover, the background satirised figures are often by a shade un-Australian. One can seldom lay one's finger on a palpable error, but a faint and disturbing scent of South London clings about them.

The necessities of the dramatic medium have here forced White to listen to the voice of his characters more attentively, and he has successfully caught their tune. Incidentally to that, he uses an authentic and unforced Australian idiom —though, perhaps, Girlie Pogson imports a whiff of Wimbledon.

At a deeper level, White here escapes one of his more serious weaknesses. Put in the simplest terms —which are here the most fitting—he has presented his characters warmly and with sympathy. He does not divide them into the large ones who have souls and the small ones who are well content to do without that frightening encumbrance. The sharpness of that dichotomy in "Voss" and "Riders in the Chariot" weakens, by its false implication, the impact of White's myths. It may be merely a by-product of the kind of structural plan which he has used, but that does not diminsh the effect on his reader.

In this play the Boyles are humanly small enough, but souls unmistakeably flicker within them. White acknowledges a fraternity with them and compels upon us a parallel acknowledgment. This warmth remains entirely unsentimental. White is still well aware of how feebly human beings shamble through their lives, and he does not condone that feebleness.

As a dramatist, in the Boyle scenes of this play White has, I believe, achieved more than any of his Australian predecessors. As a playwright, he is still uncertain, particularly in the difficult art of prejudging how an ingenious conception will work out on the stage. But no reader of White's novels can doubt that he has the intelligence, the inventiveness and the intentness to add the mastery of the lesser, but still necessary, craft of the playwright to his achieved vitality as a dramatist.

On Going to Sleep

There comes a time, the tide at the ebb,
The mind receding, the wooden drift
Of strong affections bedded in sand,
When the blue haze over the sea's lift

Lowers and broods on the decline
Of the afternoon's last lambent hour.
Then desire, receding, leads on
Illusion lest the wind swing sour

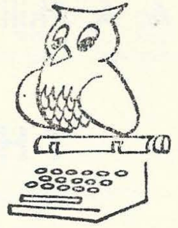
On the day's past pace, the night's dance
When you turned the wits to work at wit,
The pen to punctuate the running words.

But now you sleep: and there's an end on it.

MAX HARRIS

[The above poem is re-printed from our last issue, owing to a misprint which then occurred in the second-last line.—Ed.]

★ COMMENT



J. D. Blake (N.S.W.) writes:

In the light of the controversy which has raged around his work it may seem strange to assert that Patrick White is a realist writer; moreover an Australian realist writer whose main characters are certainly Australian. Their milieu, so effectively evoked by Patrick White, is also Australian.

In my view realism in the novel is the imaginative reflection of reality, real people, and the truth of life. On these criteria Patrick White is certainly of the realist school. His sympathies lie with the working people.

The central characters in "The Tree of Man," Stan and Amy Parker, are struggling small farmers, as are most of their neighbors. The characters who possess wealth and position, like the Armstrongs and the Forsdykes, emerge as philistines. This can also be said of the merchant draper Bonner in "Voss," whose main objective in financing the expedition is to try, by this means, to perpetuate his own name.

Thelma Forsdyke is a character who makes hypocrisy a virtue, and who seeks security by marrying the boss; but who actually, along this path, enters upon a hollow philistine existence.

"The Tree of Man" reveals Patrick White's concern with the inner life of the people who are his characters. He is able to evoke a picture of the innermost thoughts of ordinary people who are themselves inarticulate. To me the argument about Patrick White versus the Australian literary tradition seems rather pointless. The kind of striving for uniformity which is implicit in much of this argument could only lead to the kind of thing which not long ago acted as a brake on Soviet literature. In recent years the overcoming of these strictures has produced a freshness and variety of form in Soviet literature which makes it a joy to read.

If the Australian literary tradition may be likened to a tree which has not died nor been ringbarked, but which continues to grow and flourish, then Patrick White is a significant branch of that tree. Furphy and Lawson interpeted the Australia of the late nineteenth century. Patrick White interprets in his way an important part, but of course not the whole, of the Australia of the mid-twentieth century.

Just as the reality of Furphy and Lawson was their reality, so also the reality of Patrick White is part of our reality. It is this part of our reality, and not some idealised, dreamlike—one might say mystical—version, which has to be seen and understood before it can be transformed.

In literature concern about the inner life of man, far from being contrary to realism, is essential to true realism if we distinguish it from naturalism. Symbolism is also a legitimate tool of the realist provided it helps the imagery and does not detract from it. Take the ghost from "Hamlet" and consider it as a separate entity—it is absurd. But try to imagine the play "Hamlet" without the ghost! Or Balzac; take as just one example his Ursule Mirouet, with his clairvoyance and ghost walking—all absurd in themselves—but part of the tools of the essential realism of the story.

Patrick White has been described as a mystical writer. In "The Tree of Man" the premonition of Thelma at the concert rings true. But in the end part of "Voss" the treatment of telepathy is carried into a prolonged exchange between Voss in the centre of Australia and Laura in Sydney which in my opinion detracts from the literary merit of the novel, but which nevertheless does not entirely destroy that real merit.

There is reason to think it is not this element of mysticism which is to be found in most of Patrick White's work which some critics are concerned with when they describe him as a mystic. Some seem to consider his concern with the inner life of man to be mystical; if this view were accepted a large part of the world's great literature would have to be rejected as mystical.

Patrick White's work is sometimes painful for the reader because it forces one to face one's own inner life. It is not merely a question of whether some revealed segment of the inner life of Patrick White's characters can be found to apply to the reader, although such an application may no doubt be found in many cases. The significance of the work of Patrick White is that it has a compelling influence on the reader to face up to, and to think deeply of, his own inner life in relation to his surroundings. This is not always easy, but unless we bring ourselves to it we tend to float along on the surface of expediency, without ever questioning our own integrity.

In this sense personal integrity is not in any way separated from the integrity of principles, and it is in this way that Patrick White compels his readers to look into their own hearts. I mean looking, not merely as into a mirror, but in the way the surgeon's scalpel probes for and removes a tumor. This is the most difficult and painful kind of penetration of one's inner life, but it is also the most rewarding in growth and creativity.

In the character of Thelma ("The Tree of Man") we feel the sordidly philistine nature of concern for position and prestige, as well as the hollowness of such concern in relation to any real prestige. This kind of thing may be found in different forms in many walks of life.

There are of course people, used to reading literature, who will find Patrick White not exactly their "cup of tea". This is a matter of quite understandable literary taste. It is not however a criterion for literary judgment.

The symbolism of "Riders in the Chariot" has led critics to produce a varied number of explanatious of what the Chariot is, and who the Riders are. Most explanations take the religious clothing in which the subject is garbed at its face value: that the Chariot is a modern mystical version of the biblical Chariot of Ezekiel, and they interpret the riders as a special kind of elite—some call them White's version of an aristocrisy.

At the end of the book—after referring to Alf Dubbo's being "ready to refuse collaboration with dishonesty"—Patrick White goes on to say of his final artistic effort: ". . . here the Chariot was shyly offered. But its tentative nature became, if anything, its glory . . ."

I do not think either the figures of geometry, or the strictures of dogma, help us to understand the work of Patrick White. The cry about "prose poetry" is flung about—as an epithet, and the ultimate in damnation—but why those who have read the novels of Patrick White are expected to swallow this term, and the meaning given to it, is not very easy to comprehend.

Some critics become so obsessed and frustrated by the symbols that they fail to see the real essence of the matter—the essential realism—which is clearly there to see.

My view is that Patrick White's Chariot is compounded of human dignity, conscience, honor, and integrity, and his Riders are people who develop these qualities and preserve them no matter what the cost to themselves. Patrick White could well have taken as his text the wise words which Shakespeare inserted in the pompous advisory speech of Polonius to his son:

> This above all: to thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.

These human qualities are clothed by Patrick White in various religious forms; in the ancient Jewish religion in the case of Himmelfarb; Christianity in the case of Mrs. Godbold; a form of mystic naturism in the case of Miss Hare; artistic vision in the case of the half-caste Aboriginal Alf Dubbo.

Through his characters White searches for the sources of human qualities in a surrounding world of capitalist disintegration—not the capitalism of depression, but with all the gloss and tinsel of boom. Nowhere can he find these sources in the organised churches—certainly not in the Roman Catholic Church. In this sphere his greatest sympathy seems to lie with the ancient Jewish religion; but here also it is no more than a solace; not a source or solution to the problems he poses.

Always his "Riders", people of inner personal integrity, are set off against the philistine: Miss Hare contrasted to Mrs. Jolley and Mrs. Flack; Himmelfarb contrasted to Harry Rosetree; Mrs. Godbold contrasted to Mrs. Chalmers-Robinson; the half-caste Aboriginal Alf Dubbo to the Rev. Timothy Calderon and his sister Mrs. Emily Pask.

This work of Patrick White is a critique, not of capitalist society itself, but of what capitalist society does to the lives, and to the personalities, of ordinary people. White protests in vehement terms against the disintegration of human personality, and stands for human integrity, dignity, and conscience.

In his "Riders in the Chariot" Patrick White reveals a deep understanding and compassion for the Jewish people. It is not a simplified picture, but reveals the variations between Jews of differing strata in pre-war Germany. It is well known that in Germany, probably more than elsewhere, the prosperous Jews believed they had outlived discrimination. This is portrayed in Himmelfarb's father, Moshe, who goes so far along the illusory road as conversion to Roman Catholicism—finally to a death unmourned, in any genuine sense, by either Jew or Catholic.

Without the use of the term "Nazi" Patrick White evokes a gripping picture of the savage and horrible impact of nazism on the Jewish people in Germany, and an equally horrifying picture of the transportation of Jews to the gas chambers. It is noteworthy that Patrick White portrays two non-Jewish Germans who give succor and protection to Himmelfarb during the nazi pogroms, and lose their lives in the process. It is no less significant, in view of their traditional anti-semitism, that it is Polish peasants who are the saviors of Himmelfarb after the escape from the concentration camp.

In "The Tree of Man" and very much more so in his "Riders in the Chariot," Patrick White reveals a hatred of war, and its horrors for the ordinary people.

The crucifixion of Himmelfarb by a group of workers in a sweatshop on the outskirts of Sydney as portrayed by Patrick White holds a warning

for all progressive people. To deny the existence of widespread anti-semitism among Australian workers is to deny what is known of our history, and to blindfold ourselves against our present day reality.

While White sees this negative side of the Australian workers, his knowledge of the working class does not range very far, nor does it penetrate very deeply. His cry against anti-semitism is sincere and true to reality. That is why Patrick White, and not only Patrick White, needs to penetrate deeper into the reality to find the real truth, and what to do about it. It is well known in our history that it has been the advanced workers, guided by the Communist party, who have in practice led the struggle against anti-semitism and other forms of racialism.

Because his knowledge of Australian workers is limited (although this limited side is true to reality) the range of Patrick White's condemnation sweeps wider than the reality in fact calls for. It is in this field of penetrating reality that the sources for his further creative growth are to be found.

With Patrick White there are times when fascination with his medium carries him away, and he cannot resist playing the conjuror; then his words slip through his fingers, and clatter to the floor, like so many of the false teeth which frequently recur in his books. At such times it is as though we have become completely engrossed in a very moving film—then the projector breaks down—a low murmur passes through the audience; we shake our heads, look around at the dark walls, and then back at the darkened screen. The illusion is lost. After repairs have been made, and the film images again begin to appear on the screen, it is some time before we again become fully absorbed.

But for every time this happens there are a hundred other examples in the work of Patrick White where the image lights up the subject to us.

Patrick White understands the importance of the relationship between a man and woman. His work reveals the impact of today's society on this relationship, especially on women. But a rounded relationship between a man and a woman—a relationship in which both the spiritual and sensuous combine and fuse to attain fulfilment, so that the stature of both is raised, and the two are more than a multiple of each other—such a relationship is not found in his books.

It seems to me that after his "Riders in the Chariot" Patrick White may have reached a point along his creative road where there is a beckoning sidetrack—the signpost "Cynicism". It is to be hoped that, for the good of Australian literature, he will avoid this sterile sidetrack, and continue on to a still deeper revelation of our Australian reality.

[It may be of interest to readers to know that "The Tree of Man" has been, or is about to be, published in Prague, with an introduction by the Australian scholar Ian Milner, who is lecturing in that city.—Ed.]

M. E. JOSEPH

When "Joe" Joseph died on 8th May, 1962, at the age of 36, he was still the most cantankerous of men. All his life he tolerated his enemies and suffered the foolishness of chance acquaintances with equanimity, but for his friends he reserved his passions and often his rancor. Yet his only regrets in the last, tremendously courageous days of his life were that he had not done more to expose crimes against reason and scandals against humanity, and that he had not attacked sycophants and hypocrites with more vigor and imagination.

He never had the comforts of an admass mind. A clever child in a philistine London Jewish family, his mathematical and musical talents were affected when, largely as a result of negligence, he lost almost all his hearing. A second-rate public school tinged with anti-semitism taught him little, and his Cambridge course finished his formal education without arousing his intellectual powers. A social rebel, he joined the Communist Party, worked for the Daily Worker, took a dull public service job to enable him to develop his knowledge of economic statistics, then took a position as statistician for a tough London firm.

Joe's social and political life centred round every good cause with which London abounded in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with strong side interests in music, films, writing detective novels and girls. He found kindred spirits among Australasian exiles huddling round coke fires in London winters, and followed his friends back to Australia in 1954, riding his motor-bike on a solo overland trip enriched by acrimonious argument with the officials of two dozen countries.

In Melbourne Joe Joseph worked for a while on market research (which he guyed in a magnificent pseudo-serious paper on the marketing of waterproof sandwiches which he wrote for his friends), then as a bank statistician, and finally received an appointment to the staff of the University of New South Wales, where his work, some of which is now to be published, marked him as one of the most able of the younger men in his field. But more important to his friends was the stimulus of his "extra-curricular" life. There was not a brawl in the left-wing movement in the late 1950s in which he did not participate and to which he did not add. His film reviews in the Melbourne Guardian were perhaps the best series of articles that paper (to its embarrassment) ever published, and he wrote subsequently of film, with sensitivity and perception, for both Outlook ("Gerry Howard") and Overland ("Gerry Grant").

His marriage, his home and his daughter, together with a job he liked and at which he excelled, seemed to be mellowing Joe. He was maturing and coming to terms with life without sacrificing his integrity. Then he died.

HELEN HUGHES

BOOKS

Five Novels

In the time of Defoe novels were fictional narratives masquerading as factual chronicles. Today, the wheel has swung the full circle, and tales of fact appear in the guise of fiction.

A modern tale like Alan Marshall's "This Is The Grass" (Cheshire, 21/-), which continues his autobiography begun in "I Can Jump Puddles," owes more to the romanticised autobiographies of Sterne or Borrow than it does to the journals and memoirs of Boswell or Gibbon. Yet these authors are classed as novelists because they extended the factual framework of their tales into realms of the wildest improbability, whereas Marshall uses the technique of the novelist to invest his factual account with a reality which exceeds that of any mere chronicle.

Sterne, in striving for the truth of the spirit, abandons respect for the fact, but Marshall takes such care to present the facts that he cannot help but reveal the truth of spirit underlying them.

Yet the choice of such a medium leads to problems for both author and reviewer, of execution for the one, of definition for the other.

The problem of definition can be seen by comparing three extracts from Hume Dow's anthology, "World Unknown." Sir Keith Hancock's reminiscences of boyhood in Gippsland are strict autobiography, in which the events of childhood are recalled and discussed by the grown man until the reader can form his own impression, probably reasonably accurate, of the boy. The extract from Jack Lindsay's "Life Rarely Tells," on the other hand, recreates the actual experience of boyhood, making the incident and its problems immediate in a way which every novel should be, and no secondhand narrative can ever even try to be. Although factual, it has an imaginative reality which earns it the title of fiction. Then, from a still different vantage point, Gavin Casey, in "Day at Brown Lakes," is able to create the reality both of the act of remembering and of the time remembered, and so enlarge the significance of the incident by showing its truth in both tenses.

Although Alan Marshall never bothers to reminisce, he has sufficient comment—implicit and occasionally explicit—mixed with his creative recall, to convey something of the same sense as Casey, showing each episode both for its own sake and in relation to his present development. But if his work avoids both high seriousness and undue straining after meaning, it involves the reader in the fact and allows him to do his own thinking later, and so in every sense it can be regarded as a novel, whose truth of fact is secondary to its imaginative immediacy.

However, if we only see its excellence as a finished product, we run the danger of missing the nature of the craftsmanship which has gone into creating such a work from the raw material of undigested personal experience.

The nature of the author's achievement in this respect can be seen by comparing Braithwaite's book, "To Sir, With Love," where the author recreates his incidents and characters with such reality that we automatically assume the kind of development we have come to expect of the novel, only to be disappointed when the stern facts of his actual experience lead the story in quite another direction.

Thus, when the author arrives at his new school, he sketches the staff-room and its occupants so that we are aware of all the tension and potential conflicts underlying the surface appearances. But once he starts work, he is so absorbed by the struggle with his own class that he has no time to watch the development of his earlier theme, and we are surprised when later a teacher whom we first saw as vaguely hostile appears quite friendly. We do not question the truth of either appearance, but we wonder what has been left out in between.

No such faults of construction mar Marshall's work. As we read, he seems to be recalling his past without direction or purpose, yet we are held, as in Braithwaite's book, by the absorbing interest of the events he recounts, and, as we progress, we find that every incident, every person is woven into the twin themes of the development of his own character and the growth of his own understanding of the world.

So we not only meet Shep and Gunner, Flo Bronson, Arthur and Tiny, the nervous folk of the suburban boarding house and the narrowed creatures of the office, or the flotsam and jetsam of Melbourne by night, but we also become aware of the forces, individual and social, which have shaped them and which are shaping the young Alan.

Marshall must be one of the best stylists writing in Australia today. His prose runs on so smoothly that we are aware only of the story he tells, but despite this unobtrusive surface it is as far removed from the casual style of the mere raconteur as it is from the impersonal coldness of the production line writer or the mannered idiosyncracy of the deliberate man of letters. If we test it by reading aloud, we will discover a perfection of rhythm and simplicity which reflects the alertness and the humanity of its author's personality. I do not know whether a close analysis would reveal an occasional lapse, although I doubt it, but at first reading at least we are too deeply absorbed to be conscious of anything but its excellence, if we stop to notice it at all.

As is inevitable with any sequel, we find as we read that we are comparing this book with its predecessor. Yet such a comparison is meaningless, for the books are as different as childhood and adolescence, and as similar as the life of one man must make them. Suffice it to say that Marshall has set himself a more difficult task in this work, for he has neither the innate charm of boyhood nor the clear challenge of illness to shape his work, but must concentrate on the inner response of a man to his environment, and that in meeting this challenge he has written a book which goes beyond the immediate appeal of its variety of circumstance and takes us inside the life of its subject, who is only incidentally its author.

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From fact interpreted with the imagination of fiction we turn to the wildest fantasy of fiction narrated with the conviction of fact. Geoff Taylor's "Dreamboat" (Davies, 20/-) is a hair-raising romp through the advertising, publicity and newspaper worlds of Melbourne, in the company of a superbly nonchalant Italian Duke and his Nordic Duchessa, who is equipped with every attribute of body and mind needed for success in the realms of business and society.

Until a couple of years ago social satire seemed to be the weak point of Australian writing, but now Geoff Taylor is able to take his place alongside such authors as Sutton Woodcock, Robert Burns and David Forrest, who have already cut swathes through wide tracts of the urban jungle. Taylor's skill in conducting us through high places and low is undoubted, but possibly he should mix a little more weed-killer with his ink if he seriously hopes to inhibit the more dangerous growths of the Brazil Room and its environs.

*

If Taylor can laugh at the excesses of modern society, Ron Tullipan certainly cannot. He is deadly serious about his loves and hates, and his Mary Gilmore Award winner, "March Into Morning" (Australasian Book Society, 22/6), is a solemn account of its hero's progress from the slave labor of the farmed-out orphan to an acceptance of his role as a member of society. Arthur Chapman is a natural rebel, but it takes the experiences of depression, war, flood and personal tragedy to teach him that the rebel only makes sense as a member of a group. The solitary outcast is always an outsider, but once he learns to give of himself to others, and to admit them to his own life, he has a chance of destroying the things he fights without destroying himself in the process.

Ron Tullipan's conception is sound, but he fails to realise it in the incidents of his story, and so is forced to put it into the mouths of others in spasmodic episodes of preaching. The novel is cluttered with action, and the sum total of the action will explain the character, but we do not feel this as we read. An occasional incident, such as the wartime love idyll on the farm, is fully realised, but then we are swept away into another torrent of journeying and adventure before we again see the people involved. A man like Dixon emerges briefly from the story, is about to develop into a character, and then falls away into a collection of cliches, until he emerges briefly again as a symbol of all that is good in the ideal of mateship. Ron Tullipan has a good idea, but he will not give himself the chance to get at it.

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Donald McLean is another author with a message, but if Tullipan is too concerned with events, McLean is almost overwhelmed by them. Set mainly in Sydney at the time of the pushes, his new novel, "The World Upside Down" (Heinemann, 26/-), has everything, including rape, murder, brawling and seduction, an Aboriginal killing and a police massacre, a country race meeting with a city ring-in, Bible reading, adultery, love and marriage. The reader finds himself constantly thumbing back to find out just who fits in where. Just in case he should miss the moral point, the book is equipped with preface, author's note, and Biblical quotation to guide him. It may be significant that, although evangelical religion is mildly satirised, the children of the Bible readers all finish up happily at the end, or this may only be because McLean is really just too kindly to allow these particular families, all nice people, to suffer too much.

Despite the alarming succession of incidents, there is no development of character and little exploration of motive. McLean's concern with the vivid incident leaves too little time for the steady growth of personality, and although he sketches in the family background of the members of the pushes sufficiently to account for the general pattern of behavior of each, we are not given the time to know any of them individually. We are told of Walter O'Malley's disgust at finding that mother is a moll, but it has no effect apart from persuading him to seek similar adventures for himself. Later, when he is witness to a police shooting, we again are told of his disgust, but although this episode and the tale he has just heard of his mother's past may explain his change of heart, we do not share in the change.

In the same way, love brings Tiny to heel, Danny turns out too solid and upright, as well as a born bushman, and Flo remains perfect throughout, with just an occasional spark of fire to highlight her worth. None of these characters is unbelievable, but the author has not been able to bring them to life so that they stand in their own right, and not just as figures from the case-histories of the past.

Yet it would be wrong to condemn the book entirely. Despite the thinness of the characters, and the hectic strain of much of the narrative style, McLean has a talent for bringing events vividly before us, so that we share his disgust at massacre of the Aboriginal, or at the judicial murder with which the book concludes. He unashamedly takes sides, but the story justifies his attitudes, and at this level it is wholly enjoyable and wholly just. Yet we might just wonder whether our anger, as distinct from the author's, is not rather too easily roused, or whether, despite the difference of its objects, it is not rather too similar to that of the "Defender," the Sunday newspaper with the gutter content and the lofty moral tone, of the judge, or of the one fully-realised character in the book, Mr. Ebenezer Fenton, juryman, believer, and, by the end, narrow-minded pervert and fanatic.

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Now we come to the production-line work. The Golden Mile of Kalgoorlie is the ideal setting for love and hate, passion and violence, the warmth of human emotions beneath the torrid blaze of the Australian sun, with the romance of gold to wrap around the parcel.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for even a serious writer to pierce this formidable packaging to the truth beneath, and, despite some realistic details of work and play in the gold-capital, Stuart Gore gives us nothing more than another novel for the circulating library in his "Down the Golden Mile" (Heinemann, 22/6).

The story moves quickly and credibly, and the characters behave naturally. The English migrants, Dennis and Joyce Waring, convince us that their reactions to Australia are genuine, and even Dutch George's broken English amuses the reader through the vigor of the character behind it, and not just because of its irregular idiom. Conti, the villain, is a stock character, but the character of Young Conlon, his dupe, is developed believably, if a trifle abruptly. But at no time does the writer go behind the surface of either personal or social life to give us any significant insight.

JOHN McLAREN

Wilkes and Liberty

Anyone who has ever read history books, by choice or by force, must remember the story of John Wilkes and how it enlivened the complications and dull passages of the politics of the reign of George III. He challenged King, Lords and Commons, roused the London crowds under the banner of "Wilkes and Liberty," and, although expelled from Parliament, triumphed by becoming Lord Mayor of London. His story has been written many times, but in "Wilkes and Liberty" (O.U.P., 54/6) Dr. George Rude of Adelaide University pushes the hero into the background and attends to those who assisted in these audacious exploits. Petitioners and electors, agitators, demonstrators and rioters are his subject and he gives his book the appropriate sub-title of "a social study of 1763 to 1776".

Wilkes' stage was London and the election hustings of nearby Middlesex; it was in these places that he enjoyed his great successes and found his most responsive audiences. The London and Middlesex supporters of Wilkes are studied by Dr. Rude in differing roles, each coming into prominence at various phases of his career. First there were the crowds, the rioters and mass demonstrators whom contemporaries and historians have labelled, contemptuously or carelessly, "the mob". Eighteenth century crowds are Dr. Rude's special interest, and here, as in his study of the French Revolution, he is concerned with their composition, and the impulses and motives under which they gathered and acted.

Generally, he shows, the London crowds were composed of the relatively poor, most of them probably wage earners; but they included men of defined occupations who sometimes possessed independent status, such as coal-heavers and chairmen. Then again, there were the "electors of Middlesex", many of whom voted for Wilkes three times in 1768-69, despite or perhaps sometimes because of the determination of the House of Commons that he should not take his place in the House. Nominally 40/- freeholders, the 3,500-odd Middlesex voters represented a wide range of property owners. from the greater landed proprietors to the poor and humble. With great care and ingenious use of sources, Dr. Rude shows that Wilkes' support was greatest among the smaller freeholders, many of whom were Londoners. But Wilkes had numerous and influential friends in the City too, not as a rule among the magnates, but rather among the lesser merchants and traders whose suffrage made him first an alderman and later Lord Mayor. Lastly, Wilkes was occasionally assisted by aristocrats and gentlemen who were prepared to put their names to petitions against the government or who sometimes spoke for the Wilkes' cause in Parliament.

This examination of the Wilkites is both original and important. Not only does it delineate carefully the composition of the movement, it suggests that an analysis of society in the later eighteenth century in terms of the conventional categories of classes is far too rough and ready to apply to events of such complexity. Here there were all kinds of subtle distinctions of status which were socially and politically significant. We may perhaps feel less satisfied with the discussion of the motives of these old and new participants in politics. The economic distress of the poor does not wholly explain their activity and enthusiasm; the lesser merchants of the City were traditionally hostile to the Court of Aldermen and the more opulent citizens, though Wilkes gave them an opportunity to display their old antipathy with new vigor. Country gentlemen and opposition politicians were prepared to use the situation in order to embarrass a government unpopular on many grounds. But there is no simple explanation of it all, and despite those we are offered here the problem still remains. Perhaps we shall never quite understand the causes of those distant discontents.

J. MAIN

The Cockney and the Crocodile

Anyone who read Caroline Guy's "The Cockney and the Crocodile" (Faber, 31/-)—and what a repulsive title it is—is likely to be haunted by the idea that other people may not read it. What can you do to convince them that it is an important book? An old bushman who borrowed it said that he had never read any book—and he is a great reader—which gave him a better picture of the peoples of New Guinea, their differences, the problems of that huge island. And yet Caroline Guy's descriptions of her travels in New Guinea are only a small portion of the whole. Her pictures of Northern Australia are just as vivid, honest and observant. The book is so quotable, so diverse, so human that all you can do is assure the reader that it is immensely readable.

On the surface it has irritating faults. It looks at first as though it is going to be a verbose personal account of a lady doctor's trials wading through the black mud, getting dusty and thirsty, finding the gear is lost, but this soon settles into insignificance like the dustcloud raised by the passing of some heavy-powered transport. For this is an important book. Caroline Guy is not just a medical tourist. She is writing of a survey made to determine the incidence of a serious eye-disease causing blindness among Aboriginals and other primitive tribesmen in Australian territories.

Trachoma, whose existence in Australia was officially denied before the facts began to come in and Caroline Guy identified too many cases, is only noticeable in its early stage as small yellow spots on the inside of the eyelid. Later the virus spreads and the victim goes blind. Of Wyndham native camp she gives a characteristic swift sketch: "By some of the tumbledown sheds of homes stood cars, some gloriously new, some tin Lizzies of the worst. Seventeen per cent. of the half-caste population and 28 per cent. of the full bloods were infected. Two people were blind with trachoma."

When she added up her statistics at the very beginning of the trek: "We had examined 522 persons and had found twelve persons blind from trachoma, a horrifying figure for us, used to a blind average of 1 per 10,000 in England." But the figures varied in other places and the professor of opthalmic surgery, who is Caroline Gye, was deeply interested to find out why. Her quest had all the interest of a detective story.

The author has a wide tolerance. In one of the islands, bored with the official party, she strolled out on the verandah to find the house-girls chewing "pan", the betel-nut and lime mixture used in India where Caroline Gye had learnt it was "the best digestive mixture ever invented and indeed the British Pharmocopoeia has borrowed largely from it." So she "snuggled down among the crew" and held out her hand. "The betel nuts were fresh and juicy, just plucked from the delicate graceful palms beside the house." But the doctor's escorts were slightly shocked when they came to retrieve her.

One would like to know something of the treatment campaign that no doubt must have followed

this astonishing discovery of the prevalence of trachoma. Its eradication will make a great story. In the meantime anyone who does not find "The Cockney and the Crocodile" fascinating reading is just not interested in anything.

KYLIE TENNANT

Quizzing Glass

Here, in "A Bachelor's Children" (Angus & Robertson, 22/6) are thirty short stories by that "sport" of the Australian literary world, Hal Porter—a writer who, in local critical circles, arouses the equivalent reaction of "We don't want no foreigners here."

"But is he telling us anything about ourselves?" is the protest. Yes: if your ancestor was an English pioneer woman. If you have drunk with Maltese sailors. Known a sex-crazed old maid. Seen a half-caste struggling for a white man's status. Loved with the pure idealism women don't want. Remembered the event that ended your childhood. Been a schoolmaster harassed by a sadistic schoolboy. Loved a mother who never kissed you. Or dreamed of murdering someone who tortured you. These are **some** of the things Hal Porter tells you about in his distinctive amalgam of atmosphere and style.

Hal Porter is an Australian, and the people he writes of are, for the most part, the middle-class Australians of the country-town and city. Yet his manner is not the "husky" manner of the traditional Australian writer. In fact, the effect is sometimes that of an elegant eye gazing through a quizzing-glass which sometimes frosts over so that the writer seems to be gazing inward at his own memories.

For a long time the Australian short story has been modelled upon "the Method" of the "new theatre". Naturalistic mumbling has been the order of the day, delivered with the certitude that it is Real Life. It is very often the flat surface of a cartoon, draft for an artist to fill in. Hal Porter has felt that there were already sufficient writers engaged on charting Australian coasts, rivers and deserts; sufficient botanists cataloguing flora; sufficient tourists-with-cameras "snapping" all over the place; sufficient sociologists and anthropologists busy with the Aboriginal and the half-caste.

Hal Porter is one of the drops in Australia's ocean of ten million individualists telling, not of the sea itself, but what it feels like to be such a drop. The drop dares to assert its individuality. He has shinned up the gum-tree in search of a less-hackneyed focus. It isn't a sweeping focus—it has the cramp of the village and the claustrophobia of the city about it—but it has a rare sensibility, an unmistakable identity.

Hal Porter's manipulation of detail is perhaps the most striking aspect of his stories. He stamps **identity** upon every object. No assembly-line clock ticks upon one of his frequently Edwardian mantel-pieces, but a Vulliamy clock. He is, in fact, obsessed with decor to the point of fetishism. Enter any of his "interiors", and it begins to crowd with precisely-defined objects. And it is strangely familiar to those of us over 35. Vague memories arise of the heavy, bobbled tablecloth, "The Stag At Bay", the orange-colored Red Indian girl with the big moon behind her, silken, fringed electric-light shades, polished linoleum, the blacked grate. It is the interior of the 1920s. Time and place are set firm in remarkably individualised detail. It is the evocation of a man almost dying of nostalgia.

This is not a tactile or a sensuous world rendered through touch and smell. Eye-ear-and-memory are the triumvirate which rule Hal Porter's creative kingdom. And the ear produces dialogue that is more sparkling, wicked and mocking than any since Evelyn Waugh.

Shear away the rich fleece of his style and what remains? A vulpine satirist.

A satirist, it is said, is one who loves and hates at the same time. Mr. Porter is a satirist, but peculiarly more. All his love is given to language, and he dresses his laceratingly-observed characters in a winding-sheet of language of rare and precious texture. He is icily rapt as he searches for and finds the precise image. All is preserved with the arsenic of his bitter wit.

No one writing in Australia has the same amalgam of style, searing percipience and shoot-to-kill characterisation.

Asperity of tone is the flaw. Frequently throughout his work there sounds a muted, passionless jeremiad. He seems to regard passion as naive—or perhaps, merely untidy—yet it is when passion breaks its leg-rope that Hal Porter most spectacularly succeeds. When feeling breaks away from his tense grip, as it does in "Everleigh's Accent", in "Pioneer Woman", in "At Aunt Sophie's", there is nothing he lacks.

Hal Porter has put elegant, hand-made shoes on the dusty thonged feet of the Australian short story. They are tight, new shoes, and they pinch. We will get used to them.

THELMA FORSHAW

At the Cross

Autobiographical writing has always seemed to me to be a trap. The temptation to enliven the account of one's life by exaggeration, borrowing, or even straight fiction must be nearly irresistible unless the writer is so famous that even his dullest doings can be made interesting; and even then the surface and technique of narrative have to reach fairly high levels to overcome the essentially pedestrian subject matter.

Jon Rose, whose book "At the Cross" (Deutsch, 18/-) is an account of his youth in King's Cross during the war years, has at least the advantage of a lively background; but it is questionable whether he has managed to place his story and comment firmly enough within it to make it more than a superficial picture of himself.

After his arrival from Melbourne he spent most of his time with a prostitute named Bella, who introduced him to the night-clubs and parties whose descriptions make up the best part of the book. He worked unsuccessfully as a singer, unwittingly as a drug-pedler, unhappily in an antique shop and conventionally in a grocery, from which he was arrested for stealing (apparently quite justly). His Cross friends wangled his release from reform school and got him an exemption from military service; but on his return to Melbourne he found that it was only valid in New South Wales, and the book ends on his unwilling entry into the army.

But within this framework Mr. Rose is surprisingly reticent about himself. The almost unbelievable things he saw are reported in a slick, Salinger-like manner, with an eye for detail and an ear for dialogue. But most of what he saw involved him only as a spectator, and even by the end of the book I felt that I knew very little about him, except that I would have hated him if I'd met him.

He was only sixteen when most of his story occurred, so his impressions were strong and deep, but his comments fairly shallow. He feels that his acquaintances (prostitutes, pimps, drug-pedlars, homosexuals and the like) were all at bottom

wonderful people, and that the rest of Sydney hated them only because they were misunderstood. This may be partly true; but the disregard for everyone else's welfare and property shown by the Cross group during the war certainly had a lot more to do with it. It is easy to feel vicarious thrills and even open envy at the frantic gaiety of which Mr. Rose was part. It is much harder to join him in sympathising with its motives. (Incidentally, I cannot understand why he has presented such an unflattering picture of himself. Have his views really changed so little in twenty years?)

In spite of (or perhaps because of) his attitude, Mr. Rose makes an excellent chronicler. His book, like the Cross itself, sways uneasily between hysteria and maudlinity. In creating atmosphere, Mr. Rose is first rate; and there is an engaging naivete in the way he describes the appalling events which happened around him that helps a lot of rather pretentious writing to fall on its feet. But when he attempts to justify these events the atmosphere fails, and the naivete becomes self-pitying and irritating.

On his own admission, Jon Rose worked night and day to be accepted as part of the Cross; and he protests so vehemently that, in spite of all the setbacks, he had a wonderful time, that one becomes suspicious. Perhaps, after all, his unwilling induction into the army came as something of a relief.

MUNGO MacCALLUM

Lawson's Later Life

Colin Roderick's booklet "The Later Life of Henry Lawson" (Wentworth Press, 7/6) must have been more difficult to write than his earlier "Henry Lawson's Formative Years". While the earlier book gives a picture of the young Lawson as the voice of his generation, as the spokesman for the Republicanism and Socialism and Australianism of the 1880s and 1890s, the later book is just as valuable in its picture of the conflicts that plagued and tortured the older Lawson in a period of both psychological and political complexity. Only a writer imbued with both humility and honesty (and warmed also by the glow of humanity) could have succeeded, as Dr. Roderick does, in showing the tragedy of Lawson without ever losing sight of the dignity and love within.

"The Later Life of Henry Lawson" describes the poet's manic-depressive tendencies in relation to the circumstances that helped give rise to them. We see Lawson as Sister McCallum saw him early in 1910 when he had been imprisoned for debt: "I was shocked to see how terribly ill and unhappy he looked: his wonderful eyes seemed to mirror the suffering and despair of all caged creatures and all the frightened children in the world."

The First World War re-awakened much of the enthusiasm that had been lying dormant in Lawson. His sentiments towards the war, as Dr. Roderick points out, "were never simple, but rather were as complex as the man himself."

War itself, of course, is complex. In the one war there can be aspects of bravery, self-sacrifice and progress mixed with barbarity, oppression and profiteering. Dr. Roderick gives enough extracts from Lawson to indicate that his poems reflected all these elements. If in January 1916 he was advocating conscription, at other times he was asking who was bearing the brunt of the war, and pointing out that it was certainly not the millionaire.

The booklet describes Lawson's relapse of September 1915, his happy years at Leeton from January 1916 to November 1917, the publication of his "Selected Poems" in 1918. This latter story would make a book in itself; the key paragraph is the following:

> The unhappy day came when he (George Robertson, publisher) called in David McKee Wright, literary editor of the Bulletin and grand panjandrum of practising literary critics. Wright proceeded to "improve" the poems, to toss out whole stanzas, re-write others, transpose lines, alter rhymes, and to father on Lawson a poetic diction that never belonged to him. The result is that the poems of Lawson as we now have them are only partly his work . . .

Dr. Roderick adds that it is possible today to restore Lawson's text; this is something for us all to look forward to!

LEN FOX

The Matriarch

An Irish Catholic woman, composed in part of Gorky, the two Marys and with a strong dash of Oedipus Rex, would seem on the face of it to be an impossible creation, but when you think about it, these ingredients add up to the noble, fascinating and somewhat frightening figure of the matriarch.

She strides through our culture, stern yet forgiving, unemotional yet deeply loving, tigerishly concerned about her own family, yet with a concern that spreads over to all who need care. Once beautiful, now lined with toil, with her will she holds the family together because Father is either unemployed or a drunkard, or both, or because he is dead or has deserted her and her children.

She is at her most impressive (and is most often written about) when she is from the working class or a peasant, perhaps because only here has she the environment in which all her qualities of strength and self-sacrifice are most needed. She is at once of her class but outside it. She has that extra spark which makes her a matriarch instead of one of the slovenly, easy-going slatterns who have given up the struggle and find solace in the gin or the flicks, and she has that mixture of fatalism and optimism which keeps her battling when other—lesser?—women would have given it away. Her fascination for non-working class readers is great and continuing; for non-working class mothers of the left-wing tradition, irresistible. Gorky's "Mother" is not only studied as the pattern for socialist-realist novels, but she is herself the woman we would all like to be, feel we should be, and fear we aren't.

No matter how often we read about her struggles, whether in Revolutionary Russia, in the slums of Northern England, in the dust-bowl of the U.S.A. or the outback of Australia, they never pall, having the enduring qualities of a fairy story or a ballad—and for the same reasons—the mixture of realism, romance and wish-fulfilment.

Paul Smith's variation on the theme of matriarchs, "The Countrywoman" (Heinemann, 22/6), is written with the hand of love. Here she is an Irishwoman, brought from the blue skies and clear air of Wicklow, as the pregnant bride of a handsome and feckless husband, to the incredibly dismal poverty of Kelly's Lane, Dublin. Here, with her beautiful blue eyes, reserved manner and eccentric cleanliness, she immediately stands apart from the other women of the tenement, variously blowsy, dirty, half-mad, foul-mouthed and earthy, and is always known as "the Countrywoman". The ordinary troubles of poverty-stricken working class life are accentuated for her because the husband turns out to be a maniac of quite devilish

brutality, the Church counsels submission and she can receive no comfort from its ministers, and she is involved, for motherly reasons, in the Republican agitation of post-first-world-war Ireland.

She would lose my affection (though I wouldn't blame her) were she a tight-lipped moralist, hugging her sorrows to her tired breast until they became a vinegary sort of pleasure, but she retains a lust for life which is almost unbelievable. She gives motherly strength and warmth to the barren—and therefore pitiable, educated, English wife of her Republican brother-in-law, without that suspicious condescension which the less sensitive, though equally motherly, Mesdames Clattery and Kinsella feel towards barren women. For her, as for them, a new baby may have been conceived without love, often as the result of married rape, but it is still something to be proud of; the female equivalent of the male cry: "I'm as good as ever I was!" As it grows into a child it becomes, with her other children, the cause of her existence and the source of all her happiness and sorrow.

Paul Smith catches and conveys the language and life of the Dublin tenement with realism and affection and, although the Countrywoman's successive disasters may give rise to doubt that so many horrors could befall one woman in a short life, and although one wonders angrily why someone—law, church, friend, son—could not have stood up to the brutality of Pat Baines, the novel is a moving documentary of the life of an Irish mother.

AMIRAH TURNER

Australians on Tape

"On Lips of Living Men" (30/-) is a volume of colloquies about eminent Australians published by a house with a record for originality in Australiana, the Lansdowne Press. It reprints discussions of Melba, Monash, Curtin, Hughes, Meldrum and the winemaker Maurice O'Shea from radio sessions broadcast by the A.B.C. and composed from tapes of reminiscing talks elicited from people who knew them by John Thompson, who has done a fine job. Thompson got talk from people of whom some were at first uncommunicative, later too communicative, and altogether took some expert handling; he cut and arranged tapes to produce a coherent broadcast; and has edited the broadcasts with informative, elegant yet self-effacing introductory material.

Lansdowne has had the wisdom to get each colloquy (can one use the word for spoken pieces which, though heard as dialogue, were spoken in monologue?) illustrated with a black-and-white portrait by an artist whose name deserves, one would have thought, to be on the title-page and dust-wrapper, Noel Counihan. Half-way between portraiture and caricature, each drawing reflects Counihan's insight.

The talk is good. This reviewer is one for whom anything about Melba is interesting, but I don't think I am being the bore who expects his enthusiasms to be shared by everybody else when I state that what Thompson's talkers have to say should communicate interest and pride in Melba to readers who never heard even a Melba disc. On each of the topic people, the gossip is lively and genuine; the gossipers were their contemporaries, their friends; they keep their eye on the object. Through them, Thompson has produced a new type of documentary of great charm, and of historical value.

Melba (here I go again) appears as the old tiger she was—truthless in self-defence, powerful in defence of those—and they were countless—whom she helped. Thompson produces here musical people who can say such things as Ruth Ladd's "Of course, Melba herself was a magnificent pianist before she was a singer at all. And she was a magnificent violinist and was an organist, too." It takes an Australian, like Peter Dawson here, to note that "she was on the snobbish side too, sometimes." It takes an Australian like the Melba whom Laurie Kennedy recalls, though, to nudge—literally, with her plump elbow, to prod—the inviolable Queen Mary in the royal ribs.

And it takes an Australian like Melba to keep —through all that career abroad, all that hobnobbing, all that skill in foreign languages (which Lindley Evans here describes as "impeccable")—so much of her Australian accent. Many in her position would have been glad—many with her oral skills would have been prompt—to get rid of it as soon as possible. One comes near it, though, in the farewell Covent Garden speech of 1926, reproduced on tape at the Melba Exhibition in the Victorian National Gallery last September. In his thinly disguised biography of Melba, I recall, that precious if not priceless young Englishman Beverley Nichols called it, of course, "faintly plebeian," which shows his provinciability. Perhaps it is not provincial on our part, though, to be proud that Melba kept her accent.

At moments when high appointments in our intellectual life go, for no apparent good reason, to people from overseas, it is cheering to recall Melba and Monash. Monash was educated in law, experienced and eminent in engineering; but Rabbi Danglow recalls Monash's love of philosophy, and E. L. Simonson, former aide-de-camp, recalls Monash's addition to music and literature, his knowledge of disciplines as remote from engineering as medicine and astronomy, his love of painting and photographing, gardening and woodworking.

Curtin appears here chiefly as the just man, righteous and humane. I am the more grateful to Massey Stanley for reminding us of the rumor that Curtin had once been an alcoholic, and denying it. Hughes appears as the battler and the Little Digger, the cad and the card. O'Shea should have been a mediaeval Cistercian monk, says Cyril Pearl; but he wasn't a bigot, even about wine, says Leo Butler. Lionel Lindsay recalls Meldrum as a pink youth; W. G. Cook recalls him as an intellectual gladiator; William Frazer, as a man who could be taken for a brief ride; Arnold Shore, as a Heifetz with the brush.

It is all first class gossip—round the point. But here and there the reader may need some important point. On Melba's actual voice, I wish there had been somebody to point out that its unique excellence may be judged today from the fact that, whereas other great voices have been described in the language of reason and reality, Melba's seems to have been describable only in hyperbole, as if out of this world. On Monash, I wish somebody had told us just how many casualties the Aussies sustained at Hamel (Billy Hughes says here that he planned for no more than 300). On Billy Hughes, what about the £25,000—or was it £50,000? How good was O'Shea's Mount Pleasant wine? And on Meldrum we needed somebody—like, say, his pupil, the philosopher Norman Porter—to assure the ignorant of his importance in Australian art.

IAN MAIR

Published by S. Murray-Smith, Mount Eliza, Victoria; and printed by "Richmond Chronicle," Shakespeare Street, Richmond, E.1, Vic.

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