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Ian Mudie

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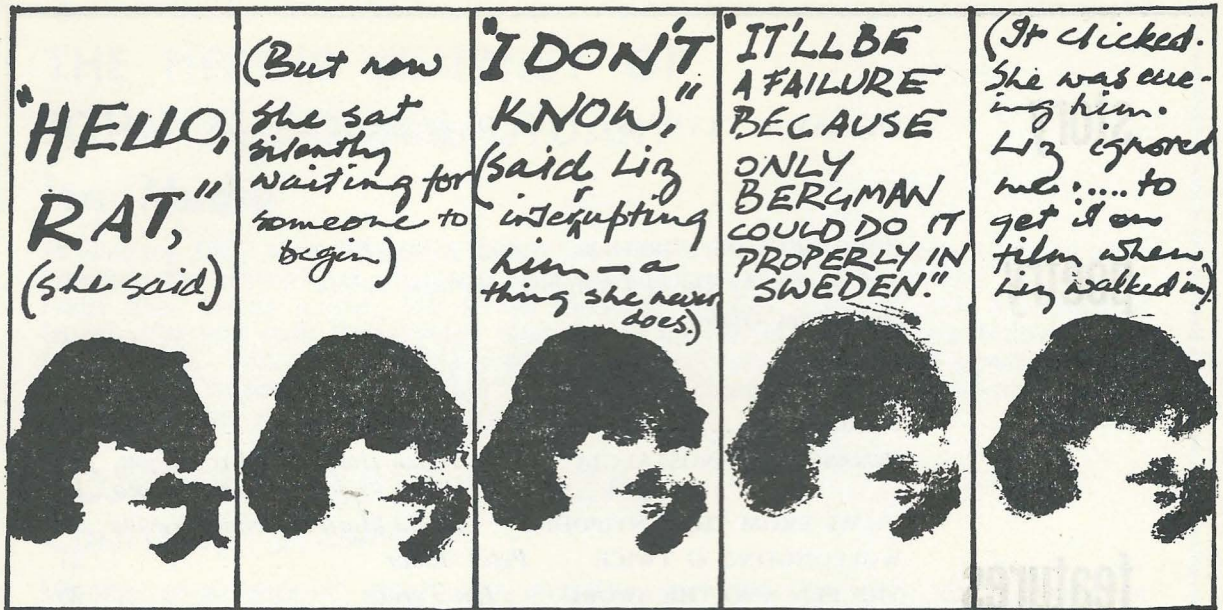
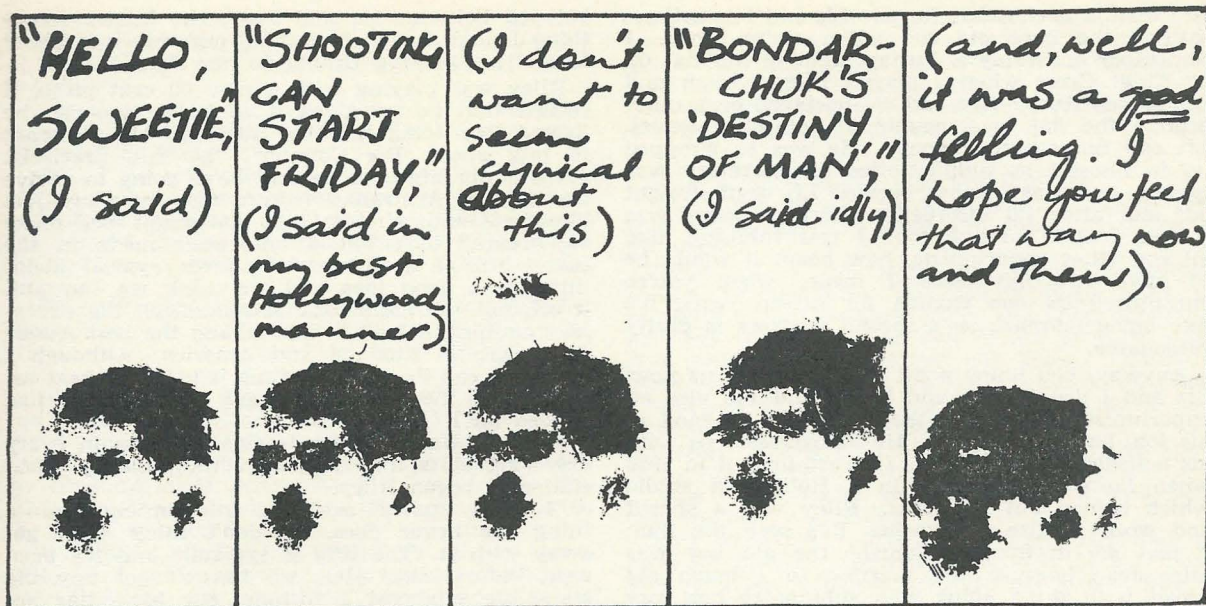


Illustration by Peter Dickie

Don Diespecker

# BIG DAY AT OLYMPUS

I COULD see Liz was mad as hell. We met at the door of what we rather grandly call the conference room at Olympus Films. I'd just got back from Melbourne and wanted to be on time for the Monday morning session—I'd been thinking and writing on the 'plane and was sure I had the day all figured out. And then I met Liz. It was five past nine; we were both rushing.



Dickie '68.

"Hello, sweetie," I said. I hadn't seen her for three days, which is a very long time to be parted from a bird like Liz.

"Hello, rat," she said, pausing just long enough to give me a look that froze me in my tracks. She brushed past me leaving crackles of electricity in the air. I quickly got the plot. It hadn't dawned on me until then. In I went, my spirits down to zero, my apprehension going up like a rocket.

"Ah, you're both here," said Riley. "We couldn't start without you. All right in Melbourne?"

"We can send the boys down on Wednesday—shooting can start Friday," I said in my best Hollywood manner. I looked for the best chair and then tried to hide in it. Young Jean, the secretary-script-girl-budding-actress, and the bird that old Liz had caught me comforting last Friday, was sitting near a window slightly behind me and on my right. Riley, who is a sardonic sort of bastard for a manager-producer-great-artist, sat benevolently opposite me with his feet on the coffee table. (At Olympus we have no conference table—only settees and club chairs and marble coffee tables. It's the comfortable way of doing things in the trade.)

I'd better tell you about Liz before we go any further. No, I'll start with me; you'll understand it more easily. I'm Harry the writer—sometime boy wonder of the Aussie cinema—workaday director. I got into films when I was a kid and was starting to learn about editing when the war came. My years in the air force were hair-raising and costly in terms of mess bills and damage to the central nervous system from all kinds of excess. Then I got back into films. And met Liz. No one knows how old she is. No one knows much about her, and I've been in love with her for years. She's marvellous. To me she's an earth mother, a goddess—if you know the type. (Did I call her a bird? I should have said broad; she is undoubtedly a broad rather than a bird. I call almost everyone a bird. This is very dicey, in mateship circles. I was once told: "Only a sheila's a bird, mate," by a virility-conscious cameraman.) She's

blonde, blue-eyed, with enough knowledge and capability and common sense for any two men I know. I think she's terrific. She takes my scripts and scenarios—they take me days or weeks to write—locks herself in an office and writes a complete camera script with all the shots, everything, in six or seven hours. There's no one like her. She does this queer, artistic job and makes it look easy. I've seen some of the male temperamental great artist types knock their brains out on camera scripting. It's not an easy job, and some of the pretentious nits who give it a go spend most of their time trying to justify their mediocre artistic vision. With Liz it always comes out right. She can interpret any story, so that it comes to life on film. That's why Olympus is Olympus.

Without Liz we'd be like any other half-baked "film company" in Australia: churning out documentaries, screen ads and tiresome prestige pieces for companies that should know better. Liz says camera scripting is dead easy because there's nothing new under the sun and no one in the Australian cinema(!) who's ever done anything original. She says much the same thing about Aussie writing in general, which I think is a bit steep. Anyway, I get all my ideas from watching old movies. I was brought up on them. You see, I'm crazy about Liz. She caught me massaging Jean's arm on Friday. I was only trying to stop the kid crying. There's nothing so disarming as a young bird in tears, and she was alone in the office when I sailed in. There she was splashing tears all over the headed notepaper. So naturally I did what I could. There are some bods who will take advantage of young birds in these situations; I'm one of them.

Old Liz bounced in, took one look, and switched on her megawatt death-ray look which incinerates right through to the backbone. She said nothing; no one did—there wasn't time, because just then Orson Welles Riley made an entrance and asked the room about some missing papers. (It's funny the way he enters left or right like some old ham:

he's always **performing** for us—Liz and I sometimes satirize the poor old sod when we're alone. I remember one rainy Saturday night in her flat up at Kings Cross when I played Riley—Adam and Liz played Riley—Eve and we upstaged each other around the flat in a couple of poinsettia leaves. Liz can impersonate anyone.) He was so wrapped up in himself he didn't notice his secretary was crying—as far as I know, because Liz went straight out and after I'd discreetly returned Jean's arm to her I shot through too. I was thinking, like all you other opportunists, how beautiful it would be to have **two** mistresses—I mean, when you're enraptured by one woman for fifteen years, it's like being married, so a second mistress is pretty reasonable.

Anyway, you know a bit about each of us now. Liz and I are friends and lovers and I'm also an opportunist. No one is perfect. Riley is good at his job, but a bit simple. He embarrasses us with his polished sophistication. (He acquired it in 1938 when he worked briefly in a Hollywood studio which turned out Westerns. Riley was a sheriff and wore a false moustache. I've seen the film; it had me in fits.) I thought the old boy was after Jean because he's married to a tough old broad with three chins who sublimates her way through bridge parties and pottery classes at the Tech. If Riley doesn't deviate solely through living with this old trout his claim to being a red-blooded digger like you and me must surely be in doubt. Know what I mean?

This Jean: I don't know much about her. She's the sort of bright-eyed kid who gets jobs at film companies and studios and dates only the blokes who are allegedly productive, creative or intellectual, those of us who wear white shirts. She's got somewhere though. There's a growing suspicion that she might one day be able to act. The danger is that someone will use her in one of those intelligence-insulting ads where healthy young women get locked out of apartments or smoke brilliantly at one of our more celebrated sports exhibitions. Sex is at the bottom of everything, you know.

\*

Where was I now—oh yes, there we were in conference. I could see it was about to start because Riley did his Humphrey Bogart piece: the business falls somewhere between the early Philip Marlowe portrayals and the later D.A.—ruthless cop characterisations. Riley takes a long pull at his cigarette (held between thumb and index finger) and says to the 'phone: "Mary, I don't wanna be disturbed ya unerstand?" and when he's finished he fixes us all with a steely look.

I was conscious of old Humph, just as I always was, because there's something fascinating in watching the world's best and most naive impersonator in action. All the world's a stage. Someone is going to spell it out for him one day, but not me. I see more live theatre, more spontaneous acting and miming, more Method stuff, from old Riley in one day than I could see in Sydney in a year. (I'm not including old movies, of course.) And I was conscious of young Jean. She looked cool and efficient but when I sneaked a good look at her she seemed a bit apprehensive. Most of all, I was very conscious of old Liz: you see Liz is predictable, she speaks her mind. She spares no one. But now she sat silently waiting for someone to begin. No gay laughter, no jokes, no brightness. Suddenly, she was unpredictable and I started programming all sorts of alarm data through my mind: Liz thinks something has de-

veloped between me and Jean; she knows something I don't know; something unforeseen is about to end my playing Uranus to her Gaea . . .

Riley was playing with a new 50 cent piece. I sensed that he imagined it to be a monocle: he looked like doing his Von Stroheim bit. "I want to talk about 'Big Country,'" he said precisely. (This is our big open secret: we're going to revive the defunct Australian feature film industry—just like that—with a major film that might well make "Lawrence" look like a one-reeler made in the early 20's. I don't want to seem cynical about this: it's a good idea and we think we can pull it off, but the costs look astronomical, the necessary equipment isn't available, and the best Aussie actors are in England and America. Although I **know** we can do it, I feel time is going to beat us: enthusiasm needs success, and we haven't had any so far.)

"I think Harry's story is good: bigness in every way—big stars, big sets, big cities, bloody great stations," began Riley.

"I don't know," said Liz interrupting him—a thing she never does. "I don't think we'll get away with it. The title is symbolic and it's been used before—okay—but we haven't got any big stars, big sets cost a fortune, our big cities are just big cities, and most of our big stations are just miles and miles of nothing—or the few sheep and cattle that the drought hasn't killed."

Normally I might have said something flippant, like "What about Deborah Kerr and Bob Mitchum, or Chips Rafferty?" but I wanted to see how the wind was blowing so I said nothing.

Von Stroheim gave her his Junker Officer look. "If I might be permitted to finish? I'm inclined to agree—to some extent. Although we all think the story is good, I believe it's, well, too **conventional**. I know you've thought of everything, Harry, even the drought and our boys in Vietnam and I agree we should paint on a broad canvas. **But**." Riley paused dramatically.

"But what?" asked Jean. I expected Riley to frown and give her one of his looks—he even seemed to start to—but he **beamed** at her. Everyone seemed to be out of character. I was feeling pretty queer myself.

"Well," said Riley, slipping into his favorite role, Otto Preminger on the set, "I think the formula is good except that it's **conventional**; it's worked before, worked successfully. If we're going to make an impact, here and abroad, we've got to be very **different**. Only the world's great motion picture industries can produce great formula pictures. I'm beginning to think we **can't**. I'm suggesting we're going to have to do something radical, something **avant garde**."

"How about that," I said in wonder. Jean had stopped taking notes.

Liz said: "Let's get this straight. If we were making a Western we couldn't use the formula and ingredients of a Hollywood Western because we're Australian?"

"Yes. I mean, that's right."

"And if we do a madly symbolic thing like 'Wild Strawberries' it'll be a failure because only Bergman could do it properly in Sweden?"

She was cueing him. I knew then that something fishy was going on. "Avant garde" gave me the clue. I started waking up. Neurones began firing in the old cortex, little wheels started turning "Avant garde" was a favorite phrase of Liz's. Riley never uses it; he wouldn't know any more about it than he would about Dadaism and surrealism. He'd been discussing this with Liz. She'd

changed his thinking. Ergo, anything he said would be her idea. And I had a vague feeling of uneasiness: this must have happened since Friday.

"Do you mean you want the film to be more experimental?" I asked politely. "Dream sequences, that sort of thing?"

"Well," he said, taking a deep breath. "Instead of the heroine running out into the wheat field to look for the hero—you know the scene—we get the camera in there, in the wheat, you know; or we use, uh, a **helicopter** and look down on the scene—"

"Bondarchuk's 'Destiny of a Man,'" I said idly. Something was suggesting itself to me, some old tribal memory was sparking away fitfully in a dark corner of my mind.

"Yes, I know there's nothing new under the sun," said Riley with irritation. "All I'm suggesting is that we use our imagination more and avoid formulation. In this scene, for example, we can do tracking shots, have the girl running in the wheat while we shoot from a truck, or perhaps do the scene at night . . ."

It clicked. I felt little tickles go up my spine. Riley had seen some of my secret, forbidden, banned, illegal film and didn't seem to realise I'd made it. He rambled on and I nodded intelligently, but I wasn't listening.

Just after the war I had visions of becoming another Orson Welles and I got a team of blokes together and we made some film. It was good stuff. I think some of it is great but Australia isn't ready for it. It would be old hat in Sweden or Japan, but in Australia we'll need a new generation of aesthetes to appreciate it. There's footage of nubile young women on lonely beaches in the nude at night; some rather frank love scenes in the great Australian outdoors—love in forests, on mountains, in the desert; footage on birth and death in the outback. And tracking shots of a girl running through wheat. At night and in bright sunlight. I don't think there's anything erotic or obscene about any of it, but, well, you know what our censors are like. When it comes to books and films, they're just bloody primitive. I've never come across any of these characters but I know what they're like: top hats (silk), mutton chops, several chins and all puffy under the eyes, and great tums with gold watch chains across, spats and brown boots. They carry little gladstone bags and go "harrumph!" before they say anything. And they're absolutely unaffected by all the naughtiness they see and hear.

Anyway, about this film: it really is good. Word got around that it existed and another rumour connected me with it. The law visited me. Big ox-like fellows in F.B.I. hats. I acted so dumb I thought they'd figure it out but they didn't. There are twelve cans of it beneath the floorboards in "A" studio downstairs. It's been there since 1946 and it's in perfect condition.

Know what I call it? The Prime Footage. There was a marvellous girl in it, Ruth—she was before Liz and I suddenly found myself gnashing my teeth because I **knew** that old Riley must have found it. Hell, even Liz didn't know about it. The thought of Riley watching my film literally made me writhe.

Look, there's something I haven't told you: there isn't really any **plot** to all this, you know. It's just a bit about, well, about what was a big day at Olympus. And you know how all stories end happily and all that sort of thing?

About this film then: everyone in the trade knows something about it; a few even associate

me with it, but like legends, the Ark of the Covenant, and touchstones, it works best, and provides the most inspiration, when it's shrouded in mystery. That's how I wanted it to be. It'll be generations before we're ready for it here and I was going to sell it abroad one day.

\*

Riley's voice sawed into my thinking.

"Our idea of the heroine being a young girl isn't too realistic. I think she should be quite a bit older."

Sometimes I can think at 186,000 miles per second. While Riley was giving those lines to posterity I read between them and short circuited my way through to the end of his little masquerade. Not young girl, therefore not Jean. Therefore older woman, therefore **my** older woman. Oh, Liz! I sent out silent shrieking electronic thought impulses to my fickle goddess.

I said: "Young girl, young country and all that. She's **supposed** to be symbolic."

"She comes across as a schoolgirl with a Lux complexion," said Riley.

Exit hysterically Jean. I told you he had to have an escape route from that wife of his. And now he'd just dropped Jean for **my** girl! I glared at Liz for allowing herself to be picked up by this prawn.

Liz ignored me. "How about an older woman?" she asked. "Someone who's been brought up in the city, married a rich grazier or pastoralist or whatever they are, and goes off to beyond the black stump. She's nearly forty when she decides she's missing life and love and the climate is lousy because she's getting to be as wrinkled as a prune."

"Well not **quite**," said Old Mother Riley. "That's just a story. Ours is more elemental, it has to be the Australian story."

"A lot of women reach forty without having lived," said Jean staring hard at me.

Riley dropped that one and picked up another. He wanted the story to move about more and I tried to beat him to the punch again, perception-wise, but I missed out. "All your story happens in the **summer**. We could have our lovers up there in the snow country—"

I stifled a great "aarrgh!" and my eyeballs popped. Liz was watching me absolutely without expression. About a year after we went to live in King's Cross she read **For Whom the Bell Tolls** and was taken with the idea of getting a big sleeping bag and camping out in the snow. And it looked as if she'd suggested our little eccentricity to Riley for the film. Our sleeping bag was a hell of an idea, I can tell you, but you can't argue with these earth mother types. We spend a few week-ends each winter in this damned thing in the most deserted bit of snow country I can find, which is just as well. The bloke who made the bag said he'd never had such an unusual order. I'm used to it now and can even look at moonlit snow with some pleasure, but I insist on wearing a balaclava.

This may seem flippant to you, all this chat about a meeting which, for me, looked like being the disaster of my life. It's all show, my way of putting on a brave front, bravura. Riley had my film and perhaps Liz too; just because I'd massaged Jean's arm. See what I mean? Riley was an opportunist too.

Eventually I reeled off (get that, **reeled** off) to my office and felt very much like one of those Wall Street coves who have just lost a million bucks. I was looking out thoughtfully at my squashed body just after a bus had run me down

and was thinking of a good way to get it on film when Liz walked in.

I told you, didn't I, all's well that end's well? Liz had two cups of strength ten expresso which she gets us when things are too hellish. Special occasion coffee. I kept the facial muscles taut, elevated the Barrymore profile, began my famous slow smile which ended in a giggling grin and all the time I was out there on the set you know, in my little canvas chair with my megaphone, yelling Quiet on the set everybody, this is a take! and conducting everyone—up boom, action, roll it!—all that stuff, because, dear fellow opportunists, I knew everything was going to be okay again and it was, and I hardly heard about breathless Riley discovering my masterpiece over the phone to my girl and then screening it and she leading him on (to punish me) and saying (to me) God, all the things you ever talked about are in that film why didn't you tell me, and how she'd already stolen it back for me and all the rest of it.

And I was happy again.

Poor old Riley, it seems, didn't know who made the film, and there he was ready to **adapt** it (there's nothing new under the sun, is there?), and planning to star **my** Liz in it. Well, there were a hell of a lot of questions I wanted to ask but I couldn't without inviting a full-scale inquest so I shut up and stayed happy. (You can figure this out for yourself if you like; I told you it was a **happy** story, meaning, it's inconsequential, mate.)

That Liz, my Liz, she's marvellous. She had me figured out right from the start, designed my punishment, used the chance discovery of the Prime Footage by Riley (aided by our electricians) and made out of it all, a Happening. She's inimitable, man, inimitable.

I toasted her and I toasted the Prime Footage (because I like libation scenes) and I toasted all the passers by and downtown Sydney and sang my favorite aria from Turandot and, well, it was a **good** feeling. I hope you all feel that way now and then.

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*THE BROADSHEET is a 25" by 20" broadsheet of artists' blocks and poems commenting on contemporary issues. The first three issues have been called "Napalm Sunday," "The Great Australian Summer," and "Where are all the Flowers Going?." Copies of Nos. 2 and 3 available from Broadsheet, 205 Lennox Street, Richmond, 3121, Vic., for 50c. each, including postage.*

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# CHRONICLE OF NORFOLK

Anne Chloe Elder

East-nor'-east from Sydney by the nine hundred miles  
Norfolk, the island of pines, rebuffs the sea  
with the smile of a great beauty: but history defiles  
her tender clefted hills, and misery  
is a stain on the soft lagoon, and mutiny  
a savage echo in the high handsome square  
of crumbling walls that remember stubbornly.  
This temperate basking isle was used for a snare,  
a most bloody trap, and its fangs are still grinning there.

Ruins are easy to sentimentalise  
when the accusing gong of the moon is strung  
in a rack of branch and the fervent stars are the eyes  
of anguished martyrs, convicts wrongly hung.  
It was not quite so, for these were the dregs who were flung  
from bad to worse Port Arthur to Norfolk the worst:  
and Maconochie, the one sane governor among  
capricious brutes, who did much for this hell, was cursed  
and failed; since men who are fed despair have a murderous thirst.

One day in 'forty-one, from the stench of the cell  
the gang went out to build the bridge; the plain  
and usual duty, to build it right and well  
and quickly, under the lash and dragging the chain.  
At a signal they split the skull and ground the brain  
of both warders with shovels, and finished the span  
with brain for mortar; and they built well again.  
And some returned with lies and others ran  
to the woods. They were rounded and tried and sentenced and shot to a man.

For the bridge told in the guilty dusk. In the glare  
of the moon it sweated the slow bruise of a face  
beyond sight, and the built-in bones and the hair  
and the guts made a webbing of liver-dark lace  
over the stone. So when they had dug enough space  
for sixteen they paid for the joy of the crime;  
they stood in their line and were glad, and the radiant grace  
of release fell on them . . . as at many a time  
of sentence on Norfolk . . . and they lay with the benison of earth and lime.

It is aeons away. The sweet tough grass  
has matched that pit to the sprawl of the cliffy spines.  
The planes drop in, and the jolly buses pass  
as the white terns fly from the sea to the pines  
that are stacked like multiple crosses in those ravines.  
The trippers, tilting a chorus of chins, go slow  
under the great gate, admiring the lines;  
and through the Officers' Bath or on Quality Row  
lantana is the scarlet riot the gaping windows know.

There is nonchalance and ease. The pretty daughters  
home from the mainland's nicest boarding-school  
loll in bikinis on a beach called Slaughters;  
or ride the dizzy bridle tracks and cool  
their brows in forest where a desperate fool  
starved in a tree to escape the knout and thong  
so long ago. In the township the cultured pearl  
is duty-free, and it's fun to stroll along  
with beady eyes and finger the beaded slippers from Hong Kong.

At "Paradise" it does not do to be stiff  
or standoff. Honeymoon hearts are worn on sleeves  
and parties of seraph smiles descend the cliff  
to the heavenly pool. The swung surf moans at the reef  
that clamps the lagoon as an empty lighter heaves  
out to the island trader hailing the bay,  
manned by the heirs of the Bounty's crew, the whiff  
of their sweat amiable, the brown eyes gay  
as the vivid Tahitian wives who bequeathed those eyes away.

These boys of the Pitcairn stock are dark with the sun.  
They canter their strong rough ponies down  
the dapple and twist of the flowery roads that run  
to Kingston . . . the golden remembering husk of a town . . .  
for gymkhana, to horse about for the girls and be thrown  
by the bucking steers. At home their easy-go days  
are jungled in guava and palm and lemon that's grown  
tall and wild-scented. The islander stays  
content with the lingo, the flesh of the fruit, and the islanded ways.

But go where the vicious thorn called Blind-your-Eyes  
divides the christened graves from all unhallows.  
Climb the thirteen steps to the slow surprise  
of strangle . . . there was no trap to this gallows.  
Stand in the plangent wind where the valley narrows  
to Bloody Bridge. Oh stand one step apart  
and pity the very ground whose story harrows  
the lovely day, and feel your pleasures smart  
for the scars of the black wrongs, for the scourged avenging heart.

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# S W A G

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GOVERNMENT aid to the arts. I don't mean in the piece-meal and poverty-stricken form this has traditionally taken in Australia, but as a co-ordinated national policy—just as much a part of our well-being and morale as an independent society of human beings as hand-outs to dairy-farmers, manufacturers or the sugar industry. More important in some ways: in the long run Australia's survival will depend in large measure in what sort of a hand we have made at showing that we are a definable nation of people, making our own contribution to the world's stockroom of ideas and imaginative delights.

\*

Most of the 'have-got' countries have some form of responsible program for the arts. Some, alas, have too responsible a program—Boris Rurikov's remarks in Australia recently (he's a secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers) that the gaoléd Ginsburg and his friends were self-evidently not writers because they were not members of the writers' union was marvellously Orwellian and formalistic in the grand old communist tradition, but falls into the category of remarks that as well as being funny give you a cold feeling along the spine. Nobody wants state support from the firm arm grips of a couple of policemen helping one into court. (I suppose one should have said to Rurikov that any real writer who wanted to join the kind of Union of Soviet Writers described by Solzhenitsyn in our last issue should have his head read.)

\*

A digression for a moment. It was splendid to see some distinguished overseas writers at the Adelaide Festival: Enzensberger from West Germany, Butor from France, Dickey from the States, Kenzaburo from Japan (a leftish writer recommended for this buckshee ride at the expense of the Australian government by an unusually intelligent decision made at the Australian embassy in Tokyo), and of course the Russians. Perhaps "see" is the operative word. It was very hard to do more than see them, even for the editors and publishers and publicists who had a special responsibility to make use of their visit. A few words at a cocktail party, perhaps—but no chance of a proper discussion: there seemed to be some kind of an establishment barrier between the visitors and the rest of us. I hope the Festival authorities will be able to do something about this next time.

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Digression continued. Of special interest to me was the Soviet delegation. Partly because of a special feeling of friendship and responsibility towards them: I have been kindly treated in Moscow by Russian writers, and when all is said and done they represent a great country and a great, and at the present time embattled, literature. However they are, it must be understood, an 'official' delegation. Their fares are paid in Moscow, and it is the Soviet political authorities who decide who shall attend. Those who do come are kept on tenterhooks until the last moment as to whether they will be permitted to leave the Soviet Union, some of those whom we out here have asked for

(Akhmadulina, Vosnessensky) do not come. Presumably they are being punished for being popular abroad. All this is very childish and immature for a nation proudly celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its revolution, and even the fact that the writers who did come were on the whole an interesting and lively group should not obscure this fact. (Rurikov, whom I have been rude about above, is, I hasten to say, personally a kindly and pleasant man.)

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More digression. I think though that we must ask ourselves if Writers' Week at Adelaide, as well as the Festival itself, is not becoming somewhat unenterprising. As I understand it, of the overseas writers who came only Butor and Enzensberger were paid for by the Festival—the rest were paid for, directly or indirectly, by some governmental body. If I may speak for the growing mob of Australian writers and hangers-on like myself who get an enormous lift from Writers' Week, then I would say that it is we Australians who should be nominating (and paying for) the people we want to see. Let's try some new gambits next time: a rebellious Greek writer, a Cuban, a Chilean, someone from Indonesia like Mochtar Lubis who has fire in his guts, who has been in gaol and is prepared to go back there again, and his equivalents like Mnachko of Czechoslovakia or Hlasko of Poland. Official delegations of writers are the bloody end. We'll end up that way with Vice Ministers of Culture nominating themselves for the ride. End of digression.

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But for all that the digression was not much of a digression because it leads on to what I want to say about the government and the arts, and what I did say about this matter in a talk I gave during Writers' Week. Firstly, I suppose, you've got to look at the question of whether the risks of government aid are worth it. There are, in brief, two reasons why we have to take these risks. Firstly, because we live in a market economy where the purveyors of bad art and bad communications hold much bigger guns in their beefy fists than the rest of us can hope to. Capitalists, who operate to make money, run this show we are caught up in. To beat them we have no alternative but to run to the government for protection in the same way the capitalists run bleating at the mere thought of intensified competition from a more efficient, more intelligent and more industrialised Japan. (Those interested in this line of argument may care to refer back to *Overlands* Nos. 20 (Raymond Williams), 23 (Swag) and 24 (Alan Hughes).)

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That is a general reason. A more specific and Australian reason is, of course, our relatively shallow intellectual roots, our national tradition of anti-intellectualism, our ill-educated political and community leaders, and our peculiar vulnerability, because we speak English, to the competition our creative artists meet from abroad. All to the good in one way, of course, but disastrous to local effort in another.

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Thus there has been agreement for some time that we desperately need more government aid for the arts (at Commonwealth, state and municipal level). About 1961 two impressive and deeply-worked reports on this matter were presented to the Commonwealth government, one from a committee in South Australia and one

from a Victorian committee. They drew attention to the magnificent work of the Canada Council (on which we shall publish an article next issue), and asked above all that a full-scale enquiry into the arts in Australia should be held.

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They were ignored, but what did happen was that Dr. H. C. Coombs launched his Elizabethan Theatre Trust and got contributions of unprecedented generosity from the government for opera and ballet (though drama, to its anguish, has continued to be starved). It was very much to Dr. Coombs' credit that he got the show going at all, and that he did manage to divert money even to a corner of the arts. But, of course, he has been bitterly criticised, and no doubt often unfairly. With the object of spreading his responsibility, and perhaps of diverting some of the criticism levelled at him, Dr. Coombs some eighteen months ago proposed the formation of a council of the performing arts. Last November Mr. Holt announced that the government had agreed to form an arts council, that it might be biased on the side of the performing arts but also might take under its wing existing bodies such as the Commonwealth Literary Fund, and that it should be headed by Dr. Coombs, who was resigning from the governorship of the Reserve Bank.

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And this was the position we were at when Mr. Holt drowned and Dr. Coombs came to the Adelaide Festival and told us there what stage plans were now at. I said in my talk some of the things I have said here. And I also pointed out a few other problems. If we are going to get a full-scale Australian Council for the Arts (and it looks as though Gorton will honor Holt's commitment, incomparably more philistine a character though he has made himself out to be) then who will be subsidised, on what basis, and by whom? Will we have a 'respectable' council of wealthy patrons, retired businessmen, O.B.E.'s and the like, doling out support to 'safe' institutions and artists? (Remember the long and bitter fight before Overland got a C.L.F. grant?) How can you ensure that what is new and different and challenging and potentially revolutionary and destructive in the artistic and creative sense is going to get helped, as it must be if the country is to move?

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I don't know the answers. What I'm most concerned about is that questions like this should be asked, by all of us from the lower depths, and by Dr. Coombs and his intimates in this matter at the higher heights. For instance, why are Australian writers and artists so spunkless when it comes to the question of injecting a bit of democracy into the process? Why shouldn't the C.L.F. be at least in part composed of elected representatives of the writers? Why shouldn't the new Arts Council have a grassroots component? Of course it's not easy to work out how to make these bodies democratic or semi-democratic: Dr. Coombs and Kylie Tennant went to some pains in Adelaide to point out how impracticable it was. They should remember that Churchill said that democracy was the most tiresome, inefficient and imperfect system of government in the world, except all the others.

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Dr. Coombs came to the rostrum after I had spoken (he left no time for the discussion of his

own intervention) and told us as much as we can hope to know at this stage about the way things are likely to turn out. He said that he agreed that an enquiry into the state of the arts should have preceded the formation of the Council for the Arts, which had "a widely spread but ill-defined charter". But Holt was anxious to get things moving, and expected the new council itself to arrange for studies to be undertaken into the functions it should perform. Referring to his own, apparently unsuccessful, recommendation that an arts council should be concerned with the performing arts alone, Dr. Coombs commented: "The recommendation reflects a conviction that there is danger in a too concentrated bureaucracy of the arts . . . I felt there was a need for other bodies similar and equal in status . . . which . . . were in claims for public support competitive."

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Since the growth of the arts in Australia is likely to be greatly influenced in coming years by the work of the new council, such indications as Dr. Coombs gave us of his attitudes and of likely developments are of great interest. He wants there to be "a widespread debate on how the Council should go about its business". We would like to encourage such a debate in the columns of Overland, and I urge readers to send us their views.

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The Letter from Africa we printed in our last issue was wrongly attributed. It was written by Robert, not 'Roger', McDonald, and we apologise to the author for this slip. Another error—in Bill Irwin's article on Malta: "Samuel Coleridge Taylor" should of course have been "Samuel Taylor Coleridge". Notice it? I didn't.

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We feel particularly pleased about Rodney Hall's appointment as a visiting fellow in the arts to the Australian National University. As a poet of increasing national stature, as a bloke with a remarkable record of personal achievement and courage behind him, and as an advisory editor of Overland, we congratulate him on this interesting opportunity. Coombs was saying at Adelaide that the universities must be encouraged to do more of this sort of thing.

Many Overland readers will know of Marjorie Pizer, poet and anthologist and widow of that fine poet and fine man Muir Holburn. Marjorie has recently published a small book of her own poems in an edition of 400 copies. "Thou and I" is available for \$1 from Mrs. Holburn at 6 Oaks Ave., Cremorne, N.S.W.

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Announcements: Norman Talbot (a poem of his in this issue) is editing two anthologies of Australian poetry for Latin American audiences. Would those interested send him three to five poems: 1198 Chapel Street, New Haven, Conn. 06511, U.S.A. The Australian magazine *Our Women* is having a short story competition: details 64a Druitt Street, Sydney. The University of Newcastle has established a poetry award in memory of T. H. Jones, restricted to those under twenty-five. Awards commence this year. No submissions required.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

# "UNASHAMED NOSTALGIA"

*Three Overland readers took up the Editor's suggestion in our last issue that they should talk about vanished delights.*

**From Helen Harrison, of Raywood (Vic.):**

It was a splendid experience to drive a buggy and pair. The thrill of the sense of speed, the control of the horses, the traces slapping at their sides, the rattle of flying wheels, the clip-clop of feet shod in iron—and above all the wonderful smell of sweating horses and then the occasional snorting as they rushed into the wind, heading for home. You could imagine for a moment that you were back in Roman days behind a chariot. There is no freedom like that when you are behind the wheel of a modern car with do's and don'ts at every turn.

Another nostalgia: to sit on a mouldboard plough with a ten-horse team in hand. The silence, the lack of bustle, the smell of the new-turned earth and the faint whisper of the sod leaving steel. There was even time to watch the birds and, in the evening, to hear the far-off calls from other farm houses signalling the cows home for milking. Now we own neither a cow nor a horse!

**From Max Piggott, of Lower Kalgan (W.A.):**

What a wonderful stamping ground the Melbourne wharves that Stephen Murray-Smith mentioned were, back in the late twenties and early thirties. Matchbrands were my main weakness, and I collected them as others collected stamps. As a true collector, i.e. one who found his collection and did not swop or buy it, I could proudly boast the best collection from Yarraville to St. Kilda. I simply did not know of another one as good. The owners certainly did not inhabit the wharf areas for their source. What became of it? My mother gave it away during the war to some interested child neighbor. I would not have objected, I suppose, life had moved on.

Shunting trains do not figure in my memories except that I remember wondering over the possibilities of being squashed on the plates. Ships interested me both as ships and as the logical source of foreign matchboxes. They came to be the finest education medium of my youth, although at the time I did not realise it.

Wandering around ships and wharves provided enough physical danger, ranging from climbing the Station Pier derrick, swimming in the Vic. Docks, being knocked unconscious by a bottle dropped on me in Morts Dock, and having unpalatable suggestions made to me by Lascar seamen in their quarters in the aft deck. It led me to a love of

geography and the enjoyment of the company of foreigners at a time when an accent was the cause of suspicion or merriment in the eyes and ears of most of my contemporaries.

I liked the smaller dirtier boats most. They smelled interesting and the crews were generally hospitable and did not notice the presence of a scruffy kid. It was uncomfortable on the P. & O. or Orient ships and ones physical experience was broadened by an occasional kick in the arse. They regarded me as a possible pilferer, which I must confess had an element of truth in it, although not at a serious or professional level. The P. & O. branch liners were okay though. My pet dislike were the German and Scandinavian ships whose crews were blunt and seemed to me to lack humor. Melbourne, I suspect, was a bloody dull port and boredom was rife. Did anyone other than the madams of Little Lon. ever offer them hospitality?

The depression years were the most interesting. My own involvement around the docks was at its height, and my father, a member of the Victoria Police, was on duty there at that time. We met once or twice. Once—unfortunately for some friends and myself—as we left with a shirt full of frozen pears from a broken case. On another occasion years later when the realisation that my father was a man came about. It was during the anti Musso-Abyssinian "troubles", and Dad—very much alone amid a mob at the pier entrance—marched the leader off the pier. If memory serves me right they burned Musso's effigy there that night not far from an Italian cruiser that was in port.

Fathers are never quite human beings until you have to take on responsibilities similar to those they bore, and then it all falls into place. The wharves, of course, meant trouble during the depression. Jeffreys, my father's policeman cobbler, had his front bedroom blown off by a bomb—fortunately they had vacated in fear. We had the front of the house boarded up, and were not allowed to answer the front door after dark when Dad was out on duty. Yet in the daytime and after school I wandered freely off to the docks or piers.

I remember the occasion when I gave my new birthday atlas away to some Chinese sailors on a Canadian timber ship at South Wharf in exchange for some matchbrands or other trifles. After some skill at avoiding the issue, I finally paid for this by presenting my bare bottom to my father's cane—or was it my own ruler? I can't recall a cane.

After the war I strolled over the shipping area on a number of occasions but it was never the same. I took David down once or twice but he neither enjoyed or became interested in it, yet we strolled onto a couple of ships and wandered freely about them unhindered.

As a boy there was always something of interest floating between wharf and hull. I used the flat

perforated side of a Meccano plate and a fishing line to scoop up matchbrands, etc. One less pleasant recollection that has persisted over these years is the dislike of wet soggy bread floating in sea or river water. I must have swum into it at one time but it revolts me. Every ship seemed to discard it.

Nostalgic memories. Being able to recognise any ship that entered Hobsons Bay by its silhouette. Aided no doubt, by the knowledge of when certain ships would return to port. We lived near the Esplanade, and with Albert Park at our back door, and Port Melbourne, Fishermans Bend and the Lower Yarra plus the seductive reputation of St. Kilda on our east, no other region of Melbourne equalled it for a youngster growing up. I could leave school at four and be in the cabin sharing a cuppa with a Scot, Indian, or a Swede by 4.30.

Since the war I've been completely cut off from this part of my life and I now know no one from that period. My friends largely would have been classed as no-hopers or drongos, and there does not seem to have been any one of them who I can remember with affection. None of them for instance saved matchbrands! Most of them seemed to wander between kicking a ball around and just mooching. We at least had a few books in the house, and a lending library nearby. Two shillings to join and 3d. a book? How many people tried to avoid the worst of the depression by opening lending libraries? For a few months during one depression winter I sold lurid love and detective magazines (secondhand) outside the St. Kilda and South Melbourne cricket grounds to help one of these battlers and my own pocket money. We didn't sell many, but he was delighted to get a few bob back. He let me take books home free. I might not have become a farmer if anyone had shown the slightest interest in my reading yen.

Another memory that has stuck probably provided my first lesson in the awful compositeness of the shire councillor. The sight of S.M.C.C. employees erecting pencil cypresses around the walls of the public latrines along the Esplanade in readiness for the "Royal Progress", my God, of the Duke of Gloucester as he left Station Pier en route to St. Kilda during the centenary celebrations. Kids yelled "Good on yer, 'Enery" as he passed. You could see the discomfort written deep, and the Royal family has meant nothing to me ever since. They shouldn't do things like that to impressionable children.

Rats under the wharves; the "pissaroos" under the piers where on a rough day you got more back than you gave; the conversations of the experienced travellers in their aft quarters playing cards and drinking; Mawson's ship moored at Williamstown; the loneliness of Fishermans Bend and the quietness of the wharves on Sunday morning—all remain as clear memories.

## From Nancy Cato of Noosa (Q.)

What about the old Overland express from Melbourne, with its shabby, comfortable compartments where you could sleep full-length on the seat if you were lucky, with a hired pillow and foot-warmer?

And being woken in the pallid dawn to consume two pallid eggs on a plate in the "Refreshment Rooms" at Murray Bridge—or a large three-cornered sandwich curling at the edges with age and dryness? Windows that would open, and the smell of coal-smoke?

My nostalgic affections are fixed not on the far sound of trains in a country-town childhood, or the days of steam, but on an ordinary suburban garden, before the days of 'slurbs', when land was cheap and rates were low and most people kept 'a few hens' and grew their own fruit-trees.

That simple pleasure of childhood, climbing trees—can there be a whole generation growing up in these new bare suburbs which has never experienced it? Or that of picking fruit warm from the tree?

The foothills of Glen Osmond were on the outskirts of Adelaide in those days—four miles from the G.P.O., and the nearest tram half-a-mile away.

Behind our place was a vacant block which remained empty for so long that it was referred to always as "the back paddock", as though it belonged to us. Two horses were pastured there for years. I never saw their owner. I used to tempt them with thistles, pat their silken necks and comb their tangled manes with my fingers, while they gazed away over my head with huge beautiful eyes.

We had flowering gums and a silver wattle, a row of almond trees, two kinds of plum, apricot and peach trees, a carob, a silky oak and a golden cypress, besides a stunted orange tree and an apple always full of codlin moth.

When the gumtrees came out in bloom they were alive with a screeching flock of lorikeets, shrill green with crimson cheek-patches, looking like animated pieces of tree as they ate and quarrelled among green leaves and red blossom. Red rosellas came down from the hills for their annual feast as the almonds ripened; each year in February and March our legs and arms were scored with scratches from the knobby trunks, as we climbed with bamboo poles to knock down the highest clusters of nuts, with their sweet sundried kernels and velvety husks. (No shop almond has just the flavor of a fresh nut cracked between your teeth, mixed with the dusty pieces of shell.)

Grapes were such a commonplace that we hardly bothered to eat them. Our school lunches were cluttered with huge bunches. A white muscatel vine spread round two walls of the house, the ripening bunches tied up in brown paper bags to save them from the birds and bees. Each grape was big enough to peel, or pop out of its skin into your mouth. (We firmly believed that if you ate the skins and then drank water you would swell up and burst.)

I forgot the luscious loquat, white and golden with brown satin stones. Once I swallowed one of these and expected to die, but was reassured by someone older who said it would not cause a permanent and fatal blockage of my insides.

There was always some kind of fruit ripe in summer. Sweet green gage plums, Angelina Burdetts with their soft purple bloom; rosy-flushed apricots almost as big as peaches, warm and squashy from the tree. After school I used to prop myself in an apricot tree, one foot wedged comfortably in a fork, and eat ripe apricots until I was absolutely full. My mother used to tell people I had no appetite.

The peaches were a special delicacy because they were fewer—Royal George with a faintly pink flesh, yellow peaches with furry skins, the stones buried in a stringy red centre.

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## THE BOONGARY

*In the night, they say, the boongary can be heard walking in the trees.*

*Carl Sofus Lumholtz*

On Monday night I went to bed,  
A snowgum sprang from my sleeping head  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Tuesday night it grew so tall  
Birds nested there and made their call  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Wednesday night an axeman came,  
He said, I'll ringbark your snowgum  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Thursday night the axe did crack  
And turned on him like a tiger snake  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Friday night the white sun shone  
At midnight in my green snowgum  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Saturday night in my branching hair  
Grey thrushes filled with song the air  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

On Sunday night while I lay at ease  
The boongary walked within the trees  
By the banks of the Grubberdedrack.

DAVID CAMPBELL

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There were other more exotic fruits on small bushes—guavas and berberis and tree-strawberries and cumquats—but not the sort to appeal to a child.

The 'back paddock', blue with Salvation Jane or bright yellow with soursobs, provided a clump of wild quinces, no good for eating but used for a wonderful jam made by my mother called 'quince honey'.

There were also clusters of white broom, where the Orange Wanderer butterflies fed on nectar or hung in clouds during their mating flights. Cotton-bushes, where they laid their eggs and the caterpillars fed on the milky sap, grew on all the vacant land. We used to search for the delicate cocoons, palest green with golden dots, and take them home on a twig to hatch in a shoebox.

Now their habitat is gone, entirely built over; yet I have seen a thousand resting in a single tree. (See William Gosse Hay, "Where The Butterflies Come From" in "An Australian Rip Van Winkle".)

The creeping city has started to gallop, the gardens have been cut up for more building blocks, the hills where the country of grazing sheep and birds and butterflies came right down into the city, are being subdivided for smart split-level homes; and no one has room to keep hens any more, or grow their own fruit.

According to the S.A. Town Planning Committee's report (1962):

It is conceivable that, by the end of this century, the metropolitan area will stretch from Gawler in the north to Sellicks Beach in the south, a distance of 60 miles. Living in a city of these proportions will only be tolerable provided that access to open country is retained.

Still the haphazard "improvements" are allowed, and already the nearly continuous ribbon development has reached Elizabeth in the north and Christies Beach in the south. We moved ten miles out, but the suburbs caught up, the vineyards were subdivided into 50-foot building blocks. Even the dam across the road, where the blue cranes and the zebra finches used to come to drink, was filled in to make another lucrative block. The little creek filled with effluent from septic tanks.

The same thing is happening in Hobart, a small city just beginning to expand, and has happened in Sydney and Melbourne, where Streeton's "Road to Templestowe" was a rural landscape sixty years ago.

Where will it end with Melbourne and Adelaide touching in one ghastly conurbation 500 miles long?

The suburbs no longer have the charm of near-country, and there is no point in having separate houses on pocket-handkerchiefs of land which give no privacy anyway. Better to build blocks of home-units with large patches of parkland around them—and perhaps a few groves of communally-owned fruit trees.

We found ourselves with two empty paddocks and enormous rates, an anachronism among the wastes of red and yellow brick. So:

It's shift, boys, shift, for there isn't the slightest doubt

We'll have to make a shift for the stations farther out . . .

or else, perhaps, into the heart of town. It must be Sydney or the bush; Collins Street or the banks of the Condamine.



# VIEWS FROM THE ANTIPODES

David Martin:

## ENGLAND NOW

**A**FTER a few months in Britain you realise that the country is not simply passing through another crisis. All the troubles which beset it, political, social, economic, are probably curable, in the sense that, taken one by one, none of them is of fatal dimensions. Unemployment is not catastrophic, at least not as I write; productivity, while lagging, is still reasonable; strikes and even lockouts are widespread, but nobody would say there is a revolutionary situation. People do not appear to be very happy, but this is probably true for all of Europe. Nevertheless one feels that old England has suddenly been caught in the middle of a storm, without any safe anchorage in sight.

"Suddenly" is the word to be stressed, notwithstanding that individual symptoms showed themselves long ago. What is sudden is how now they all clearly interact upon each other, how the crisis has universalised itself, spreading into every field. Obviously, Britain's decline as an imperial power has much to do with it, but psychologically this is not the essential factor. Holland, Belgium and France have also lost their foreign possessions, but for them the results have been different. When all is said, people in the ugly backstreets do not really grieve over the loss of Aden, Tanzania, or a few scores of territories, the new names of which they hardly know. One can exaggerate what this shrinkage means to them. To the young, in particular, it means very little indeed.

The thing goes much deeper. What has happened is that the national coat has become too narrow everywhere: it does not fit, it is no longer comfortable to wear. It was made several centuries ago, and now it is not only rather shabby,

but has stopped keeping out the weather, has even started to look ridiculous. People feel ridiculous in it—they want to throw it off, but there is as yet no other. It is above all a crisis of institutions, institutions developed in a by-gone age by a class confident of its strength and its future. It has not lost all its strength—by no means—but it is uncertain of its tomorrow. The population at large is now without much of the respect it formerly had for many institutions once regarded as typically British, and the traditions bound up with them.

In this country appearances are always deceptive. Returning to it after a lapse of years, one is at first struck by the evidence of material progress, reflected in a certain vitality that has little in common with the term "swinging". London has caught up with the continental capitals in such matters as buildings and traffic, which now is much better, more fluently, controlled. Road communications have improved everywhere, the trains are faster, the docks more modern, new communities are better planned. The place is anything but asleep. The arts are lively enough, people still have money (London gives the impression of enormous wealth) and insularity has wilted remarkably. These changes can be disconcerting, but one soon appreciates that most of them are for the better.

Then after a while it is borne in on the visitor that life has become almost unbearably complicated and frustrating. Of course, the rich have always grumbled about the coddling welfare state and the bureaucracy it engenders, and today they are grumbling more loudly and viciously than ever. But the poor are grumbling, too. And no wonder, when a pipeful of tobacco costs eleven cents. Not only politically-conscious supporters of the Labor Party, disillusioned by how it places orthodox fiscal stability above the true prosperity of the masses, and by its craven foreign policy, but almost everybody is joining in the chorus. The small shopkeeper barely knows how to cope with the fantastic multitude of imposts, taxes and regulations. The housewife is driven mad by advertising tricks, and feels cheated every time she goes shopping. The trade unionist really does not know whether his movement still fights for his own economic interests, or whether it only fights for a supposedly national interest, the ins-and-outs of which befog reason. The confusion is startling.

So you get a contrast: on one side progress, more color all round. On the other a universal sense of stagnation and lack of purpose and direction.

In fact, the whole infrastructure—a word one apparently can't do without—is tottering all along the front. The two-party system is put in question, for evidently it cannot produce lasting solutions and, by penalising even large minorities, keeps men of talent out of public life. The Liberal Party is a joke, but 13 per cent. of young people under twenty say they would give it their loyalty. The crusty two-chamber system has become such an anachronism that proposals for its reform only arouse irony. Administrative centralisation is draining the regions of the will to live. The growth of Welsh, and even more Scots, nationalism is not a flash in the pan. It represents the real, often passionate, desire of people in the two countries for an altogether new deal, more in keeping with their dignity and resources, physical and spiritual. These movements will grow, independent of what the Labor Party is doing for Wales and Scotland—which is not negligible, at least not in some ways. I will risk saying that I believe that many people now living will see a government governing from Edinburgh, if not from Cardiff. And that's a very good thing.

Militancy seems to abound in industry, but in what parts of it? Mainly in those which are languishing and will languish more and more. Among seamen, miners, railwaymen. In five years time goods traffic by air across the Atlantic may, as passenger traffic has already done, outstrip sea-borne traffic. Mines are running down fast. Each day sees the closure of more railway lines, and everywhere people say that this is condemning large sections of certain counties to a second-rate existence. Ministers claim that it is impossible to go on paying for lines that don't pay for themselves. Humble folk reply that they never imagined that under Labor's rule the balance sheets of public utilities would count for more than the utilities themselves. What is utility? In the little Norfolk village where I write this the local football team can mobilise only one locally living young man for its eleven; all the rest have been forced to move elsewhere. Under the Tories it would be the same.

Both large parties are almost equally detested. In some aspects the situation is already reminiscent of France before the advent of de Gaulle. The general is berated by the press (and what an unreadable press it is becoming, by and large, making up for lack of quality by an almost hysterical concentration on quantity!), but quite a few people think a British de Gaulle might not be such a disaster. They want some leadership! It is not yet an active, bitter cynicism. It is a kind of sardonic langor.

\*

Alternatives to the Left? Well, what do you call the Left? The Communist Party, at a time of recession, large-scale industrial unrest and dissatisfaction with Harold Wilson, manages to poll some 400, repeat 400, votes in a by-election in Manchester, the industrial heart of industrial England. There are vigorous Trotskyite groups, splitting, as always, like amoebae, and their influence is narrowly restricted to the industrial arena.

Che Guevara, here, is only a mythological figure, a Latin American King Arthur of today. John Berger wrote him a cerebral epitaph, illustrated with Rembrandt's "Anatomy".

The young, exploited by Carnaby Street and the fashion and other promoters behind the Flower People cult, take pride in being apolitical. Maybe because they don't understand the political reasons that produce the wintry discontent of their elders?

How do you explain to them, for instance, that British capital, needed to vitalise commerce and industry at home, continues to find investment out of England—in Australia for example—more profitable? Not much kicks in that! All the same, there is something interesting going on there. From Pittsburgh Peter Mathers writes that America's Flower People look like shedding their petals before long. They may do the same here.

And what about Black Britain? More restive than may meet the eye, but an unknown quantity, so far. White-collar militancy? It's prolific, but not in the direction of radicalism in the broader sense. Until someone reinterprets socialism in terms that make sense for our age it cannot be otherwise.

Whiggery is nearly dead. The New Statesman does well, but in a void. Sociological interpretation are the rage, but there is no money for proper research. An interesting phenomenon: politicians qua politicians have become objects of contempt at last, much as they commonly are in Australia.

Everything is creaking with age—national lumbago. The Co-operative movement is ailing in every limb. Industrial bargaining methods are at least one generation out of date. Some of the disputes are plain silly: craft quibbles. Others not, indicative of different stresses. Dock labor, finally decasualised, kicks against the new set-up because it distrusts the old bosses, and rightly so. There is a new mobility, by-product of advancing libertarianism, of the "lonely family", and of the shedding of class alignments. But in the depressed areas, not much changed since the days of William Blake; middle-aged workers refuse to shift, to resettle where, perhaps, there may be work, but no friends. Nowhere a voice that millions could listen to with trust and hope.

The past dies hard in a country like this, where so much props it up, but the more propping there is, the heavier the burden, on the shoulders, on the heart. An uncomfortable time, inevitably. When a straight-jacket comes off, the body usually feels cold and the muscles don't function well.

\*

And yet . . .

Take a deep breath and say it aloud: what a magnificent people the British still are! How kindly, how civilised, how temperate without being aloof and passionless! In so many ways better than ever, now that taboos are being abandoned and forbidden subjects are forbidden no more. In this country, believe it or not, it is now possible to discuss controversial matters freely. Look closely, and you will find that, in spite of everything, there remains the old commitment to public affairs, however befuddled these have become. It has entered the fabric too deeply to be discarded. They fight, but still with a strange affection for each other, tolerant of other men's sincerity. Only in Britain is it not proof of defeat if your political enemies like you. Can a whole people have a kind of fundamental decency not in the same measure shared by its neighbors?

It would seem like it. Having lost faith in their outmoded institutions, they are keeping faith with themselves. They are bewildered, not lost. I think that what is good in the spirit of their institutions (should we call it Shakespearean objectivity, a refusal to judge between courage and courage?) they will save, because they are not given to turning upon themselves, like the French; a virtue which no longer implies surrender to privilege. Travelling through England after travelling in Europe, where every pebble cries fratricide, is a

healing experience. In Germany democracy is about to perish again, in Britain it is merely, though painfully, outgrowing its old forms. Therefore this people is not desperate and does not look for desperate remedies.

The other day a Sunday magazine made dismal comparison between Japan, as a land moving forward, and England, as a land standing still. Yes, but when it goes forward again it will probably do so admirably. Only it may take half a decade before it resumes the march.

National character, unlike value judgments based on racial characteristics, is not an illusion. It exists; it is an ethnic fact. To be among the British now, Scots and Welsh for once included, is like being in a sick-room, but who does not know sick people who are better company than the allegedly fit? They are the ones who have won through to another, more profound, well-being, which is often the guarantee of their recovery.



*Richard Neville:*

## HOW TO BLUFF YOUR WAY THROUGH BRITAIN

### What will I declare to British customs?

Anything, except your poverty. The English equivalent to "Bring out a Britain" is "Chuck out an Aussie" and unless you have a glowing bank statement or a bloated wallet you might be refused entry. On no account admit your intention to work unless you have an authorised permit. If you're rejected, go to Amsterdam and try again on the Ostend-Dover ferry.

### What will I tell the English about Australia?

Nothing. They don't care. Most Englishmen, especially intellectuals, are aggressively uninterested in Australia. New arrivals sometimes quote impressive iron-ore statistics and are dismayed by yawned response. The English think Menzies (usually called "Mackenzie") is still Prime Minister and they last thought of Sydney as the port where Sir Francis Chichester rested at mid-ocean. Highbrows are patronisingly curious about "that lovable bungle" the Sydney Opera House and many echo the view of a popular drama critic who recently remarked (in a TV discussion of the ABC/BBC production "Kain") "colonial culture . . . such a drag". Patrick White, Sid Nolan and Rolf Harris are already spread too thinly to be name-dropped effectively. The ban on "Ulysses" has superseded the Shrimpton Melbourne Cup debacle as jocular evidence of Australian philistinism.

### Should I try and disguise my origins?

No. It's better to be thought Australian than South African or Rhodesian. Whereas most colonials bore the English, their reaction to Australians is one of violent ambivalence. Either way it can work to your advantage. If they love Australians, you've got a head start. If they hate them, you can be deftly disarming by acting out of stereotyped character.

### How will I celebrate Anzac Day?

Traditionally, but outside London. In fact whenever you're bursting to don a spiritual slouch hat sneak away to the South Coast, where rowdy R.S.L. exhibitionism is eagerly appreciated by locals and holidaymakers alike. In Devon there is a famous fourteenth century pub where you can chug-a-lug scrumpy (homemade cider) at 1s. per pint and singalong around the communal piano. Next to "Knees Up Mother Brown", "Waltzing Matilda" is plucked most often from a nostalgic repertoire. If you're even suspected of being Australian you will be freely lubricated until the 11.30 closing time. It's a man's country, Devonshire.

Give a boomerang demonstration on nearby oily beaches. It's guaranteed to draw warm crowds plus an invitation to enjoy genuine Devonshire teas (main difference from Australian version: scones served cold). Incidentally, the sight of bulbous green fields criss-crossed by luxuriant hedgerows which undulate against a stark rocky coastline is beautiful enough to wring, perhaps, praises from the Mayor of Ballarat.

### Can I cope with London?

At first. It's the little things that get you down. Each house has five or six varieties of power plugs, so to move an iron or record player necessitates technical gymnastics. Public phones are consistently out of order, showers a rare luxury, the underground collapses at 11.30, the BBC2 image is elusive, suburbs have random "all day closing", fresh meat isn't, pubs close between 3 and 5.30 daily . . .

### Will I like the English?

It's an acquired taste. You will spend the first few months trying single-handedly to reform the national character; failing, you will resign yourself to their axiomatic fallibilities. Finally, you will warm to them in spite of themselves. **First premise:** The deep and rigorous class consciousness is undiluted by the number of working class successes. Boasting about classless Aussie mateship will get you nowhere; plumbers love calling you "Guv'nor". (When one working class Englishman learnt I was Australian he distastefully recounted how, when his aged and ailing father landed at Darwin airport, he asked for a luggage porter. "What's the matter, mate," drawled a bystander, "broken your arm or something?") If you feel uncomfortable, resort to burlesque. Cab drivers tip forelocks respectfully when commanded: "It would be most appreciated, kind sir, if you could transport us to the residence of the honorable . . ." **Second premise:** Catastrophic inefficiency is a way of life, a national joke. It infects all industries. Technical obsolescence is cited as the reason why national dailies are losing money (and why the country is losing national dailies). Certainly the publication of London OZ has exposed, if nothing else, the staggering ineptitude of British printers. And they are charmingly deceitful. Deadlines are firmly promised without the ability or intention to meet them.

Ironically, it is probably from these national traits of inefficiency and deceit, that the great British virtues are derived—tolerance and a sense of humor. The latter are a defence against the former. Even now the English are laughing all the way to international bankruptcy.

### Does London really swing?

Most decidedly—in clubs, in boutiques, in some streets, in bed—but pretend that it doesn't. It's a fashionable affectation publicly to despise the places you privately tolerate. Grey-haired journalists tend to drone on about the insignificance of Kings Road dollies, Portabello Road phonies, Notting Hill hippies and so on, but better some diverting erotic pretentiousness than the crushing sincerity of defeated drab ex-intellectuals.

### Can Australians join in?

Until a few years ago, Australian trendies landed with a thud in Shepherds Bush, moped around Soho, sulked, and finally joined their Old Boys' Society. Even now, remnants of the Sydney University foyer push don tweed jackets and desert boots and re-unite around a keg of Watney's Brown to jive to Bill Hayley evergreens.

Suddenly, however, Australians have crawled out from behind their inferiority complexes and are thrashing out in all directions . . . dazzling Sydney girls spinning the discs at Biba's brilliant boutique; John Crittle, the owner of "Dandee Fashions", a King's Road men's shop which markets clothes that make Beau Brummel seem square; Judy Jeams, underground organiser of "Happenings" extraordinary; Tina Date, "a singer of songs" (and apparently the Deity to at least one compeer of a TV pop show who confessed "I believe in Tina!"); Robert Hughes, lively replacement art critic for the Observer, TV personality and the Elsa Maxwell of the art world; Andrew Fisher and Mike Newman, filmmakers by appointment to the British Film Institute (itself run by an Australian, Bruce Beresford); Martin Sharp, pop-song writer, art engine for London OZ, "Town" illustrator, film-maker and bearer of the Australian flag into psychodelphia; myself, garrulous pseudo-publisher/editor of patchy London OZ, gamely fighting the wrong battle on the wrong front and star of several BBC flopped pilot productions . . . all from Sydney and in their twenties, just some of the other Australians around besides those more famous and established.

### What's the scene?

There are several.

**I. Post Debuntate:** Some Australians find this an exhilarating novelty after the comparatively classless home scene. Once you make your first contact you will soon infiltrate thoroughly. Play it cool, never arrive more than ten minutes late for dinner, when you're invited to a country home for grouse shooting don't forget your dinner suit, always write thank you letters, put a "Support Ian Smith" banner on your car. Although these aristo snobs are staunchly right wing and the girls barely passable, you can reap wondrous advantages

from the Old Boy network (e.g. have your visa extended, have accounts opened at Saville Row, employment, etc.).

**Warning:** Conversation extremely unstimulating, you will have to drop most of your old friends, lays are harder.

**II. Literary—Arty:** This for the culturally ambitious. The best way to get your book published is to be at a George Weidenfeld dinner party (of Weidenfeld and Nicholson, publishers), and, when your host is within ear shot, crack an original-sounding epigram. Invariably George will lean across the table asking: "What's your name? You must write a book," and he means it. You can make it in this scene if you're charming and witty or single.

**III. Psychedelic:** Requires a flair for ostentation and a love of the crowded and uncomfortable. Hidden among the incense smog, the crass commercialists, the mute, repellent, vilely daubed, faked eccentrics are some genuinely interesting and original personalities.

If you don't take acid before a hippie mass rave you'll be unbearably bored—unless they're showing pornographic movies.

**IV. Discotheque:** Costs are crippling—there's a membership plus entry fee so choose your clubs carefully. The fashionability cycle is mirrored in the press with a three-week time lag; the game is never to let them catch up—it's fatal to be caught at a club after it has appeared in the Sundays. In-ness is measured by the celebrity quotient. You're at the right place if Jimmy Hendrick Experience is dancing with one of the Procol Harum while "The Move" smash up stage TV sets with their guitars.

### Will I always love Australia?

Madly, for the first few months. Slowly, imperceptively, unconsciously your attitude seems to alter. You tire of hearing about Paddington artists sentenced to gaol, of films being banned, of London OZ being confiscated by Australian Customs, of girls who return home and are scolded by their contemporaries for "wearing a skirt round their crotch", of pompous Vietnam justifications, of conscription . . .

You grow used to being able to wander around London looking like a pansy and not being biffed, to the sumptuous Sunday papers, to telly's Wednesday play, to the Royal Court theatre, to flying to Paris and back for £12 sterling, to the way the popular press vilifies Wilson, to the incredible variety of people, to Sunday entertainments . . . and you wonder whether you'll ever go back, whether you care any more. Then someone begins attacking Australia at a party and you leap vehemently to its defence. And you know that the Tank Stream runs in your veins.

# WOLLONGONG 67 TWICE

Peter Eldar

"Tell me with whom you keep company, and I will tell you who you are; if I know how you occupy yourself, I also know what you might develop into."

Maxim 459, Goethe.

Down from Sydney through a huge National Park—very untouched, primeval—then the look out over the coast. A long coast, like England, dotted with settlements, and beaches; behind, wooded slopes to the mountains. The road undulates through different townships, not divided from one another. Quiet, rural atmosphere, modern shops, old churches, coffee bars. A new world, a better climate, and people as yet unknown. Far from London, fresher, less sophisticated, less weary, less cosmopolitan. At last Wollongong. One main street, one mile of shops and little offices. Busy, not hurried, a mixed population, looking friendly.

Australians, like Camus' "Outsider", content with the comforts of the moment. Healthy, happy, no sense of tragedy or complication. And the beer enthusiasm. Hotels halfway between a pub and a western. No women, a bit sloppy. Lounges, rather funny, sometimes maudlin, on Saturdays. The north Europeans so efficient, even in their accents, the southerners so swarthy. Who speaks "emigranto"? Class does not intrude, one is very private, no one cares. You carry on, this way or that, no one cares. The boarding house, run with affectionate Dutch efficiency. The youngsters—all sorts, delinquents and very clean boys from the bush. It works, this mix-up. It is so easy going, no serious tensions.

How out of place the surgeon is. So Victorian, so English, yet a native. Refreshing, yes, and very charming. But quite impossible here. He is a world on its own. He stands as a monument that few would know how to admire.

The bus rolls on to Berkeley. Houses, houses, houses. How many millions have dreamed of this and never achieved it? And these, what are they

in their houses? Contented pets, dispirited humans? And the children? The Steel World. So much to learn. From walking into the dingy employment office in Cringila. Forms to fill, books on safety to hold, a mathematics test, for me or for a 14-year-old? Tallyman, what does that mean? At least a job. The company bus drives for miles, of steelworks. Industry is beautiful, it has color, shape, hues, designs, it does more than reproduce itself. One learns, about pay (bonus, shift allowance, hourly rates, overtime—it goes on and on—a veritable science). The job is easy—checking, finding packing slips—but the back-ground—144,000 possible sizes, by sixteenths of an inch. Phew! The brain jams. But, others have mastered it, so just wait for it, the penny will drop.

Everyone is so pleasant, so polite. Everything is first names, no side to authority here. Thank goodness. Somebody left. Paul for the Post Office. What's that? Oh, all those stacks of tin plate on the floor. A sort of store. Lifted in and out by crane—the overhead monster. Watch your head, wear safety boots. So many foremen. Who's in charge of what? Gordon is a good teacher. Reads "The Rosicrucian", planning to sell his home and caravan the family around Australia. Never takes his hat off. Quite a personality. Keep work at an even pace, always leave plenty of time. This is as far from a sweat-shop as Mars is from the Moon. Good showers, even a locker. Like the Army, no morale, everything catered for. Is it wrong to like the place? No one else does. But it's fascinating. Beams, rafters, girders, colors, machinery humming at different frequencies.

One sinks into a locality. People tell one things. Who's slept with who, what one can do apart from TV. The landlady goes to a concert with me, another tenant is jealous. He drinks. There's Hans, an encyclopedia of local information, like crib docketers for doublers, or who runs the art society. At night the streets are full of leather jackets, coffee bars full of young things, so important. "Zorba the Greek" is on and one races late at night to the lighthouse, and poetry. The Pacific rolls, and the chimney stacks smoke. But it is all secure. Pay, people care, and even the brainlessness is friendly.

Everyone has money, everyone is basically bored. One fishes, another gambles, another has a school teacher mistress, he's a tradesman, Greek. A D. H. Lawrence relationship. Some save, some borrow, nearly everyone has a car, and plans, and hopes. World politics, something for the journal-

ists, except for the past. Germans still brood about the S.S., perhaps even the Jews. Decide to get a flat. Easy. Beautiful view—over Mount Kembla. Cost a fortune elsewhere. Australian-Greek solicitor, very polished. I walk to work. Amazement. But it's healthy. I feel healthy, even if disturbed by the inanities. So many good men, so uninspired, undirected. The great apathy. The rich don't care, the clever don't see. They never "descend" to this—they just benefit.

I read. Like a message from Venus. What, after all, does Shelley mean to men? A Beckett, or Jung, or Marx. Decide to do some translating. Start at work—afternoon shift. Great interest. Somebody's doing something with all that time "They" insist on giving us. Call it B.H.P. scholarship. No dishonesty. Cannot do work I am not given.

Nobody is happy. Almost. There is a seething, but no answer. There are thousands of unhappy homes. Always "you lucky bastard, you're not married". Marriage as a fate, a punishment. Children an economic drag around one's neck. Why do they do it? They don't know. They want sex and social approval, and are too blind to fight off the consequences. But it makes sick kids, and disturbed adults. And then? Psychiatry.

Werner builds a plumbing business, Hans embarks on self-education, Erwin works for a new political party. And Alan and Keith and quite a few others. Not all dead, but not enough alive. I meet Reg, and we agree on so much. He works hard, so does Ted, like Fred at work. Society is socialism or nothing. They have it in their hearts. Hope is a minority, perhaps always, and the thing to do is to swallow one's own sermons.

Union delegates are motley. Worth listening to. How they splutter out their work wisdom. No polish, yet so many real states of affairs. They've had time to think, years of it. Answer the man's question! The big shot is sick. Scarred, lined faces, many pots of beer, much domesticity, and miles and miles of steel. We talk gobbledygook about awards, and winter, and margins, and endless complications. They care here, and yet apart from here, they care not at all. Nothing, as one, binds them. No weltanschauung. And if nuclear war, what then? What sidewalk will receive the survivors with their empty tragedy? Nothing is enough any more, and yet we must make it so. The least listened-to voices are best. Having given up vote catching, they have something to say. Even an echo is good in some silences.

One can drift, or one can suffer. But suffering implies a conscience, as drifting implies despair. Involution means search for meaning. Most of us can't search back, it's too discouraging. But forward? Why not? Perhaps time is laid out like a landscape ahead, and the real barrier between us and the future is lack of courage. Life is energy, and it brings its own momentum. The movement involves others, it grates at times, but it exhilarates too. We have choices which we always had, but which romanticism beclouds. In an un-romantic clear air we can choose a future whose first reward is in the present.



What do dots on maps mean? Every description implies a value-system, which will be arbitrary. But the place, the people,

their work, their reactions—surely they can be grasped. Wollongong lies 50 miles south of Sydney, on a coast backed by mountains. It is scenic, in beaches and hinterland. "Wollongong" is a cypher. It stands for all the places where people live (e.g. Corrimal, Oak Flats, Dapto, Woonoona) and for the giant B.H.P. steel complex, Australian Iron and Steel Pty. Ltd., where some 18,000 work. It is a steel town. Everyone is directly or indirectly connected with the monopoly.

Two of the three sections of its 200,000 inhabitants can be described in terms of current TV programmes. The genuine Australians could all play a part in "McGooley", with Wally Stiller as stage director. Of the English migrants, enough have the "Till death us do part" quality, to keep alive the Australian's idea of a "pommie". These two groups are half the population. The other half are a range of Europeans, from Greeks to Dutch. They often consider the first half a weird mob. In Warrawong, a flourishing new shopping centre, the Europeans predominate. It reminds one of Trieste, a goulash community.

The whole district is solidly working class. The usual pockets of middle-class consciousness, old families, business men, doctors, are there and have little significance. They gravitate towards Sydney and each other, and are not numerically growing as the workers are.

Nearly all migrants long to buy their own homes, either through the Housing Commission or privately. There is not much difference here. They begin living in hostels, where the cost of living is low, and graduate from there. The Steelworks operates in three shifts around the clock. Buses connect all districts at key times. There are spacious roads which are empty except three times a day. The pivots in time are 7.20 a.m., 3.20 p.m., and 11.20 p.m. Week-ends mean little here, because days off are "rosters" and occur on any day. Pay-day is Thursday fortnightly. Millions change hands. The Steelworks is a great enterprise, a great machine, a great bureaucracy, and like the Army breeds a sense of belonging. It gets one. Talking shop, in an incomprehensible work language, is a favorite social pastime. Each section has its own language.

A.I.S. is a wonderful case of "how to succeed in business without really trying". Success is a proven fact, and the apathy and inefficiency backing it is evident everywhere. An elderly Dutchman was employed as a cleaner. He left because his eight-hour job consisted of sweeping half a crib (lunch) room, measuring 40 by 20 feet. Too old to adjust. You will only be sacked for drunkenness, fiddling your clock card, or poor attendance. Sober and regular, you are there for life, like the civil servant; superannuated too. Yet people come and go at a great rate. Only a core remain for two years, and after that you are venerable. The working conditions vary greatly, from hot and dirty to cool and clean, but no one dies of overwork. The pace is Australian, hard to get used to; the machines are fast. Once in a section, it is hard to move, and promotion is rare. The Company has no personnel policy. Talent is not searched out, efficiency not necessarily rewarded. It is easy to feel stuck and useless.

Clubs, pubs, and supermarkets do a roaring trade. Floor shows, poker machines, endless "specials" and competitions combine with a very

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## THE NUNS' WALK

The nuns will be walking soon  
the last hour of their day.  
They avoid the moon.

When night falls they can say  
it has always been so.  
That is not why they pray,

But because when the moon shall go  
will come the priest in his blue threewheeler  
carrying consolations that they know.

When white sex defeated by black healer  
will glide still in their smiles as they softly go  
to watch the blue threewheeler

carry their confessions into the traffic flow.

NORMAN TALBOT

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mature Peyton Place background. Scandal is easy to find. There is an Arts Society, a German male choir, a dramatic group—all of reasonable standard. There is a University College, a technical college, a good library. There are the very poor, some 10,000 of them. There is very little work for women. There is the usual, massive young population, who have one discotheque, the beach and street corners. The police have their hands full, the adults complain. Wollongong's famous magistrate dispenses compulsory haircuts and severe justice. Traffic offences and shoplifting are prominent in the local press.

Life is prosperous, compared to the Depression or Sicily. House, car, TV are within everyone's reach. The Steelworks Credit Union does a good job. Children are fed well, educated averagely. But life can be drab and meaningless. There is little social cohesion. District, church, politics, unionism mean little to most people. Mainly they live inside their matchboxes and wage the battle of the sexes. Holt, Gilroy, Whitlam, Roger Bush and the rest mean little to them. They like Bob Dyer, Andy Capp, the T.A.B., Dita Cobb and Dean Martin. Common sense tells them things could and should be much better. The despair bred on apathy prevents them from believing they or anyone else can make it so. They do not get out of their shells, and little gets through to them. A people without a vision.

Modern literature depicts it so well, from Carter Brown to Robbe-Grillet. The Steelworks is like Kafka's "Castle". Nobody knows, ever, dangers everywhere, and anyone, even a high executive, is only a cog in the machine run by the faceless "THEM". Marx called it alienation, Freud frustration, Tillick estrangement. They are all here. Some people accept it stoically, others are miserable.

Degeneration or revolution? Whichever it is, it will not take on its traditional forms. No anarchy or barricades for Wollongong. But either a mounting unhappiness or a new spirit will come to Wollongong. Our opportunities have never been greater. More time, less disease and pain, immeasurably greater communication, deeper under-

standing of everything, a decline in poverty, and an increase in social security. We have them, but will we realise what they point to?

There are hopeful symptoms. Wollongong has three large bookshops, more than many larger cities elsewhere have. When artists and orchestras come here, the Town Hall is booked out. After years of squabbling the Trade Unions have combined and are reviving. One meets all sorts of people who have woken up to the sickness and the challenge. Ultra-individualism is discovering a sense of society. Even the Steelworks, sleepy giant that it is, is showing signs of arousing itself.

One of our failings is that we do not know enough about what keeps our way of life going. The complexities behind electricity, petrol, and food marketing are examples. The same applies to steel, its production and uses. One section of this Steelworks is devoted to making tin plate. Whether it holds baked beans or beer, you have a tin in your home. Its basic material was made here. The process is enormously complicated, and fascinating. It engrosses a large work-force, around the clock. But it is only one product and everything produced here is vital to our life. We could survive without soft drink, or chewing gum, or lace underwear, but not without steel and its derivatives. The common denominator of money completely hides the real importance of the things it stands for.

In Wollongong the paradoxes of present-day Australian life come into sharp focus. The Steelworks produces well and makes a huge profit. But socially it is a complete failure, because it lacks imagination and morale. Its employees are better paid than many Australian workers, and yet are the poorest paid steelworkers of the western world. The general lay-out of the district is excellent, but there are no facilities for youth. Life is reasonably orderly, but there is no general civic consciousness. Most of those coming here, from anywhere, will improve themselves materially, only to find themselves in a vacuum. Life is a variable see-saw movement between material well-being and the social vacuum, and everyone evaluates this uniquely.

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## PHOENIX 66

A SPECIAL Correspondent of the Times Literary Supplement recently reported (8 February 1968) that he had seen a copy of the magazine Phoenix 66, a central part of the accusation in the recent trial of Soviet writers, at an NTS (anti-Soviet emigre) office in Paris. He described it as "an untidy volume, about a dozen sections of which, typed on different machines, were loosely held together by a piece of string. It is hard to imagine that there can be many copies of this unwieldy affair in existence." Included in Phoenix 66 were:

An editorial by Galanskov attacking a recent decree providing for the "taming of the elemental and chaotic development of democratism in Russia;"

An article by the late Palmiro Togliatti, Italian Communist leader, deploring the slow development of de-Stalinisation in the U.S.S.R.;

A letter from a number of Orthodox priests asking that they be allowed to print religious books, including the Bible, and pleading for the restoration of certain churches;

Andrei Sinyavsky's critical essay on socialist realism, first published anonymously in Paris in 1959, but not published in the U.S.S.R.;

An essay by Sinyavsky on Yevtushenko, publication of which had been forbidden;

An attack on the bureaucracy of the Writers' Union;

An article by the late Eugene Varga, a leading economist, discussing the replacement of the power of the Soviets by the power of the Party under Stalin;

An alleged shorthand report of a stormy discussion among 250 Soviet historians on the third volume of the official History of the C.P.S.U.;

An article by Galanskov attacking Mikhail Sholokhov's defence of the Daniel-Sinyavsky trial;

A letter sent to C.P.S.U. leader L. I. Brezhnev on the eve of the 23rd Party Congress begging that there be no rehabilitation of Stalin, carrying the signatures among others of the physicist Professor Peter Kapitsa, ex-Ambassador Ivan Maisky, writers Victor Nekrasov, K. Paustovsky, Kornei Chukovsky, and film director Mikhail Romm;

A summary of the proceedings of the 1958 examination by the Writers' Union of the Pasternak case, during which all members of the committee, under pressure, condemned Pasternak;

An account by Galanskov of several clandestine publications within the U.S.S.R.;

"A novella by Victor Kelsky—the story of a man who betrays a friend by taking the latter's manuscript to the K.G.B., but then realises that he is a 'scoundrel and a traitor', that he cannot live as an ordinary citizen in Russia any more, and takes to religion;"

An extensive section of poetry, most of it pessimistic in tone and some with "religious undertones". A poem by Galanskov contained these lines:

I am only a frightened deer  
In the midst of two-legged beasts . . .

The T.L.S. Special Correspondent (could it be Alexander Werth?) concluded that "somebody in the West" was certainly subsidising the N.T.S. However, he said, it could not be concluded that Galanskov, Ginzburg and Co. had been in contact with NTS and had received funds from them as these allegations had not been tested in open court.

"What is certain, however, is that the trial of Galanskov and his friends and, even more so, the Solzhenitsyn Letter [see Overland 37] and the Litvinov allegations have done more harm to the Soviet Union in the eyes of the world (including the French, Italian and other Western communist parties) than all the millions of dollars the C.I.A. and similar sources may have spent on anti-Soviet propaganda."



# THE PEN AND THE SWORD

## Soviet Writers and Freedom of Expression

**T**HIS story of Pavel Litvinov, grandson of the famous Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov, begins with the trial, conviction and imprisonment of the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel in 1966.

There was considerable opposition among Soviet intellectuals to this trial, which seemed to them a step backwards towards Stalinism. Among left intellectuals in the non-Communist world, there was almost universal condemnation.

A "young poet" named Aleksander Ginzburg (he was not recognised as a poet by the Soviet authorities because he was not a member of the Writers' Union) compiled a detailed account of the Daniel-Sinyavsky trial, which reached the West by clandestine means. (It was published in Paris in February 1967, and later in London.) Ginzburg was arrested in January 1967. Three others were arrested at the same time. Yuri Galanskov, a poet and editor of an underground publication, *Phoenix 66* (see opposite); Alexei Dobrovolsky, also connected with *Phoenix 66*; and Vera Lashkova, a 21-year-old typist who had typed material for the cyclostyled journal. All four were said to be connected with SMOG, an underground literary-political organisation. It was also alleged that they were connected with, and had received funds from, NTS (the People's Labour Alliance), an anti-Soviet emigre organisation with headquarters in West Germany.

A week later, a writer named Vladimir Bukovsky and two others were arrested for participating in a street demonstration in Moscow in protest against the arrests of Ginzburg and Co. At the time of his arrest, Bukovsky was reading a poem.

The three demonstrators were brought to trial (which was not open to the public) seven months later; on 1 September 1967, they were convicted of "disturbing the peace". Bukovsky, who accepted responsibility for organising the demonstration, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment; the other two to twelve months, suspended. The Moscow daily *Vechernaya Moskva* reported that all three accused had pleaded guilty and had "told the court of their guilty actions".

Pavel Litvinov was a friend of Aleksander Ginzburg; he too opposed the arrests against which the demonstrations had protested. He began to collect material for a transcript of the Bukovsky trial. (No full report had appeared in the Soviet press; the only report had been a brief and, as it turned out, untruthful account in *Vechernaya Moskva*.) Litvinov's inquiries revealed that, far from pleading guilty, Bukovsky had vigorously defended his actions. In his final speech he had drawn the court's attention to that article of the Soviet constitution which guaranteed to Soviet citizens "the right of street processions and demonstrations", and asked:

"Why is such an article included? For May Day and November 7 demonstrations? But it is not necessary to include such an article for demonstrations that the Government organises—it is clear that no one will disperse these demonstrations. We do not need freedom 'pro' if there is no freedom, 'anti'."

To the great annoyance of the court, he likened the suppression of his demonstration to the suppression of a May Day demonstration in Madrid, and attacked the part played by the K.G.B. (Soviet security police) in his prosecution.

Late in September 1967, Pavel Litvinov was summoned to appear before an officer of the K.G.B., one Gostev, who warned him that he would be held "criminally responsible" if he distributed the material he had collected on the Bukovsky trial. Litvinov replied that he did not understand how it could be a crime to circulate a truthful account of a Soviet trial; he pointed out that the only newspaper account of the trial falsely said that Bukovsky had pleaded guilty. Gostev said: "What does it matter whether he pleaded guilty or not? The court found him guilty. Consequently he is guilty."

Gostev's final warning was that a record of the Bukovsky trial could be "used by our ideological enemies, especially on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Soviet power," and that Litvinov would be well advised to go home and destroy all the material he had collected.

Instead, Litvinov immediately wrote down an account of his interview with Gostev, which he sent, together with the text of Bukovsky's final speech to the court, to four Soviet newspapers and to the dailies of the French and Italian Communist Parties. None of these papers published the documents; however, other copies reached the West, and the documents were published in the *New York Times* on 27 December 1967.

Meanwhile, Aleksander Ginzburg and his three associates were still in gaol awaiting trial. They were brought to trial almost exactly twelve months after their arrest. (One of the complaints of the Soviet critics was the long delay in bringing the cases to trial; Soviet law provides that an accused person may not be held longer than **nine months** without trial.)

On the eve of the trial, it was reported that 31 Soviet intellectuals, including the novelist Aksyonov, the poet Bella Akhmadulina, and the Lenin prize-winning mathematician Shafarevich, had appealed to the Soviet authorities to allow a full press coverage of the trial, a public hearing, and the impartial selection of defence witnesses. The appeal warned that the coming trial "can not contribute to the atmosphere of a society that not long ago was witness to mass rehabilitations of people who were convicted of false charges."

The appeal was not successful. The five-day trial was open only to those with passes, there was no general Moscow press coverage, and foreign correspondents were not admitted. When Ginzburg's mother and Galanskov's wife tried to arrange a private press conference with foreign correspondents, the journalists concerned were warned that "stern reprisals" would follow if they attended.

Outside the courtroom, 200 people (among them Pavel Litvinov and Mrs. Larisa Daniel, wife of the imprisoned writer) gathered in silent protest. Inside, an alleged courier of the emigre NTS gave evidence against the defendants, and the prosecution alleged that they were paid agents of the NTS. One of the defendants, Dobrovolsky, who had turned state's evidence, agreed that this was so.

All four defendants were found guilty. Galanskov, who had said in court "by arresting me you have won a battle but lost the war for democracy in this country," got seven years; Ginzburg five years; Dobrovolsky, who had co-operated with the prosecution, two years; and Vera Lashkova one year. The year they had already served in gaol was set off against their sentences.

Pavel Litvinov appeared outside the court every day, collecting whatever information he could get about the proceedings. He commented: "I want my country to be a just country. I do not think I will be arrested, but in this country one does not know." So far as is known, Litvinov has not been arrested; however, he has been discharged from his job in the Physics Department of the Institute of Precision Chemical Technology, Moscow.

Immediately after the conviction of Ginzburg and Co., Litvinov and Larisa Daniel issued the following statement:

#### **To World Public Opinion:**

The judicial trial of Galanskov, Ginzburg, Dobrovolsky and Lashkova, which is taking place at present in the Moscow City Court, is being carried out in violation of the most important principles of Soviet law. The judge and the prosecutor, with the participation of a special kind of audience, have turned the trial into a wild mockery of three of the accused—Galanskov, Ginzburg and Lashkova—and of the witnesses—unthinkable in the 20th century.

The case took on the character of the well-known "witch trials" on its second day, when Galanskov and Ginzburg—despite a year of preliminary incarceration, in spite of pressure from the court—refused to accept the groundless accusations made against them by Dobrovolsky and sought to prove their own innocence. Evidence by witnesses in favor of Galanskov and Ginzburg infuriated the court even more.

The judge and the prosecutor throughout the trial have been helping Dobrovolsky to introduce false evidence against Galanskov and Ginzburg. The defense lawyers are constantly forbidden to ask questions, and the witnesses are not being allowed to give evidence that unmask the provocative role of Dobrovolsky in this case.

Judge Mironov has not once stopped the prosecutor. But he is allowing people who represent the defense to say only that which fits in with the programme already prepared by the K.G.B. investigation. Whenever any participant in the trial departs from the rehearsed spectacle, the judge cries, "Your question is out of order," "This has no relation to the case," "I will not allow you to speak." These exclamations have been directed at the accused (apart from Dobrovolsky), to their lawyers and to the witnesses.

The witnesses leave the court after their examination, or rather they are pushed out of the court, in a depressed state almost in hysterics.

Witness Yelena Basilova was not allowed to make a statement to the court—she wanted to record how the K.G.B. had prosecuted her mentally sick

husband, whose evidence given during the investigation when he was in a certifiable state, plays an important role in the prosecution case. Basilova was driven out of the court while the judge shouted and the audience howled, drowning her words.

P. Grigorenko (former Maj. Gen. Pyotr Grigorenko of the Soviet Army) submitted a request asking that he be examined as a witness because he could explain the origin of the money found on Dobrovolsky, Galanskov gave him this money. Grigorenko's request was turned down on the pretext that he is allegedly mentally ill. This is not true.

Witnesses Aida Topeshkina was not allowed to make a statement to the court in which she wanted to give facts showing the falsity of Dobrovolsky's evidence. Topeshkina, an expectant mother, was physically ejected from the courtroom, while the audience howled at her.

The "commandant of the court," K.G.B. Colonel Tsirkunenko, did not allow witness L. Katz back into the court after a recess, and told her, "if you had given other evidence, you could have stayed."

None of the witnesses have been allowed to stay in the court after giving evidence, although they are obliged to stay under Soviet law. Appeals by the witnesses on the basis of Article 283 of the Code of Criminal Procedure [the relevant article] went unheeded, and the judge said sharply to witness V. Vinogradova, "You can just leave the court under Article 283."

The courtroom is filled with specially-selected people—officials of the K.G.B. and volunteer militia—who give the appearance of an open public trial. These people make a noise, laugh, and insult the accused and the witnesses. Judge Mironov has made no attempt to prevent these violations of order. Not one of the blatant offenders has been ejected from the hall.

In this tense atmosphere, there can be no pretense that the trial is objective, that there is any justice or legality about it. The sentence was decided from the very start.

We appeal to world public opinion, and in the first place to the Soviet public opinion. We appeal to everyone in whom conscience is alive and who has sufficient courage:

Demand public condemnation of this shameful trial and the punishment of those guilty of perpetrating it!

Demand the release of the accused from arrest!

Demand a new trial with the observance of all legal norms and with the presence of international observers!

Citizens of our country! This trial is a stain on the honor of our state and on the conscience of every one of us. You yourselves elected this court and these judges—demand that they be deprived of the posts which they have abused. Today it is not only the fate of the three accused which is in danger—their trial is no better than the celebrated trials of the nineteen-thirties, which involved us in so much shame and so much blood that we have still not recovered from them.

We pass this appeal to the Western progressive press, and ask for it to be published and broadcast by radio as soon as possible. We are not sending this request to Soviet newspapers because that is hopeless.

Larisa Bogoraz-Daniel, Moscow, V-261, Leninsky Prospect 85, Flat 3.

Pavel Litvinov, Moscow, K-1, Ulitsa Aleksei Tolstoy 8, Flat 78.

*A letter of support for Dr. Pavel Litvinov from Australians appears on page 38.*

# BEING WITH IT

A. A. Phillips

**I**N a recent discussion I found myself compulsorily confronted by the question "Are Australian writers contemporary?" Behind that question I seemed to detect a wistfully guilty suspicion: "Oh dear, are our writers being contemporary enough?" Or perhaps it was a haughty highbrow sniff, "Australian writers? Not quite contemporary, do you think?"

In either case there would seem to be an assumption that a writer really ought to be contemporary, in some special sense of the word. Perhaps that is a proper demand, but it is not so obvious that it can be taken for granted.

Indeed the proposition reveals dangers as soon as one considers the necessary next question. What does contemporary mean in such a context? In blunt fact the unacknowledged answer lurking in the minds of most of those who would make the demand is that a writer is contemporary when he works within the formulas acceptable to the artistic trend-setters of the higher-browed London and New York weeklies.

That is a disconcerting reflection; for a dismaying tendency of our times is revealed by the difference in level between the pages dealing with the arts in such papers and those devoted to other topics. The demands made on most contributors for writing which shall be direct, precise and sensible are suddenly dropped in the pages of artistic comment. The sub-editors here appear to lay aside their blue pencils, and anything goes provided it has an air of authority and the necessary quota of cult-words.

To quote a single specimen from a rich collection which I have assembled, a reviewer in one of the best English weeklies recently wrote: "The author has dug down deep into the very bowels of our time and has surfaced with some very interesting discoveries; but he is not so successful in organising his material, and has failed to marshal the fruits of his quarrying." Well that at least tells us what the fruit-quarriers of modernity are looking for, although it might have been put more succinctly.

If one of the political or fashion writers on the same paper had offered such a hot-potch of unvisualised metaphors, he would, I have little doubt, have been firmly told to write sense in future. It is surely indicative of something seriously wrong with contemporary attitudes to the arts when commentators upon them are unilaterally exempted from such a demand.

Reflecting on this tendency, one might reasonably assert that Australian writers can perform a valuable function by refusing to be contemporary. It would be in tune with our conditions. We are an isolated community. We tend to be uneasy over this discomfiting fact of our geography, and it is both natural and desirable that we should regard it warily, seeking to diminish the shortcomings which it can create. But there is also a good deal to be said for making a virtue of necessity, and seizing the advantages which our isolation gives us. Among them is some measure of immunity from infection by the cult of the contemporary. We can escape the temptations towards the modishly superficial, the gimmickry, the posturing, which become almost inevitable where the intensity of competition forces those who aspire to be heard to exhibitionism.

This kind of non-contemporaneity has often enough in the past been one of the virtues of Australian writing, although it has sometimes also been of its weaknesses. It still is, I believe, one of the strengths of our poets. From McAuley on the right to Manifold on the left, they refuse to be obediently contemporary in the manner of their writing. One result has been that they have retained a firmer contact with the common reader than the present-day poets of most western countries; and that advantage seems to me very import-

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PLUS OTHER FEATURES

ant in a period when the gap between low- and high-brow is one of the most divisive of remaining class-distinctions. At the same time our contemporary poets have escaped the trap which often caught our earlier writers, who rejected the modes of their own generation and substituted for them the out-of-date modes of the preceding period.

Because I applaud this freedom from a slavish contemporaneity in many of our present poets, it should not be assumed that I necessarily reject those who prefer to follow the dominant European usages of the day. When one of them uses those forms as effectively as, let us say, Bruce Dawe, it would be absurd to shy away from the work because it does not accept some alleged duty of non-conformity. But it seems to me a more characteristic achievement, and perhaps a more valuable one, that we produce writers like John Blight who, serenely ignoring the demands of fashion, attain a freshness of approach by going about things in their own way. If such writers exist in the larger centres, they do not succeed in making themselves heard.

\*

However, there is another sense of 'contemporary' which is very different and which makes it perhaps a necessary quality of successful art. One of the great and fruitful functions of the arts—and particularly of literature—is the part which they play in that Great Debate conducted by all lively societies, the attempt to define the place of the society in its age and world, to gauge the direction of its movement, to see its present meaning and its present needs. Whenever a literature has achieved a real vitality and sense of direction, it has been a concerned contributor to its society's

great debate, although it has not necessarily framed its contribution in political or polemical terms.

To say that every good literature will contribute to the great debate is not to say that every good writer will contribute to it. There will always be some who opt out—or appear to do so—preferring to concentrate on themes which happen to be independent of time and space. Such writers as Douglas Stewart and David Campbell on the whole represent this tendency in Australia, and it would be absurd to reject their work simply because it hasn't an obviously 'great debating' function.

It remains true that a literature considered as a whole needs to fulfil such a function, in the interests of its own vitality no less than to ensure its social value. In this way it is true that a lively sense of the contemporary is an important part of a literature, and history decisively shows that its existence in no way diminishes that literature's permanent value.

Contemporaneity in this sense will have many differences from the kind which I have been attacking, and one of those differences is of particular importance for Australians. The superficial conception sees contemporaneity largely as the acceptance of the dominant Western European modes of the times. That will not meet the needs of our great debate. We are at a different stage of development to the major European communities. We are an isolated society. Our formative discussions must be carried on in different terms to theirs.

Two simple examples may make this point clearer. Being contemporary today tends to mean being pessimistic, for reasons which are sufficiently obvious. But pessimism is not the tone of the present-day Australian community. I do not suggest that the Australian writers should therefore eschew pessimism, still less that he should truckle to the shallow attitudes on which Australian optimism is often based. But the European writer of today assumes the existence of a prevailing atmosphere of pessimism which he is interpreting and expressing. The Australian writer who follows this example, even sub-consciously, will be speaking in the wrong debate.

Again there is a noticeable tendency at the moment for the Australian writer to adopt the forms of satire. That is partly due to the influence of current European modes; but it is also partly the expression of our contemporary search for maturity of communal attitudes. Behind it lies the feeling that an adult community needs to be able to criticise itself, and even more that it needs to accept and evaluate criticism, not to fly off into emotional rejections of it.

There is good sense behind this feeling; it probably rightly interprets one of our needs at this stage of our development—although it usually underestimates the part which Australian satiric commentary has played in the past. If, however, satire is practised according to the present European mode it will not fulfil the specifically Australian purposes of its adoption; for today, in Europe, satire is mainly the expression of post-adolescent impulses. Once poetry was the accepted medium for the freeing of youthful feeling, but that form has become increasingly contained, ironic, suspicious of naked emotion—in fact middle-aged. Satire is now increasingly taking its place as the medium for the uninhibited declarations of the young and the youthfully-minded. It satisfies the schoolboy delight in seeing the strutting mayor skid on a banana-peel, as well as the youthful sense of desperation in confronting the inertness of our world.

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## BEN TRE

Thus if our satire is to meet the needs which specially drive us towards its adoption, it will have to be differently conceived from contemporary European satire. One can see the influence of the specifically Australian aim in the satire of Hope. On the other hand "Trap" is more Europeanly conceived. It is a fresh and engaging piece of work; but one can scarcely claim maturity of attitude as one of its qualities.

Are our writers today making contributions to a great debate? I think they are. There are plenty of them who are urgently aware of present crises, anxiously diagnostic of the modern diseases; and many of them at least make an attempt to see them in terms of Australian situations—although there is a dangerous tendency to assume that what in fact are the malaises endemic in all European communities are specifically Australian diseases.

My objection to much of our present writing would not be that it fails to express or analyse contemporary needs. Rather I would complain that, in making that attempt, our writing is achieving no freshness of approach. It goes on saying the same things over and over. It complains of the shallow dreariness of a suburban civilisation—and its endless repetition of that complaint becomes as dreary as any suburb. Almost every poet seems to feel a need to write a poem about the bomb, and it almost always turns out to be the same as all the other poems about the bomb.

In the last few days I have been reading the latest volume of one of the best of our younger poets. I greatly enjoyed the wit and often the imaginative force of his phrasing, and the formal effectiveness of his conceptual shaping; but when I had finished, I found that he had not presented me with one new idea, one unexpected stirring of emotion. One had to be content with the fact that he had said the same old things a bit better than most.

Let us not fall into the mistake against which I have been protesting in others. This is not a specifically Australian error. It is at least as drearily noticeable in other western literatures. When I first read "Waiting for Godot", I thought, "Thank heavens. That's done it decisively. Now all the others can stop trying to say the same thing". Did they?

Behind this failure to achieve new analyses lies a profound dilemma. In the past the literary contributors to great debates have often been angrily critical of the direction of movement of their communities. But they criticised from the base of a faith in the possibilities of the future, or a belief in the positive value of life. Those positives gave their work edge and the possibility of variety. We have lost the impulse of such faiths.

The communists should have it, for at least they have a faith in the future. Unhappily their belief in a monolithic society has tempted them into suppressions of individual expression, and has thus neutralised their advantage. The convinced religionists, too, should have the advantage of a positive and faithful base; but in practice they say much the same things as the most sceptical agnostics. When in our time religion once again became intellectually respectable, one expected that its revival would be marked by a rejection of the old conception of Hell. It was quite a surprise to find that the neo-religionists were as addicted to Hell as a seventeenth century Puritan, but that they seemed noticeably sceptical about Heaven. Certainly this rediscovery of sin added a certain new note to writing. Unhappily that did not for long relieve the monotony, for the agnostics also redis-

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"We weep for you", the Yankees said,  
"We deeply sympathise".

With sobs and tears they sorted out  
Bombs of the largest size.

"When these go hurtling down", they said,  
"The flames will dry our eyes."

JAMES GIDLEY

---

covered sin, which they called Guilt, thus extending its range, since even the innocent can suffer from a sense of guilt. I am not suggesting that a rediscovery of the reality of sin was not a necessary movement, given the history of the last forty years; but its almost universal recognition and the degree of obsession by it have increased the monotony of contemporary literary declarations. The old ideas about sin at least provided a pleasant variety of fascinating topics; the modern sense of guilt lacks that advantage.

My generalisations of course exaggerate the extent of the disease. Among those of our writers who do not suffer from it, I would specify Judith Wright. When she is contributing to the great debate—she often prefers more universal themes—she shows a keen sense for the nature of contemporary problems, and a particularly clear perception of the specifically Australian variations of those problems. She does not take refuge in the shallowness of being reassuring; but at the same time she does not lose her sense of the positive value of life, although her tone is stoic rather than optimistic. This retained sense of positive values raises her above the monotonous reiterations of other writers. Her recent poem "Turning Fifty" illustrates the kind of quality in her work which I am trying to describe.

What is the cure for this monotony of conception in contemporary writing? I don't know. It is not going to be easy to find, because the causes which create it lie far deeper than any mere problems of literary procedure. To accept a positive faith merely because negativism has become monotonous would be a relapse into the older disease of wishful thinking. I believe that we shall probably begin our escape when creative minds recognise that the monotony is a symptom of sterility. That is so unacceptable to the creators that it will force them to batter their way forward to the evolvment of some kind of positive convictions which will be acceptable to the recognitions of a post-Freudian and post-bomb era. There is little sign of such movement at the moment.

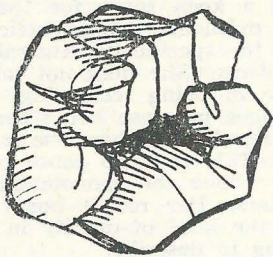
Twenty years ago, writing of the Great Debating functions of literature, I said, "The writer is of little use to us if he is merely the patient in the next bed echoing our moans". Since then the position has become worse. The moan has become a refrain, every note of which we know by heart.

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# HENRY LAWSON AND RAGNAR REDBEARD

Len Fox

WITH the centenary of Henry Lawson's birth being celebrated this year, there is added interest in some comments by his brother-in-law, former New South Wales premier Jack Lang, in a recent talk to the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney.

Lang, now ninety years old, but still full of vigor, had previously given some glimpses of Lawson in his book "I Remember". Speaking to the Fellowship, though he said nothing startlingly new, he gave some fresh pictures of Lawson's weaknesses seen in relation to his times; this has some importance in view of a recent tendency to see such weaknesses as personal failings only. And in addition Lang spoke of the influence on Lawson of Ragnar Redbeard, surely one of the most mysterious figures in our history!

First about Lawson himself. Lang and Lawson married sisters, daughters of Bertha McNamara, and Lang was able to give personal glimpses.

"Physically Lawson was a very delicate man, very thin, very tall . . . If he had a couple of beers he wanted to love everybody; if you gave him a glass of whisky he wanted to tear the place down. But that wasn't his real nature—he was kindly, full of humor.

"All his life he was poor, like the other writers. His writing meant a lot of work. He had the gift of writing so that people who read it would feel it . . .

"He became popular; everyone used to say: 'How are yer; come and have a drink'. And if you did, and had one too many, you were no good. We were a puritanical race. If you were seen going into a hotel, your character was gone. If you went to a racecourse, you were going to hell . . .

"Lawson was human and friendly and kindly, a bit deaf . . . Everybody who knew him liked him. He was very soft-spoken. He had soft kindly brown eyes that looked through you.

"He wasn't strong . . . A wonderful memory . . . and a sense of humor . . . He'd observe things you'd never notice." Lang told how he and Lawson were once walking in Sydney streets with horse buses going up and down to the railway, and the drivers touting for fares by calling out "Down sir? Down sir?" Lawson turned to Lang and said: "Do you notice, whether they're going up or down, it's always down?"

Lang continued: "Lawson really loved Australia. He had a particular affection for the people in the bush. Once I said to him: 'What have Australians ever done?' He said: 'I think the most characteristic thing is mateship. I don't think any other country in the world has such mateship. That's the greatest thing in Australia. If nothing else stands, what Australia did mate to mate will stand'."

Lang also gave a picture of the Sydney of last century which had such an influence on Lawson. He spoke of young people working for six months for nothing in the hope of getting the job.

"You worked from 8 a.m. till 9 p.m. and on Saturdays till midnight. After six months, if times were prosperous, you might get 2/6 a week. There were no unions." One felt that Lang was exaggerating often enough, but that the exaggerations seemed justified in the making of valid points.

He spoke of the "aristocrats" living at the top of Surry Hills, and driving in to the city in a coach with coachman and footman. "That was our world. The only amusements were going to Paddy's Market, or church—and Paddy's Market was the best.

"Then they began to get a little industry . . . For the first time they began to get a power that could stand up to the money power." There was an engineering works that shut its workers out to force them back at starvation wages, but the workers refused to go back and the works had to shut down.

Labor versus money power—that was how Lang saw the world as he grew up. Literature was a weapon for Labor. It was as simple as that. Lang described McNamara's bookshop, in Castlereagh Street where the Sydney Fire Station is now, as "like the heart of a machine that fed Australia . . . All the non-conformists used to come there . . . all the great names that developed in Australia." He mentioned Holman, Hughes, Holland, atheists, Unitarians, "ministers of all religions", Lawson, Paterson, Rod Quinn, E. J. Brady, J. F. Archibald ("a tip-top editor; he would reduce four or five

foolscap pages to four or five lines, and it'd be more pungent and more readable, and you got paid for it").

As one listened to Lang, one glimpsed both the strengths and weaknesses of the radical groups that influenced Lawson. The strengths are clear enough—courage and enthusiasm, and a dream of Australia as a new land that would be free from the poverty and oppression of the old world.

The weaknesses of the radical group are not so well known and understood, perhaps, and that is why it is interesting to note what Lang said about the mysterious Ragnar Redbeard, and to spend some time into trying to dig out the facts about this elusive and almost-forgotten figure.

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At McNamara's bookshop, Lang said, there was a box on the counter for contributions to an illegal journal called "Hard Cash" which exposed the doings of the banks and other wealthy companies. Detectives often put in contributions, and tried to track down the editor, but he always eluded them. But Lang himself as a boy assisted in the illegal printing of "Hard Cash" in a cottage in Rose Street, Darlington. The editor was a "poet, actuary and revolutionary" named Arthur Desmond, a man with a red beard and red eyes who sometimes wrote under the pen-name of "Ragnar Redbeard".

Lang claims that Lawson was considerably influenced by this man, and booklover Walter Stone states that Tom Mutch also believed that Desmond was an important influence on Lawson. Yet Desmond is not mentioned in most books on Lawson, and is almost entirely forgotten. Who and what was he? Research over a period of some months has produced results that are interesting, at times amusing, at times saddening . . .

An early article of his, published in New Zealand in 1890, is entitled "Christ as Social Reformer" and shows the early Desmond as a Christian Socialist. The book ends with a poem by Desmond, "The King That Is To Come", depicting a Christlike leader who is to come to save the world's people from tyranny and war. A later version of the poem, "The Leader of the Future", was published in Australian militant journals of the 1890s.

The Mitchell Library has a speech delivered by the late Vance Marshall at the Brisbane Trades Hall in December 1921 honoring Desmond as the man who moulded the "Active Service Brigade" which attempted to organise and care for the poor during the depression of 1893; Marshall states that "for six years his finger was traceable in every decisive movement associated with the working class."

Desmond thus seems to emerge as a radical labor leader of worthy stature. However, articles by George G. Reeve in "Ross's Monthly" state that Desmond left Australia in 1895 with a manuscript that "went further than Nietzsche and Stirner", edited "Redbeard's Review" in London for four years, then went to America to become a publisher in Chicago and a rancher in Montana.

And from America emerged a book "Might Is Right" (originally "The Survival of the Fittest") which was reprinted in Australia by Ross's Book Service, Melbourne, in 1921, and which is so far removed from Desmond's early Christian Socialism that it is difficult at first to believe it is written by the same man.

Written in what can only be called a bombastic style, the book has an 1896 editor's preface which declares: "This is no ordinary book. Nothing like it has ever been permitted to see the light since

A.D. 300 . . ." This preface is signed by "Douglas K. Handyside, M.D., Ph.D.", whose literary style resembles very much that of the author "Ragnar Redbeard L.L.D., University of C."

The style and content of the book can be seen from a few extracts: "Great financial corporations . . . directed mostly by Hebrews . . . Women take supreme delight in the roll of warlike drum, in the marching of the military . . . There is no cant and hypocrisy about Cecil Rhodes . . . Inferior breeds . . . human mongrelism . . . You have only to look at some men to know that they belong to an inferior race. Take the Negro, for example . . . the Chinaman, the Coolie, the Kanaka, the Jew . . ." In short, it reads very much like an earlier version of Hitlerism.

Some partial explanation of how the Christian Socialist became the racist is glimpsed in material on Desmond given me by veteran Sydney socialist John McDonald and New Zealand librarian H. Roth.

Research by Mr. Roth (published in the "New Zealand Monthly Review" of August 1960, and in a paper called "Joy") shows that the early Desmond was not as gentle and Christian as some of his writing indicated. He contested the Hawke's Bay seat in 1884 and 1887 and was noted for his vigorous attacks on "thieves and loafers . . . scoundrelly bank directors . . . bloodsucking leeches . . . hireling editors . . ." He was said to be a cattle drover, a follower of Henry George and Robert Burns; in 1890 he turned from Henry George to organising labor unions.

In 1889 when the 60-year-old Maori leader Te Kooti wanted to visit Poverty Bay and angry white settlers formed an anti-Maori Vigilance Committee, Desmond showed considerable courage in putting the case for the Maoris to two settlers' meetings; a newspaper reported that at the second he might have been "torn in pieces" if the police had not saved him. Desmond had lived with the Maoris and understood the extent to which anti-Maori feeling was based on white men's greed for land; he expressed this in a poem "The Song of Te Kooti" in the Sydney "Bulletin" in March 1889 which Mr. Roth rightly points out is one of Desmond's best; these two verses give its spirit:—

The Pakehas came with their rum and their gold,  
And soon the broad lands of our fathers were sold,  
But the voice of Te Kooti said: "Hold the land!  
Hold!"

Exult for Te Kooti, yo-hoo! . . .

The Eternal's our father, the land is our mother,  
The forest and mountains our sister and brother;  
Who'd part with his birthright for gold or another!

Exult for Te Kooti, yo-hoo!

Alongside his qualities of courage and commitment to winning a better world were lesser qualities. His article on "Christ as a Social Reformer" was, according to Roth, "shown to be a close version of an article which had appeared a year earlier in an American magazine". His poem "The Leader of the Future" had similarities with American poet James Whitcomb Riley's "The Poet of the Future". Charges he made against New Zealand Tories were based on a letter which was later shown to be a forgery. Apparently, as is often the case, his excessive enthusiasm for a cause went with a tendency to be disillusioned, and when the



# Australia in Western Imaginative Prose Writings 1600-1960

WERNER P. FRIEDERICH

This is a fascinating subject which has not been treated in detail before: the image of Australia as revealed through the writings of half a dozen utopians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and through the works, mostly novels, of foreign visitors after 1800. The survey ranges all the way from the noble vision of a new land of the Holy Ghost in Quiros and the beginnings at Botany Bay to the gold rush in Victoria and the Italian immigrants in Queensland.

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New Zealand unions turned against him, he left for Australia.

Here in the early 1890s he found much outlet for his enthusiasm and ability. Mr. McDonald has in his possession an article by former Prime Minister W. M. Hughes in the journalists' annual magazine "Copy" for 1913 which describes Desmond as the "regular poet" of the early socialist paper "New Order" (about 1893). Hughes writes:

"His command of scarifying language was appalling . . . He was a poet and a most excellent man. He contrived to land the 'New Order' in libels during its short sojourn on this journalistic earth for about £30,000! . . . Poetry oozed out of him at every pore. He could not help being a poet, any more than he could help cursing the capitalist . . ."

But by 1893 the early enthusiasm of the radicals and socialists had had to face defeats and disillusionment. Never had the need for a changed social system been shown so vividly as in those years when bank crashes ruined multitudes and hungry queues formed at the soup kitchens, while clever rogues escaped with fortunes. Yet all the radical endeavors to bring about a fundamental change met with failure. It was a time when the most stout-hearted might well be disillusioned. Many radicals turned to political careers and ended up as conservatives. William Lane took many of the finest radicals to Paraguay in a doomed attempt to build socialism in the jungle. Desmond turned to Stirner and Nietzsche, and left Australia as he had once left New Zealand.

There is still much uncertainty about his life in America.

Mr. McDonald has a number of pamphlets published by Thurland and Thurland, Evanston,

Chicago, including "Sayings of Redbeard", works by Nietzsche and Ferrer, and a pamphlet "The Coming Terror" with an advertisement for "Might Is Right" including a section in handwritten block letters claiming that "150,000 copies of this remarkable book have been sold with scarcely any paid publicity. Into 3 European languages it has been translated and one Oriental . . . Rockefeller preaches it. Roosevelt [sic] is soaked in it—the Kaiser too. The Czar has read it with profit. The Pope has the cloth bound edition. Cecil Rhodes had his copy typewritten because it was the first edition badly printed.

"Like a great shining plow, driven by super-human forces it goes tearing, ripping, swearing through the brains of men, remorselessly rooting up the evil idols and the false foundations. The ablest authors of our era it leaves far in the rear . . . It is the lifting as it were of a painted veil from the scowling brow of an evil spirit: a ghastly, loathesome, Asiatic monster: a Jew dragon of blood and tears and all hypocrisy: a crucified Satan, weeping crocodile tears over the millions and millions of deceived souls . . ."

We can take with a grain of salt his grandiose claims about "Might Is Right". But he appears to have become a rich man, and this may indicate that his book had some influence. Apparently it did in Australia. According to George Reeve (and I confirmed this in a talk with Sydney labor veteran Norman Jeffery before his death), Australian Marxists opposed Redbeard's ideas, but members of the militant Industrial Workers of the World, who exerted considerable influence in 1914-18, "venerated his book".

This was further confirmed in a talk with Sydney booklover Walter Stone, who told me of a visit to Brisbane for a lecture on Desmond where he found the only accessible copy of "Might Is Right" was in the Police Library. A police spokesman told him the book had been considered a textbook of the I.W.W., and was included in the Police Library so that police could study the ideas of the I.W.W.

The republication of the book in Australia in 1921 is partly explained by the fact (pointed out to me by Edgar Ross, son of Bob Ross, the publisher) that in earlier days radical groups tended to welcome anyone who was "agin the government" without necessarily accepting their ideas. Obviously, too, the book appealed to a number of militant workers because of its forceful attacks on ruling-class injustice and hypocrisy and because, mixed up with its racist poison and other crudities, there is the important truth that radical groups do not win gains because of the goodness of heart of society's rulers, or because a reasoned case has been argued for progressive changes, but rather because of pressure, because of struggles waged on many fronts. The tragedy of Desmond was that he confused this element of truth with so much nonsense and harmful teaching.

Where does Henry Lawson come into all this? Certain links between Lawson and Desmond are known. Desmond quotes a verse from the fuller version of "In The Days When The World Was Wide" (originally published in 1894) in "Might Is Right". He does not acknowledge Lawson's authorship, however.

Mr. Roth, in *Overland* No. 12, 1958, writes that Desmond may have been one of those who influenced Lawson to go to New Zealand at the end of 1893. Soon after Lawson's arrival in Wellington, Desmond got into trouble with the New South Wales authorities over the Active Service Brigade. He was bitterly attacked in a Wellington

weekly, "Fair Play", but there was a poem in reply the next week "By an Australian Exile"—clearly Lawson. The first and third verses give the spirit of the poem:—

They are stoning Arthur Desmond, and, of course, it's understood,  
By the people of New Zealand that he isn't any good.  
He's a plagiarist they tell us, and a scamp—  
but after all,  
He is fighting pretty plucky with his back  
against the wall . . .

They are damning Arthur Desmond for the battle that he fought—  
For his awful crime in saying what so many people thought.  
He was driven from the country—but I like to see fair play—  
And to slander absent brothers—why it ain't New Zealand's way.

But while Desmond was one of a radical group all of whom must have had some influence on Lawson, there does not seem any strong case to suggest the influence of Desmond was a considerable one. In fact, in some ways Lawson and Redbeard are opposites. Lawson represented the human side of radicalism, whereas Desmond was always theoretical, agitational. His poetry is politics put into rhyme:—

. . . The widows starving slowly  
And the child that feeds on crusts  
Are melted down to dividends  
By vast financial trusts.  
Oh cruel were Pizarro's hordes  
Who march to loot and slay  
But ruthless are the mortgage wolves,  
The robbers of today . . .

Lawson and Desmond appear to have been opposites in other ways; for instance, Lawson had a deep and motivating love of Australia, whereas Desmond seems to have had no particular love for any country. And while Lawson, despite disillusionment, always kept a certain faith in ordinary people, Desmond by 1894 (and probably earlier) showed a strong tendency to write of ordinary workers as frightened slaves. This can be seen in a poem of his in the "New Order" of 14th July 1894, called "A Missionary Hymn", in which two lines in italics refer to ordinary Australian workers thus:—

*These slaves have not the courage  
To seize what is their own.*

This tendency to treat the average worker as a "mug" or a frightened slave can be seen in militant and socialist thought in Australia in the 1910-1925 period; there appears to be a need for some sustained study of the influence on Australian socialist thought of ideas like those of Desmond with a tendency to intolerance, impatience, leftism and jargon. (It is interesting to note Lawson's satirical poem "Rise Ye! Rise Ye!" which is aimed to some extent at least against these particular tendencies.)

What emerges from a study of Arthur Desmond, in my opinion, is not that he was a major influence on Lawson, but rather that in Desmond we can see the confusion and weaknesses (as well as the enthusiasm and courage) of the radicals of Lawson's early days. The radical-socialist group of

the 1890s was much weaker than we often imagine; its weaknesses led to the disillusionment of men like Desmond and William Lane—and seeing this we can understand better Lawson's weaknesses, for they too were in part a reflection of the weaknesses of the radical group which had influenced his earlier dreams.

There is one final point of interest. While in general Lawson's poems are unlike the writings of Desmond, there is one Lawson poem that immediately recalls some of the sentiments of "Might Is Right". This is "The Star of Australasia":—

We boast no more of our bloodless flag that  
rose from a nation's slime;  
Better a shred of a deep-dyed rag from the  
storms of the olden time.  
From grander clouds in our peaceful skies  
than ever were there before  
I tell you the Star of the South shall rise—  
in the lurid clouds of war.  
It ever must be while blood is warm and sons  
of men increase;  
For ever the nations rose in storm, to rot in  
a deadly peace . . .

Many critics have pointed out that this poem, with its glorification of old-world flags and war, is in striking contrast to earlier Lawson poems praising the Eureka flag and seeing Australia as a land free from the Old World wrongs and storms. Denton Prout in his book "Henry Lawson: The Grey Dreamer" recalls that a writer in the Sydney "Cosmos" attacked this poem for its "jingoism" and "mimicry of old-world battlefields". Prout sees this and other outbursts of militarism by Lawson as "an essential part of his nature" and compensation for the dullness of existence in a narrowing world. It is interesting to speculate, however, whether in this poem Lawson is perhaps writing under the direct influence of Desmond, or rather under the influence of the more militarist ideas of Nietzsche, Stirner and others passed on by Desmond.

The poem was apparently first published in 1896, and it appears that it was between 1893 and 1896 that Desmond came under the influence of the Nietzsche-Stirner school; there seems every likelihood that Desmond would have attempted to influence Lawson with his new ideas, and may have succeeded to some extent—though of course "The Star of Australasia" contains much of Lawson's human and positive thinking as well as influences from the more negative Redbeard.

That is merely a guess. What is more important, I think, is to see the contradiction and the tragedy of the life of Arthur Desmond as part of a general contradiction and tragedy of life in the 1890s—and to see Henry Lawson and try to understand him in the light of that same general contradiction and tragedy.

(As a footnote, one can add that the death of Ragnar Redbeard, like his life, is shrouded in mystery. Reeve writes that he died in Palestine in 1918 on service with Allenby's troops; others deny this; Reeve quotes one American as identifying him with Ambrose Bierce! And Labor historians might be interested in the opinion of an Australian, Mr. K. J. Kenafick, who wrote to Mr. Roth suggesting that Desmond's main influence was on Lang, in whom he implanted the concept of "money power" as the main enemy.)

# A CRITICAL COMMENT

Don Crick

**"CRITICISM** of literature and the arts is poor, and some of it extremely cliqueish. There is a lot of 'knocking' and backbiting, sometimes reflecting in-group battles and sometimes perhaps a very real frustration about what to say."

In this rather casual and unsupported statement in Donald Horne's "The Lucky Country", lies, I think, more truth than a cursory examination of critical attitudes could reveal.

However, one cannot fail to notice one aspect of contemporary judgment that has taken the shape of a systematic position on the literary worth of creative writing. Both interesting and significant, it operates without definition as a movement and is confined to an aesthetic approach that is not readily apparent, but which has subtly created its own hegemony of standards.

Before explicitly defining this position, it may provisionally be described as an appraisal of literary value on the basis of the confinement of consciousness and motivation within the psychological, the mystical and the spiritual, and a complementary confinement of action within the purely private and personal.

One gathers that this is a reaction, born of the changed political and social climate, to the Social Realist category which was the product of critical determinism in the thirties, particularly in America where it became an entrenched feature of the socialist and radical movements and was aligned with the work of such internationally famous writers as Ignazio Silone, John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell, Clifford Odets, Andre Malraux, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, etc. Among the Australian equivalents were Katharine Prichard, Miles Franklin, Xavier Herbert, Vance Palmer, Kylie Tennant, Leonard Mann.

The delineation of society in war and peace, and the individual's role as a social entity, have been significant features of the great literature of all ages. However, with the world-wide economic chaos of the thirties and the emergence in strength of the political left, the theory of "social realism" arose to buttress politics and create the critical dogma that dominated much of the literary scene in those days.

Literature always has been subject to the influence of critical pressure groups, so there was nothing new about it, except that it had world-wide political ramifications. Dogma and politics have never been strangers and, as many of the leading writers of that era did reflect the social dilemmas and conflicts of the age, and were socialist in outlook, it was a simple enough matter to embrace the literary mainstream in a single term that flourished, like a parasitic growth, with ample nourishment on which to feed and develop its own tendencies and interests.

In the post-war world the economic and political climate changed and nowhere was this more evident than in Australia. Soon it became obvious that literature set in this era must reflect the changed situation, for it could not realistically portray a revolutionary, class-conscious mood that no longer widely existed. For most Australians the New Order had arrived and, despite flaws, it was a vast improvement on the old.

For the writers, however, it became a period to which many never really succeeded in adjusting. There were two things missing; two things vital to the writer of the thirties—society in violent conflict and the vision of social change. Though the main class lines were unaltered, traditional values and attitudes became blurred or, as areas of conflict in terms of mass poverty and hardship, ceased to exist. A different society had arrived bringing with it something of a literary vacuum for the social realist critics and for the left in general, the loss, or serious weakening, of a political ally.

It was not, of course, a social vacuum, but in the immediate post-war years, with the rise in working-class standards and the growth of an acquisitive status-consciousness, there seemed little left to delineate in the old way except the Aborigines who still lived in the twilight of social change. So the critical values which espoused the literature of the thirties fell upon stony ground and the stage was set for the emergence of new

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standards upon which to base a personal system of criticism and to advance some new establishment. The only thing missing was a writer of stature around whose work such a system could be built without jeopardising critical reputations and the industry in general.

Such a writer was Patrick White and, after the initial flurry of controversy and doubt centred around A. D. Hope's review of "The Tree of Man", published in 1955, the die was cast and all that remained for the aspiring critic was to find a place on the new critical band-waggon and begin blowing.

But the dilemma was not yet completely solved. The term, Social Realism, and writers thus categorised, were now Non-U, but how to define what was U must have remained a ticklish problem until it was established that Patrick White's work embraced the quintessence of almost every known literary quality including realism. This took time, but it was achieved with resolute zeal. Realism was not to be denied, so in the narrowing field of detection of "social realist" guilt (the writers, of course) the word "social" was the obvious culprit as it had little thematic significance in White's work. The consequent deletion of any significant delineation of social forces as a viable medium for literary expression was, therefore, a considerable advance.

Now the new critical system had its writer, and literature no longer belonged with society; but it was clear that analogies could not successfully be drawn between White's work and that of most other contemporaries, the "New Order" writers as I heard the genre described by a prominent critic who named Randolph Stow, Thomas

Keneally, Elizabeth Harrower, Thea Astley, Peter Mathers, George Turner, Suzanne Holly-Jones.

Comparison between writers' work soon palls, and in any case it is an unsatisfactory critical method. So the quality of White's imagery, his characterisation, his verbal strengths and idiosyncrasies, his use of symbols, his ability to superimpose the myths of Jewish mysticism or any other myths or philosophies onto the Australian scene, could not provide that definitive link between his work and the work of other writers that would be acceptable as a critical guideline. But, as already suggested, the lack of social connection could, and the critic drew the line of literary demarcation between the "old" and "new" orders in this way:

"If there is one difference above all, in attitude and achievement, between White and his predecessors, it lies, I think, in his rejection of environment, natural and social, as the supreme determinant of Australian life, or indeed of any life . . . No suburban community has been flayed more unsparingly than Sarsparilla. Yet, through it all, embedded in metaphors, overt in narrative, he insists that we ourselves are our own destroyers; that to escape from corruption, as Voss does, is no way of life unless the way lies towards humility; that in our most ordinary and depressing surroundings—in a 'job of spittle', or a pumpkin, or the 'pumpkin-colored eyes' of a stray dog, may lie the epiphany which shows us God; that a saint may work in a grocer's shop as well as die on a cross . . . His focus takes in Absurdity and relates it not to national but to spiritual problems . . . it is their humanity, not their nationality, nor their trades, that preoccupies him. It accepts suffering and loneliness, not in stoicism, but as an activity which can induce self-knowledge, teach humility, confer serenity."

Preoccupation with people's humanity (or lack of it) is, of course, the concern of all writers of any consequence no matter what else concerns them, so this could hardly be a point of difference between White and other writers. The key to the line of demarcation, and to the new critical criteria as related to "New Order" writing is in the "rejection of environment, natural or social, as a supreme determinant of Australian life, or indeed of any life". And this, too, could be correct, as the statement is qualified by the word "supreme". But I think it becomes less, far less, than the truth when no emphasis whatever is placed upon environmental influences as forces which project themselves into the individual consciousness to become motivating factors, both personal and collective, part of the ingredients of our reasoning, our values and our acts.

Secondly, in the foregoing quotation the word "God" has a significant place as a handy hook on which to hang spiritual values and to infer that such values are the exclusive prerogative of some form of religious or mystical experience. This furthers the concept of life divorced from society, from environment, and cossets the projection in literature of individuals confined within themselves and closely related groups, reaching for spiritual (personal) salvation without reference to corporate humanity or a consciousness of human destiny in any broad sense. It is, in Forster's definition of the novel, "character in action", but within the isolation of a closed order; a kind of critical litany bent on fostering a closed order of writers, in the critic's words, "stimulated . . . I am tempted to say liberated by his [White's] achievement".

That such a dogmatic critical precept should have been built around White's work seems to me unfortunate. The method by which a writer approaches his work is entirely his prerogative and does not necessarily make him a better or a worse writer. But the attempted monopolisation of literary standards by criteria that sponsor a particular line is as potentially corrupting to literature as power is to politics.

It goes without saying that the novel is not a treatise of any kind and should not expound theories in the didactic terms of philosophy or science. However, as the novel expresses what the writer wants to say within the context of the drama in order to further a theme, it is, in fact, an expression of self; and any writer who has felt deeply the impact of influence within society and has responded to them as determinants in his life will naturally embody them in his work, for they have become part of his interpretative faculties. To reject this is to reject social experience and the self-knowledge gained from it. To reject this is to reject society's impact on life itself—the socio-economic structure, the philosophies that shape it, its pressures, its institutions, its organisational hold on the individual, its basis as an identifying medium, its influences on personal commitment, its connection with anything that might be construed as a national consciousness or tradition.

Common to many of the great writers of the past was an ability to portray a quality of life in a broad sense, an amalgam of the personal and social, rather than small groups working out their destinies, like gold fish in a bowl, separate from yet in full view of the world. To read Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, Dickens or Balzac, Dreiser or Wells, Lawson or Furphy—the illustrations are almost too obvious to mention—is to see the creative imagination working in various ways to produce a many-faceted image of people within society, an image in which a great deal of significance derives from social delineation within the mainstream of the characters' lives.

Apparently, if we are to follow the dictums of the "New Order" critics, it is aesthetically valid, as in "Voss" and "Riders in the Chariot", to superimpose a religious philosophy onto life so that the characters think and act in accordance with its concepts, while to portray a reality which illuminates a social philosophy is somehow impure. What is implied is that the spiritual is a kind of wraith-like manifestation of forces vested in God. They cannot be vested in man or related to man as a social entity.

So, outside the astral planes of consciousness, subjectivity and the entire range of man's emotional life become the preserve of heredity infiltrated by strictly private influences. Yet it seems to me that compassion, anger, endurance, meanness, courage, pity, passion, mirth—every emotion of which man is capable—stem also from the world in which he is forced to battle with such influences as the nature of work, power structures, class divisions, war and the threat of atomic annihilation, politics, religion, nature, in short the whole range of his environment. While the critic, as much as the writer, is entitled to his own point of view, I suggest that God's own criticism

## FLOATING FUND

Overland's long-suffering accountant has recently pointed out to us that we suffered an unpleasant loss on last year's books. It's not generally understood, even by our readers, that there's a lot of type-setting and a lot of words in an issue of Overland—almost as much as in a full-sized novel. But we'll be keeping going, largely owing to your donations, which amount to a very welcome \$323.70 since last issue. Many thanks to:

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is not made manifest through burning bushes and augurs a spiritual light, but that many of its determinants are direct reflections of social mores. Apart from ambition, security and conformist social and political pressures, it could reflect a philosophy of retreat into the self as a refuge from the world so that there is little left but God, the inner life, and the search for personal salvation.

As all literary criticism is, in some degree, subjective there can be no complete validity for it. But whatever validity it has does not reside in the claims of any one critical system. Literature is as diverse as life itself, and to confine it within a category merely defines it in terms of a cult that neither reflects diversity nor is willing to recognise anything outside its own frame of reference.

For it to become the tool of any sectional interest is the first stage in its domination by forces that will use it for the propagation of other ends and eventually deny the writer his individual integrity.

Critics who are sincere in their efforts to delineate a writer's transformation of life into literature begin without didactic preconceptions as to what they should discover. As intuition plays a significant role in the writer's creative faculty, the critic will inevitably fall short of some of the truth. But literature is written for people and, if it is to be saved from becoming, as Simone de Beauvoir has said, "a peripheral divertimento" it will need critics, academic and otherwise, willing to recognise, as part of its diversity, its place as an extensive view of life, society and the times in which we live.

*The following letter appeared in The Australian on 21st February last.*

The Editor,  
The Australian.  
Dear Sir,

The editors of a number of Australian magazines have authorised me to say that they are sponsoring a statement of protest to the appropriate Soviet authorities against the recent imprisonment of Aleksander Ginzburg and other Soviet writers.

The editors are: Stephen Murray-Smith (Overland), Helen Palmer (Outlook), C. B. Christesen (Meanjin), Leon Glezer and Ian Ward (Dissent) and Geoff Sharp and Doug White (Arena).

The statement reads:

"We have read with heavy hearts of the trial and conviction of, and the savage sentences imposed upon, yet another group of Soviet writers.

"We believe that a law which deprives citizens of freedom of opinion and publication, and a legal system which subjects them to arbitrary arrest and to secret and stage-managed trials, are a travesty of justice, and make a mockery of socialism and humanism.

"We associate ourselves unreservedly with the protest of Dr. Pavel Litvinov, and (if the report of his dismissal from his university position is correct) we condemn this unseemly act of revenge.

"In our country, the action of the Soviet authorities (and the inaction of the appropriate professional associations) has strengthened the right, the advocates of the cold war and of aggression against Vietnam, while it has disheartened the left, the advocates of peace and understanding.

"We appeal to the Union of Soviet Writers, to the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., and to the professional associations of Soviet university teachers to do their manifest duty to their colleagues who have suffered this monstrous injustice, to the socialist values they profess, and hence to their friends and colleagues throughout the world."

Any of your readers who would like to associate themselves with this appeal are invited to notify me of their support.

Ian Turner,  
205 Lennox St., Richmond, Vic., 3121.

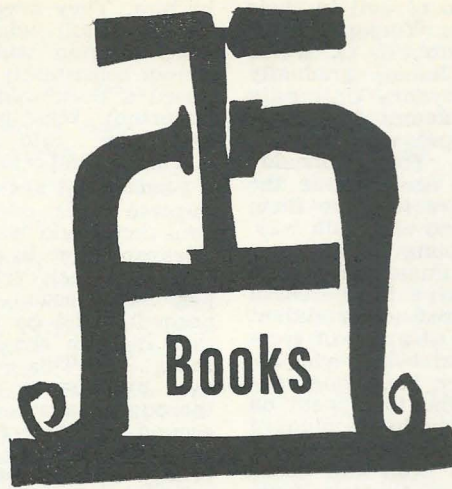
*Signatures will be received until May 18th.*

#### LATEST NEWS

In Moscow, C.P.S.U. leader Brezhnev condemned the "shameful acts of two-faced people who made loud declarations for foreign consumption. These renegades cannot count on going unpunished," he said. However there have been no reports of further action against Dr. Litvinov. Meanwhile, the appeal of Ginzburg and his associates has been dismissed by a higher court hearing to which the press was not admitted.

In London, the famous composer Igor Stravinsky wrote: "I remember how my teacher Rimsky-Korsakov suffered from the reactionary Czarist censorship. And now, 50 years later, while the

whole world honours the achievements of the Russian people, the terror again threatens the Russian intelligentsia. I know Soviet literature, its poetry and its prose, and I think that the young writers there will be the most vital in the modern world. Why does the Soviet censorship suppress them, why does it take its vengeance on Soviet writers. For they are great patriots, who love their language. It is obvious that no literature can develop under the fear of censorship, and I think the Soviet Union could prove its greatness and wisdom by removing the ridiculous sentences on the writers in acceptance of the freedom of the pen."



## Young Donald

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Donald Horne: "The Education of Young Donald"  
(Angus & Robertson, \$3.95)

We have been told that one man in his life plays many parts. We know, too, that inside the one person there are many persons. Some have been born to the cruel fate of only being able to play on the stage of life a sonata of unaccompanied dullness, and some have been born to the complex fate of having inside them, as it were, all the instruments of a symphony orchestra. Donald Horne already has played many parts. He came on to the stage of public life not so much as the "young Donald", but as the enfant terrible, or the Charles Adams boy, with a malevolent eye and a mordant wit. Then he published a book, "The Lucky Country", over which "Mr. Dry As Dust" shook his head and the self-appointed defenders of accurate scholarship were exceedingly sorrowful, but the book, unlike its critics, had a vitality and a significance to survive their petty posturings and take its place as a significant contribution to the discussion of the role of Australia and Australians in a world in which all the great ideologies of the past were losing their grip on men's minds.

The difficulty was how to place him. Was he just a product of a tough environment—of non-caring Sydney—as distinct from the city of compassion, caring, and S.C.M. cheerfulness, Melbourne? Or was he an Andersonian? Or was he a radical conservative? Or was he one of those clever reactionaries who would be put in the dust-bin of human history by those future of humanity men in Melbourne once they had taken over life in Australia, and begun to tell everyone what they should do and what they should think and not just the few odd victims who were not able to escape the monologues of such spiritual bullies in public bars and University cafeterias?

This autobiography tells us much of the many parts played by Donald Horne. For that alone it would be worth reading. It also tells us much about the intellectual life of Australia over the last thirty odd years. For that the book should live on long after the characters and environments which fashioned him as a man have vanished like a dream—and in some cases, a bad dream.

It can be read as a most deeply moving story of a family which had known great happiness only to be plunged into a great darkness by his father's mental illness. The father, a school teacher, seems to have been a victim of that war which cast a shadow over the lives of most Australian families in the 1920's and 1930's. It can be read as the story of a boy who had known a life of innocence (in one sense of that word) in the country town of Muswellbrook, on the Hunter River, like all rivers a life affirming force, and then gone down to the city of Sydney as a youth where he fell among thieves who stripped him of his myths, whipped him, and left him to wander as a vagabond till in early middle age he began to rediscover the sources of life, after years of plunging after false gods.

It can be read for its magnificent recreation of the life in a country town. As such it reminds one of passages in Twain and Sherwood Anderson—though one would not like to push that comparison too far. It does, however, confront that great change from the carefree days of the "dunny", the chip-heater, and tomato sandwiches and cream cakes, to the days of the espresso coffee bar, the flagon of claret, the contraceptive pill and the jet engine.

It can be read, too, for its brilliant character sketches of personalities at Sydney University. James McAuley, Bill Pritchett, James Plimsoll, Alec Hope, Alf Conlon and many others leap to life before the reader's eye. The book could be read as an example of the point made by the Soviet writer Daniel Granin during a recent visit to Australia—namely, that the future of prose literature lay in the marriage of the gifts of the novelist and those of the historian. Donald Horne has both talents in abundance.

But the central theme of the book is the education of a boy. As such it seems to me to be a very great achievement. Horne sets out clearly his intellectual progress from the days when he attended the Muswellbrook primary school, through his various secondary schools up to and including his 'Sturm und Drang' days at the University of Sydney. This is done with the disarming honesty of a Rousseau in his "Confessions", the detachment of a Constant in his "Adolphe" and some of the intellectual 'Sehnsucht' of an Ivan Karamazov. Happily the 'gamin' is never off the stage for long. For those who like the whiff of corrup-

tion or even an odd sniff or two of evil in their reading matter, one can see this 'Young Donald' rather like another eternal 'gamin', H. G. Wells, in his relations with Henry James, gradually resenting the role the greats of Sydney University wanted to confer on him—the James McAuleys, the Alf Conlons and the Alec Hopes, who had him taped and cut down to size as 'Young Donald', who, like anyone born with an ear to hear the 'demon's moan', waited his chance to show them what he was like—and did so in no uncertain way.

But the aberrations of the 'Young Donald' are, one suspects, not its passport to immortality. One suspects that the book will survive for a reason which may not even have occurred to its author. One sees in these pages the story of a boy of great natural talent, strong in head and heart, who received at first an education which had some connection with the life he knew, and then went on in secondary school and University to be plunged into an education which was more and more removed from the life of his own head and heart. Secondary and tertiary education in Australia were still suffering from a decision made in the Australian colonies in the 1840's and 1850's—namely, to transplant to Australia an education system designed for the education of a governing class in England. This may explain why the universities of Sydney and Melbourne, unlike the state universities in America, became billabongs cut off from the mainstream of life. So one suspects that Donald Horne became for a time like a man who expected to find the current of the stream of life in still water.

To change the image, he was like a Dmitri Karamazov, a man who had had a great dream, who found himself with those who were forever "singing soprano in the choir". He became for a reason like one of God's destroying angels. The great interest of this book is just to see that this is not to be his fate as a man. The great interest in the book is to see that he belongs to the mainstream of life—that all that Sydney 'Sturm und Drang', all the talk of a vigorous and creative culture for the few, is just a dream, or, rather, belongs now to the grave-yard; and that he, who managed somehow to survive possession by that evil spirit, must now get back to the roots of his life—which, one suspects, he rediscovered while writing this deeply moving account of his early days.

## Two Australians in India

J. JORDENS

Wendy and Allan Scarfe: "A Mouthful of Petals" (Heinemann, \$4.75)

India has a strange effect on many people who come into close contact with her: she generates either total, but naive love, or total, and irrational resentment. This reaction is too often the undercurrent of the many books about "the India I knew", or found, or didn't find, that hurtle from the presses. The many successors to "Mother India" and its bitterness turn to ashes in one's mouth, and the many one-eyed, eulogistic, naive answers to "Mother India" are too often childish, sickeningly sweet.

This book is refreshingly different. Wendy and Allan Scarfe, Australian school teachers, simply describe their three years' stay in a small backward village of Bihar, where they worked, on the invitation of Jayaprakash Narayan, in the "Gandhian Movement for Village Development" directed

by him. They never overreach themselves into the flights of rash judgment, broad speculation or false rationalisation which so many writers on India cannot consistently avoid. And yet they have produced a book that is not only beautiful but also important. What is it then that makes this "simple description" into a work of deep understanding and major importance?

First of all there is the attitude of mind that inspired their adventure—the desire to give the help they could where it was needed. Jayaprakash Narayan wrote to them, "I want with all my heart that you both return to India: first of all for personal reasons—I want you to be with us. Secondly, and no less importantly, for the reason that it is in the heart of both of you to serve India . . ." This moral urge to help is not clouded over by false or naive idealism; the Scarfes are thorough realists—their feet are squarely on the ground and their eyes wide open. They see things as they are: "As the distant view suggests the beauty and potential of man's life, so the inner reaches of the village contradict this with closed-in ignorance, the empty-stomached apathy, the helpless, disease-prone poverty which are Sokhodeora's tragedy in a world that is rich." It is a realism that expresses itself frankly, that recognises the good and the bad, that accepts the contradictions as they exist. This realism, however, is never cynical or brutal, it is pervaded with a genuine love for and a profound sympathy with the people for themselves, a deep belief in man, his nobility, and his right to live a decent life. That is why compassion and humor gently color the account of their few triumphs and many disappointments.

If one adds to this the solid judgment and persistent good sense of the authors ("I knew that it would take decades of education to do away with caste prejudices, and it did not seem worthwhile to jeopardise the existence of the night-class for an effort to solve in Sokhodeora a fundamental social problem"), one can understand why this book has far outgrown its simple aims. The chapter on their experiences in family planning is a must for all interested in the problem of birth control in India: here we see the problem concretely in the very lives of the people whom it affects. Throughout the pages light is thrown on village and caste structures, and on the strange byways of village reasoning and rationalisation. The book would be very valuable reading for anyone contemplating voluntary-aid work in underdeveloped countries.

Perhaps it is its profound humanity that is the most lasting impression of this book. The simple village people, Kesurwa, Mahadev, and Shova, will remain with us for a long time thanks to the close personal relationship the Scarfes established with them. This humanity, and also the beautiful style of the writing, can be best suggested by the following extract, which explains the title of the book:

Often the presence of children was pleasant, but sometimes they were a nuisance. One of their misdeeds was to steal the hibiscus flowers. They stole them to eat.

We would catch them with guilty, apprehensive expressions and a mouthful of petals, the ends protruding and then disappearing between their lips like the wings of beetles and insects in the mouths of the almost transparent lizards on our house walls. But it was a tragic kind of misdemeanour, which symbolised for us the way in which hunger and poverty consumed the efforts people made to create beauty in their lives.



## New Novels

JOHN McLAREN

Thomas Keneally: "Bring Larks and Heroes" (Cassell, \$3.75)

Tony Morphet: "Dynasty" (Jacaranda, \$4.95)

Griffith Watkins: "The Pleasure Bird" (Longmans, \$3.15)

Barry Oakley: "A Wild Ass of a Man" (Cheshire, \$3.25)

In his first two novels, Thomas Keneally was obsessed with grace, salvation, damnation, and violence. The last of these in some obscure way confers a kind of grace on its perpetrators, and the novels leave it unclear whether this grace is one of salvation or of its reverse. There is an obvious similarity between Keneally's mode and that of Graham Greene, except that, whereas Greene submits his characters to the ultimate in misery and degradation that they might learn the saving grace of God, Keneally seems to suggest that violence and sin have a redemptive, or at least an elective, force of their own.

His latest novel, however, shows a movement beyond this concern with violence for its own sake. Keneally has said that he himself regards it as his best work to date, explaining that the other novels have escaped from his control, and it is easy to see that this is so in a technical sense. "The Place at Whitton" contained an allegory which became lost in the excitement of the plot, and the connection between Dawes and Pontifex, central to the last chapter, was never more than vaguely implied. It was in fact the vagueness of this implication which led to the uncertainty about the final significance which the author intended us to draw from his book, and which left us with the memory of a suspense drama rather than with a number of events and characters which continued to grow in our minds. The book was in fact too well ordered in action and too little ordered in theme to achieve its maximum effect.

"The Fear", in retrospect, was the polar opposite of the first novel. We forget the details of the plot, and recall instead the atmosphere of inner Sydney and the quiet of the seaside, both punctuated by the huge image of violence clustering around the figure of Comrade. The boy and girl in the novel fade to figures only, but the events which we have seen through their eyes become a part of our own experience. The break-out from the P.O.W. camp detaches itself as a major irrelevancy, well-told in itself, but contributing nothing to the nightmare intrusion on the calm which it is its purpose to further. The notorious discontinuity in the novel, so obvious on a first reading, also tends to recede into obscurity, leaving us with a total dream-like impression of phantom figures, clearly etched scenes and pervasive atmosphere, whether of the stifling air-raid shelter or the salty air of the beach. But the very success of the book at this impressionistic level obscures the drama of good and evil which is its ostensible centre.

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The most obvious development in "Bring Larks and Heroes" is Keneally's ability to control the plot so that it perfectly matches the theme. Every scene, every character is relevant as the story weaves its inexorable course towards destruction. This is not to say, however, that every thread of the story is handled equally successfully. At the start of the novel, Phelim Halloran and his

"bride in Christ", Ann Rush, are trapped by their own passion and loneliness—another recurring theme in Keneally—by the lack of a priest they can recognise, and by Mrs. Blythe's prurient sanctimony. This part of the trap seems to be closing in on them later, when the author tells us that some people are fated to be set up by the rest of the community as standards of excellence, and are thus allowed no pardon for any of the human weakness, or appearance of such, which is tolerated in ordinary mortals. Here are the elements of a classical tragedy, with the victims calling fate on themselves by their very virtues, but in fact the denouncement is brought about by much more material circumstances arising from the events of the plot rather than from the human and historical situation of the characters.

The most important development revealed by this novel is, however, not technical but philosophical. In the earlier books Keneally was concerned with the clash of good and evil, and with grace extending even to evil. This had its own fascination for Australian readers who were brought up on a diet of social realism, with its concern for finding a way towards a better society, and the books were perhaps overpraised merely because in the local environment they appeared so original. Certainly, Patrick White and Randolph Stow had already pioneered a form of the novel in Australia which was as concerned with the inner life of the individual as with its social manifestations, but Keneally was the first local writer to relate these inner concerns to an ideological framework. But once this shock effect had worn off, the novels appeared limited in their concerns, of greater interest to Catholics who might be expected to share the authors' predilections, however differently they might express them, than to those religiously uncommitted who were looking for the basic truths of the human condition. That is to say, the novels tested a particular religious view of humanity rather than exploring the elemental conditions of human existence which it is the role of religious doctrines to interpret.

"Bring Larks and Heroes" has a far more general interest. The title of the book is taken from one of its central character's poetic scribblings, and represents his dream of having an estate to which he can bring larks and heroes—the images of natural and human excellence. But the dreams of human perfection are contradicted by the record of human evil and violence. The book is set in a mythical colony which resembles colonial New South Wales, but the author frees himself from the necessity of historical verisimilitude. The atmosphere and moral environment of the book are, however, identical with those of Governor Phillip's colony.

In this environment Phelim Halloran is subjected to the extreme testing of his manhood. He is a member of the Marine Corps for much the same reasons that most of his fellow settlers are convicts—he was found at an illegal land-meeting in Ireland and conscripted instead of being convicted. In the new settlement he meets Ann Rush, whom he would marry if there were a priest available. His sole ambition is to settle down to domesticity, but he is involved with an artist, Ewers, who is unjustly hanged, and with two other felons who are flogged to the point of death. A strange Presbyterian prophet, Hearn, challenges him to become involved with God's plans, but Phelim refuses any commitment except to his own personal ideal. He is then, however, involved in a massacre, and finally Hearn contrives to trap him into complicity

in his plans to escape through America to join the revolutionaries in France.

In essence the book is a parable on the possibility of human freedom. As in Camus' work, the odds against humanity are tremendous, and the reader is forced to question the possibility of any human values. Yet finally we are left with the feeling that the ordeal of Phelim and Ann has established its own values. The very fact that we feel their defeat as something terrible is itself an assertion that they have achieved something of substance in the fleeting victories of their doomed lives.

Keneally's obsessive concern with the fundamental truths of the human equation evokes the question of whether his novels are not open to the same charge as is levelled at the social realists who sacrifice the reality of their plots on the quite different altar of political ideology. Does Keneally's interest in theological and philosophic questions impoverish the literary value of his creations?

It must be admitted that the lesser characters in his novels are not given the same rounded treatment which he lavishes on the major figures. In this case, the governor, the judge, the lecherous employer of Ann Rush, are cardboard figures from a frieze of pre-established attitudes. On the other hand, many characters who appear for only brief scenes are nevertheless etched in strong lines which command the reader's assent to their human reality. Partridge, the surgeon, is caught in characteristic attitude when the forger Ewers attempts wit with him. "Ha, . . . these gentleman convicts, Rowley. They're bastards". He slapped Ewers a second time. "Bastards".

Similarly, a character like Hearn is portrayed with economy and precision exactly equal to his role. If the only two characters completely explored are Ann and Phelim, this is because these are the two people through whom the events of the novel are tested.

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Tony Morphet's latest novel, "Dynasty", is in the tradition of the American blockbuster which traces the history of the business tycoon and his family from worldly poverty to spiritual penury. Its predecessors in Australian fiction are Frank Hardy's "Power Without Glory" and Dal Stevens' "Jimmy Brockett". Like these earlier authors, Tony Morphet becomes fascinated by his hero, but unlike the others he has allowed for this fascination as a part of the phenomenon which he is exploring, and so the ambiguity furthers rather than confuses the moral purpose of the tale.

The plot concerns the attempt of a newspaper executive to withstand an attempt by his eldest son to kick him upstairs and out of control of the newspaper. The story starts on the morning of the crucial board meeting, and we are taken in turn through the lives of each of the members of the board before we learn the use each makes of his vote. Three of the seven members of the board are completely absorbed by the mystique of the newspaper, and the other four members share a degree of fascination, so that the business dynamic unifies the separate strands of biography, and Tony Morphet's story-telling skill keeps the reader's interest right until the third son casts his vote on the last page. We share all the varying appeals of power through the book, and we see how this basic human motive is integrated with the other base and noble aspirations which combine to make the infinitely various products which we recognise as human personality.

Yet finally the book leaves me with the feeling that all the talent and effort of the writer has proved somewhat futile. This may be because the book is a little too close to a daydream. We would all enjoy power, particularly the kind of power which would enable us to trumpet out our thoughts each morning to the nation, and here for a while we are able to enjoy this illusion. Certainly we see the price which has to be paid for this kind of power, particularly in human relations, but the book suggests that this price is well worth while. The old man may have made a life-long enemy of his eldest son, and taught his others the lesson which will destroy him in the end, but in the meantime he is triumphant, and even when he is eventually defeated the spoils of the victor will still be the creation of the father, and will go on living and justifying him long after his physical death.

One reason that we share this daydream is that there is no character in the book who suggests any stronger ideal. The humane and wise Jewish refugee and the cynical Englishman who at last finds something of permanent worth in his life are just as much victims of the newspaper-business mystique as the founder, the chairman, or the editor. Nor is the son who rebels any better, for his rebellion finishes in sado-masochistic adultery and his alleged sensitivity in a more cruelly refined bid for power than could be conceived by any of the others.

But underlying this failure to establish any objective standard of reference by which we can exercise human judgment over the events of the novel is the isolation of the action. Although various political events of depression and war are referred to, and even play a part in the individual biographies, the only reality seems to be that comprised by the newspaper and the personal emotional lives of its executives. It is this historical vacuum which creates the uncertainty we feel about the various political opinions expressed in the book. On the one hand, these are so naive and simplistic that we suspect satire, but on the other, there is nothing within the novel to suggest deliberate hollowness, and so we are left wondering if perhaps they are meant seriously.

This novel has been praised as an example of the kind of middle-brow serious novel which is needed to provide the undergrowth of Australian fiction. Such praise seems to me to do the novel both more and less than justice. Its pretensions are certainly serious, and I believe that it deserves to be judged by the highest standards. Yet by these standards I believe it fails, not because it is not a masterpiece, but because it is not true to itself. The author has fallen, not to the attraction of his hero, who is delineated with penetrating accuracy, but to his subject. The book, therefore, does not meet the standards of middlebrow fiction which have been maintained in recent years by Dan Reidy, in "It's This Way", or by Tony Morphet himself in "Mayor's Nest".

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Griffith Watkins' novel, like Keneally's, betrays the fact that it is written in the post-White era by not being content with portraying the surface incidents of life. Its writer, too, is obsessed with the fact of death, as seen by the artist-hero of the book. For Brenton Price, artist and boxer, life is a conflict between the splendor and the beauty of physical existence in all its manifold variety, symbolised by his painting of the pleasure bird, and represented in the book by a series of intimately realised sexual exercises, and the fact of death which

threatens all. Brenton finally learns to accept this fact only after exhausting his anger at his brother's death by beating-up the man responsible, and expiating his guilt for his friend's death by making love to his wife and then going to gaol.

"The Pleasure Bird" is a quick-moving, imaginative novel which is prepared to look at some of the major problems of life. If its ending tends to collapse into suburban sentiment, the vividly realised life of its major protagonist still challenges the reader to a greater awareness of the possibilities and limitations of life. However, it shares with many Australian and American novels the fault of believing that a succession of violent incidents can be a substitute for hard thought. Where it goes beyond them is in recognising that thought, and even artistic creation, are in themselves valuable forms of action.

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Barry Oakley's book, "A Wild Ass of a Man", is more traditional in its attempt to create an imaginative artefact from the failures of adolescence and young adulthood. Oakley has a lively style, a sharp eye for human pretension, and a hero whose picaresque career enables him to provide the constant interest of novelty. The book has the conventional theme of a young man's search for identity, a search which he follows in and out of bed in town and country until he reaches an unimportant end—"No resurrection, no spectacular rise in glory, just a sadder and a wiser man". The reader will be merrier and wiser, and will hope that Barry Oakley will find further material to feed into more books which will add to the variety of the Australian experience.

## Pearl's Morrison

NOEL McLACHLAN

Cyril Pearl: "Morrison of Peking" (Angus & Robertson, \$6.95)

In 1905 Lord Sydenham (an ex-governor of Victoria) declared that Australia had produced only two people of world-wide reputation—"Chinese" Morrison and Melba. Both depended for their fame on mortal qualities (the journalist's pen and the diva's voice) but Melba's reputation has weathered much better than Morrison's. Indeed, how many Australians today have even heard of him? Certainly not more than one in fifty—and most of this two per cent. probably do not even know that he was an Australian. Such is the fate of the journalist: nothing is quite as dull as yesterday's news and yesterday's paper, and nobody bothers to name 'peche' after a newsman.

Yet Morrison's career was an extraordinary one and well worth rescuing from oblivion. It illuminates at least three separate historical corners: Anglo-Australian relations at the turn of the century, the end of the Manchu dynasty, and the internal politics of "The Times" at the time of its take-over by Northcliffe. The son of the founder and principal of Geelong College, young Morrison had trekked across Australia from north to south and visited the Pacific as a sailor on a blackbirding vessel (not to mention canoeing down the Murray and walking to Adelaide) before he was 21. He followed this up with a reckless expedition, financed by the Melbourne 'Age', into the New Guinea bush, which almost ended with his death. Then, having completed at Edinburgh the medical

course he had begun at Melbourne, he had spells as a doctor at the Rio Tinto mines and at the Ballarat Hospital, and brought himself to the notice of Moberly Bell, the manager of "The Times" by coolly walking alone in Chinese garb from Shanghai to Burma and light-heartedly writing up his adventures in his only book, "An Australian in China".

Peking correspondent of "The Times" between 1897 and 1912, Morrison observed from within the Boxer rebellion, the siege of Peking and the birth of the Chinese republic, and his telegraphed dispatches describing these and other notable events quickly earned him a renown equal to and possibly beyond that of any other foreign correspondent of his day. He resigned to become political adviser to Yuan Shih-k'ai, the notorious first president of the republic, a frustrating and corrupting if well-paid post, as it turned out.

The consummation Morrison craved for his career was to become British Minister in Peking, but this eluded him (though it seems Sir Edward Grey had approved of the idea in 1910). Nor did anything come of his ruminating about entering Australian politics. However, at least he had the consolation of going to the peace conference in 1919 as a member of the Chinese delegation, as well as of the nest-egg of £35,000 from the sale of his famous Chinese library to the Japanese. He was only 58 when he died in 1920 of what seems suspiciously like diabetes—just four years before the discovery of insulin.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about Morrison was the sheer restless drive which propelled him from Corio into his incredible peregrinations and later his journalistic coups. Certainly he was lucky to have been in China at such a critical moment in its civilisation, lucky too to have been a foreign correspondent there at a time when the telegraph had made almost instant world coverage of Chinese news possible and interest in the Orient was suddenly enhanced. (Above all, the astonishing Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1905 had much the same traumatic effect on Europe as had the Italian defeat by the Ethiopians at Adowa a decade before.) But Morrison's pre-eminence among foreign journalists in the Far East was a measure of his outstanding prowess and his keen if by no means infallible political insight.

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There were premonitions of distinction even when he was a boy. "He is pretty good at everything", George the schoolboy told his diary, ". . . is very bashful and hasn't got good manners, but will improve at everything being only sixteen". The habit of self-scrutiny and an unshakeable confidence in self-improvement were to remain with him throughout his life, and useful attributes they proved. At sixteen, too, he had found the person, the idol who was to inspire him and provide a model for his own career as journalist and explorer—H. M. Stanley. "I greatly admire Stanley", he reported to his diary after reading "Conassie and Magdala". Two years later he even dedicated a book he had put together on Australian exploration to the man "For whom above all others in this world I admire the most".

In London, at Moberly Bell's dining table, the Peking correspondent of "The Times" had the satisfaction of meeting Stanley, man to man, though he must have been a little shaken by the gossip he picked up later that his boyhood hero "took his native boy with him the first night of his wedding". This was one indulgence which Morrison, a rather frantic, not to say madly successful, womanising

bachelor (up to the time of his marriage to his beautiful English secretary in 1912) did not possess, but Stanley and Morrison did have a good deal else in common, including their almost inhuman intrepidity, their robust attitude to their fellow men which bordered uncomfortably close on callousness, their virulent racialism and imperialism, and a conscience which could conveniently be adapted to the professional needs of any situation. Hence Morrison could denounce the looting of Peking by Europeans after the siege and indulge in it himself, could express politic optimism about China publicly and profound misgivings in private, could egg the Japanese on against the Russians and spend the rest of his life preaching the Japanese menace. Both were also expert social climbers as well as explorers, lionised outsiders in the polite but heady society of Mayfair and St. James', but at least one thing distinguished Morrison: he grew to love the Chinese in a way Stanley never did the Africans, and the foundation of the Morrison memorial lecture in 1932 by Australian Chinese suggests that there was at least some reciprocation.

So much for the distinguished Australian (he sometimes described himself as an Englishman) whose voluminous papers in the Mitchell Library it has been Cyril Pearl's good fortune to rummage through as the basis of his biography, Morrison's first. When it was known that Pearl had undertaken this long overdue task some misgivings were expressed as to whether he was the ideal man for the job. Some of these misgivings will be confirmed rather than dispelled by "Morrison of Peking", but it would be churlish not to congratulate him on his achievement, for he has certainly risen impressively to the occasion.

It is a big book and densely packed with quotations but no one could possibly find it heavy-going. The author keeps the narrative moving and never gets lost in his massive material. He writes, too, as might have been expected, with a nice sense of irony (which rarely degenerates into mere facetiousness) and he by no means ignores Morrison's faults, even if some of these are tidied over. Where there were apparently gaps in his documents (Morrison's Paris days and his return to Australia in 1900 are examples) we are so cleverly rushed on to the next point of call that the hiatus barely shows. Of course the high quotability of Morrison's diaries and letters helps, but this is altogether a highly professional piece of writing. As such, Morrison himself would certainly have admired it.

The fact that the author had to make do without the Morrison correspondence in the Moberly Bell papers at Printing House square only enhances his accomplishment. "The History of the Times" refers to "a generous gift" from Miss Enid Moberly Bell of letters written or collected by her father. Presumably these are the papers which Pearl describes as "her property" and to which he was refused access by Sir William Haley (then editor) despite the fact that Miss Moberly Bell had given him permission to work on them.

The workings of Sir William Haley's mind remained something of an enigma even to his own staff and one can only speculate as to the reasons for this deplorable discourtesy. (It is reminiscent of the way Lord Beaverbrook sat on the Lloyd George and Bonar Law papers and raises once again the question whether legislation is not required to regulate access to documents of public importance.) Perhaps Sir William feared that Pearl would Nortonise Moberly Bell or even Northcliffe and produce a "Wild Men of London" of Printing House Square as a sequel to the celebrated Sydney opus. If so, his fears were certainly misplaced.

This is on the whole a balanced account of internal politics of "The Times" as well as of Morrison's relations with its editors and owners. If Valentine Chirol emerges as a somewhat less attractive figure than in "The Times History", that is probably just.

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At the same time, and this is one of the major faults of the book, it is certainly true that Pearl cannot resist retailing much of the scandalous tittle-tattle with which Morrison packed his diaries. Some of this is admittedly titillating, but it is the duty of any historian at least to try to test the accuracy of gossip if he wishes to use it. Pearl gives little sign of trying, or even wishing, to do so, just as he often fails to check Morrison's interpretation of the Chinese political situation. Unfortunately, in their taste for "dirt" author and subject had too much in common.

Was Sir Edmund Barton, for example, not only a drunkard but "a man of low life who never pays his debts"? Did George Reid really have a mistress and a bastard in England? Was B. R. Wise "crooked"? Was author Balfour a hermaphrodite? Was Stanley a "sodomite and murderer"? Did Theodore Roosevelt have an affair with a barmaid at the London Alhambra? Did the German secret service really have a black book of 47,000 prominent people in Britain whose sexual oddities laid them open to blackmail? Is the account of Edward VII's affair with Mrs. Keppel and of Asquith's with Maud Allan correct? Was Mauld's brother really a sex murderer?

No doubt much of this was hearsay and beyond confirmation. But even a reporter of the dead should check his sources, and it is the hallmark of the historian that he demonstrates that he has done so. Not only does Pearl fail to do this but the entire book is innocent of footnotes so the reader is left in considerable doubt as to exactly what sources he has used. One has the uneasy feeling (no doubt unjustified) that he is ashamed of admitting the degree to which he has relied on one goldmine—the Morrison papers.

It is not being stuffy to deplore this cavalier attitude to readers, and the publisher must share the blame with the author. For it reduces history to journalism. Of course, given the choice between this lively study and a boring, academic one, knee-deep in footnotes, there is no doubt as to which is to be preferred. But the choice is a false one. With only a little extra expense of time and money "Morrison of Peking" could have been a much better book.

## New Poetry

ANDREW TAYLOR

- J. M. Couper: "East of Living" (Edwards and Shaw, \$2.50)  
 Thomas W. Shapcott: "A Taste of Salt Water" (Angus & Robertson, \$1.95)  
 Vivian Smith: "An Island South" (Angus & Robertson, \$1.75)  
 Joan Mas: "Isis in Search" (Allan Press, \$3.00)

Robert Burns and a' that notwithstanding, we tend to think in Australia that the Irish have a monopoly on a vigorous and colorful vernacular. Their gifts for making themselves heard and for saying nothing much in a colorful way have led us to overlook the Scots. I don't want to say that the prominence of the Irish in literature is unjustified; what I do want to point out is that if they set their hand to it, the Scots also have a vernac-

ular which is colorful, strong, flexible, and at its best very forceful.

J. M. Couper's "East of Living" is a timely reminder of that. This is Couper's first book of poems and, although he has been living in Australia since 1951, he hasn't felt compelled to try his hand at English when Scots will do just as well, or better. Catterline, his discontented Scot in Sydney, lets off steam with the gusto and the brilliance of a traditional flyting:

And here on the quay I come up against different customers:

wheezy web-footed wharfies wheeling their navels;

stevedores, lighting or loading, but anyway stripped to the gall-stones;

big-bellied beery bastards, and boasting about it.

Dialect always shows well when it's used for abuse. But Couper's Scots is flexible, and capable of conveying a great range of moods and observations. True, there is always a sardonic, satirical streak apparent in all his poetry, even in the long sequence "Cape Catastrophe" ("God canna be musical if he can thole precentors"). It's as though the language itself has a terseness and an ironic self-awareness which prevents the poet from taking himself too solemnly. It continually refuses to allow him to value himself as of any great or lasting importance. It's a Scots characteristic perhaps, though by no means unique to Scots. Couper has shown that it survives transportation very well indeed. The final effect is one of conversation. "Put me in conversation with this place" the poet demands in the title poem. The characteristic themes are separation, exile, distance. In "Cape Catastrophe" it's not John Thistle's death that's the important thing so much as its great distance in time, place and nature, from the poet, and from Scotland. Yet it's the very conversational quality of these poems which brings Thistle to life, along with Matthew Flinders, Mark Alexander Boyd, Catterline and all Couper's other figures. By putting himself in conversation with them, their time and their place, the exile ceases to be an exile and the poetry is enriched with a firm sense of place and history.

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"A Taste of Salt Water" is Thomas Shapcott's fourth book of poems, and to my mind it's his best to date. Shapcott is a conscious and careful craftsman, and despite all the romantic nonsense to the contrary, this a good thing. His rhythms are rarely stiff or awkward or lax. They are often tentative, but also often buoyant and supple, capable of fine modulation; the result is both precision and vitality. But his language lacks some of the brilliance and imaginative compression of Couper's. There's nothing to match Couper's "He seemed to live in the wake of his life" or "I feel like the crazy / hound that buried his talent in the ground".

Shapcott's interests are varied, and the poems range from his wife's pregnancy to city clerks to Governor Macquarie to the long sequence on the life of Christ, "The City of Acknowledgment". The poems on the first topic are probably the least successful. When, as in "Marriage", he watches his pregnant wife take a bath, we feel it would only be considerate of him if he had shut the door behind him. On the other hand, the Aubades, Madrigals and Three Sonnets which open the book have an admirable tact and lightness of touch.

Shapcott seems to have turned to myths and to historical incidents (such as the successful birth of Governor Macquarie's son) as a means of objec-

tifying his own responses to experience. It would not be difficult, for example, to read through Macquarie's turmoil of emotions to the poet's own. But in this sequence there is no need to do this: the poem stands successfully on its own feet. Macquarie, caught between personal and administrative pressures, and his predicament, are made real, and we are made to understand them. "Ariadne" on the other hand shows a forced and willful employment of myth to no apparent end.

A knock. Only the baker. Because he is dull-witted and fumbles with change he is merely the sea-bird to cry emphasis of silence into her island of security.

It takes more than this to turn a baker into a sea-bird. The result is a dull situation dressed incongruously in Greek fancy-dress. A similar uneasiness also creeps into the title poem, but there it is more closely controlled and the poem is more successful. Where he begins to create his own myths as in the Peter Freeman series (clearly not named after the painter) the poems are firmer. And in such poems as "The Return", "Returning to Neutral Bay" and "Elegy for a Bachelor Uncle", a not too destructive self-awareness enables him to do without an objectifying myth of story completely.

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For once, dust-jacket comments prove right. There is a sense of Tasmania in Vivian Smith's latest volume, "An Island South". There's not much snow, at least not much real snow, in Australian poetry; but Vivian Smith's poetry has it, along with the cold, the stillness, the clarity of light. It reminds me a little of England; or more precisely still, New England (U.S.A.). I don't think this is fortuitous, for one of the more apparent and strengthening influences on Smith is the American poet Wallace Stevens. Smith's question how can a sense of meaning still persist so intertwined with sense of no reply?

could go for both poets. But his reply "life's nonsense pierces too with strange elation" (a variation on a line by Stevens) doesn't take him as far as the older poet, and doesn't involve the ceaseless intellectual and imaginative effort that distinguishes Stevens. They share the perception that underneath the variety of this world there is a "final bareness" which is essential to the creative or regenerative process. But unlike Stevens, Smith places his trust finally in an external order within which "change is promised and awakenings". This could be called variously an avoidance of responsibility or an approach to some kind of faith. Whichever way you like to look at it, such poems as "An Effect of Light", "For a New Year", "Late April: Hobart" and "Warmth in July: Hobart" are good poems, though they lack the intellectual and imaginative rigour of their precursors.

I'm afraid I can't say the same about some of the poems in the book's first section though. Images of pain, fear and despair come too easily to be convincing. Still, there is compensation in the poems I have mentioned, and in several quite sharp satirical pieces.

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A. D. Hope puts the matter correctly in his Foreword to "Isis in Search", a first book of poems by Joan Mas. "There are some poets whose work is only seen for what it is when the poems are put together . . . It is not simply that put together the poems support one another; they form an order . . ." This book needs to be read right through from start to finish. Taken individually the poems appear slight, tentative to the point of

fragility, often distinctly "feminine" in a perjorative sense, "sensitive" in a way we think of as a weakness, rather than a strength. But when the poems are read in their proper order, and together, this is not so. Where the lapses occur, as in the first poem of the section "Isis in Search" (the poems have no names) they result from a breakdown of emotional control and self-awareness, an overloading of emotion. The result is a coarsening of rhythm, and a self-conscious, almost adolescent, posture. But these are only lapses, and they serve to point out the general strengths of the book. The poetry seems always on the point of moving out of form into banality and thinness, but it rarely does. And I think what saves it, besides Joan Mas's technical skill, is ultimately a sense of tact. She knows just how far to trust her medium and herself, and beyond that she rarely goes. "Isis in Search" is a modest book; and its modesty is one of its greatest strengths.

#### BRIAN MATTHEWS

- Chris Wallace-Crabbe: "The Rebel General" (Angus & Robertson, \$1.95)  
 Eric C. Rolls: "Sheaf Tosser" (Angus & Robertson, \$1.75)  
 Margaret Irvin: "The Rock and the Pool" (Jacaranda, \$2.95)  
 David Rowbotham: "Bungalow and Hurricane" (Angus & Robertson, \$1.95)

It would be comforting to be able to group these books under some unifying heading, but, while there are tenuous similarities in theme or preoccupation, the over-riding impression is of contrast. And this impression seems to me to come mostly from the varying degrees of technical skill exhibited by the four poets; it is in their treatment of themes rather than in the themes themselves that the most radical differences emerge.

In the course of three volumes Chris Wallace-Crabbe's verse has lost none of its characteristic discipline, but what I took to be a somewhat inward-turning asceticism in some of the earlier poems has been replaced by broader interests and a mature, tolerant insight in this third book, "The Rebel General". The poet's main concern—appearances and reality, the substantial and the ephemeral—is developed in a poetry that is unflustered and without strain: indeed, he conditionally accepts the appearance while calmly probing further to whatever may lie behind. In his own words, he moves "in moderation" seeking "the core of things".

"Ways"—the first section of the book and the most impressive in my opinion—reveals these qualities of acceptance and patient probing. Many of the poems pose the actual, the substantial, only to undercut this with an intuition that is often apocalyptic and terrifying. The first poem in the book, "Carnations", begins by brilliantly suggesting the nature of the flower, emphasising its substance and actuality, yet the final impact goes far beyond this:

From the green cartridge an explosion of  
 Substantial pink;

and energies made clear

That drive our crinkled flesh into this world,  
 Unfurl the layers of a life

And thrust with ragged edges to the light.

Again, "That Summer" takes a commonplace incident yet invests it with a vaguely terrifying force.

This concern with the hard substance of things and the terror or unnerving revelations that may lie behind the appearance is revealed in the number of poems in "Ways" that are preoccupied with

place, or with time expressed and captured as a place remembered. In "Terra Australis" the reality of tradition and experience lurks in the background of "the final children of the earth/whom Knowledge has not scarred"; it is a reality that seems at times about to burst through decisively ("... the tales of adulthood/Where life is dour and hard") but ultimately flickers uncertainly in the breathless atmosphere of fairy tale;

Far, far away, beyond some wicked wood.

I found Section II, "Brief Lives" rather uneven. The same preoccupation with substance and shadow is evident, but the poet seems to me a little uneasy in the less personal, or at least more distanced territory.

"The Rebel General" is a most impressive work. There are intricate echoes and allusions from poem to poem and section to section which would require more space than this to elaborate, but which contribute to the book's impact as a sensitive appraisal of the realities and appearances in civilisations, lives and aspirations.

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While it might well be argued that both Eric Rolls and Margaret Irvin are much concerned in their own ways with the appearance and the essence, and thus recall at least tenuously "The Rebel General", technical considerations tend to enforce a sense of contrast between the work of these two poets and that of Chris Wallace-Crabbe. The verse of Eric Rolls is most often nervy and staccato with a vibrant ingenuous quality that is sometimes engaging, sometimes crude. Margaret Irvin's poems succeed each other like brilliantly reflecting planes, each one inclined slightly more or less than the others to beam a subtly altered quality of dazzling light.

One can only admire the energy and gusto of Rolls' work but too many of the poems seem to me incomplete, verging on an insight that the poet ultimately fails to realise, so that the impression of depth in many of the poems remains little more than an impression. This is true I think of poems such as "The Native Idiot" and "The Drowned Boy": in each case a dispassionate tone points up the tragedy but the significance of the experience for the poet remains masked and obscure amidst a series of flat statements of potential but unrealised import. At its worst this tendency seems to me to make the poems rather pointless.

This sense of the macabre, fascinatingly intrusive in the poems for children, will no doubt become one of the critical clichés associated with Rolls' work. Yet I think his energy, his ability to tinge situations with the sinister and the passionate warmth with which he depicts life, both animal and human, are best seen in the poems of love. Here his natural lustiness becomes fervor, his energy a passionate virility and the nervous darting metres an appropriately excited form.

In contrast to the somewhat uneven verses of "Sheaf Tosser", Margaret Irvin's poetry has a consistently luminous texture, a varying play of light and liquidity that is at once brilliant, exhausting and monotonous. Poem after poem shines and coruscates with images of light, water and flower. Technically, the poetry is always accomplished but the sheer brilliance often seems to assume a greater importance than the thought, or, on occasions, has the effect of making the poem needlessly obscure.

Light, water, spray and mist, cavern, shell and a number of other key words and images recur so often that they tend to lose their impact. This similarity of approach in each poem rather blunts the variety of themes in the book. There is a

variety but the treatment varies insufficiently; the most accomplished poems in the book are those that are not cast in the familiar bright mould: "Song of Immaturity", "Child in Hospital", "Man to Man" and several other poems examine with moving simplicity and sensitivity the realm of human communication, individual loneliness and aspiration.

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By contrast, David Rowbotham's verse is most often deliberately flat, colloquial and deceptively simple:

I watched my father digging in his garden  
("The Gardener")  
 It was no easy thing to kill you, brave  
 Venomous spider . . .  
("Spider and Moth")  
 The barefoot boy puts on the shoes  
("Shoes")

These first lines are typical of the spare, unadorned treatment that is characteristic of "Bungalow and Hurricane". But this simplicity is deceptive, for Rowbotham so often achieves in the complete poem a peculiar density which the individual line or phrase belies. In "Prey to Prey" this flat style is made to sustain both a description of great power and energy and a sophisticated development of thought:

The birds come like fishes out of the air  
 And fishes out of the encountering sea, like  
 birds,  
 And meet in the murderous limit that they  
 share,  
 Fins and wings thunderous, without words.

The poetry ranges over a wide variety of themes, but perhaps that which most recurs, whether by allusion, implication or as a theme in itself, is a sense of the past, of history and the shaping forces that have intricately influenced the poet's life and thinking in various ways. "Reflection at Horn-castle, on the River Bain, Lincolnshire" is the most developed and impressive example of this, but the preoccupation also underlies many other poems.

Perhaps some of the pieces are somewhat fugitive, too explicitly stamped "occasional"; nevertheless, with its suggestion in the title of both the active and the posed and its development of these ideas in the text—the energetic, the fluid present, as against the unchangeable facts and scenes of the past—"Bungalow and Hurricane" represents a significant development of David Rowbotham's poetic sensibility.

## Lawson's Poems

DENNIS DOUGLAS

Colin Roderick (ed.): Henry Lawson, "Collected Verse", Vol. I. (Angus & Robertson, \$6.50)

The significance of Lawson's verse depends more on its relevance to the history of Australian popular culture than on its claim to be regarded as poetry. His success was enormous. "In the Days when the World was Wide" sold, on a conservative estimate, 8,000 copies between 1896 and 1899 and 10,000 more between 1899 and 1913, "Verses Popular and Humorous" sold 18,000 copies between 1900 and 1916, and "Winnowed Verse", "Popular Verse" and "Humorous Verse" sold 10,000 copies, 12,000 copies and 11,000 copies respectively between 1924 and 1933. If, by supplying this demand, Lawson imposed limitations on his poetic achievement, he also became in a sense the spokesman of his age.

He spoke for the dispossessed at a time when poverty and political radicalism were salient features of the Australian cultural landscape, and he spoke as the articulate representative of the poor on bush selections and in city slums.

Like Dickens, by whom he was influenced, Lawson experienced poverty from childhood, and like Dickens he found it difficult, despite a basically realistic approach to narrative technique, to avoid sentimentality. Even when, as in "Tamboroora Jim", the facade of the narrator includes a careless laconic reticence borrowed from the bush ethos, a pat emotional appeal appears in the conclusion. The vigor of Lawson's resistance to sentimentality can be felt in the ending to "The Sliprails and The Spur", printed for the first time since 1917 by Professor Roderick in the first volume of his edition of Lawson's "Collected Verse". Most readers know this poem as a description of a tearful parting scene between a bush girl and her sweetheart, ending with a picture of her stealing out to the sliprails by night to listen for his return and then going back to the hut to cry herself to sleep. The four lines that made up the original conclusion read as follows:

O great white gate where sliprails were,  
 A brick house 'neath the mountain's brow,  
 The "mad girl" buried by the spur  
 So long ago, forgotten now.

Although these lines do not save the poem, they transform it from a simple bush ballad into an adaptation, albeit an awkward one, of the Ophelia theme, a recurrent nineteenth-century motif. They provide a totally different frame of reference for the strained emotions of the opening scene, and they lead to a very different view of the working of Lawson's imagination.

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Professor Roderick's insight into Lawson's personality is admirably clear-sighted:

The tragedy of Lawson's literary jesting—which, significantly enough, found small place in his "short stories in prose"—turned on the axis of a penny a line, an axis of self-inflicted poverty. There is ample testimony to that in this volume. The bitterness born of his life-long wrestle with poverty was exacerbated by deafness, manic depression, alcoholism, and fear of insanity and suicide. He saw himself in Sweeney; and the vision terrified him. His life was a never-ending conflict between this vision of a desperate victim of his own shortcomings and the vision of his ideal self.

"Sweeney" deserves to be remembered as a study in realism as much as for its embodiment of a personal conflict. The lack of conviction in its moral theme is related to Sweeney and the priggish narrator's distance from Lawson's own personality. Both represent positions Lawson could never adopt, but it is Sweeney, the alcoholic derelict, who is depicted with Chekhovian depth and physical detail. The contrast is absolute between Sweeney's self-acceptance and the gift for self-dramatisation that makes Lawson, in "The Rising of the Court" refer to his "drunks" as "ornate" rather than "plain".

The talent Lawson reveals in poems like "Sweeney" was betrayed continually by economic need and by natural facility of expression. He was too well versed in the economically rewarding skills of the popular rhymer to acquire the habit of self-criticism.

Nevertheless, he was capable as late as 1914 of writing a fine and supple prose. The note Professor Roderick provides to "Faces in the Street" includes a passage from "From Mudjee Hills to

London Town" which is refreshingly detached in its self-deprecation and which employs a particularly effective counterpointing of narrative tone against subject-interest:

I am writing as a man of forty-six, who has been and knows as much of the world as he wants to—and who shaves his beard because it is grey—about a delicate, shabby, super-sensitive, soul-starved and almost totally uneducated bush boy of eighteen or nineteen, drought born and drought bred, who lived and suffered as I have described in a previous section of this series, and slaved in a factory amongst Sydney larrikins, and who wrote like this when not more than two years in the city . . .

They lie, the men who tell us in a loud decisive tone . . .

The opening line of "Faces in the Street" serves here to remind the reader that Lawson at twenty-one was already known in Australia and America as a composer of socialist marching songs.

It was that line that George Robertson later suggested should be changed to:

They lie, the men who tell us for a reason of their own.

Robertson wrote to Lawson on 15 October 1916. Lawson replied on 1 November, accepting the alteration in a modified form:

They lie, the men who tell us for reasons of their own  
and Robertson "lent" him a fiver on the strength of it. Professor Roderick may encounter objections to his having accepted this version as the definitive one, but the decision is in accordance with his stated principle of giving the text which "to the best of my knowledge was the last to come from the author while clearly in possession of his creative and critical powers."

By presenting the variants as well as the definitive text, and a great deal of primary evidence relating to the emendations, Professor Roderick has followed sound and responsible editorial practice, and on the evidence of a spot check the text itself seems free of errors.

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The scholarly apparatus, however, has some slight defects. The table of variants is inconsistent in its listing of punctuation changes, and, for example, omits David McKee Wright's version of line 44 of "Faces in the Street" while including the others that found their way into the 1918 "Selected Poems" (all of which Professor Roderick has rejected, very wisely, on the grounds that Lawson may not have been able to give them sober and considered judgment between 10th December, 1917, when Wright sent the list of changes to Robertson, and the 11th December, when Robertson wrote to Wright saying that Lawson had accepted some of the suggestions and rejected others). This error could have been the work of a careless type-setter and certainly should be rectified in later editions. Other minor errors that fall into the same category are the reading "Budgee" for "Mudgee" on page xix, the cross-reference to Notes instead of Introduction on page 138, and the allusion to the "first few months of 1917" where it is clearly the last months of 1917 that are in question, on page 419.

## One's Own Biographer?

DEAN BUNNEY

W. S. Robinson: "If I Remember Rightly" (Cheshire, \$6)

You could not work closely with W. S. Robinson for long without liking him enormously. If at times you felt less than worthy, it was the strength of the man's talents that gave you this feeling, never the man himself.

Through a long lifetime he developed to the point of genius a talent for being closely involved at the highest level in industry, finance and Government circles. And there is ample evidence that his influence in such circles achieved much for Australia, both here and abroad.

However, a casual reader approaching his memoirs without prior knowledge of Robinson and his role has some problems. The problems stem partly from Robinson's whole life being marked by a cultivation of unobtrusive activity and a consistent avoidance of publicity.

The press sometimes has this problem with obituaries. Before the significance of a death can be appreciated by general readers, the person has almost to be introduced to them for the first time. It is certainly a problem with W. S. Robinson as it was a problem for instance, with the late Dr. Alf. Conlon and his extraordinary role in this country's war effort.

Thus the quotations from Lord Chandos, Brendan Bracken and Bernard Baruch on one of the front pages are not only three of the most impressive tributes anyone could wish for, but are also vitally needed to point the way for the casual reader. For Lord Chandos to say, from all the experience of his days as Oliver Lyttelton, that W. S. Robinson was "the most completely equipped business man that I have known," or for Baruch to say that he was "one of the very few men I met in my life who had elements of real greatness," is high praise indeed. One, therefore, approaches these memoirs, published posthumously, with a great deal of expectation.

Very few people have exerted influence in so many directions over a long lifetime, and so unobtrusively, as Robinson did in Australia, in Britain and in the United States. The book teems with references to Hughes, Scullin, Lyons, Evatt and Curtin (although Bruce and Menzies are curiously absent). There are Churchill, Bracken, Baruch and strings of top people in the City of London and world industry, over the course of half a century, but with particular emphasis on the Depression and the thirties.

The inscription on a rare Baskerville Bible presented by Churchill and Bracken to Scotch College, Melbourne, in 1949, and reproduced in another front piece, is the sort of thing one inevitably reads twice:

In the six relentless years of the war that preceded the victory of 1945, the services manifold of William Sidney Robinson to the British Commonwealth were beyond computation.

It is clear evidence that he had a remarkable access to Churchill in wartime.

Yet for all this indicated wealth of material, the memoirs are frequently disappointing. One repeatedly looks for fresh material or new insight that Robinson might have contributed from his own experience of people and events. It is particularly disappointing in regard to Evatt, Curtin



and Chifley in the wartime and postwar years. After all, he personally guided Evatt on his first wartime mission to Washington and London, giving him unrivalled and immediate access in Washington and London to top Government and defence procurement circles. Yet nowhere does one get fresh personal evaluations or insight into the complex personality of Evatt.

Geoffrey Blainey has generously acknowledged in his editor's note that the memoirs were not completed when Robinson died and that he intended to write more about his friends not mentioned in the early chapters, or mentioned only briefly. But there is a nagging thought as one compiles the list of what might have been revealed: did Robinson, even if he had had all the time needed to complete his memoirs, possess the gift of creatively and courageously putting on paper incisive comments about his contemporaries? On the evidence of the book he did not. Remarkable as was his ability to gain and keep easy entry to people in high places and to maintain their high regard, his achievements, as measured by the book, do not include incisive pen pictures of his contemporaries.

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Although he was an agriculturist, who came full circle from Longerenong College and farming at Ardmona at 16 to living on a country property at Keilor after his retirement, it was financial journalism that really launched him to the world. He was financial editor of the Melbourne Age at 23, succeeding his father. He polished, developed and added to the communicating talents of a first-rate journalist as few have ever done. And, in putting these talents to work, he happened to coincide with an era at the turn of the century when W. L. Baillieu was laying the foundations of a dynastic fortune and Broken Hill was being re-evaluated, for what turned out to be its longer-term future following the first flush of the B.H.P. period.

He had a superb talent for nosing out pertinent information, accumulating it or drawing it to the attention of people who mattered—either in person or by letter. His genius was for communicating useful information in the right places at the right time. And, because he developed this talent to an extraordinary degree, using every available line of intelligence to gather it, he was frequently first with the information. It may not always have been the most extraordinary information, but his being first with it inevitably gave him a reputation for marked foresight.

Much of the time his facts were the best facts. As his reputation for being first with the best facts grew, so his acceptance in high places grew. And with it came permanent and deceptively effortless ability to consult and be consulted in those same high places.

The journalist in him was most clearly reflected in his distinctively terse style, his succinct language, which communicated directly and briefly. He specialised in financial, industrial (and inevitably political) advice and observations. He offered them with an integrity which meant that once he gained a confidence, he held it. It worked sometimes to his disadvantage, as with Menzies, because he clearly became too identified with people in the wartime and postwar Labor Governments. But it is significant that John McEwen was willing to deliver a moving panegyric at his memorial service in Melbourne.

Journalism and his communicating talent were both his strength and his limitation. The book is a chronicle of events and people, a journal of

happenings which, while sometimes absorbing, are often trivial. The sheer range of people he mentions at some time or other is equalled only by the paucity of really solid references to many of them.

At times it sounds like downright name-dropping—in the most literal sense of having no time to do more than merely drop a name and not develop the reference. This impression is fostered by his widespread use of "my dear friend" or "my very good friend". And there is a feeling as one proceeds through the book that Robinson's cultivation of unobtrusiveness and lack of publicity was mixed with a certain vanity. It is unfortunate that many of the extracts he quotes from personal letters from notable friends happen to contain high praise of himself.

But one can easily drift into being too critical. The question is not whether Robinson's performance in his chosen field was great. After all, one has to accept that when Curtin says, as Prime Minister, in a letter written to Robinson in June 1942, that his services on the Evatt mission "placed the Government and the people of this country under a very real obligation to you," he knew what he was talking about. But even Curtin seems to reveal at the end of the same letter some of his own puzzlement about the nature of Robinson's role when he adds: "Although you are not associated directly with the legislature or administration of this country, you have performed a very great public service."

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The best part of the book is the earlier chapters, which have a kind of Graham McInnes quality in dealing with Robinson's childhood in and around Carlton and his early farming experiences. He has included a long and interesting account of Charles Rasp's life in Adelaide not hitherto published. Elsewhere, he is at his incisive best when impatient with bankers and financiers. He never hesitated to question conventional financial thought and this comment seems even more pertinent today than when he made it in 1962:

When I first visited London in 1908 it was the world's great money power. On my most recent visit in 1962 it was clearly taking orders from the United States. The economic foundations of this once great city are today rapidly being destroyed, and its people—loyal and lovable as they are—go about what they believe to be their daily chores with ever declining speed and ever diminishing efficiency. An increase in the touchiness of many of its leading "city" men suggests a belief that all is not as well as they would like their listeners to believe. In the British Isles the moneyed and property-owning classes are producing far fewer highly intelligent individuals than ever before.

One gets the impression that here was a man in his 80's who started too late to tick off the people, places and events with which he had been associated in astonishing variety. When he had time in the beginning, the account is fresh and from the heart, but it becomes more and more a journalistic parade of facts as it proceeds. Adding up the number of overseas trips and counting his friends is just not good enough at times to sustain the reader who did not know W. E. Robinson personally. And it certainly is not good enough for those who did know him and who appreciated his real stature.

It was clear when he started writing the memoirs that he hoped he would live to see them

published. This may explain some inhibition about full and frank reminiscences of people, even though many of them were dead.

A deeper explanation may be found in his life-long method of operating: having cultivated the unobtrusive and pursued anonymity in all public quarters, perhaps he simply could not bring himself to lift the lid completely in one last (or first) public testament with which he would be incontestably linked.

Blainey has done superbly well to knit and weave uncompleted material into the memoirs so that it is indistinguishable from the writing which Robinson had left unfinished. But that is all he has in fact done, as he stresses in the editorial note.

The pity of it is that a Blainey was not commissioned ten years ago to undertake a definitive biography of this extraordinary Australian. Today it would baffle any researcher. He outlived most of his contemporaries and his passion for unpublicised activity makes the task of looking for source material much harder than usual. Was he a patriot with a true "zeal for your country's interests" (Curtin)? One accepts the judgments of his notable contemporaries, but frequently the evidence of the book fails to throw adequate light on the basis of these judgments.

It is customary to mention W. S. Robinson's deep involvement with the base metal industry. This was certainly Robinson's central and continuing interest and the one business area with which he was consistently associated throughout his life. But it was something he took in his stride with many other wider associations. He left his mark on Broken Hill as few men have, but very much as a catalyst, a figure who came and went between London and Australia and who left others to get things done, knowing that he would be asking acute questions.

He never neglected this central interest in base metals (which grew out of his early financial journalism). It was his real power base. Metals as world commodities linked him with international finance. They ensured that in the 20's and 30's and, most of all in World War II, he was close to the heart of wartime strategic requirements of metals, particularly for aircraft manufacture. This in turn led intimately to the people who made the completed aircraft, the U.S. automobile companies, the big rubber companies, and, in fact, to the people in government in Washington and London, who could, by a nod, expedite materials needed in Australia's 1942/43 wartime crisis.

He was very much a man for an era who applied exceptional insight and a superb nose for information to keep himself a little ahead of what was contemporary thinking at any time. Global communications by satellite and some of the incredible gas, oil, iron ore, bauxite and coal developments in Australia's last ten years might just have overtaken some of his methods.

## Entertaining Educator

L. R. GARDINER

Geoffrey Blainey: "The Tyranny of Distance"  
(Sun Books, \$1.95)

Geoffrey Blainey's new book is an exciting and persuasive presentation of the economic predicament of Australian society arising both from the location and size of the continent, and from changing equipment and machinery available to conquer

the problem of remoteness and inland space. In addition, and not least, Blainey has insisted on finding out in detail how processes work. No other book sees Australia like this. Others which refer to these themes lack the Blainey touch, as important in this sphere as the Nelson in another.

The arrival in Australia of the first Model T Fords in 1909 opened a period of cheaper cars and larger markets. A new loquacious occupation emerged—car selling. Salesmen had to teach their customers how to start a car and how to steer before they had a chance of selling a car. Elderly farmers in particular were slow learners. They were accustomed to driving ploughs, which they always steered by pushing the lever in the opposite direction to that in which the plough was intended to go; they were slow to forget that knowledge. Driving their first car they would sometimes come to a bend in the road and instinctively turn the steering wheel in the wrong direction, thus running off the road. They were also so accustomed to driving or riding horses that they did not concentrate enough on steering. They knew a horse was never silly enough to run into a tree. They expected a Detroit car to be as sensible.

This characteristic sample will lead the reader of Blaineyana to wonder as usual whether any of the things a reviewer writes are half so precious as the words he quotes.

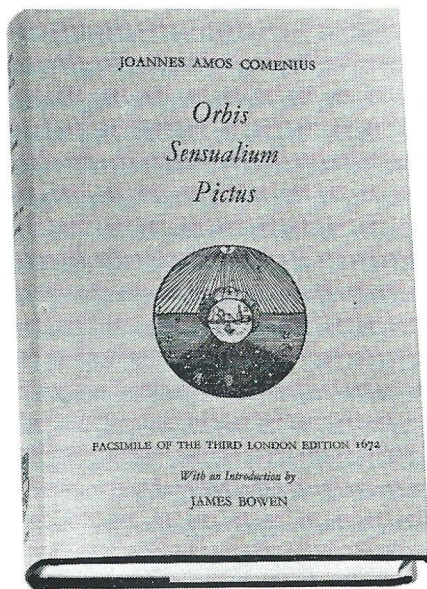
The new perspective makes a refreshing change from the sometimes dreary sequence in Australian history which runs from discovery and penal colony through the squatters and then gold and democracy, bourgeois greed and labor unions to outback lore and strident nationalism.

Blainey is well aware of the limits as well as the advantages of his viewpoint. "If this book gives the impression that climate and resources and European ideas and wars and markets and money and other moulding influences were unimportant then it is unintentionally distorting history." However, there is still a slight danger that Australian history may be enriched and then impoverished by one more popularised concept forming the basis of what Blainey calls "a kind of history of Australia". Specialists, even as poised as Blainey, may be carried away by their new insights. He says of whale fishing, "For once the long distance from the old world had profited Australia." Surely more than once, on the evidence of the book. Nearby Asian markets and far off battlefields were also part of the benevolence of distance. Today wheat growers and the R.S.L. continue to thrive on these opportunities of distance.

No criticism, real or carping, can detract from the recognition of Blainey's brilliant reconstruction of neglected influences in Australian history. We see incidentally that the recently deplored differences in railway gauges were long acceptable because a railway ran to one main port, not between main ports.

This is the fullest account yet of Blainey's Australia. He joins Manning Clark amongst the few scholarly and penetrating minds conscious of the important drives in the past and present momentum of our society. Exact, acute, humane, and a powerful story-teller, Blainey entertains, and like all true entertainers, he educates.

Published by S. Murray-Smith, Mount Eliza, Victoria; and printed by "Richmond Chronicle," 5 Shakespeare Street, Richmond, Vic., 3121.



## *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*

JOANNES AMOS COMENIUS

Facsimile of the Third London  
Edition of 1672

Edited with an Introduction by JAMES BOWEN, Ph.D. (Illinois), Senior Lecturer in Education, University of New England.

Soon after its first publication in Nuremburg in 1658, **Orbis Pictus** achieved world-wide acclaim, and it was for a long time the model for school books that attempted to relate learning to the child's interests and abilities. Its appeal was due in part to its originality, especially in the use of illustrations. It was planned by Comenius as an introductory text for the "schola Latina", with the aim of helping children learn Latin quickly, pleasantly and efficiently; and was set out as an encyclopedia in 150 illustrated chapters. These sought to cover, at a simple level, the sum of all knowledge.

In his introduction Dr. Bowen discusses the life and ideas of Comenius and the long history of **Orbis Pictus** from its first publication in 1658 to its last reprinting in English in 1887. He also gives a new interpretation of the significance of **Orbis Pictus** in Comenius' educational theory. Comenius believed that the power of Christian love could create universal harmony, if it were guided by a system of education that had this great end in view.

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