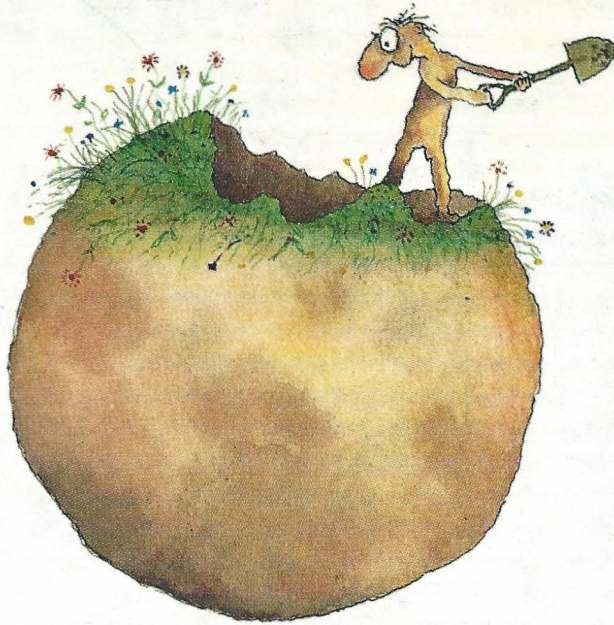


Registered for posting as a periodical, category B \$1.50

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21st ANNIVERSARY ISSUE





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*Cover painting by Michael Leunig.*

# Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

Spring 1975

62

*Overland* is a quarterly literary magazine which tries to appear every three months. The subscription rate is six dollars a year (four issues); for students, Niuginians, pensioners the subscription is three dollars. Manuscripts are welcomed but s.a.e. required.

*Overland* receives assistance from the Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts and from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. We pay minimum rates of twenty dollars for a story or feature and ten dollars for a poem.

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ISSN 0030-7416

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH: **An Editorial Swag**

I'm not sure whether I'm writing an editorial or a 'Swag'. The latter, I suppose, since I've already used the personal pronoun. In any case, we on Overland have never been addicted to editorials. A magazine, like a story, should try to *live* what it believes, and not go on about it.

What then have we believed? Well, first of all that art matters, that stories and poetry and reportage may underpin our daily lives, give them direction, create ideas which make new ideas. And the same goes for the criticism and discussion of literary topics. 'Literary?' Well, that raises the point that we shrink a bit from the word, have tried not to be elitist about literature, have seen words as significant only when they are saying something we think reasonably important about the life we lead. Cecil Holmes's piece on the Darwin cyclone in this issue, for instance.

Then we have been radical without being ponderous, dogmatic, humorless or theory-bound about it. We have not felt it our job to spring directly into the political fray, though there have been and will be exceptions. If writers have something to say on Vietnam, and can say it well, our primary job is to give *their* protest an airing. We probably haven't been radical enough except in a conventional sense. Being radical in our terms should not mean unthinking support for any party-political stance.

"Bias Australian?" God bless the gov'nor, yes, Joe's dictum has stood up well, and it will remain on the masthead. It doesn't mean as much as it did when we put it there, of course. It could even be said that in some areas of theatre, writing, art there is too much Australian nationalism today. But we have never been one-eyed nationalists, and in any case Australian literature and history still gets little more than an academic nod from the institutions. So it can stay there.

Our achievement, then? I think it is, or I hope it is, to have established a humane, iconoclastic, relaxed and democratic style which is not academic, not highbrow, not right-wing, not trendy, not 'arty' and not querulous. It is a style which in our opinion suits Australian traditions and to which many

Australians respond. By adopting this style we hope not only to reflect a tradition, but to reinforce it.

Our failures? Circulation, for a start—we sell about 1800 copies an issue, and developing standards of literacy and prosperity do not seem to help. I notice that copies placed in the staff club at the University of Melbourne are stolen within days of their arrival, but subscribers increase only slowly and, for instance, not one in twenty Australian secondary schools takes *Overland*.

Efficiency, too, perhaps. *Overland* has always been a strictly part-time, indeed spare-time, job. In recent years we have been paying out about \$50 a week for office help, which has become essential, and the quality as well as the efficiency of our whole operation has increased dramatically with Barrie Reid, for instance, running the poetry side, and Vane Lindesay the art and design side. Still, we have not been making our four issues a year—not altogether our fault, because there are always printing delays, but it's regrettable.

Money? Hardly a failure, and the taxpayer generously supports each reader. Still, we are at the moment some thousands of dollars in debt, and wonder how we're going to get out of it. Reasons? Inflation, of course, and the iniquitous postal increases. In terms of what we can afford, perhaps over-generous payments to contributors. Publishing too many ambitious issues like this one. Venial sins, but, again, regrettable.

Personal recompense? Some ability to influence events, the feeling that creating a magazine with a soul is analogous to creating a work of art, however minor. The support of readers. The immense pleasure of working and arguing with real friends like Ian Turner and John McLaren and others mentioned above and many not mentioned, to make something that will always be seen as having been part of its time.

1954

“One way of dealing with dissident writers, in an era when the climate of opinion has turned cold, is to freeze them by silence.”

*Brian Fitzpatrick, 'The writer at bay'.  
No. 1, Spring 1954, p. 3.*

1955

“Any thoughts lingering in anyone's mind that McCarthyism in Australia would know when to stop should be dispelled by the recent pointless appearance before the Royal Commission of such respected cultural figures as Clem Christesen and Clive Turnbull, and the mentioning of Colin Simpson.”

*Editorial, 'Culture?—that's Red!!'  
No. 3, Autumn 1955, p. 3.*

*I was on my way to Hiroshima when I first came to Darwin, at the end of 1945. I still have an image of the tall, bow-legged cattleman rolling down Smith Street, a rifle cradled under an arm, thrusting his long frame arrogantly through the bat doors of the Vic. Hotel. He thumps the bar, sings out to the Chinese barman, an O.P. rum and a beer chaser, chop, chop, . . . he sets out to get determinedly, raucously drunk. The dust of the Marrakai Plains lies upon him.*

*In 1960 I came back to make a film of Doug Lockwood's book, *I the Aboriginal*, and there were still some shadows from the frontier past. True, Bill Harney had retired to Queensland, but there were others of his ilk about . . . worn, ageless men with weathered faces, lean bodies and the washed-out blue eyes that all old bushmen and sailors seem to have, perhaps from staring for years across endless spaces. They told their tall tales, lovingly embellished with the passage of time and the slow steady intake of grog. But already it was becoming a public service town; people muttered that it was "just like Canberra" and the newcomers, the "white socks brigade", were treated warily.*

*In 1964 I took on a job editing a magazine called the *Territorian* which was produced at two monthly intervals and began to make a stream of ethnographic films for the Institute of Aboriginal Studies. For four years I lived with my family in an agreeable old house, pleasantly and productively. But at the end of 1968, when the parking meters and traffic lights began to grow out of the streets, I knew it was time to move on—not to Borroloola, that sanctuary of hermits and eccentrics—but back to Sydney and working for the Commonwealth Film Unit. Occasionally I commuted to Darwin to see my family and I was increasingly depressed and disconcerted by the looming little skyscrapers and the soft cloud of pollution spreading from the new bitumen works.*

*And there was the sprawl of suburbia, the anonymous, synonomous stilted fabricated fibro bungalows. A boat under the house, a swimming pool in the backyard. Manana land. Tropical Canberra. In a decade the population rises from twenty to fifty thousand. Fifty per cent public servants. On 15 December 1974 I leave Sydney to spend Christmas with the family. Ten days later Mother Nature breaks wind.*

## CECIL HOLMES **The Night of the Frogs**

Christmas Eve . . . the night for gentleness and  
generosity,  
The moment man minds his friends and neighbors,  
Takes his ease . . .  
My wife prattles on the telephone,  
My daughter thrusts her fingers into the presents  
Heaped beneath the small green plastic Christmas  
tree . . .  
I examine the fridge to enquire whether there will  
be enough refreshment  
Against the pleasant contingency of visitors on  
the morrow

Maybe another half-a-dozen cans will not go  
amiss . . .  
The local is not too far away,  
I don't like it much,  
A new twenty-storey motel,  
With a dull but adequate bottle department . . .  
Ten minutes walk,  
Down the steep street,  
It's an agreeable night, at a quarter to ten,  
Through the open tropical shutters of the houses  
there they are,  
The Chinese family, the Chans, quietly consuming  
their elegant meal,

A group of Greeks, preparing for a gambling bout,  
 My German friend Hans, fussing with his three  
 children,  
 And old Mrs Shawn, all alone as is her choice.  
 Along the main road past the park, soft and  
 swampy now at this time,  
 There has been a short shower, the tyres slick  
 and lights gleam  
 On the wetness of the asphalt.  
 Party going.  
 I return; the sky is a little misty,  
 A line of geese slide across the face of the  
 three-quarter moon, silently,  
 Yet why do they fly away?  
 For now is their time to come and stay.  
 Before the familiar shower of rain in the Season,  
 the monsoonal time,  
 There is a sound which presages this,  
 The croaking of frogs.  
 A dozen or so perhaps,  
 Nature's placid, pleasant weather warning.  
 Not so now.  
 Quite suddenly there is a great bursting of the  
 silence, the tranquillity,  
 A thousand, ten thousand of the creatures begin  
 to bellow in an unholy unison,  
 A vast cacophony,  
 Like some great organ, the notes rising and falling,  
 I have a tingle of fear,  
 I sharpen my steps,  
 I want to run,  
 The cacophony pursues me . . .  
 I am always to remember this as the Night of  
 the Frogs. . . .

*Late on the night of 21 December, 1974 the American weather satellite, SR8, recorded "an ominous cloud formation" over the Timor Sea. A technician slipped the print-out into the computer then went home. Perhaps he drove a two year-old Ford, had a wife and two children up there in Houston, Texas, stopped at one of those wonderful dark American bars for a whisky or two on the rocks, took his time, ogled a broad, went home, a little wistfully. I would like to meet that man.*

The television set has fallen out, the child has  
 gone to bed,  
 The radio is heavy with static.  
 The cyclone warnings, earlier so bland and casual,  
 Now seem more urgent, more tense, more hurried.  
 We obey the instructions, if rather half-heartedly.

We dutifully fill the bath with water, secure a  
 few objects,  
 stick tape over some windows and kick the  
 pets out.  
 Then the first sharp gusts,  
 the first flick of the whip across the back of  
 the city,  
 a tinkle of glass through the half sleep. . . .  
 The sad siren begins to cry.

At precisely two a.m., as indeed the scientists  
 had forecast, the hammer-blow fell from the  
 heavens.

*In 1942 the house we live in had been bomb damaged, and in 1945 a local builder bought it for a song and lovingly reconstructed it. It stands on a slope supported by concrete pillars and amidst a surround of palms, banyans and mango trees. It had however one flaw in its make up, one concession to kitsch, a pair of French doors at the end of the long spacious lounge room which led to a verandah, high up. A splendid view was always available in the dying afternoons of the tropical sunsets across the harbor.*

*In the middle sixties the owner died and the house came into my hands.*

Now the Beast is out of the Lair, its howl approaches across the harbor. With feral ferocity it prepares to encircle the city, crush it, bear-like. This is surely one of the most frightening sounds on earth and the last time I had heard it was back in 1942, on a destroyer crossing the Arctic Circle, moving into the blizzard country. I had seen a convoy decimated in a way no human enemy could achieve.

Now I feel a thrust of fear, no mere tingle, and I know that I, like others, must ride the knife edge between fear and panic.

There are three of us in the house, my wife Sandra and our fourteen year-old daughter Mandy. Momentarily we do nothing, huddle in the living room; pyjama clad . . .

One must DO SOMETHING, or panic will surely win. The decision is imposed by the Beast, with one flip of its paw the French windows, the weakness in the structure, are blown open. One pause, a vital one, then the three of us grasp the old oak table and run it against the windows, forcing them shut before the full onset.

There are no gusts, just a steady rising velocity. Within two hours this will reach three hundred kilometres.

So the journey through a nightmare begins. In the film 2001, the earthman in his spaceship flees beyond Saturn and in this endless passage through the infinite some new horror and terror unfolds. He lies in the grip of the elements, helpless and hopeless, beyond reach and redemption. Thus it is now for us.

With a rending sound the roof begins to go, piece by piece, the sheets of corrugated iron flake off. The rain pours in—seven inches descend in those four hours.

The panes of the French doors crumble and beyond, the sheet lightning illuminates the growing inferno.

One has seen in the autumn time a gentle breeze twirling leaves slowly through the air, now one sees whole trees, cars, caravans, refrigerators and, mingling with these objects, turning in a kind of slow motion, myriad sheets of corrugated iron.

We become tired and numbed holding the table against the doors but the Beast is pressing hard; if we relent then it will howl through the house ruining it completely.

It is bitterly cold.

Time moves slowly.

Then, at 6 a.m., just as the scientists had predicted, comes the abatement. The Beast has exhausted itself.

It is a very grey Christmas morning indeed. And so they emerge, the men, women and children, crawling out of the ruins, staring about them and at each other, in disbelief. For the first time that day, as often later, I recall the London blitz, its aftermath, and even the sad remains of Hiroshima.

After all that people say to themselves, after all that, I'm alive, alive. The children are so resilient, they fossick out their Christmas presents, two little boys play a game with toy racing cars along the ridges of a piece of corrugated iron blown from their roof, their mum and dad burrow around for the little things, bits of jewellery, photographs, a precious book.

From across the road Hans comes bearing a bottle of whisky.

*Hans came to Australia in 1946, from Hamburg, or what was left of it. He had been an engineer on a U-boat, and indeed our friendship grew from the discovery one evening that I had been in destroyers in the Bay of Biscay in 1943 when he had served there also. We shared a hatred for the stupidity of war but never war-bored each other. He served out his time in the*

*mines of Tennant Creek, revived his engineering, married, came to Darwin and raised three children. He lived for his family. One day his wife up and deserted him and the children, and for years he had tended to their wants himself, alone. When he came to Darwin he bought a poor little block of land across the street from me. It was just a hole in the earth really, and over the years, living out of a tent, he smoothed out the ground and slowly erected a house, quite by himself. A sturdy little dwelling. Hans is tough, stocky, kindly, rather talkative, a little assertive and pushy perhaps but he is a friend. We have our bonds.*

The whisky has no effect. The nervous system is too numbed. Hans stands on our verandah and stares with incredulity at a piece of earth where his house had once been. The floorboards and the bathroom fixtures. Indeed he and his children had sheltered the night, or the morning, in the bath covered with a mattress. He just says look, look, my house, my house . . . he goes back and slowly ever so slowly, wearily, patiently starts all over again.

We drive to the hospital. Sandra has a piece of glass in her eye.

Be an idea to grab some petrol. At my local friendly gas station the proprietor, Jack, is staring at a row of pumps, reeling like drunken robots, with hatred and resentment. He is a big meaty-faced man, always full of hearty good cheer for the customers. As an old one, I ask him if he may have a can or two out the back. He gazes at me like an enemy and spits out, YOU CAN GO AND GET FUCKED . . . ah, I think, now we will be in for jolly days ahead indeed. The crossroads is a tangle of wires and bent traffic lights. A policeman stands there, he thought he should, but the traffic in the event goes all one way—to the hospital. A sad stream of the dead and the dying, stunned and savaged people, driving very slowly.

The hospital is intact, a large solid modern building, though it has been gutted by the blast of air through the broken windows.

The ambulances approach silently, all too few, no sirens sounding. A driver gets out and instead of opening the door with his mate leans against the side and laughs hysterically. There is a brutal cure for this loss of nerve, a sharp slap across the face, and I itch to do it but don't. You're not in the navy now, old chap. A woman gets out of a car carrying her baby. It is dead. A young man stands quite still just staring, beneath a Father



Christmas poster, his face slashed as though by a handful of razor blades flung fiercely; another flying glass casualty. Within there is mud and blood, the rows of bodies, the low, animal-like cries of pain.

And the Salvation Army. Neatly rigged in their uniforms dispensing tea and buns. All smiles. I recall in 1945, Hiroshima, climbing to the top of the famous cupola-shaped building and there they were, just as calmly, the sallahs, handing out the same inevitable tea and buns. God Almighty, why do these people have such an instinct for disaster? I don't want any tea and buns, not right now, but the middle-aged lady in her crisp uniform with her pale face and steel-rimmed spectacles gazes kindly at me.

Suddenly I begin to sob, quite helplessly, so do others. There will be a torrent of tears on this day. A nurse hustles Sandra over to the doctor, a young man just out of university, doing his internship. Most of the rest of the staff are on leave. He drops the instrument, apologizes, he is holding on and will have to, for many hours yet.

We drive on. How have some of our friends fared? What remains? Fanny Bay gaol rates as one of the most bizarre jokes in Australian penology. It consists, or did, of a high, corrugated-iron fence surmounted by barbed wire, the whole of minimal security. The occupants are, or were, usually drunks, vagrants, horse thieves, car stealers and other small fry. At the height of the wind, at about three a.m., the solitary warder on duty decides to free the inmates. He runs from one cell to another unlocking them. Most haven't been sighted since. For his pains the warder was decapitated by a piece of flying iron. He leaves a wife and two children.

Nearby, just below the low cliffs, the sea is receding. Lying in the shallow water is a pony and it is held by a child, a girl of maybe thirteen. I walk down. The pony is dead. The girl tells me that its name is Pepper, it was her Christmas present from mummy and daddy. It must have broken out of the stable in panic, run over the cliffs, broken some limbs and drowned in the steep tide. The girl sobs quietly, hangs on tight, clings to her gift; she does not know or care where her parents are.

I walk away.

We drive on.

I wonder how Bill is faring, my old mate on the waterfront, the hardest-nosed militant and commo I ever did meet.

*In the late forties Bill was working at a power house in Geelong but he tired of this and drifted north to Katherine where he took up peanut farming, lucrative for a year or two until the Menzies government lifted the embargo on South African peanuts and the growers of Katherine suddenly found themselves without a livelihood. Bill then drifted on to Darwin, and bought a fishing boat, but this didn't work out either. He ended up on the waterfront and took a firm grip on the affairs of the rather ramshackle union. Pugnacious, very Irish-Australian, he is dissatisfied if a day passes and he has failed "to have a blue with the boss". He is also enormously generous and an easy bite. The one day of the year he lives for is May Day, and the march through Darwin's main street with himself at the head, plodding along like a bulldog.*

Like many of the older houses Bill's little donga has survived in some form, though the roof's gone, and a wall. His wife, Jean, is a conchologist, and she is patiently picking through the wreckage to put her precious shell collection together again. Bill, she says, is fine and gone off to get the wharf working. The container ship, the Darwin Trader, had been standing off all night at sea, but is now alongside. Bill drives his old ute around and gathers up a hard core of some thirty wharfies. He does so quite ruthlessly, one lad has lost his wife but this doesn't faze Bill—the people are going to need what's on that boat, we've got to get it working. And as for Burns Philp (the boss) they can get stuffed, we'll have workers' control from now on. The wharf is a ruin and dangerous but somehow the cargo is moved. Bill stays down there for forty-eight hours, in his element, the supremo. Then, crying and protesting, his nerves finally shot, his mates lead him off home. Inevitably the boss reasserts himself but Bill has had his moment of glory.

We drive on.

*Dick finished Law in Melbourne back in the thirties, went to Adelaide then practised in Alice Springs, came to Darwin in 1941, joined the army. He had a house and wife by this time. The bombs came and he lost the house and the wife. Later, he went into Labor Party politics, his practice prospered but he wasn't really much interested. He began to take on thankless cases and causes for the poor, mostly Aborigines. Someone dubbed him the Clarence Darrow of the North. In one remarkable trial he defended*

## WOMEN AT WORK

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a full-blood on a charge of murder and a wounding. Such was Dick's skill in court that he persuaded the all-white jury to reduce the case to manslaughter, and the judge passed a sentence of six years. Then Dick walked across to the pub and had a few drinks with the boys. His great love in life was literature, the classics, and he had accumulated an impressive range of first editions, rich old leather-bound volumes. Many a happy evening could I recall, as Dick, armed with a tankard and Shelley or Keats, would recite by the hour, for he had a beautiful speaking voice.

Dick lives with a housekeeper in a two-storied block of flats—the top part is now missing. The lady emerges. It seems that Dick a few days before had an operation and is still under sedation. In the course of the morning he had woken briefly and remarked that there seemed to be a bit of a breeze out there . . . how are my books . . . she told him they were fine. He slipped back to sleep. Indeed both Dick and the books are still fine.

We drive on.

*Mike was the apotheosis of the public service clerk. Everything was done by the book, yet he could stretch a point sometimes for someone he liked. He had come to Darwin from Perth or somewhere years ago, got married and decided to just move onwards and upwards. He was passing into middle age and the middle stratum of the service. He was perhaps colorless, but he was kind to me over some problems on a few occasions, and his family and ours drifted into a mild friendship, one of exchanging dinner parties, but not much more. He had a wife and three children. The atmosphere in the home was an odd one. His wife would often speak sharply, even in an intimidatory fashion. His children were sometimes rude and contemptuous. It wasn't too overt but it was there; it was as though this house carried some secret shame which centred on the father. I noticed he never touched alcohol, unusual in Darwin. Then a colleague one day told me what it was; Mike was a reformed alcoholic—but he still had to bear this burden in his home.*

We come upon Mike and his family—they are, like everyone, picking about, but the place is a write-off. There is nothing, only the floorboards. As we walk over to them, the little family gather together, smiling and greeting us. And, for the first time since I have known him, Mike is a

happy man. He is proud, he stands up straight, he exudes confidence. No grey-faced clerk he, not now. And his wife clings to him proudly, looking at him in admiration, as do his children. And I know that on that morning Mike has performed some act of courage, made some valiant gesture. What it was I will never know and it does not matter. They have no home, but life ahead for these folk will be different, will be better. We have some Lord Jims in our midst.

We drive on.

So another pattern of life begins.

There is no water, no power, no communication. No word from the outside world. For forty-eight hours no local radio station functions. People wander about disconsolately asking, if only they would *tell* us something. "They", the local authorities, are as confused and paralysed as the common folk. Nothing exists now but oneself and one's neighbors.

For a few hours there is no rain, then with a dull, dreary persistence it begins to come again, thick and heavy out of the grey, tropical skies.

And we begin to loot, all of us. True there are some ghouls who thieve for profit, lorries laden with refrigerators constantly pass our house, but we must pick our way amongst the wrecked stores for tinned food, perhaps some dry blankets and clothes. A box of matches becomes a tiny fortune.

Through the rooflessness comes the rain. It's out with mops and buckets most of the night, a cat-nap in some corner, down to a nearby stream with buckets and a yoke across the shoulders, scrounging around for tucker—the vice of hunger begins to tighten but we all over-eat anyway—out to the ice works for a block, keep what food one has in some preservation, futile attempts to light fires and boil water. We try and clear the yard but it's hopeless without gear. The nerves wear away, you trip and bruise and scratch yourself, the innumerable slivers of broken glass penetrate, everyone seems to be walking around bow legged; it's the little bits of glass in the feet. No beer or cigarettes, of course. Only sex. And I recall again the London blitz. The response of nature to death is the affirmation of life through constant copulation. Couples couple here now, quite freely and frankly. The nervous exhaustion reduces human friction, one has no energy for a row. Still one day at the ice works, in the long queue, two men start to fight about their place. The rest of us turn away in embarrassment. It's

scon over but, as in war, most people let the barriers down, chat freely, strike up a passing friendship on the basis of exchanged anecdotes, near escapes, which become more colorful with the passage of the days.

People fragment. A publican sees a man in his bar. He shoots him dead. It turns out he was a plumber he had hired to do some repairs.

Each fitful morning we awake to the melancholy, futile tapping of hammers on corrugated iron as people try to put themselves and theirs together again.

Slipping slowly through the grey green sea of the harbor they came with empty guns. One aircraft carrier and thirteen other warships. People watch from the beaches and the low hills. It is New Year's Day, just before midday, and now we know that we are not forgotten or neglected. That day is a turning point.

*The island bridge of the carrier . . . the admiral perches in his high chair, the navigating officer says, "We're coming onto the bearing" . . . the admiral glances at his watch, some time ticks by . . . "Execute," he says . . . signal flags flutter and are answered similarly from the other ships, cables rattle, anchors plunge. It is midday. The admiral levers himself from his chair and says, "Make to the fleet Manoeuvre Well Executed, and I want to go ashore in half an hour." He moves down the gangways with the agility of the seasoned seaman, proceeds to his cabin, large and luxurious. He washes his hands, in the background a steward places a tall glass of gin and lime, ice tinkling, and a plate of ham sandwiches set in lettuce and sprinkled with parsley. The admiral absorbs and consumes these. At 12.25 an aide knocks discreetly at the open door and says, "Ready to proceed ashore, sir."*

*The admiral and his entourage move quickly across the great deck, bending against the swish of the helicopter blades.*

*Theirs are the first eyes to perceive fully, completely the totality of the disaster, for a low slow flight in a helicopter can be very intimate yet comprehensive. It is a scene from a Hollywood block-buster about the end of the world. They are silent, even these hardened warriors whose trade is destruction.*

*Then, below, the admiral detects a Happening. There is a man driving along a road near the botanical gardens in a Land Rover. The vehicle is wavering somewhat, no doubt the*

*occupant is drunk. He pulls up, shoots at a stray dog, misses, fires again . . . drives on . . . he is clad in white ducks, a topee and sports a cigar. My god, says the admiral, that fellow ought to be clapped in irons. The aide, who knows the city a little better from previous service, says "That's the mayor, sir, Tiger Brennan." A pause from the admiral, then, "Ha, well he won't get the RSPCA vote next time round will he?" The machine bends back across to the fleet, other helicopters are forming across to a helipad, a space of ground by the remains of the old Darwin Hotel.*

*Good, says the admiral, the troops are on the move, in fact I think we had all better have a crack at this. Sombre looks from his fellow officers, no one relishes a clean-up job in the harsh physical sense.*

So the navy descends; in a morning they have fixed our roof, which just goes to show that energy and aptitude are readily available in the human race, and what's more we get our first night's sleep.

Two lads are cleaning up the back yard. I ask, you must have been finding odd things around after all these days? One giggles and says, yes, look at this. He fishes an object out. It is a vibrating dildo.

They are a couple of pink-faced country boys of nineteen or so who had joined up together only weeks ago. This is their Baptism of Fire, I suppose. They work with a will, using chain saws to clear the fallen trees away—these brave trees that had stood like soldiers in defence of our home, falling one by one. One has known them so long. It is curiously saddening to see them go now, forever.

The two sailors, Jack and John, work their way cheerfully up one side of the street and down the other. Then I notice that Jack has a different mate. I enquire, and he tells me the tale. One of their tasks is to clean out refrigerators, these that were left, the ones too large for looters to bear away. John opens a large one, and into his arms falls the corpse of a ten year-old girl. Perhaps in the frenzy of the morning the child had panicked about and somehow locked herself in. God knows what had happened to the parents. John had worked on that day however, returned to the ship and after the evening meal, gone up on deck and quite simply jumped over the side, drowning himself.

A casualty in this strange campaign.

There is the Night of the Rat.

My family have gone south for a few weeks and I am alone and restless. There is still no power, no light to read. I drive across to the Travelodge, a towering building newly erected which seems to have withstood the hurricane (later it was found to have moved on its foundations, and its future is uncertain). It has become a refuge for senior public servants, and is filling up with a motley collection of insurance assessors and carpet-baggers. Some have brought their whiskey and girl friends with them. Flashy types. They sit by the pool, splash about, laugh. Beyond lie the ruins. They are the scavengers, the rats.

*A day or two later I watch one operating, a smart fellow with a brief case, he walks down the main street amidst the rubble, sees some poor devil scratching about hopelessly in the remains of his shop. The southerner accosts him, some words pass, a piece of paper is signed, the ex-owner walks away shrugging his shoulders. He's opted out for some pittance.*

Now I suddenly recall a night in 1941, just after a blitz, and the rich in the Dorchester hotel, dancing away the hours.

I drive to the middle of the city. It is very black. There is no heart-beat now, for the heart itself has been torn out. So cruel and sad, more than all the rows of blasted houses. I stop. For a moment there is a sound, an odd rustle, I walk a little, I hear it again. I look about, my eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness. There is no mistaking them. The rats, hundreds, perhaps thousands of them. . . . I walk again and they rustle about some more, stop when I stop. Minute eyes gleaming. Hurriedly I drive off.

I lie in bed. As is the custom of the season, an electrical storm breaks. It is most violent, the thunder cracking above, shaking the half-broken house. I cling to the sides of the bed, quite alone. I am afraid. The violence increases and the building quakes. How long, how long will this last?

*Next morning cars stream out of Darwin, hundreds of panic-stricken people, then, realizing there is nowhere to go anyway and the sun is now shining, they come back. A little ashamed, though they needn't be.*

The storm subsides. I doze a little. There is a curious rattling at the broken flywire of the bathroom window. I go to inspect. Clinging to the

wire struggling to get in is a rat, a very large one, about a foot in length. The rat and I regard each other balefully. I run to the kitchen, grab a saucepan, beat at it. The creature does not move. I beat more fiercely, in hate and fear. It drops off. I go back to bed but do not sleep that night. I seem to hear rustles, what shall I do if there is more than one, dozens perhaps trying to get in? I have long since learned the meaning of fear, now I experience terror.

There are the Nights of the Shows.

People lust for diversion, entertainment. A Russian troupe, about a dozen or so who are currently on tour anyway, volunteer to come to Darwin. There is a new theatre, in the round, half-built and mostly destroyed now, in one of the suburbs. It is of a kind of fake Greek theatre design and, on the night, the populace turns up. Three thousand or more hanging and dangling from everywhere although the place was built for some eight hundred. They exhaust the Russians with encores, which must take some doing. At the end of an act one bloke walks up to the leader of the group and proffers him a beer, saying, have a stubbie or I'll flatten you, mate . . . the Russian takes it, then another and prances merrily about the stage. Delighted uproar. The rapport is intense. Beyond, through the broken pillars, over the harbor, a thunderstorm flickers. It is just right, but why do these goddam Russians always attract drama?

On another night at another place, Rolf Harris performs. He falls curiously flat, the response is only polite. I am standing at the back, beside me is a young policeman. For some reason he starts talking and I am used to this involuntary thing now. He says, I can't stand it any more, all those kids laid out. He tells me the morgue is inadequate and they are using the cold floor of the abbatoirs—which is a few miles away where they kill the beef—to preserve the corpses. He says the trouble is, and this annoys the tidy policeman in him, we don't know who they are, there are so many and we don't know what to put on the tags, what names. The frolics of Rolf do not grip him.

Today is quite an occasion. It is the day of the HOT MEAL. We swarm towards Darwin High School, one of the venues. More than that, we are honored with some august presences. The governor-general, no less, enclosed by a gaggle of ministers and aides, is there sitting at a trestle

table. They sit in the hot sticky sunshine, sip sticky wine, eat sticky food and are buzzed by flies. They don't like it one bit. Us lesser mortals shuffle along in one of the now familiar queues to grasp our plate of hash. I am standing there spooning it eagerly down when old Arthur Wright spies me and I am indeed glad to see him. Arthur was a lino operator years ago on the Northern Standard, one of the few labor papers this country ever boasted, and is proud of the fact that he, along with some other lively lads, was involved in the famous incident in the 1920s when the flagstaff was cut down at the residency and the administrator kicked out. A baby Eureka. Until a few years ago he was still lino operating on the local paper. He retired, got bored and they gave him a job as a sweeper. A health addict, a fanatical bicyclist — in this climate — Arthur must be over seventy, but looks little more than fifty. He grins happily. And he says, you know we ought to have one of these every year. I laugh and I know what he means. For fully ten days we have all been enjoying a kind of child's version of socialism. Everything has been *free*. Free food, free clothing, free bus rides, free entertainment, a moratorium on debts, even money has been given away—there is nowhere to spend it. The public servants hate all this, their world has been inverted, they grind their teeth. Still, soon enough things will be set to rights for them again and they will be grinningly rude across their counters as we come in to make our modest demands of society. In the meantime . . . it's all rather fun, and for a few brief glorious days the Arthur Wrights of this city are balling it up. They are getting something for nothing for the first time in their long and arduous lives. Maybe, I think, there is a moral somewhere, it is only out of adversity that good comes.

The black cars arrive, the governor-general departs. He glances briefly at a young Aboriginal standing nearby who sports a T-shirt with the legend, *Let's repopulate Darwin, Have a Root every day.*

I have now discovered the difference between being Broke, which is normal, and Destitute. I

must get a job, quickly. No more handouts, and it will be a long time before compensation begins. There is always that haven of the rascal, vagabond and no hoper—the waterfront. A clapped out Greek liner, the Patris, has been hooked up alongside the wharf, to ease the pain of accommodation, and some gangway watchmen are needed. I secure such a position. A sixty-hour, seven-day week and two hundred bucks clear. More than I've had in good hard certain cash for a very long time. The officers are a sleek, slick-haired, dandyish, dead-eyed lot and they begin to pinprick and bully. I have not encountered any European fascists for some time, but certainly the species is alive and well. After eight weeks I get fed up and walk off.

A Greek seaman calls after me, good luck, mate.

I glance in the fridge, now working and I think Well maybe another half-a-dozen won't go amiss I walk down the steep short street to the motel They're open now and it's legal to buy some grog It's a quarter to ten and there is a moon out Some geese slide across it, they're coming home, There has been a shower but it's quiet And the Tilley lamps gleam here and there, The Chinese family, the Chans are eating a meal under their house,

They have lost one child.

The Greeks have left, put up a sign Looters will be shot,

My friend Hans is alone now, his children have gone south,

He fiddles about in his little tent,

Old Mrs Shawn and her house have gone forever. On the night, the morning some neighbors come to her aid.

But she says no, Born and Bred in the Territory, This is my house, all I got,

If it goes I go with it.

Which indeed happened.

She had a cranky manner, a crackling voice and a heart of gold,

Straight from a John Ford film,

And she played herself, with lines, to the end.

I walk back past the soft swampy park and listen for the frogs.

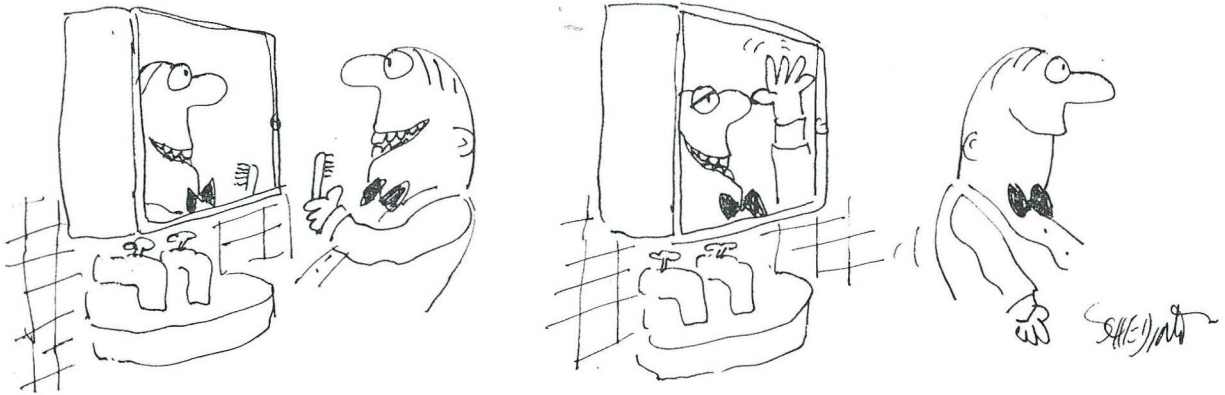
They are silent now.

Will you  
marinate me,  
Gladys?



SCHEDING

Stephen Scheduling



Stephen Scheduling

# The Haunting of Hungry Jimmy

JOHN MORRISON

Melbourne author Bernard Cronin, a dear old friend of mine now dead, once remarked to me: "John, I never did meet a rich man who didn't want to be richer."

I recognised the ancient truth of that, and always wanted to take it as the text of a novel, but didn't get around to it. Had I ever done so the short career of Jimmy Boon would have been my vehicle. He didn't quite reach the heights of a rags-to-riches story, but I think he might have had he not been one of the many who got their fingers burned in the minerals boom and crash of the early 1970s. No great intellectual equipment is needed to rule from a roost in middle Collins Street; only a primitive astuteness and an utter dedication to the making of money. Jimmy Boon had both.

He was the youngest of a large family living a street away from me in Mentone, and I found his performance worth following from the Sunday morning on which he confronted me with a dead rabbit when I was working in my garden. I already knew him by sight as a lively urchin selling Heralds of an evening at the railway station. I also knew a bit about him from stories brought home from school by my own children. Jimmy was twelve then, but already an opportunist, with a reputation for tight dealing in those little transactions which take place in all playgrounds. I'd heard of him charging other children two lollies for a ride on his first push-bike, and trading a pair of very surplus white mice for a quality biro pen—the latter subsequently retrieved by an irate parent.

I gave him a shilling for the rabbit that Sunday morning, and was quite captivated when, with a cheeky grin, he bailed me up for an extra penny when I asked him to skin it. The dexterity with which he did that marked him as an expert; I couldn't have stripped off a glove quicker.

"Are there many around?" I asked him.

"There's a few," he replied guardedly.

"In the golf links?"

"You can get 'em there as well. Anything you want doing?"

Which struck me as a precociously clever way of throwing me off the scent of his business secrets. A very alert boy indeed. His eyes were on the drive, which was littered with weeds and clippings from the border I'd just cleaned out.

"Not really," I said.

"I'll shift all that for two bob." He was irresistible.

He was also a born worker. His energy and efficiency won my respect. "Do you do much of this?" I asked him when, half-an-hour later, I was paying him off on a drive as clean as a billiard table.

"Only when there's not much on at the links. Anything else?" He was looking around hopefully.

"Not today. Bring me another rabbit next week."

"If I can get one." He was conceding nothing.

On the following Sunday he turned up with two rabbits. "One-and-ten the pair, mister"

I said that one was enough. He said the one I picked would be one and twopence on its own: "It's a big 'un. Take the pair for one and eight?"

I didn't, out of sheer stubbornness, but before he left he sold my wife half-a-dozen eggs at a few pence below shop prices and offered to cut my front lawn for one-and-sixpence. I decided I was dealing with a budding financial genius, a conviction which was reinforced next day when I learned that he had two dozen hens which he fed on the cheap by picking up off-cuts of cabbages and the like at the local greengrocer's and mixing mash with dregs collected from milk bottles left around the school playground.

The best lurk of the local hopefuls was, from



my inside knowledge, caddying at the golf links, either at Kingston Heath or Royal Melbourne. Jimmy's short stature, however, put him at a disadvantage, and he'd found he was rarely among the chosen. So he'd given it away, and was spreading his activities over an area as impressive in its dimensions as it was in its infinite variety. You never knew where he was going to pop up: dragging a billy-cart loaded with empty bottles for sale at the bottle-yard, selling programs at the railway station on Saturday race-days, calling ice-creams and chocolate in the intervals at the local Hoyts, pushing his bike on an early morning newspaper delivery, letter-boxing handbills for the shopkeepers.

He was only thirteen when he had a round of lawns which he cut at weekends, using his own rotary mower pulled from job to job on the very daddy of a billy-cart constructed by himself out of bits and pieces from the tip. The mower also was probably salvage. It was always breaking down, but Jimmy had picked up plenty of experience watching his big brothers tinker with their auto-bombs, and invariably got it going again. It made a fearful racket, and led to his first skirmishes with the law. Somebody laid a complaint about his disturbing the peace on a Sunday morning right in the middle of church services, followed a week later by another complaint about his waking people up too early on working mornings. A third complaint came soon after, when, through his father, he was ordered to reduce the number of hens he was keeping and dismantle some of the ramshackle pens which were beginning to give a drunken lean to the dividing fence.

By then Jimmy had abandoned the rabbit branch of his business complex, but, as an old customer, possessively lined me up for a Herald one evening at the hotel on the beach front. As — with transparent slowness — he fumbled for my change he wanted to know if I'd be interested in some cheap fish next Sunday morning: "Fresh flathead, straight from the Bay I get 'em down at Keeford's." (Keeford's was the boats-for-hire at Beaumaris.)

I was still interested in him, but no longer to the point of involvement. Only a few minutes previously my drinking mate had pointed him out as a promising little rough-neck who had won the coveted hotel pitch by defeating another youngster half as big again as himself. I'd decided not to continue too close an association with a boy who had already earned himself the nickname of Hungry Jimmy.

He left school at fourteen. I heard that his father, a carpenter, wanted him to go on for a further two years at Caulfield Technical School with the aim of an apprenticeship in plumbing or electrical fitting at sixteen. Jimmy, however, eager to get into immediate wages, had his way and took his first job, telegraph boy at Mentone post office. At the end of four weeks he was sacked when some citizen reported him cutting a lawn while he was supposed to be still out on a delivery. It appeared that he was already under observation for the excessive times he was taking on assignments.

It was then Daddy Boon's turn to prevail, and for the following eighteen months Jimmy struggled to keep his lawn-mowing contracts by working two or three hours before and after school. With travelling times thrown in, that made pretty long days for a youngster. But he was tough, and, at an age when boys usually do launch into real growth, was fast putting on height and weight — and muscle. So much so that I wasn't surprised when I came across him "jockeying" for Les Binns, a Cheltenham carrier with a twice-daily run between Melbourne and Mordialloc.

"What happened to Caulfield Tech., Jimmy?" I asked him

"Aw, that?" He sniffed contemptuously, and paused in the act of lowering a crate to the roadway in Mentone Parade. "There's no dough in school. I'm getting paid for this."

"This" didn't last much longer than his first job. I was never able to find out what happened, presumably because Les Binns was a mate of Jimmy's father.

"Jimmy Boon?" Les was an easy-going type, and chuckled when I tried to draw him out on the subject. "Yes, he wasn't with me for long. He'll get on, that kid. Too smart for my little firm. What won the last race?"

Which I took as a gentle reminder that you don't dob a cobbler's son in. My guess is that Jimmy was caught out running a few small deliveries of his own on the side.

He never had another full-time employer. The lawn-mowing has given him connections, and he'd gradually acquired some expertise in gardening. As I've already indicated, he was a real worker, and in the kindly climate of Melbourne speed and neatness count for more than horticultural know-how. We were in the post-war boom years, with full employment, and big wages in industry. Young men weren't attracted to what had always been the Cinderella of manual occupations, and some skilled tradesmen were them-

selves able to hire labor to do the unprofitable chores in their gardens. Admittedly, gardeners' earnings also were on the up, but they still lagged, and anything went as long as there was plenty of it. Jimmy gave plenty. In no time he'd built up a full week of garden maintenance, and word was going around that Jimmy Boon did more work in an hour than most of the local potters could do in half a day.

For about eighteen months, up to his eighteenth birthday, he steadily consolidated. He was an ant, a bee, a spider, a money-spinner. People aren't fussy in the hunt for maximum values for outlay. He was Hungry Jimmy from Parkdale to Cheltenham, but he got the work. No forty-hour week for Jimmy Boon. He was at it from the crack of dawn to the setting sun, weekends included. From all the evidence, his only recreation was a Saturday night appearance at the local cinema with Elsie Parker, who lived only two blocks away from him. Elsie, often referred to as a "big lump of a girl", kept house for her not-very-bright father (who got an occasional pick-and-shovel job from Jimmy), several junior brothers and sisters and an ailing mother who nevertheless supplemented the family income by taking in bits of homely dressmaking. There was much speculation among the local wags on who really paid for Jimmy's weekly treat, and on whether the recreation extended any further than escorting Elsie home after the show. He was never seen drinking at either the Mentone or the Royal Oak, but his long working hours and tireless pursuit of fringe benefits were subjects for further fruity discussion in both bars, with some credit given for the fact that at least he wasn't depressing rates of pay. On the contrary, and acting on the immemorial precept that the value of any commodity is the most that you can possibly get for it, he very soon began to jack up his prices. With the exception of one or two seasoned experts he was, at seventeen, probably the best-paid gardener in the district. Details of his techniques came out one day during a heated argument in the Royal Oak when someone quoted him on the relative merits of natural manures and artificial fertilisers.

"Jimmy Boon a gardener!" exclaimed Alec Fraser. "He wouldn't know the difference between a forkful of horse-shit and a forkful of bloody spaghetti." Alec, who boasted an apprenticeship served on the estate of a Scottish earl, ran a small nursery out on the Warrigal Road and employed a few men on maintenance and landscape work. "Get-rich-quick Jimmy; he's just a rip-tear-and-bust merchant. I've lost two good

jobs over him in the last month. All right, he keeps up to award rates, but there's more ways than one of undercutting. I pay my men full money, and I've had Councillor Baxter's garden for six years and never a complaint. And what does Jimmy do? He comes along, asks Baxter what time he gives, and when Baxter says one day a week Jimmy looks round with a sniff and says he'll eat it in half a day. So bang goes me. I told Baxter he wouldn't get the show my man was giving him and he says he doesn't care much about flowers since his wife died; he just wants the place keeping tidy. Another job Jimmy knocked off was Yanko Private Hospital. I had old Bob Grimm doing it. Two days a week. Bob's getting up in years now, but I'd have kept him on as long as Sister Drew was satisfied. Jimmy's got it now. One day a week, and where the hell am I going to send Bob?"

From which flying start Alec proceeded to enlarge on the tale of Jimmy's misdeeds: "He was getting all his seedlings from me to begin with; wholesale, that's a third off. Now he's growing all his own in the old man's back garden, and trying to cut me out of my corner with the florist at Cheltenham. The only shop where I've been able to get a display. I'll tell you something else he did. Sister Drew wanted a show of phlox along that main border of hers. Jimmy told her it was cheaper and better to grow phlox straight on from seed. Said he'd need half an ounce, sowed the whole half ounce at Yanko, and planted all his other gardens with the thinnings at one-and-six a dozen. That bloke would skin a flea for its hide. Remember that caterpillar plague on the cypress hedges last year? Jimmy read in the Herald about the new malathion poisons, bought a large can, told Arthur Nevinson he had a small job to do, borrowed his knapsack pump for the weekend, sprayed half the cypress hedges in Mentone at ten bob an hour, then took the pump back to Arthur without having the decency to sling him a bottle of grog."

Another man who nursed a personal grievance against Jimmy was my friend Neil Campbell. Neil was a professional photographer and commercial artist living in Cromer Road, Beaumaris. Apart from an affection for trees in general, there were two in which he had a small commercial interest. One was a well-bushed variegated agonis in Beach Road, the other a very beautiful young lemon-scented gum in Plummer Road. Both trees were occasionally used by Neil as backgrounds in outdoor commissions for wedding and fashion shots. The owner of the agonis exacted a small

fee, but in the case of the eucalypt Neil's enthusiasm had made him *persona grata* with Captain Moriarty, a retired master mariner who had christened his home 'Lawhill', after the famous old windjammer in which he had once served as a junior officer. Little of the tree was yet visible above a cypress hedge on the frontage, but when you stepped inside the garden you found it was forked unusually close to the ground, and magnificently placed against a background of dark camellias, with glimpses here and there of the fine white ironwork of an old colonial-style verandah. There was something almost erotic about the slender, naked, white limbs of the tree. "Just look at it!" Neil had exclaimed on the day he took me in to see it. "It's like a nymph, isn't it? Inviting you —"

Early in the 1960s Neil went into a business partnership with an old friend in Sydney, and when he and his wife came to my place for a farewell dinner the conversation naturally turned on his feelings about leaving Beaumaris. Apparently it wasn't only a matter of business. He was glad to be getting out.

"Mentone and Cheltenham are closing in on us, Bob," he said despondently. "When we first came here Beaumaris was a green suburb, big blocks of ti-tree scrub everywhere, and full of birds. Look at it now. They all want city-style gardens, and the first thing they do is clear out the native trees. It seems to be in the blood; Australians still want a bit of the Old Dart. To remind them of what? That damned Jimmy Boon's just knocked off my nice agonis."

"He must have muscled in on old Barnard?"

"Barnard died, and his widow went to live with her daughter. Jimmy canvassed the new people, got the maintenance job, and talked them into getting rid of all their trees on the front. See the idea? The less trees, the more beds for his seedlings. Change over twice a year, and more labor for upkeep. He's after the trees wherever he gets a foot in. Takes the big ones down free on condition he keeps the firewood. Grubbing's a charge. He's made a deal with some wood merchant down Moorabbin way. Hires a chainsaw, cuts the tree up himself into one-foot blocks, and this dealer comes along with his truck and carts the lot off at a nice profit for both of them. I'm getting the hell out of it before he picks up Moriarty's garden and murders my lemon-scented gum."

On the very day he turned eighteen Jimmy took out a driver's licence, bought a utility truck, and became an employer of full-time labor. In

the words of another fascinated observer, he took off like a rocket. The groundwork had been well scouted. He'd got on to an industrial development near Black Rock where a large quantity of sandy topsoil was available free for the removal. At the same time, back of the Nepean Highway at Parkdale, there was a housing sub-division where clean filling and top-dressing was in demand at £1 a yard. With a front-end loader at one end of the line, two lusty laborers spreading at the other, and Jimmy driving like a bat out of hell between, it was only a matter of weeks before he was able to put down a deposit on a tip-truck and advertise in the Mordialloc City News: "CARTING; Sand, gravel, soil. Rubbish removed. No job too small. Quotes free." He even had a phone number, that of his girl friend, who took the calls and did the necessary paper-work. She was turning out to be a girl after Jimmy's own rapacious heart, leaving her mother now and then to attend to the phone while she herself went along to do a bit in Jimmy's back-garden nursery.

Finding lusty shovel hands and a reliable driver for the tip-truck presented no problems. There are competent laborers everywhere, men with no special skills and a casual attitude to life, but willing enough workers where there's good money with no responsibility attached. In very little time Jimmy had five of them on the receiving end, with himself in the utility checking up now and then and holding down the best of his garden maintenance department. This latter, however, soon began to wither as the housing estate opened up new vistas of conquest; fencing, concrete paths, landscape gardening.

It was the day of what was known as the 'spec. builder'. With an acute housing shortage, and suburban councils at their wits' end to meet demands for accommodation, regulations were not always strictly enforced, and almost any ambitious carpenter with a bit of capital to pay wages, and reputable enough to get materials on credit, could set himself up as a builder, with no end of buyers ready to move in almost before the paint was dry.

Such a climate of urgency, limited funds — and "she'll do, mate!" — was made to order for the small-fry marginal operators, and Jimmy Boon prospered. Working along the rapidly extending line of development east of the Nepean Highway, and with a foot already in with the builders through his cheap filling and rubbish removal, he became, in the local paper: "JAMES BOON. Landscape Gardener and General Cartage Contractor."

THE MAGIC FIGURES . . .

# 21

## **A&R warmly congratulate OVERLAND**

During the two hundred years since James Cook first sighted the Australian coast, OVERLAND has become but the third literary magazine to achieve a 21st anniversary—which speaks volumes (62 in number) for its editor and his team, its contributors and, importantly, for its readers.

21 YEARS after George Robertson and David Angus began their business partnership, a new literary magazine, *The Lone Hand*, appeared with an initial 116 page issue. It included verse by Hugh McCrae, drawings by Norman Lindsay and an article by the founder of the *Bulletin*, J. F. Archibald. Later issues that year (1907) included material by Bernard O'Dowd, Frank Morton and Louis Essen.

During the same year Geo Robertson and Co Prop. Ltd—est. 1852, later Robertson & Mullins, Melbourne—were advertising *Fact'ry 'Auds* by Edward Dyson (illustrations by brother Will); *Lorna Doone*, new edition, 9d posted, and *The Romance of the Swag* by Henry Lawson in the famous *Red Page* of the *Bulletin*.

Times and values have altered considerably since then. New influences on the Australian literary scene, such as OVERLAND, have continued to stimulate our cultural outlook . . . older identities have either adapted to those changes or fallen by the wayside. A&R Publishers congratulate OVERLAND for continuing its important role in assisting the development of Australia's literary heritage.

**A 21st anniversary well deserved!**

One truck, two trucks, three trucks . . .

Few of the working-men home buyers could afford professional garden design, and were easily talked into rough-and-ready jobs by the builders concerned. That usually meant Jimmy Boon. Jimmy's landscaping at first amounted to little more than clearing away the building rubble, appropriating any left-overs of sand and metal, blinding what was left of the site with an inch of clean top-dressing, scattering a few pounds of grass seed, perhaps laying a concrete path, and planting several commonplace shrubs. Later he recruited a man with some knowledge of garden lay-out, an invalid pensioner, but who nevertheless was able, for a modest fee, to supervise the growing number of odd-bods on Jimmy's payroll.

At twenty-two Jimmy Boon was directing one of the most extraordinary rag-tag-and-bobtail business complexes at the northern end of the Mornington Peninsula. He had five trucks on the road, plus two utilities, plus a late-model Holden in which he did the round of enterprises extending from Frankston to Moorabbin. His headquarters were now the home of his prospective father-in-law, whose vacant block on the side was cluttered up with salvage building materials, set off by the cannibalised carcass of Jimmy's first tip-truck on the frontage. With a full-time job now as yardman, an economically promising marriage in prospect for his eldest daughter, and a son-in-law-to-be with an office already built on to the back of the house, Charlie Parker must have felt that the world was really beginning to smile on him.

In 1965 Captain Moriarty died, and his home — with Neil Campbell's beloved lemon-scented gum — came on to the market. Nobody was surprised when Jimmy Boon bought it, got married, and moved in. Rumor had it that he'd gone heavily into the red to attain this triumph, but his ability to come out on top was never doubted. It was the time also when it was observed that he was beginning to make occasional small donations to shrewdly-chosen local appeals, both sporting and charitable, such as football clubs and elderly citizens' functions. Cynical gossip at the pubs suggested that he might be trimming his sails for the city council.

My own first thought when I heard of Jimmy's acquisition of Lawhill was of Neil Campbell and his nymph-like eucalypt. I was glad that Neil was no longer around to witness what I anticipated as inevitable destruction. Every few days, in my journey to the city, I made a point of going down Plummer Road, following with a rising horror

the domestic application of Jimmy's moronic ideas of home and garden design. The first shock came when I and several motorists were held up one morning by a wire line stretched taut across the road, one end of the line being attached to a tip-truck, the other to the first tree of Lawhill's encompassing cypress hedge. Trust Jimmy to find the shortest way home. When I passed again in the evening the hedge, pulled out tree by tree as cleanly as a dentist pulling out teeth, was gone, and Lawhill's secret garden lay exposed to the world.

Stopping the car, I sat for some minutes looking across at it, trying to fix an image of it before it vanished forever from the face of the earth. It had got a bit ragged since the death of the captain, but that only added to its snug, lush, old-world charm. In my racing imagination there was a shrinking fear in the two windows peeping through the screen of camellias, just as, in the uplifted limbs of the white tree, there was a suggestion of outraged innocence, like a lovely young girl suddenly caught naked.

I said then a silent goodbye to it, but week by week the respite — of the tree — was extended while Jimmy went to work on what he, no doubt, regarded as modernisation.

Using cheap bricks, and his wife as a laborer, he built a low two-foot wall to replace the hedge. Diagonally across the big lawn he cut out and concreted a car drive, with a loop on the front of the house for turning, and access to a metal pre-fabricated garage on the side where the captain had had a picturesque fernery. In the centre of the loop he constructed a crude rockery topped by a white plaster stork that made a startling contrast to a pair of rainbow-painted gnomes pointing the way to the front steps. All the camellias were cut down, hedge-like, to the exact level of the verandah decking, and the house itself transformed from a quiet green to a brick red — which might have been nice enough but for a dazzling new iron roof. Along the sunny side of the garden every sizeable tree was removed, leaving only a few small shrubs as backing for what was obviously intended to be an annuals border in the best Melbourne suburban tradition. The general Jimmy Boon effect was finally topped off by white-painted, drip-catching clam shells placed under every garden tap.

Through it all the delicate white tree lingered on. If trees could speak . . .

The haunting? I've come to it.

Two things happened simultaneously. Hungry to get into the really big time, Jimmy (it came out, and was the talk of the town) invested much

too heavily in the minerals boom, got caught in the collapse, and had to put Lawhill back on the market. About the same time Neil Campbell came to Melbourne to look for suitable premises for his company, which was extending to Victoria.

One morning a big red and white FOR SALE notice appeared on the front of Lawhill, and on an afternoon two days later I went out to Tullamarine to pick up Neil. Several years had passed since my friend left, and he arrived eager for a sight of old scenes. He elected, therefore, to drive out through Elwood and Brighton, and along the winding Beach Road to Mentone.

Conversation moved easily from family affairs to work, and from that to local gossip, which latter soon brought us to Jimmy Boon. Neil was vastly interested, and informed me, before I'd completed my story, that he was doing some jacket designing for a Sydney publisher and wanted a good color photograph of his lemon-scented gum while he was staying with me. I told him that it was now well grown, and also that he could get a wide-open shot of it from the street, with, at foot, a gorgeous little gnome in blue breeches, scarlet jacket, and yellow pixie hat. He was not amused.

"Still want to see it?" I asked dryly.

"No."

But as we took the last curve in the road at Beaumaris he changed his mind and we swung into Plummer Road.

Jimmy couldn't possibly have timed it more cruelly, for even as we came abreast of Lawhill a utility loaded with lemon-scented one-foot olocks was creeping slowly out at the gates. Even the tidying-up was almost completed. It wouldn't have been quite so bad if the tree had been felled in the captain's time; in the tranquil colonial house something would have been left. As it was, the background of red and silver and lollipop gnomes was not only aggressive, it was obscene. I looked down on Neil, who, leaning across with his chin almost on the steering wheel, was staring tigerishly past me at the figure of Jimmy Boon, industrially stoking a bonfire of twigs and leaves on the loop of the drive. A column of pale blue smoke was going straight up into the calm evening air.

Two or three minutes passed before Neil spoke. "The lousy bastard! The lousy bastard!"

My sympathetic pat on the shoulders stirred him into life. He went to get out of the car, and shook me off when I put out a restraining hand. "Let go, Bob! And you stay there . . ."

"You can't do anything."

"I know that. I just want to have a word with him."

"You'll buy into a brawl. At least let me get out . . ."

"I won't buy into any brawl. And I don't want him to recognise you. Stay in the car."

So I remained where I was, watching with some anxiety as Neil crossed the road and slowly walked up the drive to the scene of operations. At that distance even the sound of their voices didn't reach me and most of the pantomime that followed had me completely bewildered. Neil did most of the talking, with gestures not all comprehensible but indicating a steadily rising indignation, while Jimmy, leaning on a garden rake, looked increasingly sheepish and worried, like a mischievous schoolboy caught red-handed by an irate master. Neil's first gesture, in response to something Jimmy said, was to put both hands over his face and keep them there for some seconds, as one would moan "Oh, my God!" But I could make nothing whatever of him tapping his heart a few minutes later and then spreading both hands in another gesture that took in the whole of the Lawhill property.

It went on for about fifteen minutes. Twice Neil clapped both hands to his head in disgust, walked away a few paces, then went back, as if another aspect of the enormity of Jimmy's crime had just occurred to him. Every second I expected Jimmy to explode, but he appeared to be getting only more and more crestfallen. When at last my friend gave up and began to walk back to the car Jimmy's eyes never left his back. He still hadn't moved when Neil was getting into the car.

"What on earth were you pitching him?" I asked as Neil, a bit breathless from excitement, settled down beside me.

"I fixed the hungry bastard," he exclaimed with grim satisfaction "I gave him something that'll haunt him to the end of his days."

"All right — what?"

"I told him he'd just cut up the only known tree of its kind in the world — for firewood."

"That would worry Jimmy. So what?"

"It worried him by the time I finished. He tried to tell me it was only a lemon-gum."

"So it was . . ."

"Sure, I said it was a lemon-scented gum all right. But a very special one. I asked him hadn't he ever heard of the hybrid *Citriodora echeveria eugenoides* — something like that. I'm good at names. What the hell would he know."

"Go on. So?"

"I told him only two of them had ever been

found, and that the other one, years ago, had turned out to be the best wood for violins since Stradivarius. That wiped the grin off his face. Stradivarius has the jingle of money even for Jimmy Boon.”

“He believed you?”

“Take a look at him now.” I did. Jimmy had been joined by his wife. Both were watching the car, transfixed, like the two gnomes. “I told him old Moriarty had turned down a dozen big offers for it. I told him the tree was registered with the International Society of Ichthyologists—entomologists—archaeologists—oh, some bloody thing. He’ll have forgotten by now. I told him he could look out for a stinking letter when word

of what he had done got to the Geneva headquarters of the society. I told him I was Australian agent for a famous Berlin firm of violin makers, and that somebody had drummed them that this joint was on the market. I told him they’d cabled me in Sydney to get down here on the first available plane, with a blank cheque—repeat, blank cheque.” (That mysterious pat on Neil’s heart-breast-pocket.) “I told him—Bob, for chrissake step on it before I think of something else to go back and tell the bastard.”

I stepped on it. A final backward glance showed Jimmy and his wife still stuck on the front of the house, watching us as if we were driving off with the body of their first-born.

1956

“We always remember an Oxford Professor telling us that one of the nicest things that ever happened to him here was when he called ‘Waiter!’ in a Collins Street hotel. And the waiter said, ‘What the hell’s crawling on you, Jack?’”

*Eric la Motte, ‘Smoko’.*

*No. 7, Autumn-Winter 1956, p. 16.*

1957

“He began by asking me, quite pleasantly, if I was on the (wool) press. I said I was.

‘You’ve got a ticket, I suppose?’ he went on, as if it were just routine.

‘Ticket,’ I repeated, ‘what kind of ticket?’

I can still smile when I remember the expression of blank astonishment that came over his face.”

*John Morrison, ‘The Ticket’.*

*No. 9, Autumn 1957, p. 10.*

1958

“Personally, we think it a good idea to have a magazine where professors and slaughtermen, wharfies and politicians and professional writers can all have a go, provided its temper is democratic, its bias Australian and that it is interesting. If not always ‘literary’, it’s usually lively, and that’s the way we like it.”

*Editorial, ‘Please put in a penny’.*

*No. 11, Summer 1958, p. 2.*



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# 1954: A Happy Birthday Piece for Overland

FRANK MOORHOUSE

In 1954 at the age of 15 I began a newspaper called Students' Voice at Nowra High School. The headmaster, when looking at the proofs of the first issue, said we couldn't use the word "bull". I said, but that's censorship and lectured him on freedom of the press, taking my arguments from Free Spirit, and he gave in. My reason for starting Students' Voice was to get to know better a red-haired girl with whom I'd suddenly and desperately fallen in love. I appointed her co-editor much to her surprise. I married her when we left school. She now edits a women's magazine in Fleet Street. A psychiatrist told me years later that it was no coincidence that I'd fallen for a red-haired girl in the same year that my eldest brother married a red-haired girl.

It took me six issues and a year before we had sex.

Towards the end of 1954 I wrote and circulated a 'treatise' suggesting that free love be legalised and that parents of the lovers accommodate them month and month about. It seemed a reasonable sort of idea to me and my friends—all fellow philosophers and world reformers.

I read Hemingway's *First Forty-nine Stories* and remember arguing angrily that they were not as easy to write as they looked, although I privately thought that I could do as well.

I found the Pelican psychology series and bought them all and read them. A teacher confiscated Eysenck's *Uses and Abuses of Psychology* as "unsuitable".

I psychologically tested my friends for 'introversion' and 'extroversion'.

That year I published a short story titled "Just My Luck" in the school magazine about a boy who gets a brilliant pass in the Leaving Certificate the day nuclear war breaks out.

My friends and I bought the first issue of a

new magazine called Weekend and were pretty scathing about its "level".

We took beer to a party that year but the girls wouldn't let us drink it.

I set up a car wash contract with my businessman father and washed his fleet of utilities and vans which made me the richest boy at school.

Inspired by John Landy's four-minute mile I scientifically prepared myself for the mile event and with diet, exercises, and 'race tactics' won the mile, the 880 and the 440 after having never won a race in my life.

In 1954 I began to organise 'soirees' for my fellow philosophers at which the rule was that only a soft drink called Ginex could be drunk.

The Boy Scout troop expelled me for organising a round robin (signed half-heartedly by some of the other scouts) which demanded democratic elections of patrol leaders and the scout-master (this month I received an invitation to a dinner dance at the Nowra Golf Club to mark the 50th anniversary of scouting in Nowra).

I remember that for months I affected the expression "that's rich" until my family demanded that I cease.

I was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the army cadet corps but the corps at our school was disbanded before I could exercise my rank, which infuriated me.

I read the magazine Free Spirit put out by the Association for Cultural Freedom and sent to my father probably because of his Liberal Party connections.

I remember nothing about the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the signing of the World Copyright Convention, the publication of Overland, or the synthesising of LSD, all of which I now know happened in that year and all of which played a significant part in my later life.

I taught myself to touch-type as preparation for a writing career and read Quiller Couch's *On the Art of Writing*, underlining all the words I didn't know and writing their meaning in the margin.

In Sydney I had an older friend to whom I wrote with the salutation "dear fellow philosopher".

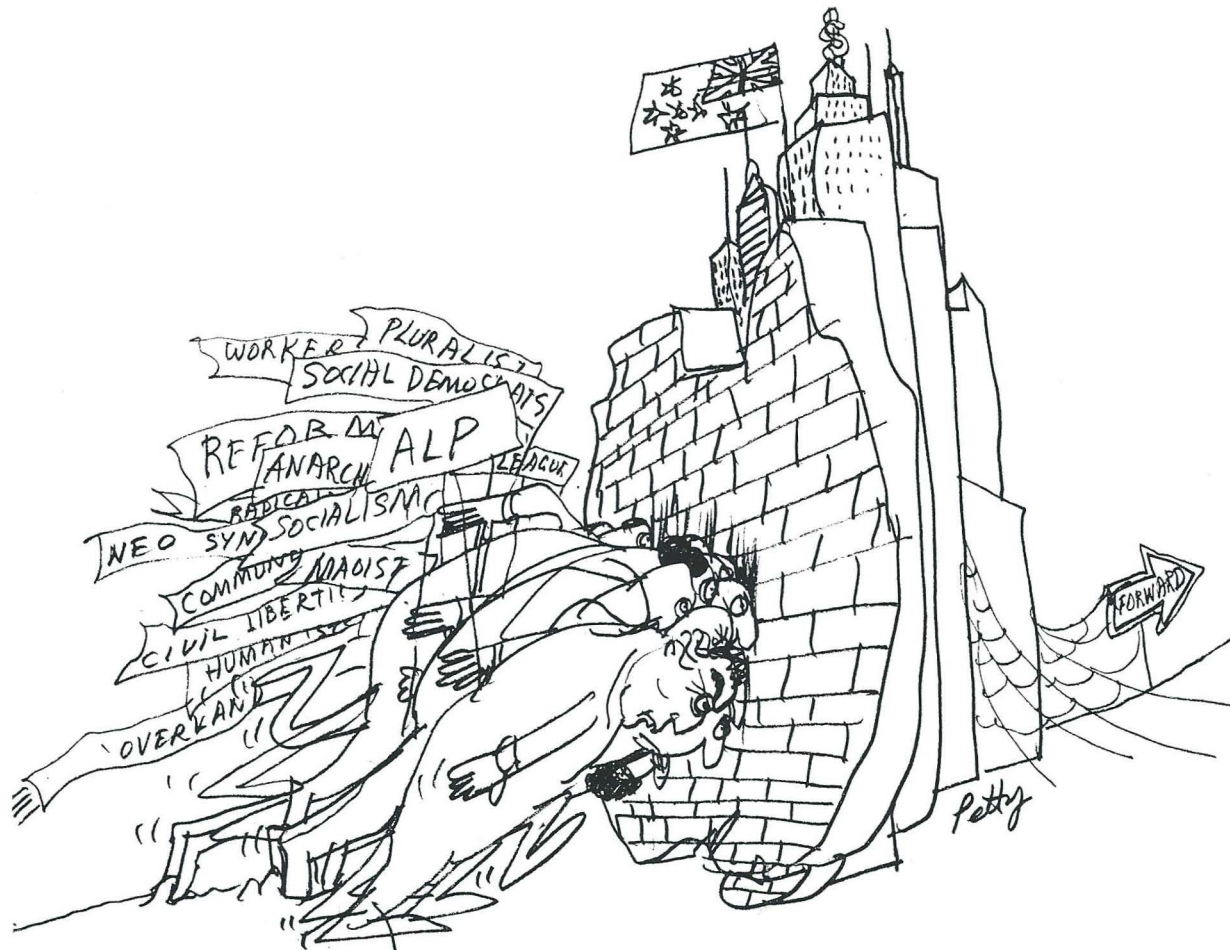
After reading a Current Affairs Bulletin on Joint Consultation in Industry I made an appointment with my father in the office of his factory and argued formally that he introduce it. I think he said that he would "think it over".

My father in return gave me Dr Dorsey's book

*Why We Behave Like Human Beings*, which I only read a few years ago and realise now was a hopelessly failed attempt by my father at sex education.

A boy with whom I had homosexual experiences the year before had now left school and refused to acknowledge me in the street. A girl with whom I had played throughout childhood went away to private boarding school and also refused to recognise me in the street.

Apart from these things and a few unresolved questions like "Why are we here?", it was not a bad year, and although, restlessly, I didn't feel it at the time, "my life" had definitely begun.



Bruce Petty

DOROTHY HEWETT **1954: Living Dangerously**

*O to live dangerously again,  
meeting clandestinely in Moore Park,  
the underground funds tucked up between our  
bras,  
the baby's pram stuffed with illegal lit.  
We hung head down for slogans on The Bridge,  
the flatbed in the shed ran ink at midnight.  
From Rapunzel in Suburbia.*

In 1954 I was living with a red-headed Sydney boilermaker, and our two small sons, in an old redwood house with a huge date palm brushing the gutters.

We lived in Railway Parade, Rockdale, where the trains went by all day to Newcastle and Wynyard, the Mascot planes flew in a direct thunderous route over our roof.

In 1949 (the year of the big coal strike) I had run away from Perth, my lawyer husband, a baby son, and respectable middle-class morality in the W.A. Communist Party, for my passionate love affair with the working class in the shape of Jack Wilson.

Jack had driven across the Nullarbor from the Whyalla shipyards in an old Humber Snipe with the radiator gone, a copy of Lenin's *Left Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder* in his kick.

We attended two Party schools together in which our Sydney tutor told us that the Revolution in Australia was only three years away. We believed him because we wanted to. Shared fantasies are always fatally attractive, and we were part of a family of revolutionary heroes who would change the world. The heroines were a bit light on the ground, but there was always La Passionara. Rosa Luxembourg was under a cloud.

When we weren't selling Worker's Stars or demonstrating, we lay in bed all day in a cheap

hotel, making love. I left him twice, but always came back. I couldn't bear to think of him living out the rest of his life without me.

But by 1954 the guilt was already off the gingerbread. We had come to the last place we would ever share together, although I refused to recognize it.

We had come via Marriott Street, Redfern, our rented house with the mildewed walls (headquarters of the South Sydney section of the A.C.P.), via Rosebery with the wire factory's nightshift clanging in our ears, the Alexandria Spinning Mills for me, and for him, Cockatoo Docks and Garden Island. We had burnt a houseful of illegal literature in our Redfern backyard, while Australia was voting "No" in the referendum to ban the Communist Party. We had lined up at Lenin's tomb, travelled the Trans-Siberian railway, stood on the Great Wall of China, sailed up the Yangtse River, lived with the Chinese Liberation Army under canvas. But none of those journeys was so long, so traumatic, or so desperate as the nine-year journey we took together.

And now here we were beached in the western suburbs amongst the white-singleted 'respectable' Sydney working class, flying their model aeroplanes on Sunday mornings, so different from the intellectual bohemia where I belonged, and the lumpen proletariat, the Tempe 'mudrats', who were his natural brothers.

How desperately I loved him and how completely we would destroy each other.

Charming, aggressive, anarchistic, a great lover and hater of women, a World War II pilot grounded for anxiety neurosis, Jack was Irish by extraction, with impeccable radical working-class credentials.

The son of a "Wobbly" leatherworker who

gassed himself during the Depression, he will, for me, forever symbolize the tragedy of the brilliant working-class boy who comes to nothing.

He left school at fourteen, became a Sydney motorbike boy in a leather jacket courting death on the Dark's Forest straight, joined the Communist Party after the war, and in 1954 was already moving into a world of delusions and powerful nightmare. In 1954 he believed I was trying to poison him, and he drove me and his two small sons to Melbourne to live with my parents in Heidelberg, I think, probably, because he was frightened he might kill me. I didn't want to go back to my parents' house. They were bitterly opposed to our politics and our liaison. They never really stopped regarding our children as bastards (which indeed they were). But what is the other title for bastards? . . . "love children". They were that too.

I remember the night Jack left me there to drive back to Sydney. I made him a thermos of chicken noodle soup. Why is tragedy always so absurd and banal? A week later he was on the phone telling me that the soup was poisoned, he was coming to Melbourne, and I was to make an appointment with a reputable psychiatrist (preferably left wing), as he knew now that I was mad. I had discovered I was pregnant with our third child. I didn't tell him.

We went together to the psychiatric clinic. I sat outside in the waiting room with some twitchy ladies. I could hear him shouting, "No, No, No" in the consulting room.

When he came out we walked past the Shrine of Remembrance. I can remember still how it burnt and flickered in the wintry air. He said, "The doctor says you are quite insane. He says there is nothing to do, it is all quite hopeless."

That night he disappeared, and I thought, "I'll never see him again."

I lived in Melbourne for four or five months. I forget how long it was, because it seemed like a lifetime. I took a job as nurse's aide at the Heidelberg Hospital, and worked broken shifts in the male paraplegic ward. It was good for me in a way, so much physical human misery took the edge off my own tragedy.

The ward was full of young men, victims of mine, car and motor-bike accidents, building workers who had fallen off scaffoldings, a policeman shot in the spine, men dying slowly of multiple sclerosis. Sometimes it seemed to me in that ward of physical hell I was living out organically

the horror of my own life.

Some of the sisters were kind and overworked, others were overworked and sexually cruel. There was a boy who lived on a sleety balcony, victim of a motor-bike crash, covered in bedsores, kidneys shot to pieces, dying under a thin sheet, full of hatred. I used to buy him jazz records, bring him a blanket late at night, empathize when he flung his twenty-first birthday cake, in a Mack Sennett burlesque routine, in the faces of his angry nurses.

There was the handsome curly-headed building worker, jerking with spasms in his wheelchair, who pinched my bottom every time I went past. There was the mine-worker with seven kids, who lived for his rare weekend at home. His catheter was always coming unstuck.

"We know why your catheter is always coming undone," shouted the sister in charge. "You're always playing with yourself. You've given her seven and you can't wait to get home to give her eight. Men!"

The ward went suddenly quiet, and a voice said, "Bitch!" and meant it. The multiple sclerosis, brain and speech mostly gone, rebelled one night and beckoned the cleaning lady to his bedside.

"Give us a fuck, love," he whispered.

"You dirty thing!" she yelled.

"I would have slapped his face," said the night sister.

Another turned to the wall, and died quietly when no more visitors came. Another went out of the ward on crutches, chasing the nurses to catcalls down the corridor. He was the only one. The rest stayed, twitching amongst their old-maidish pillows, pushing their wheel chairs along the balconies, transistors at their ears.

There was the night I didn't know how to give the boy in the iron lung his urine bottle. The ward was full of lewd advice. I blushed, almost cried. The handsome building worker wheeled himself across, and took over.

"That's all right darling," he said. "Give 'er a go. Give the little girl a go. She's new here." I kissed him.

I was lifting a boy with hideously burnt feet from wheelchair to bed when I started to bleed, and they hadn't even known I was pregnant. They sent me home, and I lay in the attic bedroom in Heidelberg, and thought about my life. Did I want to lose the baby? My mother and sister thought that would be one solution. But I, stubborn, impractical, still refusing to face the facts of my situation,

wanted to keep it. So I did, and the letter came from Sydney, stilted, desperate, asking me to come back, and, although I pretended to consider it, and consulted the psychiatrist, there was never really any doubt. I'd go back. I'd chance it again. What was life without him, anyway? I went back. He was in a pair of khaki shorts, mowing the long grass around the palm tree. The kids were delighted, smelling the warm Sydney dusk, renewing their life of dinkies, scooters and fairy stories.

We lived a life of horror together for four more years.

At the end of 1954 there was a knock on the door one night, and I opened it to a plainclothes detective and a shorthand writer, summoning me as a witness to the Petrov case. I was on the list of Petrov's possible contacts, one of the potential Australian spies he'd never got around to meeting. Very pregnant I fronted the bench, although the day before a drunken court emissary had suggested I could be "excused" because of my condition, "so embarrassing for me".

Well, I embarrassed the bench by my appearance, and my statements. I fought hard.

"It's useless to show these people any consideration," said the judge. "They have no finer feelings, no shame. Remove this woman for contempt."

1954 was, I suppose, one of the most terrible years of my life. I can remember running down Railway Parade in a fur fabric coat that winter, trying to get up the courage to throw myself under the passing headlights, or under a steam train, like Anna Karenina. That year I stood transfixed with a pan of bacon and eggs in my hand, and wondered why it had taken me so long to face the facts about Jack. From that year dated the first moment of physical shrinking, the wave of primitive, genetic disgust I felt in bed, so that, in 1956, pregnant again, I immediately and coldly aborted our fourth child. Sometimes I thought, it's true. *I am mad. I've poisoned the tea, I've poisoned the bacon and eggs, I've poisoned the pup (stricken with some mysterious doggy ailment), I'm poisoning the children who look so wan and driven, and the green cart will come for me, and I'll disappear into Callan Park, and that will be some kind of solution. But I knew it wasn't true.*

I lay in bed all night listening to him pacing the hall in that endless whispered argument with

himself, the argument about what to do with the bourgeois girl who had received, unasking, all the gifts he'd ever wanted, and had thrown them away.

Sometimes I played a game of brinkmanship, hanging by a toe and finger-hold over the rails on the outside platform, as the Wynyard train rushed in. I learnt about the perverse glamor of dicing with death.

Bill Brown, a Sydney Communist organizer, asked me why I stayed.

"Because I love him," I said. "And you don't desert those you love."

"I don't understand that kind of reasoning," he said. Communist organizers were not experts on love. But then, neither was I.

But one evening in 1958 I packed an overnight bag of children's underclothes, and the MS of a novel called *Bobbin Up* I'd written on the end of the kitchen table, hid them under the palm tree, and the next day, with a few poems in my head, I went back to Perth and to the university. There I met the ghost of myself, a wild-headed, romantic girl coming across that serene campus with a copy of *Women in Love* under one arm. Somehow I came to terms with her, and became the writer I'd always wanted to be anyhow.

I went back to the Sinyavsky-Daniel Trial, Czechoslovakia, Solzhenitsyn, and my resignation from the Communist Party. I married Merv. Lilley, writer, seaman, timbercutter, canecutter, "black faced stoker on the Ellaroo". So I left my working-class hero, and never saw him again.

But I realize as I write this how one sided it all is. How much responsibility, how much guilt do I bear for the T.P.I. in the old soldiers' home?

We read Krushchev's 20th Congress report together, argued about Stalin and Hungary. He never compromised, never toed the Party line as I did. Long before me, travelling over the Donbas plains with those tell-tale prison camps on the skyline, pillboxes manned with machine-gunning guards, he faced the falsity of all those specious lies about the Workers' Paradise.

I was the ambitious one, the egocentric, the Party pin-up girl, the gifted, middle-class intellectual who embodied all his fears and fantasies, and I was the survivor. Like the protagonists in a Conrad story we crossed our class boundaries to be fatally bound to "the other"—the primitive class and sexual enemy we each needed to destroy.

# 1954: A Lot of Rubbish in the Bin

DONALD HORNE

I had borrowed my father's leather suitcase when I sailed to England in 1949. Now, in 1954, my father's suitcase was coming home. It was one of the three suitcases he owned, and the only leather one. On our three-times-a-year vacations in Sydney from Muswellbrook when I was a child we would take this one into the carriage with us, leaving the other two along with various butter boxes filled with ad hoc packing in the guard's van. But because it was too big they wouldn't let it into the cabin of the Pan Am Clipper that was now flying me back to Sydney. It was up/down/over there somewhere in the plane, in the cargo space. In the carriage on family holidays it contained the things we least wanted to lose: in the cargo space of a Pan Am Clipper it was again filled with treasures. These included copies of the syndicated articles I had accumulated in a quick week in London, the pictures of women with big breasts I had bought in a few days in New York, and several dozen hand-lettered headings ready for the blockmaker, to save time when we started the new magazine. Four of these headings were I CHANGED MY SEX AND MARRIED, BRIDEGROOM HAD FIVE THOUSAND 'WIVES', I MARRIED THE WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN and DO YOU HAVE SECOND SIGHT?

There were some Graham Greene novels in another suitcase, although with the new magazine to launch I wouldn't have much time for reading them. A couple of years before it had seemed that I had, in any case, so far as novels were concerned, done all my reading, something that might be expected of a man of thirty. Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Mann, Stendhal, Flaubert, Joyce . . . what more could one want other than the pleasures of re-reading? Instead of novels, I took to reading books about the nazis (how could you convince yourself that all that had really happened?) and biographies of modern political

Englishmen, Balfour to Churchill. (It was easy enough to understand why *they* had happened.) Then, towards the end of 1953 I thought perhaps I should read some minor English novelists. This meant simply English novelists since, although having become an anglophile, I was not so anglophile as to believe that any English novelist was serious enough to be 'major'. I had just read Trollope, who had come back into vogue, one novel after another until his bones and my eyes stuck out; now I was about to do the same with Greene. Joyce Cary was next. I had already picked up the beginnings of Anthony Powell's *The Music of Time*, and thought I would go along with it.

I saw a few more years ahead before I stopped reading minor English novels. Was it a corruption of the passing years that I now read so much 'prose' when, earlier, 'verse' was what seemed to matter? I had stopped writing verse 13 years before, when Alec Hope said in an *Honi Soit* review of the 1941 *Arna* that my poems flapped in the air at the end. (This was the only aspect of them with which I felt comfortable.) The typescripts of the two novels I had written were in one of the suitcases in the cargo space. Fastened to them were all the letters of rejection from important publishers in London and New York. (This seemed to give me some international standing.) I still had some ideas about how I might revise them, if I had time.

As it turned out, *Weekend* was launched with such dash that there was no time for reading anything except the determinedly contrived rubbish that we spent so much anguish collecting and processing, along with production schedules, sales reports, office memos, financial figures; the only writing I did was to compose headings and sign docketts. The *Melbourne Argus* had intended to launch a publication similar to *Weekend*, so we

had got a move on, and got there first, knocking them out of the picture. The staff came in one Monday, with the office furniture. The next Monday, once we had found the thirty-seven blocks that were missing, the magazine was printing. Since it soon sold out, later in the week it was re-printing. Weekend never recovered from the consequences of this success. It took me some years to do so.

Honi Soit had been the only other publication I had edited, apart from the Bow Brickhill Conservative Newsletter, a cyclostyled sheet I brought out as chairman of the Bow Brickhill branch of the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Newsletter contained reports of village functions (the annual garden party, big decisions at committee meetings, talks and discussion panels in the village hall), exhortations to tory democracy (taking up themes that were attractive to the nearby town of Wolverton, where there was a railway carriage works), and examples of the paradox of unintended consequences as shown in the blunders of the Attlee government. In exposing errors of meliorism and planning in the Bow Brickhill Conservative Newsletter I was carrying on the good work inspired by "The Servile State", John Anderson's great article of about ten years before in the Philosophy Journal. I knew bits of Hayek and von Mises off by heart and my favorite political theorists were those expounded by Burnham in *The Machiavellians*.

I submitted myself to the perils of senseless action. Ups and downs on the big dipper of the performance graphs. Whirls around in continuing rows with everybody from the switch girl to Packer. The only member of the staff I didn't have a row with was the copy boy: when he left to take up his apprenticeship as a process engraver, I called a staff meeting to pay tribute to his excellent work. Weekend was a track I had got on to. I would wake up in the morning, reaching through the anxieties of production delays and sales reports to the greater anxiety: why was it me? Then: desk, buzzer, phone, people in and out, papers moving from right-hand basket to left-hand basket. By the end of the day a lot of rubbish was in the bin.

In all this movement I regained the feeling I had lost since student politics and Honi Soit that by making a fool of myself I was finding out about the springs of action. This was what things were really like. (Honi Soit seemed my last achievement: each year I would work out how old the latest lot of university freshers had been

when I was editor of Honi Soit. By 1954 it was down to five years.) With what degree of self-fulfilling prophecy I don't know, the conduct of Weekend was going according to those principles of irony and fiasco that I had held to be the necessary accompaniments of action. Every day there were lessons in my predicament, historical parallels: from all this farce I was learning something. I would call staff meetings to suggest some new situation in history with which we could compare our latest crisis. Contemplating the historical parallels of Packer kept me awake at night, along with worrying about late delivery of blocks, the slowness of distribution in Western Australia, the low advertising rates . . .

Editing Weekend had seemed an excusable act of piracy. Back to the colony for a few months. Put together a scurvy crew. Pick up the loot of new experience. Back to Britain, which, unlike Australia, was a nation that mattered. There were prospects of pre-selection as a Conservative candidate. As the back of nowhere, Australia seemed necessarily second-rate. In my first week I went for a walk around the Cross with a friend. The same old sameness, with everything five years tattier. I framed a picture with my hands of patched-up fibro on a terrace balcony with a shabby palm in front of it and became so perplexed by its inadequacies that I poked my tongue at it.

I was staying at the Australia Hotel — bottles of Great Western and weekly manicures at the barber's went down on the bill, to be paid by the firm. Current affairs meant little more than glancing at the Sydney Morning Herald when it came in with the breakfast tray, and I had grown to see myself used to The Times and the Guardian. One morning at breakfast in my bedroom the Herald announced that Evatt (who seemed as inadequate as the patched-up fibro) had issued a statement that seemed to expose the influence of what I thought of as 'Catholic Action' in the Labor Party. Good! I didn't like Catholics, and the Australian Stalinists didn't seem to matter any more. But wasn't it also a reminder of Australia's crumbiness? They didn't have a Catholic conspiracy in the British Labour Party. Why had it taken so long for someone to expose Catholic Action? We had all known about it when we were students: they wore little badges and, like the Stalinists, they used to attack my Honi Soits. The Herald lay on the bed, beside the breakfast tray; grey light came in from the light-well. It didn't matter much. After all, I'd be back in Britain in the new year.

CHRISTINA STEAD **1954: Days of the Roomers**

Fairlawn Gardens, a short wide street ran between Swiss Cottage and West Hampstead, bordered on one side only, at that time, 1934, with well-built brown or red villas, all belonging to an old estate; and there was number 33 a students' boardinghouse registered with the University of London. The immense City of London has a thousand names for green, Wood Lane, Forest Gate, Oak Park, Hollybush Hill, Wimbledon Common, Fortune Green, and countless Greens, Commons, Hursts, Heaths, Beeches, Laurels. In spite of dirty streets stiffly armored with terraced houses and giant multiple dwellings rising every month, a view of London from Primrose Hill or Hampstead Heath shows many patches of green and blowing trees, over a wide landscape; a local Forest of Arden not yet eaten up by toad and snail. Fairlawn Gardens, too, was not a lie. Hidden inside the big square of villas, and reached only from their backyards, was a common or green, lined with old trees in which tenants might cautiously stroll and children quietly play.

The Watson couple, literary hacks, had the large front room on the first floor, with two windows on the fire escape and with a locked door to an adjoining closet, once a dressing-room, now rented as a bedroom to a Swiss student from Basle. Each morning, his friend, another student, would come in, "*Steh' auf, Mensch!*" cried he. The Watsons had already long been up. Bob Watson knew German, and on hearing this, would sometimes break into German, a mellow rich Rhineland German which made the Swiss students laugh.

These rooms had never had the sun since the roof went on. The front room underneath, never heated, even in midwinter, sent up the cold. The landlords were saving money to have their three children educated in private schools and the two elder at least were to go to Oxford. Mr Warren, a deep-eyed, tall dark man, with a

narrow boyish head, was the son of a French mother and an English father, and Mrs Warren, born in the city of Lodz, Poland, had gone to Paris, to the Sorbonne, as a young girl, after much argument with her parents. Mr Warren was ashamed that his children had foreign parents. Mrs Warren did not mind. "You are educating your children to be ashamed of their father and mother," she said gaily to him; "you know I will never lose my foreign accent and you have a foreign accent too, except in French!" She said it only to chaff and stir him; for he was sober and stiffnecked, fierce with his struggle. "I speak perfect English!" he declared. "They will be ashamed to say their mother runs a boarding-house!" "At least, they will not have to run a boarding-house!"

The entire house, four floors, an attic and a cellar, all the tenants' rooms, were cleaned by a robust redheaded woman who came in once a week; and had, for cleaning, one dustpan, one mop, a stairbroom and a rag; that is to say, the house, painted in brown and furnished with secondhand brown rugs and chairs and beds, looked rather dirty. There had been a vacuum-cleaner, but this was now located at a house some distance down the same road, where the Warrens had taken on another lodging-house for students. They did not have to advertise, for they took in Indian and Pakistani students, though the "estate" would not allow them to take in Jamaican and African students.

The Watson couple, middle-aged, were grateful; because their room was better and cheaper than others they had seen and the foreign landlady, tolerant, friendly, was neither inquisitive, smug nor ignorant. She tried to make up for the shabbiness by little gifts to the Watsons, of canned fruit, tomato juice and soup, which her husband bought in bulk (he was in that business) and once gave them a quart of pure olive oil, which



he had received and did not like. What is more, she did not complain, though they both worked most of the day on their typewriters. The rug was small and the rickety little table thumped on the bare floor when the typewriters ran. The landlady, who was sometimes sick in winter, slept in the freezing front room underneath, lay there all day when sick, but she did not complain; and they were ashamed, but they could not stop working.

When the redhead came in to clean, the Watsons would take a walk, always on the lookout for a better place. Tens of thousands of people, even families with one or two children, live just so, in one room, in the great city. In all the houses of London, it seemed, behind white facades with pillared porches and lofty railed steps, with high walls and handsome windows that promised significant space, were thin partitions making cubicles for roomers. Walking about to get the sun, they looked everywhere, noticed the partitions dividing the light and space; but they watched and hoped. In one place, up two flights of stairs, there was no water, but water could be brought up by the landlady's son, at sixpence a jug. In another place, in "Hyacinth Gardens", the old German landlady let them in with four keys for four doors; but they had to be in early to be so let in! for she gave no keys. But at a writers' meeting, they heard of an old mother and daughter who were looking for tenants "of their sort, likeminded people" and following a long ecstasy of hope and despair, they left the front room in Fairlawn Gardens to others.

We were there too. What I remembered most, of that place, are a few strange scenes. We went for Christmas to a friend, were away for four days and when we returned the kind landlady reproached me, for the sparrows always fed by me had been dashing themselves at the closed front windows looking for bread. One moonlit night, an owl tried to pick up a black cat sleeping on the gatepost. The clawed owl hooted and the clawed cat ran screeching up the street. Another night scene—I heard crying in the street; a small young woman was running up the unbuilt side of the street, stumbling and sobbing; with a tall soldier grimly striding after her. Last, a beautiful morning scene. I was working in the office of a hospital over the other side of Hampstead Heath and caught a bus every morning. It was February, very cold; there had been rain and a sudden freeze which caused an ice-storm. Every trunk, branch, twig and fibril was coated in thin glass and shining in the sun—a woodland in glass.

I might add that a miracle occurred in that hospital in my time and I was responsible. A young timid nurse came to me to ask very diffidently about a patient; Mary Smith, let us say. We looked at the filing-cards (filled in in the last few months by me) and there she was—84 years old and she had just had a child. But there, a few cards away, was another Mary Smith, aged 22. I transferred the baby.

That year we translated several books; my husband went to Grosvenor Square to work with an American TV company. How do I remember it? Yes, 1954, when the French lost Indo-China, the Nautilus, the first atom-powered submarine was launched, and SEATO was formed and West Germany joined NATO, all of which mattered to us and the TV writers and the students and the landlords from the American, British, Polish, French and Swiss POV, as they said in the TV company (point of view). That year the United States began to get rid of the unconscionable egocentric, Senator McCarthy, who had rashly started to investigate the U.S. Army as well; and yes, Overland was born, though through all that rattle and clang, we did not hear its infant joy.

**BIALA**, an annual of creative writing, solicits manuscripts for possible publication in its first issue. Short plays are preferred, but short stories and poems, as well as drawings and graphic work, are also welcome. Enclose self-addressed envelope and return postage with manuscript and send to:

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Pahran, Victoria 3181

NOEL HILLIARD **1954: 21 Years of Overland**

While not present at the conception of *Overland*, I may have taken part in its birth. How can a New Zealander claim this distinction? It came about this way.

In March 1952 I was one of about sixty New Zealand delegates to the Australian Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship in Sydney. Two security policemen were on the ship with us going over and later on I had to pay for my attendance.

Hostility to the carnival took peculiar forms. Although buses had been chartered to take delegates to Fairfield Park for the opening ceremony, NSW Transport Minister Sheahan banned these and threatened to withdraw licences if the companies failed to comply. He ordered the railways to refuse to sell tickets to Fairfield; and for those who had already bought tickets, wrong times were announced for trains, wrong direction indicators were put up. Those of us who have been in strife on the Left must never forget what the Right is capable of.

The opening went ahead, and in spite of all harassment about twelve thousand people took part. As the New Zealanders stood sweltering in the sun waiting to join the march, a reporter from *Telepress* moved among the ranks, notebook in hand, looking for fellow journalists who might give him information about the composition of our delegation. He introduced himself as Stephen Murray-Smith and Conrad Bollinger and I were able to tell him what he wanted to know.

Carnival activities went on for nine days. Although representing the NZ Student Labour Federation, the Victoria University Socialist Club and the Wellington Peace Council, I attended the writers' conference held in conjunction with the carnival; I was working on a novel and wanted to hear what other writers had to say. (Called *The Lotus Eaters*, this novel eventually ran to 150,000 words; it was rejected by the only publisher I ever showed it to and I've not looked at

it since.) Chairman the first day was Jack Coffey, the guest of honor was Dame Mary Gilmore, and the speakers were Archer Russell and William Hatfield. That night at the Paddington Town Hall the results of the carnival short-story competition were announced. I don't remember the prize-winning story — nor does anyone else, probably. Frank Hardy was given the horrible job of trying to hold the audience's interest by reading aloud a very long story called, if I recall correctly, "If You See What I Mean".

Next day I chaired a three-hour session; speakers were Len Fox and Kathleen Carroll. We passed several fiery resolutions — I forget what they were, but topics discussed at the time included the American threat to Australian culture, the use of germ warfare in Korea, and the McCarthyite jailing of writers in the United States.

The following afternoon, when Conrad Bollinger, Don Terriss and I went into a pub, Stephen Murray-Smith invited us to join him and Rupert Lockwood for a drink. Things were going amicably until a group of Indians came into the bar and were immediately refused service. The five of us walked out in protest. Stephen and Rupert waited for some communists of their acquaintance to come out later and demanded to know why they drank, and continued to drink, in a jim-crow pub. We New Zealanders couldn't stay long enough to hear the outcome, but even before this encounter we had formed the strong impression that people with Stephen's and Rupert's militant rejection of racism were a depressingly small minority on the Australian Left. I hope things are different today.

On the Friday came the conference session that everyone had been waiting for. John Manifold chaired; Muir Holborn spoke; and Frank Hardy, after outlining the difficulties of publishing radical books, moved a resolution launching the Austral-

asian Book Society. It was to have its own regular literary journal. Although this proposal came to nothing, since *Overland* was subsequently launched as an independent journal, the idea delighted me. In the two years I'd spent in hospital before this (tuberculosis) I had drawn up detailed proposals for an Australian-New Zealand literary and art quarterly along the lines of *Masses & Mainstream*, and these I passed over to Hardy. I don't know if he or anyone else ever looked at them.

The conference and the carnival ended. A few days later Conrad and I hitch-hiked to Melbourne. We met David Martin, did some boozing with Frank Hardy, George Seelaf, Jack Tymms and Ron Hurd, and attended a meeting of the Melbourne Realist Writers. Ralph de Boissiere was there, and Walter Kaufman, highly critical of the Sydney conference. The ABS and its journal were discussed in some detail.

We returned to Sydney and later went home. Hardy had talked me into representing the ABS in New Zealand but this did not turn out to be too onerous: they never showed much interest in this country either as a market or as a source of manuscripts.

Time passed. In 1954, the year of *Overland*, I lost three jobs through the intervention of the security police (that carnival attendance), married Kiriwai Mete (we celebrated our 21st anniversary with a trip to Melbourne at the invitation of the Professional Writers' Seminar Committee in September this year), entered teaching as a trainee, and began work on *Maori Girl*.

Time passed. We heard of ructions across the Tasman but were more concerned with our own on this side. I had seen enough of *Overland* to know it was edited with distinction and felt glad that Stephen had taken it with him. When *Maori Girl* was accepted for publication in London by Heinemann, I wrote to the ABS suggesting they might get copies at a minimal price for distribution to members: "Australasian", I reminded them, implied they had some links with New Zealand. Fruitless correspondence ensued; I suspect ideologists in New Zealand were consulted who consigned the book to perdition sight unseen. The answer eventually was no, the book would be of no interest to members. Besides, they had a plethora of excellent Australian manuscripts stacked up awaiting publication. (I have since been told

that in the whole history of the ABS this was never the case.)

What they said may or may not have been true but the book did all right. Since 1960 it has been in print almost continuously and is selling better now than it ever did; sales to date are 22,500. Its successors *Power of Joy* (1965) and *Maori Woman* (1974) were published overseas and won prizes and I am now working on the fourth and last novel of the quartet, the overall title of which will be *Netta Samuel*. Another novel, *A Night at Green River* (1969) is now out in a new edition. In 1973 I published a children's book, *We Live By a Lake*, with photos by Ans Westra, who has also done the pictures for my *Wellington: City Alive*, to appear next April.

My first *Overland* story (No. 11, 1958) was used in a Soviet anthology of New Zealand stories and was included in my collection *A Piece of Land* (1963) — this also appeared in Russian translation. A couple of years ago, when putting together a new collection, I looked up the acknowledgements in the previous book, noticed *Overland*, and reflected sadly that I'd been out of touch for fifteen years. So I sent a short sketch to Stephen without comment and he used it in No. 59, 1974. I'm very glad that *Overland* will be among the acknowledgements again, in my new collection *Send Somebody Nice*, to be published in London next year.

Enough of the personal pronoun, first person singular. What of the other New Zealanders who made that trip to Sydney in 1952? Most are active in trade unions or social work; nearly all took part in activities against the Vietnam war. Conrad Bollinger, with a Ph.D. in English and the prospect of a distinguished academic career in front of him, died in June this year at the tragically early age of 46. He was working on a critical study of the work of Maurice Shadbolt, another 1952 delegate, whose novels and stories have been published in Britain, the United States and on the Continent. Hone Tuwhare's three volumes of poetry have won wide recognition. Eddie Isbey, then a waterside worker, is now a Labour MP and parliamentary under-secretary. His wife Annette has exhibited as a painter, and Don Terris also paints. Gordon Dryden is a radio talk-back host in Auckland with a big following.

Whatever our politics may be now, none of us would have missed that experience in Sydney for worlds. Trans-Tasman links are something New Zealanders work at. We wish more Australians would.

MANNING CLARK **1954: The Year of Shame**

For me 1954 was the year of shame, the year which drained off the last dregs of optimism about the future of Australia generated during the Second World War. There were many reasons for this. I was (and for that matter still am) puzzled and hurt by the death of a friend in the Korean War. He had volunteered to join the Australian force in Korea to defend, he believed, Christian civilization against the new barbarism of secular humanism. He was not to know when he and his mates were mown down close to the Chinese border just how bankrupt and empty, and devoid of all principle, were these defenders of so-called Christian civilization in Australia.

In 1954 the temporary victors in the war against world communism put on the Vladimir Petrov show in Australia. I happened to attend the opening of this show in the Albert Hall in Canberra, and walked away wondering what it was all about, because on what had been said that day at a snail's pace by R. Windeyer (one of my cynical friends timed him at thirty to forty words a minute) it was clear that no one knew anything at all. What was depressing was that it was exploited not to attack communists, but to destroy a man of stature—H. V. Evatt—and to frighten fellow travellers into disowning the Communist Party, and so shedding their radicalism.

Reflecting on these shameful scenes in Canberra I came to two conclusions: that conservatism was much more deeply rooted in Australia than those who, like myself, subscribed to the radicalism-nationalism theme, were prepared to admit. It was, therefore, one of the tasks of the historians of this country to explore the origins of these petty-bourgeois, property-owning, respectability-mongering values.

The other conclusion was that the human heart was much more complex, much more unknowable

than the radicals I had known in this country seemed to imply that it was. This came in part from observing the great gap between what a radical professed to be, and what his wife, or his child, or anyone close to him often told me that he was. It came from watching what happened when those who professed to be dedicated to the noblest cause of all—the liberation of mankind—were mad enough to get married to a 'good' or an 'innocent' woman—and how they could not bear to live near to someone whose very goodness made them aware, as it were, of the swinishness in their own heart. It came, also from noticing that for some radicals the one thing they seemed to covet was a word of approval, or a smile of recognition from the men who, on ideological grounds, they were meant to despise, and indeed to feel hostility towards.

Looking back now I suppose that was why when I was looking for material for volume two of *Select Documents* the eye lighted on those words in the Hummer: ". . . if things were once fixed right we should no more need laws to make healthy men good mates than we need laws to make healthy women mothers. It is diseased, vicious, evil conditions that breed infanticide and competition, which to me are each about as bad as the other—no better, no worse. Neither of them are being mates!" That was why some of the editorial comments were tinged with a sadness, which was construed to be a despair.

From that time the task seemed clear—to explore our past so that we might know what we are, and might know all the madness in the human heart which is there no matter what the society, or the ownership of wealth. To go on such a journey one would need the strength not to be trapped into arguments with or resentments against those whose behavior prompted that ques-

tion in Job: "What knowest thou which is not in us?" nor to indulge in a waste of spirit and an expense of shame in arguing with those who spend their time talking about what would be in a book of history, supposing one ever were to write history.

Perhaps that was why, when the first number of *Overland* came out in 1954, I welcomed it not just because it testified to a faith I wanted to believe was true, even though I knew that it was all much more complicated than most of its defenders seemed to imply. I also welcomed it because from the start its professions of faith were softened by a becoming doubt, and by a hint that the hopes of 1917 need not be handed over indefinitely to those with a taste for 'spiritual popery'.

I remember, too, many pleasant things about one's thoughts in 1954—the jokes and laughter of my wife and that most excellent helper Ailsa Thomson (now Ailsa Zainu'ddin) when working on the page proofs of volume two of *Select Documents*, and the long talks with Margaret Kiddle while hanging out the washing in Can-

berra, and wonderful exchanges with Eris O'Brien about the origins of European civilization in Australia, and the gentle, non-abrasive, non-mocking inquiries of all of them about when I proposed to start, and what would I say. They, at least, knew just how much that loss in Korea had meant, as well as that other loss five miles from Gundagai. They knew that if anything was ever written about the history it would not be about whether a navigator was wearing a belt or a buckle. And I knew when *Overland* first appeared that it was under the care of someone who was concerned with things that matter—someone who knew that the destroyers and the barbarians could take over any group. The editor was someone, who, like my father, wanted people to be kind and tender, but was beginning to wonder whether this ever would be so. It was just this gap between how things are, and how they ought to be, which made some, including me, wonder whether it would ever be bridged. We did not stop believing in and trying to achieve just that—incurable romantics that we were, and always are, my dear Stephen. Long life to you, twenty-one years later, and the child of your heart.

1959

"Modern industrial society may be modifying that [the Australian] tradition, even driving it underground. But it is proper to hope that it will not be completely smothered in the T-bones and television of the welfare state, and that, when a new social and moral testing-time comes for Australia, there will be enough of the tradition left buried in people for it to bubble up to the surface, and so influence their decisions. In these years of material satisfaction and intellectual conformity, it is good that there are people to keep this tradition alive."

Ian Turner, *'The Life of the Legend'*.  
No. 16, Summer 1959-60, p. 30.

1960

"You ask about National Culture; you say we must defend it. Well, certainly, we must. Though, secretly, I believe that culture is something one lives or doesn't live, makes or doesn't make, enjoys or ignores, is or refuses to be a part of. More or less like life itself."

David Martin, *'Hinterland'*.  
No. 17, Autumn 1969, p. 12.

## 1954: Meeting Miles for the Last Time

DAVID MARTIN

"I will subscribe to *Overland* if I live," Miles Franklin wrote to the editor after receiving the first issue of the magazine in the spring of 1954. She said she liked it because it was "alive in every pore". Aliveness in every pore was always the thing for her.

In *Overland*'s first anniversary issue I wrote a short obituary for Miles. But in these notes, written almost entirely from memory, I would like to recall our last meeting.

In July of 1954 I left Melbourne for Sydney on the good old *Manoora* on the first leg of a trip which would take me eventually to North Queensland; I was going to speak there for the Australasian Book Society and try to enrol members. Members were certainly "enrolled" but in those days our revolutionary optimism was a trifle *too* optimistic: I signed up scores of people, with a good few more or less on tick. It was quite an exciting journey . . . but that's another story.

On the way back, at Townsville, I spoke at the meatworks (where I was stupid enough to refuse the gift of a new suit from the cook), and at the railway workshops. Then I suffered an attack of that wretched URTI—upper respiratory tract infection—which Capricornia reserves for its mates. The Devannys, Jean and Harold, took me into their home and looked after me until I recovered. There was always plenty of fruit in the fridge and books to read: I also remember Jean showing me a long poem (privately printed or in manuscript, I don't remember which) by Bartlett Adamson . . . most fruitily erotic, which, I confess surprised me.

In the house, too, was an unbound advance copy of *Cockatoos*, by Brent of Bin Bin, alias Miles Franklin. Jean was a friend of Miles, and so were Richenda and I. In fact she was probably

our first 'literary' friend in Australia, and here I want to digress for a moment.

Sometime in 1949, not long after we'd arrived in Sydney from India, I spoke to the Fellowship of Writers. At the back of the room sat Miles Franklin, whose *All That Swagger* I had only recently read. The meeting over, we walked along Hyde Park together, she bound, if I am not mistaken, for the underground. A day or two later there arrived at our Bankstown cottage (owned by an habitual criminal) a parcel containing an anonymous present—a copy of *Back to Bool Bool* by Brent of Bin Bin. I read it, was puzzled but of course not deceived by the pseudonym, and wrote off, thanking Miles for giving us "her book". There was no immediate response, and later on, when we went to see her in Grey Street, and I repeated my thanks, she only smiled her pixed smile.

(Which reminds me: one of these days I must put on record what Mary Gilmore said about Miles and Brent, and what she told me about Miles' contribution to a celebration—at the Maccabean Hall?—in honor of the conferment of her damehood.)

However—back to Townsville. Jean had informed Miles that I was staying with the Devannys, and Miles had replied with a rather curious request. If I passed through Sydney I should visit her, and I was to announce myself loudly. As if I usually did it in whispers! I knew she was ill and I had learned from Jean that she was no longer in Carlton, but that she was being nursed by some relatives in another district, I believe on the north shore.

On the way south I read *Cockatoos* again, so I would be able to discuss it with her. The book lies before me at this moment, and is covered with my scribbles; on the whole I seem to have enjoyed

it, but not at all uncritically. It is supposed to have been written in 1927-1928, and to be at home in it one really needs the family tree which appears at the beginning, a rather formidable guide to the Mazeres, the Stantons, the Pooles, and so on.

(To digress once more: my prediction, soon after her death, that her work would again become popular has not yet been fulfilled. But there is movement at the station. I hear *My Brilliant Career* may soon become a film, though my own choice for the screen would be her *Old Blastus of Bandicoot*.)

I must have been in Sydney during the second week of September, because I know I returned home to Boronia on the 18th. As soon as I could I took a train out to where Miles was then. I eventually arrived at what my memory suggests was an ordinary but solid and prosperous suburban house. I rang the bell.

It took quite a long time before a lady came to open. I said I'd come to see Miles.

No, she was sorry—I could *not* see her. She was not well enough to have visitors, in fact it was out of the question. I thought I detected an undertone of ascerbity; apparently that bell had been rung fairly often already. But now I also understood the meaning of the remark in Miles' letter to Jean Devanny.

So, I repeated, pretty loudly this time, that I was a friend of Miss Franklin and that I really felt my call would not be unwelcome to her. I was a little embarrassed, because her kinsfolk were obviously doing their best and were only obeying her doctor's instructions. Still—I also had my orders! Trying to ignore the frown that confronted me, I relied on the decibels.

And not in vain.

From the interior came a dear and familiar voice. "Is that you, David? Are you coming in?"

"Only for a few minutes," I pleaded with the lady.

Well, she was kind enough to admit me. I went into the room where Miles was in bed. I cannot swear to this, but I have the impression that, for some reason or other, she was wearing a small, lacey nightcap, or some covering of that sort. We were left alone and began to talk.

We spoke about my trip and about some writers we both knew, and their books, and,

naturally, about *Cockatoos*. She asked after Richenda and after our young son, and after our box on stilts in the Dandenongs, where, a couple of years before, she had come to see us, accompanied by J. K. Moir, the well-known litterateur and bibliophile.

I have always considered Miles Franklin to have been a pretty woman even in her last years; she had the exceptional and graceful vivacity which keeps women attractive into their sixties and seventies. She still had it that day, lying in that large bed, herself so small and frail, and she had not entirely lost the slight coquettishness which she, the great feminist, liked to display towards men. She spoke clearly and well, smiled quite a lot, but it was obvious that she had to fight to keep her strength up. She asked me how I thought she looked.

"Not at all bad," I said, or words to that effect.

"David, the truth is that I'm nearly at the end. This is the last time you'll see me."

(Now, whatever some of her other friends may say to the contrary, I know that Miles Franklin, though not exactly preoccupied by thoughts of death, and certainly not brooding on it, often dwelt on the subject, which is hardly surprising. I've got myself into arguments over this before, and I shall not go into it more deeply here. Miles was a complex person, of great courage, but courage may take all kinds of forms.)

"No, my dear Miles," I said, "I refuse to believe you. As you know well, I've refused to believe you before on a couple of points. But we loves you all the same."

She shook her head, or at least indicated disagreement.

"Miles," I insisted, "as far as I'm concerned you are good for a while yet."

"All right, David. What do you call a while?"

"Say, a few years. Five, maybe?"

There was a long silence, a very long silence. Her eyes, her unforgettable eyes, gazed at me searchingly. Then quietly she said, and I swear this is true —

"What, David? Only five years?"

A few minutes later I said goodbye to her, and she waved to me when I turned at the door.

The day after I was back on One Tree Hill the papers had the news that Miles Franklin was dead.

## HAL PORTER **1954: Cooking and Booking**

Honor is one of those lustrous medieval notions women never took up. That's why, 1954, several posh or titled female friends of mine are blushlessly ready to fabricate references for me. On, if you please, their most subtly expensive writing paper: these falsehoods are for other posh women. While Porter was with us, they flowingly lie, we found him a skilled and an ingenious, a fastidious and a deft, an economical and an inventive, cook. *Cordon bleu* is implied.

Cook? cook! What *am* I up to, A.D. 1954?

Merely sidling out of nearly three years, 1951-1953, of theatrical work in Hobart, getting away from shimmery people of the kind called rogues and vagabonds in clearer-sighted centuries. Entertainers, actors and actresses, are close kin to those in the crafty, haphazard callings—public relations men, door-to-door saleswomen, manageresses of escort services, television interviewers. Those abrasive egos! That near-criminal intuition! That blood-curdling charm!

During these three depraved years, a man of many parts, I paint hectares of canvas flats; juggle with tonnes of arc lamps, paneless French windows, stage stairways and splintery rostra; hector electricians, carpenters and two-headed stage managers; perpetrate such productions as *The Mikado*, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shaw's *Man of Destiny* and Wilde's *Salome*, and (for money, only for money) even tread the boards. Regard me capering in a flavous wig as Sir Andrew Aguecheek; being clipped and Trevor-Howardish as Archie Something-or-other in Ivor Novello's *Full House* or Gallic and fruity as the Baron de Charancey in Sacha Guitry's *Don't Listen, Ladies*; there I am counter-riposting and remising (I've been bullied competent by a fierce and limber young woman whose name is happily forgotten) as a cinquecento

merchant in *The Florentine Tragedy*; and, as Esdras in *Winterset*, bemitteded and goateed, flat-footing old-Jewishly about while emitting Sherwood Anderson's snide and impeachable blank verse, mit accent yet. Having plumbed the depths—even writing's scarcely as tawdry a way to earn money as acting—I come to my senses. Now, as it were, back to nature. I become a cook—er—*chef*, first in Toorak, later (and now with an authentic reference) on a sheep and cattle property along the Goulburn River near Tahbilk. There are moments today when it's difficult to explain *clearly* to myself why, in the spring of 1954, I gave up this languid job in an elegant mansion in a glorious setting to be a public librarian which is much the same as being a *déclassé* Caesar or a drug-pedlar.

Living in the wings of a wealthy Australian household to which you've no attachments except mild and simple duties is a relaxing exercise, and has much to commend it as a way of life. No call to consider whether your employees are oafs or fools, no need to make, as a servant, those social concessions one makes to the doomed, ill-bred, witless or boring. For those who don't hanker for the herd warmth of, say, the sauce factory, how satisfying—if you keep the family at arm's length, and discourage equalitarian palsi-walsiness—a cook's job can be. The peace and power! Time on hands! Your private quarters—bathroom, bedroom, sitting-room, lavatory—are part of the same mansion your employers *have*, it's patent, to live in. Should their standards be below yours you can move out and on. They're stuck. The out-cast but ex-imperial furniture in your rooms hasn't the nervy over-tastefulness and museum-piece untouchability of your employer's but it's unfashionably comfortable. Want to put your feet up? Do so. You eat the same food as they, and



it's exactly to your taste: after all, who cooked it? And who had the crispest and most russet roast potatoes from under the sirloin? Since all's provided, including soothingly mawkish Marcus Stone reproductions in your sitting-room, and a mahogany wardrobe you could hide two Mata Haris and a well-behaved chimpanzee in, the pay (almost too ample for so sedative a job) is savings: no need to fork out for roofs, radiators, electric lights, sheets, a skilful housemaid, good food. Besides the housemaid there are a German odd-job man, an Australian gardener, and an English nanny given to midnight baths. This quartet's class-consciousness, which never goes off the boil, utterly fascinates me. I listen agog to my fellow menials' luridly Technicolor versions of the boss and his wife, a most civilized and quite unshonky couple, in which they out-slavedrive, -facegrind, and -cheesepare any burlesque olde-worlde capitalist. There's not a knout in the house; the gardener has three eggs baked in authentic cream for breakfast; the German not only likes his rump-steak *bleu* but by the pound; God knows how many gallons of piping-hot bath water the nanny uses nightly.

Four months of playing Brillat-Savarin in Tahbilk, of *chefdom* in quasi-Arcady, are of incomputerable value to my literary career. With more time on my hands than there's been since 1942 I'm able to start showering the *Bulletin* and *Southerly* of 1954 with poems and short stories. Having been successively 'discovered' between 1932 and 1942, by Louis Lavater, Norman Lindsay, P. R. Stephensen and Frank Dalby Davison, I'm enchanted to be being 'discovered' again, in my mid-forties, by Kenneth Slessor and Ronald McCuaig. Indeed, I owe more to McCuaig than any other mortal for the speeding-up of my career in the 1950s. He, Slessor, and attendant sprites, so foster me that I'm very soon in the running for Commonwealth Literary Fund grants and, within a few years, have outpaced Kenneth Mackenzie in this arena. Hitherto he had been the Australian writer who'd received the greatest number of grants.

1961

"Do you remember it, John,  
the white road down the hill,  
with thick scrub on each side?  
(It's bitumen now, and the cockies  
who moaned in our ears about depression  
keep folding and refolding their wool cheques.)"

*Ian Mudie, 'Road'.*

*No. 20, Autumn 1961, p. 11.*

Instead of hanging on and becoming a silvery-haired and discreetly powerful retainer ("Porter's been with us now for 36 years") I wantonly abandon an idyllic spot to live, work, and write in for the municipally chaotic job of spreading, with dazzling semi-competence, a network of regional libraries the length and breadth of formerly un-sullied East Gippsland. Mistake me not. The evangelicist nature of the job—oh, quite unforeseen. I'd merely pictured myself taking over from Mr Wyndham, librarian of my adolescence, the pewter inkwell, revolving rubber date-stamp, and violet ink-pad of the somnolent (SILENCE PLEASE) upstairs Bairnsdale Mechanics' Institute Library and Free Reading Room. On the lowest shelves bound tombstones, *Punch* and *Illustrated London News* for the 1870s and 1880s. Above these, metres of seemly works by un-foulmouthed authors: Donn Byrne, Dornford Yates, Florence M. Barclay, J. M. Barrie, Helen Mathers, Eleanor Mercein, E. V. Lucas. *und so weiter*. Scattered on the Free Reading Room tables copies of the *Australian Journal*, *Table Talk*, *Tatler*, *Popular Mechanics*, *John o' Londons* and *National Geographic*.

Not, alas, like that any more. While my back was turned there's been much ado about bringing libraries up to date. So I'm not to be Mr Wyndham at all, but Mr Library Moderniser himself, himself vastly surprised. Meantime, on the fringes as it were of *my* 1954, Dien Bien Phu's fallen, Abdul Gamal Nasser's risen, Vladimir Petrov's defected, Billy Graham's mammothed athwart London and Berlin, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has set foot on Australia, and one of my heroes has formed a coalition of the Liberal and Country Parties.

On December 31, 1954, I'm living in a Bairnsdale boarding house run by Hungarians, with twenty other . . . blokes. There are as many transistors. Half the . . . blokes are what I still call foreigners (i.e. they come from foreign places) but it's fashionable, and considered mannerly, that year, to call them New Australians. Why? I can't recall why.

ANDREW FABINYI **1954: Year of Promise**

In the opaque reflection of time, 1954 appears to be almost a halcyon age. The Korean war was over, but its dynamic economic consequence, even if unevenly, still reverberated. Those with any international sensitivity knew that Rakosi, the Hungarian mini-Stalin, was running the most repulsive intellectual (not to speak of political) repression, but a Hungarian revolution and a Russian invasion were not yet on our horizon. The political scene in Australia was a sort of otiose reaction or silly censorship, yet my clear recollection is that those of us who first read *Overland* or made some contribution to it had been imbued at various levels of articulation with a sense of promise. All of us were convinced that events in our literary-intellectual world would take place and, indeed, by 1975 a large number have taken place.

My main extra-curricular involvement in 1954 was the planning and bringing about of the first Melbourne Moomba Book Fair in the Lower Town Hall.

My pre-Australian experience had convinced me that to take books, in this case Australian books, out of their usual habitat—even if then, unlike now, Melbourne had a number of good bookshops—to package them in some sort of special event, will create additional bookbuyers who may eventually even become addicts.

Committees were formed in which Jean Campbell and Ian Turner played probably the most active and effective parts, and then suddenly the wind of the cold war was beginning to blow. The 'right wing', under the mildly innocuous banner of the late J. K. Moir, in whose artificially bizarre house some of the meetings were held, had no hesitation in suggesting that the book fair council (of which I was chairman) was a thinly-disguised communist conspiracy. Some others, still alive to-

day and now rid of the cold war mentality, joined Moir.

Be that as it may, through the devoted work of many people and the artistic inspiration of Lina Bryans the book fair did take place. It made history in more than one way. Innumerable book fairs (including five Moomba book fairs) have followed, but the phrase 'book fair' has unfortunately become synonymous with the charity book sale. If the Nunawading soroptimists are short of funds they go out collecting second-hand books and sell them off at bargain prices. Most self-respecting universities follow the same pattern.

That was not what the first and following four Moomba book fairs were about. We only sold new Australian books, some published specially for the occasion (for instance, Arthur Phillip's *Australian Tradition* and A & R's new *Australian Encyclopaedia*, launched by the prime minister), and the first book fair netted sales of £2,000 which, in terms of today's book prices, is something like \$20,000. I shall never forget Barbara Ramsden, superbly efficient treasurer, and myself bringing the 'takings' late at night to the safe at Cheshire's basement bookshop, and counting the money with ever-increasing surprise like two avaricious grocers.

The proceeds, of course, went to the co-operating publishers and booksellers (and through to the authors by way of royalties), and to cover the costs involved in staging the show.

Internal town-hall politics eventually killed the book fair. But there is no doubt whatever that at the time the first *Overland* appeared we were fired with enthusiasm, ready for hard work for those better things to come, of which *Overland* was then such a stimulating symbol.

Books, despite what the amateur author so firmly and occasionally so aggressively believes, do not grow on trees just to be picked up—and sold—after a short period of ripening.

1954 was a period of promise and opportunity for Australian book publishing which not many grasped and, when the opportunities were grasped some years later, the graspers sat in London or New York.

But I was marking the period (stretching the year 1954 just a little bit) when at Cheshire's I published Eggleston's *Reflections of an Australian Liberal* (the first straight political book of which the first edition sold out in a day), the first illustrated book on *The Art of Arnhem Land*, the Berndts' first book on Aboriginal problems, Leicester Webb's *Communism and Democracy*, Vincent Buckley's *World's Flesh*, C. P. FitzGerald's *The Empress Wu* and George Nadel's *Colonial Culture*.

But, more importantly, 1954 was the year when over endless cups of coffee we planned what established us for a while, alongside with Angus and Robertson, as Australia's largest indigenous book publisher.

The schools were bursting at their seams, both as a result of the post-war baby boom and of migration. I believed there was enough talent in Australia to provide Australian educational books for Australian children. Extensive schemes were drawn up, some of which took a long time to mature, but which eventually provided the funds for a great deal of iconoclastic publishing which, may I rather conceitedly say, is a matter of public record.

I recall one year (after 1954) when virtually every book used in first and second forms in Victorian schools was published by Cheshires. A vigorous expansion into other states was the concomitant. This is not a boast, rather a reproach to those who did not then see the opening.

1962

"If my study of colonial history has not misled me, I have noticed a certain savagery, born of a strange anger, an antipodean hubris, which some writers reserve for each other."

*David Martin, 'Critics and Writers',  
No. 25, Summer 1962-63, p. 30.*

It was some ten years after the planning frenzy of 1954 that I succeeded in my most passionate professional ambition—to place Australian educational books, on a large scale, in the United Kingdom. That some British children have been, and some still are being, taught English or history from a book by an Australian teacher, presented in a more attractive format than the British normally adopted in those days, is my special, personal, multi-national pride.

In 1954 we had started to talk about an 'Australia Council'. That the atmosphere of promise rested on intellectual and political foundations is illustrated by the fact that some of the 1954 conspirators are today the professional advisers of our statutory Australia Council.

The question of distributing books, and particularly literary magazines, is a problem built into the geography and demography of Australia. It was a problem in 1954; today it is a catastrophe.

If *Overland* could have been in 1954, or could today, be picked up at airports, railway stands, newsagencies and so forth, its persuasive overall message would reach a large audience. In 1954 there were at least a number of bookshops who willingly gave space to a literary magazine. The assault of printed words on all readers, but specially young readers has, since 1954, become a tornado. In institutions in particular cursory browsing, often through abstracts, is largely replacing perceptive reading.

There was nothing wrong with *Overland* 1954 initially being meant for a literary, and to an extent inbred, elite. It has been and is the elite's job to take to the streets. How much I would like to be a boy in short trousers standing in Martin Place with a batch of *Overland* under my arm and sell, aggressively, to the characters who at lunchtime thoughtlessly sit on the benches. They don't know what they are missing.

## JOHN REED **1954: A Sort of Renaissance**

The temptation is to indulge in the luxury of one's nostalgic reminiscences of the 'good old days', and I will in fact allow my spontaneous impressions to have their say much as they come to me, even though in this limited space they may add up to only a fragment of my life at this period.

So far as I am concerned it is not possible to think or speak of 1954 without being at the same time aware of 1944 and the years immediately before and after it, and though it may be a somewhat fruitless, if intriguing, occupation to speculate on how our history books would have to be rewritten if certain events had not taken place, we can be pretty sure that if the aesthetic revolution of the 1940s had not happened, then the story of 1954 would have been a very different one. The doors had been flung open — in fact so violently had they been flung open that their impetus, so to speak, swung them back again, and towards the end of the 1940s their opening had narrowed to a mere crack. However this crack never completely closed and through it, as I see things, emerged the renaissance of 1954.

In writing these loose and random notes it must be made clear that I am only speaking from my personal memory of a period, and of a series of events, in which I participated, and, in this context it would be wrong for me to speak of the genesis of *Overland*, in which I was not involved. This is, in itself, probably a healthy sign, as it indicates that in the 1950s the stream was broadening out and that entirely independent activities, all venturing into new fields, were being embarked on.

The years prior to 1954 (which I have taken as a symbolic rather than an exact date) were fallow years with those whom I knew best. In 1947 the Contemporary Art Society, with which I was closely associated, and which had carried the banner of modern art in Australia, was put

into cold storage, and at about the same time the Reed & Harris organisation, which published (among other things) *Angry Penguins*, *Angry Penguins Broadsheet*, and *Tomorrow*, was wound up, and in the following year Sunday and I set out with the three-year-old Sweeney for Europe. Albert Tucker had already left, Nolan had set a new course in Sydney, and, later in London, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval were to turn mainly to their pottery in order to make a living; other artists became relatively dormant. Max Harris had returned to Adelaide to become primarily a bookseller, and other *Angry Penguins* writers for the most part temporarily disappeared from sight. And away in the wilderness of Brisbane the remarkable youth journal, *Barjai*, folded up when its editor, Barrie Reid, disqualified himself from holding that position by reaching the relatively old age of 21.

Of course I am well aware of the existence of other publications, such as *Southerly* and *Meanjin*; but as these were outside the immediate range of my activities, and never — though I realise it is wrong to lump them indiscriminately together — seemed to fish in those troubled waters which attracted me. They hardly impinge on my nostalgic recollections of this period.

Then, during these years which I have typified as 1954, there was to be sensed a slow but exciting awakening in the art world in Melbourne. Not only had Barrie Reid migrated here, but his friends Charles Blackman and Laurence Hope, whom he had brought down earlier, were now part of our community, and there was also an entirely new and vocal, if small, group of non-objective painters, headed by Ian Sime; and the names of Laurence Daws and Clifton Pugh also began to appear.

These and other stirrings were being more and more strongly felt and were soon to be stimulated by the arrival on the scene of Georges and Mirka

Mora. These two lovely French people had only recently (and accidentally) settled in Melbourne and had finally found a studio-flat at the top of Collins Street, and opened a small bistro close by, called Mirka's Cafe — which became also a kind of art gallery — and in no time they were deeply involved with the younger artists, and both studio and bistro were soon to play that kind of catalytic role which can be so important in the development of any new movement in art, a movement, in this instance, in which Mirka was also to participate fully as an artist.

In this atmosphere and under strong pressure from Barrie Reid, backed by Charles Blackman and Laurence Hope, I called a meeting of the Contemporary Art Society and once again it was launched on its career, and once again the paintings of Arthur Boyd and John Perceval and others of the 1940's artists appeared in great exhibitions, this time complemented by the work of the new artists, including Blackman, Hope, Dickerson and the aggressive rebels of the Ian Sime group, as well as many others.

It was only natural that this feeling of a new vitality should also be sensed in other areas of our interest, and Barrie Reid and I were soon in correspondence with Max Harris urging him to join us in showing that the spirit of Ern Malley, the mythical-real poet of the 1940s, still lived on. Max, I must say, was a somewhat unwilling starter, with many second thoughts about his earlier Angry Penguins commitments, but he did finally come in with us and together we (Sunday, Max, Barrie and I) founded Ern Malley's Journal,

a virtual continuation on a small scale of our work of ten years previously. Perhaps chief among our earlier contributors whom we welcomed again was Peter Cowan, whose first book, *Drift*, we had published in 1944.

Obviously my thoughts extend forwards as well as backwards in time. Ern Malley's Journal was a fine spark which unfortunately never started a fire — the common, if sad, story of many similar ventures in all parts of the world — but the Contemporary Art Society went on to take a leading part in the formation of the Museum of Modern Art of Australia, which then absorbed most of my energies, and it is nice now to look back over this period and to realise that during all that time Overland also was battling its way through to the finally rewarding days it is now seeing.

On reflecting on what I have written around the year 1954 I find my mind being filled with the beautiful images of two people, Joy Hester and Danila Vassilieff. These rare artists, Joy the poet-artist and Danila the Cossack painter and sculptor, were our close friends during many crucial years, and in 1954 Joy was not only working strongly in her chosen medium of drawing but was also intimately involved with us in a personal way in all we were doing in both the Contemporary Art Society and Ern Malley's Journal, while Danila was just completing his remarkable series of stone sculptures and opening up an entirely new realm in Australian painting with his fantastic Murray Valley watercolors.

1963

“. . . there's a lot of laziness in Australian intellectual life. Despite our radical traditions we aren't as 'committed' to the big intellectual issues of the day, to the 'battle of ideas', as our opposite numbers abroad.”

*Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Swag'.  
No. 26, Autumn 1963, p. 18.*

1964

“The Holden. 99%. According to the taxi-driver 'Everybody knows the Holden's the best bloody unit. But look at that bloke in a Jap job. There's always got to be some dumb bastard who wants to be different'.”

*Geoffrey Dutton, 'Thoughts, home from  
abroad'.  
No. 29, Autumn 1964, p. 14.*

## Learning A Word

I can remember you, Tom Snow,  
boy stalk-high as a telegraph pole.  
When I was nine, a rhyming girl  
testing words in a world too tall,  
I found a new one: Hero.

You had a coarse but quiet face,  
handing change in the post-office store;  
you had a toss of wavy hair.  
I took my bullseyes and a stare  
in that small sea-holiday place.

It was a wild grey autumn gale,  
they said, that broke the small boat's back.  
The waves ran higher than the wreck  
hurling against the buried rock  
a hull as suffering as a whale.

You swam alone to take a rope  
out from the beach, like a long fish  
towards the men who clung awash  
watched by the anxious land. I wish  
I could remember the tale's shape,

it was a year so long ago.  
What I remember is that when  
I came back, a girl of ten,  
there was nobody called Tom Snow,  
only a new word: Hero,

and somewhere a brass plate on a stone.  
The small town watched the kingfisher sea  
and the wind rattled the banksia tree.  
Perhaps the thing was fantasy,  
maybe I dreamed it, fitted on

a tale to a shouting hollow word  
that sounded like the storm's black O —  
a bubble of vowels rose and spread  
round a dark and foundering head.  
I rhymed the word with you, Tom Snow.

JUDITH WRIGHT

## The Law of Karma

(to Joe Chetchutti)

i didn't want to see him  
but when i did decided that  
despite the injustices i had  
suffered because even if he hadn't

screwed my girlfriend he never  
returned my art books on chagal  
degas & william blake &

stole a full weighed ounce  
of best sumatran grass from  
under my floor & sent me a box  
of live cockroaches through  
the post C.O.D. & also  
said my poetry was lousy

& took all the grog at my  
birthday party & departing into  
the night trod on my best azaleas

i would act with great dignity  
& serenity & remembering all  
my guru had once told me  
when i took kung-fu seriously

that action begets action &  
all that was not total silence  
was subject to the eternal wheel  
of birth & rebirth mighty  
universes of karma recreating  
themselves out of the fire &  
matter of human emotions therefore  
keeping my mind involved in  
the non-moving blissed-out  
bee-bop-a-loowah mantram of  
krishna i walked past

& so did he evidently impervious  
to the icy needles of my love

just as i was about to step  
around the corner i looked back  
& saw him pulling out the keys  
for the new black mercedes parked  
before him as a girl in the front  
seat with a fur draped about her neck  
opened the door & greeted him  
with a smile of complete adoration

i bent down & found a housebrick  
& lobbed it at his head but  
turned & walked away before it landed

i heard him yell just as i  
was humming hare krishna rama  
for the second time

RAE DESMOND JONES

The first half was very tense indeed,  
the play-on style of both teams as smooth as any  
flowing river,

**In Season**  
(for Jim Young)

You know those blokes, do you?

Yes, I know them,  
been out with all of them.

Which one do you like the best?

Hard to say,  
depends on what you mean by like.  
Alan, the blond one,  
he's a real gentleman  
but I couldn't quite say I like him the best.  
Doug, the one getting the beer,  
he's a different matter now.  
He'd really charm the pants off you  
but you can't rely on him.  
It's all so difficult.

**Winter In The City**

They drag their faces  
behind them  
as though children  
playing with toy boats  
in the lakes of winter.

There's no pride  
stored in old pockets  
where hands  
are strung  
silently.

Or under thin  
coat collars even  
or in the sleeves  
of Salvation Army suits.

Leaked out long ago  
through the holes in their boots  
that tell them the street is wet  
and very cold.

ROBERT CLYNE

and the third quarter ended  
with a towering mark for the Magpies,  
followed by a perfectly woeful  
(there's no other word for it)  
shot at goal.

I've got a new story,  
said Bluey, shouldering back through the overcoats  
with twelve cold cans,  
There was this couple, see,  
and they went out on Sunday  
cycling on a tandem.  
Well, on their way  
they had to ride right past  
a Dog Obedience Training Centre  
when out came this alsatian  
and threw a bucket of cold water  
over the two of them!  
Laughter from all present,  
then one of the girls,  
the one with the big knockers,  
changed the subject  
to Macca — we all miss Macca —  
who'll be out for at least two weeks.

After the demigods  
have passed into their dressing rooms,  
while the crowd fans home,  
Holdens revving and hooting,  
as the last scores from other games  
go up on the board  
to an accompaniment of beercans  
kicked around the concrete  
you feel it arise  
crepuscular  
this wave of pleasing melancholy  
like a slender beautiful knife between your ribs.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

## She Moves The Sea

A step taken, and the world's  
before me — night  
so clear

stars hang in among the low branches:  
small-fires, riding  
waves of chilly atmosphere.

Islands parting tide  
as meteors burn air.  
And oysters powder to chalk

in my hands.  
A flying-fox collides  
against my trunk

as the first memory unfurls —  
rocks of shorelines  
milling star fire.

And each extinguished star,  
an angel set free  
from the river's long drive there.

The memory shines,  
fragments, falling into place  
heavens revealing

themselves  
as my roots trail, deep nets  
between channel

and shoal — gathering in,  
cosmic spinel,  
Milky Way, Gemini.

*I look about, God, I look all about —  
she surrounds me here  
light transfigures*

*light, I come to her  
anew and there the drifting things  
move against me.*

And the butterfly exploding  
herself, colors thrown  
against webs of light —

the sea adrift, tails outspread,  
the harbor dawn —  
a gale in my hair.

The mountains move in,  
I drift over lake, through surf break  
and valley — shifting geography.

*'On the edge or place  
inverted from Ocean starts  
another place.'*

*Another place  
before me — entangled of trees —  
humming nerves*

of tide, the eels, twine  
themselves round,  
loop and flick

glow through valleys  
of silt, rise  
breaking surface, twisting light

— dislodging memory  
from its source.  
On this night, time's a universe

and shines in mangroves  
through opaque  
leaves, bodies, plumage, hands —

the oldest fear  
returns through the monument  
of a fish-bone;

wings of an ice-bird  
waving from rock face with hardly  
an instinct.

*A step back: my love before me:  
life shot through with change.  
Memory ash, with no God*

to answer to.  
Together, almost, once more  
the threshold in sight

in rushing tides we turn again  
and again to each other  
making fire

of this and setting it  
there, between stars and swamp  
flowers

*to let love go forth  
to the end of the world, to set our  
lives in the Centre*

though the tides turn  
around, the river back on itself,  
and at its mouth

the ocean rising.

ROBERT ADAMSON



## Two Poems From A Sequence 1

Let's not bother questioning the fact — we're strangers.  
Only by the hope of all mankind we lie together  
only by surmounting native fear  
you let me move inside you and  
I let myself surrender to our victory:  
only because we've claimed the right to patience  
do we attempt to disentangle feelings into words  
challenging a history of ignorance and anger.  
For it is only with a stranger  
the risk can be achieved that keeps us human.

2

In the beginning was the song  
in the song began the end

Brittle with demands of craft  
we let the new notes coincide

move beyond our time — and yet to persevere  
and finish each one is our pride

my bright bones so many flutes  
I am a skeleton of sound

only place your lips  
precisely here

RODNEY HALL

## Piepoem

meat pie! old bandaid! you are more precious  
than ever to me now! & especially the piekeepers  
glugging pea floaters with tomatosauce! how drunk  
& lateatnight we elbowed at your browneyed carts!  
cowleys! harrys cafe de wheels! wheatfield to officeblock!  
sheeppaddock to wharf! tuckshops! factories! delis galore!  
gargantuan appetites! metaphysical hungers! munches  
nibbles & slurps! jaffas rolling down the aisles!  
meat pie! meat pie!! old ballsache! you are everpresent  
emblem of our history! you must be our flag!  
we adore thee o whey-faced loon!

RICHARD TIPPING

## Men At Work

jack hammer! brain chiseller! come out!  
abandon your fortress of warning signs  
& surrender! you are surrounded  
by an evergrowing angry mob  
of ears! even oldwar veterans  
poke their tongues out at you  
like medals! urchins mock your prattle  
by lighting squibs! dogs bark! even dada  
was never so unkind! you are making the street  
shudder with your furious  
staccato farts! boatloads of earmuffs  
will not suffice! trench digger! you are outcast  
like embarrassing pyjamas! go back to dental school  
where you belong!

RICHARD TIPPING

## The Spiders

Some of them slipped in from America, England, the Continent,  
others were already here —  
the spiders, the profit-spiders  
who do not live from ants or flies  
but from social products which they let others produce  
the profit-spiders who squat on every work —  
they squat on the law-courts and on parliament  
they squat on banks and in business-clubs  
they spin purchasing-power out of human energy  
out of human consciousness they spin market-awareness  
out of human weakness they spin capital  
out of ambition they spin snobbery and pretence  
out of zest-for-living they spin zest-for-buying  
they sell love as an intimate spray  
they spin solidarity into envy and rancor  
they spin human warmth into coldness and mistrust  
they condense people into a tin full of complexes  
they spin work-power into a commodity —  
the spiders, the profit-spiders squat on their money-mounds  
and wait for a new victim  
then they race on him, bind him and with their greedy fangs  
they hollow out his personality  
they tear out his feelings and suck dry his character  
what remains is nothing  
but a heap of flesh and bones that moves to the fashions  
but a heap of flesh and bones that works and buys  
but a heap of flesh and bones that is tops and dreams of motor-cars and  
great love  
cold, empty and full of anxiety  
and the people tremble and notice that they are deceived  
and they see the profit-spiders that seductively beckon with their money  
and some would like to be like them:  
just as greedy and rich and full of hate  
and the people fail to see that the profit-spiders are anxious because of them  
because they are weak  
because they are only a few who plunder the majority  
and so the profit-spiders try to make the majority anxious with a ghost  
and they say: a ghost is going around, the ghost of communism,  
and it will eat you all up and make you into slaves  
and they are anxious because they are few who plunder the majority  
and the majority might . . .

NOEL MACAINSH

## Minced Meat

Mashing flesh, I wind the handle,  
and metal coqs mesh and grind.  
The rank smell of aged, bled meat:  
I bare my teeth over taut lips.  
“They’re so like fangs,” say friends.  
Atavism. But I don’t eat meat raw.  
So I mix in rich spices — cummin,  
coriander — chopped onion, garlic too.  
Subtle odors: face, stomach relax.  
Civilised. “More like Sweeney Todd,  
the Demon Barber,” I mutter ruefully,  
as I clumsily shape the meat balls.

VIV KITSON

## Changelings

cold against the earth  
winter leaves on a bird's wing  
a snap frozen moon

at morning's elbow  
an ice palace in a tear  
cracks beneath the sun

R. J. DEEBLE

## Alas, Poor Richard

If there'd been errors of judgement  
and there'd been some, all made  
for America's good — you knew  
you could take the opposite view  
when jaw faltered once  
rehearsed voice phoney as always  
the final resignation.  
He'd been kicked around so long after  
he said no more boots, you can't  
believe he's out.

If you'd seen him through school, football, navy,  
voted for his first election  
watched his newspaper face age  
before TV and after  
you'd say he sold out promise.  
First knowing him as a crook as he said  
I am not a crook, in Disneyland,  
hearing him pardoned for offences  
he had or may have committed  
when you knew he had, you turn  
back pages searching for fatal flaws  
in newsmagazines of family albums:

afterfive shadows not looking all American boy;  
behind spiderwebbed windows, official car,  
he's difficult to see in Caracas;  
spadeface uncovering film in pumpkins  
could dig and plant too;  
though widebrimmed lapels return  
he's not quite the man you knew  
as lawyer in a stetson, California;  
college's football, curly hair,  
you'd never recognise him  
at fourteen, artistic boy with cello.

Green cracks concrete path to old clapboard home.  
Nothing's eerie, sinister. Braces, hearing aid,  
thin white hair, father looks a friendly guy.  
You don't see father in son.

Now doctors knife phlebitis. Leg to heart vein ties.  
Blood clots stop from breaking free  
to heart, lungs, by blockade. Haiphong.  
Cruel to be kind and all that.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

## Changes

The quickest change I know  
Is in the gear-box of a car  
All in one mood, unflinching,  
Not like faces.  
For faces always show  
The grated years and just how far  
The meters clocked the miles in  
Changeless places.

RAY CARMICHAEL

## Poem

As for the people we met  
They came at angles  
When we said yes on a summer day,  
And sat cross-legged for tuppence  
By the hydrangea beds  
The griddled light rolled down  
The honey was shed in laughing  
Come for the grey silk boats  
Joined with the water  
Folding the shuttered walls  
And going away with them  
Under our arms  
He wandered off  
With a white pigeon  
Nestled on his shoulder.

J. SCURFIELD

## Man Of The City

In Stonyfell, I have my swimming pool  
beneath the parrots and the rose-grown light  
of evening on quarries. Terraces rise  
as empires here. This house becomes my name.

What do I seek in the blind mornings,  
scratching at gravel? A wayward leaf,  
an eddied leaf, I suck and twist and lap;  
strung on the tension of watered time.

I can buy, and I can sell.  
I know my footpaths, know  
the soft call of traffic lights. I buy  
and sell; that need consumes.

He has a harelip and he calls  
the news. I buy, I read  
the jading day. Footsteps sound  
like souls, the girls on lino tiles.

The coffee, of course, at ten.  
Ilona with her trolley, cups  
jiggling like ghosts at dance. Her name  
I know, her face. Yet, who is she?

I call to bells across the square.  
The lawns tingle with pigeons. Someone  
sows a paper bag, a fountain frets  
the morning. Windows admit, and hide.

Sometimes I am a paper clip. I hold  
some days together, taking my only name  
from them. The papers shuffle, reverse,  
return. Their only meaning is my name.

I eat my client's mutual needs,  
consider a glass of red, finger on chin.  
My little Lyndoch winery, tossed down;  
his private source, secret at Morphett Vale.

And yet I do not know the name,  
only the words it needs. Our deal  
is toasted, and I raise my glass.  
The man is my face, and an empty chair.

JOHN GRIFFIN

## Prelude

The moon slips and winks.  
Lovers,

Harlequin in fragile beds.  
A man in the street, coughs,  
Politely arrests an echo

From his guts, picking his gold-  
Filled teeth with a hard-worked  
Night.

The factories roar and  
Belt a brazen swearing.

A dog wakes and carelessly  
Licks a slept tenderness  
Drifting through the frailty

Of early light.  
I sleep.

## Fugue

Come to this desert.  
Sand, and riddled voices, clasping words,  
As if in some denial  
Of silence. No-one speaks.

An  
Undergrowth of nervous leaves, unfolding to  
the light.  
Takes root in darkness. No-one speaks.  
Whispers  
Are too deafening

Shapes, eyes strut over, cleave their  
wilderness.  
Heartbeats, struggling to some unity,  
Into that nothingness, where  
We are one, and no-one,

In the constant searching  
For love's voice.

IAN HILL

## The Plane from Greece

Snoring at tiger's tail, the emigrants  
are for the moment whole, undiminished, themselves  
as they will not be longer, for that which marks a man  
witty, sagacious, believable, will have darkness put on it,  
all he is heir to incommunicate,  
now stowed in a sack with his language.  
Eyes, ears, smiles seek to prove readiness,  
till it seems he extends in flesh from ears and eyes  
to make a tangible web to catch a fact.  
The sack of himself seems shabby, he totes it around,  
and only sometimes may he give a gift from it.  
There are years or forever of this. Then prosperous expatriate  
may return to find some of the stuff of himself left behind,  
where he thought he left nothing. Is a man divided  
now more than a man, or only the product  
of parts, which is less than a whole.  
There are no rules in this calculation, it is chance variable.

O, sky-high hoppers, I should study Greek.

BARBARA GILES

## Voronezh (Crow-town)

*(from the Russian of Anna Akhmatova)*

And the whole town is cased in ice as though  
A village set in glass, with walls, snow, trees.  
Timidly through the crystal tracts I go;  
The gay sledge runs with such unlikely ease.

Over Crow-town's St Peter's, crows *do* fly  
And poplars and a vault of clear-green sky  
Show pale and muted in the sunlit haze.  
From slopes of Kulikovo's field there strays  
Breath of the mighty, the victorious earth;

And overhead the poplars stir and clink  
Their glasses suddenly as if the guests  
By thousands at this moment stood to drink  
Toasts to our triumph at their wedding feasts

But in the room of the poet in disgrace,  
His terror and his Muse stand watch in turn;  
And a night comes on  
To which no dawn gives place.

A. D. HOPE

*This poem was written when, with great courage,  
Anna Akhmatova went to see Osip Mandelstam during  
the Stalin terror, not long before Mandelstam was  
arrested for the second time and sent to his death.*

## Italian Words For Love

(Considering the  
Model Wives on  
The Women's Page)

At high school my first year  
shown a photo in a book  
a jewish girl  
running naked across a compound.  
It was the edge, the white edge  
cutting off half her face  
as if someone had placed a hand  
cleaving her features  
threatening to smudge my own.  
What does it matter  
one face half-face  
I still cannot get rid of it.

(Getting Together,  
Sometime)

Her breathing moon-face questions me,  
looks forgotten reappear.  
Once in love  
I ripped her elegant  
black stockings  
to shreds.  
Silence, a matter of words,  
something she wanted I could not give.  
She regards me sadly, angering.  
Her tragic children  
cling to her legs.  
She has to go  
her husband is waiting in the car.

(Italian Words  
for Love)

My history in Genoa  
floating in the heavy air  
the last sun through the shutters  
stripes the yellowing walls.  
In the backstreet leading off the square  
the local girls sit on their doorsteps  
cracking jokes  
at the American tourists and their wives.  
I check in my right coat-pocket  
for your letter.  
I read what I already know.  
It does not simulate the vast distances  
and finish.  
Piecing together half-sentences  
from my tourist phrasebook  
steps at a time  
I launch down a ringing fire-escape  
to ask how much is love.

(Looking Up  
When Shaving)

I ache with love and loss.  
At morning past caring  
we breathe together in a gathered room.  
How like the time I only had  
a handful of pictures,  
the comfort of mirrors.  
What I really loved  
one time  
was the young girl  
asking me to break her in  
and her patience with my worldliness.

(Romance)

The girl who lives with me  
fills out women's magazine quizzes  
to test if she's in love  
or half in love or not.  
Late at night  
I watch Star Soccer  
while she sleeps and dreams.

STEPHEN GILFEDDER

### **Of My 35th Birthday**

My childhood came back  
in the vernacular

My highschool master  
& my sanskrit pundit  
frowned from their chair  
as I slipped my recitation  
from the Vedas

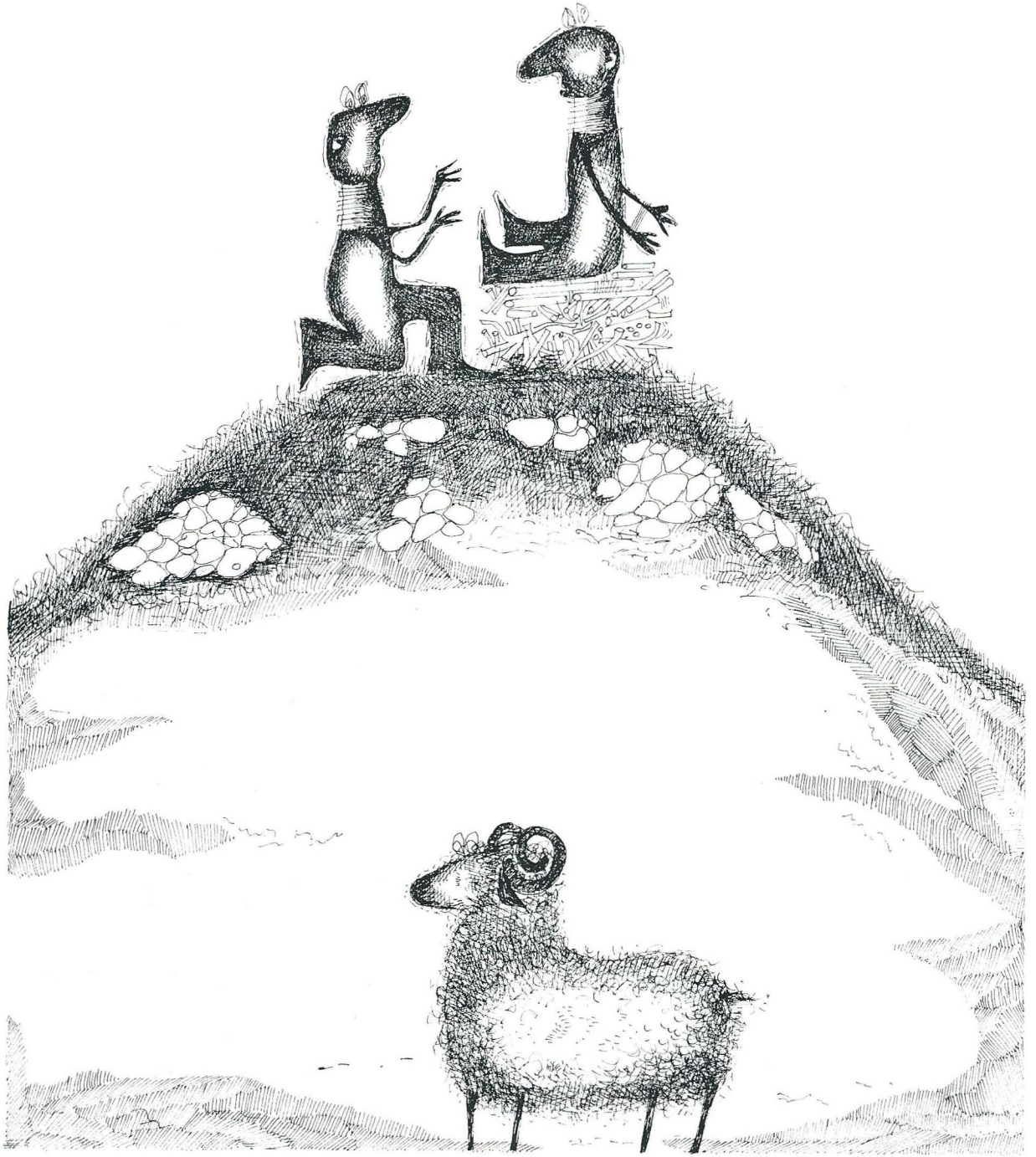
My aunt who secretly sniffed  
snuff named after a goddess  
made me repeat the brand name  
thirty-five hundred times

Gramophones in vegetarian  
hotels chased my ear  
with their hoods  
full blast

& inside a touring talkies  
Gandhi himself pointed  
his finger at me from a slide  
which read  
BE WORTHY OF YOUR MOTHER COUNTRY!

All this  
just because until late  
in the night  
in this American town  
I drank scotch  
& cursed in English

G. S. SHARAT CHANDRA



*Jiri and Dennis*

*Birth of a Liberal Ideal*



D. M. FOSTER **Murray River Breakdown**

A long still of the Renmark Hotel, gums immobile.

The bridge is less than five miles from the town, making me wonder why no one thought to chase Mick sooner. The abandoned rig is there, or at least the trailer, together with several empty patrol cars. I park next to the river and walk down to look at the water, intending to devise a sensible course of action—at an advantage over most of the police in that I am as familiar with this river as with the line of my own nose. Moreover, my long time acquaintance with Mick enables me to choose out mentally those reaches of the river he will most likely head for. I know he heads for the river: in his position, who would not? The police, as is apparent from their tracks, have headed in the direction of the errant prime-mover. Not far from the campsite is a flattened fence which I take to indicate Mick's desertion of the road system which has served him so ill. The police, as indicated by the presence of tyre tracks of narrow wheel-base in the dust about the roadside fence, have chosen to pursue his progress, probably initially in one or two patrol cars, through the gap. I smile as I apprehend Mick's stratagem: I imagine him deserting the mover after breaking through the last fence. The fences only extend a matter of a mile or two from the river; thereafter is saltbush. The mover, once in motion past the last fence at a respectable speed, could be relied upon to continue into the interior until it ran out of petrol. And as it was probably refuelled just before Mick stole it, this could mean a distance of some hundreds of miles. Thus all that would be necessary for the police to be utterly bamboozled would be for Mick to leap out of his cabin after breaking through the last fence, thereafter heading back to the river on foot. The police, as long as they have the mover's wheel

tracks extending before them, will never think to look for footprints.

Incidentally, there is no doubt in my mind now that Mick knew the police were after him from the outset, although this is not what my Cobdogla report suggested. I know Mick well enough to know he does not go crashing about through fences unless for a good reason. He has been in many scrapes. No, word somehow got to him of the precariousness of his liberty. And liberty is precious to Mick.

In order to confirm my hypothesis, I decide to follow the mover tracks as far as the last fence. I know the area and I know the last fence. But before proceeding, let me describe the river and its immediate environs, today, any day.

The Murray near the bridge is approximately one hundred yards wide, slow moving (imperceptibly slow from the banks), and about midway between locks four and five. The banks here are considerably eroded, consisting of occasional sandy beaches littered with mussel shells, but more commonly small clay hillocks sparsely covered in stunted grey-green grass, and frequently littered with tree trunks, brambles and other rubbish lodged in time of flood, that jut into the water and merge with it, uniformly red brown. Here and there a pelican and, it has to be acknowledged, frequently motor boats, this section of the river being ideal for water skiing and general pleasure boating. But none at present. Beyond the river, the land grows flat rapidly and gum trees moderately abound near the water but thin remarkably quickly as the distance from the river increases, an effect best appreciated from the air, the river with its nice undy borders. Then stretches the saltbush and the red arid flats eternal. And it is out there that I am headed in search of Mick. Of

course, I exaggerate somewhat, one can graze sheep at one-half to the acre for some distance back from the river, hence the existence of fences.

It is winter and the sky is overcast, although the breeze that blows down from the interior, fanning in my face as I walk, delighted to be in the bush again with a purpose, is warm and dry and very pleasant to watch rippling the water. The Aborigines, whose burial grounds are many in the area, made a point of worshipping the river spirits.

When I finally arrive at the last fence, still without having seen any sign of the police I know to be in the area, I see that Mick has deviated from his previous habit of driving straight through fences to take advantage of a corner gate. And since this has required a significant deviation in a path previously as straight as natural hazards permit, I become very excited; surely this provides further proof that I have correctly hit upon Mick's plan! If there *are* any footprints apparent in the dirt on the other side of the fence, then there is now a ready explanation for them! Furthermore, Mick could quit the vicinity by making use of the fence if necessary, no doubt throwing even whatever dogs off his tracks, if they'd begun to poke about near the gate a bit and set their handlers to wondering. There now remains the question of which direction he would have made in—instinctively I move to my left, confident he will have headed back in towards the town. I admit that I am seeking to place myself mentally in Mick's predicament here. I am also aided by a most intimate knowledge of the area. In order to see if Mick can have crept along the fence without touching the ground, I begin so to creep myself, by crabwise and oscillatory steps along the second top strand of wire and supporting myself by grasping with my hands the top wire, my back bent in the shape of an arch. It is by no means easy; however, I am satisfied it can be done. Having proceeded I guess fifty yards in this manner, one strainer to the next but one, I leap down and begin to run, eventually to walk, diagonally back towards the river, my excitement now curiously heightened, almost as though it were *I* who were the fugitive. My movements are impeded considerably by my suit though, which has also become covered in dust. I am also beginning to sweat.

Through the trees at last I see the river, perhaps two or three hundred yards downstream from the bridge. I have ventured inland a mile, and then a mile back. I begin, when I reach a track

along by the river (here, as a boy, I enjoyed riding my bicycle), to walk in the direction of town—slowly, for somewhere between the bridge and the river and on the same side of the river as myself, I expect to find Mick, or some sign of him, or I will think of something else. The track, which I forgot was here, brings back memories and induces in me a mood of remembrance and a sense of loss wholly inappropriate to my quest. And as I walk along, the path before me obscured by gums and shrubs and less hilly over clay heaps than I recollect it, I lapse into a sensation of carelessness, of timelessness, of happy confidence. I pass a brackish pond upon which floats an immense pad of violet lilies. I stop to enjoy the sight, the first clean secondary tint I have seen for months. I am in the sanctuary now; I begin to see occasional pelicans. Soon I will pass by the island of koalas.

By the time I reach the island, rain is falling upon me in sheets. But that is not all. I catch sight of the island, approximately two miles from the hotel, beyond a bend in the river. This moment is memorable, at this moment I become aware that someone is following me, I do not know who it is, but the island being a tourist attraction, it need not astound me that I am not alone on the path. It could easily be a tourist, or a local schoolboy, since school will be out by now. But I am put out and not anxious to catch sight of or to be seen by the boy or whoever else it may be behind me on the path. It could be Mick. It could be one of the police party. I can hear the person, I can hear footsteps and occasionally a cough, footsteps and coughs carry along rivers in a way no other sounds seem to. I, as a boy, hated to be seen on this track; perhaps the fact I am thinking of boyhood again on the track makes me hurry ahead.

When it begins to rain as I reach the island, I listen to see if the man behind is running to get out of the rain. I know by now from his coughing that it is a man and not a boy, the cough is that of a heavy smoker. A tourist would surely have begun to run—there is a clearing opposite the island joined to the highway by a dirt track, and I can see a truck in it, yes, a truck, a very old model, a dirty truck, the wheels and mudguards are splattered in red dust. Red dust streaks hideously in heavy rain. I see the truck, I hesitate, and I wonder whether to continue. As I falter, I hear the footsteps behind me still. The man is not hurrying, therefore he can scarcely be the owner of the truck. Who is he? Where is the owner? I

run across the short wooden bridge onto the island. There is very little cover on the island, but I am now very curious to see who is this man behind me. The strengthening of his cough shows the rain does not agree with him. I stand stock still, partly hidden behind a thick red gum. To notice me from the track, it will be necessary to stare for a long while with great fixity at the island. I stand stock still, blending with the trees, and wait.

My pursuer at least does not follow me onto the island. I see him come round the bend and in the same instant stop in a startled manner. But not startled by me. I listen and he listens. It is Mick and I listening. There is *another* man on the path. Someone is walking after Mick. Mick stops coughing but there is still the sound of footsteps splashing along the by now muddy path. Curiously, the rains fall noiselessly upon the Murray. It is apparent that Mick had not realised he was being pursued. He did not know either that he had been pursuing me. He looks about in alarm—I experience a moment of anxiety as he looks at the island. I could speak, I suppose. No, too complicating at this time. I am covered in sheets of rain but he would have seen me eventually. But he has no time. Then he sees the truck. He runs towards it, and crouches behind it, on the far side of it from the upriver path. Now we both wait, completely motionless.

As we wait there, he crouching and myself bolt upright treelike, the rain all of a sudden stops. Although there has been no sound during the heavy downpour, the raindrops falling from the gum leaves now the rain has stopped fall to the ground like shell fire, making it difficult to hear the approaching footsteps. Worse still, as I stare at Mick, as the water dries from the windshield of the truck in the clearing not one hundred yards from me, I can make out the figure of a man in the driver's seat—not only his figure, but his face. One yard from Mick at the outside. I cannot make out his expression, but he can hardly be asleep in that upright position, he is sitting and waiting quite immobile just like Mick and myself, and knows both of me on the island and of Mick crouched beside him. Outside, life is gay. So there are in actuality three of us waiting here. And in

fact I am not the first, but the second, to take up my position. And Mick is only the third. Or if you like, the second, and I am only the third.

Finally, the fourth man in the party rounds the bend, a policeman, in uniform, but alone. As he rounds the bend it begins to rain heavily once more, and the truck windows become opaque within seconds. Mick peeps from around his headlamp to see the policeman, withdrawing his red head before the policeman sees him. The policeman, however, when he is within fifteen yards of the truck, stops and with his arms upon his hips and his head alone moving, searches the river, looking at the truck, looking at the path behind him, seemingly oblivious to the heavy rain, remaining so, apparently awaiting the rest of his party, the party of which he is evidently forward scout. And as he stands waiting, it stops raining again.

So now a total of four men are waiting here with the tension mounting upon each arrival. For the man in the truck, how senseless, how terrifying these arrivals and subsequent attempted concealments he has witnessed must have seemed. And soon the policeman will be able to see him, if not Mick and myself. Perhaps a poacher, the man sits too frightened to move. Clearly, something is going to have to happen here.

Surprisingly, that something comes from my quarter, it is I, the least implicated, the most wholly passive and innocent, who precipitates motion, though through no volition of my own. As the raindrops fall loudly about me and as the truck windows begin again to clear, filling me with apprehension for the fate of the man within, there is emitted from the tree above me a loud roar or grunt.

Aggh!

In an instant Mick has headed off into the bush again, the truck has been primed, gunned and, sliding about in the mud, driven off, and the policeman, apparently deaf, apparently blinkered or blind, is slowly but deliberately crossing the bridge onto my island, quite indifferent to the escapes being made good by the other two. As he nears me, glaring balefully, I look away and stare only at the riverwater. And as I watch, it begins to rain heavily once more.

VANE LINDESAY

## A Fey Humorist: Michael Leunig



*Nation Review 1974*

Up to date those artists working in the field of graphic satire have done little more than reflect in their humor changes and disturbances in social values. And there is nothing wrong with that. There has been a role of documentation, of social interpretation, but rarely in modern times of innovation. If they innovated, it was in presentation and drawing style only. True to this tradition comic artists, hedged in by editorial cumbers and working in journalism, continue creating within imposed moral ambits.

But the last five years has produced young Australians working in the field of graphic satire who are not so much reflecting social attitudes as re-creating them. The same phenomenon has occurred overseas, where cartoonists and graphic humorists, rejecting the status-quo ethic, are drawing for a young, sympathetic audience through the 'underground' press.

By one of those timely accidents of history an Australian weekly newspaper with an explorative policy, and a fey and dreamy humorist, coincided to pioneer a remarkably fresh expression of graphic satire.

The pixie-like Michael Leunig, born in East Melbourne in 1945, started his career in 1969 as a political cartoonist with *Newsday*, a daily newspaper which set out to filch Melbourne's *Herald* readers. Leunig drew also for the weekly magazine *Broadside*, both ill-fated and short-lived *Age* publications. Some of his work of this period reflects the influence of the Oz cartoonists, principally that of Martin Sharp, but always the Leunig mind distinguished his drawings. He did in fact contribute later to *London Oz*.

In their happy conjunction *Nation Review* and Michael Leunig have published over the last four years something local journalism has never previously witnessed—the poetic philosophy, fantasy

ALLAH preserve us!  
What sort of cultural  
exchange is this!

a concert tour by Normie  
Rowe, ten thousand  
stubbies of  
Fosters and a lecture  
tour by Ron Barrassi  
@.@.@.@.@.@.@.@.



God strike me pink!  
What sort of  
cultural exchange  
is this!

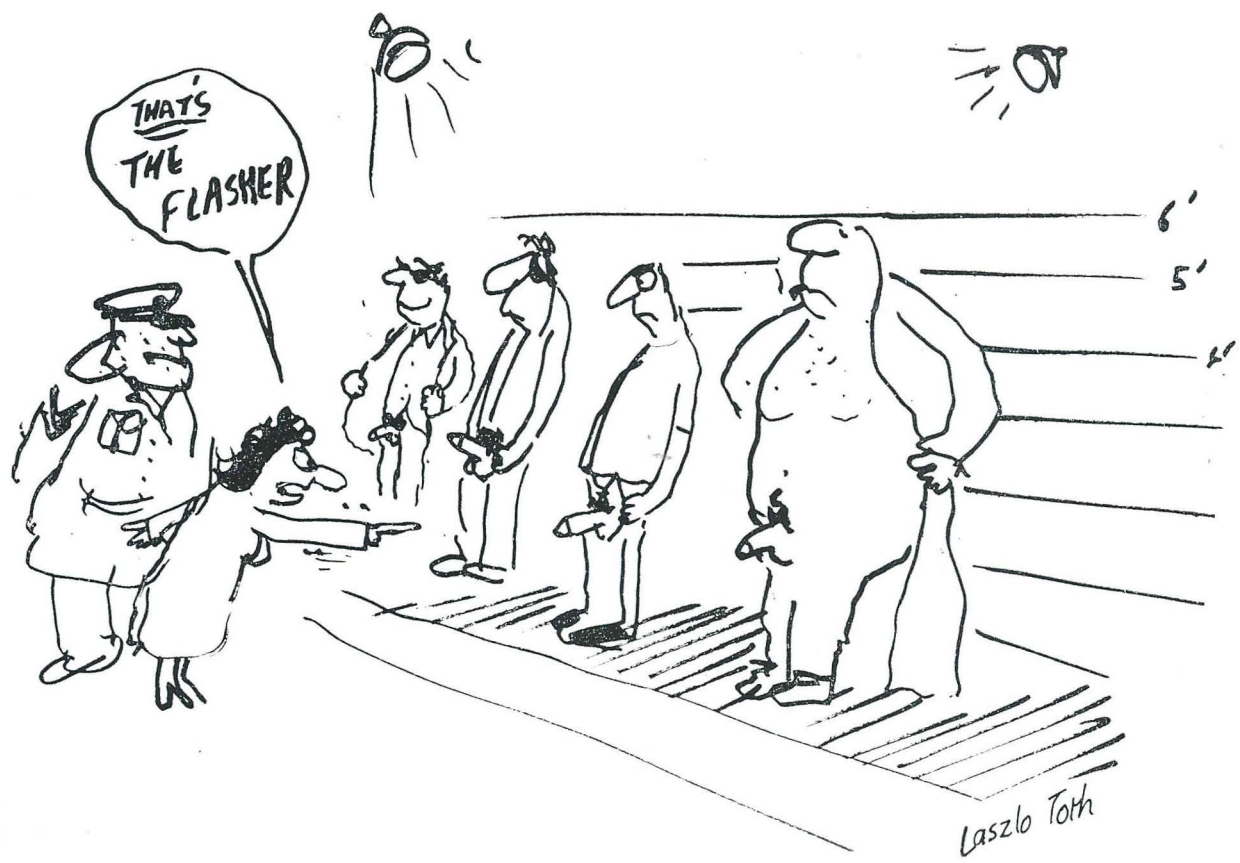
An exhibition  
of Batik!?  
a concert tour by  
a dancing troupe  
and a wood carving  
exhibition.....

Leunig

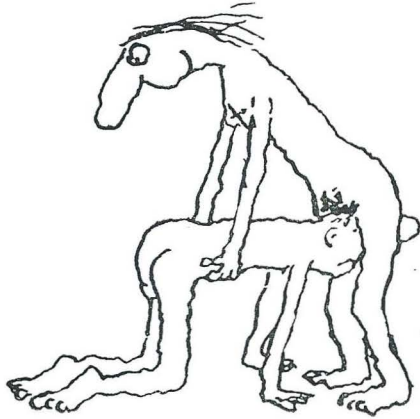


Broadside 1969

THAT'S  
THE  
FLASHER



Laszlo Toth

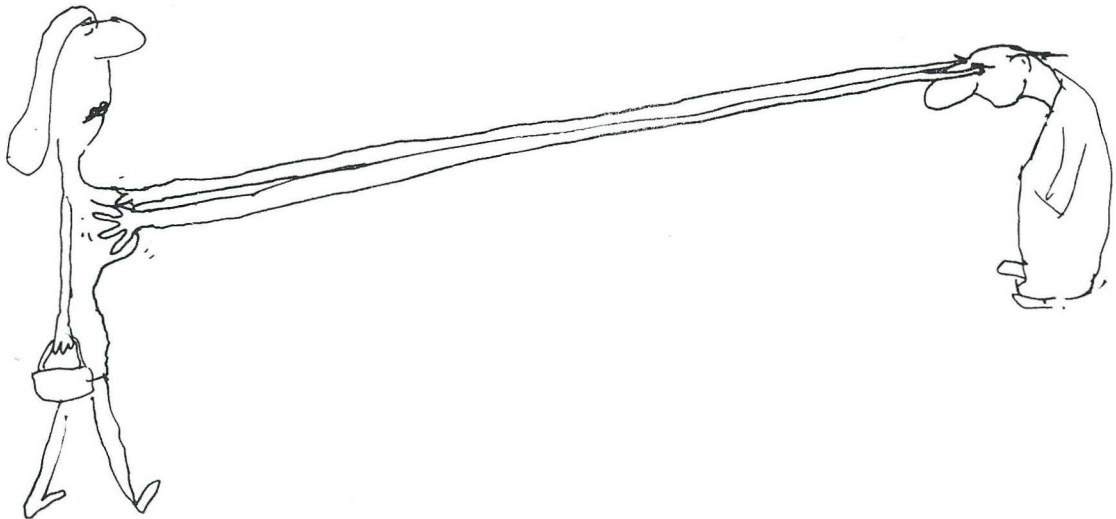


and inventiveness of an inspired comic talent, owing nothing to the tradition of Australian graphic art. Leunig has been drawing for only six years. But in that time his work has been the subject of court actions against *Nation Review* for publishing cartoons that were "obscene, crude, offensive, and unduly emphasised sex". Other distinctions include the publication of his cartoons and drawings by the enterprising Penguin Books\*; a third reprint of this book, bringing the total run to 34,000 copies, is printing now. And Leunig's drawings have been on exhibition in Melbourne's

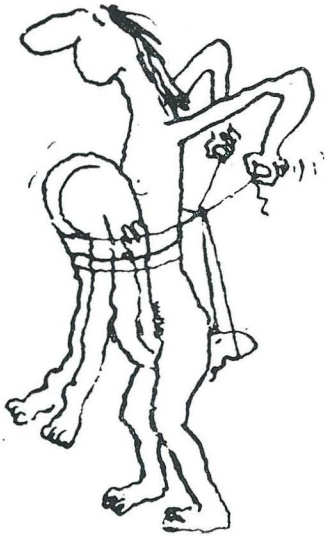
Arts Centre.

Of great appeal and popularity in *Nation Review* are Leunig's two- and three-verse nonsense poems, and the Penguin collection wisely includes examples such as "Sitting on the fence":

Come sit down beside me  
I said to myself,  
And although it doesn't make sense,  
I held my own hand  
As a small sign of trust  
And together I sat on the fence.



*Nation Review* 1974



Leunig

*Nation Review 1974*

Leunig, a self taught artist, draws incredibly small, directly with no initial framework, using a mapping nib for his pen work. The result is a rare delicacy of line which rather surprisingly 'holds' during the high speed running of modern printing. Very small drawings are photographically enlarged. His watercolor-wash drawings, often containing moody skies with a crescent moon shining through God's bruises, are tonal gems—and also exercises in the nightmare fringe of experience.

A lot of Leunig's drawing is pure fantasy—one

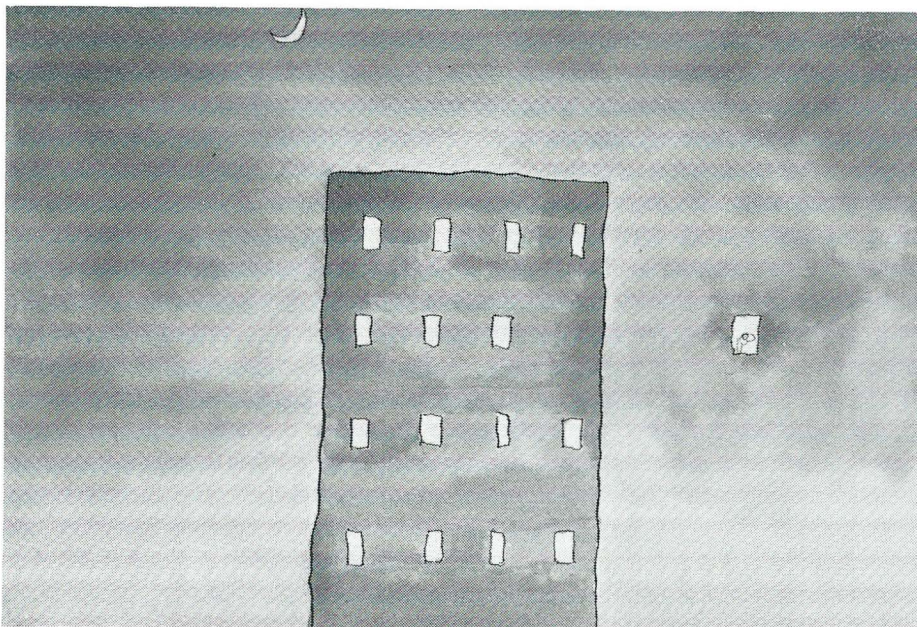
must not look for reasons or explanations. When the great American George Herriman was drawing his 'Krazy Kat' in the 1930s, he had two of his characters philosophising thus:

"The world as it *is* my dear 'K' is *not* like it was when it *used* to be."

"An wen it gets to be wot it is—will it?"

For the answer should we ask Leunig?

\* *The Penguin Leunig*, introduced by Barry Humphries (128 pp., \$2.50).



*Drawing 1974*

## John Docker and His Critics

ROBIN GOLLAN

When I offered to write a short piece on John Docker's *Australian Cultural Elites* I felt that he had been badly treated by reviewers. On re-reading the book and some of the reviews I still feel this but not to the same extent. Perhaps my feeling was too strongly colored by the first thing I read about it, namely Humphrey McQueen's standard opening diatribe in his otherwise marginally relevant review (*Arena* No. 36).

How important is the book? It has already attracted a good deal of serious discussion. A. A. Phillips has found it wanting in scholarly precision (one egregious error and some dubious interpretations) but it has also stimulated him to some valuable reflections on the growth of Meanjin (*Meanjin* No. 2, 1975). Geoffrey Serle finds it at times "exciting and brilliant", at others "dull and foolish", but certainly an innovatory work in intellectual history (*Overland* No. 60). Warren Osmond's is the most serious discussion of the book as a whole, of the achievements and limitations of the method, and of some of the issues it raises for further work (*Meanjin* No. 2, 1975). For him too, although he does not use the word, it is innovatory.

I see the book as doing three things, not all of them equally well, but all of them at least interestingly. Firstly it examines the ideas of seven influential writers in some detail with the prime aim of discovering where they stand in relation to questions which have come to the forefront during the last decade or so, such as women's liberation, black liberation and gay liberation. Docker rightly sees the Vietnam war as the catalyst which released movements and also a questioning of ideas, assumptions and prejudices, fortified, it may be added, by the mass movement of protest and disillusion in the United States.

Secondly, he looks at the role of some journals

and the cultural sub-groups which sustain them—in particular Meanjin and Southerly. Thirdly, he explores the hypothesis that there are distinctive Sydney and Melbourne intellectual traditions. This is what gives the book a degree of unity.

It is notable that five of the writers whom he examines are from Sydney. They are distinct individuals, whereas Melbourne is seen as more of a lump with Meanjin at the centre. In looking at Brennan, Norman Lindsay, Slessor, Hope and White, Docker uses the method of close textual analysis. He is not much concerned with their literary technique. His aim is to extract the essence of their ideas, in particular their ideas which are relevant to his preoccupation with pluralism, sexism and racism. No doubt it could be argued that he is simply wrong about the dominant ideas which he identifies, but this could only be done as a result of the same kind of close analysis which he so ably employs. He has given me new insights into all the writers he has dealt with. If he has misled me I hope that the continuing attention which this work deserves, and I expect will receive, will remove the blinkers which he has fitted.

Docker considers that there are two major Sydney cultural traditions—a literary tradition and a philosophical tradition. He sees a close relationship between them but the exact nature of relationship is not explored in depth. In his introduction he says:

Both Sydney traditions insist on a kind of *elite pluralism*. They are pluralist in that they think society should be composed of groups or sub-cultures which pursue separate activities. Such pluralism ensures their own right to exist as intellectuals in a separate sub-



culture. But they are also elitist, because they think their values are superior to the values of the society around them. The syndrome of elite pluralism characteristically involves seeing anti-authoritarianism, sexuality and consciousness as metaphysical realms of freedom, freedom from society.

There is nothing particularly new about these propositions: what is new is the heavy weight of empirical evidence which is brought together to sustain them.

The literary and philosophical traditions are seen as parts of a larger whole, but the links between them are not established with any firmness, unless the rather unsatisfactory discussion of Frank Moorhouse can be said to do so. What is done with much greater lucidity is the description of the several strands of Andersonianism which diverged in the 1940s and the cultural subgroups which were associated with them. Andersonianism contributed to both the libertarian subculture and to the intellectual radical right. That Docker does not sufficiently recognise the fact that the most influential of Anderson's students do not fall into either of these categories does not invalidate the characterisation, although it should qualify it.

Serle says that "Docker does not know Melbourne well enough." He points out that Brian Fitzpatrick, Max Crawford and other influential figures in Melbourne's cultural scene are scarcely noticed, or not mentioned at all. Certainly, in terms of Docker's own argument, Fitzpatrick and Crawford should be there; others possibly but not necessarily. Perhaps Docker places too much weight on Meanjin and certainly he does not know Melbourne as well as he knows Sydney. Nevertheless, although his Melbourne piece is less original than his writing about Sydney, Docker does place his finger on distinctive features of

Melbourne culture: its organicism, nationalism, social involvement and concern with historical roots. He has difficulty in fitting some of his people into their Melbourne clothes, but qualifications of the general proposition do not destroy it.

Docker sees his book as a work of literary criticism and not of history or sociology, but until the sociology and history are written Docker's book should prove very valuable for historians.

In the reviews the point has been made that people central to the culture of Sydney or Melbourne are not native to them. For example, Clem Christesen and Meanjin migrated from Brisbane. It could be added that Max Crawford, the architect of the first really important school of history in this country, was a migrant from Sydney, and that S. H. Roberts, who presided over one of the dullest history schools in Australia, was a product of Melbourne. The question is, could Crawford have built the kind of school that he did if he had remained in Sydney? Or would Meanjin have become what it did if it had remained in Brisbane? Of course there can be no definitive answer to such counter-questions, but they are relevant to the study of cultural history.

There is a rancorous and at times malicious quality in reviewing and criticism in Australia at present. This struck me very hard on returning to the country after a year away. I hope that the images of the prize ring, or more correctly the oedipal battles of middle age and adolescence which mark Peter Ryan's comment on John Docker [National Times No. 238] don't become too widespread. I hope also that John Docker's book will be recognised as an important substantive work by a young scholar of the Left, by contrast with the so far unproductive preparation of theoretical tools, which marks so much of Left writing at present.

1965

"What practical people fear about intellectuals is their impatience with practical solutions, their desire to push the argument as far as it will go. Logical consistency and self-realization are more important to intellectuals than the balance of power. Unlimited criticism is the pre-condition of their creativity."

*Ian Turner, 'Intellectuals in Australian Life'.*

*No. 33, Summer 1965-66, p. 32.*

# ARE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN DAMNED WHORES OR GOD'S POLICE?

Only five years ago Germaine Greer burst on the world — articulating the ideas that are beginning to change our lives. Another Australian, ANNE SUMMERS, is her natural successor. For the first time a woman has set out to describe Australian society — 'Manzone Country' — and to write our history. The result is devastating.

Anne Summers  
**DAMNED WHORES AND GOD'S POLICE**  
The Colonization of Women in Australia

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A Penguin Book

## Cooking Up a Good Democracy

NOEL MACAINSH

Günter Grass, perhaps best known to Australians as the author of *The Tin Drum*, but known to millions of Germans as a tireless campaigner for the Social Democratic Party, was at Neuperlach, a controversial new housing project on the fringe of Munich. Among the concrete monoliths, the towering stacks of 'people-boxes', he had given a reading from a new work in progress, had stood by while an exhibition of his graphic work was opened in the project's own art-gallery, had auto-graphed catalogues, and was now, at last, relaxing.

Led astray by numerous head-and-shoulders photographs of Grass in the media, I had always thought of him as a large, heavily built man. In fact, he turned out to be somewhat under average height; a small man, a little overweight. But the face was certainly the familiar one, with the dark jowls, the swarthy complexion, the bushy moustache. And something of his years in Paris, the years when he wrote *The Tin Drum* in comparative solitude and obscurity, was suggested by a 'Quartier Latin' quality—strengthened no doubt by the black artist's beret, the serenely scruffy pullover, and the graphic works hung all around us. Certainly the 'SPD-Drummer', the indefatigable travelling word-fighter for the Social Democratic Party of Germany and friend of Willy Brandt the famous Bürgermeister of Berlin, was hardly in evidence. Or perhaps that was my mistake. Karl Horst, a shrewd critic, has said that Grass is not two separate people, a novelist *and* a political activist, but simply the one magician who, like all magicians, wants to change reality by casting spells, whether by beating on a magic 'Drum' or incanting an electioneering speech.

The 'magician' however, was on this occasion plainly tired, even fatigued, melancholy. Perhaps the world had not changed, despite a lot of in-

canting. He seemed to be withdrawn; his face was relatively expressionless; but the eyes were watching, highly observant—like an artist; which of course completed the circle. He *was* an artist, *is* an artist, has always been an artist. He began to draw consciously in the third year of his life—has always drawn. So far as he can recall, he did not begin to write till much later, about the age of fourteen. He has had no training in literature, did not get to matriculate. But he did receive a thorough training in sculpting and graphics, at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf and the School of Fine Arts in Berlin. He feels financially reassured by his ability to go back at any time to his trade of monumental mason, sculpting grave-stones. During his childhood in Danzig his mother was a firm support to his artistic interests. She had three brothers who died in the First World War. Günter Grass never saw them, but he feels that their tendencies have worked on in his own life. One of the brothers wanted to be a writer, another to be an artist, and the third a cook. His mother occasionally wrote poems for the Sunday page of the paper. As for the cooking, he has always been a fanatic cook, and his latest work-in-progress is a cook-book, though no ordinary one. Perhaps something of his air of melancholy, of resignation, finds an explanation here, or at least adumbration.

His new work is set in and around Danzig. In the course of the centuries, from the Stone Age on, nine or so super-human females—or was it incarnations of the one female?—cooked in this district. The being now known to us as Günter Grass, but variously alive in the past as a stone-age migrant, a bishop, a Napoleonic governor, a drunken proletarian, etc., ate what these super-females cooked, and noted down their recipes. Günter Grass' new book will be about their

achievements and inventions, which, he says, were more important than the victories and defeats of the unhappy men who strove to make history. The 'cook-book' is really of epic dimensions. It is Grass's coming-to-terms with a male-dominated society which enthusiastic feminists wrongly regard as a model for their emancipation. This society, says Grass, is performance-fixated, hostile to the senses, sick-to-death of itself, and impotently sorry for itself. In his new gastronomical-historical novel, Günter Grass will spread out for us an opposing and more delectable view. It promises to be a good chomp. Along with the graphic work, it does much to explain the relative absence of Grass from public life since the last elections and the victory of the SPD.

He speaks in a quiet, rolling voice: "During the years of my political work, from the start of the 1960s on, I didn't do any drawing. Politics distorts natural things or turns them into statistics. But I've taken up drawing and etching again. It's fun. I'm not interested in the social relevance of my drawings. Snails, eels, fish-heads! Pictures can't make the world better! But perhaps they can show the contradictions in reality. I've always drawn objects, real objects in the world, not abstractions. I'm not a decorator. The eye is important to me, to see objects, their organic shapes as they really are in themselves. They are always new, and I want to go around them, and look, and know them."

I asked him if his taking up drawing again meant a turning away, a disillusionment with politics? "No, it's a creative pause. My double activity as writer and political worker has worried lots of people. To me, it's inevitable. I was born in 1927 in Danzig, was six years old in 1933, twelve in 1939 and seventeen in the May of 1945. The period marked me, but I was not guilty for it. I saw the possibilities of democracy after the war when the two German states went on their separate ways after the vote of 1949. The German Democratic Republic carried on with the national-socialist practice of manipulated elections, only of course they were called communist elections. I soon voted for the social democrats, and decided for the reform path. The Social Democratic Party was the only one that consistently behaved in a democratic way. Revolution is nonsense. Napoleon was a product of revolution; so was Stalin. Writers, especially bourgeois sons with a chip on their shoulder, are attracted by a flamboyant theme. They are bored

by reality, of whether all those kulak deaths really justified Stalin's agricultural reforms. I don't think you can neatly divide revolutions into left and right. Of course, their aims are different. But the differences in ideologies and in the directions of the aggressions involved are not as important as the similarities between revolutions themselves. They have a mechanism of their own, independent of ideology. Let the revolution stop, and the republic begin."

I asked him what the chances were, in his view, for social democracy? "We just got home in the last elections and that shows at least that German parliamentary democracy has a chance of developing democracy through socialism. The ordinary citizen wants middle-term reform-aims and clear financial proposals to realise them. Dogmatism breeds dogmatism. The dogmatic Stalinism of the fifties brought out dogmatic anti-communism in the West—and that is dangerous because the real strength and variety of social democracy is pushed aside in hysterical polarisation into black and white. Political opponents then become labelled as enemies. The social democrats become labelled both as agents of Moscow and as agents of capitalism. Hysterical anti-communism has led to NATO, which was set up in opposition to the Warsaw Pact as a military pact to protect western democracies, including such countries as Portugal, Greece and Turkey. Anti-communist ideology has shown itself to be a weakness of democracy. For two decades the western democracies have neglected to reform themselves as true social democracies. But this period appears to be reaching its end."

What about the East Bloc countries and the future of our relations with them? "Two great blocs confront each other, east and west, private capitalism and state capitalism. They are implacable, and insecure; both of them are burdened with ever-growing military expenditure, which they both give as the reason for not being able to finance the necessary internal reforms. They talk in black-and-white phrases. Because they are insecure, they are capable of brutality; Czechoslovakia was invaded by five Warsaw Pact armies; and Greece is no longer a democracy. The Soviet Union put a stop to democratic socialism in Czechoslovakia; the United States allowed democratic rights to die in Greece. In the one case, it was to prevent capitalism, in the other it was to prevent communism. These are the excuses for two violations of democratic rights. The language used on both sides, whether it's left or right

totalitarianism, is universal. It is the language of political criminality, familiar to us since Hitler and Stalin. Intervene, clean-up, re-educate. It is a jargon that deceives us still. The Soviet powers, on entering Czechoslovakia, spoke of "normalising", and the Americans in Vietnam spoke of "pacification", even while they used napalm and terror. They even deceive themselves with their language. I am not a stranger to resignation; I don't want to raise false hopes. But I am sceptical. Yet the fact that state power is omnipresent shows that it feels it is obliged to be so, that it is uncertain, that it is fearful of the power of democratic socialism."

And the role of the writer in this situation? "Writers can't directly realise political programs. They are not competent for this. They are not politicians, are not elected by the people, are not responsible to the people for the political process. And they are not the 'conscience of the nation'—that is laughable, a relic of the past. But the writer *does* have the capacity to recognise the competence of those who are entrusted with the political process and to criticise them. A writer is also a citizen, and as such he may engage—no, he *should* engage himself in the political process and use his ability with language, as a writer, to reveal to his fellow-citizens just what he sees going on, that is, political connections that his fellow-citizen may not be able to grasp fully. The writer has no special political competence, but he is entitled to the position of a critical observer who raises his voice when he sees the wrong path being taken or when something inhuman is afoot."

But what about the writer, *as* a writer? Does this political engagement affect the quality of his writing? "The idea of distinguishing writers into those who are engaged and those who are not engaged is unrealistic, like saying a bike-rider is a Catholic bike-rider. To me, writing a political speech and writing a novel are two separate forms of writing. The form of the novel is not suitable

for a political speech: thank God. One doesn't electioneer with a novel. But a novel that deals in its own form with a particular section of society is engaged literature, even if there is absolutely nothing overtly political in it. Engagement is really a very wide term. All these questions of how much one should engage oneself as a writer are really beside the point, just as are those prescriptions of which particular cause a writer should engage himself for. But if a writer is to be seen and assessed against reality in the widest sense then he is already engaged. Even giving things a new name is engagement. The engagement in tendentious literature may be slight because the reality is lacking."

But what about direct political engagement? "Well, there is the perennial objection of distance—people say that if a writer doesn't keep the right distance between daily life in politics and his writing, then his style will suffer—that he will no longer be objective. But reality, which is vital to a writer, can only be experienced if you give up that distance. I want to experience political reality, and I can only do that if I expose myself to it in political work with all its compromises. A pure style is one thing; but reality is different, and it requires risking yourself. The conflict between the demands of literary form and the compromises of political reality, which we all live by daily, is productive for the writer. That conflict is his life. For a writer to escape into romantic flight, or clamor for another revolution here, is to deny reality its proper place in his work."

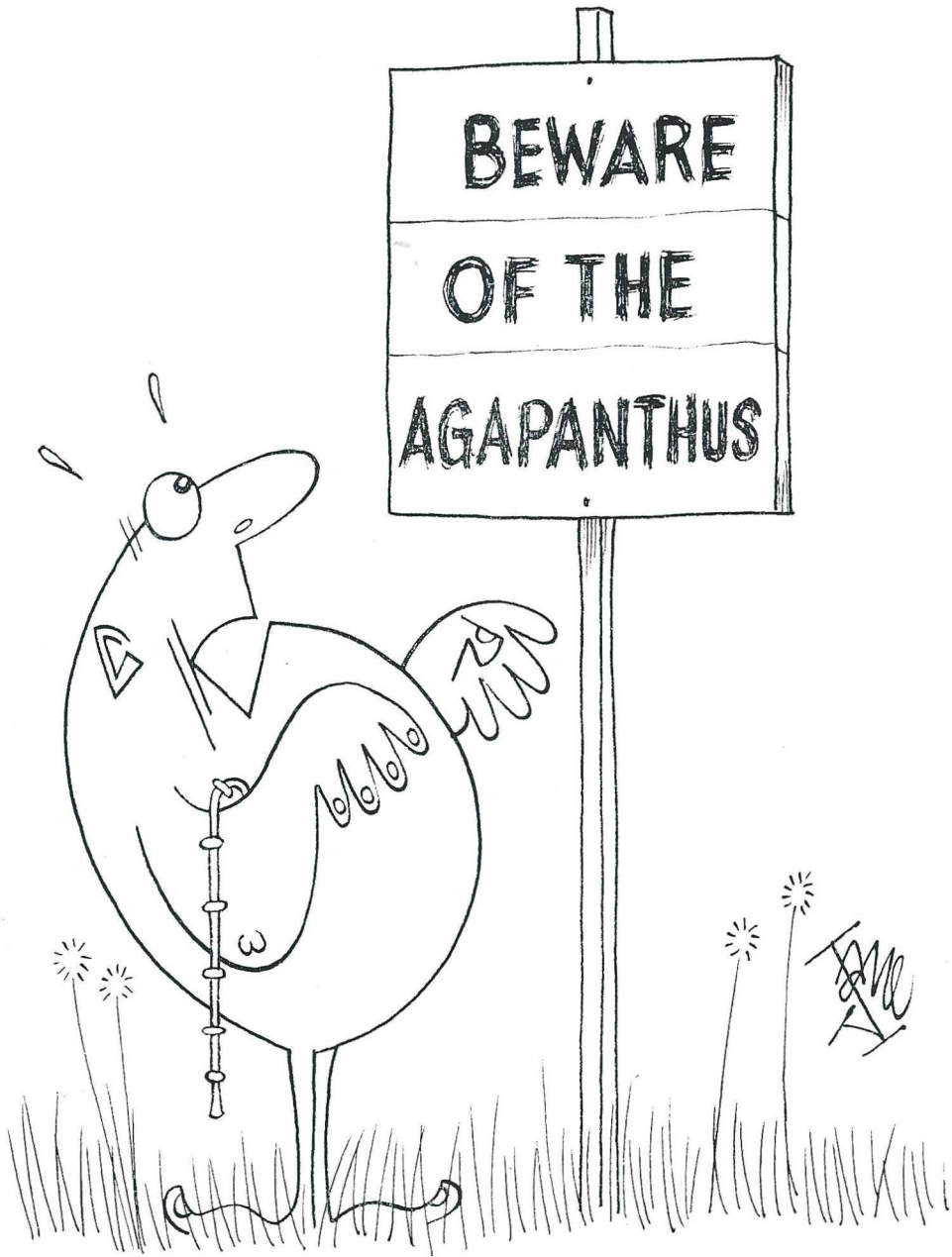
And that was all there was time for. How Oskar Mazerath and the magic drum, and the fish heads, and an eel diving into the secret parts of a lady, and an epical gastronomical historical cook-book, and the SPD, and a tomb-stone sculptor from Danzig-Langfuhr, all related to 'reality' was still a little unclear, if not unreal. But as the dark 'magician' himself has said elsewhere: poems know no compromises; but we live by compromises; he who can actively sustain this conflict in his own life is a fool, and changes the world.

1966

"Whatever we may think of Australia's participation in the war in Vietnam, it is not a national cause, because the Australian community has not decisively demonstrated its support.

"Therefore it is morally wrong that young Australians should be compelled to fight and perhaps die in Vietnam . . ."

*Statement. No. 34, Autumn 1966, p. 23.*



Vane Lindsay

There is a theory about how New York was created that goes something like this: God said, "This is a rock and upon this rock I will build the most fucked-up city in the world and see how people get along in it. It'll be damned interesting." And it is.

The rock is twelve miles long, of varying narrow widths, and upon it live one and a half million people of innumerable nationalities, crowded into a melting pot that boils over nearly every summer. So closely crowded are they that they simply *have* to get along, and the result is that New Yorkers are aggressive, articulate and have a strong sense of identity as residents of a city, however else they may differ. Even the beggars are articulate: New York is the only city in the world where a beggar will approach you and say "Can I have a quarter, mister, to go see the Kandinsky exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art?" Norman Mailer was only half-joking when he ran for mayor on a platform that included seceding from New York state and running as the fifty-first state. (The same suggestion has just been revived with the city's current fiscal crisis—\$14 billion paid out in taxes of which the city gets back only \$2 billion.)

A few years ago the police went on strike for a weekend and the crime rate actually dropped. Admittedly, it was an unusually cold weekend in mid-winter, but a lot of people claimed that criminals felt it wasn't sporting to work while the cops were out. In a recent interview a cop who worked in the stolen cars division claimed that New York car thieves could work out even the toughest steering locks in five minutes. "They're the best in the world," he claimed, with obvious pride. To most New Yorkers (which in effect means Manhattanites) the mid-west begins on

the other side of the Hudson river bordering the island, and Neil Simon gets laughs in his plays by merely *mentioning* Newark, N.J., or Peoria, Ill. (short, as W. C. Fields once remarked, for Illinois). Politicians play on New Yorkers' pride in themselves. Announcing lay-offs Mayor Abe Beam says "New Yorkers can take it. This is a tough city." Especially for people on welfare. At the Ninth Avenue Festival a vendor of toy whistles wanders through the crowd saying "Take one back to the small town, folks." It is a witty line—although, if one follows him one finds he tends to use it rather often.

The old Hollywood movies used to know how to exploit the ambivalent notions that other Americans have of New York and the quite unambivalent ones that New Yorkers have of themselves. In a 1941 movie, "Unfinished Business", for instance, Irene Dunne travels from the small town of Messina, Ohio, to New York to find out what life is really like; she finds out before she even reaches the city, as she is seduced on the train. When she arrives she meets an entertainer, Billy Ross, who is famous in New York, and admits she has never heard of him. "Whatsa matter?" says Ross. "The dame been living in a subway?" It's a double-edged joke, cutting against the entertainer Ross but also implicitly endorsing the myth that New York—Gotham City, as it was frequently characterized in movies of the thirties when Hollywood was far more closely in touch with the fantasies of its audience—is the source of both fame and ill-fortune, seducer, tempter . . . in one of the more offensive American idioms, Where It's At.

Again, in "The Awful Truth", Irene Dunne is about to reject Cary Grant, marry dull beef rancher Randolph Scott and go to Oklahoma.

“Well, good luck,” says Grant ironically. “You’ll like Oklahoma City . . . And if it gets dull there . . . (pause for effect) . . . You can always go to Tulsa.” When I saw this film in New York, the whole audience erupted into laughter. There are shared, almost unconscious assumptions that an intelligent film maker can exploit endlessly. New Yorkers believe, in Craig McGregor’s words, that living anywhere else is only kidding.

This rock has its outlets, of course. Connecting the tiny, crowded island of Manhattan with other places are something like a dozen tunnels and bridges, all of them stunning artifacts technologically, and some aesthetically as well. The George Washington bridge, for instance, with its slender, austere beauty, that makes even the Sydney harbor bridge look squat and stubby by comparison, is a beautiful piece of engineering imagination. After one crosses the bridge the highway spreads out into what seem to be fifteen or twenty lanes, with the heavier traffic carefully segregated to one side. The bridge is like a hand that continues to sprout more and more fingers. Travel is so undisturbed that the only danger is of losing concentration; sometimes one feels as if one is travelling in a horizontal lift.

A short time ago, the tolls on the west side that lead to the Hudson jumped by 50 per cent. (except for cars with more than three people in them), with the result that there were queues three to four miles long, with people not having the right change, wanting details of the rises, arguing with the attendants, wanting to turn around and go back. The truckies all banded together and handed the attendants \$20 bills so that they quickly ran out of change. New Yorkers fight authority at every turn; they usually lose but at least they put up a fight, even if sometimes misguidedly. Two million people (commuters) travel in to Manhattan every day by sub-way alone.

Most of them, however, are there already, trying to learn how to get along with their myriad neighbors. There are plenty of available teaching aids. The New York Post has just finished serializing a book called something like “How Not to Say Yes When You Really Mean No”, something that one would imagine most adults would be able to do anyway. The girl friend of a lawyer in a major New York law firm complained to the lawyer because his firm gave him too much extra work at weekends and on evenings and he wouldn’t stand up to them and refuse it. He joined an encounter group which met in

order to develop more aggressive, ‘positive’ attitudes to their society, and almost immediately his personality began to change. “He goes out in the morning Dr Jekyll,” his girl friend said, “and comes home Mr Hyde. It’s frightening. I don’t know what to do.” When I knew him last year he was a quiet, pleasant man; now he grabs your hand with a grip like a vice and when he speaks he sounds as if he had two loudspeakers under his shoulder blades. Even sitting quietly his presence is oppressive. The encounter group is now taking up most of his time and his girl friend hardly sees him. Even if you’re not naturally aggressive, in New York you can learn to be.

There are other forms of aggression as well. New York is by no means the most dangerous city in the United States—contrary to the myth. A columnist writes: “In the crime-center cities, based on percentages per hundred thousand, New York City doesn’t even make the first-50 list. It also fails to make the list of the first 25 cities in rape, burglary and theft. It’s 18th (of the first 25) in assaults and 16th in number of murders.” He adds, somewhat ambiguously, that there is considerable room for improvement here.

More common is verbal aggression. New Yorkers are highly articulate and completely uninhibited about expressing their feelings. Walking down Broadway one continually sees people talking to themselves. In the bus on the way home a woman is talking away, volubly, informatively, about politics and I nod my head sleepily in agreement. Yes, NATO was in danger, yes, Kissinger has no idea of what he is doing, yes, Nixon was a motherfucker. It is only when she gets off the bus that I realize she had no interlocuteur, that she was talking out loud to herself.

Parnassus, U.S.A., the New York Times calls it, and it is indeed a remarkable city in the way of culture. Dozens of plays on Broadway, scores off Broadway, and hundreds Off-Off Broadway. Seventy-five films are shot each year on the streets of New York and most of them deserve to be. The city has 1500 cultural organizations, the largest library in the world, and an astonishing collection of museums and galleries including the Metropolitan, the Whitney, the Cultural Centre, the Frick, the Guggenheimer, the Brooklyn, the American Indian, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Cloisters. The Boston Symphony Orchestra is currently playing at Carnegie Hall, the Bolshoi Ballet at Lincoln Center, Hamlet is being performed (free) in Central Park, and new



films by Antonioni, Penn, Resnais, Nichols and Woody Allen are showing. The two special so-called cultural bus rides offer one hundred stops and attractions of special interest. The Museum of Modern Art has acquired a Munch.

As with art, so too with sport. New York has two baseball teams, the Mets and the Yankees; two football teams, the Jets and the Giants; two basketball teams, the Nets and the Knicks; two hockey sides, the Islanders and the Rangers; a tennis side, the New York Sets, and now even a soccer side, the Cosmos. Recently the Cosmos, who have not been doing too well, bought the famous Brazilian star Pele, enticing him out of retirement for a mere \$7m. and raising the interest in soccer immediately (as well as the crowds, and the media coverage). Even cricket is catching on in New York. The sports you don't want to go to in person you can watch on television. Seventy-five of the Mets' 162 baseball games are being televised this year; even on a quiet week there will be something like twenty-five sporting events being telecast live, while during the football season the addict can watch sport on television almost continuously over the weekend from morning to night, with a special Monday evening game now thrown in.

But more intriguing to the outsider than the astonishing facilities in the way of cultural and leisure activities is the ordinary New Yorker's response to an environment that is more and more cut off from Nature and created by man himself—with the notable exception, of course, of the huge but rather dull Central Park. Deprived of a natural environment, citizens here attempt to create one for themselves. One way is through growing their own natural environments; in one apartment after another now, one finds people have their own pot plants (no, not that kind), and the garden district of New York's shopping centre has grown considerably over the last five years. One apartment I visited recently was dominated by a huge plant that was spreading through the bedroom. "I guess we bought a pup," its owner

said ruefully, looking at it from underneath the foliage. Although he had asked for a deciduous specimen the thing was steadily shedding its leaves, irrespective of season or circumstance, so that each morning the couple had to brush out the eiderdown. People will create entire indoor gardens of plants that droop forlornly under artificial light.

Another way is through pets. New Yorkers are pet mad. A drunk lies on the street at the corner of 42nd street, a broken bottle beside him, and people carefully step over him while looking in another direction, as if unconscious of his existence. A few hours later on the same day a dog is struck by a car and injured, and a large crowd quickly gathers, full of advice and concern. Pigeons and squirrels abound in the parks. Dogs are walked on leads, sometimes as many as four or five being walked together by professional dog walkers, dogs as big as wolves and dogs as small as hot dogs. They may also own cats, birds, tiny domestic-looking fish that swim in tanks of bubbling harmony and fight like piranha when you pour food into their universe, crocodiles, camels, tigers . . . no no, I exaggerate, but you get the idea. It is no wonder that the first thing any New York dog will do when he gets out of his owner's apartment is defecate on the sidewalks.

What we have is a compression, an intensification of the attractions and disadvantages of living in any densely populated urban area. Because of the unique nature of the landscape of the city—its limitations of space so that it cannot endlessly stretch but can only grow upwards (Antonioni said that he would make a film in New York when screens became vertical)—the value it holds as a model for Australian cities is limited. But in some ways at least—in the use of public transport, the virtual banning of private cars, the problems of pollution and most of all the psychological pressures that people living in extremely close proximity to one another experience—it can provide a model that we should closely watch.

JOHN McLAREN

## Over Many Lands

Our first taste of India was the moist gloom of Bombay airport at midnight. The lounge was full of sleeping bodies—hopeful travellers or workers too tired or too poor to go home? The varying ranks of official from customs officers to porters were indicated by a descending order of shabbiness. Outside, a group of blue-clad policemen watched us as we gazed at our first bunch of sacred cows, heartening evidence that we were in the India of imagination.

Bombay Airport is a gloomy place of austerity concrete, presently being rebuilt. James Cameron says that it is always being rebuilt. The flight to Delhi is across deserts and then in over deep ravines and scarred hills with mysterious ruins. I sat beside a plump, grey-suited Indian businessman who runs a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Delhi. We are to discover that motor-cars and Coca-Cola are the symbols of western civilization right across Asia.

The old city is like a human version of Darwin's Galapagos, where every available inch is seized by some enterprise seeking to support life. The gardens near the mosque are edged with squatters' tents and pavement stalls. The Red Fort of the Moghul emperors, scene of past magnificence and massacre, is now kept as a national monument for tourists and schoolchildren, but through its entrance is a colonnade of souvenir and food shops. Opposite it runs the Chandni Chowk, processional way of Shah Jehan and model for the Champs Élysées. The central canal is now filled, and the markets spread from either side until only two narrow lanes are left for the constant flow of motor traffic. Side ways lead past the comfortable padded showrooms of the jewellers to the smaller shops of sweetsellers, the tiny cupboards and closets where pots, clothes,

kitchenware and shoes are on sale, to smaller and still smaller alleys where grimy workshops with lathes or sewing machines crowd against the retail stalls until finally they spill onto the wholesale market area, where stalls with grains and builders' supplies and vegetables and hardware crowd against lines of carriers waiting along the pavements with their ropes and handcarts.

The pavements are devoted entirely to business, with haggling buyers and pavement sellers squatting around their little mats of goods. Competition is immense, with sellers apparently outnumbering buyers by a factor rather than a sum, yet there is also camaraderie, so that a commercial transaction becomes a social occasion, neighboring stall holders joining in with advice, translation, change and even alternative goods. The further away from the tourist halts the smaller are the stalls, the less the English, and the more public the business.

The business on the pavements drives the pedestrian into the roadway, where he competes with handcarts, oxcarts, horsecarts and cabs, bicycles, motor-scooters, trolleys, trishaws and minicabs and cars all hooting or shouting or clanging. Even in the narrower alleys, carts and motorcycles jostle and honk through the pedestrians. People move aside for a moment as a funeral trots past on foot, the deceased carried on a simple bed. At another spot traffic is interrupted by a tumult of people entering and leaving a hall where a guru is advertised. They ritually wash at a street tap before entering, dab themselves with holy water as they emerge, while from inside comes a constant chant of voices and gongs. Along the street a semi-circle of white-clad Moslem tailors in black caps sit cross-legged sipping tea amid their rolls of material. Nearby a dwarf-sized beggar

writhes along the ground. Another beggar, with staff and beard like a Sunday-school picture of one of the disciples, goes from stall to stall, and few refuse him. The great mosque which crowns the old city rises from a clutter of ramshackle stalls. The legacy of the Raj is the cold ostentation of official Delhi, the formal layout of Nicholson circle where Kashmiri vendors and well-dressed Hindu con-men prey on the tourists, and the grimy and dilapidated tenements which climb up narrow stairways four storeys above the street in the old city. In the business and administrative centres the buildings are kept clear by soldiers and police in uniform—although a lively demonstration is going on against a British bank—but in Old Delhi the bones of buildings and town plans are overlaid by the insistent demands of the living.

The sound and light show at the Red Fort in Delhi tells India's story from a national viewpoint. The British are the villains, and the National Army of Chandra Bose the heroes. So when we reach Lahore, now in Pakistan, and want to see the old gun we ask for it by its correct title, and are met by blank incomprehension, until one man's face lights up: "Ah, you mean Kim's gun!" It is still there, outside the wonder house, the Lahore museum, and as we soon found out every souvenir shop in Lahore has bad models of it for sale. The Grand Trunk Road of Kipling is still a torrent of traffic, but now borne in motor vehicles and bordered by familiar plantations of eucalypts. The trucks are mainly four-wheeled lorries, which were to continue to be the main form of freight transport as far as Iran, where they are succeeded by the articulated juggernauts which bring the produce of Europe to meet the new markets provided by petrodollars. The juggernauts are severely practical, and the many which fall by the wayside are left where they lie. The trucks are gaily decorated in designs which increase in intricacy and splendor the further west you go, and seem to be kept going by the faith and devotion of their owners far beyond the normal span. Our bus plies through this purposeful crowd like a mobile aquarium whose creatures see the outside world but cannot touch. Our negotiations with the outside world at borders, hotels, consulates and restaurants, are carried on by Gino, our learned and cheerful Italian courier who has the happy ability to be at home wherever he is—a latterday Kim. It is a perfect holiday from responsibility to put all our worries on him.

The borders tell the story. At the India-Pakistan border coolies in bright blue shirts unload trucks coming from Pakistan, carry the goods on their heads to the customs warehouse, and then load trucks on the Indian side. We wait under a tree near a restaurant—a hut, little more than a shelter, where flat bread is baked on hot coals to be eaten with tea and curry. A traveller on foot approaches the money changers who sit under another tree, and is disgusted to find that the rate of exchange is worse than in the towns. "This is the last time I'll be robbed in India" he shouts to the world as he walks off in his jeans to the border, where he will beg another ride to take him on the next stage of his world trip. The officials just laugh. We are now on the hippy trail to Europe, and there is a steady trickle in each direction of denim-clad hitch-hikers from England, Australia, the United States and Germany. Many are on their way to Amritsar, where Sikh hospitality at the temple will provide them with free food and bed for a few nights before they are moved on. They have abandoned all the legacy of western imperialism except its belief in the obligation of the rest of the world to support it.

Only a couple of hundred yards separates the Indian and Pakistani border posts, and border guards from the two countries stand almost side by side. Towns on both sides of the border have memorials to the dead of the India-Pakistan wars, and newspapers have tales of the present perfidy of the other side. India is in the process of annexing Sikkim and formalising the constitution of Kashmir, while Pakistan, with troubles also on its borders with Afghanistan, sees itself becoming isolated. The quarrels seem a sad irrelevance to the villages we pass, yet are probably a necessary consequence of the need to build national pride and purpose. There seems no point of contact between the views of reasonable men on either side.

Kabul stands in a valley surrounded by mountains surrounded by still higher mountains. The floor of the valley is itself higher than almost any part of Australia. To the south, the road winds down the sheer sides of a rocky gorge, and then across stony plains, some of them now cleared, irrigated and made fertile with foreign aid, to the Khyber Pass and Pakistan. Across the plains wander shallow rivers from the snowy mountains in the distance, as well as flocks of sheep, goats and oxen, an occasional caravan of donkeys, and the nomads with their black tents. The hillsides are covered

with tufty grass, and from time to time the mud-walled stronghold of a Pathan tribe. The Pathans live on either side of the border, and at the time of our journey their homeland is the subject of dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan supporting Afghanistan and Pakistan, Afghanistan promoting a new state of Puktoonistan to accommodate all the Pathans in the one nation. The dispute appears however to concern only the capital cities and the politicians, as the Pathans apparently travel at will across the border for trade, for pasture, or to visit their relatives, and the Pakistani government only attempts to control twenty-five yards either side of the main road on its side of the official border.

The new town of Kabul consists of hotels, shops, offices, apartment buildings and schools on the floor of the valley. The streets are crowded with the faces and costumes of many lands. The carrying and the laboring is done by men with the flat, pink-cheeked faces of the north, wearing wide trousers, long coats, flat turbans and broad sashes. They mix with short, swarthy men of the plains, tall Pathans and occasional white-skinned, fair or even red-headed men presumably descended from colonial armies or still more remote invaders.

Above the new town the narrow streets of the old town climb up the ridges to where, in many places, the walls of the Emperor Babur still stand. Tony and I climbed up through narrow streets which do double duty as drains and sewers. Outside the commercial areas the business of life is confined behind the mud-brick enclosed compounds of the houses, and the only people we saw, apart from an odd glimpse through an open doorway, were the children, who were greatly entertained by our attempts to clamber up through the thin mud. At the top of the houses, however, we met two energetic young men whose daily exercise was to run, leaping from boulder to boulder, to the top of the hill and back. They obligingly escorted us to the top of the ridge, and then one conducted us back to his friend's house while the other completed his run to the peak before re-joining us and inviting us inside for tea.

The comfort inside the house belies the austere appearance from outside. The house opens onto a courtyard, where this family, despite the harsh climate and unlike most of their neighbors, were cultivating a few trees and shrubs. We sat on pillows and mats around a low table covered with a blanket, beneath which was a small warmer—an arrangement conducive to intimacy as well as economic of energy. We heard, but do not see,

our host's sisters. Our host, Nasjid, served us excellent tea, and we then discussed politics. His friend is a Pushtoon—one of the two tribes of Pathans, distinguished from the other, the Puktoons, by dialect. He explained that the Pathans are descended from the lost tribes of Israel. He has travelled to the Puktoon areas in Pakistan—unlawfully, of course—and has seen the arms manufacture and smuggling which are, apparently, their main occupations. The main trade is in hashish, heroin and rifles. Ahmed's vocabulary was limited, and Nasjid acted as interpreter, but this in no way inhibited the flow of conversation or the firmness of his views. He felt that the agitation for an independent Puktoonistan was being stirred up by Russia as part of its policy of encircling China and gaining access to the Indian Ocean, and referred to the leader of the independence movement as a "traitor". They both felt that the Maoists, who although illegal publish a monthly paper and are popular among the people, represent a danger to the Afghans, but they both seemed to know plenty of Maoist activists whom they accepted as "nice guys". They had both visited Pakistan and Iran, and through the nomads they knew of events in Russia and China. They had no doubt of their preference for the way China has treated its minorities. Their central attitude seemed to be a quiet kind of nationalism, so that although they accepted many parts of Russian and Chinese criticism of their affairs, they were determined to do things in their own way. As they said, however, they are under military rule, however benevolent, and they "talk a lot because there is nothing else to do".

The road west from Kabul climbs over high snow plains until the mountains start to fall away and it crosses increasingly barren grass plains to the north of the desert. This is the land of the Kughi nomads, who travel with their camels and donkeys and cattle and low tents of black goatskin. The women wear voluminous skirts, bright scarves and wide smiles, the children scramble for coins and lollies, but there are also women begging with quiet desperation for babies suffering from malnutrition. Lily, the Swiss nurse travelling home on our bus after twenty years with a mission in Nepal, looked at some of the worst cases, but there was nothing we could do except leave some soap. We were to pass through varying nomad tribes all the way to central Turkey, and in each country there are plans for their settlement and betterment. In Afghanistan the highway—built to

Kabul with American money and beyond with Russian—and the irrigation schemes are bringing change, the speed of which is shown by the deserted mud-built caravanserai, still in good order but unused for twenty years since the road went through. In northern Iran there is an army tent in every settlement, with conscripts bringing health and education. In the south, where rebellion was put down bloodily in the twenties, and still stirring in the sixties, there is a fortified post in every village.

Tony summed up Iran: “There is nothing wrong with this country that a little poverty wouldn’t cure”. We did everything that a tourist could want—drove through magnificent mountains, saw countless beautiful blue mosques, felt the dawning of European civilization amid the ruins of Persepolis, where the carvings still combine splendor and humanity. The boldest of our party bathed in the strange grey waters of the Caspian, and we then repaired for grilled sturgeon and crisp salad, washed down with beer. Yet my strongest impressions of the country are the puritanical zeal of the pilgrims in Meshed, the vicious traffic crowding pedestrians off the pavements in Tehran and bugging up the beautifully proportioned square of Shah Abbas which is the pride of Isfahan, and the lonely exiles who, for handsome salaries, staff the Shah’s ambitious development plans. The people are rightly proud of the progress their country is making but somehow it does not seem to belong to them or to anyone—it is just a part of the faceless modern technology which fortunately stems from beneath their soil.

The border between Iran and Turkey is choked with long lines of laden juggernauts waiting to go east, and empty ones returning. Turkey is poorer than Iran, and we are back to a world of horses and oxen until we reach the Mediterranean coast. The road winds around the slopes of Ida to the graceful ruins of Pergamon, home of healing, and the windy plains of Troy now silted far inland. Gallipoli is a surprisingly moving monument to futility. Only a general could have picked so accurately the one impossible landing place on a coast of beaches. Each graveyard marks one of the further salients each at the top of a steep gully and each commanded by further slopes offering perfect defensive terrain. The two battlefields, separated only by the Dardanelles and three thousand years, seem equally remote and irrele-

vant except to dreams. Istanbul, on the other hand plunges the traveller immediately into the pressures of contemporary life which are only deepened by the ancient walls and temples from which the city grows. Yet the cathedral, now mosque, of Hagia Sophia raises the same question of continuity as the graves and the ruins. Outside the traffic surges, jet fighters zoom overhead in a show of strength directed at Greece, and the papers report charges that the right-wing government kidnapped members of the opposition to ensure the passing of a vote of confidence.

While writing these notes, news came of Mrs Gandhi’s suppression of Indian democracy. The English-language newspapers we enjoyed in Delhi, filled with wide and critical reporting and sonorous editorials analysing political issues in the light of moral principles, were suspended for two days, and now will presumably read like their Pakistan counterparts, as lively and independent as a government press-release. Nor is this of concern only to the traveller and the English-speaking minority, for we saw Hindi-language papers being read and discussed with just as much interest in the bazaars. Whether it will make any difference to the debt-enslaved villagers is yet to be seen—so far, Mrs Gandhi has been repeating only the same rhetoric as her election promises. Yet even casual acquaintance makes obvious the daunting magnitude of governing that vast country. It may be that parliamentary democracy, depending as it must on financial contributions to support the parties and their election campaigns, can only lead to corruption and the entrenchment of vested interests. There is, however, no reason to suppose that any revolutionary prospect offers a better chance of solution, and a single-party system which opened the way to change through organisational means rather than through mass campaigning might offer the best hope. The danger is that it will merely protect the entrenched minority from even the lightest criticism, and so keep them even further from any effective encounter with real problems, or from any challenge to their exploitation of misery. Yet the imperialism of the left, whether liberal, radical or revolutionary, shares with the imperialism of the right the dangerous habit of judging by criteria developed in western societies. The wrongs and evils of India, of the third world generally, are absolute, but the best we can do is to refrain from making them worse, and to help them buy time to find solutions in their own terms.

# books

## FLAWED ACHIEVEMENT

Edward Kynaston

Xavier Herbert: *Poor Fellow My Country* (Collins, \$20).

Every book that grows beyond a certain size is an achievement, if only of persistence and disciplined labor. Living in an age of hysterically applauded giantism and relative illiteracy one must therefore expect quantity to be immediately equated with quality and great choruses of “oohs” and “aahs” from the two-syllable-word press when a book like this appears. “Longer than *War and Peace*” exclaim the quantitative claque, simultaneously adding to their own astonishment and claiming merit by dubious association, while the ‘big book’ buyers are hastily clearing a space on their already crowded coffee tables for yet another never-to-be-read book. The hand-outs accompanying the book go even tastelessly further: “In sheer size—850,000 words and 1,468 pages—it is 100,000 words longer than the Old and New Testaments”. God, as always, is on the side of the big battalions.

*Poor Fellow My Country* is a ‘big’ ‘Australian’ novel, both commendations to a people who still tend to retain deep feelings of inferiority, much inverted snobbery, and a nationalism as jingoistic as once their imperial aspirations were. It is also a ‘games’ book insofar as it covers the years 1937-43 in northern tropical Australia, dealing with places and people in a way that barely disguises most of them. The local flying doctor is a Dr Fox, and the country centre around which much of the action occurs has the feminine name of Beatrice and is towards the southern end of a railway line from the only coastal town, which is called Port Palmeston. These are easy ones;

the knowing and know-alls will have a gossipy little games playing time discussing and working out the more difficult ones.

The two chief characters of the book are Jeremy Delacey and his bastard grandson the part-Aboriginal Prindy, or as he later becomes briefly, Prendergast Alroy! Jeremy is a local station-owner conservationist, horse doctor/apothecary, semi-recluse, living with a native wife whom he married after his aristocratic white one left him when he returned from the first world war. Much of the opening of the book is taken up with Jeremy’s monologues, which are delivered to a helpless visitor, and which are many (over normal size) pages long. The monologues cover local and national history, introduce a number of local characters, display Jeremy’s (and some of the author’s?) prejudices and bitterness, and are sometimes tiresomely didactic as well as being a rather crudely obvious device which hinders the initial suspension of disbelief.

Jeremy, apart from being local odd-man-out and romantic idealist, is also a violent and brutal man ever ready to settle matters with his favorite solar plexus punch or a schoolboyishly unfunny remark or practical joke. He is also a pedantic and sometimes pompous extrovert, capable of unbelievable naivety for a man of his years and experience, on whom several quite unbelievable young women exercise their Electra complexes. He is almost completely without interior life but has plenty of *ideas*, most of which are attached to an emotional irrationalism of which he is apparently unaware. Jeremy is intended, one guesses, as one of nature’s bush gentlemen. To young (and not so young) people he will appear as he is: an inverted racist, sexist, ruthlessly self-fish, and hopelessly thoughtless self-deluding old hypocrite and, unfortunately, a character in whose

significance, in the end, one cannot quite believe.

Prindy, who is eight when the book begins, is the golden boy (he is literally called the Golden Boy) of the book, and embarrassingly the "our little darling" of some of the ladies. He is a musical genius, plays flute and clarinet as time passes, and frequently renders items of such musical profundity as "La Golondrina", "Melody in F" and, in lighter vein, "The Road to Gundagai". Later, under Jeremy's care, Prindy educates himself in a few weeks at the Delacey station, Lily Lagoons, becomes something of an electrical expert and blacksmith, and subsequently and equally quickly, learns to fly an aircraft. At other times he accounts for some policemen, and is present and in part the cause of, the deaths of an old Aboriginal nicknamed King George, together with his mother and an Aboriginal prostitute with a wooden leg named Queeny! There's no stopping the Golden Boy wonder even at the end of the book when the corpses are even thicker on the ground. He also sings in his sleep much of the time.

Most of the people in the book are caricatures more than characters; cardboard individuals from a bush raconteur's tales dressed up in the thick imitation accents of the verbal storyteller. A fair enough device when rendering the 'lingo' of Aborigines, but painfully boring when used *ad nauseam* for the Hungarian Monsignor, the German-Jewess, the storekeeper Hindu, the old Japanese and even the Irish publican, who at once becomes the dull stage Irishman we are all so used to. "Ziss" and "zat" and "zey" and "zink" and "ze" are patronising at the best of times, but are also inefficient and unnecessary. Happily, there is no point in the book where all the foreigners are talking together.

The English come off just as badly in their portrayal; stiff-upper-lipped blimpish effigies all given to using a P. G. Wodehouse jargon spattered with "what", "don't y'know", "topping", "bally", "old chap", "chin-chin", "gad, sir", and "old top". These are people who never were on land or sea. Something of the author's astonishing ineptitude and twee sentimentality is best illustrated in this extract in which the English General Esk, Captain Okada, and Father Glascock are returning by rowing boat to the local mission after a convivial evening aboard a Japanese boat.

Then there it was for everybody's ears, rising, as the breeze waned, waning as it waxed,

faint as far bird-calling to begin with, at length to become that sweetest of all sounds on earth, and surely in the universe, the singing of children in harmony, sweeter because it is always somewhat sad, as if children know deeply that it is expression of their innocence, of a loveliness that cannot last: *Santa Maria, Maria, Maria . . . ora pro nobis . . . ora, ora, ora pro nobis . . . ave, ave, ave . . . Ave Mar-ce-ce-ah!*

Tears glistened in the eyes of Captain Okada, Father Glascock saw them and drooped his dark shaggy head. Esk also dropped his silvery head, murmuring, "How unutterably sweet!"

The best parts of the book deal with Prindy in his relationship as sorcerer's apprentice to the tribal Aboriginal witch-doctor Bob Wirrididirridi, also known as Cock-eye Bob, and with the Aborigines and the countryside of tropical Australia. Bob Wirrididirridi comes cackling out of the pages as the most impressive and convincing of all the characters, a force of nature omnipresent (though in jail for much of the time) throughout the book. The land with all its living things, and in its subtle relationship with the Aborigines and their legends and beliefs, is the other wholly convincing character.

The rest of the book, much the larger part, seems to be expressing a strange nationalism based on anger, hatred, and violence, and finally self-pity. For a good deal of the book the chief theme is the imperial English and their absentee landlordism and their innocent exploitation of the simple innocent Aussie in fighting their wars for them. Much of this is true, but then it is the Australians who are portrayed as cowardly, forelock-touching, abject, stupid, corrupt, and incompetent.

Jeremy becomes involved in a nationalist movement based in the south and in a series of melodramatic events so improbable as to be unintentionally comic. All the political meetings in the book end in violence, and for good measure so does the public meeting in the last few pages which is being addressed by "the First Prince of the Blood" who is an ardent and vocal conservationist (page 1459 and positively the last problem for games players). Jeremy is badly injured in his last meeting in the south and lands up in prison in the hands of the Commonwealth Police with gangrenous testicles which he is only able to save through a natural remedy picked up in his druggist days. He saves his testicles, but not his

spirit, and returns to the north to die, as he hopes, a solitary, with all his foolish and unrealistic hopes unrealised and the war well under way.

The book encompasses seven years and begins with a list of 74 "principal characters". Of these about thirty are of major importance, and out of these there are only nine left alive to tell the tale at the end, most having died by violent means unconnected with the war. There hasn't been such a wholesale literary slaughter since Shakespeare, but at slaughter the resemblance ends, since the book has little poetry and less lyricism in the writing, which is often fadedly old-fashioned and inadequate, and accompanied by creakingly clumsy techniques.

Much of the action of the book is of the fruity melodrama type, but there is a serious and disturbing leitmotiv. Early in the first section we are told of what happened to a woman who disturbed a sacred Aboriginal male ritual. In the course of the book Prindy's possessive mother interferes with a similar ritual twice, and suffers a grisly penalty which results in her death on the second occasion. At the end of the book Prindy's child wife attempts to interfere and we are given a sadistically precise account of what happens to her. It's a savage demonstration of what primitives do to women who interfere in men's business, repeated three times in the book, each time louder than before. Women's liberationists will find much here to ponder on, and to relate to some of the behavior of some Australian males.

*Poor Fellow My Country* is clamorous with rancor, heavy with anger and hatred and disappointment, and a sense of old scores and resentments being paid off at last but without any accompanying catharsis. It is a superficial but deeply bitter picture of a superficial time and a superficial people in the grip of the parochial paternalism of inflexible institutions and their mean-minded servants. It is also a picture of people in isolation and the inflation of ideas that accompanies their attempts to feel significant against the background of an alien and adverse environment. Here, at last, there seems to come to an end the heroic myth of the shrewd, rough, tough, happy bushman with his mateship and his grog and his good nature.

Marred by melodrama, more an embittered tirade than a revelation of the human condition, cheaply sensationalist in much of its action, mawkishly sentimental over much of its length,

*Poor Fellow My Country* is still something of an achievement. In all its great length (and sometimes, like "Blue Hills" one feels that it will go on forever) it is authentically Australian and authentically of an Australian time that continued for too long but, happily, has passed and is unlikely ever to return.

The book contains hundreds of typographical and other errors for which its size is no excuse, and is consequently unfair to both author and reader.

## NOEL COUNIHAN

Bernard Smith

Max Dimmack: *Noel Counihan* (M.U.P., \$28.50).

Those of us who were associated with the first generation of social realist painters in this country (a second emerged in the 1950s) were drawn to the style, I believe because it was the only style that was radically critical both of the *forms* of painting then practised in Australia and of the *function* which art played in Australian society. The avant garde styles such as expressionism, futurism, surrealism, and constructivism, all of which reached Australia almost simultaneously in the years immediately prior to World War II, seemed to us for all their fascination—and they exercised a deep fascination—to be changes in form only, whereas what we were desperately concerned about as political radicals was that art should change its functional role in our society.

This was not the view of the avant garde of the time. In common with their academic opponents they maintained that the artist had no business with politics or with social concerns. Everybody who was anybody at that time seemed to believe with Clive Bell that "the only good thing society can do for the artist is to leave him alone".

By contrast we were inspired by the work of the Mexican muralists who drew upon the Mexican revolution and the life of the peasantry for the sources of their art; we read with excitement of the work of the Federal Arts Project (under Roosevelt) in seeking to bring the artist and his work out into public places and make it a popular concern. We were well aware of the close involvement of French painters throughout the nineteenth century with social and political concerns, and that at this time French painting led the world: and we were moved by the deep sense of humanity that we found in the work of Brueghel, Rembrandt, Goya and Courbet.



Our position however was compromised—almost fatally compromised—by the fact that social realism (in the nineteenth century an art of minority protest) had been adopted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the official style of the party and the state and was being used (for more than a decade before we came to it) to repress by terror, imprisonment and exile all forms of artistic expression opposed to it.

Small wonder that most Australian artists and critics abjured politics altogether. Yet for a few the conviction remained that the avant garde protests were a series of palace coups, revolts that left the social function of art unchanged.

In the circumstance a whole spectrum of positions emerged among the artists and intellectuals of the Left: hybrid forms of realism developed linked variously with the more acceptable avant garde forms: expressionism, surrealism, and the like. The moves were largely an honest endeavor to find a way out of the dilemma: that is to find a way to avoid using realism purely for the purposes of disseminating political propaganda, whilst developing it as a mode that was capable of expressing personal political involvement and social concern. In this difficult situation Noel Counihan, more single-mindedly and in the end probably more effectively than any other artist in Australia, managed to develop from social realism that sense of conviction that is conveyed by a personal style.

The strength of his art grew from its professionalism grounded in drawing, in cartoon and caricature. Here the comparison with Daumier is close and instructive. For both the cartoon was the economic mainstay; and the mode by means of which direct comment on pressing social and political matters might be made. By contrast painting came slowly. It acted as a reflexive medium by which past events in the artist's life could be transformed into celebrations and records of wrongs done, of evils committed, of the humiliation of the weak and the defenceless. A kind of history painting of the back streets. Counihan in this respect belongs to the revolutionary tradition within romanticism; an art in which emotion is recollected, not in tranquillity but with a kind of brooding retrospective sympathy. In this his paintings are quite distinct in tone from the satire and irony of his cartoons. "The Start of the March", painted in 1944, has as its subject an unemployed procession remembered from 1932; "Woman with Candle" (1972)

recalls a childhood experience. True, not all of his paintings were composed in this way. The fine Wonthaggi series, for example, followed fairly soon after the drawings made in the mines. But his best and most memorable paintings possess this retrospective quality.

Max Dimmack's admirable monograph is arranged so that we may gain a better understanding of Counihan's distinctive contributions to the cartoon and caricature, to original print-making, to drawing, to the painting of social genre and to portraiture. He recounts Counihan's childhood in a family "clouded by religious disputes and bitterness", and also by violence; how he first made contact with the arts as a boy chorister for five years in St Paul's cathedral choir, Melbourne; his friendship with Eddie Richardson, who widened his appreciation of art and literature. It was Richardson who lent him Merejkowski's biography of Leonardo, *The Forerunner*; and it was this book, it would seem, that made him decide to become an artist. It was a critical time, with the country's economy tilting into the great depression of the 1930s. Counihan, after twelve months at Caulfield Grammar, gained a job in a workshop in Flinders Lane, attended night classes at the Gallery School and met up with the left-wing circle of artists that foregathered in the workshop of William Dolphin, the violin maker, and were associated with the magazine *Stream*. It included Cyril Pearl, Alwyn Lee, Gino Nibbi, Guido Barrachi, Adrian Lawlor and others. Artists closely associated with him at this time included Herbert McClintock, Nutter Buzacott and Roy Dalgarno.

Counihan became a political activist, and, unlike most Australian artists of his generation who were drawn to marxism, in those years, remained so. For example, in protest against the suppression of street meetings in Melbourne, he had himself locked in a cage bolted to a truck, in which he defied the police for 25 minutes before being arrested. His successful appeal led to the revision of the existing legislation in the Street Meetings Act of 1933.

In the mid 1930s Counihan met Danila Vassiliev, and was impressed by his paintings of the Woolloomooloo and Surry Hills area of Sydney. (The history of urban painting in Australia still needs to be written—it is after all a predominantly urban society, and not all of our artists have hankered after the blue hills and the Dead Heart.) Later he became intensely involved in the

politics associated with the early years of the Contemporary Art Society.

Counihan's passionate political commitment might have destroyed some artists of a different temperament; it provided him with a kind of sheet-anchor to his development. He became the only social realist to pursue his popular-unpopular art from one decade to the next, supported by a few friends and one or two dealers, who recognised in Counihan (whatever they thought of his politics) an artist who was his own man; not a

hack in a dealer's stable. Others who painted as well, and often with greater sensitivity to the nuances of paint and personal feeling, lacked the toughness of mind and spirit to see it through.

One day someone will write the history of realism in Australian painting. It will be a history mostly of defeat. But it will be worth writing. And it should throw a harsh new light on the nature of *successful* achievement in the Australian art world.

1967

"Would that volunteer, eighteen years old,  
Have told those conscripts, aged the same,  
That, no fear, his was a just war?  
I can hear him mumbling the secret of his war:  
'Well, if she's on, you might as well be in it.'  
Geoffrey Dutton, 'Conscripts at the  
Airport'.  
No. 36, Winter 1967, p. 20.

1968

"We in Australia may learn to distrust the  
authoritarianism of the dogmatist."  
Editorial.  
No. 39, Spring 1968, p. 6.

1969

"The idea of progress combines with the Aus-  
tralian hedonistic myth to prevent any questioning  
of either the reality or the direction of the pro-  
gress."

John McLaren, 'Electronic Progress'.  
No. 41, Winter 1969, p. 8.

1970

"There's nothing new in all this mayhem, car-  
nage and fouling of the national scene. We've just  
grown more efficient, more mobile, better trained  
in the use of our deadly machines. I would never  
have believed we could slaughter a whole con-  
tinent, as we are now doing our hell-bent best  
to do. Australia was too vast, I thought always."

George Farwell, 'Holy Mess'.  
No. 43, Summer 1969-70, p. 13.

1971

"Along the street there are no growing things:  
Lamp-posts, traffic lights and parking signs are  
bare;

Nothing's growing, nothing yields up anything."

Kenneth Ellis, 'The Plastic-Picker'.  
No. 49, Spring 1971, p. 38.

1972

"In Australia there was probably less social in-  
justice and more happiness than in any other  
country in the world, so that a negative resent-  
ment of evil did not cloud the vision of the good."

Martin Boyd, 'De Gustibus'.  
Nos. 50/51, Autumn 1972, p. 9.

1973

"Certainly I feel excitement at a genuine change  
of atmosphere. Despite dangers that the 'new  
nationalism', given an extra shove or two, could  
turn into the old chauvinism, there does seem to  
be a new and genuine maturity, a less nervous  
attitude towards the rest of the world, less of  
the old embattled defiance and an acceptance of  
Australia as just one nation among a galaxy of  
nations each with its own character and interests."

Alan Seymour, 'You can go home  
again'.  
No. 56, Spring 1973, p. 36.

1974

"The Australian assumes that any sort of good  
life is dependent upon the existence of a depend-  
ably *stable* society. The best, most rewarding life  
can only be lived when the individual can be sure  
that certain ideals, certain structures, certain pat-  
terns, will remain substantially unchanged. There  
must be peace — physical, political, and intellec-  
tual peace — before there can be pleasure or  
meaning."

William R. Tanksley, 'Dear Endeavor II'.  
No. 58, Winter 1974, p. 10.

1975

"I always thought that my generation's virtue  
was . . . that we move very freely in the land-  
scape, and we don't have to have a great deal  
of thought about it at all. And therefore we can  
work quite freely from it."

Fred Williams, 'Artists Camp'.  
No. 60, Autumn 1975, p. 50.

# Last time the Colonel won a medal he nearly collapsed.

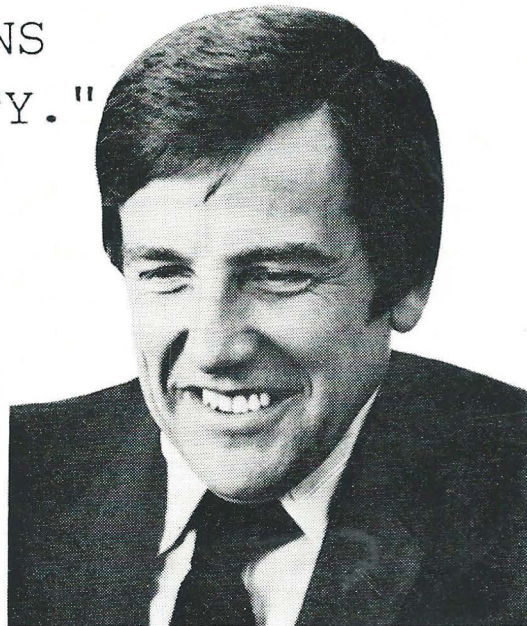
Not that he didn't expect a medal after wiping out a band of Antarctic Walrus poachers single-handed. It's just that he was starting to feel weighed down with his achievements.

It's about time medals were made from aluminium. Besides being light and easy to wear, they wouldn't corrode on long sea voyages.

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