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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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MORRIS LURIE

Outrageous Behaviour

He had never slept in before, not ever, not once. Six mornings of the week he was gone before Moses woke up, out of the house just after seven, wearing, every day of the year, summer and winter, his gabardine coat, spotty, baggy, likewise his shapeless hat, and in his left hand his famous gladstone bag, the sides so broken from years of flinging it to the ground that it hung down from its handle like an accordion (and on the ground it was a leather puddle, with rubbed-raw patches and deep cracks and the shiny handle foolishly swimming somewhere in the middle); and on the seventh, Sunday, Moses would awake to the clatter of the lawnmower on the lawn just outside his window, the old hand mower, on wet mornings to the high whirr of the blades spinning uselessly, the wheels locked and skidding, gouging deep scars in the grass, to sounds of puffing, grunting, a savage kick to get the wheels free, red-faced, impatient sounds, lasting rarely more than ten minutes, perhaps fifteen, the lawn an obstacle to be got over, finished, done, never mind the cruel scars, the untouched clumps, the wild, waving edges. He claimed he did it for pleasure, but the evidence was no. Or was impatience his style? Noisiness certainly was. He was noisy in the kitchen (this woke Moses up, if the lawnmowing hadn't), banging cupboards, slamming drawers, rattling cutlery and plates. When he clapped the kettle down onto the stove it rang like a cymbal. He ate noisily too. Listen to him drinking tea! He slept sometimes on Sunday afternoons—a *drimmel*, he called it, a little dream—hunched under a plaid rug on the settee in the front room, the rug pulled up tight, almost over his head, and then he would wake up, slouch to the bathroom, wash his face—another noisy business—run his fingers through what was left of his hair, and then, hands in pockets, walk around the house, poking his nose into every room, and then outside, a slow circuit, proprietorial, proud, a landowner surveying his property, checking out that everything was in order, nodding to a neighbor, looking up at the sky. And then he made some tea. His habits, his ways. But he had never slept in before, not ever, not once, and though Moses sensed there was something wrong he didn't know what to do.

"Dad?" Moses called softly. "Dad? Are you all right?"

Sunday morning. Ten o'clock. A hot Melbourne morning in February, going to be hotter. Moses stood in the doorway of his father's room.

"Dad?"

He was barely visible. His head had slipped down, almost off the pillow, the big European feather pillow Moses' mother had brought from Poland thirty years ago, just the top, the very top, of his head showing over the lumpy eiderdown (she had brought that too), grizzled, grey. The pillow on the other side of the bed, her pillow, was untouched. Moses' father never ventured to that side of the double bed, never encroached an inch, hadn't from the day Moses' mother went to hospital, a year ago. Where, twenty days ago, finally, wasted, exhausted, frail beyond belief, having lasted longer than anyone had thought possible, the doctors, the specialists, endless consultants—but not Moses, Moses believed nothing they said, they were just words, this was his *mother*—she had died.

Moses called again. Now his father began to sit up. There was something wrong. He looked dazed. His eyes were bleary, distant, not quite in focus. Moses had never seen his father like this before. "Hey, you slept in," Moses said, smiling foolishly, coming into the room.

His father blinked. His cheeks were frosted

with bristles. His lips were dry. He looked pale, veined, his skin like antique porcelain crazed under the glaze, like the thinnest paper. Moses was twenty-four, his father almost sixty, but it had never entered Moses' mind, and it didn't *now, that his father was old.*

"What's the time?" his father said. "It's late. I'll be late for work."

And there was something wrong with his voice.

"Dad," Moses said. "It's Sunday. You don't go to work today." Out came another foolish smile. "It's Sunday," he said again. "You slept in."

His father frowned, not looking at Moses, ignoring him. He sat up properly. He pushed the eiderdown away. His feet, his white feet, touched the carpet by the side of the bed. "Late," he said, and then he moaned. His hand came up to his brow. "Headache," he said. "Terrible headache."

"Go back to bed, Dad," Moses said. He heard his own voice coming out strange too, too high, too thin. "Would you like some aspirin? I'll bring you a cup of tea. Go back to bed. Please."

Moses hurried to the bathroom, then to the kitchen. Aspirin. Water. The kettle on the stove. Moses spilt tea leaves, couldn't see the milk. The kettle whistled, pluming out steam. Sugar. A spoon. He made the tea, put everything on a tray, lifted it carefully, but when he came back to the bedroom, his father had gone.

Then Moses heard the front gate banging and when he ran outside he saw that his father was already halfway down the street, wearing his gabardine coat, his shapeless hat, his accordion gladstone bag hanging from his customary left hand.

Mr Harris next door was washing his car, Mr Williamson in the next house was clipping his hedge, the Slaters were out, the Beatons, old Mr Thurgrove in number nine was standing in his garden with his arms crossed, scrawny Mr Thurgrove in a dirty singlet, squinting into the sun, everyone was out and busy and looking and talking as Moses went down the street, eyes down, trying not to run. Someone said "Good morning," someone called, someone waved. Moses ignored them all, his face on fire as he hurried past.

He caught up with him outside the Millers, jaunty Mrs Miller in a shiny bikini snipping at roses, the rhinestones on her sunglasses flashing. Moses put his hand gently on his father's arm. "Where are you going, Dad?" he said. "It's Sunday. You don't go to work today."

His father turned and looked at him blankly, as though he had never seen Moses before, his eyes puzzled, vague. His mouth opened but no *words came out.*

"Come home, Dad," Moses said softly, keeping his hand on his father's arm, turning him around, and together they walked back up the street, Moses not looking at anyone, his father not saying a word.

He helped him off wth his coat, his jacket, back into his pyjamas. His father pulled the eiderdown up and was asleep at once. For a full minute Moses stood and looked down at his father, hardly daring to breathe, and then he tiptoed out. In the hall he stared at the phone, stared and stared, but how could he call the doctor, how, what could he say, just twenty days after his mother had died?

Doctor Rose said he'd come at once, be there in an hour. Moses wanted to go outside and stand in the street, but he couldn't with the neighbors there. He tiptoed to his father's doorway, saw that he hadn't moved, was still asleep, and then tiptoed away. Where? The kitchen? The front room? He went out to the garden in the back. He stared at the lawn, at the scars, at the clumps. He wondered should he mow it, but he thought, no, not now. He checked on his father again. Still asleep. He sat on the back step and smoked a cigarette, and then another, and finally he heard a car, and then a knock on the front door, and as he went past his father's room to let the doctor in, he saw that his father had once again gone.

Doctor Rose, good Family Doctor Rose, wearing a gaudy Hawaiian-type sports shirt loose outside his trousers, wearing canvas espadrilles and no socks, wearing a thoughtful frown, caressed his thick black moustache with the edge of a thumbnail and said it was flu. He said if he didn't eat anything, not to worry, that was all right. He said to give him liquids, tea, orange juice, water, but only if he asked for them. He said aspirin, maybe, but don't wake him up specially. Let him sleep, he said. The best thing was just to let him sleep. He said he'd look in again in the morning, and in the meantime not to worry.

"But he keeps getting dressed," Moses said. "He keeps putting on his clothes and taking his bag and going off to work. He doesn't even know it's Sunday. He doesn't seem to know anything."

"Watch him," Doctor Rose said.

Moses watched him. The house was still. Moses sat in the front room, in the kitchen, in his room, smoking, trying to read, just sitting, every ten minutes tiptoeing to his father's doorway and looking in. His father slept and slept. The afternoon waned. Moses wondered should he phone someone, an uncle, a family friend, to tell them what was happening, but he couldn't bring himself to pick up the phone. He didn't, somehow, trust his voice. And what was there to tell? That his father was asleep? Why alarm everyone? The doctor said it was flu. He said to let him sleep. He said he'd be all right.

But he looked at me, Moses said to himself, and he didn't know who I was. He didn't even know I was there.

The house, as the afternoon waned, as the sun retreated, as night began to fall, grew even stiller, the public, outside sounds—cars, hoses, mowers, people talking and laughing, children running, people walking past—gone now, replaced by private, inside sounds—Mrs Harris next door in her kitchen humming to herself as she washed up, a radio, someone's muffled TV. A door opened somewhere on an argument, and then closed again with a bang. Moses sat in the front room and felt the stillness deepening, spreading around him like ink.

Silence.

The whole past year had been silent, but in a different way, a different kind of silence. A busy silence. Hospital visits. Going there. Coming back. Silent meals. Silent thoughts. And then, suddenly, twenty days ago—nothing. Suddenly, nowhere to go, nothing to do. All those things, those routines—they *had* become routines—taken away. Moses and his father sat in the house, like strangers on a ship, forced into each other's company. Moses didn't know what to say. His father said nothing. Another kind of silence. A vacuum. A void.

And now this silence.

Moses stood up. Oh, for God's sake, he told himself, he's only got the flu! He snatched up his cigarettes, lit one, blew smoke. His hands, he saw, were trembling. Stop it! he told himself. He went quickly to his father's room and stood in the doorway.

"Dad?" he said.

He was awake. He was looking up at the ceiling, not moving, his brow creased. The room smelled stale, close.

"You're awake," Moses said. "Do you want anything? How's your headache? Do you feel better?"

His father mumbled something but Moses didn't catch what it was.

"Stay there," Moses said, "I'll bring you a cup of tea."

Moses helped his father sit up. His father brought his hands out from under the eiderdown and reached for the tea. His eyes were still dazed, bleary. He took two sips, three, and then fell back onto the pillow. He mumbled something. "What?" Moses said, leaning closer to hear. "What did you say, Dad?" "I want . . ." his father said, and then he was sick. He was violently sick, on the eiderdown, on the carpet, on Moses' hand. And then he fell back again, moaned, and closed his eyes.

Moses phoned Doctor Rose. He was there in twenty minutes, still wearing his gaudy Hawaiian-type shirt, but tucked inside his trousers now, a jacket over it. He had also put on socks. Moses' father was awake, but didn't say anything while Doctor Rose examined him, listened to his chest, looked at his eyes. "He had some tea," Moses said, "but only a few sips. . ." Doctor Rose went past him and into the hall. "I'll use your phone," he said.

Moses sat with Doctor Rose in the front room, waiting for the ambulance. Moses smoked a cigarette. "I know how you feel," Doctor Rose said. Moses looked down at his feet.

It was the same hospital, the same wing. Moses was asked to sign some forms. A nurse asked did he want a cup of tea. Moses shook his head. He waited in a corridor. Nurses and sisters walked past quickly on the cold, squeaky floor. Twenty minutes, thirty. Then someone called Moses' name, and then a doctor, Moses didn't catch his name, a tall man with tired eyes, told Moses that his father had suffered a brain haemorrhage, something about pressure, impossible to do anything just at the moment, but he was comfortable, the best they could do. The doctor said to go home, get some sleep, come back in the morning. Moses asked when visiting hours were. The doctor said he could come any time.

Will he die? Will my father die? Is my father going to die? Impossible! Of course not! Don't be stupid; Moses refused to let the idea, the possibility, enter his head. Or if it did, he pushed it immediately away.

He made himself busy. He made phone calls.

He repeated, endlessly, what the doctor had told him, to uncles, cousins, family friends, everyone he could think of to call, standing in the hall at home, trying to be efficient, brisk. When he phoned Mrs Salter, an old family friend, and she began to wail, Moses tried to cut her short. "They told me he's comfortable," he said, and started to hang up, but she went on and on, and he couldn't. He tried not to listen, staring down at his feet, her wails and moans boring into his ear, impossible to escape, but finally she finished, and Moses, quickly, phoned someone else.

Who else? Who have I forgotten?

They were all his mother's family, the people Moses phoned, the uncles, the cousins, and the friends too, people Moses' father had never really liked, had never really had any time for, had tolerated at best, sitting uncomfortably in their houses, restless, impatient, or when they came here, the same, berating them when they had gone, mocking them, bored by them, but never to their faces, because who else was there, what else was there to do? He had no family here — his were in Israel, or Palestine as it was when he had left there, in the thirties, coming here alone, intending to stay just one year, make some money, go back. Instead, lonely, friendless, a rough, wide-shouldered young man, already balding, already grey, whose pleasure was in his body — in Palestine he had worked in a quarry, splitting rocks in the sun, "A beautiful life," he told Moses over and over, "a real life" — he married. He had a brother there, two sisters, cousins, a complicated family tree Moses had never been able to unravel and his father had not bothered properly to explain, a private world he kept to himself, reading their letters almost secretly, and never out loud. Moses thought of getting in touch with Israel, a phone call, a cable, but he wasn't exactly sure how to go about it, who to contact, and somehow all that seemed too dramatic. Not now. It was after midnight. Moses brushed his teeth and went to bed.

He phoned the hospital at eight the next morning and was told that his father's condition was unchanged. "I'll be there in half-an-hour," Moses said. He splashed water onto his face, didn't waste time shaving or having breakfast, ran down the street for a cab. When he got to the hospital, hurried along endless corridors, past endless doors, and then slowed down, stopped, came carefully into the ward, he saw that overnight his father had changed.

Amazingly.

His eyes were no longer bleary. There was color in his cheeks. He was sitting up, or trying to. There was a nurse by the side of the bed, her hands on his shoulders, trying to get him to lie down. Moses' father was shouting at her, telling her to leave him alone. His language was coarse and obscene. Moses came slowly forward, not sure what to do. Then the nurse turned and saw him. She was a small woman, in her forties, with a sharp, mousy face. She looked very annoyed.

"Who are you?" she snapped at Moses.

"That's my father," Moses said. "I've come to see him."

"Oh," she said. Her face fell, but only for a second. "Well, he's behaving *abominably,*" she said, her face hardening again. "Dreadful man. He's upsetting everyone in the ward."

"Dora! Dora!" Moses' father shouted. "I'm coming! I'm getting out of this stinking place!"

"Listen to him," the nurse said. "I'm going to get the doctor."

"Yes," Moses said.

Moses advanced to the side of his father's bed. There were rails on it, like a child's cot. "Dad," he said softly. "You mustn't shout. You'll only make yourself worse."

His father ignored him, didn't even look at him. "They can't keep me here!" he shouted to the ceiling. "I've been here long enough! I'm coming, Dora, I'm coming!"

He fell back onto his pillow. He laughed. He shouted some dirty words. And then he began to sing. Moses stood speechless by the side of the bed. Then someone tapped him on the shoulder, and a doctor, a new doctor, asked him to step out into the corridor.

There was nothing they could do. The pressure was still there. They were waiting, hoping to take an X-ray. Something about tests. Meanwhile . . . The doctor said it was all right if Moses smoked.

When Moses went back into the ward, his father was quiet again. His eyes were open, but he wasn't looking at anything. He didn't seem to know that Moses was there. Moses sat on a chair by the side of the bed. At twelve o'clock a nurse told him to go and have some lunch.

Now they began to arrive, the uncles, the cousins, the people Moses had phoned, and Moses' father seemed delighted to see them. He sat up. He laughed. He sang. His face was very red, his eyes faded but clear.

"Ah, the fat pig!" he shouted at Moses' Uncle

David. "How are you, you thief, how's business? Don't buy from him," he told everyone in the ward. "He's a *ganef!* Black market! Stolen goods!" He laughed. "Well, you're not going to steal from me," he told Uncle David. "You're too late. I'm going. Dora? Can you hear me? I'm on my way!"

He berated, he ridiculed, he laughed. "Ah, the little *pisher!*" he greeted Moses' Uncle Abe. "You've come just in time. He thinks he's a hot-shot," he told the ward, "a gambler. Ha! His whole card-playing isn't worth a *fortz!*"

Mrs Salter crept into the ward, a handkerchief to her eyes. "The dirty tongue has come," Moses' father said, "Well, I don't need dirty tongues. You know what dirty tongues can do?" he told her.

"Oi oi," wailed Mrs Salter, "what's he saying? He doesn't know what he's saying any more."

Moses' father chuckled, and then he moaned. He was obviously in great pain, but he wouldn't lie down, he wouldn't stop. He seemed somehow very happy. Mrs Salter began to cry. A nurse came and asked her to leave.

"You better go too," she said to Moses. "Let him rest."

"I'm all right here," Moses said, not moving from his chair by the side of the bed.

The nurse drew the screen around the bed, sealing it off from the ward. Moses sat alone with his father. "Dad?" he said. "Dad?" His father stared up at the ceiling and didn't say a word.

Because I never mowed the lawn, Moses said. Because I never helped him in the garden. Is that why? Is that why he won't speak to me, or even look at me, not even once, just to see that I'm there? But he speaks to everyone else. And he hates them. Why not to me?

But it was no *pleasure* to work with him, Moses said. He never did anything properly. Bang, smash, he didn't care how anything looked. Chewing up the lawn. Weeds all over the place. And whenever I went out to straighten things up, he'd walk away. Or stand there, criticizing me. "Where's your muscles? You call that an arm? Ha! I've seen better muscles on a chicken!"

What did he want from me? What did he want me to be?

Like him? Did he want me to be like him? I can't. That's just not me. He's got no ambition, he never wanted to be anything. Breaking rocks in a quarry in Palestine. I can't do that.

Moses sat and looked down at his hands. And there came to him a morning a long time ago—five years ago? six? — a cold morning, close to rain. His father and he were chopping down a tree. It was an old tree, probably dead, or if not, certainly dying, and anyhow it was in the way. There wasn't room in the back garden for a proper washing line. First his father chopped, and then Moses took the axe, and in ten minutes, working together, they had it down. It was hard work and they were both in a sweat. Rain began to spit. Then Moses' mother came out and saw them both standing there, and the tree on the lawn. She looked alarmed. She always looked alarmed. "Moses," she cried, "it's raining! Put on a jumper! You'll get a cold!" "Don't worry, Mum," Moses said, "I'm all right." He laughed. "A bit of rain never hurt anyone," he said. Then Moses' father clapped Moses on the shoulder and said, "Not bad shoulders he's got, uh?" And then added, quickly, "When he stands up straight."

I'm sorry, Dad, Moses said, sitting in the dark. I'm sorry. He felt, suddenly, that spot on his left hand where his father had been sick, where he had brought up the tea. His hand, just there, felt scraped, scalded, burnt.

Moses came every morning, stayed all day, sat and sat. There was nothing the doctors could do. He slept longer and longer, waking up to laugh and sing and shout at whoever was there. He called them thieves, liars, gluttons, and worse. His face was tight with pain. He didn't once speak to Moses, and when he looked at him, his eyes were blank.

Six days, seven days, eight.

On the ninth day he was asleep all the time, though once or twice he moaned, softly, with almost no power or strength. The doctors still hadn't been able to do anything. A nurse brought Moses a cup of tea. It grew cold on the floor by his feet.

At eight o'clock on the tenth morning Moses came into the ward and saw his father lying curled on one side, his eyes squeezed tight. Moses sat down beside him. The ward was very quiet. His father looked as though he was trying to push something out of his way, a massive boulder, a gigantic rock. He was pushing with every part of his face. His cheeks blossomed with thin red veins, a network, a map. He was like that for an hour, exactly the same, straining and pushing, but never once moving, and then his eyes came open a fraction. A nurse came in and very

softly began to draw the screens around the bed.

In the corridor a doctor, a very young doctor, his stethoscope poking out of the pocket of his crisp, white jacket like a badge to an exclusive club, put his hand on Moses' shoulder and said he was very, very sorry. He asked Moses would he like to sit down quietly for a while. Moses shook his head.

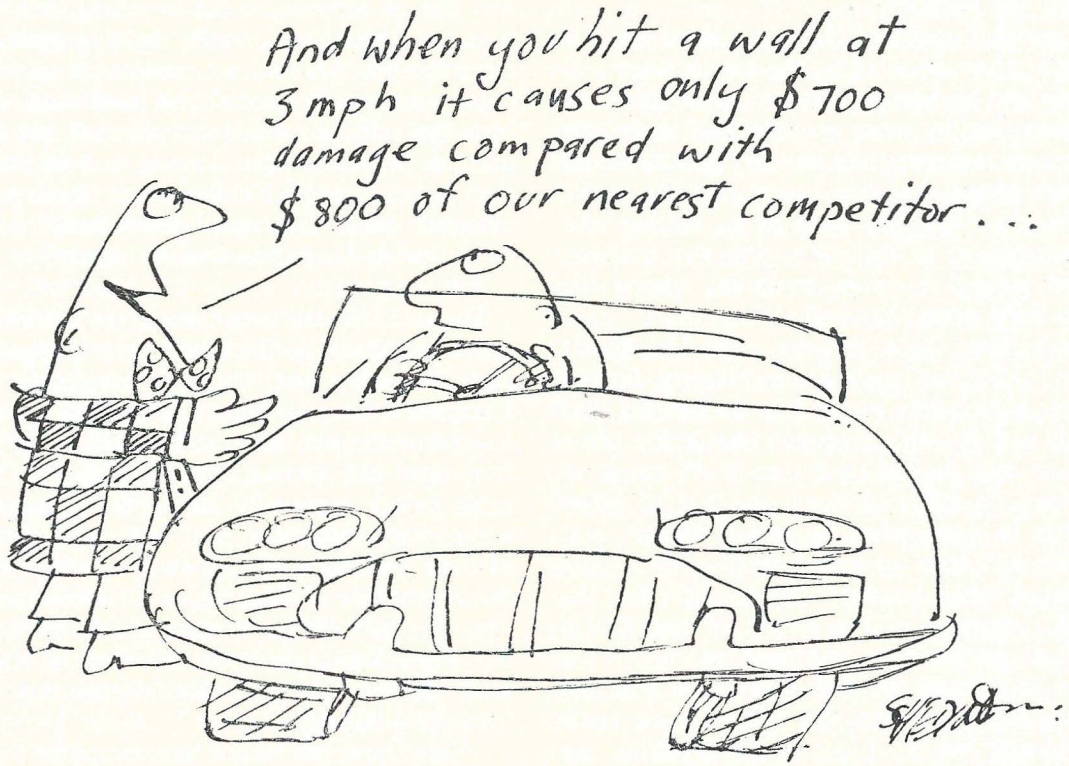
Outside, on the steps, the trees across the road moving like smoke, Moses saw someone hurrying towards him. Mrs Salter. She was carrying, in one hand, a large black handbag, an enormous thing, and in the other a string bag filled with fruit. She saw Moses and her eyes turned instantly weepy and wet.

"What's happened?" she said. Moses didn't say anything. "Oi oi," wailed Mrs Salter, fussing for something in her handbag. "Why didn't you phone me?" Out came a handkerchief. "He's gone, he's gone, such a beautiful man," she wailed. "When will we see such a beautiful man again?" She dabbed at her eyes, her nose, but looking at Moses all the time. "And what will happen to you now, a boy, all alone in the world? Oi oi." Her hand took hold of the lapel of Moses' jacket. "But why didn't you phone me, tell me, so someone could be with him there? From the family?"

Moses stared at Mrs Salter's face. He stared at her crabbed mouth, at her pinched, hard eyes, her sudden tears. Her hand on his lapel felt like a claw. He felt something rising inside him like bile. He felt himself swelling and trembling. He saw himself pushing Mrs Salter, savagely, flinging her aside, her string bag of fruit flying down the steps, and her vile black handbag, and Mrs Salter too, her falsely snivelling face, her deceitful eyes, down the steps they crashed. He saw himself shouting at her as she fell — "Hypocrite! Dirty mouth! Liar! Filth!"

And then he felt on his hand that spot where his father had been sick, that scald, that burn, that chastisement he knew then he would feel forever, feel on his hand for the rest of his life. He had no right to outrage, no right to speak. He was as guilty as any of them. More.

His eyes fell. "Excuse me," he said to Mrs Salter, or maybe he didn't even say that, and quietly he went past her, his eyes on fire but not with tears — they would come later, when he was alone, when there was no one to see, his tears of grief and shame — eyes lowered he walked quietly away, down the steps.



Stephen Scheding

Monologue, with Interruptions

LAURIE CLANCY

Once started, Smithy never stopped talking. "It's been a long time, hasn't it?" She sucked nervously on the straw of her brandy and dry. "Do you remember Wolfgang?"

Sam Jarrold nodded.

"Seven years I went out with that bastard. It wasn't for two that I started to fuck with him. It was against his principles at first. For two years." She sucked again on the ice cubes at the bottom of her glass, making a loud noise and staring thoughtfully at the Ansett picture of Bourke Street, taken with a telephoto lens, on the wall near the lavatory.

"I'll get you another." Jarrold heaved himself out of the chair, looking at the two strangers at the table and wondering how much of this they could hear. Smithy wore overalls, had short hair and wore no make-up, and her tiny breasts would have been almost invisible except that the man's shirt she wore had lost most of its buttons and was open almost to the waist. She was bra-less, and had created a minor sensation among the business suits when they had walked in.

"I saw him three months ago. He hadn't changed at all." She laughed incredulously. Jarrold had come back with a pot of beer for himself, and a brandy and dry with no straw. She took a piece of ice out and sucked loudly on it. "I swear to God, Sam, he still had the same pair of green corduroys he wore when he was a student, and they were still held up with a tie."

"One of life's eternal verities, eh? An untouched fisherman in the stream of time?" He felt this trope could be improved upon.

"You don't know the half of it. When I fucked with him I was a virgin and neither of us knew about having babies. I got pregnant within the first months and he wanted me to have an abortion. He found out about *that* soon enough," she said bitterly. "So I had an abortion at a place in Fitzroy. And a doctor I saw later told me I'd never have a kid. God, I was shitty on him. Men just don't *understand* anything like that. Know what I mean?"

Sam felt the alcohol flowing slowly through his bloodstream. Life had not failed to make an impression on Smithy. She was Merryn now, had become an actress and a painter, a mother, a radical, a women's libber, had slept with the girls as well as the boys, and when she had rung up to suggest a drink and said, "It's Smithy here", it was like an atavistic return to a forgotten, unreal past, a forlorn and sadly moving gesture of remembrance. She was a tomboy no longer. Now, every contemporary social and intellectual current blew through and around and over her and shoved her this way and that. Jarrold concentrated. A click went through his mind and his expression changed from Concerned–Interested–Fascinated to Knowing–Understanding–Avuncular.

She went on.

He said, "I can recommend the rabbit. That menu over there on the blackboard changes every day. The other one, over the bar, is the same. Everyone comes to Simeoni's for the food." He looked at the two men at the tiny table. To be fair, they had waited quite a while for a free table before eventually sitting down here when none was forthcoming, and now were going out of their way not to listen, or at least not to give the appearance of listening, to a conversation that was obviously intriguing them. In the silence that fell when Smithy became absorbed in trying to read the menu without her glasses they began frantically talking.

"You know, we've got this computer in Hong Kong. It centralizes the whole operation. Last month we sent 56,000 telexes, you know that? I

swear to God Rupert wants to be dictator of the world."

"Then I fucked wth Manfred for about four months. You remember Manfred? He was that German poet in our fourth year seminar." Sam was foundering in the depths of the early sixties. Of course. He had given a seminar paper on the water images in Jacobean drama, counting them up. With Teutonic thoroughness, one by one. It had taken most of the ninety minutes of the class. Once, in an inexplicable burst of confidence, he had shown Sam two poems he had written. One, he vaguely recalled, was about the Crucifixion and was written in tetrameters. The other had begun "Another day, another death". In return, shocked into an unprecedented attempt at intimacy, Sam had shown him his own current literary effort, a mawkish, dreadful love sonnet addressed to a girl he was too frightened to speak to. How had it begun? "If I could make a thousand ugly crocodiles/Zip down the Nile, their tails between their legs . . ." Manfred had laughed out loud, heartily, with sincere enjoyment. Since then Sam had never made the mistake of writing poetry. Instead he became Successful, a university lecturer.

"Do you remember Terence?" Good God, how many more ghosts would she dredge up out of that loathsome past? Terence. Smithy's honest, translucent, unmade-up and beautiful face had begun to glow with recollection. Clearly, she was on what she herself might have called a memory trip. Sam tried to listen to the telexes and find out who Rupert was while at the same time putting on another mask, another anti-self, half-tender, half-tough, bitter-sweet, yes, those were the days nostalgia. "God, he was a prick." A beetle had begun to crawl slowly across the table and Sam watched it intently. Neither Smithy nor the two men had noticed it. "For some reason I had a crush on him when I was a kid. I used to follow him around, make a real nuisance of myself. He used to tell me to piss off. He had very little capacity," she said, "to enter into other people's minds." Sam was watching the beetle, which had stopped up against a coaster advertising a mediocre brand of Scotch.

"Boy, I really had a crush on him. He took no notice of me at all. Then one night he came to a party at my place I hadn't told him was on. We all got pretty drunk. I finished up going to bed by myself about two o'clock in the morning. I had on my bra and my panties. Then, a while later I felt Terence get into bed beside me. He took off my bra and my briefs and I thought, well, God, this is it, he's finally going to do it, fuck me, and I thought, well, okay, though he hadn't shown much ceremony." She put down her glass, right on top of the beetle, without noticing. Sam deftly swept its squashed remains from the table with a paper napkin. "Then he just pressed his prick against my bum and came and said, Oh God, and went to sleep. I thought, okay, if that's all he can manage." She sighed.

"Then next day I see him around the uni, and he walks right by me without looking at me or saying a word, that cold red face of his turned away as if I was the harlot he'd spent the night with, but wouldn't recognize during the day."

Adrian . . . Dave . . . Malcolm . . . Malcolm was a broadcaster with the ABC and had criticized her accent. She had fucked with him, she said, for about six months. Sam tried to count up the ten or more years since he had been a student and a confidant of Smithy's, before they had drifted in different directions. They had left college, the Mayfair had closed, he had gone overseas. Her voice tolled on like a mournful, insistent bell. "Then I found that bastard of a doctor had made a mistake. I'd stopped taking precautions. I'd been fucking with Robert for about four years when I got pregnant again. I wasn't going to lose the kid this time. When I told Robert he freaked, and then a few days later he shot through. Bloody Mary was born seven months later." She looked at Sam. "Do you fuck with many girls?"

He looked nonplussed, minused. He shrugged. "I'm like the ancient mariner. I stoppeth one of three." He couldn't talk now, except out of books. They were not only his livelihood, but his defence, his security. He thought of his lecture on Blake that morning, "The Passion of William Blake" it had been in its published form, and of the handful of students who had walked out. Did he really have anything to say to them? Was their rudeness just that or were they exercising their discriminating judgment as well, voting with their feet?

"Then I met Gerry. He wanted to marry me, kid and all." Two sole tears, one from each eye, were trickling absurdly down her face but her voice was composed as ever, flat, atonal, as if she were speaking of someone else. The two sales representatives had given up all pretence of conversation. "That was the only stable arrangement I ever had. He was a dull guy, doing a Ph.D.

that never got finished on Gibbon's *Roman Empire*. But sometimes he was fun because he was so stupid. One night we had a couple of academics from Melbourne uni. over to dinner. Gerry ran out of plates. So he grabbed a twelve-inch record from the cabinet and spread the dinner on that. Ha!" She suddenly laughed. "Spaghetti and meat sauce served on the Eroica! And one of the academics a music lecturer who looked like a jockey. The sauce oozed through the hole in the middle. I never told him that he fixed any chance he had for a job at Melbourne that night. The story spread like wildfire."

The younger of the salesmen winked at Sam, who fixed on him a look of such concentrated hatred and anger that the man paled suddenly and looked away, quickly finishing his drink.

"That was the only exciting thing Gerry ever did. But we had a stable relationship."

"What happened to it?" asked Sam, who had begun to slide slowly under the table. His long, thin, bony white legs showed beyond the cuffs of his trousers. They looked like twin hairy turnips. He inspected them with care.

"I left him. He was too dull." She had become absorbed in the photograph of Bourke Street, with its trams apparently only inches away from the camera and ready to bear down upon it. Covertly, Sam watched her. Even dressed as she was, in deliberate contempt for the superficialities of fashion or even convention, she was far more beautiful than she had been years ago, when he had taken her once to see "Lawrence of Arabia" and demurely kissed her goodnight at the doorstep of the college. The puppy fat was stripped away, so that her facial structure showed clearly, flawless, almost luminous, as if her bright, tanned skin had been stretched tightly across her cheek bones. Her eyes were brown, clear, startlingly intense. "It usually lasts about six months these days."

"What happens then?" The salesmen had finished their drinks and were getting up.

"One of us gets tired of the other. It's better with women. You can trust them a lot more to be honest, and there's no worry about getting pregnant." She looked around her, as if surprised that her audience had left. Maybe she had needed them after all. She began to gather up her purse and glasses from the table. She was no longer crying and the question that perhaps she had brought him here to answer was finally on her lips. "But where have they all gone, Sam, where have they all gone?"

KELVIN THOMSON

To be or not to be

Twenty-five years after the anti-communist referendum

On 27 April 1950 Prime Minister R. G. Menzies introduced one of the most controversial pieces of legislation an Australian parliament has ever seen, the Communist Party Dissolution Bill. Banning the Communist Party had been Country Party policy from 1943 and even before, and indeed remained so until 1966, but Menzies himself was a comparatively recent convert to the idea. Earlier he had commented that communists should be dealt with in the open because "I have complete confidence in the sanity of our own people", and that "We must not let it be thought that they are such a force in political philosophy that we cannot meet them."

No matter what the exigencies of the time were thought or imagined to be, the denial of such fundamentals as freedom of speech and assembly meant in fact a suspension of democratic rights. To outlaw the holding of certain views is of course to destroy the freedom of *all* to hold the views they wish.

The fortnight after the Bill's introduction saw two of the faux pas which were to set the stage for its eventual defeat. Menzies' widely acclaimed Second Reading speech, in which he quoted extensively from Marxist theory, was highlighted by a list of some 53 trade union officials alleged to be communists bent on sabotaging Australian industry with a view to military conquest by the U.S.S.R. The effect of this long list was telling, but not so telling perhaps as a curt statement twelve days later issuing amendments to the list in five cases. In parliament Labor questioned the government's fitness and competence to administer legislation of this kind. The government felt sufficiently embarrassed to launch an investigation into the Australian Security Service, which had supplied the information.

The other faux pas occurred seven days later. The Communist Party Dissolution Bill had provided, inter alia, for the wind-up of the Communist Party of Australia and "substantially communist" organizations, and for the declaration by the Governor-in-Council (which in practice meant the Attorney-General) of individuals as communist. The criterion on which declaration was to be based, "support or advocacy of the ideals of Marxism and Leninism", was remarkably broad.

During a debate on double dissolutions Menzies rhetorically asked the House what would happen when, as was quite possible, the Senate was divided 30-all. Eddie Ward, Labor member for East Sydney and a bitter enemy of Menzies, interjected: "The right honorable gentleman could declare a couple of the Labor Senators." Menzies, reportedly having taken drink, said: "I can think of at least one Labor Senator whom it would be easy to declare." Ward replied, "The Führer has spoken", and Menzies said, "I can think of one member of this House who might escape by the skin of his teeth", referring obviously to Ward himself. The government later dismissed this outburst as jocular, but the damage had already been done.

The traditional men of the Labor Party, Chifley, McKenna, Pollard, and so on, tended to be against the Bill outright, but Labor MPs who had entered Parliament with its enlargement in 1949, particularly those Victorians who had 'Movement' affiliations, were if anything sympathetic. Two quite distinct reasons were given for not opposing the Bill. The first was that opposition would spell electoral disaster, and the second was that communism was indeed a threat to the country and an enemy of the Labor Party. Chifley and Evatt, deeply opposed to the Bill, had themselves argued

the latter during the coal strike of 1949. The outcome of internal Labor feuding was that the party decided not to reject but to substantially amend the legislation. This it was able to do by virtue of its Senate majority, a carry-over from more prosperous electoral times.

Amendments were designed to limit rights of search, to provide for appeals against 'declaration' to Courts other than the High Court, to provide costs and compensation for those falsely 'declared' and, most importantly, to place the onus of proving that individuals or organizations were communist on the Crown, rather than on the defendant.

Menzies accepted some of the other amendments, but refused to back down on the 'onus of proof' issue, set the legislation aside, and dissolved parliament. He was preparing the grounds for a double dissolution election on the Bill, using the twin campaign appeals of a mandate thwarted by a hostile upper house, and Labor's 'softness on communism'.

Outside parliament Labor was very much on the defensive. Because of union battles between communists and the industrial groups the ACTU was divided on the question, but a somewhat idiosyncratic policy resolution supported the ALP policy of amendments. A large number of academics either had reservations or opposed the Bill outright, but elsewhere little support was forthcoming. While the communists said that Labor did not stand for civil liberties at all, but merely asked that one be *proved* a communist before forfeiting one's right, the government and the media alleged that Labor was trying to destroy the Bill's effectiveness — it lacked the courage to oppose the Bill, but it would kill it by stealth. A couple of papers had expressed qualms when the Bill was introduced concerning its retrospectivity (to 1948) and other controversial provisions, but, the Argus excepted, once Menzies' electoral intentions became clear they stood solidly behind him. During the parliamentary recess they argued that each day the Bill was delayed left Australia vulnerable to the communist threat — war was imminent and the Communist Party would act as a fifth column supporting Russia. The outbreak of war in Korea seemed to reinforce this position.

For a time Chifley's personal prestige and the strength of his stand kept the ALP waverers in line, but as Menzies prepared to re-introduce the Bill and then go to the people the Labor Party lost its nerve. The party's federal executive consisted of two delegates from each of six states, and a vote on 25 September was tied. Hence the original decision stood. Almost immediately, however, the West Australian M.H.R. Tom Burke secured a change in his state's delegates' voting instructions. These delegates called a new meeting of the federal executive just as the legislation was being re-introduced, and this meeting, by eight votes to four, instructed the senators not to insist on amendments. The remarkable statement released following this meeting simultaneously supported Labor's previous position, denounced the Bill, accused the Menzies government of wishing to avoid its election promise in relation to communism, gave members freedom to continue criticizing the Bill, and directed that it be passed.

The Bill was passed on 17 October and challenged by the Communist Party and ten communist-influenced unions on 19 October in the High Court. Meanwhile the same press which had demanded that the ALP back down on amendments now castigated them for sacrificing principle for political gain, spoke of a "pitiable spectacle of either hypocrisy or cowardice" and speculated on a Chifley resignation. Dr Evatt caused further controversy by appearing as counsel for the Waterside Workers' Federation in the High Court appeal.

On 9 March 1951 the High Court, by a six-to-one majority, Chief Justice Latham dissenting, declared the entire Act ultra vires the constitution. The key aspect of the judgment was that the Act's "provisions do not prescribe any rule of conduct or prohibit specific acts or omissions by way of attack or subversion, but deal directly with bodies and persons named and described, *the Parliament itself purporting to determine, or empowering the Executive to determine, the very facts on which the existence of the power depends.*" The judgment is regarded in legal circles as perhaps the high water mark of the High Court's use of its powers to defend civil liberties. Dr Evatt was to take his campaign cue from this judgment, especially the implication that the executive was usurping the role of the judiciary. The government, said Evatt, already had power to deal with subversive activities. Any extra powers were powers against liberty. The law is no respecter of persons; people should be punished for what they do, not who they are.

Meanwhile the High Court judges offered Menzies a number of alternatives which were constitu-

tional, including action on public service positions, or in the unions through Arbitration Act amendment. Menzies did not take up any of these suggestions. Instead he called an election. The government's continued use of the communist bogey as a stick to beat its electoral opponents necessitated that it differentiate its position from Labor's as far as possible. The anti-communist legislation was pursued, with Menzies promising in the course of the campaign a referendum seeking powers aganst communism. With widespread media support this proposal apparently was a vote-winner.

Menzies was returned with a reduced majority in the House of Representatives. He had, however, captured the Senate, which was perhaps fortunate in that the bottom had fallen out of the economy in mid-1951 and inflation had taken off. Consequently the government seemed to lose its mandate almost as soon as it was re-affirmed. The resolution which the government displayed in its pursuit of a ban on communism contrasted with its dithering, laissez-faire, attitude to the economy. Eventually Menzies called an 'economic crisis' conference in late July, where he listed communism as Cause No. 13 of seventeen causes (he wasn't fussy about differentiating causes from symptoms) of inflation. The only anti-government daily, the Argus, apparently more concerned with domestic than foreign policy, made particularly caustic remarks concerning Menzies' vigilance in pursuing Cause 13 of inflation.

Menzies now asked the state premiers to refer their powers over communism to him. The Labor states of New South Wales and Queensland refused on grounds that the P.M. would not disclose what powers he sought, and that he should go to the people for them. Previously the democratic sovereignty of the people had chastened the Labor Party, now it emboldened them. The action of these states did not commit the ALP to a position on the referendum, however, and the Tasmanian Labor cabinet made no decision.

Once the feared general election had been held, though, older Labor men, such as federal president Ferguson and secretary Kennelly, reasserted themselves and ensured that the official Labor position would be anti-referendum. It was, however, in the need to convince the doubters in the Labor movement of the wickedness of the referendum proposals and of the necessity for campaigning against them that Evatt, in particular, became attuned to the doubts and fears of the public in general, in a way which was never achieved in, say, the bank nationalization issue.

The potential for abuse of the powers, particularly against the Labor Party, rather than the rights of communists, struck home in the Labor movement and eventually in the body politic. In addition time now tended to work against the fear campaign of the government and for the fear campaign of the opposition. Upon the legislation's introduction *seventeen months earlier* W. C. Wentworth and other nightmare-sellers had continually prophesied communist takeover should the Bill so much as be held up; by now they were starting to develop the same kind of credibility gap as Chicken Licken.

The Labor machines in New South Wales and South Australia were functioning smoothly and these were seen as possible 'No' states. The outlying states of Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania were regarded as 'Yes' states from the first, and so attention was centred on Victoria, especially once the initial high support for the proposals began to dissipate. On 22 June 80 per cent had responded to a Gallup Poll in favor of banning (12 per cent against, 8 per cent undecided). In August 73 per cent answered 'Yes' to the same question, and one week before the vote, on 14 September, 53 per cent were in favor (40 per cent against, 7 per cent undecided). This last figure would have ensured a comfortable 'Yes' victory, but the 'No' landslide evidently continued in the final week.

In Victoria there was a particularly strong Catholic Social Movement influence in the Labor Party, and on the Victorian ALP executive little support for a 'No' vote. In Victoria two events helped distract public attention from the Labor divisions and aided 'No' campaigners. Allan Missen, now a Liberal senator, was suspended from his position a vice-president of the Young Liberals for advocating a 'No' vote. The Liberals foolishly elevated this comparatively minor incident of dissidence by conducting a 'trial' which received considerable media coverage, and helped add 'respectability' to the 'No' campaign. In addition, the ALP-supported Country Party Premier, J. G. B. McDonald, announced, as part of a running financial battle with the Menzies government, the sacking of 10,000 public servants in the week the vote was taken.

Other areas in which the campaign received help from non-working class sources were the universities, churches, and limited areas of the media. Many prominent academics denounced the referendum proposals as threatening academic free-

dom, and supported Evatt's legal objections to the legislation. A number of Protestant clergy publicly opposed the referendum, with Anglican Bishop Burgmann provoking considerable controversy by alleging Catholic political ambitions to lie behind the referendum. In Victoria the Argus supported a 'No' vote, and certain rural newspapers gave a sufficiently unbiassed account of the issue for the voter to develop an awareness that it was not simply a question of banning communism.

To a considerable extent it was the personal campaign of Dr Evatt which switched attention away from 'communism' and onto the powers sought. Evatt had succeeded to the Labor leadership on Chifley's death in mid-1951. The government sought power over "communists and communism", specific validation of the Communist Party Dissolution Act with all its controversial provisions, and powers of amendment. It was of more than semantic interest that, as the referendum campaign progressed, its media name tended to change from the 'anti-communist referendum' to the 'powers referendum'.

As the issues became complex the referendum became for the ordinary man a question of whom to trust: Menzies, that democracy would end if the referendum were not passed; Evatt, that democracy would end if it were. In these circumstances the 'No' vote (as shown by comparative electoral statistics) of the vast majority of ALP voter is explicable. It is not explicable as a simple act of party loyalty, as many Labor-sponsored referenda fail to attract this level of support, nor as a simple 'resistance to change' vote: one could be affirming the (capitalist) status quo by outlawing communism.

A formidable amount of work was done distributing 'No' propaganda by opponents of the referendum in the Labor and Communist parties. In addition hundreds of factory floor meetings in the campaign's closing weeks helped secure the trade union vote. The other feature of the campaign was the rowdiness that accompanied meetings at which Menzies spoke. Violence doesn't usually help the Left, but it perhaps showed the notoriously 'politics-shy' Australian electorate that the communist 'problem' couldn't be simply removed by 'banning'.

At one of Menzies' major Melbourne meetings, held at Canterbury Memorial Hall, the then Senator John Gorton, not for the last time on the front page, bullied one of Menzies' many hecklers. He was grabbed by police, whereupon Menzies called from the platform: "That's my friend, Senator Gorton. Get the right man!" This the police promptly did.

The referendum was finally defeated in three states: New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. The total 'No' vote was 50.56 per cent, a very narrow majority indeed. There was a feeling in the air in those last weeks that Australians were going to cast one of the most important votes they would ever cast. One voter, however, retained his sense of proportion.

September 22, 1951 was also Preliminary Final day, and Essendon won by two points on the final siren. The voter wrote over his ballot paper, in inebriate scrawl, "Good ole Dons".

BRIAN KIERNAN

Seeing her own Mischance

The Poetry and Plays of Dorothy Hewett

An occasional observer of the local literary scene since the early nineteen forties might be pardoned for thinking there must be two Dorothy Hewetts. One made a reputation as a social realist with the novel *Bobbin Up* (1959) and the collection of proletarian ballads *What About the People!* (1961), published with her husband Merv Lilley. The other is the dramatist whose work is amongst the most experimental produced in the 'new wave' of Australian drama, and a poet whose personal and technical explorations in a contemporary confessional vein seem far removed from the writings of the earlier Dorothy Hewett.

Of course we know that they are the same person; and later works such as *The Chapel Perilous* and her new collection of poems *Rapunzel in Suburbia* (1975) refer back to her political involvement in what now not only seems another time, but also another country. Her first verse collection, *Windmill Country,* published by Overland in 1968, contains both proletarian ballads — some of the traditional bush variety, others in the ironic literary manner of the thirties ("By the waters of the Yarra I sat down and wept")—and poems of a quite different, reflective kind. It also contains "Hidden Journey", a long poem in the neo-Whitmanesque line that she can employ so vigorously, that expresses her disillusionment with her former political allegiances at the time of the Sinyavsky and Daniel trial.

However, a closer acquaintance with Dorothy Hewett's work does not produce the impression that we can readily identify the author behind it; rather, there is the sense that there are many Dorothy Hewetts—and the sense also that behind them all (and in the case of some, not very far behind at all) is the face that looks out from the front cover of the Currency edition of *The Chapel Perilous*: the glamorous blonde with the

wistful eyes and wilful mouth who looks the perfect model for the Sally Banner of the play.

This was the Dorothy Hewett who wrote "Testament", which comes towards the end of *Windmill Country*, and might suggest a development away from the committed public poetry contained earlier in the same volume. In fact, it was written at the age of twenty-two; and, like Sally Banner, Dorothy Hewett was in hospital recovering from a suicide attempt when she heard it had won the 1945 A.B.C. poetry prize. Like "Legend of the Green Country", which it is grouped with in the collection, and which won the same prize exactly twenty years later, it is a reflection on personal roots in a social tradition and the landscape that contains it. The most obvious influence on both poems is that of Judith Wright, with her adaptation of modernist poetry (especially Eliot and Yeats) to a local-historical verse. This is apparent from "Testament" when, after its opening (which is quoted in *The Chapel Perilous*), it begins to describe the first settlers:

> They carefully translated their whole way
> And pride of living to a hangman's land,
> Ploughed the dark soil, wrenched order from
> its chaos,
> Its sullen, hostile hatred of their hands,
> Subdued it, mixing their coldness with its
> hunger,
> Never gave up, or ceased to plough and sow,
> Because it was their only living passion,
> These cold-eyed men with honor in their
> hearts:
> The passion for the land, to feel the soil
> Ache through their thin loins, it was like
> Another man's hunger for a wanton woman . . .

"Legend of the Green Country" has a more relaxed and flexible line that again reaches out to embrace a landscape and a tradition:

> The windmill head hangs, broken-necked, flapping like a great plain turkey
> As the wind rises . . . this was my country,
> here I go back for nurture
> To the dry soaks, to the creeks running salt
> through the timber,
> To the ghosts of the sandalwood cutters, and
> the blue breath of their fires,
> To the navvies in their dark blue singlets laying rails in the scrub.

The difference between these poems, with twenty years separating them, seems to be less a matter of the poet's individual development than a response to shifts in the dominant tones of poetry that had occurred between the periods in which they were written. A glance at the latest collection gives the same impression of the poet capturing the characteristic mood of the time: in *Rapunzel* the manner is that of Lowell (especially in "I've Made My Bed I'll Lie On It"), Plath, Sexton . . . indeed a manner that for poetry in English has become international in the last decade or more, though earlier influences like Eliot, Yeats, and Tennyson (who provides the motif for the collection) are still acknowledged.

That first glance at *Rapunzel* might give the impression that Dorothy Hewett has not 'developed', that she has not found her own voice yet, and that, chameleon-like, she has simply taken on the predominant tones of the time in which she writes, has swapped one set of influences for another. Yet, at the same time, there is a core of genuine, highly individual experience expressed through the modes and manners of others which distinguishes her verse from the simple imitation of many younger poets. It is as though the literary forms and manners adopted in many of the poems are part of the world outside the self, part of the experience that she is coming to terms with through dramatic self-projection, and that the stances she adopts or the roles she assumes present themselves, often at least, in terms of literary precedents. From *Rapunzel* alone one can get the same sense as from her whole work that there are many Dorothy Hewetts: not only that she has written at various times in response to a variety of experiences and different influences, but that different and conflicting aspects of the self are being defined in individual works.

The broadly chronological grouping of the poems in *Rapunzel*, in terms of the development from puberty ("Memoirs of a Protestant Girlhood") to the present, conveys less a sense of the continuity of the self in time than a rediscovery or redefining of the self as it passes through different phases of experience — assuming new roles and relationships, encountering social and historical change, being forced to reappraisal from the different perspectives these offer. That is, instead of there being the sense of a unified, stable self behind the poems there are, in the individual poems, honestly confronted aspects of a more complex and elusive personality. Most apparent are an idealized self that is, consciously, prey to delusions, to sentimentality and nostalgia, and

another self that is encountered through experience in the world and encounters with others.

The motif of the Lady of Shalott, which runs throughout all Dorothy Hewett's work, expresses a Romantic sense of a division within the self and between the self and the world. This motif provides *Rapunzel* with its epigraphs and its association of images between poems (mirrors, especially, the river, Lancelot or the Prince . . .). The Lady who is isolated from the great world, seeing only its reflections in a mirror as she weaves her web that is both artifice and snare, yet who is drawn towards an engagement with the world which will prove fatal, provides an image that focuses the contradictory impulses in Dorothy Hewett's work.

The high level of direct personal reference in her writing, and her lack of any prudish reticence in expressing distinctively female experience and consciousness, mean that it is most often sexuality that draws her personae into their destructive encounters with the world. In "Grave Fairytale", which concludes *Rapunzel* and draws many of the collection's images into an ambivalent fantasy, the self is split into Rapunzel and a repulsive sexual witch; it is a strange, powerful expression, and sardonic resolution, of the personal conflicts found elsewhere in her work. Most fully, most explicitly, they are found in *The Chapel Perilous*, in the struggles of Sally Banner (whose life, step by step, parallels the author's) to realize her ideal Romantic self in a world that stifles individuality by its conformity to repressive authoritarian norms.

Although Dorothy Hewett only began to emerge publicly as a playwright in the second half of the sixties, she had for many years been interested in the theatre. She had had a play produced at school, won a matriculation gold medal with an essay on Strindberg, and on going up to the University of Western Australia started the Dramatic Society with Philip Parsons, Jackie Kott and others. She wrote plays, mainly under the influence of the Americans O'Neill, Wilder and Anderson, and hoped to go to England and become an actress — a hope frustrated by the war. Instead of continuing to develop as a poet and playwright, the girl who must have seemed among the Most Likely to Succeed of her generation, who had been excited by all that seemed new and cosmopolitan in Australian writing at the time — the Angry Penguins, Judith Wright's *The Moving Image*, Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men*, Kenneth Mackenzie's novels—and who had won poetry prizes from the A.B.C. and the fledgling Meanjin adopted a contradictory course. She dropped out of the university after failing French, attempted suicide, married, became a journalist for the Worker's Star and, after her marriage broke up, moved to Redfern to become a factory worker and Communist Party organizer.

The first of Dorothy Hewett's plays to be produced (apart from the juvenilia), "This Old Man Comes Rolling Home", dates from the social realist period of *Bobbin Up*. Before then she had written nothing for about eight years, then with encouragement from the Realist Writers' Group, and Frank Hardy in particular, she began again and produced *Bobbin Up*, a loosely structured series of sharp vignettes of working women and family life in Sydney's industrial suburbs. The play which also drew on the same social experience has now been lost, but it was rewritten as "This Old Man" when Dorothy Hewett went back to her old university in 1959 (where she was to stay on as a senior tutor for nine years), produced there in 1966, and rewritten again for its Old Tote production in 1968.

On Dorothy Hewett's return to Perth she had been excited by the university's New Fortune theatre and the possibilities its open stage offered for a more poetic realism. O'Casey was one influence, but there are many other influences on "This Old Man's" depiction of working-class life in Redfern. A stage direction suggests the play's echoes of the American and English kitchen-sink lyricism of the fifties:

> The house is shown with the front wall removed, so that we are looking straight into the living room. . . . The front wall can be represented by an edge of ragged stone, and the door hinged precariously from this, giving only an illusion of separation from the world outside. . . . Thus while the action takes place in the three-walled living room visitors or members of the family coming from pub or street, a passing flower seller, children playing, can all be seen clearly before there is any knock on the street door.

A discernible (and freely admitted) local influence is Patrick White. Not so much structurally, though the trio of housewives might owe something to the knockabout girls of *The Ham Funeral*, but in its development of moods and rhythms which are reminiscent of *The Season at Sarsaparilla*. The play is an urban pastoral

showing how the poor are happy with their lot; although there is a change of tone in the last act, with appalling things happening (a girl bleeds to death upstairs from a self-induced abortion; the son is taken to prison), the pastoral equilibrium is finally restored and the cyclical nature of life over the generations asserted. Again, there is a similarity to *The Season at Sarsaparilla* in the tension between the Romantic escapism of some of the characters and the satiric presentation of the reality that confines them. Dorothy Hewett's equivalent of Girlie Pogson, however, is a more brooding presence. Laurie, the slovenly wife and mother, lost in an alcoholic daze and self-pitying memories of herself as the Belle of Bundaberg, is one of Dorothy Hewett's dreamers. Laurie also is fond of quoting "The Lady of Shalott", but she is seen critically, and it is her husband who is the real centre of interest and sympathy.

As a 'first play' "This Old Man" reads impressively (it is to be published by Currency-Methuen). It moves easily to provide a full and varied sense of life without its careful structure being obvious; some of the speeches are mawkish on the page, and there are shifts in tone between some scenes that grate in the reading, but these might be smoothed out in production. However, in Dorothy Hewett's own account, Harry Kippax damned the play in the Old Tote production as old-fashioned, and she embarked determinedly on a course of reading to find a new set of techniques and conventions. Starting with Jonson and the Jacobeans, she read through to Brecht, Frisch, Durrenmatt, Arden and Bond—at about the time that the early plays of Hibberd, Romeril, Williamson and others were being performed at La Mama, and the Australian Performing Group was being established.

"Mrs Porter and the Angel" was the first result of this determined search for a new style. "A Modern Fairytale in Two Acts" (produced at the Pact Theatre, Sydney, in 1969) it shows the influence of the theatre of the absurd and black comedy and puts the results of her reading into virtuoso, if puzzling, practice. Partly a satiric *pièce à clef*, partly a piece of calculated outrageousness intended to overturn conventional expectations of a well-made play, it was a manifesto of intentions to write 'total theatre' that employed all the resources of dance, music, lighting and mime. It is very much part of its intentions not to be a play that can be summarized narratively, as it proceeds through a superimposition and juxtaposition of levels—fantasy and reality, past and present—and includes such devices as the doubling of roles, the play within the play (the reading of Chekhov with which the play opens providing a frame for the surreal comedy which follows), the dummy of Tatty Hollow (the beautiful blonde who is kept in a cupboard), and grotesque characters such as Mrs Wills's Mummy (Burke and Wills being stock homosexual clowns) and her husband, Mrs Wills's Mummy's Daddy. The emphasis falls on the *mise en scène* rather than on rationally motivated action. There is the absurdist allegory of Mrs Porter's imaginary poodle Angel being pursued, as she thinks, by Professor Jack Shadow's Satan through Circe's Circle, a suburb of academics; there are other mythic and literary references — Wendy serves Peter the baby roasted whole for supper. But to those familiar with Dorothy Hewett's other work, especially the poems in *Rapunzel*, it is apparent that a lot that is being projected surreally draws on personal, and sexual, experience, and on the conflict of an inner world of dreams and memories with the outer world. Mrs Porter's memories of the failed first night of her honeymoon, with the bridegroom sobbing in his long johns, and Tatty Hollow herself, who swallowed Lysol, are clearly images of the self from the past seen with ironic detachment.

This encounter with the self's earlier manifestations in the world of time, change and relationships with others is the subject of *The Chapel Perilous* — Miss Hewett's most impressive play to date, and the key work in her development in that it provides the reader with a clear centre for her varied writings over thirty years. The play's all but explicit autobiographical basis allows for the expression of the subjective within a social historical framework: public events jostle intensely private experience in the life of Sally Banner, the eternal Romantic. The play swings abruptly between nostalgic, escapist introspection and a sardonic recognition of the brute realities of life, both private and public, its tone shifting from Romantic inflation to an equally excessive 'realism' that presents life in bleak images of sexuality, violence and squalor — a juxtaposition that is summed up in Sally's cry towards the end: "I wanted to find in this dirty, scheming, contemptible world something, some kind of miraculous insight . . . I had a tremendous world in my head."

As a text, as a play to be read, it is clear

that Dorothy Hewett intends a 'superior' or 'Romantic' irony that will allow her to present her Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman with simultaneous sympathy and detachment. The maintenance of the right distance to achieve the presentation of youthful idealism (such as Sally's belief in "the blood") while at the same time signalling critical detachment from this, the implicit recognition of the immaturity, sentimentality and mawkiness of the young Sally's attitudes (however authentic these are), is extremely difficult. In shifting between the world's view of Sally ("Poor Sally/She never made it/No matter how hard she tried"), and Sally's views of herself, a Brechtian dialectical procedure is adopted to generate irony from the contrasts between the characters and successive scenes. The intention is clear enough on the page, but a director is left with large responsibilities for realizing it on stage. One example, a small one perhaps but important in establishing the tone in production and determining the audience's sympathies, would be with the music. A well-rendered singing of Blake's "Jerusalem" could emotionally estrange the audience from Sally, which would be as contrary to the play's intention as if they uncritically identified with her. There is no built-in 'alienating' irony in the use of this hymn as there is in Brecht and Weill's adaptations of sentimental songs, and the actress playing Sally has nothing so emotionally powerful to counter its effect with.

In the Sydney Opera House production, the tone of many individual scenes was uncertain (as much to the actors as to the audience, it seemed) and the shifts in tone between scenes not in any apparent interpretive control—so much so that the play seemed to be casting around for a possible final curtain. The vast elongated box of the Opera House drama theatre's stage, which dwarfed the actors and left the audience as remote distant observers, did not help. *The Chapel* has been much more successfully produced by student groups, at the New Fortune it was written for in 1971, and at Melbourne University's Union Theatre in 1972. Dorothy Hewett herself thought this Melbourne production, by George Whaley, was very much better than the one he directed at the Opera House in 1974. With its theatrical exuberance and theme of the individual's Romantic quest, the play is perhaps better suited to the enthusiasm of student theatre than to a lavish professional production. Dorothy Hewett has adapted it for a B.B.C. radio production to be broadcast in 1976.

However, despite its mixed history in production, *The Chapel Perilous* proved Dorothy Hewett's natural (if also hard won) ability to write for the theatre. It is a play assured of a prominent place in the history of recent Australian drama because it employs almost every technique that seemed new and experimental in the late sixties and early seventies, and ranges widely in its moods from the burlesque historical through the social satirical to the purely lyrical. The resources of 'total theatre' — especially the brilliant device of the giant authority figures, and the doubling of authoritarian roles — are subservient to the play's dramatic development and truly expressionistic development of a subjective world. In its essentially Romantic shifts between extremes of subjective idealism and 'low' realism, it captures the major tensions underlying Dorothy Hewett's writing.

In *Rapunzel*, the shifts in mood from poem to poem are just as abrupt, the same extreme and contradictory attitudes are expressed, but individually the poems are more surely controlled. "Sanctuary" shows a hard, bitter appraisal of reality, and presents the world in images of social dissolution:

> The boy on drugs, his bandages slipping,
> argues and pleads all day with the parking meters.
> The filthy children of Christ lie on mattresses in the sun,
> the pavement scrawled with graffiti; in excrement and blood.

This, though, is at least as much the projection of a personal mood as the depiction of an "objective" reality—the poem's epigraph (presumably a question overheard at a poetry reading and referring to Dorothy Hewett) is "Who's the old doll reading her poetry under the light?" In "Pissing Alley" a more brutal rap is administered to the ego:

> No execution equal to desire
> Can plague my pen, I abdicate a throne,
> And piddle in a gutter of my own.
> No need to dig my ribs, of course I know
> Great Sappho died three thousand years ago.
>
> In the black mirror shadows pass, repass.
> The raging gardener screams, "Keep off the grass".

The poem "Miss Hewett's Shenanigans" brilliantly juxtaposes tawdry personal fantasies with

images from the 'real', and paranoid, world. Sometimes, as in the exquisite lyric "The Child", the self is simply transcended; but most usually the relationship of the self, or aspects of a divided self, to a world that is itself contradictory is questioned through the poems, which through their deliberately 'literary' form shape and control and objectify the confusion of experience.

Though less ambitious than *The Chapel Perilous,* the plays written since have very broadly continued the process of coming to terms with the self through dramatic projection and show the same interest in theatricality. "Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly" was commissioned by the National Theatre, Perth, and produced at the Playhouse in 1972, shared the Awgie Award for the best play of the year with Ron Blair's *President Wilson in Paris,* but had its run curtailed because of poor houses and protests. This is a nostalgic expressionist piece for which the set is a cinema, Wurlitzer and all, played by Mr Ortabee, the cinema's manager and the play's Prospero. Dorothy Hewett's grandfather had built the Regal cinema in the Perth suburb of Subiaco, and the young Dorothy who used to come to town once a year from the family farm 150 miles out had a free pass to the shows. She would collect stills, posters and copies of film magazines, and on returning home would get up plays with her sister and a friend.

The play's opening, with the cinema in construction, introduces the grandparents and parents who are movingly, even reverently, the subject of the earlier poem "Legend of the Green Country". Here though they are affectionately presented comic characters who have created the theatre for Dolly. When she enters, Dolly proves to be a middle-aged woman trying to capture her private dream of herself as a young seductress. Again, as in "This Old Man", there is an underlying meditation on time, of rhythms of life through the generations, and of the 'reality', and deceptiveness, of illusion. The tonal shifts and the contrasting of sentimental illusion with farcically vulgar low realism ("We're all fumblers in the back stalls") structure the play, and the device of containing both within the cinema setting, with Hitler ranting on the screen, avoids the positing of any absolute reality. It is a piece of pure theatre that takes up many of her themes and resolves them stylistically.

Since "Bon Bons and Roses", another play, two musicals and a revue have followed in quick succession. The first musical, "Catspaw", was commissioned by the National Theatre for the Festival of Perth and performed at the New Fortune in 1974. The other, "Joan", was produced by the Canberra Rep. in 1975, and the revue "Miss Hewett's Shenanigans" in Canberra again, at the Playhouse, as part of the Australia '75 festival. "Catspaw" blends elements of the rock opera with historical pantomime. Its counter-cultural hero Cat sets out with his women-folk to escape from the wrecker's yard of the modern world into the dead heart. In the town of Opal he finds another set of drop-outs in Mrs Spicer (from Lawson's "Water Them Geraniums"), Sweeney Anzac and Jack Dunn of Nevertire. Somehow, Mo Macacky, Melba (accompanied by two drag-queen clowns), Amy Johnston, Mary Gilmore and Daisy Bates get into the act. The style is knock-about vaudeville and the characters the broadest stereotypes, but the departure of these colorful figures at the end and the return to the wrecker's yard convey a sense of the loss of ideals, past and present, that undercuts the clowning.

The more recent musical, "Joan", owes much of its structure to the *Marat-Sade*—being set in a psychiatric hospital at Rouen where Joan Lark is being examined. In a script full of literary allusions (as Dorothy Hewett's tend to be), the chief source is Shaw's *Saint Joan.* The technique employed in earlier plays of 'doubling' a character to present different aspects of his personality is extended further here. Joan Lark has her three voices who are aspects of her self: Joan the Soldier, "militant, masculine, strong-minded"; Joan the Saint, "an unreal and holy icon"; Joan the Witch, a "strange mixture" of the others. Heresy in a religious age is seen as equivalent to nonconformity in the psychiatric present (and vice versa); again, as in *The Chapel Perilous,* the imagination is brought into conflict with 'normality', but here, as Joan's fantasies are acted out in the institution, they come to transcend the 'reality' of the setting. Both the musicals develop concerns found in Dorothy Hewett's earlier writing, and show her continuing to explore the total resources of the theatre, but by their nature as musicals they are somewhat simpler and more schematic than the plays, needing the complement of music in production for their complete realization.

The play, "The Tatty Hollow Story", commissioned by the English Department, University of Sydney, was produced in Sydney in April 1976,

and is to be published soon by Currency-Methuen, together with "Bon Bons and Roses". The structure of the play is conceived with striking originality (the later "Joan" would seem to owe it something), and it is a structure that gives detached expression to key personal preoccupations in many of the poems and the earlier plays. A group of Tatty's former lovers, "the lawyer, the zoo keeper, the garbo's son, the boy from Nhill who became a Professor", gather to discuss her. Tatty, glimpsed as a glamorous dummy in a phone booth, enters only as they remember her from past stages of her life. At the end the 'real' Tatty enters, dressed as Bea Miles and reciting Caliban's "I cried to dream again". The play's subject is the self's own legend—how one is seen and remembered by others. Tatty is perceived through her lovers' memories of her, and, in turn, their memories of the different Tatty Hollows they knew (or created in their minds) define them. The 'objective' truth about Tatty, even the central facts, remain obscure. She appears, in response to their memories, in various forms at various stages of her life. Most often she is recalled sentimentally and nostalgically (in production this dominant tone is reinforced by the haunting downbeat refrain of "The Tatty Hollow Story"); at other times with an undercutting 'low' realism, as when she appears as a raunchy stripper, or as Bea Miles. In a reading I heard the play's essentially theatrical conception and its originality in exploring sexual relationships made it most impressive. In its recent Sydney production the play received a good critical response but disappointing audiences.

"The Tatty Hollow Story" shows that Dorothy Hewett has advanced imaginatively since *The Chapel Perilous* — which might have seemed to have exhausted her concerns. Perhaps better than any Australian dramatist writing at the moment, she has learnt that the theatre can sustain a multiplicity of moods, levels and perspectives simultaneously; and that dream, illusion, memory and ideal can be related to provide a complex view of reality. At this point she may be poised to write another 'big' play, but surpassing *The Chapel* in control and theatrical intensity—for it would be a poet's play, as her poetry has strengthened by becoming more dramatic. This, of course, is presumption: my only justification for indulging in it is that what has been the essence of her Romanticism — her openness to new experience and developments and her constant self-reappraisal — a guarantee that she will continue to write.

For I must carry with me on this journey,
The burden of my life, unburdened, gladly
singing;
The blowing banners, the dark, huddled houses
Under the burning prism of the glassworks.
All must now be fired
From this heavy lump of clay, to the glowing
girl,
Into this green weed, this enchanted ring,
Where all the lessons must be learnt again,
The books re-read, the tongue stumble
In sweetness, and the spell recast.

(From *Windmill Country*)

Checklist of plays performed

Time Flits Away, Lady
Best one-act play, Guild of Undergraduates, University of Western Australia. Produced University of Western Australia 1941, directed by Jean Randall.

This Old Man Comes Rolling Home
University Dramatic Society, New Fortune Theatre, University of Western Australia, 1966. Directed by Frank Baden-Powell.
Old Tote Theatre, Sydney, 1968. Directed by Jean Wilhelm,

Mrs Porter and the Angel
Pact Theatre, Sydney, 1969. Directed by Phillip Parsons and Arne Neeme.

The Chapel Perilous

University Dramatic Society, New Fortune Theatre, University of Western Australia, 1971. Directed by Arne Neeme.

Union Theatre, University of Melbourne, 1972. Directed by George Whaley.

La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, 1972. Directed by Jane Atkins.

Old Tote production at the Sydney Opera House, 1974. Directed by George Whaley.

Radio adaptation, British Broadcasting Commission, 1976. Directed by Stewart Conn.

Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly

Commissioned by National Theatre, Perth. Shared Awgie Award for best play of the year. Produced by the National Theatre at the Playhouse, Perth, 1972. Directed by Ray Omodei.

Jane Street Theatre, Sydney, 1972. Directed by Alexander Hay.

Catspaw

Musical commissioned by National Theatre, Perth. Produced by the National Theatre for the Festival of Perth at the New Fortune Theatre, 1974. Directed by Arne Neeme.

Miss Hewett's Shenanigans

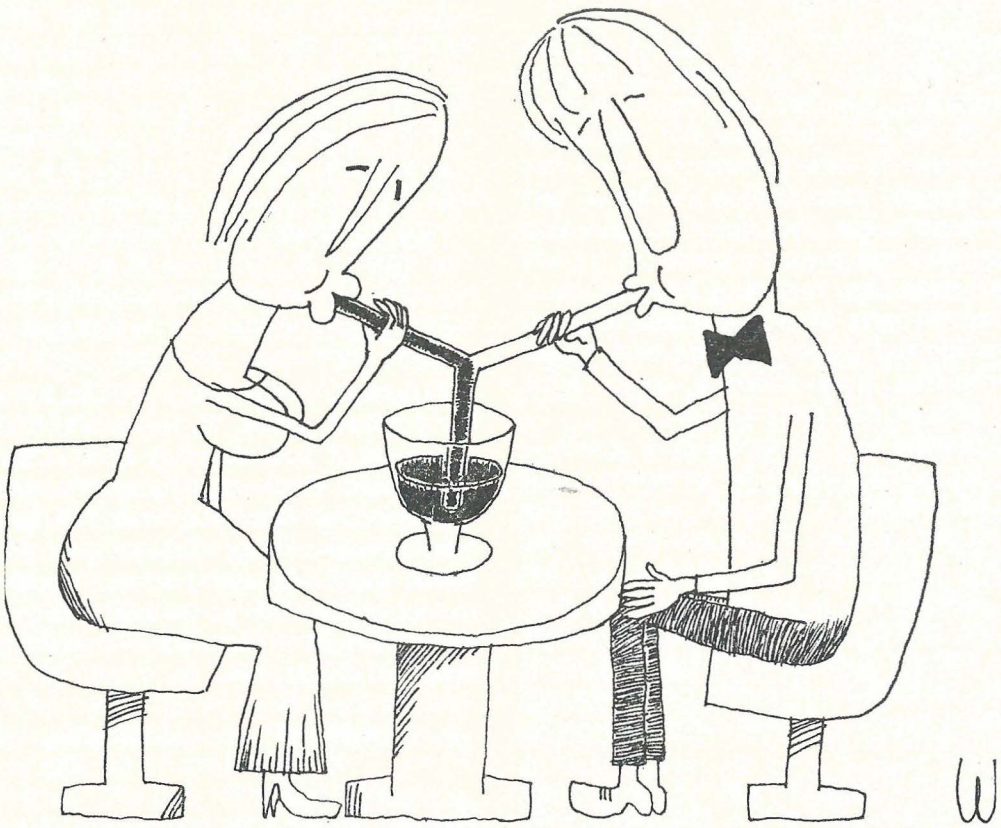
A revue. Commissioned by Australia '75. Produced at Canberra Playhouse for Australia '75, 1975. Directed by Arthur Dignam.

Joan

Musical commissioned by Canberra Rep. Produced by Canberra Rep at the Canberra Theatre, 1975. Directed by Ross McGregor.

The Tatty Hollow Story

Commissioned by Department of English, University of Sydney. The Stables Theatre, Sydney, 1976. Directed by Alexander Hay.



Hiroshi Watanabe

Dorothy Hewett: Confession and Beyond

BRUCE WILLIAMS

"Most Australians see little point in the search for identity, the tragic tension in which the seeker is also the sought."

Donald Horne, 1967

"Identity is a form of transcendence, and a person who achieves it is redeemed from the chances of daily experience."

Denis Donoghue

In the politics of Australian poetry, Dorothy Hewett is one of the rare Independents. In her time she has aligned herself with major parties (in the 1950s, with Judith Wright, in her Communist years, with the extra-parliamentary Left) but the eight years' work collected in *Rapunzel in Suburbia* (1975) prove her final allegiance to her own vision. She has become, amongst other things, a 'confessional' poet; not entirely unexpectedly, given *The Chapel Perilous* and a few poems in *Windmill Country* (1968).

"Confessional": a misleading tag for a poet, suggesting undisciplined outpourings. It suggests that the medium between self and reader is rubbed out to convey the real experience. But this notion of real experience is always chimerical. As Yeats says, in *A General Introduction for My Work*, the writer is never the "bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete". Even the most overtly biographical poem has its own life and shape; reference back to the alleged actualities from which it comes must always be oblique and problematical.

Yet the impulse to write confessional poems—to defy Yeats — can't simply be understood as a fallacy to be met with a schooled rejoinder. The confessional poet pushes at the boundaries that divide poetry from direct communication (that necessary fiction) for a purpose: to win new territory for poetry. All Romantic poets (and Hewett is entirely Romantic) challenge a community's conventions about poetry by challenging the distinction between shareable and non-shareable experience.

Recent poetics of confession attack the conventions more radically. There is a widespread wish to destroy the category of art itself. Raging against the repressiveness of our society, and against the decadence of academic formalism (which turns lively, shapely poems to ice) poets long for a direct touch, a form of communion through words. The experience of all art enforces the impossibility of their longing; the nature of our time makes their longing inevitable. The passion for 'unedited transcripts' can always be met by the question why one transcript should move and disturb the reader while another lies flat on the page? The moment the question is asked, the concept of art is reborn. Those who refuse to ask the question must take the view that every word uttered by everyone everywhere is of equal value and importance (a religious view incompatible with the existence of poetry). Nonetheless, there are historical periods, and ours is one, when societies are moved to confront their own anti-masks; to picture their liberation as total destruction even of the language in which liberation is pictured. The impulse towards confessional poetry, towards even unedited transcripts, is part of a genuine response to the pressures of the age.

"History" for Dorothy Hewett is essentially her personal record. So the first two sections of *Rapunzel in Suburbia* look back at her past life in Corrigin, Perth and Sydney. The volume then travels out into the 'wild world' of the third section to connect past with present, private with social, and finally makes an ironic return journey to the suburbs. One poem speaks of a man whose possibilities have come down to his being a zoo-keeper of the psyche:

> warden of that sad suburban beast
> that slumbers in the day.

Dorothy Hewett goes out towards this man with a sense that he is representative of those whose impulse towards liberation, towards a new world,

is stifled by their past and the given conditions of their lives. She is herself such a person. The past weighs on her, providing rich material for her gift, yet threatening to destroy it. She struggles to liberate herself by setting down the weight of the past in poems of great frankness, particularity and privacy. At the same time, she knows that her history will remain with her. One can never get free; the boundaries remain; the act of writing even a successful poem cannot by itself sustain a writer. Yet perhaps one can arrive, if not at liberation, at least at accommodations, new ways of being the person one inescapably is. The last section of the volume, with its ironic return to the suburban cage, also entertains new possibilities of freedom in the life of symbol. For no sooner has Dorothy Hewett found her own tract of new territory, by pushing at those boundaries, than she finds it beginning to turn sterile. Confession becomes enclosure. Ways beyond it must be found.

In *Windmill Country*, Dorothy Hewett published a long autobiographical poem, "Legend of a Green Country" in which, through impressionistic portraits of ancestors and landscape, she sought her "heritage": on one side, Puritanism; on the other, a kind of doomed romanticism. The men of her family dreamed and broke out, but their women pulled them back to the grim business of extracting money from salty acres. In that volume, too, there were a few poems salvaged from the shipwreck of her youth. That heritage was a bitter one for the growing girl. The years of coming to sexual maturity, of her first marriage and her roamings during the war have been decisive for her later development. She returns to them again and again, notably in the play *The Chapel Perilous* (1972). The opening section of *Rapunzel in Suburbia* ("Memoirs of a Protestant Girlhood") returns to the inwardness of those years, to the private aspects of the heritage. Sexuality, the encounter with the other, is her primary subject. In her poems, sexuality is seen as liberation and as death; as intense provider of life's vividness but also as cold loss; as the inmost expression of the self and as a parody in which the self is engulfed or supplanted by a darker identity she calls Jackstraw, or the witch. Her new volume begins with a poem about the origins of this complex of feeling.

A stanza from "The Lady of Shalott" printed as epigraph to the first section of the book supplies two clues for the poems that follow. A curse is on Tennyson's lady "if she stay/To look down to Camelot". Dorothy Hewett's identification with the lady was born in her dreaming adolescence. Camelot became the land of desire, the world of adult experience where she dreamed to find romantic fulfilment. But the curse descended. The lady found herself comically irrelevant.

> The lady floated, brushed her hair and wept,
> flung out dead hyacinths in a pained surprise.

"Memoirs of a Protestant Childhood I" records in an apparently casual verse the transition from a contaminated innocence to the loss of that innocence, a loss no less shocking for having been sought. The poem's two halves work out these ironies.

> I was brought up on Tennyson and Eliot.
> What a double! On the yellow farm
> floated like The Lady down a creek,
> lying on my back the sun motes danced,
> black cockatoos massed shrieking in the sky.
> My little sister whinged,
> my mother rang her bells,
> I lived alone: the pages riffled
> in the afternoons bound in morocco
> temperatures soared, round tables cracked,
> Grandma draped wet hessian round the house.
> Queen of the May! I had a melancholy decline.

The music-hall cadence of Tennyson and Eliot brings out their comic incongruousness: the late-Victorian settlement (still there in the wheatbelt in the thirties) and the approaching world of violence, sterility and dislocation.

But for the gifted, isolated girl they were equally quick ways out of Corrigin. Looking back, the poet sees herself as doomed. For the girl, the Lady was a luxurious fantasy. The older self remembers Ophelia and sees how ambiguous is the promise of the cockatoos gathering before rain. The yellow Western Australian farm negates Camelot; like real ones, her fancied round tables crack in the heat of summer. Those same adolescent impulses which created the fancy are already at work to destroy it. Grandma may well try to cool off the house. Finally, this half of the poem remembers Tennyson again, wryly measuring the distance between the May Queen's genteel decline and the poet's own traumatic awakening from the Tennyson-world to the Eliot-world; from dreams of adulthood in the land of desire to the bleak actualities.

Later I walked dry grass,
arms full of water hyacinths, met your eyes,
between the pencil pines the Sisters paced
howling like altars, schoolgirls twined
their magpie beaks for summer pools,
the fat Headmistress read "The Wasteland"
right through in a tinny voice, her 3 chins
quivered;
blood on my legs I swooned on the cane
lounge.

The hyacinth girl has taken over from the May Queen. Hewett's imagery, like Eliot's, combines erotic exaltation with sterility. Just as, on the farm, the girl lived in the style of a book so, in the city, the styles of the actual are given by literary experience. Allusiveness here, as usual in Dorothy Hewett, is an important means of extending and defining significance. The rushing syntax then runs these memories into a school scene with those pencil pines (phallic, banal), sisters like warders and a vignette of the still-isolated girl unable to join the thoughtless, enjoying majority. The poem veers towards self-pity in the too convenient irony of the headmistress. But it lifts away from convenience to its harsh, inevitable conclusion.

"Memoirs . . . I", in its strength, must represent the first section of *Rapunzel in Suburbia.* But, even amongst these eight poems, there is much variety of tone and attack. Hewett (like Yeats, who has meant much to her) goes down many avenues into the past, each with its own set of views. "Easy" (which follows the three "Memoirs") delicately recognises how the past, for all its terrors, becomes strangely numinous as one's own death becomes substantial in the imagination. Two more poems stem from her unresolved relationship with her mother. "Calling on Mother" is a dream dance of fantasies of revenge amongst the intimate, ridiculous details of an adult presence: "Dress preservers sewn into armpits,/rubber corsets breathing holes of fat". Puritans need moral holidays: Hewett takes several in this volume.

In the next poem, however ("I've Made My Bed, I'll Lie On It") she returns to the traumatic material of "Memoirs", noting some of the consequences for adult life of that particular girlhood. Here, with a formal closeness emphasising the effort of control, she tightens connexions between the shipwreck of youth, erotic life and creativity. The poem turns on paradoxes central to her work. The forces from the past which threaten her stable creativity can only be met by creative confrontation. At the same tme, creativity itself, in the present, is sustained — and undermined — by sexuality.

My tongue's a broken clapper in a bell,
with book and candle I roll down to Hell,
and circling back upon my mother's bed,
gift-wrapped receive the Kingdom of the Dead.

It is a poem full of a desperate humor arising from extreme self-consciousness. Here are Donald Horne's "tragic tensions" but, precisely because they are unresolvable, they are not tragic. The humor of the poem, its wryness about its own ingenuities, is a way of acknowledging life's power to break up our impregnable logic. We are reminded again of Yeats — of the humor in his last poems, and of the way one poem of his 'corrects' another.

As though to shake off the confessional tag, the second section of the volume groups poems about others, the dead, left behind in a past as private as the grave. Mostly fantasias or lyrics, freer, less intense than those in the first section, these poems turn outwards to relate the poet's own condition to others. "The Witnesses", for example, although it works some of the "Memoirs" material, strips itself of particular reference to become a poem about what it is like for any of us to recall the past. A hawk hangs over that country of her youth: herself now, seeing it as panorama. But she is also the hawk's victim. And a third 'self' remembers hawk and victim.

The mice run circles, the plovers cry,
Till I hardly know in that hurtling sky
Which of the three wild things am I . . .
Murderer, victim, recorded cry.

As these lines suggest, one unifying concern in the second section is with the terrors — and the lure — of death. For our purposes, "Sanctuary" demands comment; one of the longer, certainly one of the most powerful poems in the volume, which chronicles and resists an invasion of images of death. Dorothy Hewett's point of departure is the recognition of how she might appear to a a bystander at a gathering: "Who's the old doll reading her poetry under the light?" The poet is sharply reminded how time has cut her off from the young whose experiences she has shared. The main body of the poem consists of two accounts of suicides, the longer set against a characteristic

W.A. landscape of dune, river and hill. Perth is evoked

> This nervous hollow city is built on sand,
> looped with wires, circled with shaven trees

as a kind of refugee camp to suggest that these suicides are not only self-engendered actions, but responses, as well, to a general pressure.

> This whole city is engaged in a kind of
> slaughter

Both the dead were young, as are the drop-outs, the rebels against the city: she herself, when young, dropped out, rebelled, attempted suicide, and the poem is full of a subdued survivor guilt.

> The filthy children of Christ lie on mattresses
> in the sun,
> the pavement scrawled with graffiti, in
> excrement and blood.

To intensify the feeling of enclosure in a city of deathly undercurrents, there are images of poisoned electronic nerves:

> The exchange is jammed with outward calls,
> the T.V. screen, jagged with light,
> crackles and goes out.

This imagery works as well to bring out another unifying consideration. The poet, the dead men, the children of Christ all feel the pull of death, but none can help another; no-one can intervene. The poet, trying through poems to chart the dark currents finds herself perceived as "an old doll" whose experience is supposed to be irrelevant. As another poem puts it: "we keep to our own towers".

It is a measure of Hewett's poetic intelligence, her fertility and her command that she can turn from "Sanctuary" to a lyric like "Forsaken Mermaid" which also concerns her precarious relationship with death and her sense of human isolation. The title does more than borrow the shape of Arnold's. In his "Forsaken Merman", the sea represents impulse, fecundity, naturalness. Hewett agrees and dissents. On Bondi cliff stands a stone mermaid, truncated, arms lopped. Her twin effigy lies under the water. The stone figures become images for dual possibilities in the self, the one remaining in the imperfect world, yearning for the deathly serene freedom of the other, the "self gone free,/the wild girl in the heart/tied to no man". "Would we change places with her?" the poem asks, capturing in its tone an extraordinary appeal, then turns back to the mermaid on the cliff for paradoxical support:

> remind us of our dear human predicament,
> imprisoned, alone.

Arnold's anguish over the isolation of the self (see "To Marguerite") becomes a strange weary comfort. Its very banality (hence the explicitness of the ending) is a stay against the temptation towards the worse prison of pretending we could be otherwise.

"Sanctuary" and "Forsaken Mermaid" together bring out again the flexibility of Hewett's work. Any stress on the 'confessional' element needs that counterstress. Her flexibility extends, as well, to poems which dramatise the pressures and problems of confiding, in particular, the pressure from her envisaged audience, and the problem of a mismatch between their expectations and what she has to give. In "Underneath the Arches", an ingenious, jaunty performance, she presents herself as an ironically vulnerable witch (stabbed in the dark by her own "portents and omens") performing her tricks in front of a fashionable cyclorama of "small orbs, a moon/a skyrocket or two". Deliberate staginess is saleable: there's an audience (the successful playwright has discovered) for the parade of the self. But the parade had better have plenty of bright floats. As she grows older, and the world darker (we think of "Sanctuary") it gets harder to remain vulnerable, "closed in the black cloak of flesh", and even harder, if she is to tell the truth, to retain the element of the pleasurable. People want to read about sufferers who are glamorous.

> The impudent terror of the lady sawed in half,
> for that one needs the magic nudity —
> 34 24 34

Dorothy Hewett, who has migrated in time and space from the sexist decorums of her youth, finds that in the world of the new Australian enlightenment there remain decorums; the point is driven home with "trouvailles" (from a London music-hall):

> Gentlemen may remove any garment consistent
> with decency.
> Ladies may remove any garment consistent
> with charm.

"Out of the struggle with others we make rhetoric," says Yeats, "out of the struggle with ourselves, poetry." Too easy, says Hewett. If her sense of the "others", readers and audience, critics and friends, was sometimes too acute in her work, leading to anxious gestures, lurid display, overstatement, unguarded demands for attention, she is increasingly able to achieve the easy, complex poise of "Underneath the Arches".

There are confessional poems; there are poems about confession; and there is also, in this remarkable volume, a search for ways of going beyond the mode altogether. (It would be profitable to compare Robert Lowell's development away from *Life Studies*.) Dorothy Hewett's need to search is hinted at the end of "Conversations", a poem made of disillusioned after-images of a relationship. It begins

> After all, what's there to talk about,
> a few fucks!

and continues in a harsh, belittling strain until it ends with

> morning plane taking you south
> again, never mind — if I lose
> I write a poem about loss
> —& win.

The flatness of tone there belies her claim. Writing, for this poet, is the most substantial way of affirming and sustaining personal fulfilment. But is never sufficient. And her recent concentration on inward experience throws her into a further dilemma as the nature of the inward experience changes. If what the confessional poet has to record is what this and other poems in *Rapunzel* record — failure of love, whittling away of the self's pride and wholeness, deadlocks in the psyche — the poet becomes the recorder of her own destruction. Yet the great studies of decline are not written by victims. As the self diminishes, so do the poems. And who wants to be a victim, anyway? It follows that for the sake of both her poetry and her life (those intimately involved affairs) she needs to find ways out of her hall of mirrors into the wider world of others.

Some of the poems of recollection I mentioned earlier are relevant here. So is the group of portraits assembled in the last section ("Zoo Story", "Zoo-Keeper", "Hand Holding Violets" are some of them) where we see her gaining a new detachment and distance, a productive forgetfulness of self. Once more, Yeats comes to mind: "Why does the struggle to come at truth take away our pity and the struggle to overcome our passions restore it again?" he asks in his *Memoirs*. Amongst this group of poems, "Hand Holding Violets" is exemplary. Another way out of the hall of mirrors is to cease concentrating on historical particulars, chronicles of experience, and instead to allow the self to prance wildly through a fantastic, comic scene of metamorphosis, where the laws of time and psychology are suspended. "Miss Hewett's Shenanigans" (1975) is a bravura piece of this kind. A comparison (which I've not space to pursue) between that and "Alice in a German Garden" (written in 1968) would provide another dimension of Dorothy Hewett's development in the last eight years. However, I must consider still another way out.

The way out can be the way down, to a place whose natural language is symbol. This volume ends with four symbolic poems (all from 1973, a year before "Forsaken Mermaid"). Clearly there was a re-reading of both Blake and the later Yeats behind these poems. The shift into symbol is connected, too, with the damage to her eyesight memorialised in "The Glasshouse", an experience which after the first despair ("none can build/such private glasshouse in the brain") led to the discovery that her splintered vision could be a source of power. "Lately I stare at the world" (the next poem in the volume begins) and in this new mood the poet turns to look again at that image of an alternative self ("mortal shadow") which has worked away direly in her imagination from her youth but which now, with strength out of loss, she turns to face. The ending of "But Lately I stare at the World" wittily recalls Blake's "single vision":

> I have a choice: close one eye and forget
> or dare the two
> but lately I stare at the world.

One of the many implications here is that the poet has found a new, still fragile capacity for passiveness. Her confessional poems are always active, frequently anxious, always threatening to become mere heaps of recollections. The symbolic poems represent a way of transcending anxiety by merging the activity of the self in universal rhythms. The self recreated in the symbolic mode still bears the same outline. Her same conflicts reappear, but in forms which carry new possi-

bilities for their resolution, or at least, their accommodation. Of these last four symbolic poems the best (I think) is "The Gift", which begins in the unlocalised world, with traditional images of crisis, then modulates into a more personal idiom.

Fallen prone in the dark wood,
naked I must face the flood,
in the wood the streaming light
laps me round before the night.
Light irradiates the sky,

from one huge disfigured Eye,
drives me out to stumble blind
through the closets of the mind.

To descend further into the self offers release, but the new country keeps its idiosyncratic contours. So we have here the paradox of being driven "out" and yet *into* the "closets of the mind". The new world (of experience, of poetry) first bursts upon her in images of catastrophe. Perhaps these incursions from the "firmament" cannot be absorbed or integrated into poems — with what that failure would imply for a poet whose life depends on a right relation with her gift.

Iron tongue and fire-ball,
clapping bell and raven call,
what dread messages are sent
from the streaming firmament?

The next lines then envision the benevolent possibility that the rewards of submission will be poems of the kind she aspires towards: solid, separate, permanent (like stones) or (like the rock that housed Excalibur) a fund of power and the sacred.

The waterworn and shining stone,
sufficient to itself alone,
flashing stream and falling sword,
the round stone that holds the word.

There are possibilities, too, that the "passiveness" will become a new source of strength in life.

In a green and gentle place
I will hide my marred face,
till the angel in my side
draws her sword and we divide.

I to whiten into bone,
obdurate for death alone,
She to hold the holy stone.

She (and not-she, the twin mermaids reconciled) will go her own way, resolute and accepting death, which in other poems terrifies her, because what in her is permanent, deepest, most valuable, will have affirmed itself. The road of increasingly desperate inspection of a dwindling self need not be taken.

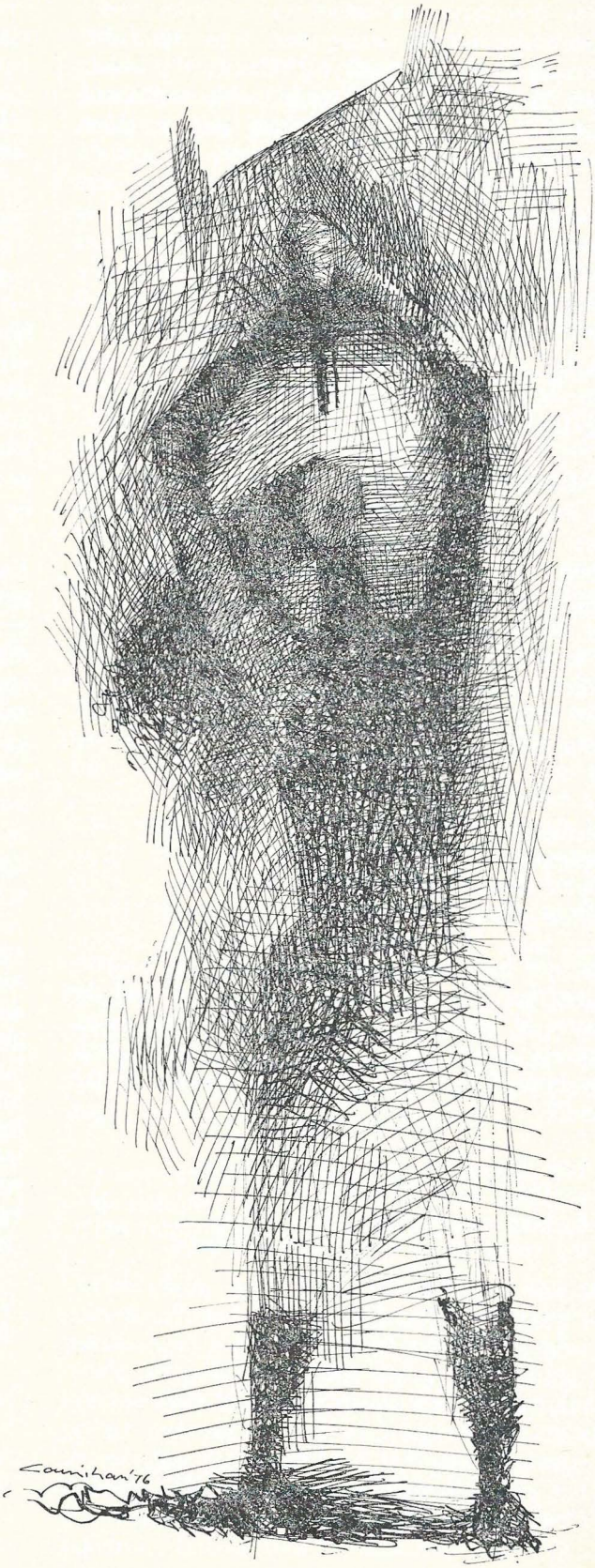
It says something about the abundance of *Rapunzel in Suburbia* that the critic is left with more than the usual feeling of having left much unsaid. There are the lyrics, the fantasias, and those poems of fluid reminiscence which bring into play other considerations altogether; or, concentrating on the qualities shared by different kinds of poem, there is Dorothy Hewett's generous, intelligent humor, akin to Faulkner's in its interplay of light and blackness; there are the rich range of her imagery, and the command she has developed of a more mobile, run-on line to express more variety of tone.

Still, the confessional element is perhaps the most prominent in the volume, and will, I feel sure, form a major part of her achievement. Her distinction (from this point of view) is to have given us not only confessional poems of great honesty, integrity and force, but to have gone beyond these to reflect on the process of confession itself, and finally, to have obeyed her inner necessity for release. She has listened to the critical voice in her which can appraise a whole venture and find it insufficient. Of how many Australian poets can that be said?

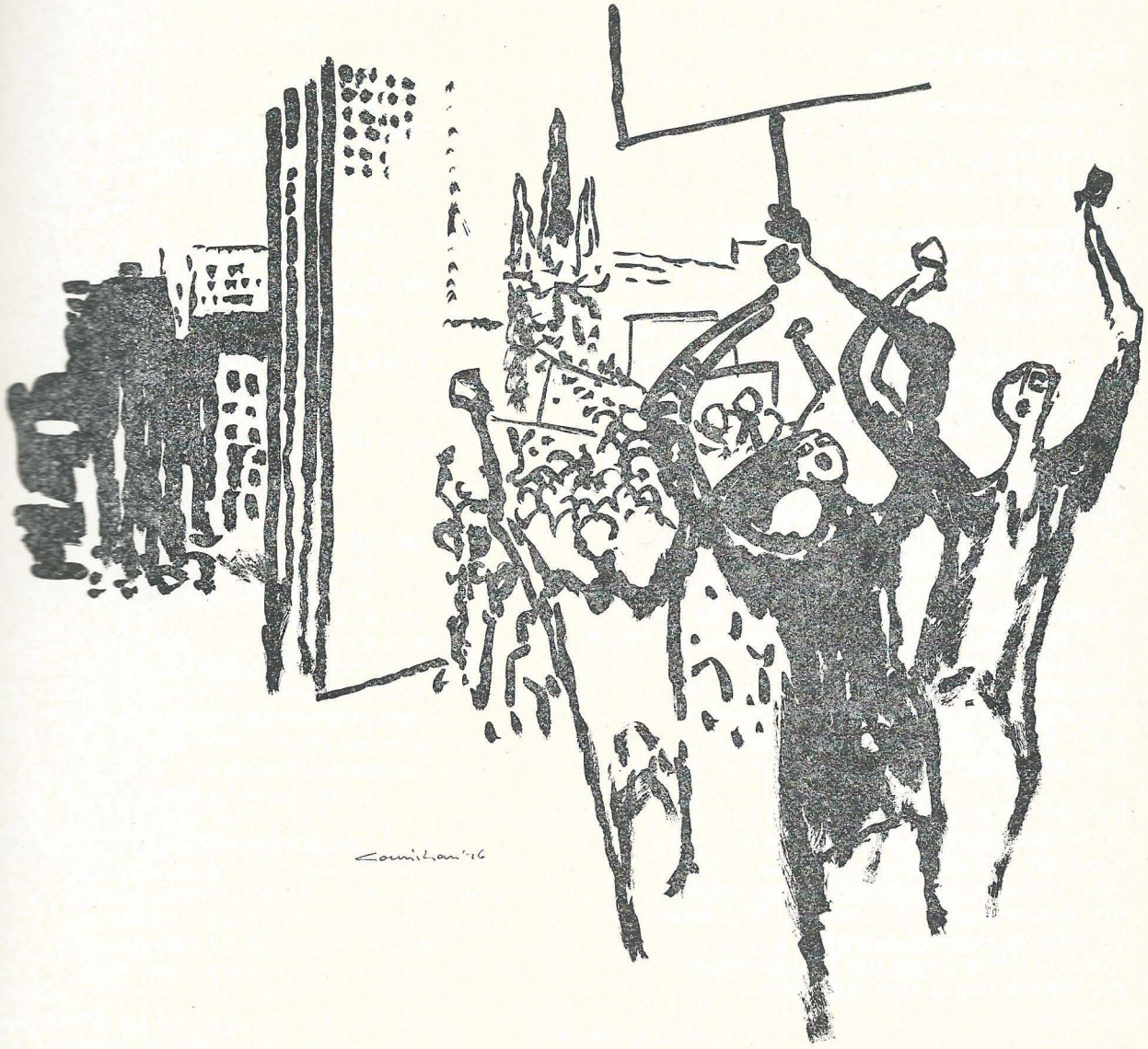
1 Banner

2 Banner

3 Demonstration



WORK IN PROGRESS: Three studies by Noel Counihan



The Foreman's Cruise

He was reluctant to permit
the offence of movement, but
he felt the yacht flutter
with a lazy macabre lightness

He remembered work, inspecting
the spinning, looking
informed & attentive, trying
to remember which was warp & which was woof.

And he knew that humor can't stop any
order or expiry, least of all
needs, but it didn't hinder yet

on his jacket
he fingered wealthy suede:
like that of gold, the surface grew
an almost imperceptible film
as if from a breath, by wear.

On the transistor, he searched
the wavelengths for opera, with not so much
pleasure as envy. His own
exasperation could have been
expressed like a baby's, in growls
wails & coloratura shrieks, which
explore as much as complain.

Instead of this he had
developed the terrible
absence, which is
"the victim's acceptance, even before
the victim knows it himself". And awed
by leisure now he allowed
foam's lattice down the hull to chain
the waves like a tangled skein.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

City Sculpture

Sure, you're hiding —

strangest lover
    I could wish for

a tangle
    of steel scaffolding;
you tight-rope walk
        iron-filings
            like rust

I want
    to heal
        you

the crane
    will hoist
my garlanded platform
    past the bird helmets
to you
    sky-larking
    sky-hurt

two black stooped hunches
    the unknown
        and his evil assistant
silhouetted
        in a German expressionist
            movie
shooting
        my deep, frightened stills
            to you

behind —
    crooks
    stand in the chimneys
and in wonder
    scratch
    dawn-stubbled faces

some construction site
some movie
sometimes I wish
    you'd come to your senses.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

The Shack At Dusk

From this window the clouds folding over
Birds whistling feathered in the last of dusk's light
As the blue sky folds into other skies
And the afterimage of kids singing and dancing down gravel lanes
Milkbar doors banging shut and fruitwomen and blue carlight
Shining eyes, glasses, your shout ya bastard,
Foaming slippery wet glasses knocked over, wet red fingers
And, as they thump you down another . . .

"You 'member that '54 chevvy, or what ar ya?"

"Sell the hearse of a thing did ya?"

"Nuh."

"Well whataya on about then, ya bloody donkey?"

"Someone wanted it."

"Argghhh . . ."

And as you wander home seeing the moon bubbling in the gutter
And the sweet hit of cool air, the trams rocking you to sleep
Dogs barking the town hall lights out; chooks buckarking
Standing on tip-toes to admire the sunset,
You catch a glimpse of yourself breathing pure happiness
And turning a corner
A wave of their singing floats back again and through the fences.

BARRY DICKINS

Flight

i Finally seeing your grandson again
you played the part to the hilt and cut
your fingers on it, twice, and twice
refused to let me bandage them.
Four days later I found blood dripped
onto the lino, near the garden door.

ii We clanged and shrieked along the doughnut
of air round the aquarium. That
was his world, deep and fabulous,
turtled and ray-stung, where you came
on the love-path with whirring shutters.
The shark and its frozen fisheye
circle the opaque green silence.

iii The jet takes you to its dark silver
belly. The huge dorsal fin
lifts into enamelled sunset,
cutting a curve south,
tapering beyond sight.

ANDREW McDONALD

Heir Apparent

My cherryboot in the stirrup,
a green acreage in my eye,
my jacket's made of worsted — and I,
(as cook insists) am his 'lordship'.

My animal's hide is rarest cobalt,
his mouth a Kembla blast-furnace,
unpredictable, and my choice
entirely. I was born difficult,

will be equal in my time
to fast buyers, over-zealous
new governments, family
funerals, but this is to come.

Now, the whip between my teeth
I'm off across Arabia.

ALAN GOULD

A Pantheist Love Poem

God has just stopped the luminous rains,
And all the galloping waters have drained away;
The sky with swimming angels has fled to Mars,
And my agnostic tempered reasons blow by me.

Sails of ether burst their configurations;
Seas of airy kingdoms bomb to Jesus;
A sky of madness rings its way to Saturn,
To sing my spiritual emblems into nothing.

I am the host of apples, wine and cheese;
Worms tell me their indelicate mysteries;
A dog, without a master, suddenly claims me,
I bark my private answers to the liquid trees.

HARRY ROSKOLENKO

Sherwood River

So the hood
slips over the head
of my last night's
river-bend dream
with
always
the next niche
of silent reeds
and wild water
luring me
to grieve
like a pack
of Darwin dogs.

Through
the neat blind fold
just a hint
of golden gimlet eyes
and a
flying cunning
that
could loot
an eyrie —

my sleep
is a bird for the hounds;
my foxy heart
summons
a falconer.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

On The River Where I Was Born

Ships, scows, tugs, barges — they go
In caterpillar motions through our miasmas.
Kites of steel pennants flare from bridges,
And warning whistles scream away collisions.

But still they come in mechanical variations —
Black flotsam — the water's own rot;
A grave of liquid malice laughs on the Hudson,
Clowning the history of the river's sweetness.

The river's gone within its many deaths,
And no boys swim or fish or play.
The gulls, soaked in oil, are feathered engines,
Gasping on rotted wharves their funeral cries.

Barges, tugs, scows, ships — kited go,
Whistling their collisions with scientific man.
The browning waves distil our ironies . . .
The river's gone away between its banks.

HARRY ROSKOLENKO

(for Robert, Harold, John, William, Bill and Malcolm on 12 December, 1975)

Leaders Liberal

His was the arrogance to bow out, winning:
as father, grandfather, almost god,
he did not anoint or bestow, he
hired only siblings, sired no sons.
His was the contempt for consequences he
forced others to live with in sequence.
Rhetorical silence became public address.

He failed to ensure succession against successor's
wife, whirlpool, deep high's narcosis,
shark's teeth opening and closing
on the law of supply and demand.

Death's replacement was too fair dinkum
to tip his party's avenging numbers off
the perfect balance of their vote by
using his own pompous self-endorsement.

By sailing beyond waters territorial
the next in line marooned himself
somewhere between Africa and Madagascar
after briefings on the Strait of Malacca.

After him came the newspaper boy in his forties
who sold and read the headlines, offered
change to pinstripes who always refused.
Victim, he knelt for honors from vanquisher.

The last in line was too young to be first.
What silver spoons had not taught, he
learned from his godfather's silver tongue:
the precedence of governor generals over parliament.

Had first and last men overlooked
the undefeated dinkum ocker bastard
who now sits in the studio, waiting
his turn to enlarge his pinned button
larger than the largest tractor wheel
in the camera's lens across the nation:
the bloodsport, bloodspot of Shame, Shame?

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

Toga Virilis

Nineteen football jumpers, flexing their muscles
among the wattles in the winter wind,
which, virtuoso, shakes their quavers of sharp gold;
in concert with mad dancers, red and black.
Such chests, biceps, setting-up exercises!

Lynda, the captain's bride, doing her womanly
Sunday bit for the team, comes with her basket,
unpins, orders and flattens the
savages, tamed till Saturday.

BARBARA GILES

Thought-Control Machine

The day we were allowed to see it
they wheeled it out carefully. (Odd that the wheel
should have survived, oxcart to rocket.)
Stripped off its veils of shimmering plastic.
We peered between uniformed shoulders,
while plainclothes men
mixed with the plainclothes crowd.

There were few speeches,
perhaps the politicians too felt obsolete.
The thing was self-controlled
they told us;
we tried our best at self-control.

It could pick up, they said,
the slightest hint of disaffection
in any mind, or even
any subconscious, present.
(The crowd had handpicked itself;
the number of excuses on grounds of previous engagements
had been commented on by the media.)

I switch it on this way,
said the inventor, doing so.

The beam began to scan
slowly, like a lighthouse.

It was red, the beam, all red.
It saw in the whole crowd nothing
but treachery, hidden mutiny, assassination tendencies;
hesitating only, paling a little,
at a crowd of kindergarten kids.

It turned towards the inventor
standing among shaking politicoes
and public servants. Red. All red.

Turn off that switch
somebody shouted.
The Prime Minister
moved into the beam. Red. Red.

'Something's gone wrong!' But the inventor
set it revolving
back over the lot of us,
and smiled proudly.

White. White as flags, fear, bones.
"That," said the inventor,
"*that* is the whole point of it.
Now we are all safe. Even I'm converted.
Knowledge, you see, is power."

JUDITH WRIGHT

Eyes Of Morning

I am aware of
her deep heart sound,
slowly moving
my eyes are greeted by
the freshness of late morning.

I see the mist's face
shadowing shadows
and the warmth of a body
reminds me of her presence.

A kiss, an exchange of breath
four eyes touching memories
noses forming L
A caress of words
drifting into smoke,
compatible discords
lips forming O
A transparent thought
over breasts
A forgotten hand — cupped
touching V

Two strangers pretending not to notice
floating the lat E
afternoon.

SWEENEY REED

Fraser Island

There has been no press release to nature
tho' trees / in the shape of newsprint
a few headlines / washed down drains

or wrapped around the garbage / struggle
back to earth. We stand
in the ways of old / on the lip
of this great lake / the silence

as black as water / ominous
as the death of prophets / no
long lizard brings our answer.
On the other side of night / white men

keep them in the shadow of the rocks.
Bulldozers begin / the first incision
the wind / whispers urgency / the trees
cannot move fast enough / penguins leave

their dancing deadness on the sand.

LYNDON WALKER

The Accused

before the police arrived
he acquired two oxyacetylene
cylinders & slowly twisted
their nipples until the flame was right
& welded the chrome-plated bed-ends
into outdated pieces
of modern art
    & then an intimate & sensitive
    conceptual act pissed
    in the electric jug & poured it
    boiling into the telephone
    receiver hoping
    to silence forever the whispering
    death of culture
after twenty years
in the country party discovered
fellatio & sang the internationale out
of the side of his mouth
    & sat in full lotus
    for twenty four hours before
    an autographed photograph of joh
    bjelke before announcing
    to the world that *he*
    was the buddha
    incarnate
relaxed & calm remained cross legged
& naked on the terrazzo & interviewed
the press
    when questioned
    about his behavior said
    that after sixteen years of
    blissful marriage & blessed
    with two wonderful kiddies he
    felt the movement of the spirit
    in post industrial society
when the police arrived
under pressure he retracted all & was
still crucified on the bradfield highway
near the tollgates below a faulty
fluorescent bar which flickered the
inconsistency of god eli eli
lamachthana in code through his eyelids &
infinity would not come
    & beautiful & camp
    cried at the end the proletariat
    is necessary to the symmetry
    in the concrete poem
    of the typeface of destiny
as the absolute artist & the absolute
in art the story of his depravity has been
serialised nationwide & the film rights
have been sold
    at his grave six thousand
    teenagers annually staple their
    arms onto the stars

RAE DESMOND JONES

From "Travels in the Blue"

Coming Through

The winds that seek you out
crouching, rugged-up and stamping on a hillside
in the steel grey savage hour before the dawn
throw their knives which snare and drag away
part of your acid-bitter tears, some of your soft reflections
until you become a thief, hitching hard and skulking
with a clever bag of deals and daydreams.
You are rattled, freshened, cut and shifted with gusts
laughing, sinister or raising the purple power of a storm.
It's left to you, the trimming of the sails and rudder hauling

leaving the last town-street for the backblocks
past the suburbs lined with easy money
the wide lanes disappear and the tales are tougher

spinning like a coin on the paper-flat plains
or rolling the battle-ground hills, until the road-lore
binds you hand and foot to the median strip

then the breeze brings a fresh spring smell of damp dust,
blows you up to a joy of moving and carries you light
along a trail of stained-glass insect shells to dump
you on a strange horizon of inland corners.

Shimmer and Chimera

One day it will catch
you up
busting camp each morning
rolling the bags just
to feel the passage of miles

Going down some dead-straight
track
the desert will burst its fences
and spill like lava
over your only direction

Or the heat will make a cloud
dance
and the gum-trees riddle
your brain with million-sunset
epithets and brief responses

I have had a sunstruck
vision
where I walked across a dazzling
sea which glimmered and shifted
on a sand of clear red crystals

Who can begin to know the
shapes
that tremble every hill-shadow
their shaded eyes and clapping-sticks
keeping in time and tune with the millennia

I am making a reckless desperate
run
to the great dividing ranges
always for oncoming water
always looking back over my shoulder

ANDREW SPIKER

The First Person. Not Understanding

I wake in a house where other people are sleeping
not so far as another side of dream
but separated from me by
decades of breathing, the house itself,
the first person

they seem to stand off a few paces
preoccupied in a dialogue with tigers
capricious under the dark wood

lid of bushes. And death won't do,
it's too serious and it doesn't explain
although we sang in the kitchen

Madam Moonlight flows in perfect ease through
the windows, a can of beer weighs
exactly a month, the fridge hums

and the tigers vanish like fingerprints.

I rise in moonlit dungarees.

ROBERT HARRIS

Suddenly, It's Spring In London

It's March, the month when birds refurbish nests,
when trees hang curtains, flowers lay carpets, when
the house-proud thousands take the tube to town,
their credit ratings poised to buy the best
of mixer, washer, fridge, the Ideal Home.
"Your easy purchase plan — just five pounds down,
a pound a week for life, with Masterloan."
And, in a plastic rubbish bin, a bomb.

The cost? Dead, no-one; injured, sixty-four.
There's Alan Richards, seven, small and black,
and Rachel Cohen, eighty, Jewish mum —
time payment on Old Ireland's wrongs. A broad
and bitter brogue returns to the attack:
"You fucking Brits, there's more where that came from."

IAN TURNER

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Peter Porter

Poets at Large

I agreed to write on new books by James McAuley and Judith Wright. I wish it could be otherwise, but I find I can only do so by way of an autobiographical prelude. So —

Except for residual childhood memories and what I was able to pick up on two visits in 1974 and 1975, I am badly informed about Australia. Australian poetry before my own generation was not something I ever read. I have now got to know a lot of recent Australian verse, but I am almost as nonplussed as ever I was about the tradition of poetry in the country. The exegetical work (pretty forensic stuff most of it) of those critics and scholars who specialise in Australian literature up to the time of the Second World War continues to bewilder me. I am unable to follow my habitual custom and make immediate value judgments about the poets in a good part of James McAuley's volume. Something in the manner of Mr McAuley's argument (and he is fair and moderate reasoner) seems to forbid my desperate cry — 'but is he any good?' — of a discourse on, say, Brennan. To be frank, Brennan seems absolutely no good to me. But you cannot leave him out of any historically organised discussion of Australian poetry. Yet when you assert that Brennan was a vital force in the development of Australian poetry, what have you said?

The curious thing about literature in English is that we are all at the same point in time but our national derivations trail behind us in very uneven lengths. Of course, it may not be of advantage to the English and Americans to have such long tails. A poet's mind is most definitely not a nationalist machine, however much it is affected by the experience, surroundings and culture of its native society. So that those present-day Sydney poets who look to San Francisco or New York, to Robert Duncan or John Ashbery, are surely right to do so, rather than to build on Slessor or even the generation immediately before theirs — Les Murray's and David Malouf's, and if I may concertina a few years, my own. I would prefer them to avoid Duncan, take Ashbery in small doses and go back to Wallace Stevens, but I approve of their choosing their models where their enthusiasms are.

This is exactly what I did in 1947. This is also where the autobiographical diversion begins. Except for anthology pieces, and home copies of C. J. Dennis, I read no Australian poetry as a child. I imagine this was the fault of the Queensland syllabus. The first poet I loved was Browning, and my early school prize-winning efforts were dramatic monologues of Browningesque cast. I managed to matriculate in 1946 without having encountered even the name of T. S. Eliot. I would have been surprised to learn that anyone was writing poetry in Australia, outside of my own tiny circle of friends. Then I bought Auden's *Age of Anxiety*, which had just been published. I can't say the scales fell from my eyes — it was more like a first comprehension that I had eyes. I decided that I was going to be a poet after reading Auden. But for some time Auden remained the only poet later than Swinburne whose work I knew.

But there is a special point to this rather calculated-looking reminiscence — though poorly educated and naive, I took no interest in any authors but the greatest. My friends and I (and I will not name them, in order to spare their blushes) thought of ourselves as artists destined to be the Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner *de nos jours*. It was wholly characteristic of us that we

James McAuley: *A Map of Australian Verse* (Oxford, $13.75 and $7.25).
Judith Wright: *Because I was Invited* (Oxford, $8).

took our great-man categories from music, an easier art to thrill to than poetry. We were not disturbed by the obvious fact that our efforts at writing were not within hailing distance of the worst work by a real master, and were, in fact, inferior to what other Australian poets were writing all over the continent. We were isolated in the masterful paranoia of great expectations.

I don't think this is a bad start to a career of writing verse — let the moderation, the false leads, the vistas of envy and disappointment, build up as you get older. With a bit of luck, you may have become tough enough to stand the dreadful strain of a lifetime of writing. But quite soon you must move out of that enchanted state of mind which concludes that, because you can enter fully into the world of *Die Zauberflöte*, you can necessarily write anything worthwhile yourself.

Some years ago I divided the partners in the business of art into the Three Cs — the Creator, the Critic and the Consumer. I was happy to classify myself as a paid-up member of the third category who still put his foot hopefully into Category One. Category Two tends to go the way of all wholesalers. It was precisely as a consumer of poetry that I rejected everything Australian, including the names I saw on the Bulletin's Red Page. I had so much catching-up to do on the poets of England and, to a lesser extent, America.

I suppose my experience could not be more unlike that of a young poet of twenty today. He will have had a pretty good run down on all the major reputations of the century at school, and plenty of academic introduction to seminal figures at university. Better than that, he will know who's 'in' and who's 'out' locally, and what sets the needle quivering in the States. I still think my ignorance and ungovernable confidence were healthier, just as I'd sooner spend time studying great poets than minor ones. (As an aside I believe we all have a duty to rescue Donne, Pope and Keats from the dons. Think how awful it would be if poetry were to be read only in universities. In this respect, Australia has a healthier distrust of the academy than America has.)

But, and this is a huge but, one learns to write better by working with other poets and comparing one's efforts with theirs. I didn't do this until the middle fifties in London and, by that time, my contemporaries were the generation of English poets, slightly younger than myself, just down from Oxford and Cambridge — Peter Redgrove, Ted Hughes, Philip Hobsbaum, Alan Brownjohn, Anthony Thwaite and George MacBeth. My point is that there is all the difference in the world between learning how to write poetry in the practical and often informal conditions of a workshop, and studying the history of poetry or the judging and placing of poets in an academy. There is no Royal College of Poetry or Conservatorium of Verse, unfortunately, so poets find themselves studying poetry formally at university while moderating and monitoring their own work by reading and discussing it among their colleagues.

Thus it is that I know the poetry of the younger Australian poets reasonably well, since I've talked to them and read many of their books, and the mainstream of older Australian poetry hardly at all. To my jaundiced eye, Australian literature hardly exists, since it has had inevitably to concern itself with minor figures. There are plenty of minor writers in British and American literature also, but they have been edited out by time or are still our contemporaries and therefore earn the indulgent concern we show for the artists of our own epoch (Philip Larkin once said, *à propos* his *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse*, "the present is always overvalued"). The British and American equivalents of the names who grace the pages of histories of Australian literature are so fugitive that only experts have encountered them. This comparison may be a bit hard on writers such as Marcus Clarke and Henry Handel Richardson, but it surely applies to Harpur, Kendall and even Brennan.

But, if Australian literature hardly exists, Australian conditions are undoubtedly different from those of England and the United States, and I find it easier to read McAuley's book as an account of how men of courage and talent built up a body of work in the face of their pressing need to define their own country. It ought never to be forgotten that the deep past of English Literature (and this means everything of value up till the beginning of the First World War) belongs to any person who has English as his first tongue. A man born in modern Stratford-on-Avon is no closer to Shakespeare than one born in Duluth, Coff's Harbour or Dunedin. With all English literature before one, the need to know the work of one's contemporaries or immediate forbears must surely be relegated to an area of special concern — because one writes oneself or because one seeks guidance in a contemporary maze. I wish Australians read more poetry by living writers, but I would not want them to spend too much time tracing the roots of their literature or

celebrating figures not intrinsically interesting merely because they are founding fathers.

It is precisely here that literature differs from history. A historian's business is with the men who shaped society, irrespective of their value as talents or moral beings. The literary man must always concern himself with artistic achievement. This is why the detailed study of Australian literature in our university departments is a largely wasted exercise, at least for most of the nineteenth century. It can be argued that, if we don't examine those writers, nobody else will. The loss would be small, in my view, if that happened. A better argument for the academic analysis of 19th century and early 20th century writers comes from the distinction I drew previously between literary history and social history. Men like Lawson, Paterson and Brennan (in their different ways) tell us about the development of our country — its attitudes, social patterns and aspirations. Australian literary criticism turns out to be social history in the end.

James McAuley's *Map of Australian Verse* is devoted to poetry written in Australia in this century, with only a short introduction dealing with popular verse such as bush ballads and the poems of Lawson and Paterson. So it seems that I have wasted many words offering offensive *obiter dicta* about work which isn't even discussed by McAuley. I must confess, however, that before reading it I would have lumped about half of the major figures of his book into the category of over-estimated forbears I tried to establish previously. I still feel less at home with many of them than I do with the younger generation of Australian poets, perhaps because the younger poets are more influenced by overseas writing. There is a paradox here, however, since the new generation of Australian poets is much happier dealing with the everyday life and character of Australia than its predecessors were. Style (and I mean more than just International Modernism) can be borrowed or imitated from America, Britain or Europe — anywhere that produces exciting poetry in fact — but substance is now unselfconsciously Australian.

There is a sense in which an erudite and referential poet like Les Murray is much more Australian than any of the Jindyworobaks. Australia has cut all umbilicals by now, and its poets are benefiting from the independence. One of their benefits is to be able to take their enthusiasms from outside the country. Being indisputably Australian means that you don't have to emphasise your nationality. Yet that nationality is used by McAuley continuously to justify the analysis he offers of his poets. I suppose he is doing no more than any man would whose map of poetry is confined to one country. I haven't read John Press's book of a similar title which maps out English verse for this century, but imagine that it too tends towards the parochial. And McAuley is refreshingly unacademic, which is more than can be said for some of the critical material he reprints in the survey. The study of Australian poetry is all too academic an exercise. I trust the literary stock exchange more than I do professional critics. Gossip and prejudice keep alive enthusiasm and excitement. Critical articles smother poetry under heaps of prose.

James McAuley's map is an easy one to read. Each chapter consists of the same elements. There is a short critical introduction to the poet or poets concerned, followed by extracts from articles or letters or reviews by the poet himself and some of his critics, and then a brief anthology of poems. Each chapter is footnoted and given a bibliography. I have only one complaint about the method — although the book is not a short one, its theme is unrepresentatively curtailed. Each section is just too short, especially the anthologies. I suspect that McAuley's choice of poems will be seen as eccentric in Australia: I found it interesting and usually convincing. My reading through was like a switchback ride — my enthusiasm was always going up and down.

The first big down was Brennan. He is a heroic figure, but a very uninteresting poet. Not for the first time, critics have been bamboozled by a poet's philosophic stance into taking his actual words for the sum of his intentions. There is no good reason to believe that poetry resides in philosophy more than it does in botany or bookkeeping. But Brennan was a martyr and his work comes equipped with a theory. Then there is the correspondence with Mallarmé, and so on. It's well-known that Mallarmé's command of English was eccentric, to say the least, but I cannot conceive what good he saw in Brennan's poetry, other than his pleasure in having a disciple in so remote a place. The big up for me was Shaw Neilson, whom I doubt that I had read for years. At his best, he has some of the strangeness, the pursuit of dreams by reason, which one finds in Emily Dickinson.

> When schoolboys build great navies in the skies
> and a rebellion burns the butterflies.

There is, even more than Dickinson, a perilous footway over the banal and the whimsical which Neilson sometimes cannot tread, but adjustments of diction are small things beside the power of imagination.

Slessor is, for me, a cross to hang on. I can see why his work is loved, and I can partly enter into his world, but always I am troubled by a failure of invention in his poetry, a fading off into lyricism at the slightest temptation. Also, he challenges comparison with Eliot, without being able to sustain it. "Five Bells" inhabits a world not unlike that of "The Waste Land" but, in the end, Eliot's poem is about so much more than Slessor's. Slessor's short poems, of which McAuley prints two of the best known, "Country Towns" and "South Country", seem to me more successful. Above all, he has style, and a penchant for the real which does not always go with style. Yet I cannot believe that he is a major poet, or even an influential one. Personality and idiosyncracy, if not accompanied by great energy, tend to waste themselves.

One of the interesting phenomena of emergent literatures is the neglected figure suddenly offered exaggerated vindication. Such a one is Bertram Higgins. James McAuley keeps cool about him, and with justice. On the strength of "The Confrontation", Higgins was a very confused writer, having little tact with words. Still, he is better than William Baylebridge, whose poetry is sheer fustian. It is quite bewildering to encounter Judith Wright, in an essay in *Because I was asked*, pointing out aspects of Baylebridge's use of language which are inferior to Shakespeare's. I'm sure we all make inflated claims for our friends and contemporaries, but wild overestimations of worth seem endemic to Australian critics. Once again, this is something of which McAuley is not guilty. Indeed, he remarks, in a footnote, that the high opinion of Francis Webb's poetry expressed by Sir Herbert Read is only a rarity in that Read was an overseas critic. In Australia itself, praise is doled out fulsomely. It happens in England and America, too, especially among the avant-garde, but it is more injurious in Australia, where comparisons tend to be either meaningless or killing.

I am not asking for a critically hostile public, or for that sour Leavisite temperament which assumes that anything done in our own time must be of little worth, but only for the critic's awareness that the immediately admirable may not necessarily be of lasting quality. The signallers down in the butts are simply recording too many bulls. Again, I think the answer is easy to find. Let us all read more poetry (Australian, certainly, but from many other countries too) and worry less about the state of our literature and our standing in the world's eyes. There is really a great deal of interesting poetry being written in the world today, which embattled positions prevent many of us from appreciating. I was alarmed to read, in an interview in the Sydney Morning Herald, a statement about modern English poetry by David Campbell, a fine poet by any standards. Campbell remarked, after returning from a trip to Europe, that English poetry was without interest at the moment, with the exception of Ted Hughes.

That, of course, is the current view in the States. I suspect that Campbell meant that Hughes's work was all that he knew — and also perhaps that Hughes can be seen to be weighty and significant. My view is equally biased, since I have lived in England for twenty-five years, but I think I know the faults and virtues of modern English poetry. But only because I know something about American and Australian poetry as well. Denouncing England when she's down fits prevailing Australian nationalism pretty well, and I don't think it matters too much. But my point is that in poetry England isn't down at all: with Hill, Hughes, Redgrove, Middleton, Larkin and the rest, England can field a strong team, though not one, admittedly, to impress someone sold on American Modernism. Yet the dismissal of current English achievement comes not only from supporters of American modes but from old-school Australian writers still anti-Pom in attitude. I remember once being chilled by a right-wing South African who said to me, "remember that literary talent usually goes with imperial and commercial ascendency — every time England loses standing in the world, her writers become less credible". Now, I don't agree with him, but sometimes, looking about me in Australia last year, I was reminded of his dictum. When all those mineral deposits begin to yield, maybe Australian poets will benefit.

That long disgression brings me on to the most difficult part of McAuley's book — the central figures of the Australian literary establishment — R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, Judith Wright, McAuley himself and David Campbell. His account of their progress and his very fair assessment of their performance seems to me to justify his whole study. I intend to be cowardly in my own judgments here, but with some justification, I think. These are the very poets who would have

been my mentors when I was young, if I'd had the sense to look to them. Later, they became the standard-bearers of a traditionalism I still support, though by this time I had found other exemplars in other places. I suppose it's a sort of Lost Leader effect, but varied. Their views I agree with, their works I don't always admire. The fight against Modernism in Australia has always been too easy. I have great respect and love for Auden's strange reactionary revolution, by means of which he restored rhyme, metre, effective form and rational discourse. But he carried it out under the banner of virtuosity and excitement — never, at least until his late Horatian phase, in the name of decorum and putting the clock back. However, poetry is in the words themselves, and fashion soon becomes unimportant. Hope and Campbell, at least, have triumphed, and theirs are the works the generations to come will build on. Campbell's way with pastoral poetry has continuously deepened with the years. Now it has a profound specific gravity of its own. His wit and learning have bloomed also, an ideal almost of the Jeffersonian democrat.

McAuley's selection from Douglas Stewart's poetry is excellently made. Stewart's later work, minutely and warmly celebrating the points and practices of nature, gets to the heart of lyricism in the manner of Clare rather than of Wordsworth. His poem "B Flat", honouring Gilbert White of Selborne's clergyman brother, who noted the pitch of the barn owl's cry, would be my nomination for the most attractive poem in the whole book. After the great names of Australian poetry, McAuley has to hustle the work of the fifties, sixties and seventies into survey-chapters which inevitably are largely made up of lists of names. This is the area which I am most familiar with, and I do not find McAuley especially illuminating in his assessments, though he remains fair, even to poets whose work he is unsympathetic to.

The chief originality of this later section is in his rating of Francis Webb. McAuley is a passionate partisan of form and reason, and he can no more agree to the premises of Webb's poetry than he can to the American school's soliciting of inspiration through confession or nightmare. Webb, although mentally ill in himself, is not a very extreme case of poetical *derèglement du sens* — less so I'd suggest than respectable figures like Lowell, Plath and Galway Kinnell, or Christopher Smart in the eighteenth century. McAuley writes about Webb: "That the powers of a remarkable poet were present in Webb one cannot doubt: that they were used effectively is open to considerable doubt . . . The poet, Craig Powell, who is a psychiatrist and knew Webb well in his later years, has quoted him as saying 'All my life has been chaos and horror. But I have tried to put order and beauty in my poems.' This does not resolve the question how far he succeeded."

I share McAuley's reservations about Webb, but for almost exactly opposite reasons. I want more horror and greater disturbance in the work. Too many of his poems seem to me to exist on only a surface tension of language. He simply doesn't go far enough in limning his nightmare visions. This begs the question of the relationship between violence of feeling and extremism of language, yet I know that my criticism is instinctive, not rationally-arrived-at. Webb's late poem "Nessun Dorma" is the sort of thing I admire in his poetry. I hope he does not become buried in academic fall out: he is exactly the sort of writer suited to vast critical exegesis.

What then of the present? McAuley is hardly a very exact guide to what is going on in Australian poetry at the moment. Like the British, American or any other extensive area of poetic activity, the scene is incorrigibly plural. I find this very encouraging, though I am less attracted by factional fighting than some poets I know. Like Britain, Australia has plenty of provincial messiahs, passionately committed poets who have never appreciated that sincerity guarantees nothing, but is merely the minimum requirement of an artist. They pursue their visionary ends and never comprehend the world's indifference. As Auden put it about a poet's recording his love for posterity, "to you it's destiny, to us it's chance". But there are also many poets of wit, imagination and skill working in Australia. It's as if it had been proved at last that the soil will nourish the art. Two younger poets, at least, seem to me the equal of any in Britain and America — Les Murray and Roger McDonald. And there are many more of almost that level of achievement.

Bearing in mind Larkin's dictum of the danger of overestimating the present, nevertheless I come back to my main argument — this is a good time to embark on a career as a poet in Australia. Sufficient numbers of dead have sanctified our imaginations (cf. Louis Simpson's line about America, "Grave by grave we civilise the land") — there is a flourishing publishing industry and a growing public — money is being found by the government (or perhaps I should say was being

found) to support the arts — and, most importantly of all, it no longer matters where you write in English, the imagination of the world is open to you. The individual fate will always be perilous: few of us write as well as we would like to, or even as we feel the censor in our heads is trying to make us do. I have no regrets that I went to England in 1951, but I know that if I had been born thirty years later I'd have stayed in Australia.

I've left myself little space to commend Judith Wright's collection of occasional pieces — chiefly lectures, reviews and articles written over three decades. I find her much more illuminating about the relationship of the Australian imagination to the land itself, its natural environment and dignity, than I do about individual poets. She is at her worst on Baylebridge and at her best on Shaw Neilson. She is brilliant when she surveys the place allotted to the Aboriginals in Australian literature. Her passionate devotion to the most miraculous of all forces in Australia — I mean the country itself in its varied topographical and geographical features — shines through the several pieces linked to the common theme of conservation. To awaken Australians (and I certainly include myself, as a long-standing city dweller with scant interest in the bush) to the one authentic mystical experience guaranteed by their country — the beauty of its natural surroundings — is the most worthwhile of undertakings. It is not yet too late, though Miss Wright's warnings are understandably urgent. Soon Australia will be 200 years old. It isn't very long in terms of world history, but it offers a firm base for a fully-developed sensibility to build on.


NO
EXIT

GLEN LEWIS

Go to the Mirror, Boys

Humphrey McQueen on the Left,
Ronald Conway on the Right

Since the appearance of Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia* in 1970 and Ronald Conway's *The Great Australian Stupor* in 1971 there has been a lot of discussion about McQueen's book and a little about Conway's.[1] Although *A New Britannia* is now about to be superseded by McQueen's more recent work, it still seems a worthwhile exercise to retrospectively contrast these two books, products of the Australian new Left and new Right in the early seventies.

For one reason, there is an astonishingly low level of sustained historiographical debate in this country. In the empiricist world-view of most Australian historians, history is something to be written rather than critically reflected on. Given this kind of traditionalism, books which are neither respectable academic studies nor the work of rank amateurs pose awkward questions for the professional historians.

One wonders, for instance, why McQueen's book has been discussed more than Conway's. Greater merit may be the obvious reason, but there is also the less flattering possibility that some Australian intellectuals have a built-in superficial bias to the left — hence the labor tradition in Australian historical writing — and so feel duty bound to take McQueen seriously while ignoring Conway.

Yet in fact there are a number of curious parallel concerns between the two books which have passed unnoticed. Whereas McQueen's book is an avowedly radical analysis of the weakness of the revolutionary tradition in the Australian labor movement, Conway's study is an explicitly conservative one that seeks to explain the lack of a viable Australian conservative tradition, and so to nurture one. They both have villains. McQueen's is the petit-bourgeois aspects of mateship which prevented the formation of a revolutionary ideal; Conway's is the expediently Whig tone of Australian social life which has impeded the development of a conservative tradition. And this is the most striking similarity and difference between the two: they reject the egalitarian tradition for diametrically opposed reasons. Where McQueen charges Australians with racism, militarism, and materialism, Conway criticises the emotional and spiritual sterility of Australian life. This latter critique is harder to define but it is also potentially more far-reaching.

McQueen's book is formally the more loosely organised book of the two. The author describes it as an argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism, and proceeds to discuss the past in terms of a broad schema of social groups such as racists, invaders and imperialists, or poets and pianists. More specifically, the opening section, "Historians", makes it clear that one of his main targets is the supporters of the bush legend about Australian history, particularly Russel Ward (p. 15). Lastly, in his final chapter, "Laborites", he mentions that the book is broken into two parts, the first dealing with Australia's place in the world, and the second with internal matters. He is emphatic about the need to situate Australia's place in western society: "only by relocating Australia in the mainstream of world development will it be possible to understand the nature of our radicalism or of our nationalism" (p. 17).

Readers may be interested to refer to Russel Ward's review of Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia* (Overland No. 47), and subsequent argument in Overland No. 48 and Overland No. 50/51. Jim Griffin's review of Ronald Conway's *The Great Australian Stupor* appeared in Overland No. 52, and subsequent argument in Overland No. 53 and Overland No. 56.

And in fact McQueen's interpretation is derived from a distinctive conception of Australia's place in world capitalism; it is from this perspective that he states the first of the four main themes which are the basis of the book's reasoning. "Australian nationalism," he claims, "is the chauvinism of British imperialism" (p. 21). This possibly ambiguous statement is clarified by a critical reference to Brian Fitzpatrick: where Fitzpatrick presented Australia as the victim of British imperialism, McQueen sees Australia as a junior but willing partner in the Empire. It is from this fundamental assumption that the dialectic of the book is then developed, and it seems to me that much of McQueen's later confusion derives from this starting point.

Firstly, McQueen oversimplifies Fitzpatrick's views. Some of the best parts in *The British Empire in Australia* are Fitzpatrick's pungent comments on the role of Australians in furthering capitalist interests in the South Pacific.[2] But more importantly, by making this assumption about Australian nationalism McQueen is denying the distinctiveness of the Australian experience, and so denying the Australian people an initiatory role in their own history.[3] Proceeding from this initially pessimistic view, he is impelled to go on and disprove the mateship legend at every turn in the rest of the book. In his eyes Ward is not just partially wrong or even seriously misleading, but totally in error.

McQueen's next thesis is the one which won the book much critical attention: "racism is the most important single component of Australian nationalism" (p. 42). Here McQueen is on much stronger ground. He is certainly right to dismiss parts of Ward's argument about this as spurious. Ward's claim that the good treatment of American Negroes on the diggings is evidence of the mateship credo's tolerance, for instance, is as suspect as his claim that the gold rushes delayed the emergence of Australian nationalism. Yet just how far McQueen can take this line is uncertain. A. A. Phillips has defended Henry Lawson against McQueen in this respect, and it seems even more unrealistic to label figures as different as Deakin and H. H. Richardson as racist.[4] McQueen's peremptory insistence on this part of his argument, which he has since maintained vigorously, seems misplaced; in the book the question is decided by its place in a broader argument, not by normal historical discussion.

Two more themes are then put forward by McQueen, one explicitly and the other generally. In his chapter, "Militarists", he asserts that "militarism in Australia was the logical outcome of the racism described above" (p. 84). But even more noticeably here McQueen's case is theoretical. The question is an ambiguous one that historians do not know enough about, but the role of the military in the Australian past seems to have been more in line with traditional English anti-militarism than with the practices of continental Europe. McQueen again seems to take his argument from a better knowledge of our external history: it is true that Australians involved themselves in a dismayingly long series of wars, but the military within Australia seem to have been neglected rather than encouraged.[5]

McQueen's final argument is then stated at the end of the book's first chapter on domestic history, "Emigrants": that Australian radicalism had a materialist petit-bourgeois character, and that it met with substantial success. It is difficult to be clear about his meaning here, but he seems to be maintaining that the radical concern with progress and materialism blinded the labor movement to a genuine revolutionary goal; this is an attempt to apply Gramsci's ideas to Australia (p. 125).

Perhaps it is best to restate McQueen's problematic here as a means of clarifying his point. He originally identified the egalitarian legend as his *bête noir*, then he posited an alternative to this by suggesting that Australian nationalism was the chauvinism of British imperialism. As a corollary of this he maintains that racism was the main component of nationalism and that militarism was another central feature of the national tradition. Till this point his argument is systematic, if not always historically plausible. However, when he turns to the domestic scene his case becomes harder to follow. Perhaps we can sum it up best by saying that the tradition of egalitarian nationalism was the ideal, but the reality was a moderate radicalism which had materialistic aspirations. The bush legend, in this sense, was an ideology imposed by the cultural hegemony of the bougeoisie as a means of misleading the working classes. Thus the main thrust of the book is to prove that egalitarianism was not the norm in Australian society, but that racism, militarism, and materialism were the realities of day to day life.

We can assess to what extent McQueen has achieved his aim by looking at some key areas: convicts, culture, the land, and the Labor Party. He criticises the convicts on two counts — that

they were materialistic, and that they betrayed each other. He assumes that this disproves Ward's thesis concerning the convict origins of mateship. Yet, given these points, they do not invalidate Ward. Naturally the convicts wanted to better their lot, and naturally some betrayed their mates; considering the miserable conditions of their life those reactions are understandable enough. To see them in an entirely jaundiced light is to do little more than reproduce contemporary establishment opinion about them. McQueen extends this line of thought by damning the bushrangers as "louts of the bikie variety" (p. 137). Though Ward's account of the convicts is romanticised, McQueen has gone too far in the other direction. For a radical historian dealing with an oppressed group he shows little sympathy here.

His brief comments on culture are also unsatisfactory. After claiming that poetry is truer historically than "the usual paraphernalia of scholarship" (p. 101) he goes on to condemn Lawson as a fascist. This kind of treatment is neither historical nor poetic. Certainly there were imperialist and racist elements in Lawson; there were also blatantly sexist undertones, which McQueen neglects. But Lawson was still more than this; he remains one of our greatest democratic writers. A related point of McQueen's, however, which is made in the next satirical chapter about the piano in Australian history, has more validity (p. 118). That is, middle class culture has exerted an effective dominance in the development of an Australian aesthetic style. But exactly how this dominance developed is a very complex subject which involves difficult questions, such as the relation between high and popular culture, and whether sport was the most valid cultural expression of the Australian worker. In this kind of argument it is important to realise that writers like Lawson were on the side of the workers, even if their latter day literary critics are not.

The chapter on "Selectors" is more substantial. Despite years of scholarly writing about the land laws and squatting in Australian history, no critical analysis of agrarianism as an ideology has yet been made.[6] In this chapter, however, McQueen writes an admirable essay on the social significance of the land; this is the one section of the second part of the book that really comes to grips with the Australian conservative world-view. It is only unfortunate that he did not include the sad story of the post-war soldier resettlement schemes, or discuss agricultural co-operation. The final chapters then discuss unionism and the Labor

Party. Both are criticised for being petit-bourgeois, though the A.L.P. is abused most caustically. Considering the long line of conservative unions in Australian history this seems unreaonable.

McQueen's point that corruption was a feature of Labor rule, however, deserves to be investigated, even if perhaps it has mainly taken place at the level of state and local government rather than federal. Yet the rationale behind his general conclusion is the same one that weakens much of the book: the worst enemies of the working class are to be found in the A.L.P. This kind of reasoning ignores the fact that Labor has substantial non-working class support, and that workers vote for non-Labor parties. McQueen's reasoning seems to be that if the workers have friends like the A.L.P. then they don't need enemies. But this sense of rage directed at the social democrats, however justifiable, only helps to cloud the fact that the most dangerous conservative forces in Australia reside in the non-Labor parties. Gramsci's advice about writing the history of a party as a means of analysing the social groups behind it makes sense in Europe in this context, but not so much in Australia or America.[7]

Ronald Conway's main point is that Australia has been a fundamentally utilitarian society, guilty of the worst kind of materialism, and he links this to an analysis of the historical conditions of the formation of the Australian personality. Where McQueen is claiming that Australian society has failed to produce a militant working class movement, and that this failure has corrupted the wider society, Conway is making the supplementary charge of corruption and mediocrity, but locates the roots of this disease in the structure of Australian family life. While McQueen writes as a political scientist, Conway claims to be a depth psychologist. In some ways Conway's book is more carefully constructed and illuminating than McQueen's; he carries his central arguments through more consistently. Yet at another level Conway's theories remain ambiguous and unclear. This is perhaps due to the conservative tradition which Conway models himself on: conservative thinkers ultimately must emphasise the force of tradition and the role of the illogical and unconscious in life, where marxists have tended to reject the irrational as an historical agent.[8]

But if Conway's arguments are more subtle than McQueen's, they sometimes verge on casuistry. His approach is as directive and even more dramatic. In this regard his style is more forceful than McQueen's; it is a distinctive blend of Catholic social philosophy, existential psychology, and bits and pieces from esoteric intellectual mentors like Aurobindo, Rattray-Taylor, Mumford, as well as Freud and Jung. Here is one typically apocalyptic passage: "Utilitarianism provided merely the hub around which anti-authoritarian matrist thought in Australia revolved . . . behind the brave self-reliant bushman's stance, dissenters and utopian pioneers were busy etching their matrist, utilitarian guide lines . . . meanwhile the great arid polluted continent we have exploited and violated stares back, sightless and incredulous at our naivety of spirit" (p. 68).

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two writers, however, is that where McQueen underestimates the distinctiveness of the Australian tradition, Conway overrates it. The English context is essential here. He sees early nineteenth century England as a sharply divided society. The anxieties of the French and Industrial Revolutions "had produced a patrist-authoritarian regime of bleak repressiveness" (p. 58). In contrast to this unreasoning type of conservatism, which Conway is quite critical of, stood the Benthamites. They represented the extreme matrist view of life: there was a line of descent from utilitarianism, through liberalism, to the present welfare state.

Conway believes that the true Australian political style is based on this Whig form of utilitarianism. The state has taken over essential services; and more especially education, and there is a social climate of anti-authoritarianism which derives from the fraternalist-anarchic character structure. Australian society thus suffers from a kind of Rankian trauma of birth. The bleak paternalism of the governing classes in earliest Australia reflected the inflexibility of the English establishment at that time. The Australian character developed an unenviable and inflexible form as a result of this. Excessive patrism in the nineteenth century, a period of transition around the nineties when the Australian archetype is defined, then the growing dominance of matrist-fraternalist traditions after the first world war, culminating in the utilitarian paradise of a welfare state. Conway describes the familial side of this process in terms of unconscious revenge: "The Australian convention of patrist manhood was too barren and heartless to survive long in dometic terms. It was up to the oppressed mother to win by endurance and subtlety what she had been denied by law and custom. The twentieth

century was to be her time of reckoning" (p. 33).

No small subject this! as T. L. Suttor or Manning Clark might say. But how valid is his interpretation? It is only fair to add that his thesis suffers greatly by simplification, but there is a degree of generalisation in his book which many historians would be quick to damn as unjustifiable assertion. Perhaps this is one of the prices popular historians must pay, yet Conway does go too far. For example, his conclusion that the utilitarian formula in Australia can be summed up as: Material Wealth = Pleasure = Happiness = Reason For Living. "Few Australians consciously doubt that this equation satisfies the requirements for psychological maturity" (p. 65). Such a dubiously mechanistic opinion is also apparent when we look at his interpretation of English history. His simplist contrast between utilitarianism and ultra-conservatism leaves out two of the other main currents of English political life at that time — viable conservatism, as represented by Shaftesbury, and the labor movement, with men like Cobbett.

Similarly Conway can write about Australia as a middle class society in which status is the principal dividing line. When discussing the question of class differences in family behavior — an essential point in his argument — he refers casually and caustically to "a traditional obsession with social class in Australian politics and life" (p. 94). This is probably the only part of the book where Conway slights tradition. Given this starting point, an easy target of a contented materialist society is created, which he can then freely criticise. We are informed that there are four primary psychological types of Australians: the patrist-authoritarian, the patrist-conservative, the matrist-indulgent, and the fraternalist-anarchic. Patrist-authoritarians were in the ascendant between 1788 and 1890, an interregnum of fraternalist-anarchics upset affairs in the 1890s, and then eventually the matrist-indulgents won out in this century. To make matters worse, this theory is unblushingly presented in a "scientific" tabular form (p. 76). It is tempting to totally reject this part of Conway's book except that it is in fact the basis of his whole interpretation. We should also recall that historians know very little about the development of the Australian family, and that what concrete evidence there is tends to suggest that Conway's main outline may be accurate.[9]

Conway then applies these themes in two short provocative historical chapters, and the remainder and larger part of the book is devoted to a structural examination of the contrast between image and reality, in his terms. So chapters four to ten examine the modern Australian family, religion, the generation gap, education, and "the withheld self". From a purely pragmatic viewpoint the test of Conway's themes lies in the insights it gives us, but here the two historical chapters are much too brief to be satisfying. He breaks the period 1788 to 1950 in two: the Disinherited Society 1788-1890, and the Commonwealth of Mates 1890-1950. We could sum these up sceptically as 1788-1890, a society without a real father, and 1890-1950, society with an unreal mother.

After this quite an important number of side-issues are touched on. Unlike McQueen, Conway tends to agree with Ward's arguments about our past and disagrees much more with Fitzpatrick (p. 18). He offers an interesting discussion about Deakin in which he claims that Deakin's biographer, J. A. La Nauze, has slighted Deakin's mysticism in preference for his cricketing ability (p. 43). He also sympathetically discusses the lack of a place that women have had in Australian history, and argues that Australia has never had a satisfactory philosophy of education.

To sum up. Many of Conway's insights are more helpful than McQueen's; however they are invariably about Australian social life, while his treatment of politics is confused and misleading. This spoils one of his central points about the lack of a permanent conservative class in Australia. Australian conservatives, he argues, have really been liberals. The country parties have never made "any intelligent statement of patrician idealism" (p. 43) about their place in Australian society, and this therefore discredits them as conservatives. Here Conway's original error about English politics is compounded: he is only prepared to grant distinctiveness to the Whigs in the Australian past, and the colonial counterparts to the English Tories are said never to have existed. A similar view to this was expressed by I. D. McNaughtan in Gordon Greenwood's textbook *Australia* in 1955, which Conway cites, but this claim is merely a revamped version of a cliche about Australian society — that it was English with the top layer left off and the middle expanded. Yet, while Conway's reasoning is biassed and confused when he claims that the Australian country parties were not conservative,

he still leaves historians in the position of not being able to suggest many satisfactory alternatives. The lack of knowledge about the nature of Australian conservatism is as great a lacuna as that concerning Aboriginals, women, and underprivileged groups.[10]

McQueen's book, on the other hand, is more realistic about Australian politics, but stops short at the type of questions that Conway pursues. *A New Britannia* is occasionally brilliant and often seriously misleading. It is an intensely subjective book rather than a personal one. McQueen has anticipated some of his critics in his introduction, but there is a central flaw in much of his analysis: his assessment of nationalism fundamentally underrates the authenticity of the egalitarian tradition. To see Australian nationalism primarily in terms of a mixture of vices is an absurd caricature. Despite this, the book is so far the most important statement of the new left, and one of the most original reappraisals of Australian history since the war. Students like it for its freshness and directness. The main danger about *A New Britannia* is that, like *The Female Eunuch,* it may prove to be a book outside of its own time, detached from the political circumstances which provoked it. Very few of its themes have since been taken up by other historians despite a good deal of radical lip-service to the book.[11]

In short, both books have highlighted some of the main flaws of Australian society, and they have raised a number of questions which must be answered. Yet they have also taken their indictments either too far or in the wrong direction. Many Australians would probably dismiss McQueen and Conway as extremists and see a middle of the road historical account, such as say Donald Horne's *The Australian People,* as being closer to the truth.[12] But that is more of a comment on the homogenous dead-level type of Australian history which still prevails in our schools and universities.

1 A detailed list of McQueen's reviews is given in his "Australo-Marximus: Reactions to A New Britannia", Politics, May 1972, Apart from press reviews the only discussions of Conway's book I have seen are Jim Griffin, "Psycho-Historical Arse Grass", Overland No. 52, and a critique in Australian Studies Booklist, No. 2, 1975.

2 Brian Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia* (Melbourne, 1969), p. 406.

3 This is doubly ironical considering that McQueen makes the same criticism of Fitzpatrick's and Nairn's treatment of the nineties strikes (p. 213). Robin Gollan makes a similar complaint about McQueen in Arena 24, p. 32.

4 A. A. Phillips in Meanjin No. 1, 1970, p. 108.

5 Sol Encel, *Equality and Authority* (Melbourne, 1970), p. 430.

6 Some recent studies are J. B. Hirst, *Adelaide and the Country* (Melbourne, 1973), D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper* (Sydney, 1968) and my *A History of the Ports of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1973).

7 Gramsci and Althusser seem to have emerged as the most important intellectual influences on the Australian new left. See Alastair Davidson's *Antonio Gramsci* (Sydney, 1968) and his "Althusser: Marxism old and new", Arena 19.

8 The Frankfurt school are the exceptions to this, via Adorno and Marcuse. Also see Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London, 1970).

9 Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890's* (Brisbane, 1973), p. 121, and S. Encel (et al), *Women and Society* (Melbourne, 1974), p. 54.

10 No extended discussion of Australian conservatism has yet been written, but see Michael Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia* (Melbourne, 1965); R. M. Crawford, *An Australian Perspective* (Melbourne, 1960); J. B. Hirst, *op.cit.*; G. Serle, *The Rush to be Rich* (Melbourne, 1971); G. C. Bolton, "The Idea of a Colonial Gentry", Historical Studies, Oct. 1968; B. Dyster, "The Fate of Colonial Conservatism on the Eve of the Gold Rushes", Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, 54(4), 1968, p. 329.

11 This is the criticism Juliet Mitchell makes of Greer's book in *Woman's Estate* (Pelican, 1971), p. 68. For a similar comment about McQueen see Bob Watts, "New Directions in Australian History", Arena 34, p. 32.

12 See my "New Directions in Australian Popular History?: Donald Horne's *The Australian People*", forthcoming in Australian Studies Booklist, 1976.

swag

Some months ago I very foolishly agreed to act as a judge for the Melbourne Herald's C. J. Dennis poetry competition, the major prize for which is $1000. I suppose this is the most generous prize ever offered in this country for a single poem. Interestingly enough, few 'established' poets have entered, so far as we can judge from the (anonymous by the time we get them) entries. But eight bloody thousand others have.

It's an extraordinary phenomenon and I don't suppose we have ever seen anything like it before, or will again. Talk about the psychopathology of everyday life! I and my fellow judges, Judith Rodriguez and Ron Simpson, agree that we felt that we should be rushing around the country trying to help the hundreds who, on the face of it, have lost love, or are marooned in suburbia, or see no meaning in existence, or just want someone to talk to. Several generalisations can be made: the bush ballad and its urban counterpart are alive and well — often rather well done; the figure of the derelict old man boozing in the park or the city streets is a popular one for poetic pity; it seems very hard indeed for those under eighteen to write about anything except their own sad plight; it seems hard for anyone at all to write perceptively and interestingly about an incident or a thought or something concrete — so many think that poetry can only be written about the big philosophical issues like love, death and existence; above all, people who have never read a literary magazine in their lives, and never will, *need* to write poetry and *are* writing it. Perhaps tens of thousands in Australia, given that the Herald competition is largely confined to Victoria. The whole thing is so interesting in its social implications that we are urging the Herald to deposit the manuscripts in the La Trobe Library for some future researcher. I hope he/she has a sense of humor and a light touch with analysis.

The experience does confirm in me one suspicion that has been growing for some time. Novels, short stories, reportage, criticism, history: in these literary areas the common reader still has a chance — not always, but often. But serious poetry has become professionalised, like dentistry. Poets write for each other (many of the numerous little poetry mags. around the place actually do print on a tit-for-tat basis); they have evolved an imagery, a technique and set of approved references which are analogous to a professional code of ethics. (I was told by one poetry editor at the recent Adelaide Festival of Arts that he was happy with his magazine's circulation of 200 because that was the limit of those who could 'understand'.) In this Herald competition we could tell immediately when we hit on a 'membership' poet: deft competence the right kind of sophisticated imagery, the masonic insignia of the 'in' allusion.

Am I being cynical and naughty? A bit. But essentially not. I accept that most readers of Overland, or a great many at any rate, feel themselves more cut off from the poetry than from any other part of the magazine. And I accept that this is inevitable. Because outside this 'professional stream' of poetry there's very little that can seriously be taken for poetry being written; and, when we find it, we print it. (I don't know what our poetry editor, Barrie Reid, whom I consider the best in the country, is going to say to all this. Barrie — you can reply next issue if you want to!) And I don't altogether blame the poets. I notice that when, as an experiment some

issues ago, we got a number of the writers of the poems in one of our issues to *tell* the reader in prose what he was saying, and asked our readers to say if they found this helpful, we got not more than one or two responses. Perhaps that just proves what I'm saying.

Alec Hope had a poem in the recent special issue of the Times Literary Supplement devoted to Australia which has been spoken about quite a bit. Called "Invitation to a Resurrection", I quote as much as I dare to without being sued:

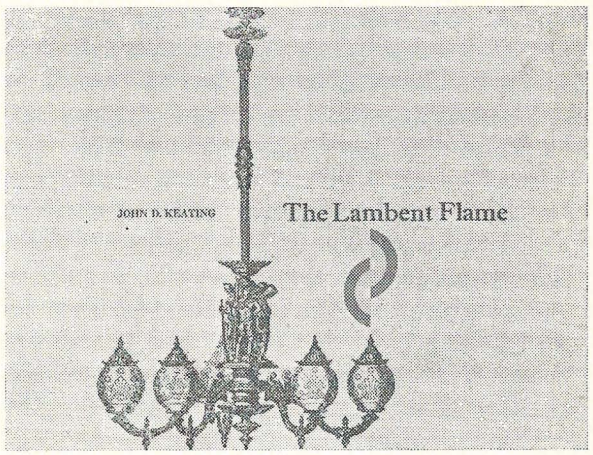
Nobody any more bursts out singing;
Words never dance to song.
Verse which once went soaring, winging,
Shambles and shuffles along.
No poet sings any more,
The Muses have all gone arty;
The free-verse voice is a bore;
The voice of a cocktail party.

Any of our dear readers who are interested enough in the history of Overland and in what the editor thinks he's doing to spend $1.50 to find out can write to Australian Small Press Review, 4/8 Victoria Parade, Manly NSW 2095, for issue number 4. They print a tape-recording there of me answering questions on twenty-one years of this magazine.

I was sorry to read of Tom Ronan's death, and I'm glad I saw him at the Adelaide Festival. A great battler, and *Moleskin Midas* and *The Vision Splendid* are books that will live. He'd have been a good bloke to have been in the bush with, Tom. The first time I ever met him I completely forgot the appointment. Hours later in a lather of apologetic remorse I galloped into his hotel room, to find him still waiting for me in perfect good humor. He had a long view.

Dorothy Hewett, an Overland editor, is being sued by her first husband over a poem in her recent collection *Rapunzel in Suburbia,* which has consequently been withdrawn from sale. The case is being prosecuted with exceptional rigor, it is now *sub judice,* and it is impossible for me to comment on it — though there is a lot I would like to say, both as regard this case in particular and as regards the pros and cons of libel laws in general, especially so far as the creative writer (and his critic) is concerned. Perhaps it will be possible to do so in a later issue.

Six of us in Melbourne have formed a Literary Defence Committee, and I believe a similar organisation has been formed in Sydney. We hope that a national organisation will emerge, to place writers on a similar footing to the doctors and lawyers who are backed by professional defence funds, and to ensure that they are not alone when taken to court. One of our functions, writes Lucy Frost, "will be to encourage writers' organizations to confront the general issue and to establish some means of raising money to be held in reserve against legal actions taken against their members". Over $1000 has already been raised in Melbourne. I am appealing to Overland writers and readers for support. Donations may be sent to Bruce Williams, English Department, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3083.



I said somewhere above that I hold Barrie Reid to be the best poetry editor in Australia. (Incidentally, it's a job that involves a hell of a lot of patience, time and correspondence, as well as sympathy and insight.) It's more than pleasant to add that Vane Lindesay, our art and lay-out editor and pillar of Overland for more years than I can remember, has just been recognised as the best book designer in Australia. In other words, Vane won this year's Book of the Year Design Award, which is made by the Australian Book Publishers Association. The book concerned is Melbourne University Press's splendid history of gaslighting, *The Lambent Flame* by J. D. Keating.

Would subscribers please notify us of change of address promptly. New postal rates make chasing them up an expensive business. You may all be interested to know that the postal rates that came in on 1 March overnight raised our mailing costs

MAGAZINE ROUNDUP

Overland readers may subscribe directly or through *Overland* to any of these listed magazines

MAKAR Vol. 12, No. 1 includes: Interviews with Peter Carey and Geoff Page. Prose by Roger McDonald, etc. Poems by John Tranter, Philip Neilsen, Geoff Page, etc. Review of small press books by Rae Desmond Jones. 3 Makars & 6 Gargoyle Poets (19-24), available in the 1976 subscription at $7.00 from: **Makar Press, P.O. Box 71, St. Lucia, Queensland, 4067.**

ASPECT, Vol. II, No. 1 includes: Interviews with Jean Genet, Magdalena Abakanowicz, David Perry. Article on Gary Shead and contributions by local and European writers. Annual subscription: **Aspect, 9 Cambridge St., Paddington, NSW 2021,** $8.00; single copy $2.00.

AUSTRALIAN LITERARY STUDIES. The October 1976 issue includes articles on Australian literature in Sweden, Keneally, Marcus Clarke's library, Lawson, Patrick White, the dismissal of Brennan from the University of Sydney, an interview with Frank Hardy. Subscription, $10.00, to **University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 4067.**

SPAN No. 2, April 1976 contains information about writers' visits, awards, grants and scholarships; a guide to Australian little magazines; to the Papua Pocket Poets series, and information about other publications, and conferences and festivals, of countries of the South Pacific region. Subscription enquiries to the **Honorary Secretary, SPACLALS, Department of English, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 4067.**

NEW POETRY — All New! New Poems, New Editor, New Poets. Articles — Nevill Drury on Magic; Creeley on Poetry; Hall reviewing Gwen Harwood; Maiden reviewing Tranter; Thwaites reviewing Page, Grant and Kinross Smith; Edwards reviewing Shapcott's latest anthology. Fantastic drawings and collage from Gary Shead. 55 poems — including a major sequence from Gwen Harwood; new departures from Nigel Roberts, John A. Scott and many others. $13.00 per year (four issues). **The Poetry Society of Australia, Box 110, Grosvenor St. P.O., Sydney, NSW 2000.**

AUSTRALASIAN SMALL PRESS REVIEW No. 4 has an interview with Stephen Murray-Smith on *Overland's* history and progress; part I of a bibliography of Melbourne little mags; reviews of small press poetry, prose and magazines by Carole Ferrier, Pat Woolley, Ian Stubbin and others. $1.50 (posted) or $6.00 for 5 issues ($8.00 institutions) from **Second Back Row Press, 4/8 Victoria Parade, Manly, NSW 2095.**

SATURDAY CENTRE BOOKS **(P.O. Box 140, Cammeray, NSW 2062)** — new title just out — *Alphabatics* by Joanne Burns and Frances Budden, $2.00. *Saturday Club Book of Poetry* No. 15 — poems by Robert Gray, Phillip Hammial, Gwen Harwood, etc. This is the second last issue of SCBOP, $1.80. A new magazine of short stories will commence publication in January 1977.

DODO, Vol. 1, No. 4. (Ovodeeododo) The Questionable Quarterly includes prose by Hemensley, Jenkins, Thompson & Wilding, poetry by Adamson, Bolton, J. S. Harry, Shadwick, etc. Also Robert Creeley & Henry Miller wrap around a supplement of Rae Jones's *Friendly Fascist!* Subscription $4.00 from: **DODO, P.O. Box 167, Wentworth Building, Sydney University, NSW 2006.**

for posting out an issue from $227 to $578! And this on top of unbelievable increases in the previous eighteen months. I am almost led to believe that our governments have set out to kill the exchange of ideas in the community, and indeed many publications have closed down. It's interesting, and a comment on the institutionalised thinking of politicians and public servants, that governments prepared to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on formalised educational institutions cannot see the unimpeded flow of the word as the most important community aspect of education.

BRIEF NOTICES: Glen Lewis says his hitchhiking piece in the last Overland was wrongly identified on the title page as a 'feature', when it should have been a 'story' . . . Stanford Writing Scholarship, for under 35's, $4500 a year for one or two years at Stanford University, California. Write Registrar, University of Melbourne, before 15 September 1976 . . . Readers may remember my praises of Brian Plomley's *Friendly Mission,* the journals of G. A. Robinson, which, it was said, "doubled our knowledge of the Tasmanian Aboriginals at one blow". *Friendly Mission* is long out of print and is fetching high prices. Plomley has now published (himself) *A Word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages,* $40 from Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston. There are only one thousand copies available, and it's a snap. Incidentally, it's far more than a word-list, containing a great deal of new historical material .

books

STEWART: A LOVING DISSECTION

David Martin

Clement Semmler: *Douglas Stewart* (Twayne, $8.25).

The first poem of mine to be published in Australia appeared in Bulletin when Douglas Stewart was literary editor. It was called "Jack Underwood" and represented my first response to the bush; in those days we lived in a place called Putty, at the edge of the Hunter Valley. The poem, whether it was good or bad, was of special importance to me — and it appeared with, I seem to remember, eighteen unilaterally made changes. I was wild with anger, and tried to raise hell through every literary organisation I could think of. I would have sued, but was warned that Bulletin could make it financially ruinous for me. For years my name was never mentioned in its columns.

I didn't know that Bulletin had done this sort of thing for years, and that it may have been a legacy from the days when ballads were sent to it scribbled on odd bits of paper from all parts of the outback. I no longer believe it was Stewart's fault, anyway. The experience didn't sour my attitude to his work, which was always *simpatico* to me, although it took me some time to understand its full value.

In 1968 I became a real Stewartite. We were going overseas and Stephen Murray-Smith gave us *The Seven Rivers* as a gift. If the idea was to make sure we'd come back it succeeded brilliantly . . . or fatally. Reading the book in Malta made me not only quite homesick for Australia and her rivers and creeks — me, who has caught only one fish in his life, and that by accident — but also a little for New Zealand, a country I had not visited at that time! It still remains for me the best Australian thing of its kind, with a place in my affection close to Judith Wright's *Generations of Men*. Perhaps the only other writer who, not being a novelist, has put as much "Australia" in his prose may have been Steele Rudd before he started boiling the pot. But Rudd wasn't a nature writer (a label Stewart probably wouldn't like) and nor, to extend the argument, was Lawson. Miles Franklin was, in her way, but her people always seem to see the bush from the saddle. Stewart sees it from human eye-level.

At first one is inclined to call it remarkable that the man who wrote *The Seven Rivers* also wrote *The Fire on the Snow*. But it isn't really. Why should local optimism exclude universal tragedy? Stewart, like most lyricists, often writes about death, and he does it well. But has he, in fact, written more than one tragedy properly so called? Is *Ned Kelly* a tragedy? Or just a drama? I think in Stewart's play Ned escapes by a reddish whisker being a full-blown tragic hero, and that, though perhaps involuntary, may not have been accidental.

To me Stewart is essentially an ironist. Irony is the archetypal Australian quality, and it anchors him firmly in the tradition. Irony easily chimes with the lyrical, in one way in *The Golden Lover*, in another in *Glencoe*, and very caustically in *Ned Kelly*. One doesn't want to stretch the significance too far, but I imagine there is irony even in *The Fire on the Snow*: on the epic level.

If I do not rate *The Fire on the Snow* as highly as do some other critics, it is because to me the central character is interesting only in a rather conventional way; he is too 'unitary' if we compare him with Ned. (Ned is of one piece to others, not quite to himself.) Similarly with *Shipwreck*, whose faults Dr Semmler acknowledges but nevertheless praises freely. Stewart as a poet has the epic reach and range, but there is something lack-

ing in — for want of a better word — his characterisation in works where he must find tragedy in the contrast between leader and led, or in man's war with nature, or in man set against his primeval violence.

When overt satire (i.e., a critically analytic view of man) reduces the scale to human (with a small h) proportions, Stewart is, not altogether paradoxically, at his greatest, and comes nearest to 'universal truth'. He needs the schoolmasters and bank clerks of *Ned Kelly*, the two ghosts of Campbelltown and the bottle-nosed Jock of *Glencoe* (which, as the ABC has proved, is as near to being a play as a non-play can be) to really fire the ice. *Shipwreck* reminds me less of *The White Devil* or *The Duchess of Malfi* than of a Norman Lindsay buccaneer canvas set to verse and dramatised. This is not carping criticism. Great tragedy needs clowns and little men, so named. Their stature is measured not solely against titans, but also against the shadow which life's manifold domesticity throws.

The right kind of essayist writing without restrictions could have a lot of fun tracing currents and connections in Stewart's work; the manner in which one part fructifies and complicates the other; poet, story-teller, playwright and critic. I derive an almost comradely amusement from thinking about Stewart's 'problems' — for instance why he apparently can't write a workable last scene for *Ned Kelly*, and yet all the time there's one staring him in the face. There is creative tension, too, in his being a New Zealander as well as an Australian, I feel: compare the faery sarcasm of his Maori world with what came after. It's not a matter of contradictions. As a critic Douglas Stewart doesn't think much of the Democratic Tradition (or of its post-Lawson evolution), but he himself stands less outside it than did, say, his much admired Slessor. Judging by the quotations selected by Semmler, Stewart was wrong about the importance of the contribution of the realists to writing in Australia related to the second world war, and about Freud's allegedly baneful influence on writers in general. But he is brilliantly right in his strictures on modish obscurantism in literature and art.

The plateau of classicism provides a space where the FitzGeralds and the Counihans and the Stewarts can meet.

Stewart likes plain reviewing, and these notes are in danger of contravening his critical principles, as explained and demonstrated on many a Red Page. So let's try to be down to earth.

Clement Semmler's approach to his subject was dictated by the fact that he wrote for a well-known American series. Longer than Nancy Keesing's study in the "Australian Writers and their Work" series, it is only technically more comprehensive. Its virtues are that it shows Stewart's versatility without diminishing his individuality. There is a clear overview, if horizontal in some aspect because of the strict internal grouping. Stewart's strength and importance are proved, as much as there can be proof. At first one is irritated by the organisation of the book, like an academic primer (which among other things it actually is), but in the end this justifies itself also to the Australian reader. There are five main sections, plus a great many numbered sub-sections ("Nature Poetry", "Origins of the Verse Play", "Editor of Important Anthologies", "Assessment of his Contemporaries", etc.), all no doubt useful to the American student, but not therefore necessarily useless to our own. The quotations are apt and sufficient.

Naturally, Dr Semmler comments with special expertness on the dramas, above all on those written for radio. His judgements are stimulating, even when one disagrees. It is in the first two parts, when he discusses Stewart's place in his own period and considers his growth as a poet, that his enthusiasm — basically a good thing in this kind of book — doesn't serve him so well. There are just too many adjectives of commendation, and only when he speaks of the earlier ballads can he say no as well as yes.

I think even he underrates the importance of irony and satire in Stewart — unless I tend to exaggerate it? — and his gaze can be fixed too much on the dominant character, to the exclusion of others, as in his treatment of *Ned Kelly*. The need to operate under so many separate headings distorts the balance a little, but not pedantically. At times the style is rather old-fashioned. "There is also a note of passion and yearning, which after all should be part of the makeup of any aspiring young poet . . ."

Within its given limits the book is very good. It has the data, and it promotes thought. Dr Semmler loves nature poetry, particularly Stewart's; he has a good understanding of his very personal but quite unprivate verse technique; he says just things about Stewart's vernacular power, his humor, his essential benevolence. He is at ease with his subject.

Clement Semmler thinks it doubtful that any Australian writer of the last fifty years has had a profounder influence on Australian writing than

Douglas Stewart had. He sees him as having been among the first who were not in the least torn between the bush and the world. I suppose it's still rather hard for us here to rank our writers, as it were, internationally, even those of them who have outgrown such provincial habits. Facility and skill of Stewart's order are of course a true mark of greatness. All the same, it is possible that within a generation or so he and a few other Australian writers of his time will have more than the rather platonic fame which they now enjoy abroad, and which seems to rely almost exclusively on these attributes. Original perceptions also count, surely.

The Birdsville Track remains an exotic location, not only to the stranger. But Stewart's poem on it does not belong to the Age of Discovery. It explores with force and finesse a personal response which is valid anywhere. Semmler is right in his suggestion: to create with full inner conviction a Captain Scott, a Joe Byrne, a Breadalbane and a Tawhai, and each in cadences faithful to their own tune, is a tall achievement.

SEXISM IN OUR HISTORY

Amirah Inglis

Miriam Dixson: *The Real Matilda* (Penguin, $2.95).

The purpose of *The Real Matilda* is threefold: to describe the standing of Australian women, past and present, to explain this standing, and to change it. Miriam Dixson sees her purpose as an urgent one and her book as a weapon with which to strengthen an ancient concept of shared humanity between men and women "in the teeth of relentless opposition from a faster-spreading public image or model of woman . . . that part-insult, part-joke — the stunted, dehumanized Android, the dolly-bird — with which malevolent late capitalist consumerism is flooding the global village" (p. 9).

From these words we can see that her stance is clear. Her argument is harder to pin out because the book has almost to be translated from sociologese into English and also because the author flies off at tangents, fired by her excitement with psychology and sociology. She wants us to share so many theories from so many authorities which seem to her to be relevant that she gives us too many bursts in too many directions at once, and has to provide a glossary of the more ill-digested terms.

Australia to-day, she argues, is a country where the standing of women is lower than in any western industrial democracy, and Australian social life has a masculine flavor which is unique. Finding this came as a shock to the author, who has always considered that our highly developed trade union movement was a mark of our advanced democarcy, and the shock was even greater because she was forced to conclude that the same influences that had created the strong trade union movement also kept women in their lowly place. Australians are misogynists, she declares, and she sees a greater gulf between men and women here than in Finland or America or England. In her view Australian men are actually hostile to women and the prevailing Australian male view of sexual relations with women is that "they're all the same in the dark."

How did this deplorable state of affairs come about? Miriam Dixson finds useful the neo-Freudian and Darwinian theory of Robert Waelder that nations, like human beings, have a "formative period", a childhood (and therefore presumably an adolescence, a middle age and a death?) during which the group is "formed and stabilised" and an "ethos common to the group" comes into being, is accepted and "mutual identifications established" (p.61). During this formative period, values are 'imprinted' on the nation which succeeding generations inherit. The formative period for the colonies which became Australia was a bad time for women. In England, capitalism had entered an "especially malevolent stage" (p. 62) and, in any case, capitalism, even when not especially malevolent, "diminished the personhood" of women.

Moreover, the colonies began as a prison and continued, in C. M. H. Clark's words, to be a "broken, cold and unnatural form of society." They were peopled by members of the lower orders from England, and Australia has remained a country without any upper layers; our "form of democracy has virtually lacked the influence of layers above a middle or lower bourgeois order, and farmers and working class layers" (p. 80).

Australian attitudes to women, the author asserts, are characteristic of the lower orders. The argument is that the poor treat their women worse than the rich in order to try and hold on to some scraps of self-respect and authority which they are denied in wider society. They are brutal and contemptuous, thus demonstrating that there is someone lower than themselves. The large proportion — between one-third and one-quarter — of the population of the Australian colonies

which was Irish exerted an undue influence on the attitudes of the lower orders and on the Australian ethos and the Irish, for historical and ethnic reasons, were prone both to the maltreatment of women and to a clan-based male bonding, a collectivism which turned into the famous mateship (p. 163).

The way the colonial economy was organised, in what the author calls "single-male staffed robber industries — sealing, fishing, wool, mining — where in a sense mother earth was raped" (p. 22) meant that women played no part in the daily work of their men, and this further reinforced the separation of the sexes. The norms and mores of the formative convict period became imprinted on the succeeding generations and in this can be found the explanation for the mateship of pub and R.S.L. and the fact that there are no women in the pantheon of Australian gods.

That is the main argument. How does it stand up? Not too well as argument, though as a set of provocative and interesting assertions the book may well perform a useful function if it prods historians into looking at facts of the past which they had not looked at before, if only to collect evidence to refute Miriam Dixson.

The key chapter for the author's argument about Australian women as a specific variety of the genus woman is the fourth — "Our Founding Mothers the Convicts". Convict women, she argues, "victims of victims", fulfilled the psychic function of a "kind of universal outcast group" in convict society. The clue to this, the author says, is to be found in the language used at that time which shows that people descried in convict women a "special quality of ugliness, despair and demoralisation far beyond that of convict men" (p. 124). "Thus" in 1787 Surgeon Bowes, on the First Fleet transport *Lady Penrhyn*, said "I believe . . . I may venture to say there never was a more abandoned set of wretches in one place at any one period than are to be met with in this Ship" (p. 124).

A further clue, the author argues, may be found in the toilet and living arrangements in the Hobart Female Factory, whose atmosphere was described in 1841 as "So foetid, so wholly unfitting for the human being . . . after the night's inhalations, that if we are correctly informed, the turnkey's [sic] when they open the doors in the morning, make their escape from the passages . . . to avoid semi-suffocation" (p. 132).

In New South Wales, writes Miriam Dixson, "one senses something of a wish to see an inherited stigma attached to convict women's children — their female children, in this case" (p. 133). "Hence" Governor King, who wrote in 1800: "Soon after my arrival in this colony I had frequent opportunities of observing the numerous children of both sexes going about the streets in a most neglected manner . . . [I noted] the early abuses the female part suffered, not only from the unprotected state they were in, but also from the abandoned examples of their parents . . ." (p. 133).

Another clue, says the author, may be found in the "unbelievably high" rate of infant mortality in the Hobart Female Factory.

So far, none of the evidence assembled by the author demonstrates what she says it does.

How high was the rate of infant mortality in the Female Factory? We are not told. Was it higher than that among the community as a whole? We are told that Mrs Hutchinson, the Matron of the Factory and one of the "privileged or elite" women of the colony, lost in infancy six of the twelve children she bore.

Governor King's observations in 1800, as quoted by Miriam Dixson, do not seem to me to show a wish to attach a stigma to the female children of convicts, the description of the sleeping arrangements in the Female Factory is no worse than in any prison or army barracks of the time and the language of Surgeon Bowes of the First Fleet was often used of the men. The annoying part of it is that if the author had looked further, tried harder, had more feeling for the people and an urge to make them come alive, she may have found much better examples. The snippets of the life of convict women make the reader long for a thorough account, and wish the author had picked examples that speak for themselves rather than hitting us on the head with interpretations of examples which do not fit the case.

Only Alice Blackstone, who was forced to walk thirty-five miles from George Town to Launceston with an iron collar weighing 5¼ pounds around her neck and her new-born baby in her arms, supports Miriam Dixson's case that women convicts were treated worse than the men, and even poor Alice does not support the interpretation that the punishment "suggests a savouring of vulnerability only too obvious" (p. 140). The other evidence from the life of female convicts shows only that the women by the nature of their womanliness suffered more than men under the same conditions, for the author does not show us

in what way the conditions were worse.

The women, of course, should have been treated *better* and this should be part of any argument about women convicts, given the attitude to the female sex among those who were in authority. But, as Miriam Dixson points out, the women convicts were thought to be worse than the men, and she assembles plenty of evidence which shows this. She misinterprets the evidence, though. It is partly because she is not sure whether they *were* worse or whether observers at the time only *thought* they were, and partly that she wants them to be worse because that demonstrates a worthwhile response to oppression. Because she has decided that women were an "outcast group" she is trying to apply the sociology of outcast groups to these women, and does not see that one of the reasons why wicked women were regarded as worse than men in 1799 and 1837 — and still are, as any high school teacher will testify — is that lilies that fester smell worse than weeds. Women, though regarded as the weaker sex, were and are regarded as finer: gentle, compassionate, loving, kindly, they thus seemed worse when they were none of these things. A Patty Hearst shocks everyone far more than her brother would have done.

Women are 'other': sometimes better, sometimes worse, never equal; but this does not make them an "outcast group"! The observers thought women convicts worse than men because they were a blot on their sex. They were letting down a whole side. A wicked man is a wicked man; no one dreams of saying that he lets down mankind. But a wicked woman is a disgrace to her sex, as a very noble woman is an ornament to it. If the sociology of outcast groups applied to women, then only the bad ones would be remarked — and they would be considered typical — and Governor Hunter would never have said of convict women that "If we estimate their merits by the charming children with which they have filled the colony . . . they well deserve our care" (p. 128).

I think the author's theoretical framework has too often blocked her view, for neither the "imprinting" nor the "malevolent capitalism" enables us to get out and see the society as it is, nor how it has changed, nor how it might change. Deserts have been made to flower; the old dry country can give up useful and beautiful minerals. The grandsons of Joe Wilson and his mates go to universities, are taught by Miriam Dixson, live in group housing, demonstrate against unjust wars; they turn from beer to wine, help their wives with child rearing and shopping and buy Alex Comfort's books. Despite the "patrocentric acquisitive" nature of "late malevolent capitalism", despite our convict past, Australian females took to the pill faster than others in the western world; and despite them, also, we look like having zero population growth tomorrow. Melanesian villagers provide as devastating an example of hostility between the sexes as one could imagine. There are no more women in positions of political authority in China or Russia or Chile or Ghana than in Britain or America.

Miriam Dixson's attack on almost all modern Australian historians is vigorous, so vigorous indeed that she bites even the friendly ones and even attacks poor Geoffrey Bolton — when he is urging the sociologically-inclined historian to tackle the history of women and their standing — for devoting "six lines (on p. 19) to women"!

A former colony is always obsessed with itself, with trying to show how rotten the mother country is, how it has been kept down and how it is not only as good, but a bloody sight better than the metropolitan power. The nationalist historians of the last thirty years would have been less than human if they had not wanted to write all this down. They showed their nationalism as well as their maleness by wanting to celebrate the diggers, the bushrangers, the shearers and by leaving out the women. Australian women, I suspect, share the nationalist vision. For every woman who bewails the fact that she's not fussed over in the cocktail bar and brought flowers before being subtly slipped between silken sheets by a smooth European type, overwhelmed with talk and foreplay, I bet there are scores of Diannes and Valeries and Sues and Jennies who wouldn't go near that lot with a barge pole and would opt for one of Joe Wilson's grandsons.

Miriam Dixson jumps on too many stools for my taste and falls between some. Who is the book written for? If it is the common reader, perhaps a member of the women's movement, the scholarly apparatus gone crazy — 102 footnotes in thirty pages of chapter one, for instance — is as forbidding as the sociologese is offputting and the esoteric name-dropping annoying. If the book is for the historian or the history student, then the scholarly apparatus is not good enough, the too-copious footnotes are often not helpful and the scholarship is wonky: the evidence is poor and not well chosen, primary sources are quoted from articles. There is not enough solid

historical work to support the argument; the evidence often points in another direction and is too often trimmed to suit the argument. Henry Lawson is quoted as the great celebrator of the outback, of the boozy fellowship which pervades our literature. But it is Lawson's story "The Drover's Wife", one of the most popular of Australian stories, which is the most moving and compassionate account of the life of the bush woman in our literature and told "from the vantage point of women" (p. 185).

However the drover's wife, the bush woman, does not play a part in enough of the histories of Australia, and in drawing attention to this Miriam Dixson has done a useful job. Whether the early convict settlement had the sort of influence that she asserts is a question that must wait on work, but it's a question that is worth asking. How did our founding mothers live, how did they marry and how did their daughters turn out? If *The Real Matilda* spurs scholars to find out, as Miriam Dixson hopes it will, then that will be a very good thing.

OUTSIDE INSIDE

Ian Maxwell

Ray Ericksen: *Cape Solitary* (Heinemann, $8.50).

Almost anyone, but especially any Australian, who reads Ray Ericksen's first book, *West of Centre*, will be at once attracted by something that was there before the book was written. He will of course realise that this is something more and other than a travel book — but what a theme for a travel book! The land had already its own aura of myth, and that long journey with its dangers and its goal had already the character of epic.

Cape Solitary has no such long start; indeed, the Otway camp might seem parochial by comparison with the desert trek. Yet this difference between the two books is no great matter. The wind that screams in memory through the preface to *Cape Solitary* and continues to rage in half-companionable ferocity round the hut on the hill makes one aware, just as the desert did, of all that lies beyond the walled-up life of civilised suburban man. The central thing in both books is a quest, not simply to escape from blinkered respectability, but to find and be one with something bigger.

That Ericksen is habitually gentle and modest, frank about his weaknesses, ready to laugh at himself, rather dourly critical of his sympathetic outgoings, and shy of conclusions, detracts nothing from the interest of his quest. Nor am I troubled (as some others may be) by his frank avowal that not all he sets down is literally true. This is not a book one reads for its facts. The excellent sketches of the fisherman's pub at Apollo Bay (near the beginning of the book) or the country show (near its end) are not written as contributions to local history; what holds one is the play of a sensitive and critical mind defining its mingled sympathies and withdrawals. For all I know, both these scenes may be 'true' to the last detail, but they would have been just as good if invented. In the exciting episode of the cattle rustlers, invention goes beyond historical fact. The rustlers may be hallucinations, and some part of the actual story is a projection of the author's disturbed mind. This, however, is not a report to the police. It is an attempt to render a man's experience, in which the potential may be just as important and just as 'true' as the actual. Ericksen states his principle plainly. In case of conflict between the outer truth of facts and the inner truth of experience (in which fantasy plays such an important part), he has let the inner truth rule. This is the kind of principle that we assume to govern an imaginative autobiography such as Borrow's *Lavengro*. It certainly seems the right one for Ericksen.

To focus on one's own mind is to risk locking oneself up in it and using outside things merely as symbols of one's own condition. But Ericksen has a lively sense of the outside world; it is mainly through this world that he seeks to explain himself, and he will not let symbol swallow fact. The scream of the young gelded bull, the horror-stricken eyes of the mouse recognizing its friend as its murderer, are moving and full of meaning, but they retain their integrity as incidents and form part of a theme — man's neighborhood with the creatures — which includes comic conversations with cows, a changed attitude to fishing, reflections on a farmer's limited oneness with the land and its inhabitants — and so much else that one feels no deliberate patterning of meaning but rather an exploration of events as they occur, thoughts as they pass, people as one meets them. Yet, although no definite conclusions are reached, and there is nothing that one could call a line of argument, one is left with a strong impression of this as one definable stage in Ericksen's attempt to transcend limitations and frustrations that we have shared in our measure and

understand the better for reading him. We can accept the modest claim of his closing words: "This experiment was finished and another was about to begin."

This 'new experiment' will no doubt have something to do with his work in progress on the explorer Giles. One thing I think one can be sure of, that he will handle this theme with intimate understanding as well as scholarly knowledge.

BIKEY PSYCHE

Edward Kynaston

Robert M. Pirsig: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Bantam, $2.30).

Bestsellers usually have things to say that their authors never intended. If they are not making important statements unawares then they are saying something about their time and ethos simply by existing. *Zen* (its trendy title is too long to bear much repetition) is no exception. It is a very well written book of remarkable clarity of thought which for much of its length says with extraordinary precision what its author wishes it to say, though there are some lesser areas of statement unawares. What is phenomenal about it, considering the nature of most of its substance, is the relatively uncritical rapture with which it has been received and its circulation amongst thousands, and possibly millions, who are certainly incapable of following out the elaborate, often rigorous, but also often obscure and circuitous thought it contains.

Zen is the story of a motorcycle trip across the United States by a father and son. The son rides pillion, the machine is elderly and needs frequent adjustment; the son is pre-adolescent but also one feels is in need of adjustment. Accompanying them on another machine is a married couple, a vague pair, flatly uncommunicative in the style of so many modern Americans, but convenient to have along because they demonstrate the romantic view of life as opposed to the classical view of life, which is expounded early on for the purpose of later argument, by Phaedrus, who is the father of the boy and the narrator of the story. The couple are jettisoned quite early in the book.

The whole journey is an account of the thoughts of Phaedrus interspersed, for relief, with brief passages about the country they are passing through, the behavior of Phaedrus and son, and the places and characters (superficially and distantly seen) that they encounter. As the journey progresses several things emerge. Phaedrus has had some sort of nervous breakdown, or severe neurosis, from which he is only now recovering after savagely effective shock treatment. As he rides he remembers more and more about himself as the amnesic effect wears off and begins to recollect the personality he was previously.

In his previous personality he was totally mind-obsessed and unable to relate to the world in any other way. This was the monomania which had brought on the breakdown. Subsequently, after treatment, he returned to everyday life and became a motorcyclist. The bad, careless maintenance meted out to his machine by couldn't-care-less mechanics pushed him into doing his own maintenance in self-defence. The mind-monopolised man had to become the practical man relating to a piece of machinery through his hands.

This interaction between theoretical and practical provides the dynamic of the thought that follows, the thesis and antithesis of romantic and classical, subjective and objective, concrete and abstract; the academic dualities which Phaedrus resolves and unifies in the concept of quality. The world, he is in effect saying, is not a series of absolutelv antithetical opposites, but is one and whole. The argument gains in excitement and drama, as it goes along towards resolution, in the counterpointing of Phaedrus' past theorising, which he is remembering as he rides along, with the very different thought generated by his mastery of motorcycle maintenance.

Phaedrus' son is a confused and unhappy child. He cannot relate (not surprisingly) to Phaedrus, and Phaedrus plainly cannot relate to him, or to other human beings. Phaedrus chooses to relate to a piece of machinery! He has continuing nightmares in which he is confronting his son, Chris, through the glass door of a coffin and is unable to reach him, or communicate with him. The relationship between father and son is as indeterminate and fuzzy-edged as Phaedrus' thinking is clear, precise and sharp. The master of the mind is the imbecile of the feelings. But all this only so long as Phaedrus has not yet fully resolved his arguments through philosophy and practical engineering.

Too much mind for too long soon becomes tedious. There are quite a number of parts of this book that are made up of obvious and boring argument that go on far too long. The mind *is* a fascination but it has its own peculiar dangers; a species of narcissism is one of them, and a sort of brain worship, at the expense of the rest of the

personality and accompanied by a subtle warping of values, is another.

Phaedrus does two things in the course of the book. He re-enthrones mind and linear logic and finds out how to use his hands practically on his motorcycle. He brings linear logic to bear on the machine and is able to overcome some of the minor psychological problems of dealing with machinery. A highly theoretical man, he manages to bring theory and practice together on his motorcycle and is naively surprised when he feels better as a result. The exercise releases tensions, allows psychological knots to loosen, and results in a more hopeful relationship to his son. However it seems clearly to be the practical activity that contributes to his eased feelings, since his compulsive theorising only resulted in a breakdown and a variety of electro-convulsive therapy.

In purely human terms *Zen* has not much to say, and what it does say is almost simple-minded more than simple. Congruence of theory and practice is scarcely a new idea. Roger Bacon, writing 700 years ago, recognised that "There are two modes of knowing, those of argument and experience", and since his time a good deal of effort has gone into reconciling the two, and into recognising, and attempting to relate, their different natures.

Phaedrus is an academic man almost unable to relate to the real world and his wife and son. He breaks down, receives treatment, and returns to the world to relate to a piece of machinery. Having done that successfully (having made the first step to relate it *something*) he believes rightly that it may now be somewhat easier to relate to the rest of the world. Optimism is justified; the woolly euphoria that billows out of the end of the book is not. In terms of human reality *Zen* is an unconvincing shambles.

Zen can also be taken at another, mythical-symbolical, level as an analogue of the state of modern man. Phaedrus may represent mind-obsessed man driven remorselessly *into* rather than out of his mind by mind itself and relating faultily to the industrial world around him as a result. It is here that 'quality', its recognition and creation, is put forward as a miraculous bridge to wholeness. It is a strange remedy that states in effect that when men can recognise quality in externals they will consequently relate better to themselves and one another! It is unfortunate for Phaedrus that much of human history says nothing of the sort. However, intricate philosophical arguments don't have to take much account of the record of human experience, paradoxical as it may be, and philosophers have always lived more in the mind than in the world. Modern man *is* hopelessly into his mind and quality *is* a good thing to have around. Perhaps we need reminding of this; but I doubt it. At this level *Zen* has little or nothing to say that we don't already know.

Zen is a bestseller. This is the most interesting thing about the book, this is what makes it significant. In a world in which anyone can do anything, in which all men are equal biologically and psychologically as well as politically, it seems that there is now a widespread need for the illusion of equality of mind. The intentions of the author are not here important. It is the way that the book has been taken up that matters. *Zen* does seem to demonstrate the often suspected truth that if you want to fool modern mass man it is best to tickle his mind and its vanity, and then anything can happen.

There is also the reality of the problem of modern man who *is* fragmented, who can relate to neither his machinery nor himself, and is struggling to awareness of his difficulty. *Zen* puts a solution in the external world. Easily manipulated extroverts, especially the young who have been raised amongst the hysterical pressures of auditory-visual advertising, are unaware that there are other areas and other possible solutions. They will always follow a clever man in preference to a wise one. Subject to the amorphous idealism, which is a result of their susceptibility to collective pressures (greater now than ever before), and the unconsciousness and undifferentiatedness of inexperience, they are bound to snatch at apparently rigorous thought which ends comfortably and sentimentally in the unjustified euphoria of what is really in the end a form of familiar gross self-indulgence.

Zen is still a very well written book with the additional attraction that its author is a genuinely passionate thinker. It is this passion which informs and gives a semblance of life to the relationship between father and son despite its essential unreality. Ostensibly "An inquiry into values" (the sub-title), *Zen* is actually a book full of strong feelings of alienation, and I believe that it is the feelings that are conveyed that are the cause of its success. Many people, but especially the young, are capable of recognising these feelings despite their obvious inability to follow much of the argument. It is also the newest currently acceptable badge of trendy conformity.

A few people (perhaps more than a few in our age of grotesque gullibility) may buy the book

because they think it really is about motorcycle maintenance. If they can struggle through to the section where the motorcycle is dealt with explicitly (from page 272) they will find an excellent set of sound principles already familiar to anyone who has been pushed by youthful poverty to refurbish old machines or maintain newer ones.

NEW FICTION: A FOURSOME

Olaf Ruhen

Morris Lurie: *Inside the Wardrobe* (Outback Press, $7.95 and $3.50).
David Ireland: *The Glass Canoe* (Macmillan, $5.95).
Chester Eagle: *Four Faces, Wobbly Mirror* (Wren, $8.50).
Gwen Kelly: *The Middle-Aged Maidens* (Nelson, $8.95).

It's very difficult to praise the deserving. What is there to say? Nothing at all that shouldn't have been taken for granted. If a man's good, he's good.

Perhaps the best comment is that such a one did what he set out to do, and Morris Lurie, if I am right, set out to introduce us to a wry world that he thoroughly enjoys.

It's an Australian's world, though mostly his Australian is pottering about Europe; it goes right down to Australian roots. It's a thought-out world, noted with a Jewish eye. And it's a world of transcience — indeed if there's a theme common to the twenty stories in this very fine collection, transcience is that theme. Not all of them are stories, if I have to be didactic about definitions; but those that are sketches explore their subjects in depth.

I'm wondering how I ever came to miss out on Lurie until now; all these stories have been published before, and half of them in Australian media, included a couple in Overland, and he has written half-a-dozen other books. But at last I've been exposed to the fantasies of the Lurie imagination and, a volunteer victim, have experienced the delights of unexpected seduction.

What I've appreciated most of all is his nicety of judgment. There's many a writer who would take the exercise to extremes if he were given the basic concept of "Hurley's Life of Samuel Johnson", about an author whose subconscious kept feeding him the words of other men, or "Warts", in which a worrier is presented with the necessity of hiding a hidden embarrassment. Lurie knows exactly when to stop.

That's probably tied up with his basic ability; he's a most precise observer of the human scene, and armored with an integrity which forbids him excess with the liberties he takes.

Ireland's current study is the ecology of the suburban pub; the bloodhouse, to be frank, and his methods and his results fill me with admiration though these days, anyway, it's not my scene.

The pub is the Southern Cross which, the blurb tells me mendaciously, is "somewhere in the inner Sydney centre". There's a couple of Southern Cross Hotels there, one in St Peters, one in Surry Hills, but Ireland writes of a pub headed for demolition away out in the west, Westmead, probably, somewhere close to Parramatta for sure. And he has probably changed its name.

Here his hero Lance, usually called "Meat" for a reason only occasionally obvious, dreams away his better hours, sometimes leaving for his groundsman's job on the golf course, sometimes to visit his darling or, in raucous company, to cheat on her, once or twice to take in the commercial scene at King's Cross for a change, or to think about football.

Sometimes with lubricated anecdote, sometimes with musings short enough to be accomplished in the time that Sharon takes to fill his glass, he presents the philosophy of a dedicated drinker. He is reasonably avid for sexual encounters, or, like most bar-supporters, claims to be; and sometimes therefore finds himself recounting the details of some very scungy scenes. But it's difficult to tell whether these are real experiences or the stuff of dreams, and that's fair enough. Perhaps sexual encounters everywhere have a content of dream; they certainly do when you approach them the right way.

The glass canoe is a beer schooner; that's not to deny its function as a vehicle on which to cruise the seas of lazy daylight. The whole of Lance's life begins at the Southern Cross; his dreams take shape there and sometimes substance; his world is the world of the pub, and its conventions condition his conduct.

Several of my friends have written books that examine the drunk: Gavin Casey, with *The Wits Are Out*, Les Such, with his *Halfway to Holsworthy*, recently Graham Billing, with *The Slipway*. I'm not sure that I like such productions. I think you have to be at least a little drunk to barge in on a drunk's party; drunks haven't got a great deal to offer the sober.

But Ireland, in this long series of mainly quick sketches, all taking form in the mind behind the glass, has achieved a remarkably accurate back-

ground to his portrait of a man, a bemused man, who finds truth in the mists.

He's annoyed with his darling for her matter-of-fact explanation of how the needle of the record-player finds the exact edge of all the different-sized records. He wanted it to remain a mystery. He wants to believe in magic. Don't we all? He can find it in the pub; he can recognize a similar desire amongst the others he can sum up so accurately. His vision is quite clear, as in this aside, thrown off as he is describing the Idiot, crippled in a fight, full of mad ideas:

> Other times he was normal and hunched over the bar like the rest of us, like the thirsty round a well.
>
> (I climbed up in the struts supporting the roof members one night to get an old guy's coat someone had thrown up there for a joke, and when I looked down they all looked like round animals attached to a rectangular, many-titted mother.)

The stories that have their birth in the pub don't have endings, and he likes them that way. The mysteries stay mysterious. Some incidents give only a hint of story: the bitter widow who throws her husband's ashes into the bar; the cut and welded steel keg, that may now hold a body; the disappearance of the student who has been collecting data for a thesis; the holidaying shearers' cook — all the voyagers in their frail canoes.

Sitting on his tractor at the fourth green dreaming of the pub's renaissance, Lance thinks about his haven:

> And on the bar, as at the edge of an ocean or the banks of a river, I saw endless rows of empty glasses being filled; those frail glasses men commit themselves to, some days floating calmly out on broad reaches of water between sympathetic shores and willows and friends and waving picnickers on the bank, and other days whipping dangerously round a sudden bend toward nervous shallows and sharp aggressive rocks.
>
> And now and then, as they drank deeply, they saw in the bottom of the glass, not the face of the man they knew, but the monster within that was waiting and all too willing to be released.

Since Chester Eagle doesn't allow me to form any opinion of my own about his characters, I find it difficult to come up with one about the story that evolves around them.

Perhaps the most important phase of a book's existence is the reading of it; that's when it is fulfilling its function, and no one subscribes more than I do to the proposition that the reader is best served when he has to make his own contributions; the author must leave something for him to do. But there's an important qualifying clause that says they have to be willing contributions; the reader must submit them with the delight of discovery, and if they must be dragged from him as reluctant approvals of author's statements reading becomes a chore, and unrewarding.

At the beginning of *Four Faces, Wobbly Mirror* I felt rather like a tyro spy whose task it is to listen to all the conversations at a cocktail party and report on them; I just found it difficult to sort out all those shifting characters, attach the opinions to the right ones for the right reasons, and establish some sort of coherence in my mind.

Chester Eagle made it much more difficult by having written with that lordly omniscience which gives you instant entry, when he wills, to the mind of every character; in addition to which he threw in opinions and moralizings of his own, so that listening to the voices I was confused by this barrage of opinion, sometimes emanating from two or three sources in a single paragraph. An interesting situation seemed ready to sizzle on the fires yet unfuelled, but I resented going back to establish or decide "X must be the one that's married to Y and Z is her cousin", none of the situations having this kind of clarity. I really did wish Eagle could find himself a viewpoint with which I could agree or disagree, instead of the stew of opinion which I had to swallow.

For almost every contribution to every conversation Eagle examines the mind of the speaker, not only examines it but throws it open for inspection; this is where the action is and no mystery here shall remain unsolved, no secret unexamined.

The situation gives him a lot of opportunity. Bob and Frances, Vic and Anna are two urban couples without much in common, with little to complain about in the world, and not very much to aim at. A meaningless contact throws off sparks, and in two shakes of a love-bird's tail it is, instead, Bob and Anna, Vic and Frances. Passion, in two totally different guises, shakes the reasonably comfortable household. But in both instances it's a constructive rather than a destructive force and there are lots of testimonies to make us nostalgically comfortable about it all.

Each couple knows about the other, but for a start the confessions that might be good for their souls are set aside. There's a good deal of introspection, of course, especially as practicality reshapes their relationships.

Here's Frances, pregnant, and fortunately to her husband who, because of the baby and a host of minor considerations, has blanketed the intensity of his feelings for Vic's Anna. Bob was hers now, there was no doubting it; and forgetting the angularity and frequent acerbity which had marked her attitudes two years before, she sometimes wondered why he had gone to Anna at all.

She rarely considered, though, what he might have gained from that relationship; she took the new Bob Banner as her natural possession. Bob's wry humour flickered over her assumptions but he conceded them when he was with her; she was a tower of strength . . . .

"If we hadn't met Vic and Anna," she says a few pages further on, "we still wouldn't know each other very well." And he answers, "But something would have turned up, or somebody. I suspect it always does."

While it took an act of will to make myself interested in Eagle's creations, no such prodding was necessary to arouse my appreciation of his analytical mind. He knows people very well, and from observation. So the main thing I have against his novel is that he doesn't give me, the reader, a chance to draw my own conclusions.

The middle-aged maidens of Gwen Kelly's novel are, of course, school-teachers, and I imagine the whole school-teaching profession, or at least its distaff side, is going to jump on me for that "of course". But that's what they are, members of the staff of a penny-pinching but superior private school for girls in Meridale, a town which, with no hesitation, may be located in New England.

The publishers claim that with this, her third novel, Gwen Kelly moves into the ranks of major Australian writers, and the only reason I let them make the claim here instead of making it myself is that I did not read her earlier works, and from the polish on this one I could have believed her quite at home in those ranks before.

This is certainly not a conventional novel. Rather it is a series of character studies; one major one of Miriam Hansen, three slighter portraits of the school principals under whom she works, and some smaller, swiftly conceived sketches of others with lesser influence on Miriam's life.

She is dutiful, she is outgoing and she is adequate, and in those three words her tragedy lies. She gives her whole life to others, notably to those three principals, and her life fails, if it fails, simply because not one of the three is worth this undue consideration. The lack of stronger human motivations could be a serious deficiency in lesser hands, but Gwen Kelly transfers her precise observations to paper with the hands and eyes of a skilful artist.

This quality has enabled her to present a background of Meridale society that, with its components, will command a rueful recognition in more than one small town, especially any with an academic flavor.

When she gives it some attention she's equally good with the countryside, but she has concentrated her interest on human factors and she can be a savage critic, though at all times, I think, a fair one.

All the first-person statements in their sections sound a shade too much like soliloquy, but the way in which Miss Kelly flaunts her delicate skill in having a character unconsciously condemn herself is a bit like wire-walking; very tricky and author-rewarding. Perhaps such skills are what keep writers writing.

ACROSS THE CREEK

Martin Sullivan

R. Evans, K. Saunders and K. Cronin: *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (A.N.Z. Book Co., $10.50).

At primary school in Hughenden, a pastoral centre sprawling along the southern bank of the Flinders River, two hundred and forty miles west of Townsville, we lived just across the creek from Jimmy's gardens, also on the south bank of the river, but separated from the town by Station Creek. At the north-east corner of the gardens, out of sight of the town, was what was known as "the black's camp". Further upstream, a few hundred yards on the opposite bank of the dry, sandy river bed was another Chinese garden. Except in bad years the Flinders would flood; no water would enter the town, though neither of the two Chinese would escape the muddy, swollen river, and the only blacks who did were the beautiful and mysterious Listle Luco, top of our class at school, and her mother, who was laundress to the local middle class. The Lucos lived at one end of the main street in a large, rambling,

tumble-down house, and like the rest of us were safe from flooding. We knew of the plight of the riverside population, but their inundation seemed to emphasize the town's social divisions, and as a fact of our life such events seemed natural for the blacks and Chinese.

Then, when teaching outside Nambour, a sugar township just north of Brisbane, I saw my first Melanesians, and proceeded to teach by direction of holy writ, i.e., the school social studies textbook written, printed and prescribed by the Queensland Department of Public Instruction, that they were "really Kanakas"; alas, a pejorative term, Kay Saunders emphasizes. All these childhood and early manhood experiences, common to generations of white Australians who have lived in the bush, came flooding back to me while reading this book. Indeed, sociologist John Rex (quoted by all three authors) argues that "the man in the street has little recourse to theories other than those which are implicit in folk-wisdom, in proverbs, in jokes, or in popular newspapers or political ideologies", and assuredly our views of the Chinese gardeners and the blacks in their riverside camp were deeply set by such influences by the time we left primary school. The blacks were dirty, drunken, lazy and "had no belly", while Jimmy and his opposition across the river were (to quote Kathryn Cronin) "the ching-chong Chinaman, the comic coolie vegetable hawker, the butt of local larrikins . . ."

Little formal reference to Chinese, Aboriginals, or Melanesians was made in class. The Chinese came for gold, the Melanesians came to work on the sugar plantations, and although they were South Sea Islanders just which islands we never knew. Predictably, the Aboriginals fared worst. We learnt that William Dampier had labelled them "the miserablest people on earth" and nothing that we saw seemed to oppose this view. The best ever said about them was "poor beggars".

The authors of *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination* acknowledge the presence of other racial minorities, but because Aboriginals, Chinese and Melanesians were the most numerous and most important in the formative period of Queensland, they have directed their atention to these three. The book is divided into three sections, "The Nigger Shall Disappear", "The Black Scourge" and "The Yellow Agony". In chapter after chapter the authors take a stance and then hit the reader with a flood of evidence to sustain the thesis. And in Raymond Evans' section the flood becomes an avalanche to the detriment of the argument. All three writers have based their contributions on theses each has submitted to the University of Queensland and Evans, in my view, has been unable to disengage his work from the strictures imposed on all thesis writers. There is too much evidence and too little exposition.

One would hope that the book is an outstanding success. At the very least, it should be compulsory reading for all upper secondary school students in Queensland, but that may be asking too much.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: At the time of going to press, with the last-minute insertion of this item, I am just about to take off to drive over the Nullarbor to Perth. On the way I hope to meet writers and *Overland* supporters in Albany and Perth. In a job like this it's nice to know that almost anywhere one goes in Australia one will find friends. On that non-medicant note (for a change) I simply content myself with thanking all those who have donated $422 to *Overland* since our last issue:

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Author and title of book reviewed, reviewer in brackets.

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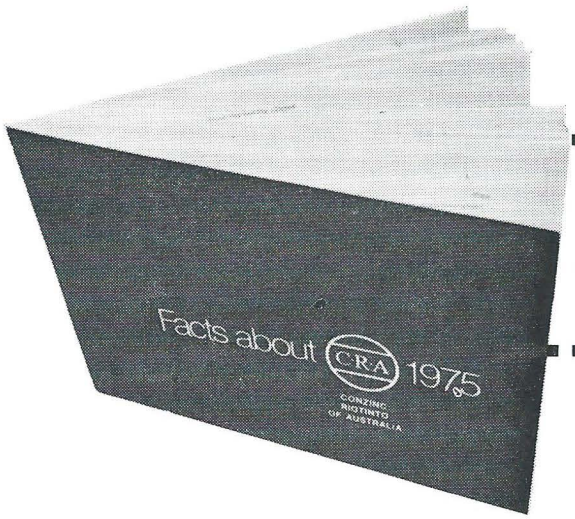

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Do you want to visit Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn Island?

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A likely story. But it's not our place to query him.

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