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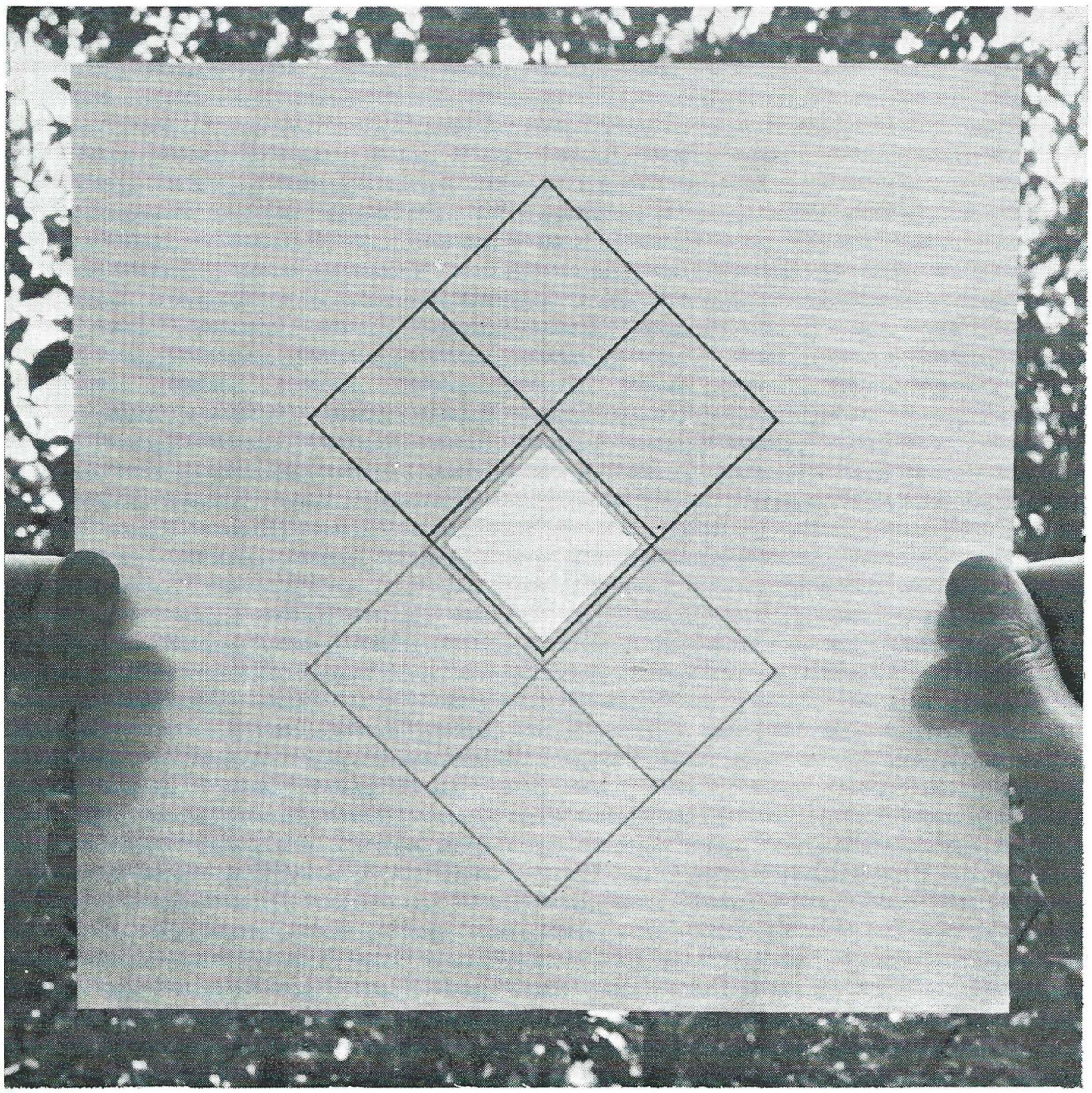

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Covers by Alex Selenitsch

Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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G. S. SHARAT CHANDRA

The Elephant Stop

Seven days before the commencement of the Dassara celebrations in the kingdom of Mysore, on its morning walk through the city the royal elephant refused to budge beyond the corner of the main bazaar street on the one side and the temple of Kali on the other. There was no explanation to its behaviour. It looked happy and swung its trunk jauntily as always except it did not wish to move beyond the shade of the gulmohur tree which thanks to its chance existence at the very spot provided enough shade until the matter was looked into. The chief mahout arrived, examined the beast, particularly the legs. He coaxed it with a sack of coconuts. The elephant grabbed as many coconuts as it could, trumpeted its glee but stayed steadfast. People gathered. The mahout ordered guards and departed in haste. Now there's nothing unusual about an elephant stopping in its walk anywhere it pleases. They have sturdy legs and sleep while standing. But unlike circus elephants trained to do awkward manoeuvers for the titillation of the public, the royal elephant is trained by masters in the art of mammal etiquette. Its behaviour in public is crucial to the dignity and decorum of the royalty. The present elephant's great grand father was famous for its impeccable manners and it had expired one day with its head turned to the wall in such a graceful manner it looked as if it was napping. Rigor Mortis set in and it had taken a half dozen mahouts and as many poles to roll the corpse down.

The Dassara celebrations were only days away and the royal astrologer had predicted everything would go smoothly. News of the elephant's behaviour spread to the palace. The Master-in-Charge of the Dassara celebrations came to inspect the situation. He was a shrewd man. He did not wish to cause any anxiety to the King before he was certain there was no alternative. He sent for the veterinarian, who examined the elephant with a stethoscope, ordered some pills to be given three times daily in sugarcane juice. A chapra was built over the elephant's head with bamboo poles and thatched with palms. Over the roof the purple canopy with the royal insignia was hoisted. The elephant's personal sweeper, washer and manicurist were posted. More guards arrived to secure the area. The elephant stood majestically flapping its ears, swinging its well groomed tusk this way and that.

Next morning it became clear the elephant would not move. Maharaja Chamadharma, King Chum to his British friends at the Race Course club, sat with a hangover. He had missed the auspicious Tuesday morning puja to the royal deity and worried about a possible curse. Perhaps he would slip while playing tennis. King Chum's father, Raja Raja Verma, King Verm to his friends in the Buckingham palace, neglected rituals so badly, on the first day of his first Dassara, that he tripped on the footstool to the throne and broke his knee cap. He limped somewhat for the rest of his life. Chamadharma sent for the royal astrologer. The queen simply said, "It's my husband's karma catching up! His sordid affairs with English women and whisky!"

It was common knowledge the King and the Queen did not sleep together. Their marriage was one of politics. She was plump, superstitious, interested in embroidery, nuts and sweets and gossip. The King was trained in a school for princes in Paris. They had no issue.

The royal astrologer examined the pachyderm, inquired about the direction of its head when it came to a standstill, made his calculations. The elephant had stopped because of some spiritual

static that must have occurred at the intersection. The Kali temple nearby could be the source. The animal with its extra sensory perception must have seen something evil. He would prepare an amulet for the elephant and offer special puja to goddess Kali.

The elephant did not move.

By the evening of the third day, the elephant stop had become a point of public interest. Women found it a god-sent opportunity to worship. They offered it coconuts, jaggery and rice, brought their children for a chance to stomp on its droppings. But the droppings were sacred and were removed by the sweeper before the children had a chance. A wagon stood nearby, ready to cart off the containers for burial in the royal grounds. Villagers parked their bullock carts causing traffic jams. The motors and city bus were deviated to other streets. An enterprising brahmin saw an opportunity and put up a coffee stand. Hawkers with fruits, vegetables, flowers appeared. The town newspaper carried headlines with route directions to the elephant stop.

In the palace there was a steady mounting of panic. Unless the elephant got back to the palace, there was no Dassara. If it were left to Chamadharma, he would have had it tied up and brought back in a lorry. But that would have caused unimaginable chaos in the palace and in the mind of the public. The beast was sacred. It was the incarnation of God Ganesha. No force could be used on its will. Chamadharma had enough trouble keeping his karma within manageable limits.

The astrologer made more calculations and revealed that the problem was more complicated. The entire royalty had to purify themselves. He narrated from an old text that many years before the coming of the Mughals and the British, the then Maharaja of Mysore had issued an edict at the very spot the elephant had stopped. The edict spoke of the King's belief that elephants are the most noble beasts on earth. He had a marble statue of the then royal elephant erected next to it. The present royal elephant had remembered both the edict and some wrong doing to itself and fallen into a trance.

Therefore it was necessary to do the following. First the King should undertake pilgrimage to the Tirumalai hills. The Queen and the courtesans should fast for three days. The palace should offer silver and food to all the brahmin pujaris of the kingdom. Further the courtesans should gather at the elephant stop on the fifth day, worship and bathe it under the supervision of the royal astrologer. The King thought the whole thing a farce. An elephant stops and everyone jumps to religious conclusions! What if he celebrated the Dassara without it! What if he substituted another who looked exactly alike! He asked if there were any restrictions on the type of his travel. There were none. He ordered his plane to be prepared. The queen welcomed the purifications. Fasting would be good for her body and mind. She had been eating too many sweets. The courtesans did not like any of it. But they existed under the royal patronage. They had to do what they were told.

The king left immediately, with his personal assistant and dress boy. The royal plane was seen heading in the direction of the hills. The courtesan march to the elephant stop became the talk of the town. The local newspaper carried stories on each of the seventeen courtesans with pictures. Literary luminaries contributed articles on the events and the role of religion in human conduct. The day the courtesans began their procession, the entire route was jammed with people. The radio supplied running commentary. The procession was a solemn affair since the courtesans, most of them in their middle ages, were weak without food. The senior most of them led the group. She was sixty five and had to rest under an umbrella every few steps. The royal orchestra accompanied the group with slow, pensive dirges. When the courtesans arrived at the elephant stop, the astrologer instructed the senior courtesan to shave the elephant's navel area and to apply a concoction of herbs. The others went around the beast touching its trunk, its belly, its tail, chanting forgiveness. People were touched. Finally, the courtesans washed the elephant with jugs of sacred water, pouring it over designated areas of its body to the chanting of the astrologer. The royal orchestra played mournful tunes from Hindu movies then settled back to their favorite medley from the follies.

The elephant lifted its trunk and salaamed repeatedly.

The sixth day came. The King returned looking pale and exhausted. He had pondered over the absurdity of the whole situation en-route to the hills and had the pilot change the course to Bombay. He had spent his time in the Taj Mahal hotel. The queen lost three pounds. She moved through the palace with the swift of an impala, her face beaming with religious virtuosity.

Exactly five hours before the morning of the Dassara, the elephant let out a huge fart and abruptly moved from the elephant stop.

JOHN SENDY

Country Reds

Have you ever noticed how public swimming pools in the country mostly look the same? Two brick veneer structures, change rooms and the caretakers' office cum kiosk, both always brick veneer, surrounded by miles of concrete, a few trees and a high wire fence. All that concrete holds a special fascination for me. Not only because of the busted noses, gashed knees, bruised funny-bones and bumped foreheads of the little kids during the summer, but for other reasons too.

In the winter of 1975 I was among a privileged unemployed trio selected to carry out major repairs to the Rosewater Swimming Pool. The Shire had obtained a grant for the job under the Regional Employment Development Scheme. Being a fifty-one year old, an office worker all my life, my fears about heavy manual labour were allayed by the shire engineer's assurances that the work was reasonably light. My heart sank, however, on the first morning when he pointed to hundreds of yards of concrete which had to be taken up and relaid and to the trench to be dug right around the pool to a depth of between two and five feet.

"Where's the bulldozer to do it all?" I asked, lending my voice just a slight cutting edge — akin to a cut-throat razor.

He pointed to a crowbar, two shovels, a pick and a bloody great hammer. "Under the RED scheme we can't employ machines. The work has to be labour intensive in order to employ you chaps." Benevolently smiling he drove off, happy about his boy scout deed for the week.

Some of that concrete was a foot thick. Pick, hammer and crowbar just bounced off, jarring every bone, muscle and nerve. However, I needed the money and thought that after a while it might even do me good, that is provided I lived to collect the first pay.

My day proceeded something like this. A seven mile drive brought me to the Rosewater Pool at 7.30. It was becoming light at that time. Underfoot the frost crackled like the dialogue in a Raymond Chandler thriller as we walked down to unlock the shed, feet and hands freezing. Liberal use of hammer, crowbar and shovel on the concrete made no impression until the sun was high in the sky. Muscles and back ached. The nerve-shattering thud of hammer on concrete charged through the body like an electric shock. It seemed 16 to 18 hours later that the morning tea break came at 9.30. Fifteen minutes of blissful tea drinking and sandwich eating disturbed only by the thought of starting work once more.

Righto! At it again! And so on through the endless day. After consuming an enormous evening meal I would stagger to an armchair and go to sleep before a roaring fire.

Rosewater was a town of some 800 souls, situated 150 miles from the city. I was a stranger, a city man, who had lived nearby for one year only. Physical trauma and mental boredom were assauged by observation of the habits and opinions of my two young workmates.

You have heard, no doubt, of the dubious and even hair-raising performances of the legendary parson's daughter. Well! here among concrete and mud I got to know the local parson's son. Peter was a handsome 22, recovering slowly after a two year stretch in hospital. He'd hit a red ironbark, fifteen feet up, at 90 miles an hour, on a bend of the Woomitella Road. The car was a wreck along with its driver. One year out of hospital Peter was still laboriously trying to co-ordinate movement, speech and balance, and not succeeding too well.

The combined wiles of speed, grog and girls had sealed his fate. Incongruously he still worshipped these three gods, although I suspect no longer savoured their charms. The sight of any female from 10 to 60 thoroughly tantalised him, eliciting winks, smirks and lewd looks. He possessed also a clairvoyant sense of their approach. None would come within 300 yards of the place without his immediate knowledge. Still, I suppose if you had hit a red ironbark, fifteen feet up, at 90 miles an hour . . .

After hearing Peter's views on life, politics and people, my conviction mounted that his digested educational diet had been based upon a curriculum chosen by a panel of Joh Bjelke-Peterson, Henry Bolte and Enoch Powell. Liberal amounts of illicit pornography, gazed at in awe, had no doubt finished him off.

His old man, the Minister, looked as though he wouldn't say boo to a goose, but I'd heard stories that his religious instruction sessions at the surrounding tiny schools were spiced with political invective against anything to the left of the Ku Klux Klan.

Still, despite himself and his Dad, young Peter wasn't a bad lad, and sometimes spoke wistfully of his former prowess as a cricketer and footballer, realising he would never play again.

The other fellow, Trevor, was a husky five foot eleven, married with a kid. He was 29 and looked 35, strong and tough. The typical all-Australian boy, he'd been everything and could do anything — with his hands that is. He'd been bricklayer, labourer, flour mill worker, railway worker, beekeeper, eucalyptus cutter and distiller (an occupation he still pursued at the week-ends), shearer, and so on. No need to call in the plumber, or ring the RACV, with Trevor. Possessing a genius for improvisation, he could fix anything. Wire, string, jam tins, chewing gum could all help to make the thing go, whatever it was. He was, at once, ignorant and shrewd, dull and sharp, soft and hard, shy and bold, a pain in the arse and not a bad bloke. Like many Australian country workers he was prone to exaggerate and had well established views on politics, women and race.

One day the policeman's wife drove past the pool. "What a bitch she is!", exclaimed Trevor feelingly. When I innocently asked why, he explained. "The bloody jokers, of course. She's always off with 'em. What a tart! The poor bastard never knows where she is."

It seemed to me after a few days of similar comment about most of the women who appeared, that Rosewater's female population must provide an unsurpassed hotbed of adultery and lechery.

Looking down the road at the Shamrock Hotel I asked "How's Mrs. Poulson getting on since her husband died?"

"All bloody right", replied Trevor, warming to the topic as he wrestled with a hunk of concrete. "She's gettin' married again. Gonna marry Tom Anstey. Course, she's a real bitch. Old Poulson died of the grog you know. She always used to have fellows in her room and he found out, took to the grog, and died."

We went on digging, thoughtfully, while galahs circled overhead and jays chattered in the scrub nearby.

An hour later leaning on the crowbar I remembered that the Delaney's used to have the Shamrock and asked why they left.

"Because of her", he said impatiently, as if I ought to have known. "That bitch Irene Delaney always had fellers trapesin' up to her room. Old Bill found out and so he sold the bastard."

I tried to visualise Mrs. Delaney, the mother of seven children, aged one to fifteen, entertaining sordid guests with all the kids strewn around.

Every Wednesday was women's day at the nearby golf course. Trevor would look balefully at the congregated cars and figures. He seemed a bit crooked on golf. "Look at the bitches. Got nothing better to do than get down there and tear one another to pieces. That's all they go for you know, to bloody gossip. Jesus, I'm glad me and Pauline don't live in this bastard of a town. That's why we went ten mile out, you know, to get away from the bloody gossipy bitches in here."

Trevor didn't like Melbourne either. That was one thing we had in common. "Christ", he'd reflect, seriously, "I don't know how the bloody kids get on in Melbourne. There'd be nothin' for the poor little buggars to do. They'd have to go thirty miles before they could get a bit of bush to walk in."

About pornography and politics and race, Peter and Trevor shared common opinions. They liked all of the former, but not all politicians or peoples.

Whitlam was a Communist. Unions were bad. Strikers should be gaoled, shot or made to work. Italians and Greeks were contemptible wogs. Aborigines were niggers or abos, who wouldn't work. They frequently would abuse an offending hammer or shovel as a "black harlot".

One evening I staggered quietly into the Shamrock to imbibe enough fuel to motor me home. Sipping my pot in the little bar around the corner from the main one I heard Trevor's loud voice in the main bar answering a query. "Yeah, I'm

working with young Peter the Minister's son and that new bloke who lives seven mile out there at Wattle Glen. Old bloke about 50. Christ, he's a lazy bastard. I've got to carry the bastard all day. Wouldn't work in a bloody iron lung. Thinks manual labor's a Mexican bandit. Course the poor old buggar's got a lot to put with you know. That bloody wife of his. Jesus, she's a beauty."

Swallowing my beer quietly I sneaked out the side door, furiously deciding to have as little to do with Trevor as possible. He was late the next morning. Peter and I were already hard at it, half freezing, half sweating, as usual. I was wielding the hammer and Peter prised with the crowbar. My grunted reply to Trevor's cheery greeting didn't deter him.

"Bought you in a big bottle of eucy," he said, "and a dozen eggs. They're in your car." Apologetically, he went on "We've got bloody eggs everywhere. We'd only throw 'em out. And listen, that eucy is the real McCoy, not that diluted stuff you buy, so be careful with it. And tell your Missus when she's moppin' the floor to put just a couple of drops in the water. Makes the house smell good."

In reply to my mumbled thanks he grabbed the hammer out of my hands. "Give it here you stupid old bastard, you'll only do yourself a bloody injury. Go and have a spell for a while." As I wandered philosophically down to the toilet, the hammer came down with sickening force on the concrete. Raucously Trevor sang, "Take a look at me, I'm yesterday's hero, yesterday's hero."

My nerves jangled once more as the hammer descended with a thud. The sun started to shine through the fog.

Ned Kelly

Alone in a visionaries' desert of umber and red
With his black box head
Kelly takes his stand
And his hidden yellow eyes make rainbows in the sand

The technicolour flames of Glenrowan burned away
Every other day
Left him black and stark
Free and triumphant over time and Stringybark.

So he looms from the smoke of squalor and disgrace
With his armoured Irish face.
Now he's game as a lion, innocent as trees,
And the bullets shot at seminars never graze his knees.

MARGARET SCOTT

Tantaene Animis Caelestibus Irae?

So that's her latest feat of espionage!
There she goes off in an immortal huff;
Slams out with a last shriek of heavenly rage:
'When, when,' she wants to know, 'will you leave off
Chasing mortal girls and learn to be your age?
Are not the pleasures of my bed enough?'
She knows too much, I tell her. Even so
I am tempted to tell her what she does not know.

She does not know how tedious they become,
These goddesses, forever young and fair,
Flaunting their regal charms of bust and bum,
Queening their way with that Olympian air
Of effortless, nonchalant equilibrium,
Untouched by doubt, by weakness or despair,
Complacent virgins and self-righteous wives
Who never took a risk in all their lives.

She cannot conceive the wonder, the mere bliss
Of loving a woman who, at her peak and prime
Senses her beauty doomed to the abyss;
Who, in the inexorable lapse of time,
Must take her chance, knowing how frail it is,
Yet, daring the unknown, achieves sublime
Ardours she could not know me capable of
And reaches raptures past her hope of love.

She cannot imagine how humanity flowers
From aspirations, of which gods have no need,
To be caught up in this divine of ours;
How ecstasy when laced with terror can breed
Spasms of vision and vision lend them powers
Of divination; how, pregnant with my seed,
Their bodies, grown strange, crave metamorphoses
To other natures: beasts, stones, stars or trees.

What prompts them, in such shapes, to welcome **me?**
What goddess, visited by bull or swan,
Would not just laugh or turn in scorn and flee?
They know me far too well. With women alone
I tap the human springs of fantasy
And in their arms, as never in heaven, have known
That sense of undiscovered light which broods
In mortal poetry's similitudes.

Woman is half a living metaphor
That reaches towards its unknown counterpart.
No goddess needs apotheosis nor
Any fulfilment of the mind and heart;
Nothing that she may think worth wishing for
Demands imagination, knowledge or art.
All things being in her power to attain,
What she enjoys she may enjoy again.

So what words could I find that would convey
The pleasure of sensing worlds beyond my reach
In mortal minds where mine must beat its way
From dim surmise to final lucid speech;
I, threading their labyrinths of doubt, while they
Dazzle through aether, probing each to each;
I, towards her tender, dark mortality
And, groping to discern my numen, she?

In that embrace how exquisite, how brief
The mind's exchange, the body's precarious joy,
Transfigurations of spirit beyond belief
For those whom easy, unending pleasures cloy!
For once to know and share the urge, the grief
Heightening one hour the next hour must destroy;
Yet how explain to an immortal wife
That single hour might be the crown of life?

What good, of course, would explanation do?
When all that counts with her has just been said,
What past resentments must it not renew?
What tears of jealous fury would she shed?
Omnipotence leaves so little to pursue,
Omniscience less to talk about in bed
And I, no conversationalist, I admit,
Shine more in love's performance than its wit.

Still, she's a heavenly creature, bountiful
And splendid even in anger; what is more,
How can I blame her, god-head being so dull?
Her immortality must prove a chore
Did not some screaming rage restore the full
— Now, why have I not thought of this before? —
The full immediacy, that zest of strife
And plural of spouse which is the spice of life.

A. D. HOPE

JOAN GRANT

The People's Poetry

A friend of mine, a Hungarian novelist who left Hungary too late to ever feel truly at ease using English, once said sadly, "I am the prisoner of the language of a small country". That's easy enough to understand and sympathize with. It would be harder to understand if a Chinese said, "I am the prisoner of the language of a big country". Yet, in the sense of being unable to understand or use the literary language, this has been true of most Chinese for most of China's long history. Because, although westerners are used to thinking of China—at least of the old, classical China which first awed the European observer—as the most cultivated of nations, in fact only a minute proportion of the population was ever even literate, to say nothing of literary.

I suppose there is almost no one in Australia, for instance, who has gone as far as matriculation without having read at least a sampling of Chinese poetry—some lovely and wistful description of a landscape, or memory of an absent friend.

Yet most Chinese could never have had such an experience, because most Chinese could not read. And even if a peasant somehow laboriously managed to learn to recognize a few characters, or heard them recited, the poetry which he might read or hear would have little meaning for him, because it is a special kind of Chinese, the language of the literati, which he could never hope to fathom.

His problem would have been a little like the problem of those of us who must read Chinese poems in translation—or, in fact, like almost everyone whose native language is not Chinese, even those who have learned good, conversational Mandarin. Good, conversational Chinese is hardly an accomplishment to be sneered at (as I know all too well), but it is by no means enough to fully savor a classic poem in the way it was meant to be savoured, and certainly translations, no matter how inspired, can give us only an inkling of the originals.

For one thing, there is a peculiar affinity between the Chinese language and the high art of poetry which makes a Chinese poem unlike any other poem in the world. To have an idea of the reason, you have to think of the look of individual Chinese characters, which in the classic language each represented one word. Some of these characters were very complex, in themselves representing the remains of a drawing, a picture of their meaning.

For instance, there are a series of words based on the character meaning "door" or "gateway", which itself looks rather like a pair of the old American West's swinging saloon doors, set unusually high on their doorposts. Many words based on this root — or "radical", as it is called in Chinese studies — simply have to do with opening and closing; but if between the doorposts you add the symbol for "moon", the resulting character means "leisure". The visual impact is, of course, that of sitting in a courtyard looking at the moon through a gateway, and the implication is that early evening, after all the day's work is done, is the time for such tranquil pleasure. In another case, the symbol for "horse" placed between the gateposts creates a character meaning "to rush in suddenly or rudely", conjuring up images of urgent messages, armies, and foaming, neighing horses — and the overtone of danger and fear. Such visual and symbolic images are, of course, part of the impact of a character, and particularly in a poem, where compactness is so important, add enormously to the richness of a phrase or thought.

Also, some of the classic characters were ex-

traordinarily refined, with a single character being able to take the weight of meaning of, for instance, "to cross a stream without a boat", "to announce the death of a parent", or even, "to feed pigs and dogs with grain". No need to explain how this kind of condensation can add to a poet's opportunities for reverberation and elaboration within a simple rhyme or rhythm scheme or a number of short lines.

There is, finally another sort of reverberation in classic Chinese poetry—the multiple memories evoked by certain characters which were used by great poets over many centuries. An educated man was able to recall the previous use of such characters when he read them in a new poetic context, and add to the face meaning of that word his knowledge of previous poets and poems, and all the implications which these might contain.

You can see, then, the problems inherent for a non-Chinese speaker in the attempt to truly understand a Chinese poem, for a Chinese speaker to adequately translate one, and for a semi-literate Chinese to get anywhere at all.

For many Chinese, however, there was an additional, and quite unsurmountable difficulty: traditionally, the written Chinese language was the preserve of the élite—that peculiarly Chinese élite which in the main was determined not from the conditions of one's birth, but from the extent of one's education. The written word, and the use of the ink-brush with which to write it, was the possession of the literate, and partly because of the complexity of classic Chinese, the literate, those who had the leisure to become educated, achieved another dimension and became the scholars.

The significance of this is even greater than might appear at first thought, because, due to the elaborate system of preferment examinations for entry into and advancement through the bureaucracy, the scholars were also those who governed. The possessor of the word, therefore, not only possessed the key to the sacred core of Chinese culture—symbolized, as A. C. Scott puts it, by "the ink-loaded brush" which "represented alike the great arts of calligraphy, painting and poetry" —but also the key to appointment into the civil service, which, even more than in modern bureaucracies, controlled the government and the vast centralized power of the Chinese empire.

And if you did not possess this key—if you were not a son of the élite and thus automatically educated by your family, or were not exceptionally brilliant and thus able to force society to educate you and force yourself through the years of intensive study which Chinese classical education required—you were doubly disinherited; disinherited from the possibility of power as a member of the bureaucracy, and disinherited from the mainstream of the civilization's culture—unable to participate in or appreciate the core of language-linked art forms which were crucial to the civilization, the calligraphy, painting and poetry which among other essences indeed *made* you Chinese, in a society whose criteria for belonging were not such determinants as race or religion, but the understanding and acceptance of cultural, aesthetic and linguistic values. It has often been said that no matter how different the dialects in different parts of China, the written language, being the same everywhere, linked the whole country. But obviously, this was only true if you could write and read. If you couldn't, you were in fact isolated by your dialect to the geographic area you were born in, and had little feeling of the greater China. Without the language, then, you were an outsider—not a born outsider, but, if you will forgive me for putting it this way, someone uneducated into outsiderness.

As the great poet Po Chu-I said n 835 AD:

> The world cheats those who cannot read;
> I, happily, have mastered script and pen.
> The world cheats those who hold no office;
> I am blessed with high official rank.

The significance of poetry was therefore greater than it might be in other civilizations; not being able to read or write it was a sign of class distinction as well as of cultural deprivation. In China there was very seldom such a thing as an upper-class illiterate; you were upper class *because* you were literate, and if you were illiterate you were, ipso facto, lower class. I hope you don't think I've labored this point; I've emphasized it because it's tremendously important in understanding the development of the people's poetry today.

In this classic Chinese civilization the lower classes were not entirely deprived. They could not partake of the high Chinese culture, but they had flourishing art forms of their own. Street theatre and music—which developed in combination into the uniquely characteristic Chinese opera—drawing and caricature, story-tellers and bards, created over the centuries a rich and lively folk culture. These art forms changed unselfconsciously with the times, and had a vigor and earthly reality alien to much of the élitist culture, which became stylized and esoteric as time went

on, with the growing Confucian worship of tradition for its own sake.

The market-place story-tellers and poets used the popular, colloquial language, of course, not the classical, ceremonial language of the scholars, which grew more remote from the spoken Chinese of the masses with each generation. In fact, the people's poets of the market-place were continuing a tradition which had begun as early as any in China. Their poems and songs of love, joy and anguish, of life and death and the nature of things, are direct descendants of those enshrined in the famous *Book of Poetry,* one of the five ancient Confucian classics. Although later these poems were reinterpreted by the Confucian dialectician and each word annotated and reannotated for its symbolic meanings, they are, in reality, the natural folk-songs, chants and poems of the working people, whose own cultural expression had its beginnings in the dawn of time and has continued unbroken until today, if often unnoticed or ignored by the bureaucrat-scholar. Not always, however. Because although the bureaucrats would hardly have regarded this poetry as literature, it was recognized as a good barometer of the people's contentment: how they felt about the government, whether there were rumblings of discontent about particular officials, too heavy taxes, and so on. So, at least as early as the Han Dynasty, around the beginning of the Christian era in the west, a special government bureau was created to record the people's folk-songs and poems—a literary spy system that had nothing to do with literature.

But a new sort of poetry writing and recording began some sixty years ago, when the idea took hold that serious literature could exist and be created in the people's language, colloquial Chinese, and not only in the classical dialect of the scholar. The young scholar Hu Shih pioneered this so-called literary renaissance in the 1920s, and although the early poems written by intellectuals in *pai hua,* the colloquial language, were strained and self-conscious, those which had already existed as folk songs and chants, but were set down for the first time, had the full-blooded naturalness of their peasant creators. Many which had survived the generations, even the centuries, handed down from parents to children, were work songs and songs of revolt, words put together to ease the burden, to help and rally the masses as they toiled or tried to resist the impersonal harshness of flood and drought or of their overseers and landlords.

The New Zealand poet Rewi Alley has collected some of the *Poems of Revolt* of earlier periods. Here is one from the period of the great Taiping rebellion of the 1850s, when the people, rising up against the Ch'ing Dynasty, first seriously shook the foundations of the ancient imperial system:

> This year drought, next year flood;
> Grass, roots, bark all eaten up;
> Money-lenders demanding hundred percent
> Interest; one picul of grain lent
> Needs two and a third to pay back—
> If we do not join the rebels
> What then will we do?

Another from this period has a more contemporary ring:

> The sun rises so bold and bright
> And into Tunghsiang march our Taiping
> fighters.
> Here was a tyrant, a landlord named Mosan,
> Arrested, then executed, so that the countryside
> Was filled with the joy of it!

In Chinese this poetry, and all the other examples I give, have both rhythm and rhyme—English is, alas, only an approximation.

In addition to poems of the people and classical poetry, there is a third strain of Chinese poetry which has taken a path between the two. This is the great Chinese tradition of "occasional" poetry, written to commemorate some particular event. Although written in the classical language, the vast bulk of it is by no means great poetry. Indeed most of it probably no longer exists. It is the poetry written by more or less every educated man throughout the thousands of years of the scholar-bureaucrats' supremacy, largely because writing poetry was the civilized thing to do. Good, mediocre and bad poetry was written on every conceivable occasion, from a chance meeting with an old friend to a son's examination success. If you spent a weekend as a houseguest in the country, instead of writing a thank-you note, you wrote a poem; if you were very proud of your calligraphy, you wrote it on the house wall, where it remained, or perhaps was whitewashed over by the time the dust of your departure had cleared. Some of this occasional poetry was charming, and some was great, when written by China's great poets; we have all heard examples of it and when fine it is among the world's most memorable poetry.

This ingrained habit of writing a poem to mark a particular occasion took a tragic turn in the

early revolutionary period of this century, when intellectuals took up arms against the collapsing traditional dynasty to fight in rebellions inspired by Sun Yat Sen's philosophy of the people's rights, to fight warlords who supported the old guard, and later, to fight against the right-wing segment of the Kuomintang. These defenders of the masses—themselves, of course, literate, and educated in the classic tradition—wrote a new sort of occasional poetry—the occasion being their own death; it was poetry written on the way to execution. Although written by men who would have been traditional scholars in an earlier time, these men are no longer the rulers, but are literati who have taken the side of the oppressed and have been in their turn defeated, and their poems forge a link between the verbal folk poetry and the composed and recorded poetry of the classical period.

Rewi Alley has also collected some of this terribly different occasional poetry; here is a poem written in 1928 by Yu Feng-chou before his execution:

Ever the hot red blood
Courses through our veins,
And in bitterness, tears
Run down our cheeks.
The tears dry up
But the blood does not.
Useless to be too sad at this moment;
Just imagine that long ago
One has already died.

This is certainly the sophisticated introspection of an intellectual. More typical of this new occasional poetry is the exhortation, the rallying cry, the warning to the oppressor by men who deliberately used the awful drama of their execution to keep the struggle going. Here is a poem by Liu Shao-nan, also executed in 1928:

You would kill me — just one man
As a light blown out by the wind!
Know this, that the revolution
With me gone, just one man, is like
A great tide, losing a bit of spray!

It is in these poems and many others like them that the poeple's poetry of today has its roots. It was still poetry largely written by members of the former educated upper class—it had to be, because the huge mass of the people still could not read or write—but it was written in the ordinary language of the people, not in the old classic style, and it was linked with the heroic folk chants and songs of the illiterate in its quality of strength through suffering, and its hatred of the indifference of landlords, the oppression of warlords, the cruelty of the Japanese, and then, inevitably, the blind rigidity and corruption of Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang, which fought the Communists rather than the Japanese.

But it was not until the spread of revolutionary centres in the countryside, the actual taking over of areas of mountainside as rural "soviets" by Mao Tse-tung and other early Communist leaders, that the two poetic strains, the classic and the folk, truly merged, or perhaps it is more correct to say were transformed in combination into something else. Beginning in 1928—the same years in which the poets presented earlier were executed—as the small communist bands grew in strength and size and gained the confidence of the peasants, more and larger areas experienced in practical terms what the Communists mean by "liberation".

One of the first things they meant was "education", and for that, literacy was necessary. Wherever the Communists set up revolutionary governments, they set up centres to teach the people, the ordinary peasant man and woman, to read and write. At last, for the first time in some 3,000 years, it was considered the right of all who called themselves Chinese to learn the mysteries of the great language which had surrounded then, as if they were blind, without revealing its secrets or unlocking its treasure-house of culture. The first "ordinary" people to learn to read and write Chinese at this time, and then to teach it to others, were those who joined the Communist army, the People's Liberation Army. Many poems by army men recalling the old Yenan days describe the experience. For instance,

I joined the Party under a canopy of gunfire
I studied without going to school.
From a buffalo-herding lad to a soldier in uniform,
It is the army that has fostered and raised me.

Another old soldier who came to Yenan as an orphan in 1935, one of the famous "little devils" who scouted for the army, calls the Pagoda Mountain which looms above Yenan his "mother", and recalls,

I learnt to write
On birch bark, read the works
Of Chairman Mao in cliff-side caves . . .

This sort of reminiscence has become a classic of the "early days" as described by old comrades for the benefit of youngsters, because now children are taught to read and write in school, and

can only imagine the experience of having the world thus opened up only as an adult. Of course it is important for the Communist Party that they do imagine this, and remember that they are the first generation of working people granted this privilege. They are meant, in this case at least in traditional Chinese fashion, to listen to the old people with respect, and learn of their sufferings before the revolution and their hardships during it—whether and how they listen is a problem which contemporary Chinese have as well as contemporary Australians, as the excesses of the cultural revolution demonstrate.

Another now classic theme of the people's poetry is the relationship between the People's Liberation Army and the ordinary peasant-farmers of the countryside. It was not only in teaching the people to read and write that the PLA spread the communist message: this army behaved as no Chinese army that the people had ever known before. "The army", said theoretician Mao, "must swim like fishes in the ocean of the people"; must, in other words, be accepted by the people as belonging among them, must be helped by the people for helping them. These soldiers did not loot; they requested, they returned what they borrowed, they helped, and, once they had learned, they taught. Here is one poem, typical of the many about them, and using Mao's phrase. It is called "The Giant's Shoes", and it was written "collectively".

After a mock assault and surprise attack,
Our troops bivouac at Pine Village.
Big Liu, a fighter in Squad No. 2,
Arrives with cloth shoes worn right through.

The men are concerned, but not one of them
Carries a spare pair of such big shoes.
With a broad grin Big Liu laughs and says,
"I like walking barefoot better anyway!"

At dawn next day when the bugle sounds,
The village Party Secretary arrives, carrying
A pair of brand new shoes, each neat stitch
sewn with love.
Armymen and people are as close as fish and
water.

The new shoes fit Big Liu just fine.
He's very grateful. Cudgeling his brains, he
asks,
"Did a scout come from the village last night,
And measure my big feet while I slept?"

The Party Secretary chuckles. Waving his pipe
He solves the puzzle and explains quite easily,
"When you carried water for the villagers last
night,
They measured your bare footprints in the
mud!"

Writing about the helpfulness of the PLA has, in the last thirty years, become almost as traditional as writing about spring blossoms. Here is one written, in fact, *by* a young soldier, an event no more unusual in today's China than it was for educated Chinese officers to write poems in the old days. It's called: "Moving On":

In the silence of night
The men pack their kit and move on,
Striding swiftly but softly,
Not wanting to disturb
The peasants who put them up.

The next morning, rising at the crack of dawn,
The villagers find the armymen have gone.
Every water vat is filled,
Every courtyard swept.
On a slip of paper on the white-washed wall
Is written: "Thank you. Goodbye!"

It is a simple poem, written in simple language which any basically educated person can understand. Its message is plain, and it is written about the kind of incident which millions of people in the countryside have experienced. And that is a basic element of Chinese poetry now—it really *has* become the people's poetry, written by and about the people, and belonging very much to them. As Mao Tse-tung said in his famous speech on Art and Literature in Yenan in 1942, quoting Lenin, Chinese art and literature should "serve the millions upon millions of working people". And serving the people's needs in art and literature should be seen not as adding "flowers to a piece of brocade", but as offering "fuel to a person in snowy weather". The arts, in other words, were no longer to be considered luxuries, but necessities.

Indeed, if the roots of the people's poetry stretch back to traditional folk poetry and the rebellious intellectuals of the early 20th century, its first sturdy shoots pushed up out of the rocky soil of Yenan. Here in northern China in 1936, after the astonishing saga of the Long March, the surviving Communists set up a central system of economic and agricultural co-operatives, government, and education. Literacy was encouraged in various ways, including the simplifying of many of the most complex characters, some of which had become so elaborate that, for instance, a

word meaning "anxious" or "depressed" needed 28 separate strokes to write it—inducing, undoubtedly, a literal understanding of its meaning. And once people began to read and write, some naturally began to write poetry, and others to read it. Naturally, but with what complex emotion. For the very act of writing poetry, no matter what its subject, was a political statement. To be a peasant and to be able to write poetry, to be an ordinary farmer—or even more astonishing a farmer's wife—and be able to read it, indicated, more clearly than any slogans, that the class distinction of thousands of years had ended. There was no longer a mysterious élite who deserved obsequious respect because they possessed an exclusive knowledge which the masses could never hope to comprehend or share. The mystery had been dissolved in the not so simple act of learning to read and write. And if some of the delicacy and subtlety of the poetic language also disappeared who was to mourn it in the general euphoria of at last being anyone's equal?.

The people's poetry of the last thirty years has been criticized by lovers of classic Chinese poetry as uninteresting, partly because it is "political". "It's all 'the East is Red' and Mao is wonderful" says these critics, "not really poetry at all". There are a number of replies to this. Of course the new poetry is political; it is political no matter what its subject, whether a spring morning, a lover's smile or the thoughtfulness of the People's Liberation Army, because it is being written by people who, because of their class, could never write poetry before, and that in itself is a political as well as a sociological fact. And certainly, in addition to this, much of the subject matter is either very directly political or can be included in a general "political" category. Indeed it can be argued, and Chinese communist theoreticians do argue, that there is no subject which is not political. But is it subject matter which defines poetry, or is it emotion and style, language and communication? Chairman Mao said in the same Yenan talk, "works of art, however politically progressive, are powerless if they lack artistic quality".

There has been, certainly, especially during the fervid period of the cultural revolution, poetry which seems didactic, even ludicrous, in its simplistic excesses. For example, take a poem called "Chairman Mao is Dearer Than Any Parent", written by an airman. Far from home, the airman writes a letter to his family, asking for his mother's photograph. Then the postman brings him a letter from home. The poem continues:

> Opening the letter I glimpse the sun,
> Red and glowing it lights up my heart.
> A picture in colour my mother has sent me
> Of our leader, beloved Chairman Mao.

The letter says, in part:

> Received your letter asking for my photo;
> The whole family sat down and discussed it.
> Far dearer than parents is Chairman Mao,
> Consider him as your own father and mother.

We may be right to dismiss this as propaganda; we may also be right when we criticize it as ridiculously unreal, unpoetic or uninteresting. But it's also necessary to remember that it is a single example among millions with very different themes and styles.

From the pre-revolutionary folk-songs through the exhortations of the war against Japan and the KMT, to the Yenan days of high drama and the struggle and triumph of the revolution, the drive for literacy and the encouragement to write poetry has always been involved with political aims, with teaching, with encouraging and inspiring the people. The events of the Long March created a heroic myth which was clearly the stuff of poetry, and the thrill of breaking through the class barrier which mastering the language symbolized was the emotional stuff of which poetry must be made. It was, in other words, a two-sided development. Literacy *could* bind the people to the Party, and poets *could* bring the Party line to every man, woman and child in the most direct and moving fashion. But it is also true that the people *wanted* to write poetry, were enchanted at their ability to enter this previously forbidden world, and wrote and are writing literally millions of poems on every sort of subject.

In a poem called "Written Deep Underground", a young girl, used to the sophistications of Peking but fired with the ardour to work among the people, finds herself driving tip-cars in a coal mine. She remembers her carefree childhood, boating parties on the lake, her feelings of life being colour and joy, and says,

> Driving tip-cars in and out
> Is sheer drudgery.
> Here in the black bowels of the earth
> What poetry can there be?

The Party Secretary, who often in post-revolutionary prose and poetry takes the role of a

benign father figure, pats her shoulder and replies,

If it doesn't make sense to you, lass,
Sit down; let's talk of the old days.

He reminds her of the revolutionary struggle when "we were desperate for steel, but we had no mines and no blast furnaces". After a long discussion she "wipes her tears and smoothes her hair" and ever since that day has driven the tip-cars with fervour:

Her country's lovely landscape is always with her . . .
And everywhere she goes
Is paved with sunshine . . .
Everything here is glorious poetry!

It was to create this kind of feeling, to show people how they could participate, that the writing and collecting of folk songs and poetry has been encouraged by the Communists since 1949 when they became the national government. Teachers, students and writers travelled to communes and factories throughout the country, encouraging poetry-writing and organizing competitions. There were poetry contests in village squares, where people gathered to try to finish a stanza begun by a "challenger". The best attempt was chosen by the amount of applause, and the winner became the new challenger. There were poetry fairs, and poetry booths, where incomplete stanzas were posted on walls to be finished, in good old "complete this jingle" style. Or a writer or group from one factory or commune might challenge another individual or group from an adjoining commune or factory.

1958 seems to have been the peak year for this sort of centrally organized encouragement, and the magnitude of response is staggering. At a poetry fair in Yunnan Province, for instance, 10,000 verses were written. In Szechwan Province, 3,733 volumes of folk songs and poems were collected from 141 cities and villages. In one city in Fukien Province, 600 pamphlets of poems were published. In Hupeh Province there were 23,000 poetry clubs.

It is hard not to agree that much of this quite incredible outpouring would be bad—either just plain bad writing, or plain clumsy propaganda. But it's also hard not to concede that a proportion of it would be good and moving—in short, "real" poetry, written by people who'd never dreamt of attempting such a thing before, and celebrating their feats as writers and as workers. Here is one from a collection published in 1959 in Peking:

Our songs now fill baskets —
Basket upon basket, they fill storehouses.
Don't say they are but colloquial words;
Once broadcast in the field they turn into grain.

There are twice as many folk songs this year,
A large baleful of them rolls off our tongues, casually.
Don't leave them to be sung next year,
No one can use last year's calendar.

If you walk, walk the long, long road;
If you sing, sing forty songs at a stretch!
Thinking about our prospects of happiness;
We laugh until midnight, unable to go to sleep.

It takes good hoes to till the land,
It takes good singers to sing songs.
Now that everyone is a singer,
Our songs make the Yangtze River flow backwards!

That is one of the great themes of the people's poetry—that, just as the people can now write poetry, so the people can now do anything, if they work hard enough, and believe fervently enough in the words of Chairman Mao—in other words, in the spirit of socialism. Another poem from the same collection expresses this with exuberance. It's called "Haystack":

The haystack rises, round and round;
On top, a haying comrade of the commune reaches the sky.
He tears a piece of white cloud to wipe his perspiration,
And he leans over to light his cigarette on the sun.

This feeling of what they have done, what they can do, and above all, that they are important—as important as the old poets, as important as the new theoreticians—is a constant refrain. A poem called "The Party Secretary of Our County", begins:

In an old straw hat
A green kit bag upon his shoulder,
His trousers rolled up over muddy legs,
He never spares himself in wind and rain . . .

Implicit in this is the memory of the old landlord's overseer, whom the Party Secretary has replaced, and who virtually never became muddy, or involved with the peasants as people. After talking about how he works in the field cutting grain with the peasants, the poem goes on:

The mud not yet washed from his feet,
He chats on the threshing floor
With the poor peasants,
And laughing, they exclaim:
"The Party Secretary of our county
Is one of our own folk!"

And then:
Seated on the ground,
Using his straw hat as a fan,
A smile on his bronzed face,
The Secretary says:
"The masses are the real heroes.
I'm here to learn from you all."

From his kit-bag
He takes the works of Chairman Mao
And together we read aloud,
The great teachings stirring
The rolling waves of paddy.

The sentence "The masses are the real heroes" is a quotation from Mao Tse-tung.

But even heroic masses are human, and though love songs may have a slightly new twist, they are love songs still, as this poem from Shensi Province shows:

I love him, for his heart
Is so red; the buckwheat husk
Tastes bitter, but the good grain
Inside is bright crimson;
He is poor, but his work
So wonderful, taking part
In the revolution; I love him
And his red heart together.

One of the effects of the feeling that everyone is important is the rash of folk poetry extolling workers in all sorts of jobs. It is not only the soldier and the peasant, the Party representative and the construction worker who are depicted. If everyone writes poetry, everyone is also written about. There are forest surveyors, whose "songs are the first to break the silence of these deep primeval forests" and whose "rugged pioneering hands add new splendour to the mountains". There are lumbermen:

The Changpai Mountains have doffed their silver capes,
The River Hailan has loosened its coat of ice,
Spring is here!
Riding on swift horses,
Lumbermen report back for work . . .
From the forests roll trains,
Loaded with the songs of spring,
Filling all the tracks with singing,
Carrying the lumbermen's work-songs all over our vast land.

There is the fisher-girl:

Round her waist a sea-blue apron,
On her head a bamboo hat,
The rosy-cheeked fisher-girl
Scans the far horizon . . .
Tossing back her plaits,
As fish leap and sea-gulls wheel,
The fisher-girl tames the sea . . .
And rolling back her tarpaulin
To stow away her catch,
At the top of her voice she sings
A fisherman's shanty,
While wind and waves make music.

There is the old ferryman:
Hair bleached by the limpid stream,
Hands callused by punting;
How much blood and sweat have filled his boat?
How much grief and anguish has he ferried?

No need to ask the green hills on the banks,
No need to ask the rushing flood;
His wrinkled brow and snow-white hair
Betoken years of wind and frost.

Now the spring breeze caresses his cheeks
Beaming with smiles;
Hale and vigorous he plies his pole
And sweetens the stream with his singing;
For this glorious age
Makes even old men high-hearted . . .

There is the doctor *and* the herbalist. There is even the train attendant:
Fresh as a breath of spring,
Pleasant, smiling, deft, light-footed,
You never rest.

You bring us tea, hot water,
Giving your youth to this mundane task,
Concerned for the passengers' comfort,
Wholeheartedly serving the people.

South of the Yangtse, North of the Great Wall,
Rolling plains and palm groves
Are your vast scene of action;
Sparks of molten steel, seas of paddy, sirens, thunder
Are your resounding song . . .

The train races through the wind,
The wind races the train;
Through this great artery of our motherland
The hot blood of your youth is coursing.

Whatever the differences in subject matter, there is one clear similarity between contemporary and classic poetry. That is the love of nature and the consciousness of natural images

which is one of the great Chinese sensitivities. As the poem about the old ferryman says, "The future unfolds lovely as a landscape painting". It is in their images of nature that the old and the new poetry come together and make us realize that poetry, people and the Chinese sensibility have not changed, whatever the political and social upheavals. For instance, when was this written?

Willows before the window trail long tendrils,
Swallows spread their wings and sing,
Twittering as if to ask us;
Are you ready for the spring?

It is timeless; and only in the second verse can one link it with the present:

Ah, Swallows, you come too late,
Spring has long been here for the army;
In mid-winter we started the spring sowing;
And our crops were blossoming in the snow.
Are we ready for the spring? We are!
We have rifles, picks, flowers, verdant crops,
And this song to show our welcome.

Another example of the incorporation of nature imagery is a poem called "The Nursery for the Busy Season". It is vividly descriptive too of village and commune life:

Under the big tree a mat,
In the shade of willows a rug,
With the big tree as roof,
With cots in the shade,
We make a nursery for the busy season.

Who started this nursery?
Two grannies had the idea
And the whole village approved.
Farming for the revolution,
We must fight hard on the farming front
For the summer harvesting and planting.

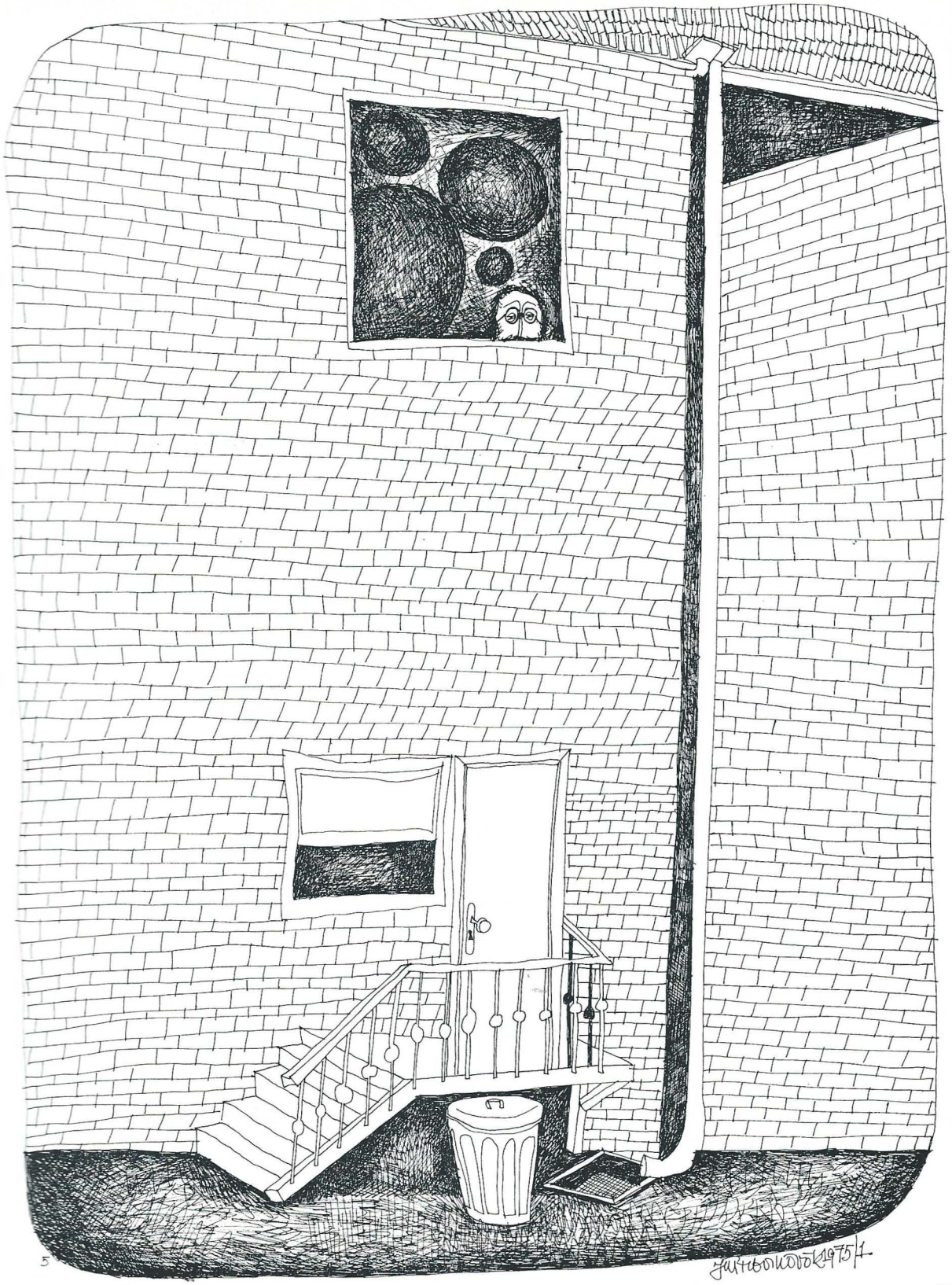
Over the willows
Swallows skim,
Under the willows
Children are frolicking;
Granny Chang and Granny Li
Are making a whistle for one child,
Picking wild asters for another,
And singing song after song.

In the boughs of the willows
Cicadas drone,
Under their shade
Our babies dream sweet dreams.
Granny Chang and Granny Li
Are giving one child a wash,
Sewing for another,
And singing lullabies.

On the threshing floor east of the village
Stone rollers whirr merrily;
In the wheat fields west of the village
Flash new sickles.
Young mothers straightening up
To brush back their hair
And wipe away their sweat
All see, yes they certainly see,
How sweetly their children are smiling.

It is difficult to conclude a discussion of twentieth century peasant poetry with any sort of summary. The vast number of poets, of poems, of subjects, the enormous variation of quality and style, defeats any effort at neat categorization. Maybe that is the point; the diverse outpourings of a vast population can't possibly conform to any narrow directive or description. The people's poetry continues to roll out in a flood which, perhaps, will only be channeled by the emergence of some great poets from among the people. No outstanding voices seem to have arisen yet; perhaps it will only be in the second generation, when the mere fact of being able to write poetry is no longer enough, that the giant voices will sound. The only certainty is that the songs will not stop. This brief verse says it all:

An illiterate like me takes a pen to write poetry!
Joy fills my heart as water fills the river.
For a thousand years the tip of my pen never talked;
Now I have more to say than I can ever finish.



Jiri Tibor

The Capitalist Face and Culture Overkill of "The Chinese Exhibition"

G. R. LANSELL

Just think how impossible "The Chinese Exhibition" would have been to bring here even just ten years ago; what storms of protest, discussions of treason even, it would have had to undergo and endure from British bootlickers such as our erstwhile Godfather Sir Robert Menzies, not to mention all the voting tergiversators or, more kindly, pay-packet trimmers that constitute our great silent majority.

The Chinese then, to play upon racial caricatures and stereotypes a little, were regarded as still the peasant remnants or, rather, hordes of the Boxer rising or the unequal treaties, capable only of becoming at best market gardeners or, worse, the presumably genetically stunted legacy of their forebears' wholesale opium addiction (of which of course we noble British washed our hands completely, while pocketing the profits); those that didn't have the good sense to flee the Chinese mainland under the aegis of the equally noble Chiang Kai-shek, we pitied, from afar, under the iron fist of the new Asian Stalin, Mao Tse-tung. Meanwhile, we continued to shunt our very own Chinese off to kinds of ghettos, picturesque Chinatowns, in Little Bourke St and Dixon St, where we kindly patronized them (in both senses of the verb) as living historical and geographical curios, the inventors of the dim sim.

Just ten years ago we (myself included) were accepting the Rockefeller-financed New York Museum of Modern Arts version of recent American art, "Two Decades of American Painting", holus-bolus. Today it would have nowhere near the stunning impact, not to mention the continuing controversy, that it had then. Just on a year or two ago we also accepted their version of modernist European art, "Modern Masters", as well, with an equal amount of beggarly fawning and supplication, though with less controversy of course since it was all older, more acceptable. Now, a complete geographical and cultural reorientation, a complete volte-face, some several years after the pragmatic British "conversion" of course, and a couple of years after the American one, for Australia has been way down on the waiting-list for these Chinese treasures (after the British, the Americans, the Europeans, and the Japanese).

Why hasn't the National Gallery of Victoria, the venue for *premiere* of "The Chinese Exhibition", become the scene of fervent, hysterical protest by the rabble-rousers? Why haven't the Gallery and the Australia Council been publicly hung, drawn and quartered, and Mobil Oil (the arch-capitalist sponsoring organization, one of Anthony Sampson's sinister, multi-national *seven sisters*) been black banned, locked out or whatever by the McCarthyites such as the R.S.L., still, in my modest experience of our local Establishment in action, the Richelieu-like power behind Sir John Kerr's throne, for becoming a mouthpiece for Peking communistical "propaganda", particularly so soon after the infamous, notorious downward thrust of militant communism and its alleged climax in the terrible Vietnam fuck-up? Does not Mr. Fraser see anything a wee bit incongruous in being prepared to conscript you and me to die in paddy-fields thousands of miles away from Australia, defending him; yet also being prepared to underwrite for millions of dollars of Australian taxpayers' money and, what's more, personally to promote "The Chinese Exhibition" (the very same day of the Granville train disaster, to further emphasize his curious, topsy-turvy sense of priorities)? He must think that we, his subjects, are all unremembering fools; the Chinese must think that Fraser is a conniving fool.

Really, what a volte-face, what utter hypocrisy,

for Mr. Fraser (and ex-President Nixon, and his equally amoral henchman or alternatively puppet-master Dr. Kissinger, in similar circumstances) to welcome "The Chinese Exhibition" with open arms and an open cheque-book (our cheque-book), after spending the last decade, under Sir Robert Menzies' adroit, expert tutelage, waging virulent anti-communism, inveighing against one of the great myths of our time, the downward thrust of communism, the domino theory of south-east Asia, Asia as a house of cards with Mao as the big bad wolf huffing and puffing away. Or does this new Chinese presence really have nothing to do with antediluvian Mr. Fraser; the real credit being due to Mr. Whitlam, the unsung hero?

Equally, we have fallen hook, line and sinker for the Chinese view of things. When "The Chinese Exhibition" was in London, there was an excellent catalogue, a model of impartiality, of easily accessible scholarship, prepared by Prof. William Watson, an internationally renowned sinologist. The extensive Chinese souvenir shop just outside "The Chinese Exhibition" in Melbourne, temporarily ousting the Gallery's own ancient Egyptian, Greek, etc. collection, is not above flogging Watson's Pelican handbook, *Style in the Arts of China*. Dr Glyn Daniel, another equally renowned archaeologist and T.V. popularizer, has had Watson's catalogue described as 'a masterpiece of concise learning' in his scholarly journal, *Antiquity* (March 1975), an assessment with which I cannot but agree since it impartially presents *both* sides of any relevant academic argument or scholarly controversy. Yet Peking, then under the sway of Mrs Mao, Chiang Ch'ing, effectively anathematized this catalogue. Accordingly, apparently Dr Edmund Capon of the Victoria and Albert Museum was invited to do our catalogue instead. This didn't please Peking either.

They wanted a hard line or party line interpretation of their own past for Australian audiences, unsullied by Western "effetism". Accordingly, we kotowed, caved in or whatever, and ended up with a fairly expensive catalogue ($4.00), though, I think nonetheless, worth it, with the 'Text provided by the organization committee of the Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China', though, on the other hand, jam-packed with the Chinese communist-loaded interpretation of the significance of their archaeological discoveries; Capon's work has been hived off into a rather stiffly priced ($17.50) paperback, also naturally on sale at the souvenir shop, the publication of which was subsidized by Mobil. Just one example (from many more) of what I mean, apropos of the so-called Jade Princess: 'More than 2,800 objects were brought to light from the two tombs, which fully expose the extravagance of the feudal ruling class at that time and provide a great deal of important data for researches into the social history, art and culture of the period." Apart from the fact that Chinese feudalism was not the same thing as European feudalism, in a sense such a prosaic, utilitarian interpretation is the direct antithesis of, say, Walter Pater's; the prose thus becomes encyclopaedic (and boring) rather than stylistic (and possibly interesting). Obviously I don't object to art being placed in its context; in fact I insist on it, for there is just no meaning without context, to quote Dr Anthony Wilden, to whom we shall return shortly; what I do object to is this simplistic, one-sided interpretation, which Watson so obviously tried subtly to counteract time and time again. We simple-minded, gullible Australians lap it up, not only because Chinese art and archaeology in particular and Far Eastern in general are such arcane matters to us anyway, but because we are Fraser's sheep.

"The Chinese Exhibition" itself is something of a misnomer, on two counts: strictly speaking, it runs from Peking Man, perhaps the best known Asian example of *Homo erectus* who preceded *Homo sapiens*, and who the Chinese themselves put at *c.* 500,000 years ago (though radical Richard Leakey has recently suggested that he may be older) right up to but not including the Ming dynasty of the 14th century A.D. onwards, perhaps the only Chinese dynasty out of dozens that the man in the street has ever heard of, the time of the most famous of all Chinese pottery and porcellain, the blue Ming (because of the chronological cut-out, obviously not in the exhibition), and also the time perhaps not coincidentally when a certain Venetian traveller, Marco Polo, under the great Khan, Kublai's, auspices, penetrated China (are the Chinese trying to tell us something?); and secondly, it consists of 'recent archaeological finds' as the Chinese themselves spell it out in the catalogue's subtitle, *not*, first and foremost, aesthetic masterpieces.

For us, however, "The Chinese Exhibition" is a million dollar operation (according to my rough computation) on a multi-million dollar exhibition; an exercise in logistics, coping simultaneously with hundreds of artefacts or relics together with hundreds of humans at any one time ('Chocka for China', as *The Sun* put it — January

28th, breaking the Gallery's all-time attendance records (set by "Modern Masters") twice in one week), as such, successfully carried through; a mobile tourist attraction.

The customers queue up endlessly, sometimes for a couple of blocks, cough up their $2.00 (50c now for general admittance to the Gallery, plus $1.50 for specific admittance to "The Chinese Exhibition"), and wait patiently in rows of chairs while being dubiously regaled by reruns of Brian Adams' predictably bland, innocuous, playing safe and aiming low A.B.C. T.V. documentary on the exhibition. One would think that one could have had a more serious discussion of all that Chinese art and archaeology, of Chinese culture and civilization. Just for starters we could have had a taped interview with the great Cambridge sinologist Dr Joseph Needham or our own delightful Prof. C. P. Fitzgerald of the Australian National University, instead of our ex-Chinese ambassador Dr Stephen Fitzgerald's seemingly endless flow of small talk, of banalities piled on platitudes.

Meanwhile, the customers have finally been ushered into "The Chinese Exhibition" itself. The design, the display, is suitably low-key, discreet, reverential, no doubt as a direct result of the London kefuffle after the Chinese objected strenuously to the hyped up show business-style display there; yet even here in Melbourne the Chinese have voiced complaints about the Gallery's 'hot' lighting. Curiously, the queue still resolutely maintains its strict formation, despite the efforts of Gallery attendants to break it up and intermittent loudspeaker announcements (shades of *M*A*S*H*), from Exhibit 1, a *model* of the skull of Peking Man, onto Exhibit 233, an open-work censer of the late 13th century A.D., all in all, something like two-thirds of the London exhibition; then is promptly disburdened into the conveniently adjacent souvenir shop because there are so many customers, directly because of the tremendous local P.R. hype (my favourite example was *The Australian*'s 'the greatest show of the century' — January 17th, on the front page, no less), and because of the need for a constant turnover, in order to make a profit on a considerable, if not almost prohibitive, investment — all in all, a classic vicious economical spiral.

"The Chinese Exhibition" is, let's face it, not really a colossal exercise in inter-country cultural and/or public relations, an attempt to make up for decades, if not centuries, of chauvinist neglect; rather, if anything, a gigantic P.R. exercise for our official arts industry. It's impossible to see anything properly, impossible to meditate, to reflect in tranquillity, upon the objects themselves; I think that the Chinese themselves, passing as they are through their extreme puritanical phase, would object strenuously to the term, *objets d'art* (*vide* Prof. Edgar Wind's 'critique of connoisseurship' in his *Art and Anarchy* (London, 1963). For them the objects are basically historical evidence, and vindication, of their — without question, justified — class struggle, their almighty fight for a proletarian heaven on earth. It's sad to see these beautiful objects, to be savored at leisure only in a quiet calm, become part of this circus system; yet, to be fair, I don't suppose that we could have had them here and seen them any other way. Cultural overkill, at one fell swoop. But then, again, to be fair, a series of smaller exhibitions, yet of comparable value, just would not have had the same 'G.P.' impact (one of the principal organizer's trendy abbreviations and implicit put-downs of the general public). Fraser's "bridge between nations" is just window-dressing crap — particularly for a nation brought up on an endemic mythology of the "Yellow Peril", from the specific genocide on the gold-fields in the mid-19th century to our present cautious patronizing of them, intermingled with our subconscious fear of (of all people) Napoleon's warning (I can't remember his exact words) that when China, the sleeping giant, wakes up, the world will be sorry.

To press the point, "The Chinese Exhibition" is, basically, a money machine, deliberately intended to make a profit (in order to finance or underwrite more such Barnum & Bailey ventures: fine art, high art, reduced to show business, with Tutankhamun, no less, waiting in the wings, rumor hath it, — from the 10c souvenir balloons to hand-carved jade pieces up to 800 years old and priced at up to $200 each, from letters posted back to you from China to the almost inevitable souvenir cuff-links and key-rings, and from Chinese kite-flying at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl to uplifting, Moral Re-Armament-style documentaries at the local town hall. Obviously the art gets lost on the way out; everything is successfully reduced to the lowest common denominator, money: the Shang and the Chou dynasties' bronze ritual vessels and implements, one of the great (and still to this day, rather mysterious) glories of early Chinese civilization, are reduced to the level of a new ice cream taste sensation. The capitalist face surely imposes itself on "The Chinese Exhibition" like the great mime Marceau Marceau's mask-wearer who in the end, struggle as he may, can't take off his mask; or do, by strange

perchance, the ethereal, etheric aspects somehow survive?

Serious and sustained concentration and meditation on the objects was wellnigh impossible. Cunningly, there were less than a half a dozen chairs available for a couple of hundred people; it was the only exhibition that I can remember where I found it impossible to take some notes on the spot or, rather, on the run. And what do these hordes actually get out of the exhibition? Bugger-all, I would imagine, for most it seems something to take the kids to during the school holidays, along with the recycled, revamped and camped up *King Kong*. I reckon that most would have learnt more from the minusculely patronized "Reciprocal Interaction between Eastern and Western Art" in an adjacent gallery. It sounds supercilious, I know, but I reckon that for the vast majority of the G.P., Chinese culture, navy, civilization, is *still* just as alien, fantastic, inscrutable and remote as, well, King Kong.

Must we educate the masses? as one of my ex-European communist friends insists. Or are "they" fit only to be Mr. Fraser's cannon-fodder? Can anyone physically and mentally absorb these several hundred items under these difficult circumstances? A handful of people would appreciate the Chinese paradox about these beautiful objects also being straight archaeology, fragments or shards of 'feudalism', ill-gotten gains from 'the slave society'; just as the achievements of, say, Plato and Aristotle rest on slavery. But I think that there's more to it than that. As I said, art exists in a context; great art transcends context: 8th century B.C. Homer, whoever he or she was, speaks to me today. Can artefacts, as opposed to art, such as these? Frankly — heresy — I got just as much, if, not more (unexpected) enjoyment out of the Gallery's new small sassetta panel, *A Miracle of the Sacrament*. In my own self-chosen or self-imposed Chinese speciality within "The Chinese Exhibition", the period running from Peking Man up until the end of the neolithic, the "Primitive Society" section, from roughly 500,000 B.C. up until roughly 1750 B.C., the difference between having to write about it all beforehand and then, finally, actually seeing them all in the flesh, was marginal, if not actually an anticlimax; quite unlike the sassetta, in fact exactly the opposite experience.

Some of my own brief impressoins: the neolithic pottery was duller in colour than I'd expected from reproductions. The Jade Princess was smaller, and also softer, more muted in colour; for some peculiar reason I'd expected a gaudy oriental version of Frankenstein's monster. And all the bronzes were truly a revelation: I had just never fully realized the incredible delicacy of their craftsmanship or, more specifically, casting. High culture indeed; the very antithesis of mass consumption-mass culture society, whether capitalist or socialist.

Do these works of art really speak to us oz bourgeois? Or is our meagre grasp of them a kiss of death, a death-rattle? An at first sight oblique quote from Baudelaire:

> Many times have we heard young artists complaining of the bourgeois, representing them as the enemy of all things great and beautiful. — There is another false idea which it is time to raise again. A thousand times more dangerous than the bourgeois is the bourgeois artist who has been created to come between the public and genius; he hides one from the other. — "Le Musée Classique du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle", *Le Corsaire Satan*, January 21st, 1846.

The central question arising from this quote, and referring back to our beginning is this: is our sudden blanket acceptance of "The Chinese Exhibition" really exactly the opposite? the ignorant philistine embrace, with no real effect, of no real effect? Or do they speak to us across aeons of time, as the late André Malraux would have us believe? Roland Barthes recently said: 'With Malraux the words are sometimes very fine but the ideas are feeble'. Does the Jade Princess's shroud-matter speak to us in the same voice as, say, the late Jackson Pollock as Malraux would argue? Of course not. As the Chinese themselves rightly insist, these are, first and foremost, 'archaeological finds', their undoubted beauty almost a by-product; if we in the West want to treat them just as we treat our decadent artists of the late 19th century, then that's our downfall; *the* central point, I insist, is that, in the capitalized words of Dr Anthony Wilden:

> 'There are no 'facts' in science, only an infinity of possible differences among which to choose, and one's choice of a particular difference cannot be determined by one's 'hypotheses'. The hypothesis of these pages is that 'pure' knowledge as such has no value. ALL KNOWLEDGE, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, IS INSTRUMENTAL'.

(from his introduction to his *System and Structure*; essays in communication and exchange (London, 1972), a book that I highly recommend, despite its density and difficulty). Bear in mind, though, the truism that Chinese 'instrumentality'

is not necessarily the same as ours, though both must be concerned with bourgeois mythology.

Let us be done with all this enervated and attenuated *haut bourgeois*-pseudo-aristocratic connoisseurship that masquerades as Chinese art scholarship in the West, and is really but the British Museum's back-door into Christie's or Sotheby's; the kind of connoisseurship that only millionaires such as the late Olympic Games chairman, Avery Brundage, could command. Let us get away from all this fustian and preciosity masquerading as disinterested objective research, along the lines of those endless religious debates in the Middle Ages. The Chinese have in their catalogue made out their case, such as it is, for their interpretation of their past in strict Marxist terms. What can we in the West offer? To ourselves of course rather than to them; they don't need us. What does "The Chinese Exhibition" mean to us here and now, in Melbourne in 1977, culturally? ideologically? I suggest as a meagre beginning the use of the semiological or semiotic method of interpretation. Either something along the lines of, say, Barthes's *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva, 1970), a literally armchair analysis of Japan. Barthes writes in his foreword:

> The text doesn't "comment" on the images or photographs'. 'The images don't "illustrate the text": each has been for me but a departure on a kind of visual vacillation, an analogue perhaps of this *loss of sense* than Zen calls a satori; texts and images, in their interlacings or intertwinings, go to assure the circulation, the exchange of signifiers, the willing, and in the reading thereof the recoiling of the signs.

Or perhaps something following on from my favourite contemporary art critic Jack Burnham's *The Structure of Art* (New York, 1971, but now into its second ed.). One possible exercise or tack along these two lines combined: gather together all the two dozen or so colour plates in "The Chinese Exhibition" catalogue and perform a structural analysis upon them; unfortunately, *Overland* is neither the place nor has the space to perform this task properly.

To end rather tritely, we still have so much to learn and to appreciate about all our tinted friends, as Humphries has them. Unlike Adams's effort, outwardly suave and inwardly feline, John Temple's recent "Asian Insight" series, also on A.B.C. T.V., was a good beginning in this direction. Ironically, this co-production between the A.B.C., what was Film Australia and is now just another part of the monolithic Australian Film Commission, and, surprisingly, the enterprising University of Queensland Press would budget-wise now be impossible, thanks to Messrs. Fraser and Lunch's recession-inspired budget restrictions on (and castration of) the A.B.C. We still have, from Sir John Kerr's posturings, to Norman Banks's outpourings, so much sheer sentimental idiocy to discard about our British past and so much deep-seated hypocrisy to expose about our good friends, the Americans, whether wearing their Pentagon battle helmets or Mafia Gucci shoes, or in the shape of Mobil currying favour in St Kilda Rd., or their ventriloquist's doll, Mr Fraser. I quote in passing and as a kind of admonitory conclusion Prof. Malcolm Bradbury's summing-up of Ayn Rand:

> She is important for the powerful influence her "objectivist" philosophy has had in the America of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly though not only among college students. Her views for which she has strongly proselytized, are a variant of the superman theory: she urges the rational recognition of self-interest, the limitation of emotional and altruistic judgements, and the uses of enlightened selfishness. Her position has strong conservative overtones. Her novels . . . are polemical and usually show heroes in industry or town planning standing out against the common herd . . .' — Malcolm Bradbury and Eric Mothram (eds.), *Penguin Companion to Literature* (London, 1971)

For some peculiar reason, this Chinese excursion seems to have been more about negative Malcolm the squatter (in the several senses of the word) rather than about positive Mao, surely the incarnation of Plato's 'philosopher-king'!

On The Hot Rocks

With all the awe and majesty
of dinosaurs, the nations now
stand next in line.

Glad to be a
skink's equivalent survivor,
ilfe may be endurable on the
hot rocks of a radium lit
earth where sun serves little purpose,
blinks through the perma-dust of an
age of insects that adapted
to conditions of holocaust
fed on human flesh, with the
gnashing teeth of toppling buildings
of big cities . . .

and this sounds
fantasy — and is? . . . and I live
out my latter years wondering
whether death is?

Brushed under the tablecloth the
crumbs may take shape as bread
and
we eat on without its winner?

Time's the destitute who shows us
no more tricks that entertain us
and is pushed out the door.

JOHN BLIGHT

Hang-gliding

No man can experience that
sheer delight, unless he has stepped
off a precipice and is a
capable hang-glider; and, then,
he mustn't wonder whether he
looks impressive to anybody
above or below, or looks like
an oversize fruit-bat in splints,
a big eagle hanging around
in daytime in pyjamas, or
just some kid's blue plastic kite caught
in high tension wires . . . for viewpoints?

Vantage points! manna for which
tourists pay up, detouring to find
a leavening of existence
other than
always . . .
just a step off into
the much photographed, but
must-be-experienced view of
a place where heat and flies are not
on postcards.

Who are the weaklings who fear to be
such sightseers? . . . a dull genus, beings?
Come away with us for views. See
the hang-glider. Who sees the views
keener than the hang-glider boy?

Soon, very soon, a whole season
of hang-gliders . . .
Open to guns?

JOHN BLIGHT

Politics

In a crude circle of dust and stubbled grass
children are playing soccer. All else
is olive brown and blue reduced to powder.
Outside the boundary the referee
draws a line, cutting of an easy talent
from originality. A small dog like a movie star
drags a grown man across the field,
and his friends follow, asking what to do

with the stricken afternoon, and why is the man
crying. The circle of burnt grass grows
smaller, and somehow the game is accommodated
in the grip of politics. In a dark brick
building on the other side of the world
a man is carefully inspecting a clip of bullets.

JOHN TRANTER

Beata Beatrix *I read the legend of myself from an enormous book.* Journals of Anaiis Nin.

I

Out in the garden my daughter says to me,
Trees & women burn!
The shadows lattice on the courtyard floor.
Late afternoon . . .
petals spill from the rose arbour,
the wild orange scatters,
hail storms whiten the streets.

No letters & no love
spin silk for your coffin.

II

Under the wild orange, drinking ice-cubes,
reading Kazantzakis,
why shouldn't I be happy?
A week has passed, your letter hasn't come.
For the first time you haven't written.
Why is it so important after thirty years?
Three weeks ago we were resurrected,
I watched through the window, hiding
behind my typewriter,
drinking diluted whisky with a beating heart,
marvelling that the only difference
was in your grey hair.

Now you have another icon to drive past
on your way to work,
barefooted, in a blue dress, turned to placid stone.
The air is full of wild orange, amorous as love,
drinking ice-cubes, reading Kazantzakis,
why shouldn't I be happy?
The only difference is in your grey hair . . .
but still the letter hasn't come.

III

What do I want with a 7-roomed house
& a conservatory!
All I need is a tin trunk like Mandelstam.

At Sackville I lived in the editor's house,
high-nosed distainful freakish!
with a typewriter & my unyielding art:
the old man's hat & stick laid out by the fireplace,
the cat on the step it is evening
they are still calling each other,
the 'phone rings through the empty house:
Beatrice are you well? Dante, my love, take care!
you have swung hundreds of light bulbs in the garden
so I won't be frightened,
trees burst into flame life is purgatory
how long can we keep on burning?

at dawn the house floats on a raft of mist
across the river . . .

IV

I sit in a state of grace in my high-backed wicker armchair,
you watch my window waiting for the light to go out,
the French doors open before me & lead me onto the balcony,
the Harbour is illuminated, the Communists are holding a meeting
to hear La Pasionaria,
the river dances & laps on my bedroom ceiling.

I am writing an autobiography, crystal-gazing my childhood,
struggling with repetition & monotony; eyeglasses without a glass
half a book half a toy bird cages broken records
an earring a single glove,
all the fairytales are possible for me.

I have written a love poem: the austere joy of work;
in life one must accept the limitations
no-one has ever loved an adventurous woman!
I am lonely my friends are no longer sufficient
do not abandon me . . .

DOROTHY HEWETT

Her Blindness

You always seemed to be turning street corners
Voices talking in parks
Bottles sunny as liquor passing through your body
You always seemed psychic/matches sparked into galleries
Haunted and sipping coffee/you were bright and intelligent
Wrapped in cutprice coats/nerves trembling in the flower
St James Underground/cigarette to lips
Images of your hands cupped and falling golden coins
Drunken and asleep at last with laughter ringing through the loft
In broken glasses of rainfall.

We crossed in ferries again and again the skip and strut of waves
Drank takeaway tea with nerves shaking like flower stems
Left with blond hair wisps on the train to Central
Wine in your hands reflects the glimmering sky/eyelids and lashes closing
Softly under the weight of your fingertips/The alcoholic platform rocks
And sways under the splashes of ten o'clock fights
Blood dripping from pursued cars/moonlight border drunks
Slumped in frozen public gardens/you sit at the fountain
Hands still cupped and hair blowing almost invisibly
Wine in the fountain reflects your blindness.

BARRY DICKINS

Visiting Earth in August

For just a week it comes alive
with caftans and desert boots:
poets. Some leave layouts, sinkfuls of essays
in space; others, subsidised garrets
and one from across the Nullarbor's
hot vacant breath,
just catching through layers
of black sunglasses (eyes with black rings)
the earthrise to the east,
and the biggest poet
in the southern hemisphere
and one, not a poet, swinging hard
looks down to check
that he's still all there.

And for the one from George Street Babylon
universities buy cakes
iced like whores
and a redness where the cherry used to be.
Outside, he waits on ornamental lawns,
skinning white arms for the sun.

MARK MACLEOD

A Split In Essence

Knowledge is a thin thing, at second
light on this sharp morning, when our
dark world rests against that other
where night has submerged her secrets.

Looped wires falsely imprison a flimsy
fading moon beneath one star-beacon
of definition dividing the distance.
My neighbour's roof and steel oak lie

in print on grey-yellow, his chimneys
pillar the coldest of blue beginnings.
In this raw moment, some charged element
stretches my vision beyond pale sight.

FAIRLIE SZACINSKI

At the end

At the end
I want to wake
and squat on the edge of the last day
like a new-dug potato.
Not like you, Uncle Sid:
I came to watch the turning of the earth
in your room, you on the wall
dressed for town at nineteen;
came to see your boots clear
the dusty frame, hear crunch
lightly the crust of worried sheets underfoot —
and I left a photograph
unblinking,
as a skull dropped
into that furrow of a bed beneath him.

MARK MACLEOD

Arch And Stacks + Dyrholaey

The splintered mica'd sea,
a wet abrading wind
in blind rasp, blind scratch
will pick the island clean
to its bones at last.

The years are silicate,
the hemispheres machine
these remnant stumps that were
episcopal demesnes;
this arch's spine is cracked,

where with his lurch, his stick,
more jet quartz than pale
blood an old man keeps
his watch on darkness. His
this patch, this sudden Atlantic.

Heimaey 1973

A palaeozoic tenure
that spits vermilion gobbets
high above the canneries,
the Spring that is no use;
this island eats its cowl.

The wharf is now for nightgowns
as ash invades the kitchens
downing like a sea
the heirloom spoons, the clocks
great grandfathers had sworn by.

Offshore where cod shoals hang
like stars on malachite,
survives a sanctity,
a house that won't be touched
by the red millennia.

Valleys On The Road To Dalvik

Green to indigo,
shoulder rump and lap
these valleys interwed;
Kjartan's kin were poets
and Einar's sons were dolts.

A woman lugs her bucket
from the talking stream
where once an outlaw gibed,
set upon by many,
outlaughed his grinning wounds.

The rain has won this barn,
the wind throws back the door
and looks us in the eye;
"I'll be the president —
or win a Nobel Prize!"

Sulur

The shawled old woman looms
above the town, her shoulder
bunched against the Arctic.
The streets and golf course are
between her knees; she speaks

to no one. On the wharf
a riotous seaman sings
of faith and fornication;
his eyeball's filmed with cognac,
his bottle's nearly empty.

Atlantic slide like basalt,
slide up Eyjafjord.
The seaman trawls your silence,
and knows where Sulur slips
beneath your bitter caves.

The Breakers

For Bella Akhmadulina

Six plates last them a week,
Nothing broken on Sundays,
(Not for religious reasons
But they spent all day in bed,
Breaking nothing but breasts of eggshell,
Eyelids of porcelain).

Motorcars last them a little longer,
Tyres still roll almost flattened,
Rubber being wondrously unbreakable,
Although bearings and pistons do howl for oil.

Children (wearing T shirts labelled YUK)
Keep on and on lasting. Unfortunately
They find it practically impossible to break them
Or even to wake up one uninterrupted morning
And find the curtains blowing by empty beds.

Friends, lovers, wives, husbands,
All those slotted into the bolted frames
Of the glasshouse of love,
They are partners made for the marvellous varieties of breaking:
The starry-eyed bullethole around which
The glass still transparently survives;
The loping crack, perhaps an accident only,
Perhaps the sly frost in the silent starlight;
The stiffened triangle arrested by Araldite;
And the full, lovely crash with its hidden slithers.

Before long they can move on from individuals
To the multitude, eminently breakable,
But so hard to break, always dissolving,
Shading like crops in the wind,
Letting go comfortable attachments
Like apricot blossom in September;
Boiling together like spawning salmon
With fathoms of empty sea all around.

To break the multitude it has to be labelled,
Usually under a leader, or wrapped in a group.
A man announces the labels on a microphone,
A man who has never broken a man with his hands
But the roots of whose pot-bound being are twisted
Around hundreds of shards below sour soil.
For him the just life will be built on breakages,
Breaking thirty thousand eggs or humans,
Is the necessary prelude,
With streaming, slippery humanity
As the basic omelette.

Glowing with the decorum of remote-control breaking,
No noise of plates, howl of dry metal,
Dread silence before the cry of children,
Hiss of knives sharpening on the loved one,
He puts down the microphone and murmurs
"Maybe there will be mistakes, but we will be forgiven."
I hear you, red-haired poet
Who walked from childhood through windows of glass knives
Without a scar on your beauty,
Jumping up from your chair and crying
"It is impossible to forgive a man who has broken one man,
Let alone thousands."

GEOFFREY DUTTON

Joalah Rainforest : Tamborine

Across the pool on the far bank of the creek
Can be seen the prickly tree fern (Cyathea
Leichhardtiana). Man climbed out of the ferns
In the age of the great lizards. Pause warily here
For the silence may suddenly flick out a tongue.

The tree with the heart-shaped leaves is the giant stinging tree
Whose fine hairs can inflict most painful stings . . .
A vine is taking advantage of the support of the tree . . .
This is the strangler fig. The roots merge and enmesh the host.
See in the placement of the fig roots how the host tree must have looked.

Taken in marriage, locked in most savage copulation,
Trunks suck and cling. *Orchids, elkhorns, staghorns and bird nest ferns*
Synthesize food using moisture trapped in their bulk.
Leeches double and stretch, reach up with vampire mouths.
Like the dead in Hades, they are addicted to blood.

This is Persephone's garden. This is a journey
Through the entrails of a triton. He is not well.
Epiphytes occupy the middle layer.
They are malignant. These are the pumps and pipes
Of Intensive Care. The green light is shot with migraine.

Look behind the stump and see where it is coppicing.
Pathogens will attack the stump and the sucker will die.
Perhaps you are being digested at this moment —
Only the northern robin is friendly, a yellow lamp
Leading from bole to bole towards the sunlight.

DAVID CAMPBELL

"they are waiting for me to die"
—gregory corso.

3 Poems by II O.

down the street, a gallery performs.
my image walks in-
doors, across panes, across
the street; hides.

a pane repeated "sell!
I will show it to others
like yourself"

"you can come & look at it
on call,"
no pane
on the street,
will say "see! the image
it follows him.' "

(they all screamed) (the whole
street)

on the walls, cut in two by panes
ducking in & out of doors
my image moved (it
followed me)

—i said
"no"

all the mirrors went dull.
the suburb went old.

i walked the rest of the street
alone.

At 86 St. David Street

we were lucky to get this old house.
on the first day, we stayed in bed.
it was raining outside. you sat, nude, on a chair to watch.
and i climbed onto the huge table, wrapped blankets round me
and we smoked. and watched the little redbricked alley on
the side of the house which led to our toilet and bathshed.
it was drenched.

you turned to me and said—
Π . . . how do you finish a poem?

—guess!

we got stoned on hash-oil that night. and we fucked on the
side of the bed. our orgasm was as wild as the fire crackling
behind our backs, and as red.

& i said—
how do you finish a poem?

& then we slept.

Π Rage, down Webb Street, Fitzroy

this brick is firm.
(i burn)

dark faces peer thru grey streaked panes.
peering at me & at the dawn.

laugh! (o.k.), but i'm fed up.
. . . it's my turn.

hide those anxious cicada eyes.
get on the streets & learn.

that my! death, my! breath
i earn.

don't act in broken windows scared harlequins.
this brick is firm.

i am a whole gang of blue larrikins.
i burn.

The Imitator

(from *The Used Fleece)*

Singers of renown sing
others' songs; blurred like an outline,
vaguely on the blind: buddy,
can you spare a dime? And the bird's
displayed on its backside in metal
mime. La Belle: *Voulez-vous coucher*
avec moi, ce soir. We've struck
it often in its mountain passes.
Decorated the masthead of old
schoolpapers. Siftings of the past,
report books, their messages, fanfares
receding and their import lost.
The snapshots that we took
in Sherbrooke never developed.

Michelle, ma belle, sont les mots qui vont
tres bien ensemble, tres bien ensemble.
The illusions of Mandrake, Lothar and Narda
understood in a robe glass looking. *Les Femmes d'Alger*
(in his own inimitable style) *sur le pont*
d'Avignon, towering Picasso, Delacroix
and Breughel babble on. Flags are hoisted
on flagging hoists. Ears are stopped
by civilization's waxings. There are
indicators at station entrances.
Tres bien ensemble; tres belle; please,
please, please me. A literate education
effectively stopped by a last or, least, a latest
duchess; a commissioned parody of Nash.

The National Library knocked
back as a source. Biographers are referred
for recognition to the last or, least, the latest
testament. An effective education
literally stopped, written off. The species
staggers like a tenuous House. Everyone
knows secondhand Rose; budded
from the briars of Thornbury: the Gordon
groves, the High and Hutton, Rossmoyne
streets. Daddy got it all for a dime
in the dollar. The bird's an aboriginal
like the house. We are the dingoes,
campfollowers of the tribe. The indications
are that there are things that we can do without.

LEON SLADE

Summer's Edge

An unpersuasive comet
swooshes past old men
talking to their shirt-sleeves
in the sun.

With feathers aflame
birds flap the surface
of a fading pool
then scuttle away

from the gutter
where parked cars bake
in the sun. At sea
unseen steamers pump

smoke-trees to the sky
and dark, inflatable blooms
mark the far edge
of our flattened world

GARY CATALANO

Henry Lawson's Joe Wilson

Skeleton Novel or Short Story Sequence?

COLIN RODERICK

I

WHEN Lawson's first complete book of sketches and short stories appeared in August 1896, A. G. Stephens adversely criticized the arrangement of the compositions. The result, he said, was "like a bad cook's ragoût". Stephens recognized that many of Lawson's stories formed a number of series: "there is a 'Mitchell' sequence, a 'Steelman' sequence, a bush sequence, a city sequence, and so on." He believed that the stories comprising each sequence should have been brought together, "so that continuity might be unbroken and the characters might gain force and distinctness from the massing of impressions".[1]

Lawson commented acidly on this in a letter from Perth to his publisher George Robertson a few weeks later: "Don't take any notice of Stephen's [*sic*] complaints in *Bulletin* review. *It was I who suggested to him the order of selection which he now suggests as his own.* He and the *Bulletin* know that we had to abandon our original plan of selection because the *Bulletin held the sketches which were to complete series and would not put them through.*"[2]

In the publisher's advertisements at the back of the volume Lawson read at the same time an advance notice of the novel which he had agreed to write: its title was to be *The Hero of Redclay*. Lawson had wrestled with this for some weeks without being able to make any headway. He was to spend many laborious hours in Wellington between 15 November 1897 and 16 February 1898 on shaping his plan for the novel into the form of a drama in four acts, then entitled "Ruth" and in 1899 re-named "Pinter's Son Jim".[3] In May of that year he got the material down in the form of a short story as "The Hero of Redclay" for inclusion in the book published in 1900 as *Over the Sliprails*.[4] In 1902, after his return from England, he re-wrote it as a narrative poem of indifferent quality (but of some biographical value) which appeared in the Bulletin of 20 December 1902: the difference in tone between it and the earlier story are due to his apotheosis of Hannah Thornburn.

Such is the history of the only composition which Lawson set out to throw into the form of a novel. It is easy to see what Lawson did to it to make it conform to his technique in the short story. If we remove the introductory scene in which Lawson presents the anti-hero of the story as a friend of Mitchell's, then cut off the characteristic final Lawsonian modulation—neither has anything to do with the story—we are left with a pure narrative that differs in mood and treatment from almost all of Lawson's short stories. It is a narrative which a competent novelist could have developed into a novel: it is the skeleton of a novel, if anything Lawson ever wrote is such a thing. But Lawson soon found that he had no talent for the novel—the truth is that he had never studied the technique of the novel—and he never again tried to write one. On his return to Sydney he wrote to Robertson: "You mustn't take any notice of the drivel to the effect that I should write a long novel—anything in fact save what I *have* written . . . If I had published a novel, they would have said that it was jerky and disconnected and I should try my hand at short stories and sketches. My line is writing short stories and sketches in prose and verse. I'm not a novelist. You will find a man to write you an Australian novel soon enough."[5]

The clear deduction from this is that we should beware of reading into any sequence of Lawson's stories a conscious attempt at the construction of a novel in serial form. The lag in

periodical publication of which Lawson complained in 1896 dogged his book publication throughout the 1890s. Only with part I of *Joe Wilson and His Mates* does he *appear* to have achieved something of his aim to bring a handful of stories together to form a reasonable sequence. Even in that book the result is patchy, and the art displayed remains the art of the short story, not the art of the novel. Too many aspects of Joe Wilson's life and of his relations with his wife are raised but left unresolved for the sequence to be classified as a novel. For example, Joe's loss of his wife is adumbrated, presumably by death: "The time came, and not many years after, when I stood by the bed where Mary lay, white and still; and, amongst other things, I kept saying, 'I'll give in, Mary—I'll give in,' and then I'd laugh. They thought that I was raving mad, and took me from the room. But that time was to come."[6]

The time never came. In the epilogue to the four Joe Wilson stories published in *Joe Wilson and His Mates* Lawson wrote: "In two or three short sketches in another book I hope to complete the story of his life."[7] Alas for the hopes of the short story writer. He wrote two or three more stories for the sequence, "Joe Wilson in England", "James and Maggie", and "Drifting Apart"; but he had lost his grip. His control over Joe Wilson, like his control over his art, had vanished: we are left in "Drifting Apart" with a picture of Joe and Mary sentimentally reunited by a glimpse from the train of the station where they had courted as depicted in "Joe Wilson's Courtship". The closing scene rings the changes on a scene originally included —as the periodical printing shows—in part II of " 'Water Them Geraniums' ", i.e., in " 'Past Carin' ", but transferred for publication in the sequence to "Brighten's Sister-in-Law" and reworked in "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek": "She pulled down my head, and her fingers began to go through my hair as in the days of old. And when we got to the hotel at Cudgegong, she made me have a bath and lie down on the bed and go to sleep. And when I awoke, late in the afternoon, she was sitting by my side, smoothing my hair."[8]

There Lawson ended. The still white form of Joe Wilson's deceased wife disappeared, like the baby in "The Drover's Wife": he never got as far as the death scene.

One of the first to suggest that this sequence might be read as an attempt at the construction of a novel was, I think, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, who wrote:

> The four interlocked stories of *Joe Wilson* are the nearest Lawson ever came to transcending the bounds of his unassertive short story form and writing something in which he could look at human relations more substantially, more expansively. The sequence is, in miniature (or in the form of a skeleton), his 'big novel'.[9]

In the same year, but independently, Cecil Mann said much the same sort of thing in the notes to the sequence in his collected edition of Lawson's stories, although he refrained from any outright assertion that the sequence did emerge as a novel—of any sort:

> Whatever his original intention in first writing "Brighten's Sister-in-Law", Henry did, in this one instance, get around to trying his hand at a novel. In doing so, he would seem to have taken as his model the already widely successful *Robbery Under Arms,* remembered from his early reading. The retrospective writing rôle he gives to Joe is identical with Dick Marston's, and there are other points of resemblance. Sustained narrative, though, simply was not his strength, and, apart from the impressive (or oppressive) burden of its bush atmosphere, the book now lives by its parts, some of these, of course, superb.

Waiving the red herring of *Robbery Under Arms,* which in technique, mood, and style is as far removed as *Moll Flanders* from *Joe Wilson,* one might appeal to Lawson himself for the belief that with the Joe Wilson sequence he was "trying his hand at a novel". At the end of his letter to Robertson of 9 September 1896, before he admitted defeat as a novelist four months later, he wrote:

> Mind you, I think Steven's [sic] idea, or rather mine, of a novel, or something connected, is right, and I can do it. What do you think of working up "The Tale of a Tank" or something in that line (I gave you the outline of it, I think) and letting the held-over yarns and sketches be worked in or told incidentally by characters.[10]

Clearly Lawson at this stage had no understanding of the technique of the novel. It was not *exactly* "something connected"; but it was,

apparently, a long work the characters of which went in for digressions in the way of yarns and meditations. This, in fact, is what his "drama in four acts" turned out to be. The idea of plan, pattern, and structure, the dominance of an idea or a theme, the application of imagery in the interplay of character and action, the variation of dialogue in the portrayal of character, the subtle modal variations of style that characterized his much-admired master, Charles Dickens, totally escaped Lawson's power of literary analysis. By the time he advised Robertson to look elsewhere for a novelist he had written most of the stories that went to make up the Steelman, Mitchell, and Dave Regan sequences. The so-called bush sequence was a continuous one: as we shall see, Lawson carried identifiably similar elements of it over from the earliest stories of the decade to the latest. These sequences, it is clear, do not exhibit the elementary characteristics of a novel. Does the Joe Wilson sequence display any significant variation from them? And did Lawson even think of it that way? To these questions we may bring both internal and external evidence.

One variation is that the central character is now a married man leading a settled married life. It is not a significant variation, since Joe Wilson's wife Mary, as Cecil Mann has in other words pointed out, served as a foil for him.[11] Cecil Mann did not pursue this point as a feature that related the structure and technique of the sequence to those of the earlier sequences, but the similarity is plain.

Mr Wallace-Crabbe has accepted the order of the stories in the published volume as the order of their conception, if not their composition: at least, the following observations appear to suggest this:

(*a*) *" 'Joe Wilson's Courtship' begins the sequence."*[12]

(*b*) *"Long afterwards, in 'A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek' . . . the conclusion might suggest an optimistic ending to the sequence, until we look back . . . We are given no encouragement to see the glow of domestic peace which concludes 'A Double Buggy' as anything but a transient condition."*[13]

(*c*) *" 'Brighten's Sister-in-Law' passes over Joe's marriage, over the birth of a son, over a period when the Wilson's have been living in the scruffy town of Gulgong [This is not quite correct. —C.R.], such past events being sketched in by means of apparently random memories and flashbacks . . . The whole tone of this second story is darker."*[14]

(*d*) *"There are four distinct stories about widely different incidents, ranging from the gentle, charming comedy of the courtship to the grim emptiness of worn-out Mrs Spicer's death at the end of " 'Water Them Geraniums' ".*[15]

It seems to me that these observations alone would throw doubt on the validity of any claim to classify the sequence as any sort of novel. Mr Wallace-Crabbe goes on to say:

> We come away from *Joe Wilson* still affected by the feeling that drought and illness, loneliness and disagreement provide the norm in Lawson's vision of life.

If that is the final impression of the book, it cannot, in view of the romantic theme of the later Joe Wilson story, "Drifting Apart", with its happy ending, be viewed as anything but a sequence of short stories. The subsequent implication that the sequence still partakes of the nature of the novel, notwithstanding its incompleteness, its "brief hints and flashbacks" that needed the full dramatic confrontation demanded by the novel—this implication is open to question. My discovery in Edinburgh in August 1973 of a letter from Lawson to the publisher of *Joe Wilson and His Mates* serves, it seems to me, to confirm the suspicion that Lawson meant to write no more than a sequence of stories and sketches, as I hope to show in the course of this article.

II

If we examine Lawson's several sequences we do not really get either a consistent or convincingly developing picture of their central characters.

Steelman is a protean figure: he begins as the sponging hanger-on of "Steelman", shades into the brutal mate of "Steelman's Pupil", appears as the card-sharper of "A Gentleman Sharper and Steelman Sharper", them as the bluffing confidence man of "The Geological Spieler". Finally he modulates into the cynical philosopher of "How Steelman Told His Story"—a crude adumbration of Mitchell. Mitchell is the home-spun philosopher who passes through half a dozen moods from "Our Pipes" to "The Blindness of One-eyed Bogan". Mitchell, the humorist of

"Bill the Ventriloquial Rooster", slides into Dave Regan, the man of ideas, the mechanist of "The Loaded Dog", "The Mystery of Dave Regan", and "The Iron-bark Chip", while Dave himself lives to reappear as the practical joker of "Gettin' Back on Dave Regan". As for Joe Wilson, one has only to read the epilogue to the sequence to see clearly that, although Lawson began with an idealization of himself, "the man's natural sentimental selfishness, good-nature, 'softness', or weakness"[16] obtruded themselves as he wrote. The Joe Wilson of "Joe Wilson in England" is no more like the Joe Wilson of the sequence than Machiavelli is like Till Eulenspiegel.

None of these characters displays the kind of development at which the novelist aims. None is fully realized. They remain projections of some aspect of Lawson's own personality—recognized as such by him and expressed in this time-honored way. Furthermore, this identification of himself does not always stop with the central character: it extends to that character's inevitable foil. Steelman embodies Lawson's notion of his own bluff urbanity and self-assurance; but Smith is his conception, as Lawson himself wrote, of "the weaker side of my own nature".[17] Lawson identified himself with Mitchell the bush philosopher—not without the assistance of Mark Twain. He saw himself as the practical joker in Dave Regan. The Joe Wilson that emerges from the printed page is a human being possessing Lawson's faults—and, knowing it, he makes no bones about saying so.

This is not to say that these sequences are autobiographical. Far from it: Lawson himself multiplied demurrers against such an interpretation. They are fugitive inhabitants of a world created in Lawson's mind. They are fragments of his personality split off and embodied in distinctive characters occupying that world and often at variance with each other. We need not deny Lawson the power to do what artists have done in all ages. These characters move in sequences that provide Lawson with a means of self-realization in his created world. That none of these characters ever fully realized himself is not to be wondered at: neither did Lawson.

Yet there was one character that did come close to realization, one symbolizing the fear and insecurity which hardship and poverty had burnt deep into Lawson's mind: the bush. From first to last, from "The Drover's Wife" through "No Place for a Woman" to " 'Water Them Geraniums' ", the bush remains a malignant monster, seeking to distort, alienate, ruin, and destroy the feminine part of him—just as it relentlessly alienated and destroyed his symbolic feminine characters. Allowing for a range of differences, the bush is to Lawson's stories what Egdon Heath is to *The Return of the Native*. Only those figures who are larger than life can make a do of it—and they exist predominantly in his verse, not his prose. The bush makes his haggard women kin: in battering them into a state of "past carin' ", it batters Lawson. They fear and hate it; so does the artist. But while fear beats his created characters into submission, hatred stirs the generative artist to retaliation; and so "The Drover's Wife", "The Bush Undertaker", and " 'Rats' " are born. His sensitive mind receives a thousand wounds, some to be cured by the catharsis of immediate composition, some to fester and never heal.

A noticeable feature of Lawson's later stories is the recurrence of early bush themes and images. The drover's wife had a buggy that she lost when the drought ruined her husband: Mary Wilson's acquisition of a buggy comes with her husband's comparative prosperity. Numerous incidents in Mrs Spicer's life repeat those of earlier poems and stories. For an example, compare these two passages.

The first, from "The Drover's Wife", Bulletin, Sydney, 23 July 1892:

> She is hurt now, and tears spring to her eyes as she sits down again by the table. She snatches up a handkerchief to wipe the tears away, but pokes her eyes with her bare fingers instead. The handkerchief is full of holes, and she finds that she has put her thumb through one, and her forefinger through another.
>
> This makes her laugh suddenly, to the surprise of the dog. She has a keen, very keen sense of the ridiculous; and some time or another she will amuse bushmen by relating this incident.[18]

The second, from " 'Past Carin' ", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, May 1901:

> They had a sense of the ridiculous, most of these poor sun-dried bushwomen. I fancy that that helped save them from madness.
>
> "We lost nearly all our milkers," she [Mrs Spicer] told Mary. 'I remember one day Tommy came running to the house and screamed: 'Marther! there's another milker down with the ploorer!' Jist as if it was great news. Well, Mrs Wilson, I was dead-beat, an' I giv' in. I jist sit down to have a good

> cry, and felt for my han'kerchief — it *was* a rag of a han'kerchief, full of holes (all me others was in the wash). Without seein' what I was doin' I put me finger through one hole in the han'kerchief an' me thumb through the other, and poked me fingers into me eyes, instead of wipin' them. Then I had to laugh."[19]

Like the elder son of the drover's wife, Mrs Spicer's eldest boy is named Tommy. Mrs Spicer goes through the same experiences as the "weary old wife with the bucket and cow", whose son Tom is "knocking around on the runs of the West". Like the drover's wife, Mrs Spicer fights a bush fire, and like the selector of "The Bush Fire", she is saved by the squatter's son. Like the drover's wife again, she is interested in the fashion plates of out-of-date women's journals. She is the same woman as Lawson drew in his 1899 poem, " 'Past Carin' ' ".

III

The question I am attempting to resolve in this article is one of literary theory rather than criticism; and I should say at the outset that notwithstanding the new evidence unearthed in Edinburgh, no completely satisfactory answer can be given, for there are still tantalizing gaps in the external evidence. It will be helpful to state what evidence we lack, and what we have.

The first gap—a yawning one—is the absence of the original manuscripts of the stories. The knowledge we have of the paper and the calligraphy Lawson used for extant manuscripts written between 1897 and 1901 would enable us to arrive at an approximate date of composition. We also lack holograph or other reliable manuscript references to some of the stories, in particular, to "Joe Wilson's Courtship". Bertha Lawson's observation that the Joe Wilson stories were written at Mangamaunu does not survive critical scrutiny. It is possible that the first draft of "Brighten's Sister-in-law" was written there, but Bertha's assertion that Lawson wrote " 'Water Them Geraniums' " at that time would appear to conflict with the internal evidence, to say nothing of the biographical facts.[20] Lawson's letters from Mangamaunu speak much of his work on another series altogether, for example:

> Am well on with a connected book called *The Native School* — descriptive, reminiscent, and personal matter—in an altogether new style for me. I have quiet, opportunity, all the characters, and the school as a peg to hang all my fragmentary ideas, incidents and emotions on; and if the book gives as much pleasure in reading as it does me in writing, I think I'll succeed. The chapters seem to fall into place and fill without an effort.[21]

In the same letter Lawson mentioned that he was being urged by the editor of the Press, Christchurch, to send in some articles. "Will not be able to spare any," he wrote, "as all my ideas and New Zealand copy are working into *The Native School.*" It is unlikely, by the way, that his mother would have served as the model for Brighten's sister-in-law, since at this time he was in the throes of a bitter quarrel with her.

The only help we get from Lawson's New Zealand letters are the statements:

(*a*) that he was "undecided as to whether [he would] run the Maori book or series through an Australian or English journal or magazine before publishing in book form!"[22]

and

(*b*) that as he would "go to London in May or June next [he did] not intend to sacrifice any more *prose* work in Australia."[23]

As is well known, Lawson did eventually make an agreement with Robertson for publication of the collections of prose that appeared in 1900 as *On the Track* (17 April) and *Over the Sliprails* (9 June). Mitchell and Steelman are prominent in both collections, but Joe Wilson is not even hinted at. Only one story comparable in tone, mood, and setting with the Joe Wilson stories that Lawson actually wrote in 1900-01, "No Place for a Woman", appeared in these two collections.

I know of no evidence extant to show that any of the Joe Wilson stories, with the possible exception of "Brighten's Sister-in-law", could have been written before 1899. When Lawson wrote to Earl Beauchamp on 19 January 1900 to ask for help in his attempt to get to England, he said: "I have recently been obliged to sell, or, rather, sacrifice two more books in Australia . . I have never been in a position to wait until my work got home, found a market, and the money got back."[24]

In the absence of manuscripts we turn to two other points of evidence. The first is the existence of work in verse that makes use of similar or identical situations, themes, and titles. Comparison of these with the component stories of the sequence may furnish evidence, even if slen-

der, on a point that is vital in determining whether Lawson aimed in the Joe Wilson stories at writing a "book"—as he seems to define a novel—or a series. From this we may arrive at a tentative determination of that most important point, the order of composition of the stories. If we can do this, we may then pass to the order of periodical publication of the stories. Proceeding from that, we may compare the text of the periodical printings with that appearing in the published book. Such a comparison ought to provide evidence from which Lawson's approach to the series can be determined. If the order of periodical publication is identical with that of the stories in the book, we may be justified in suspecting that Lawson did approach the composition of the work as a developing series of chapters of a novel. If in addition we find that textual emendations are confined to verbal alterations, that the structure of the individual stories is the same in both cases, and that the architecture of the series forms a harmonious complex whether read in the periodical or in the book, we may conclude that the whole work was planned as a novel—at least from the time of periodical publication of the first story.

Fortunately, three of the stories in the sequence published as *Joe Wilson* did appear in periodical printings, although they were not written as planned. But the stories written specifically for the proposed sequence include others that were rejected by the publisher and put aside or later placed elsewhere.

As early as 1897 Colonel William Blackwood had been in touch with Lawson for stories for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. Lawson arrived in London in June 1900 and appointed J. B. Pinker his literary agent. Pinker arranged a meeting with Blackwood's London manager, David Storrar Meldrum. The result appears in a letter from Pinker to Angus and Robertson of 22 August 1900:

> I am writing to you on behalf of my client Henry Lawson to ask if we cannot arrange for a fresh edition in England of his various books? I think Messrs Blackwood would be willing to take up the books in this country, and they would certainly stand a very much better chance if issued by a firm of that standing . . . Mr Lawson is working steadily at a new book, and if you are agreeable, I should propose to him that we arrange for you to publish this and further books in Australia.[25]

Three salient points emerge from this letter. The most important is that it establishes the date of contact —to the month— between Lawson and Blackwood's manager. The second is its evidence that Lawson was busily engaged on the material for his next book, which in the event was to be *Joe Wilson and His Mates*. Since Robertson had on the eve of Lawson's departure returned to him much of the material that went into part II of that volume, a great deal of it already published periodically, one may set up the hypothesis that Lawson could have been engaged on little other than part I, the Joe Wilson sequence. If the evidence already traversed is of any value, this hypothesis should accommodate Lawsons' assertion that "Brighten's Sister-in-law" was the first of the sequence to be written. This it happens to do. Lawson wrote to Robertson at the same time as Pinker, urging him to agree to the republication of a selection by Blackwood, and saying, "I will probably publish a volume with them next year."[26] With his letter he enclosed a copy of a letter he had just received from William Blackwood, dated 13 August 1900, offering to re-publish *While the Billy Boils* and saying as well:

> I was very pleased to receive from Mr Meldrum the MS. of your story "Brighten's Sister-in-Law", and you will probably have heard from Mr Pinker that I had pleasure in accepting it for my Magazine.

It is clear, then, that "Brighten's Sister-in-law" was indeed the first story to be written: it was the first to appear in Blackwood's Magazine —in November 1900. But—the next to appear there was "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek", in February 1901; and this was to appear in the published sequence as the final story.

IV

Between these two dates Lawson and Blackwood exchanged letters[27] which offer useful evidence on whether the stories were conceived by a novelist constructing the chapters of a novel or by a short story writer haunted by the fear of producing another "bad cook's ragoût" or anxious to compose an orderly sequence of stories, loosely using Joe Wilson as a thread to string them together.

103 (a). Lawson to William Blackwood[28]

Spring Villa,
Cowper Road,
Harpenden,
Herts.
17.8.00

Dear Mr Blackwood,

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I would rather Brighten's Sister-in-Law had pleased you than any other work I could have submitted at the time. There are, in the story, some little details, which I thought of afterwards, and which I may as well have correct —and one or two places where the story could be strengthened—so I am anxious to see proofs in time. I feel very well satisfied with a second story of that series: "A Double-Buggy at Lacheys Creek", which I have just finished.

Re "While the Billy Boils" and other books of mine, I have placed all information in the hands of my agent, and am, myself, writing to Angus and Robertson (Sydney) this mail. I fear I will not be able to let you know anything definite under at least three months. The present bungled arrangement for the publication of the books referred to in England was very unfortunate. Mr Pinker *might* be able to arrange matters in London.

Would be delighted to see you in London.

Yours sincerely,
Henry Lawson.

Blackwood thought "Brighten's Sister-in-law" a "good and strong piece of work", and offered also to bring out the new edition of *While the Billy Boils.* While Pinker was negotiating with Angus and Robertson for the publication by Blackwood of a selection of Lawson's earlier work, which appeared in 1901 as *The Country I Come From,* a characteristic letter—characteristic of the personal interest which marks the relationship between a genuine publisher and his authors—arrived for Lawson from 45 George Street, dated 10th October 1900:

My dear Sir,

I have the pleasure of enclosing you proof of your excellent sketch "Brighten's Sister-in-Law", which I purpose using in the November number of my Magazine. Kindly correct it for press and let me have it back on or before the 16th.

I have also the pleasure of accepting "A Double Buggy". It is a very simple and natural story, which will I think be liked by Maga's readers.

When you have completed the story you are at work on I shall be glad to have an opportunity of considering it also—and anything else you may write.

Mr Meldrum tells me that you and he have been discussing some points in connection with the story of an Australian girl friend which you think well of, and are to submit to me when you have finally revised it.[29] I shall be happy to receive the MS in due course and to give it my best consideration, and I shall be only too pleased if I can make you an offer for its publication.

I am today sending Mr Pinker a cheque for "Brighten's Sister-in-Law". I intended sending it some time ago, but have been away on holiday.

I was sorry to hear that you have been anxious on account of Mrs Lawson's health, and I hope that the improvement Mr Meldrum reports to me continues, and that she is now out of danger.

Yours very truly,
William Blackwood.

Lawson's reply makes it clear that he had in mind a series of stories that would depict phases of Australian bush life centred on the character of Joe Wilson—a character, it must be remembered, whose embryo had been present in his mind when he wrote the ballad of "Brighten's Sister-in-law: or, The Carrier's Story", which appeared in the Christmas number of the Town and Country Journal in 1889, with a large Gainsborough-like illustration of "*Harry the* Carrier's Boy".

105(a) To William Blackwood[30]

Harpenden,
Herts.
Oct. 15/1900

Dear Mr Blackwood,

Thanks for your kindly letter. Am sorry to say that proofs were delayed till yesterday morning when they reached me. I have marked the vital errors and posted proofs this morning. In future I will see all typewritten copy.

In "Brighten's Sister-in-Law" the Creek is spelled "Laheys" Creek from memory—the best name perhaps. In "Double Buggy" it is "Lackeys Creek". I did not think I could alter name in paged proofs. I would take it as a great favour if your editor would decide either to make the name "Laheys" all through or "Lackeys" as in second story, whichever is most convenient to the printer—and let me know. I have no objection to "Lackies". But, perhaps, to save trouble, best let it go as in first story all through, *viz. Laheys.*

The series I propose to submit to you are as follows:

1. "Brighten's Sister-in-Law"
2 or 3. "Going on the Land" (Describing struggles of early squatting life)
2 or 3. "Double Buggy"
4. "The Long Drought" (Joe Wilson as a well-to-do squatter is ruined by the drought)
5. (Title not fixed. Joe Wilson goes back to Gulgong and drinks. A realistic drink story.)
6. "Peter McLachlan" (a bush-preacher who saves Joe Wilson.)
7. "The Luck that Came too Late" (Joe Wilson gets money and his wife goes insane—but whether she recovers or dies I have not decided.)

And one or two other Joe Wilson stories. But, of course, other stories may occur to me before this series is complete.

Thank you for enquiries re Mrs Lawson. I am sorry to say that she is very ill—overworry and nursing—and the Doctors say she may take months to recover.

Yours very truly,
Henry Lawson.

Kindly address C/- Pinker as I am leaving Harpenden for London.

As adumbrated by Lawson, and supported by the subsequent composition of "Joe Wilson's Courtship", which did not appear in "Maga", as well as by the possibilities for the interwoven, gradual, inevitable and sustained development of environment, incident and character that occurs as a novelist's work captures his imagination, this series might well have provided a *novelist,* as Wallace-Crabbe suggests, with the skeleton of a novel. But there is scant sign of development of character in Joe Wilson: he ends practically as he begins, no more than a peg on which Lawson hangs a series of stories portraying facets of bush life. Only Joe Wilson and Mary appear consistently throughout the series.

Peter McLaughlan appears in the flesh in "Shall We Gather at the River?"—which was rejected by William Blackwood in July 1901—and in the story numbered 6 in Lawson's list, which Blackwood also rejected. Lawson included it under the title "His Brother's Keeper" in a collection of prose and verse which Pinker placed with Methuen and which appeared in 1902 as *Children of the Bush.* Lawson uses the figure of Peter McLaughlan in a third story also rejected by Blackwood, "The Story of 'Gentleman-Once' " (*C. B.,* 1902), in which not only Joe Wilson but also our old friend Mitchell both reappear. The notable point is that Peter McLaughlan is the central figure in all three of these stories: in all three the *heroic* focus shifts from Joe Wilson to Peter McLaughlan. As short stories these three compositions meet every canon; to fit into a novel they must needs have been structured quite differently, with Joe Wilson the centre of interest and an analysis of his changes of mood and fortune the focal point of the narrative.

To be sure, we have a portrait of Joe Wilson as a well-to-do squatter in "James and Maggie", which Lawson sub-titled, "A Joe Wilson Story". In doing so, he forced the mould, for the focus of the story is on Mary's younger brother and Maggie Charlsworth. One of the other stories that might have come closer to fitting into the framework of a novel is "Drifting Apart", in which the straining of the relationship between Joe and Mary promises well. Yet it, too, shows no sign of development: as the portrait of a marital quarrel, it is a genuine short story, and with its concluding modulation into the commonplace of life a typical Lawson story.

The remaining Joe Wilson story, "Joe Wilson in England", lacks the connecting tissue that it would need if it were to take its place in the action of a novel. It is a pedestrian attempt at satire on English life and manners and foreshadows another story, " 'Barney, Take Me Home Again' ", describing the luckless return home of an Englishman who had prospered in New South Wales. It has nothing but the name to connect it with the stories that came to form the series published by Blackwood in *Joe Wilson and His Mates.*

I think it must also be counted against Lawson quâ novelist that at the same time as he sent Blackwood "Peter McLaughlan" and "Gentleman Once", he sent "Send Round the Hat", which Blackwood also rejected, on the ground of prudence: "I have several stories in hand which will keep me going for several months, and as I have had a good many of Mr Lawson's Australian sketches lately, anything else I accept in the mean time must I feel be different, to ensure sufficient variety".[31]

The rejection of "Send Round the Hat" was a bitter blow, for Lawson had written it as something in his humorous vein in response to Blackwood's request. Yet Blackwood was entirely frank on both occasions, for Pinker had bombarded him with Lawson's melancholy stories, written to a length suitable for "Maga". Blackwood had already accepted "The Babies in the Bush", which he published April, 1901 (it had already appeared in the Sydney *Bulletin* on 8

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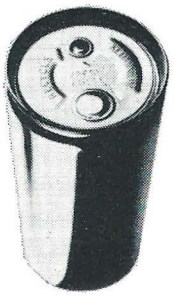

December 1900); " 'Past Carin' ' ", May, 1901; "The House That Was Never Built", July 1901; and "Telling Mrs Baker", which he hoped to find room for in his September number, but which could not be fitted in until October.

The composition of these stories, excepting " 'Past Carin' ' ", suggests that Lawson's creative activity was spasmodic: one would have thought that he would have disciplined himself to work along the centre line of Joe Wilson's fortunes. The conclusion seems inevitable that his genius was for the sketch or, as we now understand it, the modern short story, and that he tired of the sustained effort needed to develop his characters and their milieu according to any sort of structure. In all of the stories the narrator remains *outside* the characters. Lawson had to become Joe Wilson and had to remain Joe Wilson for several months if there were any hope of his achieving even a skeletal novel. Two things worked against this possibility. One was his chameleon artistic character: now he was Joe Wilson, now Peter McLaughlan, now the Giraffe, now Walter Head. The other was his chronic need for ready money, for while Bertha was in Royal Bethlehem Hospital from May to August of 1901, Lawson had boarded out the children at Shepperton, twenty miles up the Thames, and was living with Arthur Macquarie at the neighboring village of Charlton, on the Walton side of Shepperton, writing madly and revising the stories from his earlier books for *The Country I Come From.*

In March 1901 Blackwood had agreed to publish "the forthcoming volume" (*Joe Wilson and His Mates*) and to pay a royalty of 15 per cent for the first 2000 copies and 16 2/3 per cent thereafter, with an advance of £100. In June, although some of the stories proposed for inclusion had not yet appeared in "Maga", Lawson asked for £100 and received £50 from Blackwood's secretary: a week later Blackwood sent him another £50.

Lawson had collected the stories accepted by Blackwood and, from a variety of sources, patched up the rest of the volume. "The Little World Left Behind" and "The Golden Graveyard" came from Black and White, 22 September and 29 December 1900 respectively, and "Jimmy Grimshaw's Wooing", written in Sydney in 1899, from Outlook, 13 April 1901. "A Wild Irishman" was pieced together from two stories in the Sydney Worker of 18 August and 6 October 1894. "The Ghostly Door" had been accepted for Cassell's Magazine, May 1901, and "A Hero in Dingo Scrubs" for Chambers's Journal, where it appeared on 22 February 1902.

Altogether it was a mish-mash of a book for which, in addition to the Joe Wilson stories, as well as those rejected by Blackwood, Lawson appears to have written in humorous vein "The Loaded Dog", "The Chinaman's Ghost", "Poisonous Jimmy Gets Left", and "A Bush Dance": at least, I have not yet learnt of any prior or concurrent periodical publication of them.

We do not know who was responsible for "the interlocking"—I prefer "the stringing together"—of the four Joe Wilson stories that were retained for this part of the book. What is certain is that if Lawson had had his way there would have been others included in it, notably the Peter McLaughlan stories, which would have defied interlocking by Leonardo. I suspect that if it were not Edward Garnett—son of the littérateur Dr Richard Garnett, of the British Museum—one of Blackwood's readers, who did the joinery work, it was Arthur Macquarie, or, equally likely, *Blackwood's own editor.*

In August 1901 Blackwood sent the paged proofs progressively to Lawson, who was still at Charlton, and on 29 November sent Pinker another £100 advance on royalties, with a pessimistic comment on the likelihood that sales would not cover the heavy advances.

With the aid of a letter from Lawson to David Scott Mitchell, dated 11 February 1902, we may corroborate events between August 1901 and May 1902. The letter includes the statement:

> I wasn't altogether satisfied with my last book, *Joe Wilson and His Mates*—I was ill and nearly mad with worry all the time I was writing it . . .[32]

It was while he was pondering the implications of his wife's breakdown that he tinkered up " 'Past Carin' ' " and wrote "Joe Wilson's Courtship", in the latter of which Joe ceases to be the strong character of "Brighten's Sister-in-law" and "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek".

V

On the external evidence available, the probable order of final composition of the stories written for the sequence would appear to have been:

1. "Brighten's Sister-in-law"—before August 1900, probably 1899: a re-working of an 1889 ballad

2. "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek"—August-September 1900
3. " 'Past Carin' ' "—October 1900-February 1901: an expansion of an 1899 poem
4. "Shall We Gather at the River?"—October-December 1900
5. "His Brother's Keeper", in which version the evidence suggests that Joe Wilson occupied the place subsequently filled by Jack Drew—October-December 1900
6. "The Story of 'Gentleman Once' "—January-March 1901
7. "Joe Wilson's Courtship"—May 1901
8. "A Lonely Track"—February-May 1901.

To these are to be added the following, possibly conceived in 1900:

9. "Joe Wilson in England"—completed 1901
10. "James and Maggie"—completed between 1901 and 1905
11. "Drifting Apart"—completed 1905.

This putative order, to be acceptable, should be supported by the internal evidence. Confining ourselves to the periodical printings, we find that

1. "Brighten's Sister-in-law" opens with the birth at Gulgong of the child Jim to Mary and Joe, who move to the selection on Lahey's Creek a month or so before the action of the story, which occurs when the child is turning three—four years after Mary's marriage to Joe.
2. "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek" represents events two or three years after the conclusion of the action of "Brighten's Sister-in-law", when another child has come along, and Joe is beginning to prosper.
3. " 'Past Carin' ' " returns to the move to Lahey's Creek, details events of the first morning on the selection, skips over those of "Brighten's Sister-in-law", and concludes with events that follow the birth of Mary's second child, a girl, a year later—when the boy Jim is four years old. Chronologically the events belong to the period between "Brighten's Sister-in-law" and "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek".

Comparison of the periodical printings with those in the published volume shows that a substantial part of " 'Past Carin' ' " was in the revision transferred bodily to "Brighten's Sister-in-law"—from "I smoothed over the story . . ." —and part deleted. The reference to Romany in "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek" was expanded into the critical incident of "Joe Wilson's Courtship"; and "A Lonely Track" was composed as an introduction to what remained of " 'Past Carin' ' ". The original version of "Water Them Geraniums" was rejected by Blackwood for "Maga". Finally the order of the stories was determined; but this order is not chronological. From their nature these changes appear to have been suggested by the publisher's reader, or one of Lawson's literary cronies already named; but nothing could be done to rectify the defects in the chronology of the action depicted in the four sketches, which rob it of any pretence of development.

Summing up this evidence, we see that

1. The series began with a single story ("Brighten's Sister-in-law") written in 1899 and dealing in the tragic mood with events of the middle of the sequence.
2. The second story ("A Double Buggy") forsook the tragic for the buoyant mood of optimistic happiness and left its characters with the prospect of prosperity. This was the sort of alternation of sombre and bright compositions which Lawson accepted as desirable in arranging the contents of a volume.
3. This story was closely followed by another (" 'Past Carin' ' ") in the same mood as the first, but dealing with a self-contained situation and with a different cast of players.
4. The fourth story ("Joe Wilson's Courtship") was written in a more neutral tone, with a long prelude in the homespun discursive system of the Mitchell sequence, thus offering further evidence of Lawson's alternation of darkness and light.
5. The fifth story ("A Lonely Track") was composed in the same strain as the fourth. It shows more plainly the paratactical technique which Lawson used to string the stories together, especially when one recalls that "Past Carin' ' " was adapted to it to form the final two-part version of " 'Water Them Geraniums' ".
6. The sixth Joe Wilson story, "Joe Wilson in England", published in *Rowlandson's Annual* in 1902, is in an entirely different mode, the first-person narrator being an interlocutor named Harry and representing the author. Joe and Mary are many years older. The events of the story belong to a time much later than that of the epilogue to the sequence, for Joe is now resident in England as the representative of an Australian wool firm.
7. To these we should add the evidence of the seventh story, "Drifting Apart"—not included in the book—which is in a weak sentimental

vein and which endeavours to bring the sequence to some sort of happy ending entirely at variance with the brooding tragedy of its beginning, but in conformity with Lawson's general approach to the arrangement of a collection.

8. We must also take into account the rejection by Blackwood not only of the original version of " 'Water Them Geraniums' " but also of "Shall We Gather at the River?" "The Story of 'Gentleman Once' ", and "His Brother's Keeper", all three of which were composed before "Joe Wilson's Courtship", and all of which are in homiletic vein.

9. Finally, we must note that three, possibly four, of the stories that Lawson had in mind when planning the series were never written.

From this the conclusion to be drawn seems to be that Lawson had no more capability of writing a novel or of assembling the skeleton of one with Joe Wilson as a developing character than he had of writing one on Steelman, or Mitchell, or Dave Regan. If Lawson had had in him the stuff that makes a novelist, he might have been able to develop the bush into a character that would have given unity to the series: a colonial Thomas Hardy might have done this. Even as it is, the bush does come closest to the sort of presentation that one looks for in the leading character of a novel. Yet everywhere Lawson's handling of the bush falls short of the evolutionary treatment that one looks for in the novel. Lawson does not explore the process through which the satanic power of the bush gradually infiltrates the minds of its victims and effects a revolution in their attitude to life. Its effect on the people who come into conflict with it is not developed: it is taken for granted, and we are presented with the end result rather than its gradual tragic evolution. Our final acceptance of this notion of Lawson's conception of the bush is derived from the total contemplation of the corpus of his work. His treatment of it in individual works is impressionistic and in each instance leaves almost as much to the reader to supply as the author offers him. This, too, is characteristic of the art of the short story.

It seems to me, then, that to approach the Joe Wilson series as a novel or the skeleton of a novel is to read into it something that simply is not there and does not add to Lawson's artistic stature. If we try to read this particular series as a novel we cannot admire the result; if we acknowledge it to be no more than Lawson, Blackwood's reader, and Blackwood himself took it to be—a series of short stories with an attractive built-in title—we come away with a deeper respect for the integrity of Lawson's own judgment of his capabilities.

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[5] *Letters,* 1970: Number 25, [January 1897].
[6] " 'Water Them Geraniums' ", in *Henry Lawson: Short Stories and Sketches,* ed. Roderick, C., Syd., A. & R., 1972, p. 573.
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[8] *Ibid.,* p. 608.
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[11] *The Stories of Henry Lawson,* ed. Mann, C., Third Series, Syd., A. & R., 1964, p. 80.
[12] "Lawson's *Joe Wilson:* A Skeleton Novel", in *A.L.S.,* I, 3, p. 148: *Australian Nationalists,* p. 101.
[13] *Ibid.,* pp. 150-51, 154: *A.N.,* pp. 103, 107.
[14] *Ibid.,* p. 151: *A.N.,* p. 104.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 152: A.N., p. 105.
[16] "The Writer Wants to Say a Word", in *Henry Lawson: Short Stories and Sketches,* ed. Roderick, C., Syd., A. & R., 1972, p. 599.
[17] *Letters.* Number 312, [June] 1916.
[18] *Cf.* the final version in *The Country I Come From,* reprinted in *Short Stories and Sketches,* 1972, p. 51.
[19] *Cf.* " 'Water Them Geraniums' "; *ibid.,* pp. 580-81.
[20] See "Henry Lawson: The Middle Years (Part II) 1896-1900", in Royal Australian Historical Society, *Journal and Proceedings,* Vol. 55, Pt. 4, December 1969, pp. 338-9.
[21] *Letters,* Number 29, 25 June 1897.
[22] *Ibid.,* Number 42, 15 November 1897.
[23] *Ibid.,* Number 44, 30 December 1897.
[24] *Ibid.,* Number 84, 19 January 1900.
[25] *Ibid.,* Number 104 [August 1900]: Notes, pp. 439-40.
[26] *Ibid.,* Number 104, [August 1900].
[27] I wish to thank Mr Douglas Blackwood, of 45 George Street, Edinburgh, for permission to make copies in August 1973 of the relevant letters from his grandfather's *Letter Books* for 1900-1902 and for directing me to the MS. Section of the National Library of Scotland, to which he had given a mass of letters received from Blackwood's authors. By the time of my visit most of this material had been catalogued, and I wish also to thank the Director of the Library and Mr Douglas Blackwood for permission to include Lawson's letters here. I have assigned numbers to them to put them into the sequence of Lawson's correspondence in my edition of his letters which appeared in 1970 (Syd., A. & R.).
[28] National Library of Scotland: MS. 4702. Blackwood, 1900 I—LA, pp. 292 ff.
[29] Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career,* with preface by Lawson. Blackwood, Edin., 1901.
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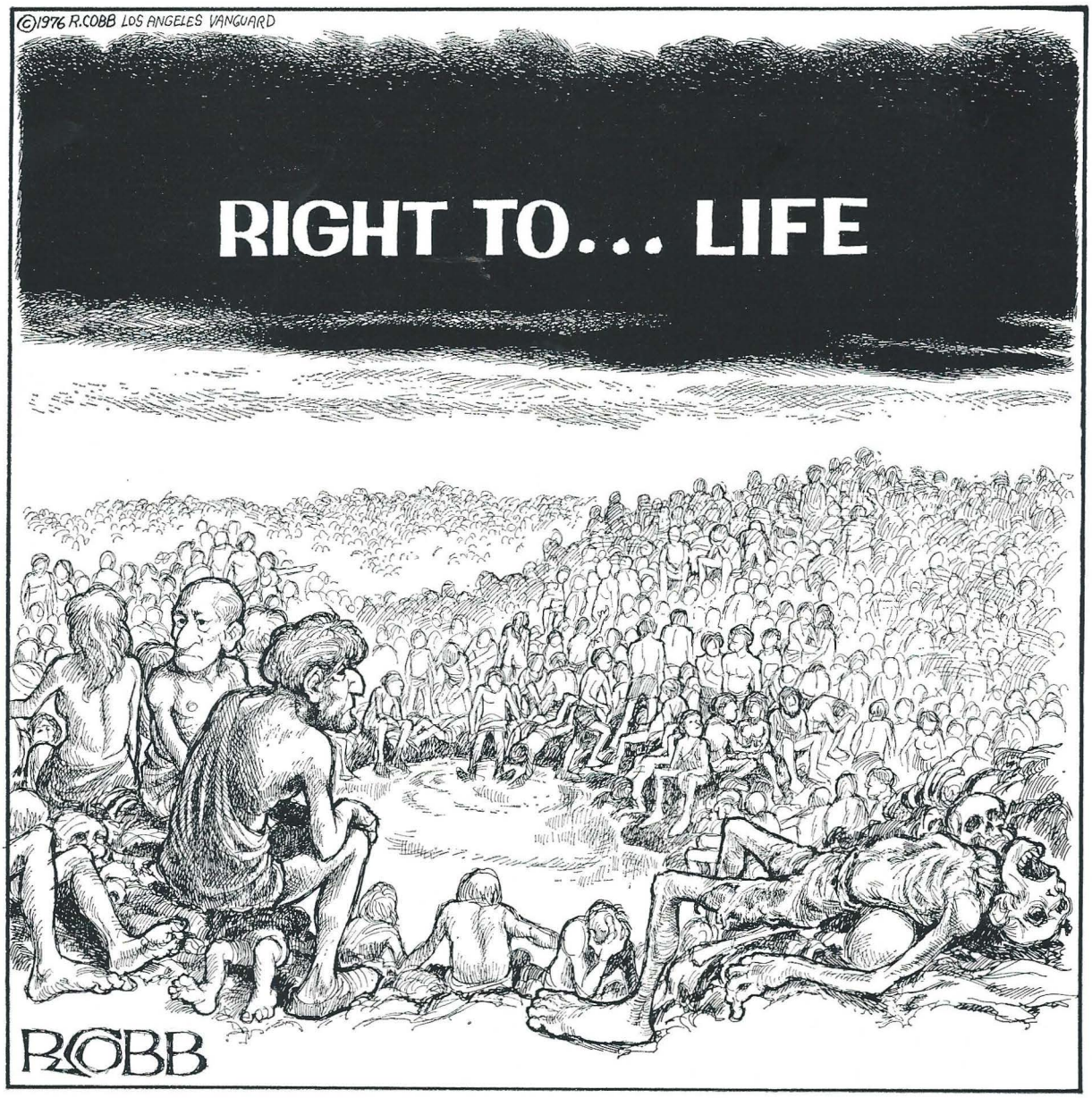
[32] *Letters,* Number 108, 11 February 1902.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IAN TURNER

Letter from Ireland

The land of scholars and saints:
Scholars and saints my eye, the land of ambush,
Purblind manifestoes, never-ending complaints,
The born martyr and the gallant ninny;
The grocer drunk with the drum,
The land-owner shot in his bed, the angry voices
Piercing the broken fanlight in the slum,
The shawled woman weeping at the garish altar.
Louis MacNeice: *Autumn Journal* (1939)

I can't seem to remember a time when Ireland wasn't embedded in my mind—an irritant corroding my conscience, a black cloud threatening to obscure my red dawn, a land-mine about to explode. Not that I was brought up to it. "Did your mother come from Ireland?" No, mine came from the minor Scots gentry. Nor did my father—his great-grandfather was an East Anglican rural dean. So not for me a primary education which combined Virgin Worship with the Wearing of the Green. On the contrary, I loved my country and the British Empire, and I saluted her flag and honored the King and promised cheerfully to obey her laws. And I was as ready as the next man with the tribal chant:

Catholic dogs
Jump like frogs
In and out the holy water.

I think I must have caught the Irish Disease —along with other Good Causes—at the university. The infection didn't invade me as totally as it did many of my Irish-Australian-Catholic friends and acquaintances, whose sentiment (then and now) seemed to me akin to that of Henry Lawson's father and the father's mate, who "talked low, and their eyes brightened up, and they didn't look at each other, but away over sunset, and they had to get up and walk about, and take a stroll in the cool of the evening . . ." But, while we might have been out of harmony over the "Internationale" and "Giovanezza", we could join together in "Kevin Barry" and "Kelly, the Boy from Killane". And—God and his Ministers of Grapeshot defend us—we had a common hero in General Jim Connolly, rebel and patriot, marxist and martyr. There was nothing of Ireland in my blood, but there was something of her in my heart. So going to Ireland was like visiting a half-remembered and half-recognised home.

A childhood home. The cottages of the small farmers of the west coast were made of stone, mostly stuccoed and white-washed and thatched; but the shape was familiar, and they clung close to the ground. The buildings of the country towns, the advertising signs, the shop fronts, the dress of the men and the women in the streets, were reminiscent of the bush towns I knew forty-odd years ago—the more so because the superficial prosperity which has colored the Australian countryside is not yet apparent in Galway and Clare and Limerick and Cork. The pubs had a furtive air—still the kind of places where the men sank their (and Ireland's) sorrows, while the women and children waited in resignation, outside. And there was one instantly recognisable symbol. Scattered throughout Ireland were statues of soldiers in slouch hats with the left-side brim upturned. It was some time before I recognised that they commemorated the men of the Easter Rising, and not my father and his digger mates of World War I.

Ireland is a country which lives closely with her past—because, of course, the past refuses obsti-

nately to leave her alone; it is still there in the border which divides the Republic from the seven counties of the North. The streets and squares of Dublin bear witness to the recent past. Leopold Bloom's house has disappeared, but his front door is enshrined in a central Dublin pub. The martello tower, through which stately plump Buck Mulligan carried his shaving bowl and from which Stephen Dedalus set out for his school, still stands, and alongside it is the rock pool, still with its enigmatic sign, 'Forty Foot Gentlemen Only". (The memory is so recent that, when I returned from Dublin and told a London friend that I had visited James Joyce's tower, she said, sharply, "That was not Joyce's, it was Gogarty's!") The Liberator stares proudly along O'Connell Street. The Post Office still carries some of the bullet-scars of 1916. A twelve-foot Wolfe Tone stands on the edge of Merrion Square, in aloof yet passionate bronze, backed by rough, erect stone pillars which cannot envisage defeat. In Parnell Square, three cranes soar over the women who are fighting—and some dying—for the liberation of Ireland. In the courtyard of the Customs House, a defiant woman holds the sword of freedom while she supports a wounded soldier. I found these more moving than any public memorials I had seen (though I have a 25-year old memory of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial, and a more recent memory of the stark simplicity of the Paris memorial to the victims of the Nazi prison camps, to challenge that judgement). I was travelling with Clifton Pugh; he found the O'Connell monument pedestrian and the Customs House statue trite, while agreeing about the other two—but then he is of Welsh descent, and lacks my long sentimental engagement with Ireland.

Stretching beyond these are the relics of the faith which still divides the Republic from the North. Towering over the whole of Ireland is the Rock of Cashel. I don't know its history; I know what is recorded in Kenneth MacGowan's guide book, which may be history or may be folklore. It doesn't really matter; what is important is what the Irish people believe happened, rather than what actually happened. Cashel was the seat of the kings of Munster, the most famous of whom was the tenth century hero, Brian Boru. (The curious might like to put beside the other legends of Brian Boru the one concerning a reversible contraceptive device, made of cow's hide; it is perpetuated in one of the songs in *Snatches and Lays*.) Cashel was handed over to the 'religious' in the twelfth century, and a start was made on the great cathedral. The cathedral was first burnt down in 1494 by the Earl of Kildare, who is reported to have told Henry VII of England, "Burn it I did, but never would I have done so but that I was sure the Archbishop had been inside it." (He wasn't.) It was burnt for the second time in 1647 by Lord Inchiquin, whom Cromwell had appointed President of Munster, and three thousand of the local inhabitants were slaughtered—including the children, of whom the Cromwellian troopers are reported to have said, "Nits will become lice." On Trinity Sunday, 1729, a Protestant service was held in the Cathedral. Twenty years later, a Protestant bishop evacuated the cathedral for a more convenient and congenial site for his worship, and left it to rot. It stands a majestic ruin, dwarfing temporal power, sectarian hatred, and scepticism. Cashel was the most imposing visual symbol of the faith which had sustained Ireland, but the signs were everywhere. A holy mountain where pilgrims followed the footsteps of Saint Patrick in Country Mayo. A holy well where pilgrims prayed for cures in County Clare. The busloads of 'religious' circumnavigating Ireland on the spiritual grand tour. And everywhere the Celtic crosses marking the past and the future of the faithful—crosses which Clifton Pugh, for whom a painting must mean as well as be, saw as marching arrogantly across the land, the messengers of God, the hounds of heaven. (Irreverently, I thought of the story of the inter-planetary visitor who reached the outskirts of Albury at 2 a.m. on a Sunday morning and confronted the assembled petrol-bowsers with the demand, "Take me to your leader"—and, receiving no reply, commented sadly, "If you'd only take your fuckin' fingers out of your fuckin' ear'oles, you might be able to hear what I'm saying!")

Faith is one—perhaps the most important, and certainly the most long-lasting—dimension. Imperceptibly, it merges with politics. My most moving experience in Ireland was to attend, in the Abbey Theatre, a performance of Sean O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars." Like Ireland, O'Casey seems to have been with me for ever. I read a part in his play, "The Star Turns Red," in 1947. (Was I the 'Red Priest' of organised Catholicism, or the 'Brown Priest' of the workers? I forget.) More recently, I had remembered O'Casey, in the years after 1956, as a stubborn, intransigent Stalinist, who seemed unmoved by the events in Poland and Hungary and by Khrushchev's secret report to the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. I had forgotten his plays.

"The Plough and the Stars" was a rediscovery.

Here, once again, was all the ambivalence which Irish writers characteristically express when they confront Irish nationalism: patriotic fervor balanced against irresolution, cowardice and idle rhetoric; the strength and humanity of the women counterposed to the windy nothings of the men. And, for me the crowning irony, the figure of 'Young Covey' who circled around the tragedy of the Easter Rising, quoting "Jenersky's *Thesis on th' Origin, Development an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of th' Proletariat*". (As was to be expected, the Abbey company turned in a brilliant performance.)

The play had been first presented in the Abbey Theatre in 1926; on the fourth night, the audience demonstrated against its "unpatriotic" flavor; W. B. Yeats tried unsuccessfully to make himself heard—"You have disgraced yourselves again, you have rocked the cradle of genius . . ." Now, with the 'golden jubilee' production, the audience was all the way with O'Casey. The theatre bubbled throughout the performance, and burst into life with this exchange:

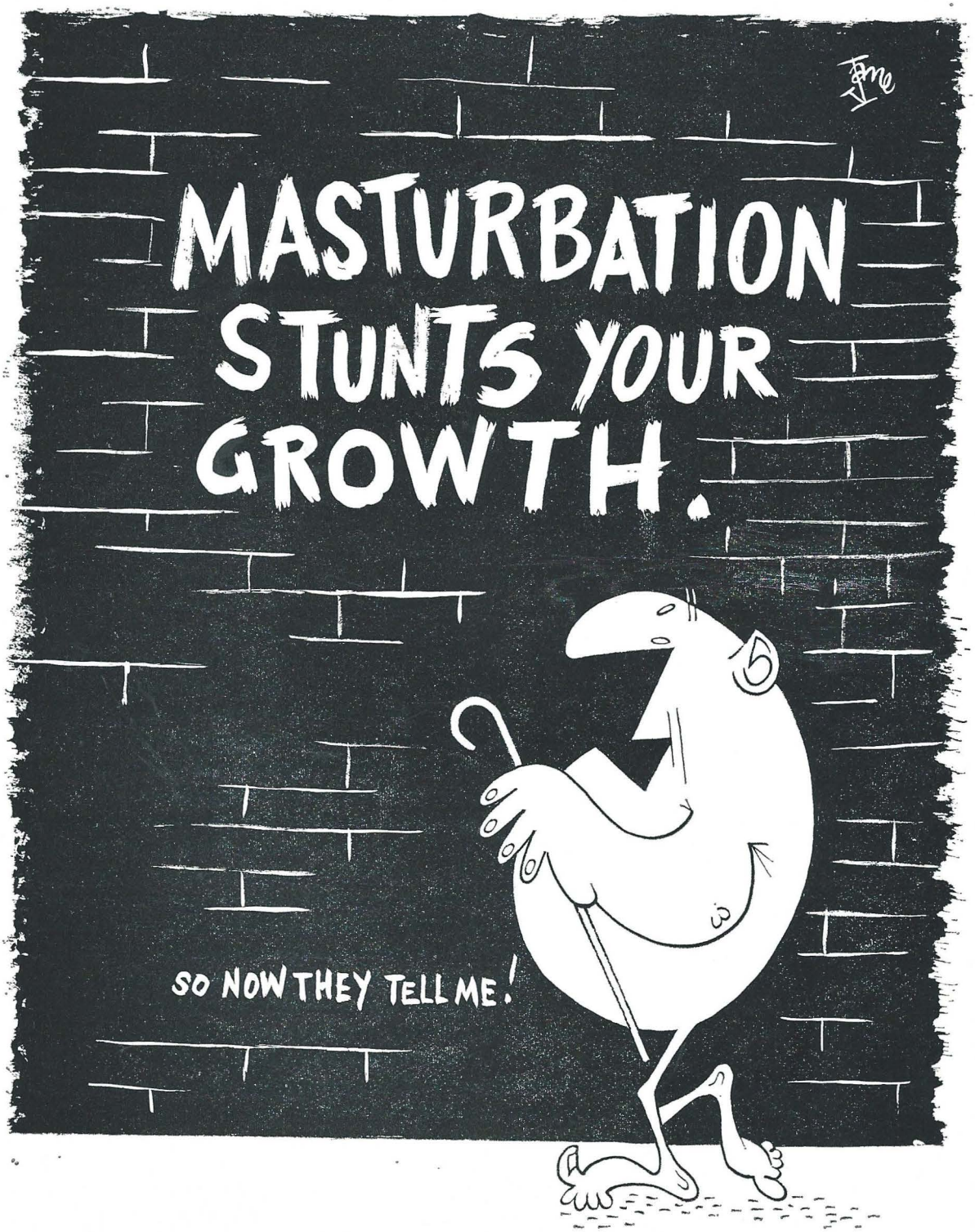
> THE COVEY: D'ye know, comrade, that more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' under?
> CORPORAL STODDART [of the Wiltshires]: Ow, Oi knaow. Oi'm a Sowcialist moiself, but Oi 'as to do moi dooty.
> THE COVEY: Dooty! Th' only dooty of a Socialist is th' emancipation of th' workers.
> CORPOAL STODDART: Ow, a man's a man, an' 'e 'as to foight for 'is country, 'asn't 'e?
> FLUTHER: *You're not fightin' for your country here, are you?*

The emphasis is mine—what stirred the audience was the simple idea of "Brits out!" It was the same when, later in London, I went to a play by Patrick Galvin (who describes himself as "an Irish poet/dramatist living in Belfast and sharing a merry-go-round of its people"), "We Do It For Love." The theme was that both sides in Belfast acted from the best of motives—love of religion and country—and that both acted stupidly and self-defeatingly. His Provos echoed the O'Casey characters—they were not only terrorists, they were inefficient. (This in turn echoed, perhaps unwittingly, the blackest of the current London anti-Irish jokes—the reason why the Provos didn't succeed in causing a major disaster with the bombs they planted in the Underground was that they got on a train going the wrong way.) The central point, which drew the warmest audience response, was again "Brits out!"

It is a point which I've argued with virtually all my Irish-Australian-Catholic friends. Brits out—yes. But what happens if the Brits get out? Take the worst possible scenario. The British withdraw their troops from the North. There are four times as many Prots as Micks in the North, and the Prots have more guns. The Prots move in on the Micks. The last thing that the Republic wants is to involve its troops in that bloodbath, and to inherit that disaster. So the Prots win, and set up their own independent state. That means UDI all over again—except that the balance of forces between black/white in Rhodesia and Catholic/Protestant in North Ireland is considerably different. I do have a side—it's with Gerry Fitt and the S.D.L.P.—but they don't seem to be doing too well at the moment.

After "The Plough and the Stars," I went back to O'Casey's earlier plays, to the terrible ironies of "Juno and the Paycock" and "The Shadow of a Gunman", and to the tragic insight of John M. Synge's "Playboy of the Western World" and "Riders to the Sea." (It was these plays to which Yeats was referring when he commented that the audience was again disgracing itself—they had demonstrated against Synge.) And I still didn't find much hope.

So, in despair, I settled for my favourite Oz tourist story. I was in Limerick, in the south-west of Ireland, on a Saturday afternoon. I was inquiring from the local office of the very efficient Irish Tourist Bureau about second-hand bookshops. I caught, on the counter to my left, a familiar accent: "Ay, love, what is there to do around Limerick on a Saturdee arvo?" "Well, sorr, just a few miles out of town, there's Bunratty Castle . . ." "Jeez—the ol' Bunratty—I know the trainer well!"


MASTURBATION STUNTS YOUR GROWTH.
SO NOW THEY TELL ME!

The Songs of Eric Beach

music by Judy Jacques, arranged by Doug Surman

Eric Beach says his songs should be sung and heard, not read. But this limits their audience to the wildly enthusiastic few who have heard them—presented with complete professionalism—at the Pram Factory, Melbourne, and a few other places. So until the record companies and radio stations wake up we offer this selection.

mister fraser's car is just aroun' th corner rag

gough was first but he was last
shake it when th queen goes past
big black car my big black past
goes to show th queen has class

all you loyal subjects take yr hat off to me
cos I'm so square, I'm so rare, get yr christmas message here

I dont' want no melbourne club
silver ware now there's th rub
turn yr glass down at th pub
guff is gough has lost his job

all you little people take yr hat off to me
cos I'm a rag, cos I'm a rag, cos I'm a rag-time millionaire

discount store has got my pay
discounts, I still work all day
discount what th papers say
discount's when th cow make hay

all you little people take yr hat off to me
cos I'm so ah, cos I'm so hmm, cos I'm so la de da de da

western district, we're all friends
v dub loves mercedes benz
means have gone beyond our ends
got th economic bends

all you little people take yr hat off to me
cos I'll go far, cos I'll go far, I'm roun' th corner in th car

vote for me, I'm coup d'etat
genuinely needy, ta ,
if my diction seems contra
tell th a.b.c. it's war

all you little people take yr hat off to me
cos I'm no fool, I pulled th wool, I'm a full-time millionaire

Monster You Blues

Well you look after yourself so well
well how come, how come
You're so hungry all the time
All you wanted to be was happy
well how come, how come
you're so angry all the time?

chorus:

Well you say you don't like the moanin'
moanin' of the blues
when it's time to walk the baby
well how come, how come
you roll over and refuse?

Well you look after yourself so well
well how come, how come
you're so empty all the time
All you wanted to have was money
well how come, how come
you're so stingy with a dime?

chorus:

Well you say you don't like the moanin'
moanin' of the blues
when it's time to sing to baby
well how come, how come
you roll over and refuse?

Well you look after yourself so well
well how come, how come
you're so hungry all the time
all you wanted to be was happy
well how come, how come
you're so angry all the time?

Well how come, how come
you're such a baby all the time?

Malnutrition ball

th rain it is yellow, th street it is grey
just where I am I can't say
once had a home, well didn't we all?
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball

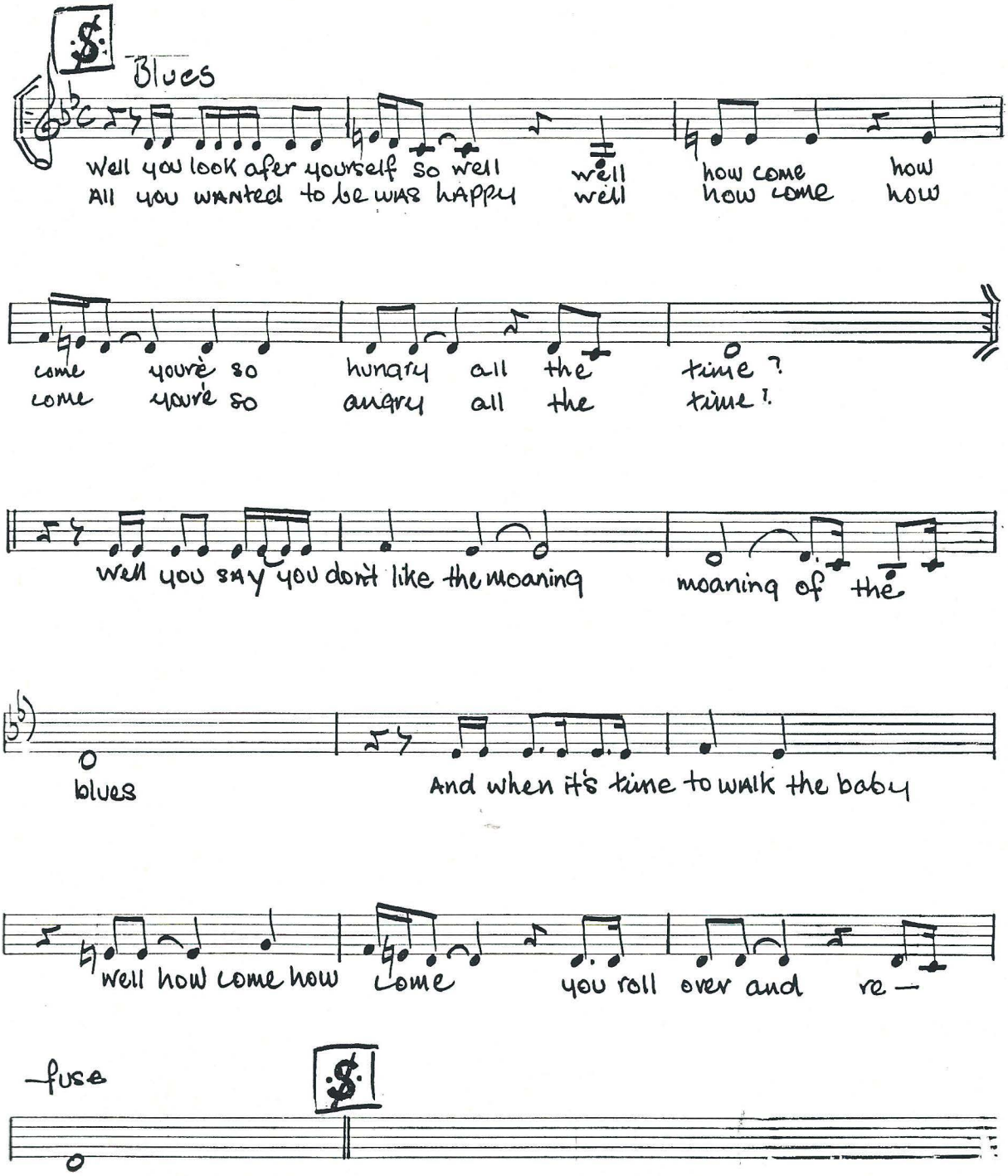
chalk up eternity, seems so far away
in a park asleep all day
my suit is from saint vincent de paul
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball

like old men & horses, their shoulders asway
traffic moves two blocks a day
window displays are startin' to pall
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball

all th tired girls passin', they know that it pays
they did give that much away
workin' man's boots, they stare & they stall
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball

th lady I talk to, I hope that she stays
light must fall, mist has to fray
can't you see th magic of it all?
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball

it's just me 'n my big sister gloria
too bad queen victoria
what would you know about it at all?
I'm on my way to th malnutrition ball


Blues
Well you look after yourself so well well how come how
All you wanted to be was happy well how come how
come you're so hungry all the time?
come you're so angry all the time?
Well you say you don't like the moaning moaning of the
blues And when it's time to walk the baby
Well how come how come you roll over and re—
fuse

heather

waal I used to be in love
with a girl named heather
said she liked
rainy weather
did say seeya
but she was in th showa
when I came back
three hours lata
she was still in th showa
a girl named heather
it was very cold water
mary christmas & I
wouldn't get out of th bathroom
had to explain to th coppers
who couldn't wrap heather
in a blanket

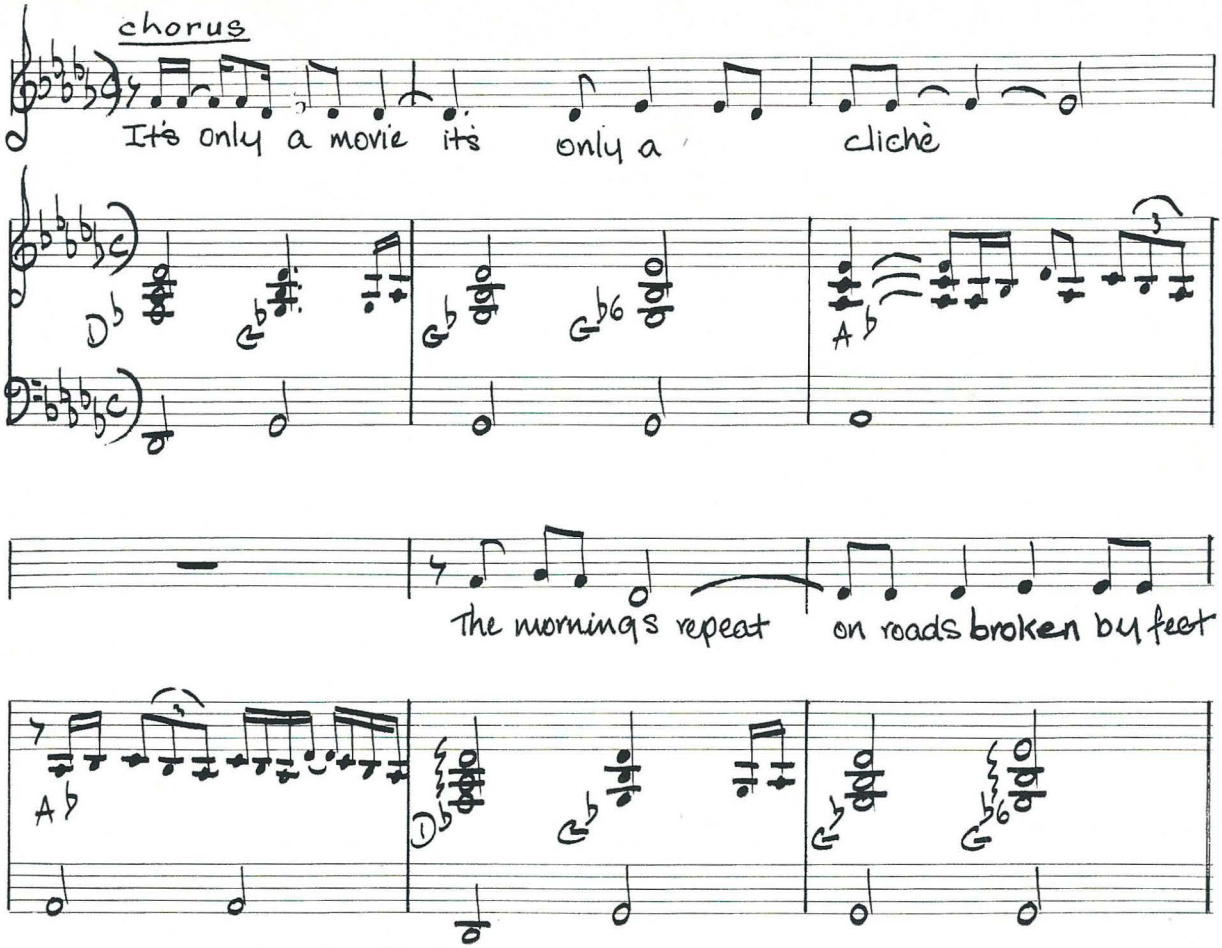
used to be in love
with a girl named heather
one night in th pub
she couldn't stop cryin'
see her big blue eyes
times when I'm tremblin'
like someone who's frightened
like someone who's changin'
—did say seeya
but she was in th showa
when I came back
three hours lata
it was very cold wata
mary christmas & I
wouldn't get out of th bathroom
too late to stop her
she rang th coppers
there's this strange
man & woman
won't get out of my bathroom
had to explain to th coppers
who couldn't wrap heather
in a blanket

no no no

work all day
got nothin' to show
they sweat my pay
just another joe
father christmas
ho ho ho
no no no
no no no
this can't be th place where th liberals go

some got pull
some got shoe-laces
turn on th lights
how come I still can't
see their faces?
lots of dough?
no no no
no no no
this can't be th place where th liberals go

I bought you
a tram ticket, oh
some jaffas to
rattle at th show
father christmas
ho ho ho
no no no
no no no
this can't be th place where th liberals go



It's only a Movie

I had some words of yours lost them in a rainstorm
The touch of your hair like the sun through the trees
I had some thoughts of yours lost them in a river
Disappeared round the corner as I turned away

It's only a movie it's only a cliche
The mornings repeat on roads broken by feet
Only horizons can go on forever
You wait for the ride, not the people you meet

I spent some time with you stared out the window
As though our confessions could bring us some peace
I shared some love with you stared long like a lover
Mornings repeat on roads broken by feet

The world is a circle, I'm walking towards you
Mornings are messages written by birds
Only horizons can fly up forever
You listen for song and you hear only words

I had some words of yours, lost them in a rainstorm
I'm feeling the cold as the wind takes my song
I had some thoughts of yours, lost them in a river
Almost your mouth I see smile and then it's gone

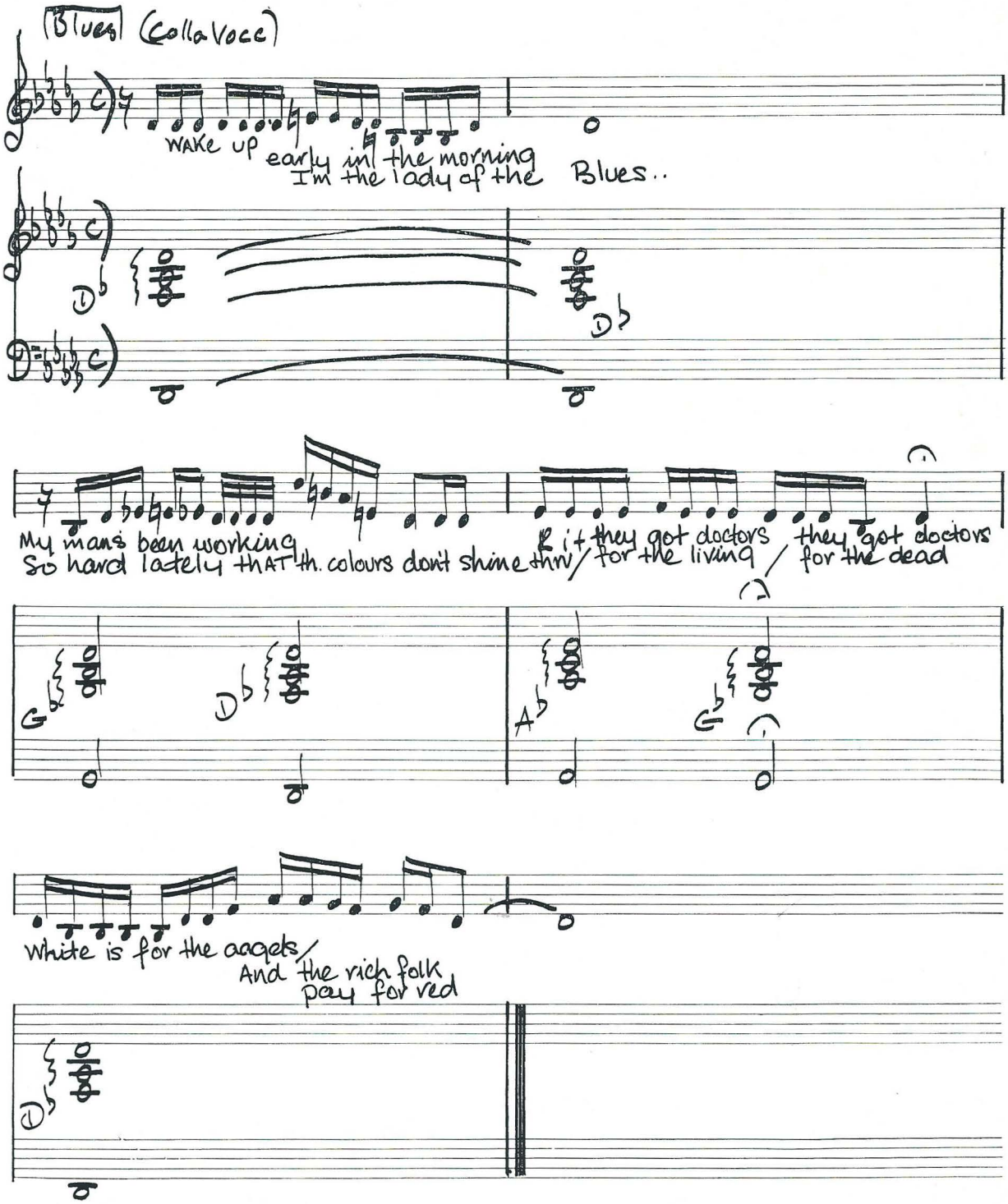
Doll Hospital Blues

Wake up early in the morning I'm the lady of the blues
My man's been working so hard lately, that the colours don't shine thru
They got doctors for the living, they got doctors for the dead
White is for the angels, and the rich folks pay for red
Blues is my colour, blues my working clothes
I payed my sugar daddy his dues, put his shoes out in the road
Blues is my sister, blues is my brother
Blues is my daddy and the blues is my mother.

Just a Road that's going nowhere, just an early morning smile
The wind that whispers in my hair says he'll stay a little while
If you got a red flag at the goods yard, red flag will stop a train
You can see my red skirt flying, yeah, the sun can fly in rain
Blues is my easter, blues is my Christmas
I feel as lonely as a rich man's mistress.

Just watching how a bird flys high, I'm no angel for a man
Lord I know this love is, where the world began
If it's broken, they'll replace it in a hospital for dolls
Blues is for the lady, and the loneliness of soul
Blues is my colour, blues my working clothes
Like a cowboy out of fashion, like a lady with a rose
Like a homesick angel, with no balcony to cruise
From the window of the suicide, beyond the strength to choose.

Strip the lace from winter stories, I'm the lady of the blues
The window of the dolls house broken like the skies where birds once flew
A hospital for broken things, a hospital for dolls
Like the rags of winter women seeking shelter from the cold
Full employment for the living, full employment for the dead
White gets dirty easily, cost you dollars for the red
Sister, mother, brother, father, the sad touch of the doll
She smiles her porcelain smile, somewhere lonely, somewhere cold.


(Blues) (Colla Voce)
WAKE UP early in the morning
I'm the lady of the Blues..
My mans been working so hard lately THAT th. colours don't shine thru
If it they got doctors for the living / they got doctors for the dead
White is for the angels / And the rich folk pay for red

NOEL COUNIHAN:
Studies from the
"Demonstrators" series

Girl on a Rock

A. A. PHILLIPS

I spent the summer holidays of my boyhood at Point Lonsdale. For most that name must sound voidly matter-of-fact. For me it borrows a music from its associations: ocean-salt manfully sluicing through my nostrils: wavering anemones in the magicking brilliance of rock-pools: huge meals wolfishly devoured: planting my foot on a cliff-top after a tricky rock-climb, as if on the belly of a tiger slain by my intrepid skill: the enlarging sense of littleness as I paced at sunset the long curves of the back beach with nothing between me and Antarctica but the thrust and counter-thrust of waves (my imagination conveniently sank Tasmania).

It was of course at Point Lonsdale that I first fell in love, for it was generally accepted in that age of simplicity that one did one's falling-in-love in the holidays, when such urgencies as friendships and football did not crown upon one. I had of course had my *passades* before I met Katrina: delighted fascination, just touched by an undefined hunger, inspired by the delicate structure of a nose: the ego-satisfying triumph of winning an answering meaningful gleam from a pair of eyes: doglike devotions to nice girls in their twenties who had the art of conversing with youngsters seriously and without condescension. But Katrina was my first taste of the real thing, to use a phrase of the time (though the time would have given it capital letters). She was 15 and I 14, so that she was a little old for me but not enough to expose our attachment to ridicule. I never attempted to kiss her, and would have been ill-received if I had; but at 14 that is—or was—a poor gauge of the depth of passion.

Katrina did not live in Melbourne but we corresponded during the ensuing year. When we returned to The Point we assumed that our love would continue from where we had left off—or at least I did. For all I securely know Katrina may have regarded me as merely quite-a-nice-kid-really-when-you-get-to-know-him-properly.

I had reckoned without the grim work of Time, who has subtler weapons in his armoury than the ultimate scythe. Katrina was now 16, I 15. Therefore by the ineluctable law governing the comparative rate of maturing of the sexes, there was now virtually a generation between us. There was no quarrel, no disillusionment, not even a gradual cooling. We simply recognised the gap, and the knot of true-love untied itself. Katrina moved into the orbit of a nineteen-year-old whom she married a few years later. I transferred my deathless devotion to her young sister, Nora. The previous year Nora had been 12, a mere kid not to be noticed without loss of dignity by a 14-year-old. Now at 13 to my 15, so swayed she level with her "—boy-friend's—heart". From her higher level, Katrina watched our affair with amused and affectionate sympathy.

That attachment lasted two years, a long time for poddy-calf love. Then my family ceased going to The Point and Katrina and Nora moved out of my ken. A few years later I passed Nora in the street with a personable young man and knew by the way they looked at each other that he would soon be fathering the children I had once vaguely dreamed of bestowing on her. In obedience to the tabus of the time, I excluded from those dreams any recognition of the process by which the bestowal would be achieved. Of course at 15 I thought much about sex, but not in connection with a beloved. Romance was romance.

Twenty-five years later I persuaded Mary, my wife, that we should take our children for the summer holiday to Point Lonsdale. I extolled its advantages with estate-agent eloquence, not men-

tioning the truth that I hoped there to rediscover my boyhood. On the day after our arrival I went to the beach to collect our kids for lunch. As I moved along my eyes were busy. Beaches change fast, but I could recognise this land-mark and that—and surely that flat-topped rock two hundred yards away, yes, it was in the right situation, surely that must be the very rock on which Katrina had been sitting when she threw back her head in laughter, and I promptly fell in love with that delicious gesture. I am still proud that, at 14, I had the discernment to fall in love with a gesture which deserved it. It had the freedom and joyousness of bird flight, but it also revealed a tenderness, a readiness of the heart to jet spontaneously into expression.

The sight of that rock would probably have plunged me into a nice sentimental wallow—no bad appetiser for lunch. But the gods who order our circumstances with so malicious a sense of irony, contrived that a middle-aged woman watching my children playing, at that moment parked her sacrilegious bottom on the rock hallowed by Katrina's. The cheek of her! Doubtless she was a day-tripper from Queenscliff, that semi-suburban refuge of those who have no taste, as every Point Lonsdale afficionado was convinced.

As I thus absurdly seethed, my kids did something childishly comical and the woman laughed—and I found myself scudding along the beach. I had no doubt. No other woman in the world could throw her head back in laughter in precisely that gesture. This was no sacrilegious interloper, this was Katrina herself miraculously restored to her throne; though in a sense she had never left it, for through the years she had sat there in a niche of my imagination, which every now and then I revisited.

Without the clue of the gesture I doubt if I should have recognised Katrina when I reached the rock. Her face retained its remembered suggestion of inner serenity but it was also marked by battles for serenity's survival, for life had shown her little mercy. I had occasionally had indirect news of her, and knew that she had been early stricken by a disabling and isolating physical disability. Her husband had died in his thirties leaving her childless—she who, I believed, had a need to spend love generously. Despite those new imprints, I gave her a swift confirming look and said confidently, "Excuse me. I think you must be Katrina—" fortunately I remembered her married name).

She looked at me with the old easy directness but a touch of puzzlement. "Yes I am. Should I know y--. Yes, you're Arthur Phillips", and we plunged into a spate of reminiscence. Inevitably we soon ran to a pause which recognised the new gulf between us. Katrina adroitly cut it off before it could become embarrassing, saying, "I've just been watching these kids. Aren't they delightful"?

"Well, I think so. You see, they're my kids". At that moment I think she was as moved as I had been—or so her eyes seemed to say.

Mary and I had sometimes spoken of Katrina, for Mary had been a fresher at their University college in Katrina's senior year, and retained a warmth of feeling towards her. She, too, threw back her head in the freedom of her laughter, though differently. I suspect that she may have been subtly flattered that someone who had the good taste to love Katrina should also have fallen for herself. That night we visited Katrina and her mother, who in the old days had benignantly tolerated, even aided, my pursuits of her daughters. It was a gay and homely evening, with rapport establishing itself between us without our having to work for it. As Mary and I walked home through the sombre stillness of the ti-tree, the aura of that evening moved with us. It was still with us later that night and lent a special flavour to our love-making.

In the thirty years that have since passed, I have not seen, nor heard of, Katrina. She has slipped back always a girl on a rock throwing her head up in laughter, to that periodically revisited niche in my imagination. She sits there, patient and enduring; in much the same way as a recording of Mozart's A Major Concerto stands dumbly on my shelves, until I have a need, perhaps half a dozen times a year, to hear its voice, to commune with it, and with the dead wife who shared my love of it.

swag

It was, I think, Lewis Mumford who remarked that the most urgent priority of the twentieth century was that government had to become simultaneously bigger and smaller. The truth of this is borne home to us daily. The great imperial powers of America and Russia constantly extend their power over their own subjects and over citizens of the states subject to their hegemony. Yet their powers are insufficient to solve those global problems which confront us all. Our maritime resources are depleted and polluted while the statesmen attempt to agree on a law of the sea. But while the great powers wrangle, the smaller groups show amazing resilience. Iceland has seemingly won its cod war, leaving the British fishermen at the mercy of Russia and the Common Market. Scotland may achieve a measure of autonomy, and even the Basques may be winning a measure of recognition. Closer to home, however, the picture is grimmer. The Khmers have recovered from the Kissinger rape only at the cost of their polity. The practitioners of *realpolitik* have allowed East Timor, admittedly a colonial leftover, no chance to determine its own future. In Australia itself, the rhetoric of federalism has been allowed to destroy the attempts from Canberra to promote diversity, and has left us instead at the mercy of the grey uniformities of the multinationals. The attacks on education, on the A.B.C., and on the arts are all parts of that philistinism which would reduce the whole human life to the single measure of profit and loss. This accountant's calculus places no value on truth, and the word in all its diversity is therefore the first casualty.

These reflections are prompted in part by the republication, under the Penguin imprint, of Connor Cruise O'Brien's collection of essays, *Writers and Politics*. The earliest of these essays was published in 1955, and the collection as it stands was published in hardback in 1965. The writing stands up remarkably well after ten years, but the reader suffers from a constant sense of irritation that the publishers have not managed to include O'Brien's later reflections on the sequels to the great events, in Ireland, Africa and the United Nations, which he analyzes. For example, Kwame Nkrumah comes out very well in O'Brien's account of his term at the University of Ghana. I would like to know what O'Brien thinks of him now in the light of the revelations of his successors about his style of living while President. I suspect that those who deposed him have merely corrected venial faults without emulating the quality of Nkrumah's vision, but I would like the views of someone as evidently qualified to judge as O'Brien. For such afterthoughts, we could have spared some of the more ephemeral book reviews in this collection. Yet despite this quibbling, I remain grateful that Penguin, after its succession of takeovers, is still interested in making available work of the distinction contained in this volume. The sorrow still remains, however, that the smaller publisher, less ruled by accountants, and readier to work with his authors to ensure that he has the best of their most recent thought, can no longer provide that distribution of their works which has been monopolised by the multi-nationals.

The paradox is, however, that the small presses continue to thrive in an age of multi-nationals—perhaps because they can provide the diversity which by definition the large publishers can no longer cater for. The difficulty that the reader has in obtaining the work they publish is compensated for by individual voices he can discover

when he does find the books. Presses which have recently submitted work for review to Overland include Wild and Woolley, Spectrum, McPhee Gribble and Wentworth, with titles as diverse as the names of the presses. Overland itself has launched a new series from its press with two collections of poetry—*a keepsake for strangers,* written and designed by Sweeney Reed, and Laurence Collinson's *Hovering Narcissus.* The books so-far published about the fall of the Whitlam government include at least three from small presses—Drummond, Widescope, and Wellington Home Press. Like the present activity in the Australian film industry and in little theatres in Melbourne and, to a lesser extent, Sydney, these achievements are a tribute to the continuation of individual creative activity. The question which remains is how much of this activity can survive during a period of economic contraction without becoming incestuous.

A recurring theme in Connor Cruise O'Brien's essays is the need for maintaining a polity as a condition of human progress. His essays on Ireland discuss the disastrous consequences of the destruction of Parnell, including the demise of the Irish Party, the loss of the possibility of change through peaceful and parliamentary means, the abandonment of the constituency to the Sinn Fein, and the loss of a united Ireland. His essays on the Congo show how the tragic murder of Lumumba destroyed the chance of that country finding an authentic voice, and left it instead at the mercy of the shabby representatives of the metropolitan powers. His addresses to the University of Ghana demonstrate his belief in the freedom of the individual voice as the condition of polity.

> The values to which we adhere have nothing in common with colonialism or with any other system of oppression, nor have they anything in common with neo-colonialism or any other system of deceit. They are forces of their nature hostile to such systems as colonialism and neo-colonialism, and they have served to bring about the downfall of the first system and the exposure of the second. Respect for truth; intellectual courage in pursuit of truth; moral courage in the telling of truth: these are the qualities essential to the life of learning and teaching . . .

These are the qualities which have marked O'Brien's own life of action as well as his teaching and his writing, and they could well be taken as the necessary qualities of the intellectual, whatever his calling. Elsewhere, O'Brien defines the intellectual as the person who prefers to do his thinking for himself, however badly, rather than entrust it to experts. The treachery of the intellectual is to abandon this duty and enlist in the service of those who seek to do our thinking for us.

O'Brien's reminders are sadly needed in a world whose rulers see themselves threatened by freedom of thought. In Czechoslovakia, the authorities have welcomed the New Year by moving against the signatories of "Charter 77", an appeal for human rights which included among its signatories Jiri Hajek, former Czech Foreign Minister, the widow and son of Rudolf Slanski, former secretary of the Czech Communist Party, hanged in 1952, and the dramatist Vaclav Havel. Another playwright, Pavel Kohout, and his wife were dragged out of their car, he was beaten, and the two were taken off to a detention centre. These attacks were in response to a group who sought to open 'a constructive dialogue with the political authorities . . . drawing attention to the various concrete cases of violation of human and civil rights'. The party newspaper, Rude Pravo, accuses them of seeking 'rights and freedoms that would permit them again freely to organize anti-state and anti-party activities', and warns that 'those who lie on the rails to stop the train of history must expect to get their legs cut off'. Their freedom has been cut off, however, not by history but by a party which shows by its own fearful reaction to the words of a courageous few its knowledge that it can survive only by freezing history in an authoritarian mould.

Repression is not limited to Czechoslovakia. In East Germany writers have been detained and removed from union offices, and the singer Wolf Biermann expelled, but restlessness and dissent continue. In Russia, Vladimir Bukovsky has been released in an exchange deal of a kind which he himself describes as 'haggling over and selling people . . . amoral and dangerous . . . it gives the Soviet government a free hand to do what it likes with us'. Meanwhile, the dissident poet Yuliya Vosznesenskaya has been sentenced to five years exile, and Vladimir Borisov, with Bukovsky responsible for exposing psychiatric abuse in the Soviet Union, has again been incarcerated in a psychiatric clinic. Borisov is a remarkable man who, at the age of 18, organized a dock-strike in a far-eastern port, and was first flung into the Leningrad Special Psychiatric

Prison at the age of 21 after having organized a clandestine circle of young socialists.

These detentions seem to be in response as much to fear of contamination by western European communism as to any worry of domestic subversion. They are in defiance of the spirit of the Helsinki agreements on detente, as well as of that trust in the ability of people to control their own lives which is the core of socialism. The Soviet Union uses the Helsinki agreement that the signatories should refrain from interference in each others' internal affairs as a protection for its war on its own people. Only protests from individuals, particularly socialists, are likely to be effective in ameliorating the circumstances of these courageous individuals and making the cause of truth a little easier.

Geoffrey Dutton's poem *The Breakers* in this issue is one Australian's response to the survival of the creative spirit despite the hellish repression of the Soviet system and its literary lackeys.

Some hope for the future is contained in the account by Vladimir Bukovsky of how he was able to continue his university studies at the Moscow University. Having obtained admission through a subterfuge, there was no bureaucratic way he could be expelled.

Bukovsky states explicitly that, although he is not a socialist, he does not advocate the overthrow of the Soviet system. He does argue, however, that human rights are international, and that western powers should not allow the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states to deter them from demanding the respect for human rights as a condition of friendly relations with communist powers. He admits that the Soviet Union has no monopoly on totalitarianism, but excuses his stand by stating that he has no knowledge, for example, of conditions in Iran. For someone who has endured the horrors of political intimidation in his own country this is an honorable excuse, but it is not available to us in Australia. The Shah of Iran is our honored ally and trading partner, and we therefore have a direct responsibility for the system of torture and intimidation which he operates. The same papers which bring news of the ordeals of Bukovsky and Borisov describe how the Iranian secret police have expelled the poet Ahmed Shamlou, tortured the playwright and novelist Gholam Hossein, suppressed the latest film of the director Darioush Mehrjoui, and concealed the fate of sociologist Vida Hadiebi Tabrizi and writer Atefeh Gorgin. These individual cases stand alongside the wholesale genocide practised on minority tribes.

Milton Friedman's Nobel Prize was awarded for his work in economics, particularly in the abstruse theoretical field of monetary supply. The accuracy of these theories is a matter for his fellow economists to decide. The political inferences he draws, however, go beyond this theoretical base, and, like the arguments of physicists about the desirability of uranium mining, are matters of argument and not of authority. The simple division of economies into public and private sectors, and comparison of forms of government on this basis, by which he purports to show that Allende's fall was a result of an imbalance between private and public, and that Britain and Australia are headed the same way, lacks any validity. It is true that there are dangers in government activity, but they are not automatic, and depend at least in part on the way the government itself is organized. The level of government activity can reflect the stage of social development, distribution within the society, or a choice of ends, but has no necessary connection with either freedom or stability. The forms of social organization which Friedman advocates are not economic means but political ends, and should be defended as such. It is not co-incidental that his advice has been welcomed by Chile. The so-called free market can exist outside the realms of economic model builders only when it is imposed on society by an authoritarian government, even if that government chooses to call itself free enterprise.

These notes by the author may help to explain some of the references in Alan Gould's sequence of poems, 'Four Icelandic Interiors'.

The intransigence of weather and geology have created, in Iceland, a subject for poetry rich in natural drama and metaphorical suggestion. Some of the place-names in the six poems may, however, be unfamiliar.

Dyrholaey is the southernmost tip of Iceland where arch and stack erosions occur.

Heimaey is the main island of the *Westmann group*, an important fishing port off S.W. Iceland, where in January 1973 a volcano erupted, burying much of the abandoned town beneath its lava.

Sulur, meaning 'shawled woman', is a mountain above the Northern town of *Akurevri*, on the *Eyjafjord*. *Helgi Magri*, (the Lean) was the first

Norseman to settle in the area, coming from the diocese of *Ossory* in Southern Ireland at the end of the ninth century.
Dalvik is also a small town on Eyjafjord.

David Campbell's Rainforest poem in this issue is written around that area in Queensland where Sidney Nolan had a hut at one stage. The passages quoted in the poem come from a dodger which reads in full:

CURTIS FALLS
Self-Guiding Nature Walk
from JOALAH National Park, Tamborine Mountain.

Published by: The Lamington Natural History Association on behalf of the Tamborine Natural History Association in co-operation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Lamington Nat. Hist. Assn., Binna-Burra Lodge, Beechmont, Qld., 4211.

According to the A.B.C.'s Week in Asia report, the Peking Peoples' Daily has acknowledged that, under the control of the gang of four, some of its articles were 'reactionary, tedious, smelly and monotonous'. It sounds like a Bland prescription for the A.B.C.

John McLaren

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: This issue of *Overland* is edited by John McLaren and Barrie Reid, and I'm grateful to them for their work and the innovations they have incorporated. I'm also grateful to the following for their splendid support—a total of $576:

$50 MC, PL; $30 CB; $24 J & WMcD; $19 MDCL; $14 DB, AD, CC, ML; $13 PA; $10 LW, CB, PC, IP, JO'C; $9 JL, FW, RM; $6 JB, BB; $5 RR, MJ; $4 ED, KB, YD, JW, EF, HA, GS, BB, HS, JS, LI, DK, JT, JB, JH, AS, JC, JG, MW, LR, EK, HK, JM, GP, GS, LF, NS, MR, DF, JB, ME, HA, DW, VB, RM, GP, MG, JJ, DB, BW, IM, DA, AT, TD, MO, AP, RB, BA, RM, PM, AS; $2 BK-W, JL, JB, ER, LP, AC, IM, NN, RC, GA, LMcK, DM, HW; $1 JH, CdeP, LF, FH, GK.

books

WHAT TO DO?

Max Teichman

Robin Gollan: *Revolutionaries and Reformists* (ANU Press, $12.95).

Robin Gollan's account of the Australian labor movement, and communism, between the years 1920 to 1955, is on balance a dispiriting story and none the less so when one considers what has occurred in the two decades which follow. One gains an overall impression of flatness, even grayness of landscape—unrelieved by any really extensive analyses of individual leaders or theorists, whether they be revolutionary or reformist, politician or trade unionist. Could the political landscape really have been so boring, and the various decision makers so colorless, so one dimensional, as Gollan implies? Perhaps so.

The author is obviously sympathetic to the problems of the labor movement and the Communist Party—he correctly portrays their almost hopeless struggle to raise the political level above bread and butter issues, in the face of the restrictions imposed by one of the most systematically rigged and fiercely reactionary political systems in the English speaking world. There is in fact too little about Australian conservatism and conservatives, hence one may fail to realize, when reading Gollan, just how much and how often the labor movement, and the communists, have *reacted* to Right Wing policies and ambushes, and how seldom they have acted in ways which *they* had planned or chosen.

Gollan's story comes to life every now and then, when particular strikes, or pieces of repressive legislation are described; something of the quiet desperation of the Depression period filters through, and the strange Alice in Wonderland atmosphere of the run up to the war. In retrospect, the Great Anti-Fascist War and the struggle with Japan can be seen in a positively unreal light—little wonder that the ersatz consensus of 1941-5 was cracking up even before the last anti-fascist had given his life for a more just and more peaceful world.

Most of the pre-war political actors were itching to resume their former roles and to wheel out their familiar propaganda, as though nothing had happened. A lot *had* happened of course; but a world habituated to violence, compulsion and confrontation could be easily put back into ideological uniform. The effects of the thirty year cold war upon the hopes, the morale, even the general perceptions of the labor movement, and radicals generally, are given some attention by Gollan, but the task of delineating just how comprehensively the local version of the cold war has bemused and contaminated our whole political processes, and degraded the general level of political discourse, still remains to be done.

To take the example of members and sympathizers of the Australian Communist Party. The steady haemorrhage of support began even before the war ended, and belated recognition of the odious character of Democratic Centralism and Socialist Realism at home, and Stalinism abroad, soon converted a leak into a mighty flood. But there were during this time two important bodies of Party members and radical sympathizers, which differed considerably one from another in their reactions to the unending flood of abuse, economic and career victimisation, and vague threats of far worse to follow, which characterized Australia in the late forties and the fifties.

One group went to water, *not* due to the vices of communism (which they had secretly known about for a long time), but in order to keep out

of trouble and repair their damaged status prospects. Some of these soon became stage anti-communists—political Kapos, so to speak.

The other group dug in their heels, remaining Party members or fellow travellers long after had they ceased to really believe in either the morality or the rationality of their formal commitments. This is because they refused to be put down by conservative forces which they regarded as a far greater present danger to Australian society than Russia or the C.P.A. Furthermore, until after the Split, there seemed no guarantee that the ALP would resolutely oppose the steady slide into structural intolerance and national mugwumpery so reverently desired, and orchestrated, by Australian conservatives.

A third group, the True Believers, are to be found in every age and society, containing as they do some of the most virtuous, some of the most deluded, and some of the most misanthropic people whom one is likely to meet anywhere. Unfortunately these Left extremists and their Right equivalents are the staple subject matter of much political sociology and psychology, with the rest of political activism, or even belief, graded accordingly to how near or how far individuals are from the Right/Left stereotypes. The conclusions one is supposed to draw from such grand simplifications are that politics is bunk; sustained commitment is a mode of integration for the psychically fissiparous; and a coherent moral point of view, no matter how temperately defended, is not merely evidence of a misspent youth but a mark of ignorance of how politics works (therefore *must* work, therefore *ought* to work).

And yet, reading between the lines of Gollan's low keyed chronicle of those years, it is plain that there were many crucial moral and political issues up for settlement, and a great number of vicious and greedy people in power whose activities, if unopposed, would have reduced our society to a de Mille set for Sodom and Gomorrah. This opposition failed, and we and our children are saddled with the consequences of that failure. These were the days of the great exodus to England, an exodus which doubtless would be being repeated at this moment, were conditions in Britain not so unpromising.

To return to Gollan's Communist Party and labour movement—there are, I suspect, some structural peculiarities in the essay, for there is no systematic step by step history of the Party, nor a continuous analysis of its thought as it developed—or stagnated—through the years; neither is there a systematic overview of the ALP, nor the trade unions *per se*. This might have involved three books, not one; instead we get periodic crosscuts whereby the various elements are brought together in a particular episodic context, wherein they play out their rivalries and exhibit their underlying motivations. This is certainly one way of covering an immense amount of territory witnout parody, and Gollan does avoid parody. On the other hand, the effect is of a certain jerkiness in the narrative.

Adverting to the putting aside of the formative if not overpowering influence of conservative standover politics, a good deal is written about Lang, his career and influence and so on, but the New Guard episodes are covered in a few pages. And yet the pressure of this permanent right wing veto upon meaningful change in Australia, as symbolised by the New Guard, who possessed a larger per capita membership than the Italian Fascist Party just before the March on Rome, simply *has* to be included in any analysis of Australian radicalism. Unless one recognizes the existence of powerful, possibly irresistible forces in Australia, who are prepared to tear the political system to pieces rather than accept substantial change, one cannot understand why Australian radicalism always emerges as a toothless wonder, why people who in healthier contexts might be intelligent step-by-step reformers finish out on a limb practising some variety or other of infantile communism.

No doubt the communists, the ALP and the unions made many blunders and committed much foolishness over the years, but no matter how they played their hands, they would have still bumped up against the ghetto walls within which Australian reformers, and the surprisingly large numbers of socio-economic underdogs, have always been confined. This basic situation has not altered, as the Whitlam government discovered recently, and the problem remains, "What to do?" As Robin Gollan's final sentence says . . . "But it would be brave or foolish to suggest that anyone, or any group, has made an adequate analysis of contemporary society and proposed courses of action which would produce the results confidently, but mistakenly, predicted by communists a generation ago."

DOOMSDAY WITH A DIFFERENCE

Jenny Love

Hugh Stretton: *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Cambridge, $8.45).

A problem in environmental studies, which springs from the all-embracing nature of the subject, is that physical and biological scientists often have a naive belief in the capacity of social science to provide solutions to environmental problems: whilst social scientists similarly may believe in the capacity of the more "exact" natural sciences to come up with the answers. Paul Ehrlich, one of the best known of the environmental publicists, and a biologist, has made many people aware of the ecological disasters which could result from man's effects on natural systems, but his political solutions are highly unrealistic.

Hugh Stretton comes from the other side of the fence, Originally a historian, he has become well known in related fields and has written on urban problems, particularly in *Ideas for Australian Cities,* with originality and wit. In tackling the social and political implications of the environmental crisis he does not make the mistake of thinking there are simple solutions, but is concerned to find a better rather than a worse way out of a "wicked" problem. The result is complex, long, and difficult to read, but also stimulating and original.

It is the effects of the worsening of environmental problems which he discusses, not the problems themselves, and the solutions he proposes are social-democratic. "Between Repentance Now and Growth Regardless [he] offers no opinion. Instead [he] explores social principles which might apply at any likely level of environmental use."

Stretton consciously rejects the use of jargon as much as possible. "Left" and "Right" for example, are defined as attitudes to equality. "Right" means wanting present or greater inequalities, "Left" means wanting to reduce them. Words like "good", "bad", "right" and "wrong" are used rather than more complicated and obscure terms.

The book is in three sections. The first discusses feasible futures for democratic countries, given the present situation: the second, what solutions are best: and the third, how programs can be implemented.

Futures are seen as developing from the extreme Right, the middle of the road, and the Left —Stretton's best solution. All are concerned with society's attempts to allocate dwindling resources and to control pollution and technology, but with differing degrees of equality and political freedom.

The first is summed up as "the Rich rob the Poor", and describes the development of increasing authoritarianism as a means of allocating scarce resources to the privileged few, while austerity for the majority, living in New Life Settlements (a sort of White Bantustans) ensures that eco-catastrophe will be avoided. Environmental stabilization is achieved at the cost of equity and liberty.

The second hypothetical future, "Business as Usual", extrapolates from present trends in affluent capitalist democracies, and foresees the increase of inequality by inflation, while the costs of cleaning up the environment are borne, in the market economy, by those least able to pay. Thus the masses are depressed into a reversal to eighteenth-century conditions, to cut-throat competition and economic slavery.

The third and preferred opinion is that in which both environmental control and increased equity are achieved. No-one's income is more than four times anyone else's, and effective government control has been established over growth in a mixed economy in which private enterprise still has a large share. An alliance of environmentalists with the Left has produced a new radication as the environmental crisis deepens, opening the way for new options to be chosen.

The question, of course, is *how?* How to bring about this mix of capitalism and socialism so that we will all have "safe and friendly faces in the street", with buses and bikes, one plain enamel bathroom and honest government?

Hypothetical futures apart, Stretton believes that three things will work for the Left in today's society: better education and understanding of environmental problems, increasing inequality under capitalism, and the popularity of egalitarian reforms. With these factors making for change, the Left has a chance to develop programs and performance to bring it about.

One of the major themes of the latter section of the book will be familiar to readers of the author's other work on cities and on housing— that reform programs should look first to the resources of home and neighborhood—based on the proposition that by far the largest proportion of people's living is done there. Resources are used, leisure is enjoyed, values and capacities are

developed there. He looks first here in his programs, and argues that socialist policy should shift more resources to the domestic sector. Houses, gardens and neighborhoods should be perceived as resource centres, their inhabitants as producers, and he sees increasing equality being achieved here with appropriate land and housing policies.

"To put it in the most shocking possible language, socialism should cease to be the factory floor and chicken battery party, and become the hearth and home, do it yourself party." Programs, briefly, are concerned with greater equity in the distribution of space and services, and with the development of urban planning policies to achieve this.

In one sense Stretton is preaching survival—physical survival with depleted resources, but also the survival of personal relationships and space, of diversity and of personal liberty. He is concerned, at least by implication, with the technology of the small, which may enable some people and some parts of society to survive even in crisis, because ways have been found to use resources differently from the ways of mass production technological society. Many people are trying to find ways to live in harmony with their environment rather than to destroy it—in cities as well as in the bush. Much of what is written here will make sense to them.

To sum up, this is a wide-ranging and complex book and it is difficult to separate out particular ideas. What people make of it will depend partly on whether they believe in reform or revolution. Stretton assumes that the Left need no longer bother to abolish capitalism and his futures will seem mild to those concerned primarily about conflicts between under-developed and affluent countries, or about nuclear warfare.

But the environmental crisis is, in the long term, potentially more catastrophic. In the end men must cope with the mess they have created and the weapons to hand are political as well as technological. Stretton has opened up philosophical issues. He has also looked at problems at the practical political level.

There are many books about doomsday. This is different. With any luck, it will give policy makers of the Left something to get their teeth into.

VANCE AND NETTIE PALMER

H. P. Heseltime

Vivian Smith: *Vance and Nettie Palmer* (Twayne Publishers, 1975. $U.S.6.95).

The rigid prescriptions of length and design imposed by the Twayne's World Authors Series will be familiar to all its readers. Yet, that the fixed demands of the format can be exploited as virtues has been convincingly demonstrated by Vivian Smith in his study of Vance and Nettie Palmer. His feat is all the more remarkable in that it compresses an account of two major literary figures into the space usually allotted to one.

Dr Smith has not given us the great book that remains to be written about the Palmers. Nevertheless, he has produced an admirable exercise in economy, clarity, and precision. The basic biographical facts are, thus, neatly recorded, their historical significance tactfully suggested. The aesthetic judgments are always sympathetic but never sentimental. Indeed, in their succinct accuracy they seem likely to be touchstones of Palmer criticism for some time to come. Dr Smith's responses encompass the particular and the general; sometimes re-enforce established orthodoxy, sometimes challenge that orthodoxy with ideosyncratic views; can sum up a whole career, or offer a new insight into it, in a single aphoristic phrase. The strong (but not wilful) individuality of response is heard in the description of *Men Are Human*: "one of Palmers most satisfactory novels" (p. 44). The summary powers of the writing can be experienced in the pages devoted to the theme of identity in Vance's fiction. The capacity for illumination at once broad and subtle can be felt in an utterance such as this: "Palmer's world is a world without tragedy as it is a world almost without comedy" (p. 63).

The critical assessments are so consistently precise and assured because, it seems to me, there is operating behind them a genreal intelligence not only precise and assured but also unassuming and fully in command of its subject. Most importantly of all, Dr Smith conveys a sense of modest but genuine affection for the two personalities to whom his study is devoted. There is, to be sure, some critical emphasis towards Vance, but in the biographical account of this famous writing team both members are accorded equal weight.

Indeed, where Dr Smith's criticism offers precision and clarity, his narrative provides a sense of cohesion, of pattern—a pattern founded upon the Palmers' relation to the developing cultural

life of Australian from the 1920s to the 1950s. In this respect, the book's principal theme is of Australia as a possible home for the imagination. In that context, both the Palmers have often (and, as I believe, fairly) been seen as pioneers of civility in this country. It is part of Dr Smith's particular skill that in the same context he can discover an aesthetic insight which transmits a true shock of recognition: "[Vance] was perhaps the most ambitious as well as the most conscientious novelist in Australia at the time" (p. 48).

If there is one area in which Smith fails as biographer and historian, it is exactly that area wherein all students of the Palmers have so far failed: the uncertain ground on which private and public lives intersect. The public achievements of the Palmers' are by now sufficiently understood to generate disagreements over value, not over fact. Indeed, probably no other literary figures left behind them more copious documentary records of their participation in the literary culture of this country. Yet, as personalities none remains more enigmatic. It is in the full realization of their inner history that, I believe, the great challenge to students of the Palmers still lies. Not to have mastered that challenge I take to be no major failure in Vivian Smith's book: it was simply not part of his brief. What he has given us, and valuably, is a lucid survey of the life and works, a critique which, for all its modest pitch, is alive with implication and resonance.

HALF WAY POINT

Barry Jones

Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 6. 1851-1890. Letters R-Z. General Editor: Bede Nairn. (Melbourne University Press, $25).

When Volume I was published in March 1966, the original General Editor, the late Douglas Pike, stated its aim in a promotional leaflet as being "to inform and interest the lonely shepherd in his hut as readily as the don in his study" and promised that "to the good, the bad and the humdrum have been added a few entries of almost forgotten characters, for no worse reason than that they are samples of the Australian experience".

Volume 6 appears to contain an unusually high proportion of humdrum or forgotten characters—many of them clergy, pastoralists or lawyers. Only the most assiduous shepherd will read it as closely as the preceeding volumes.

Douglas Henry Pike (1908-74) died while Volume 6 was in course of preparation. His successor as General Editor, Bede Nairn, pays tribute to Pike's diplomacy, scholarship, management skills and judgment.

The ADB is now half-way through. Six more volumes are planned to take it to 1939 and the complete work will have 7000 entries by some 2000 contributors.

Volume 6 has 495 entries by 286 authors. Only ten subjects are women: the singer Frances Sherwin ('the Tasmanian Nightingale'), the social reformer Catherine Spence, the pioneer child welfare worker Sulina Sutherland, the poet and artist Margaret Thomas, the last Tasmanian Trugernanner (Truganini), the Unitarian preacher Martha Turner, the controversial nurse Haldane Turriff, the Mercy Sister Ellen Whitty (Mother Vincent) and the W.A. Pioneer Emma Withnell.

At least 60 contributors are women, some of them among the most prolific, including Jill Eastwood, Suzanne Edgar, Ann Hone, Ann-Mari Jordens, Suzanne Mellor and Martha Rutledge.

Apart from Trugernanner, no aboriginal Australians are included. The entry on Ruatoka (1846-1903), a Polynesian missionary in New Guinea, is interesting but its relevance is not obvious.

The test for admission to the second chronological section of the ADB is that the subjects "flourished" in the period 1851-1890. In this volume the subjects range across a time span of more than 160 years from the Adelaide newspaper proprietor Robert Thomas (1781-1860) to the cricketer C. T. B. Turner (1862-1944).

The longest, but by no means the most interesting, entry is Bede Nairn's 16 columns on Sir John Robertson (1816-91), five times Premier of New South Wales, land reformer and stormy petrel, whose vanity, capacity and stubbornness closely resembled his rival Henry Parkes.

Martha Rutledge contributes 14 columns on Sir Alfred Stephen (1802-94), Chief Justice of New South Wales, President of the Legislative Council and Acting Governor—at times holding all three offices simultaneously.

Geoffrey Serle's 11 columns on James Service (1823-99), twice Premier of Victoria and Federation enthusiast, pay tribute to his work as "one of the three or four of the great founding fathers" and as a major influence on Alfred Deakin.

Some of the minor entries are among the most interesting, for example the Savoyard missionary to New Guinea Henri Verjus (James Griffin) and

the politician adventurer Thomas Walker (Barry Smith). Walker (1858-1932) was a Lancashire-born child preacher who became a spiritualist, then a violent opponent of spiritualism, journalist, Member of the New South Wales and Western Australian Parliaments, opponent of capital punishment (he was once charged with manslaughter and once with felonous wounding), campaigner for better libraries, schools, universities and legal reforms.

Many entries are duller than is strictly necessary even in a reference book: they hold back where they ought to give, perhaps due to our native reticence.

For example, anyone who has seen David Syme's extraordinary Pharoanic tomb in the Boroondara Cemetery (Kew) with its obsessive Egyptian motifs must ask questions which are not hinted at, let alone answered, in the sober columns of C. E. Sayers' ADB entry, or in his equally sober biography (1965).

Guy Featherstone's entry on Dr L. L. Smith (or £. £. Smith as his medical rivals sourly described him) refers briefly to the success of his advertising but does not capture the flavour of his sublime self-confidence. His advertisements appeared on the front pages of city, suburban and country papers from the 1880s:

"My success in correspondence is so great, that of the thousands upon thousands whom I have treated by letter during the last 32 years, not a single mistake has ever occurred . . .

"How many thousands have I not brought joy to? Many a sad heart has been made joyous on receipt of an explanatory letter by me.

"The only addition to the ordinary written letter is the age, occupation, habits and symptoms —nothing more. The usual consultation fee of £1 (one pound) must be enclosed, otherwise no answer will be returned . . ."

L. L's son Sir Harold Gengoult Smith is still living in Melbourne with numerous other descendants. L.L.'s daughter Louise Hanson-Dyer, founder of Oiseaux-Lyre, music publishers in Paris, is given the most perfunctory reference.

The ADB has entries on many people who visited Australia or lived here only briefly, including John Redmond, Admiral Sir George Tryon, Anthony Trollope and George Francis Train. It is striking how many long term residents saw themselves as temporary Australians and returned to Great Britain for retirement and death.

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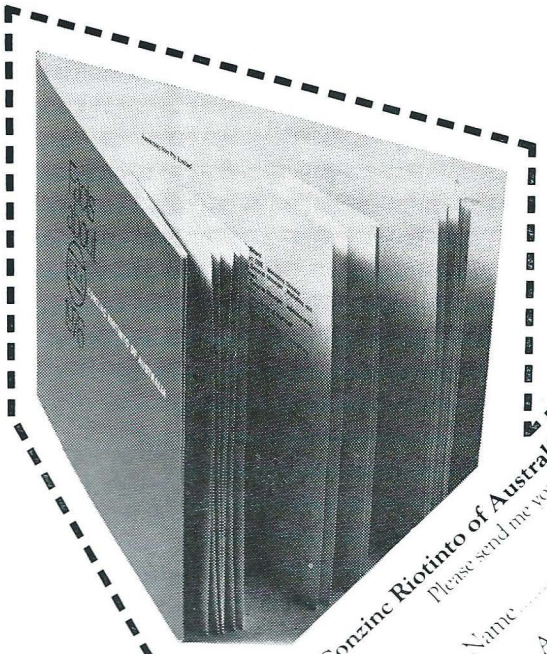

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A luminous diagram and a monotone, both exhibiting numenic symmetry:
photo by Mathew Nickson