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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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# Nuclear Clouding

We had expected to use this space to publish an article which would have demonstrated that an Australian Prime Minister, the then Mr Robert Menzies, over-ruled the recommendations of his government's safety committee and authorized the British authorities to explode their nuclear bombs at Maralinga.

This was in 1956, the time of armed intervention by Russia in Hungary, and by Britain and France in Egypt. A Security Council meeting to discuss the Suez intervention was scheduled for October 5, and the British government needed to have evidence of its own nuclear capacity in order to guarantee its role at this meeting.

Unfortunately, the winds were blowing the wrong way on the eve of the test, to which Russian as well as American observers had been invited. The scientists on the safety committee believed that a bomb explosion in these circumstances could imperil the population of the east coast. They therefore recommended that the tests be postponed.

This did not suit the British government's timetable, and the Australian government recommended that the tests proceed. The bomb was exploded on September 27, and the fallout made its unforeseen way across Australia and was discharged over Queensland and the Pacific.

There has been no evidence available to us of the effects of this fallout, although presumably they could be obtained from hospital records of the time. We have however been informed that Brisbane's normal milk supply was at the time dumped and replaced by milk from unaffected sources.

We repeat, these allegations are not at present supported by documentation. Conclusive support or refutation could be obtained from the Com-

monwealth archives which relate to the period, or from the surviving members of the safety committee. This committee included Sir Ernest Titterton, Sir Leslie Martin and Mr L. J. Dwyer, Commonwealth Director of Meteorology.

This committee would not, however, necessarily know about the fate of the Aborigines of Maralinga. It does appear certain that they were removed from their native lands by truck in order to allow the tests to take place, but it is difficult to discover when they returned. It is probable that they went back to their tribal grounds while these were still alive with radioactivity.

As we have said, we cannot document these claims. We can, however, explain why we no longer have the original article or its supporting documents available.

After the article had been prepared, one of the secretaries who was typing it was visited by gentlemen who introduced themselves as members of the Department of Meteorology. They explained that they just wanted to check the article for its factual accuracy.

The consequence of this visit was that the original article was destroyed, and that the people who hold the supporting documents no longer felt free to make them available. We must therefore supply this paraphrase from memory.

We would point out that the representatives of the Department of Meteorology were at no time in contact with either the authors of the original article nor the editors of *Overland*.

The information contained in the article we had intended to publish in no way affected the present security of the Commonwealth of Australia. It dealt with weapons which are now obsolete and delusions of imperial grandeur which are now fortunately laid to rest.

It is however particularly relevant to the present debate on the mining of uranium deposits in Australia.

The proponents of uranium mining claim that our export of uranium would be subject to such stringent controls that it could never be used for warlike or unlawful purposes. This may be so, although the same safeguards were supposed to apply to the export of uranium to India, which has now exploded its own atomic devices.

The two critical issues in the current debate are the maintenance of security and the disposal of the waste.

There is no reason to suppose that any security system can be perfect. It is merely a matter of time before a fanatic who is prepared to sacrifice his own life gains access to sufficient uranium derivatives to hold a city to ransom. It is equally a matter of time before one of these ransom attempts goes wrong, and a city is razed. Yet even the economic cost of meeting a terrorist's demands should be sufficient to deter our government from mortgaging our future.

But while the security may not be foolproof,

it must be sufficiently rigorous to interfere with normal democratic processes. Our present experience in relation to this article shows the lengths governments will go to in order to suppress harmless but pertinent information. Once we are irreversibly committed to a uranium economy, no government will be able to resist the demand to sacrifice individual liberties to public safety.

When we consider the question of disposing of uranium wastes, however, we are placed in double jeopardy. The confidence of the scientists that they can ensure that these wastes will remain out of harm's way for some thousands of years surpasses credence. The evidence we have seen, however, suggests that even if the scientists are right in what they propose, they can be over-ruled by governments interested only in short term expediency.

It has been suggested that the survival of western economies, and therefore of democracy as we know it, depends on the utilisation of atomic energy. We believe that the social and ecological consequences of such utilisation are certain to destroy the possibility of a democratic society, and likely to destroy mankind.

## A few Days in the Country

ELIZABETH HARROWER

"Heavens!" Sophie put her suitcase down on the concrete path and watched the cat flatten itself under a daphne bush and disappear.

"I don't know why she does that," Caroline said, looking after it abstractedly.

"I don't usually terrify cats."

"No, it isn't you. It isn't you." Caroline led the way up the broad steps to her house. "She always acts as if she thinks someone's going to murder her."

Knocking Sophie's bag against the wall as she went ahead in a nervous rush, Caroline stopped at the entrance to a bedroom with two big windows and a view of a eucalypt-covered hillside. She looked anxiously about. "Is this all right? Perhaps I should have given you the other room?"

"Caroline, *no*. This is lovely. It was so kind of you to let me come." And Sophie, who thought she never blushed, blushed from waist to forehead, and turned to give the oblongs of countryside her polite attention.

"I *asked* you."

Drawing a dubious breath, Sophie saw imposed on the wooded slope another landscape of such complexity that she could think of no one thing to say.

Caroline straightened the Indian rug, then eyed her guest, and went on laboriously, "How are you, anyway? Now that we're established."

"Oh, extremely healthy, as always." Sophie heard the sudden liveliness in her own voice, felt herself brim, for Caroline's benefit, with something resembling animation and high spirits. Apart from the fact that none of this was true, she could see it must seem a little odd that someone as fine as all that should have taken up in so urgent a fashion — involving trunk calls and telegrams — an invitation given

warmly, but on the spur of the moment, months before in Sydney. They had friends in common. Caroline was a widow, a doctor, and lived alone in this small country town. She was grey-haired, sturdy and, Sophie felt, mildly fantastic. Sophie herself was a pianist. This was almost all they knew about each other.

By way of explanation, Sophie now repeated, as she blindly snapped open the locks of her case, what she had said in yesterday's cells. "Suddenly the city just — got me down. A few free days turned up and I thought, if you didn't mind . . ."

This was so far from being a characteristic impulse that she hardly knew how to account for herself. The universe was hostile. The sun rose in the west. She was in danger. Only strangers might not be malevolent. Something like all this was wrong.

"Mind!" Caroline clapped her hands to her head, then fixed her springy hair behind her ears. "If you knew how we like to be visited! Now come and have lunch. Then we'll produce some of this famous country air for you. Scoot round in the car. There were mushrooms out the other day."

"Really?"

They both smiled and relaxed slightly.

Sophie was not surprised to find that the mushrooms had been claimed by hungrier souls since Caroline first noticed them, but there was a wonderful cloud-streaked sky, a river, and waves of little hills to the horizon. Completing Caroline's circular tour, they returned to the house, took rugs on to the grass, and lay in the shade of a pear tree drinking iced coffee and losing control of the Sunday papers.

"You won't see much of me. I'm missing all

day and sometimes half the night, so you'll have the place to yourself. Mrs Barratt comes in to tidy up. Oh, and I forgot to show you the piano. Mr Crump tuned it yesterday as a special favor. Came out of retirement!"

"Caroline." Sophie looked at her in dismay. "All this trouble you've gone to. So kind. It makes me feel—"

"-What?"

"Terrible. False colors, false pretences."

"I'll expect to hear of hours of practice when I get back every night," Caroline continued firmly.

"But I wasn't going to practise. I don't practise much any more. I'm — getting lazy," she improvised.

Caroline glanced at her quickly, then thumped at a party of scavenging ants with a folded newspaper. "Of course you'll practise."

Sophie shook her head. "Truly. It doesn't matter. Music's not the most important thing in the world." She gazed down the grassy slope and up to the hills in the distance.

"The most important thing in the world!" Scornful, roused, Caroline asked, "What is?"

"Ah, well . . ." Sophie's voice had no expression. She did know.

But such a statement struck Caroline as merely silly. Quite apart from medicine, the world was full of causes, calls to effort. The list in her mind was endless. Even the imminent perfecting of man through education was not a thing she had doubts about.

The women eyed each other with goodwill and an awareness that they were natural strangers. The views of persons like that could not be taken seriously. It was almost a relief. They talked about politics and local controversies, and it scarcely mattered at all what anyone said.

"You see!" Caroline stopped herself in mid-flight. "There's no-one here to argue with except a few old cronies. So I rush back to Sydney every month, go round the galleries, and see some plays. Try to keep up . . ."

Sophie realized that she was at least partly in earnest, and felt a pang of appalled compassion as she habitually did now at what interested people, at the trouble they took to act in the world, move. If only they knew!

"I'm going to leave you in peace now while I do some weeding. It's the Sunday ritual." Caroline stood up, looking resolutely about the big garden.

How courageous! What fortitude! Pity moved in Sophie and she got to her knees, ready to stand. "Let me help. I can weed, or anything." There was so much Caroline and everyone must never know.

"Stay there. You're on holiday. You can do some watering later." Preoccupied already, Caroline disappeared round the corner of the house, and Sophie sank back horizontal on the rug, and the light went out of her. Tears came to her eyes and she wiped them away and sat up again.

Her instruction resumed at full volume. Phrases that were by now only symbols indicating the devastation caused by grief transfixed her attention. The instruction had been going on for several months now. When she was in company or asleep, the volume was reduced, but the question and answer, the statements below the level of thought, never really stopped. A massive shock. A surprise of great magnitude. "A great surprise," she repeated obediently.

In its way, the instruction was trying to save her, Sophie supposed. It wanted her to live. She humored this innocent desire, attending to its words as though it were a kind, stupid teacher.

To be or not to be. Her lips half-smiled. Out in the world, when she lived out in the world, she had been stringently trained: nothing about herself, her life, her death, was worth taking seriously. Sophie smiled again. No wonder humankind could not bear very much reality. The things that happened.

Caroline crossed the lawn, purposeful and silent, grasping secateurs. A long interval followed during which only bees and shadows and leaves moved in the garden. The green tranquillity wavered and shifted in the currents of air. Sophie's heart jumped about in disorder as it often did now as the cat suddenly fled past her, out of a shady ambush. Patches of her forehead and head froze with fright. She took a deep breath and tried to stifle the bumping in her chest. Only the cat. Only Caroline's poor cat.

"Puss? . . . Puss?" Her tone compelled the cat to acknowledge her presence. "Don't be frightened. How nervous you are. Everything's all right."

The stricken animal thawed and fled, leaving a haunted path. Sophie mourned for it, mourned for its view of her as an object potentially powerful and evil, hardened. How wise

are you, cat, to resist my blandishments, my tender voice, my endless — I would have you think — capacity for kindness. It is almost endless, too. I would never hurt you, except by accident, and hardly even then. But, oh, how sad I am, cat.

Her mouth smiled at “sad”.

“You look very contented and peaceful there. That’s good. Means you’re settling in. Who volunteered to water the garden while I make some dinner?”

Syringa, woodbine, japonica, tangled cascades of roses hanging from old fences. Sophie wandered, trailing the hose, its silver spray hissing gently. Daylight was fading from moment to moment, the air cooling. Magpies held a dialogue as they flew, swooping low. Hearing them, Sophie told herself: I’m in the bush.

Then suicide thought of her. Unlike the instruction, which was of a labyrinthine complexity, suicide used simple words and images and when it overcame the instruction and claimed her in a tug-o’-war, it used them ceaselessly. Suicide was easy provided the balance of your mind was not disturbed. The essential point, neglected by faint hearts, was to commit the deed in a place where you would not soon be discovered. You would leave the city, taking with you a quantity of pain-killing drugs or sleeping pills. You would post one or two letters before catching the train, because it would be cruel never to let yourself be found. And there were the reasons, the reasons you were dying for . . . Which no-one wanted to know and would prefer never to understand, anyway . . . Then you would board a train going in a direction previously chosen, climb out at the selected station, walk to a secluded spot, lie down, and swallow the tablets. Having taken care, of course, to bring water.

Sophie sighed. A crude, peculiar, *material* way of dealing with extreme unhappiness. Like wars. Beside the point. “What will you have to drink? Whisky? There’s everything.” Caroline stood at the front door looking out remotely at the sky and the darkening garden.

“Thank you. Yes. I was watching the light on the hills there.”

“Lovely. You’ve brought good weather. Whisky, then. Don’t stay out in the cold.”

“I’ll just put the hose away.”

Lights came on in the house. As Sophie went along the side path, she felt the consoling silence all about. Silence lay enormous behind the

sound of her footsteps on grass, the dragging hose, late bird cries, insect scrapings.

*Because*, the argument resumed, being dead was not what she wanted most. It was the only alternative. Just as, presumably, generals did not want, first and foremost, dead bodies and buildings fallen down.

Over dinner, Caroline, who had emerged as funny, generous and Christian, asked about their Sydney friends and showed an inclination to dissect them as though they were interesting cadavers. Dismay ground Sophie to an almost total stop when this disloyalty displayed itself. Any betrayal, of whatever order, instantly related itself to the great calamities of the world. Which of these had not originated in one person? Her knife and fork grew heavy in her fingers, and it was an effort to breathe. Her dear friends! Unfitted to judge though she might be — no Christian — she knew she would judge Caroline later. Though even dear friends were now like faded frescoes. That response in their defence was only an outdated reflex. It was of no consequence that they would never meet again, so how should Caroline’s mild malice disturb?

While Sophie drooped over her dinner, Caroline more and more inclined to ramble, and finally rambled right out of the field of friendship into small-town scandal — unfrocked ministers and cows that ate free-growing marijuana.

“Everyone drinks their milk. Can you wonder at the things that go on here?”

Sophie laughed with relief, a little too long.

In the morning Caroline left for the hospital at seven. Sophie showered, dressed and brushed her hair, advancing jerkily from one operation to the next. No-one and nothing could be relied on now. Nothing was automatic. The simplest habits had deserted. Everything took thought, yet thought was what she had nothing to spare of. Because she had so much to think about and it was so important. And nobody realized.

Wandering through to the kitchen, she made some toast and coffee and set it out on the back verandah in the sun. The grey cat appeared at the door and saw her, coffee-cup raised to lips, and after a moment’s paralysis slunk off like a hunted thing. Sophie called after it in a beseeching voice, then rose and went to stand in the doorway. She spoke to the breathing garden, hoping the cat could hear, but there was no sign of it. When the dishes were washed, she trundled



out the lawn-mower and mowed some square yards of Caroline's dewy grass. The day was beautiful.

It was rather feeble to attempt suicide and fail. It definitely placed a person's good faith in doubt. It was worse to make an attempt with the conscious intention of not succeeding. Anyway. Anyway, she felt contempt for suicide. Butcher yourself? Why should you? Fall into a decline because nothing was what it seemed? Some had ambitions perhaps to enter the higher reaches of blackmail. But Sophie had never thought of suicide. It was just that lately she could not stop thinking about it.

Little ridges of grass that had escaped her stood conspicuous. She pushed the mower to and fro, stopping once to throw off her sweater. Only a psychosis could make the deed anything but (Sophie pushed the mower so hard that it was airborne) pusillanimous. Pusillanimous. And had she any desire to be that?

Worn out by the violence of her repudiation, she stopped for an indignant breath. Then nervously ran the four fingers of her left hand across her forehead. It was just a fact that she wasn't safe, wasn't safe yet. And all you had to do was not be found too soon . . .

Small black ants were swarming over her bare feet and ankles. She stamped about, brushing the tenacious ones away, dropping the handle of the mower. Bent right over, hair hanging, her glance slanted suddenly sideways: the cat sat under a bush some yards away, watching with round yellow eyes.

Cautiously, Sophie lowered herself to the ground, sat motionless on the grass, exchanging eyes with the cat. Then she began very gently to talk to it, and the cat listened, for the first time showing no fear.

Sophie looked vaguely into its green retreat, and rested her cheek on her knee. She closed her eyes. It was the tone of voice, she told herself. Cats must be susceptible to voices. And there was a slight, but temporary, amelioration of her suffering.

It was not a thing you could do, not in an immediate, noticeable way. It was not considerate to wreck other people's lives for no better reason than that you would prefer to be dead.

Wreck? Well, perhaps that did overstate the case. Inconvenience, she amended.

"What a pity!" Sophie muttered. "What a pity!" It was hard to understand, something she could never be reconciled to. Real love was

not so common even in so large a place as the world.

Mortal wounds, the instruction said. The psychic knife went in; the psychic blood came out . . .

My own doing, Sophie reflected, while the instruction rattled on in the background monotonously. It was she who had done the empowering, delivered herself over. Nothing she had previously understood or learned had prepared her. Yet her life had never been sheltered. Again, now, the magnitude of her surprise, of her mistake, bore down on her. Public violence, bombs, wars, were this private passion to destroy made manifest on a large scale.

"That grass is wet, Sophie. I have to call on old Mr Crisp out past the church, so I came in to see if you were all right." As Caroline emerged from the tunnel of honeysuckle and may, Sophie scrambled up uncertainly, rubbing damp hands and cut grass on her damp slacks. "Oh, Caroline . . . I was mowing the grass . . . I was talking to the cat."

"Did she let you?"

"In a way. Almost."

"I don't think there's time, or we could have a cup of tea together. — Walk back up to the car with me, anyway. I only looked in. — She was operated on once, poor Cat, and I'm convinced the vet was led astray by curiosity. He'd just qualified. She lost faith in the human race."

Leaf mould lay thick beneath the trees.

"How awful," Sophie said.

"Mmm." Caroline frowned at the path for a few steps, then looked up briskly, glancing at her watch. "You could try feeding her if you want to be friends. There's plenty of stuff in the fridge."

"I don't think she's hungry."

Her right hand on the gate, Caroline paused. Sophie looked at this small tough hand and waited obediently. She had the impression that she was expecting a message, and that perhaps Caroline was the person who was going to deliver it to her.

But Caroline just said absently, "No, it isn't that. It's a bit demoralising to have her flitting about like the victim of a vivisectionist. Which she is. — I really wondered if I'd find you practising. I was going to creep off. It isn't right, Sophie, that you should throw away your talents."

# THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

The Australian Society of Authors is an organisation devoted to the interests of authors.

The Society does not make any profit and depends very largely upon the voluntary work given to it by its Officers, its Committee of Management, its Council and interested members.

The Society was founded in 1963 and at the present time has a membership of about 1500. Members live in every State of Australia, its Territories, New Zealand and overseas.

The Society's business is conducted from its office by its Executive Secretary under the direction of the Committee of Management (which meets on the fourth Monday of every month), with the authority of the Quarterly General Meetings and of the Annual Meeting.

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- Administered the Mary Drake Award.
- Published "The Australian Author" quarterly since January 1969.

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Though once upon a time she herself had said this sort of thing to encourage other people, Sophie smiled with a sort of heartless gaiety. "Did you really come back for that?"

"I did indeed. You practise, my girl, or we'll turn you into a medico and send you overseas to do good." Her concern, which seemed real enough, disinterested, made Sophie feel ashamed of her own duplicity, though the concern was so misplaced and even preposterous that she laughed aloud.

"How can you think it matters, Caroline? Talent. Playing pianos. And even give it priority over doing good?" She felt tremendously amused, full of laughter.

"Just get on with it!" With a minatory nod, Caroline made for her little yellow car, and Sophie waited and waved through the familiar grating and humming of gears, then Caroline was gone, and so was the hilarity that had felt so permanent.

Alone again, Sophie conversed with herself about the weather as though to distract an invalid acquaintance. But, really, the light *was* dazzling, like the first morning of the world. Radiance pealed across Caroline's small valley from sky to dandelion. After staring into it for a time, Sophie continued back along the path to the uneven square of cut grass. Safely there, and gazing as if to count the blades, it seemed to her that something as mesmeric, as impersonal, and of the dimensions of the sun, was before her eyes. And this was the instruction.

"The Coopers and Stephen rang to say how much they enjoyed the other night." Caroline looked up from the telephone directory.

"How punctilious! They were nice." On her way to the kitchen with a large copper vase, Sophie paused.

"You were a great success."

"I liked them, too."

Caroline began to turn the pages distractedly. "I'm looking for that new garage-man who took Alec's place. The car's due for an oil change." She sighed and let the book fall shut. "I'll call in when I'm passing. — It's a shame you have to go tomorrow. There's no reason to rush away."

"I do work," Sophie reminded her. "Someone's going to notice I'm not there." While she would almost certainly be nowhere, there was no reason to burden Caroline with that information.

"I daresay."

"You've been marvellous."

With Caroline gone, chains dropping from her, Sophie sank from the platform in space where it was laid on her to make conversation and act as if she believed in the great conspiracy. It was amazing what quantities of time could be passed out there when necessary, she reflected, filling the vase with fresh water. Some people spent the whole of their lives there without even knowing it. Like Ivan Illitch and innumerable other characters who crowded to suggest themselves. Sophie clasped her hands round the cold vase and rushed through to the sitting-room, leaning slightly backwards to avoid the spreading branches of japonica. Placing the vase carefully on the low table by the windows, she escaped from the house to the open air, and stood bathed in surprise.

Here was the real world you could never remember inside houses: soft rounded hills and trees that had been there before history. Sophie looked at them and breathed. "Help," her eyes said to the hills. "Help," to the clouds, tree-tops and grass. They bore her appeal like so many gods, with silence, no change of expression. She continued to look at them.

She continued to look at them, but addressed no more petitions. Words trivialized. Thought trivialized. Her unhappiness was so extraordinary that it was literally not to be thought of.

She stood motionless. But from a distance she was being stared at. After a time, her eyes were pulled to the cat's eyes, and she slowly roused herself and looked into them with some sense of obligation. Knowing it would come to her, Sophie drew a breath to summon the cat. Then she frowned and closed her mouth, repelled by her power over something more vulnerable than herself. She felt physically a nausea of the heart, and understood that 'heartsick' wasn't, after all, poetic rhetoric, but a description of a state of being. One which it would be preferable never to know.

Animals should beware of humans. How tempting, evidently, to play God and play games with little puppets for the sake of testing your skills . . . Sophie shivered and shook her head. Some humans should beware of others. All should learn early the safety-limits of love and trust. But what a pity! How could you? How could you? she thought. And how could I?

Some other day, if there was another day, she would think about these rights and wrongs.

Glancing again at the cat, who was still awaiting commands, Sophie said, "Be independent," and feeling itself without instruction, the cat prowled in a circle, curled up and slept.

Caroline had stolen a remarkable pink rock from a faraway beach, a golden-pink rock worn into a *chaise-longue* by the Pacific. Now Sophie lay on its sea-washed curves, supported and warmed, grateful to the rock. She closed her eyes and a single line creased her forehead. Minutes passed, and she opened her eyes. In the whole sky there were only three small clouds, three of Dali's small, premonitory clouds, looking as unreal as his. It was possible that this time tomorrow, this time tomorrow, she would be dead.

Of whom, Sophie debated with herself coldly, might that not be said?

She made no response. It was unanswerably true that she had placed herself in the very hands of death, she was in the airy halls of death now, with all formalities complete except the last one. Everywhere there was the certainty, the expectation, that she would make the final move at any moment. And it was so clear that the alternative to death was something worse.

If she lived, sooner or later this sorrow would go, and then she would change and be a different person and a worse one, dead in truth. For the sorrow was all that was left of the best she had had it in her to be, the best she had been able to offer the world, the end result of the experiment that she was. So it was bound to seem of some importance, just now, while she could still understand it.

She gave a shallow sigh and shifted her position on the rock. In its frame of leaves, the cat dozed. Everything altered minutely. The small painted clouds had disappeared. And, of course, it was foolish to complain. In a way, she had been quite surpassingly lucky; and there was a great deal left. The only thing that seemed to have vanished entirely, now that she had time to search among the ruins, was hope.

"Hope . . ." she said aloud, in a toneless voice. "It's amazing what a difference it makes."

The two women sat drinking coffee and glancing at their watches in the minutes to spare before leaving for the station and the Sydney train. For the twentieth time without success, Sophie

sought to thank Caroline. "Rubbish! I'm only sorry you're going so soon." And they both smiled and rose from their chairs, glancing about to verify that Sophie's luggage was where she had placed it ten minutes earlier.

"Say goodbye to Cat," Caroline ordered. "You've made a friend there!" She swooped down on her pet and juggled it into Sophie's arms, before hurrying off to bring the car round to the front door.

For seconds Sophie held it against her chest, saying nothing whatever, feeling comforted by the weight, the warmth, the dumb communion, by the something like forbearance towards her of Caroline's cat. She let it leap down from the nest of her arms.

Lifting her bag, Sophie cast a final look at the silent room and its furnishings, and went to the door. As she turned the handle, with nothing in her mind but cars and trains and Caroline and, just beyond them all, the city looming, it occurred to her that, regardless of what was past, or what she now knew, she herself might still have the capacity to love. Need not, under some immutable compulsion, merely react. The idea presented itself in so many words. A telegram.

Like a soldier who, perhaps mortally wounded and lying in blood, hears a distant voice that means either death or survival, and unable to care, still half-lifts his head, Sophie listened.

Love . . . That poor debased word. Poor love. Oh, poor love, she thought. It was the core and essence of her nature and a force in her compared with which any other was slight indeed. Still alive? Even yet? Ever again? More illusions? Good feeling? The psychic knives had finished all that. Surely? It only remained for her to follow. Surely?

Yet in the car, while she and Caroline exchanged remarks, Sophie's mind considered her chances. Now and then it condensed its findings and threw her a monosyllabic report, like a simple computer. Her chances were exactly that — a chance. And the sorrow . . . Only yesterday, the other day, she had believed that if she lived the sorrow would go and that she would then know a worse death than that of her body. But as it seemed *now*, the sorrow would never go, could never leave her; like all else in life it had become an aspect of her person. As her love had. How strange, she thought, that nothing ever goes.

Nevertheless, detailing as they did the unconditional terms of her existence, these thoughts

were in themselves a death. Had she been consulted, she would have chosen none of this, none of these steely thorns, inconceivable relinquishments. But no-one had asked her; she had had no choice. One or two strengths and the love were what she had, and all she had, and what she would always have. And that was that.

Caroline said, "Hear that clanking? I need a new car."

Pedestrians cut through the tangle of traffic near the railway station. A dog pranced by looking for adventure. Sophie stared at shopping-baskets, at boys on bikes, while debating the merits of this car over that with Caroline. "Small ones are easier to park."

Suicide produced just then, like a super-salesman, a picture of the very place. She knew it! Ideal, ideal. A hidden clearing off the track where you wouldn't be found too soon . . .

And the instruction resumed its endless cries of surprise, trying to save her. How could you, how could you, it said. The psychic knife went in, it said. The psychic blood came out.

Yes, yes, Sophie agreed. She had heard this many times before, and could only suppose the reiteration had once served a useful purpose. But how like a human organization! Even at the place of instruction, the right hand did not know what the left was doing. Someone down the line had not yet been informed that times had changed; the long-expected message had been received and was under the deepest consideration.

Walking up the station ramp with Caroline, Sophie took no notice, letting the two sides battle it out. They would learn, they would learn. She had learned.

## **Dr. Max Herz, Surgeon**

### **The Human Price of Civil and Medical Bigotry in Australia**

Professor B. Roser, M.B., B.S., Ph.D., F.R.C.P.A., wrote in "New Doctor": "Max Herz was brave, good; above all, humane. He was persecuted by the medical profession for just these qualities; for being uncompromisingly honest, generous, skilful. He would have felt at home and not so lonely in his persecution (today) . . . the conservative element in the profession is as vituperative as ever it was. We need more Max Herzs, and we need more Joan Clarkes to tell us about them."

The conservative malaise which has made this a moribund society isn't confined to the men of medicine. The publishing world is inhospitable to the Joan Clarkes and uninterested in the Herzs. As George Ferguson remarked on his retirement, "So much of the decision making in publishing seems to have passed into the hands of people who appear to be much more concerned with money than with books or people."

Herz of the enlightenment, and of the traditions of von Humboldt, Schiller and Goethe, was also an artist, musician, writer, and embodied qualities which seemed destined to change the world. No such optimism permeates the West today.

If there is hope for Australian writing it is with ventures such as APCOL. Write for information about joining and our catalogue. But don't look for stocks of Herz at large bookstores; they stock for only a few weeks. Write us. It costs \$13.95.

**ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING COOPERATIVE LTD.,  
10 Shepherd Street, Chippendale, NSW 2008**

AMIRAH INGLIS **Back to Moresby**

I have just been back to Port Moresby where I had lived with my husband and children from February 1967 until we left Papua New Guinea in April 1975, with two breaks in between.

We had left before independence; Papua New Guinea was a self-governing Australian colony and we were colonisers. Now I was a new sort of B4: before independence instead of before the second world war. I wonder how you'll find it, I was asked. It will be so different now with no one you know still there, said some; nothing will be changed at all, said others; either way it didn't sound too promising.

In 1968, after having lived in Moresby for about fifteen months, I had written an article for Tom Fitzgerald's *Nation*, so amazed had I been by the two quite separate worlds of black and white which we had built on the shores of Fairfax Harbor, and even more amazed by the evidence all around me that Port Moresby was a white man's town. *Nation* gave the article the acute title "A Tale of Two Cities" and it caused a little stir among the expatriates of the town and some indignant letters to the editor. But I had been right all the same.

I left Sydney on 12 December, just about ten years after the first arrival and after an absence of twenty months, during which the country had gained its independence. It was the "Territory" when we first arrived, it was Papua New Guinea when we left. We had arrived first on an Electra in the early morning, after flying all night; we had left on a T.A.A. 727. I arrived in Port Moresby this time on an Air Niugini second-hand 707 dressed in Papua New Guinea red and black. The changes had begun on the plane.

In the "old days" the northern bound planes

were full of Australian school children coming home for the summer holidays and, at other times of the year, Australian officials coming home from leave, greeting old friends, boozing with their mates and taking over the plane like a touring football club. This time I knew only one of my fellow passengers, a young Bougainvillean teacher going home from a course in Canberra. There were twenty Papua New Guineans travelling on our plane, five of them were women, only one of whom was a coastal Papuan. A change already. The hosties — Papuan, mixed race and New Guinean — were pleasant and efficient, more diffident than the ones I was used to and less plastic.

As we came over the islands of Fairfax Harbor through the grey skies of the wet season and landed straight into the Lahara — the wet season wind that blows from the north-west — there were more changes. The 707 taxied up to the terminal and we were allowed off as soon as it had stopped, no longer being half-choked by the spray which the highly paid Australian quarantine officer had always aimed at us with each hand. The airport workers, dressed in shorts and shirts, were smart and stood up straight; they no longer shuffled about in lap laps looking as though they didn't know what they were supposed to do, and waiting for a white man to give them some orders, as they had on our first arrival. All the customs and immigration business was in the hands of Papua New Guineans, or "nationals", which I soon learned was the word used everywhere now to replace "natives", "local officers", "indigenes" and all the euphemisms which we had coined to avoid saying black and to replace the cumbersome Papua New Guinean. One customs officer was a woman! The stamping and searching were painless and effi-

cient, a fact which wouldn't be worth remarking on, except that it's only fifteen months since quite sensible people were wondering whether Papua New Guineans were "ready" for independence, and not much longer than that since jobs like this were done only by white men.

We drove out to the University of Papua New Guinea along Independence Drive, a divided, six-lane highway which at the moment leads into a hill and is known to the university wits as "the Melanesian Way". I am struck by the beauty of the town, even away from the coast, a region which the coastal people who owned this ground before colonisation visited only to hunt for food. The changes became more striking after I had settled into Gerehu, a government housing estate stuck past the university and in the middle of nowhere. At Gerehu our neighbors are nationals, which is something I haven't experienced before either in the town, where we lived for a few months in 1967, or at Waigani, the university settlement where we had lived since then. These nationals live in three bed-room government houses, have cars and go off to office jobs every morning.

This, together with the brownness of the town, is the biggest change since we arrived. When I wrote my piece for *Nation*, I said that all white men were rich and all brown men poor. Now it is no longer true. Brown men have become rich and drive cars, old and new, large and small. The owners of Papua New Guinean wealth may still be the same overseas companies as they always were, but at least now the prospect of becoming rich yourself is there if you are brown; ten years ago it seemed impossible. A rich brown man may be a relation, a rich white man almost never was, though over the years the chances became slightly higher as inter-marriage no longer seemed race pollution. Whites committed to beliefs of racial equality were around, Papua New Guineans became educated and inter-marriage seemed less horrifying, even to those who earlier would not have approved, and not in the least horrifying to the educated. Today, at least six of the young nationals in the highest positions in government service have white wives or constant companions. The appearance on the street or beach of a white man with a brown woman doesn't raise an eyebrow, and the appearance of a white woman with a brown man not as many as it did when in 1968 our teen-age daughter was ordered to leave a Port Moresby picture theatre because

she insisted on sitting next to her Papua New Guinean school-boy friend, instead of sending him off to the side of the theatre.

Independence, with political control in national hands, and economic diversity, means that relations between brown and white have changed out of sight. Whites are polite to nationals. The particular tone of voice which I had never heard in my life until I went to Port Moresby has gone from the town: I heard it only once and then from the mouth of a very long-standing resident. No longer do white supervisors bawl out black supermarket employees in execrable pidgin; no longer do white foremen hurl filthy abuse at black laborers. Though there is not much socialising at Gerehu between the university teachers I was staying with and their public service neighbors, there would not have been much had they been white clerks. The kids play together, Doula, their young baby, disturbs our peace, and the adults smile at each other.

The kids are no longer likely to go to the same schools, though. There had been much discussion after self government and before independence about the education system which had been set up by the Australians, and how to manage it. There was a dual system of government primary schools: "A" (Australian syllabus) schools and "T" (Territory syllabus) schools, but Australians could (though very rarely did, except in the bush) go to "T" schools, and Papua New Guineans to "A" schools (provided that their English reached a satisfactory standard). Since independence, the "T" schools have become community schools, and no non-national can attend.

When we left Port Moresby, almost all the university primary school children attended the local Waigani school, set up as an experimental multi-racial demonstration school. All employees of the university, gardeners and teachers, typists and vice chancellor, could send their children there. Now that Waigani school has become a community school, all non-national children go to one of three primary schools in Boroko, four miles away. Community schools now charge an annual fee (which includes books) of K27.50 for the first child, K12.50 for the second and K7.50 for each additional child of the same family. Those nationals who want their children to receive an education in the Australian syllabus, or those who would like their children to go to a multi-national school, or a religious

school, can do so and there a quite a few who do, but they must pay several hundred kina a year for the privilege.

Since independence, the administration of the scarce resource of education is a great source of disgruntlement. Only one-third of those children who successfully complete grade 6 can get a place in secondary school. The town (and the country) is rapidly being saddled with the problem of those who leave school at grade six because they cannot get a place in high school. All these children — lumped together as “standard six drop-outs” — hang around the town and its neighboring villages with nothing to do. Competition for the few places in secondary school is stiff and, as the selection of candidates is in the hands of the area authority, there are many complaints. In Port Moresby the most frequent one is that so and so’s child, who came fourth in his class, didn’t get into high school “because he is from the Highlands” and those who make the selection are coastal Papuans. I couldn’t tell whether this was so, but it certainly is very strongly believed by those who are not coastal Papuans, as strongly as coastal Papuans believe that their town is being over-run by New

Guineans who are using up resources which should belong to them.

Whatever advisers say, the people of the Central Province don’t think of themselves only as belonging to a nation called Papua New Guinea, but at belonging to something called Papua, and those tough-looking, stocky, dark-skinned men who come down from Goroka and Hagen and Chimbu are foreigners. When times are good, there is not too much trouble, because in 1977 coastal Papuans no longer want to do the jobs which the immigrants do. They used to empty rubbish drums; before the second world war they used — as prisoners — to empty the night drums and do all the most menial jobs. Now the dirty work is done by those who have come from somewhere else. But when things get tight, when jobs are scarce and places in school few, then the people who were born in the place, who bore the brunt — as well as reaped the advantages — of the colonial collision, look with dislike and fear at the “foreigners” who threaten them and become an easy prey to xenophobia and racism.

It was a misunderstanding of this important truth about Papuan life that led to the under-

## Frank Moorhouse

talks about his work, his forthcoming film of *The Americans, Baby* that he’s making with Makavejev, the Push, trendies, and indicates how writers could be given a decent living.

There’s also Dennis Altman on contemporary culture, Carl Harrison-Ford on recent novels, Allan Ashbolt on Humphrey McQueen’s media, and articles on opera, David Hockney, and Rider Haggard — in Africa and Australia.

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estimation by almost every expatriate, and unfortunately also by the Pangu Party, of the Papuan independence movement, known as Papua Besena. It's Eric Wright, everyone agreed. He is Josephine Abaijah's Svengali, a white stirrer using our lovely Papuan girl. So he was deported by the self-governing Papua New Guinean government. And Papua Besena flourished. Pangu, by completely misjudging the political base of Papua Besena, put up some radical Motuans. Radical in many ways, including that they were cut off from the strength in the Motuan villages; they didn't go to church and they saw the United Church as a colonial hangover, forgetting that it had been called Papua Ekalesia not too long ago, and that it has great vitality. Papua Besena candidates swept the ground with these splendid young men who were politically so naive and organisationally so inept. They are likely to do it again in the coming elections and the new government will have to deal with Besena, to try and win those members of it who want to keep within the national boundary and negotiate with those who don't.

In the old days one would have heard these issues talked about in pubs; this time, nobody suggested that we should go out and talk over a drink, or that we should meet in a pub. The pubs have changed in many ways. Lunch at the Papua Hotel, two days before Christmas was an utterly new experience. Three-quarters of the patrons were nationals, where ten years ago the only Papua New Guineans in sight would have been the waiters and twenty months ago the only Papua New Guinean diners would have been guests at an official function.

The pubs have changed in less pleasant ways too. When we first arrived in Port Moresby several pubs or taverns were inter-racial meeting places and women could go to them. Now there are very few pubs where women go at all. This has happened very quickly. The Islander, which opened for business just before we left in April 1975, had then a 'boi bar' completely separate from the posh hotel and designed for beer swilling "natives". Inside the hotel were three other bars, mainly patronised by foreigners. Now the outside bar is very rough indeed, full of drunks and broken bottles; the "back bar" has drunks too, but is less rough than the outside bar. Both these bars serve beer only. The middle bar is dearer and the posh bar is dearer still. Both are now patronised by richer nationals and by

mixed groups of nationals and expatriates; though the middle bar is no longer a place for women. Pubs used to be divided by class and color, and the two were exactly the same; now they are not, but as there are no white men in the poorest class, there are no white men in the roughest bars.

The old housing policy taken over from colonial times has left the new country and its Housing Commission with a very difficult problem and one which at least one of its employees, Hugh Norwood, an English Quaker who has just left the commission for a job at the University of Papua New Guinea, says it can never solve by building houses. It seems that Port Moresby people don't want to buy houses; the commission has only been able to sell about five per cent. of the houses it has built. But the houses it rents are too expensive for nationals to rent without subsidy. The cost of building, servicing and maintaining houses for rent is so high, and the money which the commission has to borrow from the Government, at 10½ per cent., so expensive, that everyone who rents a commission house is being subsidised at the expense of the poor who can't afford to. What Hugh Norwood and others support — following Nigel Oram, author of *Colonial Town to Melanesian City* — is the "self-help" solution; provision of water and other amenities to land for which people have a secure title and letting them build any sort of house on it.

On the last day of my stay in Moresby, I was taken on a three hour tour of some of the settlements. Off the Rigo road, six miles or so from the centre of Port Moresby, we saw three settlements. In some, some Koiari people who come from the mountains behind Port Moresby have built themselves houses from scrap materials and bush materials, have *bought* piped water from the City Council, have installed a drainage system, dug pit latrines and built a large church, and all without anyone either giving them anything or telling them what they must do. And in every case, says Hugh Norwood, the houses are being improved, not getting worse. It certainly looked impressive. At the back of this settlement, and living in a symbiotic relationship with the major settlement people, a small group of Morobe people from coastal New Guinea have built the most substantial and elaborate houses with concrete steps, concrete ornamental balustrades, concrete ornamental pots, forming elab-

orate and imposing entrances to large houses with shady verandahs, and front walls faced with flattened out beer cans arranged to look like ceramic tiles. Different brands of can are put together in squares and the whole is ingenious, attractive and cheap.

Further along the road, a settlement of Goilala people from the mountains west of Port Moresby have built a small village made of scrap materials and decorated it in traditional style. They paid K240 to have water brought in and have two standpipes which they have installed with concrete spillways underneath, as they have seen in the settlements designed by the Housing Commission. When we visited them they were preparing for a big festival; large numbers of pigs were in well built pens (they had a permit from the City Council to keep them) waiting to be slaughtered the following day, and a gate to the village marked STOP had been put up so that the settlement people could charge K2 admission to foreigners who might want to see the traditional dancing and dancers, and K5 to any who wanted to take photographs.

There were, I found, some things that hadn't changed. Port Moresby is still a *man's* town. Young women are cheeked in the street; others do a brisk trade at the Bluff Inn, where they

collect a group of drinkers and drive off in a P.M.V. to nearby bushes and make two Kina a time.

On the Sunday before Christmas, a perfect, hot, sunny day with the high tide at 2.6 metres, we lay in the coolish water of Ela beach listening to the band of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary playing a program which included carols and "White Christmas". The band now plays "By Kind Permission of the Commissioner of Police", who is Pius Kerepia, O.B.E.; it now produces a roneoed program which a policeman distributes to the crowd, mostly of nationals, who come to listen while the expatriates loll in the water or sun themselves in bikinis on the sand. The program now ends with "Arise all you sons", the national anthem which is a stew of all other national anthems except the Star-spangled Banner, and has strong whiffs of the Marsellaise and the Internationale, and it wishes us a Merry Christmas and exhorts us to drive carefully. This is new. But it is still the same band, still conducted by Inspector Shacklady, and the experience is the same blissful one I think of when the yoga teacher asks me to shut my eyes and think of myself in a beautiful place.

I am in the water at Ela beach, in a high tide during the wet season, listening to the police band and eating ripe mangoes.

GEOFFREY HUTTON

## Playwrights in Search of a Direction

One evening late in 1955 I remember sitting in the Union Theatre in the University of Melbourne, ears cocked like a gun dog's for the first performance of the first Australian play produced by the Union Theatre Repertory Company. Behind me were John Sumner, the producer, and Hugh Hunt, artistic director of that pioneer dispenser of official patronage, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. At each interval in the action they muttered together in the carefully modulated voices of theatre people who have decisions to make but who don't want to disturb the paying customers. Sumner had declared all along that he wanted to do Australian plays but he wasn't going to put one on the stage until he thought it good enough.

In the company's third season he had found one; it was Ray Lawler's whimsically titled *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. At the time the subject was thought rather way-out. Queensland cane-cutters and Carlton bar-maids were unfamiliar stage characters, and I was softly rebuked for having used the colloquial phrase "shacked up" in the then august columns of the *Age*.

The play had a warm press; it was described as good and gusty, idiomatic in its dialogue and situations with broad enough underlying themes to be understood by audiences which had difficulty with the slang and had never heard of Carlton or Queensland. Nobody thought of it as The Great Australian Play, that unforeseen, far-off event which was to plant an Australian Ibsen or Chekhov on the map of the theatrical world.

Nor was it, but what none of us knew was that Hunt decided to back the play, and to offer it to Olivier like a trump in a poker player's hand. Nor did we guess its golden future, its

long West End season with a fair-to-middling U.T.R.C. cast, its championship by Kenneth Tynan and its award of the London critics' prize as the play of the year. It all seemed too good to be true.

In a sense it was. I would not hold up *The Doll* as a masterpiece which threw wide the gates to Williamson, Hibberd, Buzo, Romeril and the others to march through like the saints. But it had the good fortune to arrive in London in the period of Wesker and the kitchen-sink drama, the sharp reaction from a period of classical revivals, tea-cup comedies and detective plays. The critics in revolt seized on this voice from the outlands and added their praise as a chorus. We discovered to our surprise that we were not second-class citizens after all.

This recognition had its effect on Australian audiences and on Australian playwrights. The home-made play was not something for earnest amateurs; it might be worth paying to see. The deep and abiding suspicion of the Australian play in the minds of commercial managements appeared as a conspiracy to promote imports at the expense of our own talent. Frustrated playwrights heard the message and sat down to their typewriters in a mood of optimism. One miracle might lead to another.

If they were not miracles, it did lead to two more important plays — Richard Beynon's *The Shifting Heart* and Alan Seymour's *The One Day of the Year*. The revived Australian drama had retreated from the fringe characters of Lawler and sunk its teeth deep into the national jugular vein. Beynon's theme was the xenophobia of Old Australians towards Italian migrants; Seymour's was the sacred myth of Anzac. The national school — if it could be

called that — was taking a direction. It was becoming a theatre of social criticism, a torchlight directed on our complacent assumptions, a demand to search our hearts. The plays were urban in setting (no more outback dramas), and they focussed, in the manner of the period, on the working classes. After a reading of *The Shifting Heart*, I was asked by a distinguished member of the Trust whether I didn't think that the play would be bad publicity for Australia. I had to remind him that most American plays were bad publicity for America, but somehow that country survived. If we asked PR men to outline plots we would have no playwrights left.

In fact, the Trust did back both plays (after *The One Day of the Year* had been rejected by the Board of Governors of the Adelaide Festival because it might be offensive to the R.S.L.). This, I think, was the most important fact about the revival, or the birth, of the Australian drama. For the first time in our history there was at least a measure of official support for the drama on more than a parochial scale. Groping back to the days of popular theatre, Bland Holt's melodramas died a natural death when people found something better to do with their time, the literary theatre of Louis Esson and the Pioneer Players was starved for lack of public support and even the Trust shied away from taking the poetic drama (Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly*) to Melbourne.

From an academic point of view it should be possible to write about plays as one can write about novels or poetry. The words are set down, with stage directions, and they can be read by anybody. It is much easier than reading music; less technical expertise is needed and the playwright has a far better chance of seeing his works published. In the last two years most of my acquaintance with Australian plays has been through reading rather than viewing. But the playwright is working in the performing arts, and unless he is backed by production he will wither on the vine. Backed by a grant, a working wife or some other form of income, the novelist can shut himself up and write his heart out. At the end he has a completed opus to offer to the publishers, or to an agent who will do the legwork for him. His chances may be greater or smaller but even today the cost of publishing a book and of finding retailers to sell it is not so formidable as the cost of trimming, tailoring, rehearsing and mounting a play on anything but an experimental scale. The Australian novel

flourished, or at least, survived, long before the Australian play made its break-through. It had fewer obstacles to overcome.

The battle for a subsidised theatre was long and sweaty; it was finally turned by a benign confidence-trick. Somehow the idea was sold to the Australian public that a theatre trust would make a better memorial to a royal visit than a lump of stone or a public building in Canberra. Since the Queen was more interested in horses than the stage the decision had its small irony, but while the Trust came in for a lot of buffeting from theatrical rebels, I think we can thank Nugget Coombs and his friends for breaking the door open to a publicly supported theatre at a time when the commercial theatre was approaching its death-throes.

Since this is not an attempt to write a history of the professional theatre companies which now spread from ocean to ocean, nor to retail the political in-fighting involved in the distribution of public largesse, it is enough to make the point that theatrical writing of vitality and consequence, or even the humbler sorts of entertainment, cannot exist and grow without a stage and an audience. The case is clearer when we turn to television and radio writing, but the principle is the same. The audiences may vary and the writer may try to give them what they want rather than what he wants, but without bridges to the public he is cut off.

The playwrights of the late 1950s did indeed feel cut off, and they took their wares elsewhere, to our own detriment. Sumner Locke Elliott went to New York where he bought a brownstone house on the East side and went in for TV writing, later to become a highly successful novelist. Beynon went to London where he had already created a secure reputation. Lawler was in a different position. *The Doll* failed to interest New York audiences but was bought up as a film script, "opened out" at great expense and ironed out in the process. Lawler had made himself financially independent, which may be one reason why he has continued to write Australian plays. Seymour, like Beynon, set off for London to be "near the market". What was offering them in Australia was not enough at the time. Seymour and Beynon, in particular, had given the Australian play a direction. The process of social purgation had given it a salutary shock and, perhaps because of its novelty, it had won audiences. *The One Day of the Year*

and *The Shifting Heart* were timely plays, and I doubt whether they could be revived with success. The timeless play had not arrived.

Nor has it yet, but what we have seen is a continual shift in emphasis, in style and in subject matter. The Australian play of the post-war years had been absorbed in the working classes, seeking a nationalist stamp by tuning in to the talk of the public bar, although for several years it was castrated by the efforts of the police and the judgment of the courts. John Hepworth went out to the fringe in *End of the Rainbow*. Naturalism was built on a kind of romantic view of the have-nots, like the brothel-obsession of nineteenth century French novelists. The writers were in the main middle-class voyeurs reporting on what went on beyond their immediate experience. The Irish and the Russians were blessed with languages rich in natural images; they talked poetry without meaning to. Strine offered a limited vocabulary; to make the inarticulate articulate was an unrewarding task for the serious playwright who refused to laugh at the lower orders. The middle-class play is frequently damned as conventional. The working-class play could be just as taboo-ridden. For emotional release it turned too often to fists and boots, the last weapons of the tongue-tied.

From its launching-pad the Australian play has probed many areas. In his magisterial way Patrick White turned from the novel to the stage, handing down his plays as complete and finished products which were not to be tampered with. After reading *The Ham Funeral* I felt that he might be the dramatic writer who could establish the Australian play as he established the Australian novel in the world view. After seeing the rest of his opus I was unable to find a single play which was really effective in theatrical terms. Form and content were never quite in balance.

The ancient distinction between men of letters who are fascinated by theatre (Henry James, for example), and men of the theatre by some genetic accident, has never been disproved, in spite of the brilliant exceptions. David Martin, like Vance Palmer, applied himself seriously to the task of producing the well-made play — plot, characters, dialogue, curtains — but the stage writing never left the drawing-board. Tom Keneally let his imagination flow freely without the ascetic discipline of the backstage man, but he allowed his content to overflow. Hal Porter's studied rejection of the vernacular left him in

hermetic isolation. The Australian play was alive and kicking, but it had not yet found its direction, its natural stamp.

The search has been long. The vogue for Australian roots produced several historical plays (Buzo's *Macquarie*, Lawler's *The Man Who Shot the Albatross*), Hopgood carried on the trend of social observation with his lively satire *And the Big Men Fly*. Playwrights had no central propagandist theme, like the Irish, nor did they go digging for themes like Hochhuch. Hopgood handled the hottest political potato of the period, the Vietnamese war, but so nervously that nobody knew what he was saying. The home-made play was established, rather in the style of English repertory. Television, followed later by film-making, offered a base for dramatic writers. They did not have to spend the day teaching and hopefully scratch out plays after dinner. Which way was the Australian drama heading? And when was it likely to achieve that relaxed maturity which would produce classics?

These questions are not answered yet. What took place was the great explosion, the big bang which some physicists believe to have been the origin of the universe. I find it curious that for all Sydney's anthill activity and its possession of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) the pioneering has largely been done in Melbourne. The old U.T.R.C., a distant cousin of the University of Melbourne, created a professional, non-commercial theatre while the Old Tote was still a shed. And La Mama was the small womb for the Actors' Performing Group at the Pram Factory. As a home for Australian playwrights the Melbourne Theatre Company did more than its detractors will admit (Buzo made his home there as resident dramatist, and it took up Williamson with enthusiasm). But the Carlton Commando opened fire on the MTC. It was too big and too successful. Also it was handed out too much public money. The patron of the Australian playwright was branded as the Establishment theatre. Carlton was to be the democratic, populist centre of the performing arts. The credo fired the Nimrod in Sydney. The indigenous theatre has become a battleground, with theatre restaurants and the mass media snapping up trifles from the playwright's typewriter. Popular Theatre has become the slogan against "the conservatism, snobbishness and derivativeness [which] still endures behind

token and superficial gestures towards the indigenous". *Les aristocrats à la lanterne*.

The quotation is from Jack Hibberd's preface to *Three Popular Plays* (Outback Press). Further on Hibberd writes: "None of these plays stoop to psychological explanation, something I am not very good at; it also bores me to death. They strive to work emblematically through scenic action and extroversion, an agglutination of facts, fibs, images, songs, occasions, jokes, straight lefts, and inexplicable distemper. At the very least they hopefully operate as good dramatic yarns."

This back-hander at the literary drama was delivered with more vigor by John Timlin in his angry manifesto *Pramocracy, the alternative theatre in Carlton*. Emerging from "a loose assemblage of people", mostly from the University of Melbourne, "it was a rough and tough group, heavily iconoclastic and united in its contempt for theatres like the Old Tote and the Melbourne Theatre Company." The Pram Factory was to be a populist, jingoist theatre, depending on the actors' movements rather than their words. It was to revive the tradition of old-time vaudeville in a new context. It was, in effect, to be anti-literary, as Australian as a bunyip, politically radical but not explicit enough to be actively propagandist. The Australian playwright was invited to choose between a theatre of words, controlled by a director, and a theatre of workers' participation, action and ad libbing. The standard-bearing playwrights of the angry Carltonians were Jack Hibberd and John Rome- ril.

The effects of this theatrical canon have been to produce plays which are not exportable and can be read only in a kind of shorthand. The actor is sharing his experience with the audience; each performance is an event in itself and none can be adequately recorded on the printed page. *The Legend of King O'Malley*, put together in Sydney by Michael Boddy and Robert Ellis (with the help of the cast) had music too, popular jingles with a period flavor. Hibberd followed the style in his evocation of two figures from Australian folk-lore, the boxer Les Darcy and the *prima donna* Dame Nellie Melba. Historical accuracy, like psychological explanation, was abandoned as a bore. Something lively was going on. Populist, but not very popular when one compares the thousands huddled around their TV sets with the 150 needed to pack the

Pram Factory. Hibberd's most durable play, *A Stretch of the Imagination*, does not conform to his manifesto. This rambling monologue, delivered by a drop-out from society, is rich in imagination and, in spite of denials, is strongly reminiscent of Becket.

In its own way the theatre of the fringe has become an Establishment of its own, arguing not against public subsidies but against the share going to the "bourgeois" theatre. Playwrights had a choice, Williamson and Buzo moving from group to group. The radical theatre was not politically attached to the Left, like the New Theatre of earlier days, except in its revues. It was lively and raucous, prepared to take a cock-shy at anything, at its worst when it attempted serious plays with which it had little sympathy or expertise. With TV and film rights on offer the Australian playwright has survived. But he or she (Barbara Vernon, Marien Dreyer, Betty Roland) had choices to make. Which direction should the Australian playwright take?

If there has been a confusion of signals it is not surprising. In the past twenty years the English theatre has swung like a weathercock in a high wind, from the championship of the working class to the theatre of cruelty, the zany explorations of Pinter and Orton to the brittle intellectualism of Stoppard. The American theatre has more of a stamp to it; far apart as they may be one can recognise Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill as countrymen of Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee. The Americans have the habit of asserting their nationality. So do the Australians.

This is a valuable quality, but it can also be a handicap. Williamson, whom I regard as our best playwright, has it like the rest. Retreating, or advancing, from the bush and the back street to the middle-class, we have evolved a theatre of sharp social observation, couched in the contemporary dialect, and concentrating on the abrasive relations of sharp young people on the make. While much of our radio and TV writing is sloppy and no more than Fair Average Quality, we can see plays written with technical skill and a sharp eye for our contemporary mores. This is the first step towards making a school of writers for the theatre. Their plays are recognisable both in characters and in speech. They move; they scrupulously avoid that theatrical cliché, the totally predictable character. If few of their plays are exportable we have no reason to apologise. One must begin at home,

and to most of the world Australia is a little-known country of no great interest. It is not far enough from the ethos of the Western world to have an exotic appeal. If there is something missing, what is it?

Others have made what I think is a valid point. Observation and dexterity are not, in the end, enough. Almost, but not quite. Williamson's *Jugglers Three* was a brilliant and psychologically acute study of the soldiers from the wars returning and finding that his two closest friends had been making love to his wife. It was a civilised treatment of a sexual subject which might have turned into a melodrama. Technically it was adept, to the point of brilliance. The language was rough, but the behavior curiously withdrawn. The study was clinical, and in clinics there is no room for anything more than expertise.

The missing quality is *compassion* — at least, that will do. Chekhov described *The Cherry Orchard* as a farce, but it was a play which has moved audiences to the point of tears. Miller's *The Crucible* was a brave play, reviving the

witch burnings of Salem with direct reference to the Joe McCarthy red-baiting of the 1950s. It was a serious play which risked the sneers of the sophisticated because it had something to say about people and because the author cared deeply about them. When he was not bumbling about, O'Neill wrote a few great plays; Albee and Williams, I think, never quite succeeded.

We are back to the starting-point. When will the great Australian play appear, sharply observed without being brittle, topical without being trendy, truthful without being turgid? *Three* at least have appeared from the thin soil of South Africa, because Athol Fugard had both a cause and a deep feeling for humanity. We have young playwrights who have sharpened their tools and learned how to use them. They have shown that they are durable. What remains to be seen is whether they will become commercial writers or produce something in depth. No-one can be sure.

*Editor's note: Overland will welcome comments on this article, for publication in our next issue.*



Stephen Scheduling

HUMPHREY McQUEEN **A Critical Conceit**

The year is 1923. You are a Sydney solicitor whose genuine interest in the arts is matched by your concern with Australia. Your historical and political interests are stimulated this year by two more volumes of the official war history, by Walter Murdoch's biography of Deakin, and by Gordon Childe's account of *How Labor Governs*. On a visit to Melbourne you go to a performance by the Pioneer Players. Even allowing for the company's chronically undercapitalised financial position, you can't help wondering if their dependence on one-act plays is an encouraging sign for the future of Australian drama. Worse still, there's no new fiction worth reading — unless, of course, you count D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* as Australian. *Kangaroo* is a real puzzle, you remark to your friend and fellow lawyer, John Ferguson. For decades, defenders of nationalism in Australian literature have stressed the need for local color, as you yourself have done. The feel of the place, Australia's natural environment, that's what matters, that's what eventually will give Australian culture its universal significance. And that's exactly what Lawrence has got right. And the politics of course, for hadn't you helped Major John Scott organise that big anti-Bolshevik demonstration two years before? Yet, if an Englishman can get the environment so right in every way after just a few weeks, what has happened, you ponder, to your staple defence of Australian writing, namely, that it takes a long time for a migrant people to articulate their new surroundings?

None of these doubts trouble the editors of *Vision*, you think, as you read its first issue. The foreword announces that, "The object of this Quarterly is primarily to provide an outlet for good poetry, or for any prose that liberates the imagination by gaiety or fantasy . . . We would

vindicate the youthfulness of Australia, not by being modern, but by being alive." This certainly fits in with what you've always believed about Australia's pristine arcady, more especially compared to Europe since 1914. You'd like to believe that Australia was about to give birth to an artistic renaissance that would shake the rest of the world, but your legal training obliges you to look for hard evidence, and there is none. You welcome *Vision* and its enthusiasms, but can't help feeling that they seeking an escape from the hard work of resolving the problem to which you always return: how to establish a continuing creative effort that is undeniably Australian, and at the same time is indisputably art? Establishing standards, that's the thing. How else can we know if Cezanne, Eliot and Joyce will corrupt or toughen us? The August issue of *Art in Australia* arrives and fills you with anguish. Not because of the paintings. You still enjoy what Lambert is reported to call the "blotting paper school" of Australian landscape. What upsets you are the articles, particularly the final two — "Psycho-Analysis in Art" and "Oriental Australia". They are much better written than the normal contents. It's their implications which worry you. Surely Australia has enough difficulties finding itself in relation to art without introducing new and perplexing problems. The articles are quite simply wrong, you decide. Australia doesn't need introspection, and we are part of Europe, not of Asia. Nonetheless, you feel that a little more self-criticism on the part of our painters and writers would be useful.

Late in July, the *Bulletin* sparks a controversy over this very issue with a short item by Vance Palmer called "The Missing Critics". The article doesn't say any more than is in its title, but it's



obvious from the correspondence columns that Palmer has touched a raw nerve, as almost all writers in the country chorus their agreement. This episode even helps produce its own antidote in as much as the *Bulletin* — at last — agrees to publish a series of twelve articles on contemporary Australian writers.

A. G. Stephens is still flashing away in the *Bookfellow* where he's capable of devastatingly deadly critical remarks. In May, he suggests that Lambert's portraits have established him as Australia's finest painter of still life. Yet Stephens rarely manages more than discreet "remarks". Even in his heyday as the Red Pagan, he wasn't much more than an enlivener, with very little real staying power. Nonetheless, his long review of the Sydney showing of the London Exhibition Collection is full of bite:

Of the 200 exhibits, in a cosmopolitan view, perhaps two dozen are notable. Not many of the remainder are very badly painted; they are characteristically feeble. Simply the painters have nothing important to utter; they copy nature weakly or mechanically.

Most of these painters have strictly suburban intelligences, their minds have no size; no capacity; they lay a little egg of form or colour on canvas and cackle about Art.

Where is the sense of re-exporting the work of mediocre British painters such as L. B. Hall and J. R. Ashton as typical Australian art, when Britain exported the painters themselves a generation ago?

All this is fairly true, as you recognise, but it's not really aesthetic criticism. Still, it's a great deal better than the usual backscratching and backbiting.

It's a great year for the visual arts, and you go several times to the exhibition of modern European painting which Penleigh Boyd has assembled. You find the show rather dull, and wonder if a Cezanne or a van Gogh might not have been a good tonic. Modern art has its champions even here and one of the most extreme exponents, Roy de Maistre, is awarded the New South Wales Society of Artists Traveling Scholarship. Julian Ashton resigns from the society in protest.

More than anything else, you look forward to the English reviews of the Australian exhibition which is going to London. This will be an opportunity to get answers to your favorite puzzle: "Is it art?". There can be no doubt about the collection being "Australian", as any-

thing which is not what Lionel Lindsay approvingly describes as "old-fashioned" or "provincial" is deliberately excluded.

In general, the opinions of the English critics are unfavorable. P. G. Konody deplores the "sameness . . . monotony [and] lack of experiment" of the whole show. *The Times* thinks it gives "much the same impression as listening to a programme of music entirely in the minor key". You think it cold comfort if phrases like "obvious sincerity" and "honesty of purpose" are the best the Australians can earn. Much later, when you congratulate Syd Smith on his courage in reprinting these unfavorable comments in *Art in Australia*, he tells you that lots of people are objecting very strongly to what they call his "want of patriotism". You disagree with him over Orpen's opinion that Norman Lindsay's work is "extremely badly drawn, and shows no sense of design and a total lack of imagination". Smith thinks this is far too sweeping, and says how much he approves of Norman's reply to Orpen. You are about to reply that Norman's article demonstrates his complete lack of self-criticism when Smith produces a letter from Gruner, who'd taken the exhibition to London. Smith lets you copy the phrase where Gruner writes that London accepts that Australian art is of a "fairly decent standard comparatively".

When you get home that night you copy those four words onto a sheet of paper in very large letters:

FAIRLY  
DECENT  
STANDARD  
COMPARATIVELY

You sit smiling at them for a very long time, realising that even the great Gruner has no ready solution to the dilemma which always troubles you, namely, "Is it Australian?" and "Is it Art?".

It's now 1935. You've just returned from almost a year in England. You'd have gone sooner, but you were making so much money between 1930 and 1933 that you weren't prepared to leave the firm in anyone else's hands. Although you were in London in time for the unveiling of the memorial stone to Adam Lindsay Gordon in Westminster Abbey you deliberately stayed away because you have long been convinced that Gordon was neither Australian nor a poet: he was nothing more than a cast-off English versifier.

On the other hand, you are not wholly convinced by Randolph Hughes' fiery defence of Christopher Brennan as an utterly un-Australian poet. "The Chant of Doom" has always struck you as being more about Brennan's domestic squabbles than about the Great War in Europe. And you know more than enough French to suspect that his Symbolism is not all that it should be. Certainly you've detected more than one Australian cadence and coloring in even his most obscure poems. Brennan certainly qualifies as an artist, and his art might turn out to be more Australian in derivation than either Hughes or Chisholm are prepared to see.

There's a lot of reading for you to catch up on, though John Ferguson has kept you well informed. He's also sorted out a pile of books from those he bought on your account, which he says you should read first. Fortunately, 1935 turns out to be a fairly meagre year for new Australian books and you're able to catch up.

Ferguson assures you that the novels from 1934 were the most impressive crop ever in any one year. And you agree, but they trouble you — much more than *Kangaroo* did. Something is coming unstuck. First, there is Vance Palmer writing a novel about big city life when he always writes about country folk. There are two novels about life in the country, but they're quite morbid. Eleanor Dark's *Prelude to Christopher* tells of a doctor and his wife in a country town, and is so full of psychological and political matters as to be almost un-Australian, especially as it climaxes with insanity and suicide. The same thought occurs when you read Brian Penton's *Landtakers*. Is so much violence really necessary? And where is the cleansing power of the bush? Penton seems to be denying its existence as his pioneer settlers and their convicts relentlessly tear each other apart. Appropriately, Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, which deals with communists, madmen and suicide, is written in a modernist idiom, which is what you expect from big city life. Still, you'd be more reassured if Stead did not evoke the natural elements of Sydney so convincingly. For all her perverseness, she certainly glimpses a saving grace in the harbor.

The more you think about these novels, the more you are disquieted. The old tradition of extroverted action as the solution to the world's ills appears to be losing its grip. You'd noticed indications of it in Prichard's *Coonardoo* and in the Richardson trilogy, but had put them down

to Prichard's Bolshevism and to Richardson's being an expatriate. These factors might have let you slide over Stead's book as well. But with Palmer, Penton and Dark, it's not so easy. The old question of "Is it Australian?" is getting a new dimension. All four books are "Australian" in their easy grasp of the physical environment, though there is an introspection in their work that is not characteristically Australian. All four novels are sufficiently well-written to make your other standard criterion, "Is it literature?" largely irrelevant.

You are still puzzling over the new relations between form and content when the university announces a series of extension lectures by Professor Waldock on Edith Sitwell, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. You attend, and perceive that these writers are not the frauds you had supposed them to be. In their own ways, they are technically very competent. On the ship from Perth you'd heard Lionel Lindsay defend Cezanne for similar reasons, though he was very harsh on Picasso and the surrealists. Australian writing and painting need technical discipline, and perhaps the sounder modernists can teach us something.

On your return, painting seems to be in a worse position than is writing. Although you aren't game to say so to anyone, you think that Streeton and Gruner's last exhibitions both showed distinct signs of slickness and superficiality. Still, they are right to confine themselves to landscape. The one thing that the arts in Australia do not need is a new content. Healthy, open-air ideas will always prove superior to sordid city-bred attitudes. You hear that there is a Bolshevik — or at least a Russian migrant — painting colorful pictures of Sydney's slums. Nothing good can come of that.

Surprisingly, the biggest artistic controversy for at least a decade is not over a creative work but arises from a newspaper essay. Just before you got back to Australia, Vance Palmer wrote a piece for a series that the *Age* was running on "The Future of Australian Literature". Most of what Palmer said was an accurate enough promotion of his fellow writers. The only tough section took up his 1923 complaint about "The Missing Critics": "There are columns of gossip about books and authors in all our papers, but little sense of values." You don't fully agree with Palmer that the criticism of Australian painting is as good as he suggests. Certainly, *Art in Australia* has been going for nearly

twenty years, whereas no literary journal is able to survive. Typically, *Manuscripts* has just collapsed after a four-year run. Many of the articles in *Art in Australia* strike you as little more than gossip. And much the same can be said of Croll's book on Tom Roberts, while William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* is notable for its anecdotes. They're both very useful, but they hardly approach the critical standards which Palmer wants applied to our literature. Some writing about painting and sculpture strikes you as if it is still in the bog from which fiction escaped more than a decade ago, that is, the defence of something just because it is Australian.

You realise this is not strictly true. The modern art people who exhibit at Mrs Anderson's house are torn apart by Howard Ashton in the *Sun*. You've heard him say that these people are not truly Australian, but are in fact importers of foreign muck, and as such he has no duty to encourage them, as he normally would any Australian. Would Palmer be pleased if his prayers were answered so that a writer such as Stead was dragged over the coals by a literary critic who shared Ashton's views?

When you mention Palmer's piece to Ferguson, who incidentally expects to be made a judge any day, he produces a 1931 issue of the Adelaide journal, *Desiderata*, commenting that "This is far superior to anything Palmer is capable of writing," as he begins to read long passages to you:

In Australia there are few words so misunderstood or so unwelcome as the word "criticism". In use it has become misapplied and abused until it connotes destruction, so that we have little that counts in the nature of real criticism, that is, not wholly destructive but careful analysis, constructive and helpful. Notwithstanding that the Australian temperament strongly resents anything in the nature of criticism, it is the one thing that we should openly accept and welcome. Anchored, as we are, far from the hulk of things, true standards of comparison have been largely lost to sight. Yet perhaps more than in any other sphere of culture should such standards be attainable in literature . . .

In our own literature we are weak and floundering, and therefore in need of the sound critic. Australia has had few writers possessed of a sound critical faculty, so that criticism has, in round terms, degenerated either into prejudiced attacks or unqualified eulogies.

Proof of this is seen in the literary pages of most of our daily papers, which, when they do not practise this method, relapse into a non-committal attitude by giving an epitome of books with the addition of copious extracts. A friend may review a book by a friend, and we need not enlarge upon the result . . .

It is not our object to decry that literature which Australia has produced; rather would we bear upon the difficulties that we are bringing upon ourselves, and our unkindness to those who are really attempting something, by the eulogy (as opposed to the criticism) that has been responsible for a great many of our publications, and has prevented nearly all our writers from developing within themselves that essential quality of *self-criticism*.

"The truly nice touch," Ferguson beams as he lays down the volume, "is that the article concludes with a long paragraph on Palmer himself, that points to his lack of self-criticism and to the fact that he never gets beyond the external things of life. Of course, no one reads *Desiderata*," Ferguson continues, "It was the same with Nettie Palmer's critical writings which were mostly hidden away in the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail*. Instead of paying attention to her infinitely superior mind, people excite themselves over what the dessicated Vance puts into the *Age*. I'll wager he'd have nothing at all to say if it wasn't for Nettie's table-talk."

The excitement proves far greater than even Ferguson expected when Palmer is answered by the professor of English at Melbourne University, Cowling, in the following Saturday's *Age*:

In spite of what the native born say about gum trees, I cannot help feeling that our countryside is "thin" and lacking in tradition . . . What I mean is that there are no ancient churches, castles, ruins — the memorials of generations departed. You need no Baedeker in Australia . . . from the point of view of literature it means that we can never hope to have a Scott, a Balzac, a Dumas, a Konrad Ferdinand Meyer, nor a poetry which reflects past glories. From a literary point of view Australia lacks the richness of age and tradition. This being so we are driven to invent a conventional field of very limited extent, including, "the old station", "the old mine", "the old family" and "the young opera singer". These conventional themes are lacking in vitality. Their variations are exhausted. We want fresh themes. We want new paths. Romance, always languishing, has died.

Realism, without a striking personality behind it, is not enough.

Though these are fighting words, they're prefaced by a lot of good sense which everyone — as always — overlooks as soon as the battle commences.

Outraged letters appear in the next weeks, though these turn out to be slight when compared to the forty page essay which opens the first issue of the *Australian Mercury* in July. The journal's editor, "Inky" Stephensen, calls his article "The Foundations of Culture in Australia", and subtitles it "An Essay towards National Self-Respect". In one way, it reminds you of *Vision*, with its hopes for an Australian Renaissance in 1923. Stephensen talks a great deal about the dawning of a new Elizabethan Age in Australia. The great difference between *Vision* and Stephensen is that the *Vision* people were completely uninterested in Australia as a place. Stephensen on the other hand, stresses that "It is the spirit of a Place which ultimately gives any human culture its distinctiveness". He has no practical suggestions for bridging the gulf between the ultimate and the here and now. So, despite the vigor of his prose, you discover nothing new in him. Indeed, he's not much more than a late-comer to your old dichotomy of "Is it Australian?/Is it Art?"

For all its idiosyncracies, you are much more impressed by Randolph Hughes' study of Christopher Brennan, which is sub-titled an "Essay in Values". It impresses you as the first real work of criticism by an Australian about an Australian. Literary criticism has improved since Vance Palmer wrote his "Missing Critics" article for the *Bulletin* in 1923. His wife's prize-winning essay, *Modern Australian Literature*, appeared the very next year, and introduced many people to the fact that Australian literature existed at all. Some five years later the American, Hartley Grattan, produced his slashing little booklet on *Australian Literature*, which no Australian journal or newspaper would have dared to publish. You still treasure his description of the *Bulletin's* poetry editor as "a kindly soul to whom rhymes and poems are indistinguishable, and to whom literature is something 'genteel' and 'refined' in the most wishy-washy senses of those very wishy-washy words". Palmer and Grattan are slim surveys, whereas Hughes pays substantial attention to one person.

The thrust of Hughes' argument is that Bren-

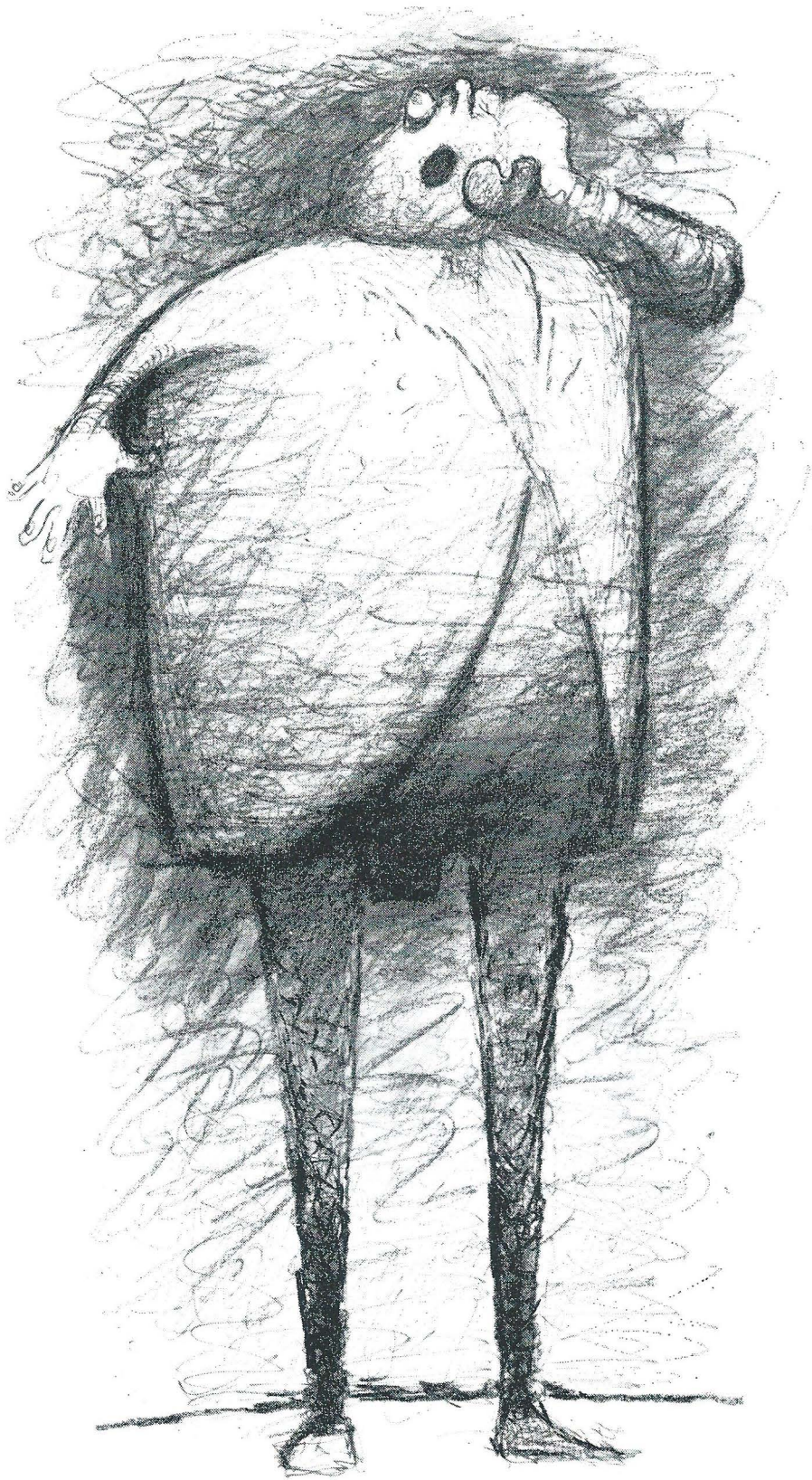
nan was not Australian at all and that his poetry was European symbolism through and through. It's comforting to find a critic with an international reputation favorably evaluating an Australian writer on international criteria. This answers the question "Is it poetry?" for you, but at the expense of showing that it isn't Australian. What's more, Hughes further claims that the poetry of Daley, Shaw Neilson and Hugh McCrae is also "not at all Australian in its essential qualities". Will there ever come a time when the Australianism and the art will go easily together?

One interesting thing about Hughes' book is that the preface is by A. R. Chisholm, the professor of French at Melbourne. He seems to be a well-informed and sensible observer of Australian literature. Perhaps he could be encouraged to turn his knowledge of world literature towards evaluating Australian culture? Perhaps he already has. No one in Sydney seems to have any idea of what people in Melbourne are doing.

Stephensen's article comes up for discussion again at the Christmas party arranged by Ferguson. Green from the university library is there, along with some of Ferguson's colleagues from the board of trustees of the Public Library. The others agree that, although Cowling had a point about the absence of tradition, Stephensen is right to stress the importance of a sense of place. Place is what makes all the arts in Australia so fundamentally sound and keeps them free from all that nonsense talked about Eliot and Joyce at those university lectures.

A few of the guests agree with you that the technical strengths of people like Preston and Dark might provide acceptable new ways for expressing the essential sanity which Streeton and Palmer derive from Australia's landscape. Mr Justice Evatt upsets everyone with his accusation that the whole discussion is wrong-headed. "It's time to stop worrying about London, "he booms, "and to start thinking about what Sydney can learn from Paris. Picasso can teach us more about how to paint the Australian bush than the entire Royal Academy put together."

Green smoothes over what looks as if it could become an unpleasant situation by feigning agreement. "Yes", Green chuckles. "Picasso's the coming man, all right. Just like this young chap, Patrick White, is bound to dominate our poetry."



ON THE BLOWER: *Noel Counihan*

### Celebration

At the Silver Wedding  
in the high white house  
like a bad Art Gallery  
the young vet. fishes  
with 70,000 a yr. & a fast Porsch.

From room to room  
the blind lead the blind,  
men with glass chins  
undress her breasts & eyes.

The vet. with the silver chin  
invites her back for dope,  
poetry, the Porsch, a perfect  
screw . . .

she rocks before the fire,  
flames burn her satin dress.  
Ludicrous Lady!  
using her teenage daughter  
to procure.

Perhaps a young lover  
in another country  
wishes his old wench dead  
so he can tell stories about her  
all his life.

DOROTHY HEWETT

### Me

My lords, meet  
the real me:  
as air is empty  
then so is my heart,  
my eyes change  
with the colour  
of seas and nights . . .  
but as lover  
constantly inconstant,  
lover of eskimaux  
and equators,  
razor blades and women  
(green-eyed women —  
yes, Nature has duped me)  
and lover of any sky  
that is hard with passion;  
the real me  
unfixed as a shadow  
flies with the raven  
to the ice  
and maelstroms  
that are harsh  
as my other selves.

SHANE McCAULEY

### No Cat Is An Island

It was not the flock, the trembling,  
that I bore so well,  
it was the laughter, the cat's paws  
of Cat Friday across my desk:  
I received the reminder, the ash  
that fled and withered me —  
you are not alone, it said,  
you are not alone. Shrugging,  
cornered, brittle, grandiloquent,  
I paused. Can you come with me?  
I said.  
If only there were more Francescas!  
The silence was dolorous,  
I breathed forth a desert.  
Then the spring came.  
Stay away, oh stay away,  
until I have met the night, she said.  
So I try to sleep in the cat's dream.

SHANE McCAULEY

## Ice music

Dante

holds out warm arms  
to the musician  
who responds  
in remote tune,  
"I am a shade" —  
shadow of lute  
and mandoline  
criss-cross  
his pale face  
like an apparition  
of melody.

I spend

Sunday dusk  
with Beethoven  
our steeds  
at a gallop  
a frieze  
in sharp light  
heaven-bent  
through the architecture  
of forest.  
In exhilarated daring  
I snatch  
at his bridle —  
the wind  
panting between us  
razors my hand  
to the bone.

Love

once  
opened a vein  
in my arm  
and I bled  
through every room  
of the house —

Dante

spilled  
The Divine Comedy  
and felt  
his arms grow chill . . .  
the musician  
pipes on  
a slither of ice  
conjuring  
winter ponds  
to mirror heaven.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

## Tower

Fetch me a line, one that  
won't prop up the nation.

Moon, toss back the dog  
it's given you catalepsy.

Be damned you horn-locking demons  
masquerading culture;

rape me the body, the body  
you're hoping to save.

Lend that wit, sociology. That wit  
festering in the memorybank-zoo.

Just take yourselves off to bed, don't  
question what I'm about to do  
with your tools:

by morning you'll inherit  
the labours you crave.

STEFANIE BENNETT

## The Way Of The Hornet

The gardenias will, of course, bloom again this year.  
Theirs is to function not compromise.  
And what a song I can make of this  
if only I'd bring myself to sketch further  
the battle glorious field-lily  
else the peace march of the power  
found glove to glove  
in the ever-watchful sunflower.

Ah! I take myself too seriously!  
A mongrel-bitch over-bred  
need tamper with the gardenbeds  
of the vanities, the profound.  
I'd do better grounded.  
An elementary volcano?  
A touch of brocade  
fitted to the throats of others?

But I take myself too seriously:  
the gardenias must bloom again this year.

STEFANIE BENNETT

## The Travellers

Driving all day  
they came into a village  
    after dark  
& slept under feather eiderdowns.

Next morning  
a window full of mountains,  
great cones glittering  
as they hung over the sill  
& all the way home  
    like Hansel & Gretel  
    begging for crumbs  
the blood from his young wife's wrists  
    darkened the snow.

In the Metropole  
    unemployed spies  
    left over from Beria  
still occupy the landings,  
  
    the intelligentsia  
    toss between bedposts  
marked with metal roses.

The Berlin taxi-driver  
    in his angst  
tries the elevator doors  
for his lost interpreter.

On slide evenings  
she always has the best still photographs.  
Under the blow-up  
of Mao-tse-tung's mole  
she loves the Chinese Liberation Army.

In Constable's country  
she wears green eye-glasses & white muslin;  
in Weimar the young Turk  
    mends her glass slipper;  
on the Orient Express  
with a rose between his teeth  
    she finds Nijinsky dead.

Dreaming of Popocatapetl  
    & a tongueless boy  
    crossing the Alps  
she cuts till the bath-tub's rosy.  
(Stalled in a snowdrift  
swearing, he cranks the car.)

Not celebrate but living alone  
    on a waterbed  
    with a harbour view,  
    her psychiatrist,  
    her vibrator,  
    her color TV  
she's happier now.

(Stoned in a Toyota  
he drives over the top.)

in the glass dome  
the snowstorm whirls . . .

DOROTHY HEWETT



### Sestina with refrain

Why does he keep bruising against me my dead father why still  
rub First War mud into his eyes something won't die  
something unspeakable he survived 'got through' kept all  
the parts to Soldier-On "War Babies" a tag stuck  
to explain old-person nightmares but not this other  
disturbance a voice faint and hoarse the call for water

and why me so long after War's so tired let it die  
our century congeals with veterans all 'War Babies' all  
with obsessive yarns (horrible: back off) poolrooms are stuck  
with them *me mate's jaw shot clean through and something or other*  
*gurgling there a voice faint & hoarse the call for water*  
what can you say remember it's over dad dead lie still

*more* something insists *you have to listen damn you* all  
refuses at some moment cities Gods belief's unstuck  
men avoid your eyes it's not you it's absences from each other  
the absence voice faint and hoarse the call for water  
there is no water 'War Baby' not allowed to be still  
to drown in that water lips fester the nerves of the tongue die

no help to have seen in the Sack of Carthage a pike stuck  
through the peasant wife's breasts or in Gaul another  
staff through her mouth a voice faint and hoarse the call for water  
Vikings Saxons into her hold her hold her still  
Bosch Anzac Marine stick the gun get it done die  
Death cry death to them enemy into them into all

into old man dad why drag me through the intestines of another  
battleground of the voice faint and hoarse the call for water  
not over not ever over not to be extinguished to be still  
each witness remembering death goes into you to die  
to haunt you haunting me mocking my innocence all  
my inheritance out of your grip on me something has stuck

*Vietnam Corporal Cavil: A voice faint & hoarse the call for water*  
*so we ripped off her clothes stabbed her breasts she wouldn't lie still*  
*we spreadeagled her shoved a trenching tool up she would not die*  
*we shot her it was okay they were Gooks Commies that's all*  
look dad these new young veterans come home survivors stuck  
into jobs and families war babies you know how they look past each  
other

wake at nights gulp the unspeakable threat lie still  
it is over lie still there are others now to cry for all  
the forgotten for the remembered voice faint and hoarse the call for water.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

## Inspector Gilfedder revisits the scene of the alleged crime

- If you'll care to sign this  
a true record of the events  
on the days and nights in question  
your childhood you say  
a foolish thought  
everyone goes through that.
- I was under the impression  
the suspect was not nearly so young  
not my own age  
an older gentleman with a sad face  
dressed in army surplus clothing  
or solemn mohair black  
who wouldn't let me blow my nose  
and had a finger missing from each hand  
or a cloven foot or tattoo  
marks around the throat.
- I'm sorry you've been reading too much  
of our superior, Plath.  
These father-figures you mention  
are quite mad and therefore  
could hardly be guilty  
of any acts, defaults, omissions, misfeasances, etc.  
of which you complain  
or even wrongdoings  
under section so and so  
or whatever you want us to charge you under.
- Come right in it's nice and warm  
don't be afraid of putting anyone out  
there's plenty of room now  
Bones and Dog have been moved  
onto Death Row.  
Please don't struggle  
we're going to have to take you in.

STEPHEN GILFEDDER

### From Melbourne

On those sweet smelling spring evenings  
In Sydney, where the atmosphere has an electric life  
All of its own,  
Where even the dirt of Railway Square  
And the sandstone of old buildings  
Is wet,  
Positively dripping  
With moisture sucked out of the harbour,  
Who would have thought  
Of the difference a city makes?

DAVID ENGLISH

## Bikies

We romped behind the hoardings while they were passing on the freeway in earnest or, else, deadly: the cars, the 'transies' — this century's U.F.Os. We didn't stick to highways, had our trail-bikes in the paddocks. What, if we rode round and round a torturous track! we were copying their machines that sped so fast flowers didn't register in optics — flashes, splashes of paint. Their art comprised of abstracts, their worlds constricting into ever tightening circles, schedules. Our rounds were just bubbles of exhilaration blown for no reason but enjoyment. As one fell off his tortured bike into the bull-dust, roars of laughter from the little boys . . . ta . . . ta . . . ta to his machine! the buckled mangle. Try, wheel that to the pit! No — lay it down, if that sore guy could shape on legs, bend over, slay the bike, butcher it with spanners, salvage parts for some new life . . . grafts fit as intercellular in vegetable, animal and here, proved too, in metal makeshifts for those faster legs, those more intense desires of galaxies to speed, fast, faster in provided space.

JOHN BLIGHT

## Recital

She seems to enjoy the applause. After a deep pink chiffon bow, she tells us that Chopin's Barcarolle is a gondolier's song, and even if we haven't seen a gondola or been to Venice, we'll hear how perfectly the music captures the atmosphere of that beautiful place. Maybe she expects us to see her shiny black grand nose out into the parquet stream, poled by that unlikely Pole at its prow. But her next fallacy draws me in over my head: a Schubert Impromptu, the close-to-dying utterance of a young man, a song of modulating serenity and rage. Putting on her glasses, she seems to see him floating near the roof, her hands moving in a mindless ecstasy across the keys.

Dead two years before my age, he calls to me across the watery lost years. I'm quite alone in the crowded hall. His anguish gone, time looms like an empty sea.

ANDREW McDONALD

## Composition

The old Japanese gardener  
who keeps the river  
is working hard today

He has raked  
the entire bay  
neatly

except for a small patch  
near the centre

which he has trowelled  
smooth perfectly  
smooth

Now just wait

and he will probably  
move  
that sail-boat

into the stillness

for a mountain

ANDREW LANSDOWN

### Burglar

He's been again  
                    at midnight perhaps.

He must think this house a tomb  
where the dead are buried with a fortune  
ready for pillage.

                    But he should know  
there's not much here — the usual bric-a-brac,  
a few dollars left on the shelf,  
and yet he solidifies in the night . . .  
is real

                    or is he?

and comes step by step from my sleep  
leaving finger-prints very like my own.

R. A. SIMPSON

### Mufti

Drunk & made exempt  
by R&R & habit  
his is an accustomed  
swagger

                    heedless

piteous

                    the corporal

translation

of any child's wail

total & fierce

                    but too

cautious for words

JENNIFER MAIDEN

### Sheba

*"that only the half . . ."*

her morning is haggard,  
but easier to govern. She hasn't  
equipped it yet,  
indulged it. she can still  
rely on the early things,  
but our noon overthrows her:  
it is lurid with its function  
it ogles & infests the million  
wells of her body like sweat,  
is itself so dry that they shut, rich  
but self-brimmed in the dusk.  
I admit that I did mock her:  
not telling her of that.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

## Green Point Baptist Church

1

my holidays at Avoca were too late  
for childhood nostalgia: I found the place

at 18. And I never liked fishing.  
while Bob and Rick fished  
I made  
a solitary way along the long white beach,  
and the sand shimmered with the sun and the new surf,  
even,  
clear.

dutifully, we spent our Sunday there  
at church. God was not left with the waves

and the sea-birds. we breathed Him in,  
and held our collective  
breath  
until we stopped at Green Point Baptist Church.  
he gave us  
6 months.

2

returning again  
to Avoca, loose bolts in the car found rhyme

with the untimed touch of my wedding  
ring on the wheel.

Light  
from my headlights caught the beacon through the rain-  
green trees: Green Point Baptist Church. Like most of us  
it had remained

these past 5 years. It had remained  
more than most of us. God was safely tucked

into new blond brick: this was indeed  
a church worthy of  
destruction.

and the windows were new, shining like ice yet  
frosted and fogged — as though breath were just melting  
on the glass.

JOHN FOULCHER

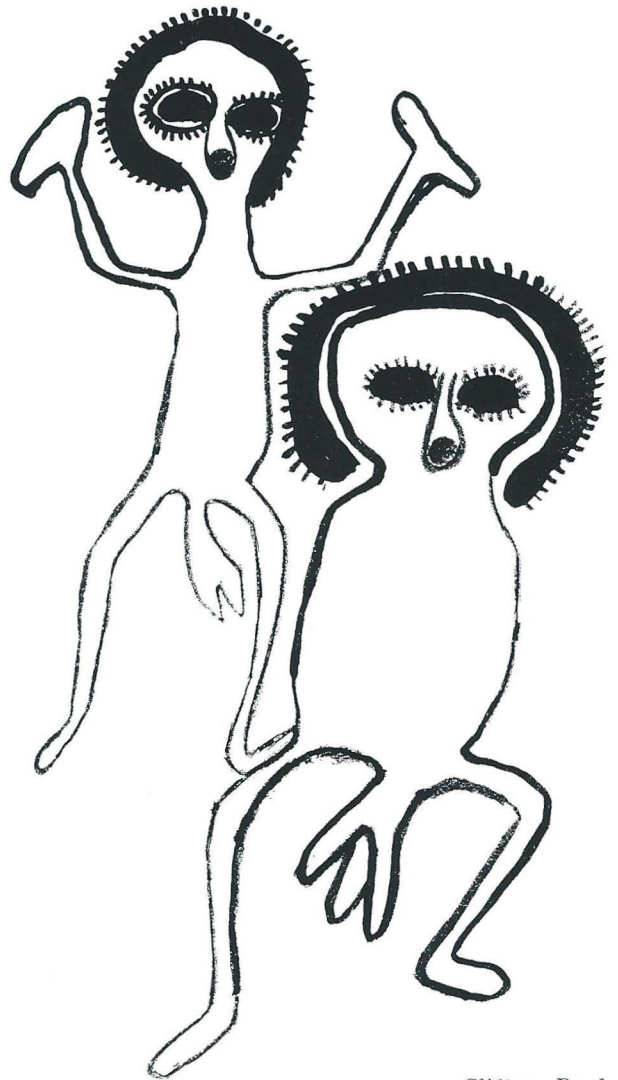
### Roll out flat

My grandmother hailed from  
monster country  
far to the north of  
Durham and York;  
left me her recipe  
for Scottish shortbread:  
“Roll out flat . . .  
Prick with a fork.”

Many years later  
in a cave painting,  
ochred sandstone  
on far Cape York,  
I saw a Quinkan  
rolled out flat,  
enormous eyes, and  
a prick with a fork.

Skinny, menacing,  
he gazed at me  
from the gallery ceiling  
on Cape York:  
a three-pronged monster  
(awkward looking)  
but still I wonder,  
would it work?

NANCY CATO



*Clifton Pugh*

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# swag

Katharine Susannah Prichard used to say to me: "The thought of a book being written about me adds a new terror to death." Many readers will have noted the recent publication of Patrick O'Brien's book, *The Saviours: An intellectual history of the left in Australia*. Published by the enterprising Don Drummond, of Richmond (Victoria), who is making something of a name for himself in 'have a go' publishing, it is a discussion of the ideologies of the "intellectual and cultural Left in Australia since the 1930s". Overland gets a number of references, as do many of those associated with this magazine, such as Ian Turner and myself.

Since both Turner and I are thanked for assistance in the acknowledgements section of the book, it may seem graceless to complain. And in fact I have discussed this book with Ian, and we both agree it was a book worth doing; that its acidulous comments and criticisms are often deserved; that it's a pity more academics don't get stuck into contemporary and near-contemporary themes which inevitably expose them to retaliation. Having said that, I'm surprised at the inaccuracies in what is said about me and somewhat alarmed that the thanks I receive from Paddy O'Brien might suggest they have been checked out by him. Thus although we intend to review the book, intending readers might take early warning from what follows.

Overland was not established in 1955 but in 1954 (p. 101); I was never trained in a Communist Party school in Prague or anywhere else (p. 101); I did not report the Slansky trial in Prague in 1951, because for a start I was not there (p. 101); the title of a whitewashing pamphlet I wrote on my return from Czechoslovakia is

wrongly quoted (p. 101); I was not expelled from the Communist Party in 1958 (p. 103)—I expelled myself; I never claimed to be a 'careerist' in joining the Communist Party (p. 106)—I did however tell Paddy O'Brien that in the CP in those days we all thought of ourselves as future leaders of a communist Australia (I wonder how long we would have lasted?). Neither I nor Ian Turner was appointed to the "Commonwealth Literature Board" by the Whitlam government, nor by any other (p. 109). In compiling this select list of errors I notice by the way others similarly treated (e.g. Ian Milner settled in Czechoslovakia, not East Germany). And there are of course many value judgements with which I disagree, but that's another question. All in all, it reminds me of what a historian's wife said to me recently: "I've seen too much of the way history is written. I don't believe in history!"

Which is not to say — and I am reminded of this by leafing through the book to pick up these errors — that I did not find *The Saviours* enjoyable and, taken all in all, pretty fair comment.

It was pleasant to meet Mary Rose Liverani at the Braille Book of the Year Award in Melbourne in May. She looks like a slightly earnest student at university tutorial, and speaks with humor, modesty and a very Scottish down-to-earthness: "Och, no, I don't write plays . . . there's no enough money in them!" Al Grassby presented the award: fittingly enough, for *The Winter Sparrows* must be the most convincing statement on the migrant condition yet to have appeared in this country. Of course its observation, humor and sense of the *human* condition make it far more than that. Incidentally, another extremely fine piece of writing on the migrant state will



appear in a month or two in a book I edit annually, *Melbourne Studies in Education*. By Lou Soccio, it is a (factual) discussion in depth of the culture shock experienced by an Italian family migrating to this country.

I don't quite see how Mary Rose Liverani comes to the conclusion there's more money in books than in plays, though. *The Winter Sparrows* had one of the warmest critical receptions any book has had in Australia in recent years. I asked the author if she would mind telling Overland readers how she had done out of it. She didn't. The first edition of 2000 sold out, and then there was a second edition (impression, really) which, for some reason, took her publishers six months to get out, thus missing a lot of sales, especially over last Christmas. Altogether 3000. Mary Rose gets 80c. a copy less ten per cent. to her agent; fifty per cent. of what was left went in tax. (She works as a librarian in Wollongong.) In addition she got \$450 from the Australian Broadcasting Commission for the rights to read excerpts from *The Winter Sparrows* (Nelson's took twenty-five per cent.) and \$18 an episode for 22 episodes for reading it. In addition Mary Rose will get a royalty of 7½ per cent, on the forthcoming paperback edition of 20,000.

Even if you take into account the Literature Board grant of \$8000 Mary Rose Liverani received to help her write the book, I make her earnings for the year's work (let us reckon) she spent on the book as \$10,498 or, if you except the grant just under \$2500. And it's taken her three years to get the money in. Being Mary Rose Liverani, she won't admit she's hard done by. All she would say was: "You wonder what authors make who haven't had the publicity I've had."

I know that Robert Falcon Scott was in many ways a very stuffy fellow, and if the English hadn't been so sentimental about eating dogs, or at least feeding them to other dogs, he and his team might well have made that last eleven miles back from the Pole. And I shall never understand why the people at Hut Point didn't make a serious effort to go out and find them before they perished on the way back. There are all sorts of irritating things about the *Terra Nova* expedition, and these were exacerbated for me recently by reading Margery and James Fisher's excellent biography, *Shackleton*, on that rather awful train

that crosses the Nullarbor: Shackleton, up against it in ways Scott never dreamed of, was in so many ways a better leader.

Yet I saw Ponting's film, "South with Scott", again the other day, and again was caught taut-throated with emotion. It really is a full-scale epic, tragic story, like nothing else I can think of in modern history: isolation, privation, absurd courage, old-fashioned patriotic values, a touch of hubris, failure, death and obliteration. All as though to mark the end of that pre-1914 world which, I am told, no one born after the first war can ever hope to comprehend.

The Scott story will last as long as stories are told — there is a great deal more to be said about it, as new generations try to understand: astonishing there's not been an opera yet. (No parts for sopranos, I suppose.) Yet the Scott expedition can also be seen as part of a wider epic, in which the fortunes of Scott, Amundsen and Shackleton are all intertwined. And of these three, Amundsen has had by far the worst press. Partly, no doubt, because he had the misfortune not to be British. Partly because he was accused of sharp practice in keeping his plans under wraps and to some extent misleading Scott. Above all, however, because he succeeded, and succeeded with the minimum of fuss and bother. It was a David and Goliath affair in many ways and he made the heavier-moving, overly satisfied British look rather silly.

That's why I'm so pleased to see that the University of Queensland Press, widely regarded nowadays as the most imaginative in Australia, has published an admirable facsimile of Ronald Amundsen's *The South Pole* at \$25. This account of the *Fram* expedition has been unobtainable for many years. Matter-of-fact in some ways, it is also a very human story, and Amundsen wrote well. It is illuminating to read Amundsen and Scott side-by-side, and work out where the causes of Amundsen's success lay. To a very great extent, of course, in the *use* of dogs rather than ponies. Not the *selection* of dogs: Scott had dogs too, but he did not have men adequately trained in polar dog sledging. Partly luck, with weather and terrain, but Amundsen didn't have it easy, either. I suspect a large part was connected with attitude of mind, the raiding party *versus* the elephant battery. Anyway, we can now all read them both and judge for ourselves.

Since writing the above I have read Lennard Bickel's book on Douglas Mawson, *This Accursed Land*. If I say above that Amundsen has had a bad press, Mawson has had virtually none at all. Bickel, using for the first time Mawson's (and others') own journals, tells perhaps the most dramatic story, so far as a single man is concerned, in polar history. I won't say more, for Ray Ericksen will review the book for us—except to remark that I doubt if one Australian in a hundred could identify Mawson if asked. Even my own dear wife didn't know he was an Australian.

That veteran bookman, Alex Sheppard of Sydney, writes to say that in her review of Rupert Lockwood's *Black Armada* (Overland 65) Ailsa Zainuddin recommended the reading of Eric Marshall's *It pays to be White*. Alex says that if any Overland reader cares to send him \$1 to cover postage he will send a copy free. (Alpha Books, 104 Bathurst Street, Sydney.) Or call and collect one for nothing. "I want to see it read now."

We have had several enquiries about a poem entitled "Sisters", written by Colleen Burke and published in Overland 65. A note attached to the poem said "based on a film narrated by June Langley about her sister Eve". (Eve Langley of *The Pea Pickers*, of course.) The title of the film, I am now informed, is "She's my Sister", and it was made three years ago by Meg Stewart with assistance from the experimental film fund of the then Film Board of the Australia Council. It runs 37 minutes, is in color, and is available from the Sydney Film-maker's Coop., St Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst, Sydney.

Anne Elder died last year, to the pain of those who knew her and to the more widespread regret of those who knew her poetry. We shall be publishing an article on her shortly. Anne's husband and children have set up a \$5000 Anne Elder Award Fund to encourage poetry of literary merit

in Australia and New Zealand. It is desired to extend the funds available so that at least \$500 a year will be available for distribution, and donations should be sent to the Secretary, Fellowship of Australian Writers, 1/317 Barkers Road, Kew, Victoria 3101.

Rosemary Wighton, chairman of the Writers' Week committee for the Adelaide Festival, writes to let Overland readers know that "a new and different" Writers' Week will be held in Adelaide from 25 February to 4 March 1978. "We have better arrangements for more readings in more places and hope thus to be able to allow a wider range of writers of both poetry and prose to get a hearing." Good on you, Rosemary. I love Writers' Week and know how much hard work goes into it. Speaking personally, I think the part of Writers' Week we can most easily dispense with is the writers reading their own work. Writers are poor judges of their own work and in any case most of them can't read properly and don't know when to stop. I hope the readings are held at a special venue at—say—Gawler.

Two publications of special interest that I'd like to draw to readers' attention. Len Fox, one of Overland's most loyal supporters over the years, has edited an important collection of factual reminiscences of the Depression years, by Daisy McWilliams and others. Called *Depression Down Under* (why the Americanized title, though?) it can be obtained for \$4.95 (soft) and \$8.95 (hard) from Len Fox at 10 Little Surrey Street, Potts Points, NSW 2011. Another Overland supporter and contributor, Jim Griffin, has edited an important series of papers on the perennial problem of the Torres Strait border. Much of the relevant material has hitherto been suppressed or ignored, but Griffin claims that these papers show that a just and humane solution is possible. *The Torres Strait Border Issue: Consolidation, Conflict or Compromise?* is available at \$4.65 (including postage) from the Townsville College of Advanced Education, PO Box 117, Aitkenvale, Q. 4814.

LAURIE HERGENHAN

## Rebuttal

*A defence of Xavier Herbert's  
"Poor Fellow my Country"*

Stephen Murray-Smith comments in "Swag" (Overland 65) that "Donald Grant's attack on *Poor Fellow My Country* in this issue and Edward Kynaston's acid review in Overland 62" should not be interpreted as showing that "we had a 'set' " on Herbert—rather this is "the way things have turned out". While assured that Overland did not go out of its way to publish two completely negative accounts of the novel, I find it unfortunate that things did "turn out" this way. Instead of adding another demolition job to Kynaston's it was after all open to you to commission or invite a more favorable piece to accompany Grant's. In your uneasy invitation for "further contributions" you state that "whatever the weaknesses of the book it would be interesting to have some explanations of the sales". Here again, and no doubt unintentionally, the emphasis is fairly negative: the book may be pretty bad but I wonder why it has sold so well? There is curiously no suggestion that the novel may have strengths, and yet given the reputation of *Capricornia* (and claims advanced by say Harry Heseltine for *Soldiers' Women*) surely the natural expectation (which would not rule out an open mind) is that Herbert's latest would be likely to include *something* of value. My purpose is not to cast a slur on your editorship of one of the finest journals in this country, but rather to express disappointment that things turned out the way they did.

There seems little point for me to attempt to argue in detail with Kynaston and Grant (for I have expressed my views elsewhere) but I would like to make some general comments on the latter's essay, which appeared after all the reviews. I have read (but not reread) all the reviews and I should think it fair to say that nearly all (Kynaston's is alone, in its degree of negativity)

found tremendous strengths in the novel, whether or not they also found weaknesses ranging from slight to basic. The notice by Randolph Stow in *TLS* is a good example of this balance. Now of course the reception should not have constrained Grant, but it may have given him cause for thought before he attempted a complete dismissal. One of Grant's main arguments is that beside *Capricornia* *Poor Fellow My Country* is a failure, yet unwittingly he fails to distinguish sufficiently between the aims and achievement of the novels, and his comments on the virtues of *Capricornia* hardly bring out the distinctive achievement of *that* work. (It took over twenty years for the critic Vincent Buckley to do anything like justice to the complexities and virtues of *Capricornia*.) Grant bases much of his attack on speculation (more than he seems aware of): we don't know how, if at all, the revision of *Capricornia* contributed to its strengths, and so for this reason and because they are very different novels it is useless to speculate on what would have happened if Herbert had revised *Poor Fellow My Country* in the "same" way.

It is also a weakness in Grant's whole argument, including the catastrophic effect of Herbert's "intrusion" in the latter novel, that his quotations and documented references are exclusively to Herbert's statements outside the novel — there is not one quotation from the novel or a documented reference to a part of it. It is curious that Grant should dismiss the city portions partly because they contain "descriptions of the most unlikely and absurd events (public meetings, brawls, imprisonments)". Are such things in themselves unlikely and absurd in Australia? Certainly Herbert's detailed treatment of such events, all in a political context are unparalleled (so far as I know) in Australian

fiction. These and other political aspects of the novel were highly praised in an article by Geoffrey Sawyer in the *Canberra Times* of 26 May 1976, and the political aspects of the novel approached anything like adequate treatment only in Humphrey McQueen's review in *Arena* (No. 41, 1976).

My own differing views from Grant's are developed in an article in *Quadrant*, February 1977. (In fairness to Stephen Murray-Smith (and without implying special claims for myself) I should point out that he invited me to write on the novel

for *Overland* when I told him that I disagreed with Kynaston's review, but I had already been invited by *Quadrant* before the novel's publication.) I do not hold them up in any way as a model, just as in suggesting that the novel is an outstanding achievement I did not picture it as flawless—it must be some time before its achievement is evaluated in a balanced way—but my article does argue that the equation of Herbert the man with one of the main characters, Jeremy Delacy, is simplistic.

The May 1977 issue of **AUSTRALIAN LITERARY STUDIES** includes articles on the Jindyworbaks and Aboriginal poetry and culture, Judith Wright's linguistic philosophy, A. D. Hope on 'the Provincial Muse', **The Getting of Wisdom**, A. G. Stephens as internationalist critic, along with reviews of recent critical works and the Annual Bibliography of Studies in Australian Literature.



The October 1977 issue will be a special one on **NEW WRITING IN AUSTRALIA**, and will include a diversity of comment by writers themselves as well as survey articles.



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## Landscape in DAVID KELLY *Poor Fellow My Country*

Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* begins with the description of a character, who is then shown performing an act within a landscape: "The small boy was Aboriginal . . . He was squatting beside a water-hole alone, fishing" (p. 9). The landscape itself is then described: "The pool was rockbound" (p. 9). The novel ends when Rifkiah is killed in the river, which retains its "Moah" (p. 1463) or magic. Throughout the novel, although not continuously, Herbert deals as here with figures in a landscape. The country itself is the most positive element in the book. No character and no relationship matches it, in thematic importance or fictional execution. But the landscape cannot always be dissociated from the characters as readily as that might suggest.

A character may be presented in terms of the landscape, as in the special case of Bobwirridirridi. When he first appears he is likened to a mantis, a bird, scrub-turkey and a grey spider; he seems to be "kindred to the crawling roots" (p. 10) which themselves look like grey snakes. As well as creating a vivid image of the man, this description suggests that he is close to the earth and prefigures his involvement in the snake cult. By stressing that he is grey it links him with Prindy; the juxtaposition of "grey eyes" and "grey whiskers" (p. 10) makes this bond quite explicit.

Usually landscape and character are related in a more oblique way than this. Landscape is presented as if it were refracted through some character's mind: not simply as he sees it, but nevertheless from something like his viewpoint and with such details accentuated as he himself would most characteristically notice. Thus when Jeremy drives to Lily Lagoons, the landscape is described with some reference to Aboriginal

mythology but with rather more to geological formations (pp. 59-62); while Rifkiah, alone in the bush at night, meets animals which are presented as children (p. 920). But the character through whose mind landscape is most often and most effectively refracted is Prindy, for whom nature is "largely a thing of his own secret perception, although no less rich in mystery for that" (p. 464). His knowledge of and his wonder at the land make a convincingly objective vehicle for Herbert's own knowledge and wonder, while the presence in the landscape of Prindy's knowing and receptive intelligence ensures that description is more than scene-setting, that it is also part of his experience. This is a subtle way of humanising the land without sacrificing its external reality — and it is incidentally a practice that might begin to appease those readers who find Herbert's voice too intrusive, and Herbert himself too reluctant to let his characters live freely.

The great sections of *Poor Fellow My Country* that deal with the landscape — especially Prindy's first train ride, his journey with King George, his several escapes into the bush — appeal to a sense that they to some extent create. The love of the land that they express is based firmly on knowledge of the land, its creatures and its mythological significance, and Herbert shares with us his knowledge, not as a lifelessly factual prerequisite to love of the land but as a living part of it. Even in describing nature, then, Herbert is to some extent didactic, but, in this aspect of the novel at least, his didacticism is completely directed towards an artistic end. A similar case is his treatment of the railway. Herbert's knowledge of trains and of the character of railwaymen gives to that part of the book a convincing factual basis which supports and

gives life to all the significance the railway is given.

The conjunction of landscape and the railway, the participation of such vital characters as Pat Hannaford and Dinny Cahoon, and the presence of such important elements as death, humor and imprisonment, make Prindy's first train ride to Port Palmeston one of the greatest episodes in the book. Since Prindy is within the train and not out in the flood, the wet season's beauty can be presented through his eyes with some detachment, unaffected by the discomfort and danger that attend his later escapes. His response to the flood is a remarkable piece of description and exemplifies one extreme of Herbert's method of describing a landscape refracted through a character's consciousness:

Slow over the racecourse causeway, which spanned what was easily a billabong of the river filled only by Old-man Flood and from which now such a mighty hallelujah chorus of frogs arose as to drown out the roll and squealing of the wheels on rusty steel. Turtles too. Look . . . tuttle, tuttle, tuttle! An old man Jabiru, looking like the old Pookarakka he was in the story in which he settled the dispute between the Frogmen started by old Tchamala. A cloud of black duck on the wing. White duck. Rainbow-tinted pigmy geese. And behind it all the trees running round and round like big mob blackfellow in corroboree. (p. 215)

Clearly the first sentence is in the narrator's voice, but there are nevertheless suggestions of a mingling of white and black traditions that look forward to Prindy's point of view: "Old-man Flood" is a personification of nature acceptable to the white man, and also refers to a phenomenon central to Aboriginal belief; "a mighty hallelujah chorus of frogs" links for a moment western culture and an aspect of Aboriginal myth often mentioned in the novel. Almost all the rest of the passage is directly related to Prindy's state of mind. The rapid sights and sensations evoke the speed of the train and the wonder of the observer. The Jabiru brings in associations of the Pookarakka and Tchamala, while the black and white duck suggest the racial extremes that Prindy is caught between and is trying to reconcile. (The parallel between colored birds and human races has just previously been drawn by the narrator himself.) The "Rainbow-tinted pigmy geese" recall Prindy: a child and a follower of the Rainbow

Cult. Essential to these details is the felt presence of Prindy's consciousness, selecting the aspects of the landscape of most meaning to him. But more basic still — "behind it all" — is the Aboriginal identification with nature that causes him to see "the trees running round and round like big mob blackfellow in corroboree."

Such a close and deeply felt relationship between landscape and observer is rare, but it is appropriate here for it expresses so convincingly Prindy's state of mind. But even Prindy cannot always live on such a level of wonder, so a more characteristic note is the more objective one that dominates the account of his journey with King George, Queenie Peg-leg and Nellie.

This journey is one of discovery and instruction: "George . . . then showed Prindy . . ."; "George also showed him . . ." "George told Prindy . . ." (p. 387). Prindy, and with him in a more detached way the reader, develops a love of the land based on knowledge. The prose moves through its encyclopaedic territory of knowledge and experience with an ease that helps create the wonderful feeling of freedom, certainty and fecundity that this journey evokes around the figures of Prindy and George. Mythology plays a part in this feeling, but usually it is not mythology but Herbert's own observation of detail that brings the landscape to life and makes it real.

The sections of the book that deal with landscape are full of clearly observed details, which may not be symbolic but which nevertheless convey much more than mere fact. They carry the conviction of actuality, and evoke a real, physical land that is the basis for Jeremy's and the narrator's generalised statements. Much of the power of Prindy's first escape into the flooded country comes from vivid observation: "There were tiny marsupial mice, one with babies big as peas clinging dead to its pouch"; "Nothing to be seen through the grey rain sheeting in the wind, except a bit of fencing"; "gobs of rank froth spat down from the sodden trunks and branches"; "one grey seething pulling mass" (pp. 605-6). Herbert can embody in his writing an emphasis on physical things as, say, Hemingway does, but with greater naturalness than Hemingway: "Although there was dry firewood in the camping shed, he made no attempt to light a fire in the antbed hearth, but retired at once to one of the hide and sapling beds, spread the oilskin, lay down and slept" (p. 607). This style

at its simplest can form a kind of tough poetry: "Here were substantial trees: bloodwood, ironwood, stringy-bark" (pp. 606-7). Even such tiny parts of *Poor Fellow My Country* as these represent a triumph of Herbert's realist style.

The part mythology plays in the narrative treatment of the land, although ultimately dependent on realistic details, is itself prominent and effective in the floods that Prindy escapes into. These are the work of Tchamala, and the protection and the menace they at once offer him powerfully suggest the cult Prindy is following. The underground stream that leads to the Rainbow Pool protects him from the police and almost kills him.

The dual nature of Tchamala is also a theme in the incident of Cahoon's death, although there are as well in that incident more complex associations. Landscape and creatures in the landscape, fascism, religion and fatherly love are all involved. Simple details suggest Prindy's heightened sensory awareness: "The Sun rose up and up. The water was falling. Bits of the sugary marble peeped. The sky was vivid blue, with white clouds sailing" (p. 980). The quick and unimpeded escape of the ibis and the cockies reinforce Prindy's apparently hopeless confinement on the rock, with two dead men chained to his neck. Cahoon's death produces a more complex human situation than any treatment of just landscape and observer could attain. He is "a dead man who probably had loved him" (p. 980), but he is also the anti-Semite and Prindy's captor. His torn-off arm reinforces the problem, "outstretched as if in waving farewell, giving a blessing, or Heiling Hitler" (p. 980). The whole episode is set in an unemotional or anti-pathetic framework, which corresponds to Prindy's attitude and is created by description of landscape or birds, as in Prindy's response to the osprey's grabbing Cahoon's arm: "The buggers would often snatch one off your line." (p. 980)

For all the beauty of the relatively simple descriptions of nature and of Aboriginal life in nature, it is in incidents such as this and Prindy's first train ride, in which landscape is seen as one splendid element in a complex human life, that Herbert exploits to the fullest the novelist's craft. (A comparison may perhaps be made with Prindy, who makes songs not

only out of the calls of butcher birds, say, but out of everything he experiences.)

However, landscape remains the most positive single element in the novel. It is pervaded by a convincing, pristine vividness, but it is always threatened by the crass, the mercenary and the uninformed people who live in it. Destruction of the land is a measure of the nation's failure; and in the last chapter, both land and nation seem completely lost. The apparent worthlessness of the present makes even unattractive aspects of the 1930s and 1940s as dramatised in the body of the novel seem, in retrospect, vital and valuable, part of a community that has been destroyed. The whole book, then, might be seen as an obsessively backward looking lament, even perhaps as a kind of gravestone over a dead country.

But in fact, at the very end, Herbert does not yield to despair but makes a difficult affirmation. It is an affirmation of the landscape and its indestructible magic — its "*Moah*", its "*Mahraghi*": "Nothing else for the gaping world to see. Only the *Moah* of the river to be sensed, by those with senses not yet too blunted by the jack-hammer logic of the *kuttabah* as still to be aware of the all-pervading *Mahragi* of this ancient land, *Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo*" (p. 1463). The land, the violation of which offers a major reason to despair, also offers some cause for stoic joy; the most positive element in the novel is also the most resilient. It can still be called — and not only ironically — the land of the Holy Spirit.

If one aspect of *Poor Fellow My Country* were to be taken as the novel's supreme achievement, it would be its evocation of the land, both in its own right and as an aspect of character and action. This achievement must include the pessimistic element in Herbert's view of the land: not only that the land is being violated, but also that, whatever its state, it can offer people like Prindy only a temporary escape from irresistible bureaucracy and inhumanity. This complete view of the country — based on love and knowledge, aware of tragedy — is the book's greatest contribution to Australian literature. Herbert has given what must be the supreme expression to the Australian writer's preoccupation with the land.

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BARRY DICKINS **Reservoir Bicycles**

Bicycles conjure my dearest memories. Bicycle saddles too, illuminate and rebound on their rusted spring foundations, groaning under impossible bums, postmen, nannies, headmasters with wart problems, nurses poised precariously atop questionable malvern star curios, redfaced, swearing at the calm Greek women, eternally black and beaming under their shoulder loads of pineapples, pork chops, babies, peanut oil, I can see them now, my bicycling Reservoir ghosts, dressed for a wedding in High St., cruising around rubbish dump back lanes, overtaking nostalgic and deadly serious church grannies, smoking, if it please them, puffing great clouds of Turf, Viscount or Albany into the early morning air, yet sweet with daphne, jasmine and wattle, clipping over chucked out empties, dodging an escapee daddy longlegs from his overnight half obliterated scorched almond carton-hotel grinning and winking at clothesline mothers through knotholes in rotten fences, caught in flashes of leaping sunlight on their breakdown, flat tyred, worthless, windy, holy pushbikes.

My older brother dinking me against the wind and deafening hailstones, his sleeves ambushed by time or moth-balls behind some canyon or gulch or wardrobe that was really some beat up prickly bushes or a heap of abandoned kerosene cans on the pipeline, as we hesitated to the high-school, his sleeves tugged over his cobalt blue frosted knuckles, the front mudguard warped into a perpetual u-turn, twisted, incongruous, snail-pace, rusted spoked velocipede, what ghostly rubbish dump or municipal springtime junkyard do you grace now? With your cobwebs, stolen vinyl two-tone toolkit that housed a Japanese dustcap, a pair of Paraguayan pliers and a restless redback spider, perpetually drunken on the leaking fumes of the puncture glue. Men cycling boozed down

Cheddar Road in the moonlight. Their tweed jacket backs covered in tiny neon raindrops, stopping on certain streetcorners with the impulse to yawn or drink more beer, bikes skidding lopsided away from pub walls, improvised pedals made of wire soapsavers and twisted flyswats wrapped around, for whatever good that did you, as you puffed and wheezed crookedly up Borrie Road with bronchitis, blue knuckles and nose running ahead of you, as the toads on the pipeline croaked aloha to the barely visible squadrons of Malvern Star, Healing, Raleigh, Repco and a host of imported, impromptu, devastated, partially burnt or stolen, puncture-proof (remember DOUG. ELLIOT forking a back tyre again and again on T.V.? "Look, kiddies, completely and absolutely for sure; PUNCTURE PROOF: AND YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE WHAT UNCLE DOUGIE TELLS YOU YOU LITTLE BASTARDS OR GOD WILL COME DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN: IN BIG FLAMES, WITH HIS EVIL MATES AND NICK OFF WITH YOUR BIKE" . . . etc., etc., etc.).

Once, a friend of mine had his bicycle saddle pinched and had to ride to Panton Hills on the stump, with two flat tyres, toothache and the clap.

Ah, but when you dunk your girl on your newly painted 28 inch Raleigh rocket, complete with silverfrosted Taiwanese pump, mirrors, toolkit and rear brakes, then you were in paradise. Sweet brown hair streaming in your face, her little freckled bum astride the bar, twitching in ecstasy, her tiny fingers tinkling the bell; what sweet joy to take on any hill or mudtrack incline at any hour; what beautiful breezes from the aquaduct and from the yellow patches of truant daisies from the lunchtime pipeline, the back wheel spinning faster than the universe, crashing silently on the banks of petal rivers in the public parks, boughs of great gums swishing overhead,

she sang into your ear, she danced down the imaginary isles of the carefree great halls of paddock light that were to shine and blow and grow greater and greener every year of your life.

And, as you pedalled away from the pub,

every streetlight shone and bicycle bells chimed under High Street and through the vibrations of the bike you felt a thousand bodies struggling up Ruckers Hill, into the moonlight, balanced between heaven and downhill good Earth.



NANCY KEESING **Everything is not Enough**

*An interview with Marjorie Barnard*

Marjorie Barnard lives in a house her father built on a high ridge at Longueville. The expansive view from its deep verandahs sweeps from Hunter's Hill and Woolwich across the Lane Cove river; overlooks Greenwich and beyond to the southern side of the harbor, to Darling Harbor and its shipping, to the bridge and the Sydney skyline which, as the crow flies, is only some four miles away. Hunter's Hill is where the Quartermaster built his house and the central prospect is directly of the soil on which Australian history began. This is no longer Macquarie's world and Captain Piper might scarcely recognise his harbor; but coming nearer, one looks down from the verandah to harborside parkland just outside Marjorie's gate and there the bush, though tidied, retains its untameable and timeless quality.

When I telephoned Marjorie to suggest this interview she explained that she had recently been interviewed for an archival film and thought herself "talked out" as to biographical matters. On the other hand, since she retired from writing, she had thought "a great deal about what writing means", and of being a writer and of "the basic things like style, discipline and creativity" and perhaps it would be appropriate to discuss this distillation of her thoughts.

She prepared some notes before our talk and was happy for me to supplement these, and my notes and memory, with a tape recorder. In one sense therefore much of what follows is "word perfect" but that, as I'm only too well aware, is in the dullest sense because I lack adequate skill to reproduce the emphasis of her voice, its quality when she is amused, its passion when aroused. She is seventy eight but her voice vibrates with the excitement and variety of pace and tone of the very young. No one will hear the tape itself.

I gave my word that it would remain off the record and we both forgot it was there. One of the things it discloses in an uninhibited passage is that a passionate woman does not grow past new loathing, or actual physical aversion to the mere presence, in a large gathering, of a man she finds repugnant both as a writer and a person.

*We talked of Style, Discipline and Creativity in that order, though sometimes these topics overlapped. But by way of introduction, and to emphasise their importance I give some of her thoughts out of sequence.*

Creativity I think is natural. It's part of the survival kit and everybody has it; most people have it, perhaps some do not . . . Creativity is both so tough and so frail. Like a baby. Babies can endure almost anything. Prince Rupert of the Rhine, when his family fled, was thrown into the baggage wagon with all the other objects and forgotten for twenty four hours, and then he was taken out, red in the face and screaming, still very much alive, bruised all over.

Discipline . . . the main problem is to keep the ghost of the book alive, especially if you're earning your living at the same time.

I stopped writing for several reasons. Because I'm seventy eight years old and I think I've said all I had to say. I would only be repeating myself and that is something I have no wish to do. And of course there was *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* which did genuinely break my heart, which is not a good book. It has something but it could have been so much better. It was a failure.

One final piece of wisdom which I have learned the hard way — EVERYTHING IS NOT ENOUGH.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow was mentioned several times and Marjorie explained that, although it is listed as one of the books she wrote in collaboration with Flora Eldershaw, in fact, because by then they lived in different cities and were both very busy, the novel is really all her own. It was the book she intended "as the sum of anything I could do or say. I don't know what I had anywhere to go from there" but it was written at a time when other work and responsibility impinged too much and she could not keep to the strict discipline which she discusses below.

When she retired, Marjorie retired completely and voluntarily. She "sent everything to the Mitchell Library and got it out of my life quite happily, and with a sense of relief."

As we spoke of *Style, Discipline and Creativity* it was very plain that she regards style and creativity as natural things innate in, and common to, humanity; these parts of our inheritance she talked of in a general way. But as to discipline she was entirely particular, describing her own way of work and rules for work. It became apparent that, for her at least, art and artistry are less products of inclination and talent than of the degree to which the artist is prepared to order his work and life. I don't think words like "inspiration" or "daemon" were uttered all afternoon, there was no need or occasion for them, but what they are symbols for pervaded the whole conversation.

### Style

Style is a completely natural thing . . . a tool as natural as the hand. The *cult of style* is the enemy of writing. Everybody has a style. The bullocky cursing his team has a magnificent flow of language. (It's not the same talking to his truck of course!) That has gone. That's historic. And then if you ever heard anyone really swearing from the very heart, all steamed up; it's poetry. It's pure poetry. You mightn't catch the words but it has that great and magnificent flow.

Children have style. They have a way of writing and expressing themselves. I don't think education has anything to do with it, or very little. Education can be a hindrance to writing. I don't think background has much to do with it. It may teach you to speak correctly but it doesn't teach style. Did you ever read Fred Blakeley's *Hard Liberty*? Well, Fred was a drover; hadn't any discernible education. He couldn't spell even simple words but he had a great fountain of style. He wrote his book racily and got through exactly what he was trying to say. Fred did have a bit of

tidying up from an editor but she didn't interfere with his natural use of language.

There was Frank Davison, perhaps the most famous example. He left school at twelve, he fought all the way through the first World War as a private soldier and yet he had that beautiful, beautiful style. *Man-Shy* is one of the best pieces of writing that has come out in Australia and it's all of a piece. It just flowed out of him like perspiration. As natural as that.

Style is a tool as natural as your hands. It can be learned but I think to learn tricks of style is almost an admission that you can't write . . . Oh yes, you can learn to write correctly and that's all to the good as long as you let it pass over into your subconscious or whatever it is. I think *grammar's* an admirable study and you don't think of grammar all the time. I was slightly shocked when a friend, on reading my novel *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* complimented me on my grammar! The friend was not another writer, otherwise I'd know that was intentional tact.

*Robert FitzGerald* has a friend who always infuriates him because when they meet this friend says: "Oh hello Bob, still scribbling?"

The little pinpricks. But no, this was genuine admiration for my command of grammar. I have a friend who is a moderately famous academic in the States. She is a professor of rhetoric. Now I always thought rhetoric was declamation. Apparently it's just the art of expression. She published a couple of text books on the subject which are widely used and which bring her in a steady income. These text books consist of excerpts from writers in the English language, ancient and modern, and at the end of each excerpt there is a bit of a questionnaire — does this author use alliteration effectively? That sort of thing. About half a dozen questions after each one. Her idea is: you give them examples of good prose and it will rub off. And I think that's a frightful idea. It's just like a mass of red herrings popped into their literary laps all alive and squirming. She cannot write herself. Anything she writes is very dreary. *What would you think of somebody who deliberately adopted a particular style for a particular purpose or kind of purpose? Would you object to that?*

No, I think the great problem is to say what you have to say and you use style as a tool; your means of saying it. People talk of style sometimes as fine writing, as ornamentation. Well, very often, to make your meaning clear — the undertones, the overtones, the climate — you *would* use patches of fine writing, but a whole book done in

fine writing or highly ornamented writing I think just cloy the reader's mind and ends by cloying the writer keeping it up. Now *Salzburg Tales*, Christina Stead; that is just one mass of exaggerated fine writing; "word heaps" and she didn't really do any good work until she got it out of her system. That was her first book. She can use [excessive writing] for good effect but in writing *that* book she hadn't the experience to use it to good effect. It was almost ridiculous. It was a piece of technical virtuosity; which is remarkable — that's not enough for a book.

*We then discussed certain authors who "write for money", some of whom she approves as "giving value for money" and some of whom she disapproves. As for Shakespeare:*

Shakespeare made his world by using his world. He straightened up the back. He could break every rule and take all those frightful plots from here, there and everywhere, absolutely idiotic, and yet he could infuse them. I wouldn't use the word genius lightly. I don't think I've ever known a genius unless it was Frank Davison. I think he had that basic thing and I think there've only been five or six "geniuses" in the world. I put Shakespeare among them. Shakespeare has persisted. He gives something to everybody and it's always worthwhile going to a Shakespeare performance even if it's a bad one. Did you see "Much Ado" at the Nimrod? Wasn't it good . . . Wasn't it *great fun*. And Bell's *Hamlet* was good; very good.

*We're going there tonight to see a play called Travesties.*

Tom Stoppard . . . excellent dramatist. I hope to get to *Travesties* some time. It's very good. Jacqueline Murphy went. She said it's very good. She's got a good nose for plays. I think that Shakespeare was great enough to accept the traditions of his day and write . . . he did write some frightful plays, *Pericles* for instance and *Timon of Athens*. I did a term's lectures on *Timon of Athens* — it's a dreadful play. I think *As You Like It*'s a dreadful play, too. Shakespeare would accept everything and then transcend it. I don't think you can judge other people by Shakespeare.

Style and fine writing are said to be the same thing. You have to use fine writing in small doses. If what you have to say demands it; if your interior feeling about it demands it and if the only way of really getting it over demands it you use everything as you need it. I once wrote a sentence that filled the whole printed page because what I was trying to get over couldn't be expres-

sed in any other way. And that was just a piece of virtuosity. A *tour de force*. If I'd repeated that it would have been a terrible mistake, just showing off. You see what I mean? You can use anything if what you're trying to get over to winkle out the meaning which is not entirely covered by lucidity alone. You can use anything. It all comes under the idea of style. Ornament can just kill itself. Every writer is like King Arthur who pulled the sword out of the stone. It is something that you have to do for yourself. Your style is there. You can't get away from it. And you can't learn somebody else's. I think that fixes style don't you?

### *Creative Writing Classes*

*Marjorie Barnard spake with immense scorn about "creative writing" classes. She does not believe that creative writing can be taught. Neither do I as it happens, but I tried to play Devil's Advocate. I also sincerely attempted to justify certain kinds of workshop groups, especially groups that provide beginners with some of the advantages of an audience. She objected "they don't realise their mistakes for themselves." I then said that she and I came from family backgrounds which gave support to one at an early age — where education and culture were valued; but this point was not taken up and we returned to creative writing classes.*

I don't think people who attend these classes are wrong, but they're mistaken. I don't think it's going to do them any good. These schools that teach people to write are out to make a profit, and I don't think their instructors as a general rule are capable of teaching people to write. We know the language; we've heard it since infancy. One develops one's own ideas and it becomes a matter of putting the two together really to find a way to express what one wants to say. That is the most important thing: to actually get it over, not to show off. Not spreading your tail feathers like a peacock; that's nothing to do with writing. If you really *want* to communicate with people, if you feel you have something to say, it is most important to get it into a *viable form*.

And it's only something in yourself that can tell you that you have actually expressed it; not just used a formula. You can use anything. You can write it like a telegram as Hemingway did, but not to keep writing it like a telegram. I think when you reach the climax of a book, your writing becomes simpler and more direct. You've dealt with the overtones and the undertones. You've reached the real climax. Your writing becomes

naturally simpler, more lucid and direct. It's just like something inside myself. As natural as a fever.

### *Discipline*

*In discussing style earlier, and in response to a question from me, Marjorie made it plain that her discipline was entirely devoted to keeping alive "the ghost" of the book she was working on, "the ghost" consisting of the book's pre-conceived plan as well as its mood, style and feeling. One must remember that throughout her writing life she worked as a librarian and achieved seniority and responsibility. During the Second World War years civilians in responsible jobs were by definition over-working because of staff and manpower problems. This should not be overlooked in considering her achievements in history and fiction during that time — her concentration and single-mindedness must have been immense.*

*When she was writing a book, she said, she read nothing.*

Never. It does take your mind off it. Corrupts the image. It's all right to read the newspaper — see what's happening. I suppose it might be all right to read something away from your own field . . . there has been so little time to write . . . but there's never been enough time to read. There wouldn't be time for both anyhow.

*Do you mean that when you were writing a book that might take a very long time in actual writing, you wouldn't read another book?*

No, I just wouldn't have much interest in reading. I might read a journal or some occasional thing or my work might make me read something of a technical nature. You know, you eat and sleep your book. And you keep the ghost alive.

Everybody has to develop their own discipline. I did that for myself. As you say, stopped reading, cleared my mind and the main problem is to keep the ghost of the book alive, especially if you're earning your living at the same time. If you can sit down every morning at nine o'clock and work through till five o'clock it's ideal. I never experienced that and I did a tremendous lot of work. I didn't do anything else. If I couldn't write I just looked at the blank page, just sat and stared until gradually it distilled. It all happens inside the mind or whatever else you use — not only the mind. I got this continuity which is extremely important.

I think you can write a book in four months or can write a book in nine months. The book which took two years to write was a failure. It died on the way. That was the second book, *Green Memory*. It didn't work because I couldn't keep

the ghost alive. There were too many interruptions. I couldn't keep to my discipline. The book although it started well didn't keep it up. It's quite an uninteresting book. I know that and I know why it is that. It isn't that I was worse, I couldn't maintain the discipline.

You have to keep that feeling of the book alive within you. A most important thing, and with a job it's often very difficult. It means perhaps you can only write late at night. I wrote *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* which is entirely my book. It bears the name of the collaboration. But Flora and I had parted company, not through a quarrel or anything but there was a war. Flora was extremely busy, she was in Melbourne and Canberra. I was here. I had a job with C.S.I.R.O. I could only write very late at night and it shows all the faults of not having enough continuity.

It's the book that broke my heart, because I really thought I had something to say *most desperately*. I cared *far* too much and it suffers as a book because I cared too much and is overwritten because I cared too much.

The ideal thing is to write consecutively, just to keep at it, and never to leave a paragraph, never to leave a chapter, until you're satisfied with it.

For me, rewriting or revising is out. It's like trying to paint a sunset two days running. It's different. And you just get a hybrid. I *never* revise. I write a thing slowly, carefully with great concentration and that's it. I might just make some minor changes, put in a comma or something like that.

*You have the whole plan assembled beforehand then? N.K.*

Yes, I know about the book before I begin writing, and I follow that. That's what I call the ghost. The ghost is there. Never never put aside anything or yield to the temptation of 'Oh yes, I'd like to write the last chapter now' and jump over and write it. There won't be a natural grace. It's something stuck on like icing on a cake.

It's a counsel of perfection to keep this continuity. But you can, even with a job, by living on two levels; like keeping your book always with you eating and sleeping. Discipline is necessary but what exactly the nature of the discipline is depends upon the individual. Some suits one and some suits another.

### *Creativity and Survival*

*It is only as I re-read my notes that I realise how firmly an apparently informal interview kept to*

*Marjorie Barnard's pre-arranged structure. As I listen to the whole tape and recall the many interruptions to the talk I admire Marjorie's clear-minded singleness even more than I did when she described her discipline.*

*The interruptions were varied — my questions; an interlude when, as I indicated earlier, she frankly discussed an author whom she loathes; lunch and the company of her companion Vera Murdoch; the presence of a splendid basset-hound who has adopted her; where locally one may buy the superb pate and cheeses we had for lunch; a good small French restaurant in the city; plans for a trip to England this year.*

*Marjorie's scheme, in a way more subtle than I then realised, survived it all and in admiration I add to this concluding section on creativity, the word "survival".*

Creativity I think is natural. It's part of the survival kit, and everybody has it. Or, most people have it, perhaps some do not. Children have it crushed out of them by having too much given to them, too many toys, too much entertainment, all their time regulated. Do this and do that. A child must have a bit of loneliness, a bit of self-reliance, make his own world. Creativity feeds on that. Creativity is both so tough and so frail. Like a baby. Babies can endure almost anything. Prince Rupert of the Rhine, when his family fled, was thrown into the baggage wagon with all the other objects and forgotten for 24 hours and then he was taken out, red in the face and screaming, but still very much alive, bruised all over.

It is both frail and tough and that is the sort of thing that we have. It's just a natural thing like part of our survival. Survival is being able to look after ourselves not only on the physical level but on the emotional and intellectual level. It's all survival and I think practically all children have it but so much is done for them that it just expires.

And then, of course, there's education and that's another great hazard. A high-powered education leaves not much room for creativity. You've got to do this, you've got to do that, you've got to write a thesis on this or the other thing. I think I've noticed in people, particularly in writers, that it doesn't come back until about the age of thirty. Most writers don't precipitate until about 30 to do any really good work. They've had to live of course and have experience, but also they've got to get over their education. It's money in the bank having an education,

raw material, but it's unnatural too. I had a very high powered education, years of it, and I was in love with learning. It was exciting and marvellous.

Up to the age of 11 I'd been writing like steam. I was born writing. I talked in sentences at 11 months and was playing games, inventing games. I had one sort I played with my mother and one sort I played secretly but it was writing really, although I couldn't actually write. Then at the age of 11 or 12 my education started in earnest and there was no more writing except what I had to do. I quite lost it and it didn't recur till I was 30, and it came back.

Well, you see, with most people when it comes back they have to deny it. They've got their careers, they've got responsibilities. They've got husbands, and wives or families who have to be kept. All that sort of thing. They've got to say no to the slow business. But with some it just won't be denied. They throw away everything for it. Some don't have to throw away everything because they're free.

It's a tremendous effort to take it up again. A tremendous self-discipline. It really is the backbone of it. A discipline — to know what you want to do *and do it*.

I had a very quiet childhood. It was wonderful for me. An only child, I didn't have any toys or anything like that. I had a lot of time by myself and I was able to live my own life. I was a really creative child because there weren't all the other things. I was very rarely taken out. Very rarely had any entertainment of any description. I had one or two jobs. I gathered chips or picked strawberries or something like that, and all the time I was doing that I was entertaining myself. It was splendid, perfect. It was lonely. But that was good. I had a governess, who was the first person in the world who thought I was a real person. She's only just died my darling Nellie\*. She was only ten years older than I was. She was 17 and I was 7. She encouraged me and never laughed at me. And she was so dear to me all her life and I was like her eldest child. She never missed a birthday for 70 years; even when she was dying she addressed the envelope but she couldn't write the letter.

So you see the influences, and I was lucky. I should have been better though, you know. And I've got one final piece of wisdom which I have learnt the hard way — *Everything is not enough*.

\*Nellie Hazelwood (Mrs Ted Ray) was a member of the notable Sydney family of horticulturalists and nurserymen.

MICHAEL DUGAN **Poetry in Publication**

Stephen Murray-Smith's very true remarks about the types of poetry being written and published in Australia ("Swag", No. 64) prompted me to look at the publication outlets available for Australian poets.

Basically there are three major types of publication available. Newspapers such as the *Age* and the *Australian* publish poems in their literary supplements. This can be of no commercial benefit to them and is presumably a gesture to literature. Publication in a newspaper will give the poet the widest circulation (and highest fee) he is likely to receive in Australia.

Literary magazines such as *Overland* and *Meanjin* publish poetry presumably because they see its publication as part of the traditional role of a literary magazine. I doubt that their poems are read and discussed with the eagerness and interest that awaited each new issue of Frank Harris's *Saturday Review*—or *Squire's London Mercury*. Stephen Murray-Smith mentions a poetry magazine with a circulation of two hundred. I suspect that if *Overland* stopped publishing poetry its drop in circulation would not be above that figure.

The third type of publication is the small circulation semi-coterie magazine, such as Kris Hemensley's *Ear in the Wheatfield* and a number of other magazines like it. It is in these magazines that poetic experimentation and exchange of ideas at a most serious and committed level occur. Their circulation is of necessity limited due to the small number of people operating at the literary intellectual level of the contributors.

In addition we have two large poetry magazines, *New Poetry* and *Poetry Australia*, neither of which can perhaps be completely separated from the coterie type of publication. Both of these magazines have swelled under Literature

Board assistance and would presumably be forced to operate at a more limited level were such assistance removed.

It would therefore seem that it is only the very small magazines that are totally committed to poetry. It may even be that some editors of other publications are publishing poetry with which they have little sympathy in an attempt to keep alive an idea of a poetry which no longer exists.

With these outlets available the Australian poet is relatively well provided with avenues for publication, I rather suspect better provided for than the British poet. This also applies to the publication of poetry in books, with half a dozen publishers consistently publishing poetry and others prepared to publish books of poems on occasion.

But who reads the stuff? I doubt if there are a thousand people in Australia, excluding those who write or are involved in the teaching of poetry, who are consistent readers of Australian poetry. On pessimistic days I doubt if there are a hundred.

Sophistication has killed the modern poet as far as wide readership is concerned, and most poets are aware and understanding of this. Unfortunately it has also robbed poetry of the social relevance it once had and its influence on the language. The writing of poetry has become almost totally self-indulgent and hobbyist.

There is still a popular poetry, a middle-brow poetry. It is the sentimental poems of Rod McKuen, the song lyrics of Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan. Poetry of sentiment produced in a manner that offers entertainment at a wide level of understanding, exactly as did the ballads of Paterson or the larrikin verses of C. J. Dennis. In some cases, such as Bob Dylan's song about Reuben Carter, it may even have some social



relevance and effect. It is not, however, poetry in any way related to the linear development of poetry as literature. One doubts, for instance, that Mr McKuen has ever been seriously influenced by a reading of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot or William Carlos Williams.

There is still a large audience for the ballad poetry of Paterson, Lawson and Adam Lindsay Gordon. However, their verses belong to a

simpler age and are not considered seriously as poetry by most of those currently engaged in writing and reading the type of poetry that is published in literary magazines today.

Fifty years ago contemporary poetry was considered part of the literate reader's literary diet. This is no longer the case with much of the poetry being written today. Perhaps we should stop pretending that it is.

A new book by Laurence Collinson

## Hovering Narcissus

Laurence Collinson's two previous collections of poems, *The Moods of Love* and *Who is wheeling Grandma?*, were both published by Overland.

Both were enthusiastically received by readers and critics and were poetry best-sellers. *Hovering Narcissus* has been published by subscription. There are 350 copies available at \$3, and there is a special edition of 150 copies, numbered and signed, available at \$6.

*Hovering Narcissus* is 48 pages, well designed with a soft cover, and contains twenty-five previously uncollected poems.

Orders should be sent to **Editor, Overland, GPO Box 98a, Melbourne 3001.**

AMANDA LAZAR **Burying Mother**

She pushed the back door open, hearing it scratch as it went over that worn patch in the linoleum, and stepped into the darkened laundry that led to the kitchen.

Someone had drawn the brown holland blinds. Placing her basket on the table, she leaned across the broad surface and jerked the cord. The blind sprung and shuddered on its roller. The sudden sound annoyed her. She stood facing the window. Bare wooden stakes grew in the round flower bed outside; the dahlia bed, once edged with lily of the valley. The soil was now empty, and the corms lay up in the back shed like a scatter of dried brown onions. Here was an end in itself, for she had never liked those fleshy heads of sulphur yellow and wine red; those bunches wrapped in a twist of brown paper and tied with string. Pressed upon her in reproach: accepted with indifference; while the tender stalks of the lilies of the valley had been withheld. Like love.

She felt tired. So tired that the thought of the task that lay ahead sent a wave of helplessness through her body. But it must be done. She was the eldest. The fittingness of the duty brought some strength, and a little bitterness. How much of her life had been pre-determined by that chance element of her place in the family? But then she believed that order could be imposed on life, if you had a feeling for the rightness of things. It sickened her the way people so often went to pieces, and then looked to her. For if nothing else (as her family were fond of saying) a religious upbringing sharpened the conscience. Then again, was it more apparent in her because she was the eldest? Cause and effect, failing and excuse; *grasping at memories singular to each*. The past rising to twine itself around the present; linking today to the chain that pulled her back to the static time of her childhood; a

lurking presence in some recess of her being: delineated, completed, and yet the key to everything else.

"What could Mother have done? With the Old Man and his moods and the five of us? We must have been a difficult lot. We got that from him."

She had said it, they had said it too, the four boys: drawn pictures in words to illustrate origin, amusing friends with anecdote, convincing themselves with their myths.

Turning from the window, she thought of her mother. Faceless in memory; recalled by her father's one sentimental description. His children had asked why he had chosen her, in that dark past before they existed. Here in this kitchen, Mother serving the roast, Father had described her cream hair wound round in a knot: his vision of goodness. The old hypocrite who kept a woman up at Echuca mouthed phrases of purity as he dipped his bread in the gravy. They had held back their mirth at the thought of their Old Man ensnared by illusion. Saving the winking and nudging for when he took off, employee of the Victorian Railways, to inspect stations — including Echuca.

But was that not, as they sheepishly declared many years later, only a ribald delusion of the adolescent mind?

Her cream hair was hearsay; had become non-descript before they were aware of such things, and Mother's goodness with time grew tight-lipped. While never remiss, she stood apart; except when he wavered, threatening to dissolve into water or fire. Then it was Mother who saved him while they laughed, excited by the anticipation of climax. *But her common sense always robbed them as they waited for him to take their bait.* "Really," she would say. "He is your father after all."

They had buried Mother three days ago, with regret and with sadness. Left empty-handed and forced by the void to regret, as they gathered oppressively in the funeral parlor, with undisciplined thoughts roaming down through the years. Then they had gone back: back into their lives, relieved by conclusion; leaving her with the debris to sort out and dispose of. Accepting her role as the eldest.

But where to begin? She walked through the passage way stained with lights from the glass above the front door, into the 'boys' room, and pulled open the drawer of the varnished wardrobe. The scraping of the palm tree fronds on the iron of the roof set her teeth on edge, like long nails being drawn back and forth, back and forth. All those nights lying alone; hearing the paim; immersed in dreams of infinite possibility.

The drawer was filled with letters and other papers. She sorted abruptly: words that had served their purpose; data collected by a tidy, practical mind. Kept and forgotten year after year. Still she hated the invasion; felt her hands soiled by prying into affairs that were not hers, however impersonal. And then there was the fear of discovery, now, when she no longer sought the burden of knowledge, having come to terms. As a small child she had clung to the dream that her need would be met: that one day, Mother would turn around and see her; would set the others aside and reach out to her alone. But when she grew older, that idea soured and she drew the hard line of blame.

It was different with the Old Man. He had sung her praises; had taken her with him to play the accompaniment (both literally and metaphorically) and she had taken childish revenge on his pride. Had sung "I am a little Catholic" to his Protestant friends, or belted through the notes of "The Floral Dance", leaving him breathless and foolish. She did not want this love which he offered as an extension of himself; scorning what she instinctively knew to be indestructible.

Crouched on the floor, she pursued her task of sorting and destroying, wrung by the sight of the pitiful flotsam: old certificates, a few photographs, letters of forgettable content; bills long since settled, and at the bottom paper patterns for the dresses she had worn in her youth. She recalled those moments of alliance, joined as women by the pins and the scissors; rewarded by the glow in Mother's face when the hem was tacked and she leaned back to declare: "That will do nicely. Should wear well I think."

Mother's understatement, her containment, had been unbearable to them all; but especially to her: the eldest. Forced by the birth of her brothers to share what she had assumed to be hers alone.

Beneath a pile of old Christmas cards and receipts, she found a small bundle of letters. A larger envelope with a government seal was tucked into the rubber band that secured them. She opened this envelope. The telegram and official letter were folded tightly together inside. So Mother had known of his death all along! Her youngest son. Had known of the circumstances and suffered the lies uttered for her protection; endured the pointlessness alone in those last months of war. His letters of lost hope, foreshadowing death, kept buried beneath receipts for water rates and stilted Christmas greetings.

Her head began to ache with the intensity of the strain. The penance exacted from the living to dispose of the dead. Faced with the need for inventory before obliterating.

Bracing herself, she entered the front bedroom to tackle the drawers in the blackwood dressing table. They had always called it "Mother's room" even when their Father clung tenaciously to his place in it. For the first time, she allowed herself to gaze with macabre fascination at the wide bed; at the plain throwover of stiff green material pulled taut at each end and smoothed out. It matched the bitter green of the tiles surrounding the fire place. Was it possible that a fire had ever been lit in the small grate? That flames moved shadows on the walls, softening the harsh lines? And once, in that time when his forehead had been topped with dark hair, had they moved receptively toward each other with tender love? Even now at fifty, with three children of her own, such a situation could not be imagined, anymore than in those days when she had lain in her room across the hallway, trying to decipher the code of creaks and muffled whispers in the darkness.

"She never wanted children you know," Aunt May had observed flatly on her one visit after the last birth. She remembered that day: taking the others behind the shed to clarify the point. "But she wanted me. I was the first." She had convinced them as usual, and they accepted her claim to superiority. Not only because she was bigger and older, but because of her intensity.

Mother at forty had farewelled the church. A revenge to rout both theology and convention.

Even he had been impressed on that day of decision, as he worked silently by the plum tree planting out lettuce seedlings. He who ate steak with gusto on Fridays, and talked of the Loyal Orange Lodge to irritate her and inform his offspring of the lineage that freed him from the inconvenience of spiritual observation. Viewing the predictable agonies of small, captive souls with sardonic detachment, as later he watched himself die in this room; filling the air with fatality. Refusing to play their games of hope and comfort: sparing them nothing.

Moving toward the window, she sat down on the box seat that followed the miserable angles of the narrow bay. She looked out and saw that the spiky brown balls of the liquid amber tree were still clinging to the branches, although most of the leaves had fallen on the puffy rise of the buffalo lawn. The hedge needed clipping, and the roses had not been pruned for two seasons. She must get Stephen to do something about it at the weekend. Decay had set in: just like that. The grass would spread its web-like runners across the path; the green and yellow privet would burst the confines of its clipped form, while paint scaled and flaked like withered skin around the name.

“Nirvana.”

But there was still so much to be done. There was the linen to be seen to, and the china in the glass-fronted cabinet in the living room. She forced herself to rise to her feet and return to her task of evaluating the contents of cupboards and drawers. Dividing boxes of handkerchiefs and vests of cotton and wool to share amongst her sisters-in-law. She wished now that she had accepted their half-hearted offers of help. Why was it that she always took control and then assumed that the burden was hers alone? It was habit of course. Mother had relied upon her so much because she was the only girl. She could still remember the injustice she had felt whenever Mother said: “Go down to the shops and pick up the order from the butcher.” Walking home with a bulging string bag while her brothers were allowed to play.

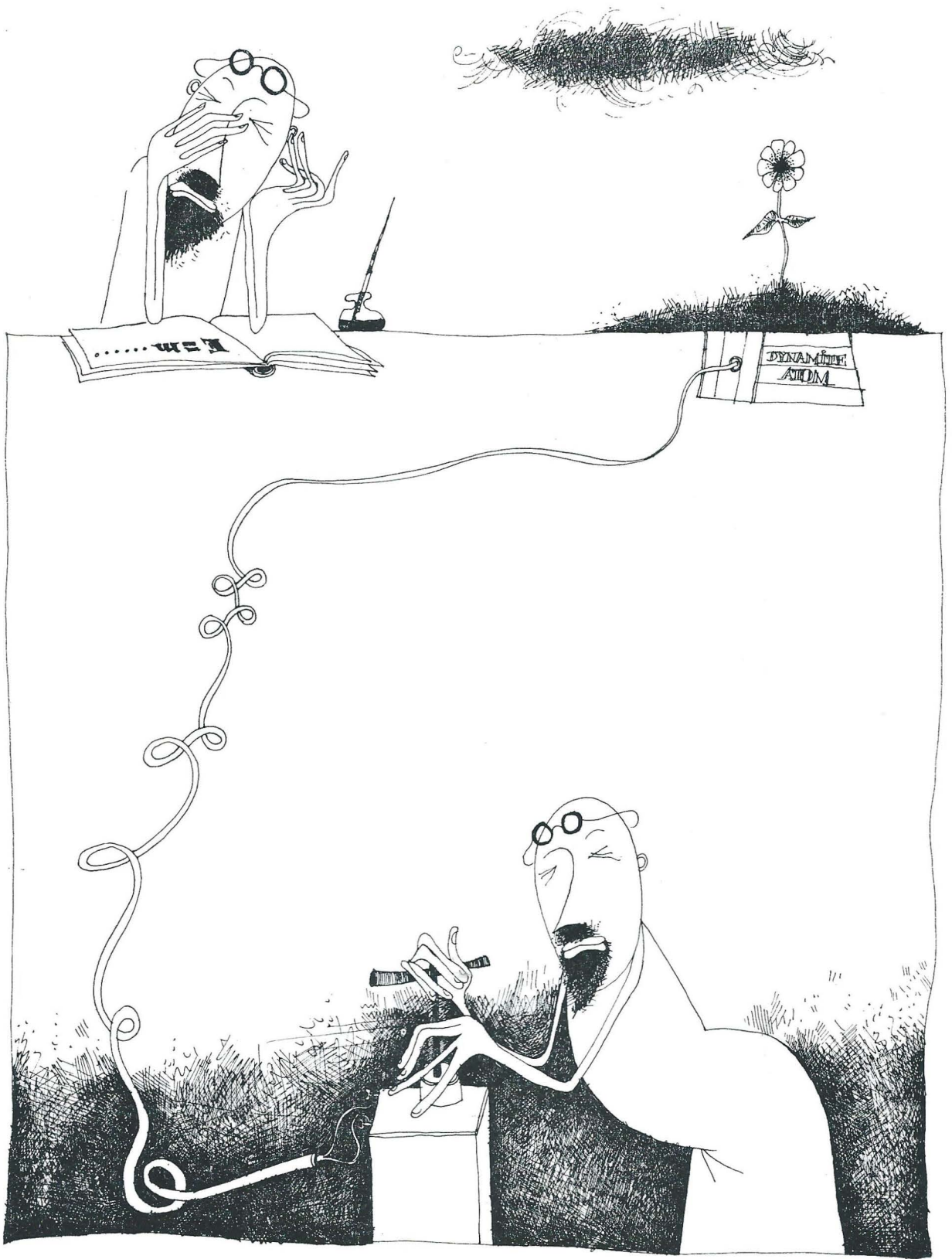
Her back ached from so much bending, her hands were dry from the fine dust that seemed

to have settled everywhere. She stood up and walked to the next room. In her attempts to order this house, she felt only confusion. Why were things done this way? It would be better to leave it all: the plates with the royal blue band which may now be valuable; the hall vase; the extra blankets that were almost unused. Leave it all to the wind and the silverfish. To the creeper that would reach the window and lift the frame, letting in the rain to mildew and rot. Let decay eat away evidence of thrift and hard work, eroding memory by a natural course. But it was not possible. The others were waiting for their share.

Whatever there was in the beginning, you went on: took responsibility for the self conceived between the blackwood bed-ends, and life rushed on covering up the snags that lay imbedded far below. There was no other way, so why was it so hard to accept? What was forgiveness anyway, except forgetting? A short memory elevated to a virtue. She knew suddenly that she wanted none of these things: these lifeless remainders of the dead recycled amongst the living. She did not have to share in this. Let the others come and help themselves. It was time that she stopped behaving as Mother had taught her. She had left this house thirty years ago and made another life for herself. There was no reason to perpetuate this sense of duty which Mother had fostered. She had been the eldest for long enough.

The tight knot of pain that had been growing at the base of her head began to ease. As she went back to the kitchen for her basket, she dusted specks of fluff from the green material of her dress. Feeling the lightness of the basket in her hand, she was pleased by its emptiness. A decision made concrete. There was nothing she wished to take.

Locking the back door, she hid the key in its usual place in the groove of the window ledge and walked down the side path. The doves in the palm tree sounded their dirge of faithfulness as she bolted the gate and walked to the corner. The bus stopped. She climbed the steps and paid her fare, stumbling toward a vacant seat as the driver jolted them back into the main stream of traffic going down the hill to the junction.



*Jiri Tibor*

# Charles Strong's Other Schism

RICHARD KENNEDY

In 1875, Charles Strong was inducted at the age of thirty-one as minister of Scots Church, Melbourne, the leading Presbyterian congregation in the colony of Victoria. Eight years later, in a famous ecclesiastical brawl, Strong was driven from the kirk by a campaign of vilification ostensibly directed against his theological modernism. The Presbyterian clergy and elders, mostly immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s, were intellectual bigots and provincials outraged by Strong's championing of contemporary European scholarship on the doctrines of atonement and the verbal inspiration of the Bible. The storm broke when he chaired a meeting of the Scots Literary Association at which George Higinbotham spoke on the conflict between science and religious dogma.

Demonstrating an admirable solidarity, Strong's friends and supporters walked out of Scots and founded an independent Australian Church in November 1885. Charles Strong took up the new ministry, and a majority of the wealthy and influential members of Scots joined his congregation. The venture has been described as typical of the ethical churches springing up in the English-speaking world of the period, eschewing dogma for being both morally and historically unbelievable, and asserting the primacy of a vaguely benevolent Supreme Being and the importance of human brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

Strong's devotion to social justice was lifelong. At the opening service of the Australian Church, he prayed with a customary social emphasis that "poverty and oppression may cease out of the land . . . and the outcast find a friend".<sup>2</sup> During his turbulent years at Scots he had supported the Australian Health Society, presided over the Convalescent Aid Society, and showed more than a conventional concern for the welfare of prostitutes and unmarried mothers—they were bracketed to-

gether—at a time when respectable opinion held a cruelly sexist view of Fallen Women. To the Calvinists at Scots, however, social work was only a peripheral activity, whereas to the Australian Church, which went in for as much social action as an entire denomination, it formed a central duty. Their main agency, the Social Improvement, Friendly Help and Children's Aid Society, was founded in 1886 to ameliorate the condition of the poor in Richmond and Collingwood. In addition to his welfare work in those two blighted suburbs, Strong's list of good causes reads impressively: village settlements for depression victims; opposition to militarism and conscription; work for mentally retarded children, and support for ill-used Catholics and refugees from fascism. His resolute internationalism and advocacy of an enlightened criminology—right until his death in 1942—won few friends in a community that was "crude, parochial, censorious, and dedicated to orthodox religion and the values of the marketplace".<sup>3</sup>

During the new church's first decade, Strong's radicalism and growing anti-capitalism alienated many of his congregation; from 1889 to 1897 the wealthy bourgeois mainly drifted away. This is the previously untold story of Doctor Strong's initial involvement with the Charity Organisation Movement in 1887, and his traumatic break with it in 1891, a break that played a critical role in discrediting the Australian Church in the eyes of Victoria's ruling élite.<sup>4</sup>

On 9 February 1887 John Jackman, an elderly miner lodging in a Beckett Street, having fallen into arrears of rent, was found by a bailiff seriously ill and unable to afford a medical practitioner. A police constable took him by cab to the doors of the Melbourne Hospital, where he was

turned away, for summer typhoid had crowded all the charity hospitals. Jackman finally gained admission at the morgue. Inured by long acquaintance to emergency cases being refused hospital admission, the Melbourne public was nevertheless startled at the barbarity of Jackman's death. Charles Strong immediately wrote to the *Argus* advocating the establishment of a Charity Organisation Society to direct assistance to bona fide cases of distress. His letter asserted that, contrary to received opinion, serious poverty did exist in Melbourne, and he demanded an inquiry into its causes.<sup>5</sup> Four days later support for the proposed C.O.S. came from Doctor S. Mannington Caffyn, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a former member of the London C.O.S.; but he supported the idea for radically different reasons than those of Strong. Dr Caffyn believed, as the bourgeoisie generally did, that poverty was a blameworthy personal condition. Claiming "there were no people in the colony who could not afford to pay a doctor", he argued that some eighty per cent of out-patients at the Alfred Hospital were "impostors" robbing the medical profession "of a commodity that we have for sale".<sup>6</sup>

The sympathetic publisher of this correspondence was Frederick Haddon, editor of the conservative *Argus* and a longtime advocate of Organised Charity on the British model. Month by month, rising to a peak at Christmas, the *Argus* received stacks of letters from doctors, municipal councillors, clergymen and others, appealing for assistance on behalf of urgent cases of distress and misfortune. Presumably Haddon expected a C.O.S. to alleviate the burden of conducting inquiries into the good faith of correspondents and the objects of their appeals. Haddon's friend, Edward Ellis Morris, the professor of English at Melbourne University, and a convert to a crude Social-Darwinian 'scientific' charity, took the lead, called meetings of 'the charitable', and as a result the Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne came into existence in May 1887. Morris became president; a council of twenty members, including Strong, Caffyn, Haddon, and the Inspector of Charitable Institutions, formally governed the society; but the real work fell to the hands of a small executive committee of honorary officers and a salaried secretary, Jacob Goldstein. Morris usually got his way with the executive.

It soon became clear that Strong was one of the few men of progressive political and social views connected with the society's foundation; he was the only one to maintain more than a nominal

connection with its activities, and the seeds of future strife lay there. The names of about thirty Protestant clergymen regularly appeared in the society's literature as supporters of Organised Charity, and about one-third of them were active within the society. However, like the Anglican Archbishop, Field Flowers Goe, they were mostly Evangelicals and proponents of a fundamentalist political economy. Their allegiance to the social status quo precluded any significant alliance with Strong.

The society's aims were twofold: on one hand, charitable institutions must be organised into an efficient, voluntary system thereby eliminating such evils as overlapping relief; while, on the other, the C.O.S. hoped to be given the task of dividing potential "objects of charity" into the "deserving" and "undeserving" classes by means of strict inquiry procedures. The society campaigned to rout impostors from the charity hospitals and benevolent asylums, and to wrest control of outdoor-relief from the hands of lady visitors who were generally disposed to "indiscriminate" giving. None of these campaigns was successful. Charity reform proved to be a matter for state action. Nevertheless, the period from 1887 to 1893 may be characterized as the society's time of hope, when a band of dedicated philanthropists, possessed with a vision of eleemosynary truth, and backed by a significant part of the ruling élite, set out on a crusade to bring utilitarian order and efficiency to charitable darkest Melbourne.

From earliest times, Melbourne's winter unemployed had demonstrated in the streets and demanded work, but from 1889 the unemployed movements broke with the past both in the quantity of their distress and the stridency of their protest. The phenomenon of mass unemployment, early in the nineties, proved to be the reef that diverted the C.O.S. from its original course and almost wrecked the society. Following the example of their British mentor, C. S. Loch, Melbourne's C.O.S. kept the term "want of employment" within quotation marks, suggesting a spurious entity that one acknowledged reluctantly and with qualification.<sup>7</sup> Loch decreed it was the duty of charity to relieve cases of unemployment caused by personal misfortune. In theory, unemployment resulting from economic causes lay outside the perimeter of voluntary charity; faced with such distress, the C.O.S. either minimized the problem or maintained that "agi-

tators" predominated amongst the unemployed. Of course, in practice, when the economic depression worsened and the savings of the unemployed ran out, Victorian charity had no alternative but to shoulder the burden of keeping families alive. By 1892 the problems of unemployment and destitution were virtually coterminous, and no charity leaders could sensibly ignore the fact.

Throughout 1889 Charles Strong was the sole voice on the council questioning the society's dogmas and calling for an inquiry into the extent of poverty in Melbourne, its causes, and what could be done about it. At a council meeting on 12 June 1889, Goldstein reported that the number of cases had increased by forty per cent. He then read a letter from Dr Strong urging the C.O.S. "to take up the whole question of poverty and distress among us".<sup>8</sup> At this point the Reverend J. B. Rudduck, minister of the Congregational Church, Oxford Street, Collingwood, took up the challenge. He, doubting a statement by a night-shelter promoter that "hundreds" were sleeping out nightly, organised a search party. He found only about a dozen homeless people, "some of whom did not at all creditably pass the ordeal of close interrogation". Rudduck advertised his discovery in a sermon published by the Australian Christian World on 27 June. At a critical meeting of the C.O.S. executive, on 6 August, Goldstein read two letters from Strong, after consideration of which the Executive instructed Goldstein to inquire into the "facts" of poverty, but expressly excluded causes and remedies.<sup>9</sup> Goldstein went further, in the manner of similar C.O.S. investigations in London, and took it upon himself to exclude the deserving-poor-at-home (about whom Strong was principally concerned), confining his inquiries to the literally homeless poor.

Goldstein determined to beat the streets of the city. By secret arrangement with the Superintendent of Police, on the cold, wet morning of 10 August 1889 an expedition set out. Policemen on duty joined the hunt. Like a dreadful parody of the prophet's injunction to seek out the poor and homeless, the C.O.S. party scoured Richmond Park and the Yarra banks and bridges. The police caught three men, and Goldstein's party only two. He concluded that, for the whole of Melbourne, "there were thus probably not more than half-a-dozen really homeless men . . ." <sup>10</sup> So, when the executive assembled on 3 September, Goldstein delivered a paper asserting that Strong's fears about the magnitude of poverty were mistaken, and the C.O.S. endorsed this criticism.

What inference should be drawn from the society's discovery that, if one included the numbers in the best-known night-shelters, 144 men, 47 women and six children were sleeping "out" in Melbourne on the night of 10 August 1889? Even if one accepts the accuracy of these figures, there is reason to doubt the society's inference: that poverty virtually did not exist in Australia's largest city. Committed to a theory of personal pauperism, the C.O.S. balked at the reality of structural poverty. If an alternative poverty index were required, one existed that the society might have used. In Melbourne, during the month of June 1889, twenty-five people were committed to gaol, ostensibly on vagrancy charges, but actually because of their age, incapacity and destitution; forty were committed in July, and thirty-nine in August. This state of affairs did not altogether displease the C.O.S.; giving evidence before the Charity Commission, Goldstein said:

The two great difficulties in all those places [i.e. night shelters] are that records are not kept . . . and that the relief is granted merely on application.

5759. [Question] But that would not be a reason why you would prefer them going to gaol?

[Goldstein] I think so . . . [5760] . . . Because they grant relief to every man who comes along, and the man who has come down to be so poor that he has no place to lay his head, would be better off in the gaol.<sup>11</sup>

By this time, none of the society's conclusions pleased or convinced Charles Strong. He stood up at the third annual meeting (23 July 1890) and argued for a commission to find out how many were poor, and why they were poor, for as he affirmed yet again, ". . . many of us do know that . . . poverty does exist".<sup>12</sup>

As economic conditions declined, Strong moved more into the anti-sweating and village settlement movements and away from the Charity Organisation Movement which was increasingly seen to be class-biased and brutal. A great public meeting in the Town Hall, on 9 June 1890, protested against the sweating system. Dr Strong, whose voice increasingly expressed an enlightened public conscience, reaffirmed his conviction that poverty arose from economic and social causes amenable to legislative action:

Many people say that poverty and suffering must always exist . . . why should we be



bound by political economy? . . . it was our duty as citizens to see poverty wiped out.<sup>13</sup>

Morris showed no desire to commit charitable heresy and the C.O.S. stood aloof from the campaign.

The Gillies Ministry, growing restive at the financial cost and condition of Victoria's charitable institutions, appointed a Royal Commission in March 1890 to inquire, inter alia, into their efficiency, management and finances. A majority of the eleven commissioners were C.O.S. members, including E. L. Zox, the chairman, and Edward Morris. Sitting in the board room of the Lands Office, the inquiry dragged on from March 1890 to December 1891. Two crises stirred public interest. When, on 19 September, Jacob Goldstein gave evidence, his account of the society's ideology and activities and, even more, his harsh tone, created a bad impression. An Age sub-leader voiced considerable disenchantment with the C.O.S., although the Argus stood loyally by, supporting the infusion of "business principles into the work of relieving the distressed".<sup>14</sup>

The second crisis represented a challenge to the commission and, indirectly, to Organised Charity. On 27 February 1891 Charles Strong gave evidence. He proceeded to read a long statement on the extent of poverty in Melbourne. He described the wretchedness of Collingwood:

. . . some of our lady visitors have expressed their surprise that such streets, houses, and cases of poverty are to be found in Melbourne, their impression, like that of many who do not go for themselves, being that no honest and industrious person need want in this 'working-man's paradise', and that there is no poverty worth speaking about. There is enough of poverty and wretchedness to make lovers of their country ashamed . . .<sup>15</sup>

He told of the life and labor of sweated shirt-finishers and bag-makers. He sought out the causes of poverty and his repetitive phrase "they are poor because" beat like a knell for the moralistic presuppositions of Organised Charity.

They are poor because their work is irregular . . . They are poor because they are underpaid . . . They are poor because they are widows or deserted wives, or women with sick husbands to support . . . They are poor because they are old . . .<sup>16</sup>

Friends of the poor, he concluded, would look to the abolition of poverty and charity alike, and to the transformation of the competitive system which underpinned them both.

Strong's evidence infuriated the Argus. It asked why every poor family should be supplied daily with roast beef and plum pudding at the public expense? Strong's evidence scandalized the councillors of Collingwood, who challenged the truth of his statements. In reply, Dr Strong invited the commissioners to come and inspect Collingwood and judge for themselves. Although their terms of reference covered the admissibility of such proceedings, Zox and his colleagues declined to accept. Their final report, dated 22 December 1891, ignored the condition of the poor: instead, it endorsed a grand plan of Charity Organisation for Victoria, which the government never implemented. Charity reform meant stirring a sectarian hornets' nest and spending public money, and consequently governments left the field alone.

In August 1891 Charles Strong resigned from the Charity Organisation Society.<sup>17</sup> Being one of the founding fathers, he kept silent about his reasons, though it seems likely he was protesting at the society's treatment of the unemployed during the past winter. Early in June the C.O.S. had drawn up a scheme for managing the large-scale unemployment that was only too clearly emerging. The scheme entailed establishing a register of persons willing to give casual employment, a labor-test by means of wood-chopping and stone-breaking, and a labor colony situated away from Melbourne. On 10 June the society's representatives met the Premier, James Munro, who expressed "sympathy" with the ideas, but doubted whether sufficient distress existed to justify their implementation.<sup>18</sup>

A deputation representing several meetings of the unemployed waited on the Premier on 1 July, while a large contingent of police stood alert. Tempers frayed when he refused to countenance suggestions for government relief-works and an official labor office. The "agitator Flynn" (as the Argus always described labor spokesmen), taunted the Premier that at least one thousand respectable artisans needed work: Munro replied that Victorian workmen were better off than any others in the world. Munro then surprised everyone. He undertook to find work for all unemployed men who registered their names within a set time. Next day, from nine o'clock till three-thirty, the task of registering the unemployed went on at the

Public Works Department. Goldstein received a list of 589 names at about four o'clock, the understanding being that the C.O.S. would investigate every case. For this purpose the society contacted the Commissioner of Police, who detailed fifteen constables in plain clothes; a labor leader, "the man Fleming", received the first call. Investigations lasted one week and, on 21 July, Munro read Goldstein's interim report to the Legislative Assembly. The report emphasised that 127 men had given false addresses, sixteen actually were in work, and twenty-three possessed some means, or had children who should support them.<sup>19</sup>

Finally the list totalled 844 unemployed of whom the C.O.S. classified 578 deserving. Only 296 accepted the society's offer of work. Of the 139 men who reported for stonebreaking, eighteen refused to start work, and twenty-seven earned less than five shillings at it. At Lake Corrong Station, where the society let a contract for fifty men, only nineteen axemen reported for duty. Overall, one-third of all the men deserted before the end of the first week. Married men received the easier labor on fixed pay, and "it was amusing to note" — *the society observed* — "how eagerly applicants tried to secure this work in preference to that in which they were paid by results".<sup>20</sup> Single men were offered stonebreaking, "an admirable test of real desire for work", and although some threw in the towel because their hands blistered, those "who were really anxious to earn their living" made one pound per week or more. The Trades Hall thought the men were treated "like dogs", but Goldstein reflected that,

. . . if it be necessary to prevent harmful interference with the immutable laws of social and commercial evolution . . . no agency can stop to consider the dislike which the performance of its duties may engender.<sup>21</sup>

Immense pride characterized the society's attitude towards its achievements in 1891. Convened by the C.O.S. to spread the gospel of Organised Charity, the Second Australasian Conference on Charity opened in Wilson Hall, Melbourne University, on 17 November 1891. The Earl of Hopetoun presided. Ebullient and eloquent, Professor Morris welcomed the guests. He had just returned from Sydney, where a public meeting attended by Lord Jersey and the Primate of Australia pledged support for the conference. Later Goldstein delivered a paper on the society's treat-

ment of the winter unemployed which was widely reported in the press. When Dr Strong read those reports he knew the time had come to smite. For the Australian Church Herald (which he edited) Strong wrote:

The Hon. James Munro claims for the [Charity Organisation] Society the credit of having dealt with the "unemployed" difficulty, but we are not so sure that Mr Munro, or the secretary of the Charity Organisation Society (whose speech at the conference seemed gratuitous and harsh, and unnecessarily irritating to some), have settled the question . . . We do not believe in employing the police for such work, and would recommend the Charity Organisation Society to avoid even the appearance also of pooh-poohing the hardship of working people, and becoming the agent of the self-righteous well-to-do, who know nothing of the poor and care nothing.<sup>22</sup>

The Charity Organisation Movement began in London in 1869 as an attempt by the upper classes to hold back the tidal wave of "pauperism" they feared would swamp the capital. Canon Barnett and his wife enthusiastically supported the new 'scientific' charity, but by 1884 the Warden of Toynbee Hall had become convinced that moralistic individualism provided no solution to the complex problem of poverty. To C. S. Loch's dismay, Barnett now advocated "Practicable Socialism", by which he simply meant a degree of state initiative against the forces of *laissez-faire*. In 1895 Barnett presented a paper to the society's council entitled "A Friendly Criticism of C.O.S.". It amounted to a sweeping denunciation of the society's social philosophy and methods, and its rigid inhumanity dressed up as philosophical idealism. Barnett perceived that the mainstream of social development was taking what he called a "collectivist" direction, and that by opposing free milk for pauper children, or pensions for the aged, Organised Charity was leading its supporters into a reactionary backwater. This clash was a forerunner to the major philosophical break between the majority and minority reports on the Poor Law in 1909.

A similar movement of ideas, attitudes, and values, took place in Victoria during the 1890s. There can be few more startling contrasts than that between the tone of the report of the Charity Commission of 1890-91 and the report of the Old-Age Pensions Commission of 1897-98. To speak broadly, in less than seven years a rudi-

mentary concept of minimum civilized standards guaranteed by the state appeared to replace extreme individualism as the predominant mode of social thought in relation to the poor. The traumata of boom, bust, strikes, financial collapse and mass misery acted like a catalyst on public opinion. Governments legislated in an ad hoc way to mitigate economic relations between the strong and the weak; in Victoria, this legislation notably took the form of Factory Acts, Arbitration Acts, and an Old-Age Pensions Act. However crude their respective sociologies may have been, both

Barnett and Strong were intuitively struggling away from a 'pathological' view of poverty towards a 'situational' view: that society is faulty in structure because it denies to whole groups of people power over resources. In both cases, their flight from Organised Charity conveniently symbolized the movement of the more progressive elements in public opinion away from the older view. It is a sad reflection on the condition of Australian social history that Strong's 'other' schism has hitherto been neglected.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> F. B. Smith, "Charles Strong: A Persecuted Man of the Kirk", *Meanjin*, June 1972, p. 231.
- <sup>2</sup> C. R. Badger, *The Reverend Charles Strong and the Australian Church* (Melbourne, 1971), p. 103.
- <sup>3</sup> Smith, loc.cit.
- <sup>4</sup> The story ought, perhaps, to be added to Badger's excellent biography.
- <sup>5</sup> *Argus*, 14 February 1887.
- <sup>6</sup> Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1892-93, vol. IV, pp. 564-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Sir Charles Loch (1849-1923), secretary of the London C.O.S. in its hey-day, ideologist of the movement, author of *Charity Organisation* (London, 1890).
- <sup>8</sup> J. Goldstein, *The Homeless Poor* (Melbourne, 1889), p. 1. The author is seeking biographical details about Jacob Goldstein, who is to be distinguished from J. R. Y. Goldstein, father of Vida.
- <sup>9</sup> Minute Book of the C.O.S. Executive, vol. I., p. 73. The manuscript records and annual reports of the C.O.S. are located at the Citizens' Welfare Service, 197 Drummond Street, Carlton.
- <sup>10</sup> Goldstein, op.cit., p. 5.
- <sup>11</sup> As in reference 6, p. 446.
- <sup>12</sup> C.O.S., *Third Annual Report*, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>13</sup> *Argus*, 10 June 1890.
- <sup>14</sup> *Age*, 22 September; *Argus*, 9 October 1890.
- <sup>15</sup> As in reference 6, p. 704.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 702-711.
- <sup>17</sup> Minute Book, C.O.S. Executive, vol. I, p. 285.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- <sup>19</sup> *Argus*, 2 July; *Age*, 4 July 1891; also C.O.S. *Fifth Annual Report*. For location of annual reports, see reference 9.
- <sup>20</sup> *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 31.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>22</sup> *Evening Herald*, 11 December 1891.

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# books

## GLUM HEROES

Geoffrey Blainey

David Walker: *Dream and Disillusion: a search for Australian cultural identity* (Australian National University Press, \$11.95).

This is a courageous attempt to disentangle and clarify an important thread in the history of Australian ideas. David Walker's book traces the intellectual biography of four young men who hoped in the years 1900-14 to establish "a national culture in Australia".

Of the four men Vance Palmer is the best known, and he and his wife appear on most pages of the book. There is a mixture of sadness and triumph in Palmer's life. There is triumph in the determination of this Queensland boy to be a novelist and man of letters at a time when the obstacles in Australia were especially high for any writer whose talents and interests pointed partly towards high culture. Reading about his early life one is reminded of a cultivated clergyman who expects a larger congregation than ever attends and cannot quite understand why his flock do not share his interest in vital social issues, his delight in words, his subtle shades of doubt and certainty, and instead prefer to sit at the feet of a simple hellfire preacher. Occasionally Palmer tried to become a simple preacher but he did not quite possess the urgency and the great powers of observation and imagination which were needed to reach a large audience between the wars.

Walker's bibliography lists 26 books which Vance Palmer wrote between 1915 and the year of his death, 1959. Most were novels but a few were works of biography, including his well known *National Portraits* of 1940. He also wrote literary criticism and analysed intellectual cli-

mates—his *Legend of the Nineties* was widely read. And he wrote plays, nine of which were broadcast. The bread-and-butter journalism of Vance and Nettie Palmer was also on a large scale, and their total income from writing in the 1920s is set out in an appendix to the book, providing a sobering account of the economics of free-lance writing. That Palmer wrote so many thousands of pages of serious work and reached a considerable audience is an impressive achievement. I think he emerges as an heroic figure.

Louis Buvelot Esson (1879-1943), the oldest of the four men in this book, emigrated from Scotland as a small child, eventually studied English and French at Melbourne University without taking a degree, became a playwright and a café man of letters, and after four years in New York and Europe, he returned in 1921 to Melbourne. Here his Pioneer Players staged a series of simple Australian plays, of which his own *The Battler* was the first and his *Bride of Gospel Place* the last. Esson was disappointed that his theatre could not attract a sufficient audience. He blamed Melbourne: "It is a wowser, bourgeois town, without an idea of any kind". Though Esson had had to compete with popular musical comedies and the boom in American motion pictures, David Walker concludes that Esson perhaps expected too much in a city with no continuous repertory tradition. In fact the Pioneer Players were "modestly successful" in reaching an audience.

The third of the book's dreamers, Frank Wilmot (1881-1942), also grew up in Melbourne. His father was an ironmonger and early socialist with hopes of entering parliament. "His preparation of 'Vote for Wilmot' notices was well under way," we learn, "when he discovered to his profound disappointment that he had not been pre-selected." The son Frank left school in North

Fitzroy at thirteen and worked in the wonderful book arcade run by E. W. Cole. He wrote his first poems (including "The Fatman's Song") for the socialist journal *Tocsin* and became, at the age of 21, the co-editor and chief contributor of a small magazine called *Microbe*. A bookseller and publisher who ran Melbourne University Press in later years, Wilmot was the only one of the four to spend his whole life in Australia. Often you hear people say that an Australian writer who did not travel simply withered: Wilmot, a fine poet, did not wither. Eight volumes of his verse were published, their message becoming gloomier as he grew older.

The fourth dreamer, Frederick Sinclair (1881-1954), took out an arts degree in Auckland, trained for the Unitarian ministry in Oxford, and came to Melbourne in 1908 as minister of the large church—not long ago demolished—at Eastern Hill. Soon he was speaking at the Bijou Theatre to the socialists—all chairs occupied and the walls "lined with eager faces"—and acting as secretary of the first Fabian Society where he preached socialism with such fervour that he soon parted from his congregation. I don't think Sinclair deserved a major place (especially at the expense of Nettie Palmer) in a book subtitled "A search for Australian cultural identity". Sinclair edited the magazine of the Free Religious Fellowship for which Esson, Palmer and Wilmot wrote, but to my mind his place in the book rests more on his pre-war optimism and his post-war pessimism—a swing of mood shared by the other three—than on any sustained interest in Australian culture or any recognized importance as a writer.

In the interwar years the four men become disappointed or disillusioned. They see the fattening cities as symbols of national decay or inertia. They see new technology as a threat rather than an aid to cultured life. The motor car is another unwelcome intruder; and Sinclair, Esson and Palmer deplore the rise of jazz. "A world where culture comes to it through the agency of the cinema and the gramophone will presently be incapable of art," writes Sinclair in 1927. Some of their statements, quoted by David Walker in his short and fascinating section on the disillusion, have a ranting, dictatorial quality which makes one slightly uneasy. Walker describes the censorship imposed on books entering Australia, and the indignation it aroused, but you can't be sure whether one or two of the men in this book

might not—if given a seat in Cabinet—have imposed their own form of censorship. Their longing for a new social order coupled with their disdain for the ordinary man and many of his attitudes seems slightly ominous. It might instantly be replied that these men were democrats, and of course all were in their formal language, but some seem much more democratic in spirit than the others.

Vance and Nettie Palmer battled on; in their mind everything was far from lost. Sinclair, however, was such an optimist before 1914 that it is not surprising to see him so pessimistic by the late 1920s. He had believed, he said, in the great Law of Progress but now the Law was repealed. Walker explains that "World War I had disturbed him profoundly, leaving him demoralised and offended in a postwar world"; but it would be fair to add that Sinclair was probably vulnerable before the war began, and that really the long epoch of European progress had upset his balance. By the late 1920s he was complaining about social trends including the democratic roughness in Australian literature. Eventually—the book's chronology is fuzzy here—he became Professor of English at Christchurch, where he "was frustrated by a syllabus which he considered often tedious and irrelevant".

When you consider the frustrations under which Vance Palmer worked, Sinclair's external frustrations seem minute. They were also small compared with the frustrations of the gifted Louis Esson—a playwright without a theatre, a writer who had lost faith in his country—"still a nation of Barbarians"—and who said that western civilization was now as "ugly and uninteresting" as any the world had yet endured: a mechanized, mass-produced way of life with its cinemas, chain stores, Hollywood music and herd psychology. Frank Wilmot, the poet, continued to write but no longer believed that society could be re-shaped or that the poet had a special mission.

The book has many merits and some unexpected weaknesses. For example, David Walker's knowledge of basic points in Australian history is patchy. He describes the land boom in Melbourne as surviving until 1894 and suggests that the Nationalists did not win post-war federal power until 1922. He writes clearly but now and then appear passages of a kind of mayoral rhetoric. The last sentences in the book, describing the final disillusion, seem misty even after a second or third reading:

Along with the apparent collapse of radical initiatives within Australian society, there was concern at developments in the wider world, particularly with the rise of fascism. In such a world there appeared to be scant hope for the fresh new democracy which civilised democrats throughout the Western world might learn to admire rather than patronise or dismiss.

It would be unfair to end the review with these final words. David Walker set out to map part of the coastline of Australian intellectual history, and the size of the task and the skills shown command respect.

## OUT OF THE SILENCE?

Edgar Waters

C. C. MacKnight: *The Voyage to Marege': Macassan Trepangers in northern Australia* (Melbourne University Press, \$20).

Matthew Flinders, in his rotting ship *Investigator*, met with six praus off the northern coast of Arnhem Land in February 1802. The senior of the prau commanders — Flinders set his name down as Pobassoo — told Flinders that the six were part of a fleet of sixty, carrying altogether one thousand men, that had left Macassar two months before. “The object of their expedition was a certain marine animal, called *trepan*.” On their return voyage, they would sell the smoked and dried trepan to Chinese merchants at Timor (Flinders thought that by Timor Pobassoo meant Timor Laut, today more usually called Tanimbar). Pobassoo had made six or seven voyages to the northern coast of Australia within the preceding twenty years, “and he was one of the first who came”.

This was perhaps the first meeting in Australian waters between the Macassan visitors and the British invaders; at any rate, it seems to be the first of which any record remains. Contacts became more frequent as the nineteenth century rolled on, with further British exploration and later settlement and continued Macassan trepanning. From 1880 onwards the South Australian government exercised control of a kind over Macassan trepanning in Northern Territory waters; in 1906 it decided that it was to end.

These few facts have neither escaped the attention of Australian historians nor, until recently, stimulated them to find out more about the Macassan trepangers. And this even though

anthropologists have been interested for half a century in the considerable Macassan influence on the Aboriginal cultures of Arnhem Land. But Australian historical studies are taking new directions. C. C. MacKnight's *The Voyage to Marege': Macassan trepangers in northern Australia* takes up questions too long neglected by Australian historians, and inquires into them by a combination of techniques which—the combination, not any particular technique—is rather new in Australia, though by now familiar enough in Africa:

On the one hand, there is material gathered from a range of techniques more or less well known to the archaeologist: field recording, excavation, radiocarbon dating, the study of artefacts such as pottery, coins, glass, fish-hooks and the like . . . information to be derived from ethnography, language and physical anthropology. This is a situation with which the prehistorian is well acquainted. On the other hand, there is an almost equally wide range of documentary material to be handled with a variety of techniques . . . official statistics . . . government correspondence . . . the accounts of explorers, adventurers and tellers of tales. This is a field familiar to the historian.

MacKnight uses all the sources of information that he mentions in this paragraph of his introduction, and some that he does not mention. One of these, which in fact provides him with an important argument, is the recording of the oral testimony of living men, tapping memories and traditions.

He suggests that his work could be classed as “protohistory, that borderland between prehistory, where no written records of any sort are available, and history proper where documents provide at least a firm chronological framework and usually much more”. I think we could do without the word myself; however that may be, MacKnight's book can be recommended to anyone curious about the methods of the “protohistorian”, as well as anyone curious about the Macassan trepangers. His book will answer most of the questions most of his readers might ask about the latter.

Two questions may thus far have occurred to readers of this review. Why “Marege’”? Because this was the Macassan name for the coast of northern Australia between (roughly speaking) the Coburg Peninsula and the south-eastern corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Why did the South

Australian government put an end to Macassan trepanging around the coast of the Northern Territory? Because, briefly and roughly, a few greedy men in the north and a few gullible men in Adelaide thought that the result would be that white men—with a lot of help from cheap black labor, of course,—would make a lot of money from the trepang industry. They didn't; it was just one of the many unsuccessful schemes to *develop the North*. At least it was a cheap failure, laughably cheap compared with such grand follies as the Ord irrigation scheme. The government resident in Darwin estimated in 1905 that a decision to keep the Macassans out would provide the South Australian government of an income of about eighty pounds a year.

MacKnight himself feels that his inquiries have not led him to a satisfactory answer to an old question, one on which there has been much speculation: when did the industry begin? Anthropologists had guessed that it must have begun a long time back, perhaps as early as the sixteenth century. "More than once it has been predicted," as MacKnight says, "that detailed archaeological work would resolve the problem." Well, his archaeological work provided from one lot of ashes a radiocarbon date of about 1200 A.D., and from another lot of ashes a date of about 1450 A.D. Is the industry much older than anybody had guessed? MacKnight thinks not. He has no doubt that both lots of ash were associated with trepanging, that the samples were of excellent quality and that the laboratory work was competently done. Nevertheless he thinks that the dates are wrong: "some systematic source of error seems to be affecting these results". This is because he thinks that the documentary evidence shows that the trade cannot have begun before the seventeenth century, and that Macassan oral tradition points in the same direction. I shall try to summarise the main points of his argument very briefly.

The earliest surviving Chinese reference to trepang is from a medical work of the sixteenth century; Chinese references become frequent only in the seventeenth century. There are no references in sixteenth or seventeenth century Portuguese sources to an East Indian trade in trepang. The earliest reference to Macassan trepanging in Australian waters so far available from Dutch sources dates back only to 1754. It says that the voyages were made only "now and then" (and it could well refer to voyages to the coast of Western Australia rather than Marege'; Macassan tre-

pangers visited the Kimberley coast regularly in the nineteenth century). Macassan oral tradition has it that the first trepang from Marege' was brought back by praus that sought refuge in the Gulf of Carpentaria, after the defeat of a Macassan fleet by the Dutch in 1667.

MacKnight concludes that Macassan trepangers probably first began voyaging to Marege' some time between 1650 and 1750; that the industry "may well have begun in a small, irregular and secretive way"; and that "the large and flourishing industry described . . . from the nineteenth century may have been a gradual development".

So far as Macassan trepanging goes, his conclusions seem cautious and well grounded. But those radiocarbon dates remain puzzling, and the attempt to explain them away rather lame. There are other puzzling things too. There is a possible Chinese reference to trepang in a work probably dating from the fourth or fifth century A.D. This piece of information is tucked away in a footnote; no doubt, like many an honest historian, MacKnight was torn between a desire not to suppress evidence, and a desire not to let a doubtful fact spoil a good theory. There are also Aboriginal stories from eastern Arnhem Land about a people, the Baijini, who came to the Arnhem Land coast before the Macassans, and who also fished for trepang. The trepangers sometimes took Aboriginal men and boys to Macassar, and MacKnight believes that these stories derive from their observations and experiences on these voyages overseas:

The idea of things which properly belong overseas has been transferred to familiar places in order to integrate this knowledge into the spatially oriented framework of Aboriginal thought. The people of these stories are known as Baiini, from the Macassarese word for women. Since they must be clearly differentiated from the Macassans, who are well-known historical figures, they are said to have come at an earlier period.

This seems a rather strange argument, the more so since the anthropologists Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, who recorded the Baijini stories in the 1950s, tell us that there was a song cycle about the Macassans, which described "the details of the trip to the Celebes, and the sights that were to be seen in Macassar, and other towns on adjacent islands".

Now then: there are trepang in Chinese waters,



and the Chinese fish them. Trepang, however little it appeals to palates not Chinese, is good protein and fairly easily harvested. The Chinese are rather inclined to boast that they eat everything that is edible; "there are only two things we don't eat, a nine-headed bird in the sky and a Hupei man on the ground". It seems to me rather rash of MacKnight to conclude that the Chinese began to eat trepang only after sixteenth century quacks persuaded them that it was "a general stimulant and aphrodisiac". We must surely consider the possibility that the Chinese really were eating trepang as early as the fourth or fifth century A.D. And if we must consider that possibility, we must also consider the further possibility that the Chinese were importing trepang fished in northern Australia as early as 1200 A.D. That date falls within the time of the Sung, a time when Chinese overseas trade flourished as never before and seldom since; much of the trade through southern Chinese ports at this time was in the hands of Arabs, and in the thirteenth century the Arabs greatly extended their trading activities in the islands of the East Indies. But, if we must consider the possibility that a Chinese trade in trepang from Australia began as early as Sung times, we need not suppose that it then continued without interruption until the beginning of the twentieth century. Quite on the contrary; Chinese trade with overseas countries has often been cut off for long periods. We may well guess that the Mongol conquest of the Southern Sung dynasty, late in the thirteenth century, would have disrupted the trade in foreign delicacies, and perhaps cut it off altogether, for a time.

Curiously enough, MacKnight's second radiocarbon date, of about 1450 A.D., brings us close to a time of renewed Chinese interest in the outside world. Between 1405 and 1433 an early Ming emperor sent a great fleet of junks and seventy thousand men on several voyages, as far west as Africa and as far south as Timor; just possibly even as far south as northern Australia. Trade was not a purpose of these voyages, it would seem, but it would not be surprising if they did lead to some revival of trade between China and the East Indian islands. But if it did, the revival would have been temporary, for the later Ming discouraged overseas trade.

If there was, possibly, a trade that began early, but which was interrupted more than once for long periods, then we need not suppose that the suppliers to the trade were always Macassans. "The Aborigines," say the Berndts, "are quite

decided that these Baijini were not like the Macassans who came after them, because they are remembered particularly for the golden copper color of their skin."

If I have understood MacKnight, his two chief reasons for rejecting the radiocarbon dates of about 1200 and about 1450 are the lack of references to trepang in documents earlier than the sixteenth century, and the lack of artefacts, in the sites he dug, that can be dated earlier than the sixteenth century. But the argument *ex silentio* is at best a dangerous one for the historian. The record that is left for him by accident is full of gaps; the record that is left for him by intent is full of lies and some of the lies are told by silence. And it is not even certain that all is silence before the sixteenth century; remembering that possible Chinese reference to trepang from the fourth or fifth century it seems highly incautious of MacKnight to assert baldly that "the earliest Chinese consumption of trepang from any area dates only from the sixteenth century". And, great shades of Schliemann and Evans, shouldn't archaeologists and protohistorians know better than most scholars the need to think very, very carefully before explaining away oral traditions?

#### CULINARY NOTE

MacKnight says that "the consumption of trepang is almost entirely restricted to the Chinese", but adds that "the European palate finds the slightly fishy taste not unpleasant, despite the peculiar texture". I searched for instructions on the cooking of trepang in a baker's dozen of books on Chinese cooking for European palates, and found them in one only: *The Chinese Cookbook*, by Craig Claiborne and Virginia Lee. Their recipe for "Sea Slugs with Pork Sauce" is introduced with the discouraging comment that "of all the foods that grace the Chinese table, there is probably none that will appeal less to the Western palate" than trepang. To make a sauce for one dried sea slug about eight inches long you begin with stock made from two pounds of pork, and seasonings of shallot, ginger, soy sauce, sherry, dried mushrooms, and so on. Claiborne and Lee estimate that one sea slug so dressed, will yield "95 Western servings, 12 Chinese servings".

But it seems that there was a time when a soup made with trepang appealed to Australian palates. By luck there has come my way a copy of *Mrs. MacLurean's Cookery Book: A Collection*

of *Practical Recipes specially suitable for Australia*, written and published by Hannah MacLurcan of the Queen's Hotel, Townsville (the second edition, 1898). The last page of the book is an advertisement for the "celebrated high-class preserved delicacies" put out by "B. Skinner, Turtle, Meat and Fruit Preserver" of Brisbane. Amongst the high class preserves is listed:

THE CELEBRATED QUEENSLAND DELICACY —  
SKINNER'S BÈCHE-DE-MER SOUP,  
PINT AND HALF-PINT TINS

Now established in favor as a Choice Soup, specially ordered with Skinner's Turtle Soup by the Queensland Club and the leading Clubs and Hotels in the Southern Colonies.

Mrs MacLurcan gives her own recipe for making bêche-de-mer soup. You begin by boiling a chicken in four quarts of good brown stock. When it is cooked, shred the chicken meat and return it to the stock along with two sliced onions, a quarter of a pound of prawns, a quarter of a pound of mushrooms and the diced whites of three hard boiled eggs. The yolks of the eggs, mixed with a very little flour, and rolled into balls a little larger than peas, are to be added to the soup at the last moment. As for the bêche-de-mer:

Half a pound is sufficient for this quantity. Before using, soak it well for three days, changing the water every four hours, and scrape it each time before putting in the clean water; then boil for three or four hours the day before using it, it ought then to be soft enough to cut; if not, boil another hour. Cut the bêche-de-mer into thin slices and put it into the soup an hour before serving, and when all is ready add a gill of sherry.

## WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT

Colin Howard

Gareth Evans (ed.): *Labor and the Constitution 1972-1975* (Heinemann, \$20.00 and \$12.50).

I recall a conversation with my colleague Gareth Evans early in 1976, or possibly late in 1975. I recall it particularly because not many of my conversations turn out to be precursors of notable events, but this one did. To his everlasting credit, it had occurred to Gareth that the 75th anniversary of Australian federation ought not to pass unnoticed. At the Law School of the University

of Melbourne we are modestly proud of our quite particular connection with the course of Australian constitutional history, and particularly of our unbroken line of succession of scholars in the subject. It seemed to Gareth that it would be appropriate not merely to organise a significant scholarly event to mark the anniversary, but for the event to take place in the University of Melbourne under the auspices of the Faculty of Law. Although an undemonstrative individual, I trust that I responded enthusiastically, particularly when it became clear that Gareth, in his usual way and with his usual enormous resources of energy, was prepared to do all the organising. Not only was he prepared to do that, he also had ready to hand a perfect suggestion for a theme. This theme was: Labor and the Constitution, 1972-1975.

The seminar duly took place on 6-8 August 1976 and was an unqualified success. Eight papers were delivered by established scholars in constitutional law. Each paper was followed by two prepared commentaries by a quite remarkably wide range of qualified persons. These included not only other legal scholars, but also political scientists, administrators, practising lawyers, departmental officers, politicians, the secretary to the Constitutional Convention, the Attorney-General of Victoria, and Attorney-General and Solicitor-General of the Commonwealth. A major paper was contributed by Mr Whitlam. So great was the interest aroused that early estimates of the probable enrolment for the seminar proved to be far too modest. With over 250 participants, plus press and assorted observers, the largest lecture theatre in the University proved to be the only venue capable of accommodating the event. The enrolment included a range of persons, from two High Court judges at one end of the scale to undergraduate law students at the other. The variety of personages in between, although of course fairly heavily weighted in the direction of lawyers, defies summary. All in all it could reasonably be described as a notable occasion.

It was not intended however merely to be something which the participants recollect with diminishing accuracy at social encounters as the years roll by. The ultimate aim was more ambitious. It was the production of a book, to the highest scholarly standards, which would make available permanently the research, argument and experience of events which had been the subject matter of the seminar. The book has now appeared, and before proceeding further the present

writer should make clear that he was co-author of one of the papers reproduced in this book. Overland, when requesting this review article, was of opinion that the advantage of detailed familiarity with the subject matter outweighed the possible disadvantage of some degree of partiality in the reviewer. One can only hope that that proves to be true and press on.

When the seminar was still in the planning and discussion stage, there was doubt in some quarters whether the proposed subject matter was too political in content for the event to be sponsored by a university faculty. This misapprehension derived mainly from the title. That it is, and always was, a misapprehension appears clearly from the opening paragraphs of the preface to the volume under review. They run as follows.

The Whitlam Government was elected into office on 2 December 1972, the first Australian Labor Party government to be so installed since 1949. Barely three years later, on 11 November 1975, it was dismissed from power by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, and then defeated at the polls in the election for both Houses which immediately followed. The three years of the Whitlam Labor Government, culminating in the quite unprecedented events surrounding its dismissal, were probably the most turbulent and exciting in Australia's political and constitutional history. Certainly no other comparable period contributed so much that was new to the law and practice of the Constitution. Certainly no other period has seen the Australian Constitution itself brought so consistently and vividly to public attention. To follow with any seriousness, from week to week, the course of political events during the Whitlam administration, one simply had to have a copy of the Constitution open at hand in a way that would have been quite unnecessary for years at a time in earlier decades.

The essays and commentaries assembled in this book range over all the significant constitutional issues that came to the fore during the Whitlam years. Read together, they are intended to contribute both a chronicle and an analysis, systematic and dispassionate, of the constitutional issue of the period and their significance for the future.

Later in the preface it is said that one of the objects of the seminar which led to the book "was to provide the opportunity—before memories had faded, but after the dust of partisan controversy had settled a little—for a balanced and scholarly review of the Whitlam period, both its place in Australia's history and its significance for

the country's constitutional future." The concluding paragraph is as follows:

The issues dealt with in this volume are by no means merely of historical interest, although the status of many of the contributors is no doubt such as to make their reflections on the Whitlam years documents of considerable historical, and comparative, significance in their own right. What is more important is that the constitutional controversies of 1972-1975 were concerned with issues that will be of fundamental and continuing importance in the future. What may be at stake is not only the operation and survival of the federal system in Australia, but also, as many have argued, the survival of Australian democracy itself.

So much for the genesis and objects of this book. Now for the volume itself. Let it be said at once that as far as physical presentation goes the editor and the publishers between them have done a first class job. It is handsomely and strongly bound and well set out for ease of reading. Ancillary information of the kind which might well have been overlooked is available in abundance: a copy of the Constitution printed at the back, a good index, tables of legislation and cases (including in the latter instance a list of abbreviations for the legally uninitiated), the letter and statement of the Governor-General of 11 November 1975, and a chronology of constitutionally significant events 1972-1975 which not only extends over three pages but displays remarkable perception in its selection of the sorts of events which one might want to look up in a hurry. There is even just over two pages of notes on contributors, for identification purposes. It is perhaps a forgivable weakness in an editor who performed prodigies of effort and accomplishment in the production of this book that the note on himself is longer than the note on anybody else.

The layout falls into four parts. The first three chapters are collected under the general heading "Labor's New Federalism". In the first, entitled "Towards a New Federal Structure?", Professor Sawyer of the Australian National University analyses the significance of events for the federal balance as between Commonwealth and States. In Chapter 2 Dr M. Crommelin of Melbourne and the editor take as their theme the many different ways in which Labor in office put the pressure on Commonwealth power in an attempt to find the limits of what it would sustain in terms of policy realisation. The importance of this

chapter goes well beyond the theme which holds it together. It is in many respects a detailed expansion of the chronological table which appears at the end of the book, for it stands also as an extremely useful survey of legislative and related events during the Whitlam years. Since, whether successful or not, these events were almost without exception of major importance, a detailed survey of them in such accessible form is very welcome indeed. The third of this initial trio of chapters is by Professor Richardson of the Australian National University, now the first Commonwealth Ombudsman, and concentrates on Constitution alteration by referendum and the achievements and influence, up to the time when he was writing, of the Constitutional Convention.

As throughout the book, the observations of the official commentators are reproduced in full. It is perhaps worth recording, as an example of the range and quality of persons brought together for this purpose, that the first six commentators were Senator Carrick, a minister in the present government; Professor Castles of Adelaide; Mr Mauric Byers, Solicitor-General of the Commonwealth; Mr Daryl Dawson, Solicitor-General of Victoria; Mr J. C. Finemore, Chief Parliamentary Counsel of Victoria and Secretary to the Constitutional Convention; and Dr R. D. Lumb of Queensland.

Part 2 of the book takes the general theme "Institutions under Change". It too includes three chapters. The first two, Chapters 4 and 5, have very happily chosen authors, for they are not only distinguished in their own right but particularly associated with the subject matter which they present. Professor Blackshield of New South Wales analyses and discusses Labor's attitudes to, appointments to, and relationship with the judicial system. Professor Blackshield is an entertaining speaker as well as a most interesting writer and he has for a long time concerned himself particularly with the factors which influence the process of judicial decision, not hesitating in the least to be as *ad hominem* as he thinks relevant. The present writer recalls that since the two High Court judges who attended the seminar very properly observed a self-imposed vow of silence, the highly entertaining spectacle was presented of Professor Blackshield regaling the assembled audience with his forthright comments about the High Court in their presence but without danger of retaliation. One of their Honors, Mr Justice Stephen, was able to take his revenge later in a speech at the seminar dinner. Mr Justice

Murphy, to whom the self-denying ordinance was probably more of a trial, had no such luck.

Chapter 5, on "Ministers, Public Servants and the Executive Branch" was written by Professor Enid Campbell of Monash, probably the country's foremost legal scholar on this subject. Among other things she was a member of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, more generally known as the Coombs Commission. The significance of her contribution is conveyed with precise economy in the opening sentence: "The matters with which this essay deals are, in the main, matters on which the Constitution of the Commonwealth is either silent or its provisions meagre." In other words, the subject matter of this chapter is pretty vital. As the whole country must know by now, the events of 1972-1975 have made Australia rather vulnerable to matters on which the Constitution is either silent or its provisions meagre.

Finally in this section is Chapter 6, in which Mr P. J. Hanks of Monash undertakes the mammoth task of exploring, under the general title "Parliamentarians and the Electorate", some of the wide variety of novel problems relating to the composition of the national legislature which presented themselves during the Whitlam era. It is within the present writer's knowledge that Mr Hanks found himself originally quite unable to keep the subject matter within acceptable limits of length for a publication of this kind. His original paper for the seminar has therefore had to be drastically reduced in size. The work has been done with skill. The chapter is an excellent first source of reference for such problems as simultaneous elections, electoral boundaries, territory Senators, casual vacancies, conflicts of interest and the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The commentators on these various contributions are Mr Justice M. D. Kirby, chairman of the Law Reform Commission; Mr J. D. Merralls QC, of the Victorian Bar; Professor Sol Encel of New South Wales; Mr Peter Wilenski, whose variety of experience as an administrator needs no recitation here; Mr P. Brazil, a first assistant secretary in the Attorney-General's Department, Canberra; and Mr M. Coper of New South Wales. From the present writer's store of pleasant memories of the seminar he recalls Mr Wilenski, *à propos* nothing in particular, relating at the outset of his commentary his experience of litigation. After one or two conferences with his solicitors, he recalled, he felt like taking a lawyer

with him to protect his interests. He is too modest.

The third part of the book, entitled "Constitutional Crisis: the Senate and the Governor-General", is composed of two chapters. Following on the six preceding general surveys of various aspects of those tumultuous three years, they concentrate particularly on the fundamental constitutional events of 1974 and 1975. In Chapter 7 Professor Zines of the Australian National University takes as his subject matter the double dissolution of 1974 and the subsequent joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament, the only one in our history. He proceeds then to the double dissolution of 1975 to which, in the event, the strife of 1974 became only a precursor. Lastly, in Chapter 8 the present writer and Dr Cheryl Saunders of Melbourne undertake an analysis of the basis in constitutional law, if any, for the blocking of the budget in the Senate and the subsequent dismissal of the Government on 11 November 1975.

Professor Zines's chapter was commented on by Professor Reid of Perth and Mr P. Bayne of La Trobe. Professor Howard and Dr Saunders had to withstand the onslaught of the present Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, Mr R. J. Ellicott, who disagreed with almost everything they said, but were comforted by their other commentator, Sir Richard Eggleston, who took the opportunity to put on record his powerful technical argument that the action of the Senate in blocking the budget was unlawful. The present writer takes the opportunity of observing that most of the apparent force of Mr Ellicott's observations derives from the spurious device of taking a large number of quotations from the convention debates of the 1890s out of context and then stringing them together for cumulative misleading effect.

There is one more chapter. It is by Mr Whitlam and he is given the whole of Part 4 of the book, entitled "A Labor Retrospect", to himself. His chapter is entitled "The Labor Government and the Constitution" and is the text of the address with which he opened the proceedings of the seminar on the Friday night. It is sad to recall that, for reasons into which the present writer has not inquired, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne did not think it appropriate that this address should be given in the Wilson Hall. Be that as it may, it is very appropriate that this book should conclude with a permanent record of the views of the man who

was responsible for the whole Whitlam era, Mr Whitlam himself.

Whatever one's individual response to Whitlam's politics and personality, there can be no question that he has been one of our most remarkable political figures. It seems unlikely that the memory of the Whitlam years in government will fade for anyone who had even the smallest connection with the events which they encompassed. It would of course be better if the memory of some of those events did fade, for they reflect no credit on anyone. One hopes that in due course this will prove to be the least important aspect of the period from 1972-1975. Whatever their defects, the Labor governments of those years had one enormous virtue: they were humanitarian, truly committed to improving the lot of their fellow countrymen. To say that in some respects they made mistakes would be regarded by many as a vast understatement. The expression "colossal blunders" comes more readily to the lips of their critics. The wounded feelings and sheer alarm caused by the Labor governments in some quarters will linger on as a facet of our national political life for a long time. Nevertheless the achievements of that period, particularly in the world of ideas, in the confrontation of basic issues, in the acceptance of responsibility for one's fellow citizens, in the quality of life generally and the character and stature of our country, cannot be reversed. Only time will tell whether, as the vernacular has it, Mr Whitlam has now done his dash. If he has, he will leave behind him much for which we can all be thankful, even if the medicine was administered with a certain lack of finesse.

For constitutional lawyers the advent of the Whitlam years has proved to be a stupendous intellectual bonanza. Areas of the constitution to which practically no one had paid attention since they were first enacted have suddenly become worthy of the most intense and repeated scrutiny. Issues about which we could all argue for the rest of our professional lives abound. And the beauty of it is that the value of the phenomenon is not at all confined to its refreshing novelty. The questions under discussion are in fact of the highest practicality and importance. It is not putting it too high to say that some of them are vital to the future of this country.

As suddenly as the excitement started with the election of the Labor Party to office, so it stopped with the election of the Fraser government. This was fortunate because it gave everyone a chance

to calm down, reflect upon what had happened, begin to explore the real issues and compile such records as this book whilst the material was still to hand and fresh in the mind. But there is a price to pay. The events of 1974 and 1975 are beginning to seem distant already, although most of them occurred less than three years ago. They have no doubt correspondingly faded from the consciousness of many people. The reason why this is better regarded as a price to pay than as a merciful release is that, although the events themselves may have faded in the memory, the problems which gave rise to them have not gone away. At the time of writing they are still there as large as life. The under-representation of the electorate at large in the House of Representatives, the artificial allocation of electorates among the states, the continuing tension between underpopulated rural electorates and overpopulated urban electorates, the artificial composition of and lack of a proper role for the Senate and large and menacing areas of obscurity about the relations between the House of Representatives and the Senate, all remain.

Nothing basic has changed at all, except perhaps that politicians of all colors have become somewhat more cautious than they were a few years ago. This in itself is ultimately no good thing. At least under Labor the policy makers were enterprising. Whatever else it may be, the present writer finds difficulty in describing the Fraser government as enterprising, but let that pass. The important point is that it only needs new inconsistent majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate for all the problems of 1972-1975 to confront the nation again. One cannot possibly predict what will then happen. One can say with certainty however that it will be a serious situation, one for which our constitution has no satisfactory answers.

The excellent volume under review provides not only a record of the Whitlam years but also clear and uncompromising analysis of those problems. It amounts in fact to a highly stimulating textbook of the latest stage in the development of our constitutional law and practice, but one which can be read with ease and comprehension by the layman. It can be unreservedly recommended to anyone at all who is sufficiently interested in the basic governmental institutions of his own country to want to understand the subject before the inevitable next crisis is upon us. This article concludes as it started, by warmly congratulating the editor for his enterprise, and

very hard work, and the publishers for their high standard of technical skill. Altogether a most valuable production.

## TRYING TO BE PROFOUND

Frank Kellaway

R. A. Simpson: *Poems from Murrumbidgee* (University of Queensland Press, \$3.50 and \$1.50).  
 Nicholas Hasluck: *Anchor and other poems* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$2.95).  
 Laraine Roche, Colleen Burke, Nancy Phillips: *Hags, Rags and Scriptures* (Cochon, \$3.75).  
 Joanne Burns, Ruth K. Fordham, Stefanie Bennett: *Radio City 2 a.m.* (Cochon, \$3.75).  
 Lyndon Walker, Graham Rowlands, Grahame Pitt: *Adam Scolds* (Cochon, \$3.75).  
 Stefanie Bennett: *Tongues and Pinnacles* (Cochon, \$3.75).  
 Barney Roberts: *The Phantom Boy* (Robin Books, \$4.95).  
 Peter Murphy: *Seen and Unseen* (Flying Duck, 30c).  
*The Friendly Street Poetry Reader* (Adelaide, \$3.50).  
*Tones of Survival* (Blue Mountains Writers Group, \$3.00).  
 Nigel Jackson: *Friends of My Long Heart's Summer* (Hawthorn Press, \$4.50).

This crop of books contains an alarming amount of angry, hysterical shouting, formless rant and perhaps even more pretentious ambiguity trying far too hard to be profound. One book which has no taint of either is R. A. Simpson's *Poems from Murrumbidgee*. The poetry has a quirky originality which reminds me of George Herbert in that it is capable of presenting something quite banal, a lump of coal, say, and suddenly some aspect of our lives or deaths is brilliantly lit up. In "Gold Mining Town" worn paint, a deserted railway station, a corrugated-iron roof being mended and a broken shop window twitch into frustrated laughter, not a reaction to the century which produced the gold town but to the human condition. The obvious reflection, when it is made, is always given a new perspective by a wry or ruefully truthful aside. "Rainbow" ends

With a stream of colour  
 which I won't forget  
 or remember exactly.

and opens the chasm. In spite of Proust and others time cannot be regained. The book is deeply pessimistic and tormented; the pain shows through, but at the same time the poetry is humorous as well as witty and ironic. One is not

surprised to find in "The Reception" that Camus is one of Simpson's heroes.

One day Camus will come to you  
in pantaloons. Of course, Camus is dead.  
You know just how to dress my idols.

The poem is addressed to Vincent Buckley. And a good example of the way the inanimate suddenly becomes charged with human meaning is "Rubbish Dump", which ends—

The bodies we dump are mainly dolls—  
headless, armless—and ruined  
soldiers without legs. We stand awhile,  
cheerless in this wreckage place;  
I tell myself I have a certain courage,  
watching your eyes that help me to endure.

None of Simpson's poems are bad and that's an achievement; nearly everybody lets through some rubbish. I reckon there are about eight poems which are as good as any being written in this country at the moment: "For Peter Mathers", "The Suicide", "Rubbish Dump", "The Telephone's Working Again", "To my Mother", "Evening into Night", "A Nearby Lady", "Murrumbeena".

Nicholas Hasluck's book *Anchor and other poems* contains two sequences, "A Dream Divided" and "Anchor", two sections called "Departure" and "Return", in which he explores his awareness of his own identity, particularly as an Australian, and a short miscellaneous section.

The most distinguished work in the collection is the sequence "Anchor"—

Resting in its holster  
on this poem's prow,  
the anchor waits—  
the huge chains slumber.

It is a series of reflections on a ferry, in a cafe, in a suburban street, exploring a cave, in a sculptor's studio. . . It attempts to relate the inner world to everyday reality as well as to the great out-there.

Ah, the quest for reality—  
my boys on my back  
by moonlight, looking  
for spiders where the vine  
clings to the eaves  
at the house's corner;  
out there, stars . . .  
and no end to it.

Section seven, which is about love, death, writing, immortality and Alice in Wonderland, is the work of a true poet. Sometimes one feels grateful that something got itself written. I feel like that about Simpson's *Poems from Murrumbeena* and about Hasluck's sequence "Anchor". Of the other poems in his book I particularly enjoyed "Raft Birds" and "Man Upon the Beach".

Stefanie Bennett is the publisher of three books of poems, each representing the work of three poets. Two of these represent six women poets: *Hags, Rags and Scriptures* and *Radio City 2 a.m.* The manner of most of them is apocalyptic and the tone, far too often, a scream approaching hysteria. Perversely, having said that, it is Joanne Burns, the angriest and most tormented of them all, who get to me most strongly. She has a strong sensuous feeling for experience and for the words she uses to evoke it.

high on the headland  
below the bansksia's yellow  
brush your back  
arches salty/  
hot smell of roasting nuts  
to be licked in the circle  
of suns

Her satire, "The Long Weekend" is savage and funny. It is all frantic, frightening stuff, but convincing. One would like to be a long way away when

along the wild adrenaline river  
Hebrus/ the fever seethes;

and Orpheus (and anyone else who happens to be in the way) is castrated.

Ruth K. Fordham tries to be oracular but only achieves obscurity. When Nancy Phillips forgets to be angry she can write well, as in the moving poem "My Dying Sister". Stefanie Bennett, who appears in *Radio City*, is also the author of *Tongues and Pinnacles*. She starts the two sections of her book with two quotations from Whitman at his most self-important, telling us in effect to 'Be quiet in the cheap seats', but of all these women poets she has the greatest range and her writing is interesting even when it's pretentious.

Of the three men represented in *Adam Scolds*, Graeme Pitt is the most even, though he'll improve when his work learns to lean less heavily

on literature and the other arts. "Rosanne" is a painful attempt at honesty, though it seems to oversimplify in the interests of self-accusation. The poems about his Aboriginal friends are also very direct and convincing. Walker can be a boring and prosy ranter, as in "Poem for a Day", but when he cares he can write spare, clean poems of considerable wit. I liked "Transposition" and "Horseshoe Bay" the best. Graham Rowlands is an acrobat with words and ideas, but he slips pretty often and at the end of it we are inclined to think the performance was a bore.

Barney Roberts' first book of poems, *The Phantom Boy*, is a satisfying contrast to Miss Bennett's publications. Harry Marks writes an introduction in which he says "Barney Roberts is Australia's yeoman poet, delighting in skylark song." The mind boggles at "yeoman poet". Still, perhaps we could substitute 'cocky poet' and get what Marks was driving at: there certainly are a great many delightfully fresh, naive poems in this collection. The book has a solid moral outlook most fully expressed in "The Wish of Wier Kinn" which is a dialogue between God and the discoverer of a natural way to save the world from radio-active pollution in the year 1990. It is an amusing piece, perhaps a little reminiscent, in the form of the story only, of Kipling's "Tomlinson". It's a pity more poets don't attempt this sort of thing. Unfortunately, for all its charm and originality, "Wier Kinn" is a mess. It mixes up 'yous' and 'thous' and biblical inversions with racy, colloquial language. It uses regular rhythms and rhymes interspersed unpredictably with passages of hobbling prose. "The Phantom Boy" is Roberts' most ambitious poem. I read it and liked it, then tried it out aloud to an audience. It has splendid vivid passages and it is informed by honest sense as well as by poetry. But the trouble again is the rhythm. Sometimes it sings, but more often it hobbles and stumbles and it's very difficult to read aloud. Most of it would gain a great deal by being printed as prose. I'd like to suggest to Barney Roberts that he should read his poems aloud again and again, get others to read them for him to hear, use a tape-recorder if necessary, and try to get the cadences falling right, sounding both musical and natural.

Peter Murphy's second book, all concrete poems this time, has some witty pages, but at best these pages are whimsical and amusing ("Pause in

Creation" one or the best), at worst obscure, silly or too like the work of other concrete poets. Still it's a cheap and worthwhile half-hour's amusement at 30 cents. Peter Murphy is a poet of far greater achievement and potential that this little book shows.

*The Friendly Street Poetry Reader* is one of the best anthologies covering about a year's poetry which I've seen. It has been edited by Richard Tipping from work presented at a weekly poetry reading in Adelaide in 1975-76. It represents thirty-seven poets and most of the different sorts of poetry being written in Australia today: John Bray's well-turned traditional sonnets and ballades, John Gillis' jazzy, macabre, vernacular poem, Geoffrey Dutton in a piece of elegant if horrifying verse reportage, Kate Jennings' very honest talk-poems, Richard Tipping's disturbing surrealist statements, highly intellectual poems like Adrian Smith's . . . I greatly enjoyed the collection, and it gives an excellent idea of most of the sorts of things which are going on in Australian poetry today.

*Tones of Survival*, a collection from the Blue Mountains Writer's Group, doesn't seem to me to present any poem in which the tensions have been satisfactorily resolved, though there are a number of striking ideas and images and some lines of true poetry. Barbara Petrie's "Insect Art", the first poem, from which the title of the collection is taken, comes closest to being a complete poem, though it is marred by archaic phrases like 'unseemly writ upon'. Her other poems are also interesting. She writes sometimes as one who has recently lost her sight: I hope this is not so. Linnea Mallas is another gifted and intelligent writer who may write good poems later. I hope Freda Galloway goes on being as funny as she is in "Bamboo".

*Friends of My Long Heart's Summer* is by Nigel Jackson. It reveals that he is a student of Hermetic philosophy and that his political hero is not Gandhi or Nehru but . . . wait for it . . . Malcolm Fraser! The book is dedicated "to the memory of Thomas Stearns Eliot" whom one might have thought already had a more fitting memorial in his own work. It is a series of pieces about close friends, written over twelve years. "It is my hope," Jackson says in his preface, "that the series will be found, overall to contain an adequate artistic unity." Not only is the series



without unity; it has nothing to do with art either. One could fill a municipal rubbish tip with the clichés. Still, Jackson has a genuine concern for ethical and aesthetic values for all his gush: parsonical, but concerned. The book is pompous, self-important and self-indulgent. It is a pity, because it also shows real intelligence and a concern for truth and goodness and for individual human beings.

### THREE NOVELS

Patsy Adam Smith

Neilma Sidney: *The Return* (Nelson, \$8.95).

Glen Tomasetti: *Thoroughly Decent People* (McPhee Gribble, \$6.95).

Hugh Mason: *The Last Enemy* (Inchcape Books, no price given).

The faults reviewers have sensed rather than articulated when writing of Neilma Sidney's *The Return* are the virtues of the author herself. Neilma Sidney is a gentle, sensitive woman, generous in the warmth of friendship; having personally weathered heartache she nevertheless harbors no grudge against life.

Unfortunately this is not the stuff that great writers are made of. Writers need to be fair bastards. They are the sort of people who get life by the throat and shake it; as well, they need to shut their eyes and jump into the middle of life and be shaken by it, to dog-paddle out to the whorls and eddies at the shore of the maelstrom, grab at life again and be swept once more into the vortex until they find themselves in the quiet, terrifying eye of the storm. Once again they bob and float on the whim of the waters to the edge. In this way they become experienced outsiders-looking-in—but, unlike this writer they *do* bear a grudge against life for so buffeting them: they are so angered by the scurvy trick their very nature has betrayed them into that they kick like all get-out at the first thing that angers them and then at any damned thing at all.

Neilma Sidney's characters are as fair-minded, warm, loving—and loved—as she is herself. She takes us to the high places, the roof of snow country that Australian authors shy from because it is a land that few of us know. Neilma Sidney knows it, loves it, visits and toils in it. Thus she is able to place her characters firmly in the setting she has chosen. The same applies with her central character, the American G.I. deserter. She knows

Americans and America — knows, loves, lives there sometimes and toils there often. Joel Reichstein, although too young to have suffered the European pogrom of his parents' time, does suffer from the folk-memory tattooed into his race, and this is handled skilfully by the writer who has herself been marked by history, legend, lore and folk-memory.

This is a good book. The snow country of Gippsland, cut off, devoid of cattle, cattlemen and timbergetters from April to September, is etched unforgettably; the bikie gang also, particularly when they get their come-uppance from the timber-carters, and the details of equipment, transport methods and the building of the hut (there is a hut in this book as there is in the author's life) are all fine. But. One is left wishing that someone, anyone, had reached out and grabbed life by the throat and shaken the bejassus out of it even if for no better reason than frustration and bias, or good, traditional bastardry.

Glen Tomasetti's *Thoroughly Decent People* is set in the period when the upper part of the window of "the front room" was decorated with stylised glass flowers and the same design could be seen in women's clothes, napery, wall-paper and woodwork. The colors too are charming: could we perhaps identify an age, various ages, by a combination of colors? Charming too is the nostalgia this well-known folk-singer evokes with her first novel. A curator of a twenties-thirties museum need only buy this book to gain the index to his proposed collection.

Yet in many ways it is a funny little book. The "snaps" of a "net cover edged with beads" over the salad dressing as it cools, a blade razor captioned "a really nasty cut", another of St Kilda Road. One is uncertain just what effect these rather banal photographs were meant to have on the reader of a supposedly fictional novel. And the details. We do suffer from a surfeit of details. Take the visit to the Public Library in Swanston Street. We learn that the reading room is eight-sided, has three tiers of balconies adorned with plaster laurel wreaths linked by swags of fruit. Higher up are sixteen round, embrasured windows, each with a centre opening pane and eight fixed panes around it and the central desk had eight sides to match the room. I mean . . . it's all still there if you want to see it. You'll even see the same SILENCE notice, the "fixtures with dozens of small drawers", the lot, but it doesn't move the story on. It's just there as observation.

Commenting on the height of the dome above him, Bert, the father, isn't contemplating soaring upwards like a bird. All this description doesn't teach us anything about him, or the reason for the single appearance of other characters such as the girl he asks, "What are you interested in?" and she replies, "Greek's my subject, and Latin." Now, if Bert had responded in some way to that unlikely-in-the-circumstances reply there may have been some reason for the intrusion, but following the lady's reply the next line reads " 'I see,' said Bert like the blind man who didn't see at all. His interest was gone. His attention wandered to the walls of the room. . . ."

With all this mass of detail, a reviewer should not be thought to be comma-picking to point out that it was not the Prince of Wales and Alexandra who came to Melbourne for the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament but the Duke of Cornwall and York and his wife, Mary (later to become King George V and Queen Mary).

For those of us who love Melbourne and the pre-1939 war period the book is a litany of expressions, mores, manners, morals and minutiae of the time and place. This rosary lovingly telling

the days and ways of old Melbourne Town is a warm reflection of the author, who has gathered the memorabilia of an age and placed it on record, and for that we should all applaud her.

"He picked up the phone and the voice said, 'Hello Hamilton old boy, it's Frank.' He answered cautiously, flatly. There was no one else in the world who called him Old Boy." So much for Dr Hamilton Pentridge. He should consider himself lucky it wasn't a voice on the phone saying "Dear Boy". He'd then have had cause for cautiousness. In fact the first few pages of Hugh Mason's *The Last Enemy* read like a nightmare to some of us and at first I thought it was a send-up of someone lots of us love. But no. The wit wasn't there; nothing but dark, drear, pre-cuscular turgidity.

Not much can be said about the book except that a blonde that "shucks" off her clothes, *throws* herself on a bed and bounces up and down laughing deserves greater reward than, "For Hamilton such lighthearted fucking was entirely novel." Such a girl should be appreciated not analyzed.

## floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: This is a generously-sized issue of *Overland*. In economic terms, quite ridiculous. If we were clever economists and were not producing *Overland* in our spare time we would produce more frequent issues with as little copy as we estimated the customers would stand, and thus spread our overheads and get more frequent renewals. As it is, our only concern, this side of bankruptcy, is to get as much as possible of the material in our 'accepted' files into each issue as it comes up, always making some allowance for the balance of presentation. Thus this issue, for instance, is probably some twenty pages longer than sensibly it should be. We get away with this bad house-keeping because of the Floating Fund—a total of \$679 this issue.

Many thanks indeed to:

\$200 Anon; \$94 RM; \$50 A & KI; \$19 MJ; \$14 LB, IMcI, EW, CES; \$10 CM, WW; \$9 DH; \$6 CE, FB, MC, GKS; \$5 GD, NG; \$4 MM, WL, RG, JMCK, PN, DR, DMcM, AHR, BN-S, RT, JD, RC, JC, HH, AP, KF, MW, JE, PW, BM, MC, CM, PF, RG, DC, TE, MM, LP, DR, JB, LC, JS, DG, BI, BR, AC, JP, EC, JKE, FS, BG; \$3 DP; \$2 HB, BW, IR, MM, KS, AA, NG, JH, PW, SD, HH, NA; \$1 MF, TG, DW, RMcE; RS; KD.  
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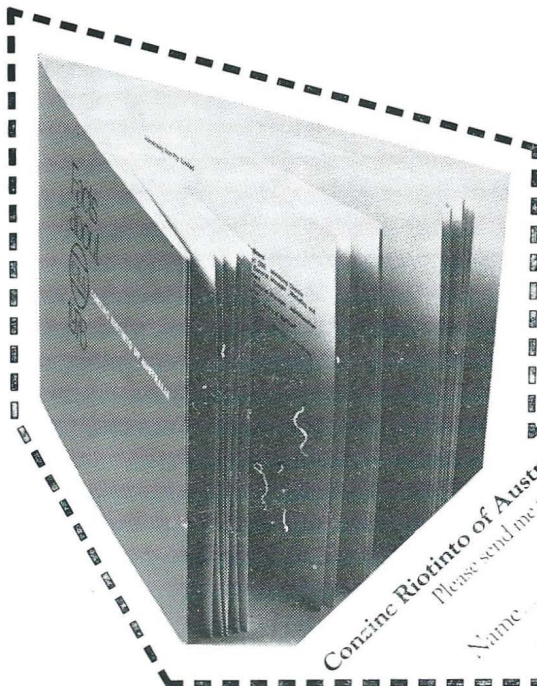
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