overland

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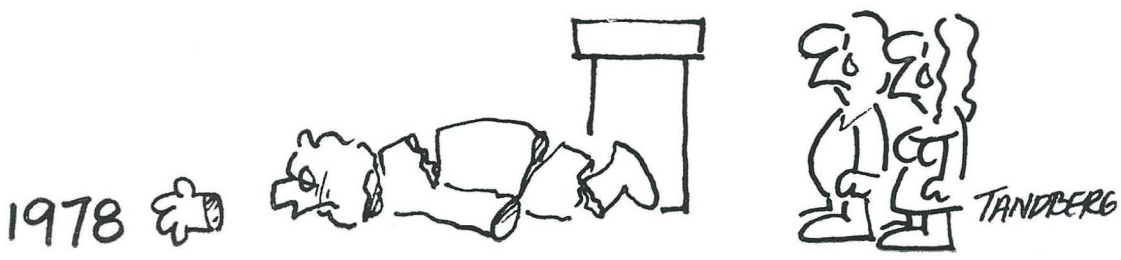

Cover by

Ron Tandberg, The Age, Melbourne

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

1978

With the Man, the Years

The day after the election
the Prime Minister was photographed with his family
in the Botanical Gardens joking about bull-ants
and the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition had retreated
into the dark caves of acrimony and regret.

The nation had voted as a cow votes against too much clover
when the knife is slipped between its ribs.
Whoosh! The last of the splendid dreams
rushed out as the blade went in. *Goodbye*
sisters of the world! Goodbye black (Aboriginal) brothers!
Goodbye big grants to the arts! But the dreams had died
before the man and 1972 and the vertical take-off
of the first hundred days is a
political light-year away. Pick up
the streamers and bottle-tops
— the road from Parramatta to the Nullabor
runs by your door and mine,
so we'll look the other way
(the sun now being in full eclipse)
as the big shadow passes
and, with the man, the years.

BRUCE DAWE

TIM ROTHFIELD

The Island

"Psara," she said. "I think you ought to go there first. I have a feeling it might prove suitable for you?" Psara? What did she say? The way she pronounced it, at first I thought she said the Sahara. I looked at her blankly. I was sitting in the office of a small travel firm on the corner of Nikis Street, just off Syntagma Square, in Athens. Mrs Christopoulos, who seemed to command affairs, was giving me advice about my trip, but it was more like a cross-examination. A tall, lean woman, with grey-blue hair, remarkably like steel burnished and tidied into shape, she reminded me of a greyhound sitting upright — that is, if I'd ever seen such a thing. Indeed, she had one of those rare bright minds that are so fast, so nimble, and so critical, that talking to her was like being pursued by a trained bloodhound, whose sniffing nose was right at your heels, ready for the fatal snap. Quite quickly she had made me feel tremendously guilty for having come to Greece so ill-prepared, in such a state of undress, as it were. By her lofty standards I ought to have spent at least a year in the British Museum doing my homework before venturing into the Aegean, instead of the hasty couple of days I had spent in London rushing around for my tickets.

"You've never heard of Psara?" She smiled. "No. Most foreigners just pass straight through it *en route* for other islands. It's not at all well known abroad, except for those (and she paused to give a caustic flip to the words) who have read their Greek history. Were it not for Psara the Persians might be occupying Greece instead of us Greeks. Anyhow, many of us in Athens go there regularly for our summer holidays. In fact, I was partly brought up on the island." She wrote Psara down on a piece of paper for me. The first letter was that strange letter of the Greek alphabet, 'psi'. It always makes me think of Father Neptune, with his long locks, holding his fork aloft; and straight away I saw myself writing dozens of letters to my friends, flourishing this unusual symbol to all and sundry. There was some enchantment in Psara. I felt it there and then. Was it on the map? How far away was it?

"Psara is very near Pireus. That's just the point," and she reached for the daily newspaper that a colleague had just laid on her desk. She skimmed down the back page, and picked up a telephone. "There's no schedule of boat in the paper today. They think it's not worth advertising in the winter. You see, everybody who goes there knows the time of the boats, and there are virtually no tourists at all this time of the year."

No tourists at all?

"The two main hotels will be closed, and you'll have to find digs with a family, I expect. But that will enable you to learn Greek quickly, won't it?" I began to wonder if perhaps I had not gone too far. In an effort to make it plain that I was serious about writing my book in solitude I had stressed I wanted to avoid an island such as Hydra, with its raffish Johnston goings-on. But was I going too far in the opposite direction? Was I going to find myself on a grim island fortress?

"The thing about Psara that I think you will appreciate is the climate. Even in the winter it never gets really cold for long. A little snap — is that what you say — and then bright sunny days again." To find the sun, I said, I would be prepared to endure quite considerable hardships, I said, but there were limits. Now Mrs Christopoulos was on the 'phone, having a brisk exchange with a shipping company, and I heard that extraordinary word 'neh' peppering the air, like commas sprinkled on a page of printing. "There's a boat at twelve," she said, putting down

the phone, "and it comes back at 5 p.m. So, if you like, cross over, take a look around, and if you don't like it, you can return this afternoon. What have you got to lose?" Yes, what had I got to lose? I got up to go, and I realised I had taken up quite half-an-hour of her time, and what had she got out of it? I thanked her and asked could I buy a ticket for the boat from her. "No, no, that is not necessary. It is better that you buy it on the wharf at Pireus. And that reminds me: don't buy a first-class ticket. It's not necessary. Just get an ordinary ticket. You'll see why when you get aboard." She accompanied me to the door, and I faced Nikis Street.

"Is there anything I can do for you on Psara?" I asked.

"No. Just write a good book," she said. "That is what you have come here to do, isn't it?" and with a wave and a farewell in Greek which I didn't understand, I was neatly tied up in a bundle, and consigned to my destination, by an utter stranger who had stepped into my life a bare half-an-hour before, and whose influence was henceforth to change drastically everything that concerned me.

At Pireus, by the wharf, you find many small steamers tidily anchored alongside one another, destined for different islands, and they make a brave sight, with their colorful banners, flags, streamers, and gaily painted placards. For Psara, my steamer was simplicity itself to find as it was none other than the faithful *Psara* itself, the oldest boat on the run to the island, and the slowest. For over two hours, the gallant vessel, built a long time ago on the Clyde for this service, doggedly chugs out the fifteen knots to Psara, keeping a steady, even course (for often it can be surprisingly rough, and she is the least temperamental, and the smoothest to travel on in bad weather), belching forth great billowing clouds of black smoke from the ancient engines, and always, winter and summer alike, jammed tight with passengers and their baggage, every inch of deck space occupied.

This was my first experience of being together with Greeks *en masse*, except for the long three-day train journey when even Greek high spirits were dulled by the tedium and the slow speed. . . . I liked the feeling of that tiny ship: there was an indefinable sense of camaraderie, of loving ties, of well-being, and a noticeable lack of tension and strain in the conduct of the people. Every few seconds people burst into greetings:

Kali mera. Tikanateh?
Kala. Essis, tikanateh?

Or the more familiar, jovial:

Yasoo.

This from men to one another. Children were everywhere. Carried in their mother's arms, wheeled, dragged by the hands, or tucked under seats, they were the recipients of godlike attention, and endless titbits of food and drink. Goodness, how spoilt they were! Coming from America, where I had lived so many years in New York, and where an aggression between parent and child seems always to be just lurking under the surface of brittle chatter, this Greek warmth and affection for children fascinates me. I can see quite clearly that this spoiling is destined to corrupt character and produce endlessly fat adults, but isn't it worth it? . . . The most coveted positions on the ferry-boat in the winter are the leather-covered seats in the saloon; and there, beside the bar, drinking coffee or sipping an ouzoo, the matrons and the men sit, gossiping happily all the way to Psara.

This was how I found it on that sunny blissful January afternoon. Not a seat was vacant, and so I went up on deck where the canvas awning was drawn back, and where one could bask in the sun. Presently, with a warning shriek from the siren, we were off! Nothing could be simpler than the way that boat was managed. Outside the wheelhouse, the Captain takes his vantage point. A sailor holds the wheel, while yet another — none in uniform it should be noted — stands perched by a rail aft, to observe the captain's signal and to see that we are cast off correctly and no one is left dangling.

A shout. Another shriek from the siren. Away we go. All done by three men and that small boy on the quay who had nothing else to do but cast off the ropes. Through the harbor, saluting friends and rivals with friendly shrieks, we threaded our way at cautious half-speed. Sometimes the Captain, to observe the proprieties, no doubt, took the wheel, but usually he preferred to stand outside on deck in private sanctum on the starboard side, hand on regulator, with a weather-eye cocked. Here he can see everything — especially if friends and relatives are aboard. Even on the bridge, family life — Greek style — is carried on. All through the voyage, the Captain held court. A constant procession of visitors, mostly women with babies at breast, came up for a chat. When they were young and pretty they

were usually invited inside. Proudly they showed off the latest infant and the Captain listened with rapt interest as if it were the Athens football results rather than the day's doings of the diminutive toddler. The infirm or elderly had red-carpet treatment. They were taken into the wheelhouse and sat behind the wheel, while the sailor steered the boat from an acute, uncomfortable angle, did not protest but busied himself making cheerful conversation.

None of this informality seemed to affect the care with which the old ship was handled. On the rest of the ship we had constant diversions to amuse us, and pass the time. At first, lotteries were run by a haggard man with a large trunk of chocolates. For a good half-hour, he went about shouting for buyers, and being assailed by a constant stream of ribald banter and chaff. (A long time later I discovered that he had a reputation for having much more interest in the fair sex than his job; indeed that it was merely a charade to deceive his wife; and this was doubtless why those in-the-know joked openly to aggravate him.) After he'd run a few games, he switched to roulette. The last time I had played roulette it was in Monte Carlo at a dashing casino. The contrast was striking. On the inside of a battered trunk numbers were chalked. With the lid as a board a top was spun in squares, and soon a crowd gathered round, avidly keen for a gamble. Nobody is interested in the sea, except the man at the ship's wheel.

Suddenly, a mile or so ahead, I saw what seemed to be a large mountain in the water, with an undulating hump. Presently tiny houses were recognisable, and what I now know to be ancient chapels, painted white and tucked into the hills.

"Is that Psara?" I asked a woman seated by the rails.

"Psara?" and she looked up. "*Neh. Neh. Ineh Psara.*"

About a quarter-of-a-mile from the coast we abruptly turned and followed the curving coastline. I could see a road skirting the shore, and a truck weaving a trail of dust. So it was dry. That was good news. A high cliff rose up as we turned a headland, and we crossed a bay with a foreshore of sand, lined with bent pines, and dotted with fishing boats, drawn up onto it in a dry-dock of sorts. We hooted. At sea our siren had mysteriously decided to change its sex. It now possessed a deep masculine voice. Throatily it greeted the island from the bay as if a goddess were hiding in a cave, and he were her lover. Everyone began putting things together, and mothers got frantic looking for missing children. A queue formed on the middle deck, obviously the point of disembarkation. Preoccupied with trying to find out what I ought to do and where I ought to stand I missed the approach to the town until we hove up. The boat swung around a buoy and we raced into the harbor. It was a breathtaking moment. Psara appeared. Like a conjuror saying "hey presto", there it was. Psara! Shaped like a horseshoe, the front street along the harbor came towards us with arms outstretched, as it were, in welcome: boats, houses, churches, cafés, shops, all laced together in a gay jumble, with mingling and intermingling masts of dozens of small boats swinging about in front of them.

My heart missed a beat, especially as we were travelling towards the pier at a terrifying speed, and nobody but me seemed to be aware of the danger. We thundered up; a tearing groan was wrung from us as our anchor was thrown into the harbor, and ten yards or so, no more, from the stone bulwarks, we reversed engines, ropes were thrown, a gangway hurled up at us, and the boat glided gently against the wharf and we were at Psara. I was about to say, then I landed. That wouldn't be quite accurate. Nobody had warned me about the Greek idea of getting off a ship, and it is a forbidding experience for the unwary. All through the ship's journey, men and women loll about indolently; they look totally incapable of exerting themselves about anything. Don't be deceived. Actually they are saying prayers to themselves under their breaths, being one and all terrified of deep water, and of drowning in an accident. The strain shows when land is sighted. As soon as the ship touches soil, wonderful, glorious soil, in one solid mass the entire passenger list hurls itself at the tiny gangway. You cannot do anything except yield to the mob thrust. It is like being a cork swirled down a mighty rapids. I had bags in each hand, and a duffle bag tied around my shoulder. I was swung off the ship, swirled through the iron-grating fronting the wharf in Psara's main street, and unceremoniously deposited on the pavement.

The great wave spent itself. The people dispersed to their homes. I was marooned, like a piece of flotsam on a sunny beach after a storm. I picked myself up, and strolled round the town. It was siesta time. The shops were closed. Waiters

propped themselves up against doorways, smoking. A few men dozed on iron chairs outside the cafés. The town was asleep. How nice it was! How quiet and tranquil! But my goodness, this Greek language. . . I might as well have found myself on the moon, for the difficulty of knowing what to do and where to go was exactly the same. Whereas in Athens, at every turn, people had been there to help and to speak English, here on this island plainly no one knew that the English race existed or that there was such a language spoken as the English tongue. You might just as well have been in the middle of a desert and come upon an unknown tribe, whose language was their own invention. At least, frankly that is how I felt. I could not make head nor tail of what people tried to tell me. My efforts with a phrase book had to be stopped almost at once as I could see it only added to the confusion instead of helping. Up and down I trudged, puzzled as to how on earth I could ever grapple with this. Passing a café in the middle of town, a lean man, with wispy grey hair, and a long cigarette holder stuck in his mouth, without a cigarette, came up to me.

"You look for room?" he asked, in a strong Greek accent, as if the voice was produced in a gearbox; but it was English, thank God. At rest, standing expectantly in front of me with a long holder in his mouth, he looked not unlike a kingfisher. I was like a fish he'd plucked out of the sea. I followed his stooping frame into the café. As we passed through the doorway, he pointed to some faded lettering, and said: "Hotel Vassilis" I didn't realise it just then, but with that second remark Alexis' command of English had exhausted itself. Situated on two floors, the Hotel Vassilis consisted of twelve rooms, mostly with two beds or more. The Hotel was above a café, and we got to it by climbing up a short flight of steps, going along a narrow passageway, and then ascendind to the Hotel itself. Alexis took me through every room in turn. Finally we got to a room with a pleasant outlook at the rear on the top floor. Alexis then disappeared. I took stock of the room. It was about twelve feet by ten feet, with a single bed pushed against the wall, a small table near the window, a washstand with a large basin on it by the door. Except for two ancient chairs in strategic positions, this was the entire furnishing. The washstand had drawers and a cracked marble top. When you opened the drawers they stuck, and the whole rickety structure shook with fright, almost falling over with the shock. It had the look of being abandoned by the Turks in the 1820s. Wooden floors, high white walls, and a very pale electric light from a small bulb near the ceiling composed the rest of it. I nerved myself for a peek at the lavatory, situated right alongside in the corridor. I was terrified that I might find a hole in the floor type. With relief I saw an old-type cistern with a complicated system of intertwined pipes. One glance at it told me it hadn't worked for years, and explained the pail standing on the floor partly filled with water.

Even a monk, I thought, would not quibble with my summing up: that it was an austere abode for anyone, ascetic, religious, or, like myself, low in funds.

"Hello! Please excuse me for keeping you waiting." An outstretched hand from a delicate, handsome, and smiling face, came towards me. "My cousin has shown you around, yes? I hope you found something you like?" It was Vassilis, owner of the hotel. Short, slim, aged about thirty-five, with thinning, dark hair, and darting glittering eyes, he had a soft, magnet quality. His voice was his most winning feature. It struck me at once. Caressing, musical, very changeable in expression, with bubbling fun, you felt, always waiting for an outlet. Extreme sensitivity was apparent in quick, graceful gestures of hands, body, and face. "My dear chap," he said, affecting an exaggerated Oxford accent, "what on earth brings you to Psara?" It was a funny take-off. I laughed, and asked him how he acquired such a good command of English. "No, no, I don't speak so well," he said deprecatingly. "I have picked it up here and there. From women mostly."

"Ah," I said, and smiled.

"Ah?" he said, chuckling, and clapped his hands.

We understood one another. Quickly I gave him basic facts for coming to Psara: to write my book on Chekhov, and so on. "Oh," Vassilis sighed, with an apologetic air. "What a pity we no longer have our philosophic writer Peter here on the island. We could all have had such interesting, Socratic conversations, yes?" Peter, I learned, had been a *megalos filos*, with whom great times had been spent, walking the island, chasing girls, long talks into the night, hours in the bazouki. Marriage, alas, had struck him down in the end. "A dancer. Very young. No flesh — all bones." Vassilis pulled a disapproving face. His hands went very wide apart. Plainly she

hadn't been his cup of tea. "Now I don't hear from him any more."

"I'm sorry."

"No, it is my fault. I don't write letters, and I have had so many, many, from him." A sad wave of his hand, like a dancer's tragic gesture of lament, expressed this disgraceful defect of character — but what could one do? There it was . . . We discussed the room. Vassilis quoted me a fantastically cheap price. I had tempting visions of a long stay, and yet it was dreadfully primitive. The bathroom, for example. How did one get a bath? "You can, if you wish," said Vassilis, "take a bath in the sewer. It is down below. Under the café." And he gestured to the nether regions, as if it were something out of Gotta-damerung. The sewer? I saw in my mind a great vat-like affair, like one of those things under the Paris Metro, a relic of the French Revolution, where rats, criminals, and God knows what else lurked. Or did he mean cellar? . . . Curiosity is a strong point in me, but here it gave out. I might have to flee the island if something ghastly lay beneath us. I saw the brown washstand, and a basin under it, and decided that, for the time being, that would have to do.

"How long will you stay? asked Vassilis. Perhaps only a few days, I told him. I would look around and see how I like Psara. It was arranged that later in the evening Vassilis would give me a Greek lesson in the café. He went off, and I felt delighted to have encountered such a genial, kindred spirit. I opened the window wide, and took stock of the situation. Looking over the rooftops, narrow alleyways, I saw a Church in the distance, and through a chink in the distant buildings a glimpse of the coast and the sea. People were drifting out of the houses after a siesta. Horse-drawn carts clattered slowly along. A boy called out from his bike as another raced past on a scooter, with a shattering reverberation. It was, though, very peaceful, and reminded me of the Provence, a region of France I love very much. I reflected on just how cut-off I was from all the things I had most depended upon in London: friends, theatres, movies, art galleries, books, newspapers, long telephone conversations, dinner parties — everything that adds up to an enjoyable civilised life. Here I would be down to solid bedrock, perhaps with none of these niceties. Not a soul to communicate with who had an inkling of my past life. If I wished, of course, I would be left severely alone, twenty-four hours of the day. That book would have every chance, but could I stick it? After all, a man needed something to make life agreeable . . . but was it here in Psara? Of course, without doubt, there was the beauty of nature, the climate. . .

A knock at the door, and a Greek woman's voice spoke. "Come in," I said. It must be the servant with towels, and an extra blanket I had asked Vassilis to give to me. The door did not open. I repeated "Come in", and went and opened the door to my reluctant visitor. She came in. A tall girl, with long curly hair, falling over her fine, fierce face. Spanish rather than Greek, I thought. A fiery, passionate creature was obvious in every fibre.

"Oriste," she said, and put the towels on a rack, and laid the blanket on the bed.

"Thank you," I said, and at the door, as she went out, she flashed me, in the briefest of glittering, darting looks, a faintly mocking, coquettish challenge.

Well, so . . . Humph! What did Vassilis say? "I think you will find you like it if you stay a day or so." Yes, it was possible. Distinctly possible . . .

—From a book in progress.

Poems of Miyazawa Kenji

Notes and Translations

MEREDITH McKINNEY

Born in 1896, Miyazawa Kenji lived his short life in the little town of Hanamaki, in northern Japan. He died at the age of thirty-seven after a long illness, having published at his own expense one volume of poetry *(Spring and Shura)* and one of children's stories — but he was a prolific writer, and now when at last he is becoming recognized as the extraordinary writer he was, there are fourteen thick volumes of his complete works published in Japan.

Kenji was above all a religious man, one who is known as a 'Seeker' in Japan, but far from being hermit or monk, his deep compassion led him to work for and with the local peasants, sharing their hard life and attempting to improve it in every way he could, until his strength gave out. His religious beliefs were in some ways akin to those of Tolstoy and Gandhi, but his vision was a more complex one, both utterly practical and utterly mystical. While yet remaining a devout Buddhist, he strove to bring religion and science together, believing that through such a unification humanity would gain liberation.

The present world of egotism, selfishness and slaughter he termed 'Shura', the name given to the realm of warring and jealous spirits in the Buddhist hierarchy of realms of rebirth. It is usually placed below the realm of humans and above the animal realm. He firmly believed however that humans could transcend the world of Shura, that heaven is the 'fourth dimension' of this world, imminent all around us, and that by being "conscious within oneself of the universe, and acting in accordance with that consciousness", the world will take on its inherent heavenly form. Art he saw as "a concrete expression of cosmic feeling which has passed through the earth, man, and individuality", something inseparable from the religious impulse. His own extraordinary and beautiful poems and stories bear witness to the power of his vision, and to his deep love for the world.

Winter Sketch

What I wish for are the true words,
the mantra of Buddha in the midst of the rain.
I come through these black clouds
which fly tattered by wind and sleet,
push open the small door
of this railway station in the gorge
and approach the hearth where a villager wrapped in
a blanket
is burning brown coal.
But truly what I yearn for and crave increasingly
even more than that marble hearth
what I wish for are the true words
the mantra of Buddha in the midst of the rain.

1921.

Flower Petals of Karma

Night's moisture and wind mingle desolately.
Black the forest of pine and willow.
The sky is filled with flower petals of karma.
I have recorded the names of the gods
and I shiver violently.

Ah won't someone come and say to me
that the bright new age will certainly come
when a million masters will be born in succession
nor will they sin against each other.
. . . A heron cries in the distance.
Is it standing still in the cold swamp
its red eyes aflame all night? . . .
Drops fall from the row of pines
and a tiny lonely star cluster
is washed clean of the clouds in the west.
These two by chance
are linked by yellow pampas grass.
The remaining huge shadows of the grass heads
are reflected vaguely white.

1924.

'In the Soft Sun-lit Rain . . .'

In the soft sun-lit rain
the swamp's blue reeds wound you
and flames of irises sway and burn.

Since the rain the clouds the water the woods
are you and are me
what should we do?

Wild ducks gliding —
golden pampas grass.

1927.

The Third Art

As I was preparing a ridge for turnips
a little man with white hair
was suddenly standing behind me.
He asked what I was planting
and I replied that I was going to plant red turnips.
A ridge for red turnips? Don't build it like that —
and he gently put out his hand,
took over the hoe,
and raked a part of the ridge diagonally.
My head rang
and I stood there dazed
as though I'd been anaesthetized.
The sun shone and the wind was blowing,
our two shadows fell on the sand
and in the distance the river was shining;
yet I was completely entranced, and thought
'what brush stroke of india ink
what flavour of the carver's chisel
could surpass this!'

1927.

Dravidian Style

A tepid wind blows from downstream.
The sandy soil dries and the grass dries.
Veiled Dravidian style
they plow the fields like dancers against the blue paper clouds
breathing hard, piling the cow dung, moving to and fro.
The wheel of karma turns.
The sun burns.
Willow buds all fade to yellow
and the river flows with silver and the Doctrine of Emptiness.
From the south the tepid wind blows and blows,
and the cabbages they planted wilt and flutter white.
The laughter of the multitude of Hindu devotees is distant.
Thistles
diadems
green vine of the creeping chrysanthemum.
The wind blows and blows the white sand.
How many tiny dunes of sand
have formed in the fields already!
Sweat and trembling.
Irridescent blue flies from Kashmir
gathered there at the cow dung.
When King Vessantara bestowed his prince upon the Brahmans
the earth trembled to the blue mountains' summits.
Turn to the right
turn to the left
even our sweat is acid, and the wind blows and blows.
If I could gain the Mani Jewel, granter of wishes.
first of all I would buy off
two hours of debt work a day
from every farmer and construction worker.

1927.

'On The Far Far Edge . . .'

On the far far edge of the blue sky
above the atmosphere, where even hydrogen is sparse,
lives a group of eternal and transparent creatures
who are not even weighed down by
such heavy thoughts as —
'I am the whole world.
The world is the shadow of a shifting green dream.'

1927.

'Now My Lungs . . .'

Now my lungs
are a hot sorrowful salt lake
and yes, for two hundred miles along its banks
stretches a wood of deep black lepidodendron trees.
And must I stay still and unmoving
asleep
until the reptile changes into some form of bird?

1929.

JOHN McLAREN

swag

The 1977 electoral defeat of the Australian Labor Party confirms the decisive change in Australian politics which began with the dismissal in 1975 of the government led by Gough Whitlam. The latest defeat has led to the retirement from political leadership of this man who more than anyone else in the seventies stood for both hope and achievement. The hope that Whitlam represented was that through democratic change we could create a just and an exciting society. His achievement was first to lead the Labor Party from political irrelevance back to becoming an active force and finally to assuming office. This work of rebuilding probably led to the involvement of more people in the party's affairs than at any other period in the last twenty-five years. Whitlam's time in office promised a similar involvement of people in the conduct of their own country. The extension of welfare services enabled the deprived and the disadvantaged not only to live with dignity, but to become active in their communities. For the first time since the program of mass migration began after the second world war, migrant groups were given the chance to enter the main stream of national life. The sums spent on education at all levels made real for — how many? tens? hundreds of thousands? — the right to an education fitting their separate interests and abilities. Medibank opened the possibility of achieving physical wellbeing for the community. Schemes of urban development, assistance to local government, the Australian Assistance Plan, all enlisted the enthusiasm and participation of people across the community. The money made available for the arts and the extension of ethnic and community radio promoted the creativity which gave life to the whole. Despite mistakes and problems, it seemed that vision could be made reality. And although many people contributed to the vision, Gough Whitlam above all others made it seem possible.

But the very enthusiasm which the Labor government generated provoked its own reaction. Those whose interests were threatened, or thought to be threatened, waged their campaigns of vituperation through the public media and by private gossip. No profession can ever have reached the depths to which some doctors sank in their campaign against every form of health reform, but not far behind them were the lawyers, the spokesmen for the private schools, the puritans and the paranoids of the churches, the rural lobby who believed that everything governments did was wrong except giving money to farmers, and of course all those who found offensive the sometimes crude nationalism which accompanied the renewed self-confidence, and those who preferred deals affecting the public weal to be carried out behind locked doors rather than in the full light of public enquiry. But the vocal detractors of Labor government found all too ready a response not only among those who found any change disturbing, but also among those who quickly became disillusioned when the government ran into economic and organisational troubles. When the sectarian fights of the Labor movement again destroyed its unity, Whitlam became everybody's scapegoat. The eminence of his rise was matched only by the loneliness of his fall. Yet it needs to be put on record that he retained to the last the loyalty of those closest to him, and of the party at large. If, in the task of rebuilding, the left must avoid the mistakes of the past, particularly the ideological enthusiasms which carry us out of touch with the fears and aspirations of the ordinary Australian, it must also avoid the opposite fault of mistaking mediocrity for the common

touch. Whitlam's strength was the lack of the former, his weakness the occasional lack of the latter.

There are many ways in which the election result can be interpreted — as a vote of fear against hope, the old against the young, the comfortable against the troubled, the average against the different. By the time this paragraph appears, the actual as distinct from the expected consequences of the election will no doubt be appearing. But one paradox seems to stand out. The majority of the electorate were undoubtedly voting against change, for stability. But the most certain fact about the Fraser government is that the Prime Minister will attempt a radical restructuring of Australian society in the interests of the few and the orthodox. He differs from his predecessors in lacking even the camouflage of decency.

One of the odd facts about recent politics has been the fate of the word commonwealth. This proud and republican term was dropped by the Whitlam government in its determination to assert its prerogatives as the arbiter of the interests of the whole nation. It has been resurrected by the Fraser government as part of its new federalism, but shorn of its connotations of sharing. Perhaps the next Labor government will restore its full meaning of difference within commonality.

We hope in a later issue to deal more fully with Colin Nugent's attack on the Victorian Ministry for the Arts for funding a few elite groups rather than the many projects at community level. This is a perennial problem with government funding. The Australia Council has attempted to overcome it through its community arts program, which is now administered by a full board operating alongside those responsible for theatre, literature, craft, and so on. But while it is necessary to encourage local initiative, it is also imperative that we support major talents and major enterprises. If the fault with our opera company is that it caters for the tastes of a socially exclusive clique and is seen by too few people, the remedy lies not in exterminating the company but in changing its management and ensuring that some of the subsidies are used for cheap seats. Yet operations like the Australian opera are so huge and so costly that almost inevitably they will eventually become inbred and stale, whatever management policies are followed. The best we can hope for, in either state or national companies, is a cycle of renewal, bringing them back again into contact with the wider life around them. But that will not be enough unless that life is also envigorated through a multitude of local and dissident activities. These however will be of no value if they are merely amateur, reinforcing accepted attitudes and gilding the workaday with culture. The key to all activities in the arts must be seriousness. The task, unenviable and probably impossible, of any arts administration must be to maintain the tensions of the centre against the periphery, the small against the large, the established against the new.

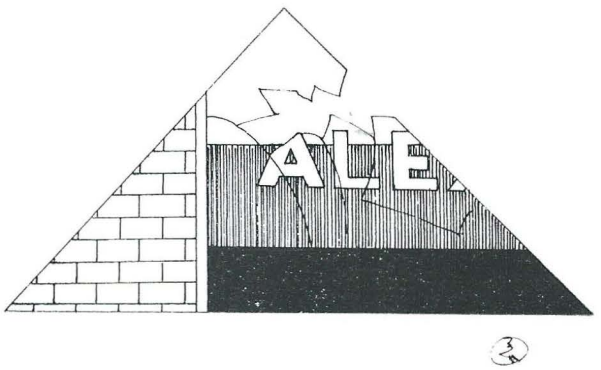
Among publications received recently was pamphlet number one of volume one of the Strehlow Research Foundation, which has been established to carry on the work of Professor T. G. H. Strehlow in the area of Aboriginal culture in Australia. It is intended each year to publish six issues of a newsletter and pamphlet for a subscription of $5. Each issue will contain an article by Professor Strehlow on a matter of current interest. The first pamphlet contains a defence of Christian missions for the Aborigines against charges that they have been responsible for forcibly uprooting Aborigines from their native lands and for destroying their native cultures. The Foundation can be contacted at 30 DaCosta Avenue, Prospect, S.A. 5082.

Corrections

Noel McLachlan writes, regarding his letter from Ireland in our last issue, that having been unable to correct the article in proof before it was published, "I must make one important correction now. Contrary to my distinct impression the Academic Council of University College did *not* approve the constitution of a Gay Society, and when the issue was raised at a subsequent meeting I was the only member who voted in favour of reconsidering it. But at least the President made it clear that the Society could continue to exist without this imprimatur. Since the article was written the President of Maynooth (where the two academic staff were dismissed under extremely dubious circumstances) has become Primate of All Ireland, but he has come out strongly in favour of the complete separation of Church and State in the Republic — the most heartening event here since we arrived."

On the title page of the last Overland Stephen Murray-Smith is referred to as "Editor (on leave)". This was not so; Stephen was actually the editor for the last issue, and the current issue is the first for which he is "on leave".

This issue of Overland includes the last pieces we received from Rohan Rivett and Oscar Mendelsohn, both good friends to Overland and to Australian literature. Rohan Rivett reviewed frequently for us, as well as contributing to Australian letters through his work as journalist, broadcaster and writer. *Behind Bamboo* will be remembered not only as one of the finer pieces of reportage from the prisoner-of-war and forced labor camps of world war two, but also as a fine piece of autobiography which adds to our understanding of the Australian character. Oscar Mendelsohn was also a prolific and gifted writer, but he will perhaps be remembered as much for his work for Australian writers through the Fellowship of Australian Writers, and for his contributions to the science and technology, and indeed — a rare combination — to the enjoyment of food. We will miss them both.



DESMOND O'GRADY

What's the Score?

"Spaced-out, the old Alan," Gavin admitted, "but there were still flashes."

"Thought he'd have more to say," Carol's voice was muffled as she searched in the wardrobe, "the flashes must have been brighter twenty years ago." Twenty years ago, as she knew by rote, Alan had been a comet.

A comet which had lit the sky of their imaginations during their first years together. As they battled with too many children, too little money they looked, with chagrin and anticipation, to Alan as a trailblazer.

Carol was impressed by Gavin's respect for Alan as a literary intelligence whose antennae had been hypersensitive to new writers: Nabokov, William Carlos Williams, Landolfi. Inevitably Alan intrigued her. Her love for Gavin was intertwined with her love for literature as his writing ambitions had opened for her horizons unknown in her country town. She felt she still had a long way to go beyond Melbourne: very sensitive, she took an imprint as easily as warm wax, and wanted to submit herself to the European matrix.

Alan had led the way in travel as well as literature. Each morning she saw him in the bedroom wall photo, on a Port Arthur wall, with Gavin and other hitchhiking companions. Alan was the only one with eyes closed as if against the sun. His hair was fiery filaments. There was a blinding shield of light, as if from a magnesium flash, high on his left temple. In her mind, he retained this allure while Gavin all too obviously had thickened, aged since the photograph, and even there his watchful baggy eyes were those of an insomniac pained by the morning light.

In the first years of marriage, she asked herself if she had damaged Gavin. She had come between him and Alan. In the midfifties, they had booked together for Europe on the "Otranto". At the last minute, Gavin had cancelled because he had met Carol. He had felt so bad about it he had not introduced her to Alan nor seen him off.

Europe remained five-children-and-a-mortgage away. But Carol did not suffer remorse. She had proved readier than Gavin to head overseas as a hostage to fortune. And her belief in him had kept him going when, after years without publication, he had wanted to abandon writing. Now he had growing success whereas Alan, who seemed a hare in their race for renown as writers, had not published for a long time. They had not heard from him for more than a year when a letter arrived announcing he was returning for six weeks on a charter flight to visit his parents.

Tonight Gavin had invited writer friends to a welcome home party for the pathfinder who had been teaching in Europe. But despite his encouragement (come on man, you were the first on to these ideas) Alan had been like a rusty old car which refuses to start. Not quite country cousin among the sophisticates but almost a foreigner who did not know the language.

"There really were occasional flashes," Gavin insisted loyally, "even if you didn't hear them. As when he played pingpong."

"That was spooky too," called Carol, who had been as disillusioned as Gavin, from the bathroom which opened off the severe, blackpapered bedroom, "looked as if he'd have a heart attack any minute. And that tongue noisily sucking at a tooth — was he up to that trick in the good old days?"

"I'd forgotten —"

"My God! How could you? Must be the most memorable thing about the old Alan."

"Be nice to the bastard anyway."

"Nice to him? How nice do you want me to be?" In her Marlene Dietrich voice.

Alan had farewelled the other guests as if he were host, then insisted Gavin front for pingpong. They had cleared the table which stood at one end of the oblong dining room decorated with play posters. Apparently Alan had not held a pingpong bat in the intervening 20 years: his snakey flicked backhand worked only twice in half-an-hour ("limp wrist's a disadvantage in this game" teased Gavin), his once-swift service finished monotonously against the net. Not only was his co-ordination poor but he was distressed even by the little exercise pingpong afforded. He was shorter than Gavin, broader and his hair had remained fair while Gavin's was already silver. A receding hairline lengthened Alan's lantern-jibbed face making it hatchety: no one would be tempted to call him Al at first meeting.

Alan rang early the following morning to say he was determined to regain his pingpong form. Gavin knew Alan had been attempting to recover it ever since, as a boy, he had seen Viktor Barna in an exhibition match at the Trocadero. "Come over any time and I'll put you through your paces" invited Gavin, but he had hoped for more intellectual exercise. However, Alan explained that his parents had a full program for him in the next few days.

Consequently the sight that night of his sharp face at the window startled Gavin and Carol as, their five children finally in bed, they picked over the party remains. Alan explained he had not rung the doorbell to avoid waking 'the nippers'.

"Had to get away for a breather, didn't know I had so many aunts — predatory to the last man," he explained, then sucked noisily at his left canine. The refugee from family affection helped himself to the cold moussaka.

"I'll heat you something," Carol offered.

"No. They've been shoving food into me all day. Extract a terrible revenge if you stay away — you have to eat five lamingtons for each year A.W.L. Clear away these ruins, Carol: I'm going to rip strips off your hero."

Gavin noted Carol's eyes narrow into green lasers and feared she would throw the moussaka in Alan's face. He was grateful that she agreed to clear the table when she finished her curry — and did not even add "if you don't mind."

Alan played better, much better. His backhand was still unreliable but his lightning service functioned. After a few games he eliminated all backhand flourish and pushed forward steadily to half-volley, keeping the ball in play, his high forehead ashine with sweat. His concentration had always been good but now his intensity startled Gavin.

In the past, Gavin had revolted occasionally against Alan's driving personality which, despite his equable temperament, could make him unbearable. His singlemindedness imposed a strain. Gavin usually discharged his tensions, evident even in the dialectic of his forehead furrows, in wit. But at times they had clashed and once, on a deserted outback road where they had waited days to hitch a ride, had staged a sullen fight. There seemed no reason for the feud other than Alan's optimism in such drear circumstances irked Gavin who began hurling stones at him from close range. They kept at it murderously for some time, the stones ricocheting spectactularly on that empty road, then grappled, unaccountably kicking like Thai boxers, until the crazed contest was halted by the sound of an approaching mail truck.

"Different story tonight, eh?" exulted Alan when Gavin had allowed him to win a match, "jet-lag fading, eyes no longer bloodshot, nervous system steadier. Watch out: the Iceman's on the way."

It was a code from their historic tussles. While Gavin used to give rein to his emotions, cursing poor shots as well as joking, Alan was grimly determined. He was called the Iceman and when engaged in one of his relentless comebacks would announce "The Iceman Cometh."

Carol, bored by hours of fanatical play and nauseated by the locker-room smell the lounge had acquired, went to bed despite Alan's protest that he needed an audience. Had the brilliant precursor been merely a figment? She had looked forward to Alan as a font of ideas but this retarded sports crank was a yawn.

Eventually Gavin, seeking intelligent talk, declined futher play. But Alan was monosyllabic, then announced he had hit a low. He asked if he could stretch out. "If I don't go with the tide Gav, I'll be left stranded."

Gavin, wishing that sleep would summon him, a candidate for a cork-lined room, so imperiously, offered Alan two blankets and the study's Chesterfield.

Apart from an initial "a handsome pad, pardner", Alan had not commented on the house but Gavin knew it must have made an impact on someone who had left Australia before setting up his own establishment. It was set in Melbourne suburbia, there was no getting away from that, although not the middle-class morass but an inner

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working-class suburb which people such as Gavin and Carol were colonising. Outside it was indistinguishable from the houses of the rowdy Greeks next door or the suspicious Ocker family opposite. But the previous owner, a graphic artist, had transformed the interior into a uncluttered cool pad. The modern kitchen gave onto a spacious dining room with white walls, polished floor, stainless steel chairs and pale wood furniture, divans scattered with vivid green and orange cushions.

The second-hand Chesterfield was the prize piece in Gavin's small study which opened from the lounge. The only modern item was the angle-poise light above his writing desk which was flanked by an oak, glass-fronted book cabinet; on the top row, the marching row of Gavin's publications, on the bottom some tarnished trophies he had won for athletics.

Gavin was certain Alan must perceive the subtext of the pad: that a style could be established here without whoring off to Europe. He did not want to rub it in if Alan insisted on turning a blind eye but counted on the Chesterfield, overnight, to impress itself on him.

When she woke, Carol sensed Alan had spent the night in the house. As it was Saturday, the children had risen late but the tardiest, nine-year-old Tim, was shovelling down his cereal when Alan appeared and sat at the kitchen table in his rumpled clothes, saying he would not knock back bacon and eggs. As she unenthusiastically prepared his breakfast, Carol noted a clumsiness which had affected her recently: she chipped a cup against a tap, spilt the tea dregs destined for the rubbish tin. She was surprised to recognise her mother's imprecision which she had always found inexplicable.

Carol told Alan she was pleased that Gavin, who was usually evil-tempered at this hour, still slept soundly.

"Exercise is what he needs," Alan admonished briskly, "when we hitchhiked, he was like a bear with a sore head of a morning if I didn't make him walk the night before."

Tips on care and maintenance of an insomniac husband, thought Carol, reflecting that if Gavin did not get enough night exercise it was not her fault. When Gavin did appear towards 11, Alan was able to engage him in a mock fight without him snarling.

Gavin was about to accompany Alan to his tram when Tim returned for lunch. He asked could his father's friend play football. It was a red rag to a bull. The trio, throwing the ball to one another, made for a nearby park where they were joined by 12-year old Eric. Carol felt she had four children to feed when they returned, jocose and flushed, for lunch.

The soup stood waiting while Gavin and Alan competed in Indian wrestling, teeth grinding, eyes bulging more than muscles as they strove for supremacy. The two boys emulated them, upsetting the tomato sauce as Eric thumped down Tim's forearm. Gavin told Carol not to fuss over the spilt sauce. She could imagine what a nightmare it would be with Alan as an additional member of the family reducing Gavin to an adolescent, ordering meals, leaving filthy clothes to be washed, treating her as if she were his mother.

"Alan's still a hard man to beat in the air."

"Gavin'd be the year's most promising silver-haired recruit: DEMONS REJUVENATE VETERAN."

"I'm worried I might do my fingers — as irresponsible as Yehudi Menuhin boxing."

"It's my legs I'm worried about — what if I broke my leg and couldn't make the charter flight?"

"You two'll be swapping cigarette football cards if you regress any further," said Carol, seated on a stool in the corner, nursing a glass of chablis and recalling her beefy brothers who had rucked together in the country town's football team.

"Our interests are basically literary," Gavin answered.

"It's only that literary life is such a load of lies," added Alan. "You can prove anything and its opposite."

"Sophistry won't get you anywhere, sir. What was Samuel Johnson's principal literary work? In the corner?"

Carol, whose literary knowledge lacked depth, passed.

Gavin pointed at Alan "Next?"

"Life of Boswell."

"Wake up, whiskers. You ostler you."

Gavin, balling a handy tea towel, threw it unerringly at Alan's head.

Tim scooped up the towel. He threw it at Eric. Eric, whooping, hurled it back.

Carol brought them to order. Gavin sometimes clowned with the boys but had not previously resorted to adolescent table behavior.

"Was it the Life of Boswell?" she asked.

She noticed Gavin and Alan exchange glances

and Alan sucked lengthily on his juicy canine.

"Rasselar," said Gavin, "black mark — you've let the side down."

After lunch, Alan offered to take the boys to the match of the day instead of them watching it on television. Gavin, who had not attended a match in 20 years, declined Alan's invitation to accompany them.

"We've found a babysitter," he said, when the boys had left, to forestall Carol's complaints.

"Babysitter? More like a balding baby. Must be sucking revoltingly on his canines since teething days. You didn't warn me he was a sports maniac."

"He was different —"

"I don't want to hear any more about that glorious past."

Gavin and Alan, thin as rakes, staring at her each morning. She now feared what they shared, from schooldays through university, before she had known Gavin.

"I just want him to go home to mother." And take his adolescent enthusiasms with him.

But she sensed he would not. On his return from the football, Alan mentioned that he was no longer used to living with his parents nor being without a car. Carol looked at the white blur of their Holden visible through the titree fence, knowing Gavin would invite him to drive it.

Alan established himself in the study, crashing into unpredictable sleep when Gavin wanted to type. When Gavin and Carol were in bed, he prowled the house or, even more unsettling, was suspiciously quiet in the study.

Gavin and Carol discussed Alan in their bedroom, the only place they felt safe from, as they called him, the visitor from outer space.

"How long do you think we can put up with this?" she asked, surprised at Gavin's remissiveness.

"Seems about six months so far," Gavin confessed, "but remember he's only here for six weeks."

"Doesn't he realise I can't stand him? He could have spent the past twenty years in Warracknabeal. Incredible!"

"An authentic fifties fossil," agreed Gavin with wonderment, "where's the European sophistication? Maybe it wasn't Europe at all. Maybe he's China's secret weapon —"

"So that's where —"

"They've been keeping him under wraps all these years. Inscrutability was what they had in common. Pingpong is the giveaway."

"The pong is anyway."

"?"

"Sweaty stench."

"People used to complain about that."

"Should bloody well think so. Your nose is nerveless."

"Sour-earth smell. Got into his criticism too."

"To understand all is to forgive all. But it's much easier at a distance — say 12,000 miles. A nice, *safe* distance. I can't wait until he's back there."

"And if I went with him?"

That broke up the patter. Ghosts stirred.

"Just for a few months. Advance scout."

"I won't throw myself in front of the plane."

"Just fantasising. Anyway, I couldn't join the charter."

Better to be alone Carol reflected. She would change the black wallpaper, for suddenly the bedroom seemed tomblike.

Every few days Alan visited his parents, driving the white Holden without a licence and, Carol imagined, on the wrong side of the road; he could not orientate himself if other cars were not in sight. When Carol wanted it, the car was rarely available and she feared she would lose it altogether, as Alan's driving habits were erratically European. She protested. Gavin begged patience and paid her taxis.

Carol's distaste for Alan, however, was diminished by recognition that there were flashes of brilliance now. As Gavin was uninterested in films, Alan accompanied her to the cinema. Encyclopedic knowledge at interval, amusing, swift comments as the films unfolded, flicked from what Carol sometimes thought of as his forked tongue. "It's the sort of thing you pick up over there," he said, as if excusing himself, during the interval of *Scenes From a Marriage*.

Gavin did not object to the mild flirting which began to flicker between them, confident it took place only in his presence. What will you lovebirds drink, he would ask, if Carol snuggled against Alan as they sat in the dining room listening to Gavin's jazz collection. "Be my guest, use my wife" he would offer with an attempt at an Arab accent.

Gavin was as bemused as Carol as to why the comet had burned out. He probed gingerly as he was afraid of seeming the winner who was investigating why the straggler had not kicked on.

"The ambience is an enigma," he told Carol,

"can't quite pick up his wavelength."

Carol wondered if it were because of static caused by Alan's envy.

"That's the view from the gravy train," he said to Gavin occasionally, which suggested a crab was gnawing at his vitals.

"Success becomes Gavin," he told Carol but as if between clenched teeth.

In Alan's presence, a phone call came from Gavin's agent who spoke of a London company's interest in his penultimate play.

"Great," said Alan emphatically, "see if you can be anything more than a big fish in a small pond."

The snide comments were barely noticed among the badinage. But Alan's competitive spirit was evident when they discussed writers. As Gavin's attempts at serious discussion flagged for want of response, they drew up competitive lists of esteemed contemporaries they had not read, laughing over the extent of their ignorance, throwing off second-hand judgements like critics in their dotage.

"I remember reviews," said Alan, "but the books I've read become a grey mush."

Carol wondered if his pathfinding had ever been anything but speed in picking up overseas reviews.

The competition was physical also. Carol was tired of them dropping to the floor without warning for pressup contests. Now the dining-room table was permanently rigged for pingpong. Alan and Gavin spent hours hammering the celluloid ball for they had reached the point where only unremitting determination could tilt the scales between them. The children complained that the table was never free for them.

Gavin had maintained a detached attitude when Alan blundered like a pingpong novice. But, to Carol's surprise, he now became intense. They joked about the rivalry, made fun of themselves as 45-year-old fanatics, but Carol detected their basic fervour.

"I'll write all the better when I'm fit again," Gavin responded to her reproofs. She had never seen him push aside his work, or her, so readily.

He did not tell Carol he was fighting the stealthy intimations of mortality: silver hair and heart of laborious beat, blurred numbers in the telephone directory, removable teeth, slight deafness which he managed to mask, misting memory, sexual quiescence, lethargic organs, unaccountable bouts of savage irritability. He wanted to prove he was as fit as ever, that these furtive messengers had mistaken destination. This was possible only with Alan who, he sensed, likewise wanted to flush out his creeping enemy and face it.

Success had arrived almost too late for Gavin. For a time he had believed it would placate his daemons. Then the furtive messengers, the hobgoblins had arrived along with creative dryness, reconfirming the dissatisfaction evident in his taut expression, his gunslit eyes. Carol was aware of Gavin's angst but he had shielded her from knowledge of how much the marching hobgoblins unsettled him.

To her dismay, instead of relenting they took up new sports with each promising to bury the other. Alan had the edge at backyard cricket. They lobbed into the basketball ring Gavin had erected for his children. They discovered how rusty were their tennis and golf strokes. In a forgotten trunk, Gavin found two sets of boxing gloves. They sparred in the backyard but he was cut badly.

"Gloves too light" was Alan's technical annotation when Carol screamed at him for pulping her husband's face. "Don't carry on" warned Gavin who seemed proud of his cuts and bruises. But he used them as an excuse when, trying to win him back from Alan, she asked him to take her to a new play.

One day Alan returned, after disappearing with the car Carol needed, bearing a new shuttlecock-and-battledore set. "We'll both start from scratch with this gear," he claimed. "Get ready for drill," responded Gavin which Carol recognised as one of the ritual phrases from their schooldays. He rubbed his hands gleefully, stamping a foot in anticipation.

Seeking help, she drove to the theatre where Gavin's last play had been staged. A new play was in production and her busy friend hardly heeded Carol. There would have been more comprehension if she had spoken of a drinking bout but, although Gavin drank heavily he rarely became drunk, while Alan was disciplined even in his drinking. They were still at it on her return, dragging themselves after the planing shuttle, fallible flesh subject to tyrannical wills.

It was the first of a series of endless matches. She was disconcerted by such passion. Moreover she feared that Gavin, like his father, would die young of a heart attack. It would be a daily danger, he agreed, if he had not become fit with Alan's help. But his incipient beer gut, which saddened Carol, did not reduce.

In desperation, she invited some of their former school friends. A mistake. Not only had Alan and Gavin grown apart from their classmates but they were upset to find that one was grey-haired, another a widower who complained of the problems of rearing his four girls, while a third, Bentley, had hallucinations, at first amusing the company but finally unsettling everyone when it was realised his mind, unequalled in mathematics at school, had slipped off its cog. The sight of their classmates eerily aged had only increased Alan and Gavin's self-absorption. Carol had the uncanny impression they were melding, becoming indistinguishable: Gavin-Alan Alan-Gavin. She washed and rewashed their clothes and scrubbed the house in a vain attempt to vanquish the dried sweat smell. She felt she was a household drab working for a mad male gym. She had to revive them as they wheezed like landed flounder after the matches. She had to hear them lament aches and strains and, hooked like incurable addicts, issue verbal challenges to prime themselves before each conflict. They began to keep a tally of the results in which the vantage alternated.

The children's allegiance was divided; Tim had taken to Uncle Alan. They lost any desire to study when they saw their elders competing in mindlessness.

In the seclusion of their bedroom, Carol reminded Gavin he had made money by attacking the national sports mania. Gavin winced but less from remorse than from a back muscle strained at shuttlecock.

"Don't you know moralists always sneak off to brothels?"

"But this is so bloody camp."

"It's not the sick ersatz thing. This is face-to-face. I'm giving the bastard a run for his money."

"It's so bloody childish."

"Second childhood. Let me enjoy it. Ouch! Only a few weeks left now — thank goodness."

"I didn't ever think I'd see you reduced to this level, Gavin," Carol began thoughtfully and continued, coaxing him to come to his senses. She was encouraged that he did not interrupt facetiously. Then snores scotched her hopes. She looked towards the damned photo, now seeing the puerility rather than the promise of those young men.

In what Gavin called the catatonic games, they concentrated on pingpong, shuttlecock and football as they wanted to be more or less evenly matched, forcing each other to the limits as they pitted themselves against the common enemy.

From the trunk where he had found the boxing gloves, Gavin fished old football gear: three boots, black shorts and azure school jumpers. "You're ready for carnival," Carol told them, regretting that Gavin now so rarely wore the black leather jacket she had convinced him to buy. No longer did Alan and Gavin merely have a kick in the park with the children. They traded kick for kick with the local louts, trained with a regular team, seeing themselves in sculptural poses before stands packed with admirers.

As the competitive pressure increased, Gavin hadn't time to recover between events. He remained prostrate longer, vowing revenge and recalling the highlights of the last clash. Carol feared he had reached some limit but, despairing of convincing him to desist, over breakfast she tried to talk Alan into relenting.

His answer was that Gavin should call quits.

"You know he'll never do that. Tell him you've had enough."

"But I haven't. It's like cider — you can't get it for love nor money on the continent."

"It's so bloody mindless I could cry. Time to get out of the playpen, you're big boys now. Do you want to kill poor Gavin?"

"We just want to see who's the better man — don't worry, I'll be off in a week. You should worry Gavin doesn't break my leg as we land after a high mark."

For Carol, Time's wheels were locked that last week. Alan and Gavin plunged into a orgy of competitiveness but she was conscious mainly of still air edged with sweat, the bay's salt and fumes from the gasometer.

On Alan's second last day, they returned late from football and ate without showering. There was a dark undertow to their exchanges: they argued about the contest's scoring system and it was Alan, this time, who aimed a balled tea towel at Gavin. It ricocheted into the fruit salad. Mixed with the sweat, Carol caught the odour of hatred.

After dinner, the discussion of dubious contest episodes continued. It was incomprehensible to Carol but she heard the hurt in Alan's voice which indicated Gavin was leading. When Alan challenged Gavin to a decisive round of pingpong, Carol found she could not continue reading "Under the Volcano". She wanted Gavin to crush him.

Satisfied to see Gavin win the first matches, she resumed her reading. Alan was reduced to repeating "Play you again" at the end of games which passed in tense silence except for grunts

and expletives. But when Carol tuned in again, Gavin was seeking to even the conflict with a laconic "Have another" each time Alan reached 21. The Iceman had arrived.

"Pack it up, you robots." It was as if she had not spoken. They still wore their football gear except for the boots. Alan's number was 7, Gavin's 13. Alan was drained white, Gavin was hectic-cheeked. The smudges left from playing football ran like mascara.

Gavin, leaning on the table, asked to stop. Alan said he could not be deprived of a chance to even the tally. Carol had never understood the scoring system but thought of them as victims of an insane numbers game which neither could win. She dozed. When she woke, they were changing ends in sour silence.

As Gavin prepared to serve once more, he slid to the floor. Carol felt anger as if she had foreseen it but without understanding. However by the time, with Alan, she had dragged Gavin to his bed, anger was overtaken by anxiety. She managed to feed him some valium and rang their doctor. He provisionally diagnosed cardiac insufficiency.

Carol berated Alan, convinced that he could not be more guilty if he had set about Gavin with a meat knife. But she could not forget her lust for Gavin to crush him.

Head down, sucking on his canine, Alan weathered the storm of Carol's reproofs. Then he reminisced about Gavin, an intimate portrait of a young man grasping at literature as a life belt. Even though the portrait seemed reductive, Carol was too curious to protest. Alan confessed he had taken advantage of sleepless nights in the study to glance at Gavin's work in progress. You prying bastard, thought Carol, but did not say it as she was hanging on Alan's words.

While he fetched the manuscripts, she went to the bedroom. Under shaded light, Gavin was clay-colored, mummified. Ruckses I. He was dribbling slurred words: opeled, yar, warra . . . Carol's heart turned over, he might stay this way. She spoke to him but the senseless mumble continued: loomee, nubul, udeega, aaaht. She left him, determined to protest against Alan's violation of his work-in-progress. But Gavin never let her see anything until it was completed and she had to know what he was about.

As Alan took her patiently through the scripts, he commended Gavin's sense of pace, his tautness, his ability to surprise. Every word of praise, thought Carol, is as painful to Alan as sweating blood, particularly as the posters of Gavin's plays which looked down on them were independent evidence of his ability. Alan had groaned when he heard theses were being written on Gavin's work.

"But Gavin's in a dead end," Alan eventually summed up as the scripts slid to the floor by the divan, "his work is becoming more and more literary. All the characters have literary preoccupations, their terms of reference are literature, not life. He's in a literary cocoon, the echoes of life become thinner and thinner."

"Reading this new stuff," he continued confidently, his eyes fixed on Carol's, "it's clear that in his earlier work, which I admire mind you, the frenetic feeling doesn't derive from an excess of vitality but from a straining after it. Now he senses that the stream's running thinner and thinner. It's an 'ell of a difference: drop L for Learner out of 'world' and all you've got is 'word'. At the beginning and the end, but it can't be the be all and end all."

It's not true, Carol wanted to scream in defence of the zombie in the next room, ashamed that she was avid for more.

"Gavin knows that you can't shrink the world into a word but fears it's happening with him. He's in the desert where life seems a distant mirage. He needs a survival kit — something to keep him going when the writing has to stop."

Was Gavin's oldest friend the only one perceptive enough to read Gavin's words as frail defences shored against a diminishing sense of life? Or was he talking of his own experience on the presumption that Gavin still trailed him? Or was it merely an arbitrary performance as a guilt-salve after wrecking his mate?

Carol was unsure and too tired to sort it out. It must have been well after midnight: even the Greek parliament next door had put up shutters. She looked at the virginal scripts which sprawled, wine-stained and rumpled, at Alan's feet, shook off his spell, and told him that if Gavin needed a survival-kit it was no help at all for him to be comatose. What if he babbled jabberwocky for the term of his natural life? She had read of people in coma for 40 years.

"The contest got out of hand," Alan admitted, taking a particularly satisfying suck on his canine.

And the better man lost, Carol commented silently. Alan had never been so loathsome.

"You never did know the score, did you?"

She wished she *had* thrown the moussaka at him that first night.

"It was a joust," Alan added quickly as if he had overstepped the mark. "You know they're always for a lady, and men usually lose their head."

The bastard's flattery reached her, she regretted.

"In this case," Alan continued, eyes trained on the posters, "the lady was the belle dame sans merci."

Me pitiless? Carol asked herself. Alan must be mad if he was fighting Gavin for me. She saw Gavin sculpted as a knight in armour with their bed as tomb while she rode off to Europe behind Alan. She had never gone for Keats or the romantics but would check on his meaning. She had no time for literature now however: she returned to the bedroom to monitor Gavin's mumbling and try to snatch some sleep.

The following morning they drove Gavin, who was conscious but apparently unaware of what had happened, to the hospital. Alan sat with Carol awaiting the results. She was so irritable with him that he left.

He had prepared a meal for the children and convinced the younger to go to bed by the time Carol brought Gavin, who had suffered little more than a fright, home. "I was pushing it too hard," Gavin had admitted to Carol as they returned home, "but don't take it out on Alan."

"It could have been worse, mate," Alan greeted Gavin with his refrain, "I might have broken my leg." Gavin bore himself as if fragile. In the space of a day, he had aged dramatically. Alan, who had revealed Gavin as a adolescent, was leaving him as an old man. But Gavin had no animosity towards the opponent who had brought his downfall. Rather there was a hint of clubmen's shared nostalgia. "You had me by the short hairs there, Gavin," Alan reassured him, "only had to stay on your feet to win."

Carol wanted to tear at Alan, to ask him why he did not have the courage to repeat his criticisms to Gavin but feared the effects of a scene on her wan husband. Gavin did talk of his attempt to evolve a more reflective prose but Alan's comments remained on a general level until Gavin said he was planning a piece on an Australian receiving the Nobel prize.

"Christ!" exploded Alan, "you're a White man, as the natives say in Rhodesia."

"No, this will be a fabulation."

"I'll bet — symbolic, nein?"

"Could work out — satiric." But Gavin's voice reflected his plummeting spirits.

"Ocker and the King of Sweden, eh? Christ."

Alan made it sound as if Gavin considered the Nobel the biggest sporting prize of all to add to the tarnished trophies in his bookcase. Carol knew Alan had killed whatever was taking shape. Apart from that censure, Alan maintained a jocose superficiality until his departure the following morning. "If you have a good win on the nags," were his parting words although he knew Gavin never bet, "ring me for a chat."

Gavin stopped carrying himself as if he were a chandelier but did not resume writing with his previous tenacity. Carol tried to keep him at it, as much for her own sake as for his, but he was like a warrior who finds peace unbearably dull. He was unconcerned that there was no further interest from London in his play. He did not even howl about his despoiled typescripts. Had he expected Alan to rape them? He took to wearing his No. 13 football jumper, to which sweat stench clung despite repeated washings, to bed but his interest in sport receded. He played games and cards for hours with the younger children. Non-competitive, gentle; a way of passing the time. The enemy had clawed him: death, he had discovered, was no paper tiger.

Without disclosing how much rope she had given Alan, Carol relayed some of his ideas about a diminished sense of life in Gavin's work.

"Nonsense," said Gavin offhandedly, "I never swallowed that romantic crap about life and literature."

It struck Carol she was the one who would need a survival kit if the writing had to stop. She had not flagged when Gavin was ignored. But how could she wind him up again if he stopped when success was at hand?

Carol again had an eerie sense of stasis, of a sweat, salt and gas Sargasso. What was the score? Instead of the airy suggestion that he had come to joust for her, Alan had robbed her of Gavin. He had spun the line about jousting, she was sure, to spread the guilt. She would check her vague school memories of Keats: she rarely read other than contemporaries as she was caught in the excitement of Gavin's work and that of his peers, his competitors. She took Philip Wayne's "Heritage of Poetry" from the bookcase to read "La belle dame sans merci".

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?

The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing. . .

Her resentment against Alan as a hatchet-faced, fork-tongued sneerer flared when she recognised "La belle dame" was Death. It was as if her vanity and ignorance in taking it as a reference to herself were shamefully exposed: again she saw the glance which passed between Alan and Gavin in the kitchen after her gaffe over Dr Johnson. And heard again Alan's condescending "You never did know the score."

How literary could you be while insisting on the need to be in touch with life? How detached while the mate you broke was burbling gibberish in the next room? Running a tutorial to dissect the corpse of his unfinished work! Literatourist. Literaterrorist. She knew she must get beyond the lies of literature as she impatiently began the next poem:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming
brain. . .

but had to swallow hard to dissolve the knot in her throat. If Gavin gleaned no more . . . She hated Keats' comely couching of pain now that Alan had left unhappiness as his heritage.

Words weren't the way; they had blinded. She concentrated on what reassured her that Keats was out-of-the-ark: faery, withereth, woe betide, hath thee in thrall . . . Outdated; she wanted to live before the dark claw slowed her. She would not be trapped by literature which always flirted with death. La belle dame was literature itself which cannibalised life, fossilised it, counterfeited it. She hated the death thing it enshrined. But the lines stayed, speaking themselves despite her:

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried 'la belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall.'

They echoed as she lay awake at dawn studying, as Gavin turned in fitful sleep which came only then, the photograph on the wall. Now Gavin appeared to spy life through slitted eyes like someone aware he would be ambushed while Alan, may he never return, emanated a blind power.

Australian Book Review

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LOOKING FOR GEORGE FINEY

GEORGE SHOULD BE WITH THEM
I TRIED
BOTTLE TOPS EYES
FLANNEL FLOWERS EYES
NECK BANKSIA CONE
WALK FOR DAYS LOOKING FOR GEORGE
THINK LIKE GEORGE THAT'LL HELP
FROM "THE FIRST CIRCLE" THERE'S TOO MUCH CLEVERNESS AND
NOT ENOUGH GOODNESS IN THE WORLD - I'LL WORK ON THAT.
WELL GEORGE HAS BOTH AND CHILDREN LOVE HIM
THEY KNOW HE DOESN'T TALK ABOUT THEM BEHIND THEIR BACKS
LIKE THEIR PARENTS DO - SO HE'S CHILDLIKE
DOLLS HEAD
WARATAH'S EARS
OLD SPEAKER'S EARS
MOUTH
BRAIN
HAIR
NOSE
THOUGHTS - HATES MONEY AND AMBITION

JESUS

GEORGE FROM BITS AND PIECES

BUT I FOUND GEORGE

GEORGE WITHOUT HIS HAT
NO GALLERY. MUSEUM
NO STABLE, TRAINERS, JOCKEYS ON HIS BACK.

GEORGE SAYS THE HUMAN RACE IS INSANE
HE'S RIGHT
DRESDEN
HIROSHIMA
MAO'S WIDOW IS A GANGSTER
BELSEN
CANNED BABY FOOD
SCHOOLS
PRISONS
GRANVILLE SEE GALBRAITH ON MENZIES
SHORT OF BREAD EAT AUSSIE YELLOW CAKE
EMPTY TRAINS AND KILLING COAL TRUCKS ON CROWDED ROADS
PARLIAMENTS
CHIPP AND CAIRNS TOO HONEST
JOHN KENNEDY'S A COMMO - LONE RED ANEMONE IN GEORGE'S CROWDED VASE
WALKING ON THE MOON TO INVENT FIREPROOF NIGHTIES FOR LITTLE GIRLS
AND LEAVING RUBBISH THERE

LOOK UP SOME NIGHT
THERE'S MY GEORGE FINEY

B.M FAULCONBRIDGE 1977.
DRAWINGS BY GEORGE FINEY

Father & Daughter

I

I can still see you
  reading the rain gauge
  under the almond trees
where we buried the wax doll that winter.

We played at horses
    whinnying down the lawn
lay in the Willys Knight by the cubby-house
    re-enacting Death & the Maiden.

When we dug up the wax doll
                with her melted face
                she had pride of place
                in the empty playroom
                victim of an acid attack.

That summer you had rheumatics so badly
you hobbled on two broomsticks
                to the Great Fire
the car-lights swerving down the hills
    & we remembered the neighbours . .

When we left
        turning away from the iron gate
                rimed with frost
the Dutchman stood in the road
        spinning his hat in his hands
Goodbye old friend & neighbour.

We were going to run horses
            on the forty acres . . .

II

Swinging in the hammock
listening to the yarns
the great talkers on the jarrah verandahs
my mother's green dress luminous in the dark
the whey-faced sheep baaing to the moon
somewhere a tractor revving up   the steam train
                in the siding
When the Armistice was signed that steam train
came over the paddocks playing Yankee Doodle.

The clearing always smells green
                in retrospect
the foal's coat rimmed in light
                its forelegs trembling
you put your finger to my lips
                & held my hand

Too light for the plough you said

Can I have it then?   you nodded
& sold it to the Dutchman for a sulky horse.

III

Driving through Day's paddock
down the track made by McGonnigal
on a bender
(they always called him Jesus)
Jack Baxter's stable lurches through the rain
Joe Swannel's cart-wheel wobbling up ahead
Polly of the Circus at the picture-show
in the Town Hall Max Montesole
strangles Desdemona
the Lark Bros. sing *An 'am an egg*
& an onion
at the R S L
country women waltz in green shawls with runny roses
Princess Marina has married the Duke of Kent
the Greek's wife celebrates with a lime-juice spider
over the rooftops with Edna the half-caste girl
There's blood on your pants
you better tell your mother.

On the pub corner
Arguing politics with Cecil Elsegood
the Country Party member
my hair twines round your waistcoat button
the street runs in tears
you haven't noticed.

The Monday brothers swagger past the Co-op
shearers in their bell-bottoms
home from jail.

IV

Under the almond trees
Lou Fuller the clearer's son
gave me a Chinese burn
out in the sleepout
in my blue silk dress
he pressed me between his thighs
when he went away
he left his holey felt hat
hanging on the back of the door
I kept staring at it
(remembering how we raced
through the creek-bed
& I tossed my hair
the beak in my side)
till my mother noticed
& put it under the copper.

V

My grandmother plants the snapdragons
she won't see
my grandfather smokes in the garden
by the hollyhocks
my mother irons lazy-daisies
till the pattern comes through

Hinkler fell into the sea
Bradman's L B W on the crystal set
singing
when the moon shines over the cowshed
you carry me up the path between the fig trees.

I smash the cheval mirror
on the autumn-toned carpet
playing *Charge of the Light Brigade*
white-starred horses wheel through
the rainy dark
the merry-go-round creaks
by Yealering salt lake . .
half a league half a league

you are reading the rain gauge
under the almond trees.

DOROTHY HEWETT

The Last is Winter
(for George Bayliss)

Spring comes and I tramp through
Rooms and corridors,
Along the balcony grotesque with cacti
Waiting for a burst of light.

If it appeared it would reveal
My bearable deficiencies,
But summer glances past me
Through the window.

Autumn draws no sweetness
From my droughty earth.
My heart droops
Like an untended plant.

I dream of her less often now
Lost down a path I cannot hope to take,
Her flaming self quenched
In winter mist.

RONALD BOTTRALL

Faustus Rampant
(for Tricia)

Broke, I walk the dull streets
of Neutral Bay in a quiet storm;
grey rain slanting down, roads slick
black asphalt, not reflecting light,
and waiting for you to finish work,
waitressing for a couple of dollars
per hour.
So, standing, coat collar
turned up, fashionably, outsider;
looking into a calm, firelit room.
And he sits, pipe gently steaming,
in a wing-backed leather chair,
the room lined with books: mocking
my cold bones, my despair, desire.

VIV KITSON

All I know about China
color pictures perfect
tractors in parade past trees
people smiling as they work
collective
fields or paddies
always near mountains
and mist behind the treatment works
preserving the traditional dances
as an end of history

the opium wars
the boxer rebellion
the emperor's aura
the mandate of heaven
the long march

a poem by Mao which concludes :

"listen ! stop your windy nonsense
look ! the world is being turned upside-down"

ANDREW SPIKER

Fungi

(for Jim Willis)

Airborn spores are living dust,
alive but sleeping as they fly.
Airlofts rocket them on high,
leave them to float down windways to the planet's crust.

In chance crevices they lie,
earth spirits dreaming in the dark;
water and soil will light their spark
when waking to their strength again they seek the sky.

They are vegetable slow,
massed cells and finely twisted,
soft heads in which power is fisted.
Concrete will crack above them when they mean to grow.

Our grasp is empirical;
we note a few facts day by day,
but what dark forces they obey
we cannot tell, nor understand their miracle.

They crowd in subtle splendour
in autumn gullies against stumps;
rotting humus feeds their clumps.
They're bitter, tough or maybe fragrant, tender.

They can take the coral's shape
or open sweetly as a shell,
elegant parasol or bell,
and they throw off their prison prey when they escape,

put on colour, tangerine
cadmium, violet or tyrion
mahogany, white, vermilion,
gunmetal, pearl, gold, malachite, ultramarine.

FRANK KELLAWAY

Amarpurkashi
(pop. 600, 24 miles south of Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh)

Behind the mud-slapped walls, the packed-earth courts
where children peer and smile and thin dogs scrounge,
where chillies long and red as devil's tongues
are laid to dry on charpoys and the ground.
Drying is what is done well here:
the chillies, wells and fields
are parched like old men's faces
and the wombs yield shriveled fruit.
The Muslim tailor's wife has one live son;
the nineteen other parchment skins have not survived
the dust, the goitre and the flies,
the failure of the dal, the wheat, the maize.

The dying rice chokes in its grey dust lake
and the dry wind tambourines the sugar-cane.

The children grin and stretch a hundred hands,
thin brown and painted-nailed, for each hard sweet:
"namastay, auntie" as their toes inscribe shy circles
and the flies settle again on sores and eyes.
The Harijan midwife toilet-cleaner laughs,
teeth flashing, silver rings around two toes.
White bullocks smeared with dung
loll under cawing mango trees
tended by Rajput Hindus near a temple
where Ganesh lies locked
beneath a cloudless sky.
The children clutching babies squat and play.

The dying rice chokes in its grey dust lake
and the dry wind tambourines the sugar-cane.

JOAN GRANT

Reserve Settlement Funeral
Dressed in black feet, some thonged and
scuffing dust up behind the two-cylinder hearse,
the skin of a snake winds through Woorabinda . . .

. . . shining mattly, writhes on, with sun
flashing crassly out serpentine diamonds,
a patchwork quilt. Vermillion and yellow
beanies, and between, black soft edges of flesh
crocheted dutifully together for death.

"Our vehicle is religious ('gargantuan') enough",
the driver rolls in neutral across the football field
to avert, perhaps respect, this settlement's grief;
and slow rubber wheels indeed grind
only sparingly on softer ritual sheaths.

ANNE LLOYD

The Vessel

(for John Berryman)

I

Some say Hephaistos was sired
by Zeus of Hera; some say not
by Zeus, but Talos, Daedalus'
nephew (perhaps a man and not
god). This much is clear:
ankles like a woman's
wrists, biceps like a Titan's
thighs, this poor lame smith
thought mainly with his hands.
He pounded rock of bronze
as gossamer web to catch
his brother Ares sleeping
with his wife. Hephaistos
was mad about this goddess.
She too was mad.

Once, when she was gone,
he took a bar of gold and worked
it at his twenty forges to
a cup a god might drink his
nectar from or man might
use for wine.

The figure was a tree.
The base had roots
and tendrils, filagree
so fine that only light,
not air, could pass.
The stem a trunk
in such detail a bird
might search in vain
for crickets there.
The bowl was lined
with branches, leaves
that spilled across
the lip and partly cast
a golden shade upon
the panels of its side.

The one showed full-lipped
soft-breasted athletes
in the act of tossing apples
at women fairer still
who held back in the
shade that hid their
smiles and the direction
of their gaze.
These, he thought,
were gods.

The other showed
a coarser life:
men and women
tilling, placing
brick on brick.
To one side, in
the shade, a boy
had raised a reed
to pipe a song that
might recall a ram
that wandered to
the other panel.
Its rear was mean
and snarled but
its head, which
passed the line,
was curled and rich
with beard and horns
that mingled with
the laurel leaves.
These, he thought,
were men.

The cup was molten gold,
about to sublimate or deliquesce,
unless the bemused smith
would plunge it into water
to stop his glowing thoughts.

II

Zeus, who could not sleep one night,
arose and walked about Olympos.
He came upon Hephaistos, working
at his forge, who was about to
plunge into the water a molten
cup just hammered out of gold.

Zeus said Stop. I must have
that cup. But Hephaistos said
No. You cannot have it. For if
you want the beauty of the
ruby glow, the gold is soft
and hot to touch; and if you want
to use the gold to hold your drink,
this goblet must be tempered.

Zeus, who could not comprehend the cup,
walked back to his home and bed.
At length he slept, and then he dreamed.
That night Plato was born.

BRIAN DIBBLE

Admonitions
(with acknowledgements to *Enquire Within Upon Everything*, 1868)

It is no real economy
to employ cheap calico
for gentlemen's nightshirts;
a cracked plate, however,
may outlast a sound one.

Never appear in drawing-rooms
with mud on your boots,
nor stare about you
as if you were taking stock.

Never be without a handkerchief.
Hold it by the centre;
let the corners form
a fanlike expansion;
avoid using it too much.

No lady puts her address
on a visiting card.

Do not meddle with gunpowder
by candlelight.

ALWAYS HAVE AT HAND
A LARGE PIECE OF BAIZE
TO THROW OVER A FEMALE
WHOSE DRESS IS BURNING.

JOHN HAINSWORTH

Requiem for Jo

Josephine, I owe this insight to you:
going over it now,
those mattresses on the floors of 1920's houses,
the headlights on the trees, talking without a break
all the way to Sydney,
you hitching down to see your sister,
and me going for a cheap car, would you have stayed two weeks
with any golden driver?

I told you about my old Holden days, and the girls I took
to the beach; you smiled as though you understood:
in Glebe, we got up to walk away your insomnia,
half-running through the streets, through broken glass,
you swearing at your sister for being a dumb bitch
"Christ, another baby!" and me wondering how anyone
can exist completely alone like you, and why your body
and smell of denim should make me feel childish,
like kissing under the church, and what your verdict was on me:
"You're a con-man, Richard." — Jo you were right, I am,
a bastard, though I'm not going to admit it, not with the sound
of that baby crying half the night, and the wild look of
your sister's eyes;
it was arrogant of me to expect such a perfect answer.

It's two years now and I'm not going to learn, not with
September here again, and tight jeans crossing the lawn;
as you said, one person's callow youth is much like another's:
Jo, I've got this metallic blue Ford now —
I picked up a girl this afternoon who asked me
to drop her at the Highway Hotel,
and it's not going to be anything to change anything,
not that I can see.

PHILIP NEILSEN

The Man in the Mirror

(to Albrecht Dürer)

So many portraits of the best and most patient of models,
self. Frequent eyewitness of painted miracles, massacres,
Christ's face so often your face, you suffering
no one else to enact that passion, that pain.

A face that is not humble before the mirror
whose transcience serves you as record,
examiner, first of boy, unalterable in silverpoint,
too bold an essay, leaving him puzzling;
then youth, wary-eyed, newly affianced, in his hand
thorny emblem of constancy, lesson ill-learned; and Master,
coolly aware of our fine clothes and high presence,
who reckons himself ironically, yet pleased by such elegance.
Last, bearded and robed in hieratical pose, as if weighing
Art of like nature with Godhead, he searches still
his own eyes for answer

and is not on this canvas
but standing beside me.
Here is a man assaying himself in the mirror.

Master and friend, five centuries acclaim you.
You may have done with mirrors.

BARBARA GILES

Empire

(for Patrick)

Where we ran without shoes and the
weeds stung like winter, we didn't
mind the pain; we were young and,
though school was on our way, there was
the rest of day stacked high with the
golden hours of games we pilfered
from the planes of poverty. From
meals of bread and jam we succoured
energies of sweetness enough
to give us speed to run from home.

There were truants plentiful and
wild among us who ran away to
toil, and grew old as men within
our 'teens; for work was everywhere:
along the roads to build, and scrubs
to fell. They savaged us, sweated
us to build an Empire and, why
we did we never asked, but died:
some in the mines, some clerks in
narrow offices. Always for little
profit and an Empire's gain.

Those of the lucky few who
escaped to sea as sailors, we
never met again; imagined
them as rulers of the waves — fed
back such rumours. Over all: the
Crown behind the glass of distance,
safe as a cottage pie which we
never tasted, never could consume;
our diet brackish with our sweat,
our blood the wine of profiteers.

JOHN BLIGHT

2 poems to sam

a sea of faces

the repetitive dance

a falling leaf
from a frozen tree

our flesh
of no returning

. . . girls in summer dresses
wait for autumn
grow cold in winter

in my fortieth summer Sam
i sit here /waiting

i sit
here
with the given
with the possible "hey
brother hey
little sparrow hey
leaf with no tree"
our fathers sat
here before us saying
"its all just a moment away"
talking
about cherry trees
cherry orchards
everywhere cherries

everywhere
the hungry ones!

MAL MORGAN

Pets

A dark November night, late. The back door wide.
Beyond the doorway, the step off into space.
On the threshold, looking out,
With foxy-furry tail lifted, a kitten.
Somewhere out there, a badger, our lodger,
A stripe-faced rusher at cats, a grim savager,
Is crunching the bones and meat of a hare
Left out for her nightly emergence
From under the outhouses.

The kitten flirts his tail, arches his back—
All his hairs are inquisitive.
Dare he go for a pee?
Something is moving there, just in dark.
A prowling lump. A tabby tom. Grows.
And the battered master of the house
After a month at sea, comes through the doorway.

Recovered from his nearly fatal mauling,
Two probably three pounds heavier
Since that last time he dragged in for help.
He deigns to recognise me
With his criminal eyes, his deformed voice.
Then poises, head lowered, muscle-bound,
Like a bull for the judges,
A thick Devon bull,
Sniffing the celebration of sardines.

TED HUGHES

Gardening is the Opiate of the Elite

A crisis of petals
leaves me out stupid
as a sparrow and sharply
jacking the hurt gravel.

They want to drown my hill
in sweet stormwater.
I'm planting natives against
the bronchial onslaught.

"If they can sell you the idea
of the supernatural,
they can sell you anything,"
O'Grady said.

They sold me a suburb full
of irony, shares in a
medium alderman
and a gerrymandered garden.

But the problem persists:
Torres kneeling on one knee
only (to take aim),
Corrigan with the Huks.

Trigger spring. Terraced fire
proves little. Am I some
Xavier Herbert of the
avenues and crescents?

While maoists stain the wattle
I get my politics
from Eisenstein, my facts
from the *Business Age*,

my theory of aesthetic
from (don't wince) Stalin.
I should do something about that.
John Forbes is working on it.

Another mattock-slice
of clay: the Trots are
tempting me again
with that pebble-clean path

back to the door. The slam
of a dry house waiting for
a gale deafens the garden
and the gardener is bell-jarred.

Thursday night raising funds
to buy a trampoline
for the convent school:
legs eleven! Is it not,

Brother McCarthy, the captain
of the school you're thinking of?
The *barrios* of Cali
are not so flexible.

What is of specific
concern now is erosion
like the will off flesh
topsoil sluices. Rocks we need.

A rectal infestation
of theists is eating
our appetites, our rocks.
(On this petrified sigh, man

is grounded, ground.) Build
a wall, where? a series
of walls. Here, and here, up
the slope. Start from the bottom.

The bottom was lost rains ago.
The convent school captain
is probably bouncing now,
unlost. The mattock springs from a root.

Brother McCarthy, scratch your arse
with a circular action.
You were born with the eggs
in your fingernails. It's too late.

The Cordillera Central,
the Diuatas, are steeper,
wetter. After the revolution
who will have the courage

to dispose of the comrade priests?
Meanwhile the hegemony
of easy courage is with
the "Independence Movement".

The crimson and pink thugs
of October are petty
against the continuing
rain, thick as clay and bonded

around the hollow house.
The gardener lies
in spring's pale blood and holds
the mattock like a limb.

TIM THORNE

The One True History

Where do flies go in the wintertime?
To Leichhardt, where else?
And where is the cockroach king, big as a rabbit?
In Leichhardt, home of the brave.
Where do the bones of failed explorers lie out mouldering with Camel butts?
In the long rank gutters of Leichhardt.
Where do the winds howl the lost folk's dreams?
Over the moaning hills of Leichhardt.
Where do the tall tickle the bellies of jets descending like wrath?
In the sniggering valleys of Leichhardt.
Where do dogs couple in threes, and cats harrow the piers of aching houses?
In the brimming spunkswamps of fecund Leichardt.
Where do tetracyclenes and monocarbons stream in the firmament?
You speak of the bracing airs of Leichhardt.
And where did Beatrice finally give up the ghost and chuck it all in?
Right here in Leichhardt, mate — first on your left, second on the right.
G'day, Crow.

ANDREW McDONALD

To Be In Heaven Forever Would Be Hell

sometimes the worst is the best,
and sometimes he holds his breath.
I know that he swallows his toothpaste,
but I don't know the reason.
Freshen up the insides, sweeten the farts?
who knows what is floating along in his stream, or
eating at some organ somewhere in his dreams?

sometimes the nearest he comes to saying something is a long silence.
a master of the silent pause.
the guiness book of records might be interested in the length of
his silent pauses.

COME DOWN AT ONCE, DO YOU HEAR ME?
no
COME DOWN
no, I like being up here
YES, BUT HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GET DOWN WITHOUT HURTING YOURSELF?
I like it up here, I'm not coming down.
DON'T BE SILLY, YOU'VE GOT TO EAT, DON'T YOU?
you'll bring me food. you won't watch me starve.
COME DOWN HERE AT ONCE AND STOP BEING SO SILLY
no
WHY WON'T YOU COME DOWN?
I told you
COME DOWN THIS MINUTE. I'LL TELL YOUR FATHER
tell everybody that this is where they'll find me from now on.

if everything that goes up must come down, must everything that comes down go up?
everything that goes stops
everything that's secure will collapse

At last, he was famous. He looked down at the tourists. He saw and heard them taking photos of him. He's a crazy, hey there he is, look at him. Eighteen years. It says eighteen years on the back of the postcard.

But the postcard was made six months ago, and already it is telling a lie. On the postcard is a picture of him, looking down, expressionless. There is no hint of what the reason might be for this demonstration of the fact that what goes up need not come down for a very long time.

Where are you going?
UP
up? why?
I'VE BEEN GOOD. IT'S A REWARD.
You're not good, your children hate you, and you hate them.
THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT . . . WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
down
OH, THAT'S BAD LUCK.
I prefer down. I've been up. I prefer down.
THIS IS MY FIRST TIME GOING UP
you'll regret it.
I THINK I'LL LIKE IT
nothing but shit and piss and million dollar yachts up there.
WELL THAT'S BETTER THAN WAITING ROOMS AND OLD MAGAZINES.
what's better will be worse. Haven't you learned anything?
I ADVISE YOU TO COMB YOUR HAIR
change your shirt
YOUR EARS ARE LOPSIDED
I know. I had a difficult birth. My head was big and the doctor was young, and nervous. He squeezed me with an instrument before I had an opportunity to get out in my own time, in my own way. He's gone They're in such a hurry the first time.

KEVIN BROPHY

Travellers

1 First Class

In the Louvre he goes directly to the portrait statue
of Tutankahmen
to examine the erased hieroglyph of the boy king's name
at the back and lower left side of the figure.
In Amsterdam he calculates the waiter's tip
as a precise percentage of the bill
and in Paris he conveys a specific *don* to the chef
because of the asperges.
When he travels alone he shares his taxi from the airport
with the young widow and her two children—
they have dinner together that evening, the tots
left safely (his gesture) with the resident sitter.
He discusses German philosophy with the student
sharing his compartment in the *Rembrandt express* to München.
He goes straight to the most discreetly comfortable hotel.
When he retires for the night
he knows exactly what he will do tomorrow
— though there is always room for the unexpected.

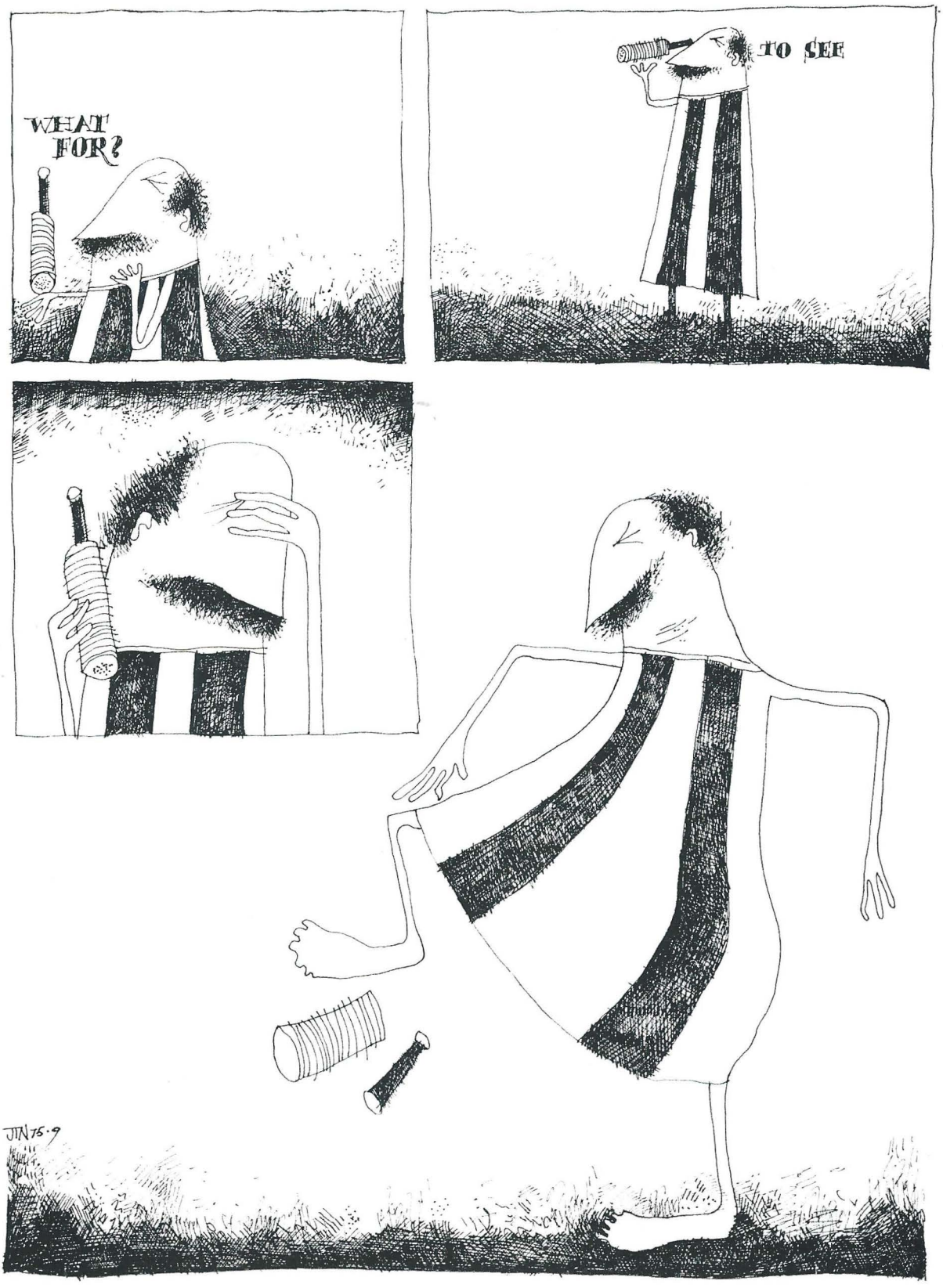
2 Second Class

The immediate gull, vendors spot him at three hundred metres.
The street photographer at the Opera will con him
into five underdeveloped polaroid shots: the sheepish expression
immediately recognizable.
In the museum restaurant the girl at the self-service payout
will scrutineer his too-indulgent pile of glazed hors d'ouvres
and add a tip for herself into the total.
Shopkeepers stand at their doorways to grin him inside;
the price of fruit goes up in the stalls;
there is a shortage of cheap hotels so he ends up in the SPLENDIDE
where the doorman scornfully accepts his overlarge tip
and he finds himself in a back room with no bath.
In lounges and through windows he sees others:
relaxed, gracious, animated.
He sits alone and gulps his meal (something he knows; or hamburger).
He has done all the tourist spots from the brochure.
He has nowhere else to go.

3 Third Class

Was told "don't let them beat you down"
and has now walked many miles burdened with his pack
(labelled with flag and an agenda of stickers)
though the local tram service would have cost less
than a saturday morning ice cream
and have saved a whole day's exhaustion.
He slept through Amsterdam in the Central Station Reservations.
He claims to know Rome (if you count two streets and a pensione);
he did the Louvre, elbowing at tourist-busloads,
though he ticked off the same three house specialities
(and bought postcards). How appalling
to stagger, lost, into the Royal Bedroom
when you are searching for the 'loo.
A friend told him of a cheap hotel at S. Lazare
so he now has a necklace of bug-bites.
He spits at guided tours and ferries
but has a suspicion he misses out on things.
in London, he made direct for Piccadilly Eros.
It is boarded up. The feeling of loss was intangible
but enormous: so much for posters.
Losses: his camera in Rome, his passport in Venice,
his innocence everywhere and nowhere.
When he returns home
he will still have enough in the bank
for a deposit on a second hand Holden.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT



Jiri Tibor

ROHAN RIVETT

Deakin's Confidante

This, one of the last articles written by Rohan Rivett, draws on previously-unused material to describe a remarkable Australian woman. Rohan Rivett was the grandson of Alfred Deakin.

Catherine Sarah Deakin was born in 1850 in Adelaide where her father had obtained one of the first two brick houses built in the town. Next year, with news of the gold finds, her parents moved to Victoria where her father, William Deakin, went into partnership with his brother-in-law, Richard Bill, to run the first four-horse coach service between Melbourne and Bendigo.

Catherine's parents made their home in Fitzroy and there, in 1856, a brother, Alfred, came to join Catherine. For the next 63 years until his death, he was the centre and dominant consideration of her life. Indeed, her letters and comments to family and friends make clear that she regarded her life as divided into two wholly different parts — the first with Alfred; the second ending with her death 18 years after his.

The children were very fortunate in that their father, William, was one of the best-read and most thoughtful men in the Melbourne of that era. Not only did he read much poetry and classical prose aloud to them, but as they grew towards adolescence he would discuss the ideas and styles of the various 18th and 19th century writers whose works they devoured.

Their mother, Sarah, was entirely a home body. She had no interests outside her husband, son and daughter, but was a superb cook and tended their various gardens with green fingers, almost until her eightieth year. As Alfred Deakin was to comment frequently to his sister, they were an exceptionally close-knit family. The death of their father in the early nineties only served to bring the other three still closer together, if that were possible.

The family made a couple of moves but finally in the sixties set up their house at 27 Adams Street, South Yarra, its back lawns stretching over the area now occupied by Melbourne's Synagogue.

In due course Alfred went to Melbourne Grammar School, a couple of hundred yards from his home. Catherine was privately educated and did not have a chance of formal schooling until Professor Charles Pearson, a distinguished Oxford and London scholar, helped to establish the first major secondary school for young ladies — the Presbyterian Ladies' College — in East Melbourne in 1875. Catherine then topped the exam results decisively but was probably older than most of the pupils in her form, although many, like her, were well into their twenties. The idea of tertiary education for women was still a number of years away, although Pearson's advocacy and reforms were to pave the way for the eventual opening of Melbourne University's doors to women.

At the end of her first year at PLC, Catherine was offered a position on the staff, specialising in music, where she was an accomplished pianist, and also taking classes in English, French and History. She was thus the first of a long line of PLC Old Girls to become members of the staff over the past 102 years, and as such features prominently in the two volumes so far published on the school's history.

A year or two before this, Deakin had encountered Pearson when, as a youthful undergraduate, he was measuring his debating talents with those of other young sparks at Melbourne University. Pearson appeared as chairman or adjudicator at more than one debate and Deakin

formed a keen appreciation of him which grew and flourished until they were colleagues in the Victorian State Cabinet in the 80s.

Pearson, in his 45th year when he became founding headmaster of the school, probably had more influence on Catherine's development and thinking than anyone outside her father and brother. She attended not only his lectures at the school but also his public addresses. When he resigned from the school and moved into public life and a seat in the Victorian Parliament she eagerly studied his speeches in the press and often discussed his philosophy and urgings for reform with her brother. His photo remained on her mantelpiece until the day she died.

The story of Alfred Deakin's first foray into politics at the age of 23 has been often told. As it happened he fought four elections in the space of 18 months and still found time to spend a month sailing to and investigating the life and colonial agricultural development of Fiji. His letters to Catherine foreshadow the development of the exceptional journalist he was soon to prove himself.

In his absence, then or later, her consolation was her piano. For three generations of the family she played all the classical masters with effortless grace. In those days it was unthinkable for a young lady to become a concert professional. But her friends were insistent that her ear and touch were adequate for any critical audience.

Both as schoolboy and undergraduate, Alfred took all his bubbling ideas, protests, conceptions of reform to his sister. After all, she was six years older and the regard of his father and mother for her reinforced his lifelong conviction that she was a particularly wise counsellor.

When the political scene engulfed him he brought back to Adams Street, after each day's sitting, his own immediate reactions — to political colleagues, to parliamentary scenes, to questions where conscience challenged expediency, or where what seemed to him obviously right was doomed to defeat. From the first days of his political life until his retirement he expressed to her thoughts and reactions known to no other living being.

When he was interstate campaigning or representing Australia overseas he wrote to her. When she was travelling in Britain and Europe with one or other of his daughters they exchanged one or two letters each week. It is futile but fascinating to speculate how Deakin would have passed his years as working journalist, state cabinet minister, fighter for federation or as federal party leader and three-times Prime Minister if there had been no ever-loving, ever-understanding sister "K".

He might have achieved nearly as much. Yet if he had done so, it is virtually certain that the breakdown foreshadowed by his retirement from politics in his mid-50s would have come even earlier. Above all things Catherine was not merely adviser but safety valve. To her and to her alone, he released all his pent-up fears, worries, angers, exhilarations, ambitions and frustrations.

Alfred had a happy marriage. Pattie Browne was a superb partner at official functions and a fine hostess in their home. She was a loved and loving wife and in her later years a most generous grandmother. It was no reflection on her that she could not share the immense knowledge of the State, national and international scene which Alfred and Catherine had built up together. Alfred and Pattie had three daughters, Ivy, Stella and Vera. Until their teens Catherine was their sole teacher.

Alfred's habit, throughout the first 12 years after federation when Federal Parliament met in what is now State Parliament House, Spring Street, Melbourne, was to walk from the House, when it rose, to South Yarra. He crossed the Treasury Gardens and Jolimont Park to the Anderson Street bridge then, usually via the Botanic Gardens to the Domain skirting the Melbourne Grammar fence to his sister's home in Adams Street. Usually their tete-a-tetes were in the evening when the House rose for dinner, but sometimes he went to Adams Street at night before climbing the hill to his own home, Llanarth, in Walsh Street.

All her life Catherine shunned the limelight. Alfred alone knew the depth and significance of her role in his soaring career. On his own 30th birthday in August 1886 he wrote:

> . . . My dearest, my only sister — I have not been worthy in any sense of the unselfish love you have showered upon me — rather at the judgment seat I should confess blindness, ingratitude and sometimes even cruelty.
>
> But recollections like these are profitless (especially to write about) unless they lead to something and all my somethings are to come!

At this time he could hardly have foreseen that he was to be the driving force for national unity and a principal founder of the new nation. Cer-

tainly it did not cross his mind that over the next 20-odd years he was to be three times its Prime Minister. But he did know how much depended on Catherine:—

"The long debt of years of patient self-sacrifice and sisterly affection pure high and strong — these are the debts never to be paid off — never to be even acknowledged but nevertheless standing against me in the ledgers of the heart. Had I known this morning what welcome was awaiting me — surely, surely, the shell even of my superficial life and selfish absorption would have parted for the instant so that I could have spoken for once from the soul. But no, the blind tide of love feels around the rocky cavern of my heart and finds no exit and dies moaning but not mournfully away."

In July 1899 on Catherine's 49th birthday Alfred wrote:—

Ever dearest sister,
It is a long time since I remember missing a birthday of yours at Adams Street . . . demonstrativeness does not sit very easily upon us . . . but it needs only a day's actual absence to remind me how the least incapacity to see you at will at once awakens a sense of what I have missed & what I would wish to do & say. — To have you always just at my elbow at all events within call has been so lifelong an experience with me that it seems out of the order of nature to find myself driven to the stiff pen, the bald paper & the cold ink . . . your inexhaustible devotion has made my children yours & made them love you as a second mother. They at least are fortunate beyond any I know in the love you have added to them & the inestimable care & training you have given them . . .

One summer evening in 1909 when Catherine was sailing to England with his daughter, Stella, and Alfred was leading his ministry on the floor of the massive piece of Victoriana that was then Federal Parliament's abode, Alfred took pen while the debate raged all about him to write:—

Dearest Sister,
Coming home this evening as I entered the tram at Bourke Street a figure at the opposite end of the car was so exactly like yours & the pose too as with head drooped she looked into her little handbag that I was startled & for an instant forgetting the ship I thought I had met you going home to Adams Street. Yet in less than an instant, the likeness to you vanished & another not like but not dissimilar remained in your place. For that instant my heart & breath stopped — fluttering still as I went to my seat remembering that the real you was probably rounding the Leeuwin about that time . . . Adams Street has ceased to exist for me and there is such a narrowing of my own life & feeling that I am not yet able to realise myself or close the breach your going has made . . .

In the same month he was writing to her again:—

. . . We are whatever we are largely owing to each other. My own memories of you go back to the cradle & my thoughts reach forward to the grave. Tenderness, gratitude & affection having been inwoven with our home, our first school & all the period of growth. To this mutual confidence & understanding there has been no interruption other than that imposed by an arduous life & never a shadow of rupture. The obligations all rest upon my side . . . the children whose education you have always made your later life's chief care. Without your help they would not have acquitted themselves anything like so well . . . and now their final steps have been and are being taken with you at their side . . . in this realm of existence it is not possible for you to be at the same time with one of your charges in Europe & with us in Australia . . . You are doing the best and kindest thing for Stella that could be done which only an unwavering and inexhaustible love could have inspired. God bless you dearest sister now & forever for all that you have done & are doing for those dearest to us . . .

At the end of the following year on the second anniversary of their mother's death, Catherine, now back at Adams Street, was writing to him at his holiday home at Point Lonsdale:—

My own dear brother,
The loving words of your Christmas note have made a sweet song in my heart ever since they came cheering, consoling, comforting me through many of the sad memories that this season inevitably brings. . . . It seemed more like a spirit's whisper than a material letter. With you it is often like that & I am apt to fancy you know without telling with what grateful & gratified tears of joy I always welcome the assurance of your loving sympathy & the evidence that the strong ties of love & affection between us have not been weakened by time or absence . . .

At the end of 1907, Alfred's second daughter, Stella, had completed an honors degree in Science at Melbourne University. While studying there she had fallen in love with a young scientist, David Rivett, who left for England in the middle of 1907 as Victoria's Rhodes Scholar. It was neither accidental nor coincidental that Stella persuaded her father to finance the passages of herself and her aunt to England and Europe in 1908, although nominally she was going to do post-graduate work with eminent chemistry dons in both Britain and Germany. Before they had been in Britain for many months the young couple were engaged. Catherine accompanied Stella on various visits to Oxford and made a home with her in flats and boarding houses in London, Berlin and Heidelberg. Although nearly 60, Catherine added a good flow of German and the ability to read it rapidly to her long-time mastery of French.

When Rivett, after completing his course with a First at Oxford, went off to study under Arrhenius at the Nobel Institute in Stockholm, Stella and Catherine returned home. When David joined them in Melbourne in 1911, he lived for a while with "Auntie K" at Adams Street before he and Stella were married in November of that year.

Less than 18 months later Catherine, a poor sailor, was again being tossed by the waves on the long voyage to Europe as she accompanied Deakin's youngest daughter, Vera, and Vera's friend, Ida Woodward, on another educational tour of Europe. One of the highlights of their weeks in Britain was a visit to one of Deakin's literary heroes, George Meredith.

Catherine with the two girls travelled by train across Holland and Germany, then through Austria visiting many of the most famous schloss, galleries and museums. They finally made their temporary home in Budapest where Vera studied under a gifted singing instructor while Ida painted at the local art school. It was not a particularly happy time for Catherine, who found the long Hungarian winter depressing. Lacking the language, she missed the contacts and interchanges she had enjoyed in Germany on her previous visit.

Alone of the family, Alfred seems to have appreciated fully the extent of her sacrifice. By this time he had virtually retired from politics and Catherine was desperately concerned about his health. She wrote him each week, sometimes twice a week, and just as often he wrote to her. Although preoccupied with the disquieting evidence of his failing memory and concentration, he was still intensely perceptive of the great strain of the European winter on a single woman of 63 who could not understand the language the community employed. His letters refer more than once to his intense sense of indebtedness to Catherine. He emphasised that it had begun with her own care and encouragement for him as a youth, had gone on throughout all the vicissitudes of his career in State and Federal politics.

It had extended to educating each of his daughters in turn and then, when she most wanted to be with him and to see him daily, to exiling herself for their sakes to Europe for a total period of about three years. Catherine never complained or suggested to the girls the depth of her deprivation and sacrifice. Possibly it was only Alfred's complete understanding of her plight that strengthened her to carry on when all her instincts cried out to get home and be with him again.

The outbreak of war found the trio in London and a few weeks later they took ship for Australia. It was the last time that Catherine was to leave Adams Street except for a few weeks at Point Lonsdale or, later, with Ivy and her husband, Herbert Brookes, during the holidays at their Macedon home.

The great tragedy of the war with the ever-swelling casualty lists in the daily papers was partly overshadowed for Catherine by her deepening concern for her beloved brother. After his last official appearance as Leader of the Australian delegation to the San Francisco Exposition, from which he returned in the autumn of 1915, Alfred went steadily downhill.

Unhappily he was acutely conscious of his failing powers and the last years were tragically sad for those who loved him most. His death in October 1919 was in many senses a blessing. But to Catherine who had shared in everything from the beginning it seemed very like the ending of life itself.

However as the months went by she began to interest herself more and more in the childish development of her great-nephews and great-nieces. The families grew through the 1920s until finally there were nine of them, all calling her Auntie K as their three mothers had begun doing more than 30 years before.

A great serenity filled the long twilight of Catherine's life. Throughout the twenties and the first half of the thirties she sat for most of every day in the bow window facing southwards onto the box hedges and garden beds which her mother

Sarah had tended so lovingly for almost 40 years. Marion King, the third of the domestic help and housekeepers who had looked after the Deakin family since the 1860s, continued to cook her meals with loving care. Occasionally, when the weather was good, she would still sally forth by cable tram along St Kilda Road to visit Ball and Welch, her favorite city store, or one of the bookshops. Mostly, if she went out, it was in the car of Ivy and Herbert Brookes, and she still joined Ivy frequently at the grand piano in the music room at Winwick, the Brookes home at the top of the Walsh Street hill.

She maintained a lively correspondence with a number of people including a second cousin who was a prominent artist and engraver in Bristol. She had first begun to correspond with Professor Walter Murdoch in Perth when that great Australian was writing her brother's biography in 1921-23 — she had been an admirer of his columns in the Argus since they first began appearing at the turn of the century. Now he began sending her his books as collections of his essays were published between hard covers. When he went to Europe he wrote to her with the typical Murdochian blend of whimsy, satire and quizzical humor over human folly. The correspondence was still active in 1936 when she suffered a stroke that confined her permanently to her bed.

In these years after Alfred's death she read omnivorously the best weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies being produced in London and the United States on international affairs and political and economic developments. Sharing Alfred's life-long passion for the strengthening and development of the British Empire, she watched with deepening concern Britain's troublesome passage through the twenties, the coming of the Great Depression, and the darkening clouds over Europe as first Mussolini, then Stalin and, finally, Hitler emerged in control of their respective countries.

It is doubtful if more than three or four people in all Australia, including the top ranks of the federal government, had a keener insight into Britain's problems and struggles. I clearly remember walking across Fawkner Park from school one day to find her on the last page of the three volumes which Winston Churchill devoted to his ancestor, Marlborough. "What a waste! What a waste!" she said, shaking her head. "The Empire has never been in more need of Winston, yet Baldwin keeps him out of the Cabinet and instead of helping cope with the nation's problems, he devotes his time to studying politics and battles more than 200 years ago!" It was still five or six years before Churchill was recalled to the British Cabinet, and by then many people felt it was too late. But the man the whole English-speaking world was crying out for in 1939 had been designated by Catherine five years earlier.

A sunny windless day would still tempt her into the garden where she and Alfred had so often walked and explored so many themes. The huge Synagogue rising over her back fence had taken away some of her trees and lawn, but the essential character of the garden was much as Sarah had left it. Occasionally a nephew or niece would read aloud to her sitting in the sun among the flowers and shrubs. But most of the reading was done in the bow window, the youthful reader sitting opposite her in the rocking chair Alfred had always occupied.

There they would explore at her bidding an article in Round Table or Foreign Affairs or Statesman and Nation. Perhaps it would be some editorial or feature article by Walter Lippman that Herbert Brookes had found for her in one of the New York papers he received daily. Always her comment was relevant, brief and to the point. It was a small miracle that at 84 she could well have contributed invaluable comment and criticism at any newspaper's editorial conference on the international scene.

Visits from her nieces, their husbands and, above all, their children were the highlight of most of her days. People outside the family who met her for the first time at Ivy's homes in Walsh Street or on Macedon were stunned by her extraordinary power of recall. Among her correspondence a letter by Sir Walter Leach of the Tariff Board is only one of several revealing their amazement that such a small, frail woman in her eighties should see with such clarity, and capacity for analysis, political events in Victoria and the Commonwealth that went back into the 80s.

Since that day in 1875 when Charles Pearson had asked her to join his staff at PLC, her greatest impact had been as friend, inspiration and instructor of the young. She was still filling that role with rare ability for her brother's grandchildren when, in her 87th year, a stroke ended her active life.

Noel Counihan

OSCAR MENDELSOHN

Salute to Mo

When the Australian comedian Mo died in 1952 there closed a long and rich tradition of the stage. It was not that Mo lived to a great age, for he was actually only 62, but he had been continuously before the public for 50 years. Half a century of inspired clowning. In his own way, Mo the comedian was quite as fine an Australian artist as Melba the singer in hers.

Australia has been demonstrably poor in some aspects of comic art. Almost without exception our finest writers have been grim, heavy, serious. Fine, I repeat, but rather wearing. It is curious, come to think of it, that in 150 years Australia has not yet produced a great comic writer. In the same period the United States, which is also a pioneering country, had owned several. Artemus Ward and Mark Twain spring to mind. But I fear the Dad-and-Dave *genre* is Australia's highest comic development as yet.

There have always been great comic writers in English letters and Canada has its Stephen Leacock, who towers above any Australian humorist.

Make no mistake, the comic is not a primitive phase of art but a very advanced and mature one. Irony is still a doubtful weapon to use in any country, and in Australia it can be positively dangerous. If we still have no comic writer of world stature I do not think it can be seriously denied that Mo was one of the great stage comedians of the age, of the same dimensions as Charlie Chaplin during his comic phase, and as great as Grock seems to have been.

For fifty years Mo trod the Australian boards and for thirty or more of them on a small circuit of the Australian vaudeville stage. During the whole of that time he held a faithful public. His audience brought their sons to see him and eventually their grandsons. Nothing comparable has ever been known in this country, with the possible exception of "Our Glad" (Gladys Moncrieff).

Another aspect of Mo was his universal appeal. The Melbourne or Sydney larrikin and the lofty professional practitioner, the illiterate rabbit-o and the dignified headmaster were all equally likely to howl with laughter at Mo until the tears ran. Mo was vulgar, very and proudly vulgar, and if you didn't like what George Robey used to call honest vulgarity, it was better to stay away. Nevertheless the most censorious were likely to be won over, first with grudging concession and finally as fully-committed fans.

There was nothing subtle in Mo's stagecraft and over a period of more than twenty years of faithful attendance I never knew him to learn a new trick. He usually drove his points home with a sledge-hammer, but the appeal lay in the fact that it was frequently an unexpected sledge-hammer and Mo swung it in some crazy and unexpected guise.

Mo had more names than a duke. He was born in 1892 in Hindley Street, Adelaide, as Harry van der Sluys, pronounced Sluice. As the patronymic shows, his father, a cigar maker, was of Dutch extraction. In his schooldays Mo was known as Bullet Sluice, an allusion presumably to the shape of his skull, and amongst his old friends (and Mo seemed to have a great ability to retain old friendships) this name always stuck. In his earliest stage days he was billed as "Boy Roy the Boy Soprano" but I have no idea where the Roy came from. But there is no uncertainty about the Roy Rene. It was deliberately adopted on the suggestion of a stage-manager, and was borrowed from the once well-known French comedian, though the pronunciation was altered to suit the Australian taste. As to Mo, this name again is an ascertainable and attested invention. When Mo entered upon his famous partnership with Nat.

Phillips, a doorman at the Sydney Tivoli, who deserves to be remembered, said out of thin air "Why don't you call yourselves Stiffy and Mo?", a suggestion instantly adopted.

Let me race over the bald facts of Roy Rene's life. After his voice broke he drifted into comedy in a so-called Jewish act, becoming an immediate success. For some years he appeared for the Fullers in their revues. Then Ben. Fuller brought back Nat. Phillips and his wife Daisy Merritt from the United States and these two were also a great success on the circuit. It was Nat's suggestion that he and Roy Rene should work together. As Stiffy and Mo they formed an ideal partnership, with Daisy Merritt as an almost equally valuable adjunct. Stiffy was the right feed for Mo, but also a considerable comedian in his own right. They worked together for some years and then split over some trifle. But happily some time later they rejoined forces and continued together triumphantly for sixteen years, until the tragically early death of Phillips. After that Mo continued alone until his death. There were interludes and excursions and a straight part in the play "Give and Take". Mo also made a picture, "Strike Me Lucky", in the early days of talkies, but that was barely successful.

In his personal life Mo was happy. At an early age he married Sadie Gale, a personable and talented young Australian soubrette and his long matrimonial life was a model of tender respectability. I always thought that the team of Mo and Sadie Gale was the perfect stage combination, in every respect one partner complementing the other. I never heard Mo make a joke on mothers-in-law. His adoration of "Mumma" (Sadie's mother) was widely known.

Now, about his walk. Every animal has its own characteristic method of movement, and possibly every human being is as unique in locomotion as in fingerprints. After all, most of us can recognise certain gaits. Mo's method of movement was one of those qualities you might term Mo-ish, for I am sure nobody else walked like him, at any rate on the stage. His gait was an unparalleled combination of the sinuous and the silly, a hopeless exaggeration of the alleged walk of effeminate men. His run—and on stage he often ran—was a sort of crazy lope, and when I first saw that trick of the cinema screen called slow motion I said "Why, that is Mo!" It is alleged that Charlie Chaplin's walk made him his first million dollars, and I am sure Mo's *modus ambulandi* could have become equally famous if he had ever agreed to an overseas tour.

I never saw that famous English stage couple, the Bancrofts, but I always remember Mrs Bancroft, earlier known by her maiden name Marie Wilton, because of what Watson, that already almost forgotten poet laureate, wrote of her: "And Wilton winks her wicked way and says the more the less she has to say." How true that was also of Mo, a superlative master of gesture and timing. I am pround to say that a hundred times I have detected lewdness in an ostensibly simple and transparently innocent remark, merely because Mo slightly lifted one eyebrow after making it.

And Mo's voice. Verbal description is futile so I shall merely say it, too, seemed to have been evolved from the alleged feminine male. The high pitch just escaped falsetto. As Mo's invariable make-up was that of an unshaven middle-aged male, the incongruity of appearance and voice was a stupendous comic coup. And Mo retained make-up and voice whatever the part. Good *Queen Bess in rich Elizabethan robes but with* dark-jowled and unshaven face and that pseudo-mellifluous drawl—all this had to be seen and heard to be believed.

It is a matter of the great difficulty to convey Mo's brand of comedy. Nobody I have ever heard has been able to give a colorable imitation of the voice, and to repeat any of Mo's patter in a normal conversational tone is less than adequate. But even the words in the correct tone were yet far from clothed without the accompanying gesture. Still, a tribute to Mo without mention of some of his characteristic utterances is surely absurd, so I must make the attempt. Every admirer of Mo will have, of course, his own favourite bits, but certainly one of mine is Flo's letter. Flo's letter was, or rather, as the lawyers say, purported to be, a recitation, but before I deal with that let me remind you that probably over the whole history of the stage comedians have pretended to be deadly serious fellows, highly offended and disconcerted by the roars of laughter which greeted their remarks. I am inclined to think that no clown was ever so completely effective as Mo in this particular brand of buffoonery. He would offer to recite and would snake himself to the middle of the stage, strike an attitude and declaim, as in the manner of a recitation at a school break-up, "Flo's Letter". But he did not get started, for the laughter drowned his words. He would then make a fresh

start but at "Flo's Letter" the theatre would rock again. At this point Mo would stride right to the edge of the stage and hiss spittingly over the footlight, "Fair go, Mob, fair go". And that was as far as the recitation ever got. I never did discover whether any such recitation as "Flo's Letter" existed.

In the same spirit, Mo must have declaimed a thousand times "I will now give you my impressions of birds, beasts and flowers." Can you imagine anything more inane? Of course, nobody ever heard or saw the impressions.

I am told that, off the stage, Mo was a very subdued and retiring person, and that the natural comedian and life of the party was one of his brothers. It is said that Mo himself excused his restrained private life on the ground that if you asked a surgeon to a party you didn't expect him to perform an operation for the amusement of the guests. But I am inclined to think that Mo must have had his comic moments off the stage as well as on. There are too many stories about his drolleries. Have you heard the one about the stagedoor cadger? Mo was a generous soul and usually handed out liberally but on one occasion he must have felt that he had reached his limit. As he left the stage door one cadger put the bite on him, and Mo asked whether he had borrowed money from him before. The cadger indignantly denied this. "Mr Rene, I've never before asked you for a penny." "Well," said Mo, "I'm sorry but I'm not taking on any new customers at present."

For anybody who admired efficiency in stagecraft, Mo was a delight to watch. As soon as he appeared the air became electric. His sheer energy never seemed to flag. His sense of timing, too, was perfect. His patter and his jokes never misfired and he was always utterly sure of himself, holding the audience amiably in the hollow of his hand. He achieved all his effect with the minimum of effort. I think you will agree that one of the most distressing of sights and experiences is a stage comedian working too obviously hard for his results. Does genius really consist in an infinite capacity for taking pains? As it has been less elegantly put, is it really ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent perspiration? The exact opposite is the truth. A genius is a man who can do something with negligible effort that another man cannot do under any conditions at all. I have not the slightest doubt that Mo was an authentic genius in his own way.

Over the last few years of his life Mo was a fairly regular performer on the radio. I do not know what induced him to desert the stage for the wireless studio. Perhaps it was the wearing life of a vaudeville performer. He was not physically robust and the strain of twelve long shows every week, two every day but Sunday, must have been frightfully heavy. But whatever the reason I always considered Mo on the radio of no consequence at all. One cause was the absence of gesture. That drawling, drooling voice was much less funny when you could not see the complementary facial expression. I know that many must have considered him funny on radio or he would not have lasted as he did, but I think his misfortune was to have just missed the start of Australian television.

Mo did make one appearance on the legitimate stage, as it is called, though why a straight play is more legitimate than variety is beyond my understanding. He took the part of a foreman in a Californian fruit cannery in the play "Give and Take", a highly sentimental effort by the American actor Harry Green. I am always glad that I saw this play. Mo's performance was excellent, but I could not share the widespread surprise that a seasoned comedian from variety could effectively take a character part in a straight play.

I have seen in print a denial that Mo was a vulgar comedian and an attempt to build him up as a basically refined and indeed almost prudish gent. Of course, you can prove anything at all if you give your own whimsical meanings to words and phrases. I do, however, suggest, that actually Mo was exceedingly, excruciatingly and gloriously vulgar. For instance Mo was the most salivery of comedians, willing and anxious to bespatter anybody on any occasion. Why spitting is considered funny as a stage act I have never been able to discover, but I have laughed as often as the rest.

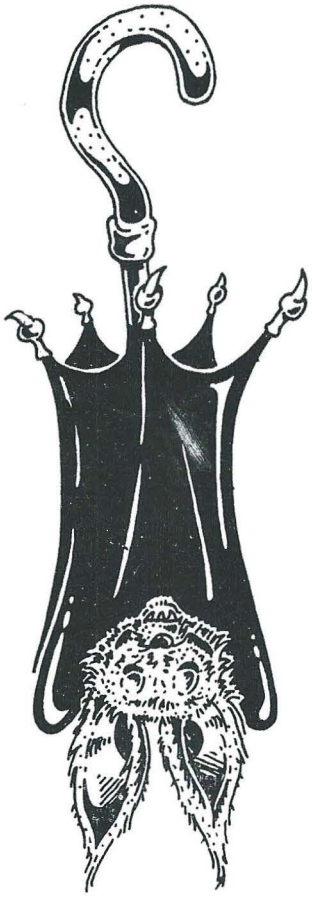
It was Mo's habit, also, to lope to the front of the stage and glare at some mild-looking old lady as if she were the source of all his misfortune. Then he would blurt out "If you do that again, missus, I'll slap you across the mouth, fair dinkum, I will!" Whatever Mo said or did to anybody, he never seemed to give offence and surely this is a distinction between vulgarity and gutterism.

I believe that Mo used to claim that his patter was pure and unsullied and that the roars of

laughter were caused by what his patrons chose to read into his remarks from their own impure and sullied minds. I suppose this was true enough, but vulgarity is an onion by whatever name you call it. Although Mo's private life was a model of suburban domesticity, of genuine old-fashioned happy family bonds—wife and children, wife's mother and gardening and neighborly gossip—on the stage he could give the most wicked twist to any remark. And he seemed always surrounded by pretty girls. I fancy the National and Tivoli circuits never had such good-looking chorus and ballet girls before or since. Mo needed only to give one side-glance at any of these girls and the mind of the audience supplied the rest.

There was one sketch I always associate with Mo. First he is seen pacing outside the bedroom door in the stage concept of a mansion, and in due time a physician appears and announces the arrival of a bouncing boy. The curtain drops to rise again on a similar scene in a mean slum house. The same physician appears and makes the same announcement, but suddenly exclaims "Wait. Didn't I see you in Toorak yesterday? How do you account for this?" "That's eathy," says Mo, "I got a bithycle." And if that isn't vulgar, I want to be informed what is.

I believe that Mo had no enemies in the profession. That is always a great achievement. He had a reputation for kindness to the young stage aspirant and was said to be a reliable and steadfast stage colleague, free from all the prima donna tricks. I thank his shade for the happy hours of laughter I got from him over the years.



Neil McLean

RODNEY MORICE

The Kungkayunti Experience

During August 1974 a group of 116 full-blood Aborigines, members of the Pintupi and Luritja tribes of Central Australia, left the Government settlement of Papunya and established their own community at Brown's Bore, the westernmost artesian bore on the Haast Bluff Aboriginal Reserve. They called it Kungkayunti.

A long time ago, in the Dreaming time, a mob of old women danced along this creek. They went from this country which is proper Luritja country, all the way to the Kintore Ranges which is proper Pintupi country. At night they camp along this creek. That's why we live here. Kungkayunti means woman dancing dreaming.

The Kungkayunti myth tells of a connection between the two tribal groups, and particularly for the Pintupi provided a justification for the choice of this site. Because of it too, the Luritja 'owners' were happy to grant them permission to settle there. A return by the Pintupi to their own land, the area around Lakes Macdonald and McKay on the Western Australian border, would have meant a severance from the services provided by white Australians, on which they had come partially to rely. Their pragmatic sense dictated the site of an artesian bore, rather than one of the other important Dreaming sites in the area.

The Luritja members of the group had been in contact with Europeans for some considerable time, as their land abutted on the east to that of the Western Aranda people. It was in this land that German missionaries established the Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg in 1877. Their influence became more widely felt when they created a ration depot at Haast Bluff, in Luritja land, in 1940. By this time a few Pintupi had drifted eastward from their desert fastnesses and were camped in the environs of Haast Bluff and the Mereeni Range, drawn perhaps by reports of the white man's food supplies. One such person was Djaburula.

I was born at Lake Macdonald, near Mt Leisler, you know, south from Sandy Blight. That was euro dreaming country. Many people lived there. In cold-weather time we walkabout all over country. Our mothers get seeds and make big damper. Our fathers catch kangaroo in rain-time, and sometimes emu in hot weather-time. I first saw white man when I was a young fellow, little bit middle-aged. I saw Lasseter. He came across with two camels. We were all frightened and ran away. He had shotgun by his side. We thought he was going to shoot us and eat us. Then I saw Afghan with camels. Some of my relations were with him. They tell me, "no good sit down naked, have to forget country and come back in. Get clothes, boots, blanket. No good to sit down in bush, no pillow, nothing." So I came in and camp at Mereeni. Others come in later, like when Haast Bluff put up wurley (i.e. 1940). Then later I went out on those patrols and tell others to come in.

Between 1940 and 1957, small groups of Pintupi migrated in to the outskirts of white communities. From 1957 to 1964, government patrols were sent into Pintupi country to assess the number and needs of the people still living there. While it was not the policy of the patrols to encourage the Pintupi to move east, this in fact was the result, as accompanying relatives told them of the advantages to be gained.

In 1959, the settlement of Papunya was completed, and most of the Aborigines living at or near Haast Bluff were moved there. Initially

planned to accommodate a few hundred Aborigines, by the early 1970s the population had risen to one thousand, and was comprised of disparate tribal and language groups. The establishment of Papunya was part of the government's assimilation policy, by which it was planned to assimilate Aborigines into the mainstream of white Australian culture, teaching them European ways, expecting them to forego and forget traditional beliefs and customs, and, in time, offering them equality with white Australians. The policy, and its instrumentalities — settlements like Papunya — have been abject failures.

Culture contact has, throughout history, boded ill for the less technologically-developed group, especially if they have formed a minority group numerically. When they also constituted a colonised group their fate was sealed. Their traditional culture has been invariably regarded as primitive and worthless. Christians and Moslems alike have attempted, usually successfully, rapidly to erode traditional religious beliefs and to replace them with their own.

Latterly, medicine and education have made their own, often devastating, inroads into traditional culture. As a result the sense of group and individual identity disintegrates and a state of anomie supervenes. This is true for the Pintupi and Luritja no less than it has been for the South and North American Indians, the Eskimos, and some African tribal groups.

While not the static society often imagined (as cogently demonstrated by Geoffrey Blainey in his recent *Triumph of the Nomads*), the Pintupi and other Central Australian Aborigines maintained, presumably for thousands of years, a highly integrated and stable sense of identity. As nomadic hunter-gatherers, gender roles were clearly defined — the men hunted the larger game and the women gathered the vegetables and smaller animals which formed the staple diet in the desert areas. The clan and totem systems provided a strong social identity and attachment to each other, and to the land, a process augmented by the rich mythology and ceremonial life. The subsection classificatory, or kinship, system further strengthened social bonding and self-identity formation. Traditional medical beliefs and practices, apart from providing actual therapeutic intervention, also acted as a social control system, whereby deviancy from 'normal' behavior could be conceptualised and managed. A nomadic life style also enabled resolution of conflict by fission, whereby groups could split and reform with relative ease.

The advent of the white man, the imposition of his culture, and, more recently, the constraints of settlement life have seriously, and probably permanently, disrupted these processes. Certainly at Papunya the main food supplies are obtained from the store, ceremonial life has grossly diminished, and traditional methods of social control, including those of the traditional doctors, have been largely supplanted by the presence of white staff, especially of police officers. The formation of an Aboriginal Council, at first as no more than a token gesture, and then given sudden and unexpected control as part of the present government policy of 'self-management', in no way redressed these changes, as the concept of such a council was purely European, and at variance with the family and clan structure of Aboriginal society. Symptoms of the anomie created at Papunya include the increasing and excessive use of alcohol, increased inter- and intra-group conflict and fighting, increasing family disruption, and a rapidly rising crime rate, particularly among the adolescent males.

It was in this setting that the Pintupi and Luritja group made the decision to establish their own, largely autonomous, community at Kungkayunti, a move they made somewhat precipitously in the view of some white advisers, and mistakenly in the view of others. Their own most commonly stated reasons for moving from Papunya were to distance themselves from the drinking and fighting. They had obviously identified these as problems and saw a geographical separation as a possible solution. While not verbally expressed, probably due to language barriers, it was my impression that many of the people, especially the older ones, desired a return to a more traditional way of life, and one at a remove from constant white supervision.

Kungkayunti is situated in sand-hill country approximately 320 km. west from Alice Springs, 130 km. south-west from Papunya, and 80 km. due west from Haast Bluff. A flat area of sandy ground nestling between two parallel *tali* (sand-hills), and about 500 m. from the artesian bore, was cleared of spinifex, and make-shift shelters *(wiltjas)* erected from a mixture of canvas, corrugated iron and surrounding scrub. Nearby was the dry creek-bed referred to in the Kungkayunti myth, and the surrounding area contained clumps

of mulga trees and stands of the stately desert oak.

The position of the shelters reflected nuclear and extended family relationships, and over the ensuing eighteen months the "town-plan" maintained its basic structure, despite a death which resulted in the entire community being moved some 300 m. to the west. The temporary nature of the shelters enabled the resolution of conflict by fission in miniature — an individual shelter was occasionally moved away from the family group, resuming its position when the conflict had been settled. On at least two occasions the more traditional style of this resolution was employed, when one man was banished permanently from the community for consistently bringing in alcohol, and another for two weeks, as consensus opinion held him to be responsible for a major fight in the camp.

The men gathered in the shade of the nyirrpi *(desert oak) in the centre of the camp. They were silent as they sat in the red sand, some still nursing the injuries sustained in the fight which had occurred three days before. Djangala's arm was in plaster, and Djaburula's hand was swollen to twice its normal size. The women and children remained unobtrusive in their* wiltjas. *This was serious business.*

Djambidjimba slowly and morosely walked over from his wiltja, *isolated on the perimeter of the camp. He carried, unmenacingly, his spears and boomerang. A sign of pride and small defiance perhaps. He sat in the circle of silent men.*

One by one they spoke of his breaches of tribal law. He had walked into the widow's camp and had made sexual advances to one of them. Moreover she belonged to a skin group proscribed to him. He had hit his father, Djangala, during the fight which followed, breaking his arm. He had caused Djabbanangga to talk to his mother-in-law. These were serious offences. What did Djambidjimba have to say in his own defence?

He rose from the circle, spears and boomerang in hand, and spoke of his wife and family, and of how he had always been a hard-working man. He was pleading a good character.

But Djambidjimba had caused trouble before. He was lalalya, *a man who was always fighting; often when there was no legitimate reason. He often beat his wife.*

The men spoke quietly among themselves for a few minutes, and then the sentence was passed. He must go away from Kungkayunti, and not come back until next pay-day, in two weeks time. If he caused any more trouble, the men would ask the police to deal with him.

Had this particular fight occured at Papunya it would most likely have spread to involve a much greater number of people, as extended family and classificatory obligations became involved. Latent grievances may also have been acted out. Almost certainly the resident police would have been called, and the effects of alcohol and strong emotions would possibly have resulted in many arrests and charges. As it was, in the restricted human and geographical environment of Kungkayunti, the fight lasted a few hours and resolution was achieved by a traditional form of social control. The men had reclaimed some of their former roles and identity.

The average day at Kungkayunti was heralded in by Djaburula, the titular head of the group, clanging a piece of iron to announce the start of the working day. The men were expected to pick up rubbish around the camp. Settlement ways die hard! When the men did respond, the task was completed in a few minutes. When a truck was available, occasionally the men would fell trees in the surrounding bush — fence posts for the Haast Bluff cattle station. Fifty posts earned a bullock carcase. Mostly though, the men would spend much of the day visiting between *wiltjas,* sometimes playing cards, more often just talking. The more energetic would sometimes spend several hours looking for rabbits or goannas.

The hunting of the larger game of the area — kangaroo, euro, perentie, emu, bush turkey — was by far their favored occupation. But the presence of an established community at Kungkayunti and the more frequent sound of motor vehicles had driven the animals to seek food and water further afield. Effective hunting, to supply such a large group with fresh meat, could only be accomplished when a reliable vehicle, preferably four-wheel drive, was available.

The catch for the afternoon was two kangaroos and an euro (wallaroo). Not bad really. Often we had only caught one. These were rather small, but at least everyone in the camp would get some fresh meat today.

The men were contented as we headed home. No disappointment in the camp tonight, no need for some families to miss out when the

food was distributed. They had done well. The younger men in the back of the Land Rover talked and laughed, with no hint of the tension of expectancy present as we had driven out to the hunting ground. The old men in the front smiled, the occasional burp attesting to the tasty meal just consumed from one of the kangaroos.

I felt relaxed too. It was good to be with happy people, and to imagine the children's responses when the three animals were unloaded back at the camp. The driving was easier now that we were back on the track, and I had time to register the expanses of spinifex, golden in the late afternoon sun. Beyond them, the shadows deepened in the clefts of Talipata Gorge, and further to the east stood Winbarrku, the towering sentinel of rock that is Jarapiri, the snake.

My reverie was hardly interrupted by the demands of driving, for although there were several washaways in the track to be avoided, a gentle movement of Djaburula's hand guided my steering. He was never wrong. It was as if the land was part of him, and he of it, even down to the ever-changing effects on it of wind and water.

Suddenly he issued a few dental clicking sounds, and his hand motioned me to stop. The others fell silent and became tense with excitement. A few hundred metres to the west was a clump of ultakunpa *(native grevillea) in full bloom, their orange flowers setting fire to the foliage in the lengthening rays of the sun. Two emus were lazily feeding on the blossoms and their heavy nectar.* "Tjakili" *(emu), Djaburula whispered,* "kuka palya" *(good meat). Following the movement of his hand, I swung off the track and drove slowly towards the as yet unsuspecting birds. In the back the men silently prepared their guns, and seated on the spare wheel on the bonnet, Djabbanangga, with his rifle at the ready, took over the directions. Describing an arc to lie down-wind of the birds, I edged closer, while they still fed. The blue of their throats glistened metallic as their heads turned, sensing danger. I obeyed Djabbanangga's signal to stop. He raised his rifle. A shot rang out, piercing the stillness. The two emus burst clumsily into motion, their powerful legs kicking up a cloud of red dust. The Land Rover was jerked into awkward pursuit, as shots were fired at the escaping birds. The fifth or sixth shot found its mark, and the smaller of the two birds dropped, one of its legs smashed by the bullet. The remaining emu, after a momentary pause; broke at right angles and ran at full speed across the plain. My impulse to stop by the injured bird was immediately countered by excited shouts and frantic gesticulations to follow the fleeing bird.*

For the next half hour the setting sun witnessed a high-speed chase as the Land Rover lurched its way through clumps of mulga, miraculously avoiding impalement on the sharp, iron-hard mulga-roots, and through seas of breast-high spinifex. The dull thud of heads against roof as the vehicle bounced across ruts and rocks brought gales of laughter, interspersed with shouts of encouragement as we seemed about to run down the panic-stricken emu. As the chase continued and the flightless bird began to tire, its manoeuvrability began to be more equalled by that of the Land Rover. The shots fell closer to their mark. The emu faltered, hesitated in its path of flight. The boom of the single shotgun was followed by a flurry of grey-brown feathers, and the bird fell.

The response of the men was one of jubilation as the emu was hoisted on to the roof-rack, and I was unerringly directed back to where the injured bird lay. "Kuka pulka, kuka palya" *(lots of meat, good meat). Enough meat, in fact, for the entire community for many days.*

It was dusk as we drove into the camp with smoke expectantly rising from the scattered camp-fires. The children danced and laughed and sang as the two emus, two kangaroos and one euro were unloaded. For the next few hours the smells of burning flesh and the sounds of a happy people intermingled over Kungkayunti.

The women were occupied with more regular daily chores than the men. They prepared most of the meals, although the men were not loathe to lend a hand. Approximately 50 per cent of the food was obtained from the store at Papunya, a much lower percentage than consumed by those still living at the parent settlement. The vagaries of climate and privately-owned cars, however, resulted in periods during which very little store food was available. On most days, groups of women and children would make forays into the surrounding bush, and return laden with a variety of seeds (crushed and made into damper) and other vegetable foods, succulent witchetty grubs, lizards and goannas.

The children, when not accompanying their mothers for the gathering of food, played noisily and happily. Their games were largely European-inspired, football and baseball being particular

favorites. Their most spectacular pastime occurred after dark, when they hurled lighted clumps of spinifex into the air, their spiralling motion sending off catherine-wheels of sparks into the desert night — a fireworks display worthy of any festival.

The adolescents did not seem as happy at Kungkayunti. In fact, within several months of its establishment, most had returned to Papunya, or to relations at other settlements. Separation from settlement life had for them, especially the boys, meant separation from their peer groups. It seemed as if the formation of such groups, difficult in the more fragmented society of nomadic life, was an adaptation to the erosion of the traditional identity processes subsequent to culture contact. At a more pragmatic level, there were few eligible girls at Kungkayunti, and one of the reasons given for the young men's departure was that they were looking for wives. The older people expected most of them to return when this was achieved.

Traditional medical beliefs and practices are intricately interwoven with the wider Pintupi and Luritja cosmology. The traditional doctors *(ngangkari* or *mapanpa)* reflect and focus the aspects of this cosmology concerned with the spirit world. Each person possesses a basic spirit or soul *(kurrunpa)* which enters the body while a foetus, probably at the time of 'quickening', and which returns to the *Tjukurrpa,* or Dreaming, after death. This spirit is believed to leave the body at night, its wanderings explaining the phenomenon of dreams. Being thus mobile, it can also be dislodged within the body, or stolen by malevolent external spirits. Such spirits are also thought to be able to enter the bodies of living people, as are foreign objects. The latter are believed to be intruded into the body by sorcery performed by another human.

Traditional doctors are considerd to possess additional spirits which endow them with special powers. These spirits may be passed on from father to son (or occasionally daughter) in a special initiation ceremony. Other traditional doctors are believed to obtain their powers by virtue of a possessing spirit of a different type, which from time to time causes them to act in a deviant or bizarre manner. Whatever the attributed method of receiving the special powers, the traditional doctors are believed to be able to find and replace lost basic spirits *(kurrunpa),* remove or settle possessing external spirits, and locate and remove objects intruded by sorcery. Spirit loss, spirit possession and sorcery are not only the main Pintupi and Luritja attributes of illness, physical and mental, but also are frequently invoked to explain social deviancy. The traditional doctor thus functions as an agent of social control as well as a healer.

Despite widespread white ignorance, and sometimes active suppression, of Aboriginal medical practices, they have continued in most settlements, Papunya included. While most Aborigines consulted a traditional doctor before presenting to the settlement nursing sister or visiting medical officer, the availability of western-style medicine has certainly diminished the role of the *ngangkari* as a healer. The presence of white settlement superintendents (later replaced by community advisers) and of white police officers undermined their role in social control. The attempt by the Australian Health Department in the early 1970s to incorporate traditional doctors into the white health-care system was far from successful, in that mostly they were used by settlement sisters, to whom they were responsible, as cleaners and general odd-job men.

Soon after the establishment of Kungkayunti several traditional doctors identified themselves. Reticent at first about their beliefs and skills, when it became obvious to them that I, as a doctor and regular visitor to the community, wanted to learn about their practices, and had no intention of imposing a white health model, they soon began to inform me of them. A single award wage position was created by the Health Department for one of the doctors. The community decided that Djabangardi was to fill this post, perhaps because his command of English was better than most. He began to be more active in the affairs of the community, as well as continuing to be their most active healer. For example, on one occasion he initiated a meeting of the entire community to berate the children for swimming in the tank which stored their drinking water. However, despite the isolation, he ran foul of departmental bureaucracy.

"We haven't been receiving regular timesheets from that Djabangardi of yours."

The nursing supervisor fixed me with a predatory stare, her talons gripping the edge of her desk.

"I saw him in Alice Springs the other day when he should have been working at Kungkayunti. We'll have to dock his wages." She was experienced, this sister. She had been in the Territory for years. She knew Aborigines

well, knew that they were a lazy lot, that you had to watch them. Give them an inch and they take a mile. Not like the good old days when they knew their position.

"He hasn't put in his claim for annual holidays either. Do we have to do everything for them?"

Despite bureaucratic rigidity, governmental inconsistencies — several award wage positions provided a cash flow into the community in 1974; there were none in 1977, and nobody in receipt of unemployment benefits — and periods of physical hardship, Kungkayunti continues to exist. There are now a total of eight outstations emanating from Papunya. The value of the neo-traditional life-style they offer to the Aborigines who established and live in them cannot be adequately assessed by a white Australian. But a major factor would seem to be a recovery of group and individual identity, and a heightening of self-esteem. From a position of "learned helplessness", induced by the unrelatedness between aspiration, response and outcome, so much a way of life for minority groups and the colonised, a group of Aborigines at Kungkayunti have demonstrated to themselves, to other Aborigines, and to white Australians, that they can pose their own problems and work effectively toward their solution. It is incumbent upon governments, and the Australian community at large, to encourage and facilitate this process.

Writers' Radio — 5UV

The Literature Board is funding a series of half-hour programs devoted to current Australian writing, and produced by Adelaide University Station 5UV.

Contributions are now sought for 1978 broadcast on this program, which is heard in several Australian states.

Material required is of the "creative" sort — poetry, short stories and simple plays which are suitable for public broadcast. Unpublished works are preferred.

Work will be read on air by (semi-) professional readers. Payment to contributors (below A.S.A. rates) will be made on the basis of quality and length. Copyright is retained by the author. Contributions should be sent to Elaine Lindsay, Writers' Radio, 5UV, University of Adelaide, GPO Box 498, Adelaide 5001.

ROGER MILLISS

Serpent's Tooth

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!
—King Lear, *Act I, Scene IV.*

My parents died within a short time of each other in their seventy-first and seventy-second years respectively — my mother suddenly at home from a coronary occlusion one cold and bleak Sunday evening in July, my father more expectedly four months later from the epilepsy and enlarged heart from which he had suffered for many years, late one night in a silent, scrubbed cream room with a plaster blue-and-white Christ on the wall in the private wing of a large Catholic hospital: an irony in itself. Even though he had indignantly refused the solace of its final sacraments when he knew the end was near, it was as if the faith he had been born into but long ago rejected had reached out triumphantly to claim its own again. I reacted to his death with a strange amalgam of grief and guilt of which I was immediately ashamed. It was not just that with my mother's passing he had nothing more to live for, but that the age which had created him had also passed irrevocably and left him clutching desperately at its shreds, his simple certainties clouded by the new complexities of a changing world he could not grasp as he vainly tried to piece together the shattered remnants of his vision. More than any other man I knew he could not be separated from his times and, those times closed, there was little more that he could offer; perhaps, then, it was time for him to die, and maybe when a month before he had submitted meekly to my brother's and my insistence that he enter hospital he had finally come to realise it: before him otherwise lay a gulf of loneliness he could no longer fill. And yet his vision was also mine, a set of principles and code of living he had passed on to me, a moral yardstick by which I measured and found wanting my own integrity, a purpose and direction which had provided the same guide for my own life as they had for his. But when, in his last few years, he needed me most, this giant of a man I loved and admired as no one else I knew, I turned savagely against him, I left him floundering alone among the wreckage of his dreams, I mercilessly mocked and ridiculed his ideas and achievements, I ripped apart the substance of the legend he had made and I had always lived by. By the time I fully realised what I had done, it was too late, but frantically I tried to make amends, to settle posthumously the debt I owed him, to redeem my own integrity by rehabilitating his. Shortly after his death I started going through both my parents' personal effects and papers in the big ugly mansion out at Burwood, broken up now into flats but once a Premier's house and centre of his estate a century before back in the days of gracious living for those who could afford it. They had bought it as an investment twenty years ago: my brother lived upstairs and they themselves had taken over a ground-floor flat only a few months earlier after selling their rambling old house at Ashfield for demolition and home-unit development, the shabby symbol of the new hermetic style of life they both despised. Soon I knew my brother and I would dismantle the elaborate structure of my parents' lives, we would strip this flat of all the traces of their presence, dispose of surplus furniture that would detract from its attractiveness for tenants, donate their clothing to some worthy charity for distribution to the destitute, divide their books and ornaments and tea services and dinner sets among ourselves, observe the complex clauses of their wills, reach settlements with other beneficiaries and decide on the disbursement of our own entitlements according to the sacred principles of inheritance which were at the very core of the system my father had spent his life fighting. Before that

came to pass, before their memories were reduced to an inventory of property they had bequeathed to us, I wanted to find some tiny key, some way to bridge the chasm of estrangement that had stretched between us in their last few years, through which I might explain and understand myself and them, some catalyst by which I might at last absolve myself of that oppressive sense of guilt and of betrayal that had been weighing upon me. I piled the assorted relics of their beings upon the bed they'd shared for over forty years, the bed in which my brother and I had been conceived and in which I had been born, from drawers and cabinets and cupboards throughout the musty flat I brought out folders, files and notebooks, bundles of letters tied with colored ribbon, old cardboard chocolate and cigar boxes full of documents and pamphlets, trinkets and mementos, souvenirs of long-forgotten holidays and trips. I dragged in from the back a huge tin trunk of family photographs, blurred childhood snaps of my brother and myself in swaddling clothes in a proud young parent's arms or romping in the sand of some seaside beach, stilted touched-up sepia studio portraits, faded grey-toned shots of the early days in the wind-swept mountains town where they had met and married, some ancient wet-plates and collodio-types going back generations to Grandpa Clampett's forebears in Dublin a hundred years and more before, austere and sober groups of solid burgher folk, secure in their allegiance to the Orange order in that alien papist world. Among my mother's debris were all the scraps and jetsam of her life, the monumental trivia of her existence. Like the bower-bird that she was, it seemed she had collected and secreted every paltry object she had used or owned, nothing had been too slight or unimportant to be thrown away. It was as if by storing it away she could preserve the moment of its usefulness, could make it bring the past to life again, as if to help her say, I started drawing when I was seven, at eleven I did such and such, when I was twelve I tied this ribbon in my hair, in nineteen-fourteen we stayed here. Pencil stubs, crayons, a set of rotting paints and straggled brushes, childhood scrawls on tattered bits of yellowing paper, an autograph album in which family and friends had inscribed their flourishing signatures and witty or sententious epigrams, a scrapbook full of Edwardian postcards she and her schoolmates had exchanged of baskets of impish red-bowed kittens or a puppy looking apprehensively at a broken vase or wistful diaphonous ladies draped around doric columns, her old school exercise books and report cards, bundled year by year and class by class. The solemn records of her people, Dublin and Norfolk, Irish protestant and French Huguenot, the huge family bible with the lineage faithfully recorded of the Clampetts and the Deals and Thurkettles two hundred years back, births and marriages and deaths, her father's rifle-shooting trophies, his commission in the naval citizen's reserve, the painstaking journal of his two years in Kalgoorlie in the gold rush of the nineties, his labored pencil-copy drawing of the death of Harold at Hastings, the little ivory box of shell-money his parents had obtained in India *en route* from England to New Zealand in the eighteen-sixties, his neat array of precision draughtsman's instruments, his green and orange sash and all the secret paraphernalia of his Masonic Lodge, her mother's testimonials from the other patriotic ladies of the town for her good work in the Red Cross in the first world war, letters from relatives scattered far and wide, press fessor cousin whose undistinguished fame she cuttings of the dull career of a philosophy prosecretly envied, another clipping of the death of a distant cousin who had perished in a factory fire before she was born. Business accounts and records spanning thirty years, obscure redundant legal documents, letters disputing piddling tradesmen's bills, tax returns of times long past the interest of the official probing eye, specially printed Christmas Day and Easter menus at the mountains guest house they had owned, roast sucking pig and duck and turkey, steamed plum pudding with brandy sauce and sherry trifle and flaming bombalasca, with biscuits and cheese to follow and bonbons and crackers for the kids, details of the evacuation scheme they ran in nineteen-forty-two when they closed the guest house down to take in city kids when Japanese invasion seemed at hand, plans and sketches for the renovation of the houses they had lived in, notes and lists of costs and estimates. And then the pieces of a special poignancy: her parents' death certificates and funeral notices, the press advertisements of her children's births, my brother's and my own, small cuttings of our infant hair, a long tress of her own when she was young, fifteen or so, fading and moulting now but still soft and fine and with the golden glow of youth before it darkened, love letters from my father in their courtship days, one with a brittle withered flower pressed in its pages, *What's in a rose?*

Nature's rebirth of the freshness of morning, of laughter, of love, of all things beautiful and you, my darling . . . and in the wardrobe with her last contemporary clothes, her wedding dress of forty years ago, a crumbling brown reminder of that day of days. Crowning the lot, as if in special pride of place at the top of one particular box, the minute diaries of her trips to China, the jet-age Odysseys she had embarked upon with my father when she was already old, following him to the awakened Middle Kingdom, Peking, Hangchow, Nanking, lunch by the muddied sweep of the Pearl River in Canton, a tour of the old concessions in Shanghai, *Chinese and unleashed dogs not admitted* a notice used to say, a nine-course banquet given by the foreign trade officials, a day's excursion to the ancient wall, a visit to the Ming tombs, the once-forbidden city where today the people strolled and courting couples boated on the imperial lake, the great parade of the fifteenth anniversary in the Square of Heavenly Peace and a distant glimpse of the Chairman waving from the official dais. From all the chaos of her litter, it was as if she was trying to shout, This is my life, this is me, this is what I was and what I am, as if it offered her some secret reassurance, some last line of defence against the unknown groping hands that sought to drag her down. From my father's random records, voluminous though they were, only the simple outlines of his rich and complex story could be traced. Emotional though his nature was, such petty sentiment meant little to him: unlike my mother he had never found it difficult to discard and jettison whatever seemed superfluous in his personal effects before their clutter overwhelmed him. In his later years, when he felt his world collapsing, he had even started throwing things out indiscriminately, as if a weariness he could not bear had taken hold of him, a huge futility that made him say, What does it matter now, the past is over and done with, who cares about the fragments of an old man's memories? The exigencies and pressures of his times had also taken toll: in nineteen-forty, in the face of illegality, he fed a backyard bonfire at our mountains home with letters, notes and documents, with suddenly *verboten* tracts and pamphlets that he thought might compromise himself and others or in some way harm his cause; some ten years later, with the same threat hanging overhead, another surreptitious burning, and again, in nineteen-fifty-four, the night before he was dragooned before the espionage commission, a further sifting and reduction of his papers that destroyed more scraps of history which, though he could not see it then, might in their minor way have thrown some light on future research. The midnight knock upon the door, the long-expected raids, the ransackings and seizures, never came, but he was a soldier in the greatest fight of all, the war of class, and nothing could be brooked to jeopardise its victory or assist its enemies. So what remained, despite its quantity, lacked form or pattern, an eclectic, chance extraction from the vastness of his life, as if he'd chosen to retain only what held some private interest for him, illuminating certain episodes in minute detail but leaving other crucial periods completely unexplained. Of his childhood in the dust and grimness of the central west cement town there was nothing to reflect the marks it made upon him, hardly a reference to his family or forebears, no record or memento of his swarm of siblings who had spread so far apart and some of whom he hardly knew, only some scattered photos of his mother in her final years, forbidding and severe in her prim, high-necked brown dresses, long-sleeved and ankle-deep, belonging to another age, and buried deep among his leavings, three photographs that I had never seen before: a pair of portraits of his parents taken I guessed in their first few years together in the early eighteen-seventies, his mother so unlike the fierce old lady of the later snaps, a young girl in the full flush of her beauty, serene and gentle, with huge lustrous, dreaming eyes set under graceful, curving brows, before nine children and the weight of widowhood sapped and seared her; her husband, the heavy-drinking bushman who had died in my father's infancy, a broad expanse of beard spilling halfway down his chest, a glint of quiet humor in the deep-set eyes, maybe a hint of weakness in the thick bewhiskered lips, a powerful undistinguishedly handsome man a little ill at ease in the stiff white dicky shirtfront vaguely discernible beneath the beard, the overlapping westkit and the Sunday-best cutaway coat. The third, my great-grandmother, whom my father never mentioned, a small and battered print of a frail and ancient woman in bonnet, shawl and long dark dress, and on the back in my father's sprawling hand, *Cecilia Fraser, mother of Susanna Kennedy*, the only inkling of his origins which I would later use to trace his people back through courthouse files and old church registers to their beginnings. It was as if his life commenced when he was seventeen or so, but even then the picture

was fragmentary: certificates of window-dressing prizes he had gained in state-wide competitions in his first job in the cement town's general store, retail trade journals containing photos of his winning entries, the pyramids of groceries and discreet displays of ladies' lingerie, through which he had escaped at one fell swoop his boyhood poverty, had fled the smoke and grime, the grey perpetual pall that hung about the limestone ridges, the monumental bleakness and sterility, for the clean, crisp air, the freedom and the opportunities that beckoned his ambition in the booming mountains holiday resort, a copy five years later of the parish magazine in his prosperous haven with a half-page photo of the confident young salesman, now an established town identity and pillar of the church, brash in his rimless spectacles and patent-leather hair, above a fulsome tribute from an adulatory friend, *A first or short acquaintance clearly reveals his captivating powers and why it is in his extensive weekly rounds he never fails to make each post or person that he meets a winning one.* A few desultory snapshots: picnics by charabanc or horse-drawn cart to Megalong Valley or the Cox's River, genteel perspiring gatherings of Sunday pleasure-seekers round a blanket thick with goodies, the bushmen's children doing weekend battle with the wilderness, young men in three-piece suits and high winged-collars poking uncertainly at a billy fire and parasoled young ladies in demure silk dresses and absurd *cloche* hats that hugged their brows like medieval helmets, the office-staff assembled dutifully in the township's chief emporium where he'd become the company secretary, a group of tennis players in eye-shades and encumbering long whites outside their tin-shed clubhouse, a cricket team in sheepish formal pose with half its members sporting braces and their ordinary clothes, my father looking somewhat out of place in spruce pressed creams and blazer; a cutting he was always proud of from the weekly throwaway proclaiming stridently *The Mighty Milliss!* after he had saved his side and led it to an outright victory in the season final. Bound volumes of the Catholic magazine he'd edited in a two-year stint in journalism, a letter from the tippling local priest who'd taken him under his avuncular brandy wing and ultimately talked him out of taking holy cloth, handbills announcing the impending opening of his mercer's shop two years before the great Depression broke and all but sank him, advertisements of summer sales and winter clearances, mail-order catalogues of new spring stock, the best range on the mountains, Milliss & Byron's for the discerning buyer and the latest city fashions. But of the decade that had made him what he was, that changed him from the pious young *petit bourgeois*, the man of property whose life had hitherto revolved round hearth and home and family, serving God while building for himself a private temple of security, to the restless revolutionary for whom the purpose of existence had become the remaking of the world, the destruction and replacement of the system at whose shrine he'd worshipped, there was no sign. Nothing to indicate the metamorphosis those turbulent ten years had worked in him, no reference to the scenes that stamped his consciousness, the human wreckage drifting past his shop, the streams of unemployed who trekked across the mountains to the hinterland in search of non-existent work camping in humpy outcrops at the edges of the town, or of the turmoil and convulsions of the larger world, the crisis piled on crisis, the collapse of order and the climb of the dictators in disintegrating Europe, the aggression and appeasement, the ineluctable advance to war, nothing to mark the trauma of those times and what it meant for him but the first few pages of an uncompleted scrapbook on the blustering demagogue he thought like thousands at first was the savior of the day, the gaunt Big Fella *greater than Lenin!* who for a time had held the masses in his hand and then betrayed them, and a small stray cutting loose among his files reporting Mussolini's first assault on Abyssinia. The clues I sought to his development were probably consumed by the flames of those backyard burnings, the only evidence surviving in his books, the gospels of his generation, Strachey and Shaw, Douglas Reed and Ernst Henri, Dreiser and Ehrenburg, Hewlett Johnson and Edgar Snow, the dull red spines of the Left Book Club and his first exploratory purchases of Marxist texts. It was the forties when his story came to life: the notes on history, economics and philosophy for discussion groups he led among the embyronic band of comrades that had formed, *The Commissar* they called him privately, the convent-educated boy combing the heresies for how to change the world, Darwin and Engels, Marx and Maynard Keynes, Roberts and Ernie Campbell, Fitzpatrick and O'Brien, with Lenin and Plekhanov, and of course the mighty Stalin in uneasy company, the origin of matter, life and man, the evolution of society,

the workings of the economic mechanism, the struggle of ideas and classes, out of a knowledge of the past we understand the present and construct the future, theory is not a dogma but a guide to action. The campaigns in the town he flung himself into, a children's library, a nursery for working mothers' kids, a canteen at the local primary school, parochial landmarks for a small community still stumbling out of the Depression, a leaflet of the team he led in a tense municipal poll, *Official Labor, Clean the Council Out! A New Deal for the Mountains!* his speech upon the town hall steps acknowledging defeat, *As for the Mayor and his supporters, who deceived the electors with their red-smear tactics, we have nothing but contempt, we spit upon them!*, a pamphlet put out by the communists, *Katoomba's Path to Progress*, a promise of a glowing post-war paradise, a handbill three years later when he stood alone against the town establishment, *Vote (1) Bruce Milliss, the Man Who Gets Things Done!* and a fleeting memory of the figures going up in the dingy tally-room that night and the biting disappointment of the lonely man beside me. The wider issues of a world at war: the second front, sheepskins for Russia, war-loan appeals, support the men in uniform, unity in the fight against fascism, and the minutes of the agricultural committee that he headed with its dictatorial powers, a personal appointment by the man who later led the country, a friend of twenty years, and then, in the second year of peace, a vehement attack upon the same man, now Prime Minister, at a meeting of his party, calling him to his face *An apologist for capitalism*, his subsequent expulsion by the state executive, his statement to the press announcing he had joined the Reds, his later letters to his old associate when the world seemed poised on the brink of a new catastrophe, the personal appeals vainly endeavoring to bridge the severed friendship, *Dear Ben, We are heading inexorably towards another global conflict a thousandfold more terrible than that which we have just experienced. You cannot allow us to become involved in the plans of the warmongers to endanger the lives of millions of innocent people in a nuclear holocaust. I beg you, Ben, to take a stand; to do everything you can to disassociate us . . .* and the cold official secretarial reply, *Dear Sir, The Prime Minister has instructed me to acknowledge . . .* The isolation of the cold-war years, the waning groups of comrades swamped by the mounting anti-red hysteria, faint solitary voices in the wilderness choked by their own brave rhetoric, a leaflet for a public meeting in a nearby mining town trumpeting in apocalyptic prophecy *There Will Be Another Depression! Are We to Have More Dole Queues, More Hungry Children, More Young Sons Jumping the Rattler? The Communist Party Has a Policy to Beat Depression. A Team of Brilliant Speakers, Ernie Thornton of the Ironworkers', Edgar Ross of the Miners' Federation, Bruce Milliss . . .*, the great coal strike of that bitter post-war winter, the miners pledged to stay out to the end, troops at the pithead on the Labor leader's orders, a widely published photo of a demonstration held against the man, my father rushing towards him with a placard saying *Chifley strike-leader 1917, strike-breaker 1949*, his months of controversy in the local press defending socialism, peace, the working class, the Soviet Union against the small-time journalist turned politico who ridiculed him in a weekly column, *Dear Brucibus, When you can dry the membranes of your borsch-soaked intellect . . .*, my father's lame attempts to match the tawrdy style, *Dear Frankie, I was enchanted by your brilliant kitchen metaphor . . .*, a pamphlet he wrote on the sterling crisis, the big bust just around the corner, no economic problems under socialism. The transcript of his testimony before the spy enquiry, a reluctant minor actor in the legal circus staged by the state machine to put paid to those years, *Your name is mentioned in a document brought from the Russian embassy, describing you as an undercover communist enjoying the late Prime Minister's confidence. Did you ever secretly assist the Communist Party when it was illegal? Did you ever know this person? Did you write this letter intercepted by the wartime censorship?—No, I did not, I don't remember, I'm sorry, I cannot help you.—We do not believe you.* This was the swansong to his public life, his last appearance on the open platform before the inward turning of his final decades, the period he regarded as his finest hour, the peak of his achievement, the close on twenty years when he immersed himself in trade, preserved in microscopic detail in the filing cabinets of letters, cables, contracts, bills of lading, invoices, credit orders, market reports and surveys, discreet requests from manufacturers eager for sales to the forbidden curtained lands, the back-room wheeler-dealer playing the bourgeois at their own inimitable game, waging class struggle in the inner sanctums of the finance

world, enlisting government advisors to destroy the cold-war barriers they had helped to build. His pioneering trips to China, crossing the artificial borders of hostility, the weeks alone in Peking and Shanghai locked in discussions with the foreign trade officials, the confidential talks at other levels, the banks' amazement at the credits coming through, the private pull and influence *over there* whose basis they could only speculate upon, red-carpet treatment from their highest echelons, anything we can do to help you, Bruce, just let us know, the nation's waning wool cheque waxing fatter from the giant it still spurned. The tea importing business that eventually became his sole means of support, tins of exotic samples, congous and pecoes, jasmine and keemun, that he plied around the local merchants seeking the mammoth break that never came. The company he formed to handle Russian films, the Bolshoi ballet and the song-and-dance ensembles, nature and travel featurettes, the propagandist epics and the gentler pieces of the brief new wave he always had his private doubts about, the constant angling for distribution outlets, the mortgage of his house to keep the firm afloat, his Moscow visits to persuade the corporation bureaucrats to channel products through him, the hours of endless arguing with the new grey-flannel breed of *apparatchiks* more intent on multi-million deals and profits in the yearly balance-sheet than propping up the small-time operator who saw their films as weapons in the battle of ideas, whittling away the capitalist hegemony and purveying the lofty virtues of the socialist ideal. The calm assurance he derived from his activities, his secret pleasure at the air of mystery surrounding him in business circles, his regular reporting to the inner leadership, the flow of funds to party coffers, the latter-day antipodean Krassin indemnifying the revolution, the strength of his conviction in the role played, that he was helping to prevent another war, forcing the capitalists to see the light of reason by dangling the bait of profit they could not resist, breaking the steel blockade they'd lowered around the countries that embodied his ideals, his sense of destiny that from behind the scenes he was burrowing at the bases of their power, contributing his little to the onset of the great new dawning of mankind. And then the mute perplexity, his dumb bewilderment as he found himself deserted, no longer useful to the men abroad, his services forgotten and unwanted as they made their breakthrough on the bigger plane, the product flowing to competitors, their unrelenting claims for losses which he thought long written off, the noose drawn ever tighter round his neck, his desperate letters pleading for reprieve, *I have been distributing your films for years, in times of the greatest animosity towards your country, seeking nothing for myself but only to serve your interests, I have mortgaged my house to underwrite this task, and now you abrogate the terms of our agreement.* . . . The sudden shattering of his illusions, the violation of his articles of faith as the twin fraternal giants he worshipped clawed at each other's throats, mauling the sacred ideology, the issues swallowed in the flood of charge on charge, his resolution of the chaos as he saw his own experience fitting a general pattern of betrayal, his memoranda to the party leaders, *Dear Comrades, We are deviating from the path laid down by Lenin, supporting those who desecrate his memory, who split the international movement, collude with the imperialists and shamelessly sell out the interests of the working class, abandoning the proletarian dictatorship and preaching class collaboration in the name of peaceful co-existence.* . . The apotheosis of his final years, the chant of Coriolanian doom he fled in terror from, his quest for inner peace and certainty in the simple dogmas of the new theosophy, his switch of Vaticans from Moscow to Peking, the truth revealed in the Chairman's Holy Grail, the precious volumes of the great man's works scored and underlined in acolytic reverence, the pious poring through recondite articles and speeches on obscure and distant issues long forgotten if their point was ever known, The Struggle in the Chinkang Mountains, Address to the Assembly of Representatives of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region, Order and Statement on the Southern Anhwei Incident, the unsold copies of the Little Red Book with its litany of aphoristic platitudes, the atom bomb a paper tiger, dare to struggle and dare to win, power grows out of the barrel of a gun, the people make history, learn from the masses, theory comes from practice, art is a weapon, the future belongs to the youth, the monumental *Weltanschauung* reduced to catechetic ritual, the pile of weekly gospel magazines bringing the Word to the waiting faithful, Uphold the Banner of Revolution, Down with the Revisionists, the People of the World Will Defeat the Imperialists and Their Running Dogs, the local ink-smudged propaganda sheet with its own peculiar brand of home-grown paranoia, *Yes, Aarons, you have honey on your*

lips but murder in your heart, the brochures for the saga-films he brought in to distribute of the epochal upheaval of the sixties, cultural and proletarian they called it, *The East Is Red, The Storming of Hingtsiang Mountain; The Safety of the Ship Depends on the Helmsman,* the carbon of a letter he had sent to me in Moscow patiently explaining and expounding in paternalistic homily, hoping I too would see the revelatory light, *Dear Rog, We are standing on the brink of terrible catastrophe. The imperialists plan another war, make no mistake about it. There are two choices facing us if we are to thwart them. One is to take the path of revolution, the other to capitulate before their threats. The Soviet comrades have renounced the basic principles, they have betrayed their people and are heading back to capitalism. You have a unique opportunity to see and judge their actions for yourself, you are young, you have the chance to come to real Marxism much earlier in your life than I . . .;* and a memory image of the aged man, white with interrupted sleep, answering the door when I returned from my four years' wanderings, Russia, the Middle East and Africa, the two old people locked in a death embrace pottering around the house, the glowing vision of a world reborn paled to a twilight of domestic trivia, a crash of furniture from the kitchen late one night, my father lying in a leaf of blood wracked in convulsive pain, then a memory echo of the savage rows, the orgies of vituperation as we raged and ranted, flung wild abuse and insults at each other, all in the name of the great Ideal, my father's vehement *Say what you will, slander him how you like, but Stalin always fought imperialism, he never wilted in the struggle,* my shouting at him, *What about Spain, you fool, or Greece, the pact with Ribbentrop, what about Shanghai nineteen twenty-seven, and he was a murderer, how can you truck with murderers!* my mother's crying *Stop it, Roger, stop it! Do you want to kill him, do you want to kill us both?* and my father's bitter-weary *Leave it, Edith, what does he bloody care?* and then my mother propped up in the corner of the couch, so peacefully, so much at rest, she could have been asleep and finally my father's corpse cold and complete at last below the plaster Christ.

—From a book in progress.

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books

ALAN MARSHALL

Laurie Clancy

Harry Marks: *I Can Jump Oceans: The World of Alan Marshall* (Nelson, $13.95). *The Complete Stories of Alan Marshall* (Nelson, $16.95).

The publication by Nelson in the last year or so of both the *Complete Stories of Alan Marshall* — not everything he wrote but the stories he wishes to preserve, some 75 altogether — and a biography of him by the late Harry Marks gives us an ideal opportunity to reassess the work of one of Australia's best loved and most widely read authors. Of his popularity there can be no doubt. *I Can Jump Puddles* is still obligatory for many Australian school children and in an appendix to his book Marks tells us that its Australian editions alone have run to 400,000 copies while world-wide it has achieved over three million sales.

Deservedly, too. As many critics who have written about Marshall have pointed out, his most distinguished quality as a writer is a wonderful transparency, a perfect fidelity in his language to what he actually feels and is. And, of course, given this kind of quality and the fact that virtually all of his writings are autobiographical or near-autobiographical in nature, it helps to be the kind of man that he is.

Harry Marks' generous biography *I Can Jump Oceans* corroborates the evidence so abundantly there in the stories themselves and in the autobiographical volumes of what an astonishing life Alan Marshall led. Its general outline will be familiar to most Australians. Stricken by infantile paralysis, he underwent an operation during which it was discovered that his leg had become infected and that he was permanently crippled. He quickly decided that nothing would prevent him from living a normal life and with his parents' encouragement and at first to the horror of the country community in which he lived he set about doing so. From this account Marshall emerges as a man of astonishing (and to us timid, able-bodied people, sometimes reckless and foolhardy) courage. He taught himself to ride, swim, play sport, eventually lead a normal sexual life and to travel over more of both Australia and of foreign countries than most people ever get to see.

The years leading up to adulthood are in many ways the most absorbing of Marks' narrative, not least for the account he gives of the way society treats physically disabled people — the jobs Marshall would otherwise have got, the girls he could otherwise have wooed, and in general the insistence of so many people he met on seeing him as disabled mentally as well as physically. It is said that, if you ever want to get off jury duty, merely walk with a limp in front of the accused: most people are convinced that physical defect goes along inevitably with mental disorder as well. Marks goes further than this to describe how neighbors would talk openly and intimately in front of Alan about his disability as if convinced he could not understand what they were saying. One can only hope above all that those "normal" people who were horrified a few months ago at the revelation of paraplegics actually having sexual relations will read this book and reassess their own attitudes and the motives behind them.

Harry Marks was a very sound choice for biographer. He has not attempted a profoundly searching investigation of his subject but instead has concentrated on narrative pace and incident. His book has something of the quality of a novel itself; it proceeds by telling vignette, with little or no overt commentary, and the stories and

anecdotes, as well as being gripping in themselves, reveal Alan Marshall most effectively. Marks does not wholly escape cliché. There are many sentences such as this (concerning Alan's father) that make one wince: "Lithe, lean, good looking in a gaunt hawklike way, his hazel eyes laughed in his sun tanned bushman's face." Nevertheless, his feel for his subject and the general narrative pace he sets (even verbs and subjects of sentences are often sacrificed in the cause of brevity) carry him over the flaccid bits.

The other reservation I have is hardly Marks' fault at all. Occasionally, almost inevitably, one imagines, in a biography of a living figure he is forced to be reticent. One would have liked to know more, for instance, about why Marshall's relationship with his wife soured and about the aftermath of this. Olive Marshall hovers around the outskirts of the narrative in its later stages but one never really finds out what happened to the beautifully evoked figure of the earlier chapters. Similarly, the letter he wrote to his estranged wife which Marks reproduces shows that there was a good deal more to the man than the unfailing sunniness on which Marks tends to concentrate. It is almost chilling in its assumption of the correctness of the writer's own position ("Let us examine your attitude.") At another point Marks mentions the bursts of anger to which Marshall was prone and which led his fellow members of the Writers' Guild "to treat him with caution". This intriguing glimpse of another side to what must be a very complex man is played down, however, and we hear nothing more of it. In his genuine excess of charity Marks is in danger of doing the disservice to his subject of making him out as being more — and therefore, paradoxically, less — human than in fact he is. But it is good to have a biography of a writer while he is still alive. Distinguished figures should be able to enjoy their tributes while they can, and this is especially so when the biographer is as unfeignedly sincere and affectionate as this one is.

And what of the stories themselves? Commenting on Alan's father and a friend of his, Marks has Marshall think: "They were part of an Australia that even in 1922 was disappearing, as the emphasis shifted from the bush to the cities." This is very much the world that Marshall himself wrote about, the world of the bush rather than the cities. As has been pointed out, his stories are in the tradition represented in our literature most conspicuously by Henry Lawson and Frank Dalby Davidson, the latter especially. Despite the fact that his only "straight" novel, rather ponderously entitled *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet*, was set in the city, he is, like Lawson, noticeably less comfortable when it comes to dealing with urban environments. And like Davidson, he has an extraordinary feeling for animals and can enter into their states of feeling in a deeply empathetic way.

Nearly all his best stories are about either natural creatures or children, and there is a whole world of adult complexity which his work largely ignores. Dingoes, bulls, kangaroos, birds, even pigs all call forth his intense identification, and in stories like "The Three-Legged Bitch" (marred only by a tendency to moralise obtrusively) and "My Bird", perhaps the best crafted and most moving story in the collection, he writes as well about Nature as just about anyone in Australia has. Only Frank Dalby Davidson rivals him here, as he himself ruefully acknowledges in a review of *How's Andy Going?* from which Marks quotes: "I take a dim view of only one of Mr. Marshall's stories. It is called Blow Carson, I Say, and is about a fight between two bulls. I would have thought that I, about 25 years ago, had covered that subject well enough for all practical purposes! John Morrison has recently said that he thought it one of Marshall's best stories . . . Blow Marshall, I say!"

In one of several appendixes, Marks' book offers a selection of excerpts demonstrating the relationships between "The Critics and Alan". With only a few exceptions, most of the critics have a kind of prickly defensiveness about them, exemplified by Ian Mudie who brings up the charge laid against Marshall that seems to be on all their minds, in order to refute it:

> One or two of his critics have contended that what he writes are merely sketches, rather than short stories. Another has spoken of him as if he were nothing more than a slice-of-life realist. In a way, these comments are a tribute to his artistry; the critics concerned have failed to look beneath the careful apparent artlessness of the surface of much of his work.

Something like this sort of case is made by most of the critics quoted. Ross Campbell, for instance, in a passage that exemplifies the anti-intellectual and often anti-academic tone of much of our non-academic criticism, says, "He is easy to understand. At the same time this hinders recog-

nition of him by many Aust Lit critics. There is not much scope for dissertations on the ambivalence and symbolism of Alan Marshall." Both he and Dr Stephen Murray-Smith praise him because he is not "trendy". I have never quite understood what the word means in literary discourse but gather from the context that it is associated with the traditional Australian distrust and intolerance of non-naturalistic modes of writing. Jack Lindsay, in a passage similar to Campbell's in tone, attacks "the devotees of alienation" and suggests (though without explaining how) that Marshall's writings have taken the methods of Lawson and other pioneering writers to their final, transcendent stage.

I think most of this sort of criticism is firing at non-existent targets. It goes without saying that Marshall wrote quite straightforwardly about the things he saw and did and heard; there is nothing about that *in itself* either to praise or to blame. The question is what he built with his material, not what kind he used. And it is almost equally obvious that although he wrote directly out of his own experience there is a good deal of re-shaping and re-fashioning of the material. There is, in any case, with even the most avowedly "autobiographical" writer, usually far more than critics who do not themselves attempt to write fiction are prepared to recognise. One of the pleasures, in fact, of reading the biography and the stories themselves together is to read the factual account of an incident and then turn to the story to see what Alan Marshall made of it in his fiction.

This having been said, then, it remains to see how the stories measure up, what has been accomplished in a lifetime's devotion to a difficult and specialized form. I have to confess to a slight feeling of disappointment until near the end of the volume. Even granted the deliberate limitations of the form in which Marshall has chosen to express himself, the collection struggles to escape the charge of sketchiness that his supporters seek to deny. There are successes, of course, not only the stories mentioned earlier but others such as the famous "Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo", "Clarkey's Dead" and "Mrs Hookey's Dick". There are also interesting examples of other traditional Australian modes — transcriptions of Aboriginal legends, for instance, and hilariously funny tall stories.

The last and largest selection of stories, however, *Hammers Over the Anvil*, does a great deal to fill out the whole achievement and make it look rather more substantial. The stories here represent the most sustained body of work in the volume. I think there are two reasons for this. The first is that in these stories Marshall has abandoned the flimsy kind of persona he employed, with its threadbare pretence at 'fiction', and has chosen to speak directly in his own voice and out of his own experience. There is no pretence now that the first person narrator is not an autobiographical projection — Alan, a boy on crutches — and the abandonment of the attempt at a series of fictional identities actually free his imagination to work more directly and urgently upon its material.

The second reason is that, as with many short story writers, the stories gain considerable strength from being read together. The discontinuous narrative has been with us for a lot longer than the last decade — in Australian literature alone it goes back at least as far as Lawson's Joe Wilson collection — and in these stories Marshall returns to what he knew best, the town of his boyhood, and recreates it with loving precision as well as a ruthlessly accurate eye for telling detail. Predictably he does it through character, which provides the sustaining link to the loose sequence (most stories have the name of a particular character).

Dorothy Green, in a recent review of the *Complete Stories* in *The National Times* praised the book highly but nevertheless spoke of "a lack of a sense of continuity, of human coherence and solidarity in the mass which, with the absence of a metaphysic, does perhaps detract from Marshall's achievement." These final stories come closest to refuting this criticism. In them we meet Alan and his friend Joe, Peter McLeod and his flash son "Duke", Alan's sister Elsie and his parents, Mick Hanrahan and a host of other citizens of the town. Though 'the Marshall kid' is always somewhere on the edge of the narrative he rarely allows his judgments to become explicit. The life of the town is presented with detachment, its unpleasant sides neither ignored nor moralised over, so that the moral stance of the narrator (and the author) can be only inferred.

Marshall's prose is at its best in these spare, understated stories. It is full of humor and of a tough Australian vernacular that, sadly, seems to be passing from our speech. The author's own experience of rejection is deeply felt in a fine story such as "Old Mrs. Bilson", about a perfectly sane and even wise old woman who is

treated as an imbecile; and it softens the portrait of the busybody Miss Armitage, who opens the mail with which she is entrusted in the Post Office. "Miss Armitage valued her good name," the narrator comments wryly. "She would have betrayed or lied in order to preserve it."

In that passage from Marks' biography concerning Alan's father and his friend that I quoted from earlier, Marks goes on, "It struck him that the thing they most had in common was an enormous flashflood of indignation over any injustice . . . a terrific outburst that usually contained somewhere: 'He *didn't* . . . the *bastard*'." It is that kind of outrage against injustice as well as sympathy with and curiosity about everything that lives and breathes that informs Marshall's writing. In a curiously poignant letter to Clem Christesen, Marshall confessed his doubts about his story "The Three-Legged Bitch":

> . . . this story is old fashioned by today's standards . . . looking over it again I sense the period of Vance Palmer and Dalby Davidson. Whether this type of story will ever be popular again is a matter of conjecture. The trouble is I can't write like Thomas Keneally or Patrick White or Randolph Stow. They live in a world with which I'm not familiar.

Chrisesen replied: "Of course you can't, or don't, write like White, Keneally or Stow — why on earth should you? You don't write like Cowan, either, or Porter. But an Alan Marshall story has its own distinctive quality — and I mean *quality*." Christesen was right, of course. Alan Marshall had his own voice, it spoke truthfully and eloquently, and that will be enough to ensure that he will survive the vagaries of literary fashion.

POETIC BORDERS

Frank Kellaway

Robert Adamson: *Cross the Border* (Prism Books, Paper, $7.95; hardcover, $20).

To a reader of my generation the title, *Cross the Border* immediately suggests writers who were young in the 1930s and 1940s, Auden, Isherwood, Day Lewis, MacNiece for example. The second poem, *Fallen Among Enemies*, is full of the sort of imagery they used, standing roughly for the same sort of things. ". . . an invisible vanguard working here on the border . . . always listening, taking in whatever we say.' '. . . the clean handed ones./ Making out their careful reports and dossiers.' '. . . the idea of a Capitol with a grip/ on those of us who cannot,/ or choose not to resist." However where the poets of the 30s were concerned, among other things, with political awareness and social injustice, Adamson, who may turn out to be as representative of the 70s, at least in this country, is concerned with intellectual and spiritual tyranny only. The poem ends, ". . . your voice . . ./ delineating my sense of an inivisible enemy,/ offering news from the front,/ rocking the foundations of the Capitol, alerting/ the borderguards, the secret infiltrators,/ I am awakened to the fact of what we call imagination./ And call it forward."

'What we call imagination.' The qualification seems at first absurd and pedantic, but in the context of the book it isn't. The word is debased, Adamson implies, is often used in inappropriate contexts, still there *is* a very important activity for which we have no other word. It is this activity which is essential to Adamson's central preoccupation already stated in the first poem, "Lovesong from Across the Border". "Driven in fear, driven in love, all instincts awake,/ out from boundaries of sanity, nerves thin/ and the song expanding/ in continuous creation of itself./ I drive the complete body . . ./ where governing reason/ will return and be taken into the heart, . . ./ and then out beyond order, language adrift,/ exploding, moving through/ and taking me forward from here."

Having taken a plunge into the poetry and having swallowed a gulp or two of Adamson in the process, the reader may become curious about the actual book he is holding in his hands. Designed by Cheryl Adamson, it's an impressive creature in itself, a large paper-back between quarto and A4 in size, with heavy double-end-papers of plain buff paper, elegant type generously laid out on 142 finely finished, thick, white pages. It has line lithographs by Garry Shead, reminiscent of Picasso, Matisse, Rodin and others, but with a mystery and atmosphere of their own. The cover has a breathtaking reproduction of a diptych, called D. H. Lawrence, one panel of which is by Brett Whitely, the other by Shead, a brilliant evocation of sea-scape/ mind-scape in vivid blues and greens. The picture has been reproduced, the back cover tells us, 'as a mirror image in correspondence with the title poem'.

The poem in question begins, 'Coming out of the blue, coming into being/ then entering the picture, surging through the heart/ pumping and pumping through,/ through through, and then the flash/ and the wind lifts the expression off my face/ blowing in, the sky drawn down/ into my body through eyes, filling the arteries with blue.' This is a fuller statement of the theme already indicated in the first poem. The great aim for the poet is getting *through,* penetrating appearances, language, expectations, mental sets, to a vision of something beyond, breaking the reality barrier or anyway the barrier which our conceptions of reality raise whether they are stereotyped or sophisticated or both. The means by which this penetration is possible is always the imagination but it may be energised through a variety of circumstances. The picture can produce this vision, ". . . nothing to breathe against/ no law to constrain me, to direct me/ no reason, no sense and everything seen/ in tones of blue'. Drugs can also change our perception and give us a new kind of experience — of color for example. Talking of L.S.D. and Heroin he says, 'there are two kinds of magic involved/at odds with each other/ The tension of two magics draws the mind out of itself/ The difference between the reality of art/ and the reality of drugs brings into being another 'reality'/ there is no color there is no particular reality . . ."

Sometimes it is the past which releases the imagination but sometimes it refuses to do so. One of Adamson's most affecting poems, "Come through the Glass Sally" is about this refusal. It suggests some of the devious ways in which we escape reality ("Have you made me up as well?"), the way the surface of experience slips by like a nightmare behind the glass. "I watched from behind the glass as the bland/ and clever executioners had you in tears . . ." It is one of the milder symptoms of schizophrenia to feel as though we are watching everything that happens as through a pane of glass. I believe that everybody has this experience at one time or another. Most of us suppress it and pretend it never happened. The schizophrenic is unable to do this; the experience gets hold of him and makes him suffer. The poet, though he suffers too, gets hold of the experience and uses it to deepen his understanding. Often Adamson's breaking through to something beyond involves a plunging into this sense of the unreality of people and what happens to them, of events and their consequences. The cry at the end of this poem is profound in that it touches deeps in us which we often choose to ignore; in spite of that it is universal. "Somehow though I think you're still around somewhere,/ so come through the glass Sally/ come where our phantoms pass./ Come through the glass Sally, come through the glass."

The holes through which it is possible to penetrate to the beyond become perceptible in various kinds of disjunction. "The Artemis Letters" suggests these holes in conversation, in action, in thought, in the continuity of our culture, even of our race, through which we can break if we will, "out beyond order, language adrift," moving "out beyond debased words," to quote from two other poems.

The trouble is that the poet has only "debased words" to work with if he is to express anything at all and when language is entirely "adrift" (it is not in Adamson's poems) it must break down as a means of sparking vision from one human being to another. This is very much the contradiction Lawrence himself was caught in when he railed against consciousness and against concepts. In spite of his anti-language, anti-verbal-communication theories ("Phantasmagoria of the Subconscious" and three or four other angry polemics) he had to use language and intellectual linguistic concepts whether he liked it or not and if he had not he could not have been a writer at all.

This difficulty does affect Adamson's poems. They give an excellent account of the holes through which we can break to something important beyond appearances and they talk very convincingly indeed about the experience of going through. We are in no doubt that Adamson has been there and many will need no convincing that it was important, but just what was the resulting vision? He mentions Traherne and the contrast between Adamson and the writer of Centuries of Meditation is striking and illuminating. The *Centuries* are certainly written from the other side. When Traherne tells us that 'The fields were orient and immortal wheat . . .' we have a double vision, of quite ordinary fields and of fields transformed through Traherne's imagination. Something similar happens in reading Blake. Traherne makes no attempt to tell us how he got there; he was through and that was all there was about it.

'When I go through,' Adamson tells us, 'it's into another empty space/ without you.' This recalls, 'there is no colour, there is no particular reality', already quoted. Some writers, John

Cowper Powys, for example in his prose, have been able to suggest a negative, a nothingness which is steep and splendid in its purity and remoteness from the human; by comparison Adamson's 'empty space' in these poems seems dull and relatively uninteresting.

The book begins with a quotation from Ezra Pound, who has always seemed to me the garbage man of world cultures but who appeals to a younger generation at least partly because he was a fascist, because he farted in the face of what are seen as the boring, hypocritical, sofa-arsed decencies of humanism. The quotation certainly satisfies the impulse to do dirt on pity as a virtue either in Christianity, in Blake's demonic universe or in the larger religious consciousness described by Huxley as *The Perennial Philosophy*. However it is much more to Adamson, and to do him justice, to Pound too, than simply that. Like most true romantic poets Adamson is dedicated to a particular demiurge embodied in the feminine principle which is represented in primitive mythology by the triple Moon-goddess who takes the form of maiden huntress, orgiastic nymph or mother and hag or witch. Artemis is one of her names. For the modern poet this dedication involves a sinking into the non-human or sub-human to listen to the voice of this demiurge. It involves a denial of personality, a denial of that self-expression, which is the aim of most false romantics, a subjection of the poet to the poem or anyway to the poetic impulse.

To put it that way is to sound solemn, but Artemis is overflowing with mocking laughter, sudden quips and darting, snide commentaries. In *Cross the Border* this aspect of the muse sometimes produces satire of an indirect, throw-away sort as in *The Literary Life* and occasionally self-mockery. 'Savage romantics imploding the guilt, any excuse/ every compromise.' It informs the verse with a tough, every-day matter-of-factness as a restorer of balance after most of the flights of energetic eloquence and sometimes takes the form of mock academic commentary on the poems themselves as in "Some Notes About the Angel". "The word Angel's allusiveness/ enters even a conceptual illustration./ The Angel has been thought up, so by illustration/ and *Angel's* illusive sense/ the word becomes useless to some ideal language." The prosiness is part of the elaborately jokey tone.

The book is presented in five sections. Of these "The Glorious Lie" is the longest and least even; however, it has more variety than the other sections. It begins with "The Angel" and its notes and goes on into a number of poems where the ostensible subject or the context of the breakthrough is the natural world: "The Heaven", "The Oceans", "The Ribbon Fish" "The River", "Sunlight, Moonlight", "The Nankeen Kestrels", "The Mullet Run". Some of these, like the Kestrel poem, are full of metaphysical complication, others like "Mullet Run" are on the surface simple, descriptive 'nature' poems. Suddenly there is a strong swing in manner and atmopshere in "Another Interlude of Winter Light" which is a response to Robert Duncan's poem "An Interlude of Winter Light". The context of the poetic experience becomes heavily laden with literary and other cultural references: Achilles, Patroclus, Idomeneus and a host of other Greek symbolic personae and, rubbing shoulders with them, Mallarmé, Botticelli and Ezra Pound. Of all Adamson's poems this reminds me most of Pound's literary junk-heaps and I like it less than anything else in the book, though the final lines relating the myth to the experience of Australian landscape are fine. "We live in the Mind" and "A Disruption" are love poems in a sense, attempting to relate the love relationship with other interior experiences. The third section of "A Disruption" which, like many other presented entities in the book, is really a sequence rather than a single poem, ends, "What love shall I make up?/ a pure being out from imagination/ or some composite drawn from what I know./ We walked around the shore/ of Black Wattle Bay/ you can't dismiss that fact." And the fourth section ends, "I have made up every heart I've loved and love/ why should they be less/ for this?" The verse is wry, alive and directly vigorous.

"The Grail Poems" which conclude the book are, among other things, an attempt to see the relation of the poet to the religious aspects of myth and to the life of our times. The invocation asks, "Lady, give me the temper/ That I might break away from the bonds of law,/ Fill me with ravenous appetites./ Let the tangle of history carry me through into the transforming body/ So that I enter your dance". The poet rejects the quest for the Grail. "The only Holy thing is song./ and this ecstatic Merlin knew, not letting on." But the poet is by no means seen as a winner on that account. In "Guinevere" the lady prefers heroes to poets. He cries in vain "My heart's in my words, Lady." And yet "Gawain", "Knight and Lady", "Lancelot" owe their very existence

to the imagination of the poet. In "The Stone" he says, 'Out of a number of words, poetry fashions/ a single new word which is total in itself/ and foreign to the language.' In "Camelot" the Arthurian myth is suddenly related to our own time and in particular to racial conflict in South Africa. The cycle ends with "The Grail" which he says 'Is a maiden. . . . "The Angel of Art".' "She is real I have held back inventing my muses/ *"What is unreal?"* She asks I have been unreal/ I have believed in the angels of my imagination for the sake/ of Belief Come Angel let us go out from all question of Faith/ and dwell in faith Let us show ourselves in public."

The "new wave" of poets, many of whom admire and to some extent follow Pound and the imagists, most of whom write loose verses taking off either from the "free verse" of the twenties or from later Americans like Ginsberg, Corso and others, have been around in Australia for so long that they are almost beginning to look trad. Adamson, however, brings a new energy to this stream in our poetry and I believe is likely to have an important effect on its development. *Cross the Border* is one of the most interesting books to have come my way in the time I have been reviewing. However, I must add that in spite of the excitement of many of its passages I couldn't find a single poem which I could enjoy for its architecture, shapeliness or completeness. Like Pound, Adamson deliberately goes for the fragmentary and often the formless. I know that my expectation is old fashioned and I know too that Adamson's admirers will see it as absurd and won't give it another thought. Still I regret even the present partial and temporary disappearance of the graceful dance which once delighted Artemis and will again.

STEWART ON SLESSOR

A. A. Phillips

Douglas Stewart: *A Man of Sydney* (Nelson, $10.95).

This volume is a compilation rather than a unified book—that comment does not necessarily imply a condemnation. Four of its seven chapters and two of its three appendices have already appeared in various periodicals. The rest have been added so that each major aspect of Slessor's life and achievements will be adequately discussed. Probably inevitably, this imposed purpose of filling in the gaps has not re-kindled the creative impulse of the original essays.

The volume begins admirably with Stewart's informal portrait of the man as he knew him. Stewart is well suited to such a task—though the word "task" fails to suggest the relaxed animation of the chapter's tone. It succeeds partly because Stewart knew the man intimately and delighted in him, partly because it is a kind of writing at which he excels. For this poet is also a master of familiar prose. Its rhythms flow and ripple, as modest and sure as a creek. Every now and then a lightly imaginative touch in the imagery reminds the reader that he is listening to a poet who is enjoying his holiday from the implacable disciplines of his art. The chapter is particularly effective in suggesting the atmosphere of the Sydney Bohemia in which Slessor loved to move.

Not that he was himself a Bohemian, as Stewart recognises. Indeed Slessor has recorded his dislike of the word. He delighted in ceremony and elegance. A meal hosted and cooked by Slessor was likely to have roast beef "cooked to just the right degree of rareness" as its main dish, and to end with port and walnuts. He was essentially a man of taste, both in the usual sense of possessing a delicate discrimination and in the more primal sense of rolling the flavors of life round his palate with relish. He enjoyed the pungency of a rich bit of bawdry no less than the subtle incense of ceremony. One of the flavors which he particularly relished was that of eccentric characters. Hence his love of Bohemia.

Slessor had other seeming contradictions. Poets often enough earn their bread-and-butter as journalists, but usually without enthusiasm. Slessor was an engaged professional with a pride in his skills, who fulfilled the exacting roles of leader-writer, war correspondent and editor. Moreover he was for some years a key-member of the staff of Smith's Weekly—and Stewart confirms my impression that he enjoyed the association. My only meeting with him was at a luncheon tendered to Commonwealth censors. Each of us fitted a little oddly into that gathering, and I silently blessed the official who seated us together. Slessor was as pleasant a companion as one could wish, but I was well aware that he was fulfilling a social duty, and that I had little chance of touching the man behind the easily-worn mask. Then the word "Smith's" slipped into the conversation and for a few moments warmth and a just detectable nostalgia glowed from him. It seemed a strange enthusiasm for the personality suggested by his poetry. How can one reconcile the chirpy larrikinism of Smith's with the sophisticated desolation of "Five Bells"?

Stewart dutifully faces the enigma which has most puzzled Slessor's admirers—his retreat to poetic silence at 43 when he had just achieved artistic maturity. Stewart conjectures that he had said all he wanted to say. That makes good sense; but I prefer my own guess—unsupported by any shred of evidence—that he sensed that he had reached his peak, and his fastidious taste shrank from the danger that he might reveal himself in decline. That would have been in character—but so many contradictious characteristics fitted into the mosaic of his personality.

Stewart follows this chapter with a more formal biography, and, despite some pleasant divagations, the word "task" here fits with unhappy accuracy. The preceding personal picture has stolen most of its thunder.

An engaged animation returns in the ensuing appreciation of Slessor's poetry. Stewart's experience of the creative process arms him with a sharp sense of how Slessor's technique works, and shields him from the critic's sin of treating technique as an end. Moreover he shares Slessor's traditionalism of approach. Slessor has acknowledged that Tennyson was his poetic instructor, and Stewart probably shares this unfashionable admiration. He uses, without embarrassment, such un-mod. terms of praise as "magic", "music" and "beauty". This is not only refreshing but fits the basic values of Slessor's poetic practice, despite its modern kind of scepticism and its firmness of intellectual bone.

At one point I thought Stewart had missed an essential recognition. Early in the chapter he notes three recurrent words in Slessor's usage—"bubbles", "crusted" and "lace"—and shrewdly suggests the significance of his addiction to them. At this point I mentally interjected, "Fair enough; but you've missed the right bus. The important repetitions are not these elegancies, but "death" and "dead". Moreover, unless I have fallen into wishful listening, the sound "d" is almost as pervasive in Slessor's mature work as it is in *"Macbeth"*. That sound in poetry is often the muffled drum-beat of a funeral march.

I should have guessed that Stewart was aware this and was merely holding back the ace of trumps to take the decisive trick:

> How persistent and pervasive throughout all his writing is the theme of elegy. He is a poet surrounded, as it were; at bay; surrounded by the implacable and hostile bush; by night and the stars; by "old witless lover-enemy, the sea"; by "Infinity's trap-door, eternal and merciless" . . .
>
> It is immensly comforting to sit down and dine with William Hickey or Adam McCay. But the darkness is always close outside. He is a poet intensely, tragically, passionately, even furiously, aware of the brevity of human life . . .

That penetrates close to the core of Slessor's communication.

But maybe it goes a shade awry in the implication conveyed by the emphatic placing of the phrase "brevity of life". I cannot accept that the complaint that life is short is Slessor's heart of darkness—perhaps because that complaint seems to me one of mankind's abiding sillinesses; "Short" is a comparative term; by what standard is our life short? To a sentient mosquito, it would seem an eternity. If the span of human existence were a thousand years, would that one jot diminish the bitter terror in our knowledge that it must end? Certainly Slessor is well aware of the fidget-wheels of time dragging each of us to his or her Sandwich Isle; but that is not the appalled fascination which dominates him. His gaze is held, not by the tininess of the island of life, but by the awe-ful ocean of nothingness which surrounds it. When he writes "But I hear nothing, nothing" he is recording a positive experience. He does not mean, "I did not hear anything", but what his words starkly say: and five tolls of the bell coldly echo them.

Further chapters deal with Slessor's lighter verse, with his prose, with Joe Lynch, the mourned friend of Five Bells. A discussion of Slessor's association with the Vision Group convincingly demonstrates that he was a more active and sympathetic collaborator with these Lindsay-inspired enthusiasts than he was later prepared to admit. These sections round out the book but do not add much of high quality. It must mainly rest on the virtues of the personal memoir and the appreciation of Slessor's poetry. They amply justify its purchase by all lovers of Slessor's work —and if their name is not legion, it ought to be.

RIGHT LEFT AND CENTRE

Jack Blake

Patrick O'Brien: *The Saviours: An intellectual history of the Left in Australia* (Drummond, $10.95).

A useful aspect of this book is that it brings together quotations from Ralph Gibson, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Judah Waten, Lance Sharkey

and others which are revelatory of the damage that Stalinism did in Australia — of the narrow, doctrinal approach to cultural, social and political problems. O'Brien shows that there are those who find it difficult, some who find it impossible, to complete the process of weaning themselves from Stalinism. But everywhere in this book Patrick O'Brien's own myopia is evident. He says Ralph Gibson mythologises the poverty in the great depression and exaggerates the significance of the 'Political Squad' of the Victorian police force. But at that time there was no dole at all, later there was a handout of groceries, and finally a tiny dole; an unemployed worker didn't have a hope in hell of raising two pounds for a fine — so it meant doing time. Blamey's Political Squad was small but it was not an isolated force; like 21 Division in Sydney it was a storm troop with the power of the entire metropolitan police force behind it. There were times in the depression when a large part of the total police force in both Melbourne and Sydney were led into action against the unemployed by these commando units. On this it is Gibson, not O'Brien, who sees things as they were.

O'Brien is not really concerned with Stalinism or its eradication as such. He wants it as a tag to categorize the entire Left. By sleight of hand he extends Stalinism to cover the whole field of commitment or, as he terms it, "the pathology of commitment". Having thus in his reductionist way defined all commitment to humanistic values as a pathological state he is able to include within his category of a diseased condition everything in Australian culture and politics which is not on the far right. Because of this there cannot be any refined analysis of the particularity of persons or trends in Australian life or history.

To rescue Joseph Furphy from the Left O'Brien makes one of his few ventures into literary criticism. His critique of *Such is Life* and *Rigby's Romance* reveals a failure to grasp the essential Furphy. The Bible, Rousseau, Proudhon, Wesley, Paine and Bellamy are among the explicit influences on Furphy's socialism in *Rigby's Romance* (a book he praises), but these are among the "secular and Christian humanist sources" of the ALP which O'Brien condemns on p. 65. Furphy's "Unless the democratic movement makes people better — more intelligent, conscientious and humane — it is not worth support" is precisely the kind of commitment which O'Brien rejects.

The author justifiably condemns the practices of Stalinism and then takes them over and uses them himself in reverse. The Stalinist looks upon a critique of CPSU policy or of this or that aspect of Soviet socialism as anti-Soviet; the far right rejects such a critique as worthless unless it is anti-Soviet.

O'Brien justly castigates Sharkey for taking over Vyshinsky's technique of guilt by analogy when Sharkey argued that Professor Anderson's thought was analagous to the "ideas of Hitlerism" (p. 52). But on p. 170 O'Brien says that Professor Manning Clark's praise of Whitlam "bears comparison with the German National Socialist view of Adolf Hitler . . ."

He claims the ALP has mythologized the concept of people and that the 1975 ALP conference could be parodied thus: "Oh, Little People — Women, Aborigines and Youth — Keep our policies Pure and Our Socialist Souls Holy" (p. 167). Alan Nicholls proved he was a "greylag" goose seeking after truth and justice by saying "he was a member of the Labour Club, a Christian, not a Communist, but by present standards to the Left of centre" (p. 75). O'Brien is truly the savior of us all.

There is a favorable reference on p. 161 to an article by Robert Murray in the Catholic Worker of August 1975 which argued that the ALP as presently structured had to be destroyed. The new "moderate social-democratic party" to be built on the ashes would have neither a socialist left nor a right wing. Perhaps this wingless creature would at least serve to dissolve Frank Knopfelmacher's fear of the "Phoenix of Labor" by leaving it without a political feather to fly with.

When W. G. Hayden says he is more concerned to change attitudes of people at the bottom rather than those at the top he reveals himself as a man governed by "religious fervour" (p. 173). When various ALP spokesmen criticised Victorian Premier Hamer for diverting federal funds away from working class suburbs, condemned the refusal of the NSW Liberal government to select an ALP member for Senator Murphy's replacement, or protested against the Liberal Party's role in the Vietnam war — all this was due to the ALP leaders' concept of mission (p. 174). Senator Ken Wriedt is pilloried as belonging to the ALP "occultist tradition" because he let it be known that he read Buddhist literature when he was at sea (p. 189). Patrick O'Brien's own preferences may be gleaned in an inverse way from his discussion of the "ALP 'spawn' groupings" on p. 180. The original forebears of the

ALP "were later joined on the fringes of the party by Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, gay and women's liberationists, radical libertarians, advocates of zero population growth, pro-abortionists and Third Worlders" (p. 169).

The adoption by the Whitlam government of the WHO definition of health as a state of "complete physical, mental and social well-being" borders on a totalistic political philosophy (p. 192). In Australia we have an ill-educated and confused cultural intelligentsia. ALP leaders, because they want to be seen as a force for progress, are compelled to continue denouncing "the 'devil' and his works of reaction in the form of 'racism', 'sexism', 'colonialism' 'individualism', 'commercialism', 'capitalism', and the like" (pp. 190-91).

Good titles of books are often hard to come by, but this is no intellectual history of the Left in Australia.

A STORY OF AUSTRALIAN RACISM

Lloyd Robson

Joan Clarke: *Dr. Max Herz: Surgeon Extraordinary* (Apcol, $13.95).

It did not do to be of German origin in Australia during the Great War. More people than one might think have reason to remember that war, not because it brought forth the Anzac legend but because it exposed their 'alien' origins.

No matter how long your family had been in Australia or whether or not you had relatives actually fighting in the first A.I.F., if your name had a German sound to it, then pity help you.

Actually it did not even have to be German or Austrian. Mobs in Melbourne marked the outbreak of the conflict in Europe by going on a rampage and smashing Chinese shops. Why Chinese ? God only knows, but they were foreigners and that was enough, I suppose. After all, Australians had an impressively horrible background of xenophobia, and the Chinese were a standing target for the super-patriots and the crazies.

More people than enough are unhinged. I recall that when doing research in the Australian Archives on the Great War I was really staggered by the number of people who fearlessly and anonymously informed on their neighbors on the flimsiest of grounds. There were spies everywhere in Australia during the war, if you looked for them. To the alert patriot any rifle shot anywhere was a German practising to take over the country; 'they' would poison the water supply of Melbourne, burn down haystacks, signal to German raiders poised just over the horizon, fly kites carrying wireless aerials. The government even grounded pigeons because the birds would obviously be used by the German spies to carry messages.

Incidentally, no German spies were caught in Australia during the Great War. Perhaps this was due to the unceasing vigilance of the Hun-hunters and the government instrumentalities which locked up people who could not demonstrate their loyalty to the Empire in a satisfactory way. Perhaps not.

One such person is the subject of this study, aptly sub-titled "The human price of civil and medical bigotry in Australia".

Maximillian Markus Herz was born in Germany in 1876, became a specialist in new forms of orthopaedic surgery and early in 1903 left Europe to come to New Zealand with Hugo Friedlander, a Pole who had settled in that dominion, done well but then unfortunately suffered an injury to his back which paralysed his legs. He had gone to Europe seeking medical treatment and there induced Herz to return with him to continue the treatment.

In New Zealand Herz continued his specialized surgical work, branched out and with typical energy and enthusiasm began writing pieces on this new land for the Berlin Tageblatt. He also married Ethel Cohen, a Sydney girl he met in New Zealand, took her on a trip to Europe and then, seeking wider fields, came to Sydney in 1910.

I am not competent to judge Herz's contribution to his chosen field of medicine, but he appears to have been on the frontiers of knowledge in his treatment of crippled limbs. He was not, however, a man to suffer fools gladly or, indeed, at all. He voiced his opinions without fear or favor and did not make a lot of friends in New Zealand when his book on that country deplored its inhabitants' lack of a sense of humor.

Herz was deeply hurt and bewildered when Britain went to war with the Germany of which he had very happy memories. The doctor became outraged when he began reading the anti-Hun tales which began to appear in the papers. He confided his furious thoughts to a private notebook which was subsequently examined by the police.

Then the censor intercepted a letter to Herz from America, sent by an ex-member of the

Austrian embassy. This included a very clumsy code which was readily translated as a sentence recording that the Gallipoli campaign was a fiasco and that Germany was doing well in the war.

Herz then offered his services to the military authorities in Australia to help establish a military orthopaedic hospital. He trusted that "my German descent and education will not prevent the authorities from making use of my large experience in this branch". Two days later he was arrested on a warrant signed by the Defence Minister, Senator Pearce.

From then on, this book is an account of how Herz was interned at Holdsworthy and Trial Bay and of how he and his solicitors and wife fought for years to regain his freedom. Joan Clarke had access to a number of Australian Archives files on the subject, made available to her after some difficulties, and it is these documents which form the basis of her analysis and narrative.

The buck-passing, bloody-mindedness and intricacies of the civil and military bureaucracies are beyond me. I think there was not only a vindictiveness there, however; surely Mrs. Clarke will allow a certain amount of sheer incompetence as well? As it is, I think she and Professor Sol Encel (who writes a forthright foreword) perhaps too easily place blame on W. M. Hughes, Senator Pearce and their civil servants for the disgraceful treatment of an eminent physician. Even given the criminal consistency of the authorities in disregarding the welfare of Herz's patients, the author perhaps underestimates the viciousness of feeling against Germans.

Granted, the B.M.A. (as the Australian Medical Association was then) should have known better, but consider the background and the brain-washing by the Allied propaganda machines. What were people to think when the British actually instigated an official enquiry into alleged German war atrocities? Was it not commonly held that the Germans rendered down human bodies for their fat content? Behind the whole Herz case were the never-ending killing matches on the Western Front.

Too many people had lost too many friends and relatives to regard the conflict in Europe with any vestige of rationality. Australians, including members of the B.M.A. and high government officials, were beyond the reach of reason and argument. Herz was the victim of a world gone berserk.

But the B.M.A. does emerge very badly from this book. Only Dr. J. W. B. Bean (brother of C. E. W. Bean, the official war historian) was prepared to stand up in a B.M.A. meeting and defend Herz against his fellow-doctors' vindictiveness.

The R.S.L. (or rather, its antecedent) excelled itself too in hatred of Herz, passing a resolution about the laxity of the government in permitting the German surgeon to remain in Australia at all. Send all the Huns back home! was the sentiment.

Herz was released in April 1920, Sir Robert Garran emerging as the one person with credit on the government side. He appears to have been responsible for Herz's release — but then, Garran stood head and shoulders above others in the employ of the government.

This is a valuable book in terms of man's inhumanity to man and in terms of a study of a federal bureaucracy at byzantine and secret work. Mrs. Clarke permits herself to be carried away a little at the fond memory of Herz and his persecution, and her style occasionally teeters on the edge of sentimentality. But perhaps that is not a bad thing in the circumstances. It is not very funny to be sent to Coventry by one's fellow professionals. That certainly happened to Herz the minute the war broke out; it is much less humorous to serve time in Australian concentration camps.

AUSTRALIAN FILM-MAKER

Ina Bertrand

Ken G. Hall: *Directed by Ken G. Hall: autobiography of an Australian film-maker* (Lansdowne, $14.95).

In recent years, as the film production industry has revived, Australians have rediscovered their film heritage. In the past year there have been two books of reminiscences from people with first-hand experience: Lyle Penn's story *The Picture Show Man* was freely translated to the screen, and now we have Ken Hall's autobiography.

Like the Australian Film Institute, which in 1976 presented Hall with the Longford Award for an "outstanding contribution to Australian film-making" specifically for "the years at Cinesound 1932-1940", Hall concentrates on his years as a feature film director. But in fact his long life spans nearly the whole of the history of film in Australia.

The first moving pictures were shown in Australia in 1896, less than five years before the arrival of young Ken. His earliest contact with "pitchers" was at the North Sydney Oval, visited weekly by Jerdan's Moving Pictures. Patrons sat on the grass, watching the pictures flickering on a sheet, while small boys evaded the payment of the threepence entrance fee by eluding the guards and slipping over the picket fence. Of the films themselves, Hall's most vivid memories are of the Frenchman Max Lindler and the Italian Tontolini, but he is wrong to conclude from this that Europeans dominated Australian screens in the early days. Australians were enthusiastic also about films produced by Britain's R. W. Paul or Cecil Hepworth, America's (not yet Hollywood's) Bronco Billy Anderson or Edwin S. Porter, or Australia's own Johnson and Gibson, Cousins Spencer or Tait Brothers.

In later years, after a brief period as a journalist, Hall entered the film industry on the publicity staff of Union Theatres and Australasian Films. This is an aspect of the industry which has been given scant attention by historians and journalists so far, and it is disappointing that Hall gives only a tantalising glimpse of a job that involved "creating advertising campaigns, designing advertisements, posters, displays and dreaming up street stunts, balloon rides, aeroplane dodger drops, anything and everything that would help to sell a film" (p. 25). In this publicity role, in a short stint in cinema management, and in editing films and titles to meet censorship requirements, Hall was preparing himself for his career as a director/producer at Cinesound.

In describing these Cinesound years Hall no longer has to link up the racy anecdotes with material culled from secondary sources — his touch is much surer, and even the verbatim reports of conversations become more convincing. Hall was invited to direct the first sound feature proposed for production by the Union Theatres/Australasian Film group. The success of this first effort — a film version of Bert Bailey's successful stage show "On Our Selection" — secured for Hall a continuing place at the head of the new production subsidiary — Cinesound.

He is a skilled raconteur, describing with great humor incidents such as his first meeting with Bert Bailey, or his problems with an errant bull or with a touchy prime minister, neither of whom was willing to "take direction". A fine selection of illustrations complements the text — stills from the films, publicity shots of the stars, reprints from trade publications. Most interesting of all are the occasional shots of "how it was done" — 'George' Kenyon beside his three foot high model forest for the timber drive in "Tall Timbers", the crew in position to film the animals in the opening sequence of "Orphans of the Wilderness", or the camera mounted on a sled to take low angle tracking shots of the racehorses in "Thoroughbred".

Hall is scrupulously fair, both in acknowledging the contribution of people like Arthur Smith and Bert Cross and 'George' Kenyon to the success of Cinesound, and in recognising the achievements of Cinesound's competitors (notably F. W. Thring and Charles Chauvel).

But his overall view of the thirties is an idealised one.

Certainly, Cinesound had its problems. Hall describes how the crew built equipment and taught themselves to use it, while others in the industry imported top-quality gear and expertise. He is justly proud of the achievements of Cinesound's technicians in circumventing physical limitations, and finally developing a sound system as good as any in Australia and outstanding skills in areas such as special effects and back projection. Hall's own greatest problem was relations with the parent company: he became adept at predicting audience response in order to protect his principals from loss and so convince them that Cinesound was worth maintaining. The change of management which brought the English Rank company into power in the group finally defeated these efforts and so feature production by Cinesound ended in 1940.

It is natural that after surviving the gradual winding down of the production operation over the ensuing sixteen years Hall should look back on the thirties with rose-tinted spectacles. He sees the unbroken string of successes achieved by his gifted and enthusiastic team and concludes from this that the thirties was one of the "few bright patches" (p. 197) in the history of the Australian industry.

In fact, Cinesound was untypical of the industry at the time. For a few brief years at the beginning of the thirties F. W. Thring achieved a goal which continued to elude Hall — continuous production. But to do so he sunk his whole private fortune and in Hall's own words he "did not achieve the success his effort and financial courage deserved". He died in 1936 much poorer

for the attempt and without having produced a single outstanding success either critically or at the box-office. Charles Chauvel did achieve critical acclaim in this period and later, but was forced to scrape along from one film to the next, expending far too much time and effort in trying to "sell" his product either to a backer or to a distributor.

The coincidence in the early thirties of the arrival of sound, requiring higher budgets for film production, and the Depression, restricting sources of finance. put an end to a number of promising careers. The McDonagh sisters gave up after one attempt at a sound film and the career of Raymond Longford, the outstanding director of the silent period, sank into mediocrity. Many small companies were set up in anticipation of a boom in the industry if the recommendations of the 1927-8 royal commission into the moving picture industry were implemented. Competition for the production of Australia's first sound feature kept them going for a couple of years, but they all faded away soon after. Many independent production companies survived for only one film, and some films were never released at all (Hall himself mentions "The Burgomeister"). A few were modest financial successes, like Pat Hanna's "Diggers", but this is not enough to disguise the serious plight of the industry in the thirties.

If ever there was a "bright patch', it was much earlier, during and just after World War I, when good quality low-budget films were comparatively easy to sell and could get adequate returns on the home market. As the twenties progressed, the grip of foreign distribution agencies tightened and by the thirties it was almost complete. Thring and Chauvel fought it — occasionally successfully. Hall never had to — he operated within the only major Australian competitor to the foreign distributors.

This should not be allowed to undervalue his achievement at Cinesound. Unfortunately, however, his distorted view of the thirties as some sort of "golden age" leads him to some quite unjustifiable criticisms of the present industry. The success rate which he quotes with much disdain (9 of 32 feature films in recent years) is no lower than that of the thirties, and it is occurring in a period when television has completely destroyed the audience patterns which made possible the sort of predictions of viability which Hall himself was so good at. After all, the screenplay of "Jaws" was knocked back by a top American production company as being only possibly suitable for TV, and then went on to break all box-office records.

Similarly, his complaints about the R-certificate are unrealistic. Rather than having caused the departure of the family audience, as Hall claims, the R film is aimed at drawing back a part of that audience which deserted cinemas for television long before the R-certificate arrived. And exploiting censorship in film publicity has been a common gambit in the industry from its beginning — Hall himself found his skirmishes with Chief Censor O'Reilly profitable as well as irritating, for instance with "The Silence of Dean Maitland".

Tim Burstall's recent analysis of the current industry in the Bulletin (24 September, 1977), or Sylvia Lawson's critique of current production in John Tulloch's book (*Conflict and Control in the Cinema*, Macmillan 1977) are far more enlightening and perceptive than Hall's last two chapters. But the bulk of Hall's book is an invaluable record of one man's contribution to a vital part of our history, as well as a darn good yarn.

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