

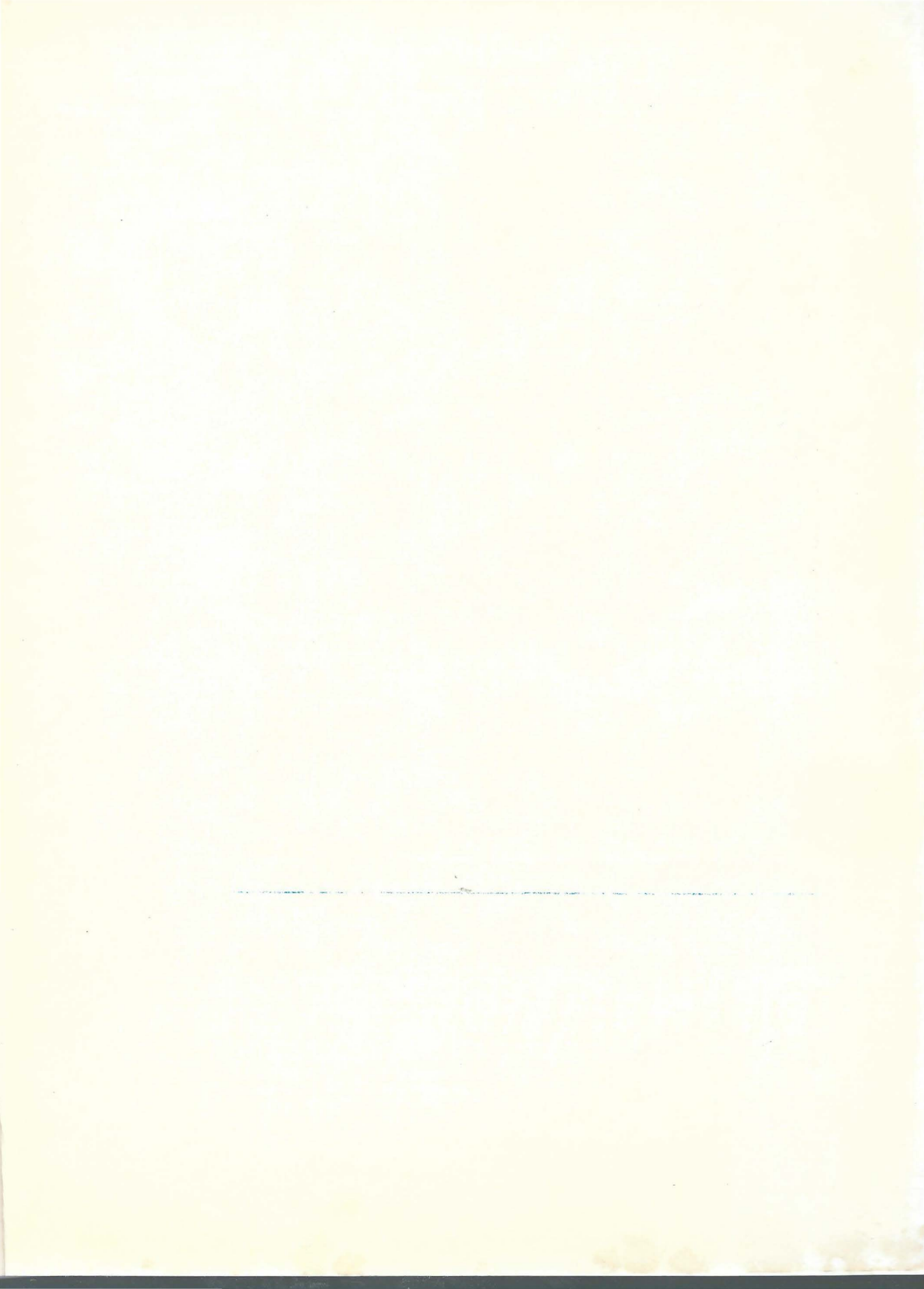
73

# overland

Registered for posting as a publication. Category B



**stories**  
**features**  
**poetry**  
**\$2**



**stories** PUSSY LOVE *Laurie Clancy* 3  
 REFUGEES *Victor Kelleher* 9  
 WHEN I AM REAL *Frank Kellaway* 25  
 LOSING THE LIGHT *John Bechervaise* 28

**features** JOSEPH FURPHY AND THE PICARESQUE  
*Dennis Douglas* 15  
 "WHERE ARE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?"  
*Eunice Oldfield* 33  
 ALAN MARSHALL'S FACTORY *Elaine Lindsay* 42  
 SWAG *John McLaren* 45  
 JOHN MANIFOLD: LIFE AND WORK *David Malouf* 47  
 THE BOX 'Halcyon' 55  
 THE LOGIC OF THE THORN BIRDS *K. A. McKenzie* 58  
 BOOKS 61

**poetry** WINTER SOLSTICE *Dorothy Hewett* 6  
*Andrew Flett* 34, *John Blight* 34, *Rae Desmond Jones* 34,  
*Ronald Bottrall* 35, *Russell Deeble* 35, *Maurice Standgard* 35,  
*David Campbell* 36, *R. G. Hay* 36, *Denis Kevans* 36, *Allan*  
*Jurd* 36, *Larry Buttrose* 37, *John Foulcher* 37, *Graham Row-*  
*lands* 37, *V. Glen Washburn* 38, *M. J. Redfern* 38, *Philip*  
*Nielson* 38, *Michael Harlow* 39, *Susan Hampton* 39, 44,  
*Mark O'Connor* 44

**graphics** Cover photographs of Dorothy Hewett and photographs (pp. 40-41)  
 of Australian poets reading at the 1978 Montsalvat Poetry Festival  
 by George Apostilidis.

Printing: Bob Cugley and National Press

Type-setting: Ern Lee

Compositor: Gary Emond

*Overland* is a quarterly literary magazine.

The subscription rate is eight dollars a year (four issues); for students, Niuginians, pensioners the subscription is four dollars. Life subscriptions are available for \$100 each. These will remain current for the life of the subscriber or of the magazine, whichever is shorter.

Manuscripts are welcomed but s.a.e. required.

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

Address all correspondence:

Editor, *Overland*. GPO Box 98a, Melbourne 3001.

Editor: Stephen Murray-Smith (on leave).

Acting Editor: John McLaren.

Associate Editors: Ian Turner, Barrie Reid, Vane Lindesay.

Editorial Advisers: Dorothy Hewett (Sydney), Jim Gale (Adelaide),  
 Donald Grant (Perth), Laurence Collinson (London).

ISSN 0030-7416

Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

1978

73

LAURIE CLANCY **Pussy Love**

My uncle Herbert was a perfectly normal man in all but one respect. He was a successful freelance writer for wealthy magazines such as Reader's Digest, Coca Cola Monthly and Qantas News, and earned quite a lot of money. He paid his dues at the Church of All Nations, was a member of the Carlton Association and had three times lain down on unfinished freeways in protest. He had stood unsuccessfully as a local councillor, had a beach house in Mt. Eliza, was married with three children, and went along to watch Carlton play during the football season, whenever the game was at Princes Park. His was in all ways an exemplary life. Except for one thing—he liked looking up women's dresses.

Most of his life, I eventually discovered, was spent in subterfuge. Outwardly respectable, with a table regularly reserved for him with his name written on it in chalk at Jimmy Watson's on Friday afternoons, he lived in a perpetual agony of fear that someone would one day find his guilty secret out.

One Sunday afternoon I drove out to my parents' house in Kew to attend a barbecue my father was arranging for the local Labor candidate. I wouldn't have gone except that they insisted. To me, the suburbs were hell. Hades St., Hawthorn . . . Acheron Avenue, Camberwell . . . Cerberus Street, Donvale. My parents had a beautiful garden at the back of the house that looked onto the Yarra, the only consolation, and that was where the barbecue was being held. I wandered through the open house and out the back verandah. It was spring and the flowers were all in bloom. Poppies popped, roses rose, snapdragons snapped, and the heady smell of frangipanis wafted over the breeze. Out in the back garden I found my uncle Herbert lying under the mainbuffet table, staring wistfully up at the blazing afternoon sky. Women were circling about

the table, arranging the distribution of salads. I thought he might be a little dazed by the heat and wondered whether I should fetch some wet towels.

"Gazing at the stars, eh, uncle Herbert?" I said jocularly. "It's a bit early for that."

"Oh." He started when I touched his arm. "Oh, it's you, Sam. Come on in."

I grabbed a can and crawled under the trestles with him, while Herb peeped cautiously from under the table cloth and groaned once or twice, as if in pain. I looked at him curiously but said nothing. I recognised the lower half of my sister Laura passing by and commented idly, "Nice pair of Dutch Pegs." He shot a terrified glance at me, as if I had suddenly probed into his soul. "Maybe," he said slowly, "Maybe you can help me. You work at a university. You must be bright. Everyone says you're going to be a writer."

Ignoring the fallacy of his initial assumption I said modestly, "You're a successful writer yourself, Herb."

"Oh, come off it, Sam. You know what sort of crap I write. Duty-free shopping in Zanzibar. Visit lovely Singapore. Helping the local mayor to write his autobiography." He looked down at his spreading waist-line sadly. "I must be the portliest ghost in the business. Come on, we'd better cook the meat and I'll tell you about it." With difficulty he crawled out from under the table, casting one or two nostalgic glances backwards. "Ho, ho, I'm the cook," he called plaintively, as he put on the big chef's hat and apron.

Balding, red-faced, his spectacles glinting like armour in the sun, he began to talk. Perspiration streamed from him and down into his can of Foster's as he turned the chops, so that it seemed almost as if he himself were alight. "You won't tell Nancy and the kids, will you, Sam?" he in-

quired anxiously when he had finished. "I had to tell someone."

"I'm glad you told me. It explains one thing that's always puzzled me—why you've got that still of Marilyn Monroe with her skirt flying up around her waist in 'The Seven Year Itch' hanging on your wall. I never thought of you as a film buff."

"I've seen that film seven times," Herb admitted. "And I still don't like it."

"I don't see what you're worried about," I said earnestly. "I like looking up girls dresses too. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Sssh," he said frantically, grabbing a bowl of potato salad off the table as if it were a hidden microphone. "Nobody must know," he groaned loudly. "Don't you understand? I'm forty-nine years old. I'm married with three grown-up children. This is getting to be an obsession with me." He looked mildly desperate. "I thought you could help me, Sam." I pondered the problem for a while. My uncle Herb Pervis was a nice man, widely popular and respected, and I felt rather sorry for him. He had a friendly open manner that won him many contacts for commissioned pieces—the pubs of Melbourne (an assignment on which he'd worked with particular dedication), a picture book of Fitzroy for which he'd written the text, even once when he was desperate for cash in his early days, a history of Port Fairy. He would come up to people in his large-hearted way and say cheerfully, "Herb Pervis is the name. Perve by name and perve by nature." Strangers would be disarmed immediately, not knowing that he meant it quite literally; that, Dimmesdale-like, he prayed constantly for his guilty secret to come out.

"Look, this is the situation as I see it. You either have to stop feeling guilty about this little habit of yours and enjoy it thoroughly, or you have to be cured of it. If, as you say, you can't do the first then the best thing is to see a psychoanalyst. The source of this is bound to be somewhere in the experiences of your childhood. Once you understand its cause you can root it out. I have friends who can recommend someone reliable." I sounded to myself as if I were arranging another abortion.

"Thanks, Sam," he said doubtfully. I left him, feeling reasonably pleased with myself. It didn't seem to me to be in insoluble problem. If the analyst didn't work, I had a vague idea of what I was going to do next. I left the barbecue half an hour later. On the way out I passed through

the lounge and noticed a pretty young woman high up on a ladder with Herb below instructing her were to hang the picture.

It was nearly a month before I saw him again. He had come over to the Baillieu to visit me where he knew I usually sat, on the third floor, but he never made it upstairs. I found him in the basement when I went down to the serials section to look up a magazine. Herb was looking up something else. When I saw him he was gazing thoughtfully at the floor above, through the spaces between the stairs. He had been there, he said, for nearly three hours. A hard-eyed blonde in a mini-skirt stared angrily at us as she passed.

"That's the ninth time she's been up and down those stairs," Herb said mournfully.

"The psychoanalyst didn't do any good, eh?"

"He was all right, Sam. I'm not blaming you."

Herb was crouched in the corner, his eyes only occasionally flicking upwards, like a man watching a blue movie in a darkened cinema, who is half trying to immerse himself in the show and half wondering whether the rest of the audience is not, in reality, watching him. "He was a bit of a trendy, you know."

I looked at him in surprise. Living in Carlton in his old, renovated terrace house must be finally getting to Herb. Soon he would be talking of "making it" on "the writing scene" or "relating to" people. He suggested we go back to his place where he would tell me what happened.

He led me into his study, told me to sit down, and went to fetch a cup of coffee. While he was out I looked around the room. It was superbly laid out. Sandbagged walls on which hung prints of Lester Johnson and Albert Tucker. A large, comfortable mahogany desk where he apparently did all his writing. A steel filing cabinet over in one corner and shelves on one wall that went right to the ceiling. The floor laid with roofing tiles, over which had been flung a huge rug in the design of a map of the world, sent to him by a cosmopolitan relative in New York. While I sat and waited he began to pace listlessly up and down the rug, stopping for a moment on India.

Herb had been shown into a smartly furnished office in Collins St, everything done up in contemporary style, including the blonde secretary whose slacks looked as if they'd been sprayed on. A tall moustached man of about thirty-five came bounding out from behind his desk to greet him. He wore a reddish cravat, the colour of his hair.

"Trevor Shepherd is my name," he said, smiling confidently and putting out his hand. "Call me Trev."

"Herb Pervis," said my uncle, without his usual conviction. "Perve by name and perve by nature."

"Ah, that's very interesting." Trev narrowed his eyes and squinted closely at Herb. "And when did you start greeting people like that?"

"Aw, I dunno," said my bewildered uncle, allowing himself to be led over to the couch by the window.

"That probably helps explain your little, ah, habit."

Herb was no genius, but as he was fond of telling me, he hadn't come down in the last rain. "Does every man named Taylor go into the clothing business? Does every Baker feel a compulsion to cook bread?", he asked with lofty rhetoric. Trev looked sulky and changed the subject.

I had become distracted from Uncle Herbert's unexciting little narrative by a preying mantis that had somehow found its way into the room and was walking across the desk. I watched its unsteady progress down a page of Herb's open dictionary. Auxanometer . . . auxiliary . . . auxis . . . avadavat . . . It seemed to take an age to wobble through its education until at last it reached avaut and suddenly took off.

"Then he took me into a room with four or five other people and told us we were going to do something called the primal . . . primal . . ."

"Primal scream?"

"That's right." He shuddered. "It was awful."

There were five of them in the room, a ferocious looking young man named Bill, with very long hair, whom Herb described as a hippy; his very nervous girl friend; a frightened looking young woman who turned out to be a primary school teacher who had had a nervous break down because she couldn't discipline her five year olds; and a man in clerical collar who said nothing and joined in the exercises with a marked lack of enthusiasm. They chatted among themselves for a while and Herb confided to the teacher how much he hated slacks on a woman; they were so unfeminine.

Trev smiling ingratiatingly, clapped his hands for attention. "Now I want you to get rid of all your inhibitions. We're all going to yell at the top of our lungs, as loud as we can. You first, Herb. WHOOO!" He demonstrated.

"Whooo!", went Herb limply.

"Now come on, you can do much better than that. WHOOOOO!"

"Whoooooo!"

"That's better, but you can do a lot better still. Now everyone join in. WHOOOOO!"

"WHOO! Whooooo!" The teacher and the girl friend gave piteous little yelps, the clerical gentleman cleared his throat nervously in a short, sharp bark, and Bill, entering into the spirit of things, gave a blood-curdling scream that drew a pleased nod from Trev.

"A big effort now. WHOOOOO!"

"Whoooooo!" Herb put everything he had into the next one. "WHOOOOO!" His top plate shot from his mouth and flew across the room.

"That's good," said Trev. "That's losing your inhibitions."

"It's lothing my teeth, too," said Herb going to retrieve them.

Bill was thoroughly worked up by now. Giving another fiercely simian yell he lunged at Trev and dragged him down to the floor. The coffee table went over with a crash. "Thats good, that's los- . . .", said the desperately smiling instructor before Bill got him into a half Nelson and started pounding his head against the sofa. The cleric and Herb grabbed him from behind and pulled as hard as they could. With a sudden lurch Bill came away and the two of them went ricocheting back against the opposite wall. Trev got to his feet and began to straighten his tie. He looked slightly pale but was still smiling.

"That's very good for a start. I think that will do us for today. Come back tomorrow at three." Herb had remained on the floor, looking up at the teacher.

"Well, I wasn't going to have a bar of that," he told me glumly, pulling up a chair for himself and sitting down on Mozambique. "I woke up the next morning with my chest sore and my tonsils feeling as if they'd been torn out of my throat. I went back the next day and told him I wouldn't be in it, and he looked disappointed and told me he'd put me in a session. He started asking a lot of questions, pretty useless ones I thought, but at last we got somewhere. I told him about Florence.

"Once when I was a kid in primary school there was this beautiful Ceylonese girl — she sang 'Shine on, Harvest Moon' at the school concert in a way that I'd never heard it sung before. I fell in love with her. Then one day she came to school without any knickers on and one of the other girls noticed. Her mother had been too poor to buy her a new pair. Well, the girl told the other kids and they gave her hell. Kept

lifting up her dress and looking at it, making jokes, that kind of thing. I felt sorry for her and didn't look, though I was too much of a coward to do anything about it. Finally they chased her into the school toilets and when they'd flushed her out from there kicked her out of the school yard altogether. She didn't come back next day and I never saw her again."

Trev grew greatly excited. "We've got it," he said. "We understand completely what happened. You've been compensating for missing out on that childhood experience of looking up that girl's dress. You've been acting out these frustrations in adult life. Plus your sense of guilt at not rushing in to protect the girl."

"My oath," said Herb, but he still looked miserable.

"What's the matter? Don't you understand what's causing you to do this? You're cured!"

"I understand perfectly," said Herb. "But I still like looking up girls' dresses."

In disgust the analyst had kicked him out.

The next time I saw Uncle Herb was a while later at Jimmy Watson's where I had called in for a drink after my last lecture for the year. I had thought I might find him there. I watched him while I was still at the bar fetching a glass of red. He was continually dropping his cigarette and having to search for it on the floor, from which he peered furtively up from time to time. He became aware of a pair of size twelve shoes

within range of his vision and looked up without hope.

"Hi, uncle Herb."

"Hello, Sam."

"Well, I've found someone."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you weren't able to be cured. So you might as well enjoy it without guilt. And I've found just the right person for you, a girl called Dani. She's a girl who likes to have men look up her dress when she's not wearing briefs. It turns her on." This was not, in fact, strictly true, but I didn't want the poor old pervert to feel uncomfortable or obliged. I had had to do some very fast talking and make some large promises, call on old favours and appeal to her better nature, to persuade Dani to be in on this, but I felt I owed it to Herb. "I can introduce you tonight. You shouldn't have any trouble at all."

He stared at me incredulously. "Ah, Sam," he said. "Sam, you shouldn't have. I don't understand you young people these days. Did you really think I'd be in that? Me, with a wife and three kids?"

I was so angry I didn't know what to say. What a fool I'd been, once again interfering in other peoples lives, thinking it would be of some use. I left him there, with my glass of red on his table, smearing his name. I looked back as I went out the door and he had just dropped his cigarette on the floor and was looking around for it.

## Helix

Helix is an international magazine which welcomes submissions from artists anywhere. In its first 2 issues it has already published work by Margaret Atwood, Les Murray, Rosemary Dobson, D. M. Thomas, Peter Redgrove, Robert Lowell, David Campbell, Galway Kinnell, Gwen Harwood, Mark Strand, Eugenio Montale, George McWhirter, Anna Akhmatova, Ostap Vyshnia, R. S. Thomas, Ian Crichton Smith, Anne Elder and many others less established. As well as fiction and verse we are looking for memoirs, travel and accounts of unpublished manuscripts or correspondence. Lively and clear academic criticism is welcome. Send your work with return postage to 119 Maltravers Road, Ivanhoe, Australia 3079. Subscriptions are \$6.00 a year from the same address.

**Winter  
Solstice**  
DOROTHY HEWETT

May

I

At Bergamui by the lake  
I watch a dragonfly descend  
predicting that you will forsake  
me long before the promised end:  
the bellbird trembles glassily;  
touching your child as surrogate  
all is revealed, aghast I see  
how I will immolate & burn  
before our flesh begins to learn  
the stations of adultery . . .

my mortal hand begins to play  
with leaves & grass & eerily  
the child to say:  
*she does not live with you & me*  
the hoax the joke the booby prize!  
a porpoise tumbles in the bay,  
I twist the knife, I shake, I rise,  
past luminous mushrooms on the track  
the child is carried piggyback;  
I try this hair shirt-on for size . . .

none are defeated, none can win,  
the war is fought, the end of joy,  
unlearning trust I follow him,  
Helen has laid her lover boy:  
what happens now, in silence grown  
above the sea the rain sweeps in,  
the die is cast, the bird has flown:  
(a figurehead with amorous lips  
ploughed under by the thousand ships)  
the story ends the woman's known.

*Envoi*

My darling while these flickering lights  
transfigure all the empty sea,  
we make a love so absolute  
so full of sexual energy:  
(what is the little death of love  
but loss of an identity)  
to be reflected in your eyes  
I take the loss & count the prize.

II

June

The night is coming down  
under the arbor a misy rain is falling  
there are no letters I miss you  
on this lowering evening in June.

I dream myself back to the balcony  
on our bedcover the red leaves tatter cling  
sentimentally I put them into my pocket  
to scatter a fortnight later on the drycleaner's floor.

O these metaphysical voyages  
to the room where you first made love  
& crawled drunk up the mountain.

I am locked under the beach house where the sea thundered  
screaming amongst the dead kittens  
let out by the grandmother a dry wen on her chin  
waiting to rise up to heaven  
conch shells border her path she collected them  
flying in bombazine her black bootprints mix it with the gulls.

Tender vulnerable as the lovers in Nabokov's *Ada*  
lips feverish with kisses we traverse these gardens  
rivers stone steps conversations  
the little city becomes an etching for Blake's Jerusalem  
the estuary glistens red leaves litter the garden  
in the stone house above the Sound we live for an hour  
with our books & printing presses



late at night my breasts droop from my satin nightgown  
but that's all over elegance silence violence rule the days

the stone house on the mountain was auctioned in early June  
I say your name over & over to convince myself  
you still exist in the world.

July

III  
*Seeking heroics we become absurd*  
— Tim Thorne

I was Kilroy's girl  
Kilroy got around  
Launceston Sydney Perth  
his whisky bottle  
pressed to my groin  
we danced cheek to cheek  
he was so tall  
he had to jack-knife  
down to reach me.

That was him  
the New England submarine  
rating who wanted me  
to wear his stickpin  
(class of '41)  
the Texan blind date I scored  
to the Thanksgiving Dinner  
(who put whipped cream on his steak)

That was me  
the one who wasn't aborted  
Jocasta at the crossroads  
with the rabbitskin jacket  
& the little stranger.

It's the old story  
Oedipus zipping up his fly  
thigh-high boots  
& High Noon trousers

wondering whether  
to live it up this year  
Jocasta nude on the bed  
Tiresius in the corner  
reading the Gideon bible

& Kilroy  
blind at 54  
driving a Cadillac  
through L.A.  
with an alcohol content  
of .08.

IV

August  
So I have come to Camelot  
with fife & bell & beating drum  
to die the little death I come  
to lie beside my Lancelot.

By silent towers the rivers run  
unbuckle now & naked lie  
breast to breast & tender thigh  
my darling dark & armoured one.

Beneath the turret & the bell  
take up your sword my Lancelot  
& come at last to Camelot  
to bed with her who loves you well.

A bird is spelling in a tree  
I am the wild girl in your heart  
who must upset the apple-cart  
& ask you questions one two three.

Then gravely answered Lancelot  
O you can ask but never know  
until the turrets ache with snow  
& we have gone from Camelot

the heart to beat the wheel to turn  
the mystery that all must know  
logic & love together go  
this is the answer you must learn . . .

time is like the rain Shalott  
beating outside our whitewashed cell  
& knowledge is the fruit of hell  
it lies upon the ground to rot

so if I bring my one true wife  
to Camelot what will you do?  
I will not come again to you  
though I may forfeit half my life.

A weekend spent in Camelot  
a joust a fuck a loving bed  
it was a good campaign he said  
don't knock it dear Shalott . . .

what will I do with you my love  
to mark the end of you & me?  
(for we will end assuredly  
there is a bell that tolls above)

I cannot hear it Lancelot  
so kiss me thrice & close my eyes  
a witch upon your breastbone lies  
dawn breaks in Camelot

& as she spoke the towers fell  
the bellmouth cracked the apple died  
& singing to herself she cried  
was it a sin to love him well?

Where is the garden where we lay  
in love my lover Lancelot  
the mirrored towers of Camelot  
O tell me where are they?

Epilogue

What sticks in the throat  
creates the texture of language  
Tim Thorne Adam and Eve

In airport bars aware of Scott Fitzgerald  
seeking heroics we become absurd  
Selkie in sealskins surfaces & smiles  
on blistered heels  
prefers her winter solstice.

Under the trees in time to metaphor  
the radiant feminists move like metronomes  
while you Pig-baby! Executioner!  
explore the dying process  
throw the master switch  
fall playfully in love with Campbell's daughter.

Sodomised in the love-hotel  
we suck off to rain  
commemorate hands picking at empty pockets:  
it will end inevitably  
but not for a long time yet  
unerringly every victim finds her sadist  
every sadist finds his masochist  
you are a language teacher who won't use words  
poems never threaten language we understand  
as it rains in the courtyard it rains in my heart  
I wish I could find a way of reconciling . . .  
everything  
don't kiss a kiss exacerbates the pain  
to assist you in reconciling your account  
the lifejacket is under your seat  
Jim Bean & two good fucks the reading's over . .

tell me that love & logic go together  
Scott cracked up & in the State asylum  
Zelda burnt to death  
in your Byronic shirt you cross the oceans  
on some white island Jason finds his fleece.

## floating fund

Once again, Overland must thank those subscribers who regularly add a little extra to their renewal cheques, as well as those whose donations arrive quite unexpectedly. With increasing costs, these donations are absolutely necessary to our survival, and we welcome them for themselves and as evidence that we are still giving our readers writing that they prize beyond its market value. The following are the most recent donors:

\$12 MW, DP, FM, MM; \$8 MB; \$7 CS, H&A; \$5 RT, GP; \$4 PF, LB, SB, SMcC, JMCC, TC, RM, JM, JH;  
\$2 GD, KS, BVBookshop, AB, EMcD, NH, PS, LF, JA, TCom Library, KC, BP High School, ER, JW, LB, KF,  
LS, JG, GE, IS, RO, JC, DY, MG, JB, DA, NK, JR, HVS, BD, DD, EW, SP, DC, PL. Total: \$183.

VICTOR KELLEHER **Refugees**

We received news of the convoy late in the afternoon, my father standing with the phone in his hand, his habitually gentle expression touched with pain and surprise. My mother was immediately against his becoming involved: she said it would only encourage trouble from across the border and bring violence onto ourselves as well. He listened to her quietly and attentively — that was always his way. But finally her arguments made no difference, and we went together, he and I.

I was just fifteen then and it happened shortly before I, too, became part of the migration south. I remember we collected Joseph and Laban from the compound — they were also father and son, yet entirely different in appearance and character; as different in many respects as he and I. They crouched in the back of the truck, out of the wind, as we bumped down the dusty farm track. At the main highway we turned north, towards Mufulira and the Congo, travelling more quickly on the tarred surface; speeding through the brief twilight, the bush indistinct on either side of us; only the short isolated trees of the savannah standing out black and clear against the pale dusk-yellow sky.

The convoy had already arrived when we reached the Mine Club. The cars were parked in a long row out front, the heavy overhanging fenders coated with brown dust, the roof-racks and seats piled high with luggage.

My father wanted me to wait outside. He said there would be a time for me to witness such scenes when I was older. He wasn't, as I have since suspected, uttering any prophecies: it was merely in his nature to be protective. But I went with him anyway. Partly because I didn't wish to be left behind with Laban, rejecting even then that possible identification.

They were all inside the Club, seated around

the edges of the central ballroom. They looked more tired than frightened, though some of them, men as well as women, were crying quietly. Others were leaning forward, their hands covering their faces. The two whom we had agreed to lodge for the night were in the far corner: a woman and a young girl about ten years old, sitting close together. As we approached across the smooth wooden floor, they stood up: the woman blond and quite young, with a pale vacant face — I don't mean innocent, not that — simply empty, as though nothing existed behind the inexpressive mask of her features. The little girl was different: her face tense and somehow wrinkled; more like the face of an aged monkey than that of a child, the knowing, experienced eyes peering out at you.

They were both quite calm at first, until we reached the truck and Joseph jumped down to take her luggage. Then the little girl shrank back against her mother and the woman shouted out:

“Don't let him come near me!”

I didn't understand her at the time, the undiscriminating nature of her horror. It would have been understandable to me had she rejected Laban in that way; but it appeared senseless where Joseph was concerned.

He stood beside the truck, hurt and confused, unaware of what he might have done.

“Bwana?” he said.

Appealing as always to my father who quickly stepped between them.

“She's upset,” he said. “She doesn't know what she's saying.”

He was standing very close to Joseph, both hands placed reassuringly on his shoulders, caught as it were in a single frame of memory: a grey-haired white man, tall and slight, and a short muscular African; set apart from each other by age and race, yet so similar by nature.

It was only a momentary difficulty and minutes later we were travelling back to the farm, the woman seated between us with the child on her lap. Outside it was completely dark, just a faint suggestion of dusk still visible along the line of the horizon. Inside the cab, the illuminated dashboard cast a greenish glow onto the wrinkled monkey face of the little girl and brushed the pale cheek of the mother, making her look more like a corpse than a living woman. None of us spoke very much. Yet it was during that short trip that my father told them how my mother and I had also decided to go south.

"It's too dangerous for them here," he said, telling it as though it were his own decision rather than ours, the sound of his voice, peaceful, without trace of resentment.

The woman put both arms around the child, drawing her close.

"Where else is there to go but south?" she said.

She spoke a good deal more later, after we had eaten. Perhaps she felt more secure once the servants had gone. Or it may have been my mother's kindness towards her — I've never seen her more considerate to anyone. But whatever the reason, the woman suddenly began speaking of her experiences in the Congo. That was what I'd been hoping for all along, with the cold-blooded curiosity of the young. My father, however, interrupted.

"Peter," he said quietly, addressing me formally, so I knew I couldn't refuse. "You go off to bed now."

In my room, I lay quite still in the darkness, listening to the drone of her voice, to the way it mingled with the cold insect noise of the night. For a while I dozed off; but when I awoke she was still speaking, and I got up and crept silently down the passage.

The door was slightly ajar and, crouched there in the deep shadow, I could see the back of my father's head through the opening. Above his left shoulder, the unnaturally old face of the little girl was just visible. The woman herself was out of sight, but her voice reached me clearly:

"He wouldn't leave. It didn't matter how often I asked him. He said it was his duty to remain. His duty! To stay there in that filthy hole of a hospital, working for people who resented his very existence. Not really people at all — more like animals. Probably the same ones who only hours or days earlier had been trying to kill us. All smiles now, in the clean wards. All friendliness because they were sick and needed him. I

told him that, but he wouldn't listen. Not even after we lost Stephen."

There was a murmur of sympathy from someone in the room, probably my mother. Within the narrow opening of the door, the old intent expression of the little girl didn't alter.

The voice continued:

"He said it made no difference. His own son and it made no difference! Leaving won't bring him back, he said. That was when I decided to get out. All around us people were leaving, packing up their cars and driving south. And I still had one child left to save." A hand appeared and stroked the round exposed skull of the little girl. "I told him, I'll wait for you in South Africa. You'll find us there when you come to your senses. I wasn't going to lose her the way I lost Stephen."

"What did happen to your son?" — my mother's voice again.

"He was outside the house, with the nanny . . . in broad daylight . . . and they . . . they . . ." She faltered, and for a moment there was complete silence. "It's hard to talk about it now. He was just an innocent child. And that black bitch ran off and left him. A baby. All alone. All alone out there."

My father was sitting right forward on his seat, temporarily blocking the daughter from view.

"But why was there nobody with him?" he asked, the words slightly muffled, as though he found them difficult to articulate.

"Could I watch over him every minute of the day?" Her voice hard now and defensive. "Didn't I have another child to worry about as well?"

And then the daughter's face appearing again, thrust upwards and forwards.

"They waited till he was all on his own," she said shrilly.

My father made no attempt to reply, though as I now appreciate, what he did was answer enough in itself. He stood up and turned away from all of them, towards the darkened, half-opened doorway, to where I crouched invisibly in the shadows. It was not, of course, an appeal to me: he had no means of knowing I was there. Still, I often feel compelled to interpret it in that fashion. It was the way he looked: not really changed; his face merely drawn into a more intense likeness of itself. His actual expression almost impossible to describe.

That wasn't the only time I saw him so affected. There was one other occasion. It happened a day or two before the arrival of the convoy, barely more than a week before we were due to go

south. I had driven with him to the far edge of the property, beyond Stony Ridge, to where Joseph was working alone, digging a well. He was still there when we drew up. In the abrupt silence we could hear the dull regular thud of the pick; the sound, muffled by the depth, like the slow peaceful measure of a heartbeat. My father went to the top of the wooden ladder and peered down.

“Joseph,” he said quietly.

The work stopped and after a few moments Joseph climbed up. He was stripped to the waist, his young sturdy body, almost perfectly black, dappled with tiny drops of sweat.

“Any sign of water?” my father asked.

All around us the bush lay hot and still, burned to a uniform grey-brown by the months of drought.

“Water come soon now Bwana,” Joseph said confidently. “I dig little bit, little bit.”

“Are you certain it’s down there?” my father said.

“Sure Bwana. I find him.” He laughed with pleasure at the idea, as though the water were already there, moving under his hands, transforming the inert dust at his feet. “Six feet Bwana, plenty water.” He spread both arms wide, inundating the shallow valley in which we stood.

“How much is plenty?” my father asked, laughing with him.

“Much water Bwana. I smell him.” With a single wave of his hand he dismissed the visible farm — the dry earth and charred scrub. “Plenty for grass; plenty for trees; plenty for cows. Many fat cows Bwana.” Like a child, he blew out both cheeks in playful imitation of the cattle he imagined.

“All right,” my father said, still laughing, “next week you can come back and make our fortune.”

And with Joseph between us we drove back over the ridge to the farm compound.

Normally, at the sound of the truck, children came running from the compound, begging my father for a ride. But that afternoon nobody came to meet us. The whole area seemed deserted, not even a village dog anywhere in sight. Parking the truck next to one of the narrow patches of vegetable garden, we walked through the two lines of huts to the clearing at the centre of the village. The people were all congregated there, old and young alike, grouped into a silent, watchful circle. In the middle of the circle, standing alone, was Laban; and next to him, docile and unsuspecting, an ageing black and white bull. As we reached the edge of the crowd, Laban raised a short

wooden-shafted spear and thrust it into the bull’s side, just behind the right shoulder.

I had never seen a ritual killing before, but I knew immediately what it was — the way Laban pushed the spear in only so far and then released it and stepped back, with everybody waiting silently, watching to see what would happen. The old bull didn’t fall: it merely staggered slightly and afterwards stood quite still, the muscles of its shoulders quivering, its large clear eyes staring innocently at the assembled crowd. Probably it was too badly injured to move. Yet that was not the way it appeared. For perhaps a full minute it seemed almost untroubled, almost totally at peace. Only when it finally tried to walk did its true state become apparent. It took one staggering step, then its gaunt body convulsed, and as it toppled forward onto its knees, two red streams flowed out of the dilated nostrils, down over the broad black muzzle. For a moment I thought it would fall right over. The hindquarters swayed dangerously, while the head, twisted sideways, actually touched the ground. But somehow it managed to recover, slowly straightening one leg after the other, heaving its great head clear of the earth. Not until it was standing once again did the crowd stir: a barely audible rustle of movement, as though an idle breath of wind had brushed the edge of the village. In the forefront of the crowd, the young children, almost naked in the afternoon heat, stared patiently at the injured beast. It looked stricken now: its whole body leaning at an angle; its legs peculiarly bent. From where the head had touched the ground, the cornea of one large eye was coated in dust, as was one side of the black bloodstained muzzle. Two slimy threads of red saliva trailed from the corners of the mouth.

I half turned away, intending to go back to the truck and wash my hands of the whole affair, but my attention was caught by an odd choking sound right beside me. It was my father, his normally tanned skin gone unnaturally pale.

“Laban,” he said quietly, “that’s enough.”

Laban was standing casually beside the dying animal, his heavy arms hanging loosely at his sides. He paid no attention to my father’s voice.

“D’you hear me!” my father said more loudly. “I told you, that’s enough!”

Laban turned his head slowly. It was the first time he’d shown any consciousness of our presence. But even then he did nothing: merely stared at us, his eyes small and bloodshot.

“For God’s sake finish it!” my father nearly shouted.

And still Laban did nothing: just went on staring at us coldly. I think by then my Father was the only one still watching the beast.

"Come on," I said, tugging at his arm.

But before I could pull him away, Joseph shouldered his way through the crowd, grasped the spear with both hands, and drove it further into the animal's body. The creature must have died instantly, because it toppled sideways from the force of the blow, its head stretched out, all four legs rigid. Joseph, unable to regain his balance, fell forward into the dust, one hand sliding on the slimy patch of blood and saliva. After that I couldn't see what happened to him, because people started to clap and cheer, the children leaping up onto the side of the still warm body.

In all that noise and commotion nobody paid any more attention to us. For them, I suppose, it was a kind of victory. Even Laban had looked away, as though nothing had happened. Only my father remained exactly as he was, wearing an expression which at the time I did not understand.

"Come on," I said, again urging him to leave.

But all I could make him do was turn around. He wouldn't come with me. He stood there looking fixedly at the mud wall of the nearest hut, his gaze unwavering, as though he could perceive the significance of the whole event in the dust of those crumbling mud bricks.

I almost forgot the events of that afternoon, and also that particular picture of him. They came back to me years later, long after his death, when I was working as a press photographer in Johannesburg. It was the time of the trouble in Moçambique and I had been sent to the railway station with one of the reporters to meet a refugee train from Lourenço Marques. It wasn't the first such train I had met. As it came in there was the usual crowd of relatives standing on the platform, staring anxiously at the passing carriages. And the refugees themselves were not noticeably different from others I had seen: some of them angry; many of them weeping and pale-faced. I wandered through the crowd taking shots while the young reporter I was with questioned various groups. He, as far as I remember, was more disturbed by it than I. As we left the station, he said:

"Someone will have to answer for this."

Yet it wasn't his remark alone which really distinguishes the experiences of that day from other similar occasions. It was what happened afterwards, back at the paper.

I was working in the dark room, developing

the shots I had taken, looking out for those which would best capture the events of the morning. One after another, the isolated faces took form and shape in the shallow pans, floating up to greet me in the present. I had expected them to be characterized by deep emotion, by grief or heart-ache, even revenge. But suddenly that was not the way they appeared to me. There, alone in the strangely revealing half-light, they looked merely confused, their vacant or bitter eyes touched by a quality of bewilderment, like so many aged children lost in a strange land. Each frame like a window into the past. Nearly all of them the same. Only one exception: a man of indeterminate age, half turned away, as though looking back to where he had come from — the face locked in shadow.

I knew then that we had been mistaken. And that evening I drove across town to see my mother.

"Peter!" she said, surprised and pleased to see me, and she kissed me lightly, her skin dry and brittle to the touch, a wisp of permed hair rasping lifelessly across my cheek.

"I'm going back mother," I said.

"Back?" she asked, puzzled.

"To the farm."

She could hardly believe what I was saying.

"But you can't," she said. "Nobody's there now."

"He's still buried there."

"What difference does that make? There's nothing you can do for him any more. There never was anything you could do. It would have happened just the same, whether we'd been with him or not."

But I could no longer take that view, and a month later, having resigned from the newspaper, I began the long journey back; travelling by road once again, as though the earlier journey could somehow be annulled.

It was a revealing trip. Once north of the Limpopo I didn't rush things, stopping frequently to photograph the thornscrub or the flat dry savannah. Peering through the lens of the camera, concentrating on the land itself, on deliberate square portions of grass and trees and sky, I methodically tried to recapture what I had lost: the quiet calm atmosphere of the bush; the farm where I had been born and had grown up; the house I had finally left. It was intended as a slow, deliberate process of rediscovery. But like those silent images which had floated up from the shallow pans in the dark room, it was not exactly what I'd expected. Because always, at every

moment of every mile — whether standing on the sandy bed of some vanquished river, or crouching in the long grass, fingering an outcrop of grey limestone — always, the landscape around me remained unmoving, oddly deserted, as though I were travelling deeper and deeper not into the living past, but into the dry hot land of the dead. Even the people who stood by their huts or watched at the side of the road as I drove past appeared strangely still to me, their loose waving hands blown listlessly by the wind of my passage, their faces and bodies covered with fine brown dust, like crumbling statues dissolving back into the earth. Wherever I looked I received the same impression of lifelessness, the same still, frozen quality, which the brief bustle of Bulawayo and Salisbury could do nothing to dispel — the hot afternoons and the black starlit hollows of the night disturbed only by the thin metallic whir of insect life. Everything became like a vacant image of the past, dead and unpossessed, my own fixed and vanquished memories somehow travelling before me, reaching out and stifling the hidden, inaccessible vitality of the countryside.

So that long before I actually reached the Zambezi, I'd begun to realize that there could be no real return; that whatever else the journey might have been, it was no more a return than our earlier deliberate withdrawal had been a flight. The past and the present congealed into a single immovable sequence.

Ironically, and perhaps justly, it was the Zambian authorities who gave substance to my growing awareness of failure, by refusing to allow me to cross the border without a visa. The official who interviewed me at Chirundu, on the Zambezi, was very polite, his shiny black skin and gentle face disturbingly reminiscent of Joseph.

I didn't try to argue with him. Instead I travelled a few miles back up the escarpment, as far as a dried-out watercourse, and then turned off the road, driving slowly between the trees, bumping across the uneven hillside until I reached a blunt spur of promontory of rock which jutted out over the valley. From there I could see the whole sweep of the Zambezi — the river running between yellow and green banks, split at intervals by gashes of white sand — and beyond the distant shoreline, the steep, tree-covered hills of Zambia rising up to meet the level grasslands of the plateau which stretched up to the north, to Mufulira and beyond.

I remained there until the evening of the following day, hidden from the road by the curve of the hill, too far above the valley to be visible from

below. During the long night I crouched before a small fire until the mosquitoes came out in force, and then took refuge in the car. By day I clambered up onto the outjutting rock and sat there in the hot sun, peering across at the distant hills.

As the second day wore on, the far thickly-wooded slopes changed slowly from bright morning green through into shades of heavy purple, the shadowy folds shimmering slightly in the late afternoon heat. From time to time small dots moved across the sand to the water's edge, their progress almost imperceptible, like hands on a watch, but they were too far away to identify as living creatures, animal or human. I might easily have been the only living thing for miles around. Yet in spite of the distance and the stillness, I didn't feel totally removed from those steep slopes. Perched up on the dry rock, it was at least possible to imagine live forms moving slowly through the thick forest or sauntering warily down towards the water which separated us.

I packed up the car at dusk, carefully stowing away my now useless photographic equipment. In the deepening shadows I drove to the road and, without looking back, began the long return journey. I had very little to show for my brief and rather belated effort — in many ways my mother had been right. And yet not completely so: because at some point during those long hours I spent on the rock, peering out across a new unbridgeable gulf, I discovered the truth about my father's death.

It happened not long after we left. He awoke one morning just before dawn, totally alone in the house, and heard the sound of firing over beyond the ridge. As he dressed and hurried out, he must have remembered my mother's constant admonition to take a gun with him. But his Quaker beliefs, as well as his natural disposition, must have made that unthinkable.

They were stealing the cattle that had been left to graze the valley around the unfinished well, firing off guns to drive the reluctant beasts quickly into the scrub country beyond. It doesn't matter now who they were — tribesmen from across the border, perhaps, or even some of the local people. Nor would it change anything to discover their motives — whether they viewed his arrival with hatred; or whether they merely saw in him an image of the white man and reacted out of fear, thinking that such a person would not come unarmed. The one certainty is that as he stepped from the truck, they shot him through the chest and he fell immediately.

The sun had risen by then and was showing

just above the horizon. He was lying in the faded grass on the lower part of the slope. Moments after the yellow sunlight touched his cheek, they dragged him across the narrow valley floor and pitched him down the unfinished well.

Miraculously, he survived both the shot and the fall. Throughout the early part of the morning he lay in the soft mud and stared up through the dark tunnel at the diminishing circle of blue and at the delicate puffs of grey-white cloud which hurried faster and faster across his line of vision. He was still alive when, later in the morning, Joseph and Laban came looking for him. It was Joseph who climbed down into the darkness. After the brightness above he could see very little; but he could hear quite distinctly the breath bubbling in the throat of the dying man.

"Bwana!" he said, his voice recalling the expression I had twice perceived on my father's face.

When he received no answer he stooped into the dark mud, lifted the helpless man, and climbed with him to the surface — that alone, a feat which defies any rational explanation.

Typically, Laban stood indifferently to one side, refusing to take a portion of the heavy burden until Joseph, near the end of his strength, strained unsuccessfully to lift the dying man onto the back of the truck. Only then did he step forward and lend a hand. And it was at that moment that my father vomited up a quantity of blood and died. Joseph was still holding him close when it happened and the blood flowed down over his right hand and arm.

While Laban went off to ring for the police, Joseph remained beside the body, clutching his own stained flesh and crying. He didn't try to wipe off the blood. Why should he have done? We, after all, were twelve or thirteen hundred miles away: someone had to take the responsibility.

Of course it might be objected that I had no way of discovering the events of that morning. As I've already said, I failed in my attempt to return to the farm. Also I've neither seen nor heard from Joseph since I left there as a boy. It might seem, then, that this account is merely surmise.

Given the choice, I would gladly concede that point. But unfortunately the felt truth of those distant, unseen events goes beyond all reasonable

doubt. Like a thin strip of wound film, it springs into life at the slightest touch, flickering vividly across the passive screen of the mind. No mere illusion of lights and shadows.

It's not my only such experience. Shortly afterwards, during the Angolan crisis, I read about the refugees who took to the boats and journeyed slowly southwards. And immediately I saw them with the same vivid certainty: black and white crammed together in a motley assortment of craft, all floating hopelessly on the uncertain sea, unable to land. Nothing happens in this particular picture. In the foreground, on dry rocky promontories, stand the giant figures of white officialdom, their grotesque bony legs forming crooked archways through which I look out onto the ocean, at the directionless boats and lost souls who crouch within them.

Again, I wasn't there to witness those scenes for myself. By then I'd come to recognize my own true status and had finally crossed those seas upon which they perpetually flounder. Here, now, sitting at the window of my room, I look out onto the Australian landscape which is not so very different from the Africa I knew: the same yellow winter grass; the stunted gum trees easily mistaken for the twisted knob-thorns. Yet the resemblance, so striking at first, is really only superficial. Beyond the limits of this actual scene, the boats ride endlessly on the surf — the faces, black and white, haunted, peering over the sun-blistered gunnels, like reflections in a mirror. And beyond them again (a single negative overlaid by several images), that final glimpse of the farm.

My father is lying in the truck in the hot afternoon sun. I can no longer see his face, only his feet and the lower part of his legs which jut out over the tailboard. Nearby, bareheaded in the strong light, stands Joseph. His hand is still stained with the vomited blood he is guiltless of; and he is crying, his face puffed and swollen with grief. To the right of the picture Laban is sitting in the shade of a large jacaranda. His face is unaltered, merely slightly older, reminding me of the ten year old girl who once spent the night at the farm — the same dark and peering intelligence. Both men are staring at the house as at the lens of a single eye, their gaze fixed on a point where I cannot choose but stand. Neither of them calls out or makes any visible sign. They merely stare: Joseph with a hint of accusation; Laban with a faint cold smile of recognition.



DENNIS DOUGLAS

## Joseph Furphy and the Picaresque:

*A Generic Re-appraisal of Such is Life*

One of the key distinctions in *Such is Life* is between conscience and the moral sense. It is mentioned only once, and the context is an unlikely one. When the Chinese stockmen of Mondunbarra inveigle 23 travelling men into grazing their horses and bullocks on the Trinidad paddock, and then round them up to be formally impounded and redeemed by payment of fine, one of the boundary riders, Barefooted Bob, holds off from the affair. He even drops in on the travellers' campfire the night before the confiscation — he is cleaning out a reservoir in the paddock — but without saying anything to warn them. When his employer rebukes him, in front of the stock-owners and the station staff engaged in the operation, for disloyalty, Bob says that he would have been "turning dog on" the owners of the stock if he had "gone partners with opium and leprosy" in rounding up their cattle, and that he would have been "turning dog on" the station if he had warned them. His orders were to clean out a reservoir. By sticking to that task he was being disloyal to no-one. "Way I was situated," he says, "the clean thing was to stand out. An' that's what I done."

The reader has recently been told, at this point in the novel, of a particularly snide piece of skulduggery perpetrated by the owners of Mondunbarra to get rid of a selector, and of Bob's part in it. There are reminders through the text of Bob's former zeal in impounding straying stock. We might here be tempted to believe that Bob is undergoing a moral conversion, from the wicked ways of a squatter's henchman to habits which might reflect a newly-won sense of personal responsibility for his own actions.

Something of the kind occurs to Collins's friend Stevenson as they watch the scene in the corner of the Trinidad paddock. That morning Stevenson had wondered whether Bob's conversation with

them the evening before had been deliberately designed to put them off their guard, and Collins had replied that he did not think Bob less trustworthy than most men in relation to deliberate deceit. "You were right, and I was wrong," Stevenson tells Collins after Bob's speech, "Bob is trustworthy — ruthlessly so." "Only in respect of conscience," replies Collins, "which is mere moral punctilio, and may co-exist with any degree of ignorance or error. I wouldn't chance sixpence on his moral sense."<sup>1</sup>

Collins's style is here particularly condensed. He is advancing two arguments against too strong a reliance on conscience. One is that conscience reflects the human fallibility of its possessor. The other is that conscience can be more like a sense of honour or a form of bravado than a faculty of sober ethical discrimination.

The distinction as it applies to Barefooted Bob is not so very fine. Bob's reaction to the rounding-up of the travellers' stock is influenced by two non-ethical considerations. One is bitterness over the death of his "mate" Bat while working with him for the owners of Mondunbarra on a new run on the Diamantina not long before. The other is racialism. His remarks about "opium and leprosy" represent the standard reaction of Australians of the day to indented Asian labour, and blur the moral issue. His decision to "stand out" is in no sense a purely ethical choice.

The distinction between conscience, with its admixture of personal considerations, and the moral sense, which aims for an objective and universal view of the questions at stake, has a second application in the context of the scene in the Trinidad paddock. At this point in the novel Collins has just learnt of the death of Mary O'Halloran. One of the causes of her wandering away from her parents' hut was her reaction to the death near the hut some months before of a

shearer blinded by sandy blight (pp. 233-4). Collins is tempted to blame himself for both deaths. Visiting Rory O'Halloran, Collins saw the dying shearer without realizing the nature of his plight. Thinking he was only drowsing in the shade, putting off his approach to the hut for a handout until the customary time of sundown, Colling politely passed him by, and then forgot about him until next morning, by which time the shearer had died of thirst and physical exhaustion (pp. 84-5, 98-9). Speaking to Stevenson of Barefooted Bob, Collins is also reminding himself, as he needs to, that an over-scrupulous conscience, too, may err, through "ignorance or error", or through obscurer motives of self-deception.

The scene in the Trinidad paddock offers plenty of exercise for the moral sense. It is a bad year. The grass on the Trinidad paddock is the only grazing for many miles. The 173 bullocks and 81 horses rounded up are all overworked and underfed. Ten more beasts illegally introduced into the paddock leave their bones there (p. 250). In the drought of 1883-4 fodder is everywhere scarce. But the duffing of grass is theft. Bullock-drivers and stockmen on all routes the wagons follow try to outwit each other all the time, the stockmen keeping watch for trespassers, the bullock-drivers springing fences and mending them again to allow their beasts to graze undetected.

The first chapter of *Such is Life*, in which Collins falls in with a party of bullock-drivers who pasture their stock for the evening on the Runnymede 'selection', and narrowly escape being caught, presents the bullock-drivers' and the graziers' points of view. Collins and his friend Steve Thompson agree that the duffing of grass is a dirty transaction, but Thompson adds:

The world's full of dirty transactions, Tom. It's a dirty transaction to round up a man's team in a ten-mile paddock, and stick a bob a head on them, but that's a thing I'm very familiar with; it's a dirty transaction to refuse water to perishing beasts, but I've been refused times out of number, and will be to the end of the chapter; it's a dirty transaction to persecute men for having no occupation but carting, yet that's what nine-tenths of the squatters do, and this Montgomery is one of the nine. . . . If you want a problem to work out, just consider that God constructed cattle for living on grass, and the grass for them to live on, and that, last night, and to-night, and to-morrow night, and mostly every night, we've a choice

between two dirty transactions — one is, to let the bullocks starve, and the other is to steal grass for them. For my own part, I'm sick and tired of studying why some people should be in a position where they have to go out of their way to do wrong, and other people are concerned to that extent that they can't live without doing wrong. (pp. 15-16)

The reader is thus prepared to see both sides of the situation in the Trinidad paddock four months later, and to observe with something like detachment the means by which the owners of the cattle take reprisals on their persecutors, taking as much time as they can about sorting out their stock and moving them on, so that they can graze as long as possible, and surreptitiously dealing out furtive and vicious jabs to the stockmen and their horses.

When Smythe, the manager of Mondunbarra, demands to know how many bullocks Barefooted Bob is working on the dam-clearing, Bob replies, apparently in a provoking drawl, "Well, I'm workin' ten, but —". "But!" snaps Smythe, "I'll have no but about it! Take your ten, and GO!" The two other Mondunbarra bullocks which had wandered off at the beginning of the dam-clearing, and which Bob had only just found again, were technically not being worked up to that time. In the light of Mr. Smythe's order, they become the property of two bullock-drivers who realize what Bob is up to, are ransomed, and eventually swapped away into another team. The distinction between plausible justification and the true rightness of an action forms the basis of the chapter's final paragraph:

Months afterwards, when the two Mondunbarra bullocks had been swapped-away into a team from the Sydney side, I camped one night with Baxter and Donovan, who discussed, in the most matter-of-fact way, their own tranquil appropriation of the beasts. Each of these useful scoundrels had the answer of a good conscience touching the transaction. They maintained, with manifest sincerity, that Smythe's repudiation of the bullocks, and his subsequent levy of damages upon them as strangers and trespassers, gave themselves a certain right of trover, which prerogative they had duly developed into a title containing nine points of the law. Not equal to a pound-receipt, of course; but good enough for the track. And throughout the discussion, Bob's name was never mentioned, nor his complicity hinted at. Such is life. (p. 253)

The consciences of the two bullock-drivers are clear, but Collins is in no doubt as to their culpability. Here is an example of Collins doing something for which Zola is praised in *Such is Life* (p. 306), refusing to call evil good.

Although Bob misleads Mr. Smythe, he does not do so by actually lying. He fails to supply information relevant to Mr. Smythe's purposes, but contrives things so that the failure is Mr. Smythe's fault. Mr. Smythe is provoked into cutting Bob off just at the wrong moment. He is angry because he suspects Bob of intending to benefit one or other of the bullock-drivers in some way, perhaps by mustering fewer bullocks than he should. His interpretation of Bob's answer to his question allows Bob to do just that. In seeking not to be outwitted, Mr. Smythe ensures that he is outwitted. He is thus doubly deceived, deceived into believing that two of the bullocks are not his, and deceived into aiding their transfer into other hands. He is deceived into being an accomplice in his own undonig.

In precisely the same way, in the first chapter, Mosey Price elicits from Warrigal Alf two pieces of information, that Warrigal Alf's bullocks spent the evening before in the Runnymede selection, and that the alternative site for a camp on Runnymede, the ram paddock, is not safe. Warrigal Alf's surly manner persuades Mosey that Alf resents doing him a favour by putting him onto a good camp (p. 7). What Warrigal Alf does not add is that his grazing his bullocks on the selection was by special permission of the owner of Runnymede, Mr. Montgomery, and that the hut on the selection paddock is no longer occupied only by short-sighted Daddy Montague (pp. 49-50). Montague now shares it with Martin, the Runnymede head boundary man. By not adding these things Warrigal Alf sets a trap for Mosey and the others with him. Mosey Price, like Mr. Smythe later in the novel, is doubly deceived. He believes that he has a safe camp for the night, and he believes that he has outwitted Warrigal Alf into laying him onto it.

Only a tangle of deceptions and cross-deceptions on the other side of the grass war saves Mosey. Montgomery is told (by a misinformed informer, called McNab) that the bullock-drivers are two miles closer to the Runnymede home station, in the ram paddock. Martin is at the home station enjoying his day of rest, it being a Sunday, and Montgomery details him and Moriarty, the Runnymede storekeeper, to round up the trespassers just before daybreak (*ibid.*). This order

prevents Martin from returning home for the night, since it is more convenient for him to remain where he is if he has to muster the ram paddock the next morning, and so it puts him out of the way of catching Price's party that night.

When Martin and Moriarty enter the ram paddock next morning, Martin unaccountably loses his horse. Moriarty, who has his reasons for wanting to do Martin down (they are, among other points of difference, rivals for the favours of the station governess), sees the loaded waggons in the distance — being on foot, Martin cannot see them through the scrub — and gallops over to warn their owners to move the bullocks. Martin returns to the home station for another horse, and does not arrive at the selection until the grass-duffers are well away (*ibid.*). The deceivers and cross-deceivers so far in the picture include Warrigal Alf, Mosey Price, Mr. Montgomery, the informer McNab, and Moriarty the storekeeper. The wrongdoers are Warrigal Alf, Price and the party with him (which includes Collins), Moriarty and McNab. The basis of the situation is an intricate cross-weave of roguery and deception. As we shall see, there is even more of both ingredients than I have so far covered.

Before the bullock-drivers reach the selection paddock, McNab and Collins are involved in some horse-trading. Collins swaps a six-year-old grey mare for Cleopatra, the black cavalry horse ridden by McNab's half-caste offsider. Throughout the course of the bargaining Collins congratulates himself on having McNab fall into his hands. The man is clearly the softest of foreigners, he thinks, afflicted by suicidal candour, bitten by a mania for swapping horses. Riding Cleopatra across the plain, Collins is so impressed by the horse's carriage that his prose takes on lyric strains. Collins is certain that he has the better of the bargain (pp. 9-12). It is only the next morning that he discovers why McNab was so willing to swap. Cleopatra has two vicious habits. They account for the somewhat battered appearance of McNab and his partner. When first mounted in the morning he bucks furiously (Cleopatra is *not* a mare). If he succeeds in bucking his rider off, he then launches a crafty and savage kick, with both hind feet, at whoever tries to catch him. After that, for the rest of the day, he is well-behaved. For the rest of the novel Collins camps near a sandhill every night; but he sees serious advantages in riding a horse that no-one ever cares to borrow (pp. 53-55, 63, 80). Having been deceived into a bad bargain, he sticks to the



# PATTERNS

VOL 4 NO 3

Fremantle Arts Centre

poetry magazine published three times a year by the Fremantle Arts Centre with the assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council and with support from the Western Australian Literary Fund

Now in its fourth year, PATTERNS publishes work from all over Australia and from New Zealand. It particularly welcomes work from Western Australian poets.

The Winter 1978 number just published includes writing by Thomas Shapcott, Graeme Hetherington and Hal Colebatch

Single copy \$1.50 (postage 30c)  
annual subscription \$5.40 including postage

order from

# Fremantle Arts Centre

1 Finnerty St Fremantle 6160

fruit of it, for reasons which reflect a wiliness of his own.

McNab's deception of Collins is one of the few in the book which advantage the deceiver. Most are practised solely out of motives of resentment, to disadvantage an enemy, or to revenge a past deception.<sup>2</sup>

In all of the deceptions discussed so far, the deceived person at one point imagines that it is he who has the upper hand, that it is he who is doing the deceiving.

Another sense in which the deceived becomes the deceiver relates to situations in which somebody pretends to be taken in by an act of dissimulation for reasons of courtesy. When Martin comes asking about the missing horse, he learns from an unnamed stranger (the one unnamed character in *Such is Life*, who comes in once at the very beginning and once at the very end), that it has been seen thirty miles away being ridden hard by a "red-headed young fellow". Martin cannot then admit that it is his own horse, since, as Collins puts it, "in the Riverina of that period, it was considered much more disgraceful to be had by a scoundrel than to commit a felony yourself". So Martin assumes "an oblivious, and even drowsy air". Collins, "pitying Martin's dilemma, and admiring his greatness of soul," comes to his aid by asking the question Martin would like to ask, "Did the young fellow say where he was going?" and having heard the answer, Martin rides slowly on. "Very slowly, so that the stranger might overtake him soon". He needs a deposition of legal standing from the stranger, and will not ask for it in front of "three cynical onlookers", Collins, Thompson and Cooper (pp. 61-2).

Martin's air of apathy is an intended deception. He is pretending that the horse is not his. Collins knows that the horse is Martin's, but he pretends to be taken in by Martin's indifference. The deceived is in fact the deceiver. The deceiver is in fact the deceived. Bush courtesy as Collins describes it relies heavily on such subterfuges.

Theft and deception are the stock-in-trade of the picaresque tradition. The *picaro*, as Sieber's recent book points out, is originally a *picaro de corte*, a scullion, a basket-carrier.<sup>3</sup> He sets out to rise in the world by skills picked up from bandits, toughs, card-sharpers, pimps, burglars, pick-pockets and confidence men, and from Lazarillo de Tormes to Ferdinand Count Fathom and Barry Lyndon his life follows much the same pattern. He has cruelties inflicted on him, and returns them with interest. He practises the trades of the world

to which he belongs. Sometimes he falls into the hands of another trickster and engages in a battle of wits to see who will emerge the deceiver and who the deceived.

Because his life is one of counterfeit, he recognises the quality of unreality in the lives of more respectable pretenders. Lazarillo tells of becoming the servant of a proud, poor country squire who has left Castile because his neighbour was never the first to raise his hat when they met, who has no proper shirt beneath his cloak, no food in the larder, no proper blanket or mattress to his bed. The *picaro* is quick to perceive the hypocrisies of the pious. Picaresque literature is often censured for anti-clericalism or revised to omit criticisms of the devout. The respectable professions in picaresque novels are the refuge of witting and unwitting scoundrels, incompetent doctors, like the one in *Gil Blas* whose theories about dieting kill off most of his patients, and advocates who prey on their clients. The picaresque author is particularly interested in the social pretensions of the aristocracy, of army officers, and of the wealthy bourgeoisie. It is not at all difficult to match each variation on the relationship between deceiver and deceived in *Such is Life* out of picaresque fiction, whether one takes the broader view of the genre, or restricts it, as Sieber does,<sup>4</sup> to the pretended autobiographies of tricksters produced in Spain in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The picaresque elements in *Such is Life* are, however, not the whole of *Such is Life*. If they were, Collins's kangaroo dog would be the central character, since he is the book's most successful thief, from p. 6, when he "silently abstracts a boiled leg of mutton from Price's tucker-box", to chapter 6, when he dines all night on the turkey Mosey Alf has hanging on his meat-pole. Collins is not a consistent deceiver, though he often deceives himself, and nothing near as villainous as the picaresque hero of tradition, though there is much for which he blames himself.

The world of the true picaresque does not much enter the novel. The only genuine criminal in it is the red-headed young man of the first chapter. Rufus has all the earmarks of a fellow on the run. When Collins "experimentally" wonders if they have met before, Rufus looks away and says he doubts it (p. 13). He admits a familiarity with the Law by stoutly denying, during the conversation that night, that Collins has anything of the "Government man" about him (p. 31). He chums up with the handsome scapegrace of the party, Dixon (p. 16), and during the early morning

hours he tries, with Dixon's help, to steal Cleopatra. When that fails, thanks to Cleopatra's bad habits, he makes off through the ram paddock, comes upon Martin and Moriarty in the dark, and so chances to be seen later riding Martin's horse. Much of this story is implied rather than told. Dixon's part in the attempt to steal Cleopatra is given away by the symptoms he shows the next day of having received a vicious kick in the ribs (pp. 51-2). This is true picaresque material, but even the indirect manner of its telling suggests its subsidiary place in the novel's scheme of things.

Indeed, there is one point in *Such is Life* when Collins directly rejects a picaresque situation:

The routine record of March 9 is not a desirable text. It would merely call forth from fitting oblivion the lambing-down of two stalwart fencers by a pimply old shanty-keeper; and you know this sort of thing has been described ad sickenum by other pens, less proper than mine — described, in fact, till you would think that, in the back-country, drinking took the place of Conduct, as three-fourths of life; whilst the remaining fourth consisted of fighting. . . .

It would do you no good to hear how the old Major (he was an ex-officer of the Imperial army) fawned on my officialship, and threw himself in rapport with my gentlemanship — how his haggard, handsome wife leered at me over his shoulder — how the open-hearted asses of fencers, in weary alternation, confidentially told me fragmentary and idiotic yarns — how they shook hands with me till I was tired, and wept over me till I was disgusted — how they irrelevantly and profusely apologised for anything they might have said, and abjectly besought me, if I felt anyway nasty, to take it out of their (adj.) hides — I say, it would do you no good. (pp. 328-9)

If anybody in *Such is Life* belongs to the world of Lazarillo and Quevedo's Don Pablos, of Don Quixote and Gil Blas, of Peregrine Pickle and Rawdon Crawley, it is this pimply ex-Major and his "haggard, handsome wife".

The use in this passage of the schoolmasterly or parsonical tag, "I say, it would do you no good" has its ironies — but they are not the ironies of the picaresque. The difference may be readily assessed. When Sancho Panza says, "Everyone is as God made him, and often a good deal worse",<sup>5</sup> the surprise comes in the final word. We expect him to say something that exonerates and cheers, in a vague kind of way, "Everyone is

as God made him, and often a good deal better", and we cast about for the reason for our sense of shock. The implication of Sancho Panza's remark that alarms us is that it suggests we all know God made bad men. It ought not shock us to have to re-adjust our expectations in this direction, since we are all familiar with the orthodox doctrine of Original Sin and the problems it poses. By ringing the change on a popular sentimental saying, Sancho Panza places those problems in a sharp, and slightly sardonic light.

Again, when Quevedo's Don Pablos is faced with a family quarrel about the education he ought to have, his father pressing on him the apprenticeship of a thief, and his mother the black arts, he waits for the heat of the dispute to die down, and then voices a wisdom beyond his years:

When the two of them calmed down I told them I wanted to learn to be an honest man and that they ought to send me to school, because you couldn't do anything without knowing how to read and write. They thought this was a good idea although they grumbled about it between themselves for a while. My mother got on with threading more teeth and my father went to scrape a customer (that's the word he used), maybe his face and maybe his wallet. I was left by myself thanking God for having given me parents who were so clever and concerned about my welfare.<sup>6</sup>

The note of filial piety, bland as it appears at first sight, is full of improprieties. The parents' concern for his welfare expresses itself in being reluctantly persuaded out of preparing him for a life of crime like theirs. His own wishes only contradict theirs, as we know, to the extent that he has sensed how many more openings are available to a rogue who can read and write to a rogue who cannot. The whole paragraph is a palpable lie.

Even after this introduction to Don Pablos's freedom from shame, his reception of the news of his mother's death, at the hands of the Inquisition, after a long career in witchcraft, contains more horrid unction than we anticipate. He is upset, but he confesses that he is also a little relieved. 'Parents' vices,' he reflects, 'can console their children for their misfortunes, however great they may be.'<sup>7</sup> There is nothing so sly, or so cold-blooded, in *Such is Life*.

Elements out of the picaresque form a narrative substratum in *Such is Life*. They are not permitted to dominate the text. At no point does Furphy

adopt a view of life as harsh and censorious as picaresque authors do.

There is another point of contrast more central still. The picaresque tradition has important satiric elements. Some of the ways in which they arise I have already touched upon. It is worth noting that however often picaresque texts hold up to ridicule wealthy and respected members of society, they do not take central issue with received moral standards. They attack religious hypocrites not for being Christians, but for being false to the ideals of Christianity. They attack incompetent doctors and greedy advocates not for being doctors and advocates but for being bad doctors and bad advocates. When Collins rebukes Oliver Wendell Holmes in *Such is Life*, it is in part Holmes's "tawdry sympathy with aristocratic woe" to which he objects, but mainly Holmes's failure to take issue with slavery (p. 306). Here is a mainstream moral line of development in nineteenth-century literature of which Furphy was strongly aware, the literature of public dissent. The assumptions behind that line of development encouraged the writer to challenge his society in a more direct and leading way than picaresque writers ever did. The American anti-slavery novel attacked a practice which the legal institutions of the Southern states protected and supported. Furphy's *Such is Life* satirizes the legal procedures which protect the sanctity of property in the Colony of New South Wales, insofar as the property protected is grass. When Smythe fines the bullock-drivers and tanksinners in the Trinidad paddock, he does so by virtue of the power "to punish, by fine or imprisonment, any trespass on his sheepwalks" (p. 299). The station-owner is an officer of the legal system, a magistrate in his own right, delivering judgment on matters which concern his own interests. This is the case against the practice of summary fines that *Such is Life* urges. In doing so, it tackles the received assumptions of the legal system of the day in a root-and-branch way alien to the spirit of the picaresque.

There is no doubt that Furphy represents Collins as fully aware of this radical force in the tale that he tells. When Collins draws up his scale of virtuous action, the least base frame of mind, he considers, "is that which, goaded by a human compassion for all human distress, longs to get a level under the order of things which necessitates the spoiling of any particular child" (p. 261). The spoilt child in question is Mrs. Beaudesart, the formidable housekeeper of Runnymede, but that irony only partly qualifies the

revolutionary undertones of the statement.

Furphy's distinction between conscience and the moral sense enables us to pinpoint a marked difference between the response picaresque literature creates in the reader and the response created by the literature of public dissent.

In the literature of public dissent — whether received assumptions are challenged in relation to a specific issue (like slavery, or, in the novels of Mrs. Gaskell, working-class militancy) or in relation to a broader and more abstract set of beliefs (as happens, for example, in *The Mill on the Floss* and in a number of Hardy's novels) — and whether the challenge is presented in an overt fashion, through a clear statement of doctrinaire intent, or more covertly, as in the case against slavery which represents a subsidiary thematic interest in *Huckleberry Finn* — the character whose actions challenge those assumptions tends to be conscious of self-division and guilt, inasmuch as challenging his or her society is challenging a part of his or her own personality and social training. Conscience indicts the protagonist in this situation: the moral sense of the reader exonerates the protagonist of blame. The protagonist may doubt: the reader is persuaded to believe in the justice of his or her stand.

The picaresque operates in precisely the opposite way. The picaresque "hero" shows no consciousness of wrong-doing except in so far as he reveals some of his misdemeanours by accident rather than design. The reader's moral sense sees beyond the protagonist's rationalizations and blunted sense of scruple and condemns him. In the literature of dissent, conscience indicts and moral sense pardons: in the picaresque, conscience pardons and moral sense indicts. The literature of dissent turns the picaresque conventions of moral awareness upside down.

The notion of exoneration does not surface explicitly very often in *Such is Life*. To judge or to excuse is left for the reader to decide — Furphy is not anxious to show a too open bias, for example, for obvious reasons, in favour of the theft of grass. But there is a quotation from *All's Well that Ends Well* which Collins introduces into the narrative and which crystallizes the movement away from accusation and towards a note of extenuation or moral reconciliation:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn,  
good and ill together; our virtues would be  
proud if our faults whipped them not; and  
our crimes would despair if they were not

cherished by our virtues. (IV.iii.66-70) (p. 341)

In the novel's overall vision it is this spirit of reconciliation that triumphs; and it triumphs not only through a stress on the extenuation of human shortcomings but also through a systematic questioning of the value system represented in *Such is Life*.

Tom Collins is the spokesman for a particularly dogmatic set of convictions in the novel, some of which can be identified with radical principles of the day — Australian nationalism, commitment to egalitarianism, a belief in democracy. He regards the nineteenth century as having witnessed the dawn of a new day in human history in this respect (pp. 112-3), and his attacks on colonial romancers have political implications. The lies of Kingsley and his school are examples of Anglo-Saxon contumacy (pp. 72, 205, 300-1, 347-8). The Imperial connexion is in Collins's eyes a shoddy falsehood. His distrust of English institutions in Australia is equalled by his contempt for the work of the Orange lodges in Ireland — he regards them as a creation of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and an instrument of the class struggle. While they divide the tenantry into warring religious camps the absentee landlord holds the whiphand there (pp. 72-4). The wealthy ruling class in Australia Collins detests. But in the novel's overall vision the power of the ruling class, the institutions of Empire, the Orange lodges, and the colonial romancers fall into place on a sliding scale of importance. In the final analysis even the judicial authority of the squatter cannot inflict much harm on the bullock-drivers over whom it is wielded. *Such is Life* has radical implications, but it is not a novel about crying grievances and monstrous abuses — unless the reader moves from the action in the text to much more serious examples of the same forces in operation in Joseph Furphy's world. Collins's denunciations are undermined by the even tenor of the life the novel depicts.

Other ethical dogmas in the text are qualified by the manner of their presentation or their place in the overall scheme of the text. Thompson wonders if God expects bullock-drivers to earn enough to take up, before they die, a more moral trade, to fit them for the Latter Day (p. 16); but Thompson is voicing a mood, not framing a case against God. The younger Tom Collins sends Rory O'Halloran on his way hoping that a drunken brawl at the next pub will purge away

his Irish innocence (p. 78); though the death of his daughter embitters Rory, perhaps temporarily (p. 241), his "innocence" remains intact as long as we know him, and the idea of its being purged away in a drunken brawl seems a singularly callow one. Warrigal Alf lies in a chlorodyne-induced dream, tortured by a maggot of conscience over having not murdered his unfaithful wife (pp. 182-9). His reflections are motivated not by a moral impulse, clearly, but by a travesty of one. Collins finds the root of all evil in the "linked sins of aggression and submission" (p. 82); yet in playing his many roles in the novel, he sometimes domineers and sometimes scrapes and bows along with the rest. All the assumptions present in these dogmatic responses to situations are tried in relation to experience, and in comparison with each other, and found wanting. The pattern of avowing a longing "to get a lever under the order of things", because it produced Mrs. Beaudesart, is the typical pattern of the novel's moral pronouncements. Good humour triumphs by virtue of continual concessions of this kind in the direction of authorial courtesy.

The overall vision of the text remains ethically concerned — the moral issues it raises are not dismissed from sight. But the vision is imbued with a humane, tolerant, anti-dogmatic leavening of scepticism, modifying the harsher scepticism of its picaresque and radical ingredients. In the context of that higher resolution, the distinction between Collins the narrator, who experiences, records, tries to come to grips with what has happened to him, and Furphy the author, who knows more than Collins ever can, works very subtly. The overall vision of Furphy's. It is a vision towards which Collins gropes through the blind alleys and deceptive ways of the life of an observer of men, and a sharer in their vicissitudes.

I have linked this overall vision in *Such is Life* with authorial courtesy and with a humane and tolerant scepticism. I should like to find in it generic implications, to say that it arises through the merging of the picaresque element in *Such is Life* with an alternative modal influence, perhaps the tradition of romance.

Novels in the direct line of descent from the picaresque often combine attacks on romance conventions with an exploitation of romance material. Cervantes, Le Sage and Smollett could none of them forego the old machinery of parted and re-united lovers, discovery scenes and implausible misadventures. Collins does not renounce their use (despite his denunciation of



Kingsley), but he preserves a sense of independence from the pure romance tradition by employing them in ambiguous ways. The tale of Molly Cooper employs almost all of the devices of a romance, but the happy ending that would ensure that it was one is by no means secure, and Furphy places it outside the text. At the end of *Such is Life* Warrigal Alf is a reformed man (p. 311), and there is a suggestion, though not a strong one, that he is free to marry again. Molly is on her way to the Channel Country (pp. 356-6), to Collins's surprise, but to the sympathetic reader's joy, since she seems to be on her way to find her former sweetheart. What will happen when she does we are left to imagine for ourselves, partly because Collins remains ignorant to the end of the novel that the stockman he calls Nosey Alf is the disfigured Molly Cooper in disguise. To such sequences of events there can be no guaranteed happy ending, in art or in life. The element of romance is certainly a thread in the narrative structure of *Such is Life*,<sup>8</sup> but the ambiguities which surround it in this particular example might imply that we shall have to look elsewhere if we mean to pinpoint the counterweight to the picaresque in the generic matrix of the text.

The alternative to looking elsewhere would be to abandon the received notion of nineteenth-century romance. If the conventions employed by Kingsley and his kind are set aside, the central line of descent of romance might be linked to the notion of the triumph of valued human attributes — for example of pure love, courage and physical prowess, of virtue and heroism in classical and medieval romance forms. The central line of romance, as opposed to the debased line, would then descend by way of Scott to writers such as George Eliot, Dickens and Mark Twain for whom the humanitarian impulse replaced the faculties prized by earlier romance writers. The problem for this "central line of romance" becomes that of reconciling a commitment to humanitarianism with an awareness of the rareness and precariousness of its triumphs. Both *Silas Marner* and *Huckleberry Finn* have happy endings which need not in real life have come out so well. Lawson's "Going Blind," a short story which has a strong thematic link with *Such is Life*, puts the point nicely when the narrator sets out to do something to help the bushman, Jack Gunther, who has come to Sydney for medical treatment for his eyes. The medical treatment does not succeed, Gunther's money runs out, and he seems likely to lose his accommodation in the boarding house where he and the narrator have met.

I went out with a vague idea of seeing someone about the matter, and getting something done for the bushman — of bringing a little influence to his assistance; but I suddenly remembered that my clothes were worn out, my hat in a shocking state, my boots burst, and that I owed for a week's board and lodging, and was likely to be thrown out any moment myself: and so I was not in a position to go where there was influence.<sup>9</sup>

A similar recognition of the limits imposed by circumstances on any normal mortal's capacity to act out his humanitarian impulses seems to me to underlie the final episode of *Such is Life*, when Collins offers the blind Andy Glover a pair of smoked glasses. It would be of some value to the understanding of the relation between Australian fiction of the 1890's and the English novel of tradition if our notion of the central line of romance could be recast in this way; and in relation to *Such is Life* it would establish a direct link between the line of descent through picaresque and the literature of dissent and the line of descent through the mode of romance, since a humanitarian emphasis could be seen to emerge in the nineteenth century in both lines of development. Received notions of mode are, however, not to be lightly set aside.

The closest Furphy comes to the direct use of conventions out of a genre allied to romance (in the received sense) is in Collins's allusions to Shakespearian comedy, and his adoption of self-images based on Feste, Touchstone and clowning Hamlet (e.g., pp. 138, 349, 370, 371).

The notion of romance insinuates itself, of course, into a good deal of Shakespearian criticism. The early comedies are sometimes called "romantic comedies", the later ones "romances". But pure romance depends on an imagined order of things in which neither picaresque rogues nor Shakespearian fools can occupy a central position. There are rogues and, less often, fools in works from the romance tradition such as *Daphnis and Chloe*, the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus, *Orlando Furioso*, or Malory, but they are peripheral figures. The rogue of the picaresque mode and the fool of Shakespearian comedy take their central place in the genres to which they belong because those genres seek to create a world *unlike* the idealized, fantastic realm of romance, and like the anomalous world which everyday people inhabit.

The Shakespearian fool differs from the comic character of the medieval Mystery play and the trickster-slave of Classical tradition, as he does

from the protean wise fool or prankster of folklore, Nasrudin or Til Eulenspiegel, by three characteristics which he shares with Sancho Panza. He is individualized as a personality in his own right; his social derivation and context are recognisably delineated as part of the naturalistic side of the text; and his personal view of things is central to any overall vision the play presents. In what we might think of as the post-Renaissance context of Cervantes' and Shakespeares' work, fool and rogue are allies — indeed, fool and rogue are often one and the same character. The rogue's deceptions and the fool's evasions play havoc with the artificially ordered norms of reality posited by romance. A sense of the normality of disorder is the operative requirement for the picaresque and for comedy in the Shakespearian sense, or in the sense applicable to Cervantes, to come into being. The subversive agents of the post-Renaissance narrative modes are instruments of a new set of fictional conventions, the conventions of nascent "realism". When the rogue and the fool appear fiction has begun to propose for itself a new ambition, the ambition of mirroring "life", with its imperfections intact.

There is one final refinement. The fool must take the rogue's place and assimilate the characteristics of the rogue-hero — Quixote must supplant Lazarillo — before the novel as we know it can come into being. The campaign against romance (despite the anti-romancers' backslidings) begins with Cervantes.

Tom Collins is both rogue and fool. He is Feste, Sir Toby, Falstaff, muddled Sancho Panza and deluded Don Quixote. He is not a type, or a functionally protean being, in the sense that he is presented to us as a sharply individualized character in a defined context; and he voices a response to life, based on serious assumptions, possessing serious implications, which must be taken into account in any interpretation of the book. Furphy is Australia's first selfconscious mimeticist, our first fictional "realist" with a clear notion of the relation of naturalistic aims to literary tradition. The generic elements of *Such is Life* are recognisably the generic elements out of which the Western European novel sprang. In *Such is Life* the genre of the picaresque and the genre of Renaissance comedy come together in a unique mingling.<sup>10</sup> Furphy's novel stands out among the "classic" texts of Australian literature for its atavistic element. It recalls traditional modes in a way that no other novel of the period does.

It remains, of course, a nineteenth-century text. Its leading ideals are those of its age. Its narrative models are the bush yarn and the Bulletin short story. The author is a nationalist and a democrat. He is even something of a revolutionary. But the universality and the distinction of *Such is Life* resides in its use of elements that reflect the continuity of narrative traditions from the sixteenth century to the present day.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Such is Life Being Certain Extracts from the Diary of Tom Collins* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1944), ch. 5, esp. pp. 227-32, 248-53. Future references will be found in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>2</sup> It has been pointed out to me, by Mrs. Nora Spivak, at a meeting of a post-graduate seminar conducted by the Centre for General and Comparative Literature at Monash University, that Collins's deceptions fit neither category. They are usually intended to advantage someone else. They sometimes fail disastrously; but the attempt to prevent the confiscation of Warrigal Alf's bullocks in chapter 4 is one signal success.
- <sup>3</sup> Harry Sieber, *The Picaresque* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 5-9.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4.
- <sup>5</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, tr. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 493.
- <sup>6</sup> *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*, tr. M. Alpert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 87.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- <sup>8</sup> More work needs to be done on the romance element in *Such is Life*. Nina Knight pointed the way in "Furphy and Romance: *Such is Life* Reconsidered", *Southerly*, 29 (1969), 243-55. Her discussion of the subject was tentative and by no means exhaustive.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Stories of Henry Lawson*, ed. Cecil Mann (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1964), First Series, p. 111.
- <sup>10</sup> The idea that *Such is Life* is essentially a comedy was first given persuasive formulation by Chris Wallace-Crabbe in "Joseph Furphy, Realist", *Quadrant*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1961), pp. 49-56, and later developed by Brian Kiernan in "The Comic Vision of *Such is Life*", *Meanjin*, 23 (1964), 132-41. For Wallace-Crabbe the choice of genre limited the serious engagement of the text with its concerns (pp. 55-6). Kiernan was inclined to attribute the seeming moral inadequacies of the vision the novel offers to Collins, and to regard Furphy as a soberer being: "Through Collins's evasion of moral issues we are made conscious of them and their resolution in everyday life. We know that injustice is done and that the sky does not fall. This is one aspect of the sense in which *Such is Life* is a comic novel: it faces things as they are with equanimity and an amused awareness of the disparity between the ideal and the actual "suchness" of life" (pp. 139-40). I am a little worried by the hint here of a dichotomy between a comic Collins and a serious Furphy. I prefer to think, as I have suggested above, of Collins as the character "in situation", and of Furphy as a Collins looking back, in the light of later wisdom, as it were, on the difficult process through which wisdom is won — so that an element of continuity can be recognised between author and invented narrator. It is Kiernan's article, nonetheless, along with John Barnes, *Joseph Furphy* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1963), that has most shaped my view of the novel.

FRANK KELLAWAY

## When am I real?

*A chapter from a wartime autobiography*

When I reached London I was given three weeks' leave before being sent to Scotland for a course in minesweeping. I stayed at the Dominion Officers' Club in Grosvenor Square. The first few days I set myself to explore the city and see the famous sights. I visited St. Paul's, Madame Tussaud's, The Tower of London. All the time I felt as though I were searching for myself, for some sense of being, even for an illusion of reality. The buildings, the traffic, the people seemed to exist in an underwater world; it was like watching it all through the wall of a fish-tank. As for the famous places, seeing them at first hand had no more actuality or immediacy than reading about them in a guide book.

I puzzled about it. My service in Darwin seemed like a dream now; now the past and the present were equally insubstantial. But Darwin hadn't seemed unreal at the time. I'd been boxing then; maybe that had helped. I remembered Borrow's Romany friend saying, 'Come and put on the gloves, Brother, and I'll show you what a sweet thing it is to be alive.' Was I such a slug that I needed to put on the gloves to feel that I was alive? Then there was old Sam Johnson kicking that stone and saying, 'I refute him thus!' Was it a refutation because the stone hurt Johnson's foot? I wondered. I hit my hand experimentally against a wall in the Knightsbridge street where I was walking. That hurt. My hand was real. I was real. The stone wall was real. The pain was a sort of electric current which joined me with objects and established the real relation between me and the objective world.

Speculation along these lines was derailed when I saw a girl looking into a shop window. I made an involuntary movement towards her, an obscure lurch worthy of the great comic puppeteer who pulled the string.

Her face was pale and boyish, framed in a grey

fur collar, but she was heavily built with big breasts and she moved deliberately.

"Excuse me," I said, "I'm lost. Can you show me the way to Grosvenor Square?"

She turned her head from the window with a jaunty movement to look at me. I remembered how her skin glowed smooth amber in the late evening light and her reflection in the glass looked like a hunched gnome.

"I think it's somewhere around here." Her voice had a strong Cockney accent. "We'll ask this chap coming along now."

The man said, yes, the best way was to take the tube . . . We both knew neither of us wanted to find Grosvenor Square and agreed ridiculously that the chap must have been talking about a different Grosvenor Square; we wandered on pretending to read the names of streets.

"Let's have a beer." I took her arm and guided her into a pub with frosted glass doors patterned with grape-leaves.

"You look nice," I said awkwardly, putting down two pints. "That fur suits you."

She laughed with pleasure. "You ain't arf a flirt."

I was delighted by her accent; it was strange and exotic and, contrary to what I'd heard people say, quite unlike Australian. What surprised me was that though it was strange like everything else in London, it gave me no sense at all of unreality; it was warm and real and reassuring.

We exchanged names. Her's was Myrtle Williams. "Not a bad pub this. Don't like modern pubs . . ." I was off on a diatribe. I checked feeling her knee against mine. I looked at her and her eyes were cheeky and laughing. I had uncomfortable pains, which could have been hunger, in my stomach but an elated feeling like standing on a high dive just about to take a plunge into . . . reality? I stopped my yabber and pressed back firmly.

“Look at that soddin old bugger by the window!” I lost contact with her. She seemed to be jumping with excitement and amusement. “He’ll dry his beer up with that furnace of a nose if he doesn’t look out.” She laughed with good-humoured malice and a moment later remembered to press her knee against mine again.

I was in no state of mind to speculate on electric currents establishing the reality of knees!

We had three pints before the pub closed. In the street I pulled her into a doorway and we kissed. She pushed her tongue between my lips and pressed close when I cupped my hand round her breast. We stayed like that a long time, then I said, “Couldn’t you take me home to your place?”

“O no.” For the first time she sounded a little flustered.

We wandered round for several hours and found a seat in a square. Only starlight sabotaged London’s black-out. We kissed again and she guided my hand up between her legs under her skirt.

“Let’s lie down on the grass.”

“No,” she objected. “We wouldn’t enjoy it like that. You get a room for tomorrow night and I’ll do you to death till you’re so whacked you can’t stand up.”

We got up and wandered on. I asked her if she ever had dreams. I was fool enough to have gone on to ask what differences she distinguished between dream and waking experience, but fortunately I didn’t get a chance. “No, I never do,” she said excitedly, “but I knew a woman once who told me her dreams. One of them was that she had a big lump on her side — there.” She put my hand on her side under her breast. “Then in the dream this friend of mine heard someone saying, ‘You’re growing a rat.’” Myrtle was agog at the drama of it. “And another time she dreamed she had big knitting needles stickin through her side.”

I wondered whether Myrtle’s friend had been mixed up with a back-yard abortionist but I didn’t ask.

We found ourselves at Victoria Station and wandered round the empty platforms. We sat on a bench close together and for an hour Myrtle slept with her head on my shoulder.

“Half-past four,” I said when she woke. “There’s a coffee stall over there. Looks as though they’re serving early shift workers. Come and I’ll buy you a cup.”

She lived in a terrace where she earned her keep cleaning several flats. I left her outside at

six o’clock.

After a late breakfast I took a room in Oxford Street under the name of Hawkins and went to sleep fully clothed on the bed. I woke with a start, a dirty taste in my mouth. It was late afternoon already and I thought I’d overslept but found I had an hour till I was due to meet Myrtle.

Ten minutes before time I was out on the appointed corner walking up and down. I was making a fool of myself; she wouldn’t turn up. I tried to remember her kisses and the way she’d guided my hand into her moist crutch but it all seemed to have happened in a dream. Bloody dreams! I didn’t seem able to get away from them! What I remembered as real now was her mockery.

I heard her before I saw her. “You don’t arf look brahned orf.”

We kissed.

“You make me feel weak at the knees,” she lied cheerfully.

“I’ve got a room in Oxford Street. I’ve signed us in as Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins.”

“Awkins,” she said with hugely derisive enjoyment. “I never thought I’d end up as Mrs. Awkins, not even for one night.”

“What’s wrong with Hawkins?” I asked her laughing. “It was the name of one of the greatest admirals England ever had.”

“Awk-ins.” She dismissed the name with comical contempt.

We went to a Lyons and had a meal of sausages and mash. I remembered my father used to call it “Two zeplins and a cloud” and told Myrtle but she wasn’t interested.

“What’s the book?” she demanded pointing to the copy of Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets* which I’d parked on the table beside my plate.

“Poetry,” she said with genuine, little-girl eagerness when I told her. “Read me a poem.”

I read “Bussie old fool, unruly Sun . . .” She seemed to like it and demanded another.

After tea we walked the few blocks to the room I’d taken. “Here we are,” I said.

Myrtle all but shied. “Gawd no. We can’t go in yet. It’s not even dark.”

I was astonished. “What difference does that make?”

“You can’t go to bed while it’s still light.” She made it sound a tremendous joke.

We walked arm in arm. Like last night, I was thinking. Hope to God it’s not going to go on as long as that did.

“It’s kind of peaceful,” she said. “I wouldn’t mind if we went on walking till morning like we

did last night." She gave me a mocking look.

"My God, I would."

She laughed loudly. It was a gay, boyish laugh, but the fine lines in the clear skin around her deep-set eyes were tender and feminine.

"Just the same it was nice last night." She sounded wistful. "Like being sixteen again."

I resented seeing her so obviously thinking of her first love affair. To change the subject I said awkwardly, "You know you remind me of a pencil drawing of Keats by Joseph Severn."

She treated this bit of academic nonsense as it deserved. "And who was soddin Keats?"

"A poet — died young — handsome . . ." He was a cockney too, I was thinking.

"Cor what a bleedin insult. Reckons I look like Mister soddin Keats." She laughed in bewilderment at the crazy boy she'd picked up. "Mister soddin Keats," she repeated with good-humoured derision.

"Come on." I turned her round impatiently and this time she didn't object.

In the room she sat on my knee in the shabby leather armchair in front of a gas fire and pretended she wanted me to read her poems. I tickled her and she giggled and fought. She was unexpectedly heavy and strong but bit by bit she let me undress her. When she was naked she jumped off my knee and into the double bed.

"Cor you're slow," she taunted. "This ain't a funeral, y'know." Then she added with a ribald chuckle, "Could be yours. I'm gonna do you to death."

We both survived what seemed a temporary death. Through a tiny rift in the grave the world flowed in again; itch and ache, legs sticky with sweat.

"Jesus I'm soddin ot," Myrtle said throwing off the bed-clothes.

If I claim, as I do, that I really appreciated Myrtle, the reader may be forgiven for commenting that I went a bloody funny way about showing it. We all try to embody what is surprising or singular to us in the complex of generalisations which constitutes our understanding of reality. We all do our best to reduce our experience to

cliché. We repeat the phrase as we repeat the experience until it is so familiar we can take it for granted. Then we have a sense of security, a bogus illusion of being in touch with reality. My little university-boy attempts to fit Myrtle into my literary clichés were absurd but they didn't preclude genuine appreciation. I enjoyed enormously the way she cut me down to size.

"You're beautiful," I told her. "Let's have a bath together."

We stood naked in front of the gas fire; I admired her firm breasts and heavy, well-moulded buttocks. Her hands too were big and her legs were powerful. Dragging up another of my clichés I saw this girl with her fine nose and deep-set eyes as a fertility idol.

"I'm going to call you Lilith." I stood touching her buttocks with my belly, stroking her shoulder with the tips of my fingers.

She turned her head and kissed me with moist lips and laughed. "Oo was soddin Lilith? Not *another* bleedin poet, I hope?" Her voice took on a music-hall gaiety. "You're not going to mix me up with another soddin poet after that!"

In the bath she said, "You need someone to look after you."

I didn't see myself as somebody who needed looking after, but if this was the form it was going to take I wasn't going to complain.

Before she'd come to bed again she made me sit in the armchair and read her another poem while she sat naked in my naked lap.

"That's lovely." I took it she meant the poem but I wasn't sure. She stood up suddenly and jumped into bed. "Come and get me if you dare. Bet you can't. Come on and I'll do you to death."

"Tell me you love me," she said when we were locked together.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," I whispered wondering what the hell that meant in this context, in any context.

Later lying quietly I had the hide to resent her having tried to impose her cliché onto what we were, onto what we were doing together.

I was staggered when she said quietly, "You don't have to love me, really."

JOHN BECHERVAISE **Losing the Light**

My grandfather's Victorian home persisted on a promontory extending well into the restless seas of the second half of our century, and reaching back into territory, as intangible but as real as yesterday, beyond the bounds of the living.

Architecturally, St Elmo was respectable but undistinguished: brick and steeply pitched slate, with tall, too heavily corniced chimneys and patterned tiled verandas where the stags' horn ferns still brooded colonially behind tea-rosed trellises. It was much smaller than the old home in Mercer Road, sold because a large family had dispersed itself and because, for my grandmother, the stairs put two floors above her limits. My memories of Mercer Road are quite clear, but they are overlain like a dream.

No inch of space in St Elmo remained unoccupied. There were bronzes and ornaments, shells and curios, trees of every kind everywhere. It must have been dusted frequently, an immense invisible labor. My aunt may still have retained a little daily help at that time.

Even the walls of the bathroom held pictures. Everywhere the shadows glinted with light: the sheen on tall *Cloisonné* urns, reflections in glass, gold-leaf on heavy moulded picture frames and on the spines of old books. I once commented on their fire-lit glimmering.

"Er . . . my boy," chuckled my grandfather, "St Elmo's fire!" Then, without pause, he laid another spell upon me. "Err . . . the Italian fishermen say *Ermo* . . . their patron saint who creates an aureole on the tips of their masts to protect them in storms. The Greeks, of course, also thought the light friendly, but gave the credit to *Caer* and *Pollux*, and . . . er . . . the Spanish call it *corpo santo*, the holy body . . . err . . . however!" By the time we had pulled down Dr Smith's *Classical Mythology* and Brewer's *Phrase and Fable*, the evening would be enchanted away.

Words and concepts entirely new to me were certainly illuminated by St Elmo's pristine light; occasionally, even now, they flash across the years.

I went to see my grandfather often, from the time I could travel alone to Malvern from Murrumbidgee, catching a train — 'sevenpence, half-second-return' — at four-fifteen, with a colloquy of tweeded women teachers from the local state school I then attended, and returning after tea and an hour or two of wonder by the nine-eighteen.

"Don't walk along the lane," my mother would admonish me, "and get into a carriage with a lady!" However, if my auntie had finished teaching music at nine, she often walked with me to the beginning of the railway lane at Malvern, and I would then scuttle fearfully through, leaping along breathlessly, rumbling a stick over the corrugations of an iron fence, or whistling loudly. By the time I was abreast the worst darkness, that of the tributary alleys near the billiard saloon, the lights of Glenferrie Road were visible.

With delight tempered by immense respect I would sit fascinated while my grandfather, a small man with immense white moustache and side-whiskers, a shining bald pate — which he often covered with a blue smoking cap embroidered with gold braid — and twinkling eyes, introduced me to art, history and literature, about all of which he held the most decided views and prejudices. I accepted these voraciously and uncritically.

In maturity, I knew his fields were hedged by his certainties, and finite, his cultivation excluding much contemporary vitality in literature and all the arts. He held no zest for indiscipline of any kind, and considered the mastery of the medium as important as the genius it conveyed.

Had he lived in another century, doubtless, his margins would have borne much the same relation to his times. He once said, "Er . . . my boy . . . time filters the past!" Very often he quoted Shakespeare. It was only after the passage of years that most of his quotations sprang like old friends from their own context. "Ah . . . my noble . . .," he would conclude, "er . . . r . . . ripeness is all!" No one who knew him will ever forget his contemplative intervals, usually spanned by a long-drawn *err . . . r* which, as often as not, concluded with an almost staccato *however* which effectively turned the corner of his thought.

He possessed a merciless sense of propriety and decorum in manners and dress, alleviated by a sense of humor which occasionally even found a chink in his principles. Then his horror would be cracked by mockery, and he chuckled like a gnome. He permitted himself no excesses other than a large Victorian family over which, although all but one had married, he continued to exercise immense paternalistic influence if not control. He firmly believed in the dictum "Populate or Perish!" "Er . . . these small families," he would declare, "er . . . these . . . small families will be the death of the empire . . . the death of the empire."

My auntie Bren, who looked after the old man for fifty years, until he died in his middle nineties, often said in after years, without rancor; "He was fortunate in having me! He could never have lived with any of his married family . . . he would always have been trying to bring up their children." I doubt whether my aunt, whose devotion so sustained the physical well-being of a genial tyrant, without often counting the cost, ever got enough credit.

He certainly had his own way with me; I sat enthralled and, in those early years, I accepted my grandfather's judgement of everything. In the flash of an eye he was liable to expatiate on the genius of Reynolds, Gainsborough and Constable; of Turner and Ruskin; of Cruikshank and 'Dicky' Doyle; of Sir John Gilbert or Birket Foster; let alone any of the Renaissance masters of the European Schools. Together we'd pore over a first edition of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, with illustrations by George Cattermole and Hablot Browne — "er . . . the immortal Phiz", or a Dante's *Inferno* or *Paradiso* with the vast gloomy wood engravings of Gustave Doré. Sometimes we'd work through Turner's *Rivers of England*, or Henry Mayhew's *Rhine*, with the exquisite steel-plates from Birket Foster. Just as often, I would be enthralled by biographies from Plutarch,

interspersed by Shakespearean quotation which was more memorable at times than meaningful. "Ah," the old man would say, "the labor we delight in physics pain . . .", or "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face . . ." But sometimes the meaning long preceded a later use. As we walked together once down the railway lane, we passed a girl with a cigarette, in those days a most unusual sight. "O brave new world," quoted my grandfather, without any evident censure, "that has such people in it."

If I found the old man intent on composing a chess problem — he supplied the Leader with chess problems periodically for forty years — I would become absorbed in a bound volume of the Illustrated London News. Always, now and then, my grandfather would lean over, and I am sure he instantly recognized whatever page of twenty or thirty volumes I had come upon.

"Ah . . . er . . . the poor old Duke of Wellington . . . there he is with the Queen and the Prince Consort . . . looks as though he should have been home in bed. Er . . . you know, my boy . . . er . . . I was taken by my mother to see the funeral procession of the Duke; it is . . . er . . . my first memory!" Then, almost without pause . . . "Extraordinary genius . . . Paxton . . . er . . . scrawled the first plans for the . . . er . . . Crystal Palace on a blotter . . . er . . . however!" This would have been the first time I had heard of the Crystal Palace, and I would ask about it. I was never rebuffed. From that day I retained an eagerness which eventually took me to Sydenham . . . only a year or so before I saw the reflection in the sky of its burning. He would return to his problem, to pounce back as suddenly ten minutes later, when I had taken another volume at random.

"Ah . . . er . . . Madame Adelina Patti! I never saw her, but I remember my aunt . . . bless her sainted memory! . . . writing of her performance as Leonora in 'Il Trovatore'."

The magic of St Elmo was manifold. But first for me, I think, was its immutability. I would hurry elated from my train, anticipating even the clatter of my feet on the tiled verandah and the sound of the door bell ringing far away down the still passages, preceding either the energetic advancing footsteps of my aunt, or the soft shuffling of my grandfather.

Most of the pictures at the old house were windows in the walls looking out eternally to Buvelot sunsets or to moonscapes along the river at Hawthorn or Heidelberg, seascapes at

Williamstown or Mordialloc, to quiet country roads through Porepunkah or Castlemaine, or, by acceptable clairvoyance, to cloud-wreathed visions of Stromboli, or to lanes outside Naples or Rome. A majority had been painted by my grandfather or his friends in the tranquil week-ends of the 'seventies or 'eighties, or during their rare journeys abroad. There were several historical portraits in charcoal or conté: King Lear in his madness, I especially remember, and Sir Philip Sidney. Other pictures were delicate still-life paintings or strawberries and primroses, birds' nests with cerulean eggs; these were by Rose Elliott, one of my grandfather's eighteenth century aunts. To me, as a child, these luminous works were dreams of discovery, for I haunted the trees and tall grasses of Springthorp's bird sanctuary at Murrumbeena, and ranged far along the old Outer Circle railway, seeking just such treasure in vain.

Often my grandfather would stand with me and tell me of his pictures, so I even knew the name and nature of a little terrier of fifty years before, and recognized my mother and my aunt Milly (whose husband had been a mining engineer) standing as young girls, in broad pleated skirts and picture hats, in red-dusted goldfields townships.

At this time I never really appreciated the Bartolozzi engravings, or the plates from Turner's *Liber Studiorum*, but my mind lost itself in the print of "The Fighting Téméraire" and in a coloured lithograph of "Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus". Somehow I associated a Bartolozzi, after Carlo Dolci, I think, with Lesbia's sparrow. I can see the light in the eye of the bird cradled in the girl's hands. I suppose it must have been my grandfather who first introduced me to Catullus.

I knew something of etching, engraving both from wood and metal, and of lithography, by the time I was ten. "Ah . . . er . . . Bartolozzi," spoke the well-mannered voice, "er . . . nothing survives but . . . er . . . proves his genius." Of a Landseer he would say, "You see, the . . . er . . . artist worked directly on the stone . . . er . . . the print has extraordinary immediacy." Or, standing by a Girton, he would murmur, "Ah, poor Girton . . . er . . . what felicity! Turner once said . . . er . . . 'Had Girton lived, Turner had starved . . .'."

Before a landscape by Herbert Woodhouse, one of his rivals on the fringe of the Heidelberg School, he would pause, "Er . . . poor Woodhouse . . . he had quality." Then he would groan . . . "A thousand pities . . . it is just a trifle muddy

. . . er . . . er . . . he lost the light!" "To lose the light" became almost a standard expression when I first began painting.

"Er, . . . my boy . . . er . . . the draughtsmanship is . . . er . . . satisfactory, but . . . er . . . you've lost the light! You've lost the light!"

Very often I would steal through the house alone, while my grandfather was playing chess with old Parker and my aunt was preparing the evening meal. In silence measured by a solemn pendulum, and often, as I fearfully lifted ornaments or peered into cupboards, by my heartbeats, I explored that Victorian world — birds of paradise under a glass dome, a Chinese embroidered slipper, many equestrian and canine bronzes, plenty of ivory and ebony elephants, the inevitable bust of Beethoven, a collection of tropical shells mostly stripped to their nacreous lustre — including a pearly nautilus carved by a prisoner, I was told, with the words, "Remember me!"

Flanking a fine Italian group of cattle in alabaster, a black marble pedimented clock and a portrait of my grandmother who hadn't long survived the move from Mercer Road, were two bowls on long stems, hung with lustres breaking the curtained light into prismatic colors which, for years, I thought unique, existing only in that space. Each could be made to sound exquisite tinklings, and each held an emu egg, carved like a cameo.

In the front drawing room there was a perpetual calm brooding over the faded floral carpet. It was years before I realized that the room was used often at night. The furniture was choice, slender and eclectic. Chairs of both Hepplethwaite and Sheraton style, upholstered in faded silk brocade, which I never dared sit upon, a rather solid gate-leg table always holding a large *jardinière* with fresh flowers, several small tables, a corner 'what-not' and a typical Empire console table, supporting a cabinet containing the more precious treen and some fine Murano, comprised the principal furniture. A long shelf held a dozen old family daguerreotypes and early sepia prints in silver frames. Then there was the piano, a Renardi, with a fretted panel backed by wine damask.

Each room possessed its characteristic light—and a redolence persisting as long as memory. Still, mentally I can touch the great camphor-scented portfolios in the study—which, in fact, was part library and part box-room, with chests of drawers crammed with old nostalgias which I seldom had a chance to inspect. The positions of hundreds of books I knew, though, and some



I loved dearly: in memory I can still take down a *Fontaine's Fables*—again illustrated by Doré—or Cuvier's *Animal Kingdom*; I can recall every Lanseer plate in vivid detail.

The pantry, of course, held obvious attractions and delicious smells of nutmeg, coffee and spices, but, here again, there brooded a strange changelessness, and the higher shelves up to which I would sometimes climb seemed to me to have been stacked in some timeless past. Every shed, even, held its treasures: old tools and boxes of catches, keys and buckles, twine, brass screws . . . all of a pattern that seemed old-fashioned and solid beyond any in current use.

Even the garden advanced through its seasons in so stately a progression that every peach and apricot was a recurrent delight plucked annually from the same gnarled boughs.

One of the enduring visions is of my grandfather sitting in a pool of lamplight, scanning with a magnifying glass Holler's View of London, in search of some detail of a church lost in the Great Fire. "Er . . . my noble . . . er . . . see Haygate up in the fields beyond St Paul's church . . . it had a fine Norman tower! *Circumspice!* Er . . . Wren's contribution is magnificent . . . but see what perished!" He wrote several pages on old London churches, always an important focus of his rare journeys to his birthplace. "Johnson was right . . ." he would say, "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life . . ."

By the time I was eleven I often played chess with my grandfather, though I never won a game for years, unless I was given a queen and rook or, later, the queen and 'move'. With his embroidered smoking-cap above his bushy white side-burns, puffing at his cigar, he moved his pieces lightly and rapidly. I would ponder long, and finally move, but he would reply on the instant, giving me no rest from his initiative; it was good training. Then, long before I could see any outcome to the game, he'd ejaculate, "Ha! Mate in two!", and it always was so.

Then it would be time for supper which my aunt brought in to the lamplight, and in no time I'd be hastening down the railway lane, carrying with me a restless sort of happiness, and whistling loudly.

When I was twelve—I recall that year quite clearly—my mother advised a tree as a present for my grandfather's birthday. To me it was a novel idea to give a tree, for I'd formulated a belief that people could not really own anything living—it was part of a secret creed which I never

confessed, nor later lost. However, I walked down to the Neerim Road and, from the new florist there, selected a tree—one I'd never heard of, with glossy green leaves, marked "Lilly Pilly—a hardy native". And, in August that year, the tree was planted near the trim pittosporum hedge fronting the St Elmo garden. I cannot recall any other such innovation in the eternity of the garden, except perhaps the balloon-flowers my mother transplanted from under our lime tree. From a scion of that colony there are survivals still.

The tree grew vigorously, but my grandfather never allowed it to overtop the hedge. Bounds were bounds; somehow the lilly pilly was too close to the hedge to escape control, and the gardener ruthlessly trimmed it to my grandfather's order. Once I suggested that the tree should be permitted to grow naturally. "No garden," the old man replied, "can be allowed to run wild. Besides," he said, "the tree would obscure the light."

As I have said there were restraints other than of trees that concerned my grandfather. These possessed a sort of common definition within which new growth was seldom acceptable. While my grandfather revered Ingres, he never even considered that John, in another era, might be as great a draughtsman; he shuddered at Epstein; for him, Henry Moore was an apostle of decadence. His literary tastes never included Galsworthy.

I became content to reserve my contemporary enthusiasms for other company, but I saw my grandfather scarcely less frequently. Each visit held the same memorable calm. In the circle of lamplight still he bent over his Gibbon or Green, his Evelyn and Pepys.

When I myself went to live and study in London we sustained a lively correspondence.

I returned to Australia once after an absence of years, knowing that there would be one sanctuary untouched by time, untinged by circumstance. Surely enough, the brilliant lustres hung motionless from their tiny links as through endless years; the gilt shone from the shadows. I went sniffing through the rooms, not only for the rosemary and cinnamon, but for the smell of old leather and paper, mellowness and must. The pictures remained unmoved; all my time away seemed to be spanned by the successive strikings of the tall clock. The topiaried lilly pilly tree remained within its limits.

In that summer again I spent many evenings with my ageing aunt and her father, exploring

worlds to which there were hundreds of assembled guides, worlds with defined margins but infinite byroads, where movements and destination were calm and assured; worlds which had sustained ataraxia through two world wars touching the heart of memory, where tokens were a few photographs added to the line of silver frames, of those who would not again rove the timeless rooms of St Elmo.

I returned to Europe, and did not see my grandfather again.

Under the terms of his will, some of his treasures were dispersed, but my aunt preserved the beautiful anachronism for many years, gradually retracting the areas of her living occupancy, so that some rooms became mortified, filled with piled books and boxes closed in darkness, making inaccessible the great portfolios. A couple of rooms were eventually let but, until the end of my aunt's life, all change was reluctant.

"Now," I recall saying to my aunt one evening, "you could ask Willem not to trim the lilly pilly. It is not natural for it to have a flat top."

"I shall do no such thing," she replied. "Pa would be horrified. He liked it just so. To let such trees grow you need a forty acre paddock!"

For two decades the greater silence and the vacant calm persisted. My aunt spent much time living with her nephews and nieces—always she spent Christmas with us—but, until she died, nothing was changed in the old house.

Then, very promptly, it was sold by the

executors at a remarkable price—although no money could have recreated the arrangement then scattered for ever. I could scarcely bear to enter the house, for a glaucous film seemed to lie across St Elmo's bright reflections. It lost the last gleam of the light which had illumined it, as though a Rembrandt had been begrimed by smoke. How well I could hear the old man's voice . . . "Err . . . my boy . . . you have lost the light."

Finally, when almost everything had been sold or distributed, I trundled out the last few loads of books and pictures, including many I had known as a child.

Soon after, I was again abroad, and I heard that the house and the garden had been bull-dozed away to make room for a block of flats. In my mind not a book or picture had been moved, not a lustre shaken; the old house could never lose the light of memory.

I had no intention of passing by the site of my grandfather's home last week, but I drove a friend home from my club, and discovered that he lived in the Gladstone Road, close to the railway line. Curiosity defeated me. I stopped by the four-square yellow brick pile set in half an acre of concrete. There was not a single shed or shrub or wall of the old home left, not a blade of grass . . . But, centring a raised circular curb of concrete, reaching for the stars, fretting the highest yellow bricks with a black lace of waving shadows, was my lilly pilly tree, alone of all things past alive.

EUNICE OLDFIELD

## "Where are all the Flowers Gone?"

I sit today, a child of the depression years, and wonder "where the flowers are all gone," the hopes, ideals, ambitions of the Labour League stalwarts in the depression. It is my fervent wish that the memory of it all to them still seems worthwhile.

I remember those bad times very well. My parents were of the new breed, determined to change the world and "give the workers a go". Dad was a returned soldier, certain that another war must never come.

Freezing nights in the local League Hall, talk, interminable talk of Bevan, Sir Otto Niemeyer, Douglas Social Credit, Marx; electioneering slogans white washed illegally on walls to be erased by opposing parties each in turn; my mother on a soap box delivering the speech she had practised at home until I knew it too; perpetually the shining and absolute faith that democracy must triumph, the lot of the worker improve.

I remember my aunts and uncles all out of work walking to save fares, shoes wearing out, parties at home with cards and the gramophone, mince always for tea when a crowd was expected, sensing the financial disaster of a new and wanted baby, but mainly I remember the undying shining belief that things *would* change for the better.

The cooking teacher making soup every day, for the out-of-work's children free — everyone else 1d. Never did anyone dare be sneaky and not pay; the bare feet of most of the children on freezing shaded asphalt. A picnic at Happy Valley (we walked) and my flavoured drink being given to a family with children living in a bag and tin humpy in the sand dunes. My father, giving away his tobacco, proud of my "social conscience".

And then the, to me, incomprehensible Lang Labour split and the end of an era.

To those who still remember all their work so gladly given, I salute you and may you never wonder "where have all the flowers gone?"

*Alan Oldfield, the well-known Australian painter, found this short article among his mother's papers after her death.*

*Jack and Eunice Oldfield were killed in a car accident near Sale on November 15th, 1976, returning to Sydney from Melbourne. They were 55 years old.*

*Their family has had a long involvement with Socialist politics. The household of Eunice Oldfield's grandparents had a distinctly Fabian Socialist atmosphere; in more radical moments her grandfather would proudly claim that he was the "last man back" in the unpopular Railway Strike of 1917.*

*Her own parents were very active in the Labor League, her father running the Fighting Fund of the Party and organising both State and Federal campaigns. Her mother made speeches from street corners. "Happy days are here again, Lang is here to steer again", voiced the optimism of the day. This period is recalled in this fragment.*

*Then came the Lang Labour split. Deeply disillusioned, her father often said that "Lang had sold the cause of Socialism down the drain." From that time her parents' sympathies lay with the Communist Party of Australia.*

*Eunice Oldfield had been a member of the Eureka Youth League. Because of this both she and her husband were denied official membership of the Labor Party. Both continued to work for the Party; Jack Oldfield was a union delegate of the Australian Engineering Union.*

*In their aspirations and hopes Jack and Eunice Oldfield represented a continuing ideal within Australian society.*

## My Father

On my lounge room mantelpiece sits  
a picture of my father in his heyday.  
Its curled up corners twist his smile.  
The dark brown ring of a spilt cup  
bull-rings his nose. His white eye lifts  
making my blood run backwards . . . .  
In his green New Guinea uniform  
his cheek bones curved like my own . .

I think of my father now, when on his  
death bed, slept in sixty years, his  
pulse raced like an athlete nearly there —  
His iron-strong metabolism made its final  
preparations . . . gathered, huddled, ditched —  
Waiting like my father's old front line  
for the glitter and clash of bayonet silver  
on the next hill.

ANDREW FLETT

## Three Sonnets from the Middleman

I  
small print  
the hours of sleep are part of my death  
i am up to my neck in debt to life  
wanting to live the full twentyfour  
hours of each day larger and larger  
instalments of sleep dispossess me  
their compound interest is a devil's  
count i can't remember expensive  
catnaps i bought without first glance at  
the small print on a contract  
concealing conditions for living  
the larger life pestered now by a  
pilfering nuisance of sleep swarmed on  
by those ant-like letters of small print

seems death is my solicitor

II  
'MON REPOS'  
After an afternoon when I  
closed-up shop, bargaining  
for the remainder of day, I  
found myself short-changed as I changed  
out of my suit of commercial  
armour and found that the trees  
had been home all day. There, my wife  
growled — 'to get away from it all!'  
It all didn't add up to me:  
the addled idea of added  
profits which didn't profit me.  
I lay awake waiting for sleep,  
counting sheep which were escaping like  
stars in time's exploding universe.

III  
AFFLICTIONS  
According to others one has  
to bear the burden of others'  
afflictions, self-inflicting the  
others' sorrow. If I am a  
happy 'so-and-so', to remain  
so-and-so I must shed the  
happiness of the legitimate,  
otherwise — 'bastard, you wouldn't  
help a blind dog across a road!'  
Well, blind dogs don't run around  
my street. If I see one, I'll phone  
the R.S.P.C.A. who will  
catch him and snuff him out. Don't  
walk down my street, looking gloomy.

JOHN BLIGHT

## the palace of art

we don't believe in being destructive  
& only wish to direct your attention  
to the contempt which you have (on

occasion) displayed towards the workers  
for whom you express an affinity  
but whose company you dislike

& the bourgeoisie whose manners  
you ape & by whose standards you would  
dearly love to be approved,

even art in your hands has become  
an expression of contempt as it takes  
away from human creation its humanity.

but it is not our intention to be  
impolite & because we believe in the good  
we will direct you consistently & gently

to self knowledge, realisation, samadhi.

soon the rail trucks will come to escort  
you to a new destination which you may at  
first dislike but which you will come

to rejoice in for it will be yours to own  
& for this reason it is likely to be a quiet  
place where the night air could turn chilly

but the sky will be clear & on weeknights  
there will be music to which you can dance  
if you can manage the appropriate dignity,

we suggest you practice the waltz.

it has been pleasant for these few moments  
entertaining you & it is time for us to part,  
vaya condios, & don't lose your numbers,

because you are a different breed of man  
from those we hope to send after you.

RAE DESMOND JONES

### The Third World

We turn over a stone, underneath are grammersows  
Fatly scuttling away from the light.  
The earth has shaken, has turned over and left them  
A prey to unknown invaders.  
Do we understand our situation any better  
Bending politely and staggering  
Under the loss of the white man's enjoyable burden?  
What we give back we never had  
What we hold is a disgrace to humanity.  
Empires crumble and pass away  
When there is no need for pioneers and adventurers.  
The conquistadores are dead.  
That is all to the good. But who would wish to choose  
Between anarchy and bloodshed or  
Riches, endless oilfields and absolute power  
Or a sea-green incorruptible  
Antiseptic mould ordered by every state and every doctor?

### Aerial Music

Hard as it is for me to catch the sound  
Of angel voices, I hear newness in the air,  
A drumming of astronauts led by girl pipers,  
A joyful noise of opening parachutes,  
Gradually dissolving in a depth of silence.  
  
I do not know for what ears these airs are bound,  
They are sweet, overmastering and rare,  
Like the fugues of melodious sky-hikers  
Who choose chromatically difficult routes,  
Gradually resolving in a depth of silence.

RONALD BOTTRALL

### Unzip Your Condition

unzip your condition  
it has stopped raining  
  
is a poems advice  
to a young line  
that has found a monk  
  
in a nun's bed  
fold back the robes  
but be warned of words  
that are tried and found  
  
to be fools in a field  
of irrelevancies  
and do not be content  
with a hunter  
and a bowshaped mouth  
  
that shoots deer  
one leg at a time  
and then panics  
because there are no arrows  
left for the heart

RUSSELL DEEBLE

### The Dialect of the Middle Class

As if from a distant county  
they speak our language  
with a strange dialect:  
state hardship in a way  
that we, the poor, would interpret  
as mild inconvenience.  
The word diet occurs  
more often than hunger;  
*own, have, got* are dominant verbs  
and their want is different to ours.

Most difficult to comprehend  
even with constant repetition  
is the transposition of intention:  
sympathy with the addition  
of several buts  
is changed to condemnation,  
victim becomes fault.

I believe these peculiarities  
of speech are influenced  
as much by the fullness of the stomach  
as the emptiness of the heart.

### The Fall

Autumn  
so soon?  
Season of despair.  
The mysterious cricket sings  
like a heart beneath the rubble  
leaves scrape along the pavement  
with the sound of discarded goodbyes.  
Illusions fall  
winter must come.

Now is the time that we seek love  
with a desperate finality, now  
before the pathetic gold watches arrive  
to mark the longest hours  
of our shortest days.

How strange  
that we  
should know so little love.

Above the distant cries of children  
I hear the sound of a machine —  
it is functioning perfectly.

MAURICE STRANDGARD

### Joe Wilson's Mate

I rise like a turtle  
In the desert pools of her eyes  
And fill my waterbag  
And set out through the mirage of her face

Her smile shimmers  
On the rim of the horizon  
As I trudge towards  
The light blue hills of her breasts

In a wayside shanty  
I throw down my swag —  
Between bottles in the mirror  
She arranges the heatwaves of her hair

As my cheque cuts out  
I re-enter her eyes  
Falling free  
Through the black hole between the stars.

DAVID CAMPBELL

### Some Bird

I watched till your plane took off  
not sentimental nor expecting see you wave  
so much as you gone, what  
the hell else was there to do.  
And then it unswooped or something.  
Stuck as usual for a word: swoop is  
down, I think but the plane went up  
through graceful and parabolic like swoop  
except up not down, and perhaps it's a catenary.

Next week you'll be back  
and chances are I'll be watching  
your plane's graceful swoop to a landing  
and you elegantly arriving, still  
stuck for a word to capture it all.  
But won't much mind my  
inarticulateness when I hold you again  
swooping and unswooping in my arms.

R. G. HAY

### Giftgas

Giftgas they called it  
In days before the Madison men had thunk  
The softsell label for their genocide junk.  
Giftgas, the crossbones and the skull  
Made us poor to whom all gifts are sent  
Uneasy in our freighttrained banishment.  
The dull, spike-headed farmboys herded us  
With "Schwein!" and "Raus!" in trucks  
That bucked typhus-dry mouths  
To the deathhouse. Giftgas,  
He turns it round in chem-lab hands,  
Grins for the Fuehrer's sake, and hears  
The snakescale rustle of the chips  
Into the cups. He throws the carton  
To one side, where hundreds of the giftgas,  
Heads off, lean and lie.  
He pushes in the button, so,  
Giftgas goes curling to its work below:  
"We knew that they were dead  
When all the screaming stopped,"  
Herr Hoess has said.

And we who have the poor still with us,  
The poor whose salt drips often  
For our sake, we do not have  
That niggly whether the screaming  
May not have stopped, because  
We really do not hear it start, as,  
Turning on the Teev ten thousand  
Miles away, we see, would you believe,  
A little girl blazing in a Phantom's wake,  
Her mouth sprung open  
Like a milking snake.

DENIS KEVANS

### Poem

#### PART I

becoming obnoxious on a television evening.

T.V.s are so very romantic,  
a war movie was on  
i dropped the half bottle of beer  
on the floor as i was putting  
it back in the frig  
"careful" my wife screamed  
"don't worry" i said  
"its not coca-cola"  
just then a soft drink ad fizzed onto the screen  
my beer was valid

#### PART 2

they all say square eyes, but its a square arse.

i had the headphones on,  
this silence really sorted out  
the actors, like silent movies.  
the crook had a smug look  
"he's a smart arse" i said  
"SHUT UP" everyone said  
which gave the crook  
time to escape.

ALLAN JURD

## canvas-stretching

1.  
from newtown to toorak  
900 kilometres  
he thought of her —  
  
one thought 900 kilometres long.  
  
thinking through goulburn  
and through albury-wodonga,  
thinking through that inevitable  
rain we struck just outside melbourne  
  
she's changed my life, he said.
2.  
she wasn't there. she'd already moved.
3.  
the living-room showed itself  
empty of her — like a shadow  
tensed above one of her canvasses —  
the whole flat was empty of her
4.  
12 midnight. 13 hours on the road.  
in toorak i'm thinking of adelaide  
and a painter i know who says  
canvas-stretching is important  
as the paint brushing paint spraying —  
measures the life
5.  
"her eyes are soft & blue  
her eyes are clear & bright . . ."
6.  
1am. 14th hour on the road. hawthorn.  
we're out looking for her. the frame  
cannot stand the strain, the canvas  
collapses from the centre outwards
7.  
". . . she's not there."

LARRY BUTTROSE

## Natural selection

At first a deserter by the dust bed pillowed  
with taller gums, she becomes a mother to us — the cord  
sways around her tail, skin sucks up  
to the emptiness after her ribs. She moves from the dead  
  
creek. There, below view, overnight foxes  
have gutted the calf. "It doesn't seem stillborn"  
(there's agony in the decay pose). "It was —  
this morning she's tried to nose it into life."  
  
Yards from the carcase are the bones of last year's mother.  
The skull beams a bullet hole: last year's birth took  
time that she couldn't give — so it had to be the rifle  
  
or the merciless herd. There was really no choice —  
a moment of pain, then oblivion . . . a cow's easy wandering  
is fine for life, but death demands something human.

JOHN FOULCHER

## The Once But Not Future President

The newsmen in the railroad's carriage  
following the ever-so-accidental President  
last heard him saying: Thank you. Yes.  
We will. God bless you! America! to  
all the Red, long dead Indians (no,  
not that meaning of Bolshevism) who  
still worshipped their Divine Sun  
through Inca and Aztec Indian maizestalks  
green, and yellow the cobs of corn  
taller than any President.

The opposition came from Georgia's old  
South, had been President for a term,  
correction — had been Governor.  
The President and his wife had more  
than enjoyed their stay in Montana,  
correction — Oregon, and loved  
the streets of San Francisco — er, Seattle.

How not knowing the differences between  
Apache, Navaho, Pawnee, Mohican, Shawnee,  
Cherokee, Chippewa and Cheyenne — was how  
the West was won and lost, although the Comanches  
turned back the Imperial Spaniards who'd  
paddled against the Mississippi.

Uncle Sam's boomerang flew over the Pacific,  
around Australia and returned to Amerika, missing  
somehow, the Dreamtime, the Great Rainbow Serpent  
and a crucial, high-frequency's fail-safe beep  
lost in a tribal tonguetwisting  
of Jagara, Kurna, Aranda and Pitjandjara.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

## Terror of Tobruk

There's a robust little old man  
who parades down and around town every day  
and from his bearing and uniform  
you'd swear he was a retired junker  
or at the very least a pipe major

He swaggers along neighbourhood dogs his entourage  
and people step aside politely  
so he touches two fingers to visor in return  
but when he gets close enough and if you squint fast enough  
you see his medals, insignia and other encumbrances  
are all hand drawn on fiddly bits of cloth  
and scraps of cardboard neatly cut and trimmed  
coat from St. Vincent's  
hat an old yachting cap from Cole's  
and the stripe down his pant seams courtesy of Bic

Some snicker after he passes  
but I always salute and get a wink as well in return

I'm proud of him  
and I believe that if more soldiers of his cut  
and less gook-hating smirkers were about  
I'd sleep a lot better  
secure knowing the Nation is truly safe

V. GLEN WASHBURN

## Policeman

The final  
Recourse of  
The Law.

Required  
Because of  
That.

Vilified  
Because of  
That.

And  
Tolerated,  
Accepted,  
Corrupted and  
Protected,

Because of  
That.

M. J. REDFERN

## The Bushranger Comes Home

You get off the bus, ignoring the hysterical dogs,  
the hard faced women hosing defeated flowers,  
and as you enter the blur of sunset, there is something about the low sun  
and the honey slut smell of wattle, smoke of striped leaves  
and crash of stock-whip summer lightning . . .

the howling of dingoes drifts from the ranges, the sun flames on their hides  
and they're at you, but you beat the curs back on their well-fed haunches,  
and then, running to higher ground, you see the brief blue flash of troopers  
among the eucalypts:  
spinning round, you hurdle the fence at the corner,  
plunge down into the gully and burst through the door of the hide-out  
only to find you've been betrayed:

For there are troopers in the hallway and others in the kitchen;  
side-stepping one bastard you crash-tackle the sergeant wearing your  
wife's dress as a disguise, and he crumples like a woman to the floor;  
rising, you catch a dwarf fair on the jaw, and his childish face  
explodes in blood, then, shoving a thin corporal aside, you dive  
through the lace curtains and sprint across the street where you turn and  
spit back at them: "No one keeps Ben Hall down, copper."  
With a shout you jump over the lawn-sprinkler,  
and head up the hill where Frank and the boys are waiting  
with the horses.

And as the red bush swallows you up and the last rays of sun touch  
your shoulders, you have to laugh to think how easy it is,  
how a bushranger's life is the gunbarrel of surprise  
and a willing tart from the settlement;  
the laugh echoes and multiplies  
as you turn to send a last defiant shout —  
tell them to come looking for you at stringy-bark creek, tell them  
death is waiting with cold drink and a grin at Free Man's mountain.

PHILIP NEILSEN



## The Tree Police and Young Girls

A chain of young Girls in surprising hats are a madrigal  
on the boulevard.

Into the air they throw colour. They mount the yellow tram.  
The tips of their fingers cut circles in the glass.

Their breasts are easy. Their eyes — aaahh . . . their eyes show  
sparks of a dark wish . . .

The Tree Police are there. They are dressed in green.

We are spacemen! they shout, jumping on and off the tram  
that clangs and sways.

The Girls, their white gloves, what tenderness . . .

The Tree Police feel the skins of trees . . . They lean  
against the eye of morning . . . and wait to be challenged . . .

MICHAEL HARLOW

## Proserpina's night-piece

Prickling the bedspread  
in formal rows,

the stalky legs of the birds  
bearing

beakfuls of belladonna (from crumbling hedges  
in the backlanes of hospitals)

I want to clock on, I want  
to wake up,

voicedrift. Sucked under again  
o mother, o mother help  
get the corn from your hair, clock me on,  
help.

but more nights, dreamfractured and damp  
and hell, it's nights packed like a broken  
windscreen, certainly,

but please: abrupt

wind, clean windows, blue sky.

And I have a book: Night, Common Indo-European.

ME. ni(g)ht, A-S. neaht, niht; cp Dutch & G.

nacht, O. Norse nǫtt nōtt, Russ noche,

Welsh nos, L. nox, Gr nyx, Sansk. nakta.

ANT. :Day. Yes please,

no more Styx nyx feelers-full of Lethe

o make me a slim inconspicuous something

the ravens won't notice, the accomplice ravens.

Mother? Or could you get Edith to do a nice annihilation

piece, *Je ne regrette rien* maybe

it's for the good of my soul

when glass-eyed gales afflict the night:

for the good, the good,

a song against ab- con- se-duct, and

a song to stop night's rasping tongues.

SUSAN HAMPTON

## Identities

Who dreams  
in you in me  
dreams also:

ripple  
of birdsong along  
the wall

I wake  
to the small thunder  
of your body

your nipples  
the colour of rose  
of earth

our hands  
ask questions over  
each other

the light  
is round, our tongues taste  
it and ourselves

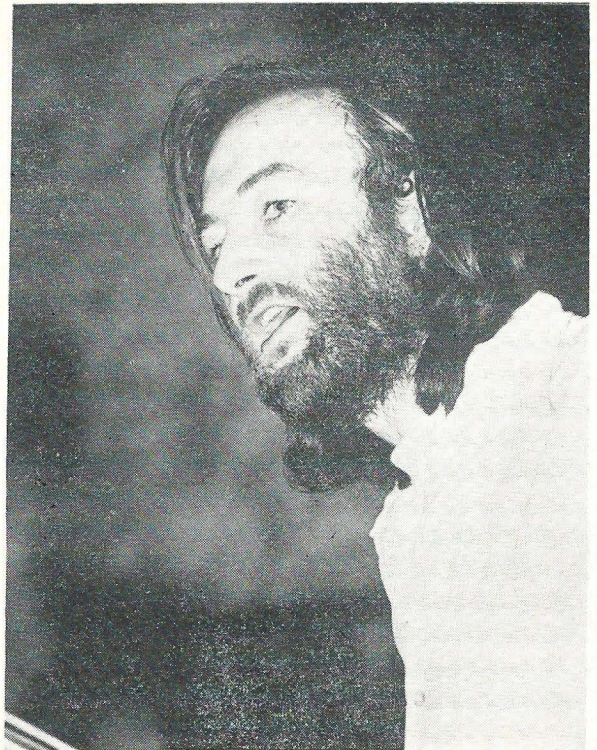
and we look out  
from the original dark  
to know why

we bend  
our bodies round the bedposts  
for tomorrow

MICHAEL HARLOW



David Campbell



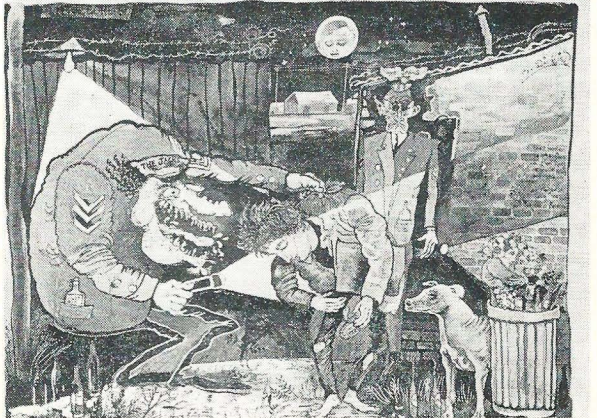
Tim Thorne

Barry Dickens



# Montsalvat

Les Murray





Shelton Lea

## **Festival, 1978**

Nigel Roberts



Frank Kellaway



$\pi$ . O.



*A Neglected Novel*

Elaine Lindsay

## **Alan Marshall's Factory**

"The book was not reviewed with the exception of one review in the Australasian Post that praised it very highly." — Alan Marshall.

Tyrannosaurus Rex versus the people . . . writing in the depths of the Depression Alan Marshall saw in Australia economic and social injustice born of a system which decreed that, whether the Factory flourished or fell, the worker suffered.

The generalization is grand, but Marshall applies it to a factory real and unpretentious, the Modern Shoe Company Pty. Ltd. of Melbourne. Although the book carries the traditional legend, "characters and incidents are fictional" and although the author describes the ironically-titled *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* as his only novel, it is obvious from the detail amassed that authorial experience underpins the sketchy plot. If Marshall had not spent six years working in a Clifton Hill boot factory jotting down notes at every opportunity it is doubtful whether the book would have assumed its now known form.

Marshall impresses as a social realist, the banner of protest held high as he recites the conditions under which factory workers were forced to labour — long hours, little pay, dangerous equipment, noise, dirt, repetitive tasks and a continual crushing pressure to produce or be sacked. But on some such occasions he waxes too eloquent forsaking his documentary style for the pathetic:

*The machine room is an oven . . . the iron roof is just above your head . . . and the girls with curved backs sitting in rows on old stools . . . the long benches and the black machines like heathen idols hungry for sacrifice . . . and girls that lay their hands upon them . . . that lay their small hands, their*

*large hands, upon them . . . or their fat hands, cheap-ringed . . . or hands that tremble . . . or hands that should be resting on laps . . . or hands that weep . . .*

Italicized passages such as this are let into the body of the text at irregular intervals: a custom which serves to prepare readers for moments of intense authorial commitment. Presumably one should be drawn further into the novel, but I find these set-writings distracting in their self-involvement.

This is not to say that the pieces are ineffective by themselves: the build-up to Blue losing his fingers in the jumbo-press is particularly powerful, catching as it does the rhythms and the dangers of machine work, the fear of slacking, the fatigue and the final, fatal slip . . . but such pieces are best read aloud and do not fit easily into the usually silent novel.

Why Marshall was moved to write a novel rather than acknowledge the bulk of incidents as autobiographical (as in the later *This is the Grass* and *In Mine Own Heart*) is uncertain. Perhaps he was haunted by the popular assumption that "real" authors wrote novels, or perhaps he was still experimenting, trying to find out which styles and forms most suited his material . . . whatever the motivation, this is a book in flux, the author struggling to contain his ideas and his energies.

From the very beginning, Marshall wants to head off in several directions at once: to protest against the factory system, to explore and recreate characters about him, to describe the times and to build a story framework strong enough to hold his observations . . . an uncomfortable mix of objectivity and subjectivity, best exemplified in Rod McCormack, the protagonist.

Here Marshall invites the reader to assume that creator and created are one and the same person — not only has Marshall served time in a similar

Alan Marshall: *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* (The Chesterhill Press 1949; Gold Star paperback 1972).

job but McCormack is also a crutch-mobile legatee of infantile paralysis. And yet, having established a physical similarity between the two, Marshall then steps back from his character without infusing him spiritually. McCormack is forced to remain an empty shell ("the accountant"), always willing to assist those in need, but unable to fully involve himself in their plight or to reveal very much of himself. When he does talk autobiographically, Marshall is heard breathing life into him, sometimes with startling effects.

Thus, in a rare soliloquy, McCormack questions his obsession with women, Marshall hiding himself behind ill-formed jargon: "Am I developing into a woman-obsessed, would-be Casanova subconsciously, doubtful of my virility and striving to vindicate it by demonstrating its existence in a feverish search for conquests? . . . Psychiatrists have explanations for my need of women, other than that of sex . . . Whether it affords a soul-satisfying compensation for the inferiority engendered by being crippled, doesn't very much matter. It is no crime . . . I have a psychological necessity that makes me want to rise superior to my handicap . . ." — that last phrase, by the way, an example of the sexual puns (conscious or otherwise) scattered throughout the text.

Beyond this one personal problem, McCormack is essentially an observer, registering the despair that was Melbourne as shops and factories shut down, but remaining unscathed himself and blaming no-one for the human tragedies precipitated.

And here Alan Marshall convinces that he could never become an effective dogmatist: in searching for the reason behind McCormack's baffling imperturbability one is drawn to a later statement by the author in *Alan Marshall Talking* (1978): "I've never really felt like blaming people or condemning them. I seem to have no moral sense at all."

Yet when *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* was first published in 1949 it was virtually ignored by critics and readers alike, not only because they had had enough of the Depression, but because they were not interested in "Leftist" books. Reading the novel today one sees how non-doctrinaire it is, for instead of an informed but one-sided outburst against the Capitalist System, Marshall has written of human fallibility . . . in the end the Modern Shoe Company's collapse is due less to the Depression than to the owner's inexplicable infatuation for the ominously-named, incompetent and somewhat unbelievable buyer, Miss Claws.

Instead of parading cardboard criminals Mar-

shall, guided by his understanding of and respect for all men has created, for the most part, identifiable characters through whom we can relive those bewildering heartbreak days.

Further, by allowing these characters to speak for themselves the author denies the polemical in favour of the individual and, leaving aside "the accountant", reveals his talents as a master portrait-painter.

Perhaps because of the method of his training (youthful evenings spent lounging around a Melbourne pie-cart savouring the idiosyncrasies and dialects of Melbourne's citizens) Marshall is at his best in brief, vital sketches — the thin little 14 year old girl brought in by her mother to work in the factory; the nervous, bloated Factory Manager living for the day when the Douglas Credit comes in; the cranky punch-drunk youth subjected to regular hot baths to quieten him down; factory girl Sadie playing dangerous seduction games with married men; the too-trusting, pregnant Leila, alone and desperate for an abortion; the widowed Mrs. Bourke, bringing up two children on £2.10.0 a week . . . if anything Marshall introduces too many characters and viewpoints, blurring focus on McCormack, overwhelming him with life.

Similarly the evocative descriptions of the factory interior (the phenyle-smelling W.C. a sensory reality) and the blighted suburban landscape, the wealth of extraneous detail and the stray, wonderful pieces like the surrealistically obscene images of the feverish Leila's hands reflect the diversions within rather than the overall homogeneity of the novel.

I suspect that these are purposeful devices, designed to cover up the lack of a story-line, a suspicion which is reinforced by the appearance of some incidents as short stories in their own right ("Boot Factory", "Grey Morning" and "Stepmother") — the book is not so much a novel built around a narrative thread as a celebration of sketches and characters assembled under one tottering factory roof, the ordering of which imposes visible strains on Marshall's technique.

It may seem unfair to assess this early work by the high standards of work either later in time or of a different genre, but such assessment is inevitable. If so many of Marshall's stories were not gems of perfection I would be less critical of this particular book which, although it demonstrates some of the strengths in Marshall's writing also reveals some of the problems of style and technique which he had to overcome.

It is impossible not to feel a warmth for the book, to appreciate its intentions and to rejoice in its life and reality . . . *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* is not Alan Marshall's best work but it does lead to a greater understanding of the author and a greater appreciation of his art.

(If you are moved to read *How Beautiful Are*

*Thy Feet*, try to obtain one of the 2000 bound copies released in 1949, as the paperback edition is full of literals.)

(Since we received this retrospective review, Penguin Australia have announced that they plan to publish a new edition of *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* early in 1979. — Ed.)

### Two Cups

There are two cups on the table.  
A man and a woman sit staring  
into each other's cups. They are silent.  
Above their heads, centred, is the head  
of a red articulate lion.  
No body, just the head with its human  
look of fear, and a pair of wings  
which hover over the heads  
of the man and woman.  
From each cup extends a steamy snake,  
intertwines with its mate, holds up the lion.  
Still no-one speaks.  
Then, accidentally, the man looks at the woman's  
eyes. The lion wings flutter and stop. The man  
looks back into his own cup.  
They drink their tea and leave the room.  
No longer held up by the snakes, the lion  
descends to the table and roars. The room  
is full of roar, it shakes.

SUSAN HAMPTON

### A Fugue for T.S.E.

In *Prufrock & Rhapsody & Preludes*  
you put an unknown cosmos into verse  
the unknown world that everybody knew;

found the harsh scales of *accidie*,  
the dry felicitous gasping of despair  
and the casual murmur of the yew  
hinting the truth of time's covenant

until you scarcely hoped to turn.

You were terrified, & could not surrender  
twice. Prayer of the terrified hart  
on the precipice ledge.

England the complex, has labyrinthine ways,  
crazed corridors of issue, ducts that lead  
to a national church or the British Museum.

Your head pressed rock;  
stars hung down below your feet  
&  
like Dante  
at the centre suspended  
beyond hope you  
reversed expectation, faced  
failure in the moment of triumph

And the rest was quiet, stasis, fame,  
twenty years re-working that handful  
of themes, those dry bones rattled  
under the armadillo's foot of time  
into ever less tolerant patterns

Old man in a draughty church, plaiting  
the past to the unremitting present  
in a climate of deteriorating business

Although you did not hope to turn

(and after *Sergeant Pepper* what forgiveness?)

MARK O'CONNOR

JOHN McLAREN

## swag

Among complaints about the Commonwealth government's austerity program have been those from sportsmen who feel that our national prestige and health are being jeopardised by the lack of subsidies for sporting activities. The amount contributed by each taxpayer is allegedly compared unfavorably not only with that spent by British taxpayers on sport in that damp island, but also with that spent by Australians on the arts. All such comparisons are of course suspect, because the taxpayer contributes to national activities not only through direct slugs on his pocket by the Treasurer, but also by the payments diverted by multi-nationals and other financial giants from profits and taxes into promotional subsidies, among which are huge payments to sporting bodies. Sir Frank Packer also has managed to divert into sportsmen's pockets some of the profits he derives from his licence to use public property — the airwaves — in order to transmit paid advertisements by wireless telegraphy. But even apart from its factual basis, the comparison is as deceptive as it is attractive. Games and pastimes, arts and crafts, tales and songs, are central to human life, the means by which we discover and establish our identity, our capacities, our relationships. Sport is exciting, infuriating and intriguing, but it is peripheral. It offers a commercial and political substitute for communal activity. Where it retains close links with the community — like a football team in a country town — it may still contribute to the vitality of that community. But for this, it needs no subsidy, just loyalty. Subsidies for organised sport can only remove it further from its origins, and lessen its worth.

Yet, while organised sport may be far removed from the simple games of its origins, public reactions to it are far outside the bounds of both prediction and control. W. F. Mandle, in his

excellent book *Going It Alone* (Penguin Australia), points out the part cricket played in the development of Australian nationalism, in defining ourselves both against England and against the division of six separate colonies. He shows how close the bodyline series in 1933 came to breaking the empire. Yet it can only be argued that cricket, with its English origins and connotations, was a major factor in keeping empire sentiment alive. Without it, the empire might have collapsed sooner, the public and politicians of both countries faced reality, and some of the disasters of the second world war been averted.

Australia certainly defined its national identity through its sportsmen earlier than it did through its writers or artists. One of Mandle's quotations is from a letter by Louis Esson to Vance Palmer. He writes in 1921 that "England is really scared of Armstrong and the fast bowlers . . . There is such energy in the . . . cricketers who are infinitely superior in character and temperament to our writers . . . They really do represent Australia. They are not pleasant players".

The same issues of national pride and politics arise in connection with the Olympic Games scheduled for Moscow. The rhetoric in the run-up to the Games is couched in terms of international understanding and individual prowess; the reality will be national pride, international discord and public countenance to a sordid dictatorship. The only thing which can really be said in favor of the Games, or of Australia's participation, is that they are better than war. Yet, if we are to rule out Russia on the grounds of its suppression of minorities and of dissent, where can we draw the line? At South Africa, with its racial repression? At the United States, with its active support for genocide in Brazil, totalitarian regimes through-

out South America? At Queensland, which used the Springbok Rugby tour as the first stage in its campaign against dissent? Moral distinctions in politics are enormously difficult, but necessary. Perhaps a starting point would be cases where sport is used as a deliberate instrument of public policy, as it is in South Africa, as it is in the case of the Moscow Olympics and as it was in the case of the World Cup final in Argentina. To take part in such events is to accept the policies of the host. In other cases, it is just possible that the understanding coming from contact will outweigh the illwill which is the natural consequence of any sporting endeavour. Alternatively, as is the case of the Tests, the natural assertion of native superiority may be worth any amount of international hostility.

This is the last Overland for which I shall be Acting Editor during Stephen Murray-Smith's sabbatical in the motherland. Our genial and tradition-loving Prime Minister, in savaging sabbaticals, has reduced the chances of such future prolonged absences as well as ensuring that our national life will remain sufficiently provincial and parochial to save his government from being swept out of office in the vast gale of laughter that it would so richly merit if its disregard for truth and compassion did not make it so frightening. Its austerity measures make life harder for independent voices, but not so far impossible. The Literature Board of the Australia Council and our subscribers and benefactors still maintain our lifelines. Editing the journal, even for this brief period, has been a privilege, for which I owe gratitude to Stephen Murray-Smith, to my associates on the board, and to all our contributors and readers.

The Overland award for the most modest self-promotion during 1978 goes to the Melbourne Sun. On a day when other newspapers were

concerned with minor matters like peace in the Middle East, Victorian land scandals, and controls on mineral exports, the Sun's poster humbly proclaimed 'Toorak Tops for Trash'.

Stephen Murray-Smith writes: In Rodney Hall's book on John Manifold, reviewed in this issue, reference is made to the fruitful and pleasant connection that was established in the 1950s between Overland on the one hand and John Manifold (and the Brisbane Realist Writers' Group) on the other. Then, in a note on page 142, Rodney Hall states that "A few years later this connection was broken by the editor of Overland, Stephen Murray-Smith". This I believe to be a travesty of the truth. After the break between Overland and the Communist Party in 1958, every effort was made to maintain friendly relations with writers we respected, and John Manifold was certainly one of these. He still is. For instance, on 25 June 1962 I wrote to John: "Congratulations on the successful sonnet you had in Australian Verse. Very nice indeed. There wouldn't be any more of the kind around for the next Overland, would there?". I frequently wrote to John, before and after this time, in the same tone; and in 1971, after the demise of the Realist Writer, I wrote to Manifold from England inviting him to renew his relationship with Overland. To none of these approaches from me was there ever any response, or even a reply. Kate Manifold and I wrote to each other, particularly when she was dying, but John never. I regret this very much, and Overland has been the poorer for John's absence. However the problem was not our attitude to John Manifold, but his attitude to Overland, or to me. Perhaps I deserved it, but that is not what Rodney Hall says. He could have checked his statement by writing to me, or he could have had access to my correspondence. In fact I think I offered him this access, but he never took up the suggestion.



## John Manifold: Life and Work

DAVID MALOUF

John Manifold's *Collected Verse* and Rodney Hall's critical biography, simultaneously issued in what is, I think, a unique venture for an Australian publisher and a unique tribute to an Australian poet, offers the serious reader of poetry a rare opportunity to see the man and his work in a single perspective. The opportunity is worth taking. Manifold is an important poet. He has written what may well be the finest poem of its kind in our literature ("The Tomb of Lt. John Learmonth AIF" strikes me as a greater achievement than Slessors's "Five Bells") as well as a dozen other poems in different modes that should have a permanent place there. He is personally a fascinating character, his contribution to folk music, and even more to musical scholarship, would themselves earn him serious attention, and his attempt to function as a Communist poet in what is, after all, a hostile environment, not only to Communism but to all kinds of non-conformism, might present itself as a model for that sort of possibility at a time when Marxism and its aesthetics have again begun to attract some of our best minds.

Rodney Hall's *John Manifold, an Introduction to the Man and his Work* is an affectionate portrait of an old master, an old friend, and a reading of the poems that is detailed enough to be helpful and rigorous enough to make clear both the weakness and strengths. And added to all this is the dimension of Hall's own personality and writing. How he sees Manifold, how their relationship has developed over nearly thirty years, tells us a good deal about both, and Hall's criticism of Manifold's poems, both individually and as a body, offers us direct insights into his own. Let me just point to some of the highlights:

John Manifold: *Collected Verse*, U.Q.P.

Rodney Hall: *John Manifold: An Introduction to the Man and his Work*.

an extended analysis of "The Tomb of Lt. John Learmonth", and a brilliant placing of it in the work as a whole; an account of Manifold's theories, as yet unpublished, on the *Goddess and the Flute*; and several glimpses of the poet in action that are wonderfully evocative of his individual, not to say eccentric style, as when he tells us of one of his poems: "Quite a solid little bit of work. You can take it in one hand and bowl it down the stairs and nothing breaks off". The juxtaposition of Manifold's story of how he escaped to Holland at the beginning of the war (with details added to take account of Hall's own special interests) against a contemporary letter that gives an altogether plainer version is a daring way of having the writer reveal himself "in the act", as it were. Manifold is fortunate in having found in Hall a sympathetic ear (a good deal of the material was taped) and an admiring though by no means uncritical interpreter of what he has to say.

And we do in fact need an interpreter. Manifold is in no way so easy to come at as his public manner would suggest, and I can think of no other Australian poet of his generation who is so difficult to place.

What are we to make of this scion of one of our oldest pastoral families, schooled at Geelong, educated at Cambridge, an Officer in the British Army, who becomes a Communist of the most rigid kind, but without giving up for a moment the mannerism of his caste, and who at the beginning of what might have been an international career, retires to the outskirts of Brisbane and stays there for the rest of his working life?

Manifold's natural affinity is with Geoffrey Dutton and David Campbell, whose background he shares, along with some of their "cavalier" qualities: a preference for the formal lyric in its seventeenth-century dress, a certain style of mas-

culine swagger, a delight in action, a mixture of courtesy and jolly randiness in the matter of sex, an unselfconscious Australianess that finds no disparity between Arcady and the Monaro, the Barossa Valley or the Western Districts of Victoria. One could go a long way with a comparison between Manifold and David Campbell in particular, though I think Campbell might, in the end, have the edge. He has developed further, has been more ready to expose himself and his poetry to the forces of change. Manifold, for all his radicalism, is a conservative. In some ways he has hardly developed at all. The second to last poem in his collection, *The Afterlife of Bold Jack Donahue*, repeats — almost defiantly one feels — the stance and the form of *The Death of Ned Kelly*, which comes second to first.

And yet the Manifold/Campbell/Dutton constellation doesn't really take us far. There might be more to discover by setting Manifold beside the poet who is sometimes seen as his immediate predecessor (though in this case the disciple outshines the master), the South African poet Roy Campbell. They share a talent for rough satire (rough in what they have to say, that is), a colonial, fellow-feeling for the Parnassians of the last century, Heredia and Leconte de Lisle, and a boisterous sense of adventure that goes further than anything we might find in the Australian Campbell and touches, at its furthest edge, an elegant thuggishness from which neither poet is entirely free. The fact that Manifold is a Communist and Roy Campbell a Fascist, and that they liked and respected one another just the same, might tell us a little of what there is in this juxtaposition that goes beyond politics and political faith.

Or to return to the Australian context, we might set Manifold's preference for the seventeenth and eighteenth century, for Pope and Byron for example, against A. D. Hope's, and wonder if, back there in the Fifties, there mightn't have been a stronger axis for Hope and McAuley's insistence on "classical" principles if on this occasion political affiliations hadn't taken precedence over literary ones.

Or when we come to some of Manifold's more recent preoccupations, we might ask ourselves if the real link wasn't all along with Robert Graves. Some of Manifold's war poems, especially "Ration Party", are very close to Graves' own poems of the First World War and to *Goodbye to All That*; there is some likeness in the love lyrics; and of course there is the whole matter of the goddess, the kings, and those "blood-rites of pagan sacri-

fice" that a late poem, "L'Embarquement pour Cythere", so tellingly reminds us of. Though Graves is committed to the irrational, to inspiration in the old sense, he too is a formalist, and he has enough of Roy Campbell's swagger for Manifold to stand quite well between them.

A strange place to find our rational Marxist, we might think: between the Fascist adventurer and the votarist of the *White Goddess*.

All this serves to cast shifting lights on the subject and to suggest, I hope, how difficult Manifold is, for all his "consistency", to pin down. He is very much his own man; but there are more sides to him than at first appear, and he has lines out into English and Australian verse, affinities with contemporaries and near contemporaries, that are worth exploring since they complicate and qualify what might seem at first glance to be an ideologically narrow stance.

Manifold's own statements about poetry and its uses are so bald, so practical, that they ought to explain everything, and one is surprised and to some extent delighted, when they don't:

To earn his keep the poet has to be  
Himself, his age and his society;  
Not bawling run to Nature for relief,  
Nor seal his ears and eyes with selfish  
grief,  
Nor yet make self-expression all his goal,  
Nor try too hard to lose or save his soul,  
Nor live in libraries but on the streets  
On equal terms with any man he meets.  
I'd have him active, social, not apart,  
Bold in his thought, proficient in his art,  
Apt from his audience to accept his  
form,  
Game to compose and eager to perform,  
Close to his listeners — within shouting  
reach —  
Alert to fit their mood with song and  
speech,  
Quick on the draw and good at the guitar  
As Lorca was . . .

Rodney Hall makes a good deal of the public stance that is being adopted here, which he reads, if I take him rightly, as "classical", a term that would seem to be endorsed by the "classical" couplets.

It is, of course — if we must use such terms — entirely romantic. It may not be self-expressive or inward-looking, but that is only one side of romanticism; Manifold belongs to the other, the Byronic side. Even here there is so much heroic swagger, so much of the "tough" about, that it looks almost like parody. And if Manifold's

strong distaste for self-revelation, for self-absorption and self-pity (cf his version of Leconte de Lisle in *Contemporaries*) was learned from the Parnassians, what he found in them as well was just another form of romanticism, the kind that delights in highly-coloured historical pictures with a twist (“Antony and Cleopatra”) or emblems of savage nature (“The Sleeping Condor”), the kind that goes in for rhetorical gesture and flamboyant excess, however strictly it may be and however the poet may pretend to locate its energy in the subject rather than in himself. Manifold is, I would suggest, a romantic who happens to prefer fixed forms, who likes language mostly (but not always) to be descriptive rather than evocative, and who works for the most part with emotions that spring from public rather than private experience. And that’s about as much as one can say.

Rodney Hall may not be responsible for the blurb on his book, but it offers as one of his unique qualifications for writing about Manifold the “theory of Classicism he is able to provide as a frame for Manifold’s contribution”.

I’ve looked hard for this “theory of Classicism” and can’t find it. Terms like romanticism and classicism occur frequently enough, but they shift their meaning so often that it might have been better to avoid them altogether. What do Homer, the Greek Anthologists, Virgil, Horace or Propertius have in common with one another — let alone Manifold or Pope — that could usefully be contained in a single term? Manifold’s one quotation from Virgil, “Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore”, is, one would have thought, replete with what one might elsewhere call “romantic” feeling (it becomes the source of a whole romantic mode) and Manifold responds to it with a well-known romantic formula: it’s a line “that would stand the hair up on your neck”.

It isn’t in terms of Romantic or Classic that Manifold can be described, and notions of poetry as craft, a public tone of voice, a system of perfect rhymes, will hardly sustain anything so grand as a “theory of Classicism”. Hall is, in fact, weak on critical theory and weak also in another area that matters here, the filling in of social and intellectual background. “This period, the late sixties and early seventies”, he writes, “was a time when things were felt to be changing. The whole society was in a state of upheaval, with even the most conservative people beginning to fall victim to an unspeakable horror — the suspicion that perhaps all the carnage of Vietnam which Australia had supported was impossible to justify. Challenges were voiced on all sides: ethnic

communities began making their voice heard, the new drug culture swept the country, conservation groups gathered strength. There was a lively dialogue developing between the various factions of the socialist movement.” The prose here, with its heavy ironies, its preference for passive and impersonal constructions, seems oddly inadequate to the dynamic nature of what is being described and gives one no confidence that the writer has anything more than the vaguest grasp of what he is doing.

When Manifold comes to his own description of what his poetry is about, it is in terms of poetic form and purpose rather than stance: the poet, “active, social, not apart” is a proficient craftsman in an art that is primarily *useful*:

It has been said and will be said again:  
“The typewriter is mightier than the  
Bren” . . .

Guerilla words, the flying pasquinade,  
The slogan-epigram’s stiletto blade,  
The loud Come-ye-all to a ballad air,  
The declamation in the crowded square,  
The spoken sonnet, eloquent and terse;  
These are the proper marks for adult  
verse;

No job for “wonder-children” but most fit  
To show Invention, Eloquence and Wit,  
And yield that best reward the poet  
needs —

To know his words result in worthy  
Deeds.

The manifesto is plain enough, and Manifold has at one time or another practised every one of the forms he mentions. The question is how far the manifesto takes us in reading and making sense of what the poet writes, and how far such a notion of the art takes *him* along the road to poetry.

That rather cheeky reference to the Bren opens one way into the poems and presents us immediately, I think, with a difficulty. There is in the early poems an easy admiration for machines, especially for machines of war, and a tendency to let them stand as models for human behavior, that is not at all attractive and which makes the poems difficult to “read” — that is, difficult to make anything of. Take “Oerlikon (Maritime AA)”, for example:

Cloud-searcher, dead-pan, squinting  
down your nose,  
I can see you hold the very poorest  
opinion  
Both of the lazy clouds and the big  
dominion

Of sea, and grant you reason. In that  
 pose  
 Compact and faintly contemptuous in  
 silhouette  
 Against them both, you know what they  
 have never  
 Been taught — matters of precise  
 control, clever  
 Positive knowledge — and just value it.

Wait for your equals then; wait for the  
 guests  
 Whom function stronger than the rut of  
 beasts  
 Will draw to you, skidding through sky  
 with bombs

Or rising slowly on metal flukes into  
 view:  
 At the appropriate time, whatever comes,  
 You will do no less than you were built  
 to do.

Leaving aside such questions as how far this is self-expressive because reflexive (that “compact and faintly contemptuous” might be as much a description of the poem itself and of the poet as of any machine), we might ask ourselves what the poet is doing here with his heroic model. Obviously he approves of the big gun, he tells us so several times: it has “reason” to feel superior to the clouds and the sea because it has a purpose and they do not; it “justly” values what it “knows” and they have never been taught, matters that the poet also values and that his poem itself embodies, “precise control, clever positive knowledge”. But is that all? We have so far dealt only with the octet, and the problem here, as with so many of the sonnets, is the relationship between the opening eight lines and what follows. Does the sestet simply carry the argument through? “At the appropriate time, whatever comes / You will do no less than you were built to do” sounds like the heroic acceptance of duty, like Lt. John Learmonth: “His freedom gave him nothing else to do” — except that there is, of course, a world of difference between what you are “free” to do and what you have been “made” to do. Or is there? And that is the difficulty. The tone of the poem is so dead-pan that it’s difficult to judge whether we are to read the poem straight or take the whole aristocratic “pose” of the gun, the whole analogy in fact, satirically. And the difficulty is increased because when we go to other poems for help, we find that Manifold over and over again offers us weapons as perfect models for human action with no satirical intention whatever. In “Fencing School”, for example, he praises the “single aim”

of the fencer in a situation that has been purged of everything recognizably human, so that

I only feel  
 The sinews of my wrist assert  
 The tremor of engaging steel,

and in “Camouflage”, since the choice must be made, he praises the tommy-gun because its purpose and its being are clearly declared:

Therefore if I must choose, I prefer to  
 sing  
 The tommy-gun, the clean, functional  
 thing,  
 The singlehander, deadly to the rigid  
 line,  
 Good at the job it doesn’t attempt to  
 conceal.  
 Give me time only to teach this hate of  
 mine  
 The patience and integrity of the steel.

These contiguous examples would suggest that “Oerlikon (Maritime AA)” is just what it appears to be and has no satirical intention at all. Though where that leaves its companion piece, “Demolition”, raises further difficulties again:

This was provided for: before they built  
 They reckoned on demolition: the  
 plan  
 Plotted in detail where the wiring ran  
 Under the surface like a sense of guilt.

The bridge here is being described in “psychological” terms that seem to suggest a parody of Auden; we might think of Auden’s Rimbaud sonnet, or the sonnets on Arnold and Houseman; and the sestet when it comes would appear to carry the satirical intention through:

So the event — something as unforeseen  
  
 As the *amazing disappearance*, say,  
 Of Edna Brown of Highgate, age sixteen  
  
 Boyfriendless, bright, and helpful —  
 miles away  
 Hangs on a tossup; but has always been  
 Bedded like this, structural in the clay.

The “event” (that is, the demolition of the bridge) was “structural in the clay” — the bridge was “made” to be destroyed. But how is this related to the “amazing disappearance” to Edna Brown? Once again it’s a question of that break between

octet and sestet in which so much gets left unstated. Are we meant to carry across the psychological weakness of the bridge (which was really a structural weakness) and apply this to the human case? Or are the two sorts of event, the two kinds of being, in opposition? And if "amazing" belongs only to the language and the world view of journalists, and the event in Edna's case was predictable after all, how is it to be explained; Or doesn't Edna really matter? Is the poem talking about people or not? Is it parody or not? What is it about?

These questions seem to me to be unanswerable. If the poem is so well made, so seamless, that you can "bowl it down the stairs and nothing breaks off", it is also seamless enough to offer no point of entry. The difficulty, I find, occurs again and again. Most tantalisingly in "Defensive Position", where a quite splendid octet is followed by a sestet which, if I read it right, diminishes both sides of the analogy, the sexual and the military, by being so pleased with its own cleverness that the subtly observed and moving insights of the opening simply frizzle up and disappear.

It is worth making these points because the poems appear on the surface to be so clear, and because the language itself offers no difficulty; the ambiguity comes from elsewhere. And because the very best of the poems are not ambiguous at all. But then the best poems do not attempt clever analogies and are prepared to speak of the human in human terms.

"The Tomb of Lt. John Learmonth" is too well-known to need quoting and if we need analysis we have Rodney Hall's excellent reading to hand; but "Ration Party", another early poem, illustrates well the range of Manifold's sympathy and the power of utterance of his very precise language when he allows it to work in a situation that positively moves him:

Across the mud the line drags on and on;  
Tread slithers, foothold fails, all ardours  
vanish;  
Rain falls; the barking N.C.O.'s admonish  
The universe more than the lagging man.

Something like an infinity of men  
Plods up the slope; the file will never  
finish,  
For all their toil serves only to replenish  
Stores for tomorrow's labours to begin.

Absurd to think that Liberty, the splendid  
Blond of our dreams, the intercessory  
saint

For us to judgment, needs to be  
defended

By sick fatigue-men brimming with  
complaint  
And misery, who bear till all is ended  
Every imaginable pattern of constraint.

About the best of Manifold's work there is no question, and the best work is most humble, most human. "The Tomb of Lt. John Learmonth" and "Ration Party" both have at their conclusion a statement of wry affection for people and their limitations that is rare in Manifold's poetry, where it is more often a gesture of violence, or a proclamation of outright hatred and defiance, that provides the poem with its final flourish:

To walk in the cold and share  
The tang as if marine  
Of hatred in the air

'For Comrade Katherine, I'

And, as a poet holds a lute  
With love she holds a tommy-gun

'Indochinoiserie'

When bold Jack Donahue shall ride  
With his companions at his side  
To smash the bastards down.

'The Afterlife of Bold Jack  
Donahue'

There is a lot to lose; we must be rid  
Of our allegiance — we are not for  
either;  
Of our expectance — it will only wither;

Of sympathy — each instant takes its  
tithe.

Let your achievement be your own myth.  
And kill with nothing but a craftsman's  
pride.

'For the Mercenaries'

To insist on the superiority of the Learmonth elegy and "Ration Party" among the poems is to point to qualities in them, over and above mere virtuosity, that give them pre-eminence, and to establish standards by which the rest may be judged; some of them harshly. Not, as Rodney Hall tends to suggest, because "in the context of the wordy post-Romanticism of much Australian verse . . . critics are inclined to think (Manifold's

verse) is not fully serious, simply because it is approachable and enjoyable", but because it is, in the case of "Fireworks", "Prayer for the Eve of Mayday" and "Ming Tombs", so predictable, or because, in the case of the "Six Sonnets on Human Ecology" it is so full of received notions, tired, boring clichés, or because it is crude ("The Ballad of '17 and '53", and a good many of the "Red Rosary Pieces"), or lightweight ("Tancred and Clorinda"); or small-minded ("Outer Suburbs" — who are those "oversexed damned greedy sparrows" the poet is being so snooty about?) or because, as in "Ocean Beach" it is so obvious and silly.

The poems I have listed above come from the second half of the book, and it is clear, I think, that the poetry Manifold wrote after the war — or after his return to Australia in 1949 — is in every way, except perhaps in the matter of fluency, inferior to what came before.

There are two real turning-points in Manifold's career. One was his conversion to Communism, sometime in the middle Thirties, the other his return to Australia ten years later. It is in keeping with his "impersonal" style that we know almost nothing of the context in which these decisions were made, though we know rather more about the first than the second, and it is the latter, perhaps, that has had the more important effect on his writing.

David Campbell, in a letter to Rodney Hall in 1970, speaks of meeting in Manifold's rooms at Cambridge "a lanky aloof Australian whose name I never knew, who spent the weekend dining into John that his poetry had little to do with the world he lived in. By the end of the week, John had joined the Communist Party".

Manifold mentions no individual proselytizer, but does offer an explanation of sorts: "I was an anarchist with a distrust of governments — came across Communism, Marx, when I was at Cambridge and began to see that from a practical point of view the communist party was probably more sensible, expedient, more rational than the anarchist point of view. And anarchism, I'm afraid, fizzled out in Spain; the lovely vision of being able to do without policemen, tax collectors, armies and navies, by tomorrow. Unfortunately it's not until the week after the next that we can do without them — and it's from here to the week after next that we're going to need (alas! it could be said) a strong communist party — a worker's state, which is a contradiction in terms, but there you are, it's got to be accepted. I liked the communists I met at Cambridge, I

liked them better than the anarchists".

This explanation, offered so long after the event and couched in such reasonable terms, might make us suspicious — Manifold's stance hasn't been at all as flexible as this present statement might suggest, and Rodney Hall has shown in another case how Manifold's version of things is likely to re-write itself over the years and take at least part of its tone, and even some of its facts, from the expectations of the listener. Still, it's all we've got. "Practical, sensible, expedient" — these are words that fit well with Manifold's view of things, and if we can pick up clues from elsewhere, from a poem like "Another Recruit" for example, we might guess that part of the attraction was the possibility of belonging again to a "tribe", but one of your own choosing, not one, like family or class, that had been imposed on you by birth; one moreover that offered the "solidarity" of a group but left you at the same time in the position of a "rebel". The army later, I think, offered Manifold a similar situation, and it is no accident that it was there that he wrote some of his steadiest and most moving poems. In the party, as in the army, Manifold could be a poet of action, a soldier poet, with clearly defined friends and even more clearly defined enemies; he could be both a responsible member of society (either the provisional one created by the war or the future one of which the party is the seed) and at the same time a "bush-ranger", since in his reading of Australian mythology the bush-rangers are all heroes — even Morgan — and all members of the revolutionary army.

It isn't difficult to see what joining the party offered Manifold in the way of steadiness and a "single aim", or why, once he had embraced it, he should have stuck — absolute loyalty is essential to his code. And it isn't difficult either to see why, in the late sixties, he should have resented what he thought of a rebel's position, hard fought for and maintained at such personal cost, becoming a fashionable one that could be taken up by young "trendies" (as he must have seen it) with no cost at all. There is a revealing moment when, in Hall's words "a whole generation of self-declared radicals in Che Guevara clothes discovered the existence of what they took to be a "primitive" of their cult. But it was too much to expect such contact to remain amicable, considering Manifold's unconscious military manner, fastidious musical tastes, Cambridge accent and uncompromising outspokenness. Although both he and they made considerable efforts to meet on common ground it turned out, as so often in the

past, that his attempt to reach a popular audience tired him rather than gave him energy. For the first time, disillusionment began to show. This was not ballading or picketing in quite the spirit he'd hoped".

It's a sad moment, for all its comedy, and one guesses that there were more reasons for the failure than Rodney Hall is ready to admit. The inflexibility is one thing: it is part of the man that one comes up against at every point, the inability to accept change, a hanging on to the purer style of where you began. Another is a certain authoritarianism that brooks no argument, accepts no challenge, and therefore has nothing to learn. Describing a typical scene at the Manifold's in the early days of their acquaintance, Hall writes: "Time after time we gathered, in hot weather and cold, in that main room, reading aloud Restoration comedies and Shaw and Wilde. Kate spoke passionately of Lope de Vega; John of Haydn and Schubert. We listened to records and played our own music, we sang, we talked, but as I remember it we never argued — that would have seemed unthinkable." "Why?", one is tempted to ask. And what was lost, for all parties, by the fact that no argument ever took place? A page later Hall tells us how, "before setting off for his Saturday morning stint as paper-seller in Raby Bay, he (Manifold) might be sitting at the kitchen table deep in a discussion of Arabic high culture during the middle ages and of the amazing African voyages of Ibn Batuta . . ." Discussion? That surely is the wrong word, and the fact that Rodney Hall can use it tells us something, I think, about the style of Manifold's relationship with his circle at North Wynnum and the effect it had on even the most intelligent and critical of its adherents.

We may not be able to speculate on the reasons for Manifold's return to Australia but its results are clear. He wrote no poetry for nearly ten years in the fifties. He became more settled in his opinions. Since he never ventured beyond a small circle of party members and younger disciples, he never again tested himself against intellectual equals and was never called upon to exercise his considerable intelligence in ways that would extend him. An ideological commitment that might always have made things difficult for him was turned — partly through Manifold's own personality, partly because of the way Australia itself polarizes, intensifies, and then fossilizes attitudes — into something so rigid that it became a mould within which he never shifted again.

The failure to listen, or to respond, has been

fatally damaging to the verse, and it shows; even the colloquialisms of Manifold's later diction seem mugged up, they don't all have that receptivity to the voice of real people speaking that we get everywhere in Bruce Dawe and often enough in Les Murray as well.

But the failure of the verse to fulfil its own extraordinary promise is not the only failure here, or from our point of view, the only loss. Having returned to Australia in 1949 with a strong reputation, and being as he was in the possession of strong intellectual gifts and a clear notion about how society should be remade, what did Manifold contribute to public debate at a time when public debate might have been most useful to us all? Very little. He retired to Wynnum, performed brilliantly in his small pool, and with the intellectual life of Australia engaged not at all. Can one imagine him keeping his distance like that in France, or Italy, or even in the UK?

There is a tendency to think of the atmosphere of Australia in the Fifties as having been created entirely by Menzies and the Lunatic Right Wing. It was also created, one wants to say, by the quality of discourse that was available, and discourse is a two-way affair. The quality of Manifold's contribution is evidenced by a story, "Smoko with the Balkans" in which the narrator overhears a conversation between two migrants, Danilo a Montenegrin and Jaffir an Albanian, a "nagger . . . a whinger, a bludger". Jaffir is, of course, one of the rich merchant class who has been forced to flee because of a peasant revolution. He speaks of his wife: "She writes to me. She dares not mention the famine, the deportations, the massacres, the secret police, the forced labour . . ." The irony here simply assumes that such things never occur in Socialist countries — which is about as useful as assuming that they are universal and inevitable — and Manifold never engages with the problem at any other level. It's the sort of mindless propaganda that might be produced by any hack, and the kind of preaching to the converted that ensures no one need ever listen because all the arguments, all the commitments, are already known. It's a style we know only too well. It's almost a national preference. But a man of Manifold's intelligence might have been expected to resist it, as he might also have resisted the temptation (Brecht did) to look for heroes. Manifold finds his in Stalin, whose achievements he praises as if all the rest hadn't occurred, or hadn't to be taken into account; as if the life of a Mandelstam or an Akhmatova were of no importance — I mention them not

because they are poets, and therefore of more significance than "ordinary men" because what happened to them is documented. Rather, it's as if a local Nazi were to memorialize Hitler as the builder of autobahns and the savior of German nationhood: Uncle Adolf comes home in a cloud of holy smoke. There is a lack of intellectual distinction about the performance of our old Left that we still live under the burden of and which contributes to the weakness, both ideologically and in effect, of all opposition in this country to anything but the most timid confor-

mity. Manifold's devotion to this little group of Realist Writers, and to his paper-selling, represents a failure of the man of action to respond to the fullest requirements of the situation that is typical and tragic. It contributed in its way to the shabbiness of the Fifties and has robbed us, I think, of a valuable body of work.

Manifold's *Collected Verse* — one says it with regret — is a shattered trunk. Another of those big sad fragments that are the Life and Works of our most talented poets.

## Overland Book Publishing

Overland is to launch a new book publishing program to present the work of its contributing authors.

Now available

*We commence with three of our poets*

ERIC BEACH: A PHOTO OF SOME PEOPLE IN A FOOTBALL STADIUM

FRANK KELLAWAY: MARE'S NEST

PETER STANSFIELD: POEMS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

*Superbly produced*

(Design and typography by Vane Lindesay

60 pp. 2 colour illustrated cover and illustrated title page)

\$3.00 each. \$8.00 for complete set. 40% Trade Discount

POST FREE

Order now from

Overland Press, c/o Eastend Booksellers, 33 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne



## 'HALCYON' **The Box**

*Highlight of early days in the Colonies*

In the 1870s, "emigrating to the Colonies" must have seemed to present a way out of many an impasse. The tales of fortunes won and lost during the gold rush in Australia, the stories of notorious bushrangers and the expectation of a warm, sunny climate must have cast an aura of adventure and promise over that distant land. This must have been especially so for a young Londoner at a time when, we are told, the Thames was more polluted than it has ever been before or since and London's "pea-soup" fogs were often at their unhealthy worst.

To what extent my father was influenced by these factors I do not know, but family records and letters indicate that the sudden ruin of his future prospects caused the decision to be made. He was a younger son who was being trained for a partnership in his father's large import business, but certain serious business reverses and losses caused the winding-up of the firm, and his future in that direction and in others also at that time seems to have been bleak.

The voyage to Australia was so long and hazardous that the decision to go there must have seemed an almost irrevocable step, and for most emigrants here from Britain it was. At least there were no lengthy negotiations with governments or form-filling, but there were no guarantees of accommodation or government assistance when one got there. A man had to take his chance and make his way as best he could. With his wife, one child aged two years and some household goods, my father travelled by sailing ship, the voyage taking about four months.

After many vicissitudes which included some unusual jobs and some hard studies under great difficulties, he was ordained a minister of the Church of England. During all these years of many changes and much travel in various parts of New South Wales, he had acquired a large

family in the best (or worst?) Victorian age tradition. His new vocation, however, ensured a more settled life for his family, but his work as vicar of a vast parish of many scores of square miles of grazing and dairying country in the state of Victoria still involved a great deal of travel by horse transport, often under quite primitive conditions.

When he left England, his family at home, consisting of numerous sisters and a younger brother, all heartily disapproved of his "restlessness", as they called it, but nevertheless they co-operated, and from this there came about an annual event of the utmost importance in our family, the arrival of "The Box".

In the early days of the young Colony shopping facilities were meagre, and it was the custom of many families to import large quantities of goods and clothing from "home". This custom in some cases became a tradition, so that even in Edwardian days (from which my first memories date), long after excellent shops had been founded in the capital cities and most large country towns, some families continued to import annually a large crate of clothing, toys and books, chosen for them by the relatives "at home". The box was always the same size, a massive packing-case about five feet long by three feet deep by two and a half to three feet wide, securely nailed and bound with hoop iron. To a child its proportions seemed huge, and its arrival dominated our thoughts and plans for weeks beforehand.

Only second in importance to "The Box" was "The List". This was compiled early in each year by our parents and consisted mostly of what, to us children, seemed such uninteresting items as clothing and household linen. Each child, however, was allowed to ask for one or two toys and books, and this, of course, to us was the really important feature of the box. In a flight of imagi-

nation, I once asked for "a toy ship with crew of sailors", and my parents somewhat doubtfully put this down, probably with an apologetic footnote to the aunts. They were equal to the occasion, however, and after several months I received a toy model of a Brixham trawler, not with a "crew of sailors", of course, but with a picturesque fisherwoman standing at the prow, and I was not only content but inexpressibly happy.

After the list of the requirements of each person had been carefully drawn up, it was despatched to the English aunts. Most of them had not married, and lived in a large well-kept home in an English provincial seaside town, where they were well-known for their interest in church and welfare work of various kinds.

Some months later "The List" came back again, or rather a revised and altered version of it showing what had actually been able to be bought. This was when excitement really began to mount, because the arrival of "The List" was the fore-runner to that of "The Box" itself.

It was customary for "The List" to be read with great solemnity by my father to the assembled family after evening prayers, for which we all (parents, children, maid and governess) were rounded up each day from our various pursuits before the evening meal. This was quite a feat, because in those days a country clergyman in Australia had to work his parish with horses, of which we usually had at least five, a pair of carriage greys, a pair of ponies and a large ex-military riding hack for my father. As we also had a cow and poultry, two pet sheep, a dog and cats, we lived in a vicarage-cum-farm, three miles away from the small town in which was the church which was the centre of our parish.

We had one paddock about a mile long and two or three small ones, in one of which was a lake or lagoon, which we called "the dam". We also had a garden, an orchard, stables with lofts and various other outhouses. Those were spacious days, and sometimes it took some time to find people and get them gathered together. Family prayers and daily reading of a chapter from the majestic Authorised Version of the Bible helped, I believe, to mould our taste for good English in later life. For a young child, however, it was at times rather a dull ordeal, and I remember once enlivening the proceedings a little for myself by creeping in last, carrying a rather tame white hen, which squawked faintly once or twice, but this fortunately passed unobserved by my father, who was by that time elderly and at times somewhat absent-minded.

The day when "The List" was to be read, however, there was no difficulty in getting the family assembled, and I fancy the family prayers were somewhat abbreviated. The great moment then came, and each person's name was read out with his or her list of clothing and, finally, most important of all to the large number of children present, the toys and books. Some of the items would have an odd sound to modern ears, "chemises", "slip-bodices", "camisoles", and a word which constantly recurred was "ditto", for instance, "one plain linen chemise, one embroidered linen ditto", so that for some years afterwards I was quite convinced that a "ditto" was some kind of under-garment.

The actual arrival of "The Box" was a time when excitement reached its highest pitch. Whether it was in the vicinity of Christmas or had anything to do with Christmas, I can no longer remember, but it almost outrivalled Christmas Day as the red-letter day of the year. Two or three strong carrier's men manoeuvred the big packing-case on to the front verandah of the brick bungalow in which we lived and then into the house. My father superintended operations, while children pranced all round chanting "The Box has come! The Box has come!", and were ordered "Out of the way! Out of the way!"

Hammers and chisels were then sought, and my father and an elder brother opened the treasure-chest to the thrilling accompaniment of the groaning of hoop iron and the rending and creaking of wood. The great ceremony of unpacking and distribution of the contents then began, and I can still visualise the beautifully packed layers of fine linen and smell the scent of mothballs and lavender, from underneath which at last appeared the long-awaited toys and books.

The boxes served many purposes thereafter, becoming repositories for harness, axle-grease, spare gig-lamps or hay and straw in the outhouses. Some, covered with wall-paper or cretonne, were even converted into cupboards for the house. Similarly, fruit cases nailed together or taken apart and re-assembled by certain handy members of the family and covered with cretonne or wall-paper made quite neat and attractive bookcases, bedside cupboards or dressing-tables, and it never occurred to our pioneer parents to mortgage their future by entering into hire-purchase contracts for expensive furniture which they could not afford.

A few more years went by, the children began to grow up, and we moved to a capital city where shops had improved more than ever. Increases

in customs duties had also probably taken place. The custom of importing directly by private families therefore began to become an unnecessarily expensive anachronism. Finally, the first World War, with its submarine attacks causing much loss of life as well as cargoes, must have put an

end to our time-honoured family custom, just as it wrote "Finis" to so many other pleasant things. Anyway, the advent of "The Box" seems to have ceased about that time, but it remains a delightful memory the like of which the new generations of Australians have never known.

# Australian Book Review

*Official Journal of the National Book Council*

The Australian Book Review covers every field of Australian writing — fiction, politics, poetry, science, farming, travel, education, children's books, practical books, economics, government, management. If it's published in Australia or written by an Australian, we are interested in reviewing it.

If you want to know what Australians are writing then you need a subscription for ten issues over a year. As a bonus, you will also get general articles on books, publishing and literary matters.

Subscriptions — \$20 a year to Peter Isaacson Publications,  
46 Porter Street, Prahran, Vic.

# The Logic of the Thorn Birds

K. A. McKENZIE

The advance publicity for Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* (Harper and Row, 1977) led readers to expect a chronicle novel, a family saga, which would invite comparison with some notable existing examples, such as Martin Boyd's *The Montforts* (1928; revised 1963), Helen Simpson's *Boomerang* (1932), and G. B. Lancaster's *Pageant* (1930). So, in some ways, it is and does.

Each of those novelists, however, undertook to spread a story over four or five generations. It is very difficult to give unity and shape to a narrative so extended in time: the actors in the early part are all dead before the final scenes, in which an entirely new cast performs. Yet all three authors mentioned above achieved a measure of success, by means of various ingenious devices. Boyd makes his successive generations illustrate a continuing theme: the tensions between the colonial way of life, as it evolves through eighty years, and the English way of life.

The action in *Boomerang* extends over an even longer period: a hundred and twenty-seven years. There was serious danger that in such a time-spread the end of the story would forget the beginning. Miss Simpson avoided the danger by using two devices. She has the narrative conducted by Clotilde Boissy, the fourth generation representative of the family, whose previous history is thus gathered up and made to move, as it were, towards the great-grand-daughter who is at once the product of ancestral influences and a uniquely different individual. The other device was to adopt a spiral or cyclical conception of history. In the beginning a French nobleman sets out from Montemar-en-Artois, and a hundred and twenty-seven years later, his great-grand-daughter returns to this old village, "where we started from". The boomerang curve is completed.

In *Pageant*, G. B. Lancaster adopted the same narrative method as Boyd used in *The Montforts*,

and gave the story coherence by making it illustrate the wider theme of Tasmania's social development, rather than, or as well as, tracing the fortunes of several generations of one family.

Miss McCullough did not set herself this problem. Although her story extends over a comparatively long period — fifty-four years — and although three generations appear, the principal characters are present throughout. Meghann Cleary is aged precisely four when the story begins; she is still there, aged fifty-eight, when it ends. Her mother Fiona is also present from beginning to end. Ralph de Bricassart enters the Drogheda circle early, and his death occurs almost at the end of the book.

The subject of *The Thorn Birds* is the fortunes of an Irish family, the Clearys, first briefly in New Zealand, then on Drogheda station in northern New South Wales, with sorties by some of the characters to north Queensland, Rome, and London, and short interludes of war in north Africa and New Guinea. The action begins on December 8th, 1915, Meggie Cleary's fourth birthday, and proceeds steadily through seven precisely dated sections to 1969. There is no attempt, as in the novels referred to above, to trace the ancestry of the family — except for the fact of its Irish origin. We are not to be interested in historical perspective, but only in the here and now — even though these are to spread over fifty-four years. Similarly, although it is clear that Father Ralph de Bricassart comes from Ireland, there is no reference to his family background, apart from the general indication that his remote ancestry was Norman-French. (It is perhaps worth remarking that in each of the three novels mentioned above, half the family background was French.)

The division into seven time-limited sections creates the air of a chronological novel, but this is

deceptive; for in several cases the character who gives his or her name to a section has already been present for some years, and only now is to be given slightly more prominence. Nor is there any attempt to study general social change, as in *The Montforts* or in *Pageant*. The one important exception is the presentation of the latest representative of the family, Justine, who is clearly the liberated woman of the permissive society, and speaks its language. Another mark of modernity is the large amount of attention paid to the human excretory and reproductive systems, even in the early parts of the book. But it remains true that the novelist is chiefly concerned with the study of background, character, and incident, not with the changes from one generation to the next.

The writing is vigorous. The background is painted with bold and garish strokes — too many strokes, perhaps. Some of the descriptions, for example those of the cane country in Queensland, read like extracts from a tourist brochure. But there is some good descriptive and narrative writing, as for example in the account of the disastrous bushfire on Drogheda. Indeed, the presentation of the natural scene is one of the most attractive features of the novel. Consider for example this piece of rapid and crowded prose (Meggie is coming “home in peace” to Drogheda after the breakdown of her marriage.):

Back to the brown and silver, back to dust, back to that wonderful purity and sparseness North Queensland so lacked. No profligate growth here, no hastening of decay to make room for more; only a slow wheeling inevitability like the constellations. Kangaroos more than ever. Lovely little symmetrical wilgas, round and matronly, almost coy. Galahs, soaring in pink waves of undersides above the truck. Emus at full run. Rabbits, hopping out of the road with white powder puffs flashing cheekily. Bleached skeletons of dead trees in the grass. Mirages of timber stands in the far curving horizon as they came across the Dibban Dibban plain, only the unsteady blue lines across their bases to indicate that the trees weren't real. The sound she had so missed but never thought to miss, crows carking desolately. Misty brown veils of dust whipped along by the dry autumn wind like dirty rain. And the grass, the silver-beige grass of the Great North-West, stretching to the sky like a benediction (p. 329).

The two rather grandiose and doubtfully appropriate similes, incidentally, are examples of the tendency to overdraw which occurs occasionally

elsewhere in the novel. That Drogheda station was vast we can accept; but could Mary Carson's estate have been valued at thirteen million pounds? And were there wagon wheels ten feet in diameter, or frost two inches thick on the ground? Correspondingly, the principal characters are represented as slightly larger than life. Mary Carson gazes at the priest, “enjoying his beauty, his attentiveness, his barbed and subtle mind” (p. 54). She goes on reflecting upon

the height and the perfect proportions of his body, the fine aristocratic features, the way every physical element had been put together with a degree of care about the appearance of the finished product God lavished on few of His creatures (p. 55).

It is true that we are looking at him through the eyes of Mary Carson, and perhaps the hyperbole is hers. She goes on to note as a curiosity that “many priests were handsome as Adonis, had the sexual magnetism of Don Juan”. This paragon of priests shoots rapidly to the top, as Cardinal Archbishop. Similarly Justine, though apparently no beauty, through ability and force of character moves to the top of the theatrical world as an actress in the great Shakespearean roles.

There is another aspect perhaps not unrelated to this: the attributing to certain characters, especially in the later part of the book, of greater intellectual sophistication and more elevated language than we should expect from them as so far drawn. The novelist makes Fiona and Meggie talk like herself, instead of like themselves. The conversation of that unpleasant person Justine, on the other hand, seems just right. For this and other reasons she is perhaps the greatest artistic success in the book.

The theme of the novel, as distinct from the subject, is the proposition, implicit in the title, and explicit in the epigraph, that “the best is only bought at the cost of great pain”. The handling of this proposition is amateurish and confused, partly because the analogy between birds and human beings is necessarily inexact; and partly because pain is defined — never very satisfactorily and only by implication — in several different ways. The most comprehensive and despairing declaration is that mere living is painful. This is furthest from the thorn bird theme; for this pain is not self-imposed, nor does it lead to “the best”. It appears first in the prayer (evidently uttered by the devout young Dane, though this is by no means clear):

Lord, it is lonely. I pray it be over soon, the pain of life. They do not understand that I, so gifted, find so much pain in living (p. 422).

Closer to the bird-situation is the status of de Bricassart, as seen by Dane, who remarks on the Cardinal's "intensely sad eyes", and then reflects:

'How much he must have suffered to appear so, but how nobly he must have risen above his suffering to become the most perfect of priests' (p. 432).

This view, however, is shown to be mistaken; for de Bricassart himself declares that he is not a perfect priest: he has broken all his vows, and accuses himself of "pride, ambition, a certain unscrupulousness" (p. 499). Meggie certainly speaks of pain as being self-imposed: "We create our own thorns . . ." (p. 390). Ralph's rejoinder — surely unexpectedly naive for an experienced priest — is:

'That's what I don't understand. The pain . . . Why the pain, Meggie?'

Meggie's reply is hardly consistent with her earlier declaration about our creating our own thorns:

'Ask God, Ralph,' said Meggie. 'He's the authority on pain, isn't He? He made us what we are. He made the whole world. Therefore He made the pain too.' (p. 391).

This logic would not have been acceptable to Job, or to Milton; nor would it be to a modern theologian or moral philosopher. Here, as so often in the book, one does not know just what sort of pain or suffering is being referred to. Is it the mere pain of living? Or is it the frustration both feel at the thwarting of their mutual love by life's circumstances? Whatever it is, there is no reference here to the second part of the theme: the assertion that "the best" can only be achieved through and after pain. It does not seem to be, here or elsewhere in the novel, the kind of suffering that fell upon Job: the loss of material possessions, the deaths of children, serious illness. There *are* deaths: of Paddy and Stuart in the fire, and

the drowning of Dane; but they do not match the thorn bird legend.

The same uncertainty appears in the longing for suffering expressed in the prayer of the young priest Dane after his ordination and just before his death:

I have not suffered enough. My life has been one long absolute joy since I began in Thy service . . . It is only through suffering that I may rise above myself, understand Thee better . . . Plunge Thy spear into my breast, bury it there so deeply I am never able to withdraw it! Make me suffer . . .

This seems closer to the theme of the novel; though once again the suffering is to be God-imposed, not self-imposed.

The author should perhaps have called the book *The Clearys*, and left out the epigraph. In announcing so prominently her intention of dealing with the relation of suffering to achievement, she gives an undertaking which is not satisfactorily carried out. It may be argued that the author's intention was to portray characters who were morally confused. This seems unlikely, however; for some of the discussion of self-imposed suffering occurs in authorial comment. Admittedly it is not always clear who is supposed to be speaking. For example, is the very last paragraph in the book still Meggie's meditation, or has the author taken over?

But we, when we put the thorns in our breasts, we know. We understand. And still we do it. Still we do it. (p. 530).

The "we" presumably means human beings in general. But whether it is Meggie or the author speaking, the reference once again is limited to self-imposed pain, and there is no mention of the expected "superlative song".

Indeed, it is doubtful whether any of the vaguely defined pain in the book is really analogous to that which the thorn bird is said to inflict upon itself. Sometimes the pain is not self-imposed, or is not productive of superior achievement; and sometimes it is neither. In a novel possessing undoubted merit in other respects, this thematic ambiguity is regrettable.

# books

## BLACK PAST, PRESENT — FUTURE ?

Elizabeth Webby

Kevin Gilbert: *Living Black* (Allen Lane, \$9.95).

Borac, me sing —  
Him white fellow king,  
And him black fellow poor kangaroo  
(1844)

They always after us. They used to drive around here, in the van, at night-time with a spotlight. They musta thought we was kangaroos. (1977)

Two anonymous voices, separated by 130 years but making the same point. The first, a white poet writing, despite the Negro minstrelly language, about the effects of white invasion on Aboriginal civilization in a Melbourne newspaper, the Port Phillip Gazette for 18 May 1844. The second, an Aboriginal recorded by Kevin Gilbert in a camp on the Mallee at Wilcannia where “The rubbish lies in great heaps; tins, bottles, wine flagons and over all, the scent of despair.” In the intervening years nothing has changed except that the resilient spirit given to the Aboriginal in the earlier poem has been increasingly sapped by the loss of their land and its associated spiritual values and the breakdown of tribal rituals and rules. As Gilbert writes in his introduction to *Living Black*, “The traditional Aboriginal was drunk on religion, intoxicated by the metaphysics expressed through the physical features of his land.” In contrast, the scene at the Mallee camp ends “Kev, you wanna drink? Have a drink, bud.”

Through his introduction, his linking commentary and his arrangement of the recorded interviews, reminiscences and verbal exchanges, Gilbert places these widely varying accounts of what it means to be an Aboriginal in Australia today

in a controlled perspective of past, present and, hopefully, future. His attribution of the predominantly poor black self-image to years of conditioning by white ignorance and intolerance is only too well substantiated by many of the following accounts of exploitation at both personal and governmental levels. He seems equally correct in asserting that the only hope for the future lies in a substitution of a more positive self-image: “Aboriginals should be building a modern Aboriginal culture, something that is meaningful in today’s context.” The questions raised throughout *Living Black*, however, are where is the material for this culture to come from and how is the building to be done?

Two ways to help restore Aboriginal self-esteem, proposed by Gilbert and a number of others in the book, involve compensation for the historical wrongs which have produced the present situation. White acceptance of the need for land rights or equivalent compensation would mean recognition that the Aboriginals were more than mere kangaroos who could be hunted off their land without fear of reprisal. Along with this physical compensation, some spiritual compensation could be made by greater emphasis on the study and teaching of Aboriginal history and traditional culture. But compensation is not the same as restoration — it is now impossible to turn back the clock to 1887 as Gilbert recognises in stressing the need for an Aboriginal culture meaningful in today’s context. It has often been observed that times of great social unrest, such as depressions, produce a nostalgic longing for past golden ages. Many of the older people interviewed in *Living Black* look back in this way to their childhoods: “When I was a child, Aboriginal discipline was very strong and I might add very beautiful and it made a woman out of me.” They long for a return to tribal rules based on the

authority of the elders but, as Gilbert comments, "Aboriginals pay lip-service to the idea of respect for elders, more particularly the tribal people, but in reality few of them command much respect." For communities now have to be run, land rights fought for, according to white rules and regulations and it is the younger, European-educated and more sophisticated southern blacks who know how to organize committees and petitions.

The difficulties in establishing a modern Aboriginal culture that will incorporate both the past and the present and hence give hope for a better future are reflected in cultural forms as well as content. Like other colonised peoples, such as the Irish, Aboriginals have the problem of attempting to express their sense of identity through the forms and the language of their alien conquerors. The problems of having to communicate through English — gaining sufficient control for clear expression and at the same time resisting control by the language itself — are apparent in many of the interviews in *Living Black*. Gilbert's own use of English (and his reminiscences of the past are anything but nostalgic) is exemplary in this respect. The form of *Living Black* itself — a combination of Aboriginal oral cultural traditions, the modern technology of the tape recorder and Gilbert's editorial and literary skills — can be seen to symbolise the fruitful combination of old and new necessary for a modern Aboriginal culture.

My comments so far have necessarily emphasised Gilbert's role in the book but I would not like to leave the impression that he is just indulging in a personal ego-trip of the type other Aboriginal leaders are criticised for in several places in *Living Black*. The final speaker, Grandfather Koori, stresses that "To regain respect you have to force your enemy to respect you and your rights. To get his ear and his admiration you've got to wrap him in your humanity because men are the same everywhere." For this enemy, *Living Black* was ultimately most impressive for its personal histories which do vividly involve and enwrap the reader so that "living" becomes more important than "black". To single out any particular speakers would do a disservice to a book which aims to be as inclusive as possible, varying from elders to teenagers, from Adelaide to Darwin, from upper middle-class urban blacks to those still in a virtual tribal state. The efforts necessary for this inclusiveness were presumably inspired by a desire to avoid the too frequent rivalries and jealousies, between families, regions and urban/tribal blacks, which are seen as one

of the chief problems to be overcome in the creation of a more positive future. While the resultant diversity of views and opinions may make one doubt the value of calls for an Aboriginal ideology, it certainly indicates that blacks are individuals rather than the favourable or unfavourable stereotypes of present black and white perception.

## LIFE IS IMMENSE

Peter Corris

C. M. H. Clark: *A History of Australia, Vol. IV, The Earth Abideth Forever* (Melbourne University Press, \$17.50).

"This volume," Manning Clark writes in the Preface, "tells the story from the discovery of gold in February 1851 to the centenary of the coming of European civilization to Australia on 26 January 1888." It does too, building on the three previous volumes an equal majesty of language, wealth of evidence and idiosyncrasy of vision. That vision has darkened as Clark has drawn closer to the present, and he has found little in the period covered by this volume to be cheerful about. His themes have not changed — the struggle for power, the meaning of existence in the continent last-discovered by civilised man, and the forces in men's nature and the society they constructed which determined the outcome of the power struggle and the "authorised version" of what life in Australia was to be all about. Although the story is assuming the dimensions of a tragedy this is not an altogether sombre book. "Life is immense" Clark observes more than once, and the display of a magnificent historian's skills, even when playing over unhappy events, is a confirmation of that. There is a surge of life and energy through the book which, paradoxically, challenges its creator's vision of Australian society.

That is not the sort of judgment which would be appropriate to the work of any other Australian historian because Manning Clark's work stands outside the mainstream of Australian historiography. His *History of Australia* has very little in common with the careful monographs, the text book treatments of periods and places, even the interpretative essays which make up the bulk of Australian historical writing. Its companions are the novels of Henry Richardson and Patrick White, the poems of A. D. Hope, the paintings of Sydney Nolan. The only other Australian histo-



rian who bears comparison, not ideologically, but artistically, with Clark is Geoffrey Blainey, another stylist and visionary whose achievement, great though it is, remains fragmented compared with Clark's. Still, a comparison is apt; both Blainey and Clark write as if their work will be read in a hundred years time. In reviewing Blainey's *Triumph of the Nomads* elsewhere, I commented that he will undoubtedly earn a place in 'The Dictionary of Australian Quotations' when that volume is compiled. It goes almost without saying that Clark's entries will be legion. This is a way of stressing that Clark's writing, though unique, is not un-historical as some have claimed.

What emerges most clearly from a close reading of the fourth volume of the *History* is that biography is central to Clark's historical method. There is a delight in narrative and description and a distaste for statistics and lists; there is a fine ear for quotations and a superb theatrical sense in the juxtaposition of incidents and scenes, but what most excites Clark's imagination is the power the historian possesses of declaring what shaped and moved a man and, perhaps even more, of being able to set down in brief the salient facts of his life. There are big portraits in this book — Wentworth, now going towards the shadows, Parkes in his hey-day worshipping things British, Robert O'Hara Burke — but also many smaller figures upon whose lives Clark has mediated and who have called forth some of his best writing. I have always treasured Clark's remark about Hugh Glass in the *Short History*: "He put up an expensive house in Melbourne, with an artificial lake on which swans floated with a dignity their sponsor lacked" and wondered what he would do with Glass when the time came. The longer account is just as good:

He lived in Flemington House, Melbourne, the show-place of show-places for town squatters, a mansion of great conspicuous waste, of Grecian columns, marble floors and *objets d'art* with its own lake over which lovely white swans glided on the still waters set in an English-style grassy parkland. For all the eye could tell Glass was 'disgustingly rich'.

We have Tommy Bent in all his venality, Graham Berry, all good intentions, Marcus Clarke and Adam Lindsay Gordon simmering in their melancholic juices and Henry Lawson, just emerging from obscurity and learning to drink.

Clark made it clear in the Boyer lectures what he was about with these portraits:

The story of Burke and Wills, for example, could be told to illustrate many things about life. Like all great stories it had everything. It had a mighty spirit, Robert O'Hara Burke, destroyed by a 'fatal flaw'. It could be told to show that when chance conspires with a man who suffers from attacks of the 'sillies', then all the inventions of science, all the material progress of mankind is powerless to save him from the fruits of his folly. It could be told as a story about the evils of snobbery with a special glance at 'poor Charlie Gray' as a victim of such snobbery.

And again:

The most difficult thing of all for a historian is to learn how to tell his story so that something is added to the facts, something about the mystery at the heart of things.

I have no quarrel with that; without men and women there would be no history and they are its proper primary subjects and historical writing which says nothing about the human condition will surely be ignored.

In examining the high and low points of Australian history through these decades — the gold discoveries, Eureka stockade, the Lambing Flat riots, the reduction of the Tasmanians — Clark seems to be taking the moral and ethical temperature of the period. As he draws closer to the twentieth century he finds that temperature grievously low. Bush rowdiness is complemented by city philistinism, men of small vision hold political power and the populace is sustained by tawdry imperialism, booze and spurious mateship. This represents a change from the tone of earlier volumes of the *History* where Clark was able to detect energy and strength amid the seeking after power and profit. Now he sees the country 'settling down', going slack. This bleak picture owes something to selectivity. Clark's is, in many ways, a history of ideas and rhetoric in Australia rather than a history of social and technological change. There were social and technological changes in this period — in education, medical science, food packaging and communications — which improved the lives of people. When Clark gathers large crowds of people together in this book it is usually to reprove them for philistinism or boot-licking, but somehow their exuberance and irreverence seems to defy him and they stand forth as people no worse than their fathers before them and no worse than their counterparts in other lands.

Manning Clark's pessimism obviously owes something to his dismay at the fate of the Whitlam government, but it has deeper origins. Superbly

equipped by imagination and erudition to understand the great men of the world, Clark labours under a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the not-so-great — the disadvantage of never having been poor. Without that experience it is hard to direct the 'eye of pity' at those Australians who settled for petty bourgeois status and values in town and country. It is hard also to understand those Australians who genuinely became frightened by Gough Whitlam's stylish prescriptions for Australia when told by a reactionary media and unscrupulous politicians that the bills could not be paid. Most people who have lived their lives out in Australia have had, in terms of the wealth the country has yielded, very

little of this world's goods and have been ruthlessly used by those few who have had an abundance. Given this, it is not the timidity and conservativeness that should be wondered at, but the decency and good will that is displayed every day on the streets if not in the board rooms and corridors of power.

It is to be hoped that Manning Clark can find some heroes among the many villains in twentieth century Australia and some grounds for hope among the many signposts to despair, for it is a mark of his influence as a writer that his next volume will be read as much for what it implies about the future of this country as for what it says about our past.

## The Year 1863

by James Smith

Extracts from a hitherto unpublished diary by a Melbourne man of letters is the main offering in the Summer *Meanjin*, a glimpse of life both high and low in a colonial city. Writing with all the urbanity of Delacroix (who died in the same year) Smith managed to be everywhere: at theatre performances, dinner parties with politicians, at the Burke and Wills funeral ('Burke's skull a very fine one. In taking a cast of it, some of the teeth dropped out which I procured.'). and possibly elsewhere. ('Aspinall tells me that the brothels of this city . . .') In all, a major piece of Australiana. Together with a Peter Mathers story, an interview with Jack Hibberd, Hibberd's libretto *Sin*, more on opera, Jack Clancy and Andrew Pike on film, John Lonie on South Australia, and Dennis Altman on E. M. Forster.

### Meanjin

\$14.00 annual subscription  
post included

University of Melbourne  
Parkville 3052

# The CRA Book of Facts

**No gimmicks. No purple prose. No fancy copywriting.**

This is a book about CRA: who we are and what we do.

It's made up largely of lists. Names, places, amounts of money, percentages.

You won't find any gimmicks or purple prose. But you will find facts.

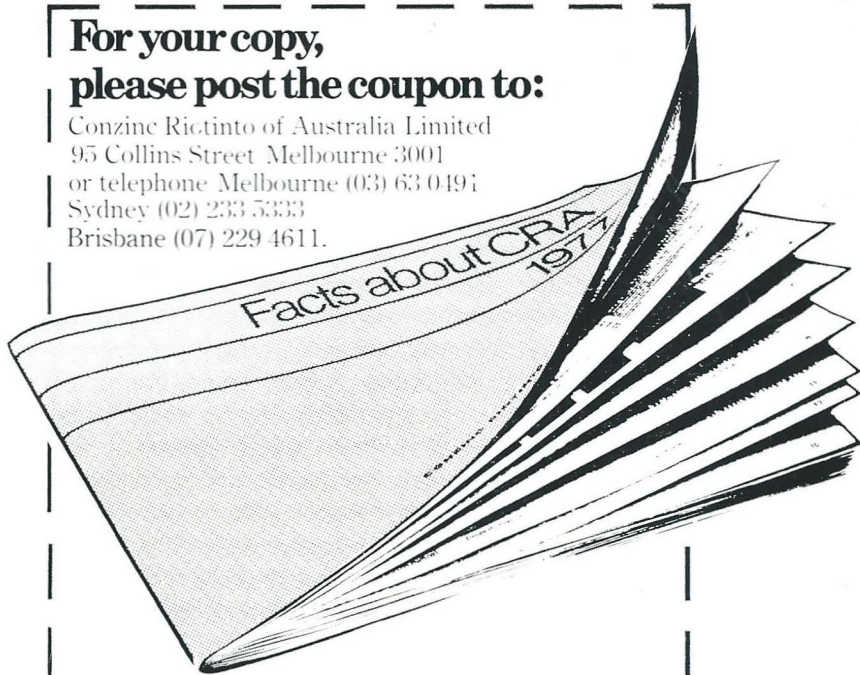
The book lays out our corporate structure; our earnings, income, and

where our income went; our financial record, 1967-76; our directors; our subsidiaries; our associates; our exploration and mining companies, from aluminium to uranium; and a brief history from 1905 to 1977.

Altogether 45 pages of facts. Facts about CRA. Basic information about Australia's major mining group is available free to all interested Australians.

**For your copy,  
please post the coupon to:**

Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Limited  
95 Collins Street Melbourne 3001  
or telephone Melbourne (03) 63 0491  
Sydney (02) 233 5333  
Brisbane (07) 229 4611.



Name.....

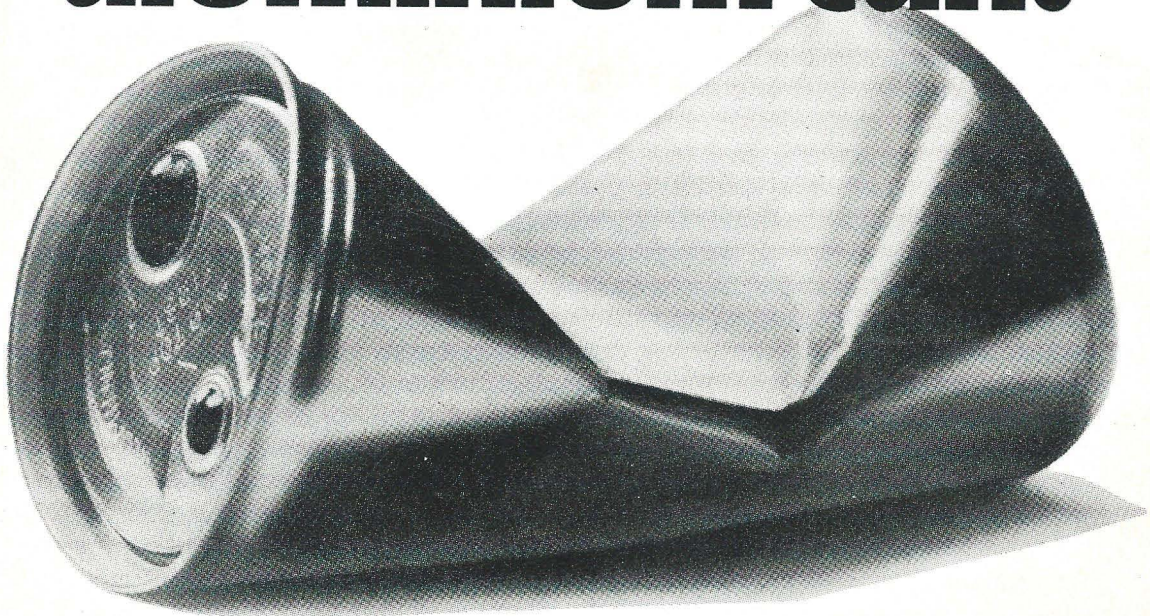
Address.....

State ..... Postcode.....



**Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Limited**  
Australia's leading mining group

# The Comalco aluminium can.



## Too good to throw away.

Aluminium cans are a valuable source of metal. And turning used cans into fresh aluminium requires only 5% of the energy used in producing the original metal.

Last year, 80 million aluminium cans were recycled throughout Australia . . . 1,800 tonnes in all, representing over \$500,000 cash for can collectors.

Almost 60 million of these cans were returned through Comalco's long-established network of Buy-Back Centres.

Comalco has 70 Centres, in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Launceston and country areas. Any of them will confirm that the Comalco aluminium can is too good to throw away.

**For more information** write to Comalco Limited, 95 Collins Street, Melbourne, 3000 or 168 Kent Street, Sydney, 2000.

 **COMALCO**