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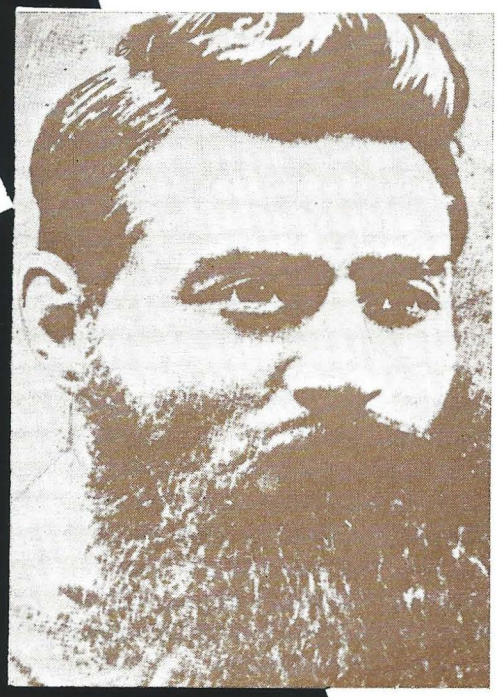

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overland

July, 1981

DENNIS HYDE

The Local Legion

"Cough, Cough," Melen said, wagging a finger at the chatter around him. "Chairman's cough, gentlemen. I think we should get started."

"Smoker's cough more like it." Percy Baker, perched on one end of the sofa, tapped his chest a couple of times and wheezed.

No one paid any attention to him.

"Smoker's cough," the old man piped up again, tapping his chest, trying to raise a laugh.

Harold King lurched up out of his seat and dumped the flagon of white wine on the bridge-table in front of Melen.

"Let's get on with it," he grunted. "I'm half full already."

"Well, don't just leave it there," Melen chortled. "Pass it round, dear boy. Pass it round. Spread the nectar. We haven't mopped up the fighting fund yet. Or have we? Not that it matters."

"There's plenty."

Jill, who happened to be passing the fridge on her way back from the kitchen, stopped, opened the fridge door and stared in. "Yes," she repeated, "there's still plenty."

"There's always plenty at the Baker's." Percy left the sofa and hip hopped across the room. "Circulation's gone," he exclaimed, pausing to massage one knee. "Never sit with crossed legs."

"Anything the matter?" Mrs. Baker's grey head appeared at the kitchen door. Her spectacles glinted at them.

"Everything is just fine." Melen held up crossed fingers. "Just fine."

"Disappear, woman." Percy flapped a hand. "Disappear. This is business. A council of war."

"If everything is just fine," she asked, "why has Mr Melen got his fingers crossed? You want some more cheese? Some biscuits?"

Reaching the fridge door, Percy flapped her away without comment. "South Islander," he informed the room. "Too many volcanoes down there. They always fear the worst."

A small eruption sounded in the kitchen. Percy grinned. But ignored it. "We can't start the revolution without refreshments," he announced. "Let them drink riesling."

Jill angled out a fresh flagon and lugged it across to the chairman's table. Percy returned to his seat.

"First entry," Melen intoned, opening the brand new minute book in front of him. "Two flagons of wine." He reached for his pen and made a scrawl on the page. "That's all right, is it?" he asked, turning to David Mews in the armchair beside him. "Double entry book-keeping? Debits on the window side, credits on the typist's tit? Lucky, we have an accountant," he added to the rest of the room, *sotto voce*, speaking from behind a tilted hand.

David shrugged. "I thought you wanted people to put out a newsletter."

"Right, right, right." Melen held his glass out to Harold King for more. "Gentlemen, I keep forgetting. This is no ordinary accountant. Ex-student editor. Ex-athlete. Ex-dramatist. Jill Stafford's ex-boyfriend. Mr Ex. Perhaps he should be Chairman."

"Moved and seconded," Percy cackled, holding up both hands.

Melen pushed away the bridge-table, standing.

"Richard, please!" Jill exclaimed, leaning across to calm him down. "Let's just get on with the business."

Melen sat down again.

"Jill said come to a meeting and I'm here," David remarked. "But otherwise I'm in the dark. Something about a newsletter. That's all I know."

Having filled his own glass and put the cap back on the flagon, Harold King sat down slowly and

carefully. "Better start from scratch, Dick," he commented. "I'm a bit foggy on it m'self. All I know is you want to put the boot into Stafford. Sorry . . . I mean Jill's Dad. I forgot."

"Don't worry about that," Jill snapped. "That's got nothing to do with it. As far as I'm concerned he's just president of the club for the time being. No more, no less. The whole thing has nothing to do with me. I'm just willing to help. That's all."

"Jill is quite right," Melen chipped in, becoming magisterial for a moment; folding his arms. "This is precisely where the club is going wrong. Too much back-biting. Too much emphasis on personalities. What we need is objectivity and common sense. That's what the club could do with right now. An objective view. Some common sense."

"I'm not even allowed into the club," Jill added; pouting. "What's it got to do with me?"

"Sorry," Harold muttered. "Sorry. I didn't think." He took out a handkerchief and began mopping his brow. "By God it's hot. Rangitori in summer. Can I open a window?"

"Let me."

David, the man nearest, went to the window and pushed it up to its full height.

But there was no welcoming breeze. The house, a Californian bungalow, stood on a slope overlooking the Hauraki Gulf. Today, the waters of the gulf were placid. The sky grey and steamy. The islands of the volcanic archipelago were scattered across the horizon at random; the floats of Taramainuku's net, according to legend. The township itself tucked in beneath the curving shoulder of the Rangitori Ranges; bumpkin tree ferns parading along the promenade at the water's edge.

A ferry was moving out from the main jetty on its way to Auckland, the engine stammering. What on earth was Jill doing hanging about with old Percy Baker and his cronies, David wondered; turning back to his chair. He hadn't seen her for years. Not since Dramatic Society days on campus. An occasional meeting in the street, a fleeting word at a party. But no real contact. Then, out of the blue, a phone call.

What was she up to? And Richard Melen. Where did he fit in? A plump, ginger-headed, little man wearing socks and sandals; an older man; a hole in one sock.

"Thanks," Harold muttered; loosening his tie. "Talk about the club. This room's like the club sauna. Although at least we've got something to drink. The other day I tried to smuggle in a gin and tonic. Suddenly, the manager's all over me like a rash. No drinking in the sauna bath, sir. Club rules. A single gin and tonic! Little pest."

"Let's come back to the point." Melen took a sip from his glass and put it back on the table. "The club. A lot of people are complaining and it's about time someone took a stand. Which is where we come in. A small group of members, concerned for the welfare of the club, get together and put out a newsletter. Nothing pretentious. Just a circular to tell members what's going on. Instead of the rubbish they put in the official sheet — golf scores, tennis scores, Fred Nurk was fined a dollar for kissing his wife at the social, that kind of junk — we put out a broadsheet for the literate. An editorial or two. Informed comment on the building program. The occasional book review. Some space for the juniors' debating. In other words, a proper bulletin. An alternative to Pravda. A quiet reminder that other people have opinions too. Not just the committee."

"If it's for the literate, don't expect my father to read it," Jill remarked, lighting a cigarette. "He hasn't read a book in years. A menu just about kills him."

David laughed. "Apart from a game of squash, I haven't been out to the club for ages. I'm not even sure I'm paid up. It must have changed. Is there enough news to keep two bulletins going?"

"There's plenty of news all right," Melen replied. "The news is that Stafford and his cohorts have been sitting on top of the place for the last three years and they're squashing it flat. That's the news. Hidebound reactionaries, the lot of them. What the club needs is a new broom. A few men of goodwill who are prepared to look at some up-to-date ideas, move with the times. The place is getting too narrow. It reeks of apathy. There's nothing in the constitution forbidding a newsletter. All I'm saying is that a second publication stimulates debate. It's part of the democratic process. Either we believe in open debate or we don't. Leave the club in mothballs if you like, but for me, we should at least try and get the place moving again, get rid of all the trivial gossip and sniping. Get back to essentials."

Melen unfolded his arms, hitching up the belt of his trousers.

"Bravo," Percy cheered, waving his glass in the

air. "Stimulate the corporate body. Put in the boot."

Mrs Baker, tip-toeing out of the room, stopped and stared. Silently, she raised her wrist, slapped it with the other hand, and wagged a stiff, admonitory finger at her husband. She closed the door behind her.

David held out his glass while Harold circulated the flagon. "A newsletter," David remarked. "Yes, it makes sense. Why not? Liven the place up. Create a few ripples. That's the way Jill and I worked on the campus rag. Rational commentary and persuasion. Open debate. I'm right behind you."

"Well, if you don't mind me saying so," Melen said, putting down his glass and smoothing the first page of the minute book flat with the back of his hand. "We want somethig a bit better than a campus rag."

David flushed.

"Don't get me wrong," Melen continued. "I don't doubt you wallowed in printer's ink and did all the usual things. Dog bites manuscript. Professor down but not out. The young Mencken. But this is the world, ducks. A brand new sheet in the ledger. A flood of letters from kindergarten boils down to an ounce of steam in the sauna. So what say we come back to the main point. Professionalism. A prospectus for action, to use accounting-speak."

"When Richard was in Hong Kong, he freelanced for The Times," Jill explained. "The Times of London. One of their leading contributors. I don't know how he did it. Scooping murder trials, and so on, as well as practising law."

"Let's get one thing clear," Melen said, snapping the minute book shut. "As presently constituted, the club is nothing more than a cesspool of gossip and triviality. It needs a kick in the pants. The way to do it? A newsletter. Something to raise the tone of the place. But we have to know what we're up against. Stafford is a mean and bloody-minded little man. Right? A little Hitler. He knows how to manipulate people. He knows how to twist the rules. What is he? Chairman of the Shipping Conference?"

"That's right," Jill confirmed. "Chairman of the Kaitomo Shipping Conference."

"So there you are," Melen continued. "You've got a trumped up little despot, an old boy network, and Stafford at the centre of the web. We've got our work cut out."

"Why not stand for election," David asked. "Change things that way. They still have elections, don't they?"

Melen snorted. "They still have elections and they still have the club picnic. Both are just the same. The ants come from all directions and they run towards the honey. Manipulation. That's the name of the game. How many people do you see refusing an invitation to the President's tent on Derby Day? Champagne. Cider, Hock. Prawns and bikkies. You don't lose many votes that way."

"I didn't know about that," David admitted. "Personally, I don't go to the races."

"I got an invite last year," Harold King mentioned. "To the President's tent. Beautifully cold beer. And champagne in gas cylinders."

"Gas cylinders?" Percy interjected. "Champagne?"

"Champagne in gas cylinders," Harold King repeated. "No less. Beautiful silver cylinders. And a barman dishing it out with a gun contraption. Cold as cold. Colder than the beer."

"They used to have big tubs of ice," Percy held his hands out wide to show the size. "Pack the bottles into ice the night before. Handsome green bottles with white labels. No cylinders. I used to cover the races for the Auckland Advertiser. Way back. The President always invited the reporters in at the end of the day for a binge. Young fellows. Cadets. The lot. A kind of tradition. The best races in the whole of New Zealand. And the President of the club playing his part."

"That's gone by the board," Melen interjected. "All you've got now is a tent full of goons guzzling their way to the morgue."

"He wouldn't even introduce Richard to the Chief Recorder," Jill added, turning to David. "My father. Not properly that is. We came all the way out to the races — the big reunion supposedly — and after standing at my father's elbow for half an hour, the best he can say is: This is Mr Melen. A former English lawyer. A friend of my daughter's. To the Chief Recorder! Two legal men and that's the best introduction he can make. After all Richard's done for the legal system in Asia. The Chief Recorder got the message all right. Oh, yes; he got the message. One minute of 'Jolly good race day' and so forth, then we're left standing."

"I wasn't left standing." Melen loosened his tie. "Frankly, I thought he was a bore. I used to strike that type in Hong Kong. An Oxford johnny who stumbles through a few cases, drafts a mort-

gage or two and gets dumped on the bench by mistake. No conscience, that type. Frankly, I was glad he left us. We had nothing to say to each other."

"Well, you were cross at the time. Ropeable."

"Ropeable is hardly the word. I was amused. Nothing more."

"The last Chief Recorder but one was a good man," Percy Baker chipped in. "Always friendly to the press. He wasn't a racing man but always willing to pass the time of day. Stop you in the street for a chat. Out at the club. Anywhere. I liked him. That was the thing about the club, for me. You could talk to anyone."

"It isn't like that now," Melen snapped.

He dragged off his tie and undid the top buttons of his shirt, jiggling the flaps of his collar to create a down draught.

"In the three years I've been here, the place has gone from bad to worse. It's not a question of being *able* to talk to anyone. You *have* to talk to anyone. Anyone is the only one they're letting into the club, these days. Talk about Maori customs. You spend your whole day rubbing noses with riff-raff. Car salesmen. Commercial travellers. Women."

Jill clicked her tongue. "Don't start on women's lib."

Melen splashed some wine into his glass. "Well, it's true. Every time you front up to the bar, you're staring at cleavage. Pant suits. Thongs. Striped footwear on the tennis courts. Poker machines. Billiards in the front bar. No overseas papers."

"No gin and tonic in the sauna," Harold reminded him.

"The place is going to the pack," Melen concluded. "What can you expect from the Pooh Bah of the Kaitomo Shipping Conference? Sometimes I think he's got a press gang in every port drumming up membership. Every time I go to the bank I half expect to see a member of the club. A stocking on his head squirting shaving cream at the video cameras. It's that bad. Riff-raff. Reprobates. Complete nobodies. It's about time someone had a look at the constitution. What we need is some men of goodwill. A group who still have a few standards. A praetorian guard. And the newsletter is the starting point. The catalyst. The same thing happened at Leicester. Some idiot got control of the club and wanted to change the world. Ban the black tie. No more curtseying. A special levy for Bangladesh, or whatever it was in those days. The same pattern. You know what we did in that case? Do you know what we did? Five of us who knew each other from National Service got together and kicked the stinker out. Caught him in bed with his secretary. Do you know what we called ourselves? The Local Legion. That's what we called ourselves. The Local Legion. It only took five of us. Five dedicated people. And we published a damn good bulletin. The last issue was a corker. A photograph of the two of them. Holding hands, right in the club parking area. Sent him back to the slums of Birmingham or wherever he came from. The Local Legion. We knew what we were doing. Just five of us."

"There are five of us," Percy Baker giggled, counting with one finger. "There are five of us. Right here in this room. Exactly five."

David checked. Yes, it was true. There were five people present. He looked at Jill, but she was staring at Melen, one hand planted in her dark, frizzy hair. Sitting there, wrapped up in her new cause, exactly the same as she used to be on campus. But then, it had been Vietnam.

Surreptitiously, David glanced at his watch.

"Did the bar trade suffer?" Harold King asked. "At Leicester? That's what you've got to be careful of. If the bar trade takes a knock, then sometimes it never recovers. That's the trouble with upsetting the apple-cart. You can lose your bar trade. People start going home after work. No one likes a fuss."

Harold peered into his glass. Jill leaned forward with the flagon and re-filled it.

"No more for me," David said, covering his glass with one hand. "I've just about had enough."

"I haven't," Percy chirped, swaying forward to receive another glass.

Jill topped him up, then Melen. She put the flagon back on the table.

"Listen," Melen said, pointing a stumpy finger at David. "You work for Mosby, correct?"

"Mosby's company is a client."

"They're eating out of your hand."

"I wouldn't say that."

Melen snatched a mouthful of wine, wiping his mouth with the back of his arm. "Don't come the soul of discretion with me. You have influence in certain quarters. Contacts."

"Richard," Jill pleaded. "Let's get back to the newsletter."

"Damn the newsletter," Melen growled. "Let's get down to tin tacks. We didn't bring Mr X

here to write features. We want him to write letters to the men who write cheques. We've got a list of people you're supposed to know."

Melen leaned down and fumbed for a folder in the brief case beside him. Straightening up, he bumped the bridge-table, his glass spilling on to the shoulder of his shirt.

"Damnation," Melen muttered, standing up to examine the damp patch, craning his neck.

"Get me another from the car," he added. "There should be a beach shirt on the back seat."

"We dropped our swimming gear at the flat," Jill replied. "There's nothing in the car."

"Well, there should be." Melen peeled off his shirt and examined it. "Does wine stain?" he asked. "White wine?"

"I don't know," Jill admitted. "I don't think so, Not a shirt like that."

"What about finding out, then," he snapped. "For future reference. A personal assistant should know things like that. I thought typing was meant to be your weakness."

He hung the shirt over the back of his chair and sat down again. A fold of white flesh slopped over his belt. His breasts were like pale, squashy pears; the skin freckled.

"Mosby and his friends know a lot of people out at the club," Melen resumed. "Your job. Get close to them. Keep tabs on Stafford."

"Richard, please!" Jill argued. "I don't think you can put it to David quite like that. I asked him to help with the newsletter."

"Well, I didn't. Leave the newsletter to me. If Mr X is on our side, then he does what he can do best. That's politics. You spent three years in the cot with him, you tell him. Dram Society days are out the window. Hamlet or James Bond, he had his chance. But if Mr X wants to be club accountant then he'd better start working for it right now. Otherwise, it's Doctor No, No."

"Up school, up school," Percy Baker clamored between hiccups.

"Where's the toilet?" Harold demanded, staggering to his feet.

David put his glass on the table. "I have to leave."

"Have another," Harold muttered, blundering past, bumping the table, watching the contents of David's glass disappear into Melen's lap. Harold grinned oafishly. "You'd better come out the back with me," he said, pointing a chuckling finger at the stain.

Melen was on his feet brushing the liquid off the front of his trousers, ignoring Harold. "Not so fast," he panted, straightening up, blocking David's path. "Not so fast, ducks. You think you're pretty high and mighty, don't you? Walking out on us."

He waved his folder in David's face, the blubbery flesh on his upper arm joggling. "You think you can sit there sneering at us. Crowing about your tinpot university. Your contacts. Don't you fret. We'll get someone else. The Local Legion. People who know what loyalty is. What a good club is."

David brushed past him, making for the door.

Melen rushed after him. "I'm going to break Stafford," he shouted. "I'm going to break that man Stafford if it's the last thing I do. Put a man like that in charge of a club and you get filth. I wouldn't stand for the committee again if they asked me on bended knees. The place is rotten to the core. Rigged elections. Fingers in the till. Back-biting. Gossip. Intrigue."

David fumbled with the lock, looking to Jill for help.

"Listen," Melen bawled out. "You know what Stafford said to me? Do you know the kind of man he is? You're lucky to be a member of the club. That's what he said to me. In the circumstances, you're lucky to be a member at all. Well, no one says that to me. No one. I'm going to break him. I've seen him hanging round the locker room. People like that should be shot. Colonial mongrels. I may not hold a practising certificate any longer, but I can still draft a constitution. They can't take that away from me. We'll find someone to replace you. Someone better. Someone with guts. The Local Legion. We'll get to Mosby. Don't you worry."

David wrenched the door open and pushed Melen away, his hand sinking into a fat shoulder as he kept him at arm's length. "Just leave me out of this," David replied, angrily, one foot on the doorstep. "It isn't my scene."

Percy Baker appeared at the side window. "Up school," he barracked, leaning out to watch the struggle. "Up school. Up school."

"You're not getting out of this," Melen raged, pursuing David on to the porch, the half-naked man scrabbling at his quarry. "You're in it up to your neck. You've been here. Your name's in the minutes. We've got witnesses. People are going to hear about this. The lies you've told. The slander. The same as Stafford. That's what you are. The same. Mr X and Mr Big. I'll break you both.

The Local Legion. We'll raise the tone, don't you worry. We'll get a Royal Commission, There'll be questions in Parliament. The press. You know what Stafford is? A common, conceited paranoiac, little hypocrite. That's what he is. A mongrel. He isn't fit to be a member of the club."

David shook himself free and stumbled down the front steps. The door slammed shut behind him. He made his way down the driveway without looking back.

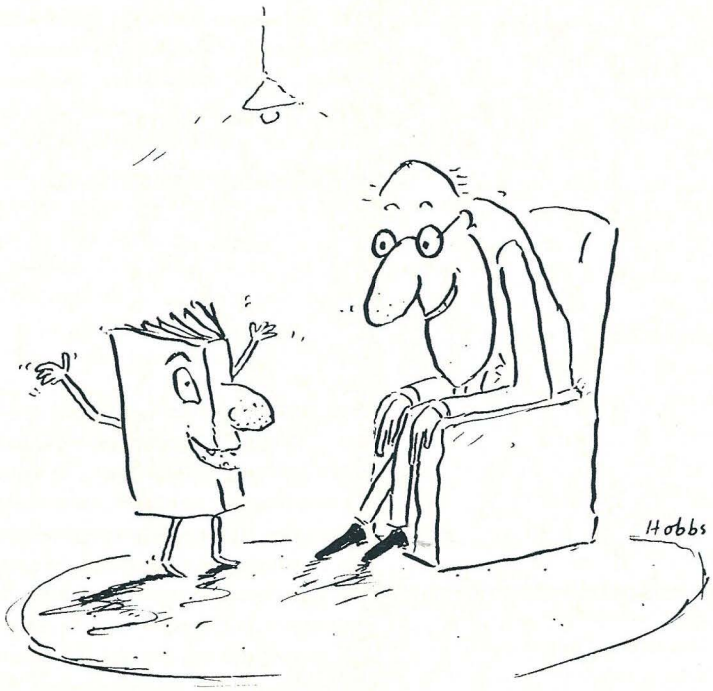
Mrs Baker was standing in the front garden with a hose, watering a patch of lawn. "Is everything all right?" she asked. "I thought I heard shouting?"

David searched for the right words, pausing by the letter box; watching the fine spray of water shimmering in the air. "An argument," he confessed. "A conflict of interest."

"All this committee work." Mrs Baker sidled across to the tap and turned it off. "Percy's meant to be retired. Right out of it. Why doesn't he get on with his gardening. Bowls. Fishing." She waved a hand at the bay spread out beneath them. "Why doesn't he get out there where he belongs? Catch some fish."

The afternoon was so still that each white boat at its mooring slumbered beside a reflection. David looked out to sea. The muscular outline of the Rangitori escarpment stretched along the coast. Beneath, at intervals on the water, the volcanic islands; the floats of Taramainuku's net.

"I'd better get home," he said; raising a hand in farewell. "I'm late already."



The tall story

LEONIE SANDERCOCK

Castes and Outcasts

A review article on the collapse of work in the late twentieth century.

Leonie Sandercock, author of Cities for Sale *and* The Land Racket, *is Professor of Urban Studies at Macquarie University.*

"You know what work is these days. They have to deactivate robots to find things to pay us for doing." — *Walter Tevis,* Mockingbird (1980).

Almost a decade ago a group of scientists ("The Club of Rome"), concerned at the world's voracious consumption of non-renewable resources, argued that mankind was at a turning point. Unless we slowed down and rationalised our resource consumption, they warned, all sorts of chaos would follow.[1] Now, at the end of the decade which has seen rising levels of unemployment and inflation, a new debate has begun, although barely in Australia. It's the debate about the silicon chip, the micro-processor, and the effects of these new technologies on employment. Two British researchers, Clive Jenkins and Barry Sherman, have just produced *The Collapse of Work* (Eyre Methuen, London, 1979), a book which indicates (though not to its authors) that mankind is now at another kind of turning point. For the first time in human history, it would seem, it's within our power to create the conditions whereby humanity can pass beyond a life dominated by the relations of production — by work.

As a socialist, and a feminist of sorts, who's also a technological determinist*, I find this latest technological revolution both terrifying and exciting in its prospects. It could lead to the long-awaited liberation of humanity. It could just as easily generate a social order characterised by castes and outcasts. It could end the familiar capitalist dualities or contradictions between work and play/life, the economy and the family, commodity production and domestic consumption, alienation and fulfillment, social reality (work) and instinctual pleasure as an end in itself (play). Or it could lead to a "Clockwork Orange" or "Fahrenheit 451" world in which a privileged elite in control of the technology, the jobs and the wealth use their position and power to repress the new caste of untouchables — the permanenty unemployed.

The ideal of a life no longer dominated by relations of production has an old and elitist history. It has been the province of aristocrats, philosophers, courtiers, mystics and, since the nineteenth century, artists, and intellectuals. Now, however, the new technologies combined with the right social policies make possible the realisation of that ideal on a democratic and universal basis.

The nature of work in capitalist society since the industrial revolution has undergone an important change. Production moved from the home and the extended family to the factory, and the split opened between work and life, between the economy and the family. In this new division the family became the realm of private life, opposed to the objective social world of machinery or industry or (into the twentieth century) big business or city hall or technology.

Women and children lost the central place they had occupied in the pre-industrial and early industrial workplace. Child labor was slowly eliminated and women were transformed into a marginal labor force in relation to capitalist production, with their primary loyalty to the home. The housewife emerged; her task was not only to look after the physical well-being of the

* By which I mean a belief that the technological foundation of society, its technological forces of production, set the limits to the kinds of choices any society can make and is the key to understanding not only the historical development but also the possible future of any given society. This in no way denies the equally important implications for the society of the ownership of the forces of production.

family but also to preserve the human values of love, personal happiness and so on, against the impersonal sphere of the workplace. Thus the split in society between personal feelings and commodity production, the self and the economy, was integrated with the sexual division of labor, and the institution of the family acquired prime responsibility in the search for personal happiness, love and fulfilment. Reflecting the family's 'separation' from commodity production, this search was seen as a 'personal' matter, having little relation to the capitalist organisation of society.

Over the course of the twentieth century the gap between the radicalism of personal liberation and the radicalism of political revolution has widened. The Bolshevik revolution focused the attention of socialists on the question of state power just as personal questions were assuming widespread significance. Following the Russian example the goal of socialism came to be presented purely in terms of economic development, and socialists rejected the legacy of romantic individualism and art, and the various currents of personal radicalism, as petty-bourgeois. Correspondingly the various ideologies of personal life, artistic expression and so on began to reject socialist politics. In Australia this gap opened in the 1950s as the increasing affluence of the postwar economic boom entrenched itself.

Clearly any future socialist program has to involve both poles of this dichotomy. A starting point would be the argument that housework is socially necessary labor, and as such must be shared by the entire community. That is, cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing, cooking, looking after children, old people and sick people are forms of labor like any other; can be carried out equally by men or women; and are not of necessity tied to the ghetto of the home. But this re-organisation of domestic labor and transformation of domestic relations cannot be achieved in isolation. It is only possible in the context of a drastic reduction of the work day, for all men and women. All this means a working week of, say, twenty hours.

As a result of developments in micro-electronics this transformation is, for the first time in human history, conceivable. Which is the significance of Jenkins and Sherman's *The Collapse of Work*.

As a result of developments in micro-electronics ("the third industrial revolution") the Professor of Science and Society at Bradford University has predicted that within twenty years only 10 per cent of Britain's workforce will be needed to produce the country's material needs. Other predictions differ as to the percentages of likely permanent unemployment, but the magnitude of resulting social change is not in doubt. And yet very few politicians, businessmen, academics or trade unionists have begun any serious debate about this issue in Australia, let alone any long-term strategic planning. Clive Jenkins and Barry Sherman (general secretary and director of research for the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs in the U.K.) are convinced that, unless wise decisions are soon made, the application of this new technology will create a "job holocaust" — the collapse of work. Without "a revolution in attitudes" to match this third industrial revolution — attitudes to work and leisure — the destablising effects of the job holocaust will be cataclysmic.

So far, none of this sounds terribly new. Prophets of doom and gloom heralded the dawning of the computer age twenty years ago with fears of the redundancies that would be caused by computer automation. Those fears were not realised but, in retrospect, they may have been premature rather than wrong. The development of micro-electronics makes possible the widespread application of computer technology to all sorts of work processes. *The Collapse of Work* is the first book to marshal together all the available information about the new technology and its probable employment impact and to challenge the community to face the consequences by questioning many of their most deeply held assumptions and values.

Today two million people are unemployed in Britain and six million in the E.E.C. Jenkins and Sherman argue that *nothing* can prevent the U.K. unemployment figures reaching around the five million mark by the year 1990. The only adequate response to this unavoidable reality is a leisure revolution, a transformation of attitudes to work. Unfortunately however, the further we get into this book the more we realise that these key social and political questions are being sacrificed to the cause of economic nationalism.

The early chapters provide a detailed and well-reasoned economic analysis and account of changing technological processes. The orthodox economists have always argued that employees work until their monetary reward is sufficient and then they trade off work for leisure. (When they refer to 'work', of course, they mean paid employment. Hence, what housewives do is not work.) Leisure and leisure activities are supposed to be the obverse side of the work coin. Work is what

we do for money. Leisure is time spent outside of paid employment.

Clearly this economists' picture is far too simple. Very few people have the choice that economists discuss, that of stopping work to take leisure when they feel they have enough money. Generally speaking, only the self-employed and some professionals enjoy this luxury. For the average industrial and clerical worker there are fixed hours tied to the work process which must be kept to, if the job is to be kept. And since work produces the income that buys the goods in industrialized societies, loss of work implies loss of the comforts and perhaps even the basic necessities that advanced capitalism offers. Naturally then, nobody wants to be unemployed because nobody wants loss of income. But what if work and income were not related? Would people still want to work? Jenkins and Sherman say no, work *per se* is not necessary to human survival and self esteem. It only appears that way after two centuries of propaganda and because of an education system which maintains the idea of work as its main objective, and has not taught about leisure and how to use it. Marx would have disagreed. He wanted to liberate man from wage labor under a capitalist system in which the product was alienated and the process was alienating. But Marx regarded work as part of man's essence, a necessary form of expression and activity (which ought not to be confused with the 'false consciousness' of the Protestant work ethic).

At any rate, Jenkins and Sherman's philosophical deliberations on work (with which I disagree) in the early chapters give way to two central chapters which detail, sector by sector, which jobs will disappear. They argue convincingly, using Kondratieff's theory about long-term economic waves related to technological change, that the full employment of the post-war period was an aberration and that we are now reverting to form, and are in the downward phase of the fourth fifty-year cycle since the industrial revolution.* Unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual jobs, clerical, administrative and managerial posts and the whole information industry workforce are at risk — in fact all jobs which repeat one or even many operations and where personal decision-making is at a minimum, can be replaced by a machine. Other jobs will disappear because of the indirect effects of these changes. Specially significant will be the reduction in the types of jobs traditionally filled by women — the office job, shop job and bank clerk — at a time when women represent the greatest growth in the potential labor force.

So far, so good. The authors have posed important questions about the purpose of work, criticised conventional economic assumptions, and given us a detailed breakdown of the expected loss of jobs in twenty-seven different sectors (pp. 116-123). Now they assure us that there is no need for alarm, since not many people *really* want to work anyway, if they're guaranteed a decent income without a job. The *real choice*, we are told, is as follows (the 'we' refers to England):

> Remain as we are, reject the new technologies and we face unemployment of up to 5.5 million by the end of the century. Embrace the new technologies, accept the challenge and we end up with unemployment of about five million. . . . the latter is by far the most favorable. What is clear is that whichever road we take work will collapse. (P. 113.)

Here the authors switch tack completely. Abandoning their earlier questions about what people want from life (consumption of consumer durables, power, enjoying oneself, reproducing the species, political freedom?) their focus becomes the ailing British economy and how it can be restored to its former greatness, if only its leaders would recognise the national economic significance of adopting the new technologies. This slide into transparent economic nationalism is not redeemed by a later emphasis on the European situation. Indeed it seems that the authors feel that some advantage can at last be extracted from Britain's membership of the E.E.C. That body will have to make it mandatory upon countries to reduce the working week, develop job-sharing schemes and equalise corporate taxation. The fact that the E.E.C. is "a capitalist club" is so much the better. "The one certain thesis about capitalism is that it changes and adapts to given circumstances . . . It will accept lower profits rather than no profits at all . . . Thus, if any one institution can take the effective action required, it will be the Common Market" (p. 138-9).

This may be all very well for Britain if, as the

* 1793-1847: the gradual spread of the handicraft-made or manufacture-made steam engine to the important branches of industry and industrial countries. 1848-1893: the generalisation of the machine made steam engine as the principal energy-producing machine. 1894-1939: the generalised application of electric and combustion engines in all branches of industry. 1940-present: generalised control of machines by electronic apparatuses.

authors argue, it has the technological capacity to cash in on the micro-electronic revolution. But what of those less sophisticated neighbors, Spain, Greece and so on? There is a similarly cavalier attitude to the special problems for women in the application of new technologies. Since 'traditional' female occupations are disappearing at the very time when women are being encouraged through the education and legal systems to go to work, "more girls will have to turn their attentions to the new technologically oriented jobs and thereby compete directly with boys" (p. 147). Since attitudes to marriage, divorce, pre-marital relationships, homosexuality and abortion have all changed over a relatively short space of time, the authors reassure us implicitly that women, unskilled workers, Turkish, Yugoslav and Greek 'guest workers' will likewise adapt, just as capitalism has and will.

This slide into an essentially anti-humanist stance from such promising beginnings is the most disturbing aspect of *The Collapse of Work*. Admittedly the penultimate chapter ("A Manifesto for Change with Security") re-focuses on the earlier social-philosophical issue revolving around the work ethic versus the leisure revolution, but the overall impression is that the authors have failed to ask the most important question of all. What is the purpose of technological progress? What human ends should the new technologies serve? Jenkins and Sherman's analysis is strong on economics and technological analysis but not sufficiently thoughtful on the social, cultural and political issues. They have not examined in depth the nature and effects of capitalism, and have not thought through the human implications of the new technologies. Thus at the key point their argument descends into economic nationalism instead of moving into the realm of human liberation and meaning.

There are 450,600 people registered as unemployed in Australia now and at least another 150,000 who are not registered, many of them married women and therefore not entitled to the dole even if they lose their job. By 1990, with the introduction of the new technologies discussed by Jenkins and Sherman, unemployment could easily reach the level of the great depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, around thirty per cent. That's the kind of future we're looking at unless we choose to adopt social policies that would reverse this trend. What are our choices?

There seem to be four possible courses of action. We could take social action to inhibit technological advance. We could implement social policies to reduce the population to the level needed to operate the new technology. We could ask society to accept the prospect of large-scale unemployment as the new norm. Or we could take the appropriate social action to redefine the concept of work and the relationship between work and leisure and work and income.

It seems unlikely that either of the first two options could win popular support. The third course, riding the bumps, accepting the social 'restructuring' that would take place as the outcome of a laissez-faire approach, seems the most likely but certainly not the most desirable outcome. This would eventually create a new caste system, with the unemployed filling the role of untouchables. Caste, rather that class, because those involved would be permanently unemployed, excluded from the production process, and soon that would become an inherited status like the Indian caste system. But if we accept this option (and current attitudes to the unemployed by those in work suggest that we could), then we are accepting the existence of a permanently disaffected group in our society. Neither sociologists nor technological enthusiasts have thought much about the implications of that. But imaginative writers have: Doris Lessing in *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Anthony Burgess in *The Clockwork Orange*, Michael Young in *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury, George Orwell, Walter Tevis. Each recognised that once social organisation has created such a group, methods of social control must be devised. Who decides who's to constitute the dispossessed group? At present, there is a self-perpetuating elite of wealth and power, based not just on ownership of the means of production but on access to and monopoly of knowledge and professional training. Such a society will be characterised not by competition for scarce material satisfactions but by competition for scarce jobs.

In Huxley's *Brave New World* social control was arranged through an unlimited supply of psychotropic drugs and sex, and the pumping of the appropriate ideology into people while they slept. That was a 1920s vision of the future. After the Second World War George Orwell's *1984* foresaw brainwashing and fierce organs of state control predicated on terror. In the 1950s Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* imagined a society without books, and fire brigades whose job it was to seek out and burn the last remaining

books. Transistor radio type devices inserted in people's ears supplied pop music, ideology, and official news.

It's not accidental that nineteenth century accounts of the future were all happily utopian — William Morris, Edward Bellamy, William Lane and so on. But since the First World War, from Zamyatin's *We* through Huxley, Orwell, Bradbury to Lessing, the visions of the future are dystopian, pessimistic, terrifying. The reason for this is that since World War One the possibilities for social control inherent in technological change have been evident. If we put together the visions of these creative writers with that of an important social thinker like Hugh Stretton,[2] we can see that the new technologies, combined with limited sources of energy in a laissez-faire society confronting diminishing resources, could produce a future dominated by a technological elite, with a permanent caste of unemployed, incorporating the above methods of social control with perhaps a bit of genetic engineering thrown in too. The new miniaturized technology increases the likelihood of these dystopian futures.

Returning to the central question regarding the purposes of technological change . . . Often technology seems to have its own momentum. We are talking not about change for its own sake, but to serve human needs. And this will force us to re-think our ideas about politics and economics, about private and public economies, and about work and play.

High levels of unemployment and much-reduced working hours contain the possibilities of human liberation *provided* that the nexus between income and work is broken, and that people's attitudes to work change. At the moment unemployment is a threatening concept (and the threat is used by conservative governments to divide workers among themselves) because people tend to judge themselves, and others, by their job. Jobs don't just provide money, they provide a place in society, a set of acquaintances, even a purpose in life. In our society, to be deprived of a job is to be taken out of the general community and put in the 'unwanted' basket. But if more people valued themselves, and were valued by others, in terms of their activities outside work, all this would be less of a problem.

Associated with such a re-valuation of work however is the development of a more positive and creative attitude to leisure. Once a significant part of the adult population is working somewhere between zero and thirty hours a week, our 'leisure time' becomes the main part of our lives. What will we do with it, once we're no longer prisoners of the Protestant work ethic?

Clearly if we are to be relaxed and unthreatened by the prospect of increased 'leisure' or 'play' time our whole education system will have to be re-structured. Professional training will continue, and re-training, but education must assume two new functions. Firstly it must promote the idea of self-realisation in leisure time, including increasing involvement in domestic production and doing things for ourselves in domestic situations — carpentering, repairing, growing things, preserving them, and so on. Household chores will be shared and domestic labor relations thereby revolutionised, raising for the first time the real possibility of the liberation of women and of relationships between men and women. Secondly, education must aim to provide an understanding of the relationship between science and technology and social change. In other words, education will be increasingly about non-participation in the workforce, and the unemployed should probably have priority of access to all educational institutions.

All of the foregoing of course assumes that there will, in the technological future, be no financial penalty associated with being workless or partially employed. Clearly the economics of technological change are of the utmost importance. Unless the unemployed are paid at around the national average wage (as in Denmark) there is no prospect of re-orienting attitudes to work and leisure. It cannot be done in a financially insecure situation. The leisure revolution is a hollow idea to an unemployed, unskilled laborer in Altona. But if a society guarantees a lifetime economic security, which may involve full, spasmodic or no employment, a three day working week, a sabbatical for all workers, or whatever, *then* the changes in attitudes are possible. *Then* we can grasp the possibilities of personal and political liberation.

And here we must re-think our ideas about private and public economies, about capitalism and socialism. The advent of this new technology, with its immense productive capacities, again highlights our ever-increasing capacity to harness the forces of nature and our *public* lack of control over these capacities. That is, few of us have any control over what is to be produced, and how it is to be produced and distributed. Apparently we are expected to accept the contra-

diction between our enormous productive capacities and growing unemployment and poverty.

Jenkins and Sherman's book never fronts up rigorously to this contradiction, or to the fact that it may be closely related to the private ownership and control of the design and application of technology and to the workplace and capital. Since the 1950s the whole idea of socialism has been submerged by both the apparent post-war successes of capitalism and the deformations that have characterised the Communist block and turned socialism into a dirty word. But we are confronted now with the question of the revaluation of values, and private enterprise is not likely to be able to encompass this change. It cannot deal with the reallocation of resources into the service industries and public sector. It can't develop new education policies directed toward leisure and personal fulfilment rather than the creation of job skills. The redefinition of work and the redistribution of incomes can't be encompassed by the private enterprise system. Nor can the movement toward a steady state of material production, which is necessary in order to cope with resources depletion and the energy crisis.

Human needs are complex, but paramount among them are the needs for meaningful work, absorbing play, and the need to love and be loved. Capitalism is organised in such a way that our basic needs are met individually. Psychological needs (love, self-recognition) are supposed to be met within the family or the realm of personal life. Material needs are satisfied individually through the wage and market system. But capitalism simultaneously gives rise to needs which cannot be satisfied individually: for example, the needs for sun, clean air, open space, planned cities, parks, public transport. The dilemma of the housewife is a classic expression of this contradiction: her family's income may rise, technology may lessen the burden of her domestic labor, but she remains in many cases unsatisfied because she remains isolated. She needs public laundries, child care, canteens, recreation and the public transport to take her beyond the quarter-acre block and enable her to take part in work or play outside the house. The prerequisite to realising the promise of personal life (first mooted by the romantic movement) is to abolish its forced separation and isolation.

A socialist program for the new technology would consider all the dimensions of personal life — economic, social and psychological — and attempt to relate them and diffuse them throughout the entire society, throughout the world of work and the world of play. Harnessing the new technologies to overcome the problem of scarcity and to serve these paramount human needs, society will then be about some form of personal development — achieved by individuals both through social activity, and alone, both through work and through play.

This is a reintegration of society that could never be accomplished under capitalism because it demands that the economy be governed by criteria other than blind, meaningless, quantitative aggrandisement.

Footnotes

[1] M. Mesarovic and E. Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point* (1974).
[2] H. Stretton, *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Cambridge, 1976).

Favouritism

JACK BLAKE **Comment**

In "Communism and Culture" by Richard Haese (*Overland* 83) it is stated on page 36:

> Shortly after the end of the war Blake called Bergner in and demanded that he cease painting Jewish themes or the *lumpen proletariat* — Aboriginal or otherwise — and depict instead the noble figure which communism would make of the worker.

That statement is not true. I have never spoken personally to Bergner about his art or about anything else, let alone "called him in and demanded".

Moreover because a mythology has been created out of similar accusations I wish to state that I have never at any time 'called in' any artist or writer to make demands (or for any similar purpose). At one exhibition I remarked to Vic O'Connor that I thought his colors too sombre; on another occasion Noel Counihan invited me to his home studio to view some of his recent work — early post-war. I remember being impressed by his portrait of a child and telling him so. In neither case was there any question of 'calling in and demanding'.

How then are statements like the one quoted above to be explained? I can only assume that some of those who attended a meeting or conference at which I spoke on literature and art have later in mind and memory transposed that experience into one which has me 'calling them in individually and demanding', etc. Facing up to one's growth from a Stalinist past to a present free of Stalinism is not an easy thing for any of us. With some the difficulty of this process may have been compounded by a subconscious repression or transference of their own responsibility, within the ethos of the Communist Party in which all felt the need to adhere to the party line, a need which was seen to be linked to the unity and strength of the revolutionary section of the working class.

In this connection it may be useful to note that the meetings and conferences referred to were also not 'called' by me. The conference in June 1946 was called by artists and scientists who asked me to speak. A later (1948) meeting on the subject of Lysenko was called by communist scientists and again I was asked by them to speak. (Of course I alone am responsible for what I said at those gatherings.)

Richard Haese gives a free quote of one paragraph from my 1946 speech but makes no mention of the immediately following paragraph which is relevant. It reads:

> This second path is the path which has been taken by our socialist realist group of painters headed by comrades Counihan, Bergner, and O'Connor. Their contribution to Australian art lies in the fact that they have led a clear artistic break from the dominant corrupt and decaying trend among the contemporaries. They have boldly taken the initiative in developing a socialist realist trend in Australian art. In my view they are on the right road. (Communist Review, August 1946, p. 249.)

Finally I would say in retrospect that there is much that was wrong and misleading in those speeches of mine in the 1940s and early 1950s — an undue stress on Marxist-Leninist theory and too great a readiness to pronounce judgements which reflected my political level at the time — but they also contain something which goes beyond the limiting narrowness of the time, something which exercised a beneficial influence on the political and artistic culture of the Left — at least so some writers, artists, composers, and dancers have told me.

THE CAT

I have lost you, my poor stray, my refugee
to some vine-twined thicket nodding with morning glory.
You have gone to die
away from the hover flies and the questing bee.
No longer limping lurching plunging through the window
(dragging your left flank as it were a different awkward beast,
unwilling companion) that's suddenly too high.
No longer glaring malevolent yellow unforgiving
at me as enemy,
hissing the offered hand.
No longer crouched under willow weeping
on to carport roof,
licking combing turning correcting fur
into a pattern, with the sun-crazed leaves,

Poor cat, survivor of Ra the Sun God and Pangur Ban Tybert,
from Egypt via the witch's breast to this green place,
try for the window again, try once more
in memory of the Garden of Delights.
Cry out, make a sound, fill the window again, defy
experience. Do not hide to die.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

LEAVING JERUSALEM BEFORE SUNRISE

Leaving Jews searching
for themselves and discovering U.S.A.
Leaving Moslems starting a diaspora.
Leaving religions nailing each other.
Leaving churches that would never
get through the eye
of a needle.
Leaving priests who live
to sell plastic crosses,
Catholics who wouldn't
know the meaning of the word,
Protestants who have never
protested.
As usual the cock crows,
I cast off my cross and halo;
who wants to go through
all that crap again?

ROBERT HABOST

BIRTH RITE

WHEN WE ARE BORN, WE CRY THAT WE ARE COME
TO THIS GREAT STAGE OF FOOLS . . .

KING LEAR

WHO WILL PROTECT US NOW FROM THE GRATED CARROTS OF LIFE?
FROM THE GREEN POTATOES OF EXISTENCE?
FROM THE TWICE-BOILED SPINACH OF BEING?
WHO WILL TUG US QUICKLY ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE PLAUSIBLE FIGURE OF TIME
EXTENDING THE BEAUTIFUL TOOTH-ROTTING BARLEY-SUGAR OF EXPERIENCE?
AND WHO IS THERE WILL DASH FROM OUR PUDGY INNOCENT PAWS
THE CARBOHYDRATES OF FANTASY
INDUCING THE DANGEROUSLY-HIGH CHOLESTEROL-LEVEL OF DREAMS
ILLICITLY PURCHASED AT THE CORNER-STORE OF NECESSITY
INSTEAD OF AT THE AUTHORIZED TUCK-SHOP OF CURRICULUM
WITH ITS WHOLESOME BROWN BREAD OF REALITY
CONTAINING THE CALORIE-BALANCED SALAD FILLINGS OF ADULTHOOD
AND THE HIGHLY-NUTRITIOUS CHEESE SLICES OF CONFORMITY?
AND WHO WILL HOLD US SAFE ON THE SLIPPERY SLIDE OF WORDS
IN THE GREAT LEAFY PARK OF LANGUAGE
WHERE THE CURRAWONGS OF ASSOCIATION CLAMOR THE LIVELONG DAY?
AND WHO WILL LEAD US HOMEWARD AT EVENING
WHEN THE IRON SWINGS OF HISTORY ARE CHILL WITH THE FIRST DEW OF MEMORY
AND THE ALREADY WITHERING CLOVER-CHAINS OF METAPHOR
TRAIL FROM OUR HANDS?

BRUCE DAWE

LYGON COWBOY

Dresses blue,
blue shirt, blue socks,
blue pants too.
His blue uniform is starched,
his blue uniform can march.
He wears a gas mask
before he steps outside

to keep the peace.
This gunslinger keeps the main street
safe for the likes of
for the women and
for the tourists from Brisbane.
On his street we are the extras,
we try to remember to
wear colors that don't clash with blue.

And though he keeps his pistol warm
his mind is not on violence.
From inside his mask his mind is powerful,
he can't help it
he wants to breakfast on violet crumble;
has tried the food from the continental delis,
the health food stuff, souvlakis, Chinese, Lebanese,
is putting on weight.
Pink bulges push for a part in his act.
His stride is blue and straight,
but he can't help it
his mind is wandering,
heroically bored,
a whole day ahead of it.
It's the food he suspects,
and coming up from behind
is how he likes to approach a situation
on his street,
stares at me from behind the gas mask,
stops and watches me remove a poster from a wall.

"You all right?" he says, not knowing what to say.
I stare back from somewhere on Lygon Street,
and he's whispering to friends through a black radio in his hand.
Where are they then?

KEVIN BROPHY

APOTHEOSIS

Sweet Christ! This swollen servile State,
flogged off to foreigners at half-rate,
run by an ageing paradox
— part bigot, numbers man, and ox
— who preaches (when the words take hold)
a gospel bloody as it's bold:
free enterprise and lowered tax
— meanwhile God help the poor, the blacks,
for here the multi-national Will
's made manifest, and we are krill
before these monsters of the deep
who cruise our shores and inland sweep,
filter-feeders, to whose care
we offer up our earth, our air . . .

O blesséd State, where big is free,
to doubt's to question Destiny,
yet every day the question grows:
whose hills are these? *whose* sands are those?

BRUCE DAWE

THE DAY THE CIRCUS

That I say what you want you
get offends. But to
get what you give
is another way to live
entirely.

(the lion the tiger
they took the chance)

Didn't take much to
bring the house down
did it? Always the
wrong house — some
clown in the crowd.

(the lion the tiger
they tried the dance)

Yet I thought you finer,
cared for me more
than your pride:
mine's lost to keepers —
losers weepers?

JANE ZAGERIS

LEVEL 50 PSYCH.

I am at the 50th level now as lift purrs, stop —
and I enter the offices to explain;

indeed, everyone is very kind, eliciting slowly only
the practically essential from the details, which, like

yesterday, today and the day before have enmeshed themselves around what I really have to say. Smiles

bump gently against the ceiling like small balloons:
but there are no stethescopes here. The sound is of oil

bathing the filters through which the waste is drawn:
the same cleanliness that makes more important now

all that which I have memorised and reiterated before —
thus turning myself again into that sharp instrument

I do not recognise as being myself. As the silence stretches
out, fingers are steepled patiently, a mouth pursed into

vagueness floats behind a bowl of flowers on the desk.
One sits by the window here at this 50th level up,

the sky is violet, small cotton wool clouds just nudging
the edifice. Certainly, I feel in this quietness that one

could linger here — even, perhaps, be happy too. As the howls
of the street fade, suddenly I find myself weeping.

PETER LLOYD

LOOK DOWN AMIGO

look down amigo
the Dakota Black Hills
hunched like pigs
balled like slugs
these are the black hills

I go down to that pond
to drink the brass of the water
loving nothing consciously
living black in the sun
resisting
like a little grey lawyer
tasting again and again
the grindstone's kisses

BARRY WESTBURG

THE MODERN POET'S DILEMMA

Up until now writing has been easy there were so many objects
to be seen heights to be experienced depths to which to sink

and faces like fingerprints all seemed peculiar to humans of
differing moulds however much to an unobservant anglophile
asiatics presented stereotypes and black was black

but I realise that variations were mainly upon surfaces as a
lake's to which a calm or a gale lends character

Now I've learnt that over 600 million people speak Spanish
that Mahomet's devotees are even more numerous so reputedly
Christ's and Buddha's most

and your believer may be one of a flock which singly shepherd-
dogs could herd into yards into pens

one false premise and 600 million people argue incorrectly

What is correct?

I've not the status of Pope or Lama to put you right

only a reliance upon consequence to know that you may prove
wrong if you conjecture on any given premise

So I find difficulty writing a poem now one where love is
virginal hate is not political color is not frangible death
is not commonplace space is not contained within the curved
lines of Einsteinian theory and time isn't a reality any longer
the lyric is no other than a standpoint and a narrative is any
more than an autobiography

JOHN BLIGHT

CROWS WITH STILL LIFE

In gusts of today's wind
They tangle the tops of white gum
and stringy,
Blown rags of heavy, black, brown-paper.

Eyelids resist the sun
On still summer mornings, early.
Crows arc among low sounds from the sheep
Emphatically mournful, absurd and funny,
Smile and sleep,
They cause the water-still morning to stir
With ludicrous waves of sound,
Children practising silly-noises in Sunday quiet.

Last season
We had twenty acres of peas in,
Some gorged themselves so
They could not run.
I killed them with a stick
And hung one from each hand
Of my dead father recrucified
His panama bent-nailed
Above his empty gabardine,
Hayband-tied it flaps and flaps
A thief hangs on either side,
It did the job for awhile, a day perhaps.

They are much lighter
Than you think,
They are not heavy birds
And smaller.

BARY DOWLING

THE TURTLE-EGG COMPLEX

The turtle-egg child-bearing woman sees
the sky as her offspring's sea; sees her faith
as a beach upon which she may scoop out a
nest. The little turtles shall die outside
her womb. Heaven will determine chances.
If one infant survives from a hatch of
a hundred eggs, turtles are vindicated
her vision is serene — why, in Ireland,
a mother sleeps with her dead child in its
coffin under her bed the night before
burial. The sea is a big space and has
many vacancies; the turtle must lay again.
The beach is eternal. Every year
adds up proof for her. She drags herself up.

JOHN BLIGHT

BARBICAN STATION

The Americans and Germans and Norwegians walk up Baker Street
to Regent's Park from 6 until 9 in the evening
nannies push prams around the tulips and the young learn:
diplomats with grey goatees and fur caps stroll in groups
around the swans in the german group there are five
fur-coated men and one beautiful woman
the group stops to point at the path and laugh:
"Ja, ja — das ist England — der Schwan und die Schiesse!"
the woman moves ahead to the tulips

in Brisbane she sits down on a chair
stands and carries the chair to another room
away from the smell of gas and mango peelings:
the night breeze catches river mud the walls contract
unwillingly from their heat a sound unnoticed before:
she stops writing and goes outside looking up at the
rustling on the iron roof the familiar dark shape of possum

on the side of the lake old people in striped deck chairs
huddle until dark they watch the swans not missing
a single movement of feather or leaf they see the slow
drift of smog from St Pancras the fish smells from Baker Street
they hear the train come through the tunnel into dark
boots cracking through the frost holes in the close lawn
holes made by the hunchback and the german

she gets out of bed takes the torch
and walks down through the unmown yard pulling
spider's web from her hair feeling with bare feet
the wet sharp grass the long clinging stalks
green even in the dark

PHILIP NEILSEN

FERNHOUSE

stones/fountain/garden/turnstile/guard

my regard/glass/inside/plus outside
approaching woman/rabbit-children in pairs

and don't forget the ferns
we are standing just outside the fernhouse
quiet on the bench
in the arbor
trying to avoid
doing something interesting

she points at the fernhouse
I look away she has painted
a fingernail green
the radio still playing

the observer shows up
dressed in his/her imagined way
with the usual demands
I show him what I've done
regarding the fernhouse

which excites him
he begins waving gesticulating
won't calm down until
I look (pointing)

wide open French doors
reveal the inside exotic a wild-
ness spidery ferns
waving in Latin and nobody
there
gathering up paper and pencils
we prepare to leave the Botanic Gardens
just as we shut the radio off
the *Fern Symphony* begins playing

in the fernhouse when
you do hear sound
it is already past
see it passing the arch
taking stride of stone
losing itself in glass
and looking around
I find the house
surrounding the garden
and the inside
not yet present

BARRY WESTBURG

TAKEN WHILE LAUGHING

Framed by light, halo-like
she leans so far out of the train insistent

She leans so far out on the thin brown arm
with fine light hair
out of the bull-faced train

insistent with its captive and blue shadow
rippling square wicker boxes of light
along the banks and boys faces
beginning to know desire
and discovering the urgent essence
of possessing alone all that power
and delicate freedom.

Then, as we watch, she attempts
the impossible, and one foot
perfectly pointed
arcs off like lightning
and both arms arange themselves
balletically
around the rushing air

and she does not look at us
we are so helpless
as the train completes the corner
she is so dangerous, breathless
voices of the boys begin to crack
and words fly by
with nothing but stones along the track.

Explanations don't appear.

LYNDON WALKER

BETWEEN FRIENDS

They've spiked the skyline — high
as meticulous kites they sit
probiscus minded. The ringed in city
skims with my daughter singing
"'Cranes, look at cranes", and I
think of he who found out
about paper clips and how
they're always disappearing,
tracked their secret breeding
into coathangers (stretched out
metal metamorphases), and taught
me not to trust horizons, just
keep counting . . . counting . . .

DORIS BRETT

THE ODDBALL DIVES FOR THE DOOR

In the room
looking round at everyone

for the first time in his life he
suddenly noticed something

quite ludicrous — on every side
his eyes were

obtruded into (it was
quite embarrassing) —

he had to excuse himself
to get AWAY

— they all had
noses)

GRAEME KEIR

THE SUBURB AS STICKS

this suburb is landhold & pasture —
a small strip of lawn, and a back garden,
producing a crop of seeds, spider webs,
and spun-out, late afternoons —
the quarter acre
breeding up sparrows, house mice,
and blackbirds —
the grim herds that all the naked children
have to cope with.
This place has the smell of the pine,
the smell of new rain on old dust,
and the never formulated always casual
smell of the wind coming over fields
of barley grass —
this place has a name, and a buried rural
legend —
In Plympton, deep wells — McTavish's
went 70ft through a dark world
for five of water,
wheat sown in April, a fair crop.
In Tusmore, Will Rogers' granary full
of the same light as his mudbrick house
— foretelling all this,
that shallows would be built on wells
it would be necessary to re-discover —

This suburb is located by particular individuals,
but could be anywhere —
Sex and death they toss-off with almost
too-casual phrases — "slipped his bolt"
comes clawing through their nostrils
without the aid of their pocketed hands —
and above all, without prayers,
they come home from the gravesite, the wells,
to wrestle a true feeling in their living rooms —

MIKE LODD

THE POLITICS OF HUMUS

"When the season cracks,
The dust on the faces of the people
Is washed into rivulets, like the surface
Of a map."

Rising, show myself out to her yard
for a first piss: the urine steams,
sour in the dog-eared leaves of the vine.
From across the iron fence, voices argue
in Italian: late April mornings are all
like this; an invitation to punch.

The season breaks apart in chunks of clouds,
in dead figs that burrow into loam.
The politics of humus is no rigged chocolate wheel,
but the woman in the bed uncertain of her dreams,
who feels out the other side of the mattress,
nostril and toes, like a pet with a new home:
Yet it is relentless — the politics of new thunder,
the raiders that pound shit-colored rain into dust.

It is the tear that washes the eye clean.

LARRY BUTTROSE

TRAVEL POEM

Some journeys begin and end in rain.
We have moved to the highway from breakfast,
nothing remaining but perfect shadows. Rain turns
them visibly pale and goodbyes are muttered,
fumbled really, like difficult paragraphs in French
or Chinese. You'll never feel the distance between us
for the sentiments are diluted and your attention
will be for getting warm or dry or taking off or getting laid.
You might hear the throb in the distance, the drone
as gears mesh like the unfolding arms of fear.
It gets heavier, rain and oil slicks, elixirs of
frequent journeys. Absorbed in the thick of a new dawn
the last suburb thins into occasional glances,

the stereo belts out something which is appropriate,
or perhaps it's silence.

BARRY O'DONOHUE

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

The Cootamundras are out at Mount Eliza, as I suppose they are all over Australia; we know their promise of spring is spurious, but they lighten the heart, and they remind me of the Western Slopes of New South, which we discovered to our delight only a few years ago. I think I'm right in remembering that the Cootamundra was discovered in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens of all places, and only with much difficulty traced back to its place of origin.

I had a kind of botanic treasure hunt of my own the other day. Joan Lindsay, of *Picnic at Hanging Rock,* lives near us in that splendidly human house "Mulberry Hill", overlooking the Baxter plains, with Arthur's Seat just visible as a blob of grey-blue in the far south-west distance. Joan Lindsay lent me her mother's memoirs, a delightfully informal book about growing up in upper middle class Australia at the beginning of the century which I was ashamed not to have known of: *My Little World,* by A. S. H. Weigall (Angus & Robertson, 1934) and yes, I would like a copy, please.

Mrs Weigall spends much time on describing her garden, and in particular mentions a climbing rose, old-fashioned even in her time, the Mde. Alfred Carrière. My wife likes roses, though no worse soil than ours for growing them could be found, and I thought it would be an amusing exercise to try and hunt Mde. Carrière down. After one or two phone calls I got onto the famous rosarian Dr Thomas, who lives in Melbourne and first exhibited in 1905! (His mother went to school with Henry Lawson.) He put me on to Ross's, a South Australian firm which specializes in historic roses, and yes, they had Mde. Carrière, and at the right time of the year, which was only the other day, three specimens arrived at Frankston railway station. I planted two in my own garden and Joan's gardener planted one at "Mulberry Hill", and we'll see what happens. I was delighted to have found in Australia a nursery for historic roses. Indeed, it made me feel better for my country. Then the other night we had a dinner party to farewell Leonie Sandercock, one of our editors who is moving to Sydney to become professor of urban studies at Macquarie University — at 31 certainly the youngest woman professor in Australia, perhaps the youngest altogether. I told my story proudly, but our poetry editor Barrett Reid, very much a student of gardens, deflated me. "Pooh! *Everyone* knows about Ross's." Then he added that to his chagrin he had left his ordering too late this year, and Ross's had sold every rose they possessed.

All this is not very literary, you feel? Excellent. It's not meant to be. I notice increasingly how uneasy people get when our man-made boundaries are crossed. I'm sure some of my colleagues in the educational world feel I should be more interested in inkwells than in islands. I was ticked off in the press the other day for wasting valuable *literary* time on the ABC's "Books and Writing" program (which Tony McAdam discusses elsewhere in this issue) for talking about lighthouses. In any case if you don't think there's any relationship between books and gardens, go to Sissinghurst in Kent: one of the great gardens of the world, and the finest memorial of the rather awful Harold Nicholson and Vita Sackville-West.

Actually we're supposed to be running in Swag a series of comments by editors of Overland on where they stand politically and what they think the magazine's tasks should be. I started off some issues ago with an admirably judicious and bal-

anced résumé of affairs which, to my dignified surprise, aroused a lot of ire (and also a lot of support). Leonie Sandercock (*vide supra*) then came in with a spirited denunciation of my views, and Ken Gott followed on rather a different tack. Last issue John McLaren approached the issue in a different way again, by writing his Letter from Cambridge. This issue Barrie Reid was to have a go; but he's not been well, and his piece will appear next issue. So we're back momentarily to the old Swag, in which I allow myself to ramble on. A. G. Stephens said that editors should remain hidden ("Only the unknown is terrible"), and that's the way I prefer it. But when Swag doesn't appear, a surprising number of readers complain.

What I'm working hardest on in the literary line at the moment is a history of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, which was established about a hundred years ago. (My co-author Tony Dare and I have decided that it's rather hard to say when, which is convenient.) I'm no great believer in institutional histories, which are usually boring; and I'm cynical about technical education, which I've been researching for twenty years, and which I believe our society has looked upon as a religious device rather than as a means to transform reality. Of course religion does transform people's *perceptions* of reality, and that's all that much of the huffing and puffing about technical education in Australia has done. The interesting story is really why we have failed. I can't dare to be as cynical as this in the actual book, of course, so I'm faced with that most unwelcome of tasks, trying to think of reasons why I'm wrong. Or, to put it another way, if the roses won't grow, is it the garden or the gardener that's at fault?

History repeats itself as farce, my old friend Karl Marx is supposed to have said, and I must say I sometimes have an eerie feeling when I come across the pronunciamentos of the ideological desperadoes of the contemporary Australian theatre. In the 1950s many of us espoused Australian nationalism, folk-songs, folk-lore, Henry Lawson and all the rest, partly because we believed in it and partly because someone in Moscow had told us that the line was "socialist in content, national in form". Today the ratbag sectarians of the Australian theatre (and no doubt other areas of the arts) carry on with the frenetic pushing of a far more phony Australianism than ours, which sets my teeth on edge. The Australian Opera put on a performance the other day of that magnificent eighteenth-century piece, "The Beggars' Opera"—but felt constrained to set it disastrously in Hollywood in the 1930s. At the Victorian College of the Arts a drama boss recently tried to prevent the staging of a Moliere play, as un-Australian. He had previously insisted that the two derros in "Waiting for Godot" be cast as Australian swagmen. On television last night I witnessed a producer from the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney (who added, after saying how much he owed to Sir Laurence Olivier, "he is my *bête noir*", which startled Michael Parkinson) declaring — these are his words — "You must find some way of localizing Chekhov and Shakespeare".

With all this goes, of course, a determination to push 'new' messages of all kinds down the throats of audiences. A leading light at the Melbourne Pram Factory theatre told me once, apropos of "The Hills Family Show", which *was* a genuine and on the whole convincing piece of Australiana, "We're only putting this on to make money so we can start up factory-gate theatres". The political narrowness all this represents is an interesting expression of the end-of-the-road position such people find themselves in. Sectarianism *a la mode*. Parkinson showed a clip from the Nimrod's Australianized version of a Goldoni play which was Oz-kitsch of a high order and the uncleverest thing I've seen for a long time. The social impact of art depends, not on equipping Ibsen with bowyangs, but on honest productions and publications of great works which show us how great writers speak equally, *and on their own terms*, to us all.

LAURIE CLANCY

A Year of Varietals

Laurie Clancy teaches in the English School at La Trobe University. His most recent book is The Wife Specialist, *a collection of stories.*

Reviewers of a year's fiction run the risk of sounding rather like wine writers assessing the latest vintage. In those terms 1980 would not be a particularly distinguished year — every year without a new Patrick White tends to look a little meagre, such is his pre-eminence still — except for two encouraging elements. These are the emergence of a number of new or relatively new writers, and the publication of a relatively large number of works of fiction by women. In March last year at Writer's Week in Adelaide I commented on the surprising scarcity of women writers in Australia and the many areas of female experience which had not even began to be documented. Since then, there has been a second volume by Helen Garner, new novels by the prolific and well-established novelists Barbara Hanrahan and Jessica Anderson, and books by Blanche d'Alpuget, Michele Nayman and Beverley Farmer. Add to these writers such as Judith Woodfall and Mary Dadswell, whose stories have been appearing regularly in various magazines, and who must have a collection being issued soon, and the future looks a little brighter.

Jessica Anderson is now the author of five novels but began to be noticed only with the publication of *Tirra Lirra by the River,* her fourth, which won the Miles Franklin Award. Reluctantly, I have to confess that I could not join in the chorus of praise for that book. Though it commands a certain admiration, the sustained pessimism of its treatment of the life of a woman seems an over-statement. In the end one was tempted to conclude that Jessica Anderson's heroine, like one of the unfortunate characters in *Njal's Saga,* simply had an unhappy face.

Her latest novel, *The Impersonators,* is hardly optimistic but its tone is a good deal more restrained and low-key and I didn't find it as overbearing. Sylvia Foley, a woman of nearly forty who has lived abroad for a long time, returns to Sydney at the start of the novel, unaware that her father is dying and the relatives of two marriages are clustering together for the distribution of the spoils. It is a nice, if rather neatly patterned, situation and Anderson does well with it. The strength of the novel lies in her sardonic and dispassionate observation of the manoeuvres of the family — financial, sexual, political — and the subtle shifts of power and feeling among them. Though sharp-eyed, the author is not without sympathy or a sense of justice, and the satire never becomes caricature. These characters are in implication the 'impersonators', playing out roles and lacking any real sense of the self.

By and large, though, this is fortunately not the case. With the exception of the wastrel Guy most of them behave with some sense of decency and dignity, even when they are making mistakes. *The Impersonators* resembles most one of those old-fashioned English novels by writers like Ivy Compton-Burnett in which the author places a large number of characters under her microscope and watches them with detachment. As the characters are accepted so, finally and reluctantly, is their country, in Sylvia's decision to stay on in Sydney with her lover Harry, despite her feelings of revulsion about Australia.

Barbara Hanrahan was nominated by The Age recently as the author likely to make the most significant impact of anyone on fiction in Australia in the eighties. I don't think she is that good, but she is unquestionably an original and gifted writer. I can think of no one else in Australia who writes like her, and if comparisons are necessary one has to turn to the south of the United States. She has an almost Gothic imagination that recalls parts of Carson McCullers and even Truman Capote, but in a slightly more benign and sometimes even whimsical and playful way.

The Frangipani Gardens continues her chronicling of the darker underside of life in Adelaide early in this century, the Adelaide which she insisted in an interview is "a terribly sinister place". Certainly it is in this novel. It is 1927. The Duke and Duchess are coming to Australia to open the first Parliament at Canberra, but juxtaposed against the pomp and ceremony of official, establishment Adelaide, turning out in droves to celebrate the arrival of the distinuished visitors, are the dark machinations, the "magic and night", of as grotesque a gallery of characters as one could find in any Australian novel. There are Boy O'Brien and his ugly dwarf-life sister Girlie, who uses her body in order to achieve domination over other people. There is Pearl, "pale, neutral-tinted, with a thin rat mouth, pointed teeth", who tries to rape Boy. There is her husband Jim with whom Boy is in love and who, as one of the novel's very few 'normal' characters, dies in World War One. There are Lou and Tom and their mother Ella, a warm-hearted prostitute who dies from what is apparently a self-inflicted abortion; Brother Wells, a Christian Brother who is also Swells, a transvestite who rapes and murders a Boy Scout; Aunt Doll, Charlie Roche (Cockroach) and Mr Fisher (Fish) who rapes Lou.

Sexual encounters, in fact, in this novel are very frequent and often brutal, nearly always a means of exercising power and domination. Bodies and their desires are a source of extreme torment to the characters who often feel like two people, or are possessed by voices commanding them as to what to do, or have raging spirits inside apparently self-possessed bodies. Faint echoes of Patrick White echo throughout the novel, especially in Aunt Doll, the prim, proper, reticent woman who harbors within her a mad, demonic genius for art which she tries to suppress and keep a secret from the world, or in Charlie Roche, "God's fool", one of those sainted, sacrificial figures White often creates, but who himself is briefly driven mad by the sight of two young people making love, momentarily loses his innocence and tries to kill Tom.

The Frangipani Gardens does have its own imaginative consistency and conviction, though any description of its characters and plot runs the risk of making it sound insane. One quality that helps is the sensuous texture of its prose, the sense of a very real world within which these nightmares take place.

Two first novels appearing under the excellently produced Aurora Press series are both by authors who have already established reputations in other areas of writing — Blanche d'Alpuget and Bruce Grant. Set in Indonesia in 1966, d'Alpuget's *Monkeys in the Dark* almost inevitably invites comparison with Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, which was set a few months earlier, culminating in Sukarno's overthrow. Many of the similarities are striking. Both writers focus on the tiny expatriate community of Australians, with their plotting and intrigues and internal dissensions, the bored wives, the male reporter or diplomat who can indulge his homosexual proclivities in a way that he could not do back in his home land, the appalling poverty and the curious mixture of hostility and open-heartedness of the Indonesians towards the foreigners. Both writers render the Indonesian landscape superbly, perhaps a tribute to a richness of texture they could not find in Australia.

Blanche d'Alpuget has a similarly intricate plot as well. Her central character Alexandra Wheatfield, a beautiful young Australian writing press despatches for the embassy in Indonesia is, as her cousin describes her, "not particularly intelligent, but she was brave; she would do the good thing, not the right thing". She is also generous, idealistic, compassionate and appallingly naive.

It is the latter quality that stopped me from enjoying this novel as much as I wanted to. Alex is as innocent as her surname suggests and is betrayed by almost every one she meets in the novel: her colleague Ashby reports her to her boss because she is having an affair with an Indonesian poet who is a Sukarnist and has been banned from writing by the new regime; the poet himself uses her as a front to supply money to rebels; her servant steals from her; a businessman tries to set her up for an Indonesian general in exchange for favors, and her cousin cynically

destroys her love for the poet in order to have her for himself. Although she's a wonderfully attractive character she is so oblivious of or indifferent to the machinations against her, plots which the aloof distancing of the structure and style emphasise all the more, that it is hard to maintain any sort of patience with her. But this is a novel with many fine things in it, and the news that its author has received a grant to write a second novel is very pleasing.

If Blanche d'Alpuget's Alexandra Wheatfield seems rather naive, she is a positive miracle of sophistication compared to the central character in Bruce Grant's first novel *Cherry Bloom*. The eponymous heroine, originally a Melbourne model named Cheryl Bloomfield (the similarity of the surnames for the two women is odd) marries an English diplomat symbolically named Billy Pittwaters, who is posted to Singapore. For reasons which the author fails to explain quite satisfactorily, she has an affair with a rather unlikeable American scholar named Tom Grainger and, like Alex, begins to dabble her toes in local politics.

Like d'Alpuget, Grant conveys very well the physical attractiveness and vitality of his heroine, but when he comes to describing both the landscape and the lesser figures of the novel his hand is less sure. Issues are raised but are never quite in focus. There is a great deal of talk about Australia's role in Asia and a rather clumsy counterpointing of the culture of Singapore against that of Australia as conveyed through a doltish exchange of letters between Cherry and her best friend in Melbourne, but compared to *The Year of Living Dangerously* and even *Monkeys in the Dark* this novel seems a little tame and static. Its best moments are in the exchanges of diplomatic courtesies and wiles. Bruce Grant has an enormously varied range of experiences to draw upon for material. It will be interesting to see whether he continues to develop this side of his writing talents.

Helen Garner's new work, *Honour and Other People's Children*, takes us a lot closer to home, to the Melbourne world she explored earlier in *Monkey Grip*. Although it lacks the fashionableness of subject matter of that novel, and although it has been greeted by some reviewers in a shallow and even spiteful way, I thought it was a much more interesting book than her first novel. It is far better written, the prose sensuous and showing a lovely responsiveness to nature, the dialogue understated, the touch delicate throughout. Garner has managed that enormously difficult jump from a successful first book to the second with considerable poise.

Of the two novellas I thought *Honour* much the better but *Other People's Children* in some ways more encouraging for Garner's future development as a writer. It is more intricate in structure than the simple triangular situation of *Honour* or the rather anecdotal jottings of *Monkey Grip*, and in the harmonica player Madigan it introduces us to a comic, affecting character quite outside the range of Garner's earlier work. The story concerns the break down of a tiny commune in Fitzroy; as in *Monkey Grip* Garner shows a keen interest in the differences in living in Melbourne between north and south of the river, and offers us another group of people in Prahran for contrast. One of the two main female characters in the story, Ruth, comments ruefully, "We thought everything we'd theorised about was coming true. Breaking down old structures, as we used to go around saying in those days", to which Alex replies, "It almost sounds oldfashioned." There is in truth something paradoxically anachronistic about the story; the characters are, as Michele Nayman noted, sixties survivors.

In *Honour* Kathleen and Frank have been separated some years but still have in common a genuine feeling for one another and a young daughter Flo. Now Frank wants to make their separation official by divorce in order to marry again, and Kathleen has to face up to what she has never really accepted, the finality of the breakdown of their relationship. With a gentle economy and lightness of style, Garner observes the tensions played out among the four characters as the adults struggle to behave with dignity and trust towards one another. It ends on a beautifully judged note of irresolution as the two women, watched by the child between them, play on a see-saw:

> The child stepped back. Jenny, who was nearer the ground, gave a firm shove with one foot to send the plank into motion. It responded. It rose without haste, sweetly, to the level, steadied, and stopped.
>
> They hung in the dark, airily balancing, motionless.

The title of Michele Nayman's first colection of stories, *Faces You Can't Find Again,* is an especially appropriate quotation from Bob Dylan. The stories — all short, some no more

than a page, mere vignettes or snapshots — mostly concern characters who are rootless, estranged, but curiously innocent. Usually they are women; often the stories begin with the name of the central character — Brenda, Peter, Eda, Helen, Carol, Mara, Jennifer, Anna, Jean, Richard. The style is deliberately subdued and low-key — or in the parlance of Nayman's own characters, laid-back. No judgements are made. The prose merely observes coolly the severances, weaknesses, sometimes cruelties of the characters. Michele Nayman's only venture into what might be termed Peter Carey country, "A Face in the City", is one of the least successful pieces in the collection.

The stories in the book range from international settings (Jerusalem, Denver, New Orleans) to the Carlton territory made familiar by Helen Garner. The central characters are often similar and the brevity of their encounters is almost invariable. The vision that dominates them is locked into the present; the past, the future don't exist and the concentration is purely on the existential moment. People come together, diverge to go their separate ways, and there is no lament or nostalgia. But Nayman's protagonists (the women especially) are resilient, there is no crying over spilt blood or wasted emotions, and this is what prevents the book from being depressing. Instead, it is almost buoyant in its intense curiosity; there is a sense of entirely unsentimental gutsiness.

Where Nayman is an observer, Beverley Farmer is very much a participant. Her first novella, *Alone,* gives the impression of having been wrenched out of intense personal agony and distress (this is not, of course, the same thing as saying it is autobiographical). The story is set in Melbourne in 1959, a Melbourne both ugly and insidiously attractive and seen mostly at night. A young student named Shirley Nunn has been having an affair with another young woman which ends when Shirley becomes too importunate. In total despair but still quite rational, Shirley decides to end her life unless her former lover comes to visit her before Sunday, the day of her eighteenth birthday.

Alone describes with dispassionate sympathy exactly what the girl does during the last hours of her life, before she comes to the moment of her final decision. She composes epitaphs for herself and imagines them appearing in the morning's newspapers; she thinks about her lover Catherine as the story of the affair is revealed retrospectively, in bits and pieces; she reads over the few samples of prose and poetry she has been writing before deciding to burn them; she telephones her mother to apologise for not having attended the Sunday roast in honor of her birthday; wandering around the docks she even, in a final act of self-abasement, invites rape from a stranger.

Farmer keeps a firm perspective on her heroine. Her self-pity is not allowed to become the novel's; there is a good deal of kindness in the world of *Alone* (even Shirley's assailant is described without rancor) and for all the intensity of her anguish we can see that the absoluteness of the girl's demands would indeed make life as intolerable for her lover as she claims it was. Moreover, the other inhabitants of this seedy Carlton world of the dispossessed and defeated are observed with a sympathy and at times even a kind of bawdy humor. Beverley Farmer's style ranges from the poetic conjuring up of atmospheric detail, through the meticulously objective description of physical detail, to a painstaking rendition of harshly Australian idiomatic speech. My only criticism is that sometimes the prose is almost too richly and lushly textured, almost Dylan Thomas-ish, though usually Australian fiction suffers from the opposite fault. But this is a fine book and the short stories Farmer has been publishing recently confirm her outstanding talent.

Peter Carey's eagerly awaited second collection, following the spectacular success of his first, *The Fat Man in History,* confirms his reputation as one of the most inventive and original writers in Australia. It is very much in the mode of the first volume and has much the same strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses, to dispense quickly with those, are, briefly, that his prose is no better than functional; it is undistinguished in itself and is only just sufficiently competent to carry the writer's astonishing leaps of imagination and bizarre fancies. And secondly, much more gravely, Carey's writing gives me the impression of being cold-blooded. The stories are written for the most part without love — the exceptions being "American Dreams" in the first volume and "The Chance", the longest and most outstanding story, in this. The stories are brilliant, they extend our sense of the possible, but they are also finally chilling in their reductive view of human relationships.

In "The Chance" the American invaders have left and been replaced by the Fastalogians who

have devised a genetic lottery: for two thousand inter-galactic dollars a citizen can go in the Lottery and come out with a different age, a different body, a different voice and still carry his memories more or less intact. It is a brilliant concept but more importantly it is not just a concept; it is dramatized and given the very human context of an aging man in love with a beautiful young girl who has determined out of a sense of guilt to discard her body for another one. Peter Carey is always clever; but at his best he is never merely clever. The story is psychologically acute, especially in its depiction of the girl, and more than that it has a dimension which is astonishingly rare in Australian fiction: it is aware of the political contexts in which our lives are necessarily lived and by which they are influenced.

Another of Carey's great strengths is to begin from a comparatively commonplace premise and to use it as a springboard from which he can vault into the fantastic and the fabulous, even though it is usually a fabulous that is grotesque and frightening. In "The Journey of a Lifetime" a humble clerk saves all his life in order to take a train journey which has chilling repercussions. The plainest, most matter of fact details blend unself-consciously with the unreal to create worlds which have a mysteriously dream-like authority and logic.

There they are, then, a very mixed bunch indeed about whom it is difficult to generalise. (There were also several other interesting works which space prevented me from discussing.) Perhaps it is most encouraging to see writers like d'Alpuget, Grant and Nayman dealing unself-consciously with societies other than our own and moving to cover the middle ground of novelistic material that is often neglected in Australia. But it is also pleasing that the deep conservatism of most Australian fiction does not inhibit the success of fiction of a more experimental and formally innovatory kind, such as that of Peter Carey, David Ireland and Murray Bail.

Jessica Anderson, *The Impersonators* (Macmillan, $9.95); Barbara Hanrahan, *The Frangipani Gardens* (University of Queensland Press, $15.95 and $7.95); Blanche d'Alpuget, *Monkeys in the Dark* (Aurora Press, $12.95); Bruce Grant, *Cherry Bloom* (Aurora Press, $13.95); Helen Garner, *Honour and Other People's Children* (McPhee Gribble, $11.95); Michele Nayman, *Faces You Cant's Find Again* (Neptune Press, $8.50 and $4.25); Beverley Farmer, *Alone* (Sisters Publishing, $7.95); Peter Carey, *War Crimes* (University of Queensland Press, $7.95).

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: A relatively modest Floating Fund this issue, due in part to the fact that it follows fairly fast on the heels of the last. But most welcome for all that. I notice many old friends, and some new ones, among the contributors. Total $328.

$38 MW, KS; $24 AP; $20 CH; $10 CJ; $8 RG, SMcC, PR, GT, ED, SB, DB, JMcK, DP, DB, WK, RH, DD, AS, RR; $6 IW; $4 MG, IM; $3 PS, JE, DD, LC, JR, GL, JR, DR, RJ, JR, ER, BS, ME, PP, GM, MD, AB, PA, DC, BR; $2 MF, RO.

JOHN CLANCHY

The Boys Won't Leave the Girls Alone

Brr-ng Brr-ng

"Hello. This is a recorded message." Quick service. No delays here. "I am a medical practitioner." Liar; did it matter? Cool, laid-back you'd call it. An actor's voice, not a doctor's, honed for service in a thousand studios. Did it matter?

"You are probably ringing because you suspect that you have contracted a venereal disease." Too bloody right, mate. "Contracted?" Is every contact a contract? We have contracted your contacted. Shut up and listen, you broken-down poet, you rhymster, poor punster.

". . . venereal disease." Damnit; what did he say? Venus, venus, venerem . . . The possessive (recessive?) of Venus is veneris, and the plural . . . Sweet Jesus, how many of them are there?

". . . quick diagnosis." Godsake, concentrate. Nosis, hocus-pocus, temples of Knossus. The temples of Knossus/ bestrode the Colossus.

The temple maid was soundly laid
As her dear mother taught her;
Da dum da dum da dum da dum
She was her mother's daughter.

Your education, boyho, will get you a dose of the clap yet.

Who will take this mind from me
And throw it in the . . .

". . . head of the penis will become sore and reddened and an ulcerating sore may appear on the shaft."

My dad had ulcers.

'Excuse me.'

What?

"I said excuse me."

"After nine days your penis . . ."

". . . be long?" Belong? I don't belong to anyone.

Give your heart away
But keep your fancy free.

Bloody woman at the door. Goldfishing through the glass. W-I-L-L Y-O-U pointing into the box. Christ, madam, there's no one else here. Do you want to bring on an identity crisis? B-E L-O-N-G? Longer than you think, madam, and thicker too/ And I will screw . . .

". . . pussy discharge from the penis. Pussy, pussy/ I'm not fussy. Could she hear? Don't be stupid. Ring off.

"No, s'ok. I was finished anyway."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. Go ahead. I'll ring back."

"But if you weren't finished . . ."

What is this, a finishing school?

"Look, it's o.k. I'll ring back."

"Well, if you're sure . . ."

I'm sure, I'm certain, I'm indubitably infalliby bigotedly inerrantly self-evidently axiomatically dogmatically zealotly (zealotly? The zealous zealot/ Lost his palate/ When swimming in the sea/ He . . .) oracularly authoritatively dead set certain.

It's certain I'm hurtin'
There'll be no more flirtin'.

"Well, if you're certain then. I won't be long."

"Fu-ck."

"Well, really."

Try again. Oh god, what's the number? Where did I get the number? Look in the book. What's it under? Government Services? Child Care? Couldn't care.

They pulled my hair
They stole my comb
The boys won't leave the girls alone.

Social Welfare? Ambulance Service? They carried the lecher/ Out on a stretcher. Public Service Board? Public service, hah. This girl's no broad. Broad in the beam and broad in the bust/ She'd rival the elephant's lazy must. Council Matters? Does it? Veterinary Officers? Bloody cow. Where did I get the bloody number? Weights and Measures? She's had my measure.

A dirty mind in a dirty place
Would drive a . . . a . . .

Nothing. Look under the general index. Flynn, O'Flaherty, V, V for Venereal. O'Mara, Sheedy, Ursula's Florist. Lost in the forest/ With a foul-minded florist. Too far. V. Va, Ven. Venables. Struck in the Venables. The Venerable Bede. The Venerable Bede spilt all his seed/ And didn't know where to find it/ Leave it alone . . . Vener . . . Nothing. God what now? Can't just walk in off the street, street-walking/ foul-talking/ stop gawking. Look, nurse, I've got a sore dick. None of that filthy talk here; this is a hospital. If your penis is obscenus/ take a pew/ join the queue/ there's plenty in where you have been. That's no good; have to be een-been.

What's the fucking number?

Health Service. Of course, the bloody Health Service.

"Though venereal disease is more common than most people realize . . ."

Jesus, they go on. ". . . no need for guilt." Just stay out of the quilt. What do I *do?*

"Consult a general practitioner immediately." Immediately? What if it falls off before I get there? Can I help you? What you got in that bag?

". . . or present yourself at the reception desk of a public hospital. There is no need to identify your problem. Simply tell the nurse on the desk that you wish to see a doctor and that the matter is personal. She'll know what you mean."

Oh my god. Will she?

Nursey dear, don't be a prude,
My complaint, you see, is rather rude.

"I'd like to see a doctor. It's er . . . It's personal."

"Percival who? And which doctor?" Witch-doctor? I don't want a bloody witchdoctor.

"There are three doctors on duty."

"What?"

"Who will I say? Percival who?"

"What? What are you talking . . .? No, not Percival; personal."

"Personal? Is that really your . . . Oh, *personal* (giggle), I'm sorry. I thought you said . . . Oh, is it?" Freeze. Twitch of the skirts. Professional.

"Name?"

"Um Smi — Jones, yes Jones."

"Jo-nes, I see." Biro bites into the paper. "Christian?"

What Christian physician
Would embrace my position?

"No, not really." Stare. "Oh, I see. John, John Jones."

"All right, Mr Jones. Take a seat over there. Doctor will see you in due course. We'll have of course/ To take recourse/ To radical surgery.

Please do not smoke in the waiting room. Milk, Nature's miracle food. For godsake take your hand off your groin. Hold your thumb/ your bum . . . Where's the lavatory? Take Nutrax for nerves.

The nervous Dr Purvis
He gives good service
He'll mend your bones
And remove your . . .

". . . Jones. Mr Jones." Who me? "If you go into the third cubicle, doctor will be with you soon."

Be with me, doctor,
Sore prick concocter.

More skirt swishing. Plenty of room to pass. Three white witches whisper in the corner. Leave a corner/ For this dirty forni/cator. White walls. White curtains. White sheet. Snow White/ took Fright/ all in the summer hay/ Fright took White . . .

"Is it a possible infection?"

Why so calm?
Sound the alarm!
The cocks will crow
On a barbed wire fence.

The cocks will crow all hence/ On a barbed . . . Doesn't scan. "Yes," Dully. Found out at

last/ Cash in your past.

A resident, very young, with a public school accent you could cut with . . .

But pleasant, trying hard.

It's important to try and identify with the patient, empathize with his state of mind. You will find in your year of residency that you will rub shoulders (hrump) with a wide diversity of people and types. In time you will learn to speak their language.

"Well, drop the old daks." Old daks? "Best have a look." A look, a look/ A butcher's hook.

Aunt Mary had a canary
Thought it was a duck
Took it behind the kitchen door
And taught it how to . . .

". . . luck, really. You could knock around for years and never catch a dose or get it on your first throw." Wait your throw/ Join the row. God, what was he doing here, a well brought up blarney, with his pants down around his ankles, at 33, in 1980? Eighty eighty/ my balls are weighty.

"Is that it?"

"I beg your pardon."

"That abrasion on your penis. Is that what you're concerned about?"

"Yes. Shouldn't I be?"

"Be what?"

"Concerned." Is there any cure?/ I'll be so pure.

"Oh I see. We'll know soon enough." Who's "we"? What are they running, a bloody radio station? Found wandering the city streets this afternoon, Mr Jones, 33, of Dicksville, an arterial suburb of Sydney, was arrested by police for being drunk in charge of a penis.

". . . no charge."

"What?"

"You needn't worry about any account being sent to your home. This service is free." It's free/ I'll flee/ I'll take my . . .

". . . take a swab. This may hurt a bit. I'm going to insert this instrument . . ." (my god) You're not inserting . . . Mind where you're putting your hand. Remove your hand, sir/ From my gland, sir . . . Chri-st. You've burnt it off/ you scrofulous toff.

". . . whip it down to Pathology." But it's stuck on.

"The swab. Should have an answer in twenty minutes. Just take a seat outside, Mr er . . .?"

"Smith."

"Mr Smith . . . and the nurse will let you know shortly."

That's it, that's the finish
I'll let it diminish
For want of exer-cise.

This hospital was constructed out of public funds for your benefit.

They'll hold a benefit when I'm gone
When this dick from my body they have sawn.

Bloody cow.

"Mr Smith." Silence. "Mr Smith . . . or should I say Mr Jones?" That smirk would make/ a parson jerk . . .

". . . off now. Doctor says you are to put this twice daily on your . . . Apply the ointment to the affected part."

My part's affected
I've been rejected.

"You mean this'll do it?"

"*Do* it?"

"You know what I mean. Cure it."

"It?"

"You know what I bloody mean."

"I don't think you heard me, Mr Smi-Jones." Deliberate bitch. I hope you itch/ beneath your bony corset.

"Are you listening, Mr Jones? I said you are clear. Doctor says you have only a local infection."

I got this infection
From a local erection.

"You mean I haven't got the pox?"

Gloria the whore-ier/ no need to worry you.
I'll save the pox/ for Goldilocks.

"Well, really. Some people. No, you don't have a venereal disease."

"Nurse, I could kiss you." Miss you/ Bliss you.

"You will do no such thing. Next."

Clear wind. Fresh air. I am the gallant Bedivere.

What's her number? Dear Gloria, I've wronged yer/ shouldn't have pronged yer/ but now I'm clean . . .

Better not. Bloody cow. You can't be too careful.


Place de la Tour. Opoul
Winter- Courihlac '80

PAT COUNIHAN

Letter from Opoul

Pat and Noel Counihan, well known to Overland readers, spent part of 1980 living and working in the Pyrenees.

On warm evenings here people have the pleasant habit of sitting out in the street and talking to each other or singing. When we return by car or on foot from our various expeditions they smile at us and wave, because another very nice thing about this part of the word is that people always greet each other, whether friend or stranger. We never quite expect this when we go to another village, but people behave just as courteously as in Opoul.

Life seems both more private and more public than at home. After the main meal in the middle of the day there is an unnatural quiet, the streets are deserted and the houses like fortresses defended by the tightly closed wooden shutters. At 4 o'clock life resumes, the shops open and if the sun is shining and the Tramontane not blowing, people come outside and talk to each other, or rather shout very amiably in Catalan.

Neighbors, of course, tend to sit with each other and women predominate, because in the long twilight the men may be out working in the vines or playing *pétanque* in the Place des Acacias, literally above the bones of their ancestors; the square was built over an earlier cemetery and contains the monument to the dead of the 1914-1918 war.

Two Algerian families live in Opoul. One father of eight is an *Harki* on a soldier's pension, here because he fought for the French; the other family is that of an immigrant worker who only last summer brought his wife and children to France. The two Algerian wives sit together on a stone bench, occasionally joined by our neighbor.

There is always a group of retired *agriculteurs* (not *paysans*) arguing and reminiscing on one of the iron seats provided in the square by the municipality. Not so far away on chairs they've brought out into the street sits a venerable group of four or five friends of Madame Bernadoy, an erect and handsome lady of eighty-four. Dressed in black, the latter are widows of long standing. In this ageing population, now reduced to 450 people, the old women play an important part. Some of them are vigorous assertive personalities who have weathered pretty tough circumstances — not only wars and occupation but lack of water (water was laid on only twenty years ago) and lack of hygiene (sewers and a purification plant are even more recent). Their legs are sturdy under the short black skirts. They once walked considerable distances to work in the vines in the valley and even further afield to the big *mas* near Salses and on the Rivesaltes plain. By all accounts they enjoyed this work in the fields in the open air.

Now the same tasks are performed by machines and chemical sprays. Of course all hands are needed at the harvest, but apart from that, the only time the women go into the fields is to gather the prunings (*sarments*) which are bundled up for firewood or burned on the spot. Pruning requires skill so only men do that!

The men too no longer walk but go in their little Citroën *deux chevaux* to the *parcelles de vigne* — the plots of assorted shapes and sizes which stretch rhythmically in every direction over the floor and up the sides of the valley.

One of the things that surprises us about Opoul is the feeling it has of being isolated. In physical

terms, this seems ridiculous. As the crow flies the village is only a short distance from the Mediterranean and from the autoroute, la Catalana, which traverses a similar route to the Roman Via Domitiana, linking Narbonne with Spain. On this very coast since 1963 there has been enormous tourist 'development' all the way from Argelès to the Golfe de Lion. At Argelès, where once the French authorities put up barbed wire to contain a number of Spanish republicans (102,000) almost equal to the present population of Perpignan, the summer population now rises from the normal 5000 to 120,000.

A good road leads to Perpignan 20 kilometres away and the capital of the Département, Pyrénées-Orientales, and to Salses and Rivesaltes (chief town of the canton) which are even closer. Distances here always strike us as so short; villages like Feuilla and Vingrau are linked with Opoul by road and are only a few kilometres off.

Though the railway never came through here and a bus goes to Perpignan only twice a day at rather awkward times for the general traveller, there is no lack of transport in Opoul, as can be gauged from the number of former stables on the ground floor of the houses transformed into garages. Nonetheless there is still a feeling of being enclosed in the valley surrounded by the low hills of the Basses Corbières, of being apart.

Another van has just set up shop in the Place de la Toue, as I can hear from the constantly reiterated announcement over the loud hailer. This time men's socks, women's blouses and skirts are being advertised. Another day it will be fish, or snails. It seems to work out that over several weeks, big, well-equipped travelling vans in succession provide goods that are not available in Odette's or the Co-op or the butcher's. There is no need, many people think, to go further afield, Opoul supplies all you need. Twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday evenings, the priest comes from neighboring Salses to say Mass for a diminishing flock; the doctor too makes regular visits from Salses. (It is not a simple matter of ringing the doctor's for an appointment; here, you pay a ritual visit to the house of Madame Belbèze, the one who rings the church bell, and she will put your name down on a list of prospective patients.)

As a consequence of all this, many villagers leave Opoul only on special occasions. It is really a self-imposed passive confinement to the valley; people do not feel impelled to seek wider fields, connections or experiences. Once, isolation was imposed on them; now, they are conditioned to it and seem to accept it without any questioning.

It occurs in its most extreme form in the case of a few folk, so we are told, who have not left their houses for several years. They can only exist in this way with the connivance of other villagers, and this points to another characteristic of Opoul — the strong feeling for the clan of a small community which has had to struggle to survive.

Life has always been hard. For hundreds of years in the past this place was on the frontier between Spain and France, with all that implies of destruction of people and crops. The ruined fortress above on the Puig Salvaterra was a Spanish outpost. As an inducement to come to this waterless place and supply additional manpower for the garrison in times of stress, people were let off various feudal dues. (It is tempting to see a modern parallel in the Electricity Board's offer of lower rates to people who will live in the vicinity of a nuclear plant proposed for the Pyrénées-Orientales.) Water has always been scarce. In a famous Charta in 1303 Jacques II gave the Opoulinques in time of drought the right to water their herds in the *étang* at Salses or the River Agly at Espira. This was the cause of bad relations with the neighbors (including lengthy lawsuits) until quite recent times.

Even now Opoul is something of an outpost; the most northern village in the Pyrénées-Orientales, it is the last Catalan-speaking community. Fitou and Feuilla may be only a few kilometres to the north, but they are in the Aude and have a different speech.

The business of surviving in all these circumstances has developed Opoul into a very close community. Amiable and friendly as the villagers are to outsiders there is a definite dividing line between "us" and "them".

When it rains the vinegrowers walk round with broad smiles. Rain is good for the vine, the harvest is the only time when it is not welcome. But being courteous people they deplore for our sake the lack of sunshine. After all we are *vacanciers* enjoying in their opinion an unusually long holiday. I may feebly suggest that Noel is not being entirely idle in making so many drawings of the village and its activities, but no one is really taken in by this — work here means work in the fields on the vine.

We ourselves are not so peculiar in coming

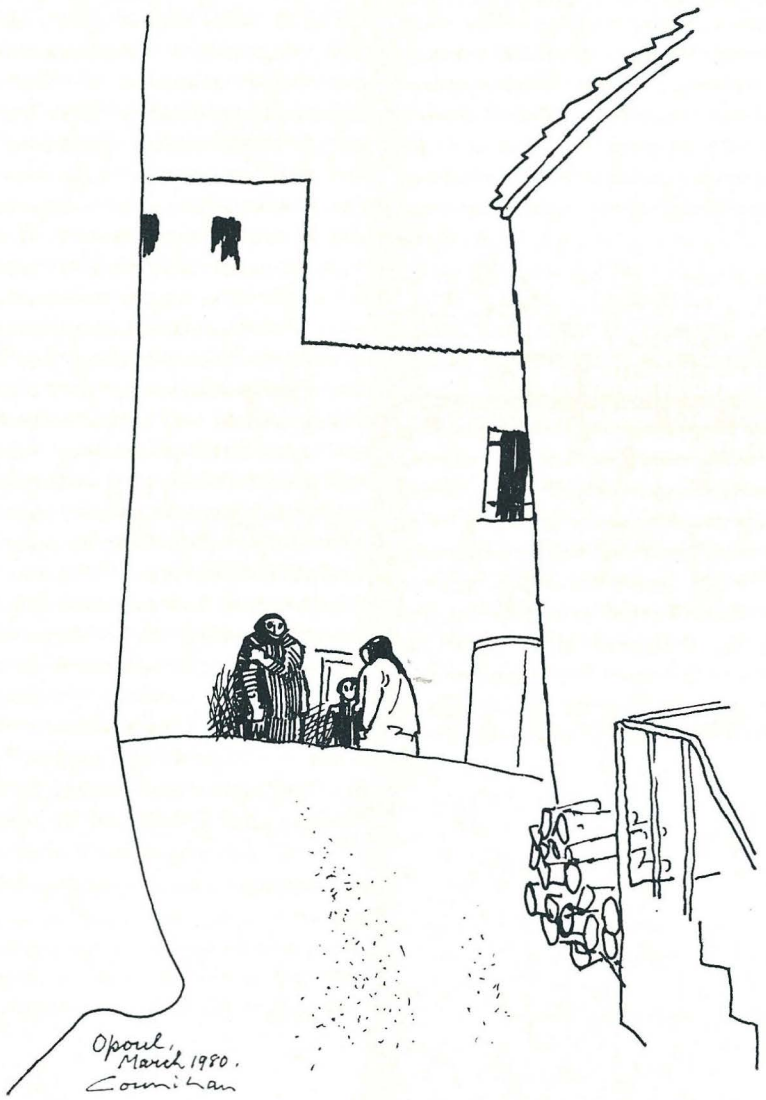
from Australia, as we are the third couple in as many years to come to Opoul from that distant land, but we are unusual in that we came in the winter, have stayed for several months and leave before the most important events in the life of the village, the fête and the harvest.

The majority of "outsiders" are *estivants* who rent or buy here and spend the summer days in July or August on the beach at Barcarès or Leucate-plage. With the decline in population there are empty houses in the village. At the moment there is a rash of *chantiers;* the old stone is being refaced and shutters painted against the influx of summer visitors which will increase the population of Opoul by at least a third.

We find ourselves in an intermediate position between these and the people more regularly connected with Opoul — the German painter and his wife who have bought and done up an old *bergerie,* the man from Paris who spends every holiday faithfully restoring an old mill, the Dutch painter who has spent more than half each year here for twenty-two years and who has transformed what were dilapidated houses into a studio and a dwelling.

But all of us in our various ways are outsiders.

The big problem of course is that neither Opoulinques nor outsiders can solve Opoul's problem — how to keep going the cultivation of the vines in the valley. The postal address here is Opoul-Périllos. For lack of people nearby Périllos finally died as an independent commune eight years ago. It is a sad prospect but this could be Opoul's fate too.



JOHN McQUILTON

The Legend of Ned Kelly

John McQuilton teaches history at the University of New South Wales. He is a native of the Kelly Country, and is one of the editors of the forthcoming bicentennial history of Australia. His recent book on the Kelly Outbreak is reviewed by Frank Strahan elsewhere in this issue.

Ned Kelly may be an old familiar in Australian popular and cultural tradition but he remains a controversial figure. After all, no other man in history has been described as a thieving, murderous thug, dismissed as a bush bodgie and homosexual, and lauded as the father of our national courage and the embodiment of the Australian character. Opposition to Ned is as fierce today as it was a century ago. One critic recently saw in Australians' preference for Barabbas (Kelly) to Barry "the corrosive envy, the black defeated nothingness that lie somewhere near the heart of our national character".[1]

Although it is the first time the learned judge has been cast as a Christ figure, parallels between Kelly and Christ have been drawn before. Some argue that Ned filled the same need Christ had filled for another colonial people in another time and place. Far-fetched? Undoubtedly. Yet, the one man who has shown a remarkable talent for expressing visually the Kelly legend found merit in the idea. Nolan's last Kelly series has a messianic undertone.

Just as Ned is capable of provoking a dichotomic response, so too is the legend, and there has been a proliferation of explanations for its persistence. All use the legend as a vehicle for commenting on Australian society. The Kelly legend has been seen as an illustration of a basic turpitude in the Australian character: or as a reflection of a national inferiority complex, a way of thumbing the national nose at a critical outside world. Others have argued that Australia is so desperate for a national hero we'll take anybody, and a bush criminal is good enough. There is also the view that Australians love a failure, and Ned was a spectacular failure. And then there is the peculiar notion that once this nation is properly blooded with a war on Australian soil, Ned Kelly as hero will (thankfully) vanish.

On the positive side, it is argued that the legend reflects basic Australian attitudes, particularly a deep-seated ambivalence when it comes to authority. Kelly is part of a convict heritage with its tradition of anti-establishment feeling and rebellion which has become woven into a broader Australian consciousness. And although we may accept with resignation the dreary geographical reality of an urbanised society, Kelly still represents the images Australians associate with themselves and their country: the bushman, independent, self-reliant and game; a 'doer' rather than a 'talker'; a man capable of taking the local cop (and the boss for that matter) down a peg or two; a man associated with mountains and plains, the dancing haze of summer heat and the blue-grey beauty of the bush. Nolan's paintings again spring to mind. So too does the visual quality of the recent TV series "The Last Outlaw", where man and environment were combined in a series of striking images.

It is all good, clean fun of course. Each explanation has its place, although each says as much about its champions as it does about Ned. But in the rush to intellectualise and analyse the legend and to place Kelly in the mainstream of Australian history, two important elements are overlooked: the man himself and the nature of the Kelly Outbreak. These are the legend's origins, and both are as important in explaining the survival of the legend as general observations on the

Australian character. They provide the human, or emotional, focus for the legend and explain its early development.

The Kelly story is a powerful tale: the feud between clan and police, the family's attempts to avoid trouble with an incredible succession of over-zealous troopers at Greta, Mrs Kelly's jail sentence on the suspect evidence of Fitzpatrick, Stringybark Creek with its sense of inevitability and tragedy, the bank robberies and the final stand at Glenrowan. Central to it all is a character as fascinating and complex as any in our history, a man of contradictory impulses, of faults and virtues. It is hard not to respond accordingly.

Ned Kelly is no manufactured hero. Unlike his American counterparts, he has been spared Hollywood sanitisation. He boasted that he was Victoria's most accomplished horse thief and duffer, although he did admit to some stiff competition from Constable Flood. He shot three policemen at Stringybark Creek and robbed two banks. Sherritt was murdered. At Glenrowan, the police special was to be derailed.

Yet he was something of a dreamer, with a crudely developed social conscience. Naively, he believed that if enough people heard his story, his family would find justice. Twice he argued his case in lengthy letters. He gave speeches to (literally) captive audiences. After his capture he gave a long interview to an Age reporter. "I do not pretend that I have led a blameless life, or that one fault justifies another," he began and he went on, "let the hand of the law strike me down if it will, but I ask that my story be heard and considered."[2] He made one last attempt at his trial, as Barry passed sentence.

Ned Kelly was acutely aware of the society in which he lived, and by either accident or design he became a rough spokesman for the selectors in his district and the selectors in north-eastern Victoria. His criticism of local squatters echoed similar complaints made over the bar on lazy Saturday afternoons by many selectors. His plea to the rich "to be liberal with the poor"[3] has a timeless quality to it. His condemnation of police tactics in rural areas still has force:

> If my lips teach the public that men are made mad by bad treatment, and if the police are taught they may not exasperate to madness men they persecute and ill-treat, my life will not be entirely thrown away.[4]

Kelly's role as spokesman culminated in the republic, an emotionally charged symbol of resistance and rebellion. It is impossible now to gauge the impact that symbol may have had in 1880. It is enough to know that the north-east's senior police officers in 1881 feared civil disorder, with a small band of guerillas taking to the hills.

Ned Kelly left a lasting impression on those who had known him. Superintendents Nicolson and Hare both tried to come to grips with the paradox that became their nemesis. He was flash with a strong streak of the larrikin in his nature. He was also a leader and loyal to family and friends, and in turn inspired a loyalty that, for some, came close to fanaticism. Nicolson must have deeply regretted the familial loyalty that led the young Ned to turn down the Superintendent's offer of a job on a station in the Riverina. Kelly's courage and, in the dark days following Glenrowan, his dignity, moved 32,000 people in Melbourne to sign reprieve petitions, and a friend of the Chief Commissioner's to write "Kelly's Defence by a Lady". It was cold comfort for Standish to discover that the lady in question blamed the police for the Outbreak. It was a view shared by Constable Arthur, although the authorities found Arthur's case easier to deal with. He was sacked.

The man's charisma was most clearly evident during the band hold-ups and at Glenrowan. Mrs Scott's reaction is famous. The press creation, murderer and mutilator of the dead, gave way to "Mr Kelly", a man of considerable charm and command. Mrs Jones summed up the Kelly magic at Glenrowan where four men kept 62 people prisoner when she wrote, "The devil was in us. We had to be looking at the darling man."[5] Although the prisoners dutifully confessed to fear when questioned by the police, their later reminiscences, both written and verbal, belied it. When it became clear that Kelly had no intention of harming them if they obeyed orders most of the prisoners relaxed. And many remembered, and believed, Ned's long speeches setting out his side of the story.

Of course, not everyone was swayed by Kelly's charm. Those who represented outside authority (like Curnow at Glenrowan) feared and detested the bushranger. In spite of an unexpected compassion shown at Glenrowan, Superintendent Sadleir remained hostile. So too did Barry. Oral tradition holds that Mrs Scott's nurse was also singularly unimpressed by the bushranger. On learning that she had fallen into the hands of the terrible Kelly Gang, she screamed and fainted. Revived with whisky, she found she was still in the gang's clutches and once again screamed and

fainted. Once more whisky was administered. She was finally escorted to the cart with a serene smile on her face, clutching the arm of the bushranger.[6]

But Kelly was not interested in reaching the schoolteachers, police superintendents, postmasters and bank managers. He was interested in reaching the ordinary man, the selectors, the railway gangers and the rural laborers. He succeeded. Kelly's version of events in his life became folkloric truths. That ability is still an important contributory element to the legend today.

Of course, the criminal element will always remain a part of the Kelly Outbreak. Kelly did break the law, although it is interesting to contemplate the ink and paper wasted to prove what is, after all, a truism. But it is fair to say that the criminal nature of the man is tempered somewhat when placed in the context of his life. And from a broader humanist perspective, one that places Kelly in his social context, one that sees laws undergoing constant changes and crime as partly a function of social inequality, and one that recognises loyalties (however wrongheaded) beyond those demanded by the statute books, Kelly is, in the words of an old district resident, "a magnificently flawed bastard".[7] And that is the strength of the human focus of the Kelly legend.

The second element that contributed to, and sustained, the Kelly legend is the nature of the Outbreak itself. It was more than simply a criminal outburst led by an Irish-Australian who somehow defied modern technology and the forces of law and order for twenty months. As argued elsewhere in some detail, it was a classic example of social banditry.

The social bandit is a more important figure, historically, than the rural criminal. He is a symptom of rural discontent, an indication of a troubled rural community and a leaderless rural malaise. Outside authority is viewed with suspicion, often because of a conflict between local attitudes and the law enforced by the authorities. In the case of the Kellys and North Eastern Victoria, it was stock theft where a mere 4 per cent of Victoria's population accounted for up to 20 per cent of the colony's stolen stock. An outbreak of social banditry begins when one member of a community takes up arms against outside authority for an activity deemed criminal by the authorities but accepted by the local community. Fitzpatrick's visit in April 1878 was made to arrest Dan Kelly on a charge of horse theft. In his conflict with authority, the social bandit offers his supporters a vicarious means of expressing their grievances, and he relies on them for sympathy and support. He fills a surrogate role and rapidly becomes a legendary figure. Man and myth blend into a symbol reflecting the basic needs of the community that give it birth.

Ned Kelly was a legendary figure even before his capture in June 1880. And the attributes of that legend clearly reflect his status as a social bandit. An important element was the general belief that the Kellys had been victims of police persecution. Ned Kelly had contributed to that view through his speeches, and Joe Byrne had helped with the ballad "The Kellys, Byrne and Hart" which was being sung in 1879. The legend pointedly ignored his reputation as a stock thief, but placed a delighted emphasis on his ability to outwit the police. Stringybark Creek was seen as just revenge, and although the deaths of three troopers were to be deplored, they were set beside Mrs Kelly's jail sentence. Ned Kelly was also seen as "the squatters' foe"[8] and the poor man's friend, robbing from the rich to give to the poor. Kelly's bushmanship, horsemanship and physical stamina played a prominent part as did his leadership, flashness and gameness.

Central to the legend in 1880 was Ned's devotion to his family, particularly his mother. Mrs Scott stressed that he was a good son and brother although she doubted whether Mrs Kelly and Dan were so deserving.[9] Mrs Kelly's place in the legend says much for the role played by women in the rural Australia of the 1870s and 1880s. With many of the menfolk absent for part of the year following seasonal work, the women provided an element of stability in rural areas, and could find themselves acting as family protectors. Lawson was to capture this spirit some time later with "The Drover's Wife". Mrs Kelly's defence of her family the day Fitzpatrick called, and the fact that she had been widowed with a young family, struck a strong responsive chord within selector communities.

Ned Kelly's personality and his life gave the legend its initial impetus, so much so that his words now have a prophetic ring:

> . . . after the worst has been said against a man, he may, if he is heard, tell a story in his own rough way that will perhaps lead [the public] to . . . find as many excuses for him as he would plead for himself.[10]

The Outbreak became an expression of a primitive, pre-political discontent, filling a very real social need, which gave the legend substance, and

tied it into the tradition of dissent in Australian history. These origins are still reflected in the Kelly legend. The continuing debate about Kelly as a man, as saint or sinner, is one example. And the attempts to explain the heroic status accorded Kelly by Australians is an implicit recognition of the social significance of the Outbreak itself.

Of course, the legend has grown and changed over the century. Australians have drawn from it and re-shaped it, telling us something of their times in the process. By the 1930s, for example, Ned's bush skills were no longer important, an indication of talents no longer needed. Mateship had become a central element and Ned had emerged as a battler struggling to make ends meet in hard times. The 1930s also saw the first suggestions that Ned Kelly was the 'typical' Australian with a healthy contempt for authority. Tex Morton's song captured this spirit so splendidly it became accepted as a 'bush ballad'.[11] In the 1960s, the Irish element dominated. The sins and ills of mad Ireland had found their expression in the Australian bush. It is tempting to suggest that this may have been linked with a new-found social mobility on the part of the Irish following the second world war. Today, the legend has distinctive nationalist and political overtones. Ned Kelly is seen as an Australian nationalist, a man who knew the cultural tension that comes to the native-born children of immigrant parents but who identifies fiercely with Australia. The republic has been seen as an expression of a newly found political spirit, an integral part of radical Irish politics. One might argue with the literal truth of these interpretations, but they do illustrate the continuing vitality of the legend.

There is no doubt that the Kelly legend will continue to live and will continue to change. It will continue to provoke debate and will be used to gain some insight into that most bewildering of concepts, the national character. But behind it all will always be the man and the Outbreak he led, driven by the almost elemental plea, "If I get justice I will cry a go."[12]

FOOTNOTES

1 P. A. Ryan: *Redmond Barry: a colonial life 1813-1880* (Melbourne 1980), p. 2.
2 Age, 9 August, 1880.
3 E. Kelly, The Jerilderie Letter, Kelly Collection, Public Record Office, Victoria (PROV).
4 Age, 9 August, 1880.
5 Statement by Mrs Jones to Montfort, 5 December, 1882.
Police Files, PROV.
6 Field Interview, August 1973.
7 Field Interview, September 1974.
8 Field Interview, June 1972.
9 Mrs Scott, "The Kelly Gang at Euroa", typescript, Mitchell Library manuscript collection.
10 Age, 9 August, 1880.
11 T. Morton, "The Ned Kelly Song". The song begins "Ned Kelly was born in a ramshackle hut, he battled since he was a kid, he grew up with bad men and duffers and thieves, and learnt all the bad things they did".
12 E. Kelly, The Cameron Letter, Kelly Collection, PROV.

FRANK STRAHAN

The Iron Mask of Australia

Frank Strahan is the University Archivist of the University of Melbourne. Here he reviews John McQuilton's recent book on the Kelly Gang, and supplements his remarks with six recently-discovered letters on the Kelly outbreak, never before printed.

When Stephen Murray-Smith asked me to review John McQuilton's *The Kelly Outbreak, 1879-1880, the Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry* (Melbourne University Press, $17.60), I sprang at the chance. Not to bail up the book, but to bail up myself. The response was a personal form of banditry — self-indulgence.

Like many I have accepted Ned Kelly as a hero, a true spirit of my country, a telling champion in the battle of freedom against authority. Yet my dimensions of understanding have been imprecise. Here could be the chance to mark them more clearly.

I engaged in a journey towards this purpose, early in 1963, with Clem Christesen, editor of Meanjin. Clem had heard of two places in the Pilot Ranges, flanking the road from Beechworth to Chiltern, said to be hide-outs of the Kelly gang, when the police searched, quarrelled and did not find them, between February 1879 and June 1880. We wanted to investigate these sites.

We set off from Melbourne. Chateau Tahbilk winery was the wayside place for lunch, with proprietor Eric Purbrick as host, and a manservant dispensing food and wine. Mr Purbrick recounted the story of a special dozen of his red, previously consumed by twelve hand-picked men. I remember one was an admiral, one a general, and one R. G. Menzies. At the time for port Clem opened the way to the north-east. To the surprise of our host, he declaimed strongly against the iniquities of the Petrov Commission.

We proceeded to Chiltern, to the home of Wilfred Busse, deceased romance novelist and local historian, reputed as a great collection of Australiana. His family had agreed that we could raid Wilfred's collection, for the University of Melbourne Library. Results seemed disappointing, no pricy delights for monied collectors. The tiny room, Wilfred's study, with its jumble of contents, lacked electric light, darkened quickly as evening came. In the last glimpse of day we found eleven books, published for the Australian general market, telling of bushranging, including Jack Bradshaw, *Highway Robbery Under Arms. Sticking up the Quirindi Bank. And a Full Account of Thunderbolt* (Sydney, 1871); Ambrose Pratt, *The Outlaws of Weddin Range* (Sydney, 1919), and M. McAlister (Max) Brown, *Australian Son. Ned Kelly* (Melbourne, 1948). A fine cache, from a selector's library.

Next came the call at the old Kelly home, on their selection at Greta West. The house was decaying, elements being robbed by renegade souvenir-hunters. Charles Griffiths, owner of the property, was sympathetic to the Kelly cause, but told of threats to fire his land if restoration of the home was allowed. He saw the game as lost. I have a souvenir, a photograph of Clem, posed in the sapling frame of the Kelly smithy, his foot on the bellows said to have been used to forge the gang's armor.

I might seem distant from John McQuilton's book, but dimensions tighten. We visited several pubs. Charles Griffiths' opponents were rare. Clearly the quick way to a split lip would be denigration of Ned Kelly. He was a favored person. With this acceptable observation, we narrowed through to the tough, high granite country of the Pilot Ranges. We found the two structures, dry-laid granite, fort-like walls, the views spanning the sweeping arc of country north of the Chiltern road. None but a fugitive or strange hermit ought to shelter there, so far above water and people. We returned on a later trip, with those bandits of humor and perception, Nina

Christesen, Bill Culican the archaeologist, and Lynne Strahan. At the northern structure Bill's precise trowelling revealed lines of nails, dropped to the ground from the burning of a wooden structure abutting the granite. We repaired to Beechworth, to argue and sleep. Back in Melbourne, our investigations suspended, the headlines after a press conference read: "Did Kelly Hide in these Forts? Kelly Hideaway Found? Did Kelly Gang build these Forts?"

I would still like to know answers to these questions, looking for them, as previously, from the inside looking out. John McQuilton has produced answers to his questions more from the outside looking in. He displays initiative and industry in obtaining information to illustrate a theory of geographical determinism, inspired by sociological notions in E. J. Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* (London, 1963). *The Kelly Outbreak* is introduced by a quotation from Hobsbawm: "Bandits and highway men preoccupy the police but they ought also to preoccupy the social historian. For in one sense, banditry is a rather primitive form of organized social protest, perhaps the most primitive we know."

Primitive Rebels was first published in 1959, reprinted in 1963 and in 1971. Each edition emphasises that bandits are to be sought in "peasant societies". There is no reference to Australia or Ned Kelly in the book. Hobsbawm wrote another book, *Bandits* (London, 1969). This moves closer to our scene: ". . . banditry is found throughout the Americas, Europe, the Islamic world, South and East Asia and even Australia." Whereas Kelly or Australia have no index entry, Sidney Nolan has. An illustration is captioned, "The Bandit as a symbol: Ned Kelly (1956) by Sidney Nolan, part of a series about the famous bushranger (1854-80) with his home made armor."

There is too the later statement (pp. 112-3) that "the bandit myth is also comprehensible in highly urbanized countries which still possess a few empty spaces of 'outback' or 'west' to remind them of a sometimes imaginary heroic past . . . like Huckleberry Finn, man can still imagine himself 'lighting out' when the constraints of civilisation are too much for him. There the outlaw and bushranger Ned Kelly, still rides, as in the paintings of the Australian Sidney Nolan, a ghostly figure, tragic, menacing and fragile in his home-made armour, crossing and re-crossing the sunbleached Australian hinterland, waiting for death." Accompanying this is a contemporary illustration of a transfixed Ned Kelly, pistol raised, with three hunters shooting at him from behind petrified eucalypts. The end pages carry a companion picture of the Glenrowan pub shoot-out. That is all. The text has no account of the Kelly saga.

In *Bandits* Hobsbawm groped towards Australia. In the 1971 edition of *Primitive Rebels* he states that, "in the light of his subsequent work . . . he would have planned and written it rather differently. Since there are people who still find *Primitive Rebels* interesting, let it stand, until such time as it is possible to scrap the original book entirely, absorbing the material into a larger and more systematic treatment of the great theme of the 'archaic phase' of the history of social movements!"

Perhaps Hobsbawm is queueing up to 'light out' to Australia, from the constraints of Mrs Thatcher's civilisation, now chillingly exhibited by Britain. Meanwhile, John McQuilton has enlarged our bandit scene for him. However, whilst Hobsbawm's sociological generalisations allow elastic measures of personality to a Spanish or Sicilian desperado, the historical geography of McQuilton, his geographical dimensions, are tightly drawn. They constrict personality.

True, there are many occasions when the Kelly gang and their hunters get their heads out of the noose. This is so at times in chapter 3, "Squatters, Duffers and Traps"; chapter 4, "The Kellys, 1841-1878"; particularly so in the second half of the book, commencing with chapter 6, "The Kelly Outbreak, Stage I: Changing Fortunes October-December 1878", through to chapter 10, "The Aftermath, 1880-1887". Within the latter context the book quickens, with swift movement of people towards the Glenrowan engagement, to fears and the acrimonies of the aftermath. But the statement that causes of the Kelly outbreak "lay in the land" (p. 93) is the substratum of the book. There is a top-soil of assiduous research, potentially highly fertile, yet compacted and unexploited, to accord with the character of the basic theory.

It is not till his concluding statement that McQuilton attempts to break away from preoccupation with Hobsbawm: "Lawlessness of the type associated with social banditry could well be more than an aberration associated with peasant societies — it could also be a function of the settlement of the new lands of the nineteenth century where two settlement types are placed officially at odds with each other."

The break should be clearer. Through Hobsbawm, McQuilton interprets the elements of social banditry as essentially related to a rural

setting. He states that Ned Kelly's prestige was based on skills and attitudes important in selector communities but often alien to the north-east towns. He sees the larger urban centres of the region as of peripheral importance, states that they were at a loss to explain the outbreak, became the most strident anti-Kelly group. Did Beechworth, Euroa, Benalla or Wangaratta lack sharp-shooters and flash riders? Were the average townies anti-Kelly? Where is the evidence?

In his preface to this third edition of *Primitive Rebels* (the edition subsequent to that used by McQuilton, but well pre-dating his book) Hobsbawm notes recent studies of urban mobs and riots, observes that "In general historians have followed lines similar to those suggested in this book". New country was opening for Hobsbawm. As for Ned Kelly in the Australian bush, he had not yet explored it.

Consider this assessment by Sir Redmond Barry, in judgment at the trial of Ned Kelly, quoted by McQuilton (p. 172):

> In new communities, where the bonds of society are not as well linked as in older countries, there is unfortunately a class which disregards the evil consequences of crime. Foolish, inconsiderate, ill-conducted, unprincipled youths unfortunately abound, and unless they are made to consider the consequences of crime they are led to imitate notorious felons whom they regard as self made heroes.

This was in October 1880. A century later, on 11 October 1980, I was in Swansea, Wales, rereading *The Kelly Outbreak*. Sandwiched rows of terraced houses were below my window. The people living there were caught in Britain's worst area of unemployment, with daily deterioration. The Western Mail of that day continued the drab chronicle of loss of jobs in Britain — the tally for the day being 4240 "redundancies". The Times carried a report of 6000 demonstrators, many of them teenagers, confronting the Tory Party conference at Brighton, demanding "the right to work". Over 2000 police were there to keep them in order. Four demonstrators penetrated the meeting, interrupting Mrs Thatcher's speech with, "Power for the Workers!" The Iron Lady responded with, "Never mind, it's wet outside, you can't blame them; it's always better where the Tories are." "By that time," said The Times reporter, "one young man near me was being dragged unconscious after a pounding by security men dressed in plain clothes and some conservatives, including women!"

The lesson in relation to Judge Barry is that in times of social distress reaction of the privileged and non-privileged in communities old or new have similarities at many points in history, in town or country. John McQuilton has admirably demonstrated effects of dummying and political pressure by the squattocracy, forcing selectors into poor country; of harassment and persecution through a low calibre police force representing established interests; of consequent reaction of the non-privileged leading to the Kelly outbreak.

However, whereas much of the detail is new, the points have been well made previously, as with Max Brown in his *Australian Son. Ned Kelly*, 1948, which is strangely absent from McQuilton's bibliography. And whereas McQuilton (p. 168) shows great interest in the proposition by Ian Jones, at the Wangaratta Seminar in 1968 on the Kelly outbreak, that Kelly's aspiration was for a republic of Australia, with rebellion commencing at Glenrowan, he does not dismiss the idea. Lacking evidence, he states that it will remain "a controversial one". The question still remains— what would have happened if the police train *had* been derailed? As a different question, widening our geographical dimensions — why, for example, was there no Gippsland Ned Kelly? The geographical and social setting of Gippsland parallels that of the north-east.

In summary, the land played a role, but the real element was people: those of power who framed the laws and applied traditional beliefs from England that property, and human rights, belong to the few who are rich; those who opposed them. As is the case elsewhere, the picture is not strange to Australia, of the past or today. To premise otherwise, as in *The Kelly Outbreak*, introduces the danger of placing an iron mask over Australia, with no Ned Kelly inside it.

Two years ago, papers of Superintendent Francis Hare, who led the police contingent at Glenrowan, were found in a steel box at St Mark's Anglican Church, Fitzroy. Through the agency of Dr John Foster, Department of History, University of Melbourne, they are now in the University Archives. Six of the letters are now published for the first time, unedited, as they were written. Senior Constable 'Blathering' Strahan, cited by John McQuilton as a major cause of the outbreak for saying he would shoot the Kelly gang down "like dogs" (p. 29), is not represented. He was my great-great-grandfather. Possibly he was illiterate — certainly misguided. Detective M. E. Ward, lacking morale, opens the series; Superintendent Nicolson, angry

at being supplanted by Hare, follows; then a pitiable statement by John Sherritt, father of murdered Aaron; next his son John, begging police protection; similarly with Jacob Wilson; and finally Superintendent Sadleir, assuming command after Hare was wounded, and refusing Hare's request for Ned Kelly's armor. The human aspirations, fears and quirks are strong.

Beechworth Police Station
August 7th 1879

Private

Mr. Hare
Sir,

I have been down at Benalla on yesterday and was speaking to Mr. Nicolson about my promotion, he told me he was speaking to the Chief on the day before in Melbourne and that the Chief said he could not see his way clear to promote me over the heads of senior men. The last two promotions from 3rd Class to 2nd . . . are years Junior to me. I have 10 years service on the 1st of October.

However if the Chief Cannot see his way clear to give me the Vacancy Caused by Detective Williams leaving, you might get him to appoint me 2nd Class Without pay until such time as a vacancy might occur as you got him to do for Snr. Constable Mullane Flood & Johnson, if that could be done it would give me a better standing in the District amongst friends in getting information, many of them say to me what is the use of giving information to you. it does you no good you are 10 years in the force and not promoted yet. and it is well known the dangerous position I now occupy dont know what moment I may be shot down by these ruffians I hope and trust you will use your influence with the Chief Commissioner who has always been very kind to me; your puppies are doing well the one I took up you would not know it now it has got so fat. Moses is out in the ranges watching and is in great hopes of having good news shortly he often wishes you back again to the District. I suppose you heard that Joe Byrnes came to sherritts on the evening of the 30th remained for one hour had some dinner and left there is not the slightest doubt but they come back and forward to Mrs. Byrnes.

M E Ward
Det 2358

Benalla Monday
10th May 1880

My dear Hare,

In reply to your letter of 6th I was quite unaware of what was going on in Melbourne, consequently the communication made to me on the morning of Saturday week last, viz: that I was to be withdrawn from the Kelly business and that you were going up to Benalla in my place, took me quite by surprise and I certainly felt indignant and disgusted.

I admit that I did think you had something to do with it — but I feel glad to learn by your letters that you had not — and I am sorry to have done you an injustice.

From the length of time which has elapsed, and from other circumstances, I do not anticipate deriving much kudos even if I am instrumental in bringing the matter to a successful termination.

I need not tell you what misery it has been to me to reside in this district for so many months continuously.

I do not affect to be prompted by higher motives than my neighbours, but to me this Kelly business seems too serious to be trifled with.

If *you* come up here and supersede me, and yet *do not succeed*, then *the deluge* (not for you) for the department. Because the police will be considered played out, and the condemnation of the present organization will follow as a matter of course — what that means in the present state of the country may be easily imagined — unquestionably the change will be a radical one, not that you personally need fear it. As for me I am prepared for anything. The absurdity and injustice of discrediting me because I have been up here for ten months will be apparent enough bye and bye in calmer weather. Here is a simple question of Arithmetic. If A & C with a certain number of assistants failed to catch the Kellys in six months — how many months will it take B to catch them with fewer assistants. The answer is more than *10*! Why should our ship drift into such dangerous waters?

The police are not played out and the organization is not bad and I am confident of success, why should the knowledge and experience I have gained in the case be thrown away, and you, the last card that will be allowed to be played, be brought into the game prematurely, and the risk, run unnecessarily, to the whole force, of the consequences of your not succeeding.

I see much trouble brewing but trust it may

be averted by the speedy capture of the Kellys. Meantime the game is a bad one.

I shall never be induced to go into such an affair again.

I remain

My dear Hare
Very sincerely Yours
C. H. Nicolson

Sheepstation Creek
July 1st 1880

Mr. Hare
Dear Sir

You have heard of the murder of my Dear Son Aaron it Seems the mother or the Son Patsy is not satisfied yet On Monday last Aaron's burial took place on the fowling night — Tuesday night their was five or six signals given about five or six perches of my house those signals is whistles after a little while, came a foot step close to the door so I went out and seen the man running a way could not tell who it was but I have come to the Conclusion it must be the murders Brother Comming to see if my son John was about these signals is the same that burns the murder had when in the ranges it was about eight a clock at night when this took place. the reason of this is on the day of Aaron's funeral it was Commonly reported in Beechworth that it was my son John that shot Burns at Glenrowan but my son John is stooping with the Police in Beechworth and is a fraid to Come home also his Brother William is going up to night to stop with the Police until we hear from you On the Saturday night that Joe Burns murdered Aaron Burns says to Aaron's mother inlaw to send out Johny Sherritt he want him Mrs. Barry said he was not here Send me out William Sherritt She said William was not their my son William was just half an hour left to come home when the murder took place my son — William was working down on the Woolshed he sleps in Aaron's house at night except on a Saturday night when he would Come home to see his mother I have reported those signals to Detective Ward and also to the Police Magistrate on this day the two young lads want to leave the ovens district and made up their mind to join the police John is 21 years William going in to 20 years and if you would be so very kind as to Speak of it to the Chif Commissaer to take them on you — will be the means to Keep them from being murdered. the two lads will have to stop at the Police Camp until the hear from you Detective — Ward was say it would be better for Johny to go to New Zealand and join the Police their but their mother will not let them go their when the learn their drill the could be sent to Gelong where my Brother George was Stationed about Seventeen years ago he was Stationed under Sergent Glass when those boys leaves me I will have none to — help me I have seven Daughters and one Son the son nineteen-months old we give all the information that we could get about the Kelly Gang to — Detective Ward and After all I have lost my Dear Son that I will never forget and it will be the means of shortening my wife's Days Dear Sir I hope you are not seirously — wounded, thank god that the murders is at an end my wife says that you will do what you Can to protect her two boys the are at the Police Camp in Beechworth until the hear from you

I remain Yours
most
Respectfully
John Sherritt

[Hare's note]
Letter from John Sherritt
after Aaron was murdered

Beechworth
July 1st 1880

Mr. Hare Dear Sir I write you these few lines to let you know how I am situated the night that Aaron was Shot Byrne asked if there was any of his brothers in there in the house I am shure if we were he would have murdered us I was down at Glenrowen at the takeing of the outlaws and some one reported about Beechworth that I shot Byrne and Mrs Byrne heard the report and I ask one request of you Sir to give me a Situation at anything because there is no one knows the down that there is on me by the Kelly Sympathisers they would shoot me on the quiet and no one would know who done it I will now conclude hoping Sir you will do something for me

I remain yours
Respectfully
John James Sherritt
Beechworth

[Hare's note]
Letter from Jack Sherritt after
Aaron was shot

Lurge 31st July 1880

Letter from Jacob Wilson

To Superintendent Hare

Sir

I greatly regret to hear that you met with that sad accident being wounded in the execution of your duty at glenrowan I hope it will not be too serious. I now bring before your notice what has transpired up to date the man you despatched to my place on the 14th of June was known by all the people about here having been working at Glenrowan Railway Station and in leaving my place on the day after the Kelly gang was taken it leaves my position criticle as he is spoken of here as a spy he might have stopped here for to or three weeks after the capture of the Kelly's it would not have caused suspition but leaving at the same time it was enough to rise the suspision I most respectfully beg to ask your opinion what best do for I cannot leave my place and will I have to stop here to be shot for you know them brutes gives no warning I have never been in my bed since Kelly was caught but when I had a private conversation with you at Benalla on the 11th of June I promised to do my best providing you secquereg my safety which you promised faithfuly and now as a Gentleman I leave it for your greatest consideration I do not Blame you for the (?) as the news came so unexpected and you had many other things to think upon besides my safety but I hope you will think on me now My Son is living at Glenrowan and eversince a week after the capture of the Kelly's sombody is loitering about the place every night ever since he has been obliged to call the attention of his neighbors for protection he informed Senior Constable Glenny of the matter but could do nothing for him would it be possible that he could join the force as a mounted Constable I now leave the matter for your greatest consideration

Sir

I am your

most obedient servant

Jacob Wilson

[Letterhead crossed out] Police Department
Superintendent's Office

Benalla
5th Aug/1880

My dear Hare

I am in this position about Ned Kelly's armour. If I allow it to leave the Hdquarters of the district, it should I think in all fairness be given to Segt Steele, who arrested Kelly — but there is really no reason in the world why it should leave Benalla, and I should most decidedly object, and I am also quite sure it would cause very great dissatisfaction throughout the police in the district, — of course a temporary loan of the armour to shew to your friends is a different matter. I can send you either of the other suits, or you can take that at the Dst office, to keep altogether at the Depot, where I certainly think one should be as the Hdquarters of the Chief. I hope your wound will soon mend, tho' I suppose you cannot expect for some time longer to be free of pain.

I am up to my eyes in work & see no ending to it — I am just starting for Beechworth.

Yours in haste

J. Sadleir

WESTON BATE

Ned Kelly Rides Again

Weston Bate is professor of Australian Studies at Deakin University. He is well known for his books on the history of Brighton (Victoria) and of Ballarat. Here he reviews John Molony's I am Ned Kelly *(Allen Lane, $19.95).*

Ned Kelly rides in John Molony's heart. He is as free there as he was among the mountains of Victoria's north-east. Although chained to circumstance, to his Irish upbringing in particular, he is shown by Molony to have maintained to the end a striking independence of spirit—an amalgam of the idealism of youth, the defiance of a rebel and the stoicism of a bushman. In narrative-evocational, rather than explanatory-analytical style, Professor Molony traces the unfolding of a tragedy. It is an old-fashioned approach, out of favor with the present generation of modellers and stratifiers, who seek wth surgeons' scalpels to expose structured bones under the flesh of social experience. Molony seeks flesh, shape and movement, not structure. He is also counsel and jury, not judge; and especially counsel, as he says himself:

> The historian, like the lawyer, holds a brief but his is for the dead whose lips are sealed. He is not compelled to pick up that brief but, once done, his task takes on its own sacredness. Only the mute records, the dusty files, the broken down buildings, the tombstones, the editorials of long forgotten newspapers can speak today. In this case the Kelly country with its wild beauty, and some of its people with their reticence and delicacy also helped to break the silence. In the end it all remained a matter of trying to understand, to unravel the tangled skein of a life over which legend cast its spell so that reality had become secondary. The fabric in which I have clothed the story of Ned, of his people, of his time and place was woven deliberately for I could not tell of these things in a broken stammer nor in the dry jargon of a courtroom. In the end it may be the case that in speaking of Ned something has been said of the Australia that made him and which he loved.

The book depends upon recent major analyses like John McQuilton's *The Kelly Outbreak, 1878-80*, and Douglas Morrissey's "Ned Kelly's sympathisers" *(Historical Studies,* October 1978), and Ian Jones' pioneering work on evidence for the episode at Glenrowan, but it is built on new foundations quarried by Molony himself. "Only the mute records, the dusty files, the broken down buildings, the tombstones, the editorials of long forgotten newspapers can speak today," he says. But he knows how to make them talk, especially how to bring together scattered scraps of information hidden in school rolls, newspapers, birth, marriage and death certificates, police, courthouse and other government files. He has a magnificent eye and appetite for detail, especially as it reveals the inner life of his actors. A debt to Manning Clark is everywhere apparent, but most of all in the delineation of a titanic struggle between settlers and the bush and between simple Irish peasant folk and a self-confident Anglo-Saxon capitalist civilization.

For me the most satisfying result of reading the book is the feeling that for two years, during 1878-80, when they were at large, the Kelly Gang gave evidence that as nomads Europeans could be at home in the Australian bush in a way that was not possible to them as exploiters. It is an iconoclastic thought of a kind that only an Aboriginal would be able fully to think, suggesting as it does that the Kelly family's failure as selectors

opened up that greater possibility. Here I am at odds with Molony. Perhaps the answer to the mystery he hopes (p. xiv) his work will help to reveal — why Australians have chosen Ned as part of their common inheritance — is that he was free and was clobbered for it by those who believed that every man should be tied to a workaday world. For he was especially free of that longing for freedom *and* land which Molony posits as the great dream of our national birth and early development. Surely, possession of a modicum of land in Australia made one a slave to it and a violator of it; possession of a lot made one insensitive to it; so Ned, who, throughout the pages of this book and any other that I have encountered, never raised a finger to plough, sow or reap the selection, to tend its stock or do domestic chores, was the free rider of a later myth, and therefore more suited to anthropological than historical explanation. He is of spiritual not material significance, and I, for one, delight in the fact that in so materialist a civilization such a man should be a hero. He would have been just that in the A.I.F., for he had in abundance all the qualities hallowed there, and was similarly remote from the mundane getting and spending of ordinary life.

In historical terms, though, Kelly's freedom from economic constraints was bought at the price of being hunted. He was free in the bush in a way not possible to a struggling selector, but was potentially in chains and was pushed to his crude republican dream and to his last stand as the only means to maintain his freedom. Molony sees the move towards that position as a kind of madness, suggesting that by the time of the Jerilderie raid he had left the realms of ordinary discourse.

A great strength of the book is the treatment of, first, the Quinn, Kelly, Lloyd clan relationships and, later, the Kelly gang — both in opposition to the police. Although it is never openly argued, only narrated, Ned is seen primarily as a product of his extended family. He was pushed outside the law at the age of eleven — either because he had been forced to lie to establish an alibi for his uncle Jim Quinn, or because the uncle was convicted for an offence Ned knew he had not committed. Molony argues (and the reader will find on many such matters that the notes contain discussion absent from the text) that the family was persecuted: "To them all, it had begun to appear that to be a Kelly, a Lloyd or a Quinn was in itself as effective as branding a steer". Painstaking research of sparse family records yields patterns of bog-Irish on the make. Old Quinn, still rough-hewn, rose by cunning and even by work to the ranks of squatters in the north-east, but only sustained that position by cattle-duffing and a trade in stolen horses. In contrast to the law-suits and property squabbles of the Anglo-Saxon establishment the Celts clashed physically with their kin, and only (and not always then) closed ranks against the police. Their ambivalence is evidenced many times, most strikingly when Pat Quinn (was it for the £100 reward?) offered to lead police to Ned, when they were seeking him on a manufactured charge of the attempted murder of Constable Fitzpatrick.

The making of Ned Kelly is also a story of police harassment. The branding of the clan meant that police treatment of Ned was usually of the hit first, ask questions afterwards variety, in a general vigilance about the rights of property generated by senior policemen who maintained close connections with landed society. Molony shows, more clearly than anyone before him, how strong this pattern of behavior was in the north-east. The mistreatment of the Irish and other underdogs bred a resentment that (like the prelude to Eureka) took new strength from specific cases. The tragic slaughter of a derelict R.C. priest from the Wangaratta area by N.S.W. police, who were exonerated from blame, discredited in general colonial methods of social control:

> such indiscriminate slaughter of a man totally innocent of the paltry crime involved, gave pause for thought to those in the northeast, and especially those about Greta who were given to infraction of the law. It was all one with the pattern the clan had become accustomed to from the early days of Kilmore, a pattern which hitherto had not resulted in death, although Ned had narrowly escaped at the hands of Hall. But it stood there as a lesson and a grim warning, for who could suppose that given a heated moment the Victorian police would be less inclined to slaughter than their fellows across the river?

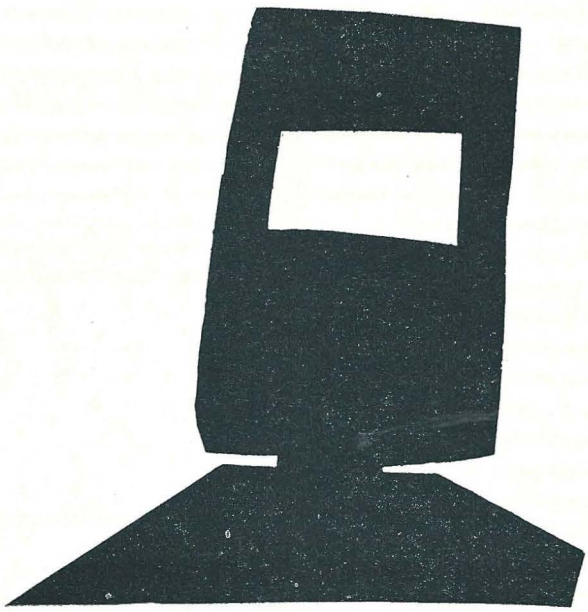
However convincing the narrative — and, despite some quaintly archaic prose, it is convincing — one is left wondering at the end of the book just what was Kelly's psychological development. A kind of madness is hinted at, and an emotional transition is described, using Ned's own outbursts and actions as the most accurate indication of his mood and motivation. The aftermath of that first event in the making of

Kelly the outlaw, the visit of Constable Fitzpatrick, the liar, to the Kelly home, is linked by Molony through Ned's later justifications and protestations to his conviction that the police would shoot him like a dog.

> After the arrest of my mother there was none of our family left but five sisters. The police would come to the house, Inspector Brooke Smith in particular who has since been discharged for his cowardly conduct towards my family. They used to search the place and destroy all the provisions by emptying them out on the floor. He would say to my sisters, 'See all the Police I have out today. I will have as many out tomorrow. We will blow your brothers into pieces as small as the paper that is in our guns'. Some told my sisters that they would not ask their brothers to stand as they knew they intended to fight. They would shoot them first and then tell them to stand afterwards.

So the reader is guided through evidence of biased justice to the well-known finale at Glenrowan, where, at length, Ned's flamboyance had to disappear. Even if he had succeeded in ambushing the police train and taking the Governor hostage, the convivial mood that had been generated during the bank hold-ups at Euroa and Jerilderie, and for a whole day at Mrs Jones' hotel in Glenrowan, was due to end.

His large-heartedness and aplomb, his coolness and tactical grasp, depended upon his superiority as a regional bushman dealing with a centralised police bureaucracy. The provenance of 'I am a widow's son outlawed and my orders must be obeyed' was restricted. But, as Professor Molony has shown, the echoes can reach out across a century and grab Australians by the throat. Who among us has stood out against oppression with the courage and flair of that boy from Greta?



VINCENT BUCKLEY

Ned Kelly

Vincent Buckley, the well-known poet and critic, is Professor of English at the University of Melbourne.

Romsey, where I was born and brought up, was just below the southmost tip of the Kelly country; but Kilmore, which was the town of my father's preference, and to which I would go for holidays, was somehow firmly inside it. Even when I was a child, that seemed strange to me, for the two places were linked by a set of easily negotiable roads. And Beveridge, Wallan, Kilmore, Broadford, all staging-places on the historical road to Greta, Beechworth and Glenrowan: segments of Kelly country. But what was Kelly country?

It might have been the area in which the Kellys operated; or it might have been the area in which they had sympathisers, in which they meant something. Under whichever interpretation, Romsey was not Kelly country; but it was polemically close to it.

On the other hand, I do not remember people in our town discussing Ned Kelly, or arguing about him; perhaps the religious and racial balance in the town was too delicate, perhaps it was too long after the event (after all, it was more than fifty years after Ned's execution, and the middle of the great depression), perhaps the local Irish were chiefly of a sort which would not so much conceal as suppress any sympathy with the Kellys—respectable farmers, tradesmen and shopkeepers, for example. Like everyone else, they said "Game as Ned Kelly", but I think they did not worry much about him.

They did not *need* to discuss him; people of different persuasions did not argue about him, because there was no issue between them of which he could be the focus. The attitude of many of them to the whole story was one of unsceptical, unspeaking awe; in their non-analytical way (for they were readers, but in a oral, yarning tradition), they knew what was at stake.

For example, I do not remember my parents speaking to me of the Kellys. I now realise that they would not have seen themselves as being *like* the Kellys, or as having anything like the same anarchistic basically irredentist interests. They were Labor people, landless certainly, but represented by a political party, ideology, and tradition. At the same time, they would not have denied sympathy to the Kellys on that score; for they would have recognised that they *were* the same people, and the same class, even if in very different stages of formation and reformation.

I picked up Kenneally's book *The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang* from a shearing-shed. It was well-thumbed and minus its cover. The very title was intriguing; the notion of a history both "complete" and "inner" appealed to a boy of about 10, even more so when it proved favorable to the Irish. I read in it, breathless, that one ground of complaint against the police was a harassing of Kate Kelly in a pub in Lancefield. This was the town next to us, and my father had often drunk in that very pub. Independent of Kenneally's book and of my imaginings derived from it, I heard at this time the legend of Dan Kelly's survival: another Irish-Australian boy murmured to me, "They say Dan Kelly never died." "What do you mean?" "They say he got out of the fire alive."

This was the simplest statement of a legend which had survived for more than half a century. Tim Kelly, who comes from Corowa, had often heard it. Ian Jones in the 1960s cites anonymous letters that give suggestive if not exactly persuasive claims that the legend is true; the interesting thing about them is that they claim to have identified the survivor, and they cite claim-

ants to that title. The matter, whether in its scattier or in its most tentative version, is "Arthurian"; and, as the Arthurian legends do, it echoes elements of the resurrectional central myth of Christianity.

If one thinks of Ned Kelly now, it is not for the purpose of arguing whether or not he was an admirable man, although astute commentators like Ian Jones certainly think he was. But he is certainly a mythic figure, fit to have legends accrete to him. Arguments about his legendary and/or mythic status are merely confused by arguments about his moral worthiness or the justification for his actions; legends, while they will be told for centuries only if people have an interest in the subject and so in some sense approve of some of the actors in its drama, are in the short term independent of moral reasoning. For example, Ned's leaving of the burning hotel and passing through the police lines is seen by a recent police commentator as evidence of his cowardice and willingness to desert his mates; Ian Jones sees it as an act of moral heroism, of willingness to bear the burden himself and not to impose it on his supporters. Two interpretations of the one face here grow towards two opposing legends.

The legend as Jones sees it contributes to a myth. For a writer like Mircea Eliade, the prototype myth, which is one of origins, shows "myth" establishing images of unity and of representative action. Jones and, following him, McQuilton obviously see the Kelly myth in these terms; and they reason very powerfully and eloquently for their view. Where the people are oppressed or disadvantaged, the hero will often be seen as representing them by *bearing* and *avenging* their wrongs; it is they, and not simply later generations, who create the myth, which is one of their own communal nature and needs. In such a myth, the hero may also of course *go too far,* and in doing so meet a fate which they are then enabled to avoid. Jones and McQuilton both show this dimension in the Kelly story. The details of such a fate are awesome, and may induce both superstitious exaltation and gloom. The demeanor of the hero in meeting his fate will then become the dramatic basis for establishing the myth, and the dramatic mode for remembering it. That is why the whole scenario of the Glenrowan siege, including the dancing, the fire, the encirclement, the darkness and the armor, is crucial to the Kelly myth. Without it, the legends could hardly have persisted with such compelling force.

All of these features of myth are present in the Kelly story, most markedly from the very moment that Ned became an outlaw; the method of his outlawry is also part of the myth. McQuilton makes beautifully clear what sort of myth it was, and in what its representativeness consisted and consists, while Jones was his precursor in much of the analysis. McQuilton also suggests intriguingly that Ned was aware from the start of the mythic possibilities in his own situation. Heroes (military men, explorers, but also politicians like Whitlam) are often aware of their future name in this way. 'After ages' will show what they were; or *Postera crescam laude,* as Justice Redmond Barry might have reflected, but probably did not. The armor, the Jerilderie letter, the Glenrowan assembly, are all highly imaginative features in the staging of a mythic drama, as well as phases in the development of an heroic action. I think of McQuilton's magnificent image of Ned Kelly at Glenrowan, in the half-dark, watching the police, or making a ringing sound by drumming on his armor with his revolver-butt. And I think it was no accident that, in the Jerilderie letter, he wrote his own prose ballad, the literary perspective in which he was to be seen.

Jones of course argues that all these dramatic lights, these features of the final staging, are not merely histrionic but show the nature of the Kelly venture and the character of Ned Kelly himself. He is clearly right, for Glenrowan was not intended to be an end but a new phase in the historical action. At what moment Ned converted plan into self-consummating event is a matter for speculation, if indeed that is what he did. And, as we know, he continued the drama, and extended the myth, by his demeanor in the dock. No doubt he was not the sort of person who helped a nation to "come of age"; but he may have helped some of us to grow up.

NED KELLY

The Jerilderie Letter

Late on the evening of 8 February 1879 the Kelly Gang rode into Jerilderie. They took over the town, robbed the bank and provided free drinks for the local boozers. Ned Kelly, failing to find Samuel Gill, editor of the Jerilderie Herald and Urana Gazette *(who had wisely bolted), handed what came to be known as "Jerilderie Letter" to a bank teller, Edwin Living, with instructions to deliver it to the editor for publication. This was one of the main purposes of the raid. The letter was not published in Kelly's time, but it is regarded as his major testament — and as a remarkable piece of demotic writing.*

Dear Sir,

I wish to acquaint you with some of the occurrences of the present past and future.

In or about the spring of 1870 the ground was very soft a hawker named Mr Gould got his waggon bogged between Greta and my mother's house on the eleven mile creek, the ground was that rotten it would bog a duck in places so Mr. Gould had abandon his waggon for fear of loosing his horses in the spewy ground he was stopping at my mothers awaiting finer or dryer weather Mr. McCormack and his wife hawkers also were camped in Greta the mosquitoes were very bad which they generally are in a wet spring and to help them Mr. Johns had a horse called ruila cruta although a gelding was as clever as old Wombat or any other stallion at running horses away and taking them on his beat which was from Greta swamp to the seven mile creek consequently he enticed McCormacks horse away from Greta.

Mr. Gould was up early feeding his horses heard a bell and seen McCormack horse for he knew the horse well he sent his boy to take him back to Greta.

When McCormack's got the horse they came straight out to Goold and accused him of working the horse; this was false and Goold was amazed at the idea I could not help laughing to hear Mrs. McCormack accusing him of using the horse after him being so kind as to send his boy to take him from the ruta cruta and take him back to them.

I pleaded Goulds innocence and Mrs McCormack turned on me and accused me of bringing the horse from Greta to Goold's waggon to pull him out of the bog I did not say much to the woman as my mother was present but the same day me and my uncle was cutting calves Gould wrapped up a note and a pair of the calves testicles and gave them to me to give them to Mrs McCormack. I did not see her and gave the parcel to a boy to give to her when she would come instead of giving it to her he gave it to her husband consequently McCormack said he would summons me I told him neither me nor Goold used their horse.

he said I was a liar and he could welt me or any of my breed I was about 14 years of age but accepted the challenge and dismounting when Mrs McCormack struck my horse in the flank with a bullocks skin it jumped forward and my fist came in collision with McCormack's nose and caused him to loose his equilibrium and fall postrate I tied up my horse to finish the battle but McCormack got up and ran to the Police camp.

Constable Hall asked me what the row was about. I told him they accused me and Gould of using their horse and I hit him and would do the same to him if he challenged me McCormack pulled me and swore their lies against me

I was sentenced to three months for hitting him and three months for the parcel and bound to keep the peace for 12 months.

Mrs McCormack gave good substantial evi-

dence as she is well acquainted with that place called Tasmania better known as the Dervon or Vandiemens land and McCormack being a Police man over the convicts and women being scarce released from that land of bondage and tyranny, and they came to Victoria and are at present residents of Greta and on the 29th of March I was released from prison and came home Wild Wright came to the eleven mile to see Mr Gunn stopped all night and lost his mare both him and me looked all day for her and could not get her Wright who was a stranger to me was in a hurry to get back to Mansfield and I gave him another mare and he told me if I found his mare to keep her until he brought mine back.

I was going to Wangaratta and saw the mare and I caught her and took her with me all the Police and Detective Berrill seen her as Martins girls used to ride her about the town during several days I stopped at Petre Martains Star Hotel in Wangaratta, she was a chestnut mare white face docked tail very remarkable branded (M) as plain as the hands on a town clock, the property of a Telegraph Master in Mansfield, he lost her on the 6th gazetted her on the 12th of March and I was a prisoner in Beechworth Gaol until the 29 of March therefore I could not have stole the mare.

I was riding the mare through Greta Constable Hall came to me and said he wanted me to sign some papers that I did not sign at Beechworth concerning my bail bonds I thought it was the truth he said the papers was at the Barracks and I had no idea he wanted to arrest we or I would have quietly rode away instead of going to the Barracks.

I was getting off when Hall caught hold of me and thought to throw me but made a mistake and came on the broad of his back himself in the dust the mare galloped away and instead of me putting my foot on Halls neck and taking his revolver and putting him in the lock up. I tried to catch the mare. Hall got up and snapped three or four caps at me and would have shot me but the colts patent refused.

This is well known in Greta Hall never told me he wanted to arrest me until after he tried to shoot me when I heard the caps snapping I stood until Hall came close he had me covered and was shaking with fear and I knew he would pull the trigger before he would be game to put his hand on me so I duped and jumped at him caught the revolver with one hand and Hall by the collar with the other.

I dare not strike him or my sureties would loose the bond money I used to trip him and let him take a mouth ful or saw dust now and again as he was as helpless as a big guano after leaving a dead bullock or horse.

I kept throwing him in the dust until I got him across the street the very spot where Mrs O'Briens Hotel stands now the cellar was just dug then there was some brush fencing where the post and rail was taking down and on this I threw the big cowardly Hall on his belly I straddled him and rooted both spurs into his thighs he roared like a big calf attacked by dogs and shifted several yards of fence I got his hands at the back of his neck and tried to make him let the revolver go but he stuck to it like grim death to a dead volunteer he called for assistance to a man named Cohen and Barnett, Lewis, Thompson, Jewitt two blacksmiths who was looking on I dare not strike any of them as I was bound to keep the peace or I could have spread those curs like dung in a paddock.

they got ropes tied my hands and feet and Hall beat me over the head with his six chambered colts revolver nine stitches were put in some of the cuts by Dr Hastings And when Wild Wright and my mother came they could trace us across the street by the blood in the dust and which spoiled the lustre of the paint on the gate-post of the Barracks Hall sent for more Police and Doctor Hastings Next morning I was handcuffed a rope tied from them to my legs and to the seat of the cart and taken to Wangaratta Hall was frightened I would throw him out of the cart so he tied me whilst Constable Arthur laughed at his cowardice for it was he who escorted me and Hall to Wangaratta.

I was tried and committed as Hall swore I claimed the mare the Doctor died or he would have proved Hall a perjurer Hall has been tried several times for perjury but got clear as this is no crime in the Police force it is a credit to a Policeman to convict an innocent man but any mutt can pot a guilty one Halls character is well known about El Dorado and Snowy Creek and Hall was considerably in debt to Mr L. O.Brien and he was going to leave Greta Mr O'Brien seen no other chance of getting his money so there was a subscription collected for Hall and with the aid of this money he got James Murdock who was recently hung in Wagga Wagga to give false evidence against me but I was acquitted on the charge of horsestealing and on Hall and Murdocks evidence I was found guilty of receiving and got 3 years experience in Beechworth Pentridges dungeons. this is the only charge ever

proved against me Therefore I can say I never was convicted of horse or cattle stealing

My Brother Dan was never charged with assaulting a woman but he was sentenced to three months without the option of a fine and one month and two pound fine for damaging property by Mr. Butler P.M. a sentence that there is no law to uphold therefore the minister of Justice neglected his duty in that case, but there never was such a thing as justice in the English laws but any amount of injustice to be had. Out of over thirty head of the very best horses the land could produce I could only find one when I got my liberty.

Constable Flood stole and sold the most of them to the navvies on the railway line one bay cob he stole and sold four different times the line was completed and the men all gone when I came out and Flood was shifted to Oxley.

he carried on the same game there all the stray horses that was any time without an owner and not in the Police Gazette Flood used to claim He was doing a good trade at Oxley until Mr Brown of the Laceby Station got him shifted as he was always running his horses about.

Flood is different to Sergeant Steel, Strachan, Hall and the most of Police a they have got to hire cads and if they fail the police are quite helpless. But Flood can make a cheque single-handed he is the greatest horsestealer with the exception of myself and George King I know of.

I never worked on a farm a horse and saddle was never traced to me after leaving employment since February 1873 I worked as a faller at Mr J. Saunders and R Rules sawmills then for Heach and Dockendorf I never worked for less than two pound ten a week since I left Pentridge and in 1875 or 1876 I was overseer for Saunders and Rule. Bourkes water-holes sawmills in Victoria since then I was on the King river. during my stay there I ran in a wild bull which I gave to Lydicher a farmer he sold him to Carr a Publican and Butcher who killed him for beef, sometime afterwards I was blamed for stealing this bull from James Whitty Boggy Creek I asked Whitty Oxley racecourse why he blamed me for stealing his bull

he said he had found his bull and never blamed me but his son-in-law Farrell told him he heard I sold the bull to Carr not long afterwards I heard again I was blamed for stealing a mob of calves from Whitty and Farrell which I knew nothing about. I began to think they wanted me to give them something to talk about. Therefore I started wholesale and retail horse and cattle dealing Whitty and Burns not being satisfied with all the picked land on the Boggy Creek and King River and the run of their stock on certificate ground free and no one interfering with them paid heavy rent to the banks for all the open ground so as a poor man could keep no stock, and impounded every beast they could get even off Government roads.

If a poor man happened to leave his horse or a bit of a poddy calf outside his paddock they would be impounded.

I have known over 60 head of horses impounded in one day by Whitty and Burns all belonging to poor farmers they would have to leave their ploughing or harvest or other employment to go to Oxley.

when they would get there perhaps not have money enough to release them and have to gave a bill of sale or borrow money which is no easy matter and along with this sort of work, Farrell the Policeman stole a horse from George King and had him in Whitty and Farrell's Paddocks until he left the force

and all this was the cause of me and my step-father George King taking their horses and selling them to Baumgarten and Kennedy.

the pick of them was taken to a good market and the culls were kept in Petersons paddock and their brands altered by me two was sold to Kennedy and the rest to Baumgarten who were strangers to me and I believe honest men.

They paid me full value for the horses and could not have known they were stolen.

no person had anything to do with the stealing and selling of the horses but me and George King.

William Cooke who was convicted for Whitty's horses was innocent he was not in my company at Petersons. But it is not the place of the Police to convict guilty men as it is by them they get their living had the right parties been convicted it would have been a bad job for the Police as Berry would have sacked a great many of them only I came to their aid and kept them in their bilits and good employment and got them double pay and yet the ungrateful articles convicted my mother and an infant my brother-in-law and another man who was innocent and still annoy my brothers and sisters and the ignorant unicorns even threaten to shoot myself But as soon as I am dead they will be heels up in the muroo. there will be no more police required they will be sacked and supplanted by soldiers on low pay in the towns and special constables made of

some of the farmers to make up for this double pay and expense.

It will pay Government to give those people who are suffering innocence, justice and liberty. if not I will be compelled to show some colonial strategm which will open the eyes of not only the Victoria Police and inhabitants but also the whole British army and now doubt they will acknowledge their hounds were barking at the wrong stump and that Fitzpatrick will be the cause of greater slaughter to the Union Jack than Saint Patrick was to the snakes and toads in Ireland.

The Queen of England was as guilty as Baumgarten and Kennedy Williamson and Skillion of what they were convicted for when the horses were found on the Murray River I wrote a letter to Mr Swanhill of Lake Rowan to acquaint the Auctioneer and to advertize my horses for sale I brought some of them to that place but did not sell I sold some of them in Benalla Melbourne and other places and left the colony and became a rambling gambler soon after I left there was a warrant for me and the Police searched the place and watched night and day for two or three weeks and when they could not snare me they got a warrant against my brother Dan And on the 15th of April Fitzpatrick came to the eleven mile creek to arrest him he had some conversation with a horse dealer whom he swore was William Skillion this man was not called in Beechworth besides several other witnesses, who alone could have proved Fitzpatricks falsehood after leaving this man he went to the house asked was dan in Dan came out I hear previous to this Fitzpatrick had some conversation with Williamson on the hill. he asked Dan to come to Greta with him as he had a warrant for him for stealing Whitty's horses Dan said all right they both went inside Dan was having something to eat his mother asked Fitzpatrick what he wanted Dan for the trooper said he had a warrant for him Dan then asked him to produce it he said it was only a telegram sent from Chiltern but Sergeant Whelan ordered him to relieve Steel at Greta and call and arrest Dan and take him in to Wangaratta next morning and get him remanded Dans mother said Dan need not go without a warrant unless he liked and that the trooper had no business on her premises without some authority besides his own word.

The trooper pulled out his revolver and said he would blow her brains out if she interfered in the arrest she told him it was a good job for him Ned was not there or he would ram his revolver down his throat Dan looked out and said Ned is coming now, the trooper being off his guard looked out and when Dan got his attention drawn he dropped the knife and fork which showed he had no murderous intent and slapped Heenan's hug on him took his revolver and kept him there until Skillion and Ryan came with horses which Dan sold that night.

The trooper left and invented some scheme to say that he got shot which any man can see is false, he told Dan to clear out that Sergeant Steel and Detective Brown and Strachan would be there before morning Strachan had been over the Murray trying to get up a case against him and they would convict him if they caught him as the stock society offored an enticement for witnesses to swear anything and the germans over the Murray would swear to the wrong man as well as the right.

Next day Williamson and my mother was arrested and Skillion the day after who was not there at all at the time of the row which can be proved by 8 or 9 witnesses and the Police got great credit and praise in the papers for arresting the mother of 12 children one an infant on her breast and those two quiet hard working innocent men who would not know the difference a revolver and a saucepan handle and kept them six months awaiting trial and then convicted them on the evidence of the meanest article that ever the sun shone on it seems that the jury was well chosen by the Police as there was a discharged Sergeant amongst them which is contrary to law they thought it impossible for a Policeman to swear a lie but I can assure them it was by that means and hiring cads they get promoted I have heard from a trooper that he never knew Fitzpatrick to be one night sober and that he sold his sister to a chinaman but he looks a young strapping rather genteel more fit to be a starcher to a laundress than a policeman For to a keen observer he has the wrong appearance for a manly heart the deceit and cowardice is too plain to be seen in the puny cabbage hearted looking face.

I heard nothing of this transaction until very close on the trial I being then over 400 miles from Greta when I heard I was outlawed and a hundred pound reward for me for shooting a trooper in Victoria and a hundred pound for any man that could prove a conviction of horse-stealing against me so I came back to Victoria knew I would get no justice if I gave myself up I enquired after my brother Dan and found him digging on Bullock Creek heard how the Police used to be blowing that they would not ask me

to stand they would shoot me first and then cry surrender and how they used to rush into the house upset all the milk dishes break tins of eggs empty the flour out of bags onto the ground and even the meat out of the cask and destroy all the provisions and shove the girls in front of them into the rooms like dogs so as if anyone was there they would shoot the girls first but they knew well I was not there or I would have scattered their blood and brains like rain I would manure the Eleven Mile with their bloated carcasses and yet remember there is not one drop of murderous blood in my veins

Superintendent Smith used to say to my sisters see all the men all I have out today I will have as many more tomorrow and we will blow him into pieces as small as paper that is in our guns Detective Ward and Constable Hayes took out their revolvers and threatened to shoot the girls and children in Mrs Skillions absence the greatest ruffians and murderers no matter how deprived would not be guilty of such a cowardly action, and this sort of cruelty and disgraceful and cowardly conduct to my brothers and sisters who had no protection coupled with the conviction of my mother and those men certainly made my blood boil and I don't thing there is a man born could have the patience to suffer it as long as I did or ever allow his blood to get cold while such insults as these were unavenged and yet in every paper that is printed I am called the blackest and coldest blooded murderer ever on record But if I hear any more of it I will not exactly show them what cold blooded murder is but wholesale and retail slaughter something different to shooting three troopers in self defence and robbing a bank. I would have been rather hot blooded to throw down my rifle and let them shoot me and my innocent brother. they were not satisfied with frightening my sisters night and day and destroying their provisions and lagging my mother and infant and those innocent men but should follow me and my brother into the wilds where he had been quietly digging neither molesting or interfering with anyone he was making good wages as the creek is very rich within half a mile from where I shot Kennedy. I was not there long and on the 25th of October I came on Police tracks between Table top and the bogs. I crossed them and returning in the evening I came on a different lot of tracks making for the shingle hut I went to our camp and told my brother and his two mates. me and my brother went and found their camp at the shingle hut about a mile from my brothers house. We saw they carried long firearms and we knew our doom was sealed if we could not beat those before the others would come as I knew the other party of Police would soon join them and if they came on us at our camp they would shoot us down like dogs at our work as we had only two guns we thought it best to try and bail those up, take their firearms and ammunition and horses and we could stand a chance with the rest We approached the spring as close as we could get to the camp as the intervening space being clear ground and no battery we saw two men at the logs they got up and one took a double barreled fowling piece and fetched a horse down and hobbled him at the tent we thought there were more men in the tent asleep those outside being on sentry we could have shot two men without speaking but not wishing to take their lives we waited McIntyre laid his gun against a stump and Lonigan sat on the log I advanced, my brother Dan keeping McIntyre covered which he took to be Constable Flood and had he not obeyed my orders, or attempted to reach for the gun or draw his revolver he would have been shot dead. but when I called on them to throw up their hands McIntyre obeyed and Lonigan ran some six or seven yards to a battery of logs instead of dropping behind the one he was sitting on, he had just got to the logs and put his head up to take aim when I shot him that instant or he would have shot me as I took him for Strachan the man who said he would not ask me to stand he would shoot me first like a dog. But it happened to be Lonigan the man who in company with Sergeant Whelan Fitzpatrick and King the Bootmaker and Constable O'Day that tried to put a pair of handcuffs on me in Benalla but could not and had to allow McInnes the miller to put them on, previous to Fitzpatrick swearing he was shot, I was fined two pounds for hitting Fitzpatrick and two pounds for not allowing five curs like Sergeant Whelan O'Day Fitzpatrick King and Lonigan who caught me by the privates and would have sent me to Kingdom come only I was not ready and he is the man that blowed before he left Violet Town if Ned Kelly was to be shot he was the man would shoot him and no doubt he would shoot me even if I threw up my arms and laid down as he knew four of them could not arrest me single handed not to talk of the rest of my mates, also either he or me would have to die, this he knew well therefore he had a right to keep out of my road, Fitzpatrick is the only one I hit out of the five in Benalla, this shows my feeling towards him as he said we were

good friends and even swore it but he was the biggest enemy I had in the country with the exception of Lonigan and he can be thankful I was not there when he took a revolver and threatened to shoot my mother in her own house it is not true I fired three shots and missed him at a yard and a half I don't think I would use a revolver to shoot a man like him when I was within a yard and a half of him or attempt to fire into a house where my mother brothers and sisters was and according to Fitzpatricks statement all around him a man that is such a bad shot as to miss a man three times at a yard and a half would never attempt to fire into a house among a house full of women and children while I had a pair of arms and bunch of fives at the end of them they never failed to peg out anything they came in contact with and Fitzpatrick knew the weight of one of them only too well as it run up against him once in Benalla and cost me two pound odd as he is very subject to fainting. As soon as I shot Lonigan he jumped up and staggered some distance from the logs with his hands raised and then fell he surrendered but too late I asked McIntyre who was in the tent he replied no one. I advanced and took possession of their two revolvers and fowling piece which I loaded with bullets instead of shot.

I asked McIntyre where his mates was he said they had gone down the creek and he did not expect them that night he asked me was I going to shoot him and his mates. I told him no I would shoot no man if he gave up his arms and leave the force he said the police all knew Fitzpatrick had wronged us and he intended to leave the force as he had bad health and his life was insured he told me he intended going home and that Kennedy and Scanlon were out looking for our camp and also about the other Police he told me the N.S.W. Police had shot a man for shooting Sergeant Walling I told him if they did they had shot the wrong man and I expect your gang came to do the same with me he said no they did not come to shoot me they came to apprehend me I asked him what they carried spencer rifles and breech loading fowling pieces and so much ammunition for as the Police was only supposed to carry one revolver and 6 cartridges in the revolver but they had eighteen rounds of revolver cartridges each three dozen for the fowling piece and twenty one spencer rifle cartridges and God knows how many they had away with the rifle this looked as if they meant not only to shoot me but to riddle me but I don't know either Kennedy Scanlon or him and had nothing against them, he said he would get them to give up their arms if I would not shoot them as I could not blame them, they had to do their duty I said I did not blame them for doing honest duty but I could not suffer them blowing me to pieces in my own native land and they knew Fitzpatrick wronged us and why not make it public and convict him but no they would rather riddle poor unfortunate creoles. but they will rue the day ever Fitzpatrick got among them. Our two mates came over when they heard the shot fired but went back again for fear the Police might come to our camp while we were all away and manure bullock flat with us on our arrival I stopped at the logs and Dan went back to the spring for fear the troopers would come in that way but I soon heard them coming up the creek I told McIntyre to tell them to give up their arms, he spoke to Kennedy who was some distance in front of Scanlon he reached for his revolver and jumped off, on the offside of his horse and got behind a tree when I called on them to throw up their arms and Scanlon who carried the rifle slewed his horse around to gallop away but the horse would not go and as quick as thought fired at me with the rifle without unslinging it and was in the act of firing again when I had to shoot him and he fell from his horse.

I could have shot them without speaking but their lives was no good to me. McIntyre jumped on Kennedys horse and I allowed him to go as I did not like to shoot him after he surrendered or I would have shot him as he was between me and Kennedy therefore I could not shoot Kennedy without shooting him first. Kennedy kept firing from behind the tree my brother Dan advanced and Kennedy ran I followed him he stopped behind another tree and fired again. I shot him in the arm pit and he dropped his revolver and ran I fired again with the gun as he slewed around to surrender. I did not know he had dropped his revolver, the bullet passed through the right side of his chest and he could not live or I would have let him go had they been my own brothers I could not help shooting them or else let them shoot me which they would have done had their bullets been directed as they intended them. But as for handcuffing Kennedy to a tree or cutting his ear off or brutally treating any of them is a falsehood if Kennedy's ear was cut off it was not done by me and none of my mates was near him after he was shot I put his cloak over him and left him as well as I could and where they my own brothers I could not

have been more sorry for them this cannot be called wilful murder for I was compelled to shoot them, or lie down and let them shoot me it would not be wilful murder if they packed our remains in, shattered into a mass of animated gore to Mansfield, they would have got great praise and credit as well as promotion but I am reconed a horrid brute because I had not been cowardly enough to lie down for them under such trying circumstances and insults to my people certainly their wives and children are to be pitied but they must remember those men came into the bush with the intention of scattering pieces of me and my brother all over the bush and yet they know and acknowledge I have been wronged and my mother and four or five men lagged innocent and is my brothers and sisters and my mother not to be pitied also who has no alternative only to put up with the brutal and cowardly conduct of a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splay-footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or english landlords which is better known as officers of Justice or Victorian Police who some calls honest gentlemen but I would like to know what business an honest man would have in the Police as it is an old saying it takes a rogue to catch a rogue and a man that knows nothing about roguery would never enter the force and take an oath to arrest brother sister father or mother if required and to have a case and conviction if possible any man knows it is possible to swear a lie and if a policeman looses a conviction for the sake of swearing a lie he has broke his oath therefore he is a perjuror either ways, a Policeman is a disgrace to his country not alone to the mother that suckled him, in the first place he is a rogue in his heart but too cowardly to follow it up without having the force to disguise it. Next he is a traitor to his country ancestors and religion as they were all catholics before the Saxons and Cranmore yoke held sway since then they were persecuted massacred thrown into martyrdom and tortured beyond the ideas of the present generation. What would people say if they saw a strapping big lump of an Irishman shepherding sheep for fifteen bob a week or tailing turkeys in Tallarook ranges for a smile from Julia or even begging his tucker, they would say he ought to be ashamed of himself and tar-feather him. But he would be a king to a policeman who for a lazy loafing cowardly bilit left the ash corner deserted the shamrock, the emblem of true wit and beauty to serve under a flag and nation that has destroyed massacreed and murdered their fore-fathers by the greatest of torture as rolling them down hill in spiked barrels pulling their toe and finger nails and on the wheel and every torture imaginable more was transported to Van Diemen's Land to pine their young lives away in starvation and misery among tyrants worse than the promised hell itself all of true blood bone and beauty, that was not murdered on their own soil, or had fled to America or other countries to bloom again another day were doomed to Port McQuarie Toweringabbie Norfolk island and Emu plains and in those places of tyrany and condemnation many a blooming Irishman rather than subdue to the Saxon yoke were flogged to death and bravely died in servile chains but true to the shamrock and a credit to Paddys land What would people say if I became a policeman and took an oath to arrest my brothers and sisters and relations and convict them by fair or foul means after the conviction of my mother and the persecutions and insults offered to myself and people Would they say I was a decent gentleman and yet a policeman is still in worse and guilty of meaner actions than that The Queen must surely be proud of such heroic men as the Police and Irish soldiers as It takes eight or eleven of the biggest mud crushers in Melbourne to take one poor little half starved larrakin to a watchhouse. I have seen as many as eleven, big and ugly enough to lift Mount Macedon out of a crab hole more like the species of a baboon or Guerilla than a man actually come into a court house and swear they could not arrest one eight stone larrakin and them armed with battens and niddies without some civilians assistance and some of them going to the hospital from the effects of hits from the fists of the larrakin and the Magistrate would send the poor little larrakin into a dungeon for being a better man than such a parcel of armed curs. What would England do if America declared war and hoisted a green flag as it is all Irishman that has got command of her armies forts and batteries even her very life guards and beef tasters are Irish would they not slew around and fight her with their own arms for the sake of the colour they dare not wear for years and to reinstate it and rise old Erins isle once more from the pressure and tyrannism of the English yoke which has kept it in poverty and starvation and caused them to wear the enemy's coat. What else can England expect.

Is there not big fat-necked Unicorns enough paid to torment and drive me to do thing which I don't wish to do, without the public assisting them I have never interfered with any person

unless they deserved it and yet there are civilians who take fire-arms against me, for what reason I do not know unless they want me to turn on them and exterminate them with out medicine. I shall be compelled to make an example of some of them if they cannot find no other employment If I had robbed and plundered ravished and murdered everything I met young and old rich and poor the public could not do any more than take firearms and assisting the police as they have done, but by the light that shines pegged on an ant-bed with their bellies opened their fat taken out rendered and poured down their throat boiling hot will be cool to what pleasure I will give some of them and any person aiding or harbouring or assisting the Police in any way whatever or employing any person whom they know to be a detective or cad or those who would be so deprived as to take blood money will be outlawed and declared unfit to be allowed human buriel their property either consumed or confiscated and them theirs and all belonging to them exterminated off the face of the earth, the enemy I cannot catch myself I shall give a payable reward for, I would like to know who put that article that reminds me of a poodle dog half clipped in the lion fashion called Brooke E. Smith Superintendent of Police he knows as much about commanding Police as Captain Standish does about mustering mosquitoes and boiling them down for their fat on the back blocks of the Lachlan for he had a head like a turnip a stiff neck as big as his shoulders narrow hipped and pointed towards the feet like a vine stake and if there is any one to be called a murderer regarding Kennedy, Scanlan and Lonigan it is that misplaced poodle he gets as much pay as a dozen good troopers if there is any *good* in them, and what does he do for it he cannot look behind him without turning his whole frame it takes three or four police to keep sentry while he sleeps in Wangaratta, for fear of body snatchers do they think he is a superior animal to the men that has to guard him if so why not send the men that gets big pay and reconed superior to the common police after me and you shall soon save the country of high salaries to men that is fit for nothing else but getting better men than himself shot and sending orphan children to the industrial school to make prostitutes and cads of them for the Detectives and other evil disposed persons send the high paid and men that received big salaries for year in a gang by themselves after me, As it makes no difference to them but it will give them a chance of showing whether they are worth more pay than a common trooper or not and I think the Public will soon find they are only in the road of good men and obtaining money under false pretences. I do not call McIntyre a coward for I reckon he is as game a man as wears the Jacket as he had the presence of mind to know his position, directly as he was spoken to, and only foolishness to disobey, it was cowardice that made Lonigan and the others fight it is only foolhardiness to disobey an outlaw as any Policeman or other man who do not throw up their arms directly as I call on them knows the consequence which is a speedy dispatch to Kingdom come I wish those men who joined the stock protection society to withdraw their money and give it and as much more to the widows and orphans and poor of Greta district where I spent and will again spend many a happy day fearless free and bold as it only aids the police to procure false witnesses and go whacks with men to steal horses and lag innocent men it would suit them far better to subscribe a sum and give it to the poor of their district and there is no fear of anyone stealing their property for no man could steal their horses without the knowledge of the poor if any man was mean enough to steal their property the poor would rise out to a man and find them if they were on the face of the earth it will always pay a rich man to be liberal with the poor and make as little enemies as he can as he shall find if the poor is on his side he shall loose nothing by it. If they depend in the police they shall be drove to destruction. as they can not and will not protect them if duffing and bushranging were abolished the police would have to cadge for their living I speak from experience as I have sold horses and cattle innumerable and yet eight head of the culls is all ever was found I never was interfered with whilst I kept up this successful trade. I give fair warning to all those who has reason to fear me to sell out and give £10 out of every hundred towards the widow and orphan fund and do not attempt to reside in Victoria but as short a time as possible after reading this notice, neglect this and abide by the consequences, which shall be worse than the rust in the wheat in Victoria or the druth of a dry season to the grasshoppers in New South Wales I do not wish to give the order full force without giving timely warning, but I am a widows son outlawed and my orders *must be obeyed.*

Edward Kelly.

books

THE ABC: WHAT'S WRONG

Anthony McAdam

Clement Semmler: *The ABC — Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow* (Melbourne University Press, $21.60).

At the heart of Clement Semmler's absorbing, challenging, and at times, extremely irritating book on the ABC, its problems, failures and prospects, is an all-pervasive contradiction between democracy and paternalistic control. The contradiction is so obvious that one wonders whether he is naturally schizoid or whether he wrote the book in stages, forgetting the arguments of the previous stage as he went along.

In order to fathom the moral and philosophical assumptions of this book it is necessary to take a hard look at the models Semmler uses throughout, the BBC and its Founding Father, John Reith. Malcolm Muggeridge once described the BBC as an institution "begotten by John Knox out of the Bank of England with Fabian Society intervention". For Semmler, the BBC is "the finest broadcasting institution the world has known, or is ever likely to." He goes on, "and this was due entirely to the influence of John Reith (later Lord Reith), the formidable Scotsman and Director-General of the BBC until 1938". We are told "Reith and his equally high minded colleages . . . were unashamedly paternalistic in setting the standards of the BBC in the 1930s and entertained no such irresponsible notion as giving the public what it wanted or what it thought it wanted. Rather, *it would get what people of fearless intellectual and moral integrity decided was good for them.*" (My emphasis.)

In his brilliant and famous essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty", Isaiah Berlin warned us that people who impose their own idea of 'what is good for us' are part of a sinister tradition that dates from Plato through to Rousseau and takes in some of the nastier characters of our own century. Democracy is about respecting "what people say they want" not what someone else, least of all a self-appointed bureaucrat or programmer, thinks is good for them. Clearly, Semmler *is* a democrat and although he is aware of the old bug-bear of "who watches the watchman" he gives the distinct impression all too often in this book that the dilemma will somehow resolve itself.

Semmler sees Lord Reith as some kind of paragon of civic and cultural virtue, and if there is a ghost which haunts these pages it is Reith's. My reading of Reith's character and contribution is less adoring. It can hardly be denied that his world-view was profoundly narrow, although it has retrospectively enjoyed a patina of profundity by virtue of a granite-like stolidness the equal of Edinburgh's St Giles Cathedral. Churchill used to refer to him as "that Wuthering Height", and as responsible for the BBC's attitude of "pontifical mugwumpery".

As Andrew Boyle has put it in his recent book, *The Climate of Treason*, "If the Corporation [the BBC] usually echoed the cautious, muddled but well-meaning leaders of the Establishment, to which it adhered with the steadfastness of a limpet, this was the predictable fate of a monopoly licensed by Royal Charter." A. J. P. Taylor's view of the BBC of Reith's time is no less critical:

> In no time at all, the monopolistic Corporation came to be regarded as an essential element in 'the British way of life'. Like all cultural dictatorships, the BBC was more important for what it silenced than for what it achieved . . . The English people, if judged by the BBC, were uniformly devout and kept to the middle of the road.

For Reith, Rectitude, Honor and the world of the High Mind were not open to ironic or even ambiguous interpretation. As Keynes observed of Woodrow Wilson's caste of mind, "it was theological, not intellectual". On top of that he was a Scottish *parvenu* with a sycophantic regard for the English upper classes and an ambition that was quite the equal of his self-righteousness.

One might argue that that disposition was appropriate to the 1920s and 1930s, although I would contest that. Semmler tells us approvingly:

> Naturally, the people Reith selected to help him run the BBC reflected his idealism and principles. They were described as 'an oligarchy of rare individuals, with one foot in Bloomsbury and one in All Souls'.

Well yes. Bloomsbury, as we now have cause to know after the publication of a few billion words about that little group, was dedicated to preciousness, snobbery and a few other notable attributes of the English middle and upper classes at their worst (I exclude here those notable individualists, Leonard Woolf, Keynes and Russell, who were marginal members of Bloomsbury anyway). As for All Souls, its claim to fame during the Thirties was its role as the High Church and inner sanctum of appeasement and Hitler worship (see A. L. Rowse's *Appeasement and All Souls*). Hardly rocks on which to build one's 'Church of the Air'.

In the late Thirties the BBC continued its policy of giving the least offence to the greatest number. One can only guess what effect the BBC *might* have had on British society in those dark inter-war years had it only been less snobbish, smug and intellectually rigid.

That said, I am sure Semmler is absolutely right in asserting that the BBC is "the finest broadcasting institution the world has known". The ABC could have no better model than the contemporary BBC (but surely not the BBC of Reith's day) and I believe that Semmler is also justified in suggesting it is getting less and less similar as time goes by, with a resulting impoverishment of Australian cultural life.

Semmler, it seems to me, makes the great mistake of appearing to have a Manichean view of what is good and bad broadcasting. He does this most blatantly in his Introduction, and I have no doubt this is the main reason for the sharp criticisms of his book in the newspaper reviews I have read. This 'Holier than Thou' elitism strikes me as especially unfortunate, because this is by far the best criticism of the ABC and what ails it that I have come across.

It is not the intention of this review to catalog all the criticisms and detailed recommendations in the book except to cite, in passing, Semmler's adamant opposition to the ABC's entry into the "ratings game" and his convincing indictment of the ABC's leadership, over the last twenty years especially, for gutlessness in the face of political interference and philistinism in their attitudes towards cultural and intellectual issues. Rather, I will take two areas where I believe his criticisms are particularly pointed and important: public affairs and literary broadcasting.

Public Affairs broadcasting is a very difficult area for any broadcasting service in an open society. Because it involves interpretation and analysis of contemporary issues it is much more vulnerable to the charge of bias and partiality than straight news reporting. Anyone who has given any serious thought to this issue of bias will know that it is an enormously complex, messy and unscientific business. Someone somewhere will always find some assessment "biased", a danger heightened when dealing with controversial issues.

To recognize the complexity of the problems posed by this issue is half the battle. There are, obviously, clear rules of thumb in order to avoid the most obvious pitfalls. At the end of the day, however, decisions have to be taken on the really tough cases which do not lend themselves to instant resolution, and here it seems to me one has to fall back on tradition and the experience, intelligence and integrity of individuals.

Oddly, there are two clear cases in this book where Semmler suggests a change of current policy which I think would increase the likelihood of bias and narrow the range of interpretation. One, he believes that the ABC should not have as many (or any?) correspondents abroad. I just can't see how cutting out the ABC's first-class team of foreign correspondents could be justified. As it stands, the TV news coverage in Australia of world events is far too limited and superficial, a state of affairs that has been recently highlighted by the impressive example set by Channel 0-28's world news coverage. Two, he recommends greater Foreign Affairs influence on Radio Australia, the ABC's overseas service. Here, Semmler reveals an ignorance of how his model, the BBC, handles its affairs. The BBC World Service has, in reality, much greater autonomy vis-á-vis the British Foreign Office than does Radio Australia vis-á-vis the Department of Foreign Affairs, and it is this

autonomy that goes a long way to account for the World Service's unsurpassed reputation among the world's short-wave services. Again, it comes down to tradition. The Department of Foreign Affairs has shown itself to be lacking in a measured understanding of the subtle but real link between editorial autonomy and international credibility, a failing clearly demonstrated in its pressure on Radio Australia concerning reports on East Timor, and by its submission on Radio Australia to the Dix Committee.

Semmler quotes Sir Michael Swann, the Chairman of the BBC's Board of Governors, on the question of tradition. Swann speaks of an "inherited tradition within the [BBC's] Board . . . that it shall not be politically polarized" and that "because of the absence of politicization in the Board . . . the staff of the BBC put their politics aside". For Semmler, the contrast with the ABC is glaring: "To put it bluntly, I ascribe most of the political controversies that have surrounded the ABC in all the years of its existence to the simple fact that no government yet has, like the British government with the BBC, appointed its commissioners or governors of the ABC consistently and wholly on their merits."

Semmler feels that the root cause of political bias of ABC Public Affairs lies in this politicization of the top, by both political parties. If the staff intrude their political biases they can at least argue in defence that the example was set by the government and the commissioners.

The obvious conclusion from reading his many disturbing examples of the blatantly political decisions taken by commissioners over the years is that Australia simply lacks that "inherited tradition" which distinguishes the contemporary BBC. But I would suggest it is not just a difference of bureaucratic tradition, and Semmler puts forward some very sensible proposals for change (such as an all-party committee to oversee appointments to the Commission and the staff), it is also a difference in intellectual tradition. Australia differs from Britain in a thousand ways and many of those distinguishing characteristics are a tribute to Australian society. But many are not. Australia is simply a very different culture. For instance, it has no metropolitan centre with anything remotely approaching the vital intellectual and political debate and discussion which characterizes London.

Australia has no equal to the British weeklies and the continuous high level of political and literary debate that they stimulate. It lacks anything comparable to the BBC's weekly, the Listener, a failing that Semmler refers to and is quite critical of (even the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation has its Listener, and very good it is too).

Australia lacks a large and varied company of intellectual journalists and freelance intellectuals which makes Britain, especially London, such an exciting theatre of ideas (in Australia almost all intellectuals are institutionalized in academic structures, with all of its stultifying attributes, and rarely come out of them).

The ABC has nothing like the colorful range of types that one comes across at the BBC. This is especially the case with ABC journalists, and is partly explained by the ABC's disinclination to use outside journalists and writers on a freelance or short-term contract basis. ABC journalists are invariably either fact-mongers, with not the slightest inclination to look behind the obvious surface facts, least of all to analyse issues with reference to history or ideas, or they are young producers and presenters of public affairs programs with what strikes me as a raw, know-it-all left-wing view of the world unencumbered by irony, humor or any sense of the pleasure of playing with contingent or underlying themes.

ABC TV Public Affairs is a vast emptiness with the sole exception of "Four Corners". I can't remember the last time I saw an ABC TV documentary that came close to the kind of programs that one sees daily on British TV, BBC or the commercial stations (the latter have risen to BBC standards and sometimes are even better than the BBC). One thinks, at random, of the "World at War" series, the "Secret War" series, Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man".

Where, in Australian TV or radio, are the people of the calibre of Brian Inglis, Robert Kee, Magnus Magnusson, Jeremy Isaacs, Robert Robinson, James Cameron and Malcolm Muggeridge? Australia could proudly claim Michael Charlton, but then he left, possibly because he got tired of talking to himself.

When it comes to attempts at 'controversy', I can't say that I've ever heard as many rigged 'debates' as I've heard on the ABC. The last program of Robert Moore's "Monday Conference" was also the last time we have seen anything vaguely approaching a debate on television. His tragic death is also a tragic loss for intelligent media debate in this country.

As for radio Public Affairs, with the exception of Brian Furlonger, and possibly Huw Evans

(whose professionalism unfortunately doesn't compensate for his hugely boring manner — not, I suspect, unrelated to the matter, Australian politics, he tends to concentrate on), we are mostly stuck with a crypto-Marxist kindergarten who seem never to have left their agit-prop campus bull sessions of anti-Vietnam demo days.

When I first started listening to "Broadband" three and a half years ago, straight from London, I couldn't believe my ears. It seemed that night after night we were given the same sour voices, even the mechanical sniggers seemed to come through on the radio (one wonders what Orwell would have said about our vicarious 'revolutionaries' of the air). Their choice of overseas commentators (a most significant, but somewhat disguised, form of ideological bias) was, as the saying goes, "out of this world". Mark Lane, lawyer, outspoken defender of Emperor Jim's 'Jonestown', was their commentator on 'imperialist' America. Robin Blackburn, a Marxist dialectician with a world-view of neo-Troskyite temper, their man on Britain. Marxist activist Malcolm Caldwell (world champion in pro-Pol Pot apologetics), their sometime commentator on South-East Asia. The list is endless. When faced with a cultural revolutionary circus like "Broadband", to talk of bias is on a par with criticizing the oboe player's performance in the orchestra of the Titanic as the ship is turning tail for its great plunge. It should be said that "Broadband's" replacement programs are a vast improvement.

Clearly, there is no tradition in ABC Public Affairs, and those parts of the Talks Department that deal with political issues, remotely similar to that of the BBC. But equally clearly many of the personnel are of a different calibre. If you don't choose the right people all the talk about structures is a waste of time. What is clear from Semmler's book, reinforced by my own experience, is that the senior and middle management appoint an awful lot of intellectual duds because they are, for the most part, intellectual duds themselves. The one glorious exception to all of these comments is that jewel in the ABC radio crown, the Science Unit. I would suggest that the ABC management could learn a lot by simply asking themselves what it is about that unit, its leadership, style of operation and recruitment policies that have enabled it to set such a brilliant example.

On most of these issues Semmler is, in my opinion, 'spot on'. He gives chapter and verse references to the vague but nonetheless lasting impressions that I have gained after three years of fairly thorough exposure to ABC radio and television. One point comes over very clearly: things have been getting worse, not better, and it remains to be seen whether the Dix committee report will come up with a program to stop the rot.

As for literary broadcasting, which I have deliberately left to last because I think it says more about the parlous state of the ABC than any other example, the situation is appalling. On this subject, Semmler is particularly good, but it is also in this area that I think he reveals his own limitations, limitations that go to the heart of what is wrong with this book.

As with Public Affairs, the ABC's treatment of things literary, that is the discussion and review of books, has got much worse. At the moment there is only one program that might be called a general books program on radio (although its producer likes to call it a "literary program") and that is "Books and Writing", which goes out at 10.30 on a Wednesday evening (there is absolutely nothing on television). Semmler simply notes the program's existence and calls it "outstanding".

I find this a curious description and I think it goes some way to explaining his peculiar and rather off-putting form of elitism. I have penned my own assessment of this program in my radio column in the Age and it is essentially this: review of books are rarely tailored for radio, rather they are mainly academic papers cluttered with Lit. Crit. jargon and invariably read in a boring monotone; poetry itself is rarely read, it is mostly reviewed, and talk *about* poetry takes up a disproportionate amount of the program's time week after week; the program has a distinct parochial Sydney bias; the commentaries, excepting the overseas ones, are invariably self-conscious exercises in literary preciousness; rarely are non-fiction books reviewed.

What I particularly dislike about this program is its air of insufferable smugness and the pervasive attitude of contemptuous superiority on the part of the presenter and many of the contributors, as if this thing called "Literature" is not something that non-specialists (particularly non-academics), should tamper with. And it is this program that Dr Semmler calls "outstanding". This spurious Antipodean imitation of Bloomsbury at its worst, this decidedly anti-intellectual intellectualism, it is this that Semmler apparently admires. Well frankly, Dr Semmler, and it pains

me to say it because I am sure that 90 per cent of what you say is long overdue, you are a terrible cultural snob — which might just explain why you think that appalling self-righteous Calvinist prig, John Reith, is the bee's knees.

Surely, what is needed are programs, on radio *and* television, and the more the merrier, which tackle ideas, books and intellectual trends with style, freshness, originality and genuine openness, but definitely without that forbidding manner and tone which says to the ordinary listener eager for culture and stimulation: "This program is only for 'serious', academically qualified, intellectuals".

There are a few million people in Australia who read books and at least a few hundred thousand who enjoy playing with ideas, arguing about values and interpretations and getting engrossed in a good story. They have a clearer sense of what a free and open society is about that many of our certificated intellectuals. They are not necessarily intellectuals themselves but they do have minds, and I have a deep nagging suspicion that they would readily respond to a couple of quality programs which tackled the world of books with a democratic tenor, civility and good humor. We don't have anything like such a program for that army of Obscure Judes in the desolate wastes of Aussie suburbia. Australia is the poorer for it, the ABC is demeaned because of it, and Dr Semmler is to be praised for at least recognizing the scale of our deprivation.

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AXEL CLARK'S BRENNAN

Brian Matthews

Axel Clark: *Christopher Brennan* (Melbourne University Press, $25).

> One night at Petty's Hotel, after friends and admirers had plied [Brennan] with sparkling burgundy, Dowell O'Reilly said [he] should draw more on Milton in his verse, and read Milton more. Brennan replied that he had no need to read Milton, he *knew* him. Then, beginning at Man's First Disobedience, Brennan recited the first four books of *Paradise Lost;* Jordan, checking the recitation against a text, found two verbal errors.
>
> (P. 222)

The very first lecture I ever attended at Melbourne University was on Milton and was given by Professor Ian Maxwell. He was wearing that famous off-black gown — handsomely quilted and embroidered across the shoulders but deteriorating, as if gradually giving up the struggle, through a series of rents and repairs down to a hem that was a mere straggle of frayed threads and pendant strips. His entrance amazed us into silence which he broke with his deep, slightly gruff voice:

> Of man's First Disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater man
> Restore us and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing Heavenly Muse . . .

He never did consult his book on the lectern and he continued for about forty minutes without a falter before turning to a brief commentary and peroration.

The reason why this no doubt too personal recollection surfaced as I read Axel Clark's fine biography of Christopher Brennan is of course obvious enough. Perhaps it's worth mentioning though, because I think that in this case it is not simply fortuitous, not solely a matter of the persuasive parallels between the two stunning recitations (and, for that matter, the similar scholarly dedication and distinction, the panache). It is one of Clark's qualities as a biographer that, in evoking the atmosphere and flavor and details of Brennan's life, he also allows the reader to remain aware of the broader human picture, that picture a small part of which the reader himself inhabits and in which Brennan's triumphs and tragedies, struggles and achievements and failures are particular variations on the common lot. Since this review is later than most and since Clark has already been criticised for *failing* to provide or intimate this sort of breadth beyond the confines of his immediate subject, it would be phoney of me to proceed without some reference to that point of view.

I note, therefore, David English's remark that "Life is bigger than the Arts Faculty at Sydney University, but this doesn't seem to have occurred to Clark" (*Australian Book Review*, no. 25). I think that this complaint indicates a failure to appreciate a fundamental paradox in Brennan's make-up and lifestyle, a paradox which Clark clearly evokes. Brennan was a genuine bohemian, a *bon-viveur* and man-about-town; he was also, however, and willingly (at least at the start of his marriage and then again, later, with Vie) a man of the hearth, a domestic man. As Clark shows so well, he 'went in' for verse because he saw it as a means towards the achievement of

Eden, the Absolute; but he saw marriage — romantic nuptial consummation and domestic bliss — as a part of the same pilgrimage towards the same end. He committed himself to marriage and to poetry at about the same time, holding out hopes of both which neither could possibly fulfil. When marriage for Brennan deteriorated into, among other things, domestic wrangles, pressures and responsibilities, even he was forced at least some of the time to cope with them. A very large part of his interest in an academic job was to achieve security and, at last, freedom from endless money worries. When you're broke and in debt and your best chance of a job is in the Sydney University Arts Faculty, then 'Life' and the Sydney University Arts Faculty start to look to be around about the same size.

The dichotomy between, on the one hand, Brennan's desperate and intermittent attempts to shape something like a 'normal' life and, on the other, his wide-ranging bohemianism, his disdain for anything beyond the world of intellectual debate and discourse, is always apparent and Clark makes it perfectly clear. The paradox, the delusions, the failures of perspective, the unreal expectations — were all Brennan's. Against his more spectacular 'performances' and the legend generally must be set the fact that he lived all of his life in Sydney except for one short period, that in many ways his life *was* a very narrow one. As far as I can see, it is one of Clark's achievements that he has recognised and accommodated the paradox of the legendary bohemian and the domestically enmeshed Sydneysider (a paradox intimately related to Brennan's own views about pursuit of the Absolute), and has steadfastly refused to gain cheap color by throwing the emphasis on to the bohemian.

What I take to be a scrupulous fairness, a refusal to allow Brennan to become larger than life simply because he is the biographical subject, and a care, equally, not to cut him down in all his vulnerability, are major features of Clark's book. As I suggested at the start, Brennan remains human and, for all his extraordinary abilities and powerful presence, part of the human process we all know about. Clark's determination to portray him as above all a human being with great attributes and disabling flaws (and not as legend, whether legendary monster or legendary victim) makes it possible for the reader to remain basically in some sort of sympathy with Brennan despite the fact that he was, patently, an extremely unattractive, even repellent, man in so many ways. That is to say that part of Clark's success lies in his having resisted the current tendency to regard the biography, the recorded life, as somehow magically its own justification, and to see the act of putting together the chronological pieces as being of itself automatically worthwhile and as endowing the subject with stature by virtue simply of his being the subject.

Clark's restraint, his refusal to, as it were, champion Brennan on anything other than the most established grounds, is consistent throughout the book and everywhere evident. Concerning the reception of Brennan's volume, *Poems*, for example, Clark writes:

> The war obviously distracted or isolated some people from the opportunity to read poetry they might conceivably have been interested in and impressed by. Just when *Poems* appeared, events created an even wider gulf than had already existed between Brennan and the European sources of his chief intellectual and imaginative interests. But perhaps the result would not have been very different in peace time. The critical reception to *XXI Poems* in London and Paris had not been warm; it is hard to imagine that *Poems*, even if it had reached sympathetic and influential readers there, would have enjoyed a much more enthusiastic reception, or made a decisive impact.
>
> (P. 215

This is perhaps rather relentless; nevertheless, it seems to me that, in so steadfastly refusing the opportunity to credibly explain away the failure of *Poems* to make much impact, Clark is being no more than honest. Overall, and allowing for parts of "The Wanderer" and some of the poems added in 1913 to the original plan, the work is clogged and labored. Victorian poeticisms, an almost continual sense of strain in the writing and a tendency to fall back on large gestures, sap so many of the poems of their potential impact. "O Desolate Eves", in which a powerful and effective opening passage (ending with "the iron wind/that . . . made all its way/a loneliness . . .") gives way suddenly to "a clamour of trumpets . . . resolute, stark, undauntable", has always struck me as an especially pointed example of this tendency. Axel Clark regards this poem as "the climax of 'The Wanderer' ". From it, he says,

> issues an affirmation, an impression of triumph won in and through adversity. But the impression is only an impression, because the triumph does not really come out of the adversity. It seems for a time that Brennan feels and recognizes fully the desolation and bitterness of being a Wanderer . . . But the introduction of words like "battle" and "triumph" indicates that the poem is changing to something more familiar and comfortable and when the trumpets are brought in, the verse reverts to stale language and vague formulations . . . in 'The Wanderer', as in 'Lilith', Brennan is typically unsure whether he is hopeful or miserable, searching for Eden or truly lost.
>
> (P. 172)

He was, as Clark shows, truly lost. The search for an Absolute in life and in the art which, despite superficial appearances to the contrary, arose so intimately out of his life experiences, ended in failure. The sense of failure, Clark agrees, had much to do with "lack of pertinacity or defect of will": there were works planned but uncompleted, hopes of academic preferment ultimately dashed. "But the failure," he insists,

> should also be seen from Brennan's most personal point of view: his greatest needs and ambitions were private, religious; 'The Wanderer' at its basic level expresses the pain of recognizing the disappointment of these needs and ambitions, and nothing that might have gained him public respect or recognition could compensate him for that disappointment. 1902 marks the beginning of Brennan's slow terrible descent.
>
> (P. 175)

This is a splendid chapter-ending, the crux of the book and the climax of an argument, brilliantly conducted, which demonstrates the ineradicable divisions and delusions in Brennan's personality and in his art. Clark is proposing that what above all destroyed Brennan, what set him upon that downward path to the frightful degradations and despairs of his later years, was artistic failure. The parallel with Lawson, in this one respect at least, urges itself quite strongly (though there are still those who find it impossible to accept that an 'ordinary bloke' like Lawson could have something describable as an artistic crisis), a parallel which is made more interesting by Brennan's obvious antipathy towards Lawson and his immoderate attack on him. Lawson, he wrote,

> has . . . already ceased to count among our poets. His defects (in language, style and meter) are really more than superficial; they prevented him from ever acquiring more than a fair, second-hand singing-robe of emphatic, turgid journalese. And it would be hard to say precisely how he faced the world: it looks as if, most of the time, he sat down with a grievance and let himself be miserable.
>
> (P. 273)

It is a strangely splenetic onslaught, the vehemence of which hints at more obsessive causes than merely objection to Lawson's undoubtedly flawed verses. Clark's own explanation is a fascinating one: "most probably Brennan despised him," he suggests, "not because they were so different in education and interests, but because in other respects they were so uncomfortably similar . . . perhaps in reviling Lawson, he was really reviling himself." Certainly self-hatred is increasingly characteristic of Brennan as Clark portrays him in his latter years, and it manifested itself not only in indirect ways, as in the attack on Lawson, but also in various and only too apparent kinds of personal, physical neglect.

The "slow, terrible descent" which is documented in the second half of the book makes grim reading. Though there is a good deal of detail here about Brennan's bohemian life and anecdotes of the Brennan legend at Sydney University, Clark does not allow the fated, doomed nature of so many of Brennan's activities at the time to escape notice. Again, this is only to be honest. There is something frenetic in Brennan's carousings and social relationships as his life falls inexorably to pieces. More and more avoiding ordinary conversation and inclining to endless monologue, venting the cruelty that had always been part of him on friends and foes indiscriminately, dominating gatherings (including the Casuals and *Les Compliques*) so thoroughly that they disintegrated or changed for the worse, Brennan alternately rampages or shambles from one major experience or disaster to the next.

All things considered, Brennan does not emerge as a very attractive character, but Clark's imperturbable even-handedness somehow pre-empts what might have been our distaste: we are being given a meticulously balanced picture: it seems only just to accord the undoubted strengths — the charm, wit, dynamism, intellectual distinction — their full due when the dark side — the cruelty, monomania, physical repulsiveness — is so candidly dealt with. A more strenuous, more strident call upon our sympathies might easily have provoked outright rejection: there is so much that is grotesque in Brennan that such an appeal would seem incredible. The admiration and sympathy which Clark obviously feels for Brennan is always present, almost always under very tight restraint and never, it would appear, the source of distortion or exaggeration. The book ends with a dignified but characteristically temperate claim for Brennan's "challenging and deeply moving" poetry.

The price Clark pays for this control is that the account is occasionally flat, *too* withholding; and the meticulousness issues sometimes in repetitions (the fact that part of the book was originally a thesis would also contribute to these problems since it is absolutely impossible to remove all the thesis marks). Further, the critical examination of the poems — excellent in my opinion — are nevertheless probably open to the charge of being on occasions a little too subservient to the overall thesis. The extremely interesting and dramatic appraisal of "The Wanderer" would provide a

useful test case with an essay such as Terry Sturm's "The Structure of Brennan's 'The Wanderer'" (in Leon Cantrell (ed.), *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen*, 1976), being used perhaps for comparison and contrast.

Finally, while in complaining mood, I found the many references to the "increasing violence" of Brennan's home life irritating because they are almost never backed up with any detail. He *did* run through the house wielding an axe and shouting; but that was on a few occasions. What form did the continuing and increasing violence take and what contribution did Elizabeth make to it, since the implication is that the 'violence' was not always simply physical and not always on Brennan's side?

But this is a fine book — a book which Brennan scholars will be discussing, learning from and debating for some time to come.

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POETRY FROM ANYWHERE

Graham Rowlands

Stephen K. Kelen: *To the Heart of the World's Electricity* (Senor Press, $3).
Richard Lunn: *Pompeii Deep Fry* (Randolph Press, $4.25).
Philip Salom: *The Silent Piano* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $4).

Australian poetry publishing is in a debilitated state. When major publishing houses do publish poetry, review copies aren't sent to relevant magazines. Why do the publishers *bother* with poetry? For prizes, I suppose. It can't be sales. Prizes are an obsession in Australia. There are big prizes and little prizes. They say as much about the country as the poetry says. The gold rushes. Phar Lap. Lotteries. Prizes.

With major publishers no longer sending review copies, small presses, co-operatives and self-publishers fill the void. Since there's no shortage of poetry this trend is likely to intensify. I'm sympathetic. It's a response to the mismanagement of the economy. I'm sympathetic from personal experience too. Of the three presses who have published my collections, one is deceased, another no longer publishes collections and the other is very slowly winding down. Adelaide University Union Press, for whom I edited *Dots Over Lines Recent Poetry in S.A.*, is in suspension. In practice, it's also deceased. I hasten to add that small presses don't bring out my underdog allegiances *only* when they fail.

Most poetry I read for Overland now comes from unknown small presses with outlandish names. I read every word of every page, only too well aware that I'm thrown back on my own critical resources not only in reviewing but also over *whether* or not to review a book. I read seven collections (only one woman) before deciding on three poets — Stephen K. Kelen, Richard Lunn and Philip Salom. Quality can come (and increasingly *does* come) from anywhere.

The quintessential Kelen poem will be on the move, pleased to be going, working out attitudes towards being pleased and further fathoming how these attitudes will relate to where he's going or, at any rate, will end up — often with dope, a toy Buddha and Kafka's *Diaries*. He'll be dogged by the dog of double meaning, although the reader's groans and laughs will be Kelen's own. He'll be disillusioned without giving up; *knowing* without stopping his enquiries. *Deja vu* every time he's *vu*. Equally uncomfortable with hedonism *and* asceticism. He'll send-up kitch while sometimes preferring it to so-called culture. He'll call a rip-off a rip-off and then announce that he'll rip it off for a poem.

There's far too much about poems, poets and poetic processes in Kelen's small third collection *Zen Maniacs*. More parody than satire. By contrast, this second collection *To the Heart of the World's Electricity* is about the world — no matter how itinerant the participant-observer. Moreover, *To the Heart* eliminates the obscurity, banality and garrulousness that sometimes marred his exciting first collection, *The Gods Ash Their Cigarettes*.

To the Heart is a witty mixture of both internal and external history and geography. The alert reader can find occasional lyricism and even vulnerability kept in check by the poet's hard-boiled attitudinizing. See "Coming Home", "The Gymnasts" and the beautiful title poem which surely owes something to Rae Desmond Jones' *Shakti:*

> Infinite regression unwinds backwards &
> fast, no borderguards to slow me travelling
> to the horizon. And there the void begins
> nothing specific, just a hum
> a thousand dancing buddhas, a big zero
> & kangaroos jump to the next zone

Atypical lines, but accomplished.

Kelen is too young to be part of the "Generation of 68", John Tranter's Old Boy Modernists — that already middle-ageing and nostalgic brigade of baby boomers, the Max Harrises of the *fin de siecle*. Kelen is one of the *sons* of Modernism, his most relevant father being John Forbes. I, for one, am pleased that Forbes has finally managed to influence someone who's already his equal.

Lunn's first collection, *Pompeii Deep Fry*, is nothing if not ambitious, having extraordinary range, including variety of forms — even formal rhyme. Largely because of his scope, however, he's paid little attention to quality control. Even the book's sections are arbitrary. Flaws include undigested data, over-statement, cliché, garrulousness, historical inaccuracy and clashing imagery. Revision could cure the stylistic problems. Curing the clashing imagery might prove a harder task since it seems part of the poet's creative act of will.

The lunatic and gangster poems in "I" are an inappropriate start because of the poet's ambivalent attitude. He's involved with them despite himself. Moreover, the involvement is strained and heavy-handed enough to approach send-up. Despite this danger, "park" is a fine prophetic poem about statuesque old men playing chess. "Playing the Numbers" is about the range of possible readers, the blind poet and the poem being "a white cane tapping/in a field as soft as cowdung".

"II" is supposed to be a birth to after-death cycle. The pregnancy poems are evocative; the babyhood pieces, concise. Age and loss in the highrise are captured with marvellous economy in "north ryde". "Theology" is witty. In "elegy" Lunn attacks Christianity via a cathedral, preferring the sexual temples at Khajuraho in his poem of the same name.

"III" includes similar juxtaposition. As if they weren't enough challenge, he travels through his own mythology via both Eden and Humpty Dumpty in "Garble and the Cosmic Egg":

> Yet, at the centre of silence, at the dust-heart
> of deserts, on the tallest of mountains, there
> sits the Godhead, ice-white and timeless,
> the vast Cosmic Egg, Humpty Dumpty unfallen,
> crooning old loony-toons over the dead.

He arrives at this poem via a slice of rape-incest-murder-alcoholism social realism, "Calcutta Still Life" where he bribes "truth/with a rupee", an over-long send-up of Miss Universe contests, a portrait of a bouncer, a wry poem on Newton, a detailed prediction about the car as dinosaur, an unintentionally confused unemployed person's address to the Dalai Lama, and "Earthwise", where the earth avenges Aboriginals in alternating good *and* gauche lines. There are poets who haven't said as much in five books as Lunn has tried to say in one.

Salom's first book, *The Silent Piano*, is one of the best-produced collections I've seen. At this level of excellence Fremantle Arts Centre Press can't stay a small press for long. Via W.A. Literary Fund assistance the book is also a very cheap 93 pages. The poetry, however, belies the appearance. Salom writes a language in search of material. He's a religious poet in search of subjects suited to beatific, apocalyptic and guilt-racked visions.

It's not surprising, then, that only his last and title section is convincing, for it's largely about non-contemporary Europe and the Middle East. Here his Christian laws, rituals, ceremonies, dreams and, above all, abstractions, don't intrude into his material. They're already part of it. Moveover, in this title section he's able to evoke the modern world:

> He breaks the wood like old, dry bread
> and arranges it. As he kneels, shapes
> run from his unravelling image
> to threads, to a piercing of song.
> He ties them across the cracked wood,
> bending with tension. It is done.

He's concerned about injustice. "The Italian Girl" and "The Missionary" reveal a *critical spirit* lacking in the rest of his work. Only here does the quotation from Camus that prefaces the book achieve relevance.

There's only one poem about Australia that works at the same level as the poems about historical Europe and the Middle East — a poem about Aboriginal beliefs. Most revealing. Of the many poems about Salom's childhood and youth in rural W.A. perhaps only two work by sheer descriptive power alone — "Nungarin, 3.00 pm" and "Sea-town". Here Salom's often sparkling imagery is *allowed* to work free from mysteries of purpose, compulsions of love, stones of contrition, repetitive eternities, demented oil, hallowed palms, "sensation's glass", "the perjury of dawn" and these extraordinary lines from "Walking

Home", a simple piece about the poet in ploughed paddocks in the rain:

> I was in the drench of ecstasy,
> blindly, mutely, on a huge crescent of land
> reading the book of law, year by year
> walking on the eyelids of Gods.

Christian experiences, like everything else, have to be lived anew and written about anew in each generation. If nothing changed there'd be no need to write at all. The Copernican isn't the Ptolmaic. Ask Giordano Bruno.

Salom's verbosity is more than the same voice he can't change even when he makes others speak. It's linked with his lack of wit or humor, which itself is linked with his gnawing sense of guilt. Is the smell of our mortality so rank that the poet is unable to fuck with a woman in a paddock near domestic animals in late 1970s Australia without re-experiencing the Fall of Man? (See "The Fall" and following poems.) Camus also wrote a work called *The Fall*. It's remarkably different from Salom's. Although the poet derives his book's title from Camus he hasn't been *influenced* by Camus. Salom's metaphysical ethics are those Camus attacked for most of his life. The last section is the only section Camus could have possibly liked. Australian poetry will be enriched if Salom can play more pieces on "The Silent Piano" as distinct from *The Silent Piano*.

CHANGE OF VIEW?

Graham Rowlands

William Grono and Nicholas Hasluck: *On the Edge* (Freshwater Bay Press, $9).

William Grono's half of *On the Edge* shows just how pleasant life can be for an artist-intellectual within rampant capitalism in Perth's balmy climate. There are some doubts about environmental vandalism and the odd hanging. There's a feeling that life could have been different. Others are bored and apathetic towards the great issues of the day. The poet is no better. Grono's poetry is the work of a man who knows he hasn't suffered. At least he's honest. It's easy-to-read poetry but seems suffused with the very lassitude it depicts. Unfortunately, the full-blooded imagery in "The Oleander" is only the exception proving the rule.

Nicholas Hasluck's half starts with such a superb poem that everything else is a let-down. "Islands" is insight, attitude, viewpoint on those who charted imaginary islands and those responsible for wiping them off the maps. With exceptions, such as the not very funny "Ode To Apathy" and the operatic "Bikie", most of his other poems describe landscape, sometimes in effective imagery. When he injects emotion into landscape and situation he's usually adequate — if little more. "Troop Ship" is the only poem that comes within cooee of "Islands". Significantly, it's a viewpoint poem, change of view.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Recent publications which, in the editor's opinion, are of special interest, but which there is no space to review in full.

W. J. Hudson and Jane North (eds.): *My Dear P.M.: R. G. Casey's Letters to S. M. Bruce 1924-1929* (Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, $30). This handsome book contains the private and confidential letters written by a young Australian public servant stationed in London to his country's Prime Minister in the 1920s. It is interesting and important on several levels: the assurance of a junior officer who had nevertheless come from the right social level and been to the right school; the ease with which Casey penetrated the English corridors of power; his shrewd common-sense, later to be displayed in more important contexts; the assumption shared by all, that Australian and British interests were virtually indistinguishable. Since the 'freedom of information' moves by recent Australian governments have made it steadily harder to get access to basic documents, we must be grateful for this, and hope for similar publications to follow.

Christopher Fry (intro.): *Charlie Hammond's Sketch-Book* (Oxford, $15.95). A real turn-up which for some odd reason has not done well in the shops. Yet it's a marvellous insight into pre-federation Australia. Young Hammond migrated here in 1885, and worked as a soldier, farmer, photographer, journalist. He was a most competent and lively sketcher, and his pictures bring alive the Australia and New Zealand of his time, particularly at what can be called the 'people level'. Because so intimate, far more evocative that photographic archives. A mine for the social historian, and a delight for the general reader. Let's have more — this is only a selection.

A. J. P. Taylor: *Politics, Socialism and Historians* (Nelson, $42.50). Always shrewd, some-

times crusty, and a historian who has never acknowledged an ivory tower, Taylor is one of the most provocative and readable commentators on our recent past now living. Here he discusses, in a number of reprinted articles, himself, history and historians, politics and politicians, socialists and socialism, and war. There's no urbanity here: every line reminds us of both Taylor's commitment to social criticism and his refusal to hold anyone's party ticket.

Neil Murray: *Starting Procedure* (Papunya Literature Production Centre, Northern Territory 5750, no price given). We get many modest publications of the *samizdat* type, a few duplicated pages and a lot of hopes. We seldom can do much about them. But there's a freshness of expression and of vision about Murray's "poems and prose to be read aloud" which is immediately captivating. One poem starts "Who put the kibosh on the toilet?" Others deal with the Aboriginal/White engagement:

CONVERSATION

I asked the old man,
"When do you want to go, Tjilpi?"
"Oh, afta Prismess."
"After Christmas?"
"No, no, not afta Crismis, afta Prefess.
What puckin language you talk? You
Pintupi or what?"

Only 300 printed. Might be worth writing.

Nancy Wills: *Shades of Red* (Communist Arts Group, 229 White Road, Lota Q. 4179, no price given). A useful and frequently lively contribution to the literature of the Communist experience in Australia. Nancy Wills moves from a Melbourne childhood to a discussion of political movements and personalities she has been involved with, the latter including Paul Robeson. She has many insights on the Left, including critical ones, which the future will be grateful for. Certainly future work on the Australian Left will have to take into account the personal reminiscences now coming to the fore, and in themselves exemplifying a welcome freeing-up of thought and the confidence to express it.

A. B. Facey: *A Fortunate Life* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $22 and $12). An exemplary autobiography of a self-styled "ordinary Australian", born in 1894, this book takes us through a childhood on the West Australian gold-fields, farming in the bush, Gallipoli, the Depression and a great deal more, all told with authentic recall, humanity and humor. It is my belief that Australian intellectuals can't write about themselves with this kind of truthfulness. A rare experience and a publishing coup.

Alun Richards (ed.): *The Second Penguin Book of Sea Stories* (Penguin, $5.95). At least as good, and possibly better, than the excellent first collection in this series, this includes material from William Bligh, Richard Dana, Josiah Slocum, Conrad, C. S. Forester, a piece on the *Titanic* and a story I've always remembered, Oliver Onions' "Phantas". All most satisfying armchair reading in winter gales. A sensitive introduction.

Michael Cannon: *That Damned Democrat: John Norton, an Australian Populist, 1858-1916* (Melbourne University Press, $12.80). A short biography of a notorious Australian, with a large collection of illustrations and printed matter about him. Norton is of course Australia's prime nominee for the Pantheon of Populists, Demagogues and Hustlers, where he will be enshrined beside Horatio Bottomley, Huey Long and others. This story of yellow journalism and an appalling domestic life throws light on the Australia of the day and of the way his espousal of the under-dog (perhaps not entirely cynical) promoted Norton to power and wealth. It would be good to see Cannon essay a full-scale biography some day.

John Bartlett: *Familiar Quotations* (Macmillan $35). The fifteenth edition of the best of the dictionaries of quotations, but especially useful beside those published in Britain because of its American bias. It also has an admirable reference and cross-indexing system built in. Hard to hold in bed but great for browsing. "What they could do with round here is a good war . . . Do you know what the trouble with peace is? No organization" (Bertold Brecht). A handsome production, cheap at the price.

Why Franz Kafka didn't get to write about the Australian Merino.

We're wondering what Mr. Kafka would have thought about a happy Australian metamorphosis that would have been quite beyond his comprehension.

In the 1830s our colony was being transformed by the introduction of sheep from Great Britain. It began a great tradition.

The legend grew that Australians rode to prosperity on the backs of sheep, and particularly the Merino.

But times are changing.

Australia's economy in the 1980s will increasingly rely on processing our mineral resources for export.

The sheep is developing an aluminium fleece.

As for Mr. Kafka, he was preoccupied with man's fear and isolation in a dehumanised world. He obviously never got to Australia.

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