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DAVID MARTIN

An Emotional Type

The trolley entered the room and stopped by the bed nearest the window, which was the bed next to mine. They half rolled, half heaved the patient on to it. As they did so, he opened his eyes and murmured:

"Gia, gia?"

I laughed. The Sister who was helping the wardsman turned to me.

"What's so funny?"

"He says, 'Already?' I think we all have this idea when we come out of the anaesthetic."

"You, as a matter of fact, wanted to know what the time was."

He was a solidly built man, broad-shouldered and heavy.

I watched them work on him. They were securing the tubes in the same places where yesterday they had fastened mine to me. Having been moved in here only an hour ago I had not seen him before his operation. If he was like me he would now be feeling a kind of weepy happiness, a wowsy, masochistic pride.

The Sister spoke again. "Do you know Italian?"

"After a fashion."

"You could be a bit useful to him, then. He has practically no English."

"What's his trouble?"

"Prostate, same as you."

"He looks much too young for it."

"He is fifty-seven or fifty-eight. Better to get it over early; it saves many problems."

So, in this room we all had our prostates removed. There were four of us. Number three was going home this afternoon. Number four lay opposite me. He was the first to have had his operation but I was in better shape than he was. His face was pale and bloated. Later I saw that his body was bloated too. He was about seventy. A railwayman once, he was now a pensioner who lived with his brother. His name was Bert.

Soon afterwards the Italian had his first visitor —a woman. A nurse showed her in, and after looking about her self-consciously she went to sit by his bed. He was sufficiently awake to let her hold his hand and, from the way she stroked it, and how she whispered to him, I concluded that she was his wife.

She must have been a good deal younger than he. Her hair was red. It was tinted, mingling copper with bronze. Piled high, it made her look tartish, and this her clumsy make-up accentuated. But I liked her profile: its softness did not derive from muscles gone slack. Her flesh seemed firm and healthy. She had on a green peasant blouse with a scoop neck and drawstring, and a pleated skirt. As she leaned forward I saw the outline of her haunches.

She was not allowed to stay long, and before she left she bent down and kissed him tenderly. As she went out she bowed to Bert, giving him a smile. She did the same for me, and I thought that she could well be one of those women who, when still quite young, are taught by their mothers how to smile.

I had smiled back, of course. The Italian, my neighbor, raised his hand and saluted me with a wave.

His name was Stefano . . . Stefano Lozzi. I asked him how he felt, he asked back whether I spoke Italian, I said yes, like a Maltese cow, and he managed a grin.

"*Vacca maltese . . .*"

He had only heard of people who spoke Italian like French cows. I saw that his face was bony, with eyes set deep under surprisingly thin brows. The hair was cropped so close that it resembled a black helmet lightly specked with grey. His hands were powerful, the fingers stumpy. I could imagine him moving about some building site in Turin or Milan, with a tight-fitting hat made of news-

papers to keep the dust out. Even in bed his appearance suggested the proletarian.

Bert wanted to know who the new man was and what he was suffering from. I told him. In reply he grunted a sort of welcome across the room.

The next day Stefano had more visitors. They were his wife's parents. The father, a tough little bull with snow-white hair and hard, ironic eyes, was a tobacco farmer from near Myrtleford. The mother walked with a heavy gait and was short of breath. There was also Stefano's wife again. Over her arm she carried a gaily-striped cape — it had been raining since before dawn — and she had some flowers, dripping wet, a posy from a garden.

How quickly impressions can change! That day she did not look tartish to me, although she was still using too much lipstick and eye-shadow. While the others talked she perched on Stefano's bed, playing with her locket and gazing down at him. She often took his hand, as I had seen her do the first time, but I noticed, too, that as soon as her father glanced at her she let go of it.

As they went out the old man said a few words to Bert and to me, politely in English. I asked him about somebody I knew in Myrtleford. When his son-in-law saw that I could not follow his reply he told him to complete it in Italian.

Stefano's wife was called Marcellina. His first wife had died four years ago and their children were now grown up. They had no wish to emigrate, except possibly the youngest who was doing his army service. Stefano had been in Australia sixteen months. Marcellina's father had brought him out to help him work his farm, after his son, her brother, had been crippled by a fall under his own tractor. Theirs, therefore, was a second marriage, late in life but evidently happy, entailing on his part a new beginning under a new roof.

Stefano Lozzi came from Bassano, where he had been a mason, as well as owning a share in a small vineyard.

"I've been to your province, Stefano. I'm very fond of the Brenta valley, but Bassano is a sad town. All those little crosses in that church for the soldiers who died on Monte Grappa! And the trees in that long avenue, where the Germans hanged the partisans."

"One of them was my cousin."

Lying bed to bed in hospital men talk freely.

"How long have you had your enlarged prostate?"

"It started when I got here, just to make me feel at home. I kept pissing like a horse, but it has its compensations."

"Wish I could think of some!"

"For me it makes desire more hot. Builds up the pressure. Lately I wanted Marcellina all the time."

"You're lucky, then. One hears of it happening, but only to a few. And you managed all right, despite . . .?"

"Like a lion. I don't think it hinders."

He was easy to get on with and cheerful. He improved rapidly, and as he grew better he tried to make friends with other patients who came straying in, but none were his countrymen, as far as I remember.

The Catholic chaplain introduced himself to us. He was a rosy young man, Father Griffin by name, who was standing in for another priest. He spoke some Italian and wanted to learn more. Stefano taught him a song.

Sul ponte di Bassano
Noi ci daren la mano . . .

I would make it a trio:

Noi ci daren la mano,
Ed un bacin d'amor.

For Bert's sake we sang softly. He was in pain, lying on his bed hour after hour with his great belly bare, grumbling that the ward was like a sweat-box. When each of us was given a transparent plastic vessel into which to drain our flow, I saw that the color of his was much darker — black almost — than Stefano's and mine. But he was encouraged to get up and, like us, walk to the bathroom. There he sat in the soapy water, the vessel, connected to his penis like a displaced umbilical, hanging over the edge of the tub. He talked about Marcellina Lozzi.

"The stuff she brought this morning, that was nice." It was *zabaione,* which she had doled out to us from a pudding basin. "I'm not like some, I don't mind trying a new thing, specially with eggs in. She looks all right, that one. Myself, I never felt like getting me a woman. A man needs one, they say, but from what I see they wear you down in the finish."

Marcellina now came visiting alone, travelling three hours every day. When she bent over me with the dish I could have held her breasts in my hands, so close were they, nestling in her blouse like two pigeons, plump and white. Had she ever suckled babies? Could someone like

her have been sitting around all those years, waiting for a husband to turn up? I questioned Stefano.

"No, no, she was married before, but he was a rogue. He left her and flew off to Italy. She went after him, believe it or not, and that's where I met her, in Asolo. But he already had another one, so she came home and got herself a divorce. The old man threatened to throw her out, but she got her way."

"No children?"

"The swine wouldn't give her any."

In the middle of my fourth or fifth night in the hospital I heard cries, shrill and high, coming from another room in our wing.

"Food! I want food!"

It went on and on, like a fierce bird's. I thought I recognized the voice.

The next day, carrying our plastic vessels under our dressing gowns, Stefano and I began patrolling our floor. I asked about those heart-rending cries.

I was right. They had come from someone I knew, a Mr Crewe, who until recently had lived only a few doors from us, one of those shipwrecked widowers you find in every street. He was well into his eighties. He had been an instrument-maker, and even now was still a masterly gardener. He was, however, so deaf that when you wanted to compliment him on his flowers, or on the prizes he took every year, you had to write it down for him. Finally something dreadful happened also to his eyes and he went blind. People were patient, but trying to make him perceive what color his blooms were, their contrasts and shadings, became unbearably laborious. And then, as if this too were not enough, his spleen . . . But why go on? There are things which don't demand to be described.

"Poor old chap," the Ward Sister said, "he doesn't know where he is; he can't tell day from night; he is always shouting for food. Who knows what goes on in that head? He is not hungry. All he wants is to be sure someone hears him, that's why I think he does it."

I told Stefano. We went in together and looked down at the old man who, worn to his last essence, was sleeping with his mouth open.

"Devils! Why can't they let him go in peace? What is there left for him to live for? No hope, no light, no love . . ."

In the afternoon the nurse came and spoke to me.

"We have what we call penile hygiene. Not penal: nothing to do with prisons. It's a grotty job and if a patient can do it for himself we appreciate it. If I give you the doings and show you how to clean yourself up properly down there, will you take care of it?"

I translated it for Stefano. He laughed.

"Is this what we pay health insurance for? Tell her I so much looked forward having her do it for me, it kept me going in my troubles. If I buy her a new watch to pin to her chest, will she be nice and start on it right away?"

She had heard such jokes before. "Kindly tell your friend he's too old for that sort of crack." But she was not put out. "I'll have a word with Father Griffin when he comes in, I bet he will have something to say to him."

In the evening, there was Marcellina. She took a chair and with Stefano sat by the window. It looked out on to a lawn where a pavilion stood in which they sold toys and other gifts made in the therapy department. Someone was still working there: I could see the pink reflection of the light. It was spring; this was the warmest day we had yet had, the first when windows were left open so late. The mood in the ward was almost gay; many patients were still up. Marcellina was giggling; my guess is that he was telling her how he had teased the nurse. You cannot ask a man how old his wife is, but just then I would not have given her more than forty-three or forty-four.

The next day was the day before we were to be discharged. At four o'clock the boy with the evening papers came round, I had my cup of tea, and then accompanied Stefano on what Bert called our shuffle along the lino. By now we were free of those undignified containers. I remember the sequence of what happened, and that it began with us catching sight of Father Griffin as he was coming up the stairs used by the staff. He wore a white stole over a dark suit and carried a small bag. The priest inclined his head and Stefano bowed.

"Somebody is receiving the last Sacrament," he said.

We strolled to the day-room, where there was a television set and tables with magazines and dominoes. The place was empty. We sat down: the chairs were soft but their armrests uncomfortable.

"The chaplain looks different tonight," I said.

"When he goes to the dying he is not the same man, not the man who sings songs with us."

"I'm still thinking about our little nurse. She looks the kind who wouldn't be afraid to tell him what you said to her yesterday, about what you'd been looking forward to so much. If only

to see how he reacts. But as to me, Stefano, I don't feel like making fun of my condition."

"Why don't you? I do. It'll be good to get home at last and not have to piss every ten minutes."

"True, but there's the other part."

"What other part?"

"Oh, come, you know quite well."

"The bill you mean? That's nothing."

"I mean *cohabitazione.*" I deliberately used the pompous term.

"What about *cohabitazione?*"

"It will never be the same again, do I need to tell you?"

"Eh? Never? In two weeks I'll be a stallion; take my word for it."

"A stiff erection is a stiff erection, certainly, but when you can't let go in front, can't shoot it out to where it wants to be . . ."

"I don't understand."

"Of course you do. Till the end of our days our seed will flow back, inside us, internally, into our own true selves. Without meeting a friend. Some stallion! No more presents to leave for the woman, though the little fellow will still go soft and limp when it's over. Farewell emission — see you again in paradise!"

"Explain, for Christ's love."

"But you have had it explained to you, you must have."

"Please, can I hear it from you?"

I had to strain my Italian to encompass the medical details. He listened, putting in a question once or twice. When I had finished he stared at the floor.

"I didn't know this," he said at last.

"But that's impossible. Didn't the specialist make it clear?"

"He probably tried, but if he did I didn't take it in. Or he thought I knew already. Or we got mixed up. Speak English to me, and I am deaf, like the old fellow who keeps screaming for food."

"You asked your own doctor, surely, about you and Marcellina?"

"A little, maybe. I would still enjoy it with her, he said."

"So you will, so you will. In its own small way. And she'll save on the Pill."

"Who wants that?"

"What do you expect? Lose your prostate and have a dozen kids? Be sensible."

"I suppose it's like being sterilised."

"Now you're looking at it straight. Congratulations."

"And not to make love, not as we used to!"

"But you will."

"Not like a man. Not if you are right . . .'

"I am sorry."

"They could have put it off for a few years. It wouldn't have killed me."

"I'm sure you know some people who speak English. Why didn't you find out from them?"

"I didn't think there was very much to find out." He shook his head. "The surgeon, he flies here from Sydney. He examined me, that's all. And there's my father-in-law, but he knows nothing."

"Yes, the doctors, the hospitals! They never let you in on what they should. Last year our dairyman had this operation, and what do you think they said to him when he went home? 'Take reasonable exercise.' After dinner he walks to the lake and back — perhaps a kilometre — and nearly haemorrhages."

"Thank you for what you told me."

"You'll cope with it, Stefano. Everyone does."

We went back to our room and lay down. That evening we had no visitors. I had my pills, dropped off early and woke again about eleven. Only the nightlight was on, a diaphanous shimmer.

In his bed Stefano was crying. Weeping bitterly.

In the morning, when he was away in the bathroom, showering and shaving, Bert said to me:

"What's with your mate? Last night, did you hear him howl?"

I explained what had upset him. Bert, who probably would not be released for another week, lay back, his pyjamas open as they always were, and rubbed his stomach.

"Tough, finding out about it so late. But what's the odds? An emotional type, isn't he?"

In the forenoon, when I too was making ready to leave, Marcellina came with her parents to collect Stefano. They shook hands all round. The old man went out first, with the nurse who insisted on carrying the overnight bag. Stefano followed on his wife's arm. Once again she had on the green blouse with the scoop neck, but this time she wore a matching skirt, a plain and narrow one.

THE ABORIGINAL TREATY COMMITTEE

The Commonwealth Government's commitment to land rights produced the Northern Territory Land Rights Act which transferred reserves to the Aboriginal groups. It also supported, through the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission (now through the Aboriginal Development Commission), purchase of land for groups off reserves. The Queensland and Western Australia Governments have resisted such policies, as the stories of Archer River and Noonkanbah illustrate. If, as now reported, the Queensland Government intends to take the remaining Queensland reserves from the communities, this would not only be a rejection of Commonwealth policies but a denial of promises, both specific and implied, to those communities made by Queensland governments since 1896.

The reserves were poor compensation for tribal country forcibly taken; but in the circumstances the reserve Aborigines must in justice have established residential rights. A second expulsion from homes and property would continue to make nonsense of Commonwealth and Queensland Government claims for their Aboriginal policies and might be a greater cause of shame than the expedition to Noonkanbah.

Such action can be prevented only by the Commonwealth Government which, if necessary, could acquire the reserves compulsorily and vest them in the Aboriginal communities.

But these are not the only threats to Aboriginal traditional rights. At Gordon Downs in Western Australia a community identified with its land for generations is being forced from it by the pastoral leaseholder. Throughout the Kimberleys mining interests attracted by ore, diamonds, etc., encroach upon traditional sacred sites.

The Aboriginal Treaty Committee urges you to protest to the Queensland and Western Australia Governments against these developments and write to your federal MP, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and the Prime Minister, demanding that the Commonwealth Government make it clear to the Queensland Government that it will not tolerate the abolition of the reserves and that, if necessary, it will acquire them for the Aboriginal communities.

Support the Aboriginal Treaty Committee to press for a just settlement of Aboriginal Rights to land, compensation, and social justice. Sign the statement below.

The Aboriginal Treaty Committee:
P.O. Box 1242,
Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601.

I/We agree that a Treaty, Covenant or Convention of peace and friendship should be negotiated between Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, and the Commonwealth of Australia.

I/We enclose a donation of $ to the costs incurred by the Aboriginal Treaty Committee, P.O. Box 1242, Canberra, A.C.T. 2601.

Signed ..... Name .....

(Donors will receive such publications which the Committee from time to time produces.)

Address ..... Postcode.....

I would (not) be interested in joining/starting a regional support group.

DONALD HORNE

The Two Half-Cultures

Donald Horne is one of the most prolific and free-ranging of Australia's writers on intellectual and cultural problems, and is the author of a notable autobiography, a form rare in this country. "The Two Half-cultures" is an address given at the 1980 dinner to present the New South Wales Premier's literary awards.

I shall introduce my theme tonight by telling an anecdote about a speaking engagement of a few years ago. The scene was a College of Advanced Education where I had been invited to give some lectures: after one of the lectures a woman came up to me and, wanting to be helpful, ran over some of my major faults as a writer. One of them was a wilfulness in not confining myself to themes that could be scientifically based on what she described as verifiable documentary evidence. What's more, by not reciting litanies of sacred names and hard words I had not shown proper respect for scholarly authority. A fault she found particularly worrying was a refusal to speak in the legitimising language of footnotes.

The two things that most concerned her were connected with *The Lucky Country*. One was that it had sold a lot of copies and was therefore worse than anything else I had written. The second was a charge even more grave: how could one possibly take *The Lucky Country* seriously as a work of "social science" when it had been set in so many schools as a text for study in English courses? A book set for literary study was dangerous to use in discussion about Australian society.

I have told the anecdote as a reminder of the great and debilitating intellectual divisions that can exist in modern communities. These divisions began with the growth of the knowledge industries in the nineteenth century, and the desiccation of knowledge in the twentieth century as it was chopped up into increasingly smaller divisions of scholarly labor and then dried out in the languages and styles of the new academic specialisations. At times it now seems that scholars are no longer able to speak to each other, and that there is no longer such a human being as an educated person. It is true that in Australia we are also victims of a particularly mindless pragmatism in which there is no sweet music to conceal the grunting as snouts contest with each other to get into the trough, but we should remember that as an industrialised society our predicament is also part of a general schizophrenic disintegration of European culture.

Not that scholars, in Australia as elsewhere, cannot be notable contributors to what is left of general intellectual discourse. A person of learning, at the best, can create a new world, show a new way, arouse a new interest. Consider the imagination that, say, Geoffrey Blainey used in *The Tyranny of Distance* or Manning Clark in his *History of Australia*. These two scholars performed the miracle of interesting many Australians in the history of their own society. Other scholars may make less influential contributions to intellectual discourse than this—but useful ones nevertheless. However, their work may sometimes have to be translated from academic prose into educated English. Other scholars do write readably, but for one reason or another we don't hear of them; or we have not got the habit of serious

reading. Unfortunately there are others who become lost in the legitimising rituals of scholarship. For them, good works are manifest only in the labors of research, and faith is manifest only in the repetition of magic phrases and the names of other scholars. The effect of their labors is not to open out the possibility of intellectual discourse, but to stifle it.

We should remember that the words 'intellectual' and 'scholar' have different meanings. Some scholars are intellectuals; some aren't. One can speak of a cultured scholar; but one can also speak of a philistine scholar. But one might imagine that scholarship of the kind that is not also intellectual is only, as it were, a 'half-culture'.

By 'intellectual' I am imagining here the kinds of people who have a special interest in constructions of reality and accept as one of the central considerations of their existence a concern with theorising about humanity and its environment. In this sense an intellectual is not simply — or perhaps not at all — a critic of texts, but a critic of existence, leading an examined life in which two great questions constantly arise — and perhaps constantly remain unanswered: How can I describe existence? What can I believe? But the intellectual I am imagining does this in terms that, ideally, make some sense to others. Even intellectuals who are specialists, ideally, do not express themselves in a specialist way. This provides one of the reasons why the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards should be praised.

It is this: there are many opportunities now for scholarship to be practised — especially in the tertiary education institutions — and a number of opportunities for it to be rewarded, both by money and by honor, even if sometimes what is being rewarded or honored is merely an expression of a half-culture; but opportunities for paying honor to the fruit of the full culture of a shared intellectual life are, in Australia, rare. (For example, perhaps alone in the world, the Australian universities, in their conferrings of honorary degrees, do not honor the intellectual, as distinguished from the scholarly, life.) In a ceremony such as tonight's we are merely witnessing the handing out of cheques and medallions: we are making two declarations of worth — that the examined life is worth living, and that there are still possibilities for general intellectual discourse. We are making an affirmation that there is a common language we can still use — the literary language, if you like — in which we can make sense to each other as, like patients lying in a hospital ward, we share some of our secrets and speak a little of our common predicament.

This brings me to a second anecdote. It begins with a telephone call from an office-bearer in a scholarly literary association, who told me the association was having its annual dinner on such-and-such a date: they would like me to be the main speaker; could I come?

Well . . . yes . . . perhaps . . . what would they like me to discuss? The answer was quite definite: "We would like you to propose a toast to Australian writers."

I said yes, that was a good idea . . . But there was, of course, one difficulty. I was myself an Australian writer.

To that there was for a while no answer, denoting either a significant silence, or a disconnected telephone. Then came a cold, two letter reply. If one were writing this reply down it would be preceded by three dots and followed by three dots, along with a question mark and an exclamation mark in brackets, denoting incredulity. This well thought out two-letter put-down to the idea that I was an Australian writer was:

". . . Oh?(!) . . ."

To speak bluntly: as well as the half-culture of a scholarly world that rejects the possibility of common intellectual discourse, there is another half-culture — the half-culture of a literary world that also rejects the possibility of common intellectual discourse. They are both of them fragments of a disintegrated culture. The followers of each cult can become proud of their incomprehensibility to the other — except in the case of the literature departments of universities where scholars have to read literary works so that they can tell writers what they really meant. In a society in which secret languages have become one of the modern forms of honor, the scholar and the litterateur can both of them be equally philistine in proudly shrinking away from the possibility of a full, and shared, culture, in which they might both speak to a general intellectual public, and to each other.

There will probably be times at these functions at which the Premier's Literary Awards are presented when this particular half-culture — the literary half-culture — will be honored. Yet that shouldn't worry us. Even if scholars returned in greater numbers to a shared culture there would still, and probably necessarily, be a half-culture of scholars' scholars — people whose work might itself be uninteresting or even unintelligible to the nonspecialist but that, when translated into educated English or in some other way popularised,

might be made intellectually useful; or it might give ideas to the Manning Clarks or the Geoffrey Blaineys, which they can then carry on to the rest of us. In any hive there are imagination-free worker-bees, and there have to be drones. In the same way, in the literary half-culture there will also — and always — be poets' poets and novelists' novelists — experimentalists whose work might be unintelligible or even repellent to most intellectuals but that provides at least a compost out of which the best stuff can grow. Just as we tolerate this in the scholars' half-culture we should tolerate it among the belle-lettrists. In fact we should tolerate it all the more since there is so little other consolation for belle-lettrists in our pragmatic society.

Another declaration we are making tonight, providing another reason for praising the Premier's Literary Awards, is that the imaginative and generous recognition of the non-fiction category is a reminder that the word 'literary' can extend to more than fiction and verse: it can include history, biography, and other forms of general social inquiry and general speculation. A literary culture that does not accept that this is so is likely to remain as stunted as a scholarly culture that shrinks from intellectual life.

The least one can expect of works of general intellectual interest (that are not fiction or verse) is that they are structured so that their themes are developed and that they are written in a serviceable prose. But they can offer more than that. Works of this kind, as much as fiction or verse, can also be distinctively *literary,* in that their style — their characteristic ways of presenting material — can be part of their content, perhaps the most important part of it. The way in which the writer says something can be as important as what is being said; in fact it becomes part of what is being said, and it may be what is remembered most. The style is part of the writer's construction of reality and part of the writer's criticism of existence.

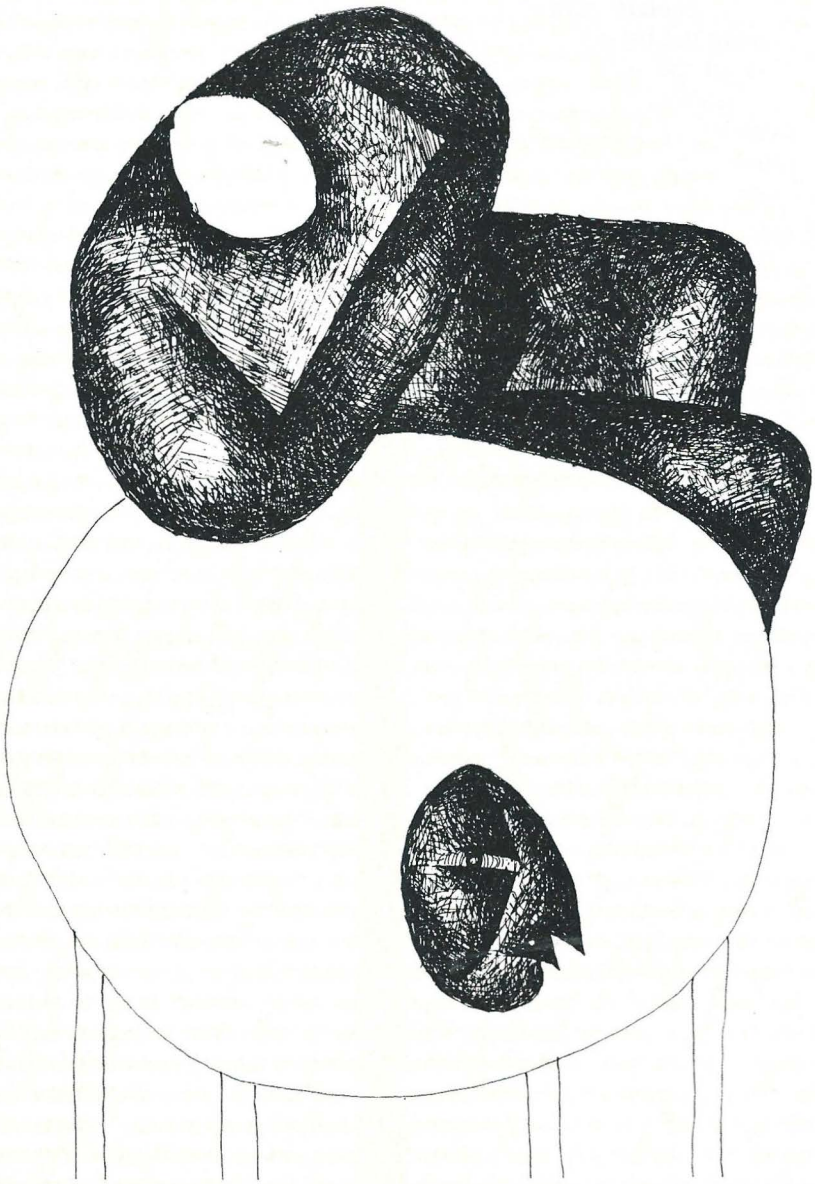
Whether a stylist of this kind works in fiction or non-fiction, prose or verse, is not the principal question. The principal question is: from these characteristic ways of presenting material, what kind of world is the writer projecting? For some fiction writers their style, in this sense, is their only talent. They write art novels in which when you've read a few pages you have read all they have to say, because what they most have to say is simply their style. It might have been more economical if they had become poets. But this doesn't really matter: we can buy their art novels and never finish them, but nevertheless be deeply affected by their view of the world, perhaps more affected than by the books we read right through. However, it is a pleasant extra if novelists also tell us a story, and a decisive extra if they are developing (in my sense of the word) intellectual themes. What some of them should perhaps consider is that if they wrote non-fiction this might enable them to add ordinary content to the content of style.

It used to be said of Australia that it was a country that cut down its tall poppies. It was seen as a country so democratic that the destructive jealousies of the ordinary people stifled talent and reduced originality to mediocrity. As I have suggested one way or the other in half-a-dozen books, this may be the opposite of the truth. Australia, for understandable reasons, as a colonial society ran a very mediocre line in elites: they were made mediocre from the start; it was one of their essential requirements that they should remain mediocre; and if anything it was the proudly maintained mediocrity, that of the elites, that stifled the potentials for development of the people. If 'destructive jealousy' occurred it may have been the destructive jealousy of one part of the elites for another part of the elites. Unsure of themselves in a derivative society where imitation was prized more than originality, they cut each other down — although for this purpose one must move the metaphor from the poppy field.

I wonder if these part traditions now account for the sharpness of the hatreds of what might broadly be seen as the intellectual, or half-intellectual classes in Australia? Consider for example the venom that can be carried in the vituperative use of the two rival curse-words 'academic' and 'journalistic'. Is the usage of these two words quite so venomous in countries with more assured traditions of intellectual discourse, even if they have been attenuated, in the modern manner? The word 'journalist' is used with particularly comprehensive venom. General intellectuals in Australia can be dismissed as 'journalistic' by both the half-culture of the scholars and the half-culture of the litterateurs.

I also wonder, however, if there might not yet be some healing time. In Australia we intellectuals are now perhaps somewhat more assured of ourselves than we used to be. Could we possibly reach a stage when we might find a little interest in each other and perhaps even offer a little more encouragement for each other? In the industrialised countries at large, with the absolute belief in technology and in science at last being

questioned, are we likely to be seeing the beginning of a questioning of that harshness of intellectual specialisation that came with the belief in science? As we begin to face the limitations of material progress and of material affuence might we begin to seek more confidently for a strengthening of other values in our lives, with some reachings out towards a full culture in which we might be able to speak to each other again. We should hope that occasions such as tonight's might help us along that road.



Jiri Tibor Novak

Australian Popular Culture Revisited

A Comment

STEPHEN ALOMES

Stephen Alomes teaches Australian Studies at Deakin University. He has recently completed a doctorate on Australian liberal intellectuals in the 1920s.

Jack Clancy's unrelenting blitzkrieg against the Spearritt and Walker collection, *Australian Popular Culture,* in *Overland* 80, suggests several important questions regarding approaches to the subject in Australia and the character of popular culture under the several phases of industrial capitalism. The phalanx of experts called on by Clancy to add weight to his onslaught has significant gaps in its ranks. He has his target, the book, clearly in his sights and manages to emphasise its conceptual uncertainties, but his own vision of the subject is conspicuously vague. He approves —after Kreiling—of the study of "symbolic forms and styles of life" as "human realities" and stresses the need for 'a thorough exploration of popular culture in Australia and especially media culture', but tells us little about how we might undertake such a journey. His overseas soldiers in the field are mainly characterised by their capacity to generate "heated polemics without much illumination".

Such observations are not intended to suggest that his critique of *Australian Popular Culture* is entirely unsatisfactory. He is correct in noting the sparseness of contemporary international literature on popular culture in the book's bibliography, though a few works are referred to in the introduction. Many of the pieces simply highlight controversies and the prudishness of earlier generations, as in the essays on sex guides and on the cinema.

The book's limitations can be better understood by reflecting on the short history of the study of popular culture in Australia and overseas. Putting to one side, with Clancy, the 'civilization versus mass culture' theorists of the 1800-1960 period, the real study of popular culture only begins with Hoggart (1957), Barthes (1957), Williams (1961) and the Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham set up by Hoggart in 1964.[1] The field then mushroomed in forms as diverse as European structuralists and neo-Marxists analyses of culture, language and power, sociological and media studies research and American work on popular literature and cultural forms.[2]

The problem for Spearritt and Walker, or Clancy, or anyone is partly the newness of the field (especially in Australia) and the extent of the recent efflorescence. Earlier this year, after working in another field for some time, I took it on myself to prepare printed teaching materials to introduce third-year Australian Studies students to popular culture in post-war Western society. Reading excerpts from 30-40 books and articles I was both excited and bewildered by the diversity of material and approaches. I essayed a variety of things: a short assessment of Hoggart (which I found later had already been done in similar terms in England); a discussion of work and popular culture; a critical summary of Lewis' categories of sociological work in the field; an exploration of the relationship between popular culture and industrialisation; a tentative assessment of the social mythology of contemporary advertising; and several short empirical pieces including one on the social role of TV and radio women's program

personalities such as Bert Newton and Mike Walsh. In doing this I noted approaches outside the scope of my discussion and assessed those within it. Later, when an Open University draft chapter on popular culture landed on my desk, I took stock of the things I had and hadn't done. While most of the interpretations were comparable, my intelligent guesses about industrialisation and popular culture would have gained from greater awareness of historical research on the subject; and my knowledge of some of the most recent work was partial. Over time I hope to deal with my sins of omission but I don't feel culpable. In a rapidly changing field, which is barely two decades old, cultural lag must influence the character of work in Australia.

Such problems are reflected in the descriptive empiricism of several of the Spearritt and Walker essays and in Clancy's discussion itself. He condemns *APC* for still using the term "popular culture" and for what the editors call "an indirect autobiographical impulse evident" in most of the essays. On the first point he is simply wrong. "Popular culture" is still used, usually in neutral or approving terms, rather than in the language of the critique of "mass culture". It is often supplemented by "media culture" or "consumer culture" when dealing with specific manifestations, but the term has not been liquidated. The study of popular culture often begins with an autobiographical impulse, or at least a desire to write about that with which one is familiar. Hoggart's treatment of the working-class world in which he grew up, written as an insider, is incomparably superior to his alienated condemnation of late 1950s working-class culture. The student of popular culture often does begin as a fan collecting material of personal interest, just as the regional, labor or religious historian often is stimulated to research by a personal affection for his subject matter.

The first hesitant moves towards the study of popular culture during the 1960s came more out of a Left or populist tradition than out of academic or 'high culture' traditions. The early work of Ian Turner on children's books, graffiti, jazz and football (also with an autobiographical stimulus) came out of such a tradition. Turner's pioneering work was complemented by the writings of a later generation who were, in a sense, his contemporaries in the celebration of popular culture. A university generation from lower middle-class, and sometimes working-class, backgrounds, which was more influenced by teenage culture than by the official culture of the school and university, looked sympathetically at popular culture. Their empathy differed greatly from the downward glances and frowning condemnations of their often Leavisite middle-class predecessors.

Internationally during the 1960s, experiental and celebratory books appeared as offshoots of the 'new journalism' of Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. Craig MacGregor's *People, Politics and Pop* (1968), Richard Neville's *Playpower* (1971) and Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* (1968) represented a new phase in approaches to popular culture.[3]

These critiques-cum-celebrations of popular culture have had their more recent popular counterpart in confessional novels (such as Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey's *Puberty Blues*, 1979) and in drama and popular song (the social criticism of David Williamson, Bob Hudson, Captain Matchbox and even Skyhooks).[4] The new populist work first appeared at a time when popular culture was changing, perhaps in nature rather than in degree, with the growth of media culture and consumer culture. It was the period when first Hoggart and Williams in England, and later Marcuse and the New Left cultural critics in America, and the Meanjin Godzone contributors, Craig MacGregor and Donald Horne, and Marxists, in Australia were trying to come to terms with changes in working-class culture in the era of the car and the television set. It was also a time when few major libraries and archives kept popular magazines, and conservative academics looked askance at any colleague who dared to 'slum' by writing on popular culture, usually in the only available vehicle, the newspaper.

Simultaneously, academic approaches to the subject were being developed. G. H. Lewis' (1978) summary of sociological approaches takes account of the bulk of research. Most work has been done in what he terms the "Social Indicators" approach, which considers the form and content of a particular cultural phenomenon as an indication of social experience and belief. Typical is the research on comics and the Depression which considers their appeal to be partly a symptom of the social experiences of the period or studies of romantic fiction and its appeal to women.[5] It is the method which operates most often in Spearritt and Walker and seems to be preferred by Clancy. A second, but very different mode which also appeals to the growing army of media studies

researchers, is the 'social science' statistical survey of mass media cultural audiences, and experimental behavioral science work on the psychological impact of television. Both approaches have similar weaknesses, the product of unrestrained literary and numerical empiricism respectively. Lewis notes that form and content work is "seldom derived from theory". It is typified by "isolated, unco-ordinated, atheoretical approaches to topical social problems such as violence, sexim or racial stereotyping'" which too often simplistically duplicate earlier work or draw invalid inferences as to the effects on an audience of exposure to popular culture.[6] The media studies of the audience are often equally concerned with form rather than with the social reality in which the culture is embedded, though their form is often the methodological one of the research project. Lewis remarked that this method has been usefully "productive in the accumulation of data" but had been "much less successful in the interpretation of this complex material".[7] The third approach, the study of the production and distribution of culture, looks more directly at the political economy and organisation of cultural production. Varying in style from Simon Frith's *The Sociology of Rock* (1978) and E. J. Epstein's *News from Nowhere* (1974) to Humphrey McQueen's *Australia's Media Monopolies* (1977) it has a specialised but important role to play in the analysis of popular culture in the era of the mass media.[8]

The vices of simple-minded empiricism in the form and content and audience survey research are often mirrored by the limitations of mystifying theory in much of the work influenced by European structuralism and semiology. Influenced by Barthes and Levi-Strauss one cluster of researchers associated with the Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham is developing the new critical language of 'signs' and 'significations', 'deep structures' and 'meta-meanings', 'codes', 'referents' and 'glosses'. The work has been fruitful in the language of theoretical performance but the devotees have not yet demonstrated that they have a new and powerful method, or that its fruits will be more profound than that of other researchers. The intuitive Barthes of *Mythologies* is a different beast from the theoretical one of *Elements of Semiology,* and the former method seems central in much research inspired by the latter work despite the obligatory jungle of language.[9] Pierre Bourdieu's observation that cultural artefacts have symbolic codes embedded in them that make sense only to those socialised in those codes is a thoughtful one which highlights the ideological and social character of language. The concern to discern the larger social mythology present in the worlds of media culture and education takes us beyond the mere interest in 'symbols' and 'styles', in popular culture and belief. The language in which most of the work is carried out, however, allows admission to the temple of semiology of only a small number of novices.[10] The performance seems more concerned to establish an intellectual elite of Left gurus than to challenge conservative cultural hegemony and hasten social change.

The Birmingham work in the older culturalist tradition which studies the symbolic elements in a culture of rebellion (bikies, 'hippies', etc.) as part of a social situation has proven more fruitful than the structuralist embrace.[11] The varying gains of the two major Birmingham approaches and the fragile plant of popular culture research in Australia pose the question of how the study of popular culture can illuminate larger questions of contemporary society. The early service role for popular culture research — throwing light on racial and Imperial symbolism in sport[12] and 20th century Victorian moralism in respect of film, books and magazines — was predictable. Inevitably, the work of the first pioneers will only scratch the surface as it begins with hesitant general insights and rudimentary tools. The next stage is to study popular culture as it is located in society: the relationship between work and leisure; consumer culture and changes in working-class culture since the 1950s; consumer culture and the counter-culture; and, historically, the role of culture in the lives of different social groups from working-class Collingwood in the 1930s to nouveau-riche Doncaster-Templestowe today.

Terms like "hegemony" and "social control" are often invoked in contemporary discussions of the political role of education, welfare and popular culture. Whatever the changing interpretations of the terms, the role of sport and media culture in maintaining conservative political ascendancy demands investigation. A simple noting of the predominance of football and music, film and TV star news in the media asserts this more powerfully than any theoretical insight or deftly hurled polemical dart. A reading of the front pages and billposters of the Melbourne Sun reminds us that a multinational takeover there or a land deal here is of little consequence compared with what

Perc said to Jezza or Bert said to Don.[13] Secondly, the impact of the car and consumer culture (the world of beliefs, behavior and consumption patterns encouraged by television and contemporary marketing) on working class consciousness is of crucial importance. The change in Australia working class experience and consciousness as a result of suburbanisation, the car, TV and immigration has been treated more fully in films like "The FJ Holden" than in research. The similarities between the counter-cultural themes of authenticity, self-expression, freedom and 'naturalness' and many of the selling themes of the consumer culture pose crucial questions regarding the changing ideological demands of consumer capitalism. The partial transition from the simple, puritanical repressive values of early industrial capitalism to the 'do your own thing' ideology of consumer capitalism may represent one of the most significant ideological shifts of the last two centuries. The supplanting of traditional beliefs (some good, some bad, including traditional class, racial and ethnic loyalties and religious and patriotic beliefs) by the values of consumer capitalism is related to the decine of local community life in the street and the neighborhood. In Australia, which has led the world in many aspects of consumer, media and popular culture (vide car and TV ownership, film and sports attendances) contributions to the debate on the nature of consumer culture being developed by Stuart Ewen and others are most needed.[14]

Popular culture research should be part of the study of society rather than offering simple abstractions from it, analyzing social experience rather than merely skimming the cultural cream off the duller milk of actual life. The culture of the university English Department, female process workers, the Over 60s Club or interstate truck drivers might equally be the subject of research along with that of the housewife, the surfie or the male football follower. Nor can the culture of organised, commercialised sport be studied simply in terms of its form and content on the field and off. The relationship between working "to earn a living" during the week and turning yourself on at the football ("get out there and clear your mind") in the words of "Up There Cazaly" is more important that the mere phenomenal popularity of the football anthem. The culture of interstate truck drivers can be understood only in terms of the larger occupational, social and economical context. The machismo culture of trucking music, CB radio, drag racing, and pin-ups of women and of trucks is not that of a confident social group. It is a 'negative' of the frustrations and difficulties of an isolated, peripatetic group of petty bourgeois workers who are paying off huge debts and being held to ransom by the large middle men, the companies for whom they do contract work.

The crucial next stage in research in Australia is to show how popular culture fits into the experience of different social groups, and into the larger ideological and economic schema of things. This is not to assume that popular culture is simply false or cheap, or a means of manipulation, though it may play this latter role. The distraction from politics and the escape from work are not simply élitist clichés; they happen, and to all of us. The argument that consumer and media capitalism substitute vicarious experiences for actual social interaction requires further investigation. The extent to which people relate more to television programs and material goods and less to the social world around them (as in the picture of the people in the street who are all, separately, watching the same TV program) is an important question regarding the dramatic social change of the last three decades. The argument that cultural rebellion (through music, sex, alcohol and narcotics) supports the system through offering an escape-valve and maintaining consumption must be grappled with.

The role of the consumer culture in the political economy of modern capitalism is more important than the mere search for what Clancy termed the "indigenous" or "symbolically revealing" elements in Australian social life. Central are the social implications of a society in which the electronic hearth of television offers substitute warmth to "you can laugh, you can cry, you can feel like you can fly . . . you heave a little sigh" and "find someone who's just your style". The social values the family or the lone individual: on Channel 7 and needs implied by a commercial like that for the multinational supermarket chain, Safeway, which asserts that it is "reaching out to serve you . . . wants to get to know you . . . to give a little extra . . . care a little more" deserve scrutiny. Some of that research will be theoretical, some of it will be empirical. Its urgency is emphasised all the more by the surprisingly frank comments of Bruce Gyngell on the exploitative aspects of the media: society relationship. The twenty per cent of the population with a stimulating job liked

the ABC because they were interested in the real world. The rest preferred, and needed, commercial TV to survive. They were

> the people for whom the working week is time to fill in between the weekends, who have got boring jobs and who don't like their wives because they got married for the wrong reasons before the advent of the Pill. There's no romance in their lives — she has varicose veins, her hair is in curlers, she smokes and he's not too attractive either. They need escape to get away from the humdrum.[15]

Gyngell's simply exploitative interpretation of mass media culture can be qualified by a recognition that the interaction between the 'consumer' and commercially created popular culture is complex. Most of us gladly appreciate or are involved in, some forms of popular culture, whether 'live' or through the media. The subtle relationship between the authentic elements of popular culture as part of social experience and its larger political and economic role demands social research.

1 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* London 1957. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* Paris 1957. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution,* Harmondsworth, 1965.

2 G. H. Lewis, *The Sociology of Popular Culture,* London 1978, offers the most complete survey of the field.

3 Craig MacGregor, *People, Politics and Pop,* Sydney 1968. Richard Neville, *Playpower,* London 1971. Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture,* London 1968.

4 Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey, *Puberty Blues,* Melbourne 1979.

5 See William H. Young Jr.'s "The Serious Funnies: Adventure Comics During the Depression, 1929-1938" and "Love and Sex in the Romance Magazines" by David Sonenschein in H. R. Huebel (ed.), *Things in the Driver's Seat: Readings in Popular Culture,* Chicago 1973.

6 G. H. Lewis, *op.cit.,* p. 33.

7 *Ibid,* p. 47.

8 Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Rock,* London 1978. E. J. Epstein, *News from Nowhere,* New York 1974. Humphrey McQueen, *Australia's Media Monopolies,* Melbourne 1977.

9 R. Barthes, *Elements of Semilogy,* London 1967.

10 Mick Counihan's *Intervention* review article (no. 3, August, 1973) on David Chaney's *Processes of Mass Communication,* London 1972, demonstrates the weaknesses of traditional approaches but itself suggests the needless complexity of language of much of the analysis influenced by semiology.

11 Paul Willis' *Profane Culture,* London 1978, which also has some implicit debts to the populist style of Tom Wolfe, is one product.

12 The chapters on Imperial cricket, the 1956 Springbok Rugby tour of New Zealand and the 1908 Burns-Johnson fight in R. Cashman and M. McKernan (eds.), *Sport in History,* St Lucia 1979, are examples.

13 Multinational sponsorship of sports teams, such as the Ford and Alcoa support for Geelong and Alcan's backing for Kurri Kurri Rugby League team, add another dimension in this context.

14 Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture,* New York 1976.

15 *National Times,* 3 January 1977.

DENISON DEASEY

Taxi Driver

Denison Deasey's recent history of early childhood education, Education under Six, *received considerable critical praise. A Melbourne man, he has spent much time abroad. His Oberon Press published Adrian Lawlor's novel,* Horned Capon, *in 1949.*

MONDAY

At six-thirty of a winter morning you are sitting on a rank watching the butchers fixing their windows, the newsagency opening up, first train travellers going to work, coats turned up, heads down. Bleary dark morning.

In my company the work is competitive on a "vacant" call "Car vacant Carlton" — you dive for it, someone is quicker, you've missed a job. Dawn won't come for an hour or so, the creeping dismal dawn over the Dandenongs. Nothing in the paper; big Mal is whingeing about the Olympics again, oil prices go up, two more murders, including one taxi driver. Seven o'clock, still no job.

Waking up and getting sharper, I grab a job four miles away (traffic light, no trams, easy fast run) and remember the address; it is my nice little French woman, lively, full of sparkle, going to work in a computer firm. Good start to the day.

Mademoiselle has been here for years, long enough to like the old Melbourne: "These bistros, everything is bistros — all the same. What happened to those good Melbourne counter lunches I used to like so much?" What indeed?

Pick up a weird doctor. All rush and bother. Seems like a queer; well, odd anyway. We weave through the Toorak Road traffic and he opens a black case full of hypodermics. "My friend is sick, I had to give him a shot, and he's *got* to be ready to leave for Sydney tonight. Not only, my dear, but his wife's in hospital and I have to get her on her feet by tonight, too. Oh! What a bother friends are." Sure are.

Normal day, just enough money, tired after ten hours. No police interference, no rough customers. Radio reports trouble around the town on the code; police traps here, a driver under threat in Footscray. Ten cabs go to lend a hand and they sort the awkward customer out. Nice old women from the hospitals and the homes for the aged, perky businessmen. Thirty dollars by nightfall in a recession city. Not so bad.

TUESDAY

Don't drive Tuesday. You've got to hunt it with a magnifying glass on Tuesday. Go bowling and help the wife.

WEDNESDAY

Taxi driving is a visual experience or a people experience, or that's the way I figure it. It certainly isn't a money maker. What I mean is: You know you are stuck in the thing for twelve hours. You know they are in bed when you are working, and they are in the pub when you are still working. What makes it may be a Melbourne autumn day, golden leaves on St Kilda Road, shapely legs and high heels in Collins Street. We are prisoners in these metal cases, but we are men as well and sometimes luck goes your way . . .

Well-dressed businessman, probably architect, driving along the river in the mid-autumn morning. Thick, golden brown leaves still on the trees skirting the Botanical Gardens, and the freaky sunshine slanting through: "Look at that," he says. "Aren't they beautiful?" And they were.

By mid-afternoon you've made your day or lost it. You've had a bad day, you go wandering, and a woman's voice, very quiet and ladylike,

calls "Taxi" on a street corner. Lady luxury goods saleswoman from Sydney; she's had a bad day, too. Reckons the Melbourne buyers are snobs and hard to get near and plenty else. Would I take her on a few stops and then to the airport? Would I what? Your day is made, because there is still time to get back for the evening rush.

She was good people, too. You make a sort of ranking order. I'm sold on down-to-earth Aus. men and women, often from north of the river. But a Tooraky can be broad-minded, too. It's just harder for them. Then I like children passengers. Drive a kid from a hospital and he is crying for his Mum, so you show him the two-way radio, or an ambulance belting along Sydney Road. Kids are in awe of taxi drivers. One woman said to her kids in May: "Now you have had a ride on a tram and a ride in a taxi, and you've had a good holiday." They had.

Pick up a J1 (off the kerb passenger). Nice bloke, limping. "Get me home to Fairfield and I'll make a cup of tea and put this bloody leg up, Drive. How yer going, anyway? Barsted of a life, isn't it?" Tips, of course. The ones who call you Drive are always considerate, friendly; and give you something. Relics of the boom days? Or just generous people? Poor day, Wednesday, but nice people.

THURSDAY

is a hassle. Lot of work out of South Melbourne and money coming in. Businessmen, the younger ones, in with a brief case, out with a nod. Twenty thousand in the brief case to pay a cheque but they give you exact fare and tell you what's wrong with your car for a bonus.

Three of them, out to Carlton for a long lunch. "Geoffrey was into silver, you know, but he dropped a packet. Now I'm into coins. Got about ten thousand put into them now; made a few mistakes, you know (grunts of agreement) but so what, I'm learning and I know what I want now. Specialising in certain series, and reckon I'll double it in five years." Take them out to a trendy little place where the Steak Diane costs eight bucks and the one who was third on the show-off order is left to pay the fare.

Hungry work, the city, for me. Penny round the pier. The bank men from Sydney, grabbing a cab from air terminal to Collins Street. I tried a joke on one the other day, I was so tired of 'em. "Did you know we have a higher fare for short trips in Melbourne, now, sah?" "Good heavens, no, really. Please give me a receipt." So I did; for one dollar fifty. Hope he makes a mistake at the bank meeting and gets a black mark from the Boss.

Not always bad. Sit on the city rank and get a radio call to pick up Heather outside a building in Queen Street. Heather is twenty, brown-haired, fresh and nice. She's got cheques to pay in Collins Street, South Melbourne, La Trobe Street, and William Street. On the firm, of course. And back where we started. Six dollars fifty and you go in a circle. A good job can be a bad job, if you see what I mean? But a boomerang job is a good job.

City rank, early afternoon, I think it was. Radio goes: "Mobiles, stay clear of the Supreme Court area, there has been a bad happening there." Drive to a job past Lonsdale Street and see J15s (police) shutting off the street. What goes on in this town in 1980? Pick up the Heralds to rush out to Channel 10 and see the headlines: several shot, two dead. Bloke grabbed with blood all over his clothes.

Made some money and home to my kids. There's still another dawn ahead of us.

FRIDAY

Having a good day, and time to stop for a feed at the truckie's cafe in Spencer Street, where the food does taste like food. Normally, you can't stop for a feed. You might miss a fare.

Having a good day, fare aboard, and a black cab draws alongside in St Kilda Road. "Back tyre nearly flat, mate." Laughs, waves, and goes.

So bang goes an hour. Had to radio for another cab as the tyre spanner wasn't there. An hour for nothing, do you get it? Maybe not.

Anyway, this woman she was a beaut. Jewish, middle-aged. Lots of presents for the children, and she had come from Perth to see them, and her daughter.

I had to pull all her bags out of the boot to look for the tools, and she said: "But why are you worried about it? We'll get there in the end. We'll have a chat, or you will change a wheel. You *are* going to get me there in the end, aren't you?" So I cheered up, and found her a coffee-bar on the corner of Toorak Road near the Synagogue. She never gave a murmur, and we unloaded the presents and the baby-basket she had brought all the way from Western Australia. Of course, they were pleased to see her, a mother like that, when we made it to Caulfield.

You can do about thirteen jobs a day before the red lights look like threats and the car starts weaving. Older driver gave me the nod. "You dehydrate fast in the summer. You'll need a bottle of drink every hour or two on the forty-

degree days." The mind starts blurring, you miss a call, you make a mistake. It isn't good. So keep drinking.

On a good Friday I get a city-to-Tullamarine and a job back. Thirty dollars, maybe. Tulla's an arena. Might be sixty other cabs in three columns waiting. Might wait for an hour, two, three. You watch the Greek chaps in the poker school inside a big Valiant. You see the drivers flopped, asleep, who started work nine hours before. You keep clear of the food bar, where a sausages-and-chips costs you about three dollars. You watch the Arrivals board clicking over. "Delayed, delayed, delayed." If you aren't smart, you will lose your day, get a passenger to Airport West and make four dollars in two hours!

Taxi driving! There's no such thing. It's like the army in wartime. Nothing to do for hours and then the big panic's on. Faster, faster, driver! But he never tips, that one. Bad Friday, good Friday, we'll end at the pub for once and drink three pots before we even feel the taste.

SATURDAY

Some work the northern suburbs, some the south. I reckon the people are nicer in the north. The other sort, she gets in the back, opens her magazine and says "TOO-rak, please, Drivah." Makes her point. There's a gulf between us.

There's this driver I knew who was studying at the university and he got in a bunch like that, doctors or psychologists or such. They went on with their talk and he was drowsing, half-listening to it.

The driver's mind is wandering, then he hears one of them, a classy type in a pin-point, say to the others: "Well! I never can remember that doctor who gave Freud all the trouble in the early days, and went quite psycho himself."

My mate looked in the mirror and said, "His name was Ferensky, wasn't it?"

What did they do? They didn't speak again. He'd broken the rules, you see, and stopped being just a number on the door!

Saturday is chaps going out and all sorts going to the races. Out to Moonee Valley from a pub in Prahran with two blokes, biggish blokes. They wait until they are outside the gate before the fourth race. Then, as it is too late for me to ring anyone up, they tell me the publican "had the mail" on Number 3. They were putting a thousand on it for him. It won all right. I had a lousy five dollars on it, wondering, do you see, how they *know* they are going to win.

Pick up a kerbside wave, a lovely chap, Latvian or somewhere up there, with a bag full of bottles. Wants to see his friend in Coolaroo or Lalor. Hasn't seen him for years, hasn't told him he will be seeing him now, either. Laughs all the time as the meter goes up. Lovely. "This is a f—ing good country, mate, and I've worked it from the Isa to the Pilbara."

He gets out in an empty street of weatherboard houses, miles from anywhere, and pays me off before he knocks on the door. Crazy. "Don't worry, mate, I'll be right if he isn't here. I'll sit down and have a drink and wait."

Like the Dutchman. Took him to Yarraville from the International Terminal. Shows me a piece of paper with an address scribbled on it. "You know? Yes?" "I'll find it," I tell him. He's going back to Amsterdam from New Zealand, flies out tomorrow, see.

The address is his daughter's husband's cousin's house. He hasn't written. We can't find them in the phone book. Wouldn't he like to see Melbourne first, as it was morning, and people in Yarraville go to work? "No. You know? I go there. I sleep there tonight."

I found the house, and the dogs barking through the locked back gate. And a milk bar where they spoke Greek. I left him there to spend eight hours in the street and then tell his new friends they had him for the night.

A massage parlor job in the evening is on the cards. "Pick up the dinner at X restaurant and pay fifteen dollars then take it to St Kilda Road." Knock on the door under the blue lights and she opens it in shorts or underwear. "Taxi driver." "And I've got your dinner, for Prue, it is, and you owe me nineteen dollars."

The girl looks cheery, jazzed up. My! You must enjoy the work. Late at night you drive them home to their other life and they are a wreck. Suppose the sniff has worn off by then, poor little bitches.

Time to knock off. The 'hungry' drivers are still around, told they have to make a lot of dollars for their owner. Needless to say, you have to do about sixteen hours to get it. A one hundred-hour week.

Australia! Land of the free!

I've done my seventy or so, and haven't struck a police trap or a bash artist. It's a hard job, and I wouldn't be in it if I didn't like people.

Beer, bath for the back muscles and . . . BED!

Leonie Kramer in the Prison House of Criticism

JOHN DOCKER

John Docker, 35, lives in Sydney and is the author of Australian Cultural Elites. *A free-lance historian of culture, his new book,* Texts and Contexts, *an examination of the Cold War offensive in cultural studies, is being considered for publication. Here he discusses* The Oxford History of Australian Literature, *edited by Leonie Kramer (Oxford University Press, $35).*

The Oxford History of Australian Literature, edited by Leonie Kramer, has so far experienced a reception of singularly little warmth, accused in the main of treating Australian literature in a cultural void. Why has a volume, supervised by the professor of Australian literature at Sydney University and drawing its contributors from the same Department of English, met with coolness, impatience, irritation, even contempt? How can this be explained?

Before we go on to this task, it should be mentioned that the *Oxford History* is really two books. The first encapsulates the critical approach, tone, and attitudes of Leonie Kramer in her rather perfunctory introduction and of Adrian Mitchell and Vivian Smith in their chapters on fiction and poetry: this book I'll focus on. The second book is a history of drama by Terry Sturm, displaying a very different — an admirable — approach. It lies, unfortunately, between the same covers as the other one.

I also found the first book — *Oxford History I* — of Kramer, Mitchell and Smith irksome and dull, and feel it's a little demeaning even to grant it the importance of a serious review. But if *Oxford History I* has little intrinsic interest, it has a certain historical importance in highlighting the present state of literary criticism in Australia: of how the orthodoxy is trying to maintain itself, and why people are becoming more and more attracted to alternative approaches.

The orthodoxy in literary criticism predominates by virtue of its institutional power in university English departments and is applied to English, American, and Australian literature alike. It prescribes that analysis should focus on the internal relations of a literary work. Ideally, the text is seen as a self-sufficient imaginative whole, independent of the conscious design of its creator (the intentional fallacy, the persona, the mask), and the approach interests itself in qualities like ambivalence, irony, paradox, tension of opposites, and play of mind over varying possibilities of experience. The method opposes contextual approaches as extrinsic, as reducing the autonomy of the text to non-literary aspects, whether these are historical (for example, literature as the expression or reflection of the national mind or character), or ideological or political.

Our Australian Leavisites and New Critics — figures like Vincent Buckley, G. A. Wilkes, and H. P. Heseltine—came to prominence, influence, and power in the late fifties and sixties, just as the universities were massively expanding, and in the icy climate of the Cold War. The Cold War influenced a lofty end-of-ideology view which looked down on the social, political, ideological, and utopian as an unworthy human interest, and which paraded the moral and metaphysical as the supreme location of interesting experience, and hence literature as of supreme

interest. In a further, comforting move, the social and political, ideological and utopian were perceived as pertaining really only to the extra-literary, while the moral and metaphysical were identified as strictly or purely literary.[1] In the garden of criticism, the metaphysical nestles up against the literary/aesthetic, other perspectives being exiled beyond its high walls.

It is safely behind these institutional walls — of Fortress Criticism — that *Oxford History I* houses itself. Yet here is also its initial problem: the orthodoxy is starting to age and wither. Worse, it's beginning to *look* it. Despite all its institutional power, critics here, there, and everywhere — while accepting the necessity of detailed analyses of texts — are wanting to explore broader, more historical and contextual, approaches. Representing the orthodoxy, how can *Oxford History I* offer itself as presenting anything new to the world? How can it claim to be making a distinctive and needed contribution? After all, the main push for the metaphysical orthodoxy lies way back in essays like Vincent Buckley's "The Image of Man in Australian Poetry" (*Essays in Poetry,* 1957) and "Utopianism and Vitalism" (Quadrant, 1958-59), in Wilkes's "The Eighteen Nineties" (Arts I, 1958), reprinted in Grahame Johnston's *Australian Literary Criticism,* in Heseltine's "Saint Henry — Our Apostle of Mateship" (Quadrant, 1960-61) and "Australia's Literary Heritage" (Meanjin, 1962). How can it now, as the eighties dawn, be seen as rivetingly fresh?

Well, there is a strategy to hand, the same that was employed by the pioneers of the Metaphysical Orthodoxy in the fifties and sixties. This is to suggest that they — critics like Buckley, Wilkes, Heseltine — are not the orthodoxy at all. No sirree. On the contrary: the orthodoxy is literary nationalism. It's hard to reel off names here, because, usually, our brave proponents of the Metaphysical Ascendancy will only trade in phrases like, "the common view of Australian literary history . . ." What the Orthodoxy means is the challenges to their own view by a varied caste of nationalists ranging from Vance Palmer and Nettie Palmer through to the Jindyworobaks, and then to A. A. Phillips, Russel Ward, Stephen Murray-Smith, Geoffrey Serle, and Ian Turner.

Somehow or other — mainly by saying it so

loudly and so often — the view is sustained that the literary nationalists were, are, and always will be the critical orthodoxy (the "common view") in Australia, and the new Critics/Leavisites will always be admirable and daring for taking on such a powerful orthodoxy and pointing to serious qualifications, doubts, neglected areas, and new interpretations. What's never explained is: how can *they,* the Metaphysical Orthodox, who occupy the positions of power and influence in university criticism — with control of undergraduate teaching, direction of postgraduate research, influence on teaching positions — *not* be the orthodoxy, the ascendent group?

This seems to be a fairly laughable, obviously spurious, strategy. But the faith of the orthodox in it is great. In 1958 G. A. Wilkes was arguing in this way against the literary nationalists — and still, in 1975, in "Going Over the Terrain in a Different Way: An Alternative View of Australian Literary History" and in his just published *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn* he is drawn, like filings to a magnet, to the same move. Leon Cantrell is another to be mightily impressed by the same evergreen strategy, in the introduction to his selection *The 1890s* (1977).

Do we find Leonie Kramer and her contributors in *Oxford History I,* in a book dated 1981, resisting this strategy's appeal and glamor? No, they can't and don't. Clearly, then, *Oxford History I* will join on the shelves the establishing works of the Metaphysical Ascendency from the early 1960s like Grahame Johnstone's collection *Australian Literary Criticism* (1962) and the critical chapters of Geoffrey Dutton's *The Literature of Australia* (1964). How to add the old to the old, the worn to the faded, dust to dust to dust.

The key move in the strategy is to argue that the literary nationalists have focussed attention far too much on the 1890s, and have unjustifiably treated pre-1890s literature as a dark age, derivative and imitative, and so unworthy of interest. Further, in dealing with the 1890s, the literary nationalists have concentrated on Furphy, Lawson, and O'Dowd, and have dared to neglect the mighty figure of CHRISTOPHER BRENNAN. Further, in the twentieth century, the literary nationalists have tried to claim that the social realists, who follow on from their beloved 1890s lot, are of most significance because they try to capture what is distinctive about Australian culture and history. This neglects the evident fact that the best writers are those with strong moral/metaphysical interests like Slessor, FitzGerald, Hope, Wright, McAuley and Francis Webb in poetry and Richardson, Stead, Boyd, and White in the novel, and that these writers have strong affinities with European literature: they're international in reference, not merely about an illusory distinctiveness; and we shouldn't ignore expatriates either, as the lit. nats. inevitably do. Further, when we think about it (having thrown off the literary nationalist blinkers) it's obvious that pre-modern writing in Australia is valuable and interesting — in an aesthetic, not historical or sociological sense — to the degree that it is also metaphysical/moral. So we have to conclude that Brennan and Neilson are the most interesting poets of the turn-of-the-century period; Lawson and Furphy (and, latterly, O'Dowd) are interesting for the metaphysics that can be discovered in their work, and nineteenth-century novelists like Henry Kingsley and Marcus Clarke, and poets like Harpur and Kendall, are absorbing for much the same sort of reason.

It doesn't, then, gets one's pulse racing to observe *Oxford History I* plodding, drone-like, in the wake of this orthodoxy, an orthodoxy, we've observed, that was forged over twenty years before. At least the pioneers of the Metaphysical Orthodoxy had a job to do, were trying to establish a case. There in the 1950s were Overland and Meanjin acting as forums for contextual approaches; Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties,* A. A. Phillips's *The Australian Tradition,* and Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* were arguing strongly for a view that Australian literature has been responsive to a folk culture that stresses values like democracy, independence, a sardonic, wry sense of humour, egalitarianism, tolerance, hospitality, a culture present throughout the nineteenth century (though not in official culture) and which surfaced especially in the 1890s (Furphy, Lawson, Paterson, O'Dowd, the *Bulletin*) and, fitfully, beyond.

New Critics and Leavisites like Wilkes, Heseltine, and Buckley had to counter this challenge with their own overview, which suggested that instead of focussing on a note of social optimism in Australian literature, as the radical nationalists were doing, we should rather observe the presence of a pervasive spirit of gloom — of alienation, isolation, loneliness, despair, nostalgia, regret. *These* were the real, the essential qualities shared by Brennan and Lawson and Furphy alike, and these critics then established

that a mode of metaphysical questioning was the dominant spirit of Australian literature as a whole.

Further, the New Critics/Leavisites had a lot going for them. These *were* neglected aspects of writers like Lawson; the nationalists *didn't* know how to handle Brennan; the lit. nats. *did* tend to be unjust to nineteenth-century writing and to expatriate authors (though this is hardly a charge one could level at Nettie Palmer). The Cold War made the social realists appear tainted with political radicalism — the red bogey slithered into criticism, setting limits to what was respectable to talk about. The growth of English departments, with their inheritance of New Critical and Leavisite techniques of detailed study of texts, revealed much nationalist criticism as unsophisticated, because too often incapable of intricate textual analyses; writers like Brennan, Hope and White lent themselves to such modernist critical methods, and in turn provided the standards for how all Australian literature should be judged.

The New Critics/Leavisites in their early days could appear pluralist, the defenders and promoters of those writers or aspects of writers neglected by the nationalist concern to identify the distinctively Australian. The result, however, was to substitute *their* chosen authors/aspects as the *essence* of Australian literature, and so establish a canonical approach, a system of exclusions on the one hand, and praisings and puffings on the other — an approach easily seen (certainly until recently) in university Aust. Lit. teaching.

Oxford History I, then, inherits a by now old, arthritic orthodoxy, stiff in the joints. And Kramer, Mitchell, and Smith go through its moves and motions in a predictable, dutiful way. Why, in that case, should we be interested in what comes out?

In her introduction Leonie Kramer criticises the literary nationalists for "characteristic (and often repetitive) attitudes". She tells us that criticism based on the legend of the nineties is a form of cultural protectionism, and this can be "prescriptive by laying down conditions in which literary values are less important than social attitudes". To insist on the importance of Australianness, she says, "at best introduces extra-literary considerations into criticism, at worst proposes a severely limited view of the possibilities of Australian literature". Furthermore, literary nationalist historiography has insisted too much on Australian literature as a story of progress, of growth to maturity. Kramer, instead, argues that while her contributors might discuss the differences between literary periods, this is "not to imply even a theory of development, let alone an achieved literary condition".

How well does *Oxford History I* bear out its editor's injunctions? Do the chapters by Adrian Mitchell and Vivian Smith avoid the sins of repetitiveness? prescriptiveness? introducing a so-called extra-literary dimension? a developmental, progress model of Aust. Lit.? a restricting view of its range and possibilities? The answer is: no, they don't. Their chapters are awash with repetitiveness, prescriptiveness, and methodological confusion. In general, as we shall see, Mitchell advocates a highly restrictive and narrow kind of psychological realism, which he attempts in a bullying way to impose on all Australian fiction, while Smith, faced with Australian verse, bows to the Metaphysical Ascendency in prescribing what's acceptable. To be fair, however, while Mitchell seems to indulge in such sins with an almost obscene relish, Smith appears far more hesitant and confused, as if he knows not what he's done. Unlike his colleague, he comes across as a *reluctant* bully.

What of Professor Kramer? Does she herself avoid these faults — these grievous faults that are usually sheeted home only to the literary nationalists? The introduction in fact mounts an obsessive and repetitive attack on assorted literary nationalists — Vance Palmer, Frank Wilmot, A. G. Stephens (!), Rex Ingamells, and Judith Wright. Vance Palmer is a particular target, repeatedly returned to and given the skewer. The attack is so insistent as to become simple and obvious.

In her final paragraph Kramer declares that she and her contributors have tried to "expose the critical assumptions upon which our judgments rest" — assumptions which, it doesn't take us long to see, issue forth from the New Critical/Leavisite orthodoxy of the last twenty years. But nowhere in her introduction is this body of work scrutinised. Where is the analysis of the critical principles underlying the work of Professor Wilkes, Professor Buckley, Professor Heseltine? Could it be that Professor Kramer feels their work is so slight and insignificant that it doesn't deserve our interest? The answer probably, is no. To study the criticism of her contemporaries doesn't fit into the orthodoxy's strategy: which is to attack the literary nationalists as if *they're* the orthodoxy.

Is there an element of cowardice in such a

strategy? In attacking Vance Palmer, Frank Wilmot, Rex Ingamells, and Judith Wright, Leonie Kramer fails to mention that none of her targets had or has any institutional power in Australian literary criticism. Why not make the effort to question those who had or have — her own contemporaries in university English departments? Why not assign *problematic* status to their critical writings, rather than only to that of the literary nationalists?

Kramer also offers, despite her disclaimer, a highly prescriptive progress model of Australian literary development, particularly for this century. Indeed, how can a criticism which declares itself to be one of value "judgments" avoid being prescriptive? In her model, after the 90s of Lawson and Brennan sharing the honours, there's a trough until nearly the Second World War. The dun-colored social realist fiction (yes, White's phrase is once more pressed into service) of Prichard, Xavier Herbert, Vance Palmer and the like is not "significant". For: "The revival begins in the late 1930s, with the first novels of Christina Stead and Patrick White. It continues into the 1940s and 1950s, with first volumes of poetry by R. D. FitzGerald, Judith Wright, James McAuley, Douglas Stewart, A. D. Hope and David Campbell, and takes a new direction with the flourishing of drama in the 1960s and 1970s." If that's not a narrative of twentieth-century progress, of literary development, what is?

Curled Lip Criticism: The Sins of Repetition, Restriction, and Prescription

It's strange that Leonie Kramer, so alert to prescriptiveness in the literary nationalists, should be so blind to it in the volume before her. For Adrian Mitchell's chapter in fact reveals, to use Kramer's own words, "a severely limited view of the possibilities of Australian literature".

The social realists and the literary nationalists are Siberianised. "The best Australian fiction has come", says Mitchell, "from writers who are independent of that tradition".[2] Social realism descends from "the nineties school" (p. 74), and is in fact false realism. Really (and here Mitchell is echoing Buckley's late fifties' essay "Utopianism and Vitalism") it is sentimental and, "at its core, romantic" (p. 111). Like Kramer (and Leon Cantrell in the introduction to *The 1890s*), Mitchell is drawn to throwing at the social realists and literary nationalists White's phrases from "The Prodigal Son" (1958) about dun-coloured journalism and the Great Australian Emptiness (pp. 104, 128). These attacks are so repetitive in Mitchell's chapter that they become (to use his own phrase) "eventually distasteful": how to kick a body of writing when it's down, and then keep coming back and putting a few more in for good measure.

Mostly, he finds Aust. Lit. is obsessed with landscape realism, details of scenery and bush life, and we should instead admire novels "which break from the preoccupation with the distinctively Australian" (pp. 106, 108). We shouldn't like Boldrewood, Paterson, Ethel Turner, or Mrs. Aeneas Gunn, because they "all alike endorse a sentimental core as the heart of their image of the real" (p. 99). But even where it might be a novel of city life, like Louis Stone's *Jonah,* it can be seriously flawed. Stone's approach is "mainly sentimental" and its realism "only superficial", the example of this being that *Jonah's* characters are "presented in clear outline, but not substantially". They are "simplified, mere sketches of character", in the manner of the Bulletin — and the Bulletin receives precious little admiration indeed in the pages of *Oxford History I.*

Mitchell is not opposed to realism at all as a fictional mode. But it has to be the right kind of realism to qualify for praise and placement in the steep, almost dizzy hierarchy of Australian fiction. Mitchell stresses again and again — with an unstoppable repetitiveness — the centrality of character in fiction, so that what quickly emerges in his chapter is a highly prescriptive demand for psychological realism. For Mitchell, the key entity of fiction is and should be study of the individual, the "self", and in particular its "inner life". Mitchell's procedure is to ask of his authors: how much do they focus on the study of character, the individual, the inner life? In answering this question, his chapter becomes a narrative of progress for Australian literature, if not for all that much of it. A charge sheet, scoring various credits and debits, is drawn up. The early memoirs, admirably, Mitchell starts off telling us, present "the self as accountable" and so remain "attractively individual". In general, however, colonial fiction was far too dominated by various conventions like romance, adventure, melodrama.

It is Marcus Clarke and Henry Handel Richardson who get Australian fiction to proceed safely along the correct pathway. The strength of *His Natural Life* lies in Clarke's concern to look at what is happening to an individual. In

Richardson's fiction "naturalism devolves towards psychological impressionism, so that she may hint at the workings of the inner life" (p. 84). She moves beyond naturalism in *Maurice Guest* because it cannot sufficiently display "the truth of character". In *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* Richardson changes "the usual practice of the Australian novel" by accomplishing a "full and sustained analysis of character"; she studies the "inner life of Richard Mahony". Indeed, Richardson, Mitchell finds himself repeating, "gave Australian fiction its first sustained analysis of character" (p. 96).

Others in the twentieth century can now build in sight of the landmark of her fiction — Stead, Boyd, White, Porter, Stow. But it is Martin Boyd who is the true hero of Mitchell's vision of the possibilities of Australian fiction. Here Mitchell offers some discriminations amongst the members of his Australian fictional elite, his great tradition. Boyd not only affirms the "uniqueness of the individual", but watches also for the "more profound significance of individual actions for evidence of the spiritual nature of man". Boyd reaches to the "more abiding truths, that transcend the individual and speak to all men. Individual actions sometimes acquire the significance of parables, aspects of the Myth, touching the great prototypes of moral behaviour." Boyd's "real interests are the abiding and universal concerns lodged in the individual"; he attempts to unravel "the essential self" (pp. 139-140).

Boyd is "a much finer writer" than Christina Stead. The "substance of Stead's fiction lies in her detailed presentation of her characters' inner perspectives", but Stead tends to be too ambitious and inclusive. Sometimes her "fascination with the individuality of character competes with her interest in social theory"; there is a "persistent melodramatic tendency"; she can be "extravagant", and veer unevenly between the "obsessive and the bizarre". In *For Love Alone* this becomes a "disjunction between inner and outer circumstance", between the "novel of character" and "the novel of ideas". Our critic also prefers Boyd to Patrick White, because White tends to sacrifice the "complete realization of character" to a symbolism bordering on allegory. The "quest for a transcendent harmony, the reaching towards a vision of totality, competes with his sensitive understanding of character". The danger in White is that "character as archetype conflicts with character as individual and real", and here White's "artistry" has its limitations.

Mitchell demurs at everything in fiction that detracts from the creation of character as "individual and real". This means a great deal of Australian literature is excluded or diminished in value: romance, melodrama, adventure; social realism certainly, because it focusses on outer social conditions; fiction that is too extravagant or symbolic or allegorical. Fiction that doesn't satisfy the strict requirements of psychological realism gets the gimlet eye, even if ostensibly anti-social-realist, as with some of the new writing of the last decade. Mitchell's temperature doesn't rise when he glances at the work of Murray Bail, Peter Carey, Frank Moorhouse, and Michael Wilding, because they are "more concerned with situation and meaning than with character" (p. 171). The critic's eyelids droop over such irrelevant concerns.

Mitchell says of the 1920s and 1930s that the nationalist mood of the period was "strongly conformist; anything extravagant, or experimental, or exceptional, was resisted" (p. 111). To which one can only reply: look who's talking. The Law of Fiction is the Portrayal of Character, and this can best be achieved by formal means that ensure a steady, uninterrupted study of psychological and "spiritual" (what a tired word that is!) truths of the individual. Anything else in fiction is aesthetically suspect. Standing on the heights, as I have said, is Martin Boyd: "At his best, no Australian novelist rivals Boyd in his narrative control". Writers are appproved or ticked off to the degree that they achieve "narrative control' over their themes, whatever these are. Here Mitchell's terms and phrases include "deftly", "graceful", "a calm, intelligent writer" (Tench); "deft irony" and an "even, unexcited prose, with a quiet, intelligent awareness" (Spence); tactful (Mrs. Praed); the "quiet force of the narrative surface" (Lawson); "a quiet irony of perception", "a discerning steadiness of perception" (Richardson); "controlled, observant and reflective" (Frederic Manning); "quiet", "low-keyed but attentive" (re John Morrison, a rare exception among the social realists because he's interested in "the truth of individual experience"); "quiet" (Kenneth Mackenzie); Michael Baguenault is "one of the few quietly attractive figures in Stead's fiction"; "poise" (Boyd); "temperate humanity of the narrative" (Stow); "narrative control" (Murray Bail); "steady integrity of reflection" (Ireland). Mitchell feels that in colonial fiction Tasma

anticipates Boyd; "all her effects are light, witty, compact", with her "cool sense" and "controlled irony". He admires Hay's major novel for its "stillness . . . the firm will imposed upon it".

We can infer from this that Mitchell is trying to impose his own firm will on Australian fiction: the tight, relentless, ungenerous will of the ideologue, the kind of will that can never sympathise and empathise with aims and desires different from its own. Australian fiction should be "quiet" (a strange, obsessively recurring term), intelligent, temperate, cool, measured, tactful, controlled, still, deft, even, poised, steady, and, if witty, compact. The new ice age of criticism has come upon us; only cold-blooded creatures from now on need apply to survive. Australian literature will become so quiet no-one will hear it.

Fiction should also be "graceful", "elegant", and "gentle" (Boyd). If writers don't conform to these highly sensitive qualities, then a reverse scale of value judgment is applied. White's insistent symbolism, for instance, particularly in a contemporary setting, is liable to become "clumsy or distasteful". In colonial times the pose of Savery's writing is "eventually distasteful". Rowcroft "does not attempt to refine his perceptions", poor chap, and his main character is "either sententious or droll, in that peculiarly distasteful but persistent (distasteful because persistent) facetious manner of much early nineteenth century popular literature". While Lawson rises above the 1890s muck by being delicate, sensitive, and subtle, "the nineties school" of the Bulletin (its members going unnamed) tend towards farce or melodrama: "their place in literary history is now to display the broadening of humour and coarsening of sensitivity that took place in the pages of the *Bulletin* (though to be fair, the *Bulletin* was also encouraging Victor Daley and Shaw Neilson)". There's some dismay at the want of maturity shown by some writers. Norman Lindsay and Steele Rudd's fiction shares "much the same adolescent humour"; Sybylla's sense of fun in *My Brilliant Career* is "mere adolescent noisiness" and there is a "touch of unpleasantness in her nature" that "becomes tiresome". *Such is Life,* too, can have its distasteful moments: "Indeed, Furphy is so determined to be unsentimental that he goes too far, and Tom's comments on the unfortunate Ida are in distinctly poor taste". Mitchell recoils from "the unsubtle (even slightly distasteful) naming of characters" in *Capricornia,* and Herbert's humor, "like so much Australian humour, carries violence at its core". Like much criticism influenced by the Leavisite tradition, Mitchell's comments slide quickly from a text to judgment of the sensibility — indeed the taste and manners — of the writer. We can notice this in his comments on the unfortunate "Rowcroft's literary manners"; Xavier Herbert's autobiography reveals "coarseness and vulgarity".

In the popular TV series "Prisoner", Miss Bennett, the most repressed, repressive, and distasteful of the screws, known as Vinegar Tits by the inmates, always curls her lips into a contemptuous smile, or smile/smirk. She believes the prisoners are all animals, and there's no hope for them. You feel with the chapter on fiction that our critic also thinks most Australian writers are animals: rough, crude, coarse, distasteful, noisy. But special cells and privileges are provided for the "quiet" trusties, the cool, controlled Boydites of Aust. Lit. Mitchell has no notion of taking literature in its own terms: he doesn't respect variety, plurality, difference, of genres and modes; it doesn't disturb him that a great deal of Australian fiction doesn't even want or try to achieve psychological realism.

The assumption behind this unceasing flow of confident judgments on the sensibilities of writers — the assumption alike of Kramer, Mitchell and Smith — is that critics themselves possess sensibilities so fine, intelligent and comprehensive that they can discriminate all the shades of feeling that make up the total human condition. The critic, in fact, is the true hero of *Oxford History I:* the arbiter of taste; judge, jury, and jailer; the scourge of literary bad manners. The critic's role in Aust. Lit. is to be dominant and domineering. The Sensibility Police have arrived, and set up a Katingal-like prison-house of criticism.

Officer Mitchell: Officer Smith, are all the Australian writers in their cells? Have you seen to the poets?

Officer Smith (gulp): Yes, I think . . . I hope so.

Officer Mitchell: (Hope he has. Not sure if Officer Smith is the right person for this job. A closet softie. A waverer.) Hold on. My God, can this be? I hear a noise. One of the prisoners is being extravagant or symbolic or not interested in character. How immediately distasteful. So adolescent. When will they grow up. BE QUIET DOWN THERE. *Quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet quiet. Better report this to Governor Kramer.*

She'll know what to do. Officer Smith, you run up and see the Governor. I'll keep watch here, and if there's any more noise they'll all be put in solitary. They'll know who their rulers are. The brutes. All I want is control and quiet. Is that too much to ask?

Officer Smith: Governor Kramer, the writers are rioting! Well, making a noise.

Governor Kramer: Oh dear. Always something. Why can't they obey instructions? I can't really deal with it in person, I'm afraid. I'm sure Officer Mitchell can handle any problem. And you, too, Smith, I can trust, can't I? I need men of tough, delicate sensibilities.

Officer Smith: Yes, of course. (Gulp.)

Officer Mitchell (quietly determined): Where is he? Can't wait to get at their sensibilities and refine them.

(Some years later. Two nurses are talking in a local loony bin.) (How coarse and vulgar.)

1st Nurse: Who's that nutter over there?

2nd Nurse: The one muttering to himself? They reckon he used to have a big future going for him. A university bloke.

1st Nurse: What's he sit there muttering about all day?

2nd Nurse: He just keeps saying quiet, control, quiet, control, all the time. Over and over.

The Sins of the Literary Nationalists

Time and space's winged chariot are running this review down. In the seconds left, we can glance at Governor Kramer's other main charge against the literary nationalists, that by stressing Australianness they introduce "extra-literary" considerations into criticism. Well, does *Oxford History I* also avoid these? And what are they, these fabulous, magical purely-literary considerations? For example, against the literary nationalists and social realists Officer Mitchell says that two of his trusties, Boyd and Stead, possess "real social intelligence" (p. 114). Why is this a purely literary consideration? Don't the nationalist critics believe that they perceive "real social intelligence" in their versions of Lawson and Furphy? There might be a difference in values here, but where is the difference in critical procedure?

In her introduction Governor Kramer says that some of the writers she admires, particularly in the voyager tradition of poetry, "demonstrate the persistent and deep interest in the positive aspects of Australian development" (No Gloom Thesis here! All is comforting): "The excitement and dangers of exploration, the qualities of character it demands and elicits, and the mystery of the impulse towards heroic endeavour are central preoccupations" (p. 17). Yet, when the literary nationalists talk of the "heroic endeavour" of the bush pioneers and the exploration of the natural world they inhabit, and evoke a legendary figure to indicate the "qualities of character it demands and elicits", and say these amount to "positive aspects of Australian development", such concerns are extra-literary and so dismissible. The orthodoxy, however, can praise Stewart's works and *Voss* in exactly these terms: "Modern works based on themes of exploration and discovery re-create a past which might serve as grounds for belief in a future (Introduction, p. 17). Why can the orthodoxy come out with this kind of thing, and not the literary nationalists? Who legitimates the one as revealing the literary, the other as leading into the wastelands of the extra-literary?[3]

Governor Kramer says social realists like Prichard and Herbert and Vance Palmer write about social groups rather than directing their attention to "the quality of life and experience" and "the exploration of character", thus leading to a "sacrifice of artistry". Boyd, on the other hand, is praised (as her critical son Mitchell praises him) because "the centre of his fiction is character — the definition of individuality" (pp. 18-19, 22). There might be clear differences of artistic method involved here, but why translate differences into an absolute distinction between the artistic and the non-artistic? Doesn't this sacrifice a wide-ranging, sympathetic criticism for an insistently moralistic and punitive drive to construct hierarchies?

Vivian Smith's chapter poses such methodological problems even more starkly. Indeed, we can feel rather sorry for Dr. Smith, Leonie Kramer, one suspects, has bidden her contributors to take a high and lofty view of Aust. Lit., and Smith's chapter duly opens with trumpets. Yes, he blares in the first couple of pages, it is "important to keep perspective", to note that the history of Australian poetry is the "history of accomplished minor poets, with a few outstanding figures", that Australian poetry "has always been traditional and deeply derivative". We always have to remember the "derivativeness of Australian culture" in general and to keep in mind the "burdens of a culture in perpetual difficulties". In fact, however, after this, Smith's chapter settles down to a quiet hum. It offers the common view: the Australian poetic elite is composed of figures like Brennan, Neilson,

Slessor, Wright, Douglas Stewart, Hope, Francis Webb.

But Smith overall doesn't merely set up his elite and sneer at everything else. On his third page he warns of the danger of being "aridly dismissive", and in fact — to talk of sensibilities — he reveals a quite genial critical personality. As Dorothy Green observes in her review,[4] there is a disjunction in Smith between the head and the heart. He's generous towards figures like Gordon, O'Dowd, Mary Gilmore, even the Jindyworobaks. He still wants, however, to be prescriptive: to insist, in the manner of Vincent Buckley's "The Image of Man in Australian Poetry" (1957), that Australian poetry should observe a "middle ground" between "mature use of the vernacular" and "highbrow" verse. In these terms, he finds that Hugh McCrae "lacks a sense of the pressures and necessities of everyday living"; and there's a similar kind of aridity in Baylebridge especially, but also in FitzGerald and McAuley. So Smith wants a "middle way", not really a plurality of possibly very different modes.

Early on, in talking of colonial verse, Smith asserts Kramer's and the orthodoxy's distinction between the "historical, cultural, and sociological" interests of writers, and "real aesthetic returns" (p. 274). What is this "real aesthetic" quality? Smith says of Harpur that he emphasises the landscape's picturesque, dramatic and more violent qualities, while "later writers have concentrated on the arid monotonies of the Australian landscape, merging their sense of its social and cultural limitations with the sense of the repetitive sameness of the land" (p. 279). Are these purely aesthetic considerations, or are they sociological and cultural? Smith also refers admiringly to "Harpur's craggy, hard and austere will". Do these refer to moral qualities, or to aesthetic criteria?

Vivian Smith admires in Gordon's verse "moments of grace and relaxation" and also "an unmistakable energy" — again, these are moral values one might or might not prefer as admirable, but hardly propose themselves as intrinsically aesthetic. Apropos Gordon's energy, Dr Smith's colleague Officer Mitchell might conceivably dislike Gordon's verse because it is not still and quiet enough. Smith believes Gordon's verse captures an historical "mood" in colonial times, the mood of social, economic, and political transition from the pastoral ascendancy (p. 294). Can we conclude from this that Smith is a closet contextualist?

This concern for poetry as representational— the literary nationalist concern outlawed by Governor Kramer — becomes a guiding interest in Smith's chapter. O'Dowd retains interest in part because his verse "touches on areas and perceptions that are still active and alive in the national consciousness": would a literary nationalist critic like A. A. Phillips have said anything different?! Smith doesn't like McCrae for reasons to which no nationalist would object, referring to his verse as part of a Celtic Twilight kind of "highly aesthetic minor poetry" that misses out on "the ragged vitality of life" (p. 323) — does this last phrase denote a purely literary quality? Smith admires Brennan and Neilson for their "unshaken commitment to the values of art", a commitment which means they stand out from their contemporaries like "oases in the desert" (p. 348). He writes of Brennan that what accounts for the "power" of *Poems (1913)* is "the agonising personal element, the passion and frustration, the spiritual restlessness and aspiration . . ." Here Smith is arguing that certain qualities of consciousness are responsible for the aesthetic "power" of the verse: but why are they, more than any other qualities, strictly "values of art"? Smith also admires Brennan because he "embodied metropolitan and cosmopolitan experience in his poems". Similarly, he says of Slessor that in his "best poems" he "gives the sense of speaking from within a representative modern experience". He writes of the title poem of Vincent Buckley's *The Golden Builders and Other Poems* that it "conveys the sense of a representative modern consciousness": indeed, the "achievement of the poem is in the way it recreates aspects of the experience of inner city life, particularly through its human inhabitants".

These are heavily representational criteria indeed, with the aesthetic achievement of such poetry apparently dependent on its power to represent aspects of reality. Why is any of this different from the literary nationalists, say, admiring someone or other for recreating "aspects of the experience of (bush) life, particularly through its human inhabitants"? Why is a nationalist concern for representative experience extra-literary, while a concern for "a representative modern consciousness" or a "representative modern experience", or embodying "metropolitan and cosmopolitan experience", are to be deemed purely literary values? Smith says that "poetry is related to a sense of the truth of human experience and imaginative whole-

ness" (p. 371). If this be so, who decides that some truths of human experience are more closely associated with the values of art than others?

Clearly, methodologically, poor Dr. Smith is confused, lost in the maze. He has to find a way out, and perhaps he should start by asking: is the distinction between the literary and the extra-literary, a cornerstone of the orthodoxy's strategy of control in Australian literary criticism, really workable? Isn't it in fact impossible and ridiculous?

Overall, the work of the editor of *Oxford History I* is far from impressive. She doesn't notice that it suffers from repetitiveness, prescriptiveness, limiting the possibilities of Australian literature, and methodological insensitivity. She encourages a lofty view which, especially in the fiction chapter, becomes "aridly dismissive". She permits throughout, including in her introduction, the use of quasi-sexist and quasi-racist terminology — at various points "the individual", "the Australian", "the poet", "the writer", and even "the reader" are all "he" and "his'. Sometimes "Aborigine" is given the courtesy of a capital A, sometimes not, even in the space of a single page (e.g., p. 42), while no restraint is laid on Mitchell and Smith when, jarringly, they refer to "the natives" (pp. 37, 283). Mitchell also refers to "the Aboriginal problem" (pp. 37, 40) — a highly sensitive, graceful, delicate, intelligent formulation indeed. Nor has Kramer queried Smith's opening statement that "the first Australian poet" is Michael Massey Robinson: one might think that the first Australian poetry dated from some forty thousand years before (oral poetry, of course, but a little later Smith discusses popular European-Australian songs — p. 299). As Dorothy Green points out, women fare badly throughout. Barbara Baynton gets half a par. Ada Cambridge not much more, *Seven Little Australians* not a whisper, Miles Franklin a violent slam, and Ada Cambridge's remarkable verse in *Unspoken Thoughts* no mention at all. Little things are indicative. In her introduction, discussing *The Aunt's Story,* Kramer talks of the novel as an allegory of "the experience of the Australian making contact with the challenging civilizations far beyond his rural origins", and names the chief character as Theodore [*sic*] Goodman!

Kramer is very down on A. G. Stephens, accusing him, against all the evidence, of being a literary nationalist. We might wonder how much sheer ignorance is involved here, an unanticipated quality in a professor of Australian literature, for the editor also doesn't query Mitchell when he writes of the unfortunate influence of A.G.S.: "The effect of Stephens's injunction to 'boil it down' was not simplification so much as reductivism" (p. 74). "Boil it down" might have been part of the policy of Archibald and the Bulletin before Stephens became literary editor, but Stephens in fact believed in internationalist and cosmopolitan criteria and encouraged a taste, if anything, for Celtic-Twilight-type writing.[5]

We might finally wonder how much Professor Kramer enjoys Australian literature, or literature as such. Her introduction is covered with hard chips of a highly empiricist, rationalistic idiom, a reverence for facts, reality, and reason. She can blithely refer to the "facts about landscape" or "the facts of colonial life", or "the facts of the past and present"; against nationalist critical theory she urges that "reason would suggest . . ."; she writes critically of Judith Wright that in her attitude to "aboriginal man" and Australian history "legend is . . . substituted for reality". It would appear, then, that literature is finally a species of legend and myth, not reality, facts, reason. Is there here, beside the strangley naive attitude towards history as "facts", a distrust of the imagination for not being factual? What *does* Professor Kramer find interesting about Australian literature? She doesn't like the literary nationalists and social realists — they're too obvious, simple, uncomplex (pp. 12, 14-15). But when she writes approvingly of her heroes, she comes out with the dead phrases we saw before like "The excitement and dangers of exploration, the qualities of character it demands and elicits, and the mystery of the impulse towards heroic endeavour are central preoccupations". If that's all there is to the supposed best of Australian literature, we might well wonder why anyone should take any interest in it. Finally, on a lighter note, the editor should perhaps have tried to restrain Dr. Smith's enthusiasm at one point when, in referring to Douglas Stewart's interest in verse patterns, he finds that Stewart is concerned with "total effect, more than the fondled details of its saying" (p. 400).

We shouldn't, nevertheless, end this review on a note of ridicule. *Oxford History II,* the chapter by Terry Sturm on Australian drama, is all that *Oxford History I* isn't. If the former seems ultimately to emerge from a particular, highly judgmental form of Leavisism — Vincent Buck-

ley is, clearly, its critical father — Sturm's criticism can probably be related to Raymond Williams and so-called left-Leavisism: attentive to the texts, but situating them in a variety of contexts, historical and institutional. Drama is treated as having definite conditions of production and reception. Sturm evokes the excitement and fascination of colonial theatre, with its melodrama, burlesque, farce, pantomime, fantasy, magic, operetta, musical comedy, nautical plays, and the way it celebrates theatrical conventions themselves as images of British identity and ideals. He argues that Australian film, radio, and television directly inherit and develop these forms — English and American in origin — as part of their staple entertainment fare.

The 1900-1960 period, he feels, is characterised by a form of realism that stresses tragedy, conveyed through a focus on personal relationships. After 1960 drama has returned to a spirit of comedy; it still has a strongly naturalistic component, but it also often takes up nineteenth-century forms of popular entertainment, burlesque, pantomime, farce, and so on, although without the happy endings of colonial melodrama, reassuring that now all will be well. Unlike the approach of *Oxford History I* Sturm's method is to analyse and explain, rather than to judge and dismiss. He doesn't sniff at colonial theatre because it's sentimental and doesn't attempt (say) psychological realism — the last thing it wanted to do! He doesn't pronounce that the moral and metaphysical are privileged aesthetic themes; he doesn't aridly dismiss social realism, doesn't assume it will be inherently inferior to other forms; he can praise some recent Melbourne radical theatre for dramatising "ideological forces" (p. 250).

The result is that Sturm's chapter *explains* so much more about culture. It offers a rich tapestry, and my only query, directed to the author himself, is: why O why, Professor Sturm, didn't you offer your chapter, in expanded form, as a book in itself? Why be in the same book as the products of the orthodoxy? Why did you choose to publish in such sordid company?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 See John Docker, "University Teaching of Australian Literature" and "The Politics of Criticism: Leon Cantrell and the Gloom Thesis", New Literature Review, no. 6 (1979).

2 Leonie Kramer, ed., *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 132. Subsequent references will be inserted in the text.

3 In a review of Grahame Johnston's collection *Australian Literary Criticism* in Southerly, no. 1, 1964, W. M. Maidment raised exactly these kinds of methodological questions against G. A. Wilkes's chapter "The Eighteen Nineties": questions which the orthodoxy has never tried to answer. So much for intellectual openness.

4 Dorothy Green, "Approved Writers in a Void", National Times, 5-11 April, 1981.

5 In the early sixties H. P. Heseltine attempted to picture Stephens as a nationalistic critic. The feebleness of this claim was easily demonstrated by S. E. Lee a little later. See H. P. Heseltine, "Brereton, the *Bulletin*, and A. G. Stephens", Australian Literary Studies, vol. I, 1963, pp. 16-31, and S. E. Lee, "A. G. Stephens: the Critical *Credo*", Australian Literary Studies, vol. I, 1964, pp. 219-241. See also Maidment's review in Southerly, 1964; Brian Kiernan, *Criticism* (Melbourne, 1974), p. 18, and Grace Keel, "The Early *Bulletin* and Lyric Verse", Overland 81, October 1980. Research is beginning to show that "boil it down" is a very crude summary of pre-A. G. S. Bulletin aesthetic theory. See Douglas Jarvie, "The Development of an Egalitarian Poetics in the *Bulletin*, 1880-1890", Australian Literary Studies, vol. 10, 1981, pp. 22-34.

TIME OUT OF MIND

Joyful birds fly from every perch
into the landscape of crumbs
They think there's to be a handout
Fame! At the banquet of himself
he's cast, dished, chewed
Chief Cornflake — all around him people
crunching munching on his words
which are filled with certitudes
while he is filled with terror
Later the episode will be televised
Bugs Bunny cutting his ears off
Viewers will wander off mealie-mouthed
woefully repressed: their false teeth
gummed with wordflakes

He would give half his
(fame? name? mind's game?) . . . half
their estimate of his lines'
life-expectancy whatever that
might be for 2 fortuitous
& brilliant, cuts
of his filmed, verse-lines, by the cutters —
They would have to be jump-cutting
in a way he'd not previously envisaged —
in a way untarnished by his thinking it —
by the predicted geometry of his or any
mind-in-language — The tall ask — to escape —;
for whom (the predicted geometry)
fortuitous?
A spider webs all night over his face
Dawn, his breath will break it

THREE POEMS BY J. S. HARRY

GRIFFITH 1977

it is 23 years
to the year 2000

in the country australia
here on the grass

mari
huanamafia

bodies
from under

dirt thrust up

prohibition

lying on it
letting
the ants climb up

the big bluewindow sky

we've climbed through
with our eyes

smoking the body of donald mackay

and nothing to be nowhere
and no one gone or done

FRAME

soft as chamois
paperbarks' white torsos
rise out of water

like sleepers caught
in a dream by degas

there is no wind music
and they do not dance

on their
white arms
black streaks are cormorants
the round
soft splotches ducks

ears paint
what they cannot see
in the varied shapes of frogs

rain crickets and cicadas
play the movement on

a wet cormorant
stretching to dry
is a dancer's
old black sock

briefly hung
on the air above a
bough

paint blurs line
as the sock wrinkles down

the ripples of the carp
throw rings that glide on a water-stage
slow silent at
a particular stand
of paperbarks there is no approbation

the willows trail
their green hair
into the blackened stage
and do not talk though they are inside
the carp's language

the moon is in its first third
low off centre
lighting the way
mute misty of face
to fade
stand
and move out

SUMMER BRUSH-STROKES

Under the grey pages waited this blue one
with the brown-hawk mobile turning
and the midday moon slow to fade away.

Lethargic gum-leaves swing without exertion,
green lorikeets screech across the tree-tops.
One step from the shade is a brutal sun.

Keep these melted shadows.
Keep this blue page,
summer seen, summer felt, not summer known.

R. H. MORRISON

LOGIC AND ART

I am not The Poet

The Poet starves and lives in a garret.
I pull twenty thou
And meet two mortgages nicely thanks.

The Poet is cosmopolitan in a sleazy sort of way.
Jeez cock, fair suck.

The Poet is lonely and at odds with the world.
Hail matey, well met;
A great life if y' don't weaken.

The Poet understands death and welcomes her.
I shit myself.

He/she can cross the cultures to earn his/her hash
From translations of Balzac (slightly flawed).
It never faut necessaire to me
(No need to be multilingual to know a french fry
From a ditto letter.)

I know why I stalk the quickandead planet —
To escape the vag laws
And dotage in the overkill of a Salvo hostel.

So, Q.E.D., I am not The Poet.

I might try watercolors.

P. R. HAY

WATERFORD

if two old mad boys hold hands
& two little bad boys behind them laugh
& a crop of boot boys hang in
time out as they have been
for less than earrings

then its sunday afternoon according to
who's been to mass & who hasn't I
want to go home but its
not in any of these streets

LUCY GIBSON

GIRAFFE

(From *Ark Voices*)

Front legs spraddled wide
neck arched
delicate
down
I
sip O sir
your rough waters

Within the ark I stifle
paceless, acute spectator,
mustard-and-orange brawn:
sky-bather

Why not excess undo and
dock me?
down to size expose me to
feel what others feel, see
what others see.

Taller, more abject I
strip acacia's highest leaves
towards which others strain
fail
fall
short and I long
witness enemies and warn
with soft blunt horn.

To whose advantage?
I'd rather mingle vision
with the ant than, so
removed, command the
lion and the leopard
in my sight.

whirr

I jitter whinnying
kick bite bolt
at shadows: dappled
forelimb and hindlimb
rock over yellow plains in
blue-hoofed funk. Fly-wisk tail
corkscrews behind: kind winds
favour clownish miles.

Motionless mottle
I blend: am
sun-patches
leaf-clusters
everything
nothing

FAY ZWICKY

RECREATION LEAVE — 1944

Sometimes I escape the bomber's shapes
on Dartmouth Moor —
A family in a small town
takes turns with my life
in a house cleaner than death
where there is no war
where the sky's shawl hangs over the mantle piece
level with photos of soldiers from other wars
and I can run without stopping
through all the kindness in a glass of water
all the flavor in a spoon of honey
through blue twilight with its secret weapons
through a wireless set in tune with the evening news
and all the names mentioned before bedtime
I can spend whole days thinking of home
waste time washing the dishes
look at the women and the small children
and the mother-in-law, tigers in her eyes

then run again
in clothes borrowed from an old wardrobe
which after one day fit my whole life
I can run onto the moors
in a sky full of feathers and flanks
to watch wild horses swing through a gate in the earth
where there is only sunshine
learning the whole sky
and walk into the dusk with nothing on
singing without words all the colors of Africa

Sometimes running through the rain
blown over Dartmoor
I lie down —
back to the wind and the grass
my whole weight falling through them
in a place slowly covering cities I burn

Going back into the small house
I listen again to spiders establishing themselves
in a pantry full of apples and quince jam
and women taking beautiful bare feet to bed
walking on tiptoe to an upstairs room
past London sleeping
and children smudged into blankets —
those women tasting of fireplaces and logs burning
kitchens in their laps and white beans
bread and applejack and potatoes —
potatoes laughing
with the smell of earth on their arms

JOHN MILLETT

REDUCED

Missing you,
I do everything slowly —
sitting in gloom
in the late afternoon.

I am alone.
Your absence is
stark, palpable.

The sky's blue
is a fake. The trees
are anaemic, and
the house malfunctions,
cursed.

I recall,
you used to like my voice.
Now my lips are pressed together,
and radio clowns do my singing for me.

The papers are full of cruel jokes,
snide remarks.

What do they know?

MICHAEL AITKEN

MADDENED VOICES

From out of the last urban fosse
we heard their sighs:

"Who was it then, d'you think
commanded the execution
of twenty-three unemployed?"

"Seems they had units
of the Tax Evaders' Rifles
at the gates of every cricket ground
and creepered college."

"I don't believe
that all the killing squads
were in the pay of the USA."

"There's no way of defining
a simple fact in days like these."

"Just keep your mouth shut
is the sanest rule of thumb."

"Have you no
feelings? All very well
to be phlegmatic and carry on
but kids are starving in there."

"How does it all begin and end,
where do we stack our bodies?"

Thus the future,
a cheap mirror
bristly with layers
of blue five-o'clock shadow.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

A TREE ON A CHAIR
A tree on a chair.
A baby in a boat.
A bow on a plait.
And that is that.
A horse on a ladder.
A cat with a man's face.
Seven women in a ring.
Oh what a thing.

Fish on a table top.
A hive in a wall.
Spotted cats in hanging baskets
And sometimes large vases.

A lighter blue mountain behind.
A river making fish scales.
A guitar in a haystack.
Rays make straw grey, grey, black.

All the old cows under one tree.
Boat hulls against woodsheds.
A railway track on another.
Missing a lover.

An egg on a wall.
The bull-ants are blue tacks.
A statue of taps.
All we need are maps.

A bird on a hand.
A hat on a house.
Apple spider's lines rising.
The sun is surprising.

PHILIP HARVEY

FOR PAULA B.
I don't care that the woman who died
was crone ugly,
had varicose veins,
was always drunk, looming down streets
an angelus of despair, hair flying wild,
blown by a private wind;
or that her fivefold sons are strong
and in their veins criminality runs,
blue bloods of a reverse royal house.

I don't care that her face was ravaged beyond belief
by the strain of these sons being sent away
to the grief of orphanages, reform schools, jails
having become thieves, standover men, murderers.
She was alone
with bare survival only
to urge her to rise to broken days
from shattered nights.

I don't care even that suddenly there are tears
in the eyes of the fivefold sons
more used to staring, unblinking at death.
This woman has died,
unhurriedly she has died
with time alone as her faithless companion.
Unhurriedly Paula has died
with beer in her veins
and that long inward stare of failure
screwed in her eyes.

SHELTON LEA

HUGO'S BIRTHDAY

Eighteen with an earring
6 foot 3 and strong
as a brand new door
punk and rock and roll
are what we ate for lunch
with an effort
at the carving of the chicken
something spills
and past irritations fade
enough for kindness
to ease a difference
you even took a park walk
with me
the first since being three
when climbing up the judge's post
you defeated me again
while stood calling
at your tiny bottom
you'd never take my hand
and filled me
with my turning head away
a painful antiseptic
thing we had
it never met
nor was anything but sore
time has stitched somewhat
and walking to the bus stop
no-one would guess
that 18 years ago today
I was full of you
and clambouring
and reached out
and gasped
into the microphone of life
I jolted at the decibels
today we look like friends

KATE LLEWELLYN

THE CLEANING

sorry seemed the least she could say
to the man falling apart outside her door,
his tallow hair softening down the light,
eye broken blue.
she had never learnt the words,
the silver stroking ways
as old as womankind.
so she shut the door on their separate miseries
though hers, better fortified, were also stronger.
no sound, no crumbling sound
above the savage lunging of her broom.

MAGGIE KELLY

THREE POEMS BY ROBERT HARRIS

LETTERS AND DOTS . . .

The letters and dots don't want to fly
like ashes, they say a table
will naturally overflow knowledge

A washerman and a bus-conductor
will share their whisky under the stars

The dogs bay into the universe
over the barges

An orange shirt hung out to dry in a window
devise me to recall your breasts.

When I want to run into you and hide
the letters and dots don't want to fly like ashes
so that we are together again
until at last a light bulb overhears morning.

The ashes do not like to be found
trembling, hours later.

EITHER THE BARGE OR THE ARMCHAIR

1.
You were on a barge receding downstream
and the throne where you sat in your slender
little spacesuit was ringed by stylish
men on chairs. You were carried away
on softly shining waters
when all at once you started to
blow me kisses,
it seemed that your arms
were the spokes of the sky.

2.
Sleep returns love to the head of
a merchant banker, a strange rebuke
without any accusation.
yet they write of her
growing haggard
and losing her spirit,
by a bit of a fire
and umpteen brewers' tombstones.
Of course it's revenge,
another thing
all the friendly Norwegian women
in all the cribs in kingdom
come are not about to
change.

3.
Sit for long in the Venus library
and you realise there's
a deafening grudge
between a young plant
and an ornament.

HISTORY

Musicians who can't let the roadie work without helping
having the hands that are large enough
to go about the strings and frets
blue has created the color called sea
everywhere sunlight then rain and then another
blue bout
such brilliant composition comprising also dullness
all our youthful white faced tension in the blue jersey
almost purple Payday
aboard *Diamantina* 19-
65 or 6
my brother who is opening
the packet, taking out the two green notes
and the red one
against blue where they flutter

CRUSADERS AND CAMP-FOLLOWERS

The shrill soprano seventh-graders
Who met my verse before their teens
are now grown militant crusaders
For Women's Lib and all it means.

And some are sternly Party cadres,
And some on television screens
Disperse their talents; some, invaders
Of my field, write for magazines.

What brains, what charm, what ease of manner!
I hesitate to fling a spanner,
But still, in spite of guts and wits,

They'll have to push their load of waste,
The dills, the nongs, the double-faced,
And just the same old bunch of shits.

JOHN MANIFOLD

CAPITAL

At Belconnen Interchange
I prowled the dark spaces.

Black hole, the vacuum
nature abhors, concrete halls
of sleep: surreal realisation of
malaise of modern man! Suburb light
is pinned all round the night: galactic
sweeps of suburb. This
is night's dead centre. By day
the dollars are dealt, supermarket
trolleys feed the carparks; back
to the low-slung houses,
brick so pretty that it can't be true.

Burley Griffin's test-tube baby,
innocence of the early century set down in chaste
radials, dreaming ellipses, planting trees
to plant a nation's heart, as if you could, to make
history happen. Dreams
don't come true so easily. The Chicago dreamer
in ink and pencil thought future for a land
still as stop.

The unused air. The sun
dumps itself on dazzled citizens, and day and night
they bear their Southern cross
of barbecues and Channel Seven.
I watch
you petrify as you stare across water
at its gusher sows the sky. A thousand
desks forsaken noon joggers
fray the lake's fringe — almost
the city's busiest sight!

Driving out, an eerie thing:
dozens of streets
doodled on bare scrub-humps, and named.
A capital joke no doubt, though there's
a poet here whose name is Hope, and serious
mountains gather round, in wait
for what might happen.
We drive on through them
hauled in the noose of a different dream.

HUGH UNDERHILL

THE GARDEN WEDDING

For Denny

the party over
I half-heard her say
as she carried her husband
past the wedding cake
and across the garden
to the honeymoon car
that when she next came
she'd be a beggar
given the nature of marriage
and the state of her man

and then she'd beg
friendship, love, affection
be a thief of souls
she said

and the time after that
she'd come as a mother
feed bread to the ducks

and tiring of that
she'd throw scraps of dead meat
to the crows
the black-clad guests
at the end of the garden

DONNA MAEGRAITH

THE DRUNK

the drunk at the traffic lights
weaves across three lanes
against the red
the cars almost bumper to bumper
horns blow
the traffic slows to a standstill
he works around each car
like a 200-game league player
clearing the ball out of the goal square
when he makes it safely
to the footpath opposite
he pivots
turns his body, again
towards the traffic
& with the grace of an actor
at his third encore
gives a slow, steadied bow
& shuffles into the night
treading softly
on the rose petals
of their gardens

RORY HARRIS

POEMS FOR MY FATHER

1.
my father's wife has left him,
after 30 bloody years
my mother has left home,
my mother has a new home.

there are no more letters to "nan & pop"
it's "dear mother" & "dear father",
two envelopes, two stamps,
a desert away.

2.
in the front room, my son's room,
singing, "all the sunshine
couldn't make the roses grow", he's
sentimental, maudlin, more than a thousand
miles from home, more removed than
a stranger.

3.
he courted her
like a clown courts
an audience.

& my mother has not loved him
for at least ten years.

his tear-streaked make-up
tells him that the circus
has moved on.

& the old audience is playing
a quick nine holes before lunch.

4.
i suppose you've forgotten the words
that echoed all down the tunnel
of my childhood,

"that's for nothing
nowyaknow whatchyou'llget
if you do something"

& mother shouting,
"don't hit them on the head,
hit them on the bottom
where it won't show."

my sister & i,
nursed each other's bruises
& kept out of your way, kissed you
in the morning when you asked.

i did not want
to be reminded. put your white rollerskate
on the train, father, catch the plane home,

here comes the dark night,
the one you keep singing about.

5.
you collected your presents
& left.
there was no waving ceremony.

the kitchen walls sighed
after you'd gone,
you did not listen
or like to laugh.

there always were tears
& tears to spare.

there was no waving ceremony,
i drank my tea, you took your
tears with you,
forgot to say goodbye.

JENNY BOULT

THE SYDNEY HARBOR BRIDGE

sent on an envelope (proudly) to some unknown, now-
dead correspondent nearly fifty years ago, those hard lines
angled over fine faint stamp-vertebrae, I saw it

first in fifty-eight, mounted it with unthinking care between
george the fifth and aborigines, marked '3d red, used',
I craved the sixpenny blue, the five shilling green

and later gaped at such solid insouciance, such imperviously
meccano-metallic curvings and verticals,
veritably acrobatic so that from pyrmont to balmain, driving

from paddington to glebe it swings unsolicited
into sight from hills, floats up through gaps of suburbs:
untiring trapezist in this soaring unrehearsed circus, sydney

JOHN M. WRIGHT

GUN SEQUENCE

It is very quiet
behind that tree
The boy with a gun
imagines a sash of fire
scarving a tiny animal

Behind his face
dark hair
another image
multiplying death by death

In each cross sight
there is a balance
which will never level itself —
a power to withhold death

Under the tiny ribs
a pebble flutters
This is the sequence
where the small heart
swallows the bloodstream of the world —

as the cold eye leaves the barrel.

JOHN MILLETT

FILMCLIP

I saw the officer raise his pistol &
fire. Saw the soldier aim his rifle &
fire. Saw No. 2 soldier shoot his rifle
at someone in a crowd — a seat in a row of
seats. At me, although he missed the lens, me,
hit only the cameraman whose name I don't know,
who held his camera steady as a mounted telescope
through 1 2 & No. 3 shots. It would be inaccurate to say
he filmed his own death. Even 4 seconds after shot No. 3
I thought the camera would swing round onto a
third person. Even 5 seconds after shot No. 3
the road lurching to a stop *wasn't* footage of death.
The cameraman kept his lens dead centre
right on the cause, the barrel — or bullet
or finger or officer's order or coup d'etat.
I will not wonder Why? out loud out of
respect for the dead, if not standing on ceremony
above thousands of small white criss-cross crosses,
still respect. I saw the seconds unreel for the first time
7 years after they were news on television news
when I might have been *not* watching another channel
because it was the hottest December night of
the hottest December day for 35 years &
I knew the cinema would be air-conditioned &
because a newspaper listed a wrong time a week before
& I arrived late for Galileo's inquisition
& after complaining to the ticket-seller
& then to the Manager by telephone
was rewarded with a complimentary to any film
of my choice & chose a *realpolitik* documentary
with an army set & wound up long before by Prussians
& still wearing Nazi uniform, including helmet
in a country where women clapped saucepan lids
above their heads in opposition to my hero
going down with a machinegun in his arms
as if it were a camera or Chile.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

WATERING THE HORSES

I was five when I rode on a Clydesdale.
My desperate hands clawed at its mane as it slowly lop-
lolloped over the cobblestone yard to the five-barred
gate, then down with a rush to the beck to be watered.

Yes, I remember the Clydesdales, with shaggy, white
collars fringing their hoofs; and broad, shiny backs
like the slippery horsehair sofa that prickled bare
legs in the farm's best parlor.

"Take me down," I whimpered, my stomach pressed hard on
its back, "Take me down."

Slowly I felt myself slither, over its flanks, half under
its belly, "Take me down." My thin legs dangled in button-
up boots.

The farmboy's mouth was a gash, but his squinting eye looked
kindly. He gripped me under the armpits hard. It hurt,
but he swung me clear.

I crouched in the mud, while the earth went on spinning.
and my corn-haired sister, two years older, with legs that
were two years longer rode past me, superior, smiling.

VERA NEWSOM

NOBODY THINKS THAT I LOOK MY BEST: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

to be born in new zealand was my greatest wish . . . so there I was, born
with the gift of precognition; I used to bleed first & fall over
afterwards . . . mum taught me to swim at 2 years of age, we used to go
& visit her in prison . . . my brothers & sisters were all different
sizes & in different colors & my dad was only one of my uncles . . .
down th road was hooky dean who didn't wear a hook & missus seagull
who kept her house as neat as a pin tho' & tracy dean was a bike, &
puberty was when you stopped talking about who was wetting th bed &
put one on th horses, but not always . . . little wonder that I didn't
begin to talk until I was fifteen, well after I started school . . .
I was unfed & forcibly educated, but luckily I won a scholarship to
a bodgie gang, who were rather like scouts, & taught one how to light
fires & made th art of defence a science . . . my first widgie girl-
friend caught me in short pants on my way to school & left me
furiously ringing my bell & reading ernest hemingway . . . my best
mates beat me up for learning to talk & I decided to get a higher
education . . . I became a mod & inverted th seams on my underwear by
hand, this proved my undoing . . . summer was no longer fashionable, &
cricket was a little thing that rubbed its legs together . . . during
th night I worked in a cemetery & during th day I tried to cough up
blood . . . some friends formed a band called th dead things & began
to live on stolen milk bottles . . . something had to give . . . I got
married at 19, broke my back at 20, at 21 I got a divorce on th grounds
of my ulcer . . . I didn't come to australia, I just left new zealand
. . . nobody understood my accent so I became an actor . . . due to my
good looks I was a natural for radio . . . after speeding up goonshow
tapes to approximate th cry of a kookaburra & 15,300 cups of noisy
tea I was a recording star or a pressed ham . . . slowly, I came to
realise that there was more money in poetry . . . 23 muses & a bottle
of mandrax fell into my arms . . . I fell to writing & falling . . . 23
women wearing overalls in bed & gumboots during th summer got to be
too much so I moved to wangaratta . . . there I wrote plays for a de-
consecrated theatre group who are now successfully unemployed in
saint kilda . . . queensland called & I answered promptly . . . after
marching at th double & just missing th quinella I was arrested for
not smiling at a policeman who went by th name of sylvia . . . my first
emaciated volume of poetry was published, & th university paid me my
busfare to recite . . . this could be th beginning of a short career,
I thought, & joined th poets union . . . we began to bring th footloose
to their feet & th government to its knees . . . I wrote poems about
everything except my 3 year old son, who was 12 . . . I tried th country
but cheap places with a good view turned out to have too religious an
outlook . . . after returning messages from elder brothers in flying
saucers unopened, I was excommunicated

I got myself a paper run & began to save up to go overseas . . . spent
my spare time trying to remember not to sing in libraries & not to
get drunk in pubs . . . I fell in love but she left when she got th
bill from th florist . . . I was in despair, luckily I'm a poor shot
& a good swimmer . . . I ended up in san francisco bay, went to see my
sister, who wouldn't answer th door, so I put my pet rock thru her
window, tied to 3 pre-dated christmas cards . . . I lived in th tenderloin,
where everybody was named smith, those named jones having had their
names changed by deedpoll . . . th landscape of california hinted subtly
that I should get my teeth fixed & have a good day . . . nobody got old
& th fruit refused to drop from th trees . . . & I was still living in
rooms with a sink to piss in & carrying a suitcase stuffed with newspaper
. . . I didn't want to be th lower case in a gay capital so I took to
wearing piano keys on my belt to confuse 'em . . . came back to melbourne
saying; 'great place, san francisco, y shoulda seen th size of th sinks'
. . . melbourne was much th same; still trying to work out who sold th
city square & "Rape of Lucrece" well-thumbed in th sex shops . . . for
th first time I noticed th sunday picnics in th cemetery & th brides
weeping at th church, so I tried to join th Party, but they decided that
I was too frivolous . . . wrote POET on my dole form but they told me
self pity's a genre: not an art . .

ERIC BEACH

BUSHFIRE AT WATERFALL

When I'm awake
the wind
fills my house
like gas swelling the belly
of a corpse
and waits for the fire
that murdered Charlie —

I can hear
a television crew
in a helicopter
swigging cheap hysteria
watching the red sky
giddy above them
like a reeling, violent drunk —

I am not awake!
even though
my bones are screaming blue murder
in the street
even though
I'm dreaming about Charlie
fishing on an ocean
that I can barely reach
with its water
boiling and roaring
in my skull
I dream
you're not safe, Charlie,
I dream
of holding you tight
in a boat
that's tipping up
in a furious swell
of ash.

The television crew
shoot something different;
the smouldering skeleton of a truck
and five bodies under sheets.
Zoom lens
of memory
follows Charlie
driving a stolen car
to see me,
could that kind of fire
have stopped him?
Clear focus
on my cold smile
as I read a book
in the crook
of his arm.

Are you under a sheet, Charlie?
Spit/hot sea-spray
hit me in the face.
Have I woken up
just to lie to you
all over again?
All right,
I remember
your wild rat eyes and hair
your stealthy shyness
to end it all
I lit a fire,
a terrible fire
I knew you wouldn't survive
I stood back to watch
with a hypocritical blanket
in my hand
and, sure enough,
you blazed
you ran at me
soundlessly, shirt aflame,
you burnt
away to nothing.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

SHOPLIFTING

I was stuffed around too much you see
by salespersons, metrics, demented shoppers,
and finally finding my size at the third store
in the exact color
I went into the fit room with two,
and out with one.

The office girls watched me scratched and twitch
all afternoon. I had the costumes still under
my underpants.

It makes you feel queer and secret to steal
but I remember how much they've ripped
me off
and I feel sickly better.

PETER BAYLEY

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

Around the Hills of the Giant Men

Papunya is a kind of battleground where the two cultures collided twenty years ago, and the wreckage is strewn over a hundred square miles.

It is difficult writing about the Aboriginal people at Papunya without remembering Joan Didion's observation that "writers are always selling somebody out". The problems facing a 'whitefella' writing about Aboriginals in central Australia are not easily ignored; the English words seldom fit snugly and one runs the risk of sounding righteous, naive or almost anything but truthful. So I better begin by telling you what I cannot tell you.

I cannot, for example, tell you what the Aboriginal is thinking today or what he has ever thought. I cannot romanticize the 'olden times'; I do not know them. I cannot even transcribe old Tutama's outrage at the government "liars" and "crooks" who tricked him with the promise of land and a four-wheel drive vehicle; you would have to *hear* it, or at least be able to read it in Pintupi. In this, all the voices are missing and, here, even my would-be storytellers are reduced to cameo-parts, without hands, without eyes and no breathing in your ear the smell of kangaroo meat and campfires.

To be totally honest my own experiences are not substantial. All I can tell is a little part of the little that I have been able to glean from the brief contact that sixteen months has allowed. In a place like Papunya that is not long; by Aboriginal standards, I would guess, it is almost nothing. Even now I feel that I am hurrying this into print. But the fear of hurrying it is outweighed by the feeling that the longer I wait the less inclined I will be to write anything at all.

I am sitting at a typewriter, 160 miles west-northwest of Alice Springs. Here is a house on the edge of the desert. Here is a table, paper, books and cigarettes. Around and about are the broken bodies of deserted automobiles and a collision of houses, built for the Aboriginals, beaten by the elements and by irrelevance. These are among the things that are definite. Beyond this what is definite becomes a cliché. The time passes slowly—already months overdue, the letter yesterday reminded me I'm writing a prose piece for this magazine; it had escaped me—no newspapers, no television, some nights Radio Moscow is clearer than the A.B.C. The government provides a house, air conditioning and electricity; the western suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne are only a few jet-hours away. The mail plane comes once a week. No hardship.

Here lives a thousand thousand stories and some amazing old men and women. Papunya holds its people with a store and a continuous supply of water. It is one of the last 'resting' places of the Pintupi, for nowadays the corroborees are tapped out in ramshackled lounge rooms with tennis racquets and hammers, with rocks on cool drink cans, and old Tjungarrayi shows up at council meetings wearing a pair of underpants on his head, and old Tjapangati regularly puts on each, new, second-hand shirt over his old shirts, four or five shirts deep.

Afternoons, the house is filled, cups of sweet milky tea and talking. The mothers nurse their fat babies and shout abuse at the children. The

men, nodding their heads, plan hunting trips or discuss the football team. People appear to be happy.

But in many different ways one sees and is told that Papunya doesn't like itself; too many of its children are sick, too many of its young men dead, too many old people drunk. So I ask myself, how will I write about this or, more to the point, knowing that it won't change a thing why am I writing about this at all? It is a question that accompanies a lot of frustration; it is connected to the question of what good can I do here, anyway? Even in the short time I have been here I have seen more than a half-a-dozen Europeans go out the 'back door'; they had arrived eager and enthusiastic, and left with instructions where to send their belongings.

Certainly, my original reasons for coming (i.e. a job, an intellectual curiosity in Aboriginals, a desire to help) are not the reasons why I have stayed. Somewhere between coming and staying a break occurred, a gap between my superficial expectations of the place and the place itself. Now the reasons for staying, if they are reasons, *are* the people — but more than wanting to 'study' them, even more than wanting to 'help' them. There is no one here I know well, least of all any Aboriginals, but I do not want to leave here unaffected. Perhaps it is grossly selfish but I want to learn something here no book can tell me, and which I can only insinuate in this article. I want to learn how to be with these people; I do not want to lose them, not their warmth, not their humor, not even their suffering. I am partial to them and because I am here, and because I want to find out, I must let them win something of me if I am to retain anything of them. Because I am a writer, writing helps.

What follows is, of necessity, little more than a series of sketches. I don't know how else to approach it. There is no system that comes to mind, no method other than piling incident upon incident, story upon story, to show you what criss-crosses my time here, chosen not because of what they tell but because of what they might suggest. Together, perhaps, they might make a picture. For me, most of them have been 'touchstones' in my search to realize this place — that is to say, most of them, either as stories or as incidents, have jarred me or surprised me or made me laugh; they stand out as clear 'events' in what is mostly a mass of confused detail.

All of this starts at a time when I first began to realize that Australia was becoming, for me, more than it ever was and could never return to what it had been. I had been in Central Australia for about five months and I was camped out bush, way out toward the Western Australia border. My job, then, was to collect stories in Pintupi and to print them in books for use in an outstations' bilingual program. I'd been collecting stories at Kungkayunti outstation, 75 miles west of Papunya.

The last couple of days I camped alone. It was mid-winter and the days were cool and clear, perhaps the most comfortable time of the year for a whitefella unaccustomed to the kind of heat the Centre can turn on. During this time of the year the air is fresh, aromatic; you can imagine you are almost anywhere except Australia — Spain, say, or maybe Africa near the coast. The mountains, the trees, the rocky outcrops are focused hard-edge. There is no interruption, unless it be the four-wheel drive track that disappears so easily curving into the spinifex. It is probably one of the last great areas of real elbow-room on earth: not a supermarket, not a telephone for hundreds of miles. I enjoyed these few days, but I knew it was time to start heading back. I remembered that many Aboriginal people had said they didn't go out much further than this, saying that it was "too lonesome out there now".

So I pointed the Land Cruiser east, toward Papunya, and worked my way up to good, top gear. For four hours the track led through alternating areas of mulga and big desert oaks, occasionally breaking out into vast plains of scrub and spinifex, with views of billion year-old mountains. Several hours more and I topped the last sand ridge two miles from the settlement. In the near-distance I could see the store, a grey, concrete building with caged windows. It seemed a welcome sight at first — cool drinks, I thought, friends, the vague promise of something more familiar, more human. But it reminded me sharply of what I had left behind. I began to feel like an escapee who, having travelled hundreds of miles, had finished up once again outside his prison. The store was a part of this. It was part of *my* culture, and the inherited culture of the desert people. They, like myself, had come to expect it; it was a fact of life. It was something we shared; without it I probably wouldn't be here, nor would they. It was inescapable.

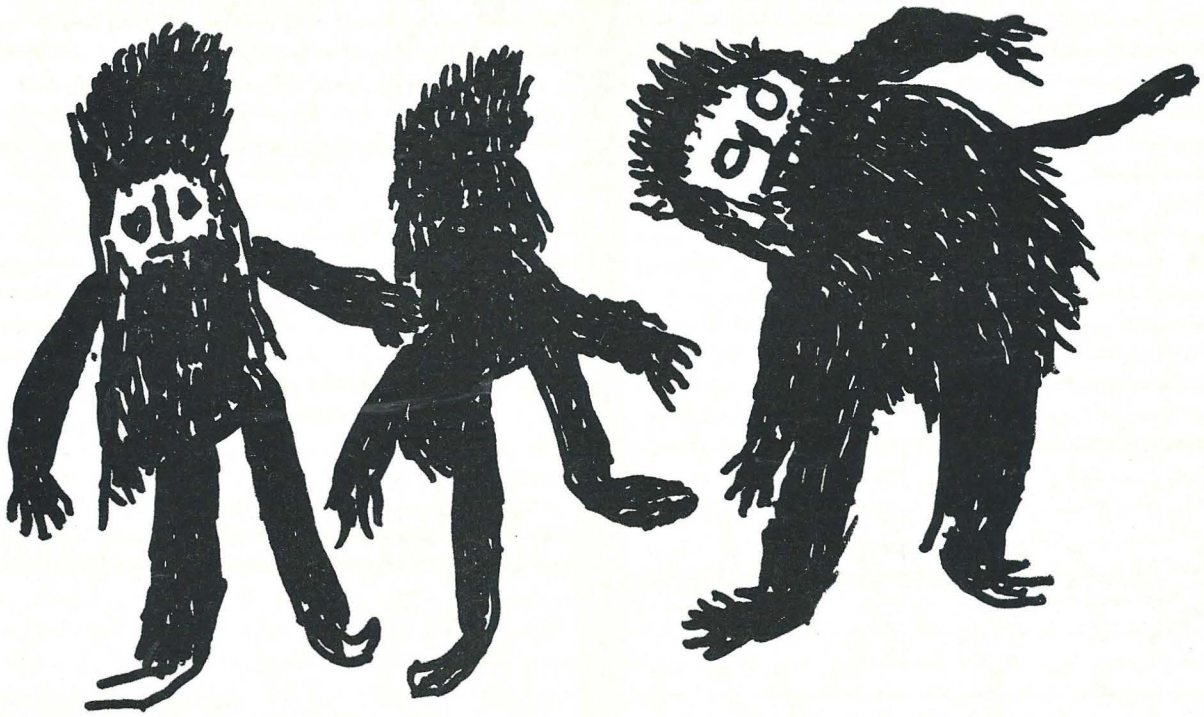
I also realized something that I hadn't gone into the desert to find out. It was more than an idea; it was an almost over-powering sense of being forcibly drawn into a dirty, little place where things had to be paid for and which necessitated getting money in order to pay for them. I *had* to

live here, or somewhere like this, where there was a store, people. The idea of being trapped was no longer just an idea. Here was the heart of a way of life, dragged out to the edge of the desert, and we were all paying dearly for it. For most Aboriginal people the store was slowly, subtly locking out their past; it was locking out wandering. In the desert I had felt myself waking up. Now I was back to the trance.

The store, like the school and the hospital and so many other 'services', is a whitefella thing: set up by whitefellas, administered by whitefellas, sustained by whitefellas' money, and it is impossible to speak about Papunya without speaking about its white inhabitants as well. Papunya is a kind of battleground where the two cultures collided twenty years ago, and the wreckage is strewn over a hundred square miles. Here is where the Pintupi nomads walked through 40,000 years in one week. Neither the Aboriginals nor the Europeans have adjusted very successfully to the place. Among the Europeans, anyway, one finds some curious attitudes.

One middle-aged whitefella, a person who holds down a 'responsible' position here, has often described the time he spent in New Guinea, and on several occasions has quietly boasted about how he was able to maintain his own 'cultural values' in the face of such sub-civilized conditions. He said he made a point of always carrying a table-cloth with him wherever he went. No matter where he travelled — on mountainsides, in jungles, sitting in straw huts — he always had his table-cloth and his food was always served on it. He reasoned that we (white people) were the ambassadors of our way of life, a way of life that the indigenous peoples were requesting, and that it was our responsibility to present at least some idea of a good standard of living. Somewhere along the line the table-cloth disappeared, but when the circus came last year I saw him just inside the tent, watching the show, a thermos in one hand and, in the other, a transistor radio.

Johnny Warangula, the head-man at Ilbili outstation, remembers his first contact with Europeans as if it were yesterday, and not fifteen years ago. He's told this story so many times it always amazes me how eagerly people listen to it, but then repetition has never detracted from the story. Each time it is told it is as if there is always something different, a change in inflexion, a shift



Above: Two Pangkalangka have captured a bush man and intend to eat him. Drawing by Tutama Tjapangati, 65, of Papunya.

Left: Pintupi/Luritja schoolboys at Papunya Settlement. They represent the first generation of children not born in the bush.

of mood; the story has a life of its own. The last time I heard it was when he'd come around for a shifter and a cup of tea. We talked about Ilbili, about going for kangaroo, and gradually he warmed to a storytelling mood.

He always begins with great seriousness, telling how his family (a group of about ten or twelve people) had been travelling from Tjikati, south of Lake Mackay, to an important ceremonial site at the beginning of a 'honey ant dreaming' track 150 miles west of Papunya. Almost methodically he explains how they approached Ilbili and were stopped by a terrible thunder. But it was strange, not really like thunder, and it frightened them. It was like the sound of some *mamu* (evil spirit) coming out of the sand, or a debil-debil, a monster; what words they had only made them more frightened. Then they saw it — a devil maybe, a devil bird, something — it swooped on them. The women grabbed the children and ran while Johnny and another man tried to spear it from the sky. "Ohh, proper debil-debil that one, we bin think, can't spear em, wiya, nothing; him bin made outta tjitapayin (sheet of iron)!" Less than a week later the airplane had taken Johnny and his family to Papunya for dresses, shirts and trousers, and food.

It is just as well the desert people possess such a good sense of humor. It is probably what has saved them from us. Take, for example, the camera crew that was sent out here a few years ago to make a film about the Pintupi people. They employed the aid of an Aboriginal guide and, accompanied by some of his companions, trekked out to Jupiter Well in Western Australia, filming country and several ceremonial sites along the way. During a break in the shooting one of the Aboriginal men sat down on the ground and began drawing with red, white and yellow ochres on the back of his hand. The camera crew, sensing some mystical or spiritual significance in this act, gathered around him as he worked intently on his designs. The film turned round, the camera zoomed in, everyone leaned forward; the man

with the microphone squatted down. Then the man extended the microphone toward the bloke and asked: "What do those marks on the back of your hand mean?" The Aborigine looked up, slightly puzzled by all the commotion and then, beginning to smile, held his hand up to the camera and said: "Oh, these? These," pointing to the marks on the back of his hand, "these for color T.V.!"

At another time, the Queen of England had asked to meet a full-blood Aboriginal. A person was found and the official ceremony, complete with military uniforms and a 12-gun salute, was finally staged. Eventually the Aboriginal bloke was led by the elbow up to Her Majesty and the official aide made the introduction. "My good man," he began, "I would like to introduce you to the Queen of England." The Aboriginal stuck out his hand proudly, and with great dignity he said: "Reeeallly! I'm Nosepeg . . . King of the Pintupi!"

Stories such as these are inexhaustible. They form an important part of what good health there is in this community. But not all the stories are funny or entertaining, and many of them appear in abbreviated, written form on the sides of old buildings and derelict motor cars. Scrawls of graffiti provide the outsider with important 'footnotes': "you SEX girl from R.R."; "Mervin No love"; "you RED cUnT you lik water HOLY"; "no Love from PapunyA".

When I first arrived here, on a baking-hot day in late January, I was met in the street by a powerful-looking Aboriginal woman. Solid, with short cropped hair, she was naked from the waist up. In one hand she squeezed a red, builder's brick, wedging it between her jaw and her shoulder; in the other, a large rock swung at the end of a strong, relaxed arm. A plug of mingkulpa (wild tobacco) bulged from her lower lip. Her eyes wouldn't let me walk past. "You gimme that key," she said, coming up to me. "I want my key you walypala (whitefella), that one bin mine." I didn't know what to say so I just stood there trying to make what must've looked like a ridiculous smile. She became angry and spat tobacco juice into the dust, then went on abusing me for not giving her back her key. I didn't know what she was talking about. Shoving the brick up tight against her chin, sweat rolling off her tits, she looked ready to strike. "That's my house you got, that one *mine*, you gimme that key you walypala bastard!" Later, several people told me about Cora. They said: "That one proper rama-rama (mad)", and laughed. But I can still see myself walking away from her, helpless, while she stands her ground, flat-footed and firm and calling out: "You bastard! That bin my house, my house! You gimme, gimme, I'm hungry mister, I'm hungry!"

It is not an infrequent ocurrence to find myself confused about what's what out here. To one degree or another confusion is a constant companion of most Europeans living at Papunya. There is so little one can be sure of. The responses that we make with such ease in European-type society are more troubled here — partly because we do not understand the language, and more particularly because we do not and cannot, I think, understand very much about the sources from which these people derive meaning for their lives. It is also difficult because for most of us we have always had the rather dubious luxury of having too many choices available to us. Papunya is not the end of the line for us; we can ignore the worst of it, or we can leave. We can build up our homes like fortresses, listening to rock-n-roll or jazz behind closed doors.

Some take the 'easy' way and simply say, "I don't like you and I've never liked you . . . because you're black, and I'm here for the money", and once that is sorted out they go about their jobs. But for those who want some kind of authentic relationship with an Aboriginal person it is rough-going. The mentality of so many of the white people in the Northern Territory, generaally, has been shaped by suspicion, jealousy and hatred. The opposition that comes from fellow Europeans is usually subtle, though not always, and often comes in doses of 'good advice' given by people who set themselves up as experts on Aboriginals and settlement life in general. I have learned not to trust anyone who, being white, espouses to 'know the nature of the beast'. What is clear is that there is damned little that is clear about Papunya.

One European woman in her early-twenties was telling me about how she'd been advised of the hazards of being an unmarried white woman living on an Aboriginal reserve, and that during the orientation program to prepare her for a job at Papunya she'd been warned never to stop for an Aboriginal on the side of the road. She asked if whether or not this would be the case even if his car was broken down or if he was otherwise in need of help. "Oh no," the orientation officer told her, "if someone tries to hail you down you just keep on going, and if someone comes out

into the middle of the road to try and make you stop just drive right over the top of him . . ."

I received some 'good advice' too, my first week in the place. A big, red-faced bloke who said he liked his whisky started telling me about how, oh, he'd lived on settlements for seventeen years or so and he reckoned he'd picked up quite a few clues, no worries. "Well, ya can't trust 'em," he said, "none of the bastards!" Then he leaned over and said: "Lissen, every community has its rules and this uns no exception." He put his hand on my shoulder. "Being new to th' place don't mean ya gotta make the common mistakes, an' ya can save yrself a lot uv bloody trouble if ya don't lettem in yr house, 'specially th kids," he said, "they're nothin but a pack o' dogs." I asked him what he did here and he stood back and looked at me with an interested smile "I'm a teacha," he said.

After sixteen months in Papunya I have noticed that there are, generally, two major 'types' of whitefellas that survive fairly well. There are those who take the paternalistic view that Aborigines aren't as good as other (i.e. white) people, but nevertheless they are prepared to 'look after them' if the salary and incentives are right. On the other hand, there are those people who can imagine that the Aborigine is a decent, even an interesting, bloke but is in need of some kind of personal commitment to Christ. Both of these are of course stereotypes, but both contain a modicum of truth. If one doesn't fall into one of these two categories it is very difficult to find reasons, or encouragement, for staying.

The history of Papunya, it seems, supports this hypothesis. The whitefellas come and go as if it was their station in life to be so temporary out here. Over the last twenty years thousands of white people have passed through this place, so much so that there is a standing joke that if you can last in Papunya for a year you can be spoken of as a long-time resident. I don't believe it is an accident that the European persons who have been here the longest are two Christian linguists who have studied the local language extensively (for fourteen years) and who are currently finishing a translation of the Bible into Pintupi/Laritja.

Nevertheless, I have also discovered many curious attitudes among some of the born-again white people here. One day I was driving back from Yuendumu with another linguist and we fell into talking about religion. He told me how he had 'found' religion and how the Bible was a document that could be taken quite literally. I was naive or uninformed enough to consider this a rather strange conception coming from a linguist, and I was interested to hear his views. He explained that his relationship with God had saved him from "death" and that he was working at Papunya because, as he put it, he'd gotten the call. I looked at him, trying to size up the shape of what looked like becoming an argument, but then, half-jokingly, I said that perhaps I'd been called too. The good-natured enthusiasm he'd maintained in trying to explain himself to me slipped away. He glanced towards me, almost offended, and said: "No. That can't be. If you'd been called, God would've told me." We sat the next thirty miles in silence; he never liked me much after that.

There is so much more to tell, though so much of it is so unbelievable. Most of what happens here is so intangible, and a great deal is tied up with secrets that no whitefella can know. And if he did know them, he would think twice before putting them to print. What comes to whitefellas directly is the more negative aspects of Papunya: the violence, the sickness, the misunderstanding. Many of the family groups here come from different tribes that were, traditionally, hostile to each other. Add to this the overpopulation, for it was very seldom that the desert people gathered in groups larger than twenty or thirty, and you have a situation that is made for aggravated violence. When grog comes in to the place, or rather when it is snuck in, the fuse is much shorter.

But these are not the kinds of situations I would like to discuss in any detail; they are mentioned simply because they cannot be ignored, and because I do not want to leave the impression that Papunya is an entirely placid place where people sit around all day telling stories. Alcohol is also a fact of life out here, and the damage it has done to so many families already is incalculable and grievous in the extreme. This comes through even in, what would be called at Papunya, 'small incidents'.

The other night, for example, a drunken woman stood in the open-air theatre at the settlement and poured anger and abuse on someone's daughter who'd got her son into trouble, and now her boy was in the Alice Springs gaol with a broken neck, and she had no car to get in, and she was afraid he might die, but she was damn sure someone was gonna pay for this one. Her words broke to bits with sobbing. In the background, up on the screen, Bruce Lee karate-chopped his way around her silhouette. At last, a few men got to their feet

and took her off to the side to quieten her down. This business could be taken care of tomorrow (it was). On the screen Bruce Lee held up his fist to the audience and said: "I'm not the one who's doing the talking around here; *this* is!"

Looking back over all this I feel a tremendous lack. The language, somehow, is still not exact enough; there is still too much that is missing. It feels as if one has to learn a whole new way of writing if one is going to write here. After nearly a year and a half I still feel that I am groping, still learning. So take this, then, only as an 'interim' report on the current state of one whitefella's perceptions of the place. There are many others, and they would have other stories.

In the late afternoon David Bromberg is playing his music into my room. The air conditioner spins out cool air; the shades are beginning to lengthen outside my window. In the distance, a rugged swell of sand and rock climbs into the Belt Range. The Aboriginal people say Pangkalangka lives up there, giant men with hairy bodies. Too many Pangkalangka. "Whitepella think we liar," Nosepeg Tjupurrula says, "think Pangkalangka nothing. Him not *nothing,* notta bullshit; that Pangkalangka true, ilta, from olden times, *no worries!*" No one has ever seen a Pangkalankga or, if one has been seen, no one has ever lived to tell about it. And no one goes up into those hills after sunset. The people here will tell you why: that Pangkalangka, he's a really clever fellow, and besides . . . he eats people.

D. J. O'HEARN

Re-reading Peter Mathers

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The question I put to myself in re-perusing Peter Mathers' two novels *Trap* and *The Wort Papers* is why the original and highly talented writer remains one of the great un-read. As eminent a critic of Australian literature as Vincent Buckley has, without qualification, placed him with Lawson, Furphy, Richardson, Herbert, Stead and White as "our chief prose writers", yet he remains a peripheral figure in the world of letters, unknown outside of Australia, and is dwarfed by his more popular contemporaries such as Keneally, Oakley and Lurie.

Probably the basic reason for Mathers' lack of a wide reading public lies in the demands his novels make on the reader. There is none of the easy (at time facile) flow of narrative that we find in Keneally, and none of the tumbling quick-witted humor at which Lurie is so artful. Mathers' novels are difficult to read and even more difficult to comprehend as meaningful form. There is little discernible as a thread of 'story' in his novels — in fact both novels seem to be a dislocated jumble of vignettes, a pot-pourri of yarns, peculiar taxonomies, essays, meanderings and chaotic adventures.

Mathers' characters have no rich inner life, they are not given to psychological reflection and they bristle with eccentricities, much as William Wort's obsession with camels, or Turnbuckle's odd behavior with parrots' feathers (*Trap*, p. 153). Vincent Buckley, in one of the few essays which gives a genuine insight into Mathers' work, points up the originality of *Trap* by a series of negatives:

> There are no lyrical passages whatever . . . no narrative *flow* of any sort . . . neither has it anything like the picaresque structure which, in its many forms, the modern novel attempts. It is not about Trap as a single travelling consciousness experiencing a various world and moving from place to place in it.

Buckley goes on however:

> Its dominant question is: what are the origins of this society, these institutions, the myths which console and the legends which fortify them? . . . society is its [the novel's] theme, quite overtly, and its concern is to establish the appropriate social range and depth in time. This is done . . . by layers of retrospect which are also corrections of false consciousness . . . it is about Australian history as it reticulates into the present Australian society.

In reviewing *The Wort Papers* I made the following remarks:

> Mathers has turned the traditional Australian theme of the explorer into a vast geographical joke, and as such into a metaphor for life itself . . . the country is too vast to be mapped and life too elusive to be charted . . . yet running through and informing the comic and lively incidents is a constant theme: that the clown is really the free man, that delight in life is the core of innocence, that life is too sacred and sad not to be laughed at. Age, 1970

If these claims are correct then Mathers' venture

is daring, ambitious and original. Only one other novel in our literature attempts a similar exploration, Furphy's *Such is Life*, and it is interesting to note that that novel remained for decades only half understood until A. A. Phillips, in the mid-fifties, pointed out that where everyone had previously dismissed the structure of the novel as awkward, messy and inartistic, and had therefore concentrated on selected passages of social analysis, the novel was carefully and acutely shaped and that its very form was artistically contrived to express Furphy's imaginative vision of Australia and its people. I believe Mathers' novels show a similar artistry of structure and that one can comprehend their richness of meaning only by struggling to understand their singularly shaped form. It is the subtlety and artistry of the structure which makes the novels on the one hand difficult to read, yet finally so impressive as works of fiction.

In his own humorous way, Mathers lightly characterises the apparent messiness of his works. The manuscript of *The Wort Papers* arrives in a butter-box, sent to Thomas Wort by the mysterious X Matters, himself a failed novelist. The papers are "musty crumbs of soil . . . manilla, bond, rag and rice-paper sandwiches". Confronted with this disgusting *mélange* Thomas recalls an earlier manuscript of X Matters (an obvious reference to Trap):

> Am reminded of recent book made up of hodge podge of diaries, papers, recollections, an anthology of rubbish . . .

Thomas later reads bits of the new manuscript to his secretary Susan:

> She cried: Has he no shame, no feeling for history and the environment? Hasn't he heard of our list, our documentaries — *Magic of Mining; Wattle Heritage; Population Implosion or Explosion*? How dare he send us his pollutions.

The ironic humor is, of course, that despite the messy appearance, Percy Wort and Matters are concerned almost exclusively with "history and the environment", but theirs (or is it "his"?) is a view which cannot be neatly codified and contained in Thomas's tidy publishing world. Theirs is a view which explores and ranges to and fro in time and space and comprehends a scope of social history and geography that almost defies limitation. To encompass this range there is a need both in *Trap* and *The Wort Papers* for a variety of narrators and commentators, for a certain mystery of being which envelops the major characters (Trap, Matters and P. Worth) and for the apparent disorderliness of the narrative.

History is not, in Mathers view, an orderly chronological assembly of past facts — it is fluid and web-like, a composite of fact, fiction, myth, legend and accident; it is both interconnected and discontinuous, personal in its genetic character, impersonal in its constant exposure to the chaos of chance. History and the past can be constricting if permitted to dominate one's life, as is the case with Thomas Wort or the Sancty-mony family. The past can however be vivifying and liberating if, like Percy Wort or Jack Trap, one chooses to explore and understand it — to catch it in story and language. To understand the past is to understand both order and disorder and to gain a certain cynicism before the former and a resilience, an openness to the chaos of *l'acte gratuit*, when confronted by the latter. Vincent Buckley speaks of *Trap* giving us "the sense of a society proliferated revealingly in time and space . . . the prose is directed towards this proliferation". *The Wort Papers* continues this direction and the two novels, read in conjunction, offer an astonishingly vast and varied number of perspectives on past and contemporary Australian society. In order to do this, however, Mathers has had to jettison anything like a monochromous, single-voiced narrator. He tests and explores many voices and, through these voices, a variety of tones and styles of prose. His language reflects a prismatic perspective, giving color and immediacy to each voice and view, certifying both the authenticity and the living actuality of the past.

In *Trap*, therefore, the diarist David David is constantly being supplanted by others who take over the narrative (a narrative which is not so much story as a deliberate mixture of stories). Adamov tells of Jack's adolescence, scaffold-making career, and his time in Northern Queensland (p. 72ff.). Jack gives us the hilarious history of Eb Cruxtwist (p. 16ff.), Nina gives us Maisie's account of life in the factory (p. 12)), Old Peters is given his own voice and prose style through the "authentic" pieces quoted verbatim from his diary; Grandson Sancty-mony steps forward to give us a direct account of his meeting with Jack in the park (p. 276) and so on.

In *The Wort Papers* a similar inventive process occurs, though in a slightly different form. Here the narrators are fewer — Percy, Matters

and the opening voice — but Mathers creates a multitude of perspectives through the variety of *papers* and the different voices required for each. So we are plunged into school essays (p. 125), narrative tales, childhood reminiscences, dreams, extracts from the Peeny Gazette competition (p. 263), telegrams, pamphlets (p. 144), "botanical bric-a-brac", disgressions on tomato sauce (p. 110), a history of the Cow (p. 98), Uncle Fred's account of the fracas near the Archibald fountain (p. 23), etc. etc. With each change of prose comes a change of tone and perspective. As readers, registering these changes, we suffer initial confusion: who or what is the "I" speaking? as we are jerked uncomfortably from one point of view to another. But it is precisely this "dislocation" (to use Vincent Buckley's term) that is the point.

It is as though the form of the novel creates a distinctive view of the human condition — at the core of things is both anarchy and inter-relatedness, chaos and continuity. No one perspective dominates its polar opposite more than momentarily, and there is no cause either for elation or despair. The heart of the matter is survival and an openness to chaotic adventure, whether one is an unwitting cause or passive participant. Survival in this maelstrom of existence is a matter of resilience, humor and flexibility. To mirror this flexibility, Mathers creates a fictional form which wilfully moves through time and space. He does not, as so many novelists do, attempt to "capture the world in a cage" — rather he expresses, through the form of his novels, the constant susceptibility and possibilities of existence.

In *Trap*, for example, the diary commences on 1 May, moving back through April to finish on 3 May. Through the various narratives and stories, however, we journey as far back and as far afield as Tierra del Fuego in the early nineteenth century, to Hobart — Sydney in the 1830s and northern N.S.W. in the mid-nineteenth century. This historical and geographical movement is all encapsulated, contained even, in Melbourne of the early 1960s. In *The Wort Papers* we commence fifteen years after the disappearance of Percy and are launched back from the contemporary urban business world of Thomas, first to the rural world of Uppersass and Peeny, and then to William Wort's journey to the Kimberleys, decades earlier. We move through World Wars 1 and 2, country life in Victoria and northern N.S.W. and Sydney in the 1930s and 1950s. In both novels we encounter businessmen (Robert Free-Rutt, Thomas Wort), politicians (Colin Free, Collie), wealthy landowners (Colonel Sancty-mony, Mr Thyme), Aboriginals, evangelists, Catholics, security men, police, farmers, country hicks and urban riff-raff, cedar-cutters, gaols, ships, factories (Steelcyl, Ford) etc. etc.

Played against, and serving to create and enliven this panorama of time, space and people, is the deliberate dislocation of the narratives' time sequences. For example, in *Trap*, we are told of Jack's first meeting with Sally at the Black Cat (p. 138). By p. 140 Sally herself takes over the narrative and moves us back to her life with the Steels of Tubbi Park. There we first hear of Adrian Beestings, the Steel's son-in-law, whom David (to whom the narration has returned, p. 143) meets through Free-Rutt (one of Mathers more clumsy moves). By p. 144 we are back with Trap and Sally at the Black Cat, but by p. 146 we move to Tierra del Fuego and Jack's account of the forebears. This account, weaving its way through time and space, continues until p. 224, when we take up again with Jack and Sally at the Black Cat. The odd events of that one afternoon and evening (Jack lands in gaol and is interviewed by Jones and Spry, gets drunk in the Limerick Arms (p. 263), returns home to Mrs Paine and meets his relation Horace Sham-Meely in a wine saloon, suffers hallucinations and falls asleep in a wardrobe) do not finish until p. 274.

The change of narrators, narrations and incidents, so rapid and deliberately disruptive, creates the sense that in the persons of Jack and Sally the actuality of history is omni-present: it is turbulently *there*. Similarly in *The Wort Papers* the episode describing the football match between the High School and the Marist Brothers' team commences on p. 94. From the "field of Mars" we move with the boys to the Parthenon Milk Bar; the conversation leads Percy to digress on his vocation to the medical profession, his relationships with Thomas, an essay on cows (pp. 98-9), then back to the milk bar and the local girls. Percy digresses again (on scapulas) and then meets the girl Pat (p. 104). His romantic dream of her leads him again to digress, and we have the Jenolan cave episode (pp. 105-9). Back to Pat (p. 111) by way of an essay on tomato sauce (p. 110), and the incident finally ends on p. 113.

The effect of such dislocations of time and narrative is to create simultaneously a sense of turbulence and of integration. Webs of meaning

and relationships are spun with apparent carelessness, yet their very existence, tenuously strung through time and space, gives actuality to the characters and a sense of history to *their* haphazard and often chaotic existence. It is as though each person's existence is both real and mythical, continuous but a-chronological, a kind of passage of the mind open to, and defenceless against, digressions of memory.

Central to Mathers' imaginative vision is, as mentioned above, the sense of society both anarchic and continuous. In such a society the individual is both legatee and agent, subject to and unleashing forces beyond his control. Only in retrospect, and with cautious probing, can a pattern be discerned — a pattern which intertwines past and present, a web strung through time and space. The form of both novels seeks to create this pattern, to become itself the pattern.

The Wort Papers is witness to this attempt to weld form and meaning. The structure is there, yet never so clearly there that it annihilates the mysterious or eliminates the possibilities of other meanings. On p. 9, for example, we encounter our first scene of what appears to be pointless chaos.

> The black skin-diver reached the top and bowed to the General. The barb, thought Thomas, is a piece of bone set with shark's teeth. The skin-diver flip-flopped towards the General. Complimentary remarks were uttered. Thomas, on the other side of the General thought: He is going to shoot the General, how bloody fantastic. He dived on the General and dragged him down. Bodyguards wheeled, shooting with deadly effect. Screams, rattles, groans and ouches of surprise. Asiomen, bodyguards, flunkeys, directors and a mixed sprawl of celebrities bled down the gutter. The General fired a bullet through Thomas's shoulder blade and into the face of an ore foreman attending his first company commissioning.

Mathers is a master of this prose style, where an almost taxonomic precision of the language allows madness and chaos to run their course until a point of exhaustion is reached. It is as though the claim of the prose itself is that order is an unnatural and fragile imposition, at any time open to destruction by a chance event triggering off unforeseen consequences. In similar vein we have the explosion of William's Morris (p. 26), or William's vomiting when handed the skewer of eyes, the result of which is that Orrebul Downs is burnt to the ground (p. 83ff). At moments such as these (and the novel is full of them) the prose sweeps the reader forward as event tumbles upon contingent event and the whole world seems to run amok. The locus of the impression of chaos lies in the episodic onslaught of the prose which creates and typifies what it seeks to create, the logic of slapstick, a logic of chaos, at once highly inventive and rich in possibilities.

The point is that in Mathers' novels anything can happen at any time, and once the unpredictable has occurred the social order, which man erects to defend himself against the chaos of life, crumbles, explodes or flies into disarray. Survival, in Mathers' terms, does not lie in the studied erection of social and psychological defences against chaos, but in a naive and almost innocent resilience wherein lurks something of the clown and something of the saint. As contingent beings we are both subject to and creators of life; like Mathers' characters we are sometimes passive, victims almost, and sometimes active, unwitting anarchists.

So the incident with the frogman and General Wu is not just a haphazard, comic exercise in riot and anarchy. The frogman is an Aboriginal and plays a "long sad tune" not, we note, on the traditional gumleaf but on "seaweed", thus prefiguring one of William Wort's fads — that kelp is a source of life and health.

He points the bone at General Wu, having already refused to pick up General Wu's "handful of Gold Thais". His refusal is apposite, for Wu's crass materialism, like that of Thomas, is an image of the end point of a certain perverted direction of Australian history and society. William, and particularly Percy, represent another direction, more akin to the "sense of history and environment" as understood by the Aboriginals. Wu is *persona non grata* to the Aboriginals because he is "responsible for the imminent removal of a small sacred mountain which happens to be seventy per cent iron ore". Thus this incident sets up the basic terms of the nature/culture conflict which is one of the themes the novel pursues in its wayward mode.

But there is more to it than this. Somewhat like the elusive novelist, Matters or Percy, the frogman rises up, creates chaos through an unexpected change in a ritual, and then disappears. His direct mission fails but his action has other odd consequences, which are worth looking at in detail. The ensuing fame which is heaped on Thomas Wort unearths the mysterious Matters

with his manuscript of a novel, *Fish*. Matters torments Thomas with telephone calls and cryptic telegrams, finally sending him both an ink bottle supposedly containing Percy's ashes (see p. 282) and Percy's manuscript. According to Percy, Matters seems to be an Aboriginal and is the only person to discover him in his Wortarium (p. 153). Matters gives Percy information about Thomas and the Peeny people, and seems to know all about him and his predicament: "I wondered how he had come by such knowledge" muses Percy. When finally Percy decides to make a break for it — somewhat in the manner of a mix between King Lear, an Aboriginal, and the naked Collins (in Furphy's *Such is Life*, p. 281) — his heart, according to Matters, gives out. Instead of sauntering off disguised as Tank's scarecrow, he is himself supposedly eaten by crows and his remains found and cremated by Matters. People refuse to believe however that Percy is dead: "I saw him in a newspaper, said one. I had an unsigned postcard, said the other", and Matters is warned that he is in danger of "emulating" Percy. "There were always similarities." Finally Matters announces to Thomas, in a language and tone indecipherable from that of Percy:

> I am beyond risk and I have gone my own way, Thomas. I have used culverts as tunnels, have crossed double lines, seen red as green but never been involved in a thrall. Have disposed of the estate, sunk the boat, loaded up animals and pissed into the wind. We move on.

Who then is the mysterious Matters? Is he a novelist, *the* novelist perhaps; or a symbol of one? Is he in any way related to or the same as the mysterious Aboriginal Frogman — an anarchist with original but recognisable symbols — a pointed bone which is a spear-gun shaft, a tune played on kelp rather than on a peeled gumleaf? The frogman suddenly rises up to attack those who rape land and sacred mountains in the name of progress; he is an elusive figure who causes chaos and then disappears never to be apprehended. Such, some might say, is the role of the novelist — certainly it is close to Mathers' own sense of his own role — daring, surprising, disturbing, elusive. It is no surprise to us, then, when later we see Thomas wondering if the manuscript is written by Percy or Matters: "Perhaps it *is* the work of Matters. The whole business. Percy couldn't have done all this". (P. 18.) And the name itself: "something familiar about the name. Familiar. Am not keen to revive the near-forgotten." Is it Matters or Mutters? Does it Matter. What Matters? Do these matters matter? No matter unless it matters!

Mathers deliberately sets the questions, but for Thomas (and for us) no positive answers emerge. Nor should they, for the novel is an exercise in imaginative exploration, nor exposition, and certain ambiguities and mysteries are central to it. Hints and innuendoes are all we are permitted, for Mathers' concerns do not direct him to dogmatic statement. In *Trap*, the novelist, although ranging far through time and space, does create a discernible web of interrelationships (in fact, if anything, the final tying in of all the relationships is a little too forced, too neat). In *The Wort Papers* relationships are much more mysterious and tenuous, and exist not through people and events but through an intricate maze of ritual and symbols. The progress is analogic and metaphorical and depends on our alertness to the recurrence of certain key images. Mathers, like the frogman and/or Matters, is disturbing and elusive — he speaks to the imagination.

These central images in *The Wort Papers* are fundamentally, though not exclusively, those of life and death. On the one hand we have episodes of sweeping movement; plane trips, boat trips, jeep trips, escapades on trains, camels, horses and of course 500c.c. Nortons. These journeys are chaotic, hilarious, disastrous but immensely vital. They brim with life; they are hectic and riotous, full of the sudden, the savage, the comic, the unexpected (the pilot who catches ducks in the air and drops meat bombs (p. 60ff)), the Afghan who gallops around homesteads, rifle at the ready (p. 77); the motor cyclist who runs into a camel on a deserted beach and kills himself (p. 147).

On the other hand, there are constant images of death. Percy commences writing from a wortarium (p. 20) "probably the style of wretched sows", and moves finally to a 'hole in the ground' (p. 242). He considers himself "a cave-owner" (p. 279), and images of caves and holes figure frequently throughout the novel: "Caves have so far featured several times in this series of recollections. (Caves or recollections joined with one another by passages sometimes long and narrow). (P. 105.)

The womb-tomb aspect of these images is a recurrent one. Ship's holds, wells, mines, enclose

and entomb mind and body: "I am encaverned. Literally in a hole, and see no way out at present. What a situation. Die here unless I escape." Such an entombment leads Percy to brood on death: "Here it is pleasant. Basic. From earth to earth. Transformed into leaves — eaten! Ingested by worms — eaten! The trail into a myriadness." (P. 260.)

This ingestion by worms is similar to the fate of manuscripts devoured by silverfish (p. 18), and the imagined death of William Wort in Mr Thyme's garden: "The bullet through the head; the body limb, then stiff; interred; into worm's dinners." (P. 82.)

So the gusto, the archaic vitality of life is always, in the novel, on the imaginative brink of death and the novel itself, its language and act of fiction, becomes, in terms of the imagery, an act of survival. "When you are in a hole write yourself out of it . . . Heap these words against the predicament and climb to safety." (P. 258.) This is Percy's answer: survival and regeneration through the art of language, and it echoes that of Matters.

> Farewell, Gutenberg, Caxton, Print interred . . . words no longer convey. Film is. Every frame tells a story. Twenty-odd of them a second. Grave wherein the words do sleep. Plastic grave, clothes, coffin and marker, lens-decorated. However, there's no keeping out grave-robbers. (P. 17.)

Matters and Percy, like the novelist, are grave-robbers: disinterring, mining, unearthing, undermining, but, "resuscitation is possible".

So Percy does come from his dole and his words live on. Matters, of course, has the final word as grave-robber: "we move on", so that, finally, the images of life and of art conquer those of death and decay. (It is of course no accident or mere gesture of comedy that Percy's supposed remains are contained in an *ink* bottle. Bottles, after all, especially in our culture and this novel, are splendid images of death and replenishment.)

Or do they? Is it as simple as this simplistic outline would have it? Mathers takes care to show us that the panorama of the country's geography and history does not exist solely as a static backdrop. It is a living actuality which people inhabit but which also they shape. The recurrent imagery of bones in *The Wort Papers*, for example, shows not just the imminence of death, the harshness of the land, but the need to survive by constant regeneration. And there are two distinct modes of regeneration — one is that of the businessman, typified by Thomas or Fred — the other is that of the free spirit, the elusive anarchist, such as the frogman, or Percy, or Matters. Mathers is not just exploring people and the 'large issues' of life and death. His attention is always to man the social animal, to the history, genetic and cultural, the myths, the accidents, the politics, the religious issues, the social needs, which form and have formed him. And the point is that man is always more than the sum of these things and never less than all these forces acting upon him and his reaction to them. Man is both individual and free.

It is in this that Mather's genuine genius and originality lie. He does not conceive of history or society as ever in stasis — all is movement and counter-movement and is of immense imagistic complexity. In *Trap* Mathers examines the growth of family relationships in the context of the growth of a nation. Rural and urban society intertwine, foremen and bosses, capitalists and bums, genetic determinants and genetic accidents, they are all there. The unexpected and the ambiguous are 'part of it all'. The end product of all the intertwining forces, of people, legends, accidents, arson and racial conflicts is Jack. Jack darkens swimming pools, strangles dogs, makes over-efficient scaffolds, forges stamps, cultivates anarchist dogs, seals foremen in cylinders, and generally terrifies people. He is both a living legend and an actuality — he is myth and reality in one. Having no children he is the end of the line, and all that moves backwards and forwards in the novel is there to produce *him*. In fearing him, admiring him, seeking to understand him, explain him or manipulate him, people come up against a force and a being beyond their comprehension.

For Jack has explored all his origins, has "disinterred" the past (p. 24) and is, therefore, no longer trapped. He is *free* in a way that no-one else is free and so too are his actions. The unpredictable nature of his actions (will he fight his tormentors in the wine bar or pretend to cringe before them, thus driving them to shame?) springs from his singular freedom. He is not bound by astrology or capitalism or unionism or genetics or myths. He simply *is* in an invincible way, and so he creates terror in some and in others, the gift of freedom. He frees his diarist David from the mincing, "one subject left towards a B.A." social do-gooder that David has allowed society to make him. He frees Mrs Paine

and Sally and Maise and Adamov, Sharp, Reef, etc. and, we are told, he would not have been surprised to hear that Eb Cruxtwist was joining him. In the end, Mrs Nathan and her capitalist cronies have Trap arrested, but his influence lives on in David's brick-throwing anarchy and Trap's own fate, a jail sentence, as the novel has shown, is no real threat to his invincibility.

In *The Wort Papers* Mathers creates an even broader socio-cultural spectrum against and within which to create the individual man. Matters has "disinterred" the past. Superficially, Percy is not free — he is "in flight", hunted by Thomas, the Peeny citizens, Sergeant Smockton, the army and who knows who else. Yet Percy, like Matters, or the Aboriginal frogman, may be outlawed but he is never apprehended. Mrs A. Tank in her account of the Uppersass bottle incident concludes by saying: "I suppose Percy has slipped back to the city. I hope he's well. He mightn't have much money but he certainly has his fun. Or whatever you call it." In the same account, we hear the suggestion that after the blowing up of the bottles "there's an amber and green mosaic of Percy in the weatherboards".

Percy's wilful act of anarchy may even have produced a perpetual monument — its major consequence, however, is that it has freed him from the past. The hall and its bottles dated back to Old Russell's time and was a standing symbol of the community's past; its history:

> Then the empties began to gather. From Release Russell meetings to let the Poms fight the Kaiser and We'll Stay at Home to card nights for money for the boys and Uppersass's war widow Agnes Banks to debates on Conscription and Billy Hughes, to Welcome Home Parties, union meetings, timber workers' and farmers' meetings, Welcome Home celebrations, New State and Ban Margarine nights. The usual wedding receptions, farewell parties, cedar and dairy balls. And for about 10 years when outsiders thought it smart to have dances there. The history of the Hall and the district on leaflets and posters on walls inside and out. (P. 270.)

It is all this past which Percy gelignites, this past traced through bottles. In so doing, he finally wins a victory over Thomas and creates at the same time a certain beauty:

> The sunlight was bright when he returned and stood in the centre of the glass — blasted space . . . the sun on the glass glittered and sparkled. Necklaces shone around trees and posts and window sockets were diamantined. (P. 271.)

Percy's act explodes not only the community's past but his personal past. He wins out over his brother and removes himself finally from the family. Having done that, all that remains is to write out that past, in all its detail and complexity so that its thereness, its actuality, will both free him and forever torment Thomas, who, in his rejection rather than exploration of the past, is forever captive to it.

Thomas has sought to use the past to his own ends — he has taken the last cedar from the district and had it made into a desk. The novel opens with a letter from Uncle Fred chiding him for forgetting his parents and Thomas is doomed to hunt Percy whose image forever haunts him.

Thomas is forever trapped by it all, his family, the past: he is the hunter become the hunted, the victor become the victim.

Percy, on the other hand, like Trap, disinters the past, mines the archives and follows the veins until they wear out. And we must follow him as he does so, realising that much of his past is our past and that our freedom is also at stake. His mnemonic history is also our own. So we sit again in the Parthenon Milk Bar, play strip-Jack-naked, count the Griffiths' Tea signs, dig graves for dead animals, meet Mormons and Evangelists, relive the Catholic-Protestant battles, fumble through sexual experience, circle around mysterious Woomera, ride motor-bikes and give cheek to assistant station masters of the N.S.W. G.R. We must revisit the 19th century commune of R. V. Russell and the contemporary commune on the Hawkesbury River, wonder about the heraldic emblems of State shields, and encounter theories of how the Aboriginals turned the north-west into a desert and bequeathed us the dingo. We have to recognise part of ourselves and our nation in what follows:

> In Perth William applied to an employment agency for work in the Kimberleys. The interviewer was a big, suntanned, no-nonsense man who opened up with a speech about the Empire, Boy Scout Movement, Perils red and yellow, Abstinence, Unionism and Defence. William presented himself as an Englishman eager for Kimberley experience, a married man preparing the way for his family, a man well endowed with character references, born in the saddle and lately immured in the vast Eastern wen. The interviewer urged William to bring his family West as soon as possible

because the golden West was about to secede from the strike-ridden, Jew-run Commonwealth. Are you with us, Wort? snapped the man. You have come West; now, are you man enough to go North? The Jews wanted the Kimberleys but I kept them out. They belong in Palestine where they can be watched. Chew it over, I can spare two minutes.

Slogans and views, the taxonomies of political parties and businessmen, is Percy's past, as it is our own, and Percy's act of freeing himself is the act of any individual who must understand the past before arranging it in a new and creative order. Even particular eccentricities — such as William's addiction to camels — must be borne with until they can be disposed of by understanding. (William as a young man encountered the local squire leading four of them along a misty dyke and finally trying to gallop them down the aisle of Ely Cathedral — pp. 145-6.)

Once the past, in all its detail and from its many perspectives, has been understood, then one might be free from its determinism and free to use it. Percy can use it against Thomas and for his own escape. He can, through memory, bring it to life again with its intense vitality and so, clothed with it, divest himself of it. He can then disappear or reappear at will because he is no longer captive or hunted. He like Jack Trap, can become both myth and reality.

Mathers is acutely aware of the formal artistic problems this particular view of society, history and the individual creates. He cannot, for example, indulge in narrative flows, since his view of the past is not vertical but horizontal, not chronological but organic. He must subject his reader not to one voice but to several, so that changes in perspective and tone can be experienced as sudden new revelations of the complex whole. He must show that myth, when accepted as fact, becomes fact, and that slogans contain less truth than sauce bottle labels, but that people act on slogans just as readily as they use tomato sauce. Hence he bombards his reader, as his reader is bombarded in real life, with facts, legends, essays, telegrams, reports, post-cards, happenings, chance events, conspiracies, and historical facts — *messages* of all sorts. His prose can rush with torrential flow as event tumbles on event, or break up in disarray as confusion dislocates the imagination. He can create, the mock lyrical prose of his literary antecedents:

> Came a Thursday afternoon cold, clear, with a delicate sun, with willows streaming into mirrors, wattles goldenly motionless, magpies strolling augustly, crows enthroned knowingly, water-hens stepping discreetly and ibis stalking profoundly in the lignum and reeds of the small swamp at the foot of the stoney hill on the western side of the valley. (P. 127.)

And he can be delightfully playful: "The Peeny and district ambulance screamed up and driver and assistant, still fresh after their two hundred yard errand of mercy, dashed inside." (P. 256.) He is masterly at creating, with a few deft strokes, a dynamic sense of action and activity that is always teetering on the brink of riot:

> They played poker. William lost 37/6. Five players criticised him for being an Englishman. O'Brien stood up for him saying Wort was a very old name, old English at least, probably Scandinavian and that the Celts and Scandinavians had much in common. The big Swede jumped to his feet. No, he thundered, Invasion paths vos different, and we Svedes outflank dem. O'Brien said he'd shoot him. William stood up and fainted across the table. Glasses spilt onto cards and a bottle fell onto the cook's dog. Give him air, said Jack. Jim poured two small measures of rum into William's ears saying, It's the aerial wax from high altitude travel. He was then placed in the cane chair. The dog crept under the table, quickly nipped his ankles, and disappeared. He shrieked (falsetto, they later told him, questioning his manhood). Your friend the pilot, said Ted, Was very fond of dogs. Jim poured rum into the slight punctures on the ankles. The cards you stuck together, shouted the Swede, Wid the quick acting rum. O'Brien ran from the room. Stop him, cried Ted, He's going for his gun. The dog ran after him and they heard a yap and a curse.

On and on it goes with untiring vivacity: an unforgettable scene of riot, racial conflict and the madness of men confined together in an isolated and closed community.

There are, of course, weaknesses and dangers in such a daring enterprise. Trap's diarist David David, for example, is finally an improbable figure, too consistently naive to bear the artistic weight imposed on him. Then too the intricate web of family relationships and relationships between characters such as Trap and Sanctymony are too neatly tied: they are as though willed into existence by the novelist. In *The Wort Papers*, the author's weaving of relationships is relaxed and deliberately open-ended, thus leaving

the reader with questions rather than answers. Nevertheless, even Mathers seems to realise that structurally there are inadequacies of form, and there is something almost of an apologetic note in Percy's comment: "Referring back to my tales for children and adolescents: they are, I think a little complicated."

Indeed they are, and although one can appreciate their purpose and their place in the novel's structure, and elaborate detail in them does not entirely fit and, instead of extending various metaphors, anecdotes and slices of the Wort narrative, at times they prevent such extension. (The relevance of "a chapter for children who appreciate Fine-Wrought Prose" is easy enough to see as continuing the saga of William Wort, but the analogic purpose of "A Tale for Children" remains vague and obfuscated.)

There are times, too, when Mathers' fervid imagination seems to leap out of control and incident piles on incident, object upon object, to clutter the prose and render the effect less rather than more dramatic. At other times his characters come close to mere satirical stereotypes (Colin Free, Chica, Sharp, Mr Loomes, Collie) and because of this Mathers could be charged with failing to explore in any depth the social problems which confront this country. His irreverent mocking humor points up foibles and idiocies but, it could be argued, offers no real insight into the nature of problems woven into our sociocultural history. Some would see his novels as too inextricably messy and wayward to grant him status as a great writer. Others would see his anti-establishment humor as lacking in serious artistic concern. His anarchic kind of humor lacks the savage bite of piercing social satire and, in creating its own comic world, draws the reader away from rather than into the social situations which the novels mock.

Nor, of course, are the novels structured so that the tenuous connections between incidents and the delicate correspondences between images develop in any linear way. Rather the novels are constructured organically and their movement is somewhat like nature overtaking a well-ordered garden, shoots of wildness gradually overcoming manicured order. It is not for nothing that *The Wort Papers* bears that title, nor that the author has his characters wonder about the name Wort and its relation in meaning to rag-wort and in sound to the word "wart".

None of these criticisms, however, do more than slightly tarnish the major achievement of Mathers and that achievement, in the terms of Australian Literature, is unique and individual. Nowhere else in our literature do we find such a comprehensive and comprehending sense of Australian society, urban, rural, semi-rural, modern, colonial, pre-war, post-war. Mathers' novels are a vast geography and history of the country and its people, limned lightly and always with a touch of caricature, but incisive and accurate.

His novels are kind of social taxonomy — a list of essential ingredients that compose the Australian gruel. Through irony and humor he creates an intimate sense and the feel of social movements, ideologies, and institutions. There is a rightness about it all. In E. B. Cruxtwist there is something of the essential DLP grouper — in Jones and Spry the essence of the ASIO man. And whether we encounter the Country Party politician, the proponent of the Camel Corps, the country newspaper editor, the harassed schoolteacher with a trainload of kids, or the colonial squatter, Mathers has created the distinctive feel of it all. This, in itself, is achievement enough, but his novels are more than just a social almanac.

He seems to understand that one of the most fundamental and forceful impulses throughout Australian history has been the problem of survival and its corollary, the threat of annihilation. The vastness of the land, the minute population, the imported legal and social structures, the fears of invasion have all created a deep sense of insecurity which the thinness of the social fabric has been unable to alleviate. For this reason, Australians have been readily subject to ideologies and slogans which promise cohesion and defence against fears. The ruling classes, there by historical transplant rather than centuries of growth, and insecure in their own borrowed notions of aristocracy, have defied challenge only by manipulation of wealth, property and legislative position. What A. D. Hope once called the "pullulation of second-hand Europeanism" has lead to the creation of identity myths and legends, to heave reliance on institutions and to addiction to "-isms" of all kinds. The real enemy of the state, therefore, is he who adds to the burden of fear, either by challenging the reality of fears created and sustained by society, or by exhibiting fearlessness.

Vincent Buckley rightly categorises both the mode and, to some extent, the point of *Trap*, when he says:

This is done by layers of retrospect which are

also corrections of false consciousness: contemporary falseties are shown up by seeing their sources which they themselves deny. (P. 119.)

At the core of the false consciousness of Australian society lie unarticulated fears, and the social structure exists in its present form as a response to those fears. In a humorous but exacting way, Mathers shows us how these kinds of fear are generated and sustained.

In both *Trap* and *The Wort Papers*, he offers us numerous examples of the way in which suspicion, doubt and fear create turbulence for the decision-makers and result in victimisation, subtle or blatant for his 'heroes'. On almost every occasion the fears are imaginary and exaggerated. Jack Trap, William and Percy Wort are passive rather than active yet their very presence poses a social threat. The development between *Trap* and *The Wort Papers* is itself interesting in this respect. Jack Trap and other odd characters occasionally burst out with deliberate antisocial acts. Jack blows up the boundaries of Banjo Springs, strangles dogs, seals the foreman in a cylinder; Wilson is an active Wobblie, Kruger is an arsonist; Old Fee burnt not only the haystack but the master's house. Billy Potts, because he was asked for the eight-thousand-and-third time by his employer if he had shaved: "with the husband and wife sun-stupefied, he rolled their heads into the firm, well-grown sod of English Bent and Perennial Rye". By the time we meet Jack his bursts of anarchy seem to be things of the past and his general attitude is one of nonchalance rather than revolution of active rebellion. Nevertheless, he creates, wherever he goes, an aura of suspicion and fear.

In *The Wort Papers* however, the major characters, Percy and William, are much less awesome. They are cast more in the mould of the modern 'anti-hero' than Jack Trap — they are passive victims, individual and eccentric yes, but acted upon rather than acting. Jack's creation of social chaos is often deliberately even if, as he recognises himself, somewhat petty:

> His earlier attempts at social discord had all been petty: his randy dog, disguised canaries, faked parrots, forged stamps — the scores of anti-social activities . . . Billy Potts now. The roller of employers' heads — he was the one. After all his years with hateful employers to suddenly revolt and inter their heads! The true spirit of rebellion. (P. 258.)

Percy and William, on the other hand, create chaos merely by acting as individuals. William is trying to deliver his newspapers when his car blows up; he is trying to accommodate Mr Thyme's wishes when he accepts the sheeps' eyes, vomits and causes the destruction of Orrebul Downs. It is Percy's sexual escapades which often land him in trouble. Acting on Wendy the typist's suggestion, he banisters down the stairs at Austral-Texas. When they reach the bottom, they realise they have been spotted:

> Up we went full of fearful disdain. Chop, Chop. Week's notice but go now. Cast out infection. Be fucking on the marble next and messengers with crucial papers slipping in semen and slip, fractured skulls and falls down the stair wells . . . I waited for Wendy in the street. Mum and Dad, she sobbed. Let's have a drink then. I don't. And off she went. Finish. (P. 182.)

This is an incident typical of so much in *The Wort Papers*. The managerial fears are exaggerated and crazy but Percy must be cast out. Wendy, "bold typist, sixteen, slim, blonde, tennis and taunting" leads him on until social shame and guilt cripple her. He is undaunted, unrepentant; "fearful disdain" is endemic to him — a pale version of Jack Trap's careless contempt for the world. William Wort simply endeavors in his eccentric way to make a living. The chaos which surrounds him is either caused by him quite unwittingly, or caused by his very contingency as a social being. Percy is a somewhat naive innocent endeavoring to enjoy his individual freedom but falling, almost always by accident, into a social maelstrom. His one magnificent deliberate act in blowing up the bottles is an even more petty act of anarchy than Jack Trap's forging of stamps, yet Percy, like Jack, becomes a victim, hunted by society and family, fleeing from hole to hole. He survives, however, living on, either in the words of his memoirs or in the person of Matters to rise up like the Aboriginal frogman from the depths, point the bone, create social chaos, and then elusively to disappear again, leaving behind a question mark and a legend of escape:

> The skin-diver was outlawed *but* not apprehended. It was said that he had been hidden by General Motors, M & M, Angus and Robertson, the Australian Mutual Provident Society, radical students, the Church Missionary Society, the Melbourne and Metropolitan

> Tramways Board, The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, the Transcendental Worm and other. (P. 10.)

Mathers in his two novels, presents us then, not only with "layers of perspectives" on our society, our history and the land itself; not only with sharp satiric vignettes which show up the extent and depth of false consciousness in all areas of that society, but with the essential problem of man as a social being: what place has any individual in any given society and particularly in Australian society which is so flimsy, built and sustained so much on fear, on money, and worse, on unsubstantial myth and legend?

Mathers' main characters have one essential thing in common — their excessive individuality. Jack Trap and Percy Wort have a thereness, a quiddity which society fears. They are sacked, jailed, beaten up, hunted, conspired against, hounded and kept on the run, but they exist in an invincible way. Society keeps tripping over their actuality and they pose the constant threat of anarchy. Yet they are, for all society's fear, hatred and actual oppression of them, paradoxically free. It is their very freedom as individuals which causes such fear. Mathers is at great pains to show that their freedom is of an anti-romantic kind. Percy writes from his hole and Jack is under constant surveillance and is finally arrested. For all this, however, they are, in essence and unambiguously, *free* because society cannot control their imagination or cope with their spirit. They live in society but are not trapped in it. They are both peripherally contingent upon society yet society, whenever they act, is contingent upon them — hence the unwitting chaos they cause.

In Jack's case, his being part-Aboriginal tends to explain part of the acrimony and fear he creates. In Percy's case, there is no such explanation. He thinks, acts and writes differently than others, but at the core of the fear both he and Jack generate, lies something else — their refusal to participate in society's games and myths, their refusal to share society's values. This is not because they are deliberately anti-social individuals; it is, in terms of the novels, because they have something they share in common with the novelist, something like Blake's "naked vision".

Despite the deliberate structural complexity of Mathers' novels there is a firm and cohesive binding force — the novelists' unflinching gaze. *His* consciousness, working through the variety of styles, voices, forms and deliberate detours of the texts, remains constant. Through Jack and Percy and Matters, Adamov or David, the excoriation of social lies, injustices, idiocies and myths is consistent. When David David is expounding social myths: ("one is positive that the people of this part of Malvern are decent. The very air carries a kind of cultivated suburban goodness"), or when Jack is blasting them ("What you bastards don't want is anyone who's not the sun-bronzed digger type. So most of us Abos. are out. So are the short thick Greeks and Italians or Poms"); whether William Wort is supporting the establishment ("you watch your tongue, Percy, Mr McK-D. is a gentleman with too much of the sun on him, the English are all right but they can't stand the sun; the rain they're used to, it's the sun what's shrinking the British Empire); or Percy Wort is persecuted because the townspeople took no heed of his warning about the onion disease, allium mingies: ("when Percy went to town pensioners spat at him, the sergeant followed him, the publican gave him dirty glasses and the bank people refused him a clean blotter"); throughout it all is the insistent consciousness and voice of the novelist.

That voice is humorous, perceptive and incisive and the imagination which gives rise to so much madness, so much movement and vitality, is ebullient and self-generative. The novels and the prose have a horror of dullness and the variety and range of incident, character and voices, give an impression of extraordinary activity and movement to the works. Yet informing the works and all their variety is a steady imagination and a vision which penetrates to the heart of things. Both Jack and Percy, as commentators and activists, are men who have searched their origins with diligence and dedication. They are, like Matters, grave-diggers, disinterring the past, dragging buried shibboleths to the light of day, staring myth into reality. Both of them are figures of fear because they are unpredictable, living always on the verge of anarchy. So too, by artistic deliberation, are the novels. The imagination which informs the novels, the vision which creates them, are steady in intent but unpredictable in manner. What is remarkable and unique about Mathers is that form and content, while initially appearing to be anarchic, chaotic and disjointed are, in the final analysis, so superbly intertwined. The very structure of the novels and the prose styles are in themselves the novel's meaning.

The writer and his imagination are, in a real sense, threats to the social fabric. Imaginative

freedom is unpredictable and in its lucidity of vision, can be feared as socially anarchic. It creates fictions which, by destroying other fictions, seeks to create something of the truth. It disinters the past to explain itself and while it is *in* society it is not necessarily *of* society. If it is too individual, too sharp, it creates fear and is victimised — it can also create social chaos in that its workings, once published, are beyond its control. It is subject itself to an extraordinary range of influences and stimuli, from esoteric botanical knowledge, for example, to personal incidents of social victimisation. It is concerned with its own life and death, with exhaustion and regeneration and the symbols and metaphors which best might express such concerns. In its final artistic form it must be true to itself, express itself in the form which best captures and announces its own irreducible essence.

Mathers, I suggest, has given form in his novels, to the life and abundance of his own imagination. In so doing, through the medium of his art, he has expressed, and is in some sense partially reconciled, the very conflict with which his imagination is concerned: the nature of individual freedom. It is a concern which is central to all of us as members of and heirs to a given society, to a national and personal history, to the contingency of our existence. Mathers does not give statements or conclusions or answers other than the novels themselves, and we are grateful for that. But what the novels do show is that freedom and survival, at least for the imagination, are at least possible; that repression whether self-inflicted by our acceptance of the bonds of historical data, personal and national, or inflicted by a myth-ridden, fear-dominated set of social systems, is not an inevitable end either to the individual or his imagination. The very vitality and range of Mathers' novels, their buoyancy, their extraordinary sense of fun, and their constant movement, are witness to the invincible spirit of the true individual. Jack Trap is never really trapped and Percy Wort uses words to climb out of his hole. They are both wanted for attempted murder — fitting fate for a true novelist — but their final fate is mysterious and elusively unknown as each novel ends. The final words belong to X Matters: "have . . . pissed into the wind. We move on." Not an epitaph for a novelist, but a sense of what has been achieved and a hope for the future.

References to Vincent Buckley's remarks on Peter Mathers in this article relate to his "Peter Mathers Novelist" in Ariel (University of Calgary), 1974.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

There can be few more extraordinary Australian literary stories than the discovery of Ralph de Boissiere's fine novel *Crown Jewel* thirty years after it was originally published. *Crown Jewel* was the second or third book published by the Australasian Book Society in the early 1950s. It was written by an immigrant to Australia from Trinidad and is about the struggles of ordinary people in that island for dignity, a decent life and the right to form unions in the 1930s. The A.B.S., of course, was very much part of the Communist-led cultural movement of the time, its first managers being Bill Wannan and Ian Turner. After a chequered career and many crises the book club closed down only a few years ago.

Ralph's book was given a good reception within the 'movement' of the time and no doubt beyond it too, but no one, and certainly no one at all 'respectable', suggested that it was one of the finest works to be written in Australia. But now that it's been republished (owing to the interest of a German scholar) in England, it is being hailed as a "triumph". John Mellors in the Listener says that there is "much substance" to the publisher's claim that *Crown Jewel* is "one of the lost masterpieces of world literature". "A real find," says Cecella Dekker in Head and Hand. The reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement speaks of the "enormous appeal" of the book, and I have seen other reviews which join the chorus. (*Crown Jewel* is published by Allison and Busby in England and sells here for $18.25. Local distributors are Lothian. There is also a Piacador paperback edition.) Ralph, who spent the last twenty years working as a clerk for the Gas and Fuel Corporation in Melbourne (he has some great stories about this but I fancy he won't write them down!), turned 74 today, 5 October, the day on which I am writing this. He looks a couple of decades younger, and he takes his latter-day discovery with pleasure but with a modesty that has always been very much a part of his character.

Certainly his old comrades-in-arms take a real pride in this event. The so-called 'radical nationalists' took a heavy bashing in the 1950s from what we used to call the 'forces of reaction'. In the 1960s and 1970s they took a bashing from the so-called 'New Left' (which I call the 'New New Left'), which has set out to prove them unwitting (or perhaps not so unwitting) agents of capitalist imperialism. Perhaps the time might be coming when what they achieved will be looked at with some real understanding. I have just examined a Sydney Ph. D. thesis by Sue McKernan, called "Australian Literature 1950-1959", which takes an admirably objective look at the socialist realists as well as the Quadrant-ites and many others, and suggests to me that this may in fact be going to happen.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission has conceded the point being made with some force by the National Book Council in recent months, and has started a new books' program, "First Edition", which may be heard every Thursday at 6.30 p.m. on Radio 2. It is designed to be (and is) more popular and more wide-ranging than Jan Garrett's established program, "Books and Writing" — and it is good to have both.

D. R. BURNS

The Layman

Bob Burns teaches at the University of New South Wales, and has published Mr Brain knows Best *(1959) and* Early Promise *(1975). What follows is an extract from a forthcoming novel,* The Layman.

The year is 1984. The Great Recession has ground on for years. Unemployment is of epidemic proportions even among the wealthier section of the middle class. It is considered rather immoral for more than one partner of a marriage to possess paid employment, and usually it's the woman who's gone to the wall. All those well educated, early middle-aged matrons, with time on their hands right through the working day, have to be kept happy. Mark Hanley, thirty-six year old bachelor, senior lecturer in English at Samuel Marsden University near Parramatta, has, in an accidental sort of way, become a 'wife comforter' with a circuit extending around the Middle Harbor and across to the lower North Shore. It's all becoming rather much. This afternoon, for instance, he's come on from Pam Federsen's harborside place to visit Zephie, wife of "Cracker" Chambers, the pharmaceuticals multinational executive, in hers.

The side road wriggled to left, coiled round to right, then dipped, suddenly, straight down to bobbing yacht masts and slow blue sweep of Sydney's Middle Harbor. Facing Moreton Bay figs to front and all that water to one side, the Chambers' house, long, low, white with red, rippled roofline, sprawled like some beached and semi-deflated whale, Moby Dick defeated by a gastric attack. Rip of tyres over driveway gravel, crunch-crunch of Mark's crepe-soled casuals. He reached to the bell twist, but the amber glass door opened, he was seized about the wrists and drawn in, off balance so that he stumbled a little. A knee, hard and bony, to match the wrist grip, nudged between his thighs, in and up. Some pressure was applied.

"Ouch!"

"Gotcher!" vowed Zephie Chambers, "I wish you really were an intruder. I'd bruise your balls. They'd be black and blue. Cracker's in L.A."

She ran finger and thumb down now to the flap of the zipper on his blue grey denims. She worked it up and down, spasmodically.

"What's it look like? Eh? Are they still blue stippled on a sandy yellow background? Or is that the Yacht Club pennant? Shows you just how out of touch a girl can get."

"Not so very far," Mark murmured, feeling her fingers. "Can we get away somewhere by ourselves? I mean, where all these hallway plants and umbrella stands aren't staring so hard?"

He was, he realized, becoming excited. This was partly a tenderness he sometimes felt, quite spontaneously, for Zephie and her crazy play acting. Mainly though it was his reviving awareness of the sex roles they played out on the rumpus room triple-width water bed. He became pliable before her thrusts, he played out Pam Federsen to her Mark Hanley. And, given the oddly contrasting nature of their physical builds, they could easily imagine themselves into the reversed roles. Mark was really quite rounded, certainly in the face which was still almost chubby, set with regular, quite unremarkable features, to match the gentle wave of soft brown hair. His body was slim, though less than completely concave now about

the middle. His buttocks, which Zephie sometimes liked to bite, were even a little plump.

This was to see him in contrast, naked body to naked body, with Zephie as they stood now, momentarily eyeing each other off by the gentle rock-rock of the water bed. (Zephie held one index finger suggestively down on its surface.) She was handsome perhaps, really a bit of a witch, hair of straw-broom yellow, all "flung out sideways" as Crystal Roulent had once described it, she was lean, skinny indeed with great bars of cheekbones, pointy shoulders, scalloped hips, stick arms, stick legs, turned out frog's feet. Her breasts were neat but flappy. Tartar face on brittle lubra body, white Aboriginal with vulpine appetites vouched for by long thin famished lips. She was just about the sexiest member of the animal kingdom alive, Mark was thinking now, as he went down, before the heat of her breath and the hardness of her desire.

"I've got it in for you Buster," she growled, sinking teeth for a tryout taste of the main course, straddling him, a lioness above the juicy, still heaving springbok.

But suddenly then she could bear this mere browsing no longer and wheeled herself about with a clumping of paws so that ripples, melting corrugations, lipped at Mark's vertebrae as the water bed, like its mistress, really got going. Going, going, gone. He was sunk, out of sight in the deep delvéd earth. (Intercourse with Zephie always seemed to wrench some poety up out of memory.)

The high beat of Zephie's growing excitement was not really transmitted, not at full voltage anyway. Mark liked to think of himself in such moments as a recumbent slave there to pleasure his mad queen mistress. Her deepening ripples he experiences only as pleasurable fluttering of a kind with the water bed's slow sag and sway.

In control while out of control, Zephie knew this. She needed the workout. Mark was her sparring partner. She needed to put on a performance. She needed the play acting. She could never just lie there and let it happen.

Mark, for his part, was as involved with the water bed as with his sexual partner. Wash wash. Full fathoms five thy father lies/Of his bones are coral made. Drake he's in hammock and a thousand miles away/(Capt'n art thou sleepin' there below?). It keeps eternal whispering around/ Desolate shores . . . /Gluts twice ten thousand caves. Hard to get away from Keats, richest of sensualists, when he had intercourse with Zephie, the most strenuous, avid, dramatically gifted of all his sexual partners. An irony of a literary kind, a subject perhaps for seminar discussion. The fat in the skinny, the wet in the dry, the thick in the thin, rich vision and narrow vagina, the Keatsian implications of Zephie Chambers' lean, naked body.

Thus, lulled by the water bed ripples, the lazy academic turn of his own thoughts, and Zephie's moth-wing motions, Mark now had the distinct impression that he was being hypotized, passing into a trance, gaining a dim, threshold awareness of tribal identity, becoming one with all his other black Aboriginal brothers, kin to desert scrub, rocks, dried creek bed and their guardian god, the ochre-splashed Big Man Kangaroo. This drift was sensuously in keeping with the alluringly brittle body of the woman who moved above him, and with the vibrant, monotonous dirge, a female counterpart of bullroaring, that sounded out of Zephie's throat. She took her hands from the bed. In a cleverly balanced crouch she began to sway backward and forward. She lifted her skinny white arms, flapped them as desert bird's wings. The noise that came up out of her throat was a caw-caw of pain and increasing delight. But now, playing right along with these ecstatic avine suggestions, the hitherto prone victim arched himself up a little to become crouching hunter, skewer-er of soft bellied scraggy bird, a spear wielder, thrusting and thrusting at this odd, cawing creature only just crouched now, on weakening chicken legs. Stricken at last, the dancer, become meat hunter's prey, fell, sliding back, sides heaving, wide mouth sloping open, eyes filmy, against male thighs, slung to support her. Helplessly impaled, toppling this limp creature took the last hot strokes. One, two, three. All over in seconds.

And now, scarcely alive, catching breath, lying about like shipwreck victims on a raft, Mark and Zephie said nothing, felt nothing but the sea's sweet restlessness beneath.

Mark rose with some effort. He poured himself a large charge from the siphon on the Italian veneer sideboard. His first concern, after a bout like that, was always for the state of his kidneys. In the shower cubicle he finished off with a prolonged blast of the cold over head and shoulders. At six-fifteen he must attend the fourth year, final honors seminar, this week on The Literary Myth of Australian Manhood. It would be followed by the usual staff dinner and possible collapse into their carpet-bag steaks of half the participants, arriving starved and already drunk from passing flagons about in the seminar room.

Back in the rumpus room Zephie sat cross-

legged on the edge of the water bed, wearing what Mark supposed was a tea coat, a limp survivor from the nineteen-thirties. A pattern of yellow begonias spread like a skin complaint over cocoa-brown background. She was smoking from a hexagonal mauve glass holder, a foot long. Trust Zephie. She was in touch, of course, with the way it went at the executive beach parties out of L.A.

"Cracker will just be waking now," shs remarked, "with his Jack Daniels hangover. He says it's quite distinctive. Not like being hit on the head. More the sense of something long and thin lodged in the brainpan by a very good surgeon. He only really feels it when he looks sideways."

She regarded Mark closely. After strenuous sex Zephie's face wore creases. With her prominent cheek bones she looked like one of those Indian women who wear bowler hats in the high country of Bolivia. She was surely the most beautiful unbeautiful woman alive. It would be nice to sit with her here, at the close of day. But it was barely five p.m., with the sun still high above the silvery Middle Harbor. Academia loomed before him yet.

"Chicken," said Zephie in her kindest way, "your brow is smudged. You look too pensive for one who's just been drawing pleasure from the primal source. Providing it too. Come sit. Is something eating at your intellectual vitals, sweet rooster?"

On the impulse, Mark sat on the parquet beside her and laid his head against her thigh.

"I'm split," he told her. "I'm split between my books and you girls. It was all right when there were only five of you and I was a lecturer. I'm a senior lecturer now with organisational responsibilities, and there's twelve of you all told. No, eleven. Lydia's gone to join her husband on the Ord River project. They grow long-grained rice."

"The brown sort, I hope."

"All rice starts out as the brown sort. You should know things like that, Zephie. I get worried about my back."

"That comes, sweet peacock, with the sexual territory."

"No," said Mark, a shade testily. "It's when I sit at my desk. When I'm bent a bit forward correcting scripts. When I'm in the library again, standing for a stretch, reaching up to a shelf."

"You've become too avid for knowledge with all that reaching after books. Or you're maybe just working too hard."

"At what?" Mark snapped.

"You can't blame us girls if you've fallen victim to the work ethic, just when you're moving into middle age."

"One thing leads to another."

"The act of love is not a 'thing', Mark."

"I sometimes think it's a circus."

"Especially with me, you were about to say."

"I wasn't, but I will."

"Mark, you know we almost always have it off with you lying on your back. How can I be blamed for these library twinges?"

"One thing leads to another."

"If you keep on repeating that maddeningly frustrating remark it just might, you'll be late for your seminar, I shan't have the semolina ready for Blanche and Stella's afters, and you will really have an overworked dorsal region."

Zephie, he remembered now, had been a physiotherapist before marriage. That was how she knew so much about muscles and pressure points.

After all, she added, fondling his curls now, reminding him of that other side of their relationship, the sister-brother feeling they had for each other, people like Pam and herself did ask a lot of him, she knew. They should take more care of him, they must see that he didn't over-exert himself, in this area of his activities anyway. But he was still inclined to feel put-upon and to complain.

"Hah! 'Over-exertion!' This has been a light afternoon on the wife-comforting side. Last Tuesday after I left you —"

"You went on to Crystal Roulent's. I know. You told me you were. But your back was surely hardly at danger in Crystal's hands. She's as light as a fairy, in the older sense of the word. Sex with her is a breeze, I should imagine."

"Right. But her conversation can be just as airy. Or airy-fairy, hard to follow. And that sort of thing's effort enough in the tutorial room. Trixie Cay happened to phone while I was there. She and Jubal have just had their new dance routine vetoed by the Sydney Club Circuit Censorship Office. Being a dark-skinned couple from the West Indies they may not make movements which seem to suggest sexual excitement. It's nothing like racial prejudice, they're assured. Just that the mixture's considered too rich for the average outer suburban couple on a Saturday night, after, say, Mexican Hot Plate or Peking Duck, a few beers and a bottle or two of Sauterne in the Club Steakhouse. The Censorship bloke was all apologies, it seems. He asked Jubal and Trixie to see the ban as a by-product of the high cholestrol levels that Sydney suburbanites suffer from. Apoplexies occur among the audience, he said, sure

as they put on really stimulating acts. Change the people's dietary habits, he said to Jubal, and you can have sex with a horse on stage so far as we're concerned. But that's no help to a dancing team who've got no pull with the Department of Food Technology. And you know how depressed Trixie can get, how she can suddenly plummet."

"Right," agreed Zephie. "All those generations in the West Indies. All that voodoo worship."

"So," Mark sighed, going on.

So, when Trixie had learnt he was with Crystal, she'd asked would he come on to her, just for a little while.

"For a little 'woof-woof', as she likes to put it," he added sadly.

He'd gone on to the Cay's redbrick house by the Killara golf course, after leaving Crystal, to offer Trixie comfort, Jubal being away on location, playing the part of a tribal rainmaker in a new film about the Outback. It was to be called "Dry Horizons".

"Rather a virile role," Mark added. "There was to have been full frontal nudity, but someone pointed out that Jubal's not circumcised. A rain-maker who'd clearly never been initiated into full tribal manhood wouldn't do. So they've had to keep the camera right off his penis. The director said they could do without it. Which depressed Jubal as you can imagine."

Then, driving away from Trixie Cay's place, Mark had realized he was on the edge of the humbler side of the suburb of Chatswood. That was where Josie Hunacker lived, in a damp house, domestic squalor and some physical discomfort. This came of having her tubes tied, after the fourth child, by some macrobiotic freak who happened to have a medical degree, one that hardly qualified him for delicate surgery on the female reproductive system. He had been one of those buddy-buddies of her common law husband Larry, whose awful American surname she had taken by deed poll since they moved back from the communal settlement near Tuntable Falls in northern New South Wales. Now Larry and Josie had work in different shifts at "Le Poulet", the large rotisserie on the Pacific Highway at Pymble, and talked about the "great urban adventure".

So Mark had called in on the impulse to visit Josie, even knowing what he was letting himself in for at that time of day. The children, aged ten down to two, would be all at home, and Josie would insist upon having them about her, on the wonderful hand-crotcheted counterpane once the possession of her great-grandmother, while she and Mark "made that toothy old carnivore, the two backed beast" between the sheets.

"That's the way she talks," Mark said. "She was doing her doctoral thesis on Shakespeare's Use of Obscene Imagery before Larry carried her off."

"It wasn't very exciting. The sex I mean," he added. "Though neither was the thesis. Apart from the sheer weight of the kids and their kicking about, there's always a smell of cabbage soup and herbal tea and charred ends of buddha sticks about Josie's place."

Zephie looked serious. She didn't know Josie at all, except as a name. She didn't know anyone who didn't have a rumpus room, a swimming pool and a Harbor view. She was made aware, again, of the width of Mark's circuit as a wife-, in this case a common-law wife, comforter.

"Why did you go on there then, Mark? Four women in one afternoon! Were you trying to prove something? Or was it one of those perverted, up-to-the-minute pain-as-pleasure trips?"

"You should know I'm not an up-to-the-minute person, Zephie. I went for the same reason, I suppose, that vicars call on the bedridden or victims of the palsy. I was in that area and it seemed wrong not to look in on Josie, whom I don't see that often. It seemed not only uncaring. It seemed unprofessional, and that's the bit I find so worrying. Josie's a member of my parish, or my clientele. She's part of my practice. She's as important to me as my students. So are you all."

"M-m-m," murmured Zephie fondly, cudding his boyish cheek, fitting another cigarette to the mauve glass holder. He lay back against her knee. His need for comfort or for a confidante was patent. And she was closest of him of all the women whom he knew socially and in the Biblical sense. Even more so (perhaps, perhaps) than Pam or Sadie Haffner or Di Kilbourne. Sometimes just lately, as now, he could look slightly, well, creased. Terrible to think of Mark as no longer young, easy riding, amicable, chatty, indefatigable, low-voiced, ready smiling, a smooth changer of gears, equable, possessed of a gentle New England charm (as, she surmised, he would seem possessed of a bluff Australian charm to a lady from Boston or Amherst). These other qualities need not vanish with his youth, of course, but somehow they seemed all part of the one deal.

"See me as a tree," he suggested. "No, I mean as the slender trunk, supporting two quite separate branches to either side, each of which grows thicker and thicker. What can happen except that the trunk will split right down the middle, unless something is done?"

"But Mark, trunks and branches are both part of the one arboreal system. The trunk expands to support its burdens."

"You see?" he insisted, "I'm a senior lecturer in English. But so bowed down with my burdens I can't even produce a sound, logical simile."

"So what's to be done, sweet magpie?"

"Flight seems suddenly in order."

She stared, unbelieving.

"I've practically been offered an associate professorship in the English department at James Cook, the University of North Queensland."

"Mark!"

She leapt up and stared at him. She drew the tea gown about her. She made him feel suddenly guilty, sinful even. And resentful too.

"Mark," she repeated. "What would I do without you? What would Di and Crystal and Pam and Trixie and Sadie do without you? It's not only how nice you are in private, my love. You're the bond between us. Between the boys too, let's face it. What have Cracker and Rolfe and Dirk and Colin and Jubal and Leo got in common really except all us girls get it from you during the day?"

"The way you get it from your hairdresser?"

"Mark!"

But he was clenching himself up, moving towards decisiveness, not being bitter.

"I'm just pointing out my appointment book gets kind of full, like Anatole's or Luigi's. And they don't have to take time off to give lectures on Narrative Forms and Contemporary Society. Suddenly I have this letter from North Queensland, just when I seem to be sagging. Or maybe I just started wilting under the weight of it all when I got the letter and saw the chance of escape."

"Escape! Do you feel you're on Devil's Isle? Here, with me, at the moment?"

"That's a sexually provocative remark, Zephie, coming from you. No. I simply mean I think of days up there in the tropics, outside the classroom, away from the library, which would be filled with sand and sea and palm trees and breezes, with space, with sweet nothingness. Down here you could say my life is, quite simply, overpopulated. And the human bodies get no less in number. Two years ago I was supervising four post-graduate students. This year it's nine. Arithmetic progression. The employment situation outside gets worse by the year, and university numbers grow and grow. Graduates who once would have been settling down to jobs in the Water Board or as supermarket sub-managers are staying on to write master's theses, about Mythic Intention in the Racing Novels of Nat Gould, about some other author who still hasn't been all used up. So it goes with you girls. There are less and less opportunities for gainful employment. So the world of leisurely pursuits, which includes sex and literary scholarship, is becoming overfilled. And I'm on the receiving end."

He rubbed his head against her thigh to show his tiredness, his reluctance to rise and leave.

"No," he added. "That's not right, physiologically speaking. I wish it were."

"Is there any alternative?" Zephie asked, feeling an anxious tightness now in places where fifteen minutes before she had known only pleasure. Mark, making the effort, rose and smiled wryly.

"The choice is between Queensland, where I would only have to offer intellectual stimulation, and staying here to offer you girls the other sort. On a full-time basis. After resigning from the university."

"Full-time!"

Zephie's pale face flushed with pleasure.

He opened the door. She rose to see him out.

"You'd have to support me. There'd have to be a set fee."

"Fine. Cracker could write it off as a tax deduction, I'm sure. He already gets doctored receipts from the cat house he visits in Beverley Hills. And Rolfe claims for that geisha he helps support in Honshui. Pam told me she needed extra tuition in the Tea Ceremony. She suffers from lazy index fingers."

"You'd be sort of a male geisha," she added.

He smiled, already more relaxed.

"Geishas are highly professional people. There'd be no drop in status. And the money might be better."

By Mark's car, the gate to the swimming pool area was open. Thirteen year-old Stella, seeing him pass, leapt from the water. By Zephie's order she wore the bottom part of her bikinis at least.

"Mark," she shouted. "Hi Mark, take a look at my boobs. They're really sprouting."

"Another time, honey," he called gently, slipping into the Alphetta. He turned its nose towards the ring road, towards Parramatta, towards Samuel Marsden University and the duties of his alternative profession.

books

TRANSLATED PASSIONS

Amirah Inglis

Gianfranco Cresciani: *Fascism, Anti-fascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945* (Australian National University Press, $19.50).

What happens when immigrants from many countries, bringing new religions, national inheritances and ethnic characteristics come to Australia, a country inhabited by a population with a history and national style of its own?

How do we behave? How do the native-born behave? What has happened in the past? What *should* happen? Should immigrants give up all thoughts and feelings about their countries of origin, preserving only its cooking and national dress for carnivals, and identify themselves with Australia? Yes! was the answer of an earlier period. Migrants should assimilate into the new society; bringing something of their own to add to the small, isolated, generally tolerant and democratic population, but trying as hard as possible to become Australians and put away Poland or Italy or Greece. NO! many will say today. How can they? Why should they? This is narrow ethno-centrism.

Should immigrants be taught in their native language rather than English? NO! was the earlier answer. They must learn English from the beginning to help them quickly to become members of the new country. And many people today will also argue that the answer should still be NO! because separate schools in the language of their parent country will put immigrant children at an even greater disadvantage than they already suffer by being children of parents who are uprooted, often poor and vulnerable. Those who are of immigrant background — and very many immigrants too — know that it is the most socially conservative parents who are the most keen to keep their children in the national culture as a means of keeping them at home, free from contamination with new patterns of behavior and the revolutionary free and easy Australian manners. The children themselves want to learn English, to stay away from church, to go out un-chaperoned and become as independent of their parents as Australian children. Sad for the parents, but is it bad for the children?

YES! many people will answer today. If this is their answer, then by whom should the children be taught and what should the immigrant children be taught about their country of origin and their new homeland? Should for example, Yugoslav migrant children be taught by teachers selected by their own communities who, as in a recently reported case, may be Croatians steeped in a fierce hatred of the whole notion of 'Yugoslavia' and an equally fierce committment to its destruction? Should they be taught by Yugoslav nationals on secondment to these schools by an Australian arrangement and under the control of the local State education authority?

Life itself will answer some of these questions, but not all and not always in the most desirable ways. Some migrants will turn outwards as fast foods provide an easier meal than home made pasta, as immigrants get jobs, make money and find native-born partners. But some won't turn outwards at all. Post-war immigrant communities are large enough to become little worlds; jobs may be found only among other migrants; migrants may have no jobs at all; they may be political refugees with real or romantically-based ideas of helping to overthrow their home government and then go back; they may be timid.

In any case, whether they turn themselves inwards to their past world or outwards to their new may make no difference to the way they are treated by the rest of the Australian com-

munity. This will depend on how their group is regarded already by the native-born, or an earlier wave of immigrants; on whether there is unemployment; on the political and economic tensions which exist in the community.

To see all these questions and problems played out among the Italian community in Australia between 1922 and 1945 is part of the fascination of Gianfranco Cresciani's book.

From the moment Mussolini, backed by armed squadristi, demanded and was given power in October 1922, his fascist movement received support among the 8000-odd Italians living in Australia, and this support grew steadily during the years of increased migration between 1922-27, when more than 24,000 more Italians arrived. This support, Cresciani argues, was partly a spontaneous surge of nationalism among a mostly poor and despised section of the Australian community; though the earliest manifestations of fascism in Australia seem to suggest another source. Two newspapers, first published in Sydney in 1922, were the earliest, and until 1924 the principal "if not the only" (p. 6) sources of fascist information for Italians. The Italo-Australian, owned and edited by two men about whom we are unfortunately told nothing except that they were members of the "Italian Establishment", and the Italian Bulletin of Australia, the official organ of the Italian Chamber of Commerce, were both fervent supporters of fascism. Fascist branches existed in Australia from 1923.

From the beginning, the fascist government of Italy had the intention of disseminating fascist ideas through overseas Italian communities, but it was not until 1924, after Mussolini's declaration that "Italy must follow the fate of its sons beyond the Frontier" (p. 11) that a Commissioner for Emigration was despatched to Melbourne. The spread of fascist propaganda and the construction of a fascist organisation was from then on taken into official hands. The commissioner went back to Rome to report to Mussolini on the state of his sons in Australia, and attended while there the first Congress of Overseas Branches of the Fascist Party in October 1925. On his return to Australia, he began busily to set up more branches. When the Consul-General, the only career diplomat in Australia, was joined in 1925 by vice-consuls stationed in Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville and Perth, the organisation of fascist branches was effectively established.

The consulates received their ideological impetus from Rome and their direction from a General Secretary of Fascist Branches Abroad who based his work on a "Statute of the Fascists Abroad" which aimed at control of the immigrant communities. "One way to reach this goal, the statute ruled, was to discourage all attempts at political participation and social assimilation by Italians in their foreign environment" (p. 24). Italians were discouraged from accquiring foreign nationality. *L'Eco d'Italia,* the newspaper published in Townsville by the Italian vice-consul, told immigrants that to renounce Italian citizenship and become assimilated into the Australian environment was "a shameful decision" (p. 26).

By the late 1930s officially controlled fascist branches had been set up under the auspices of diplomatic staff in twenty-one towns, including the goldfields town of Edie Creek in New Guinea. Fascist branches started language schools for migrant children in which the teachers were either officials of the diplomatic corps or members of the directorate of the Fascist branch. Members of the Fascist party marched on Anzac Day and were ordered by the consulate, Cresciani says, to wear black shirts. But, as one of his photos shows, orders were not always carried out. Italian servicemen however did give the fascist salute as they passed the cenotaph in Sydney on Anzac Day 1937, for they can be seen doing it in one of the photos between pp. 114-115.

Throughout the twenties and thirties, the Australian governments were receiving a stream of reports on Italians from agents: the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, Military Intelligence, the Security Service, the Italian Security Service and, from 1928, the representative of the Central Political Office of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, who was operating in the Melbourne consulate. Files of these organisations, held in Australian and Italian archives, have been made available to Cresciani, who has used them to great effect.

The Abyssinian war brought enthusiasm for fascism to the highest pitch among Italians in Australia, and even some anti-fascists gloried in the victories of their nation against the "barbarians of Africa", and flocked to meetings in support of the war. A total of 21½ kg. of gold and 31½ kg. of silver was collected in the Consul General's campaign, initiated in December 1935, for men and women to give their wedding rings "for the Fatherland". Fishermen at Fre-

mantle donated 1½ kg. of gold (p. 75). Between 1938 and 1940, Cresciani estimates that "the bulk of the Italian population, although it did not take part in Fascist activities, was largely sympathetic to this credo" (p. 86).

When Italy entered the war on 11 July 1940, Italians regarded by the security services as likely security risks, together with some who were chosen to save them, it was said, from the wrath of local Australians, were rounded up and sent to internment camps. But the consular staffs whose "bombastic nationalism' and exaggeration had convinced the Australian security organisations that a fascist fifth column existed, Cresciani notes, were allowed to go free! After a thorough burning of their files, the consular staffs boarded the M.V. Mako Maru on 30 June and sailed off for Japan. There were no fifth-column activities, Cresciani shows; but perhaps there would have been if some of these men had not been interned?

Were there no anti-fascists until then, one wonders? Of course there were, but these and many similar questions ask themselves because of the unsatisfactory structure of the book. It is really a series of articles collected under its awkward title. The first four chapters deal with the fascist movement among Italians until 1940. Then come two chapters 5 and 6 on the anti-fascist movement; separated, for no good reason, into "The Anti Fascists" and "Anti-Fascism and Communism before World War Two". Both chapters deal with the same period, the same activities and often the same people. Chapter 7, "Fascist propaganda in Australia 1922-1940", is badly misplaced. It should have been integrated into the first four chapters where it was needed. Interrupted by chapter 7 and a chapter on "The War Years" we return to the anti-fascists with the post-war Italian Libera movement and the final chapter on Dr Omero Schiassi, whose life in Australia cuts across the whole period of the book; so we have a repetition of information from earlier chapters together with new material that would have been better incorporated into earlier chapters. This weakness of construction is a serious fault of craftsmanship. Because of it, the reader cannot for example, without a great deal of re-reading, of turning back, of plunging forward, decide whether Cresciani's judgement that the bulk of the Italian population was sympathetic to Fascism is accurate or not.

The chapters on the anti-fascists are more satisfying than those on the fascists. Cresciani's sympathies are with the mixed, often wild collection of communists, socialist and anarchists. Many of them are alive and able to be interviewed. For the first time we get an idea of the men who were anti-fascists; how they lived, acted and talked.

Anti-fascism, Cresciani insists, was always the minority position among Italian migrants in Australia. It came out, he says, between 1924 and 1926, with those migrants who emigrated for political reasons. Mainly from the industrial north and the Po valley, they settled where there were already Italian communities and lived in boarding houses which became political centres so lively that the consul general wrote to Prime Minister Bruce suggesting that he keep them under police scrutiny. Whether or not Bruce took this advice we never learn, for Cresciani relies too simply on his superb archival sources, which presumably didn't tell him.

In 1926, the first of many anti-fascist organisations, the Lega Antifascista, was formed and in the following year, the first newspaper, Il Risveglio. This was an anarchist journal which "regretted that Mussolini had not been killed in one of the attempts on his life", anti-capitalist and anti-religious as well as anti-fascist. The anarchists, whose political philosophy was of the "nothing convinces like a lick on the lug" order, were particularly strong on the cane-fields of North Queensland, but also led the Matteoti Clubs of Melbourne and Sydney. After Dr Schiassi arrived in 1928 and became the leader of anti-fascist activity in Australia, the anarchists lost their commanding position, which was taken over by a Communist Party committed to its 'Third Period' left line and not far behind in sectarianism.

During the thirties, an attempt was made to broaden the anti-fascist organisations to embrace all those who were opponents of Mussolini's fascism, including those who had previously been attacked as "social fascists", but Cresciani's anti-fascist Italians of the 30s are mainly communists and anarchists and concentrated in Melbourne. They formed the *Gruppo Italiano* Club; distributed communist and anarchist propaganda, raised money for the International *Contra La Guerra* on the ashes of the Matteoti Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, and marched on May Day. Matteo Cristofare, the leading Italian communist (whose recollections helped to give this section its flesh and blood) sent a monthly report to the Italian Communist

Party. With Dr Schiassi at their head, members of the *Gruppo* decided to set up a united front Italian club at the same time as the fascist branches, who had decided to call their club Casa d'Italia, but had forgotten to register the name. The Schiassi group quickly slipped in their club under the name. But this coup was one of the few triumphs which anti-fascists could claim before the war, and Cresciani's judgement is that the fascists had the hearts and minds of most Italians in Australia.

Clearly this book is a mine filled with rich information for anyone who is interested in Italian migrants, in politics, in the work of security services or diplomatic corps, in migrants generally and in Australian history. Though I have important reservations, some of which I have already mentioned. Because Gianfranco Cresciani relied too heavily and uncritically on the archival material, we get too often the estimation of an angry fascist consul general or the judgement of a security officer without either check or follow-up. Thus when Cresciani learns from a C.I.B. report that the fascists of Innisfail started to raise funds to send Australian-born youths to Italy for Easter, he tells us that, but not whether they went or not. When the files of the Italian State Archives reveal that the Victorian branch of the Dante Aligheri society wrote in 1936 to the A.B.C. applying for permission to broadcast "propaganda lectures on Italian history, literature, arts and music" we learn something about fascism and anti-fascism in Australia, but not enough, unless we are also told the A.B.C.'s response to that request.

Because Gianfranco Cresciani has read too little Australian history for his task, his migrants — both fascist and anti-fascist — arrive and act against a too-shadowy Australian background, a background which is sketched in too lightly and often from interviews alone, unchecked from other sources. The confusions and blanks of memory make this a risky thing for a historian, and it was unnecessary in this case where there was plenty of material for checking memory and opinion. The bibliography is impressively long, but the works which would have given Cresciani a more solid and accurate background against which to set his Italians are too few. In this he was not helped by his teachers, if the ignorant braggadocio of R. J. Bosworth's foreword is an example.

Other reservations lie in the weakness of Cresciani's explanations and the errors of his judgement. His judgements are his own, and provided that he gives us the facts we can agree or not. As I disagree both with his judgements that Omero Schiassi was a "reformist socialist" (p. 228) though "at the time his Australian friends could not appreciate the difference between a Socialist and a Communist" (p. 241, footnote), and that the Matteoti clubs "attracted all anti-fascist Italians, whatever their political allegiance" (p. 103). Neither of these serious errors of judgement is supported by the evidence. Ralph Gibson (p. 232), a leading Australian communist and close friend, believes that only Schiassi's "bourgeois upbringing and intellectual snobbery" prevented him from joining the Communist Party of Australia. Schiassi, who in the late 1920's was a very close ally of the red-shirted anarchists of the Matteoti club, who was the agent in Australia for the Italian Communist Party's published propaganda and who wrote in 1942: "Forward, forward, Italians all, worthy of the name of Italians, forward with torch in hand, and axe, and book, and sickle and hammer . . ." (p. 242, footnote) does not — and did not — sound to Australians like a reformist socialist. If there is any evidence that there were no other anti-fascists except those who were attracted to the Matteoti Clubs, we don't have it; without this, it seems unlikely that a club whose leaders were well-known anarchists, who distributed anarchist literature and whose members "went around in clubs and public places, armed with guns and iron bars, provoking fascists to fight" (p. 105) *could* attract all anti-fascist Italians.

Another such error seems to me Cresciani's final judgement on Dr Schiassi (p. 239); though in this case he has given us a great deal of matter and we can make our own judgements. Too much of this excellent material, however, is in footnotes here and in other chapters.

Cresciani's explanations are suspect. Too many of them are of this order: Schiassi "decided to put himself to the fore of the anti-fascist struggle in Australia" because "by 1928 the political situation within the Fascist as well as the anti-Fascist camps favoured a determined drive for the leadership of the anti-fascist movement" (p. 229); and "by 1926, the position of anti-Fascism in Australia had consolidated enough to give birth to the first political organisation . . ." (p. 101). Schiassi, we are told, was not appointed to the University of Melbourne as a teacher of Italian in 1925 "in consequence of the consul-general's representation" (p.

228). But the evidence for this explanation is very flimsy indeed. And he *was* appointed in 1927, though the same consul-general wrote a very angry letter of complaint to Prime Minister Bruce. For this, there is no explanation at all.

Despite these reservations, Gianfranco Cresciani's book is a pioneering work of great importance, and I have not here discussed at all two whole chapters: the war-time internment camps and the post-war Italia Libera movement. It is of immense interest to all Australians, home-grown or imported, and to all those who think seriously about the Australia we were before the second world war, and about the more diverse people we have now become. Though it often irritated me, I found it impossible to put down.

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INCONSTANT MASTER

Stuart Macintyre

A. W. Martin: *Henry Parkes: a Biography* (Melbourne University Press, $29.80).

This is one of the great achievements of Australian political biography. Less reticent than La Nauze on Deakin, more critical than Fitzhardinge on Billy Hughes, Allan Martin's study of Henry Parkes is at once authoritative in its scholarship and compelling in its exposition.

We begin in the English midlands with the son of a dispossessed tenant farmer, born at the end of the Napoleonic wars. His aspirations and struggles are typical of his time and place, sharing in the radical political culture of the earnest, self-educated artisan and subject to the vicissitudes of the craft trades. We might compare Parkes' early life with the autobiographical accounts left by others from similarly humble backgrounds who went on in the later 1830s and 1840s to channel their energies into the Chartist movement and who, after the final collapse of Chartism, were left out of touch and and out of sympathy with the newly-quiescent rhythms of working-class life. The comparison fails because the young Henry Parkes abandoned England just a few months before the first Chartist petition was presented to Parliament. Hence as the People's Convention began to break up and as the authorities harried its adherents, Parkes and his wife were sailing to Australia as bounty-migrants. As Martin remarks, Parkes' conception of politics was formed not by the Charter but by the Birmingham Political Union of the 1832 Reform Act, a union of the middle and working classes.

The couple arrived in Sydney in 1839 with their first child, who had been born at sea just two days earlier. Parkes soon established a pattern of activities that was to persist for more than half a century: the pursuit of success by business, journalism and politics. Considering his prodigious energy and sheer will to succeed, the persistent lack of success in business affairs is remarkable. In 1858, 1870 and 1887 he was unable to meet financial obligations and indeed throughout most of his life was juggling creditors and calling on the assistance of friends to stave off ruin. Sometimes enormous sums were involved — in 1870 his assets were set at £11,456 and liabilities at £35,306 — while on another occasion his eldest daughter lacked tea or sugar until Parkes was able to send £3. Parkes' earnings from public office were his only dependable source of income on more than one occasion, and this fact lent credence to accusations of political opportunism, yet it is also clear that public life distracted Parkes from proper attention to his business ventures.

Parkes' political career followed a trajectory that is all too familiar: radicalism, liberalism, factionalism. He established his reputation as a journalist and later as proprietor of the Empire by attacking the exclusives, pressing for a less restrictive constitution and generally advocating radical and liberal causes. The reforming impulse persisted when Parkes was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1856 and joined in the fight for land reform and public education. But as Professor Martin shows, radical rhetoric yielded to a more qualified liberalism, and liberalism lost its cutting edge after the first great victories were won. Parkes' maneouvrings became ever more blatant.

How could a man with so blemished a record, one whose inconstancy shocked even his closest admirers, achieve the political mastery he did? This book suggests a variety of answers. First, by the standards of the time Parkes was an honest, attentive and skilful administrator. Again, Professor Martin shows that the readiness to

bend principle to immediate advantage should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Parkes did retain a certain conception of colonial society — a society where white Protestants, at least, should enjoy the freedom to prosper — which spoke to the aspirations of a wide constituency. Finally, the success and remarkable longevity of Parkes' political career must be attributed to his indomitable energy: he possessed a determination to succeed of almost elemental force.

The treatment in this book of Parkes the politician combines mastery of detail with clarity of perspective. Martin remarks in his preface that his method of exposition, what he describes as its "rigid chronological framework", represents something of an "intellectual and artistic defeat". So far as the public Henry Parkes is concerned, both the businessman and the politician, I think he is much too apologetic. Certainly, the narrative form of biography imposes restrictions. Particular contexts are established only as they become relevant to the story, they are described from the vantage point of the subject, and the need to keep the story moving makes it difficult to elaborate their full import. But I am not sure that this is too great a price to pay for the advantages of a crafted narrative, nor that the reader always requires the writer to spell out his conclusions and their explicit theoretical significance. It is the repetition and accumulation of Parkes' financial scrapes and political strategies that builds up the full picture.

The disadvantages of the narrative form are more apparent when Martin deals with Parkes' personal and family life. These are the most intriguing passages of the book. My mental picture of Parkes, and I imagine that of most readers, derives largely from his depiction by Manning Clark, especially in volume four of the *History of Australia:* a man gross in body and in appetites, a man from whom no woman was safe and yet one obsessed by his own rectitude. Some features of Clark's portrait are confirmed here. Parkes was indeed a man of enormous vanity, and that vanity blinded him to the absurdity of his posturing as an intimate friend of the famous and great back in Britain, just as it enabled him to cling to self-righteousness in the face of public scandal. The inability to see beyond his own needs explains his thoughtless treatment of his wife (when Parkes went to England in 1861 on a public salary of £1,000 per annum, Clarinda and the children were left behind in poverty on a rented farm) and the constant demands on his daughters.

Martin seems to play down some aspects of Parkes' personality and emphasise others. While allowing that Parkes' second wife had been his mistress and had borne him several children before the death of Clarinda, Martin argues that the other charges of sexual infidelity must be regarded as unproven. That verdict is surely reached a little too easily, but the more significant conclusion is that the question is really unimportant. What mattered was not Parkes' sexual proclivity but his dependence upon admiration and emotional support from the women around him.

This insight complements other passages in which Martin modifies the conventional portrait. In his intimate correspondence, for example, Parkes habitually offered severe self-appraisal, albeit in a manner that demanded reassurance. Particularly interesting also are passages from the diaries which Parkes kept in times of crisis. They reveal a man of greater introspection and more prone to self-doubt than we would expect, even though Parkes habitually resolves such periods of turmoil by the only means of which he is capable, simple reassertion of probity. Here Allan Martin has opened up an area of historical experience that is of major significance. The problem I experience with his treatment of it is that he no sooner locates the interplay of the personalities than he is forced by the exigencies of the narrative to move on. The fascinating eldest daughter, Menie, cannot be treated in her own right. Between the covers of this remarkable biography there is another book, dealing more fully with the complexity of personal relations in a nineteenth-century family, waiting to be written.

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THE WRECK OF HOPE

Richard Haese

Gary Catalano: *The Years of Hope: Australian Art and Criticism 1959-1968* (Oxford University Press, $19.95).

In spite of its shortcomings, Gary Catalano's

book is a serious study of a complex time of far-reaching change in Australian painting and sculpture. The two events Catalano uses to signpost the character of these changes are the controversial Antipodean exhibition of 1959 and the brash assertive "Field" exhibition some nine years later. A correct reading of the significance of these events, he argues convincingly, demonstrates just how far Australian art had moved from the preoccupations of the 1940s and 1950s. The shift is from the hotly aggressive nationalism of the fifties, with its expressionist preoccupations, to the coolness of eyes fixed on Caro steel and New York edge and flatness.

Catalano writes well and brings considerable sympathy and sensibility to bear on the art and artists of these years. He attempts rescue missions on artists such as David Strachan, whom he feels have not yet been fully appreciated, or like Ken Whisson whose work has been neglected. But whereas Strachan is generously — perhaps too generously — treated in the illustrations, we find no example of Whisson's work at all. Nor is this an isolated case. While one is aware of the great difficulty in cost and effort in providing visual evidence, the selection of plates is at times inadequate. In addition, the author refers to key or important works by Australian and non-Australian artists without giving the reader any real indication as to their character. We are told, for example, that the Hiroshima Panels by Maruki and Akamatsu exhibited in Australia in 1958 overwhelmed local artists. But we are not told anything about their character or why they elicited such a response from critics like Robert Hughes or artists like Joy Hester.

Not unnaturally Catalano is at his best when dealing with the artists whose work most excites his admiration, such as Strachan, John Brack or the Annandale Imitation Realists. The dada-like assemblages of Mike Brown, Colin Lancely and Ross Crothall, with their brash vulgarity and mockery of all apparently serious modernism were, as Catalano shows, the most refreshing and challenging events of the time. He concludes his account of this 'Dog's Breakfast' by characterising imitation realism as an antidote to Sydney romanticism and preoccupation with overseas art: it asserted itself "like the city's convict origins and a dark stain on its conscience". Catalano's metaphors are strong and allusive but are all too often merely tossed off or thrown away. They rarely seem to sum up a complex and considered idea or opinion.

While *The Years of Hope* includes in one way or another pretty well all of the main figures of the period, this is not a discursive account or a chronological survey but a selec- becomes apparent in all this that hope is not tion of themes, issues and observations. It soon the key note of the sixties at all, but an emotion belonging to the preceeding decades — that, in fact, the bulk of the period dealt with is marked, it seems, by the betrayal of that hope, if not its almost complete wreckage. It is something the author regrets:

> The *Antipodean* exhibition, whatever its immediate purpose, formed a high-water mark in Australia's sense of confidence in the potential of its society, yet beyond that trail of salt and broken shells *The Field* was an emphatic rejection . . . of the idea that art should be its vehicle and its voice.

If there is a *leit-motif* in this book it is the whole question of a national tradition and the perennial problem of its relationship to other influences and traditions. Catalano's discussion of this issue in relation to responses by writers and critics is especially valuable. He provides the first critical look at the whole comedy of errors and misapprehensions that surrounded the Antipodean movement and its exhibition. He locates precisely the contradictions of the now infamous manifesto, and shows the degree to which a sizable proportion of the works on show had little direct relationship to the stated aims. Moreover, by reference to the work and ideas of Sydney artists such as John Olsen he demonstrates the degree to which its polemics were based on a false opposition and a misreading of modernism.

One of Gary Catalano's aims is to examine the ways in which local art criticism perceived and responded to Australian cultural change — to the art events and the new art of the decade. He spars enthusiastically with all manner of opponents, scoring point after point. The problem is, however, that, interesting as much of this is, one wishes for more than an identifying of the mistakes, muddle-headedness or the immediate motives of others. These correctives are important — as is a compendium of critical opinion — but this can only be of limited value where the reader is not made aware of *who* the writers are. We need to be told more about their backgrounds, their characters, and what, if anything, they thought that they represented or were doing as critics. Apart from the number of

appearances, a Bernard Hesling seems to be given something of the weight of a Bernard Smith; the opinions of Robert Hughes are undifferentiated from those of Paul Haefliger. Is it possible to grasp Bernard Smith's role as the Antipodean champion fully without some awareness of his background as a radical? Given the emphasis which this book gives to the role of art criticism, one might also have hoped for some kind of questioning as to the role of the critic and the most fruitful or appropriate ways of writing about art.

To have opened up these areas would demand a deeper and a more tougher-minded approach. One is aware of the limitations of the book all the more acutely because of the quality of the writing (in spite of an unnecessary and irritating use of exclamation marks!) and because of the evidence of the writer's ability to handle ideas. Catalano has made a useful contribution to the nationalist-internationalist debate. He also offers the first sustained comment on such important themes in Australian modernism as childhood and primitivism.

When did the 1960s begin? If the art of this decade differed in important ways that gave shape and direction to a new phase, this is surely a worthwhile question. No real answer is given, although Gary Catalano suggests that the outraged howl that greeted the antics and assemblages of the Immitation Realists was a sure sign that a new game was afoot. Unfortunately this point is not pursued and any notion of change bogs down in the following chapters over such questions as whether or not local artists developed an authentic Pop art. And perhaps this is the main problem; the book's concerns are not located in any firm sense of the unravelling thread of Australian modernism. If the late fifties had indicated signs of hope, Catalano states that in the earlier part of that decade:

> . . . it could hardly be said that Australian art was the object of any widespread thought or reflection . . . Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder and Tom Roberts still held their premier position, and general appreciation of their work was still limited to the attitudes of the 1920s and 1930s.

Catalano is correct in stating that the radical art of the 1940s was little understood or recognized on any broad front until the end of the fifties. He is not correct in the assumption that no change had in terms of recognition occurred. Potted history just won't do, and a reading of Bernard Smith's general account of what had been happening since the 1920s should have been sufficient to suggest that the kinds of views Gary Catalano cites had long since been dismissed or re-assessed in those quarters where it *mattered.*

The most stimulating comment in *The Years of Hope* is contained not in the main body of the text but in its "Afterword". Here Gary Catalano offers a brief lament for his lost causes and suggests (alas, all too cryptically) possible answers to why, in his own view, the aspirations of an older generation had been betrayed or ignored; why, with few exceptions, a new generation showed scant concern or much evidence of possessing deep feelings about their society. The five artists whom he nominates as the best during the 1960s are David Strachan, John Brack, Robert Klippel, Mike Brown and Dick Watkins. He argues that at their best their work is "distinguished by an obstinate independence from the artistic conventions of the time." By rebelling against the conventions not only of their predecessors but also of their contemporaries, they demonstrated an independence of spirit rare in the sixties. Catalano suggests that this kind of rugged individualism might be the only valid Australian artistic tradition we should accept.

It is a pity that this provocative after-thought was not at least introduced at some earlier stage on a more conscious level. We might then be in a better position to decide whether this is yet another example of allusive sophistry or a powerful and useful way of thinking about our artists and their traditions.

Richard Haese, lecturer in art history at La Trobe University, has just published the important study Rebels and Precursors, *an account of Australian art and artists in the 1930s and 1940s, which will be reviewed in an early Overland.*

DELIBERATE DICHOTOMIES

Helen Daniel

David Ireland: *City of Women* (Allen Lane, $12.95).

Like *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and *The Flesheaters,* David Ireland's two most recent novels, *A Woman of the Future* and his new *City of Women* are related, counterpoints of each other. Both are futuristic, setting up images of social disorder and surrealistic patterns of growth and decay, and both explore the private

world of a female protagonist trying to make sense of the outer world. But where *A Woman of the Future* has Alethea growing from foetus to eighteen year old, with her reckless vitality and cool brilliance an image of growth and fertility in the dead heart of Australian society, *City of Women* has a lonely old woman measuring her private pain against the brutality of circumstances in a city of women trying to recover from a male past. The leopard image of freedom and fertility in the earlier novel is transformed in *City of Women* into a more ambiguous image, as Billie Shockley, retired engineer, leads her pet leopard through the streets and pubs of Sydney, a surrealistic world built on deliberate dichotomies.

The central dichotomy of the novel is male and female: Ireland creates a society of women, united against the common enemy living beyond the Edge of the City, an Edge which is also the boundary between past and present. Within the City are female truckies and politicians, female pub brawlers and engineers, female couples and lonely women seeking a boozy mateship in the Lovers' Arms pub. The City is Sydney, its streets and landmarks drawn with meticulous realism, but it is also a surrealistic landscape, where fantasy blurs into nightmare, decay smudges into growth, chaos into order, male into female. Through these deliberate dichotomies, Ireland seeks out an image of unity, exploring the point at which opposites spill over into each other.

Like his earlier novels, *City of Women* is a mosaic of fragments, jigsaw pieces of urban lives in the process of changing, snatches of incident and feeling which are bound together by the narrative presence of Billie Shockley. To her departed daughter, Bobbie, Billie writes letters wherein she tries to ward off her loneliness and loss by representing to Bobbie the people and places of the City. Billie is the observer, drinking in the Lovers' Arms or walking through the streets with her new Bobbie, her pet leopard, and recording the lives of the numerous minor characters who move in and out of the narrative. The women, who come to Billie with their predicaments and their symptoms, suffer grotesque ailments — public rot, labial laxness, buttock wilt, tit abatement, urethral anguish — and these indignities of their age and sex become surrealistic images of decay and disorder.

The City is no idealised society: the women are as crude, violent and competitive as their supposed male counterparts, mouthing obscenities, making forays beyond the Edge of the City for a pack rape of some helpless male, or falling back into boozy mateship when the brawls end. Occasionally males sneak into the City and hovering over the narrative is a threatening surrealistic figure, Old Man Death or Jack the Zipper, who claims his victims in horrific ways. Yet Billie's letters incorporate gentler moments too, some lyrical scenes of the natural world improbably surviving amid the machine world, some plaintive scenes of Billie's recalling Bobbie's words to her and trying to remould them into some happier shape.

Ireland's style moves easily from nightmarish scenes, with grim, menacing undertones, to the lyrical, nurturing a fragile hope, and to the bawdy language of the pub, where he twists unexpected images out of common parlance (such as "penial servitude" in the male past). The pace of the novel quickens through its jigsaw structure as the complex vision behind it becomes clearer. It accelerates not only according to the pressure of the predicaments of the women whose lives Billie recounts, but also as her own world begins to appear more fragile. Words are the pastime of the lonely Billie, clenching and unclenching her mind with the sentences of her private reality. And when that is threatened, with another reality trying to break down the walls of the City, neither she nor Ireland is prepared to surrender, even under siege. As Ireland presents two contrary worlds standing side by side, it becomes a meeting of opposites, of real and surreal, of public and private truths, of past and present, of chaos and order, just as the whole novel has moved by the blurring of male and female.

Ireland's status as a novelist is already well-established and *City of Women* can only heighten it. As it counterpoints *A Woman of the Future,* it reveals more of the controlling vision behind all his work, impressing again with the urgency of his perception of the social disorder in which we live. But in its sense of opposites meeting and smudging into each other, of dichotomies bridged, *City of Women* offers a glimpse of a contrary faith, often submerged in Ireland's work, a sense of hope that may be a turning point in the work of a novelist so aware of disorder and human diminution in Australian society.

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HOW MEANINGFUL?

John Barnes

Peter Holloway: *Contemporary Australian Drama: Perspectives since 1955* (Currency Press, $24.95).

At the Melbourne launching of *Contemporary Australian Drama,* Sir Paul Hasluck — sometime playwright and drama critic of the West Australian — reminded the audience of the importance of reference books. It was a point worth making. In *Contemporary Australian Drama* Peter Holloway, a lecturer at Melbourne State College, has collected articles written since "The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll," and the result is a very worthwhile reference book. A very attractive one, too — well designed, easy to handle, and convenient to use. There are one or two lapses — Dutton becomes Hutton in p. xvi, and the date of the Emerald Hill Theatre is confused on p. xlv — but nothing to detract from the worth of the volume.

Peter Holloway has made a judicious selection from the "substantial body of critical material available to those who want more from a play than a programme and a performance can offer". In his thoughtful, somewhat over-earnest introduction, he seems anxious to claim that a "critical tradition" is being built up locally. Certainly, on the evidence of this collection, Australian plays have received sympathetic and well-considered criticism over the past twenty-five years. There are substantial essays here by P. H. Davison ("Three Australian Plays: National Myths Under Criticism"), H. G. Kippax ("Australian Drama Since *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*"), A. A. Phillips ("Assaying the New Drama"), and Peter Pierce ("Revaluing Australian Legends") — to mention only those which had a particular interest for me. Although some of the pieces have lost a little of their initial sparkle, at least none of the playwrights discussed here has any cause for complaint. The critics are respectful — if anything, too respectful.

It's surprising, then, that Peter Holloway should quote as an epigraph Dorothy Hewett's remark that "critics (or reviewers as they all are in this country)" are one of the "problems in the Australian theatre". Peter Holloway seems half-inclined to accept the implied devaluation of critics as "reviewers", though he does note the influence of reviewers on the development of drama, especially in the last decade, and rightly draws attention to the high quality of the reviewing by "Brek" (H. G. Kippax) in Nation in the sixties. There are reviewers and reviewers, of course. Reflecting on the way Roger Pulvers' extraordinarily interesting production of "The Two Headed Calf", a play set in Australia by the outstanding Polish playwright, Stanislaw Ignacy Witkacy, at the Pram Factory recently was received (or rather not received) by Melbourne newspaper reviewers, one is tempted to agree with the proposition that reviewers are a "problem". But as this collection reveals, Australian playwrights over the past quarter of a century have been able to count on perceptive reviewing from newspaper writers of the calibre of Geoffrey Hutton, Bruce Grant, Katharine Brisbane, and H. G. Kippax, all of whom are represented by pieces well worth preserving.

The most challenging voices to be heard in this collection, however, are those of the playwrights themselves — and especially Dorothy Hewett and Jack Hibberd. Both express their views with a gusto that makes the professional critics sound all too sober and restrained. In "Shirts, Prams, and Tomato Sauce: The All-Australian Theatre", Dorothy Hewett suggests a revised version of the history of Australian drama, by representing the anti-naturalistic and improvisatory drama of the alternative theatre as in the mainstream. What is particularly interesting here is the desire to find a local tradition, rather than to acknowledge the strength of the international influences at work on the local playwright. There is no doubt, though — and Dorothy Hewett's essay highlights it — that contemporary drama is marked by a freedom and confidence in its very theatricality, and has thrown off restricting notions of what an Australian play should be.

In the La Mama program note for the 1970 Festival of Perth Jack Hibberd asserted the need for a break with the past. In 1977, when he reviewed *The Doll Trilogy,* he wrote of the extremely tenuous connection between what had been happening in the Australian theatre over the preceding decade and the fifties. This really goes to the heart of the matter. Contemporary Australian drama does not begin with "The Doll" in 1955, but with the "alternative theatre" at the end of the sixties. The arrangement of material in the anthology tends to obscure this fundamental point, though it does enable the reader to see how the expectations raised by the success of "The Doll" were disappointed.

Mr Holloway divides his book into "Historical

Perspectives" (a selection of general articles) and "Critical Perspectives" (articles on particular writers). In the second section he begins with "Lawler and his Period" (Lawler, Seymour, Beynon). One swallow does not make a summer — and "The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll," "The One Day of the Year", and "The Shifting Heart" do not constitute a 'period'. "The Doll" has a special place in the history of the Australian theatre because of its phenomenal commercial success. As Jack Hibberd says, "More than Errol Flynn, Bernborough or Betty Cuthbert this made us feel culturally enfranchised, a nation at last instead of a colony in the Artistic Atlas". Back in 1956 a wide-eyed Leslie Rees, in an article entitled "New Hope for Australian Drama", was telling readers of Overland: "All over Australia, largely by reason of the inspiring example of 'The Doll', there is a warmer public attitude to the question of Australian drama." Exactly. After "The Doll" there was a more receptive public for Australian plays — and a much more receptive theatre management. One can understand why Mr. Rees in his *History of Australian Drama* (the first version — before "The Doll" — was called *Towards an Australian Drama*) lingers over the details of Ray Lawler's literary earnings.

The success of "The Doll" was the single most important factor in creating a sympathetic environment for would-be Australian dramatists. But the play itself was not a creative influence. As Harry Kippax shrewdly observed in 1964, its effect was that of the best-seller. To say this is not to disparage the undoubted craftsmanship and integrity of vision of Lawler's play. "Who lives to please must please to live", in the words of Johnson. Ray Lawler pleased audiences at home and abroad, and made it easier for those who followed to get a hearing. But within a decade of the success of "The Doll" Kippax was talking of "our stalled drama", and seeing in Patrick White's plays the possibility of liberation from "the shallows of naturalism and reportage". White — and perhaps Barry Humphries, as Mr Holloway argues — can be seen as preparing the way for the "new wave". "As a dramatist, I have never been affected one iota by "The Doll'," declared Jack Hibberd in 1977; and that holds true in essence for his contemporaries.

About half of this collection is devoted to essays on the dramatists who emerged at the end of the sixties. Although some of the recent reviewers feel free to use terms like "masterpiece" and "brilliant", one could hardly claim that we have much in the way of dramatic literature. What we do have is a situation which has never existed before in Australia—a number of talented young men (very few women) who are writing steadily for the theatre. For instance, David Williamson, not yet forty, has nine published plays; several of his plays have been performed abroad; some have been filmed; he has a list of credits as a script writer; and so on. Playwrights can get their work performed and published in a way that just wasn't possible twenty five years ago. And here one should point to the exemplary attitude of Currency Press, which celebrates ten years of risk-taking with the publication of this volume. The building up of a library of Australian plays in print has itself been a factor in creating more intelligent audiences and general public awareness.

Nowadays Australian playwrights do not go unrecognized. Commentators fall over each other in their eagerness to produce critical studies of writers barely out of the chrysalis. It is all too easy to take this excitement and flurry of the past few years as being more meaningful than it is. As an epilogue Peter Holloway prints Jack Hibberd's "Proscenium Arch Blues", a stimulating reflection on the situation at the end of the seventies, which puts things in perspective:

> For those seriously concerned with building upon our not unsound foundations, the current situation could eventually prove more beneficial than destructive. Once the scales fall from the eyes, it is quite clear that we don't as yet have anything remotely resembling an Australian Theatre, a theatre *practice* that permeates the whole country with its undeniably distinctive flavours and styles.

Will it be different twenty-five years from now?

John Barnes, well-known for his critical writings on Australian literature, teaches in the English school at La Trobe University.

OUT OF ANONYMITY

Graham Rowlands

Jenny Boult: *The Hotel Anonymous* (Bent Enterprises, $4).

Jenny Boult's first collection is divided into four sections. They aren't discreet. In fact, each is prefaced by "from", as if the whole book were drawn from four manuscripts. Most of the poet's diverse qualities appear in all four sections.

Thus, when poems fail, one sees them as exceptions to a carefully planned book of above average quality.

This basically Adelaidean collection is inner-urban in milieu and content. What distinguishes it from many an inner Sydney or Melbourne book, however, is Boult's lack of poetic self-consciousness. Many of the characters frequenting her rooms *may* be artists but she writes about them as *people*. She writes poems for everyone — although not everyone will like them.

It's not surprising that Boult called her book *The Hotel Anonymous*. There are carefully observed poems about pub life. Even so, more of her qualities appear in the poem title and section heading "The Schooner of Roses" that captures both pub and lyricism. This book shows a more romantic and vulnerable woman than appeared in the tough, funny selection in *Dots Oven Lines,* the S.A. anthology.

Still, there are lots of sex, dope and booze in puns, jokes, slang and narratives in poems such as "A Madwoman", "At the Massage Parlour", "meditation" and "I remember it all" among many others.

Under the toughness (it isn't bravado) Boult evokes moods of loss, regret for loss, the difficulty of losing and *surprise* at regret over the departure of both men and women in poems such as "Close Silence", "Breaking up is hard to do", "a short walk" and "the blondewood bed" among others. Because of the toughness, her emotions seem close to sentimentality while mostly avoiding it. Not easy poems to write!

Although influenced by Rae Desmond Jones (an apt, intelligent, working class *Australian* influence) Boult's style is very much her own. On the one hand, her pure imagery tends to obscurity in "A Sequence of Changes" for example; on the other, her straight comment tends to over-generalization in, say, "Once you have become". Most of her work falls between these extremes. Her imagery is only part of her description. People feel, do and talk in rooms. All is recorded, including the narrator's view.

Boult's poetry doesn't lend itself to brief quotation — not even from the beautiful lyric "di's dream" and the equally moving elegy "eighteen". The whole of the short masturbation lyric "Deflect", however, conveys both her toughness *and* vulnerability:

> The woman in the mirror has damp eyes
> as though she has been walking
> against the wind.
>
> Her face is as flush as her nipples
> in the loose pink shirt.
>
> Her body is not sad. She rocks her hips
> slowly in the jagged frame,
> moves like a camera is watching
> from the other side of the glass
> as she dances with her thumbs
> caught in the belt loops sliding
> out of the jeans
>
> leaving sloughed skin
> and an empty frame.

In the last section, the tension between toughness and vulnerability is stretched to screaming-point, almost to breaking. This excuses some arrogance. The reader feels that here the poet realized how well she could write at the same time as discovering how art can involve merciless self-exploitation.

Although Boult succeeds with repetitive oral-type poems such as "i'm just returning your call", she's less successful with public issue and event poems. "Mary Nelis" works well on the British in Ireland but "front line", "painting the desert" and "bloodstains on the sand" are banal rhetoric. It's a pity the Fraser poem (which ends effectively) contains a few gratuitous lines. It's harder to get away with them on the page than at a poetry reading.

Despite Brian Elliott's name spelt wrongly, Michael Dransfield misquoted and the spine's back-facing printing, it's an attractive production at a cheap price—half the price of an imported counterpart. It's another arrival from the future when most of Australia's best poetry is likely to be self-published.

Graham Rowlands is a freelance poet and writer who lives in Adelaide.

DISPUTED BARRICADES

John Sendy

Wilfred Burchett: *At the Barricades* (Macmillan, $19.95).

My last meeting with Wilfred Burchett occurred in December 1972. Approaching the building of middling affluence which housed his flat on the outskirts of Paris, my French companions, the Communist mayor of a small working class municipality and a non-party student radical, raised their eyebrows somewhat and muttered, *"Tres bourgeois, tres bourgeois!"*

But they found Burchett an intelligent, enthusiastic and charming host. He is easy to like, and

maintains, frequently, lasting friendships with those who have worked with him in the most controversial situations, as Harrison Salisbury conveys in his warm and generous introduction to these memoirs.

After meeting his Bulgarian wife and two of his teenage children, the one having been born in Hanoi and the other in Moscow (a third, born in Peking, was absent), we were ushered into a comfortable lounge room cluttered with books, documents, armchairs and other paraphernalia. Burchett was elated by the election of the Whitlam government, one of the first acts of which was to re-issue his Australian passport after conservative governments had withheld it for nineteen years. Small stubby-like bottles of beer disappeared as he fired questions about the Australian political scene, and we discussed the prospects of a French Socialist-Communist election victory as forecast by the public opinion polls and reminisced about the Peking in which we had met in 1952. Two hours later I lurched out happily, clutching a copy of his twenty-third book, *My War with the CIA,* written in collaboration with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, suitably autographed in memory of our previous meeting twenty years before.

With Burchett, ideology, theories and political philosophies are rarely to the fore; it is events, policies, facts, and assessments of what might happen which seem to fill the world of the man who Max Harris has described as the greatest Australian journalist since Chinese Morrison. Certainly his journalistic record is impressive, even amazing. He possesses an uncanny capacity to be on the spot at the right time: the first foreign journalist into Hiroshima after the Bomb, the trials in Eastern Europe, Dien Bien Phu, Panmunjon, a trip from the 17th Parallel to the suburbs of Saigon with NLF guerillas, the Geneva Conference. He seems to have been present at just about every war and revolution over the past forty years and enjoys a rare ability to write about them in an informative, exciting and persuasive way. His friendships with Chou En-lai, Ho Chi-minh, Pham Van Dong, Prince Sihanouk and many others enabled him to play an important part not only in supplying readers with valuable appreciations of political and military situations but also in influencing Asian affairs as well.

The two greats in Burchett's long journalistic career are, undoubtedly, Hiroshima and Vietnam.

In 1945 the front page of the British Daily Express carried the following Burchett headline: THE ATOMIC PLAGUE, "I Write This as a Warn- to the World." A description of what the journalist saw at Hiroshima followed. Unfortunately this warning has been heeded only partially by a world piling up atomic weapons and only starting to debate the dangers of producing nuclear energy.

Burchett's newspaper articles and ten books on Vietnam and South East Asia over a twenty year period proved, overall, to be remarkably accurate. His views on the subject were sought often by American officials and he was a trusted confidant of the Vietnamese leadership.

At The Barricades brings events to life, whether confrontations between Soviet and Yugoslav Communist heavies at banquets in Belgrade, puffing through the underground tunnels of the Vietcong near Saigon, breakfasting with Henry Kissinger in Washington or dodging the bullets of US pilots in Korea or Vietnam. Yet while Burchett the journalist is very much alive in these pages, the man remains in the background after his early years in Australia. Beyond certain political commitments, such as strong support for peaceful coexistence and the underdog, and for a general sort of communist solution to the world's problems, his own thoughts and passions remain rather veiled.

Alexander Herzen is alleged to have regretted, cynically, that he did not die on the barricades of 1848 so that he could have taken two or three convictions with him to the grave.

For Burchett there have been many illusions shattered and Gods that failed, as he freely admits in some cases or implies in others in *At The Barricades*. Yet strangely, he makes virtually no effort to probe the reasons. This is regrettable because his vast experience should provide him with unique advantages to analyse much about the Communist world.

Furthermore, he displays a convenient memory about the Stalin-inspired Hungarian and Bulgarian trials of certain Communist leaders in 1949, their subsequent execution and posthumous rehabilitation in the aftermath of the 1956 20th Congress of the CPSU. *At The Barricades* describes the unfortunate Bulgarian, Traicho Kostov, as a hero and highlights his "honesty and courage". However, Burchett's *People's Democracies,* published in 1951, portrayed Kostov as a crafty, villainous, double-dyed betrayer of country and colleagues. The Hungarian system was praised greatly in

People's Democracies, but five years later it required Soviet troops to quell a mass uprising against it. In 1951 Tito was severely criticised by Burchett and his Yugoslav socialist system was likened to Hitler's regime. But in 1981 Tito has become a Burchett hero.

There is nothing wrong with changing one's mind but Burchett makes no effort to recall any of the previous judgements, let alone analyse them. In fact *At The Barricades,* while it refers to and quotes from most of his other books, fails to mention *People's Democracies* at all. Additionally, Stalin is mentioned only in passing and Stalinism not at all.

Such omissions are startling and reprehensible, despite the otherwise engrossing and talented nature of the work.

Harrison Salisbury claims Burchett is "a man who defies classification." Indeed there are many opinions about him. Generally speaking, the left in politics have appreciated his work greatly. Simultaneously and predictably conservative forces in Australia considered him a traitor. Yet despite challenges by Burchett himself and leaders of the ALP, Liberal governments failed to prosecute or even investigate him. Time Magazine branded Burchett "a mouthpiece for Asian Reds." Other observers consider him a "Party hack" who has done the bidding, from time to time, of various Communist leaderships. On occasions this may have been true, for Burchett has never denied his Communist sympathies. Yet *At The Barricades* would not please either Moscow or Peking and Burchett has been at variance, publically, with both Soviet and Chinese policies on many occasions, particularly about their attitudes, at various times, towards the Vietnamese liberation struggles.

Burchett estimates his own position as being that of a non-aligned radical: "It so happened that step by step and almost accidentally, I had achieved a sort of journalistic Nirvana, free of any built-in loyalties to governments, parties, or any organisations whatsoever."

Like many old-time Communists (and he admits and explains how it was only accidental that he did not join the Communist Party of Australia) Burchett has performed admirably in support of many peoples fighting for independence and against the US imperialism which dropped the Bomb, burned Vietnam, laid the basis for the savagery in Kampuchea and so on. But sometimes, when, in the name of socialist democracy, people are oppressed, and when, in the name of defending socialism, the sovereignty and independence of countries is trampled underfoot, old Communists behave less admirably. Sometimes they prefer not to analyse and instead to forget or avoid; or, blinded by loyalties, they just stubbornly defend against what they see as the main enemy. It is not their fault necessarily. Many are both heroes and victims.

Perhaps Shakespeare was right when he wrote: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues."

John Sendy, formerly a senior Communist Party functionary, now lives in rural Victoria and works on the history of the Labor movement.

THE BUSH AS BEING

Richard Harris

Archie Weller: *The Day of the Dog* (Allen & Unwin, $9.95). Paul Radley: *Jack Rivers and Me* (Allen & Unwin, $9.95).

Both of these novels refer contemporary social problems to the Bush for solution, the Bush as a way of life and even a way of being. *Day of the Dog* is a novel in the fictional documentary mode about a group which rarely figure in fictions *or* documentaries: urban Aboriginals and part-Aboriginals. Therefore it's also about the repetitive, deadening cycle of self-accusation and anxiety that is part of unemployment, ungiving material which Weller records with felicity during his exposition of the even more extreme difficulties facing black youths. These are a constant background of racism, which, because it is stupid, usually takes its victim unawares, and appeals of kinship which can't be ignored although they are often loaded with emotional blackmail and secret malice.

The story follows twenty year-old Doug Dooligan from his first night out of Fremantle prison through abortive attempts to reclaim control of his life. These are foiled by his petty criminal mates and the passive hostility of white society, as represented by Perth. We are reminded by the suburban artificiality of Doug's mother's house, and by a young Aboriginal able to rely on tribal culture to defy the impact of a jail he need only comprehend as an insane place, that there is more to being an Australian black than the drunken *milieu* Doug moves in, unwillingly

if loyally. Racism works in direct ways. There is the white friend who walks close enough to be with you and far enough behind to seem like he might not be; there is subjection to the ineffectual parole officer with his round of worn phrases and police-court concept of rehabilitation; there is a vicious detective trio known as the Boys from Brazil, who at a single visit lay waste the timid goodwill of a white employer; there is the degrading, icy patronage of Jamie, a relative through marriage, who takes Doug on as a farm laborer.

Sympathetic characters aren't as easily achieved by Mr. Weller. Doug's mother, and his girl-friend Polly, think only in relation to him, and generally in platitudes. On the face of it, this could be intentional, since at extremes the simpler thoughts are the more realistic — and useful, but the shadow of a brother who died in Vietnam signifies that their shallowness is due to the enormous task undertaken here, namely to speak on behalf of an entire race and the outcasts of both races, those of mixed descent. Fiction tends to suffer in the name of documentary.

Polly comes fully alive when she has been arrested, a paradox which lends her character strength in this book. She has been on the run from the law, and, through Doug, from drink and sexual abuse. Her silence about her own record before Doug's braggadoccio is entirely convincing. So too is the suspenseful relationship between Doug and Jamie McDonald, as they trade insults, threats, and arrive at a plateau of tentative — and temporary — conciliation. It's an unusually good portrayal of a delicately cocked kind of hatred: Weller projects his antagonists into the niceties of a culture shock which defeats them both. Similarly, when the white boy Silver shows up at a black party on an errand of apology, the reader is shown how the human tasks of race relations fall on those least equipped to carry them out. Silver would like to be a thug, but he's only a lair. The chronically victimised meet the chronically underprivileged.

This is a book on behalf of the underdog, not an imitation of one, and the words behind the words are very angry indeed. There's some overwriting, but it doesn't impede the oblique narrative power, or Weller's dry-eyed crispness.

Two pieces of information are fairly well known about Paul Radley's first novel. It won the $10,000 Vogel/Australian literary prize, and the hero is a little boy's imaginary friend, Jack Rivers, who "comes from everywhere" in the words of Peanut, who is the little boy. *Jack Rivers and Me* is much more than the glittering schmaltz these facts alone may suggest, it is a successful story of family life (the more startling because the family is a relatively happy one) in which every character is uniquely heroic. Connie, the elder sister who harrasses Peanut about Jack Rivers, collects her grandmother's old corsets to make wings so she can fly. Nance, their mother, protects the illusion of Jack's reality from maternal feeling, but by the time the basis and depth of her feeling are revealed in a moving chapter late in the book. Jack Rivers is no illusion.

Who, and what, is he? Superficially, the imaginary playmate of a little boy who might be dying, he is always the Other Boy alongside Peanut, the more perfected shadow of the self. He might be a family psychosis, a nightmare emerged from Freud's romance of the family with a separate personality and his own place at the table. He might even be the soldier who died in Tony's arms in the Islands or, when Connie drops the final bombshell about him, a cleverer, more imminent, identity.

The narrative is conducted as Peanut reports dialogues with Connie, his mother and father, and those between them which he and Jack overhear. It's a method which allows Radley's sense of the hilarious free reign, while inviting the reader to re-experience, through childhood, life in an unpredictable yet cohesive world. With the exception of a few dialogues between Nance and Tony Delarue, the characters are swept along by speech. The children talk in a contemporary and often very funny idiom, but in the pub the repartee is closer to that of Shakespeare's clowns. It is the brat, Connie, who ushers in the book's pro-feminist theme, and the secondary line of talkers in the lovingly recorded Sulphide hotel who splatter each other with bawdry. Overall, Radley is suggesting that bawdy sexuality and feminism may well be less contradictory than parallel phenomena in the struggle for personal integrity against the authority of church, work and family.

Since this is a book about an imaginary person among actual people, it is supremely about identity. In the Delarue family, love takes shapes which extend from giggling pillow fights to the brink of horror. Antipathies and alliances develop around Jack Rivers, methods of parenting, and simple differences in temperament. Is Connie mad? Nance? Tony? Peanut? They all

are, yet none of them are. They are simultaneously the victims and commanders of identities which isolate and extend them. The emotional capitol of Boomeroo is the Death Seat — Peanut is dying to be big enough to go there by himself — and dialogue shifts the characters smoothly through time-zones, so the children on one page might be talking about Korea, and on the next adults thrashing out the details of a non-sexist relationship. The realism of the dialogue allows this to happen easily, so that in a novel which effectively presents us with an essential social history of relations between the sexes from the nineteen forties to the present, we retain an intense interest in the outcome, the fate of a child's fantasy.

When Nance sits on the Death Seat, which might also be called the Truth seat, and tells herself "You done good, Nance," the isolated person in the secret sympathetic life of family is revealed and applauded. "There is another world, and it is in this one", said Paul Eluard. Radley has written the novel of what is erroneously known as 'ordinary' life, and done so with hilarity and beauty.

Robert Harris is a poet well-known to Overland readers. He lives in Melbourne.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: We have to thank our readers yet again for a fine total of $558 in the Floating Fund, desperately important as the year runs out and the grant from the Literature Board, which we received at the beginning of the year, is almost gone. Still, we feel that we have so much in our files that should be published, some of which has been languishing within folders for a year or more, that we have enlarged this issue to 80 pages, greatly heartened by our traditional reader support. Very many thanks to:

$100 NS; $18 PL, JW; $13 EP, DA, CB, BB, DB, DB; $10 RD, LB, GG; $8 MN, RR, D&KW, HM, RC, JH, EW, PI, DA, DW, TC, MS, GP, SP, MM, SO'S, LC, TM, JH, RH, JL, DP; $6 HS, JL; $5 HD, BH; $4 PM; $3 DW, JC, MG, KF, BL, RS, LB, DC, GD, HL, LM, JB, AB, JF, OG, GM, MT, JS, JB; $2 LH, MTS; $1 JA.

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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