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overland

features
stories
poetry
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KATHARINE BRISBANE ON CURRENCY PRESS

JUDAH WATEN: 70 YEARS

WILL DYSON CENTENARY 1880–1938

(Concern at the disappearance of the Australian forests grows apace – and at the sitting of the Church Congress lamentations were heard about the treatment of the Aborigine).

The Last of the Tribe: 'My word, pretty soon no place in Australia for us Aussies!'

graphics *Lay-out and cover design, Vane Lindesay. Cover cartoon by Will Dyson (1925). Drawings by Rick Amor.*

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

December, 1981

PETER CORRIS

After the Bell

I was a small boy at the time, ten years old, and that's why I got off so lightly. I was the one who discovered Joey Carter and turned Manningbrook into a ghost town. It's history now, but this is how it happened.

The Depression was on and I can remember it. It was just the way you see it now in photographs of the time; the men thin with scraggy necks showing out of collarless shirts, and the women in shapeless dresses. Manningbrook was a farming town in the west of New South Wales and it was battling to stay on the map in 1931. Half the shops had closed and places like the meatworks and the bakery had shut down.

It was still hot in May, in the school holidays, when I went walking along by the river and found Joey Carter. He was wearing old tennis shoes and shorts, a singlet, and he was pounding away with his fists at something hanging from a branch. His swag was unrolled near the foot of the tree and I could see his few possessions — tin plate and a billy, a straight razor.

I stood off a bit and watched. He danced around snapping out punches at the bag, a sugar bag stuffed with something, which hung down about chest high. He looked a bit awkward at it and I worked out why; he was mostly flicking out his right and holding up his left — he was a southpaw. I knew that much about boxing even at ten.

I waited until he stopped moving and walked up to him.

"Gidday." He looked embarrassed and gave the bag a little push.

"Gidday," I said, "boxing?"

"Yeah." I can see his face now — the scars around his eyes and the wide, flat nose. He was a middle-sized man, not tall, not short, thick in the body but not fat. His skin was very white, even his face, which meant he hadn't been on the track very long.

"You like boxing, son?"

"Yes." I hit the bag.

"Not like that, like this." He showed me how to make a proper fist and hit with the knuckles.

"His name's Joey Carter," I told my father at dinner time. "He was state middleweight champion five years ago and he's making a comeback."

My father grunted and forked some rabbit into his mouth.

The next day I took some of my mates out to the river to see Joey and we all got a boxing lesson. He showed us an old pair of boxing gloves and some newspaper clippings that proved Joey Carter had won the championship of New South Wales in 1926 by knocking out an Aboriginal named Dave Roberts in ten rounds at the Leichhardt Stadium. We all told our fathers and I suppose they all reacted like mine — stopped eating and showed some interest.

My mother said something surprising: "Did he tell you how he lost the title?"

My father was working three days a week on a farm five miles from town. On Friday nights he'd bring home a sugar bag full of food — corned meat, some vegetables, tea — and some money in notes and silver. He'd give the notes to my mother and take the silver and himself off to the pub.

At breakfast on Saturday my father contributed some information, a thing he rarely did.

"Joey didn't lose the title," he told my mother, "he retired."

"Why," she said.

"He had a quid and didn't want to get hurt. Smart, see."

"What about now?"

"The money's gone and he's training for a come-back, like the lad said."

"Fine place to train, the pub."

It was then that I learned something new

about my father. There was a category of mankind that could be teetotal and escape his scorn — the sportsmen.

"He didn't have a drink," he said. "Not a drop. We all just had a yarn."

My mother sniffed.

The next Saturday my father sought me out after lunch. My young sister tried to tag along but we shooed her away.

"Davie, there's a bit of a boxing match being got up this afternoon behind the pub. Thought you might like to come."

I'd known about it for days but it didn't do to tell grown-ups everything.

"Who's fighting?"

"Joey Carter and Johnno Neilsen."

It was fair I should be along; I'd 'discovered' Joey and now he was repaying me. So I said I wanted to see the fight. Neilsen was one of the few athletes left in the town; the others had gone to Sydney or on the track. Why he stayed I don't know. He'd finished second in a country Gift a few years before. He'd also done some boxing.

I've no doubt now that the Carter-Neilsen bout was an illegal one. Hotel premises were not licensed for boxing matches, all the equipment was makeshift and the betting was illegal. It hardly mattered, for Joey knocked Johnno out cleanly after ten minutes of sparring. Neilsen was bigger than him but Joey made it look easy. I demonstrated for the kids at school on Monday — shuffle in, a straight right, feint with the right, cross with the left. Out.

Joey collected a few bob for the fight and moved into a shed at the bottom of the paddocks behind the pub. We saw him training over the next week, jogging around the paddocks, doing exercises on the football field.

The town was at a low ebb. The banks foreclosed on the farmers and they left. I remember the empty desks at school and the friendships just snapped forever overnight. But in early June there was something to talk about, aside from the long drag-on of the summer and how sick we were of the sight, smell and taste of rabbit. The Show was on!

Some citizens rallied round, got up a committee and the Manningbrook's Agricultural Show for 1931 would be held. It was a near thing, it had all but been called off for lack of support. As things turned out, '31 was its last gasp. That's the right thing to say, looking back. It was as if the town drew in a big breath for a last hearty puff and then expired.

For me, my father and several of my mates and his mates the biggest attraction of the Show was Tom Sharkey's boxing booth. The horses and cows and pigs were a bore, the flowers were worse, the wood chopping was O.K. But the boxing was terrific. Sharkey had all the trimmings — the posters and hand-painted backdrops of white men and brown whaling away at each other. They stood in front of the tent while he spruiked — the real thing, Aboriginals with cobbled-up eyebrows and tough whites with tattoos on their big forearms.

I stood in front of the booth with my father and heard Sharkey's yell: "Who'll have a go?"

"Me." Joey Carter stepped forward and we all gave a little cheer.

Sharkey looked him over. "Twelve stoner are you?"

"Nearer eleven," Joey said.

One of the men lined up outside the tent, an Aboriginal wearing a red silk dressing gown, gave a crooked grin.

"Don't give me that," he said, or words to that effect.

Joey said, "Who asked you?" and it was on. They slanged each other for a while and then we were all inside the tent and Joey was stripped and Sharkey was striking a gong.

Joey and the Aboriginal moved around each other in the first round defending rather than attacking. In the second round the Aboriginal got home a couple of solid rights which Joey felt and he landed a neat left on the Aboriginal's nose early in the third. The gong finished the bout and Joey put out his hand to shake; the Aboriginal stepped in and dropped him with a short left hook.

One of the tent boxers threw a few punches in defence of his mate and a couple of fights broke out in the crowd. Joey got up and started swearing and saying the sort of things we all said about Aboriginals but not to their faces. The upshot was that Joey and the Aboriginal were matched to fight over ten rounds in the scout hall on the Monday night following.

I saw Joey on the Sunday. I rode my bike alongside him while he jogged. It was a rough ride for me because the bike didn't have any tyres.

"Can you beat him?" I asked between jolts.

"Yeah, I reckon."

"Lot of people putting money on you."

He didn't break stride and I couldn't see his face, but there was something a bit strange, sort of soft, in his voice.

"Have you put money on, Davie?"

"No," I said. 'I haven't got any, but I would if I did."

He nodded and ran on.

My father scraped up some money and put it on Joey and so did most of the men in the town with any sporting instinct. Others without that instinct did too, it was a flicker of town pride or something. Tom Sharkey took the bets. I heard my father say Sharkey stood to do a couple of hundred quid if his man lost.

"What does he stand to gain if he wins?" my mother asked. But my father answered that Joey was sure to beat the Abo., he'd outpointed him in the tent he said.

The weather broke the day of the fight. It rained all day and gave my father an excuse not to go out to the farm to work. I pleaded with my parents to let me go to the fight but they wouldn't budge. It was too late they said. I tried to sneak out after my sister was asleep but my mother caught me and hid my boots. But I didn't have to ask who'd won the next morning — it was obvious from the droop of my father's body and face. Joey had gone down for the count in the fourth round. Tom Sharkey had cleaned up and my mother was not the only woman in Manningbrook to roast her husband. For a good number of families it was the last straw, the sign that things in Manningbrook had finally gone sour. We left within a few months, so did the Andersons, the Clements and others.

I went down to Joey's shed after school on the day after the fight but he'd packed and gone. I asked at the pub and they said he'd shot through without a word. "Ashamed" was the common verdict, and because I'd been such a fan of Joey's some of this shame rubbed off on me too.

Boxing was a bad word in our family for years after but I kept up an interest. I saw some of the great fights, like Patrick and Dawson at the Rushcutters Bay stadium. And one day I came across a picture of Tom Sharkey's boxing troupe taken in 1930. There they were lined up at the Orange Show — Tom and ten boxers, including Joey Carter, and right beside him the Aboriginal in the red silk dressing gown who hit him after the bell in Manningbrook in 1931.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Many of our readers will have a nasty shock over the Christmas period, to find this issue of *Overland* appearing so soon after issue no. 85. But we are trying to get our four issues out each year, come what may, which in this case includes postal strikes, factory shutdowns and postal bars on the transmission of bulk articles over the pre-Christmas period. So, if not a happy Christmas, a good New Year to youse all. The Floating Fund is down, mainly because of this issue treading on the heels of the last. But many thanks, all the same, for a total of 156 much-appreciated dollars. Incidentally, I think and hope our four issues this year (1981) have been the best four we've ever published in one year. I'd be interested to know what you, our readers, think.

$100 MC; $20 MB; $8 JL, JS, JL; $5 JG; $4 CW; $3 AH.

MICHAEL HAUSER

Born in the Fifties

Michael Hauser, 26, has worked in historical research, lives in Melbourne, and plays saxophone in a band named "Equal Local", which has recently recorded "Madagascar".

Rock'n roll, rhythm'n blues, punk, pop and new wave; whatever tag is attached, popular music generates an astounding influence on the youth of the western world.

An integral part of the mainstream popular culture for the past two and a half decades, music has provided a means of expression, a positive outlet for the post-war generations. This phenomenon has overshadowed the literary and performing arts largely through the efforts of the record corporations and promoters who have expanded their markets from regional to international status. Through developments in sound engineering and record production, technology has accelerated this growth — the world of rock'n roll is now firmly entrenched in "the computer age". Not surprisingly it constitutes the largest service industry in the world, together with its stablemate, telecommunications. In terms of sales it forms the fourth largest industry in the world behind the automobile, oil and computer-electrical industries. In Australia over the past decade, the manufacture of records has doubled from 10.5 million in 1969 to 20.2 million in 1979. Per head of population we buy more records than any other country in the world. Given this situation it is ironic that most Australian musicians (jazz and contemporary artists included) struggle to get by on performance earnings alone.

As Australia's industry develops a character of its own, one less dependent on British and American influence, the artists and technicians involved are growing in numbers and experience. In America, the U.K. and Europe, rock and jazz musicians alike have found acceptance as valid contributors to the cultural community. In Australia however, excepting the chosen few who receive considerable financial backing from commercial interests, the majority of artists are 'paying their dues' for too long a time.

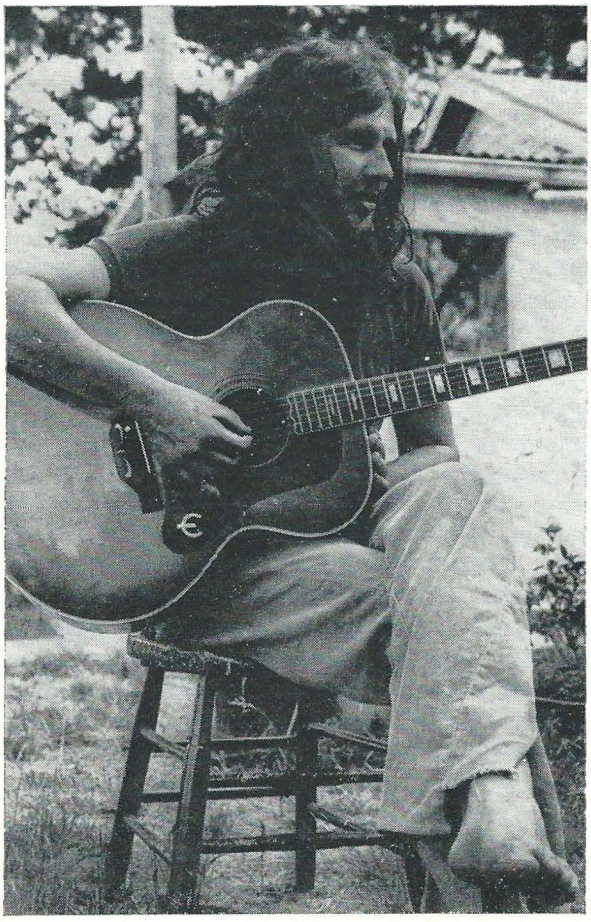
One case is the "Reuben Tice Memorial Band" or "Reuben Tice". Originating in the Eltham (Victoria) area, the band kicked on in one way or another from 1965 through to late 1979. Spanning a decade and a half of rock'n roll is an achievement in itself — there aren't too many Australian bands that have survived for ten, let alone fifteen years. "Survival" is the operative word here — keeping everything together musically, personally and financially.

Guitarist, singer, song-writer, Roger Davies has been an integral part of "Reuben Tice" from the beginning. In one sense Roger is the primary source of information on the band's history. However, he warned me that most people in the band over the years (there were dozens) held various opinions about the whole thing — conflict, change and a "rampant individualism" were the norm. Of Roger it has been said that "he [has] guided more than thirty would-be musicians through an apprenticeship which embraced rock'n roll, jazz, blues and theatre as well as extra-terrestrial tuition in the finer points of approaching life itself".

Fuelled on mother's home cooking and McWilliams banana cocktails, Roger and some of his high-school contemporaries formed a band

in Eltham in 1965. Initially the lads played trad-jazz and New Orleans standards, displaying more enthusiasm than finesse. Roger's bedroom became the band room and the process of "getting to know your instrument" began. Blues songs infiltrated the band's repertoire and Roger swapped banjo for guitar experimenting with the twelve-bar blues, an essential ingredient of rock'n roll. Their introduction to this style of music was a timely one, as the jazz scene in Melbourne was shortly swept aside by the onslaught of "Mersey Beat" and Beatlemania. The eruption of popular music saw jazz in Melbourne go underground. Bands such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals and the Who generated record sales of a previously unthought of high — the mass market had arrived, along with the reality of the 'packaged artist', fit for popular consumption.

In early 1967 Roger and his friends crossed over to amplified music — electric guitar, bass and drums. The music retained the legacy of the blues at the expense of trad jazz, and the band found a name, "The Reuben Tice Memorial Band". Reuben Tice was a fanatical sixty-eight year old inventor from California who was trying to perfect a machine which extracted the wrinkles out of prunes. One day police found his body in the workshop where his machine had exploded, killing him instantly. Around his body were the remains of his shattered machine and half a pound of still wrinkled prunes. Reuben Tice, tireless optimist, victim of the great American dream, was not to go unnoticed.



"Reuben Tice" began performing at local parties, usually playing for nothing and having a great time. Confidence was high and the future prospects regarding a professional career of some sort seemed promising. Earning a wage turned out to be difficult however — as far as commercial music interests were concerned, the band was a round peg in a square hole. Little commercial potential was seen in "Reuben Tice", its members being on the whole an uncomprising bunch of individuals, instead of the more desirable stylized band, preened for publicity and packaged for the market.

Roger felt that the idea of having a good time often clashed with the hope of 'making it':

> "It" of course was fame'n fortune or even fifty dollars a week sometimes. Never have so few so often tried so hard to clean up their act without effect . . . The combination of high spirits and mixed spirits led to certain compromises in our general approach to the formalities of presentation.

What to do about it:

> We even used to have band meetings (all B-grade bands have 'em) in order to decide policy. Should we wear cowboy hats? Skin-tight pants (my skin was already pretty tight)? Neat, casual? Nothing? Anything to attract attention?

Apart from the dilemma regarding image, the band experienced many difficulties in moving away from their established audiences in the hills into the thick of the Melbourne scene: "We were caught in a bind, too loud for the down to earth moondance set, too quiet for the Croxton Park, too bluesy for the new wave, too country for campuses and not country enough for Wandong!"

These two problems, management and market,

Roger Davies, leader and founder member of the Reuben Tice Memorial Band, 1965-1979.

have thwarted "Reuben Tice" and countless other bands in their attempts to find the happy medium: "playing our music, saying what we want to say, providing entertainment for a wage."

"Reuben Tice" grew up in the days of radicalism, when Vietnam, the bomb and the emergence of the hippie were raging issues. The protest song, long hair and psychedelic drugs (grass, L.S.D.) were all part of dissociating young people from the masters of war, law and order. All of these factors, political and personal, came loosely together under the banner of 'counter culture' and were expressed most directly through the medium of rock'n roll. In the Eltham region the emergence of alternatives in art, lifestyle and popular culture was very apparent, and "Reuben Tice" became directly involved — one doubts whether they could have gone in any other direction.

Success, recognition and financial security played little part in the ethics of the hippie: "Achieving isn't what it's all about. Do your own thing!" However in a band situation the pressure to succeed always lies dormant. Many "Reuben Tice" members along the way felt frustrated about not progressing in terms of recognition and income. The band generally had little success in attracting commercial recording interests or promotion of any substance. "As for the media and the management-promotion scene, their job is to categorize, to pigeon-hole a band and find an appropriate market. When the article is hard to package they get scared off."

Hence the reputation they earned as an underground band, playing original spirited music to a near cult-like following in an area which was to become one of Melbourne's foremost strongholds for the pioneers of alternative lifestyle.

Regarding the nature of their audiences, Roger poses the question, "How many hippies or 'alternate' people eat meat, smoke cigarettes and drive cars? These were our typical audiences, yeah, consumer oriented, carnivorous, but with a tinge of intoxicated anarchy which emerged on Friday and Saturday nights." Pressures from parents, wives, children, contemporaries and ones own secret desires contributed to the general feeling of discontent. "What do you say when an old acquaintance asks you, 'What are you doing now?' "Oh, um, er, I'm playing in a ten-year-old, B-grade, outer suburban rhythm'n blues band', or maybe 'I love loud rock'n roll and the world is stuffed!'."

There's no doubt that the international acceptance of rock'n roll has made music in general a more commercial commodity than in the past. Any company that produces a product — for the popular market and gets a positive response will tend to standardize its output, concentrating on what sells and discarding the rest. This standardization developed during the late sixties and early seventies at the expense of the music itself, creating a commercial mainstream which overshadows the less marketable bands and artists.

Whilst many bands like "Reuben Tice" have been denied the opportunity to gain exposure to a larger listening audience, others have succeeded through compromise by developing a 'crossover' style of music, playable on both AM and FM radio and commonly known as "M.O.R." (middle of the road). Many bands are caught in the 'Catch-22' predicament that controls the playlists of commercial radio: "If the record sells we'll play it, but we only play what sells." Others without recording contracts find it hard simply existing. High running expenses, investment in equipment and transport, leave little for the band members and road crew to share amongst themselves, especially after the promoter and/or manager takes his percentage. This situation sees many bands working on a treadmill, playing at the same venues for a meagre fee (or not uncommon loss) and battling against rising overheads and indifferent management. For better or for worse "Reuben Tice" managed to evade this position, hovering around the outskirts of the central scene in Melbourne, playing to their growing following in the hills where the competion and commercialism were less fierce.

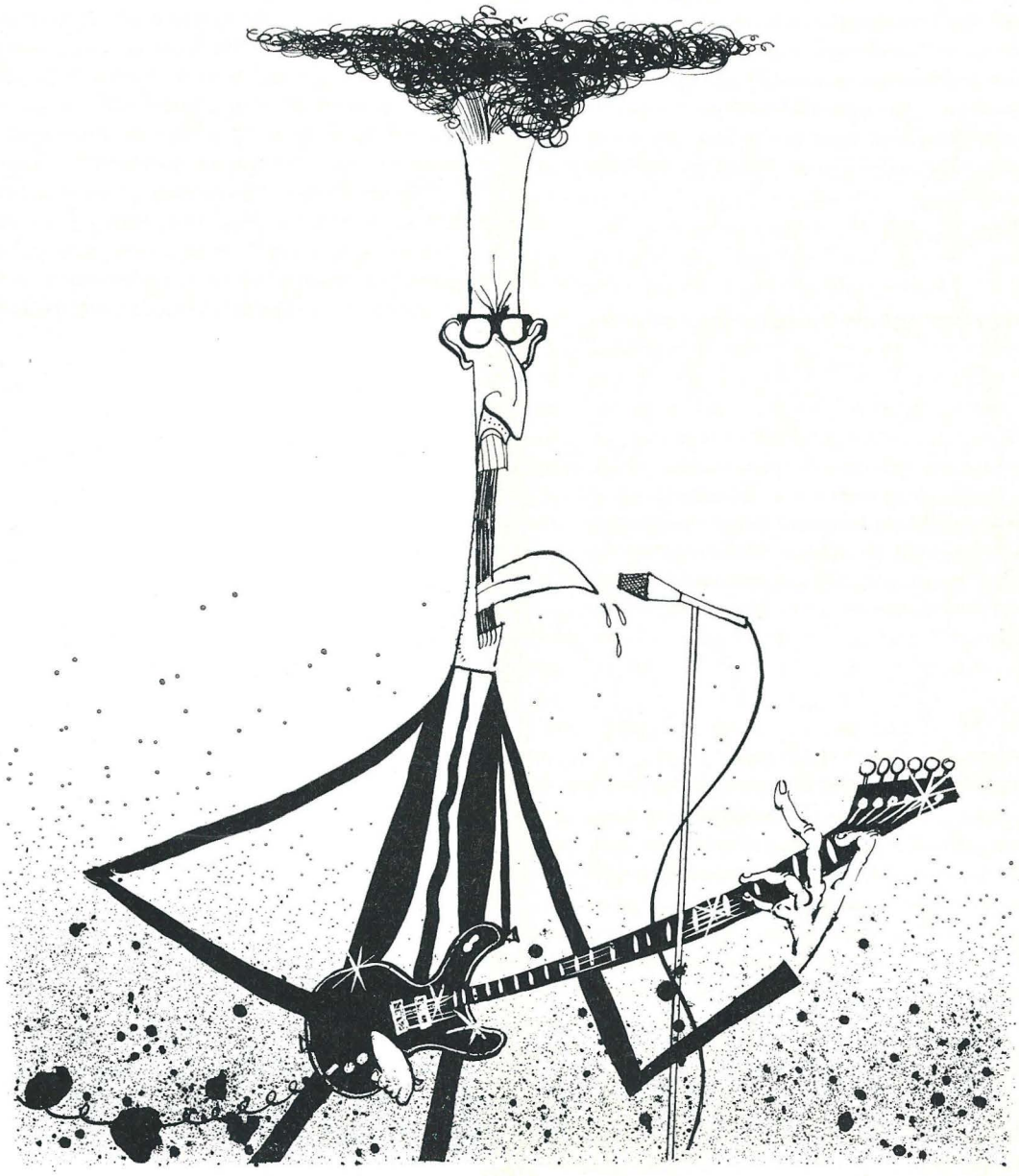
In late 1978 the band begun their final assault on the city, incorporating a promising singer by the name of Sharin Anderson. Roger sums up this last phase of "Reuben Tice's" lengthy career: "Technology was at last conquered. We had three road crew, all the trimmings and therefore no cash after expenses. At last we were a potentially competitive band."

The potential however was never realised. The singer and band parted ways due to personal and musical differences in mid-1979. In December 1979 "Reuben Tice" presented "The Last Super Show", a concert which traced the players and songs from the heady days of the mid-1960s up until the present. With over forty musicians (some of Melbourne's finest) providing eight hours' music for one thousand people, "Reuben Tice" went out in a style not unlike their name-

sake. The band left a legacy of non-compromise which touched on two issues yet to be resolved: minority culture versus mass culture, original expression versus commercial manipulation.

Although the music industry in Australia is maturing there is little room for bands such as "Reuben Tice". Recognition and financial reward are determined by commercial viability rather than by experience, originality and the artistic quality of the material: "Art for art's sake, money for God's sake."

Performances aside, only a small percentage of the music around us reaches the public via commercial radio and television. Although the recent development of FM radio is a step in the right direction, independent recording labels, sensible promotion and alternative venues are needed to cater for the diversity of material offered by bands and artists throughout the country. It is the performers and song-writers who provide not only the raw materials for Australia's music industry, but the primary means of expressing what is felt in the hearts and minds of young people today.



GLEN LEWIS

Angus Chucks a Browneye

Glen Lewis lectures in communication at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, near Sydney. His article "Violence, Militarism and the Australian Media" was recently published in the Australian Quarterly, and his film "Too S/M" was screened at a Sydney Super 8 film festival.

I didn't see the Melbourne AC/DC concert where fifty arrests were reported, but I was one of the more than twenty thousand people who crammed into the Sydney showground the week before to see their eagerly awaited home town show.

I'm not too sold on big concerts as I get claustrophobia, but this Back-In-Black tour was a historic occasion. It was a kind of Irish wake to honor the recent death of the band's lead singer, Bon Scott. The original Sydney concert had been set for Friday, 28 February, but was washed out, as was the replacement concert the following night. At $12.90 a seat everyone was naturally a little anxious, so when the band announced they'd stay in Sydney till the rain stopped that was great.

One story went that when many kids had vainly queued up on the wet Saturday night they'd got an impromptu invite to go backstage and have a beer with the band. For some of the fourteen-year olds that must have been a peak experience. It was a characteristic AC/DC gesture too. Generosity and maximum contact with their audience is Side Two of the band's public image. Side One is their nasty, dirty, evil, head-splitting rock'n roll music.

The only time I'd seen them before was years ago on TV. Vague memories of Angus Young, the lead guitarist, dressed up outrageously as a uniformed schoolboy in hot, short pants, prancing round the stage of "Countdown", violently masturbating his guitar while Molly Meldrum mumbled in the background. Those days of schoolboy innocence are gone. Now the band are a major international act who, along with the Little River Band, Air Supply, and Olivia Newton-John, are one of the few Australian acts who've made it really big in America. Coming in between the heavy metal bands and before punk, AC/DC retain a massively high voltage music level which produces some of the loudest, ugliest, and best rock left in an otherwise decadent music scene dominated by disco muzak, new wave experimentation, and punk pretentiousness.

They are also probably one of the finest performance bands left in the whole rock'n roll world. AC/DC are the great Oz dinosaurs of the cockrock tradition. Angus has foregrounded his already leading role in the group, and often the whole show stops to highlight his brilliant solos, which are a mix of music, ballet, theatre, mime, and sheer madness. If there is a real warlock left in the rock'n roll world it's probably Angus.

When he appeared on stage the crowd flipped out. He was dressed in an exotic, sexually ambiguous costume which retained a touch of the old schoolboy blues, but now looked more like a medieval cavalier's or clown's costume, all crowned with his mop of long unkempt hair which he whips himself with. Painfully thin and incredibly energetic, Angus is a mute star like Chaplin or Keaton. "Hi, hi, hi", he screamed out once to the crowd in a nervous high voice, but nothing more.

But to really appreciate this entrance it's necessary to backtrack to the start of the show. The security checks were the first thing. The

turnstiles were the initial clearance point, then a hundred yards on came a baggage check carried out by bruisers in virginally white T shirts. The aim here was to keep out drugs and booze, also any sound recording equipment, cameras, or other weapons. Some still smuggled stuff in, but mostly the huge teenage crowd was quite sober and got high just on the excitement and mass claustrophobia.

The grandstands were packed, and as you worked your way carefully towards the front the crowd thickened and got more excited and less friendly. We settled for a spot off to one side of the stage fairly close down. Centre front stage itself was the place for the most determined fans and the drunks, and was where the fights began.

More than anything else the atmosphere was like a huge football match. Most people were standing up and eager to get emotionally involved. During the warm-up groups a vicious routine of exchanges developed between the M.C. and the crowd, with the obnoxious 2SM deejay alternately whipping the crowd up, then bringing them down by abusing those fighting in the audience. It was commercial and calculatedly callous — the same kind of double-bind behaviorism used in manipulative TV commercials. The fights would stop for a time, some more red hot rock would be piped out to get things jumping again, then the DJ would provoke the crowd once more till another fight started.

This provocation-punishment strategy has come to be normal at many Australian rock concerts. I'd seen Jimmy and the Boys, a neo-Barry Humphries/Kiss group, whip the crowd up and then abuse them for fighting at a big summer concert at Sydney's Castle Hill in 1979. It's this emotional oscillation between excitement and danger which seems to be the main thrill many kinds come for. This kind of risk is an integral part of their own collective celebration of themselves and their youth culture, which otherwise is largely excluded by the older ceremonial occasions of Australian public life.

When the first really large pop concerts happened back in the 'sixties there was frequently an idealism about them, which culminated in the supposed festival of love and peace at Woodstock. Of course there was always an uglier side to it. There were several rapes at Woodstock, and the mass concerts, like the commercial music system they grew out of, were also business operations to make big money. They could and sometimes did turn nasty if the promoters weren't careful to follow the right crowd control tactics. This was what happened at Altamont in California at the Stones' fatal concert.

Still, it remains an awesome experience to be in a crowd of so many excited people. Kerry Packer's world series cricket lights brilliantly illuminated the crowd, and it was astonishing to see so many people together at night so clearly. What happens in a crowd of that size is a result of where you choose to go, who do you happen to end up next to, and how you behave. There was a fair amount of wariness and curiosity at first, then as the concert warmed up people got stoned on the performance and less aware of those around them. It was then, when the drunks, crazies, and toughs got going, that the nasty side of it all started to come out.

Typically, it's the girls in the audience who get lifted onto their boyfriends shoulders to see, and its the same girls who get hurt when the crowd grows restive and pushy. The guys get into fights, but it's more often the girls who are injured, either by falling from their chivalrous vantage points or as not necessarily innocent bystanders at the brawls.

This kind of crowd violence is an integral part of the show — not an unfortunate accidental by-product, as the promoters would claim. There is an implicit violence in both the promoters' management of the concert, as they basically treat their mass audience as profitable, dumb cattle, as well as in the blatant sexism of the band's lyrics and the narcissistic phallicism of their stage performance. AC/DC's songs and stage act are mostly about heterosexual violence. Their songs — like many Top 40 records — are macho variations on an obsessive theme of frustrated romantic love and a complementary sexual fear and hatred of the other partner. So when they get their audience to sing community chorus style — something I remember my parents' generation sometimes doing — the chorus line isn't a statement of love, or peace, or just plain fun, it's "She's Got the Jack" (clap), which is a vicious piece of sexual politics in its own right.

As well as fostering the illusion of rock'n roll as salvation, and viewing romantic love and sexual sado-masochism as good things, there is an implicit worship of technology in these kinds of large pop concerts. The act began with the spectacular descent from above of a giant silver bell, sending out a cavernous electronic boom. This was a moment of pure mad exhibitionism

that the crowd loved. This was Hell's Bell, the title of one of their tracks on the new Back-in-Black LP, and a salute to the fate of all good rock'n roll singers.

Apart from the usual amount of electronic gadgetry on the stage itself, the speaker banks off-stage on either side were at least a hundred feet high. They looked like space modules which had landed specially for the night. This subliminal worship of technology at pop concerts is probably a subconscious recognition of the dominance of the death-oriented, military-scientific complexes in industrial culture, and can be seen as the demonic counterpart to the youth culture's mystical faith in rock'n roll as salvation.

Once the music starts though these kinds of comment become absurd. Angus's blatantly homoerotic performance was a regularly interrupted series of long, almost oriental, nerve-wrenching guitar solos, climaxed by tortured sonic booms. The musical message was the same as that of 2SM's crowd control tactics — provoke, punish, never completely satisfy. Finally, the high point came when Angus chucked his browneye. It was about two-thirds of the way through. One moment he was near centre stage, close to the end of another tortured, deafening solo; next he was stripping like a seasoned drag star. He took it all off then turned his naked bum on the audience, bent over, and threw a V sign at the crowd — that's chucking a browneye, mum.

And there was more. Disappearing briefly, he re-emerged down in the audience at the side of the stage. This time with his pants on, sitting on the new lead singer's shoulders and still crazily playing his guitar via a remote control pickup. He charged recklessly through the most packed, violent part of the crowd down front, who gave way like the Red Sea for Charlton Heston's Moses. That kind of contact with an audience is exceptional in rock today.

What I've been suggesting is that the regulation of pop concerts today has become a basic part of cultural politics in industrial societies. It is a means for both releasing and reinforcing the emotional energies involved in the state's politicization of everyday life. As meaningful public communication decreases, the private sphere of everyday life becomes increasingly regulated and controlled.

Concerts this big can be promoted only by large media groups, either record producers, radio stations, or TV companies. In AC/DC's Sydney concert the promoters were 2SM, one of the largest and most culturally visible AM broadcasting groups in Sydney, and sister station to 3XY in Melbourne. The station aims at a teenage-young adult market and recently ran their own Rock'n Roll Eistedfodd, where schools were encouraged to have their students present mimed versions of current 2SM top 40 material. This strategy is indicative of the dominant-subordinate relation which exists between the media and education systems in Australia today.

Rebellion against school and authority is one of the perennial themes of post-war pop, starting with Chuck Berry's classic "School Days", and most recently updated by the Pink Floyd hit "Brick in the Wall". There is a healthy cynicism about these songs that tell the kids that schoolteachers and school are bad news, and rock'n roll is good news. That's a mystical proposition, but an appealing one. Once young people got excited about God and salvation, now salvation is available only on rock'n roll records.

These songs reach their audience through a broadcasting system which is as dominated by official culture as the education system is, but it stresses popular instead of high culture and necessarily is more impersonal. It is also much more glamorous. The average DJ develops a hyped-up media persona that the average teacher can't compete with, and often thinks it beneath their dignity to do so anyway. That is, the media educators are the impersonal at-a-distance role models young people prefer to identify with, while the commercial, competitive, anti-intellectual, and sexist values the media gurus stand for are transmitted far more effectively than the curriculum is in schools. One-way communication is most efficient if your main aim is propaganda or persuasion.

So the rebellion and violence that modern pop music plays on is rarely stated in political terms as most teenagers see politics as just one more repressive system like school and work. Punk, with its explicit statements about anarchism and anti-royalism, was the exception here. Consequently the potential for genuine political violence (even as a riot: "Who wants to march/ When you can riot?," is the lyric of one Sydney punk band) is funnelled off into an obsessive preoccupation with private relationships, mostly sexual ones, and it is this tension which is played on by groups like AC/DC.

Rock bands' expression of their audience's potential for group violence is not communicated to a large crowd, however, except under conditions that the promoters and the authorities have

complete control over. When pop crowds turn really nasty the police intervene. This was what happened at the 1979 New Year's Eve 2SM Opera House concert, when the crowd justifiably became violent after being packed in like sardines and subjected to the insults of pseudo-stars like Jon English and the smarmy patronage of the then Lord Mayor, Nelson Meers. It happened also in Brisbane in the late 'seventies, where punk was fostering a radical political subculture until the police clamped down. Recently there's been a move to completely ban large outdoor concerts — supposedly the AC/DC show was the last one at the showgrounds — and smaller places are also harassed if they become too popular. Pubs and clubs like the Grand and the Stage Door in Sydney were closed down for this reason by the police, and their audiences have to go somewhere more commercially conventional.

What is at issue here is corporate control over the definitions and uses of public space. Urban space is a commodity, either for leisure-time activities or real estate speculation. Just as the streets of Paris were re-built in the nineteenth century to preclude barriers being erected across them in an insurrection, the Australian urban terrain today is constructed in such a way as to ensure the maintenance of public order. Seen in this light, commercial public culture in the West today often comes close to a form of officially sanctioned terrorism. At concerts like AC/DC's the crowd is put into a situation where if anyone gets hurt it's going to be them. Though there is a romantic mystique about being a male cockrock star that encourages self-destruction, it probably won't be the band itself or the concert promoters who are injured. It'll more likely be the teenagers from the suburbs — the F.J. Holden crowd — who'll get hurt. And the worst violence is done psychologically. Most of the crowd don't get directly involved in the fights, but all of them pick up on the bad feelings, many enjoy it, and come subsequently to associate emotional satisfaction with sexual provocation, punishment and violence.

This manipulation isn't the fault of rock music itself, which as a social performance can transcend the banal content of most rock lyrics and music. When AC/DC sing "Rock'n roll ain't noise pollution", the audience gets off because they agree: state regulation and control they don't like, music and fun they do. What makes rock politically backward isn't so much the music, but the anti-social commercial structures rock music is contained in by media monopolies.

Pop concerts should belong to the people. There should be more parts of public space opened up for sheer enjoyment, which shouldn't be sold out to the highest media bidder. There are alternative ways of organising carnivals, such as the promising Festival of Sydney, but until that space is greatly enlarged big pop concerts will often continue to damage their audience's sense of their own personal worth. This way the public image of AC/DC, instead of standing for a subversive model for bisexuality and liberation — as the term AC/DC first meant — is co-opted into more chauvinist cockrock and more conservative commercialism.

Still, AC/DC's brand of Ozrock has added a new sheen to the ageing features of Big Daddy rock'n roll, and positively influenced some of the best young bands around. At the recent "Countdown" rock awards, Cold Chisel smashed up the show and mocked compere Molly Meldrum after collecting all the awards. Social protest, in other words, still lives in Australian rock.

JONATHAN DAWSON

What Jack Deserves

Clement Greenberg wishes to announce the rival of the museum of:
a Modern Pantheon. (Conclusions as to artistic worth quickly arrived at.)
Jack knows that it's 1980. And that if he gets the nod from, let's say the Age, or the Australian, art critics that is, well, a bit like money in the bank.
Noeleen has noticed that several painters have stopped painting. It seems to have a sort of chronology: that is, right after the damning critics. Presumably they are teaching, somewhere. But they can't walk down New Kings Road any more and be that safest of Australians, the one whose accent no longer matters. Which brought Noeleen to the matter of Greenbergs, of whom there aren't many.
Why not *Gold*berg?
Gold is on the up and up, like paintings: if they get the stamp. If they don't, then,
Noeleen is pregnant. Luckily she has heard someone, possibly Manning Clark, talking about myths on the Broadband program on radio.
She too has a *natural* sort of voice, why not have a shot at that, a first class History degree has got to be worth more than the ability to read Milton pamphlets
and practising breathing.
Someone has to buy the paint. Jack, right now, isn't too much into picking up the odd art student. But it was a big mistake to have that exhibition in Hobart. Patrick McCaughey was away talking to Clem at the time, not that he's into provincial visits, that's three sales at an average of two fifty bucks or so. Less commission.
Jack is down the back. In the garage. Sort of loft. The canvases and all the rest (empty tubes, all colors) are piling up.
I saw this guy Miller, used to do revues, anyway he was talking about the human body. Now, I mean, I'm frightened of mine. So the series is about dissection. I'm not using brushes, but a knife.
Blow on the fingers to stay warm. The gas fire has died and the baby isn't liking, it, shifting around, keeping warm.
And in New York Patrick is talking to Clem.
Noeleen recalls a seminar: talking about workers in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Walter . . . or? Anyway. One can use a Polaroid and possess the past, the pose. Bit trite to say that photography made realism obsolete says Jack. Working on in what we'll call Hyper-realism.
Which needs a lot of paint. And a bit of fine work. Jack has abandoned the knife. Crude. The critic will hurt him a bit if the surface is crude. Easier to make metaphors about closely-textured surfaces. If you're a critic.
Paddy calls around. He's teaching now. Once he and Noeleen tried a few things that Jack didn't: a special sort of relationship. It hurt Paddy's lower back a bit.
See, the critics are few, squire. Very few. But they're kind of like sanctified accountants. They tick up things on their calculators, metaphors (like dynamic use of space), metonyms (like the paint is the picture), and it gets set in type. If they're smart they edit a book or two. The pictures they write about can't fight back.
Noeleen is hurting. Four months. If Jack doesn't sell she'll have it (Is *Persia* a bit dangerous as a name?)

JACK'S TIME: THE NARRATIVE.
Begins with Noeleen. Tough about the name. Persia would have been good. Or Jade. If you're serious (at twenty-three). But Noeleen was special, and besides, Noel sounds fine, anytime. Came down to Hobart with some yachtie who had read a book. Saw the pictures and told me

I was like Rousseau. Bugs me that I know he was a public servant and if he was around now, he'd be on the Arts Council, not painting lions.
I paint, but everyone else is full of . . . words. Noeleen loves my paint-touched jeans, Paddy wants to tell me about the role of the bourgeois entrepreneur intervening in the mode of production of the artist.
Seems simpler: if they rubbish me, I'm done. I chat up the gallery owners, through clouds of sherry and they like what they see, not what they hear because they don't hear it. They won't hear it until the crits appear.
GOLD UP TWENTY-THREE DOLLARS AN OUNCE.
And a Manet sells for a quarter of a million.
There was this chick in Hobart:

Paint thick with living,
Like sugared photos of my loves.

Well, O.K. if it turned her on,
It had, but the words, not the painter.
Is that what happens to critics? Words more important than the subject. Seems reasonable. Paddy puts it another way.
PADDY'S NUMBER is:
Who the fuck is Gold/Greenberg anyway? Or any other stockbroker with a way with words? Writers can publish before the critical moment. People are afraid of pictures. When it comes to the crunch a picture is its value in the market/ Like Pro Hart. At least he chose the desert and cons like a pro.
HOBART INTERLUDE.

The surface comes alive
Breathes
and, like a poem
moves from its surface,

ALLOWING THE CRITIC TO ENTER
(Extract the Age, 21.3.81)
In failing to learn the lessons so well learnt by the post-impressionists, Miller fails to write firmly for the eighties. His work, even granting it coherence, seems to:
Worry too much about whether it will sell, because if it doesn't,
Noeleen will not feel too well tonight, in fact Paddy is hanging in a bit too long, out the back of the house now, sniffing the paintings, liking them probably, but what the hell does that matter against the pain.
THE AUSTRALIAN. HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT:

. . . and spent some time with Greenberg discussing

ONE OF JACK'S PAINTINGS
is, since it is the hyper realistic sort, very clearly of some person in a garage, working on a car. Jack calls it MECHANIC, which he didn't need to: it clearly mirrors the subject, the brushwork is invisible, he's changed, certainly.

DEAR JACK,
I'm writing to remind you that the Gallery is pretty much booked out, and not just for a couple of years. If you feel you can't
Worrying so much about Noeleen, who is also worrying, and hurting.
Paddy is getting insistent now.
Noel. You don't have to have this kid. You and I . . .
I mean, it never really ended did it?
But it has, or almost. Noeleen is feeling bad. It comes in waves now

YOUNG DOCTORS 7.00 o'clock. Channel 9 (excerpt)
I'm sorry Mrs er . . . Miller.
Greenberg.
Mrs Green berg. The baby has . . . gone. We'd like you to
Stay with me tonight. It won't get better
But it might.
Jack loves her. And it'll be worth a second try. A different position for the next one. Like moving to hyper-realism. They all seem to like that. The careful brushwork: the love.
Maybe the right critic will get back from sabbatical at the right time.
Meanwhile, till she comes home, the paint.

JUDAH WATEN

Seventy Years

On 29 July 1981 a large gathering in Melbourne paid tribute to Judah Waten on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. The evening was convened by Geoffrey Blainey, to whom Judah Waten paid tribute for his work on behalf of writers on the Literature Board and the Australia Council. Extracts from Judah Waten's speech in this occasion follow.

Balzac is supposed to have said to Stendhal, who was complaining that he wasn't read and that he was without friends: "No, that's not right, Stendhal — you have me among your readers and friends"; he then proceeded to name four others, very distinguished people. "That's enough", Balzac said, "think of it, five genuine friends and admirers". But I am better off. I can count more than five friends, if not admirers, which is very flattering and almost makes me complacent.

It is over fifty years since I first began to write stories and novels. I was about seventeen and I was also very busy in the Communist Party and in the unemployed movement. I was reminded of those days when I received on Friday a birthday present from a good friend of mine, the novelist Elizabeth Harrower. The present was a red handkerchief and it was an allusion to something that happened in Perth in April 1928. I will read a cutting from the Melbourne Herald on 2 April 1928 which Dorothy Fitzpatrick, Brian Fitzpatrick's widow, sent me. Headed RED HANDKERCHIEFS IN COURT: COMMUNIST PAMPHLETS BANNED, it reads:

> Judah Waten, a young curly-headed Russian, and Ernest Smith also a youth, appeared in the City Court today on a charge of having distributed Communistic pamphlets during the Anzac Day celebrations yesterday.
>
> They were remanded for seven days, bail of £10 being allowed.
>
> Red handkerchiefs were aggressively displayed in the breast pockets of sympathisers of Waten and Smith.
>
> Isabella Peach, a woman about 40 years old, was accepted as bail for the youths.
>
> The pamphlets, which were printed in impassioned language, were headed "Lest We Forget," and were addressed. "To all workers, soldiers and sailors, ex-soldiers and would-be soldiers."

I will add that Ernest Smith and myself were defended by the late Colonel Crouch, then President of the ALP, convert to pacifism, art-lover; and that both what Ernie and I got the maximum, £10 in default I'm not quite sure what, it might been a month. We were spared durance vile, as the nice old colonel paid our fines.

Another example of how busy I must have been in the 1920s will be seen in the peremptory letter addressed to Arthur Calwell in 1927, writing on behalf of the Melbourne Group of the Communist Party. I shouldn't have known of the existence of this letter but for Mr Calwell sending me a copy of it in March 1973:

Communist Party of Australia
Melbourne Group
217 Russell St.,
City
May 16th, 1927

A. Calwell
Metropolitan A.L.P.
Dear comrade,

I have been instructed by my party to invite you to lecture in our hall 217 Russell st., on the 26th of May. We suggest that you lecture

on the following subject: Can a Labour government abolish the capitalist system.

Your fraternally,
Judah L. Waten

In his letter Arthur Calwell said:

> I don't think I ever replied to your letter because your question was a well-plotted one. You knew as well as I did when you typed me your letter on behalf of the Communist Party, that no Labor Government can abolish the capitalist system; the present middle-class government led by Whitlam and the A.C.T.U. led by Hawke, aim at humanising Capitalism and, therefore, making it more acceptable to the working classes.
>
> The only way to abolish Capitalism is by making revolutionary changes in our society, but I believe in revolution by evolution, and this is through the ballot box.
>
> In our affluent, permissive, acquisitive, bourgeois society, this now seems to me to be impossible.

Somehow I found the time to write sketches, articles and a novel, my first which I called *Hunger,* about the unemployed. And I also developed a passion for history, which was quite common among young people in the left ranks in the 1920s.

At that time there were plenty of people around who had known some of the participants in Eureka like Monty Miller, later an IWW leader, who had heard Henry Parkes, who had attended the first meetings of the Labor party, people who were friends of Tom Mann and Henry Holland, then still alive, who had taken part in the shearer's strike, had been active anti-conscriptionists, members of the IWW who had been in prison.

I knew a chemist of French origin whose father had been a Communard exiled to New Caledonia, and several old socialists who had spoken to Frederick Engels and William Morris. In Richmond I met the grandson of a convict, a leading member of the ALP; and I talked with Sir Isaac Isaacs about the Jews who had come to Australia in the 1850s and the 1860s. Isaacs himself was born in 1855. These people could piece together the whole of Australia's history, hardly more than 140 years. We young radicals used to argue about the exact location of the Melbourne branch of the First International. For us in a sense history was past politics and politics present history, as the conservative historian Seeley has said.

In 1928 I went to my first literary meeting. Bernard O'Dowd was in the chair, Marie Pitt the poet was still very active, and there were a number of writers who had known Lawson, Brennan, Price Warung and many others of an even earlier period. There was some organization of Australian writers even in Charles Harpur's time.

In the late 1920s I became interested in painting, not as a practitioner but as a camp follower, and I used to meet regularly with young painters who introduced me to older ones like Max Meldrum, something of a seer to some of them. In 1931 I went off to England with my novel *Hunger* in search of publication and fame, but that was not to be. I learnt, however, a great deal about literary matters, taking part in a left-wing writers' group of which C. Day Lewis was the presiding genius, then considered a brilliant Marxist theorist. Decades later he was to become the poet laureate.

When I returned home to Australia I gradually concluded that my failure as a writer was not only due to inexperience but because I had been an onlooker. I began to write stories again in the 1940s, partly as a result of meeting up again with Pinchas Goldhar, the Yiddish writer, and also because of Vance Palmer. After several false starts I finally decided on a new course. I would write about people I knew, real people as it were, not changing them into other people. You had to give them the parents who had made them, and you could not make them do anything they would not do. Invention was the finest thing, as Hemingway said, but you must not invent anything that would not actually happen. Recreate, rearrange life, but do not fake it. Bashevis Singer says that the real writer has an address, and always returns to it.

These new conclusions led me to write about my parents and their friends and my own associates and myself, the migrant world that I had grown up in, from 1914, when we arrived in Australia, onwards. In doing this I brought into my work a Yiddish and Russian influence which flowed naturally from the subject itself. If I have done anything I have brought this new note into Australian literature.

In the 1950s the cold war brought many problems to writers like myself. There was the attack on me during a general onslaught on the Literary Fund, then chaired by Vance Palmer. I had received a fellowship from the Literary Fund, and that was one of the pretexts for the attacks made by Wentworth and Keon and other cold war worthies of the day. I felt very sorry

for such writers as Vance Palmer, Kylie Tennant and Marjorie Barnard, who somehow or other were falsely implicated in an alleged sinister plot. I can't say I felt very happy about my own situation but I was used to that sort of thing, having been taught that if you were frightened of the wolves you had to keep out of the forest. Perhaps what hurt more than anything else was that sometimes my stories and novels were assailed by critics who were inspired by largely political considerations. However we did have many very good friends, such as Inglis Moore, A. D. Hope and Arthur Phillips, who certainly did not agree with my politics, but remained objective in their judgements. On the whole we writers assailed in the cold war days not only survived, but perhaps even gained from those experiences.

In our family, on both sides, there was something of a musical tradition. My grandfather, according to my father, pulled himself out of his deathbed to see a new production of "Aida" at the Odessa Opera House. That absorption with music, for all kinds of good and bad reasons, was not unusual in Odessa, as Isaac Babel shows in one of his great stories, "The Awakening." But as far as literature was concerned my mother perhaps played the most crucial part. I shall only mention that she used to say, when speaking of her golden past, that she had once seen Chekhov entering a hotel in Odessa. Writers were important people to her, and she certainly conveyed that idea to me. Every potential young writer needs a mother who is an enthusiast for literature. When you come to think of it, so does everyone.

After fifty years as a writer and a politically involved person I have no feeling of disillusion. I believe that the ideas I have believed in, Marxism, Communism, in less than a century have brought humanity a measure of good exceeding that which capitalism can claim to have brought in five centuries, at an incomparably smaller cost in crime and suffering. And as for the future, literature and art will never be a thing of the past. There is no machine, no kind of film, that can do what a Shakespeare, a Tolstoy, a Flaubert, a Dickens, or a Lawson did. There is no camera that can rival a Rembrandt.

IDENTIFICATIONS

I

Granite Outcrop

Here break your climb and spell your wind
on this great granite outcrop from the hill.
Lie down on it and let your senses fill
with acid magma cooled by intellect.

Let the sharp roughness penetrate your skin;
suffer the crystals forming in your flesh,
the felspar, mica and the quartz enmesh.
Lie here and listen as the planets spin.

Pulse with the passing of the earth's long night,
with earlier mountain heaped upon your back
and sense it lighten as the storms attack,
till aeons pass and suddenly there's light.

Stretched out in rain and sun you'll weather too,
a warming-place for fox and kangaroo.

II

Apple Box

Landscape and inscape intersect
at this loved tree beside my boundary gate.
Here I can dream my skin into its bark,
a rough and scaly hide, feel the effect
of a great leafy body which must wait
here in both storm and stillness like an ark

or island in the ocean air,
a roost for birds on every limb and fork
while sap through patient roots flows silently.
Then I breathe in as well this life I bear,
possum and phalanger, magpie and hawk;
grub, ant and spider become part of me.

I dream, a tree standing in time.
The Dreaming's all about me; shadow men
gather. *Mapooram* sigh my rubbing boughs.
The gentle possum-hunters dare not climb,
fearing the nymph in me may rise again
and wake a magic which they judge to drowse.

III

Road

Along this tawny road above the river,
its wheels muscling round, exploding gravel,
a great car's rolling with its faceless driver,
a secret sharer of the ways we travel.

We watch and listen as the motor whines,
feeling the yellow camber of our backs
and the mind stretches, following the veins,
the arteries and the capillary tracks

across the continent from heart to heart.
The road becomes the distance in ourselves,
a streamer clinging to a rocky height,
the question of a corner that resolves

itself in yet another bend of doubt,
lascivious, fingering the verge of creeks,
following serpent reasons in and out
but never finding the elusive crux.

And yet it is not only distances
we carry in us from the road's buff hide
but intimate and shivering nuances
as insects fall and rotting timbers slide.

And sometimes lying there under the night,
wet by a passing shower, we see emerge
from milky cloud, a blown moon in full flight,
then suddenly the trees on either edge,

stringy, and scribbly and apple box
burn with the voltage of a million lives
as though the stars had flown to them in flocks
singing and sighing, glittering in the leaves.

When we are road we are continuous,
turning back on ourselves, a Moebius band,
a paradox, subtle and sinuous,
a state we feel but cannot understand.

Crossing the desert definition falls,
for at a point parallel edges meet;
perspective creates space with unseen walls,
a vision which our inward miles repeat.

But as the mind ebbs out along each track,
Death follows blindly half a thought away,
abstracted, leaves a wombat on its back,
its skittle legs pushed still against the sky.

A wallaby, her joey, kangaroo,
snakes and lizards, insects of every kind,
his wings blown inside out, a cockatoo,
are scattered with an absent-handed mind.

On the road's back the carcases must lie.
We feel the protean teeth of earth begin,
beneath the eternal, everchanging sky,
to build new, seething energy within.

Our own destruction too, we intimate
in pyres of buckled, oxidising tin,
as negligent and as precipate;
we feel it in the tightening of our skin.

IV

Waterhole

The intersection of the inner eye
and the plain magic of the body's sight
comes at this waterhole whose skins reflect
rockface and stringybark and changing sky,
blackberry and wallaby and ducks in flight,
a surface leaves and fish and flies have flecked.

And on the mirror-surface of the mind
slowflowing all are given back
until we dive into the grey-green deeps,
shuck off the carcases of human kind.
There we become the water, drifting slack,
and feel the fish swim through us till he leaps.

In us diatoms and amoebae swarm and grow,
and from this moon-pulled womb our forces flow.

FRANK KELLAWAY

HARVEST

I

1.
This bush rose
hungers & thirsts
upon rock & rockcrumb
& crumbshaving,

swelling its knuckles

fingering open
cool rifts
under the stone's
loose skin.

2.
The fig tree commands
with a thousand hands:
sit down.
Wind gives
the nudge
& a snatch of hibiscus:

sit down!

Afternoon:
the space between
beginning & end

the space
to stir the earth
& drink it sweet.

3.
On this stage
sweat sours
the harvest: tickling
roots, teasing espaliered fruit.

4.
The hand feels the air
for moisture
correspondence
with eye & mind.

This oily flesh
is wrapped around
bone, bone around marrow
& marrow around jel.

5.
Last night
we jiggled our buttocks
over reed & brass

& we slept
with hunger & thirst.

6.
Last night
the body explained
to itself
how to lie
one strand to the untwining
at a time.

7.
& last night
I learnt
the grape clamped
between teeth
& tickled
with the tonguetip
could eventually
smile.

II
1.
Sweat sours
the harvest; sleep
keeps it sweet.

2.
The river's so suasive
with its rippled mouth
crooning
(sit down)
draws you near
just to hear it
(sit)
articulates
shards of your own
abrasions
in its flickering eye.

The eye
draws you
down
just to feel it:

put one finger
inside its lips
to touch stone.

3.
The stone grips fingertips;
the hand feels the air;
last night
the body explained:

the child in my bones still
groans for a mate,
the old man in my hair
leans into the wind alone.

4.
We sag in our bed
& each to the other : turns
& returns.

5.
Whichever side of dawn
I rise upon
I enjoy the stagger,
the snap of gum-twig
& fumble with matches.

The heat that's been
cored out of cold
breathes my breath.

The fire takes to a log
with its licking.

6.
You return

to fill me with your dreams
of creature night

to pin me with your arms
of laughter

to stare into this space
over your cup & plate.

7.
The old man in me casts his line;
keeps an eye on the cork
& a finger on the line;
his mind
is joined with the worm.

The child collects stones,
makes a dam
for the old man
to catch fish.

TERRY HARRINGTON

CONVERT

I may be a bit
of a Jew, she said
reading *Sylvia Plath.*

Changed her name to Ruth
grew her dark hair long
encouraged the touch

of melancholy
in her large brown eyes.
Started wandering

around parties and
refusing food, now
that she ate kosher

and was seen standing
alien among those
sure they were Aryan.

Sold her fur coat, they
say, saving for her
day of Exodus.

AUDREY LONGBOTTOM

LAMENT

I asked for
Nothing

You gave me
All

You had
No right

BRUCE WILLIAMS

THE HOUSE FROM THE ROAD

You can go further. Look, a door that opens on
a parlor. Go in and close it softly, softly. Three
windows stand before you like women clad in floor-
length dressing gowns. It's here you wait, though
no-one's said you must. This room may once have been
a salon. Embroidered roses bloom on chairs like stains
from some ancestral accident. It is forbidden to sit.
The light that falls in white sheets through the
windows is very like daylight. This is not the house
you saw from the road. You want to be a child of
four again, and far away from here. Once this was
possible. Now shoes are boc boc'ing down the hall.
If the door should open, all you know will change,
though imperceptibly.

II

So there at last the bridge, so small, so unremarkable.
We crossed, and let the treelight lead us, on a path
that wove uphill, but slowly, like a summer conver-
sation, until the town became a lake of foliage.
The gate, I recollect, was unattended. Behind it — who
could have foreseen how vivid were those gardens;
white furniture beneath a cedar, flower ranks that
shivered saffron, cinnabar, magenta, like a crowd in
holiday costume, beside the whitewashed walls; streamlets
ran like a nervous system, swelling into eye-green pools
shot with tiny fish that poised like gemstones. No,
this was not the house we'd seen from the road. Rather
it was like an image growing for so long and so quietly
at the mind's centre that our ambience had become it,
imperceptibly, now making us its centre. To amble there,
and with you, was as though to be watchful for the
first time. We knew a door must soon confront us,
perhaps fore-sensed the subtle trouble interiors would
bring. Later, much later, I was to leave that place,
without you, and with almost no regrets.

ALAN GOULD

AT THE PARTY

I was merrymaking
with Muscadet
I was very merry
with Muscadet,
as merry as a Muscovy duck,
when a stuttering woman
stood up beside me
and said:
Would you like a ff
ff ff ff ff
uck?

Now
I know sex
was the
great producer
of the whole goddam show
but I thought of my ailments
(my old man's ailments)
and I answered her
(briefly)
No!
(I didn't say *Let's go!)*

But the funny thing is
(I'm as square as a
toadstool
and thick as the Seven Dwarfs)
that her kind invitation
bounces in my memory
among the
mesomorphs

and in her kinda
jerky delivery
explosive lika
passionate kiss
I heard a reminder
of the two-way rhythm
ff ff ff ff
(it goes a bit like this)
that I felt bound, as an elderly gentleman,
to mm mm mm mm miss!

GAVIN EWART

THINGS THAT MATTER
You're wearing
trendy trousers
and the things
that no longer matter

are
the shape of your bum
whether it looks too fat
are you happy or sad

we get
the business of children done
uneasily easy
awkwardly divert to the garden

so that
I won't notice
and
you won't notice.

LILY BRETT

RELATIVES

They tell you in Townsville that if Castle Hill were
a few metres higher, it would be a mountain: but I
think I'd still fail to be awed. Bartle Frere was different
though: we flew past at five hundred metres with cloud
at about a thousand, and Bartle Frere just sort of went up
into the cloud like it was Jack's beanstalk. Mt. Archer
I've walked up, driven up, and seen in cloud, sun,
moonlight, fog, smoke, rain, and every light there is.
I'd come to think a mountain was nothing much: but
passing the base of Bartle Frere that went on up into cloud
was like Mt. Archer used to be when I was a ten-year-old
on holidays from flat scrub country. I'll bet if I went
and lived twenty years in Innisfail, and got to think
Bartle Frere was nothing much, then travelled a bit,
I'd meet another mountain that would just go up and
up and take me back to a gaping kid. That's the trouble
with the world: it just goes on for bloody ever. A bloke
should stay at home, give himself a chance to feel
important. I'll bet those Treasury officials who think
that a few hundred thousand unemployed are good
for the country never get out of Canberra, put blinds
on their windows so they can't see Black Mountain, even.

R. G. HAY

THE STRING

the evening awake to life's latest undoing
(a transistor
sizzling on a deskful of abandoned notes)
transcribes all its woes of fidelity: a sylph
spiralling out of a thousandth chance sonnet

in another kingdom, a poet refills his quills
with saloon bars & guitars & sago-skirt tropica-
lities & drums & golden island nymphs snared
in a winged mercedes benz. edenic conversations
there is much clapping & coconut-juice drinking

suddenly, the clashing cymbals
a faustian symphony invites
dusk
to a freudian beheading

the positive stroll reaches a bleak hut
sweating, fatigued, & humming a certain
recollection; an harmony ventured astray perhaps
or the driftwood seen tossed ashore, or the gulls
embracing the gale. all attire blown loose

the wedding song
sniffs after a vase of frangipanis
conscious of the string about the waist

RUSSELL SOABA

ON THE DAY LUNA PARK CLOSED DOWN

On the day Luna Park closed down
I slipped off a chair
and my whole family roared hysterically.
On the day Luna Park closed down
I was standing at the entrance
it was my 21st birthday
and I could feel Luna Park authorities
erecting small barriers beneath me
— to keep the sight-seers out.
On the day Luna Park closed down
the world stopped to take fun seriously.

On the day Luna Park closed down
10,000 kids burnt on the ghost train
and herds of wild elephants stampeded
across Sydney's overcast skies.
On the day Luna Park closed down
it was a dollar a ride
on the ghost train
and no ferries arrived at the fun pier.
On the day Luna Park closed down
men started dismantling the fragile rides
police combed the wreckage of the ghost train
as crowds gathered outside
blowing big balloons of gum
a twenty one gun salute to fun.

ALAN JEFFERIES

THE TURTLE EGG COMPLEX

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

JOHN BLIGHT

GONE TOMORROW

She talks like a medium,
through her lips, each
of her husbands speak
her parents sometimes forbid.
And here today
in the skin deep winter sun
she has brought out her anxiety children,
conceived in rooms
where the beds of the departed
lay neat and ready as they always did,
born on the long, unused table
in the darkened dining room,
she has brought them out
for me to hear
and listening
they grow less
fade
and she is herself again
a lonely old woman with
a cheerful acceptance of death
who can say with a laugh,
"I thought
that I might die last night, so
I put a clean night gown on".
Do a few steps on the footpath
like a dancer dimly remembering
then say with a rueful smile:
"But I spilt coffee on it
in the night, a waste of time
because
here I am!"

Deaths men are here
they among us,
they speak for death
is silent.
How to protect your family, they say . . .
. . . An acceptable number of casualties . . .
. . . What to do after the blast.
The sirens sing.

Hooked on knuckle-bone hands
they extend
a gown of fire,
"Try it on," they say, "Try it on."

"Oh, it's you".

MAURICE STRANDGARD

THE LAST BUTCHY MEN

There's five naked
out there
oh! plenty of naked:
nakedy tjurta
puutjingka
(in the bush) —

footawalk footawalk
out there
long way!
coming naked
sitting naked
strong naked,
anyway,
in the bush.
maybe ten naked:

wati, minyma, tjitji.

Go walkabout and hide;
can't find em
in the bush.
Naked,
go everywhere;
maybe ten,
mighty twenty, maybe.
Can't catch em, wiya.
Still there!
Whitefella can't
grab em, can't steal em:
run like the wind
and plenty cave.
Motor car can't walk everywhere!
Airplane can't land em.
Naked
with
spear
mirru
karli
they find meat, water, butchy tuck —
proper butchy men
still naked &
strong!

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

TO A SAD DAUGHTER

All night long the hockey pictures
gaze down at you
sleeping in your tracksuit.
Belligerent goalies are your ideal.
Threats of being traded
cuts and wounds
— all this pleases you.
O my God! you say at breakfast
reading the sports page over the Alpen
as another player breaks his ankle
or assaults the coach.

When I thought of daughters
I wasn't expecting this
but I like this more.
I like all your faults
even your purple moods
when you retreat from everyone
to sit in bed under a quilt.
And when I say 'like'
I mean of course 'love'
but that embarrasses you.
You who feel superior to black and white movies
(coaxed for hours to see *Casablanca*)
though you were moved
by *Creature from the Black Lagoon.*

One day I'll come swimming
beside your ship or someone will
and if you hear the siren
listen to it. For if you close your ears
only nothing happens. You will never change.

I don't care if you risk
your life to angry goalies
creatures with webbed feet.
You can enter their caves and castles
their glass laboratories. Just
don't be fooled by anyone but yourself.

This is the first lecture I've given you.
You're "sweet sixteen" you said.
I'd rather be your closest friend
than your father. I'm not good at advice
you know that, but ride
the ceremonies
until they grow dark.

Sometimes you are so busy
discovering your friends
I ache with a loss
— but that is greed.
And sometimes I've gone
into *my* purple world
and lost you.

One afternoon I stepped
into your room. You were sitting
at the desk where I now write this.
Forsythia outside the window
and sun spilled over you
like a thick yellow miracle
as if another planet
was coaxing you out of the house
— all those possible worlds! —
and you, meanwhile, busy with mathematics.

I cannot look at forsythia now
without loss, or joy for you.
You step delicately
into the wild world
and your real prize will be
the frantic search.
Want everything. If you break
break going out not in.
How you live your life I don't care
but I'll sell my arms for you,
hold your secrets forever.

If I speak of death
which you fear now, greatly,
it is without answers,
except that each
one we know is
in our blood.
Don't recall graves.
Memory is permanent.
Remember the afternoon's
yellow suburban annunciation.
Your goalie
in his frightening mask
dreams perhaps
of gentleness.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

A GOOD AFTERNOON

God was out fishing
with 'Bluey' Grey, 'Pat' Murphy,
Theo Papadopoulos, Gino Angelucci,
and 'Bludger' Bott.

His companions admired the way
He cracked the stubbies, said 'bloody'
and told tall tales about the Creation.

God caught nothing all day,
and at 4.42 He began crying with disappointment.

Three squadrons of Angels entered
the physical dimension in one nuclear shout.
Full bosomed matrons swaddled and cuddled Him,
cooing over the weeping Divinity,
while Michael and Gabriel, swords drawn,
zoomed in dog fights over St Kilda.

Packs of young bucks roared
in tight formation through Alpha Centauri
lifting out of their dive one inch above Beaumaris.

God began to be delighted.

For a final cheer-up coup
the angels did Armaggedon in music-hall,
with Charlie Chester as M.C. and
Laurence Olivier as the Devil, bringing his forces
out of a dark horizon.

God was delighted and clapped heartily.

'Bluey', 'Pat', Theo, Gino and 'Bludger'
threw back their catch
and founded a new religion.

NOT TO ABBOTSFORD

God took a job
selling tickets on a Melbourne tram.

"Hearts, please", said God.

She had sliced white in her bag,
four kids on her back,
mauve fluffies on her feet
and Death by her side.

"One adult and four kids to Abbotsford".

"Hearts, please," repeated God.
Blushing, fumbling, apologizing to Death,
She gave Him her heart,
which disappeared into His endless leather bag.

He gave her five tickets,
but not to Abbotsford.

THREE POEMS BY DAVID LANDER
From the series "The Backyard of Heaven"

MARY SIMPKINS

"There's a wind blowing out of you, God
That's making a mess of my begonias.
You've upset my dog, stripped my trees
and swung the light in my lounge.
What kind of a being are you anyway, God,
always pushing yourself around.
No time for the little people, I guess."

She got a letter back, scented like Heaven
asking to come one day to tea.

She did her best, made a cake
and had Earl Grey all ready.

Seeing Him standing, wrinkled grey mac,
trousers bagging at the knee, one shoelace undone

And a hungry look in His eye,
brought the wobbles to her knees.

She caked Him and teaed Him
and told Him every story but one,

Which He told her, then without even a "By your leave"
took her to His place.

ALAN McCULLOCH **Dyson**

The centenary of Will Dyson's birth near Ballarat in 1880 has happily coincided with the re-issue of his war drawings (John Ferguson, Sydney, in association with the Australian War Memorial) and with a major touring exhibition during 1981 of Dyson's cartoons, caricatures and prints. We print here the introductory remarks by Alan McCulloch, critic and art historian, at the Mornington (Victoria) exhibition earlier this year. We accompany this with some rare photographs collected by Vane Lindesay.

This exhibition takes me back into a past that seemed to have a touch of magic in it. Perhaps it was the magic of youth, but the time, at any rate, was one when the Australian art world was small, very poor, but totally uncomplicated. We didn't know it at the time, but the art of the Western world was reaching the end of a remarkable period of black and white illustration. For nearly thirty years the art of drawing in pen and ink for reproduction had maintained primacy over painting. This had been caused by the invention of the photographic line block and its use by a vast number of publishers of books, magazines and newspapers. The 'bible' of the movement was a huge book, *Pen Drawing and Pen Draughtsmen* by Whistler's devoted follower, Joseph Pennell, published first in London in 1889. This impressive compendium of international black-and-white introduced to Australia the names of Beardsley, Keene, Menzel, Vierge, Fortuny and a host of others. Through it the early Bulletin artists came into their own in Sydney. It gave the Lindsays and many others an education they could never have got from an art school.

In 1925 I was working in a bank (hating every minute of it), but studying art at the evening classes at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. Whenever I could I tried to get my drawings published in local papers, but with little success, for there was no-one to teach me the things I wanted to know.

Then, one memorable night, news was circulated throughout the school that Will Dyson was returning to Australia to work on a new weekly — the rejuvenated Melbourne Punch. A tremor of excitement ran through the school. Not that we knew anything about Dyson's work. But what we did know was that he was a famous war artist who had been written about by G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw.

Understandably the celebrity hunters saw to it that his arrival home in Melbourne made front-page news. The students couldn't get near him. However one night the instructor in drawing at the National Gallery School (W. B. McInnes) gave me a ticket to a lecture to be given by Dyson on the subject of "Pictorial Satire". I didn't know what pictorial satire was but I was in the lecture hall at the NGV half an hour before the lecture started.

That lecture changed my life, and Dyson became my hero. I was eighteen at the time . . . I was very impressionable and that night I walked through a succession of doors whose existence I had never previously suspected.

My greatest ambition then became to meet my hero, and I finally attained this end by means of a fairly unhappy accident. One of those rare souls — a friend who owned a motor car — was driving me to a picture theatre one evening when we met with an accident. Another car bumped into us causing a fair amount of damage, a small amount of injury and a vast amount of excitement. The excitement was caused when the other driver revealed himself as a drunken journalist friend of Will Dyson's! I won't go

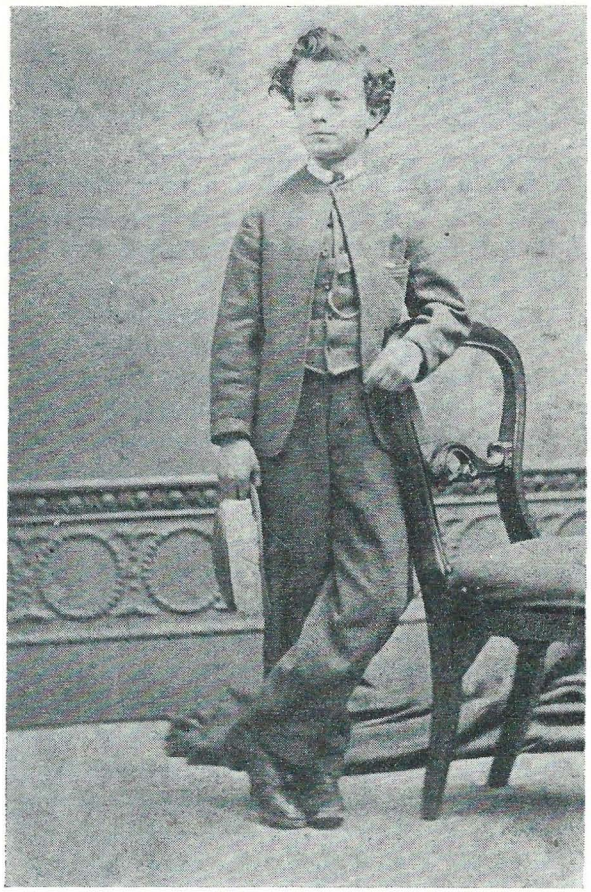
Right: A Melbourne studio photograph of William Henry Dyson, c. 1890.

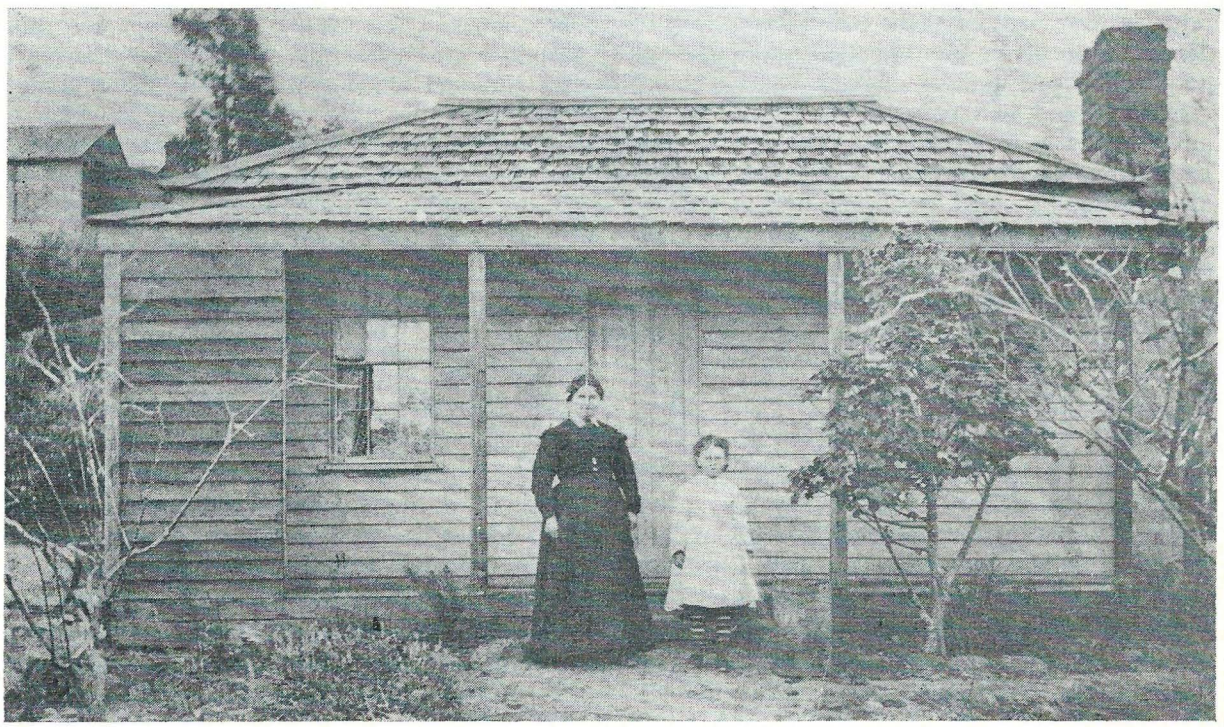
Below: The house in Gillies Street, Alfredton, Ballarat where Will Dyson was born. The young girl is Will's sister Elizabeth.

Top right: Will and Ruby in their Chelsea studio-flat at the time they knew Vance Palmer, London 1911.

Below left: Ruby Dyson with their only child, Betty, London, c. 1914.

Below right: Lieutenant Will Dyson appointed the first Australian War Artist in 1916.





into the details of the somewhat confused negotiations that followed, but the final upshot of it was that the journalist became the instrument by which I met my hero. I was taken to his house, a rather untidy white house with white window shutters and red tiled dragons on the roof situated in Wallace Avenue, Toorak. The initial meeting was my entrée card. I could see that Dyson was apprehensive about the meeting, because he was careful to offer me no encouragement about my talents as revealed in the sheaf of drawings I'd brought with me. But he made an unguarded remark that proved his undoing. As I was leaving he removed the cigarette from the corner of his mouth, gave a cynical smile and said: "It wouldn't matter what I said, about not being an artist — you'd be one anyway."

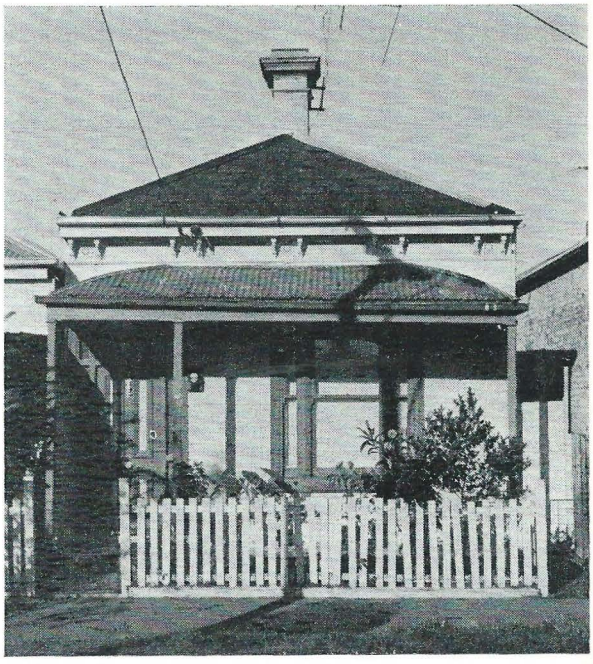
From that moment, just as the boy, Nosey, haunted Gulley Jimson's decrepit barge on the Thames (as everyone who read Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth* will remember), so I began to haunt the house in Wallace Avenue. In later years, with the wisdom of hindsight, I often thought that I might have caused Dyson's premature return to England. I stood on the threshold of a situation that was to ripen into something less than friendship, but was not bad enough to cause instant irrevocable banishment.

Melbourne Punch, the new paper, lasted for one year. It paid too many high salaries to survive as a weekly. But the company wouldn't release Dyson from his contract, and he was obliged to serve out his term of office as cartoonist for the Herald. And that he hated.

And my haunting presence during some of his hate sessions didn't improve matters. He drew with big brushes which he plunged into the Indian ink to attack the paper as if with a sword. His language was often appalling to my youthful, Presbyterian ears, and when it got too bad I'd shrink behind a door, bookcase, easel or perhaps the mangle that he used as an etching press. What moved him to real fits of savagery was for some junior editor to alter his captions or change a word. At such moment, he would start tearing things up and I'd know it was time to leave. I'd let him cool off for a day or two, then gather up my courage and ring him up. "Well? What the hell d'you want now?" His voice would come over the phone in a desperate sort of way. "I only wondered Mr. Dyson . . . that is I've got some drawings . . . so I thought . . . what I mean is . . . could I maybe . . . if you wouldn't mind . . ." Then when I'd reached a state of complete incoherence he would break in. "Christ almighty! Oh alright. But only for a little while . . .", and I'd be on the next tram, running the last mile at full speed, and always arriving in state of nervousness bordering on total collapse. Sometimes he would be all kindness and those moments were sheer bliss. And how I learned. I could learn more from Dyson in half-an-hour than I could learn at the NGV School in six months.

I was present when he started printing those etchings on the improvised mangle that served as a press. Henry Lawson, *Still Marching,* came steaming off the press during one of those sessions. I've often thought that had Dyson been born in France he would have been a worthy successor to Daumier. He had the brilliance the wit and the uncompromising attitude. But that's in the realm of speculation, and far removed from Wallace Avenue, Toorak.

One day a friend and colleague from the NGV school, James Flett, rang me up. A friend of his, Philip Lindsay, was on a ship arriving in Melbourne from Sydney on its way to England. Philip was very anxious to meet his uncle, Will Dyson, and so was Flett, so could I arrange it? I met Flett and Philip Lindsay at the South Yarra railway station. Philip was in a terrible condition. His trousers were tied up with string,



The house in Mountain Street, South Melbourne where Will and his elder brother Ambrose set up their first studio, c. 1897.

he hadn't shaved for three days, and from the smell of him I'd say he hadn't washed for weeks.

To my relief Dyson didn't seem to notice his appearance. But what worried me more was the presence of Betty Dyson, a charming, pretty and talented girl who was rarely present except for a few minutes during my visits. Betty was an ultra-sophisticated fifteen — far beyond my reach. But there she was to meet her cousin, and not in the least abashed by his appearance. So little so that she served us with afternoon tea. Scarcely had we started when another visitor arrived — Daryl Lindsay, immaculately dressed in Savile Row tweeds, and earning a living as an under-paid free-lance illustrator. "How do I look?' said Daryl, modelling his tweed coat for all to see, and utterly ignoring the vagrant, Philip. The conversation turned to sartorial matters. "By the way you *do* know who this is?" Dyson said, indicating Philip, who was muttering under his breath. Daryl's reply was negative, he hadn't caught the name. "Well he's your nephew Phil, you fool, Norman's boy from Sydney." It was a bit much for Daryl, who left soon afterwards.

The others were still at Dyson's place when I left. Flett told me about it later. It seemed that Philip had taken a fancy to Betty Dyson and decided to stay the night. He also stayed the next night and the night after that. The boat sailed without him so he had to wait for the next. As the days lengthened into weeks Dyson's patience failed. Requests to Philip to leave had born no fruit. So one night while Philip was out visiting, Dyson piled his meagre belongings on the porch outside and locked all doors and windows. Next morning when he opened his front door there was no sign of Philip. Instead on the door a small circle had been drawn with chalk. In its centre was stuck a knife, signifying eternal enmity between the house of Lindsay and that of Dyson. I learned many many years later that the enmity had begun with a row with Philip's father, Norman, soon after the joint arrival of the two artists (together with Dyson's wife — Norman's sister — Ruby) in London, in 1910.

Some few years after this incident I met a mutual friend just returned from London, having been with Philip Lindsay at the launching of his second successful novel, *The Path of the King*. "What does Philip look like these days?" I asked. "Marvellous, absolutely marvellous. He dresses like a Threadneedle Street banker, or like a county squire, and carries a furled umbrella."

A few days ago Joan Lindsay, Daryl's widow, called in at the Mornington gallery and I asked her about her recollections of Dyson. But she had never known Dyson well. However she had known his wife Ruby. "She was the most truly beautiful girl you could ever imagine," Joan said. "But she was painfully shy. So shy that when she married Will Dyson in 1910 she wouldn't go in the front door of the church at Creswick because of all the people. So she climbed a fence with her veil and everything, went through a field of nettles and long grass to the back door and arrived in front of the altar covered in grass seeds."

Dyson never really looked at another woman after he met Ruby and her premature death from the 'flu epidemic in 1919 broke his heart. Dyson was a boy from the Australian bush who — as to-day's journalists might put it — made it into the big time. He was a great artist, a great personality and a great humanist. He was famous in London in 1914 and could have had anything. Instead he chose to go as a lieutenant into the front line in Flanders with the AIF. He was wounded twice, but he produced that book, *Australia at War,* the finest, most human book of war drawings produced by any war artist in our time.

I end with a quotation — the last verse of his dedication "To the Men of the A.I.F." It says a lot about Dyson:

> To you, and you, I dedicate these things
> That have no merit save that they, for you,
> Were woven with that truth that was in me
> Where you went up, with death athwart the wind
> Poised like a hawk a-strike — to save the world,
> Or else to succour poor old bloody Bill
> Beleaguered in a shell hole on the ridge.

KATHARINE BRISBANE

Tangible Assets

Ten Years of Australian Drama Publishing

Katharine Brisbane, well-known drama critic and founder, with her husband Philip Parsons, of Currency Press, here tells the story of perhaps the most remarkable Australian publishing initiative of our times.

I suppose in these days that it is some kind of achievement to have survived ten years in the publishing business without having been taken over and with the same faces at the head of the firm. But when I think of its vicissitudes and the anxieties about our day to day survival I remember the words of Nancy McConnan in 1977 after Cambridge University Press had taken on the distribution of our books.

The year 1976 had been a bad one in the secondary schools market. The December 1975 election had frozen funding during the changeover period just at the time when academic sales were at their peak; and the 1976-77 summer was for Currency not heartening better. Concerned that the sales which pay our overheads might be slipping through our fingers, I sought Nancy's advice. She patted me reassuringly and said: "We at Cambridge tend to take the long view of these things. We've survived as educational publishers since 1534."

After ten years I am convinced that to take the long view in publishing is the only way to survive. Claiming to be Australia's drama publisher, Currency has now brought out some 80 titles. We have printed 58,700 copies of David Williamson's *The Removalists* (1972) in nine runs, and its annual reprint looks as dependable as ever. On its tail are Williamson's *The Club* and Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll,* both with 45,500 so far, and both published in 1978. Besides the new plays we have made it our business to collect, as they become available, those older plays that are part of our history. As well as *The Doll* we have acquired Sumner Locke Elliott's *Rusty Bugles* (1948) and Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly* (1947, in preparation).

Parallel with these is the National Theatre Series of plays from 1844-1944, which Philip Parsons established to give continuity to our list and show that our drama had not begun with *The Doll* or *The Removalists,* but had been reflecting the Australian character for 150 years.

All this has been a great satisfaction to us and gives us a place in the history and development of Australian dramatic literature. It is the kind of program in which respectable publishers should be engaged and which a civilised community should take for granted.

On the other hand, it is also commercial idiocy.

We were warned, of course, that there was very little money to be made in publishing, and certainly none in publishing plays. What publishing house in the world existed by publishing only drama? (Samuel French does, but it is a worldwide organisation and handles performance rights as well.) Later, when we got to know him, the British drama editor of Eyre Methuen confided that their list got started after one of their editors met Anouilh in a pub. Since then the list had been maintained almost entirely by the works of Anouilh, Brecht and Pinter. Our experience has proved much the same.

Currency Press did not start in a pub. But the idea was probably confirmed, in my mind at

least, by meeting Peter Kenna at dinner at Doris Fitton's house, sometime in 1970. Peter had recently returned from Britain, and, knowing him only by reputation, I was astonished that *The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day* had never been published. (This was the beginning of an association which in due course brought us also *A Hard God,* one of our best and steadiest sellers.)

At that time my husband, Philip Parsons, and I had just returned from a fairly intensive eight-month sabbatical leave in Britain, Europe, Canada and the United States, in which he, as senior lecturer in drama at the University of New South Wales, visited drama teaching institutions; and I, as theatre critic of the Australian, made a study of theatre performances and subsidy patterns (theatre subsidy being then a very new and contentious issue in Australia).

Learning about theatre in other countries helped us to define what was unique to Australia;

Below: Philip Parsons and Katharine Brisbane at Currency's tenth birthday party and launching of Contemporary Australian Drama at the University Co-op Bookshop, Sydney.

and to realise that we had a young theatre movement — albeit a rough one — with an energy and originality that might well be envied by older countries. We also discovered an embarrassing lack of printed matter on the Australian theatre.

I had taken over the job of national critic in 1967 and had found myself in a unique position to observe the growth of a remarkable movement. It was an exciting time. By 1971 I was getting tired of pontificating about it all and wanted, constructively, to be a part of it. Philip, as a teacher, deplored the fact that young Australians were being taught about drama as if their own country's theatre did not exist; and saw also that the problem could not be remedied until a library of plays was made available.

These and other motivations were behind the establishment of Currency Press. Early in 1970 Mrs. Jean Cooney had come to work with us as our private secretary, to help me with my professional work, as our two children were then quite small. She was very much a party to our planning — and she still is so today.

The name Currency (meaning born in Australia) was inspired by *The Currency Lass,* a play of 1844 recently discovered in Government archives by the drama research scholar Dr. Helen Oppenheim, and the first extant play to be produced professionally in Australia. The script itself we published in 1976.

The company was incorporated on 3 September 1971 and we published our first book on 21 February 1972 — Alexander Buzo's *Macquarie.* The occasion was marked by a literary luncheon at the Carmel Wine Cellars, Circular Quay, part of Robert Campbell's row of bond stores built in Macquarie's time. It was a lively occasion, attended by people from all aspects of the theatre to discuss the need for an Australian drama. The guests included Barbara Jefford, Leo McKern, Charles West and Dr. H. C. Coombes; and I remember Harry M. Miller coming to blows with someone as the afternoon wore on. Passions were high in those days.

At that time we were in total ignorance of the printing process. We conceived the idea of selling by subscription, bringing out six plays a year paid for in advance and thus minimising our capital outlay. Our capital was some $7,000 which we had earned from the sale of a house. The question of inflation and what it might do to our cost structure did not then enter our thinking.

Our first plan was to publish scripts rather

than books; but we rejected this in the belief that there was a general market, at that time of nationalist euphoria, for the new Australian play. So we set off in search of a designer, and found Harry Williamson. Harry designed our logo and letterhead: his brief was to produce something to make us look an old-established firm.

Then we chose our first six plays, with an eye for something for everyone. They were *Macquarie, The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day, The Chapel Perilous* (Dorothy Hewett), *The Lucky Streak* (James Searle) and *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (Louis Esson). Talking the authors into signing up was not difficult. In those days there was nowhere else for a playwright to go.

Harry then designed a classy brochure outlining the scheme; and a handsome, rather discreet cover with an apple green horizontal stripe. Our second set of six plays had a blue stripe, the third a red stripe. After that we abandoned the subscription system and the red stripe remained. The design was adapted by degrees, the titles became bolder and the author's name, initially in a timid 14pt., now stands out as the principal selling point.

The manifesto of Currency Press printed in that first leaflet and written by Philip is worth quoting in part:

> Ten years ago it was almost impossible to obtain a professional production for an Australian play: our cultural sights were set on London and New York . . . Today there is an audience that no longer demands or cares that playwrights succeed overseas and Australian plays are a regular feature of the theatre in almost every capital city.
>
> Try-out houses have sprung up devoted to their resident writers and for the first time Australia has an expanding group of young, developing playwrights, exploring the society we are creating, asking who we are and where we are going.
>
> Why this sudden efflorescence? Our interests and values can no longer be identified with those of the great and powerful friends who made yesterday's world so comfortable and undemanding. We are a nation and a culture in search of an individual role in a colder, harder, more isolated world, and a new Australian awareness is in the making in our theatres . . .
>
> It is because we believe in the importance of what our new drama (and, in retrospect our older drama) has to say to us today, that we have set up Currency Playtexts — to enable a wider audience to discover them, both through the bookshelf and the theatre.

Harry had persuaded us that we could save setting costs by having the preliminaries typeset and reproduce the text in IBM typewriter reduced, in a format that resembled an acting script. In these early books the text has a half title marked "Manuscript No. 1", etc. I don't think Harry knew any more about bookmaking than we did. The putting together of *Macquarie,* the errors, the painful pasting up and so on, proved horrendous. The corner printer we chose was also ignorant in the matter, dealing largely in record covers. First the heads didn't range, and the printing had to be done a second time. Then when the advance copies were delivered the author's name was spelt wrongly and the books had to be rebound.

But we learnt. We lost the stock of *The Lucky Streak,* I remember, when the printery burnt down, and later part of the run of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* was lost when a second firm had a fire. I remember printing a slip for the cased editions of *The Chapel Perilous* alerting the purchaser to the fact that some of the words in the play might not be suitable for school libraries. A few hundred copies boomeranged.

We planned to publish a book every two months but soon found it difficult to keep to our schedule. But we plugged along, learning as we went. Soon we began to receive help from the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

At the time we were setting up the company *The Removalists* had its first performance at La Mama in Melbourne. By the time the play was taken up by the Nimrod Street Theatre we had published a couple of books and made a bid — successfully — for a work which in its time proved a phenomenon. It was the first play of the new wave to be taken up by a commercial management (Harry M. Miller) and subsequently it was produced in London and won two British awards.

With this play we made our first two commercial decisions: first to design it like a trade paperback; and secondly to print 5,000. Up to that time our print runs had been about 2,000, including 500 hardbacks (these were dropped from our runs in 1975). The cover design, by Kevin Chan for Valli Moffitt and Associates, was probably the best we have ever had. Inside we presented the play as one document in a collection of pieces about violence in Australia, edited by Sylvia Lawson. We conceived this

idea as a way of breaking through the drama market to the general reader, and we used the format with many books that followed — and still do today. It has succeeded — but not in the way we anticipated. We have never had substantial success in the general market. But what this book represented was something teachers were looking for. We sold the 5,000 in ten months and Kevin Chan is our permanent designer now.

The Removalists was the first book we were able to sell through the trade. We also had the book on sale at the Playbox, Sydney, during the play's run. It was there that Gerry Wallis-Smith, Managing Director of Hicks Smith and Sons Pty. Ltd. and a director of Associated Book Publishers Ltd. found it.

The first we knew of his interest was a knock on the door one day in October 1972, at our house in Jersey Road, Woollahra which now carried the shingle of Currency Press. It was Wallis-Smith, with a copy of *The Removalists,* asking if he could talk to us. We were able to impress him enough, not only with our ignorance, but with the fact that *The Removalists* was a seller and others weren't going too badly, for him to propose a partnership. As Eyre Methuen's distributor he knew the market. Later we found that our print runs were matching their British counterpart for the whole Commonwealth.

And so we set up Currency Methuen Drama Pty. Ltd. with Currency owning 51 per cent. of the shares and ABP (now Methuen Australia) 49 per cent. Under the agreement Currency was to take charge of contracting and editing MSS., and ABP would undertake production, accounting and distribution. The company would subsist on an overdraft at ABP's bank of $25,000, guaranteed by both partners. Currency's editorial assistant, Jonathan Shaw, then a drop-out Australian Literature student who had dropped in one day looking for a job and had found us on our knees packing subscribers' books, became the employee of Currency Methuen.

By this stage we had published seven plays from our back bedroom, and had 15,000 books in our front hall. Something had to be done. The name Methuen, our choice, was very important to us. Despite Philip's stirring words, writers still yearned to be published in London — playwrights by Britain's premier drama publishers. And so we argued for a joint imprint: Currency Press, Sydney and Eyre Methuen, London. It is a reflection upon the rapidly changing climate of the early 1970s that, by the time we parted from Methuen three years later, the British connection was no longer important.

Our first editorial board meeting was held at 301 Kent Street, Sydney, the registered office of Currency Methuen drama, on 26 April 1973, at which were present Gerry Wallis-Smith, Ed Highley, then an editor of Hicks Smith, Philip and myself. The formal incorporation of the company did not take place until 31 October 1973, when the directors appointed were Philip Parsons, Gerry Wallis-Smith, Doug Allen (ABP's company secretary) and myself as Chairman. The editor Marilyn Stacy replaced Allen in November 1975.

At this first editorial meeting there was a formal motion on publishing policy: that for the present at least it was to publish the work of Australian playwrights. This was in response to a feeler of Philip's that we might publish a book on the Sydney Opera House controversy. The motion was moved by Gerry, who all through our association has warned us against moving out of our field of expertise, and he still gives us the same advice. Nevertheless we continue to try our hand at other things — and sometimes get our fingers burnt.

Small as we were, we didn't look too bad a bargain at that first meeting. Reprints were mooted for *The Removalists* and *The Chapel Perilous;* and a run of 20,000 proposed for *Macquarie* (which had been prescribed for the NSW HSC course in 1974 and 1975), *A Stretch of the Imagination,* published three months previously, was also reprinted before the end of the year — a run of 5000. But of course we had nothing like the kind of list which could be self-sufficient. We resolved to spend three years building a list, and to absorb the loss as best we could. ABP and Currency each received a service fee, initially of $1,000 a year, which in the third year grew to $3,500. Beyond that, Currency's contribution was found by Philip and myself from our other professions. I resigned from the Australian in November 1974 when the pressures finally became too great; thereafter even more of Philip's salary had to be applied to Currency. Currency Methuen's earnings covered the typesetting and printing costs and enabled us to pay for the production of a book every six weeks.

Reading through the editorial minutes today I can see we were not the easiest of partners. ABP was having its own troubles, and there was a fairly heavy turnover of staff among those we

had to deal with. The first production schedule I drew up listed publication dates only three months from the date of handing over the marked-up typescript. Mind you, we were at that time printing plays at that pace; but clearly we did not take into account that ABP might have a publishing list of its own. With the production, accounting, warehousing, invoicing and stocktaking as their part of the deal, ABP had the major responsibility, and the major hidden costs.

The launching of Currency Methuen Drama Pty. Ltd. was held at a lunch at Len Evans' restaurant at Circular Quay on 24 August 1973, at which Don Dunstan, then Premier of South Australia, was the guest speaker. The book published that day was another Buzo: *Three Plays (Norm and Ahmed, Rooted and The Roy Murphy Show)*. The plays were somewhat avant garde, the first two between them having been banned in three States. Today the book, in its third printing, is set on the NSW HSC course.

The partnership continued happily for three years in steady work on a list of quality plays. Relations at all levels were harmonious: our only worries lay in the turnover of editorial staff with whom we worked and ineffective communication between us and the sales representatives. In time we grew uneasy about this lack of continuity. Gerry Wallis-Smith was the only one at the top level of management who knew the thinking behind the company. Should he disappear there would be no-one — only a set of monthly meeting minutes dully outlining work in progress, and some distinctly unpromising financial statements.

To allay our fears we wrote an extensive report to the directors of CMD on 9 December 1975 setting out our aims, progress and achievement so far. This followed the appointment in November of Marilyn Stacy as company director.

Finally on 7 May 1976 our fears were realised when Gerry retired at short notice. His replacement, Peter Taylor, was new to ABP and his field was marketing. The first moves were reassuring — on 11 May we received an enthusiastic memo saying he was "convinced that one can sell plays in satisfactory quantities within Australia".

> I suggest that Currency Methuen has now proof that there is a market for Australian plays and that the time has now come to develop more vigorously than was possible and perhaps prudent in the past. There is an air of excitement in the Australian theatre which also coincides with this timing.

He advocated a more aggressive sales policy and the introduction of full color covers; the print run of first editions increased from our standard 2,500 paperbacks to 5,000.

By June, however, the mood had changed. ABP estimated CMD was costing them $10,000 a year and growth prospects did not justify it. In July Peter Taylor called at Currency to announce, with obvious regret, the decision of the ABP board to withdraw from Currency Methuen. Under our articles of agreement the ABP shareholding was first offered to Currency. We could not, of course, afford to take it up (except on terms unacceptable to ABP). Since Currency Methuen's trading position was, in the view of ABP, hopeless, the possibility of another buyer being found seemed to them remote: the ABP directors on our board demanded liquidation.

Our first reaction was to point out that, with our list now embracing every significant playwright then writing, our partners would be pulling out just when their investment in Australian drama was about to reward them. Our second was a determination that, come what may, Currency would honor its obligations to its authors and continue in business. Liquidation would have spelled the end for us — our investment gone, our books sold off for what they would bring or pulped. To ABP it may have seemed simple commercial sense; to us it was monstrous, not only for us personally, but for the emergent theatre and playwrights we were trying to serve. We passionately denied the moral right of ABP to destroy so completely what it had so generously helped to create. Believing CMD could trade into a more satisfactory position, we used our majority shareholding to block liquidation and invoked the provisions in our agreement to offer the ABP shareholding elsewhere. The strong and sympathetic response we received from a variety of publishers, backed by a wide and supportive interest from the press and public, encouraged us in our conviction that what we had been doing mattered, and that others besides ourselves would not be willing to let it die.

In the meantime we were being brought under massive financial pressure to agree to liquidation. At a board meeting on 1 October we considered a sudden decision by ABP's bankers to review our overdraft facilities; and were in-

formed by ABP that after fourteen days all further bills would be forwarded unpaid to me as chairman of the company. On 8 October Philip and I deposited $3,000 in the CMD account, bringing the overdraft well within the $25,000 limit; the bank manager, an understanding man, assured us he would wish us to have ample time to make arrangements with a view to continuing operation. On 14 October he informed us that the overdraft was being called in forthwith; and at a resumption of the board meeting adjourned from 1 October the ABP directors pointed out that any further financial commitment by Currency Methuen would, of course, be in violation of the Companies Act.

At that time, however, the Australian theatre was news and the media, especially in Sydney and Melbourne, were reporting the dilemma of a small Australian publisher under threat from an insensitive multinational. David Williamson publicly offered to relieve ABP of the printer's bill for *A Handful of Friends,* scheduled for his Sydney opening and stopped in mid-production. Philip appeared before the Industries Assistance Commission inquiry into the publishing industry to reverse Currency's original submission that multinationals should be eligible for the same assistance as Australian houses to publish new Australian work. Instead he spoke on the dangers of tangling with a corporation which could withdraw patronage as swiftly as offer it, and which neither knew nor cared what effect its operations might have on the local cultural scene. It was pretty tough stuff, not particularly fair to ABP, and we had it printed and circulated as a pamphlet which gave a good deal of offence. We made no apologies then or later; we had to match ABP's financial power with that of public opinion.

Associated Book Publishers decided to settle. On 25 October Peter Taylor bowed out asking that all future correspondence be through a solicitor. On 28 October the writer Tim Hall was introduced as a mediator. We all got rather drunk one night. A dissolution of our partnership with ABP was signed on 17 November 1976.

Having resolved upon an honourable surrender, ABP offered terms of agreement on a very generous scale, representing a total loss of their three-year investment. They purchased our shares in CMD for $25,000 and we bought the stock for the same figure. The assets and liabilities cancelled each other out. ABP accepted responsibility for the overdraft and handed the stock over to our new distributors, Cambridge University Press, on Christmas Eve. By that time they had offset much of the overdraft by supplying the summer academic orders — and they acquired a tax loss company. So the experience did not do great harm to either side in the long view — and it taught us a great deal.

Methuen Australia has gone through many more changes since then. Peter Taylor did not stay long but set up on his own very successfully; and none of the editorial and sales staff we knew now remain. In the end we had a conciliatory and kind letter from the British Chairman of ABP expressing his regrets for a situation of which at the time they knew nothing.

So there we were back on our own with a pile of books and others in production — about $17,000 worth; a bit of Literature Board money transferred but otherwise no liquidity. And no staff. Jonathan Shaw and our promotions rep., Mrs. Jan Balodis, had been laid off on 15 October after their wages were frozen. We had to learn about book production fast.

But in times of crisis one finds new friends. In the dark October days there had been another portentous knock at the door. It was the publisher Lloyd O'Neil, who had read an article about our problems in the Age on the plane from Melbourne and who had come to offer us a loan of $25,000. We had not met him before. The settlement came soon after that but we remember his offer with gratitude. Later he gave us practical help in preparing cash flow charts; and he introduced us to a firm of Hong Kong printers who still do the bulk of our printing outside Australia.

We had heartening encouragement from Australian publishers and several offers of distribution before we settled with Cambridge. The choice has proved a wise one; in five years they have built up a solid bread-and-butter education market for our books. They are a cautious, pragmatic firm, never given to sudden enthusiasms. But they never make a promise they cannot keep.

From the theatre and most of our authors we had rather less personal support, perhaps because the theatre does not expect permanance in anything. I think they felt helpless and never expected our publishing would last.

But somehow it has. One thing I discovered was that I could cut our printing costs by about one-third of the Methuen figures. Another was that Methuen had never taken full advantage

of the help offered by the Literature Board, who came to our support very strongly in the following years. We have tried to be modest in our demands and careful about the kind of book for which we seek subsidy. In return we have never had an application fail.

Jean Cooney was still our faithful support and friend and we battled on with part-time help until October 1978 when Ian Murdoch joined us as manager.

How have we managed financially? The gross earnings of CMD to 31 October 1974 were $12,711; and in 1975 $20,350. These figures are from retailers' price received as Hicks Smith made no charge for distribution. We never received figures to October 1976 but our estimate was around $44,000. Currency Press's gross earnings after distribution costs to June 1977 were $32,121, and twelve months to 30 June 1978, $56,493; 1979, $92,741; 1980, $139,672. The estimate to June 1981 is $180,000 and to 1982 $250,000.

So we are an expanding, but still not a profitable company, because we continue to work on a back list which can support the company's overheads. To June 1980 we made a trading loss of $10,800, due chiefly to a cut back in school orders. It was not until 1979 that I began to receive a salary; Philip still receives no remuneration. But the company has paid back the bulk of its debt to us and is self-sufficient within its limited budget.

Now after ten years we are consolidating. In the theatre the euphoria described both in Currency's first leaflet and in Peter Taylor's memo is over now. The participants are a decade older and different things are demanded of the theatre. We are still publishing only eight or ten plays a year and all of them represent a loss over twelve months on their first run. Most of the plays on our list have had at least one reprint (very few of the original cover designs are still around). Some are substantial — 6,000, 10,000, once even 30,000. But the market is not growing, and now that we have a substantial list teachers seem inclined to return again and again to the tried favorites.

To attack the problem of the new writer we have made an agreement with the magazine Theatre Australia to provide four booklets of plays a year supplied by them free to subscribers. This means that some 2,000 people are introduced every three months to a new playwright. The scheme is subsidised by the Literature Board, and there is now a move to increase the supply to six a year.

All in all much has been won — and lost — over the decade. Our chief sources of satisfaction have been in the way publication has confirmed the reputations of our playwrights in the theatre and brought back to the stage works long forgotten. Today the Australian play is part of the senior school syllabus in every State and to be found somewhere in every University, C.A.E., T.A.F.E. — and even police academy. The words of ABP's Clive Gardner in a report on promotion to the editorial meeting, 8 February 1974, have begun to come true: "Every home, every library desk, every school-bound Globite should have one."

Meanwhile to pay the bills we are trying new ways. An adventure story called *To Fight the Wild* by Rod Ansell and Rachel Percy has this year made up in the sale of subsidiary rights the dip in our summer sales predictions. Our critical text, *Contemporary Australian Drama,* has also boosted sales. We have a luxury title forthcoming on *The Golden Age of Australian Opera* by Harold Love; and a series of titles published with the Australian Film Institute on the cinema. And our collection of Barry Humphries monologues, *A Nice Night's Entertainment,* published in July, we see as our reward for being our kind of publishing house for ten years. These are bigger books and the stakes are higher. Gerry Wallis-Smith, who remains our cautious monitor and friend, still tells us to stick to our last and publish what we know best. He is probably right.

My ambition now is for our accountant to say that Currency is big enough at last to leave home and set up its own establishment. Then perhaps I can stay home from work — maybe even write something of my own. Currency Towers we like to call it. But maybe it's just a castle in the air.

BRUCE BENNETT

Provincial & Metropolitan

The Literary Journalism of A. A. Phillips and Clive James

Bruce Bennett teaches in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. He is editor of Westerly.

Long-time Melburnian A. A. Phillips and ex-Sydney-side Londoner Clive James have each recently had second books* of their literary journalism published. Their articles and reviews for magazines and newspapers reflect the different literary worlds they have inhabited and illuminate their distinctive notions of the role of critic. Phillips has nailed his skull and crossbones to the masthead of provincialism, while James sails in metropolitan seas.

The terms provincial and metropolitan have much to answer for in accounts of Australian culture, referring as they do both to place and to certain qualities of intellectual and cultural life. "Provincial" is usually a label of scorn, connoting narrowness of outlook, intellectual bluntness, vulgarity, a certain rough-and-ready directness and honesty, a sense of humor perhaps, but essentially a 'hicksville' outlook. "Metropolitan", on the other hand, is usually a term of praise, connoting a broad and knowledgeable appreciation of the arts, sophistication, intellectual acuity — though sometimes faddishness and questionable moral values are also implicit. The debate about values and attitudes can be carried on under these banners. In Australia though, the debate has been one-sided because the metropolis has always been imagined to exist in another country: provincialism has been synonymous with colonialism and metropolitism has been seen to reside in the heart of empire. But the old orientations are changing and the grounds of the debate from which these terms emerge must also change.

In his essay "Provincialism and Australian Culture," first published in 1966 and reprinted in *Responses,* A. A. Phillips set up an opposition between "metropolitan" centres of culture and "provincial" communities and asserted, from his avowedly Australian standpoint, "I am advocating the acceptance of the provincial status" — a typical gadfly statement, aimed at stinging orthodox notions of the necessary superiority of metropolitan culture. To those who have read *The Australian Tradition,*[1] the tone and technique of this essay are recognisable. In that earlier book, Phillips had entered a persuasive plea for Australians to examine the literature and social forms of their country from their own standpoint, without the spectre of the metropolitan — especially the English or European writer or critic — peering over his shoulder and censoring this self-examination; it was a gesture of defiance by a widely read man who was well versed in English and European as well as Australian literature. Phillips' theme in that first, remarkably homogeneous collection of occasional writings was "the illumination of the evolving personality and the evolving traditions of the Australian community, as reflected in the works of our writers"; and his calculated effrontery expressed the kind of independence he wished to see in the Australian character — a refusal to submit to the passive colonialism of spirit, the bowing before attitudes and cultural values of foreign critics, which he found so pervasive in his home country.

In his Introduction to *Responses,* Brian Kiernan suggests a connection between A. G. Stephens, Vance Palmer and Phillips — all three "literary nationalists" yet demonstrating cosmopolitan interests and an awareness of English, European and American writing. The breadth of Phillips's literary reference is more apparent in *Responses* than in *The Australian Tradition,* and indicates that a standpoint of literary nationalism does not necessarily preclude range; nor does

* A. A. Phillips: *Responses: Selected Writings,* Australia International Press, Melbourne, 1979. Clive James: *At the Pillars of Hercules,* Faber and Faber, London, 1979.

it, in the work of Stephens, Palmer or Phillips lead to an uncritical acceptance of Australian literature or society. Indeed, the criticism is often sharper from this close-in vantage point. Yet in Phillips's case a preference for certain kinds of literature — for prose fiction, especially in the realistic mode, above poetry (and to a lesser extent drama) — does narrow his range.

The study of Australian writing according to A. A. Phillips has the central purpose of making Australians aware of themselves; and with such awareness the building of an independent (though not isolationist) culture may begin. Yet it would be wrong to ascribe to him a narrow nationalism. The following comment from the conclusion to his essay "The Family Relationship" (in *The Australian Tradition*) indicates his critical view of the limitations that constrain his typical Australian:

> The Australian temperament is essentially pragmatic — a quality which is sometimes mistaken for materialism. In truth the Australian does not ignore spiritual values provided they are plain, direct and accessible. His limitation lies in an obstinate bondage to the positive, a preference for the sum with an answer verifiable in the back pages of the book. He turns aside, scornfully and yet timidly, from the glories and terrors of the incertitudes, from the exaltations of the mysteries . . . Sometimes the Australian writer, in his need to identify himself with the spirit of his countrymen, has accepted the pragmatism, and has shut his art within walls without windows.

With the sort of éclat that gave Phillips's phrase "the cultural cringe" such wide coverage, his notion here of the Australian's "obstinate bondage to the positive" is imaged forcefully in the picture of a seeker for certain answers; the canny schoolteacher's understanding of his students' lazy habits of mind is apparent, along with a suggestion that the stuffy atmosphere of his nation-schoolroom inhibits audacious speculation, holding potential learners back from launching themselves into the unknown. It is a lack of audacity that Phillips understands, because it constrains him as well.

Perhaps the inherited institutions of British culture weighed more heavily on the shoulders of those who pondered on their cultural fate in Melbourne in the 1940s and 1950s than it did on their counterparts in Sydney. However that may be, Clive James's departure from Sydney for Cambridge University in 1962 was a kind of liberation for him, the beginning of a prolonged voluntary exile during which he has made a number of public statements about the advantages of a truly metropolitan base (i.e. London) for a person interested in the arts and ideas, and particularly for the literary journalist. Australia, by comparison, is "provincial", which for James, unlike Phillips, is usually a term of abuse. In a radio broadcast in 1971, which was included in *The Metropolitan Critic*,[2] he explained how England had transported him from a state of Australian gracelessness to something different: "Ten years of England have at last softened the harsh illusion Australia offers you that the whole world is there to be begun again; that fatal fancy that the world can be made over in your own image."

Had it been issued from a more informed, involved position, James's proposition about Australian self-centredness and superficial optimism might have been interesting, but the broadcast concentrated on a personal justification of his decision to stay in England. ("I'm not going home, because I *am* home, in the country I was born to live in and doing the work that such powers as I have fit me to do.") James contrasts a uniform belief in progress in Australia ("everyone is heading in the one direction — onwards") with the English "realisation of a great complexity in the body politic, of a lot of separate liberties managing to accommodate to one another." He says nothing of the dead weight of seniority that can afflict the English spirit, making action sometimes impossible, but comments that England's propensity for trimming ego is a good thing.

After a return visit to Sydney in 1976, James[3] reaffirmed to his English audience that Australia was a good place to be out of. Ockerism was still rife, "internationalism" meant American commercialism, and the recipients of government grants in the arts were generally insular, cut off from their European life blood: The ideology of nationalist self-sufficiency — the Australian "renaissance" — has mainly acted as licence for provincialism, not just in painting, but in films, drama and literature as well . . ." He uses Australian painting as an example of the need to rebuild links with Europe:

> The strong periods of Australian painting have always depended on painters recognising the necessity for educating themselves abroad. Any Australian painter could apply European methods to Australian subjects. What counted was applying European standards.

The fact that many Australian critics and artists (and some who would call themselves "nationalist") would agree with these sentiments considerably reduces the force of James's claims about "nationalist self-sufficiency," which is something of a paper tiger. What needs to be stressed is not the patriotic narrowness that James ascribes so indiscriminately to Australian artists and critics, but their capacity to produce the highest quality of work from within their own centres without the continual need to seek appproval, support and the imposition of foreign 'standards'. The belief that this kind of independence is possible — that it is indeed occurring — is the dynamo that has driven A. A. Phillips's criticism. Lying behind his belief is a strategy — that the writer and critic should be prepared to accept the status of "provincial" as a bulwark against the eroding forces of metropolitan European attitudes and fashions. In time, metropolitan values and standards of our own will be achieved. He proposes a waiting (and nurturing) game, sustained by a vision which he wryly calls on "obsessive hope" and a "pipe dream":[4]

> I began to develop an almost obsessive hope — to see in my life-time the emergence of Australian arts of vigour, confidence and increasing maturity.
>
> The impulse behind my engagement in cultural activities was that pipe-dream of an invigorated Australian art (and of wider cultural movement.) What I hoped for was something not altogether unlike the efflorescences in Periclean Athens or Elizabethan England. It was obvious how much those flowerings had been fortified by the community's sense of a common identity and of a pride in it.

These great artistic and cultural flowerings of previous ages have been associated with a sense of community, argues Phillips. By implication, the critic should work to achieve that kind of self-understanding in a community which will create the conditions for a flowering of creative activity. His vision is, in a sense, prescriptive in that it requires the development of a sense of ones place in the Australian community; not a free-floating, uncommitted world view. But it does not, as some critics of the democratic and nationalist position have claimed, exclude in principle other cultures from its models of intellectual or artistic endeavour.

Yet even if one agrees with Phillips' sentiments, it is difficult not to agree with Clive James's assessment in 1976 of Australian literary journalism:

> There is plenty of goodwill and vigour and even talent . . . but no consistent standards. It is not so much a lack of writing as a lack of editing. Punctilious editing is the real secret behind most of the good literary journalism done in London. Even the best of the Australian publications are full of copy which in London would be regarded as unpublishable. The literary journalist who has never been strictly blue-pencilled will never develop. And although it might be said that whether or not its literary journalism is any good is not of much importance to a young and rich country, it is of importance to me.[5]

It would be too easy, in self defence, to point out the stylish vacuousness of much London literary journalism, but of all James's charges against Australian intellectual and literary life, this one has the most bite. In spite of a proliferation in the last decade of publications professing an interest in literature, it is still the major quarterlies that are left to set the lead in responsible and serious editing and the establishment of standards. And they are hard pressed.

How then does the literary journalism of Clive James reflect his self-professed metropolitanism in terms of audience, range and outlook? How does it compare with the work of A. A. Phillips? And how may their work be seen in relation to future directions in literary journalism?

In the first place, it should be recognised that Melbourne has been A. A. Phillips's base and the centre from which he has asserted his influence. His essays and reviews since 1945 have been published almost exclusively in Meanjin, Overland and the Age: Phillips acknowledges the encouragement and assistance of Clem Christesen and Stephen Murray-Smith. The influence of editors is also attested by Clive James, when he acknowledges Ian Hamilton, literary editor of the TLS and the New Review, somewhat cryptically as "trailblazer for his generation." But James has written for other audiences too, — including in England the New Statesman, the Listener, the Observer and New Society; and in the latter half of the 1970s across the Atlantic, the New York Review of Books, Encounter and Commentary. The London-based literary reviewer, though younger, has obviously published more widely; indeed he has managed to make his living as a literary journalist, whereas

the Australian has made the best of his amateur status.

The most noticeable difference in the work of these two writers is in terms of range — the kinds of books and topics that each has chosen to write about. James's versatility is at once obvious: his topics are from both high culture and mass entertainment areas, including film, television, rock music, detective novels, literary criticism, government reports, feminist treatises, poetry and, to a lesser extent (because he doesn't like much beyond Tom Stoppard) drama. He launches into these various tasks with a vigorous, swashbuckling air, sometimes reminiscent of the writer who might be the archetypal metropolitan critic, Byron. Byron clearly lies behind Clive James's enthusiastic espousal of rock music, in *ottava rima:*

> We should be glad, then, that we work in Rock
> Whose mark for ordered Symmetry is Zero.
> Its *cognoscenti,* talking total cock
> Concerning slack-mouthed bitch or dildoed hero,
> Combine the thickness of a Mental Block
> With all the musicality of *Nero:*
> And yet despite their I.Q. in two figures
> They've sussed out where the only decent gig is.
>
> In liking Anti-Intellectualism
> They're wrong, but right to value simple Verve.
> A long way gone in pale Eclecticism,
> Like all those nostrums that no longer serve
> (*Vendanta, Joan the Wad, Collectivism*)
> The Classical Succession's lost its nerve —
> Or else it shrieks an *avant-gardiste* foolery
> That makes the average Rock Song shine like joolery.[6]

This jaunty attack on intellectual stuffiness, with its wilful eclecticism and pleasure in outraging the earnest carriers of culture, is an important indicator of James's literary persona. Rock music is indeed for him an important interest: at last count he had written seven collections of lyrics; and in one of these, a song called "Senior Citizens",[7] he expresses a nicely ambiguous optimism about the range of options open to a person in this life, which seems to encapsulate his own expectations:

> And there'll be time to try it all;
> I'm sure the thrill will never pall
> The sand will take so long to fall
> The neck so slim, the glass so tall.

The echo of Prufrock's definitively metropolitan neurosis is not lost on the educated reader, but James still seems to assert the possibility of giving it all a go.

A. A. Phillips's interests in his literary journalism, while not narrow, are more concentrated than James's. I have already remarked on the surprising homogeneity and complementarity of the essays in *The Australian Tradition. Responses* widens this range to include, as well as prose fiction, drama (poetry is not a strong interest), the Australian folk song, education, architecture and the work of a variety of Australian, European and American writers. Yet there is a recurring interest in these writings more noticeable than in Clive James's work, in place — the social, geographical and political milieux in which writers, artists or musicians operate: Jack London is "the rumbustious personification of San Francisco in its palmy days"; the young Jack Lindsay epitomizes the rebellious spirit of the King's Cross Bohemia of the 1920s; Lawson exemplifies a democratic outlook inherent in working men who have experienced the harsh conditions of the Australian outback. According to Phillips, writers are defined by, and help to define the places they inhabit.

Clive James says in one of his reviews that "criticism needs negative capability too."[8] But his own receptivity is chiefly towards contemporary writing, while Phillips most often sees literature through the eyes of a cultural historian, looking in books, old and new, for the "life of the times" and how this relates to national traditions. Phillips's "Australian tradition" seems to be modelled in part on F. R. Leavis's notion of a nodal point in history (for Leavis it was pre-industrial revolution provincial England; for Phillips the 1890s in Australia) and a group of writers who carry forward a certain tradition of prose fiction in their country. The narrowness of such definitions of tradition worries James, as his essay "F. R. Leavis in America"[9] shows:

> Whether nostalgically or not, the past is vaguely invoked — (by Leavis) — an organic unity then that is not an organic unity now. Standards. Life. For Life. But suppose that culture were one factor in a plurality, had always been and must always be one factor in a plurality . . .

James is not here merely smarting at the gibes that Leavis and his followers had made about the 'modish literary world' of London and its

lack of moral backbone or historical percipience; he expresses a different, more eclectic (and almost certainly more realistic) view of contemporary metropolitan society. Nevertheless, his pluralist view of history and literature bypasses many problems which continual switching among a variety of editors and audiences cannot solve.

Certainly, James has attuned himself to his audiences effectively. He has said of the writing of his weekly television column in the Observer: "I imagine the audience there and I am playing to them as I write. Each sentence is timed to make them laugh at the right spot."[10] But he has other interests, other audiences as well: his success is partly due to the range of these interests and his capacity to move rapidly from television commentator to the serious critic of poets such as Auden, Berryman, Lowell and Larkin. A potential danger is exploiting such a range of opportunities is of becoming a chameleon figure, changing according to the complexion of the audience or editor you wish to please; the corresponding danger, in a country of fewer opportunities, fewer international contacts and fewer outlets, is of becoming a 'fixed' personality, albeit an eccentric, programmatically straitjacketed in a rigid consistency.

Just as James, through force of personality seems to avoid the first danger, so does Phillips with a stubborn independent wit and sense of the absurd avoid the second. Phillips's implied reader is the Common Man, that mythical but important buffer against mindless triviality on the one hand and abstract mystification on the other, who, transmuted to the Common Person, should be acknowledged as an endangered species in the 1980s. James seems to share his ideal poetry critic, Randall Jarrell's, hunger for "an egalitarian society of uniformly high standards", along with Jarrell's solution of writing as though this society already existed.

The different personalities which James and Phillips project in their journalism are shown when the two writers separately discuss Al Alvarez's accounts of modern extremist literature, as expressed in the work of Plath, Hughes, Lowell, Berryman and others. Phillips's response[11] is to agree with Alvarez's impatience at English "genteelism" but to be suspicious of his "championship of the new wayoutness", which deals with suicide, mental breakdown, guilt and death:

> The pursuit of such preoccupations is of course no disqualification for a poet. Death and remorse have been greatly written about in almost every generation. But such things have never before been the exclusive, or even the dominant, emphases. *Prometheus Bound, Lear, Moby Dick, The Brothers Karamazov,* recognize unflinchingly the tragic situations of man but they also make their positive affirmations; and without those affirmations they would not be great works of art. I do not believe that a black square can make a good painting, despite the recent example.

James,[12] on the other hand, dips himself briefly in Alvarez's bath of emotional and mental crisis, then gets out quickly:

> I for one am never going to understand why Alvarez should want to cling by his fingernails to a vast slab of naked geology while vultures stagger past with one wing folded over their eyes, but I can't deny that such experience gives his narrative writing a certain edge: he seems to go about with his nervous system worn externally, and I suppose it is true that if you conduct your life in this way you will face and resolve problems that most people shirk, and restrict the range of their sensibilities by so shirking. But I can suppose this without supposing that it is *better* to push things to the limit . . .

James here exposes the incipient melodrama of Alvarez's writing, cleverly turning it into comedy and thereby defusing it. Taking the argument further than Phillips goes (Encounter gave him plenty of space), James challenges Alvarez's view of the historical uniqueness of twentieth century violence and angst and argues, in contradistinction to Alvarez, that the liberal-humanist intellectual still has a major part to play in furthering civilization. In this belief, as in their instinctive retreat from the abyss, James and Phillips would appear to agree. However, it would be fair to say that James gives more scope to pessimism in literature and life and somewhat more range of vision to the blind spot that Phillips discerned in the Australian temperament, its timid yet scornful avoidance of "the glories and terrors of the incertitudes . . . the exaltations of the mysteries." Yet both are survivors, optimistic enough to stand clear of the abyss.

The range of topics covered in Phillips' and James's criticism, together with their personal preferences in literary and social matters, makes it difficult to sum up what they might express of the "provincial" and "metropolitan" outlooks.

Nevertheless, some observations can be made. In Phillips's case, his preference as a tourist for the architecture of the "modest colonials" of Provence above the "metropolitan heaviness" of Rome is predictable and consistent with his literary tastes. An overweening show of power or grandeur is a definite negative in Phillips's scheme of values, and those writers who keep things on a more restricted human scale, showing insight into the humanity of flawed, ordinary people — writers such as Furphy, Lawson, Melville and Chaucer — are preferred to 'show offs' or followers of metropolitan fashions, such as Byron or (strangely) Hawthorne. He is critical of literary experiments which diverge too far from the conventions of realism and of authorial attitudes that are too negative or pessimistic: hence the more traditionally realistic narrative form of *A Fringe of Leaves* and the "steadier affectionateness" of Patrick White for his characters in that novel make it superior, in Phillips's eyes, to "algebraic" novels such as *Riders in the Chariot* or *The Aunt's Story*.

A conservative reformer in literary matters, Phillips is suspicious of the avant garde impulse of some modern dramatists,[13] preferring the realism of Ibsen and Chekhov. His discussion of Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination* shows his didactic concern to promote realism and naturalism in a play which departs radically from these theatrical norms:

> Despite his non-realistic presentation, his (Monk's) diversity of meanings, the deliberate contradictions and self-romanticising which he embodies, he is solid and rounded — once again the look-back-over-the-shoulder towards naturalism has succeeded.

Phillips' relish for this play — which both celebrates and satirises Australian provincialism — is expressed in a personal response to the play's central character: "He remains after one has left the theatre a permanent inhabitant of the village of one's mind. The last time I observed him there, Hamlet was enjoying him as he once enjoyed another gravedigger."

Dr Johnson's view of provincial behavior as "unpolished" "rude", or "barbarous" would certainly apply to Monk O'Neill; and Phillips enjoys the play, one suspects, both for itself and for its debunking of the alleged metropolitan ideals of "polish", "manners", "good taste" and "culture".

It is perhaps important to point out that Clive James's 'metropolitanism' is often also characterised by a healthy vulgarity, and that he can at the same time be seriously engaged, mentally and emotionally, with the writers whose work he analyses or comments upon. Edmund Wilson is James's ideal metropolitan critic,[14] a man for whom "literature has always been an international community". Wilson however, had an early and abiding interest in the literature and society of his home country, which informs much of his work in the New Republic, the New Yorker and elsewhere; James acknowledges this without any sense of a contradiction in his own role as a metropolitan critic almost uninvolved in literary developments in *his* home country. Wilson's "steady work of reporting, judging, sorting out, reproving and re-estimating" is perceived by James as quality metropolitan journalism, exhibiting "durable excitement" and "comprehensive seriousness", arising from a standpoint of intellectual equality with his reader. This is a crucial issue for the metropolitan critic today, in London or Sydney: the question of audience. Most of James's writings suggest that he couldn't envisage a relationship of intellectual equality between himself and an Australian audience. It is surely a nonsense view, based on a jaundiced picture of the Australia of the 1950s.

Most of James's own literary journalism deals with contemporary writing: it crosses international borders more frequently than date-lines; the range of reference is wide and includes European and American literatures. At his best, as in the essays on contemporary poets in *At the Pillars of Hercules,* a sustained critical intelligence is at work, punctuated from time to time by a sceptical sense of humor which sounds unmistakeably Australian and would be recognised as such by his predominantly English audience. While Phillips has remained, as was said about E. M. Forster, a renegade corpuscle in his country's bloodstream, Clive James has brought his own brand of Australianness to the London literary scene. He is not of course, the first Australian emigre to find a niche there: Barry Humphries, Richard Neville, Sydney Nolan, Peter Porter and Rolf Harris, to name only a few, have dramatised aspects of their Australian identity for English audiences: the former colony can still provide copy in London which would be unacceptable in metropolitan centres with lesser ties with Australia, such as Paris or New York.

While the heady excitement of participating in the cross-fire of London literary and intellec-

tual life might remain more stimulating to the young journalist there are signs that, in the 1980s, it will be possible to create in Australian cities a more suitable environment for the exercise of an intelligent, critical metropolitan journalism.

A. A. Philips would not, of course, oppose this. But he would insist that it should be a metropolitanism "of our own", tempered by the valuable qualities of what he calls provincialism — realism, honesty, an earthy sense of proposition — against the fads and excesses of the cultural capital. Strangely though, neither James or Phillips seems aware that the cultural capital can be within Australia, or that a number of alternative centres might exist.

The growth of such centres will depend largely on the climate created for the arts by the 'high' journalism of which A. A. Phillips and Clive James are, in their different ways, such admirable exponents. As that growth occurs, the debate between metropolitan and provincial viewpoints will not stop, but will change from the old exclusive obsession with a colonial complex towards a more appropriate sense of the relatedness of the different Australian regions and a more diverse set of international concerns.

NOTES

[1] A. A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition,* Cheshire, Melbourne 1958; revised edition, Lansdowne, Melbourne 1966.
[2] Clive James, *The Metropolitan Critic,* Faber and Faber, London 1974.
[3] Clive James, "Cracking a Nut for Culture" in the Observer Review, 27 June 1976, p. 17. More recently, however, James has expressed an interest in living in both England and Australia. See Trudi McIntosh, "The Kid from Kogarah," Australian, 28 June, 1980. See too, James's autobiographical essays, *Unreliable Memoirs,* Jonathan Cape, London 1980.
[4] A. A. Phillips, *Responses,* pp. 20, 22.
[5] "Cracking a Nut for Culture", loc. cit.
[6] *Fan-Mail: Seven Verse Letters by Clive James,* Faber and Faber, London 1977, pp. 40-41.
[7] *The Road of Silk,* London 1974. Like all of James's albums, this one was produced for RCA, with the songs set and sung by Peter Atkins.
[8] Clive James, "Settling for Dust", *The Metropolitan Critic,* p. 69.
[9] Clive James, "F. R. Leavis in America", *The Metropolitan Critic,* pp. 150-160.
[10] "The Kid from Kogarah', loc. cit.
[11] A. A. Phillips, "Genteelism and Extremism", *Responses,* pp. 149-151.
[12] Clive James, "Big Medicine", *The Metropolitan Critic,* pp. 29-46.
[13] A. A. Phillips, "Assaying the New Drama", *Responses,* pp. 182-189.
[14] See Clive James, "The Metropolitan Critic", *The Metropolitan Critic,* pp. 15-29.

I am indebted to my colleague, Mr. R. B. Freadman, for discussion of some of the issues contained in this paper.


Lloyd Rees
RICK AMOR '81.

ERIC WESTBROOK **L.R.**

He looks like a prophet bringing salvation from the wilderness. The thin neck springs from a shirt which should be a goat-skin cloak and disappears into the folded complications of a jaw and mouth seemingly formed by the joyful pessimism of calling upon us sinners to repent. The mass of white hair once preserved by artists and musicians still fits him well, in spite of having become boring in banks and on building sites. All this frames the dark mounts of the eyes which focus behind you in conversation as if fixed at deep distance from years of reaching into the landscape. These eyes can become fierce with conviction but even then gently cancel any fanaticism which the balance of the face might suggest. This preacher has not come to town to measure the closeness of our end, but to urge us to prepare for a future which will be long in hope and achievement.

He moved as a young man from Queensland to find that Sydney was where he should have been born. Some never discover their native places and remain exiles, but he was fortunate and has celebrated this good fortune in his works and days. He has painted and drawn many places and found them fruitful, but Sydney is his point of return and has served him faithfully as a subject during a long life, and will do so for his remaining segment of time. The city in its bowl of water has given him the structure and the light which his work needs, but it has also provided him with exciting contemporaries to help him find reasons for living and painting and to strip off the wrapping of Queensland conservatism to reveal a man of the Left who is at the same time a humanist and a humanitarian. Then, as a bonus, Sydney gave him generations of students of architecture who have, if they cared, been taught by him to see a world in other ways than as a bran tub from which they could draw packets of saleable space. And in this time and in this place he has always drawn.

His drawings have been praised by some as miracles of detail, a virtue which puritans applaud; but detail is meaningless if it is merely a way of filling time and spaces. Real drawing, as against the slap and tickle of 'fine draughtsmanship' so often praised in reviews and obituaries, is a process of learning by following the point of the pencil, pen or chalk around and into the structure of things; and so in drawings such as his, detail is the act of comprehension taken further. He exhibits his drawings because they provide the bread and butter for the painter's table, but probably he would prefer to put them in their proper place — the studio drawer — as did the Italians before Vasari made working drawings into collectors' pieces. These drawings are 'studies' in the true sense of the word; like Bach exploring his new-fangled keyboard, they try out the possibilities of the landscape and spread them out with logic and cleanliness; but the paintings, on which he wishes his reputation to stand, are Mahlerian in their smoky passion. Now the execution has become rapid and sensual, for the pencil has already scouted out the land for the brush, but the brush does not necessarily tread in the same footprints, for the paintings are not colored and enlarged versions of the studies, but surge out on their own with the confidence which they have been given. In the long years during which he has covered miles of canvas with gallons of paint the weight of color and tone in the pictures has varied, but their structure has remained constant.

This, and the fact that he has chosen to keep his wondering and unwavering eye concentrated almost entirely upon landscape, might suggest repetition. But in his retrospective exhibitions,

those selective autobiographies of the author's good works, there is no weariness of spirit in the painter or the spectator. For while the pictures clearly spring from the same head, hand and eye, each has a discovery to announce. These discoveries are at the same time a further laying open of the possibilities of paint, and fresh revelations of the bones, hair and hide of the visible world and what man has done with it and to it. He looks like a prophet bringing salvation from the wilderness, and in each canvas he does just that.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

Dear Dr Pascoe:

Not all our readers will know who you are, so I had better explain. You are the present chairman of the Australia Council. The Australia Council hands out government grants to the arts in this country. You, recently appointed, are the first permanent chairman. Previously there were part-time chairmen, the latest of whom was Geoffrey Blainey. Your first name is Timothy.

You are fairly young, in the thirties, I think. You have, I think, a prestigious American business qualification (a Harvard MBA?), you were a few years ago some kind of a Liberal Party *apparatchik*, and more recently you have been active in an organization called ARTS, which was something to do with increasing the bonding between private industry and the arts.

You must be aware that many people, especially on the Left, both paranoid Left and reasonably sane Left, are suspicious of your appointment to the Australia Council. They see it as an attempt by a conservative government not only to seize ideological control of the arts in Australia, but to have someone there who will maintain it even after a conservative government falls.

It will be interesting to see what happens. I think most people would rather see at the head of the Australia Council someone who actually has a reputation in the arts, as presumably we would wish to see someone with a literary reputation at the head of the Literature Board — which is part of your empire, of course. But you may prove an admirable chairman. I was pleased, for instance, to see you recently at the National Book Council's annual awards dinner in Sydney: it was good that you came. I've heard nothing of significance against you.

I had a ring from the Literature Board the other day. Would I join Dr Pascoe's "challenge scheme"? What the hell is the "challenge scheme"? I asked. It's a scheme, I was told, whereby we are given extra money if we raise extra money. For instance, if *Overland* could raise say $4000 or so in a year in donations, then you would give us an extra $1000.

My reply, Dr Pascoe, was I am afraid rather caustic. I pointed out that the National Book Council, of which I am chairman, does a lot of work on behalf of the Australia Council already, and for my participation in that I receive, of course, no fee. A section of my time is a gift to you, in effect. Then I pointed out that the literary magazines perform an important economic function (which must have escaped your attention) on behalf of the Australia Council: the grants we receive are in considerable part *not* for the magazines, but for the writers who write for us, and they are passed on by us after a tremendous amount of hard work assessing manuscripts and printing some of them, *at no cost to you*. If you wished to distribute this money directly to writers, you'd need a couple more project officers, with their holiday pay, overtime loadings, long service leave and what-have-you. More of my time is therefore a free gift to you. And I pointed out that we receive more already in donations, for which we work hard, than I think any other magazine does.

"You can tell Dr Pascoe," I regretfully recall saying, "that on top of this if he thinks I'm going to walk the streets trying to entice money out of his multi-national friends he can get . . . well, he can get another opinion. I'd rather close the bloody magazine down."

Has it occurred to you, Dr Pascoe, that the whole point of the arts in society is that they should not, repeat not, appeal to your "corporate donors"? Have you reflected that once paintings and writings become board-room cosy (or for that matter politbureau cosy) they become a veneer

around an empty box? Do you not understand that a perfectly proper definition of "the arts" would be: "that section of the imaginative work of a community which challenges the received, the proper, the respectable and the familiar"? Do you not understand that the attempt to create a forced marriage between your Australia Council and the wealthy will end up depriving your own work of its significance? Should you not be saying "When Utah or BHP takes an artist or a theatre under its wing, that is the time we must penalise the recipients for deserting under fire, not reward them?" The only appropriate way for major 'corporate' donations to the arts to be handled would be for the donations to be made to the Australia Council itself, and even that has dangers. Of course I appreciate the operas that the 'corporations' underwrite, but the principle is wrong, and leads to better and better productions of "Don Giovanni" (for which I'm grateful) while innovative opera, potentially boat-rocking, never even gets born.

Why does *Overland* print a Comalco ad.? I hear some cry. Yes, it is important to get this straight. *One*, because we need the money. *Two*, because we are not in the business, except under extreme provocation, of censoring ads. *Three*, because this is a business arrangement, in which we give an advertiser something he wants to buy; it is not a hand-out to us. *Fourthly*, because what I have written here establishes that we are not in the pocket of Comalco or anyone else, and that we don't intend to be. We can do without them. We are not hooked.

But what you are proposing, Dr Pascoe, is a highly-motivated attempt to drive us all into the hands of the wealthy patrons. While we on *Overland* will dine with all, varying the length of our spoons to the occasion, the patrons we care about are the thousands of Australians who read us, write to us, send us their few dollars, and have found it worth while keeping us going for nearly thirty years.

We must meet some time. I'd like to see what you have to say.

Yours sincerely,
STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH.

GRAEME TURNER

For the Term of his Natural Life

A new view of the self in Australian Fiction

Graeme Turner teaches in the School of English at the Western Australian Institute of Technology. He has published articles on modern American fiction, Australian literature and the Australian film, and is working on a study of the fiction of Robert Coover and Joseph Heller.

Life, for the Australian, seems not to go on in his country as it does elsewhere. This has become a commonplace utterance, littering the novels of the nineteenth century, cropping up in contemporary novels such as Roger McDonald's *1915,* and reaching some sort of cultural orthodoxy, one imagines, with Barry Humphries' reference to the Australian as an "exile from life's feast".[1] This sense of being ejected from the mainstream of life, "elected out of human society"[2], is another face of the image of incarceration and exile which springs from our penal beginnings and which is still a dominant metaphor in our literary tradition.

The pervasiveness of the image of exile and imprisonment has not, of course, gone unrecognised by accounts of our literary tradition. However, it is usually seen in the same ways as the theories about egalitarianism and mateship; theories that seem to me to be offering limited insights into our literature — rather like remarking on the amount of class distinction in English literature. As Brian Kiernan points out, the choice of a penal colony for the setting of a novel of the mid-nineteen sixties, *Bring Larks and Heroes,* has more far-reaching implications than such theories are capable of revealing. The image of the prisoner recurs in this novel, and many others; but, unlike codes of social conduct such as those of mateship, it is also, and primarily, used to question the "metaphysical basis of the relationship between the individual and society."[3] The details of this relationship and the concept of the individual self that underlies it are what define our literature as Australian.

The received overview of our Australian literary tradition is oddly superficial, noting details without attempting to relate those details to their source in our tradition. Indeed, we even debate whether there is an indigenous tradition. An unflattering comparison can be made with America, where the problem of defining the national literature has been more successfully tackled. The work of Fiedler and Lewis, in particular, does not content itself with noticing, say, the wealth of prelapsarian symbolism in the presentation of the American hero, or that the stylistic devices of gothicism and romanticism have endured as features of the nation's literature.[4] They look for patterns of belief and myth that create these signals, avoiding the glibness with which Geoffrey Dutton has written off the distinctively depressive tone of much of our fiction as simply "matters of temperament."[5] The myth of Adam, tied in with the motives for settling America in the first place, is comprehensively argued by R. W. B. Lewis to be a defining myth within American thought, and one which particularly dominates its fiction. This myth is pieced together with the aid of the early colonial rhetoric, as well as patterns of plot and thematic direction in the fiction which place the moral priority on the individual self, and which express a resilient faith in the innocence of the American Adamic hero.

If we look at our own literature in similar ways I think we find there is something peculiarly Australian about it. In the depiction of the central character, the portrait of the individual self in Australian fiction, we can see a pattern. Kiernan has established that the individual in our

fiction is in limbo; not endorsing his society, nor fully at ease with Nature:

> In Nature, the individual seeks the fulfillment he cannot find in society. He projects his frustrated hopes and ideals onto the natural environment, but the Nature he idealises proves to be the ultimate, obdurate reality against which his ideals are tested. Society, instead of being a community built out of shared experiences and values . . . is an intrusive force that negates the possibility of free and harmonious relations between man and man, man and Nature.[6]

Further, Nature — or more accurately, the land — is always alien, and even when presumed to be hospitable it is also inscrutable in its antiquity and potential cruelty. The society itself is seen, usually in documentary terms, as banal, routine and devoid of spirituality. This is particularly so in the cold detailings of the domestic decorations of Australian life which festoon the novels of Patrick White.

Alienated from both society and the land, the individual has, it would seem, no other option but to assert the self. However, there is no enabling myth of the innocence or priority of the self in our tradition as there is in that of America. The reasons seem simple: America was a society established to escape from the perceived iniquities of life in Europe, while Australia was a prison established to contain those judged guilty of perpetrating the iniquities of Europe. To simplify further, theirs was a mission of hope, ours the ordeal of exile.

Therefore, both excluded and disaffected, without a supporting mythology to convert the predicament into either quest or revolt, the central character in our fiction is firmly trapped. It should hardly surprise us, then, that our most enduring literary image is one of imprisonment. It is often actual, as in the case of Dawes or Halloran, but the image can also be widely metaphorical; it would include the enclosed and codified world of brotherly exiles (mates) in Lawson's bush stories, as well as the isolated women tormented by male gaoler figures in Barbara Baynton's stories. The sense of 'gloom' in *Ultima Thule* does not merely come from the temperament of Henry Handel Richardson. The novel describes a man psychologically imprisoned, trying ineptly and desperately to penetrate the barriers between himself and the social and physical environment he is forced to endure. Mahony's turning on his wife as a betrayer, a cruel gaoler, expresses the deep sense of divorce experienced by the individual in Australian fiction confronting his environment. The boredom of the incarcerated, the longing for a break in the monotony, reveals itself in the assertion repeated by Stow, Herbert and others, that World War I offered a welcome reunion between Australia and the world. The crisis develops, and the prison is — briefly — opened.

Our fiction is riddled with images of social deprivation, set as it usually is within a small, prosaic and unsurprising society, without a developed mythology or folklore, and without a common sense of spiritual direction. Where spirituality exists, it is diminished and abstract: Stan Parker's vision of God in a gob of spittle, Heriot's absorption into the land.

The experience defined by the novelists as Australian offers little hope for the individuals caught within it, and they see themselves as trapped and alien. Their attempts at dealing with this situation follow the pattern of the prisoner's response to his gaol: we find the alternative of escape (usually to England); of identifying with the land, the prison itself, as a way of winning some peace of mind and a sense of place; of moral criticism of the cruelty of the gaolers in order to propose the moral superiority of those incarcerated; and of a railing against the boredom, the lack of nourishment the society of the prison offers, which at best employs the strength of the frustration as a relief from the pain it expresses.

This profile of the central character in Australian fiction implies not only a dominant narrative image and a characteristic plot structure (the saga for instance) but also a characteristic metaphysical dilemma. Brian Kiernan suggests our literature offers support for Nature expressing an essentially romantic impulse to live "in harmony with the whole universe", and reinforcing the need for the individual to search beyond the promises offered by the society. While the romanticism he mentions may exist in many ways in our tradition, I would not accept that the "land" in Australian fiction, and the romantic concept of "Nature", are synonymous. If anything, the Australian "land" is the inverse of Nature: it is to Nature what the prison is to society, what the original perception of Australia was to the remembered society of England.

However, the continuing line of despair, of hopelessness created by the failure of the attempt to articulate a whole and worthwhile life for the individual, does seem to me to be an essentially

romantic position. This is odd, because, as Kiernan says, the way in which our writers see the world also leads one to a position that could be termed existential. I do not accept Kiernan's definition of an existential position — "the insistence on the essential loneliness of the individual and his need to search for fulfillment beyond the empty forms of life offered by the society"[7] — but there are others which still illuminate our fictional image of the self and its predicament.

A more appropriate definition of the existential position, and one which applies to the recognition of nothingness in our fiction, describes the plight of the individual who "finds himself in a world suddenly deprived of lights or illusions":

> Man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.[8]

The quotation is from Albert Camus and its reference to the "memory of a lost home" is the only section that does not apply to the individual in Australian fiction: the yearning for England is still the romantic residue within the metaphysical position our writers adopt. Escape to England is often suggested as a means of resolving the sense of exile and divorce in Australia. However, this new context is rarely imagined in detail, so the resolution is not tested for its authenticity.

The term "divorce," however — the image of the actor deprived of his setting — admirably describes both the dilemma of the individual in Australian fiction, and also that of the predicament of the prisoner. "Divorce", as a term, unites both the predicament and its recognition. If we look at the rest of the quotation, we see that the "hope of a promised land" is also denied to the Australian individual. The sense of guilt which cloaks Australia's beginnings is relevant here, even though it is combated by the rhetoric of many early writers and by the rush of nationalism and social democracy at the turn of the century. But we possess no enduring mythology of hope as the Americans do, and the images of Australia as a new Eden have been cancelled out, as it were, by the departure of the boatload of colonists who emigrated to South America. So our enduring literary image of the individual self imprisoned in Australia implies within it an existential position, depending as it does on the recognition of isolation, of divorce and exile. The individual is trapped at the point Camus describes as the "feeling of absurdity".

The application of Camus' definition of the absurd to a discussion of a central image in Australian literature may seem perverse, but the notion has been aired before.[9] However, when we consider how little absurdist writing there is in our tradition, we are obviously looking at a very special version of this view of reality. In many ways, for example, our writers seem to halt just before the "feeling of absurdity", without fully accepting it; they are arrested at the pre-existential moment. Instead of responding to an existential vision by evolving an existentialist mode of behavior, we tend to 'resolve' our dilemma of divorce through death or a kind of terminal alienation. Our fictional heroes have to be destroyed because there is nothing else for them. Rufus Dawes dies because the novel's world has offered no context wherein he could convincingly renovate his life. Barry Oakley's anarchistic hero, Prendergast, while transparently modelled on American absurdist anti-heroes whose picaresque adventures provide them with the strength and confidence to endure their conflict with society, has to be destroyed by a crowning act of silliness which defines his approach to life as unacceptably nihilistic. Amy Parker's infidelity with the travelling salesman in the *Tree of Man* is an attempt to ameliorate the feeling of solitary confinement; and it fails, pathetically, leaving the novel to carry its characters towards death, their alienation from each other by no means convincingly neutralised by the framing and consoling symbolism of the natural cycle of the seasons. Halloran's question on the gallows — "Am I perhaps God?" — reflects more than the character's confusion in the face of the problem of trying to exist authentically in Australia; it is also Keneally's confusion, and the novel offers an unresolved and awkward dialectic between the Christian and the existential viewpoint which is terminated by the twin barrels of, first, the alienation and then, the death of the main character.

The dominance of the saga form in our fiction, with its central character typically young and confused, suggests the uncertainty and scepticism of the Australian writer as he seeks to provide a meaning with which to make coherent his vision of existence in Australia. In the saga the writer appears to abdicate his role, leaving his

characters at the mercy of the naturalistic and deterministic imperatives his plot has set in motion. Yet the writers are more ready to imagine the death of their characters than to accept a manner of survival that implies a philosophical resolution of the separation of the individual from his context, of divorce from meaning.

The result of this is that Australia has not, so far, developed a strong absurdist or existentialist movement in fiction, or in any other literary area. Our dramatic writers are still largely social realists, and with one or two exceptions — notably Jack Hibberd — appear little interested in the influence of the European Theatre of the Absurd. Even the emphasis on 'nothingness' in contemporary short stories seems more of a stylistic device than a thematic position.

So perhaps the Australian writer sees absurdity, nothingness, but cannot react to it as an existentialist. When faced with meaninglessness he becomes a romantic, killing his character off or allowing him to escape; or he affects the pose of the social critic, blaming the gaolers or the prison itself. This must be a glib and inadequate explanation. The writers must choose their responses for reasons that are authentic determinants of our tradition — to do with a dissatisfaction with romanticism that is complicated by the feeling that the assumption of an existential position would be an irrelevance.

One reason for this may go back to our beginnings. The secular and materialist character of our society could make any philosophical solution to the problems of existence seem a notional abstraction that would not resolve the writer's problem of his relationship to his society and his land. The very notion of a metaphysic, or spirituality, is an uncomfortable passenger in our society, and in our literature we tend to borrow concepts of spirtuality from the Aboriginal rather than offer them as something conceived of by the white man. Stow, Herbert, and White have all used this device.

However, I believe the main reason lies in the comments quoted at the beginning of this discussion. If life does not 'go on' here as it does elsewhere, then a 'universal' solution to the problem of divorce and imprisonment may not be convincing. Our writers face not only a metaphysical problem of divorce, but also specifically Australian social and physical problems. Metaphysically, Australia is a special case, since existence is defined here as being Australian — and therefore imprisoned — as well as human — and therefore divorced from meaning. The prisoner will not be consoled by a faith in God, or in the self, unless he can be convinced that he should still be in prison while others remain free.

So not only is the image of the prisoner a dominating stylistic feature of characterisation and setting in Australian fiction, but it also discloses causes for the kinds of thematic resolutions and metaphysical patternings our novels reveal. The image provides us with a way of seeing the unique dilemma of the individual self in Australia, but it also seems to invalidate advice from elsewhere, such as existentialism, as relevant methods of resolving this dilemma. Victims of a cosmic xenophobia, we are still baled up by the problem of being Australian as well as the usual artistic problems of inventing or discovering those universal meanings. Australian literature's quirky distinctiveness may well lie in this perception, and it does seem dependent upon it for its characteristic irresolution in its approach to meaning, as it oscillates, thematically, from the romantic to the existential.

Far from being an indication of cultural immaturity, or the failure of the attempt to articulate a national identity, this is a defining feature of the portrait of the individual self in Australian fiction. As with the American self, the American Adam, the Australian prisoner is definitively Australian; but, as such, he is denied the support the optimistic American myth provides for its heroes. Ours is a myth of entrapment and exile, and our vision of ourselves that of a self having been elected out of the human condition and thus divorced from life. We are obsessed with our prison, and do not easily see it as part of a larger, universal system. The need for an Australian to come to terms with his particular physical and social setting therefore preempts any wider philosophical endeavor — as we inherit the thinking, the myth, of the first Australians in our belief that life does not really go on in prison.

The appropriateness of the prisoner metaphor, then, leads us beyond a simple local choice of setting, characterisation, or patterns of images. It has consequences on the view of the self that defines Australian fiction, creating the thematic patterns which impel the isolated and exiled individuals in our fiction towards the alternatives of death, escape or alienation without expressing any confidence in the legitimacy of these options. This lack of confidence is not caused by any

lack of skill or perception in our novelists, nor by coincidence of temperament; rather, it is created by their awareness that the individual in Australia faces a uniquely Australian dilemma that necessitates the characteristic thematic irresolution in our fiction.

Further, this awareness produces certain strategies of form that can be seen to texture the surface of our fictional tradition.

NOTES

[1] Rolling Stone, 11 December 1980, p. 108.
[2] H. Heseltine, "The Australian Image: The Literary Heritage", in C. Semmler's *Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism* (Melbourne, 1967), p. 94.
[3] *Images of Society and Nature* (Oxford, 1971), p. 175.
[4] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Paladin, 1970): R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam,* (Chicago, 1955).
[5] "Strength Through Adversity", Bulletin, centenary issue, 29 January 1980, p. 131. While dismissing earlier reviewers as examples of the cultural cringe, Dutton offers a very limited view of Australian writing, dividing it into an Age of Gloom and an Age of Wit. Loath to enquire into the source of these features of our writing he dismisses the problem by claiming airily, "gloom or good humour in a writer is, of course, partly a matter of temperament. Some writers are just naturally cranky."
[6] *Images of Society and Nature,* pp. 180-1.
[7] Ibid., p. 178.
[8] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Penguin, 1975), p. 13.
[9] Both Kiernan's book, and Heseltine's article, cited above, draw on this kind of comparison to explain the nihilism implicit in some of our writing.

HIS SIDE OF THE STORY

He told her: you come with me.
A tear cut through the printed roses.
Everywhere she turned there were houses,
quiescent with cupboards and scrubbed pots,
dead locks and indoor plants.
In one house a radio played something catchy
with a Brazilian beat.

We ate donuts as he told me this
We shared a comradeship of cigarettes.

They'd been lovers; they were very good
together.
She was very good.
She thought he was very good.
He *was* good.
A little drunk, a little wild, maybe,
but basically
good.
What's a little love between friends?

"She ran away so I grabbed her blouse.
Not hard, but enough to stop her.
The buttons popped. I heard them land
somewhere in the grass. She didn't mind.
I get paid this week; storeman, that's right;
I'll get her another."

"How's that sound?", he asks.
"Do you want anything else to eat?", I said.

Not rape, he says, not rape.

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

The Bicycle and Australian English

JIM FITZPATRICK

Jim Fitzpatrick works in the Research Branch of the Western Australian Education Department. He has published The Bicycle and the Bush (1980) *and will shortly publish* The Kids' Book of Bicycles in Australia.

During the 1890s many countries, including Australia, were swept by a bicycling craze.[1] By mid-decade many newspapers and magazines had instituted regular cycling columns, or featured occasional articles on the device. The bicycle was advocated, lampooned, criticized or denounced by various publishers and writers through cartoons, stories, poems and articles, and was the subject of earnest discussion across the entire socio-economic spectrum. Along with the machines, numerous cycle journals were imported, mostly from England and the United States, and several local ones were founded. In the period 1896 - 1900, in particular, every Australian colony (with the possible exception of Tasmania) had at least one. In New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia several journals were simultaneously in print at one time or another.[2] The result for Australian English was the rapid infusion of a variety of words and phrases from overseas, along with some home-grown creations and adaptations.

Australian Adoptions

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) indicates that the word "bicycle" was used in England as early as September 1868, and in the United States as "bysicle" and "bicycular" by February 1869. The term "cycle" was used in a similar sense by February 1871 in England. "Wheel" was used to refer to the bicycle as early as 1882 in the United States. It appeared in the English *Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant* in 1890, although in 1897 an English cycling author said that the term was more American than English: "Bike" was used by at least 1882, although it is not clear whether it was of American or English origin. It is commonly used in America and is not listed as slang or colloquial in American dictionaries. In the Supplement to the OED and the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary,* "bike" is given as a colloquial term.

"Boneshaker", a long-established word in the English language, was quickly adopted in cycling circles to refer to the iron-rimmed, rough-riding velocipedes of the 1860s. The word's use was eventually broadened to refer to any rough-riding bicycle, especially the solid rubber-tyred machines of the 1880s (pneumatic tyres were invented in 1888 and came into popular use in Australia in about 1893). The term "header" also took on a new connotation as cyclists found themselves occasionally executing the manoeuvre (sometimes with fatal results). All of the above words were well established in Australia by 1890.

The phrase "penny-farthing", now used to refer to the high wheeler machines that were popular in the 1870s and 1880s, was a relative newcomer. According to Ritchie,[3] the high wheelers were originally called "bicycles". However, as the new "safety" models (similar to those we ride today) came on the market, it became necessary to differentiate between the two styles. The term "ordinary" was consequently adopted to refer to the high wheelers, while "bicycle" referred increasingly to the new "safeties". It was only after the high wheelers had substantially faded from the popular cycling scene (about the mid-1890s) that they were commonly referred to as "penny-farthings". Usage in Australian literature supports this con-

tention. In a similar manner, the term "bloomers", well-known today, was in fact far less popular in Australia and overseas during the 1890s than the alternatives, "rational dress" and "rationals".

As would be expected, cycle enthusiasts and the racing fraternity had a seemingly endless number of highly specialised words and phrases that never achieved general public use. An example is the word "jigger". The term, referring to mechanical gadgets having a jerky motion, was common in America and was understandably applied to the bicycle as well. However, in association with the Australian cycling scene I have encountered it only in cycle journals in the late 1890s.

Numerous adopted overseas terms current in Australia around the turn of the century have not survived to the present day, at least in their cycling sense. Among these are "scorcher", for which the modern equivalent is "hot rodder", and "crack", referring to a top-class cycle racer. Tyre pumps were commonly known as "inflators", women riders were often called "cyclistes", and the modern bicycle was frequently referred to as a "safety".

In Australia "pushbike" is now a common word for a bicycle — possibly even more so than "bicycle" itself in some circles. The earliest recorded use of the word referred to in the *OED* is from an English newspaper of June 1905. "Pushbike" is rarely listed in American dictionaries; the *Webster's Third International* specifically cites it as British and comments upon it being used to differentiate between pedal and motor-driven bicycles. The earliest written use of it in Australia that I have encountered is in the title of an unpublished typescript prepared by Frances Birtles in about 1910. The *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* refers to "pushbike" as a slang word. However, in my view the term is so common in Australia that it could hardly be considered as "peculiar to one class of people", or "outside of standard English", the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary's* own definition of slang (I would argue the same with respect to "bike"). Because of the increasing tendency to use the terms "bike" and "cycle" to refer to motorcycles the word "pushbike" would appear to be more useful than ever.

"Grid" is given as a slang word for bicycle in both English and Australian dictionaries, but is not mentioned in that sense at all in American ones. The evolution of the word to refer to a bicycle is not clear. The earliest written appearance I am aware of was in D. H. Lawrence's 1922 work, *England, My England.* I have no idea when it was first used in Australia, but oral interviews suggest that it persisted as popular slang in many Australian schools until at least the late 1950s, and is still known in some circles.

Australianisms

A number of words and phrases associated with the bicycle appear to be peculiarly Australian. Possibly the best known is the reference to a sexually willing or promiscuous girl as a "bike" (e.g. the "town bike' or "office bike"). As David Williamson wrote in 1972 in *The Removalists,* "Turned out the tart was the biggest bike in the district". The expression "to get off his bike", in the sense of losing one's self control, or temper, is also still used. Several examples of the above usages are given in Sidney J. Blaker's *The Australian Language,* and G. A. Wilkes' *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms.*

However, most cycling-associated Australianisms have not been recorded in Australian language studies or dictionaries. For example, the use of the noun "treadle" (I have never seen it written, so can not vouch for a spelling) to refer to a bicycle was encountered in oral interviews in Western Australia. It is used more with respect to an older bicycle, about which the owner might be a bit embarrassed, than to a new, prized machine. I have not found the word listed as referring to a bicycle in any dictionary, Australian or otherwise. However, its origin is undoubtedly associated with the use of the word "treadle" to refer to pedalling a bicycle. This occurred at least by 1891 in England, according to the *OED;* and in March 1895 an Australasian article, "Women on Wheels", referred to a lady learning to "treadle her bike". Several Western Australians I interviewed still talk of "treadling" their bikes.

The first adjustable handlebars seen on a bicycle by many Australians were those used by 'Major' Taylor, the legendary black American cycle racer who toured Australia in 1902/03 and 1903/04. For the next several decades the phrase 'Major Taylors' was used in this country as a synonym for adjustable handlebars.

Several of the brand names adopted for bicycles and tyres in Australia gave new connotations to existing words and names. People (such as "Bond" and "Brassey"), horses ("Carbine") and constellations ("Southern Cross') joined English bicycle club names

("Speedwell") and local creations ("Dux" and "Malvern Star") in the Australian cycling pantheon. Such brands enriched the Australian language and, as decals on frames, added a highly mobile diffusionary element. And that very mobility was itself assisted by the "Phiz" tyre, a Sydney product of I. Phizackerley.

The widespread use of the bicycle on the Western Australian goldfields resulted in several words being adapted to the peculiar cycling circumstances found there. One such was "pad". The word has a long history in the English language in the sense of referring to walking (both men and animals) or a path formed by walking. Bicyclists on the Western Australian goldfields found that the packed, smooth pads created by the strings of pack camels that shuffled supplies between communities formed superb cycling routes (in fact the best and most extensive cycling path system yet seen in this country). Eventually a number of additional bicycle routes were constructed informally by cyclists themselves and formally by Roads Boards; they were all referred to as "bicycle pads" or simply "pads". The "pads" (camel- and man-made) were so important to the travel of local cyclists that "The Goldfields Bicycle Pad Protection League" was formed in mid-1897 to lobby for Parliamentary legislation to prevent any but camels or cyclists from using them (horses and teamsters' wagons quickly chewed up the smooth surfaces).

Another Westralian development centred about the rapid delivery of messages by bicycle, between goldfields mining communities. A number of cyclists delivered on short notice, "special" messages to anywhere on the fields, day or night. These "special cyclists" were highly respected, could cover 200 miles in a day, and were considered important in the development of the fields from 1894 - 1896. As a result, the terms "special", "special cyclist", and "special rider" achieved a unique connotation in Western Australia.

The word "lengthrunner' refers to those men who, for many decades after the completion of the Kalgoorlie pipeline, collectively patrolled its entire length daily, looking for and plugging leaks. The term does not refer to the mode of transport. However, the pipeline "sections" were ridden by bicycle for so many decades that the image of a "lengthrunner", in the minds of most interviewed, was inseparable from the use of the bicycle.

An intriguing matter concerning the bicycle's introduction into the outback is the Aboriginals' reaction to it. Neither I nor any anthropologists with whom I have discussed the question are aware of any ethnographic data. However, I have collected some "reports" from early writings and recent interviews with European bush travellers and workers. Jerome Murif, for example, who rode the first bicycle from Adelaide to Darwin, in 1897, said that his machine was described by Aboriginals he encountered along the way variously as "kangaroo engine", "piccaninny engine", "big mosquito", and "one-side buggy". But given the tongue-in-cheek nature of much of his writing and the apparently heavy-handed treatment the manuscript received at the hands of the publishers, I personally believe these terms were European inventions, and not necessarily by Murif.[4]

This contention would seem to be corroborated by the fact that a reporter who worked in the Kalgoorlie area in the 1930s informed me that the Aboriginals at that time described a bicyclist as "white man run sitting down". However, unknown to the reporter, the identical phrase, attributed to North American Indians, was published in at least one Western Australian cycle journal in the 1890s.

An especially interesting perspective upon colloquial Australian English is offered by the cyclists' concern with punctures from the numerous thorny plants found about the Australian countryside. The popular names of thorny plants were, and still are, confusing, misleading and inconsistently used both locally and nationally. For example, the most common plant that affected rural cyclists nationwide was *Emex australis*. It was apparently first introduced from South Africa, first to Western Australia, where the Afrikaans word for it, *duweltjie* (devil's thorn) was corrupted to "doublegee".[5] Other terms used to refer to it (both in W.A. and the eastern colonies) were "prickly jack", "three-cornered jack", "Cape Spinach", "Tanner's curse", "giant bull head", "bendei" (spelled variously, e.g. "bindy-eye"), "spiny emex" and "catshead". Interestingly, I found that some of the eastern terms were known by Westralians, although rarely used by them, while the Western Australian term "doublegee" was not at all familiar to most "tothersiders".

As well, a given popular word was commonly used to refer to distinctly different plants. For example, the word "bendei" was standardly used to describe various species of both *Bassia* and *Emex,* which are not related to one another.

The cyclist, in bandying about the popular words, only seemed to have further confused an already complex terminological situation.

Two terms which came into particular vogue during this period were "thorn proof" and "puncture proof" (these were used worldwide). Both referred to bicycle tyres that were originally manufactured (or later modified) to resist puncturing, either by being extra thick or incorporating additional layers of rubber, leather or other material inside the tyre. "Thorn Proof" was used as a trade name in Australia by Dunlop Tyres, but the widespread generic use of the term appears to have precluded any proprietary claim.

The pneumatic tyre made another contribution to the Australian language. The word "puncture", with the meaning extended through the concept of deflation to mean giving out, or tiring, was in use by early this century. In his book *On the Wool Track* C. E. W. Bean referred to a man who gave out, " 'puncture' as they say out there"; and later to another who "nearly punctured getting up that bank".

And when Jerome Murif encountered heavily infested thorn country in Central Australia, he cut a small piece of metal to fit the profile of the cycle tyre. Mounted between the forks, the template swept thorns off the tyre before several rotations could embed them. He called it a "burr dissuader".

As with so many words, it is difficult to estimate how current they may have been at one time or another in Australia, Some, such as "bicycle", "cycle", "bike", pushbike", "penny-farthing" and "boneshaker" have remained in use for many decades. Others have lost much of their popularity, if not disappeared entirely, in the sense they were formerly used, such as "scorcher", "crack", "rationals", "specials" and "pads". Such terms as "kangaroo engine" and "burr dissuader" appear to have been quite limited in their use, possibly restricted to the book in which they appeared.

The results of oral interviews have left me wary about making any claims as to the extent of word usage. The frequent volunteering of words like "grid", "treadlie", "treadling", "lengthrunner" and "Major Taylors" has clearly shown that there are a number of terms widely used at one time, and still familiar to some Australians, which have rarely appeared in print. Perhaps dictionaries of Australian English, and language studies yet to come, will ultimately profit from the increased interest in oral history that is evident in this country. In any case, they should more thoroughly acknowledge the influence of the bicycle upon the language.

FOOTNOTES

[1] I have outlined the bicycle's impact upon Australian society in, for example, "The Spectrum of Australian Bicycle Racing: 1890-1900", in R. Cashman and M. McKernan (eds.), *Sport in History* (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press), pp. 326-342; "The Pushbike and the Parish (Being a True Tale of Technological Triumph", Overland, nos. 76 - 77, p. 61; "Australian Cyclistes in the Victorian Era", Hemisphere, January - February, 1980, pp. 12 - 17; and *The Bicycle and the Bush: Man and Machine in Rural Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[2] These included The Australian Cyclist, The Austral Wheel and The Cycling Times, of Victoria; The New South Wales Cycling Gazette; The South Australian Cyclist; The West Australian Wheelman, The W.A. Cyclist and The West Australian Sporting Judge and Wheelman; and reputed Queensland Cyclist and Queensland Wheel journals, of which I could find no copies.

[3] Andrew Ritchie: *King of the Road: An Illustrated History of Cycling* (London: Wildwood House, 1975), pp. 79 - 80.

[4] Jerome J. Murif: *From Ocean To Ocean: Across a Continent on a Bicycle* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co. 1897), pp. 56, 80. Also see Geoffrey Blainey's comment about Murif s book, based upon a letter from Murif to Essington Lewis, in *The Steel Maker* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1971), p. 206.

[5] D. J. Gilbey: "The Doublegee Problem in Western Australia", *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Western Australia,* March 1975, p. 23.

books

ART THROUGH A GLASS

Terry Smith

Richard Haese: *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Allen Lane, $39.95).

Rebels and Precursors makes public part of a debate which has been going on, quietly but steadily, amongst those interested in the history of Australian art for some years. Usually, the debate asks the question: how, and to what extent, do the structures of Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting 1788-1970* require revision in the light of new evidence and changing ideologies? Haese also buys into a more general, and more important, discourse: that of the politics of our cultural life, of how such recurrent reference-points as elitism/populism, aestheticism/commitment, intellectualism / hedonism, Melbourne/Sydney, relate to each other, then and now.

Perhaps it is the conjunction of these two discourses which accounts for the burst of attention which the book is currently receiving. But not for the nature of the attention, for the excitement on the pages of that tabloid with the ugly, awkward name and such erratic content, the *Weekend Australian*. Is it that Haese's relentless plumbing for the middle-of-the-road-as-revolutionary seems to accord with the fierce boredom afflicting most of those who, emerging from the situation described in the book, now publicly define our intellectual culture? An establishment, treading gingerly, often obsequiously, around bosses such as Murdoch and Fraser, but also capable, when pressed as they are now in ways that they were then, of going the ginger, of fighting back and, one hopes, of defending the current crop of young 'rebels' as they take on the reactionaries all around them.

The central value of *Rebels and Precursors* is its recognition that the late 1930s and the war years were a key moment in the history of Australian art, at least equal to the much more heralded 'nationalism' of the 1890s, the 'rise of modernism' in the 1920s and 1930s, the 'Antipodean' 1950s and 'abstraction' in the 1960s. Furthermore, Haese recognizes that this moment effected artists right across the stylistic range, and so the Social Realists and the Realists receive an attention they lost in *Australian Painting*. But both these emphases structure Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition* of 1945, an indebtedness not fully acknowledged by Haese. As well, they inform much of recent work in the field, for example, that by Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, forthcoming in Arena, and indicated in my review of Humphrey McQueen's *Black Swan of Trespass* in Australian Left Review, no. 77, September 1981.

The fundamental error in Haese's approach is to assume that *his* ideology — a 1960s cultural libertarianism and a political liberalism, a 'humanism' made of artistic subjectivity and fear of 'the social' — is both the most desirable of all ideologies (indeed, is 'natural') and that it was a key in Australian life, exemplified above all by the Angry Penguins. His felt, liberal reaction against the Cold War conflict between Communism and Conservatism becomes a norm of cultural free thought. He then applies it to an earlier historical period. An anachronistic ideology creates a historical fiction. He would do well to read Tim Rowse's *Liberalism and the National Character*.

In his introduction, Haese follows *Place, Taste and Tradition* in pronouncing realism to be the characteristic concern of the period, along with communalism amongst artists and an openness to theory, aesthetic and political, and to poetry, writing, to other texts. These should, indeed, be key — if problematic — concerns

of any account of this moment. But communalism becomes the social lives of the artists, and this the author is very good at, especially with the aid of the great revelation of the book, Albert Tucker's photographs, which are sprinkled liberally throughout. (These should be the object of a detailed study; they tell us much about the moment, much that cannot be said.) Realism becomes subsumed under Modernism, itself vaguely defined as artistic innovation and a search for new roles for the artist. Nationalism suffers the same swamping: it becomes a kind of unprogrammatic Australianness, one which would, perhaps, emerge 'naturally' and 'spontaneously' from a subjective, individualist, innovative, independent art. The book becomes a study of the Angry Penguins in their artistic context. They are defined as the liberal option in relation to all the other forces indicated, from suburbia to Stalinism.

Haese does have a sense of historical flux, change, lag, confusion, conflation and contradiction. He is fascinated by shifts of position, gross and subtle, charting them carefully and fairly. Page after page is, in this light, interesting. But the fundamental structure of his thought is static, wishful and astray. Around one pole collects conservatism, nationalism, narrative, landscape traditions, the Academy, racist philistinism. Around the other collects communism, Russian influence, figurative traditions, limited populism. The first is represented by Streeton, Buckmaster, J. S. MacDonald and Lionel Lindsay in a shorthand which does none of them justice and which dismisses what is, in fact, a more complex and widespread tendency. It ignores the vitality of the regional tradition, especially in landscape; it fails to see the modernism of many of these 'traditional' landscapists; just as it overlooks the regionalism of many of the modernists, e.g. Sidney Nolan. Similarly, pushing the Realists constantly in the direction of Stalinist unfreedom distorts their practice and its problems, but it does allow the Angry Penguins through the middle. This Cold War model was used in the 1960s to structure the history of U.S. art since the 1940s: there, Abstract Expressionism emerged by refusing conservative regionalism (Thomas Hart Benton) on the one hand, and radical Social Realism (Ben Shahn) on the other. Irving Sandler uses this model in his *Abstract Expressionism, The Triumph of American Painting* (N.Y., 1970). Haese refers to U.S. art as the measure of greater artistic achievement in both his introduction and conclusion, but I do not think that the model is transposable.

A different approach is needed. My preference is for attempts to trace the making and uses of visual images understood as a set of related practices, interesting in themselves but important because within them personal, social and political contradictions and conflicts are negotiated. Art-making—or, in this case, painting—is one such practice. It is the only one on which Haese, like so many others, focusses. A broader view of visual cultural practices gives quite a different picture. If we take into account cartooning, illustrating, film and photography, banner-making, spectacles and other similar practices, we not only see painting in its relative social positioning but we also see the range of practices pursued by individual artists. This was wider than Haese allows, especially in the case of the Communist artists. These artists then become more prominent within the total visual culture of the period. They become more accessible to those of us working today with similar problems (which is my starting-point).

My other general complaint is that a book devoted to the study of art should do that: Haese rarely spends a more than a few lines on any individual painting and, when he does, he is concerned mostly to position it stylistically and ideologically before quickly moving on. He publishes many paintings and prints for the first time, and many are stunning. Why does he not explore them with the reader, especially those whose unfamiliarity would make them difficult for many? But, on this score, my greatest anger is reserved for those who designed the book with postage-stamp size colour reproductions. These are an insult to the artists and to the reader interested in art.

It might be amusing to end these brief remarks by noting the range of reviews so far received by the book. Most have been written by refugees from the period or those of us taught by them. They pick over old wounds and speak to new ones. Peter Ryan accuses the artists and critics of hypocrisy and moral cowardice for not actually fighting in the war. This, apparently, makes their art valueless to those wishing to find "true insight into Australia in the crisis of war" (Sydney Morning Herald, 26 September, 1981). G. R. Lansell found the claims for special achievement during this period pitched "a bit too high" (Ibid., 10 October, 1981). The Weekend Australian serialised extracts, making a

change from their usual heavy-handed promotion of their own Bay Books publications, with Peter Ward interviewing the survivors, weaving the webs of gossip ever more thick (3-4 and 10-11 October, 1981). Bernard Smith treats the issues with the profound seriousness which they deserve, offering details as to his own attitudes during the period as well as revised views of the art of the period, displaying the aesthetic, moral and political conjuncture which Haese attempts to show in such chapters as "Communism and Culture" with less success (Age Monthly Review, October 1981). Charles Merewether's is the most useful critical review, making us look forward all the more to his exhibition "Art and Social Commitment 1928-1954," scheduled for next year (National Times, 25-30 October, 1981).

Haese ends his book by sympathising with Clifton Pugh's anger that not until the "Rebels and Precursors" exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1962 was he aware of his social and expressive heritage. Haese's book will help another generation to awareness of this key moment. But access to the art itself, and to the radical traditions of which it is part, remains strewn with obstacles. As I write, the exhibition "Art and Social Commitment" has been axed by an Australia Council, led by a Liberal Party hack under orders to push the arts into the market place, so that they might sink or swim, like the philistine primates currently running this country.

Terry Smith is an artist and lecturer at the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney. He writes frequently on contemporary art and on the history of Australian art, and was co-editor of Australian Art and Architecture: Essays Presented to Bernard Smith, *Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1980.*

MODERNISM & NON-MODERNISM

Graham Rowlands

John Forbes: *Stalin's Holidays* (Transit Poetry, $3.95)
Ross Bennett: *river* (Nimrod Publications, University of Newcastle, $6).
Norman Talbot: *where two rivers meet* (Nimrod Publications, University of Newcastle, $6).
Jennifer Strauss: *Winter Driving* (Sisters, $5.25).

The term Modern poetry always contained its own built-in obsolescence. How could James Joyce and Virginia Woolf remain Modern indefinitely? How could Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot?

The solution was the invention of the term Modernism, to cover what had previously been known as Modern. This includes contemporary writing that embodies the main preoccupations of what *was* Modern. Einstein's theory of relativity underpins the minimization of narrative. Freud underpins a greater freedom to portray psychic life without the restrictions of rationality and realism. Above all, there's a preoccupation with language itself as the ultimate reality of writers.

John Forbes is an Australian Modernist who can appeal to non-Modernists. As a Modernist, there are many things Forbes *doesn't* aim at — moralizing, theologizing, propagandizing, beauty, narrative, realism, expressing emotion from the extremes of agony or ecstasy. Forbes' aim is to take nothing seriously, especially his own disgust and cynicism. He doesn't even take seriously *not* taking things seriously. It might be a limited viewpoint but a medium-sized collection isn't too much. Here's why.

Most poems work by juxtaposition of extremely disparate images or arguments. Although some connections are intentionally meaningless, most are absurd, deflationary and/or outrageously funny. How could anyone not laugh at:

> The sun's so hot
> a match dropped on the sand flares like a dirty weekend. I light my cigarette & go in — it's cool inside our best inventions; my favourite ad asks, 'I made this, could you?' But I can't relax & let myself imagine Ayer's Rock as just a huge lump of hash.

Forbes' items or arguments cover a wide range of past and present, mind and body, city and beach, Asia and Australia, sacred and rock, significance and trivia, politics and cosmetics and all the media. Because Forbes is informed about the world in which his readers live, his juxtapositions catch more readers' attention than the historically and societally ignorant work of the rest of the already nostalgic "Generation of '68".

We should be grateful that Forbes at least takes writing his poems seriously. Unlike most Modernists, however, he doesn't take his poems about poems seriously. Bravo! He'll convert to non-Modernism yet! "A Snowman in Miranda" comes perilously close to a beautiful lyric. Ironically, the documentary "Drugs" is the only straight poem in *Stalin's Holidays,* despite its wit:

Then by way of light relief
there's my own favourite, alcohol
which is not really a drug
at all, just as the motto
'lips that touch liquor will never
touch mine' doesn't mean
the girl of your dreams won't be
a problem drinker.

I welcome his new publisher, John Tranter's Transit Poetry.

Ross Bennett is another non-Modernist who can appeal to non-Modernists. His poem *"river"* would work well at a (long) poetry reading. It might even be stageable as Expressionist monologue.

Although the poem is about its own creation, it's also about the urban and rural, Aboriginal and industrial mythology, Australian history and European art. There might be too much about the process of starting the poem *at* its start. Still, the tentative beginnings seem justified after they have been left behind. The poem is written in various forms: narrative, lyric, quotation, parody, satire, prose, shaggy dog story and epigram, among others. The main method is juxtaposition. While the river unifies *river,* humor is equally important. Although Bennett has a fine ear for rhythm in all his modes (including several beautiful lyrics) he can also describe a Brahmin bull as "a Siamese magician standing there in a buff-suede kaftan".

A few of Norman Talbot's haiku, in *where two rivers meet,* stand alone as effective art — whether comic, descriptive or conceptual. If there were more of them, however, his book would receive more attention as *poetry* than it will as *project.* For there's no doubt that it's an important addition to Australian writing either about, or influenced by, Asia. Western plunder of historically and geographically-based Japanese haiku for purely descriptive purposes has trivialized the form into a few leaves fluttering into ponds. Talbot restores history and geography. About time!

It's a pity, then, that the collection is overloaded with announcement, notes on *every* poem and an academic article to boot. Some of the cross-cultural notes are useful. But Talbot doesn't know when to stop. He seems to have compiled his notes (usually twice as long as the poems) for overseas readers so that the Australian reader finds them as obvious as he or she would find a 1981 John Douglas Pringle introduction to *Voss* for Netsilik eskimos. Moreover, Talbot can't refrain from general comments on planes, climate, ornithology, emotions, behavior, on almost anything. Although the notes assist the reader with some poems that would be unintelligible without them, their page-filling banality swamps the refreshing and surprising poems.

Jennifer Strauss' *Winter Driving* is a conservatively-titled, badly-edited second collection in which all the good poems appear in the second half. (There must be *some* readers who begin at the beginning!) What's one to make of the book's third line:

"Which more illuminatingly escorted"

or serious stanzas starting "O sea-witched child"? Indeed, what's one to make of poems that seem contorted to fit a formal rhyme pattern that's non-existent? These are strained, verbose, overheightened pieces that shouldn't have started the book, if they had to appear at all.

Fortunately, readers who start from the back will discover more relaxed and many excellent and well-made poems including dream elegies, explorations for rituals to express grief, ironic and sarcastic pieces, humorous R. D. Laingian tangles, morally ambiguous re-writes of Bluebeard, lyrics set on expressways, portraits of immigrant women, oppressed women and men and women who should have worked harder at their marriages. Readers will find a mother-to-son poem the last line of which could have been used to give the collection a more exciting title:

She weeps, briefly;
Presents, calm-faced at evening,
Precepts wittily distanced —
The goddess not-quite-stone,
Offering as final gift
The atheist's white cane.

THE SHARP EYE OF BARRY HUMPHRIES

Dennis Pryor

Barry Humphries: *A Nice Night's Entertainment* (Currency Press, $19.95).

In a radio interview Zoe Caldwell recalled playing in Twelfth Night with Barry Humphries as the Duke. One night, in the if-music-be-the-food-of-love scene with which the play opens, Barry emended the original "Enough; no more: 'Tis

not so sweet now as it was before" to read "Enough. No. More!". The discordant panic from the on-stage musicians elicited: "'Tis not so sweet now as it was before." The story exemplifies the essence of Humphries — his impromptu flights of outrageous humor and his sharp eye for the possibilities of a text.

It is good to have his writing for the stage handsomely collected in *A Nice Night's Entertainment*. There are two hundred pages of text, a bibliography, discography, list of shows and a glossary. A great deal of successful stage comedy does not come across in written form, but this collection does and it enables us to see how sharp a writer Humphries is. The chapter headings are "The Fifties: the suburbs", "The Sixties: the swinging city" and "The Seventies: the cultural boom". They make you realise that it is now twenty-five years since we first met Edna. His tough observations of the decades show him to be an important figure in Australian writing as well as an example of what sociologists ought to be. His feeling for the mores of Australian society produce much sharper insights than a thousand public opinion polls or clotted sociological clap-trap.

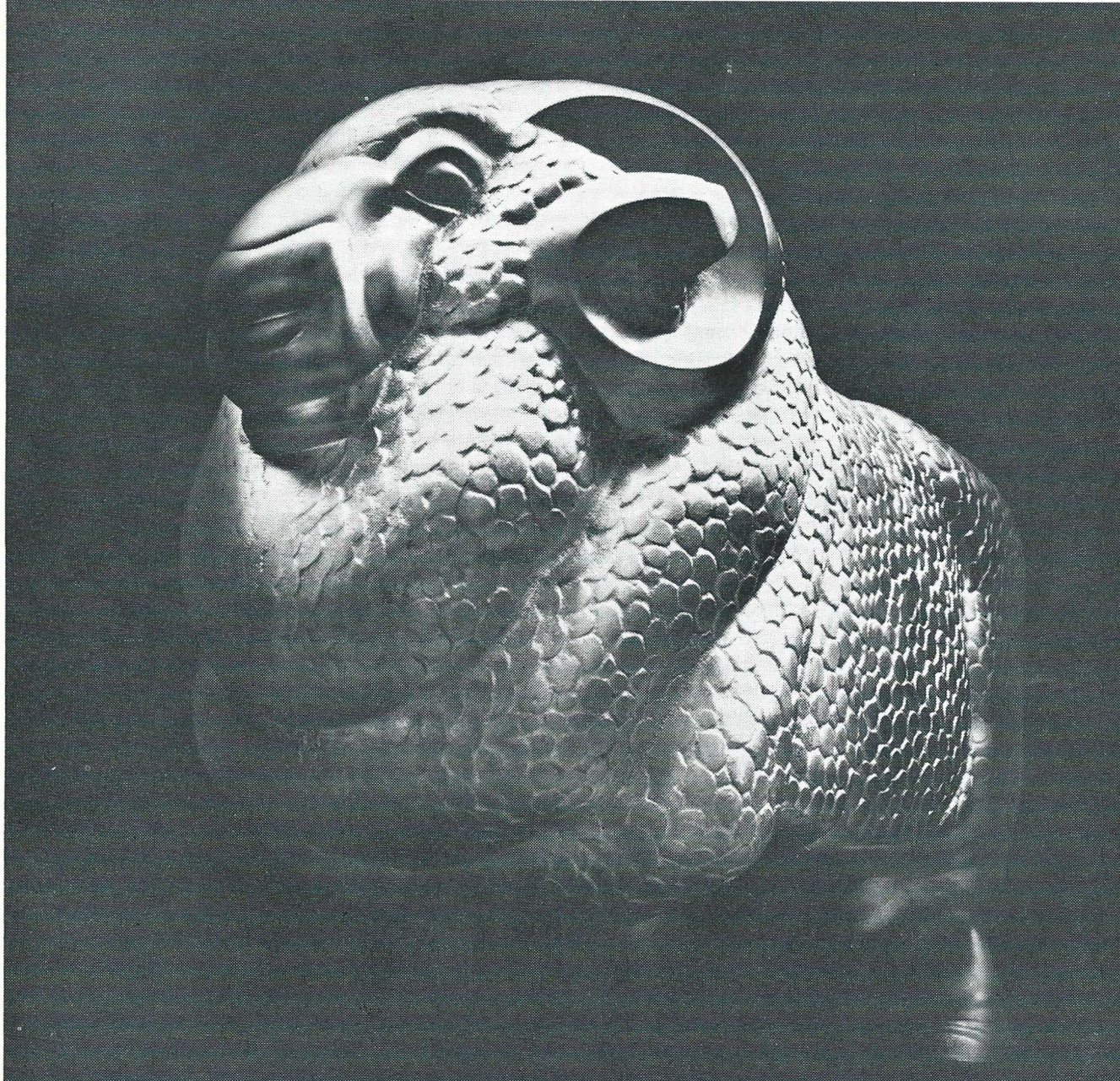
We know him as an actor in a series of one-man shows in which he has held audiences for hours on end. We know him too as a salesman: his press, radio and television interviews are part of the selling of the shows. But this book lets us look at greater leisure at the precision of the writing, at his cutting use of speech rhythms and exploitation of fashionable clichés. Coming as a migrant to Australia I first learned to tune in to the cadences of Australian speech from listening to Humphries. He is his own best critic in this area: "I had always felt that the Australian accent was most imprecisely rendered in stage and radio productions — somehow the accent was either too broad or rendered in a kind of weird Americanised Cockney." Just as it was painters who taught Australians to look at their own landscape, so Humphries appears to me to have taught Australia how to hear its own speech.

He is a writer with a fondness for reviving unusual words. In the comments which link and introduce the transcripts of the stage writing he is thoroughly elitist (on which word see his glossary definition — "an undesirable holding the dissident view that there is room for improvement in Australia") reviving such rarities as "nimiety", "ventripotent", "glabrous", "fuscous", "lambency", "algid", "hispid", "tabid". The glossary is one of the delights of the book. Humphries should be encouraged to produce a much more extensive guide to the vocabulary of nostalgia, politics and intellectual fashion. In a world where the word "media" has become a singular noun in the language of pretentious illiterates his definition shines with rare lambency: "THE MEDIA: a title conferred upon themselves by a group of newspaper reporters and radio announcers." Though I think he should have added television presenters to his list. His observations are full of sturdy prejudices: "pious, root-faced Marxists", beatniks described in the jaunty anachronism of "hobbledehoys", the "baroque scatology of Barry McKenzie", "department store Christmas carols".

There are some pieces which most of us have not heard or read before. The business man Colin Cartwright, for example, who is on the Sandy Agonistes record but never appeared on stage. He is triumphantly re-worked into Rex Lear, who gives the lie to the claim that Humphries only attacks on the left. There is also an *editio altera* of Neil Singleton which was apparently performed once only, at the first night of "At least you can say you've seen it", when technical disasters meant that it was never used again. It's a good piece, introducing such authentic-sounding institutions as the Painters and Dockers Drama Laboratory and the Brechtian Theatre for Aborigines.

This is a kind of retrospective exhibition of Humphries' protean talents (nothing to do with meat-packing). It has some amusing photographs and the author's drawing of Sandy Stone. I haven't mentioned the Sandy Stone pieces, though they are major works. Sandy is much more important for us than any Rolling Stone.

Dennis Pryor was born in Wales and says he was educated at Cambridge University and in the Friends' Ambulance Unit in the Second World War. He is well known as a television and radio critic, is Reader in Classical Studies at the University of Melbourne, and has published a book on Milton Moon, the potter, and (with his wife Rita Erlich) a cookbook, Two in the Kitchen. *A translation of Juvenal's Satires is to appear.*



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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