

# overland 88

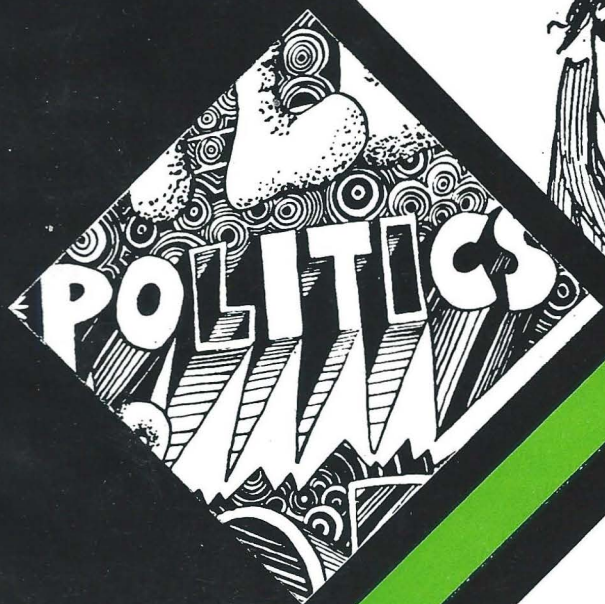
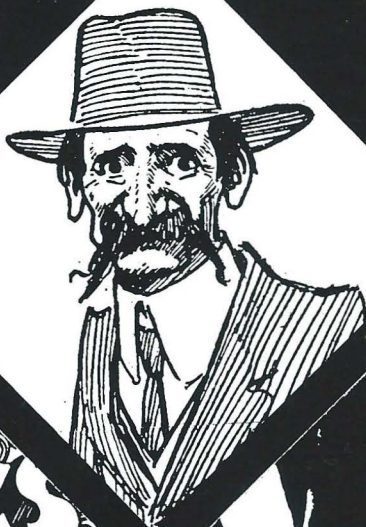
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FEATURES

STORIES

POETRY

\$4



Harry Heseltine:  
A NEW VIEW OF HENRY LAWSON

Craig McGregor:  
EQUALITY: WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

David Yencken:  
CULTURE AND THE COMMUNITY



**stories** GEMINI *Gwen Harwood* 2  
THE WAY TO THE PORT *Peter Bibby* 37  
POOR BABY *Ian Williams* 46

**features** THE DEEP DUNG OF CASH *David Yencken* 5  
THE DAY THE DEPRESSION ENDED *Iris Militunovic* 12  
ON EQUALITY *Craig McGregor* 14  
BETWEEN LIVING AND DYING *H. P. Heseltine* 19  
POPULAR CULTURE REVISITED  
*Craig McGregor, Beverley Smith* 27  
ESCAPE *John Morrison* 41  
SWAG *Stephen Murray-Smith* 45  
BOOKS 51

**poetry** *Dorothy F. Porter* 29, *Doris Brett* 29, *Fairlie Szacinski* 29,  
*Bruce Dawe* 30, *Shane McCauley* 30, *Peter Lloyd* 30,  
*Eric Beach* 31, *Jane Zageris* 31, *Q. B. Willoughby* 31,  
*Nihat Ziyalan* 31, *Elizabeth Riddell* 32, *Chris Catt* 32,  
*D. A. Myers* 33, *Michael Samarchi* 33, *John Blight* 34, *Jill M.*  
*Farrar* 34, *Billy Marshall-Stoneking* 35, *Faye Davis* 36.

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

# overland

July, 1982

“Go down and skim the cream,” said my grandmother. “We are to have visitors.” I took the cream jug carefully. On one side of it were the heads of Jellicoe, Kitchener and Haig and some words which I knew by heart:

Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make  
us rue,

If England to itself do rest but true.

On the other side was a painting of a pink rose. As I stood on the box skimming the cream I thought of what Georgy Bowers had said when he caught me at the gate. When school began again next week he and his brother were going to throw my port in the creek and drown me. I had kept close to my grandmother all morning.

As I carried the cream upstairs the Hudson Super Six drew up at the front gate. The Doctor and the twins got out and walked round to the back verandah, as friends always did. The twins had golden-brown skin and dark curly hair. Their real names were Otmar and Annie, but they called themselves Otto and Anna. “We prefer palindromes,” Otto had told me. I thought them the most beautiful people in the world, and wrote “palindrome” and “lustrous” in my book of words that evening. My grandmother said I should write in “besotted” and “infatuated”, but I did not like those words. My friend Alice was not allowed to play with the twins. Her mother told my mother that she woke up wet and screaming after their games. They did not go to the State School, where the big boys had undressed them on their first day to see if twins were any different, but were caught in the mornings by a retired schoolmistress. In the afternoons they did what they liked until their father came home. Was he a real doctor? He had a clinic in town for the Diagnosis and Treatment of All Chronic Diseases. He was as golden-brown as the twins, as plump

as they were thin. Their mother had died at their birth. “We were brought up by fallen girls from the Good Shepherd”, Anna had told my shocked grandmother one day. But my father said it was a good idea. “You know they’re clean if the Sisters of Mercy had them.”

On the table were cold duck, cold peas and salad, home-made bread and butter, fruit salad and my jug of cream. “What a feast,” said the Doctor. A feast! I longed for butcher’s meat, shop bread and butter and bought cakes. But we could not have meat until we had eaten the last of the old ducks, and Daisy was still giving three gallons. While we ate, the Doctor kept praising my grandmother’s cooking and saying things like “You’re wasted here,” and “You really should have a household of your own.” I was not allowed to speak at table unless spoken to. When the Doctor finally spoke to me he said, “How would you feel if I took your Granny away with me?”

Fear made me silly. I shouted, “I’d stab you, I’d cut you, I’d poison you, I’d kill you.” I was slapped and made to say I was sorry. The twins, whose manners were always perfect, went on eating.

“Perhaps you had better go and play at the twins’ place. The Doctor and I have to talk to one another.”

We cleared and stacked the dishes, and my grandmother gave us an orange each. “Don’t eat in the street, don’t take your shoes off. When you hear the train, go to the gate and come home with your mother.” The twins were all charm. “We’ll take care of her. Thank you for the lively dinner. How pretty your hair looks with the big comb in. We adore home-made butter. Some day will you teach us to make bead mats? Can we give you a goodbye kiss?”

As soon as we were out of the gate the twins began peeling and eating their oranges. They sat

down and took off their shoes and socks and walked in the soft white dust at the edge of the road. "We're not afraid of your Granny," said Otto. I was worried. "If my Granny married your father, would she be your Granny too?" "Good heavens, no," said Anna. "She'd be our step-mother." "And what would my mother be?" Nobody could work out the complications. "Are you afraid of God?", I asked.

"God is just a word," said Anna.

Mrs Chatband waved her three fingers at us. Her son had left a razor blade in his school trousers on washing day. So many terrible edges in the world! My friend Alice was on her front verandah playing school with her dolls. The dolls were lined up with their knickers down, waiting to be caned.

In the front yard of the Bowers place Georgy and Davey were skinning frogs. Two frogs waiting their turn were impaled on wooden meat skewers, still moving feebly. Georgy lifted his knife towards me and said quietly, "We'll get you." The twins, who had been walking on either side of me, said "Run!". We ran to the safety of their gate. They dropped their shoes and the remains of their oranges and put their arms round me. I did not quite come up to their shoulders. "How old are you now," asked Otto. "Seven." "Don't be afraid. We will teach you the words of revenge."

"They are secret words," said Anna. "We will have to get a secret place ready. Wait near the steps until I call you." After a while she came back with a black cloth. "You must take off your shoes, and be blindfolded. I will whisper the password."

She led me, blindfolded, through lantana tunnels in the old garden. Often I had to crawl. I heard a door creak open and was pushed into a space with a dirt floor.

Otto's voice said, "Stranger, how old are you?"

"Seven years."

"What is the password?"

"Jaobulon".

"Let the veil be lifted."

Anna took off my blindfold. We seemed to be in an old garden shed, but as I regained my sight it became a magic place. Two candles were flickering on a bench draped in black velvet. Between them lay a Bible and a carving knife. A few circles of sunlight lay on the altar. I could see the nail holes in the iron roof. Otto was wearing a red cloak from the dressing-up box, and in the shimmering darkness he looked old and strange. Anna took down from a nail a

dull gold lace curtain my grandmother had given us to play with. She cloaked herself in it and became a mysterious bride. The twins stood holding hands, and said together, "We were married to one another before we were born." They kissed one another, and told me to kneel down.

Otto said, "Now you will swear a most solemn oath never to reveal what you have heard and seen. You will have a new name, Eshban. It means very red." "It is because of your hair," said Anna. Otto blew out one of the candles. "Repeat the first part of the oath after me." I said the fearful words. "If I reveal these secrets my penalty will be: to have my left breast cut open, my heart torn therefrom, and given to the ravenous birds of the air for prey."

"Now you will learn the first word of revenge. It is *Necum*." Otto blew out the second candle. "Now you will say the second part of the oath." I repeated after him, "If I reveal these secrets my penalty will be: to have my skull sawn asunder with a rough saw and my brains taken out."

"Now you will learn the second word of revenge. It is *Nicum*."

The twins made me join hands with them in the darkness so that we formed a triangle. We heard the train whistle in the distance, and Anna said "Let us close this lodge by the mysterious number." Otto clapped seven times, and said "What remains to be done?", to which Anna replied "To practice virtue, shun vice, and remain in silence." Then, in her ordinary voice, she told me to run and put my shoes on and wait for my mother at the gate. She opened the door, and I found myself in an overgrown part of the old garden. We had held the mysterious rites in a windowless toolshed.

I had just got my shoes and socks on when my mother reached the gate, carrying the Little Man on her hip. "You've had your shoes off," she said crossly. "Did you drop those orange skins? Pick them up at once." The twins appeared, breathless and charming. "Oh no, we dropped the skins; we've just come to pick them up. It was our fault she took her shoes off. We're sorry. Can we nurse the Little Man? How pretty you look in your town clothes. We had lunch at your place. You have the most beautiful food. Is your hair very long when you let it down? Would baby like an orange?" They gave him my untasted orange. As he fondled it, Anna drew her hand round his wispy hair.

"Look, you can see the veins in his little skull. Aren't they blue? Where would his brains be?"

"In the same place as yours," said my mother tartly.

"Isn't he lovely. Can we feel his little heart?" My mother surrendered her treasure to be played with and admired. "I can feel his heart beating," said Anna, looking at me with warning in her eyes.

"What did you play this afternoon?" asked my mother. I was dumb with fright. "Go on, tell your mother," said Otto. Anna made a sawing motion across the Little man's head. "We had fun," I said wildly. "We played lots of things. We played with the guinea-pigs." The twins hugged and kissed me and climbed on to the stone gateposts to see us walk home. As we passed the Bowers house I began saying under my breath, "Necum-Nicum Necum-Nicum Necum-Nicum." "Stop muttering," said my mother. "Speak clearly. What did you say?" "Nothing." "Answer me. I asked you what you said." I must give some answer. "I will not ask you again. Answer me." I began to recite the words from the cream jug:

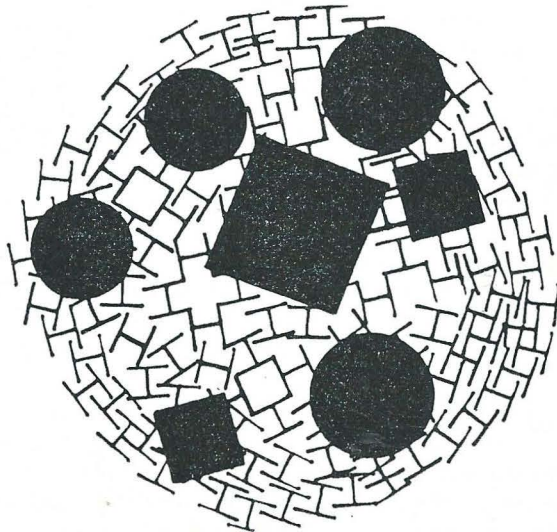
"Come the three corners of the world in arms —" My mother began laughing. "Would you learn your tables if we got them put on a jug?"

At home my mother said to my grandmother, "I hear you had those devils for lunch. Did their father come too?" My grandmother was quiet, and seemed sad. "For a while," she replied, and went off to do the milking.

When my father came home it was almost dark and we had lit the lamps. "I've just seen Mrs Bowers," he said. "That elder boy, what's his name, Georgy. Fell off the tankstand and broke his leg. He'll be in plaster for weeks." Necum-Nicum.

I went safely to school, but I did not see the twins again. The next week their father simply packed up and left. "Trouble at the clinic," said my father. "I knew he wasn't a proper doctor," said Granny. My mother looked at her and said, "Perhaps he was disappointed in love." Where had they gone? I used to dream of the twins. They would appear in bridal finery and invite me to play, or it would be afternoon in the dream with the twins driving off in the Hudson Super Six while I ran and ran to catch them, held back by the soft heavy dust of the long street. In some dreams they would come to the bedside and stare at me. Sometimes, in a nightmare, I would be lying with my heart torn out and my head sawn asunder, trying in vain to call them.

I asked Granny, "Is God only a word?" She replied that God was The Word. Georgy Bowers came home with crutches. Hospital had done him good, said his mother. What do we have to protect us in our powerless childhood but magic? But there were some words I never wrote down in my book of words.



—Peter Murphy

DAVID YENCKEN

## The Deep Dung of Cash: Cultural Policy in Australia

*David Yencken, who is 50, was inaugural chairman of the Australian Heritage Commission, a position he held from 1975 until 1981. A Melbourne businessman (Merchant Builders), he is co-author of A Mansion or No House — The Social Consequences of Planning Standards. His continuing interest in the relations between society and its material culture is clear from this article.*

Culture everywhere has many different meanings. At one extreme is Sir Kenneth Clark's unstated definition in his "Civilisation" series — a pervasive model in Australia. At the other is the anthropologist's view of culture — everything affecting human society. The ambit of cultural policy in this essay includes the arts, libraries, communication media, museums, the National Estate, but it also goes much beyond that. It is impossible to cover such a huge subject adequately in so short a space, so here I concentrate on some basic principles and some selected evidences. The examples aim to show what a better defined cultural policy might achieve and how it might reach further into the whole community — into the suburbs, into provincial centres, and into the countryside.

I begin with five propositions:

No major Australian political party has a cultural policy based on clearly stated social objectives. Cultural policy is often confused with arts policy.

There are major gaps and omissions in cultural programs.

There are major imbalances in funding.

There is an inadequate effort to extend cultural programs into the community.

There has been no comprehensive attempt to stimulate grass roots cultural activity (cultural democracy).

To understand why our views of culture are so limited we need to understand how cultural perceptions have developed in Australia. As an example of changing cultural attitudes the story of museums is instructive, not least because museums have a long history in Australia and until recently public and semi-public cultural expenditure was largely concentrated on museum development. (I use the word museum as it is used internationally, to include art galleries.)

The first explorers and settlers found strange plants and animals and a nomadic Aboriginal society with many novel attributes and artifacts. Thus the first museums in Australia were concerned with natural history and anthropological collections, and hence the curious association of natural history and anthropological collections still found today in our major museums. New information and new techniques were of vital concern for the development of the colonies, so the next wave of museum development introduced technological museums, such as those attached to mechanics institutes and the schools of mines. These museums in turn led to the development of major science museums. A new and progressive society also needed cultural institutions. In quick sequence in the 1860s and 1870s art galleries were established in the major cities.

Missing from this schema is one whole area of cultural activity — Australian culture and history. Even the Aboriginal collections are collections of anthropological and art objects, not artifacts collected and presented to illustrate Aboriginal culture and history. There are no major

museums, museums of man, solely devoted to Australian history. The one possible exception, the War Memorial, is concerned with a very limited theme, Australia at war, which it has also interpreted narrowly. The museum has not, for example, attempted to show the social, cultural, economic, and political consequences of war on Australia. There is no federal national museum commission. Only in South Australia and Western Australia are there the beginnings of well co-ordinated State policies actively supporting the development of historical museums. The new Museum of Australia is thus specially welcome, but the government's recent decisions cloud its future.

Only very recently in universities, in governments, amongst voluntary societies and amongst a few museum workers has the significance of the artifacts which illustrate Australian history begun to be recognised. The movement has been as much a grass-roots movement as an intellectually-inspired one. The spontaneous growth of local history societies, and the development of some thousand local history museums, for the most part entirely unsupported by government and unaided by the universities, has been a popular movement, leading intellectual elites by the nose to tell them something very important about community cultural interests in Australia. It has taken far too long for governments to respond.

In the Australian Heritage Commission there is now a federal body responsible for the National Estate. The commission is, however, hardly a striking example of government cultural commitment. It has a current staff of sixteen and has operated for most of its life with a staff ceiling of twelve. Its current annual budget is just over \$600,000. In the States the situation is worse.

There are heritage bodies or councils, and Acts to support them, in only three States, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Victoria's Act is inadequate. Archives are sadly neglected, short of funds, and often poorly housed and staffed.

If this seems a reasonable state of affairs it might be remembered that the Australian War Memorial, despite its limited attempts at historical interpretation, has the highest regular visitor attendance of any museum or art gallery in Australia. Port Arthur, despite its remote location, gets a remarkable 200,000 or so visitors every year. In Sweden a recent survey shows that twice as many people visited museums related to Swedish history and culture as visited any other

museums (including art galleries). A Canadian survey of tourist visitor spending early this decade identified that \$517m., or 29.2 per cent of all tourist spending, related to historical and cultural sites. This was by far the highest expenditure of any of the nine categories listed in the survey. Even the "All Canadian Leisure Pastimes", boating, hunting, shooting, and sport watching, accounted for less spending than historical and cultural visits. (Spending on historic sites and history centres constituted the largest bulk in this figure.) The most successful exhibitions sent overseas by the Australia Council have not been exhibitions of contemporary white Australian art. They have invariably been exhibitions of Aboriginal art and culture. One could say much, much more about a society that fails to value its heritage, even sometimes to recognise it, and what that implies.

The imbalances in funding are part of the same pattern. In Jean Battersby's UNESCO document, "Cultural Policy in Australia" (an excellent historical review of cultural programs in Australia, total federal and state cultural expenditure for 1977-1978 was estimated at \$301,300,000. Leaving aside the ABC and libraries, which between them account for approximately \$200m., the Australia Council received \$23,700,000, the various State arts authorities spent \$30,700,000, the various film bodies \$18,500,000, galleries \$11,000,000, Foreign Affairs cultural exchange \$1,100,000. By comparison total expenditure on programs related to Australian history constitute between 3 or 4 per cent only of cultural expenditure. Annual operating budgets for the arts moreover tell a part of the story only. There has also been massive expenditure by federal and state governments on capital works: on the Sydney Opera House, on the Adelaide Festival Centre, on the Victorian Art Centre, on the National Gallery of Australia, on the Western Australian Art Gallery, on the NSW Art Gallery extensions, to mention only a few of the more obvious projects.

To make these observations is not to say that the arts are over funded. It is to say that there is imbalance, and that there are serious omissions. It is also to say that whatever their failures, the best achievements of arts policy, over the last few years, are closely related to the resources that have been available, and the sense of purpose, the energy, and the imagination which have been released through them. Some aspects of



culture have always needed patronage, and patronage today is for the most part provided by governments. If governments are to be involved, and over \$300m. annual spending implies a certain degree of involvement, then they should have well-considered policies based on clearly stated social objectives.

Until very recently serious attempts to extend cultural programs into the community have again been found to be exclusively in arts programs. One of the few examples of a museum extension service (travelling exhibition or museobile, commonplace in other countries) is the Australian Museum's Museum Train.

All these cultural activities involve the dissemination and communication of more or less elite cultural views throughout the community. A fully developed cultural policy should also be concerned with help and encouragement of grass roots activity, with activities moving from the bottom upwards rather than from the top down. The most important feature of programs of this kind is that they are responsive, not directive, and that they reflect the interests and wishes of local communities. "A culture which is imposed from above is not a culture which facilitates life and contact between people. It is a culture of poverty and dependence."

There have been some worthwhile, if tentative, attempts made by programs such as the Community Arts Program of the Australia Council. Their great limitation is that they are restricted to the arts. All overseas literature on cultural democracy emphasises that community culture activities do not work unless they engage people on issues which affect them most closely. One doesn't have to be a follower of Maslow psychology and his hierarchy of needs and satisfactions to know that self-expression and cultural confidence and self awareness are not stifled merely by lack of opportunity to paint, play music, act, make pots. A much more powerful constraint is the sense of powerlessness to affect a person's circumstances or environment. One objective of cultural policy should therefore be to show local communities the creative techniques to give expression to their basic concerns and to effect change.

What does this mean in practice? Examples from two groups of activities, museum activity overseas and the work of the Australian Heritage Commission, suggest some possibilities.

In his book, *Museums for the 1980s*, Kenneth Hudson wrote: "The future historian of museums

and museology may well decide that 1971 was the year in which it became obvious that there would have to be fundamental changes in the philosophy and aims of museums and that the traditional attitudes were leading to disaster." In 1971 ICOM met at Grenoble, and during the proceedings an African delegate got up to make four statements about museums:

- 1] Museums were not integrated in the contemporary world and formed no real part of it.
- 2] They were elitist and of no use whatsoever to the majority of people in most countries.
- 3] They were obsolete.
- 4] Public money could be spent to better purpose.

When they returned from the meeting a group of museum experts from Latin American countries sat down to consider the validity of the statement. They then, in 1972, organised a meeting at Santiago de Chile. From this "round table on the function of Latin American museums in the contemporary world" came a document of great significance. It is too long to reproduce in full, but certain points are worth noting, particularly parts of its preamble. "Most of the problems revealed by contemporary society have their roots in situations of injustice and cannot be resolved until these injustices are rectified . . . [solutions] require the full conscious and committed participation of all sections of society . . . The museum is an institution in the service of society . . . [It] moulds the consciousness of the communities it serves, presents contemporary problems, links together past and present, identifies itself with indispensable structural changes." An important section of the Santiago resolutions concerned museum services for remote or disadvantaged areas.

One example of this new museum approach is to be seen at the Anacostia Museum in the USA. Anacostia is situated in a black district of Washington. It is a museum without a collection which deals with local community issues. John Kinard, its Director, has said of the museum, "The urban industrial centres have their own history. In Anacostia it is one of crime, drugs, unemployment, inadequate housing and sanitation, rats, to mention but a few of its problems . . . How can the museum exhibit historical objects that bear no relationship to social issues?" Anacostia, it is interesting to note, is part of the Smithsonian Institution.

At Le Creusot in France the Eco Musée has attempted an ambitious program to turn the whole of a large industrial community into a

museum. The museum's collection is the collection of all of its inhabitants. Local groups are encouraged to make their own exhibitions, research their own history, and decide their own cultural activities. Le Creusot is now a well known project in France and many university researchers from all over the country have worked within the community.

Norfolk Heritage, part of the Norfolk Museum Service, has set out "to treat the total heritage of the region as a collection, the region itself being a kind of museum to be drawn upon to illustrate the region's story and the story of the life and work of the people".

At Rüsselsheim, a factory town just outside Frankfurt in Germany, a small museum has begun to interpret the town's industrial history. Here in 1862 Adam Opel began to make sewing machines in a small workshop. He later turned to making bicycles and then to cars. Eventually the Opel works were bought by General Motors. Rüsselsheim's history is therefore the history of capitalism, from hand lathe to the largest capitalist organisation in the world. The museum has illustrated it brilliantly and shown it in a larger historical and environmental context. Many aspects of Nazi Germany are almost taboo subjects in West Germany today, but the museum has not feared to treat them controversially. Rüsselsheim's museum also has an active and successful educational and trade union program. Rüsselsheim won the European Museum of the Year Award last year. Nearly all the most recent winners of this award have been regional museums concerned with regional life and history.

In Scandinavia more than anywhere else there has been active debate over the goals of cultural programs. As part of this reassessment a body called Swedish Travelling Exhibitions was established to help break down the forbidding walls of the great museum institutions, and to make museum services available to the whole community. Swedish Travelling Exhibitions makes exhibitions of all sizes on subjects of all kinds, ranging from major exhibitions to the smallest suitcase displays. Swedish Travelling Exhibitions has also carried out a great deal of instructive research — on general patterns of museum visiting, and on the effectiveness of different exhibition techniques. When considering the potential of exhibition productions of this kind we should remember how little we make use of a medium which can combine every form of communication: the written word, art and graphics, the spoken

word, music, audio-visuals and film, theatrical and other events, and direct personal participation.

Closer to home the Australian Heritage Commission has been attempting to work to a similar philosophy. The commission's objective for the Register of the National Estate is that it should not only contain a list of the outstanding and remarkable, but that the Register should also be representative of every period, every region, every social group and every strand of Australia's cultural and natural history. With the help of a small carrot of grant money the commission has also actively set out to persuade State governments to prepare State historic conservation policies to broaden the base of conservation action. Each State has been invited to prepare a synopsis of its history, and from it an abstract of major themes and sub-themes, then to form a check-list to ensure that conservation programs more adequately reflect the whole of the State's history. Already in their embryonic form the themes have been used with some effect, first in a survey in the north-east of Victoria, and second to analyse early listings by the South Australian Heritage Committee.

Most of all, the commission has been trying to reach out to Australians to awaken interest in their surroundings and in their natural and cultural history. The commission has recently published a 1200 page volume which illustrates all of the 6,600 places now listed and explains why each is significant. This is as yet a first generation listing only and not — if there ever will be one — the comprehensive listing which is the commission's eventual objective. It is nevertheless a significant move towards a fully representative Register.

Another Heritage Commission project has been a school kit prepared in conjunction with the now defunct federal Curriculum Development Centre. The first book review on the kit said, "It is not often that one witnesses a cultural landmark, but this publication is just that. It is a kit of resource materials and teachers' aids for use in secondary schools. As a specialised technical publication it commands itself to undergraduate teaching as well and the concept is good enough to export. The kit will do much to open eyes and should in time take discussion on heritage out of the realm of blue-rinsed prissiness and elitist preciousness". The kit is designed to encourage children to find out for themselves, not just to tell them what to see.

Yet another project is a major exhibition on the National Estate, and together with it a small scale travelling exhibition. These projects not only illustrate many fascinating opportunities for cultural initiative. They also say something about the importance of relating one cultural program to another. The school kit is a cooperative venture with the Curriculum Development Centre, the book is a joint publishing venture, the exhibition will be, if it comes to fruition, a joint exercise with a museum-related organisation. The richest cultural programs must be able to draw upon all the cultural resources of the community. A small agency such as the Heritage Commission furthermore would not have the resources to carry out any one of these projects on its own.

In the suburbs and in the countryside and in regional and provincial centres we especially need to relate cultural activities together more effectively. We need to develop programs which combine historical and environmental research, conservation, architectural advisory services (as now operate in Maldon and Beechworth), museum interpretation and school programs, and integrate them with community arts activities such as the new community arts centres currently being developed around Victoria. There should be a special place for travelling exhibitions and for locally mounted temporary exhibitions on local issues. Kalgoorlie should be researching, conserving, and presenting its goldfields history. Areas like Yallourn should be studying and interpreting their industrial history. In NSW for example a strategy has been discussed with the Hawkesbury Council for a comprehensive conservation (National Estate) and visitor interpretation (museum and school) strategy for the five Macquarie Towns area, to which the council has so far responded enthusiastically.

Helping local groups to give cultural expression to problems that most directly engage them is especially important in grass roots programs. Some examples from Sweden illustrate the potential of these programs. When I revisited Swedish Travelling Exhibitions last year it was apparent that the ideas and interests of many of the younger and more active members of the organisation had changed. On previous visits discussion had centred on exhibition work and its distribution around the country. This time we discussed the help Swedish Travelling Exhibitions was giving schools and local communities to mount their own exhibitions on topics and issues of their own choosing. One example of such an approach

related to the closure of an enterprise highly valued by a local community. The community prepared and mounted its own exhibition. This was so successful that it attracted attention from Stockholm. Its impact there finally achieved the reversal of the decision. A series of workers' plays on similar topics have been produced around Sweden in recent years. Some have achieved considerable fame.

Another remarkable community exercise took place in Norbotten, described as "a large and forgotten area" of North Sweden. When other attempts to reach audiences like Norbotten's with cultural programs had failed, a team was sent to Norbotten to analyse the causes. The team concluded that the people of Norbotten had a deep-seated sense of cultural inferiority. After much local discussion, an experimental project was begun. It was agreed that there should be an attempt to write the history of Norbotten since industrialisation. In 700 study circles 5,000 participants wrote 3,000 pages which were later edited and published. Despite much bureaucratic opposition and misgiving, not only did the community respond, but the book sold out. From this process people began to realise that everyday events could have real significance and that their own history and surroundings were valuable and interesting both to themselves and to others.

These are examples of very many interesting "animation projects" which have been carried out in Europe. Another project has been a six nation (all European) UNESCO study on Culture and Working Life. The preliminary report makes the comment, "The human being functions as a whole. It is not possible to divide a human being into a leisure man and a working man. Working life may be seen as part of people's overall culture. Work itself may be regarded as a cultural activity which should help to develop man in all his aspects."

"Culture and Working Life notes that there is now agreement on certain objectives for society's cultural policy. It is objectives of this kind that need to be determined in Australia. Sweden's cultural goals, accepted and agreed by all political parties, are an interesting example. Swedish goals for its cultural policy are that it shall:

help protect freedom of expression and create genuine opportunities to utilise this freedom

provide people with the chance to carry out their own creative activities and encourage contacts between people

counteract the negative effects of commercialism in the cultural sphere

further decentralisation of activities and decision-making functions in the cultural sphere

be designed with regard to the experiences and needs of disadvantaged groups

facilitate artistic innovation

guarantee that the cultural heritage from earlier periods is preserved and kept alive

further the exchange of experience and ideas in the cultural sphere over linguistic and national boundaries

If to this list is added "to develop cultural identity and self-confidence" — implied, but not so clearly stated in Swedish goals — the goals correspond well with the "agreed" objectives mentioned in *Culture and Working Life*, to UNESCO's own formal objectives and to Canada's cultural policy of "Democratisation and decentralisation".

Why is it important to state these goals? *Culture and Working Life* gives one answer: "A viable cultural democracy requires measures by society in many fields, otherwise the culture of the rich and powerful will dominate the culture of others." Another is that innovative programs need the support of policy objectives. When Swedish Travelling Exhibitions was first established it was savagely attacked by some major museums, who no doubt resented the threat to their hegemony. Today Swedish Travelling Exhibitions is acclaimed as one of the most outstanding museum innovations in the world. A third answer is that many cultural programs need to be informed with a different spirit. No government has, for example, set down for the Australian Heritage Commission or, to my knowledge, any of the other comparable State heritage bodies, what their cultural objectives should be.

The commission has chosen to interpret its function in the way described, but it might well not have. The commission's view was certainly not universally held. One senior officer in the same Ministry did everything in his power to stop the commission publishing its first list, on the grounds that it was far too big.

Let me conclude with three additional comments. The objectives of cultural policies of the

kind described here are long term. They require skill and patience and a respect for different cultural backgrounds and interests. There are not likely to be many immediate scintillating successes. What we should agree is that these cultural concerns should be the concerns of any civilised society, that we should encourage self expression in the most sensitive and imaginative ways, and that cultural programs should be as lively, stimulating, and challenging as we can make them.

Second, policies of this kind do not exclude excellence. On the contrary, they should create a confident base for individual creative acts, more exchange and cross fertilisation to encourage them, and a larger, better informed audience to support them.

Third, cultural policies should be closely related to environmental policies. Cultural and environmental history are closely intertwined. Culture is moulded by the environment in which it flourishes.

Some time ago D. H. Lawrence wrote a poem.

In Nottingham, that dismal town  
where I went to school and college  
they've built a new university  
for a new dispensation of knowledge.

Built it most grand and cakeily  
out of the noble loot  
derived from shrewd cash-chemistry  
by good Sir Jesse Boot.

Little I thought, when I was a lad  
and turned my modest penny  
over on Boot's Cash Chemist's counter  
that Jesse, by turning many

millions of similar honest pence  
over, would make a pile  
that would rise at last and blossom out  
in grand and cakey style

into a university  
where smart men would dispense  
doses of smart cash-chemistry  
in language of common-sense!

That future Nottingham lads would be  
cash-chemically B.Sc.  
that Nottingham lights would rise and say:  
— By Boots I am M.A.

From this I learn, though I knew it before  
that culture has her roots  
in the deep dung of cash, and lore  
is a last offshoot of Boots.

Here in Australia we need to use the deep dung of cash in more productive ways.

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UNESCO also has very many publications on cultural policy.



— Jiri Tibor

# The Day the Depression Ended

IRIS MILITUNOVIC

*Iris Militunovic, well-known writer and author of Talk English, Carn't Ya, lives in Devonport.*

It was a Wednesday, not, as memory might expect, a day of sunshine and hope, but one of Melbourne's grey bitter days with biting wind sweeping Parkville's wide streets. The unpainted fences and some of the shabbier houses looked hopeless in the cold uncompromising light of that distant day. The year, remembered with less clarity, must have been 1935, and we lived in that charming suburb of wide streets, almost-quiet students and rows of terraced cottages for several happy, or near-happy, years. We rented one of the terrace houses; a charming small, beautifully-built Siamese with, on the street front, a midget lawn bordered with scarlet geraniums, themselves disciplined by the white picket fence hemming the footpath. We came there to live in 1933 and I fell forever in love with that well-planned, seemly little home. Even now, with a glorious river view and other blessings, I'd still be happy in Parkville.

Inside rooms were few but not small. The narrow front had a rather splendid red-and-white tiled verandah which, at the cost of natural light into the main bedroom, we further embellished with a gay red, white and green striped canvas blind behind which we kept a small table, a couple of chairs, a cupboard with glasses, and at times, grog, and a large flowering plant. Sitting there in our hideaway we felt quite cosmopolitan.

The cottage was comfortable, if not as convenient as we now expect. That Place, as my prissy Aunt always called it, was in the farthest corner of the back lawn, discreetly hidden by a rather droopy plum tree; nice enough in summer but icy cold in winter. Hot water in the neat blue and white bathroom came from a chip heater which spluttered, crackled and belched alarmingly whenever we lit it.

But both bedrooms had fireplaces, and the

living room was a large bright comfortable place, well-heated by an open fireplace big enough to take three-foot logs.

My husband had a job of sorts. Helped out by weekly visits to the nearby Victoria Market, financially we managed quite well. A visit to the market any Saturday morning after 11 a.m. meant that most unsold perishable goods could be bought for almost nothing. Perhaps we were lucky that deep-freeze was still far away in the future.

From the first week we were there until some time after that remembered Wednesday, every week-day saw the sad men ringing our front door-bell. No women ever; only very occasionally anyone younger than forty, but always that endless procession of unemployed trying to sell the results of their week-end work at home.

I've since wondered if it was kinder that wives didn't join their husbands in that last frustrating battle; or if participation, where possible, might have helped the women in their endless struggle against the monotony of difficult, underprivileged lives confined to the home front.

The range of goods the men tried to sell wasn't extensive, and quality varied greatly from man to man. Some concentrated on wooden clothes-pegs and clumsy coat-hangers. A few offered crepe paper flowers in shades and shapes never seen in any garden, and these might have been made by their wives. Most of the offerings were made from the ubiquitous four-gallon kerosene tin. Using tinsnips, and curling back the cut strips to form both decoration and protection, it was amazing to see the variety produced. Gaily-painted flower pots in a dozen different sizes and shapes, half-size and full-size buckets with neat handles and rolled tops, double washing-up dishes which tended to wobble when used.

At first we gladly bought as often as we could, but soon money and space gave out. It was then that I began to offer, as a sop to the Cerberus of near or real hunger a pot of freshly made tea and a thick sandwich of meat or cheese. Most of those sad ones were glad to sit behind the striped blind and rest their feet. Usually I sat with them, pretending that I too needed refreshment. My greatest need was to maintain a semblance of composure as they told their sorry tales. Many had almost paid for small homes only to eventually lose them to the banks. Their wives and families might not have had everything in those earlier days, but they had enough to get by, to be happy, or at least as happy as most of us ever can be. Their greatest loss, their most precious possession, that priceless thing, self-respect. Many were now without a proper home, help, or hope. Nothing ahead but the weekend whittling of clothes pegs.

Very few of those unhappy men paid more than one visit, knowing that only charity buys the same unwanted articles more than once. I don't remember anyone calling those nineteen-thirties out-of-work men Dole Bludgers. Certainly not in Parkville. We were too close in income and locality to the poorer suburbs not to realise

that no-one could successfully bludge on that tiny amount of dole money.

My husband was home with influenza that Wednesday in 1935 when I answered that early morning door-bell. This time it wasn't one of the usual elderly men. Standing on the door-mat were two neat young men with a vacuum cleaner. We already owned one, so they realised our house offered no encouragement at all. After I closed the door I stood thinking about the young salesmen, what they were selling, and the difference between them and their older counterparts. Quite suddenly I realised what I was seeing. The very beginning of the end of the Great Depression. I ran down the hall shouting to my husband. "The depression's going. It's starting to lift. Soon it'll be over."

"What are you talking about. What do you mean?"

"Everything'll be all right soon. They're selling vacuum cleaners, and firms don't give people things like that unless there's a chance of selling them. I tell you it'll soon be over."

"Then what in God's name are you crying about?"

Perhaps I didn't really know, but on that cold grey day it seemed too soon for laughter.

Just published

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CRAIG MCGREGOR

## On Equality

*At a time when political debate is dominated by the dismal science of economics it is easy to forget that politics can be about more than the details of managing a collapsing system. Craig McGregor, in an essay from a forthcoming collection, reminds us of some first principles. We hope to publish further contributions and comments on his ideas.*

When I was a kid I always used to be mystified by those tales where the fisherman's wife or whoever it was would be given three wishes by the Good Fairy and they always wished for crazy, self-indulgent things like "I wish everything I touched turned to gold", and of course it always rebounded on them, I mean who can eat gold toast? And I always wondered why they didn't wish for something more general, like wishing that everyone in the world (including themselves) should be happy ever afterwards, because then nothing could ever go wrong again and the world would be a perfect place to live in and there wouldn't even be a need for a Good Fairy to dispense dubious favors to favorites; all it needed of the fishermen and fishermen's wives and shoemakers and others was a bit of imagination, and a bit of commonsense, and just a hint of generosity . . .

Ah! The birth of utopianism.

Socialism isn't utopianism, because no socialist in his (or her) right mind really believes the human race will ever achieve the millenium, or whatever it's called, least of all in our own lifetime — most socialists I know are idealists condemned by the world to be pragmatists — but socialism does hold out the idea of a better life (for everyone) and a better world than the one we currently endure, and has some thought of how we might edge cautiously sideways, like a crab, towards it; and I still think that all that's needed to bring us closer is a bit of imagination, and a bit of commonsense, and just a hint of generosity.

Of course, there are always corrupt and siren voices who tell us that human nature can't be

changed, that it's dog-eat-dog, every-man-for-himself, you gotta keep ahead of the Jones's, anyone can make it, some are more equal than others, what will be will be, and all the rest of that puerile John Laws line — but I don't believe a bit of it and I don't think a lot of other people do either, despite generations of media manipulation and the sort of cultural reinforcement of existing exploitative arrangements which Gramsci talks of; otherwise it would be hard to see why half the Australian people regularly vote Labor and why a great deal of our intellectual and political debate is about what sort of changes we should make in Australian society and how we should make them, and why, indeed, there would be a socialist movement at all. But there *is* a socialist movement, which is as diverse and argumentative as you would expect any movement to be which cares about freedom, real freedom, such as freedom from wants, from fear, from exploitation, and from the life sentence of living powerless in an unjust and unequal society; and it's that movement, with its spin-offs and moral demands and associated ideas and philosophies and initiatives, which holds out the best hope for a good life for most people, including most Australians, today.

Despite its theoretical complexity, it seems to me that socialism is based upon some very simple ideas. Like equality. For myself, I think all inequality is wrong. Everyone should be equal, *really* equal: any other way of organizing society is manifestly unfair to those (women, blacks, workers, the sick, handicapped, weak, powerless, in fact the majority of people) who suffer so



that a small and privileged elite should gain disproportionate power, wealth and the good things of life. This doesn't mean that people are born equal, or the same; obviously they're not. But it means they should *be* equals in the society in which they share, and to which they contribute. They should have equal rights, equality before the law and the State, and equal access to education, power, freedom and what Manning Clark calls "fulfilment".

And that doesn't mean that they should simply have equal opportunities for these things, and then be forced to accept the lottery-of-life results by which there are a few lucky winners and the rest spend their lives in a form of industrial slavery . . . which is basically what happens at present. If you think this is an exaggeration, talk to some of the out-of-work kids who, despite the Fraser government's persecution of 'dole-bludgers' and its attempt to stop welfare payments to young people leaving school, refuse to work in a factory; they've been there, or their mothers and fathers have, and they know it for what it is: a charnel-house, where people live and die in chains.

People need equal *rewards*, or at least should be rewarded according to their needs — an old, old principle, so old and honorable that you'd hardly think it needed restating, except that so many politicians spend their time running away from it. I don't believe in a meritocracy, or in grossly unequal rewards being dealt out to people because of merit, luck, effort, the Hand of God, accident of birth, or random arrangement of genes. People have the right to be equal because they are human, and deserve an equal chance at happiness; equality doesn't guarantee happiness, but it increases the chances remarkably (ask any freed slave, or Vietnamese refugee, or political prisoner).

We live in Australia in a society so prosperous overall, so wealthy, so endowed with resources, that the gross and shocking inequalities which we confront every day of our lives are unforgivable — let alone the grander inequality of our position in a world where the great majority of mankind is starving, ill, or poverty-stricken. And yet Murdoch and his hired pens, cartoonists and columnists and editorialists alike, cook up a phony Tax Revolt because, they whine, we don't have enough to spend on ourselves! Unbelievable. Look: I think *everyone should have the same income*, with perhaps adjustments for size of family, disabilities, illness, etc. I can't see any reason to organise it any other way. Nor do I

believe any of that stuff about people needing the incentive of greed to work, or compete, or put their best efforts into something. Women and men become nurses, or doctors, or artists, or farmers, or mechanics, or politicians, because they want to, not because of the money; there are a lot of incentives, such as prestige, and job satisfaction, and challenge, and expression of personal skill and ability, which, to pitch the argument at its lowest level, can take the place of income incentive; in many occupations they already do. The idea that people need grossly unequal rewards to inspire them to work is a piece of capitalist mythology, perpetuated by those who are already the benefactors of massive inequality and believe society should be run on a basis of competition instead of co-operation; after all, it's got them where they are.

When I was a secondary modern teacher in England, teaching in a punishment-centred Catholic school in inner London, there was a fiery, rotund, white-haired Welsh teacher (I think he taught maths), in his sixties at least, who used to stand around cheerily drinking coffee and listening to his mates grizzle about school and the government and the Labour Party most of the time, but occasionally, just occasionally, he would lose his temper with all of them and stomp around the room shouting lines from Aneurin Bevan and Kier Hardie and roaring about the social nature of man and ordaining that the highest honor we could have was to work for each other, for the common good; and though, as an ex-student of John Anderson's, I am aware of the philosophic problems with the idea of the 'common good' (though not the common *goods*) my heart went out to the man — he was right, and I wish we had some people like him around now, giants, people with Bevan's fire in the belly (an old cliché, but a lovely one) and glory in their heads and some sense that, as Bruce Petty once put it in another context, all present arrangements are artificial.

Instead of which, back here in Australia, we waddle around in cottonwool with mortgages coiled around our necks and media poison in our ears and, as I said in *The Australian People*, a spike driven by the industrial society right through the heart. And one of these days, I hope, though I believe the crawl sideways is inevitably slow, we will all come to realise what a freaky society this is, how selfish, how far removed from the ideals and high-courage determinations of the rest of the world we are.

And take the ice cream out of our mouths.

I've never understood why we don't make sure that everybody *starts off equal*. I mean, that would be a first step. It would be an obvious way of at least diminishing the inequality which surrounds us. A system, like the current one, in which a small minority inherits gross and accumulated amounts of money, while the great majority of ordinary people set off to battle their way through life with the chance of even owning a home of their own becoming more and more remote, seems absolutely ludicrous. As the old socialist argument points out, those personal and family fortunes accumulated by the Gettys, Rockefellers, Baillieus and Knoxes of this world have been created, basically, by the effort, work and resources of the *community*, by the toil of hundreds of thousands of people who work in factories and mines and shops to create that wealth; it should go back to the community, not be hoarded by wealthy families to be passed down from favored son to favored son, generation after generation. I personally don't think those fortunes should be allowed to be passed on; they should be appropriated by the community and spent on creating real equality for the next generation of Australians. Hence death duties, which is an unfortunate name for a perfectly valid and fair process. In fact, I'm not really in favor of people inheriting wealth at all; inheritance obviously makes everybody unequal from the start, and makes it even harder to achieve true equality in our society. Of course, everybody likes to pass something on to their children: personal possessions, sentimental things, the family piano, maybe the family home. That seems OK to me — as long as everybody has a home to pass on, or a home to live in for themselves, or true equality with everyone else in their living conditions. But beyond that, no. No inheritance. Bjelke-Petersen is trying to push us the other way; he's abolished death duties in Queensland, because that favors his rich backers and supporters, and he's conned a great many other Australians into believing that death duties are somehow immoral, or bad for them, or an attack on their precious individual savings; whereas the attempt to reduce private fortunes, and to have community-created wealth returned to the community instead of being passed on, selfishly, to private individuals is a highly moral endeavor and something we should all support. Sorry. No inheritances.

What else?

Well, we have to get rid of those gross and traditional inequalities which confront us every

day. Between men and women, for a start. The formal and informal discrimination which still exists against women, and the inequality of male and female roles, should not be tolerated in any society which is concerned about fairness. Nor should we tolerate the inequalities which still exist between races, between religious groups, between migrants and native-born, between so many other privileged and underprivileged groups in Australia. Religious and racial bigotry isn't nearly as bad now as when I was growing up and learning a whole lexicon of prejudice but, to take three different examples, Jews, Roman Catholics and Aborigines are still the target of discrimination.

We should not accept inequalities of education: the private schools are the chief source of this, and in Australia they occupy a position as citadels of power and inherited advantage which is even more marked than in England, whence they came. They should be abolished, or transformed into state schools; I reckon Melbourne Grammar would make a first-class individual school, with its own character and freedom to experiment, within the state system. Easy.

I don't want my kids to have special advantages over anybody else's; and I don't want anybody else's to have special advantages, either, unless they're handicapped and need help; the only way to ensure that is to have a schooling system which is as fair, though diverse, as it's possible to devise. Nor does bringing all private schools within the state system mean that schools would become depressingly uniform; there is plenty of variety within the state system of, for example, England, and the United States, and to a certain extent Australia, and further variety and nonconformity could easily be built in.

When I was at Cranbrook I was fortunate to come into contact with some of the best teachers I've ever met: Harry Nicolson, an Andersonian, who had a great influence on me and became a good friend; C. A. Bell, who taught us English honors; and Mark Bishop, the current headmaster. Manning Clark, bless 'im, taught at Geelong Grammar! But why should such teachers be available only to those who can afford to send their kids to expensive private schools? (I was a scholarship boy.) I mean, the idea of being able to *buy* your way into special schools, so your kids get special advantages over everybody else in the society, even though they don't deserve it, and of the government (of the people, by the people, for the people) giving immense amounts of money to these schools to fortify their special

and unfair place in the community . . . crazy, isn't it? I can't believe it goes on.

Equality of power is something much harder to achieve. Some form of participatory democracy is about as close to achieving it as mankind is likely to come, in governmental terms anyhow; but it would have to be a participatory democracy very different from the travesty of one which exists in Australia right now where, every three years, a slightly different segment of the ruling elite presents itself for re-election under a heavily biased electoral system — and then goes ahead and rules as it wishes, with a tame-dog media system in full hue and cry in support of it. A genuinely participatory system of government is one which enfranchises all people so that they are involved in the political process (in its broadest sense) most of the time. Evolving such a system is a much more difficult task in complex modern societies of millions of people than it was in the days of the small Greek city-state, but one which, with the aid of contemporary media technology, should not be beyond us. The Greek polity had grievous flaws, just as ours does, but if we wanted to make democratic principles work I'm sure we could.

It means reforming and revitalising parliament, for a start; making major changes to the constitution, which Donald Horne, Gareth Evans and others have already canvassed in full; extending the democratic process to the most minor level; and reversing the centralisation of government power, which has steadily developed over the last decades, into the hands of an elected monarch called the Prime Minister. The day after Harold Holt, an affable and consensus-minded man, took over from the Great God Menzies I went to interview him in the Prime Minister's office and found him standing, very pleased with himself (as well he might be) behind the enormous PM's desk. Dutifully seeking a bit of newspaper 'color', I asked him what the desk was made of. "I've no idea, Craig", he replied, grinning, somewhat taken aback, "it's the fact that I'm behind it which counts!" Poor Harold. I liked him; he introduced me to the avocado. A streak of good old Aussie hedonism killed him. But even Harold developed a taste for the abuse of power, and proclaimed, sycophantly, "*We are all the way with LBJ*" (David Moore took a classic photo of him on that very occasion, head bowed as if in worship, lurking on the dias behind the most powerful Texan in the world) — and sent off conscripts to a lottery of death in Vietnam. No more Harolds, please.

Giving everyone access to power in the workplace is just as important. Here again some of the techniques have already been established: self-management, worker control, union ownership, co-operatives, nationalisation. Most of them simply haven't been tried, not with the sort of effort that would be needed to make them succeed — not here, anyhow, though some Scandinavian countries are well down that road. In Australia we are burdened with a ludicrous constitutional interpretation which, at present, prevents the government nationalising any single industry, though it allows private companies to 'nationalise' any industry they wish by setting up a monopoly. Thus BHP has effectively nationalised the steel industry, and CSR the sugar industry, and ACI the glass industry on behalf of private shareholders — Australia, in fact, is the most highly monopolised and oligopolised nation in the world. But the government, representing the community, is outlawed from touching a single new industry, though it already runs (successfully) most of our vital service industries: water, power, telephones, public transport, the post office, the business of government itself!

Not that I think government ownership is, in itself, an answer to the problem of creating genuine equality of power in the place where most Australians experience inequality face to face: at work. There is something terribly demeaning, something *inhuman*, about the boss/worker relationship, and nationalisation often merely substitutes one form of power relationship for another. The answer, I am sure, lies with forms of organization in which people don't simply order each other about but make decisions together, co-operatively. There is no reason why democracy shouldn't work as well on the factory floor as in politics; in England and Europe industrial democracy is being actively practised in some industries, and is being extended. The most successful forms may turn out to be complex, diverse and fairly experimental, but the principle is clear: our factories, shops, service industries, media networks and institutions should be *owned and run by the people who work there*, not by private owners and corporations. We don't need authoritarian structures in our places of work any more than we need them in our homes.

Unless, of course, we really think life should be like the Army.

Equality of opportunity?

I take that for granted: of course we should have equality of opportunity. And we don't but in recent years 'equality of opportunity' has

become something of a conservative catchcry to justify grossly unequal rewards; as long as everyone starts off the same, the argument seems to go, it doesn't matter how unfairly everyone ends up. As I said before, you could justify a slave state on such grounds: everyone starts equal, the winners become emperors, the rest become slaves.

Come to think of it, maybe that's not so far from what actually does happen, in heavily disguised form, in our society; the winners in the 'race of life' — a favorite phrase among clergymen, you know, ambassadors for Jesus, who used to visit our school — become very rich and powerful, and the rest become industrial slaves. When I was in America the process was even clearer: for a start, the slaves were black . . . most of them. Sometimes they revolted and burnt their ghettos down, but their political rulers, armed with things like half-tracks, tanks, tear gas, and Armalite rifles, soon put the disturbances down and set up inquiries to make sure it didn't happen again; if you don't believe this was how it was, please read my own *Up Against the Wall, America*, or Joan Didion's *The White Album*, or any account of Kent State, Attica, Jackson, Marin County, the Panthers, or the black power riots of the 1970s. In Australia, as elsewhere, we don't even pretend to start off equal. M. J. Berry, co-editor of *Australian Society*, concluded after an exhaustive examination of the distribution of income and wealth in Australia that "the Australian situation more closely resembles the case where a few competitors start one metre from the finishing line, a few more fifty metres back up the track, a larger group are further back hammering in their starting blocks, while the remainder are at home under the impression that the race starts tomorrow!"

Equality of opportunity is merely *what we start with*. Then we move on to other, more important equalities, the ones I've talked about. Equality of reward. Equality of power. Equality of freedom. Equality of sex, race and religion. Equality of fulfilment.

You can't guarantee the last, of course, but if every human being had the other equalities, then the chance of equality of fulfilment would be greatly enhanced. And we might get closer to the sort of human society which all of us, everywhere, deserve. As my wife's father, a lovely man

and a socialist, used to say: *from each according to his ability, to each according to his need*. An old saw, but I haven't come across a better one yet.

Some people argue that if everyone was equal a great deal of the zest, the salt, would go out of life. Everyone would be the same. Well, we haven't tried it yet; why don't we give it a go, and see? But anyhow, that argument confuses *equality* with *sameness*. I'm not saying everyone should be the same. There's no way in the world that could happen, given the infinite variety of human beings; giving people equality is not going to diminish that variety — if anything it could free people to develop their own individuality in ways which are cruelly stunted by the present system. Take something basic, like what people do with their increasingly important leisure time. Everybody has different hobbies, sports, pastimes, ways of spending their non-working lives; it's what gives human life much of its richness and diversity. But people don't have to be unequal to display that variety; you don't need kings and a leisured class to give spice to life — it's what millions of ordinary people do with their leisure, from stamp collecting to sport to orgies to reading to disco dancing (or a plentitude of mass entertainments: there is no more equal, or more interesting, place than a footie crowd), which provides the excitement and vivacity of mass urban culture. Socialists don't want people to be the same, they want them to be equal and free — to be different.

Well, that's it. Except for one last thing:

I deliberately wrote this without re-reading George Bernard Shaw, or Tawney, or Althusser, or any of the classic texts on equality, because I wanted to see if it were possible to write about it without making use of theory, but simply by working from first principles. I mean, it should be clear, shouldn't it, what we should do . . . maybe just by applying what used to be the old Aussie principle of 'fair go'. I reckon I worked out most of these things by the time I was a teenager. I remember sitting in the Cranbrook School dining room once, and being asked what I would like to do "when I grew up"; and I said I would like to do something for other people. I must have been eleven years old at that time. Ah, youthful idealism! But really, that's what this essay is about.

H. P. HESELTINE

## Between Living and Dying

*The Ground of Lawson's Art*

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The strident controversy that attended the publication of *In Search of Henry Lawson* in 1978 in some measure obscured what must surely be the most obvious implication of Manning Clark's title: that his subject still awaits a full and true discovery. The conflicting views of Clark and Colin Roderick, indeed, merely schematised a prevailing pattern in Lawson commentary. Virtually every new account of our most enigmatic author has achieved its own conviction only at the expense of blotting out some of the central features of its predecessors'. It is not my aim here to support either Clark or Roderick in their opposing claims concerning Lawson as a profoundly representative figure of our culture. What I do assert is that neither (at least in *In Search of Henry Lawson* and Dr Roderick's response to that work) provides adequate reasons why, through and in his writings, Lawson can be claimed to be profoundly representative of anything. It is not enough repeatedly to claim that Lawson "knew what life was all about"; nor, on the other hand, to insist simply that "his work mirrors the yearning of man to refine the human condition."<sup>1</sup> If the public property we call Henry Lawson is to be worth anyone's ownership, there must be demonstrated in his writing particular proofs of an actively searching, successfully expressed creative imagination.

In other words, as often as competing arguments about Lawson's cultural significance are raised, it becomes the responsibility of literary criticism to submit his work, once again, to its own procedures — the only procedures by which, in the long run, we can test whether he merits the high national importance imputed to him by Manning Clark, or Colin Roderick, or anyone

else. To address myself to that task is precisely my aim in this essay. Not that I shall offer anything so pretentious as "My Henry Lawson" or "Henry Lawson: A Revaluation". My modest purpose is to examine a comparatively small and well-defined part of Lawson's prose writing with the intention of demonstrating in it one instance of that creative dynamism which, multiplied a hundredfold, is the mark of the major literary artist.

My starting point then, is the year 1892, a "year [as Manning Clark would phrase it] of miracles" (p. 52) in Lawson's life. 1893-94, too, Clark sees as "halcyon years" (p. 57). And there would be few to dissent from his belief that it was during the three to four year period from 1892 to 1895 that Lawson reached the high-water mark of his career. Some of the major stories of that time will constitute my subject; the ground of Lawson's art, my theme. In adopting that phrase I do not wish primarily to indicate the importance of place in Lawson's prose narratives. Enough has been made, for instance, of the bush as a source of passion, meaning, value in his tales. The meaning of "ground" that I have chiefly in mind is its musical one: "the plain-song or melody on which a descant is raised." Now all great writers have such "melodies" playing to their inner ear; their books become the descants raised upon them. If we can detect even one such motif stated and restated in Lawson's stories, we will have at least one possible starting point for arguing his mastery as a writer, and consequently his importance as a figure in our culture.

One particular interplay between ground and descant, one source of creative dynamism, has

struck me more forcibly than before in the re-reading of Lawson's work demanded of me by the Clark-Roderick conflict of opinions. I can identify it most clearly in that story which, as Clark would have it, initiates the golden period of Lawson's artistic life. "A Day on a Selection" was published in 1892. Only four pages long, this bitter, plotless snapshot of up-country living has generated some remarkably diverse responses. Here, for instance, is Manning Clark's comment:

In this work a wondrous thing began to happen. On the surface it was a description by a man who had begun to feel bitter about life. . . . On the surface the life of the selector seemed hopeless. . . . At the end of the story an attempt is made to portray the majesty and absurdity of life in the bush. . . . he had managed to confer a might, a power and a glory on what had previously been dismissed by the cringers to overseas culture as the affairs of the sliprail, the cow-yard and the chook-house. (Pp. 51-52.)

This, by way of contrast, is Denton Prout's assessment of the same story, in *Henry Lawson: the Grey Dreamer*.

The... whole sketch . . . is filled with scorn for the fantasy-ridden idealists who live in a world of slipshod incompetence and haven't the willpower, "guts," or initiative to improve their lot by physical action. . . . It is a picture of the "bad" side of the "intellectual ferment" of the nineties.<sup>2</sup>

Such divergencies of opinion I find neither surprising nor distressing. For there is that in Lawson's own words which permits, enforces even, a range of response limited only by the number of his readers. To me, the unavoidable feature of "A Day on a Selection" is its style of scrupulous meanness, a style which, in reducing human life to mere event and observable action, evacuates from the whole performance any possibility of guiding its readers to any single moral or emotional judgment. In "A Day on a Selection" Lawson, no less than Joyce in *Dubliners*, remains within or behind or beyond his handiwork, allowing the primal facts to speak as they will. It is perhaps the first thoroughly (and compellingly) depersonalised work of fiction in Australian literary history. The means of achieving this remarkable *tour de force* (and it is nothing less) are obvious enough — the consistent use of the passive voice ("A boy is seen to run" . . .

"The thick milk is poured into a slop bucket"), the recurrent elision of narrative connections, the dependence on a tone of voice wholly apart from the action or any moral significance that might conceivably attach to it. The full result of Lawson's method is a representation of the enigma of sheer existence, of that order of human experience captured by T. S. Eliot in "The Hollow Men":

Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion.

My allusion to Eliot is neither arbitrary nor, as I believe, unwarranted. For in "A Day on a Selection" Lawson committed himself, at the beginning of his major phase, to the depiction of that state of spiritual nullity, that kind of life-in-death, in which the author of "The Waste Land" was so expert. Even before 1892, indeed, there had been preliminary soundings of what during the middle years of the decade was to become the very ground of his most important fiction. As early as 1890, in the *Albany Observer*, he had surveyed the inhabitants of the continent's western third and dismissed them in a single phrase: "*the people of Western Australia have no existence.*"<sup>3</sup> As social observation, the remark must be allowed a measure of exaggeration; as the expression of one man's state of mind and heart, it registers the personal vision for which Lawson, in succeeding years, had to invent plots and characters, that it might enjoy a local habitation and a name.

The exact phrase, "they have no existence," does not occur (to the best of my knowledge) in any of the major stories of 1892-95. They exhibit, however, their own recurring verbal motif, summing up the hollowness that Lawson felt in himself and sensed in so much that he looked out on: "it doesn't matter." The phrase occurs, almost parenthetically, in "A Day on a Selection":

Sometimes the boy's hand gets tired and he lets some of the milk run over, and gets into trouble; but it doesn't matter much, for the straining-cloth has several sizeable holes in the middle. (P. 44.)

It forms the theme of the old shepherd's obituary spoken over his friend's remains in "The Bush Undertaker": "Brummy . . . it's all over now; nothin' matters now — nothin' didn't ever matter, nor — nor don't" (p. 56). Its most striking

appearance is in the climax of "The Union Buries Its Dead":

[The grave digger] tried to steer the first few shovel-fuls gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard, dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much — nothing does. (P. 83.)

The whole of "The Union Buries Its Dead," as we now see, is probably less in praise of union solidarity than in recognition of that state of spiritual paralysis which its author could project so tellingly upon his characters because (we must believe) he knew it so well himself. Every significant element in the story testifies to this view — action, setting, comedy, social observation, most of all, perhaps, its rejection of the sentimental comfort of literary convention ("I have left out the wattle — because it wasn't there" — p. 83). Even the detail which so taxed Colin Roderick — the shadow cast by a fence at noon — can be explained (if not finally defended) in terms of this reading of the tale.<sup>4</sup> Richer and more fully dramatised than "A Day on a Selection," "The Union Buries Its Dead" yet takes up exactly the same theme: "shade without colour,/Paralysed force, gesture without motion."

"The Union Buries Its Dead" appeared in the *Bulletin* on 16 April 1893<sup>5</sup> — during the year, that is to say, which followed the publication of "A Day on a Selection." These two stories portray with a thoroughness never surpassed in Lawson's canon his sense that it is man's lot to be held somewhere between living and dying. To the very extent, however, that they succeeded in sounding the groundtone of his fiction, they represented a barrier to its further development. It is not to my purpose to enquire into the psychological genesis of the tune which played so insistently to Lawson's inner ear, merely to examine its energising effects on his creative patterns. Even within the limits of such an enquiry, however, it is possible to suggest that few human beings could bear to remain stalled in that perception of nullity which characterises "The Union Buries Its Dead" — particularly one as alert as Lawson was to human potentiality. In such a situation Lawson almost inevitably sought for a release from the imaginative impasse he had revealed to himself in and through his art. The mode and substance of that release are to be detected in a new descant he began to raise upon the ground of his narratives, a descant first unmistakably heard in "The Bush Undertaker,"

published in the *Antipodean* of Christmas, 1892.

Colin Roderick finds the primary significance of "The Bush Undertaker" in its traffic with the Australian bush:

[Lawson] wanted to retain the notion of Nature's indifference to human activity, to leave the impression of the bush brooding over the grim episode. . . .<sup>6</sup>

This view or something like it represents the common wisdom about the story, and has accordingly directed a good deal of attention towards the well-known final paragraph — especially the critical acumen (or otherwise) exhibited by Lawson and his editors in the various alterations and omissions of the early printings:

And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush — the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands. (P. 57.)

Whatever uncertainty Lawson may have felt about the ending of "The Bush Undertaker" is of less consequence, it seems to me, for his representation of the Australian bush than for his status as a creative artist in the culture in which perforce he operated. I shall return to this issue later; for the time being, however, I wish to comment on a strand of meaning in the story much less obvious than the impact of the bush — what might be called its inside narrative. I do so not for the sake of contesting prevailing interpretations but in order to lay bare what I have described as the descant that Lawson came to weave about the thematic groundtone of his spiritual nullity.

The main action of "The Bush Undertaker" takes place on Christmas Day.<sup>7</sup> The heavy-handedness of the irony should not, however, blind us to its importance. For the tale is last, if not first, a tale of death and rebirth. The opening sequence, wherein a solitary shepherd goes in search of some old bones in what is probably an Aboriginal grave, does more than establish the pathological eccentricity of an individual condemned to a solitary life in a remote corner of the bush. It establishes the motif of the (here quite literal) resurrection of the dead: the nature of the bones may remain problematical, but they are most certainly exhumed. The narrative then develops along a line of ironic counterpoint: after the shepherd has uncovered the long dead occupant of the grave, he discovers

an unburied body, that of his old friend Brummy, awaiting ritual committal to the earth. It may be imputing too great a subtlety to Lawson to discover a pun in his description of the skeleton as "thunderin' jump-t-up bones" (p. 54), yet observation of the possible play on words confirms the prevailing meaning and emphasis of the entire tale.

The fugal opposition between the shepherd's Christmas dinner of "boggabri and salt meat," on the one hand, and the meal of the goanna makes of Brummy's remains, on the other, cannot be gainsaid. Nor is it possible to overlook the resolution of opposing themes — of death and rebirth — in the closing scene. As the shepherd commits the remains of his old mate to the ground, his hope is that Brummy will find "a great an' gerlorious rassaraction" (p. 56). For all the grotesque comedy of its realised action, "The Bush Undertaker" finds its deepest motivation in the juxtaposition of an absolutely hopeless, sterile existence with the possibility of redemptive change.

I make this claim for "The Bush Undertaker" with all the greater confidence because exactly the same dynamic structure can be shown to inform many of Lawson's other stories of the same period. It is foreshadowed, for instance, even in the city tales which precede the great bush studies of 1892-95. The irony, thus, of dating Arvie Aspinall's death (in "Arvie Aspinall's Alarm Clock") during the Easter holidays may be as heavily pathetic as the Christmas setting of "The Bush Undertaker" is deliberately grotesque; it points quite as clearly to Lawson's dream of renewal. Nor should it go unnoticed that in "Jones's Alley" Mrs Aspinall lived in dread of her husband's "daily resurrection" (p. 35), and that rescue from imminent eviction at the end of the story takes on the appearance of a funeral:

When the funeral reached the street, the lonely "trap" was, somehow, two blocks away in the opposite direction, moving very slow, and very upright, and very straight, like an automaton. (P. 42.)

After these tentative experiments Lawson was ready to confront, in story after story, death-in-life with the hope of release by dying into a new identity. A recurring feature of this interplay between the ground of his art and the new motif he wove around it is set out with singular clarity at the beginning of "The Mystery of Dave Regan":

"And then there was Dave Regan, said the traveller. "Dave used to die oftener than any other bushman I knew. He was always being reported dead and turnin' up again". (P. 326.)

Time and again the pattern is repeated. The bush worker disappears up-country, seemingly dead, only to return, unannounced, to his former surroundings. Time and again the faint hope that he may be renewed, especially through the influence of romantic love, is disappointed. The expression of the pattern may be comic (as in "The Mystery of Dave Regan"), pathetic, grotesque, but its activating elements remain the same. Mitchell, for instance, is made to undergo a representative experience in one of the briefest Lawson ever wrote, "A Love Story". "He went up-country and was reported dead" (p. 141), says Mitchell to his mate, patently projecting his own case onto an imaginary third person. But there is no comic sequel to this disappearance:

"He was reported to have been drowned while trying to swim his horses across a billabong. His girl broke her heart — and mended it again; then he turned up alive, and drier than ever, and married her, and broke her heart for certain. And — she died." (P. 141.)

The only release he can know is the bitter, familiar comment "Ah, well — never mind. . . . The billy's boiling, Joe" (p. 141). Mitchell is required to suffer a remarkably similar experience in "On the Edge of a Plain," while the situation to which Lawson condemns him in "Some Day" is even harsher. He speaks his tale of lost love from the outback itself, the outback from which he knows he will never return. Descended into purgatory, he knows that there can be no resurrection.

If the farthest reaches of the bush could hold an itinerant pastoral worker like Mitchell captive for months or years, Lawson knew of other ways in which the Australian earth could literally swallow those who inhabit its surface. The conditions of shallow-shaft gold mining, with which he was so early familiar, provided him (as it did, later, Henry Handel Richardson) with potent images for nourishing the dynamic tensions which shaped his art. The motif of the miner dying underground was quite as vivid to him as that of the pastoral worker wandering the land in hope of resurrection. Indeed, exactly that motif is at the heart of the very first of Lawson's prose narratives, "His Father's Mate." In that piece the father's desire to work underground is the



direct cause of his son Isley's death, through a fall to the base of the mineshaft. As an after-piece to the main action, the long-lost elder son returns home to find his father dead of a broken heart. The ironic symmetry of "His Father's Mate" clearly prefigures the design of "The Bush Undertaker," while its substance is repeated in a number of important stories, notably "When the Sun Went Down." This tale tells of a quarrel between two brothers, both helping to sink the same shaft. The quarrel is resolved (before the sun goes down) when the elder brother Tom saves Jack from a cave-in, only to die of heart failure at the very moment the rescue is effected. As one brother is resurrected into life, the other goes down into the darkness of death. "The Golden Graveyard," by way of contrast, uses the mining material to create a comic variation of Lawson's central theme. In their search for a rich reef of gold, Dave Regan and his mates drive straight underneath a cemetery, literally uncovering the coffins of the dead as they strike towards their hoped-for wealth. In a farcical climax, one of the diggers momentarily thinks he has met the devil when he comes face to face with a Negro driving in to the gold from another direction. It is life, however, which finally triumphs — life in the form of drunken Mrs Middleton, as she saves her husband's grave from threatened despoliation by the diggers.

Comic, pathetic, or tragic, the hope (never more than half-believed in) that there may be some release from the state of death-in-life by a redemptive rebirth is the animating force behind nearly every significant story that Lawson wrote in the middle years of the 1890s. In many, as in "Brummy Usen," it determines both the substance and the mode of the telling. Brummy, thus, experiences the rare difficulty of being declared unofficially dead by his bush companions and subsequently being unable to convince them of his continued existence. He becomes that loneliest type in all Lawson's range of characters — the solitary traveller, the "hatter." The terrible detachment of his life from the rest of humanity is revealed in the conclusion of the story, when the narrator unwittingly reveals that, in recounting Brummy's history, he has been recounting his own.

Perhaps, however, the most extreme instance in Lawson's fiction of the "hatter" as a man condemned to live, in Eliot's phrase, "in death's other kingdom," is the story entitled "Rats," first published in the *Bulletin* of 3 June 1893. Its experiential extremity is further complicated by

an ambiguity of meaning quite as marked as that which attaches to "A Day on a Selection." The ambiguity in the case of "Rats," however, derives less from any scrupulous meanness of style than from rival interpretations produced by its alternative endings. The editorial crux turns on the propriety or otherwise of printing a single sentence as a coda to the main narrative:

And late that evening a little withered old man with no corks round his hat and with no humorous twinkle instead of a wild glare in his eyes called at a wayside shanty, had several drinks, and entertained the chaps with a yarn about the way in which he had "had" three "blanky fellers" for some tucker and "half a caser" by pretending to be "barmy."<sup>8</sup>

That sentence did not appear in the original *Bulletin* printing; it was added for *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (1894), and completely altered the meaning and tone of the tale. The later version uses the final sentence to produce a sort of "trick" ending to which the entire episode must be regarded as leading. Without the coda, however, "Rats" becomes accessible to a much more ambiguous and, as I would believe, satisfying interpretation. The opening scene, thus, in which Sunlight, Macquarie, and Milky first see the hatter apparently struggling with a human opponent in the middle of a dusty track, becomes crucial in establishing the groundtone of Lawson's meaning. The three shearers are sufficiently interested by the prospect of witnessing a fight to abandon their "smoke-oh" and move, without undue haste, towards the encounter. Their interest becomes urgent, however, when they decide that one of the participants is a woman:

"It's a funny-lookin' feller, the other feller," panted Milky. "He don't seem to have no head. Look! he's down — they're both down! They must ha' clinched on the ground. No! they're up an' at it again. . . . Why, good Lord! I think the other's a woman!" (P. 57.)

It is only when a sexual element is introduced into the scene that "they dropped swags, waterbags and all, and raced forward" (p. 57). While it is certainly possible to account for this haste as a gesture of outback chivalry, it is quite as fair to regard it as the behaviour of sexually frustrated men excited by the prospect of near contact with a woman. Neither interpretation is invalidated by the fact that when the shearers come near the hatter they discover that he is in fact wrestling with his swag.

Even when the truth of the matter has been established, however, the behavior of the three shearers continues to offer psychological interest. Seemingly untouched by Rats' neurotically disabled condition, they encourage him in his pathetic parody of the ritual contest of the boxing ring. Sunlight and his mates take a sadistic pleasure in the old man's antics that Lawson is at no pains whatsoever to conceal. If, however, the overt actions of the shearers vibrate with implicit aggression, the behavior of Rats himself in the latter part of the story is even more ambivalent in its psychological implications. "Well, old Rats, what's the trouble?" asks Sunlight, and his question encapsulates what is perhaps the deepest motif of the tale. Rat's manifest behavior cannot be accounted for by any generalised appeal to the alienating effects of prolonged solitude in the Australian bush. It is reported with an exactness of details which demands a detailed response.

Once the symbolic boxing match has been concluded, Rats, borrowing a piece of meat for bait, goes through the motions of fishing in the dust. There is no need to rely on accepted literary convention to account for this behavior as displaced male sexuality. There is ample evidence elsewhere in Lawson's own fiction to justify such a reading of "Rats." Rivers in his stories are regularly (if not universally) associated with romantic love between men and women; one tale in particular, moreover, provides striking evidence in support of a sexual understanding of Rats' pathetic angling in a sterile bush track. In "The Hero of Redclay," Mitchell tells the narrator of the sad history of "Lachlan," who has condemned himself to a living death outback in order to preserve the honor of the girl he loved. Mitchell himself had been peripherally involved in that history, to the extent that he had observed some of the meetings between "Lachlan" and his girl while he himself was fishing. Mitchell's report of one such incident leaves no doubt that his fishing excursion was a quite direct attempt to "catch" a woman of his own:

"About a week before that I was down in the bed of the Redclay Creek fishing for 'tailers'. I'd been getting on all right with the housemaid at the Royal. . . . She mentioned one day, yarning, that she liked a stroll by the creek sometimes in the cool of the evening. I thought she'd be off that day, so I said I'd go for fish after I'd knocked off. I thought I might get a bite. Anyway, I didn't catch Lizzie — tell you about that some other time." (P. 297.)

Rats' fumbling with meat and string, that is to say, may be seen as the symbolic gesture of a man spiritually paralysed through prolonged deprivation of the company of women. So understood, the whole story must properly end at the comment which insists on the ambivalent existence of a man completely without hope of restoration:

When they turned their heads again, Rats was still fishing; but when they looked back for the last time before entering the timber, he was having another row with his swag; and Sunlight reckoned that the trouble arose out of some lies which the swag had been telling about the bigger fish it caught. (P. 58.)

So radical a reading of "Rats" must provoke questions about Lawson's intentions in writing the story, about the validity of a commentary so completely based on a doubtful text. My own position on the matter is simple enough. Whatever Lawson's conscious 'intentions,' his imagination was demonstrably capable of entertaining at least two possible interpretations of the same events. My inclination in such a situation is to prefer the richer reading. In any case, if there is any discrepancy between the pattern that Lawson finally decided on and that urged on him by the deeper promptings of his imagination, the question of primary interest concerns the nature of that discrepancy and the reasons for its appearance. An inspection of the whole range of Lawson's stories written in the middle 1890s, furthermore, reveals that indecision about the final status of a text is by no means unique to "Rats." On the contrary, variant printings of the stories seem to be the rule rather than the exception.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, many of the textual emendations can be accounted for, as Colin Roderick has pointed out,<sup>10</sup> by the interference of editors less perceptive than Lawson himself. Even those which can be shown to have authorial sanction are often the result of Lawson's desire to heighten, say, the dramatic impact of a particular tale, or the naturalness of its idiom. Nevertheless, the very fact that Lawson had to suffer (and accept) frequent editorial interference indicates something of the uncertain status of the Australian writer of his generation. His own need, furthermore, to tinker with his texts (sometimes with profound consequences) suggests that such uncertainty was not entirely a matter of external pressure; it existed within the man himself, as a radical element of his creative apparatus. Manning Clark is, thus, right to draw attention to the

codas so often appended to Lawson's stories. In perceiving them, however, as a "signature tune, a Lawson comment on life in general" (p. 52), he was missing much of their significance in the larger patterns of Lawson's art. For nowhere more than in these end pieces and in Lawson's seemingly unavoidable need to tinker with them is there more acute evidence of his uncertainty about his own self, the very basis of his being. The textual history of these final paragraphs suggests as potently as any other data marshalled by Clark the actuality of that divided and ambivalent self which the whole sweep of *In Search of Henry Lawson* aims to demonstrate.

Curiously, however, what might be construed as fundamental weaknesses in his life and personality proved to be the strength and buttress of his art. The great stories of his flowering time are precisely those in which he refuses to let ambivalence, uncertainty, distress be resolved by the comforts of doctrine, any absolutes of belief or action. His primal sense, that is to say, of human existence held between living and dying stubbornly opposes the seductive symbols of death and rebirth to which it is so regularly submitted. However great the temptation to convert the motif of resurrection into a faith, an explanatory myth, he steadfastly refused to succumb, at least in the middle 1890s, to any certitude which would falsify his sense of the enigmatic, the ambivalent, in man's life. The Christmas and Easter symbols of "The Bush Undertaker" and "Arvie Aspinall's Alarm Clock" are, in spite of their diagnostic value, patently machinery (or at most uneasy devices for injecting sympathetic irony into the writing). Unlike T. S. Eliot, Lawson would never have occasion to write an "Ash Wednesday"; the integrity of his great tales of the middle 1890s resides in his determination to hold the balance between the spiritual wasteland he perceived in his own and other lives and the tantalising but illusory promise of rebirth he could not help but entertain.

I should make it plain that I claim no status for the patterns I am imputing to Lawson's fiction other than what in theatrical terms would be called the sub-text to a script. In other words, I do not wish to challenge the validity of orthodox readings of such tales as "Rats," "The Bush Undertaker," "A Day on a Selection" and "The Union Buries its Dead," which locate their meanings in the interchange between men and the Australian bush. All that I wish to suggest is that the manifest meanings of these stories can be made to bear the burden of cultural represen-

tativeness and value so often demanded of them in part because the "melodies" I have attempted to describe can be heard, by the well-tuned ear, playing at their very core. It is also, and finally, true that, just as from the late 1890s on Lawson's life began its long disintegration, so too did his art begin to lose the authority it derived from the tense balance it had once held between the groundtone of existential dis-ease and the several variations on the theme of resurrection. From the end of the decade on, indeed, Lawson's career had at least this in common with Christopher Brennan's: both men acted on the metaphoric prophecies of self-destruction that they had dared to create in the flowering time of their imagination. Just as the latter part of Brennan's career is, in a sense, contained and predicted in "The Forest of Night," so too is Lawson's life, from, say, his journey to England on, characterised by episodes in which he sought to destroy the old Adam of his former self and rise into a new and changed identity. One thinks, for instance, of the burning of his manuscripts upon his arrival in England — a symbolic auto-da-fé; of the abortive leap from the cliff at Fairy Bower; of the multifarious *personae* tried and discarded in the letters of his later years.

Such episodes in his life find their parallel in the conduct of his later fiction. The nexus between his awareness of spiritual paralysis and his dreams of release is all too often shattered into polarised extremes. By way of example I might cite "That Pretty Girl in the Army," composed in 1901 and first published in the following year in *Children of the Bush*. In that tale Lawson reverts to material he had gathered on his trip to Bourke in 1892. Where, in the stories written immediately after that outback expedition, the motif of romantic love had been expressed with a tactful restraint, in "That Pretty Girl in the Army" his treatment of women undergoes a complete polarisation. On the one hand there is the sentimentalization of the "pretty girl" of the title; on the other, an attitude towards female sexuality which produces perhaps the only coarse jest that Lawson allowed into his fiction:

The Army prayed, and then a thin 'ratty' little woman bobbed up in the ring; she'd gone mad on religion as women do on woman's rights and hundreds of other things. She was so skinny in the face, her jaws so prominent, and her mouth so wide, that when she opened it to speak it was like a ventriloquist's dummy and you could almost see the cracks open down under her ears.

"They say I'm cracked!" she screamed in a

shrill, cracked voice. "But I'm not cracked — I'm only cracked on the Lord Jesus Christ! That's all I'm cracked on —." And just then the Amen man of the Army — the Army groaner we called him, who was always putting both feet in it — just then he blundered forward, rolled up his eyes, threw his hands up and down as if he were bouncing two balls, and said, with deep feeling:

"Thank the Lord she's got a crack in the right place!" (P. 491.)

No story, however, more fully measures the extent to which the deepest controls of Lawson's imagination collapsed along with the externals of his life than "The Man Who Was Drowned," not printed in Lawson's lifetime and probably composed about 1908. Its opening paragraph gives the clearest indication of the value it had for Lawson:

This is the story of a man who went away and died — or was supposed to be dead. Supposed to be drowned. He was a writer. I might have made him a "great" artist, actor, singer, musician, or poet, or anything else out of the common and great — or in the common, rather, and "great", as "great" things go now; but he was a writer. He was a writer who had been widely known and had written for many years. And he found that the more he wrote, the more widely known he became, the less money he got for it. Perhaps it was because of the drink — and perhaps private worries had been the cause of the drink. No time nor space to enter into the mystery of drink here. (Pp. 672-3.)

To dispel any doubt that Lawson is, in fact, writing of himself, he identifies his protagonist in the second paragraph by one of his considerable range of pseudonyms: "Maybe his name was John Lawrence" (p. 673). "The Man Who Was Drowned," in other words, must be read as a prolonged and uncontrolled fantasy in which Lawson, bitter and aggrieved at himself and the world, gives way uncritically to the dream of dying into a new life.

There were of course temporary reversals of the trend — the Joe Wilson stories spring instantly to mind. By and large, however, after 1895 Lawson found it increasingly difficult to bring his fantasies under the command of his creative imagination. That fragile balance between the personal groundtone of his fiction and the vision of Australian life that he constructed upon it more and more slipped away from his control. Only rarely could he repeat the triumphs of the major phase; hardly ever could he find some new vision of his own uncertain

self to give his life and art new impetus. Near the beginnings of his sad decline, however, one story stands out, and for a single scene. In "The Blinding of One-Eyed Bogan" Lawson strikes off an unforgettable image. His protagonist is briefly revealed, blinded in the act of saving a policeman sent to effect his arrest, naked and alone by the side of the life-giving waters of the River Darling:

. . . I've often thought since what a different man Bogan seemed without his clothes and with the broken bridge of his nose and his eyes covered by the handkerchiefs. He was clean shaven, and his mouth and chin are his best features, and he's clean limbed and well-hung. I often thought afterwards that there was something of a blind god about him as he stood there naked by the fire on the day he saved Campbell's life. . . . (P. 323.)

A fleeting glimpse of man as Adonis-Lear, and no more. Unable to find release from his wasteland, increasingly paralysed by its sterility, Lawson was condemned in his later years to the composition of fragments to shore against the ruins of his life.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Manning Clark uses the phrase "knew what life was all about" repeatedly in *In Search of Henry Lawson* (Melbourne, 1978). I cite Colin Roderick's view from his introduction to *Henry Lawson: Short Stories and Sketches 1888-1922* (Sydney, 1972), p. 72. This judgment was registered, of course, prior to the Clark-Roderick controversy, but it does seem to me to be representative of the highest kind of value that Dr Roderick characteristically assigns to Lawson's work. All future page references to Clark and to Lawson's stories will be, unless otherwise indicated, from the editions cited here, and will be incorporated in the text.
- <sup>2</sup> Denton Prout, *Henry Lawson: The Grey Dreamer* (Adelaide, 1963), p. 94.
- <sup>3</sup> Henry Lawson, *Autobiographical and Other Writings 1887-1922*, ed. Colin Roderick (Sydney, 1972), p. 10. The italics are Lawson's.
- <sup>4</sup> See Colin Roderick's note in *The Bush Undertaker and Other Stories* (Sydney, 1970), p. 256.
- <sup>5</sup> For this information I am indebted to Dr Roderick's notes to *The Bush Undertaker*. All other information about dating in this article is drawn from the same source, or from *Short Stories and Sketches 1888-1922*.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Bush Undertaker and Other Stories*, p. 251. See the whole of Dr Roderick's notes on "The Bush Undertaker" for the textual difficulties it poses.
- <sup>7</sup> The original title was "A Christmas in the Far West: or, The Bush Undertaker." (See *The Bush Undertaker*, p. 248.)
- <sup>8</sup> *The Bush Undertaker*, p. 31. Dr Roderick does not print this paragraph in *Short Stories and Sketches 1888-1922*.
- <sup>9</sup> Virtually every story between 1892-1895 is followed in *Short Stories and Sketches 1888-1922* by the asterisk which indicates that Lawson revised it at some time or other.
- <sup>10</sup> For a discussion of some of the most important textual difficulties, see Dr Roderick's notes in *The Bush Undertaker*.

CRAIG MCGREGOR  
BEVERLEY SMITH

## Popular Culture Revisited

*In Overland 85 Stephen Alomes wrote an article on "Australian Popular Culture Revisited" which aroused much interest. Here Craig McGregor and Beverley Smith (who teaches at the South Australian Institute of Technology) comment on the Alomes piece.*

CRAIG MCGREGOR

I write to correct a couple a minor points in your article. First, my own *People, Politics & Pop* was not an offshoot of Wolfe or Hunter S. Thompson, neither of whom I'd read when I wrote most of the pieces in that book. I was more influenced, if by anyone, by Mailer. A later book, *Up Against the Wall, America* (Angus & Robertson, 1973) is more clearly focussed on popular culture, though on American rather than an Australian version — I wrote it after living for two years in New York and Berkeley. I agree with what you say, towards the end of the article, about the relationship between work and 'leisure' culture, and also your defence of the usefulness of popular culture and mass culture as terms referring to different things: a question I took up, very briefly, in my own review article on Spearritt & Walker's book in Meanjin.

BEVERLEY SMITH

The first thing is of course to distinguish between culture as a phenomenon and as a subject of research. What strikes me most forcibly is continuity. For various reasons popular culture was strong and assertive in Australia up to 1914-18, so strong that people who were part of it, the majority working class and some middle class, did not see themselves as something separate from elite culture, but rather as a dominant culture. I am quite sure that Russel Ward was correct about this. Because it was so strong it had already developed its own conceptual framework. (This involved art as well as literature and it is not surprising that Bernard Smith's book, *Place, Taste and Tradition* is one of the first

serious studies of our art and life. Compare the date of publication of this with Hauser's recent book.) The idea of cultural lag really has no basis in history. The Australian continent has just as much capacity as any place to generate new cultural forms, new cultural concepts. A section of Australian society has clung to the idea of lag to ensure dependency, whether to Britain, the US or whatever, and as a way of distracting attention from native ideas challenging to their own status. But life itself, popular culture as it originated here, had great vigor and no need to defer to foreign models. (I think late nineteenth century Australian culture has similar features to popular culture elsewhere especially in its association with journalism, but this went further because of the independent attitudes of working people in a country when all major institutions were new, not old, and uncertain in their own foundations.)

After about 1914-18 popular culture began to change very decisively, but we won't ever come to understand the character and reasons for this change unless we see history as a continuous process. If we do this we will not see Ian Turner as starting something new but as continuing in a tradition marked out (in a grander way) by people like A. G. Stephens and Andree Hayward. I can imagine that this view will be howled down because of the tremendous difference between popular culture after 1918 and after 1945, or because some people incorrectly believe that the popular culture associated with Stephens was really not popular but conceived with a select minority, but I am certain that the 1890s culture was popular, not select. If we say Ian Turner

started something new it must be new as related to new forms — but there is this danger, that by talking in this way we deflect attention from continuity and an urgently needed analysis of what changes took place.

What is characteristic of the 1960s in Australia is that the people who were interested in popular culture were extremely conscious of the early popular traditions in this country; to look at popular culture and take it seriously came quite readily because of the vigor of this native popular culture; and at least in Ian Turner's case this was carried over into contemporary studies.

It is true that academics took little interest in this area, and in some cases obstructed it. There was some academic research in the 1960s on popular culture of the early period, apart from Ward's book, and some attempt to develop suitable con-

cepts, by paying attention to the distinctive features of popular as compared with elite culture, the relationship of work and leisure, and so on. I completed a thesis on early colonial and gold-fields literature in Western Australia about 1960, based on some three years devoted to reading the press of the goldrushes, an excellent mirror of popular culture of the day. But it was not easy to sustain work of this kind at that stage, and by the mid-1960s, with Australian involvement in Vietnam, it was easy to take the view that the most urgent aspect of Australian's cultural deficiencies was ignorance of Asia. But my main argument is that we should see popular culture and the study it generates as a continuum. Some people are bored with Lawson and what he stands for. This is foolish. We still don't properly understand that era. And it is very significant.

---

island

— *Michael Dugan*

**WILSON'S DIARY\***

(For Josie Porter and Ian Close)

*Cri de coeur*

is simply  
 strength of character  
 whimpering to itself  
 on sea-ice  
 that is yielding  
 to the spine  
 of a killer whale —

the water

is a palaeontologist's  
 paradise,  
 frozen fossils  
 surfacing  
 to add nostalgia  
 to a century  
 that likes defrosting  
 extinct things,  
 the water is quite fascinating  
 and will kill you  
 damn quick!

When the wind drops

the sea will come for you  
 stiff, shuffling, white  
 like an Edgar Allen Poe  
 bride

whose hands are cold  
 whose memory  
 is frightfully good—

*Have I made myself perfectly clear?*

Yes, sir!!

Toast, fires, chat  
 and fagging  
 at Eton  
 are behind your resolve  
 not to look  
 to shiver  
 to care

ah, the soul is a plateau  
 a plateau  
 dignified  
 bare—

not a hymn

of shameless tears  
 flooding out  
 the conduits  
 of glistening  
 infatuation

*well said!*

And no sea snakes

to taunt us here  
 nothing twisting  
 us about  
 with beauty  
 just this avenue of icebergs  
 mauve, pink, gold!  
 ice crystals  
 the sham jewels  
 of Purgatory!  
 Hell's Versailles!  
 Can you cope?

If I come South

(come South!  
 come South!)

it's because

I've fallen in love  
 and love

is a trance,  
 a marching order!

Let my heart

crack  
 like a ship destroyed  
 in pack ice

let my soul

perish  
 like a sledger pulling  
 across an infinite glacier

let my eyes

blister  
 in the blizzard  
 of God.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

\*Bill Wilson was an explorer and naturalist who  
 perished on Scott's Last Expedition, March 1913.

**FLIRT'S DESSERTS**

I want to wash it all out like in "South  
 Pacific", not end up naked as peanuts,  
 unshelled again remembering  
 the shower I never had with you, the hot  
 abandon under water that was not  
 my plan. I wanted cloth, safe  
 space like folds of cotton, thick  
 as wool and virgin too  
 between us. Just the tickle  
 of your words was all I  
 needed, but you misconstrued.  
 And were corrected.

Yet it's the shower  
 now that haunts me. Each  
 morning in hundreds of fingers  
 living down my spine it must remind  
 me — of something thundering as water and  
 drowning at the same time.

DORIS BRETT

**AT THE NEW WORLD**

Going cheap today, glossy William pears,  
 dream pears by the crateful, firm-cheeked  
 virgins on the brink of a ripening turn.  
 Good season, they said, up Shepparton way.

On the side, a rub. Head on at the pears  
 our provident sister, devoted wife, loving  
 mother, bagging with busy grab and thrust,  
 a pacesetting lady, ruthless with rejects.

I see misfits become missiles to be flung  
 from reach. Beyond facades I see one who  
 can give the nod to bait, hook and poison  
 or set a mean trap. Anyone for Auschwitz?

Judge not . . . charity thinks of a hard life,  
 let-livers blink, wiser not to see; my hope  
 is here at my desk, reining in a spillage  
 of distaste to counter a certain bruising.

FAIRLIE SZACINSKI

## BACK-STAGE AT THE CON

Where had they dreamed them up? we wondered,  
watching with horrified fascination the ballet-dancers  
specially imported to interpret our poetic lines.  
Behind the drawn curtains,  
five fleshy young persons in white bulging tights,  
hair tucked obscenely into white hair-nets,  
leapt, shoeless, on soft fat feet, with great practice  
leaps,  
thumping like obese bunnies as they performed  
an endless series of *pas de deux* and *entrechats*,  
bored absorption  
shrouding their plump faces. On the apron of the  
stage,  
beyond the curtain, a high stool in a single intense  
spot  
awaited us, faced with two hundred people in the  
pitch-dark,  
but what was this compared with the Flopsy Sisters  
—those frightening mutations from Watership Down  
via the Australian Dance Theatre's first rejects of the  
season?  
"I can't believe it," Jack whispered. "I can't even  
afford to believe it . . .!"

A vast calm  
settled over us, crowded in the wings, among the  
dusty properties;  
towards such monumental embarrassments  
life leads us blandly; it leaps continually  
like some improbable Cottontail we have no choice  
but to partner, clutching our carefully-chosen sonnets,  
our spry  
rallentandos of free verse, unable to run  
for the exits, explain away our presence,  
or disclaim the gross dancers.

BRUCE DAWE

## THE CURIOUS WAR

To pee straight and kiss warm — why should there be  
less to it than this?

And yet even in sleep, the wild carillon breaks. Afterwards,  
speaking to the ground, we find our nostrils have already

burst. The name of the theme is universal victory — as  
with blind faces, machine and monster grind themselves

towards darkness at the end of streets and through the cold  
stone mountains. The old have survived only because

their gums are inured against savagery. But now entering  
the umpteenth year of this curious war, the guns

still flare across the valley while the skull rises only  
as the keeper of its own breath. We have become obsessed

by detachment. Walking home, we see how straight the evening  
curtains hang — and how the children, racing round the block,

each sink into the sunset yellow one by one, their arms  
extended in perfect crucifixion for another day.

While, later, across lives darkening in lines geometrical  
to the moon, the dreams again come droning overhead —

but carrying below their engines these deadly roses in bulk  
cargo: against the stars,

slowly those bomb doors which are opening everywhere.

PETER LLOYD

## CITY-GAMES

So many faces here, complexities,  
Each mind containing landscapes,  
Lovescapes of its own. It is  
People who haunt their own pasts,  
Who delve into them as if some  
Hulking meaning existed there;  
But the past is an empty pond,  
Dwindling rapidly in the sun.  
In the city the streets are like  
A children's game in three dimensions,  
People walk hurriedly as if there  
Were some purpose in winning;  
But life is a fat man yawning  
Into his hamburger, or a child  
Swearing, or a tired man feeling  
His head erode with wine.  
Innocence is only an incompletely  
Re-called memory, perhaps of  
Some faded auntie handing  
Out biscuits, or of a long dead  
Dog stumbling in puppy-hood.  
Living long means coming to terms  
With dread, with decay, with  
Spit in the gutter, a pretty girl's  
Eyes full of their own emptiness.  
Despair is a giant, the hungriest  
Of ogres: only the repugnant  
Are never eaten. Survival  
Means observing, hiding, never daring  
To admit repletion. The sun also  
Sets.

SHANE McCAULEY



## HOUSING COMMISSION SHARPS

th flats are monolithic/  
the people are scrawls  
like th graffitti;  
TH WORRIERS  
like jana's photo  
2 arms, 2 legs, blurry, furred  
D NOTICE — DO NOT PRINT  
people coming from all over town  
to jump  
sue lives there  
puts people up on her floor  
nights when it rains  
& the ceiling caves in at th starlite motel  
one of these park managers rips her door off  
th neighbors are unhinged  
th cops come & take her daughter away  
fines she can't pay  
th law's stupid  
she's feeding her kids  
from th poorbox at th court  
it'd break yr heart  
th in-valid pension  
it's fair  
if yr not 85% incapacitated  
you can act like yr not all there  
no pension leaves you whole  
34 years & on th dole  
th staff call us by our first names  
just big kids, really  
they call us  
BENNOES  
me  
I'm  
MISTER BENEFICIARY

ERIC BEACH

## RUNNING A MARATHON

From the stony plain  
a word descends,  
born into living speech —  
metaphor commemorates  
the runner's day,

until it spills  
to express a sense  
of effort/time for any hand,  
finally, a tired epithet  
before a lumpy noun;

such that Mrs Rothfarb's  
extraordinary ability  
to run more than twenty miles  
at the age of eighty  
is misunderstood:

the fantasy — a wisdom-freak  
touching the gaping lips  
with milk-stone  
all week long  
while paper folds.

Q. B. WILLOWBY

## HALLO SAILOR

Seems my fine  
decisions  
captained fast  
sinking ships.

Walls (how pain  
toughens) were  
they answer;

no-one could tell  
me tales of sand.

I'd come out to play,  
stay, never — was I  
fearsome? I was  
so sure.

No wonder you're  
wary now — who's  
taken who in —

no wonder you  
question who's shy:

I stand here  
naked as a  
wind-egg.

Can't swim (you're  
lumbered).

How to fly?

JANE ZAGERIS

## POEM

*Translated from the Turkish by Gün Gencer*

a poem nobody has written, or can write  
there must be a mountain in it  
the mountain's fringe must fall on his forehead  
his cheeks pinker than pink  
love, tomorrow, happiness and the light of my blood  
must be distilled in a Turkish bath with its marble  
basin

amidst the tinkling of the bowls  
those who don't understand poetry too, must love it  
it must be said that poems are not understood  
they are loved  
a white beard must be put on the mountain's downs  
an authoritative beard  
he must admonish  
and we must sneer behind our moustache

a poem  
that no one has written  
with noise  
with people who've had fights  
with truants  
with breaking up and making up  
with things in it that we all know about  
of the kind that the reader would say  
I can write that

NIHAT ZİYALAN

## SUBURBAN EVENING

This is the picture I have of you:  
such a pretty woman and so melancholy  
saying goodbye to your son in the leafy evening  
street

as if he were going to Gallipoli or the moon  
or he might be going to depose the Soga clan  
or to join Sobieski against the Turks at Lemberg.

His arm is around your shoulder which seems  
suddenly  
to have grown tender, confiding, sad.

We had been listening to Adelina Patti on record,  
singing from *La Sonnambula*. She was sixty-three then,  
as you are now. She was the queen of song  
and the scourge of entrepreneurs.

In the street there is a glint of metal  
from your son's sabre, or his shield. And a great dog  
strides softly beside you.

Your husband walks with a guest  
making small talk (the economy, traffic and gardening)  
and your daughter-in-law silently —  
stepping angled because of the jutting baby  
which seems to have an arrogant gait of its own —  
brings up the rear.

In the trees the starlings adjust their wings  
preparing for the crash of artillery and for bombs to  
fall.

It is nothing, really. There is no adventure, nor war.  
He is going home to another suburb  
where his garden sleeps awaiting the spade,  
and taking his dog and his wife and the unborn child.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

## THE ANTARCTIC PILOT & THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM

*David Lewis set sail from Sydney on 19.10.72.  
Fourteen weeks later Ice Bird reached the US Palmer  
Antarctic Station.*

It wasn't all tinkling brash\*, companionable whales  
(Sniffy & Snuffy) and  
"aft through the hatchway the new moon riding  
a pale yellow dawn."

In sodden sleeping bags there were  
novels of escape and poetry  
while wind flurries  
and rock solid waves turned  
all topsy turvy.  
Did he try to reset the barometer  
like a clock wound back?

Practice obituaries, fatal landfall  
in the mind and disorientation: "Books  
are my only drug" in the log after  
double doses of tetracycline, a  
poker bluff to win back frostbitten hands.  
Did he see his hands as rubber  
gloves and try to inflate them with antibiotics?

There was the scientific veneer  
when the whole mad journey  
sprung from "they  
are dangerous men who  
act their dreams with eyes open" and  
desert analogues.  
There was a time  
when?  
when it was necessary to scream  
Is anybody awake?  
wondering perhaps if he should answer?

CHRIS CATT

\*brash is a form of ice where trapped air bubbles  
give a musical sound when released.

## GROSE RIVER

As we launch the canoe we are partly aware  
that our cargo is not only backpacks and dry  
clothes in a home brew kit but distillations  
of *Deliverance*, *The Coral Island*, *Daniel  
Boone*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Blue Lagoon*,  
*A Week*, *Fire on the Snow*, *Voss*, and probably  
*The Hobbit*.

Our canoe is no bibliophile in  
these sluggish mountain waters.  
We dip paddles. Steering.

CHRIS CATT

## DEATH IN VENICE IN GLENELG

as narcissistic as gustav  
on a self-destructive kick  
i squint eyes shut  
no hoi polloi here  
it's all in the mind

a flutter of nerve ends  
washed away with high tide  
and a treacle of Mahler chords  
to weltuntergang

where're the empty pop cans gone?  
they're still there, mate, but  
the mind is faster than the garbage man  
what philistine can see  
lower class litter on this movie set  
what square can hear rock  
fuzzy through silicone chips  
with an incurable case of the shakes

portable culture is here at last

this is a real decadent dude  
we got us here  
they've switched channels to country western  
let's go pooftah bashing

no, no  
i sit in a deck chair decorously  
with a straw hat and a shuffle of papers  
i say shoo flies shoo  
staring through fingers  
all elongated  
with pencils and creative urges  
staring at sea  
your queue, sea:

sea is bronze with heat  
and menaces with monotony  
if i walk upon it  
in search of tazio  
i shall surely burn my feet  
but it's just a visconti nightmare  
it can't happen here  
not on a strine beach  
we're a nuclear-free  
pooftah-free  
art-free zone

still i stare at sea  
wondering what i'd do  
if tazio really beckoned

D. A. MYERS

## AUSTRALIA

The immigrant  
skins oranges for a living,  
each new-found land  
is his long sought-after tyranny.

Over the ocean  
the immigrant sings —  
"Altona, where the grass grows red . . ."  
rolls up his sleeves and muses:

"Wholesomeness has a home here, a  
color so ambitious —  
like the pictures and the posters  
in Italy . . .

"What an eden of fruit,  
Of apples and grapes and oranges  
heaped in abandonment  
close to the coast!"

Suddenly, the black spear of the land  
shoots up, impales  
an orange or two and gets lost  
in print;  
After every migratory landlord,  
the black man's sober on his central throne,  
the black man's naked as a beggar,  
the black man's a part-timer,  
the black man's a beauty-spot  
lavished in marsh-mallow.

Summer, the regions  
bubble and seethe in a stew  
of potatoes (unskinned),  
the brown-stained singlets sunk in sweat,

The artist's colors  
search out the palate edge —  
pinks and browns and blues and yellows and  
RED will surely infiltrate the canvas!

MICHAEL SAMARCHI

### THREE POEMS BY JOHN BLIGHT

#### AFTER THE BEACHMINERS

The beach is dead. Miners have killed the life that lit the beach at night: once bright under every footstep taken in darkness there. Knowledge doesn't learn . . . or doesn't want the rumor of its dearth aroused. "Let the beach erode as, soon, all traces in the old peoples' memories shall be extinguished." Now they are few who walk a strand mindful of the fire that blazed underfoot, when green phosphorus glowed and gave Time's sampling of a walk above the stars to couples strolling out at night.

#### BEACH RESTORATION

Our Council pumps sand onto the beach; as yet, hasn't completed the project. The sand keeps disappearing into the sea which must be as deep as our ratepayers' pockets. They are paying for sand where once sand was sold to a foreign country.

That sand was black and remains so in the ratepayers' memories. its loss has exposed hate — hate whose shadow clouds reason when they think of countries from which they cannot import dollars to pay for sands, but must dig for sand forever from their own pockets.

#### CONTAINER-SHIPS

I'd have to be born, a little boy, again to see for the first time ships at sea creep over the horizon in shapes like these container-ships to sense romance once more traversed the oceans. Instead, in my old age, I see a montage of these barge-like vessels crawl into my universe, like shell-humping snails. Their ugly boxed deck-freight piled like the square block architecture of a modern city to which they lug containers of the baubles pampered civilisations consider part of 'the good life.' Their now the contours imprinted on the skies of cities renowned in olden times for domes and spires.

#### FRIENDS

. . . and you buy (shrug) 20 or 25 friends at a time. And box them about in a playful sort of match. (Sigh)

So you take one out, one night. The Leader, of the Pack, and fri its end — painting the whole town red and white.

Then sprinkle ashes for your friends, in small, crematorial obeisances in passing the time of day or flight.

Sealing your faith with each suck of the incense of their burning entrails. In through ze mouth! Hund, Out through ze nostrils!

Thus making of yourself a kind of waterpipe for your friends . . . A hookah (see f. mouth to mouth) A martyr to biosynthesis — of cause.

Till they give you (cough) short answers (cough) and you punch them in the head. And there you stand, alone stand alone leaving them leaving you, a loan. A mortgage, a heretic! a single column, ruined in punch drunk tears.

Till you reach out again for the faith. Reach back your hand with abandon to the till box — for your friends. And pray and watch with glee, as their little eyes light up!

JILL MARTINDALE FARRAR

## PASSAGE

The oldest man in the world wears shoes.  
The oldest man in the world has a cowboy hat on  
his head.  
The oldest man in the world speaks to me in English.  
His body: fluid, capable—a perfect shock absorber.  
One tooth knocked out in front, a red bandana tied  
around his neck, he names Names  
as we bounce over the dirt track in the back  
of a four-wheel drive.

That tree is a digging stick  
left by the giant woman who was looking  
for honey ants;  
That rock, a dingo's nose;  
There, on the mountain, is the footprint  
left by Tjangara on his way to Ulamburra;  
Here, the rockhole of Warnampi—very dangerous—  
and the cave where the nyi-nyi women escaped  
the anger of marapulpa—the many-handed one.  
Wati Kutjarra, the two brothers, travelled this way.  
There, you can see, one was tired  
from too much lovemaking—the mark of his penis  
dragging on the ground;  
Here, the bodies of the honey ant men  
where they crawled from the sand—  
no, they are not dead—they keep coming  
from the ground, moving toward the water at  
Warumpi—

it has been like this for many years:  
the Dreaming does not end; it is not like the  
whiteman's way.

What happened once happens again and again.  
This is the Law.  
This is the power of the Song.  
Through the singing we keep everything alive;  
through the songs, the spirits keep us alive.

The oldest man in the world speaks  
to the newest man in the world, my place  
less exact than his.  
We bump along together in the back of the truck;  
wearing shoes, belts, underwear.  
We speak to each other in English  
over the rumble of engine, over the roar of the wheels.  
His body, a perfect shock absorber.

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

## THE PROMISCUOUS OLD MAN

*From a Tingarri song cycle*

"It went west!"  
The old man laughs as he tells me this.  
It's the end of a story  
about an old man who was worried  
all the time  
for tjiiki-tjiiki—  
"He liked women.  
All the time/all the time:  
one night wasn't good enough;  
one woman wasn't good enough."  
The storyteller grabs my hands  
and leans over close to whisper  
in my ear: "Law! Aboriginal law!"  
The story's about this old man  
who liked women;  
and loved a different kungka  
every night.  
"He couldn't think straight."  
One morning he woke up—  
'karlu wiya, ngaampu wiya"—  
his sexual parts were missing.  
They'd gone walkabout by themselves.  
"They couldn't wait for him anymore."  
He tracked them for days and days,  
over sandhills and dry lakes.  
He tracked them at night  
with a firestick in his hand,  
but that penis wasn't going to stop.  
Those balls weren't going to wait.  
That penis has a long 'dreaming track' now;  
it goes a long way. West!  
The storyteller sticks out his tongue  
and scrunches up his nose:  
"That old man,  
he never did catch up!"

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

**A MEMO:**

I sent you a postcard from Chile  
And wrote about the weather,  
the people I had met,  
the splendid porticoed park,  
the theatre and art,  
the bus-ride to quaint Valparaiso  
(houses stacked steep on hills),  
even the weekend drive to Portillo

But this I was not permitted to add —

the child who touched me in the  
crowd,  
the child with poverty's wide eyes.  
Did she simply brush my side?  
Did she intend to meet me face to  
face?

And this I was not permitted to add —

the man I met from Argentina,  
the man I met at lunch.  
He asked me to walk in that  
splendid porticoed park  
where we talked of communism,  
patriotism,  
religion,  
and marriage

and by the steps and stairs of  
conversation  
we arrived at their disintegration.

And this I was not permitted to add —

the legless man,  
whose intensity  
ate the string of witness held  
between our teeth.

And this I was not permitted to add —

Walter, the Chilean,  
who interpreted my thoughts  
described the way to Portillo,  
explained those road-verge head-  
stones,  
the need to visit Valparaiso,  
typed the words of that patriotic  
song, 'Se Vas Para Chile',  
and bought me the love poems  
of Pablo Neruda.

And this I was not permitted to add —

those school-boys who slept in that  
porticoed park  
while sunlight and shadow played  
their games.  
Why did they sleep so soundly at  
noon?  
Why was I disturbed by their  
undisturbed dreams?

And this I was not permitted to add —

the carts,  
the horse-drawn carts,  
the man-drawn carts,  
the boy-drawn carts,  
and the peasants bending over their  
cribs.

And this I was not permitted to add —

the adobe, the restaurant,  
the sterile cry, the vibrant song,  
the music, the dance  
carried upon  
plaintive notes of an Indian flute.

And this I was not permitted to add —

the lovers,  
living mortar in the city's face,  
with its park,  
its splendid porticoed park.  
The city,  
of sophisticated theatre and art,  
echoing high-ceilinged museums,  
and the opera —  
the opera: El Hombre de la Mancha.

For these belong to song.

FAYE DAVIS

PETER BIBBY **The Way to the Port**

They had decided to run away. Before too long went by. Everything was packed in school satchels. Their own leather satchels, brought from England, they trusted to take them back there. That is how far they wanted to run but the sea would be a problem. Although it was their friend, for everything that was good came by sea, parcels, letters, parent one day. No, now there would be no need; she wouldn't have to save the fare and they would surprise her, arriving back.

Once they were again on the sea. Dreaming on the sliding crowns of white sandhills, amongst the sweet hay-smell of sea-rocket, they would watch over the beach to the horizon for ships and pull the long, rasping seeds from clusters, pulling off whole heads to bowl them down the slope, watching how far the wind plucked and wheeled and tossed them. Occasionally fat liners took shape, turning into harbor. Cargo boats waited at anchor, doing nothing for days. They could watch the lean, low tankers traverse the length of the Sound, going down to the flame of the refinery that never went out. On their way they passed in front of islands. He loved the big one with a white cliff like a prow and the name Garden. Garden Island wasn't part of Australia.

The little shape of rock he disliked because it so often seemed a ship, moving on the rim, always far but there, taunting. Why had they come to this place of white sand, grey sand, brown sand and hills bare as teeth? No one wanted to answer that. Among themselves they talked of escape from the cobbers and the corrugated roof, the long verandahs of emptiness and the fat, corrugated water tanks that stood like the strangest of all things at the back of the home. Each tank to its corner, under a spout, painted a dull red, and between them sunflowers, tall and gawkish, glaring with black beaded eyes that

turned to the sun and kept their shrivelled leaves. Hateful as the dirty white dilapidated bird, so big it had a cage to itself, squawking over its carpet of split seeds at anyone who passed.

He walked past the girls' door and then past the boys' and was glad not to be going to the dunny. It was one of the horrors of arrival that had to be renewed too frequently, although he was not any more the same pale boy that squirmed from the grimness of the shed and the tarred, stained wall.

He went on with his load of warm, watery mash in a deep dish, careful not to spill, mainly to keep it off his legs, trying to reach the duck-pen without a second stop for a rest. He didn't mind the ducks about Australia, they were his for a job, so friendly, coming with lowly urgent noises whenever he approached, because they knew him. His ankles were brushed with warm feathers as he tipped their mash into one feeding bowl after another, always followed by a few. He made attachments among them, had favourites and those to whom he was a little cruel, like the drake with its raging countenance. Sometimes he found the eggs warm and would count the number he laid in the dish with graceful sides, comparing the days of eggs. Always he hated the floor of the pen because it did not matter how carefully he walked. Out he would come, stamping and scraping the cake from underfoot, fretting until he reached the water tank and the handkerchief of lawn that lived by spill and climbed for drips. The tap was curious, with a slot and a hinge so it would fold down over a little brass tongue. He had wondered at these taps of tanks but now he knew. There was one outside a church with a paddock on it, locking up the water.

He didn't mind the ducks when his feet were clean again and the kitchen warmth enclosed him

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and matron turned from the stove to greet the eggs, her eyes making ovals at the tally. For he was keeping the ducks happy and so could keep the job. She said he'd be good for the country.

Today he left the pen, put down the bowl of eggs, unguarded upon the ground, out of his care, and went quickly into the paddock. He tried to walk straight as if he didn't care, like brown cobbers and mates. Let the ground bite. When it did you stopped and looked back at your lifted foot, plucked the pain but that didn't go; you threw the devil's head away from the path but it would send some back because it was the seed of a runner. So many doublegees that all their weekends of patrolling feet did not clear a path in a summer.

He lifted the sheet of iron and there appeared to be nothing under it. That was good, they hadn't been discovered. In the sorrel sand he felt for the satchels, unearthed his own, dusted it off and looked inside at the store. It did not seem much, but he added from inside his shirt a fistful of dried fruit, two biscuits and a crust of the ducks' bread which was all right, not a bit mouldy. It wasn't really stealing. There had been a box of plums just left on the floor, open. "Take whatever you want — they are there to be eaten," Matron had said. He looked at the plums that shone in the bag like red jewels. They would not keep. Soon his brother must tell them to take the satchels and go.

After tea the lanterns were in use because there was a failure at the power station, which they weren't finished building, Mr Logan said. The heavy man stood on a chair to reach the hissing Tilley lamps, hung down from the rafters. Greenish light grew so brilliant it hurt to look, as he pumped at the shining brass bellies. On the table pages glowed brighter but some heads were nodding and it wouldn't be long now. Later they would escape, when everyone else was asleep. That was a part of the night he didn't know much about. If they could carry light on their way, a Tilley by the handle . . . only they didn't know how to work one. So much they did not know but the way to the port they knew, even in the dark.

His brother came quietly up to the bed and stood there as if not to wake him. "Do you still want to go, littlun?" He was already dressed under the blankets. David helped him stuff the bed; his brother had a watch that would help them get to England. You could see the dial in the dark. Outside they met the whispers of girls, the twins even younger than he was, Brian his

friend and big Peggy, to go with his brother David. They left the verandah, where a light might come on and catch them if the power came back. In the dark it was delicious. The wind was warm and with sandals on his feet, satchel on his back, he wasn't afraid of the distance. A night would be enough to complete the journey. He only wondered about his ducks and how they would be fed and if someone would find the small one, missing from the pen. He'd fixed where she'd escaped, the lifted wire netting. Not a sign of her, though. She must be lying low on some eggs, Matron Logan had said.

Now the stony building was a shadow behind them. Was there really no one watching? Sometimes Mr Logan stood in the dark on the verandah, so still you wouldn't notice till the red pinprick of his cigarette glowed. They didn't know why. Mr Logan could be there now, quietly smoking, about to call them back, letting them get so far. He was often slow to speak but when he did it was no beg pardon. Matron would understand, wouldn't she? They had been welcomed on that verandah, inside the cyclone wire and up the steps, fresh from their voyage out. Now at night it had no voice, no red pinprick, no short, certain shape, no Mr Logan, nothing to prevent them. Nothing it became. He hurried, not to be left behind. All their feet soon slapped away happily on the hard, black road.

Light beams sent them scurrying into bushes. They were sure any adult would know where they were from. When the road was empty, Peggy led them skipping back and the silly twins giggled until they came to the gloomy skin-drying sheds. The high roofs reared overhead, and they could see the fleeces with their ragged bits of legs dangling from the racks, right at the edge of the road. The air was damp and the smell was awful, never had been so bad.

The railway crossing signs were like something marked wrong in the sky. Lightly it came, settling on their faces, rain, droplets milling down like the shakings of a great black bag emptied on them. At first he didn't mind. Morning would find them a ship in the harbor. All you had to do was creep aboard and hide, one at a time, up the gangplank and into the lifeboats. He knew all about a boat-deck and had once peeped into a lifeboat, lifting a flap of canvas. They didn't know where ships might go, apart from back to England. He dreamed not of home, just of going on the sea as it had been, going on and on.

The power house was ablaze, a liner cruising the night, so they must have repaired the failure.

He walked with Brian through the noisy glow, by which all could still see one another, dimly on a shining road. How far they were spread out. He tried to answer the call to keep up, quickening the slap of his feet in competition with Brian. Then his friend complained that the twins were falling further behind. The leaders should wait for them. Brian sat down. So he went alone. His legs were all right, going by themselves. After the power house the night received him like a black hole. He thought of the waiting darkness of the sea, and how, blacker still beyond the Sound, lay the ocean of tomorrow. There were stranger ships than his islands. Before they climbed one of those inviting gangways that cling to unknown sides, they must make sure they could read the name on the prow and the port of home on the stern.

The worst hill to come yet, one that could even stop the rattle of an old school bus. David did not call any more and the rain fell too thick to look through. He felt the dry side of a post. Overhead conductors fizzed and sang. He wished he was electricity, then he could walk in a cloud that hummed from pole to pole, flash to the terminal. Instead of waiting for a mousy whimper to tell him Brian and the twins were coming up. They never did, though he waited until Sid and Dave and Peggy must have drawn far over the worst hill. Was it further to return than to keep going now? Peggy would understand if the line of them grew longer, the little end stretching back. David would be glad.

Wet through, he drifted by the power house. Back. Its voyaging was stationary. He still would have the ships of islands: Garden, Carnac, Fisherman's Rock. And the drying-sheds to pass, awful as ever. On the abattoir gatepost a white cat stopped him dead. Sid came up from behind so fast his back was bouncing the satchel.

"See the cat?"

"Where?"

"Scared him off." The rain let up and a distant upper deck of stars came out. Their legs felt as if they were joined to the ground with walking to end walking. A musty smell rose to make them welcome. Once again the verandah. No spark of cigarette. Still they were careful not to scrape their tingling feet, emptying their satchels, stealing to unfold their beds.

Afloat with weariness, he thought of David with Peggy at sea, standing before the man in spotless white. A honey-colored cabin surrounded them. When stowaways were children, even big ones, they couldn't be put in irons, could they? Sailors understood about home. A ship's carpenter had made him a wooden sword, varnished for the fancy dress parade, when they crossed the Line in the Indian Ocean. He still had the stump of the sword, though he couldn't play with it broken, kept, still hankered after the cosy carpenter's paint-and-putty shop. Just call me Chips — and what can I call you, eh? Dormitory shutters rattled in the wind, heavy rain hammered the roofskin of iron, as if to drive it home again.

In the morning Mr Logan shook the long lump in David's bed and it was David. Matron brought in dry clothes without a word, just like normal change day. And at breakfast Peggy was framed as usual in the servery. When the line brought him there he wondered whether to smile but she looked him straight in the eye.

All the ducks paddled over, happy as quacking with a good night's rain, and especially glad to see him. Their mash of old bread, pollard and potato peelings fumed as he tipped it hot among the diving bills, his ankles buried in warm feather bodies. The small mother was there, returned with a golden train. They followed her everywhere, the proud runaways. He found the ruck where she'd lifted the wire netting and put paid to any further adventures with a heavy stone.

Under his feet the pen was a quagmire but he could not have cared less, going about the business as if to the manner born.

To run away from home.

The phrase has lost much of its significance in recent years. Only infants run away from home now, although stray is a better word. They do it without premeditation, moved by nothing more than an inherent urge to explore the immediate neighborhood. Traditionally, the true absconders were teenagers, who put plenty of thought into the venture, who were lured by dreams which went far beyond immediate horizons, who planned in secret and did a 'moonlight flit', well aware of parental wrath if they were caught up with, possibly by an alerted policeman.

Nowadays infants still wander, but a teenager just walks out after boldly announcing that he or she has taken a flat in Carlton and is going to shack up with Peter or Sheila, as the case might be. My only personal reaction is that I was born two generations too soon.

All the same, there's something to be said for the old element of major challenge about those first calculated steps into the unknown, usually — especially in the case of English boys — with visions of London, or Brazil, or Fiji, or Australia, at the foot of the rainbow. There was glamor in the very words "run away from home", prestige to be gained even if you were caught and forced to retreat. My father did it (twice). I did it, and — even unto the third generation — my son did it.

Details of my father's first escapade never got to my ears, but there was evidently something a bit reprehensible about it. Perhaps he financed the venture by dipping into Granny's cashbox. Nobody would talk about it. I knew nothing about it until, soon after my own short-lived flight, Uncle Tom consoled me with the startling remark: "Anyway, your Dad did it himself", but shut up like a clam when I wanted to know more.

Later, when I asked Dad about it, I got snubbed: "Your Uncle Tom talks too much. I had good reason to do it. You hadn't." Which wasn't quite true, as he was well aware.

His second flight was in a different category, and was, substantially, a rehearsal for my own. Without dragging family skeletons right out of the cupboard, it's necessary to explain that there was trouble in the home. Years of domestic discord, punctuated by 'scenes' between Father and Mother which used to frighten their four children. Mother was, let's say, difficult, and one day, in my sixteenth year, Father took me into his confidence and told me he was going to get away from it all for a week or two, otherwise he was afraid that something in him might snap. As leading foreman over several gangs engaged in telegraph construction he worked long hours and carried a lot of responsibility, and had reached a point where home was no longer a place where he could relax and recuperate. Everything else apart, Mother was a poor manager, with the result that although Father never missed a day's wages and invariably brought home his pay-packet unopened, there had never been anything put aside for a holiday.

That day he told me he was going to take one. A soldier of the first world war, but exempted from front-line action because he had only one eye, he had been stationed at Boulogne on specialised communications work. There, he had been billeted with a French family with whom he had subsequently kept up a desultory correspondence. He told me that he had now, using the address of a trusted friend, accepted their long-standing invitation to re-visit old scenes and be their honoured guest. He knew very well where sympathies lay, and needed me as an accomplice, but as I listened to him I knew that the idea of conspiring with son against Mother was

thoroughly distasteful to him, as indeed was the whole scheme.

Organisation was simple enough. Father told me it was his intention not to come home at the end of the week preceeding his holidays, but to begin his journey by going to Newcastle-on-Tyne and joining a small freighter which ran a bi-weekly service down the coast to London. He told me it was cheaper than going by train, but I think he was also attracted by the idea of a sea voyage, however short. My function was to meet him at Newcastle and take over his pay packet, to deliver that into the hands of Mother, to break the news of his departure, and to assure her that he would return in good time to start work again on Monday fortnight.

It was an arrangement that presented no complications, because his work just then was close to Newcastle, while I myself was employed as learner-gardener by a wealthy shipowner near East Bolden, on the Sunderland-Newcastle line.

Everything went off as planned. It all happened sixty years ago, and many of the details have become misted by time, but some images and impressions remain with me as vividly as if it were yesterday. I remember Father laying his hand on my shoulder just before he stepped on to the gangway of the General Havelock, saying

“I hate having to — having to —” then breaking off to turn his head away, pass a hand across his face, and finish in a choking voice “having to ask you to do this, but —”. I was deeply moved, because it was the first time I’d seen a grown man shed a tear. I clearly remember also standing alone on the wharf with my hand tight on the pay-packet in my pocket, and watching the little ship drift out into the stream. And of being taken suddenly by an overwhelming sense of loneliness and responsibility. But deep within all that there was a stirring of something else — envy. Something that fired long-cherished dreams. Father had *acted*. He’d pulled up the anchor. He was sailing away to a foreign country —

But is was something else that set up the longest ripples; Mother’s reaction when I reached home, laid Father’s pay-packet on the table, and delivered his message just as I’d received it: “Tell her I’ve gone to spend my holidays with the Veniers in Boulogne, and that I’ll be back next Sunday week.”

I’d anticipated a scene, tears, abuse of my Father, reproaches for the part I’d taken, perhaps hysterics. There was nothing of the kind. It was as if I’d walked in and announced that Father had been held back for urgent repair work after a storm, as he so often was. She heard me in silence, gave me a long and searching stare, asked me a couple of quite inconsequential questions, then turned to the stove to bring out my delayed lunch. But I had no doubt at all that I’d seen the beginnings of a smile on her face.

I was utterly baffled, and became increasingly so as the two weeks passed with the house quieter than I’d ever known it, and Mother going about her domestic affairs with the smug smile of one nursing a secret joy.

Young as I was, understanding came swiftly with the storm that blew up within minutes of Father’s return. Perhaps the first lesson I learned in the fascinating aberrations of human behavior. Father had done something which, shrewdly exploited, would put him in the wrong with the neighbors.

About twelve months later I did my own Dick Whittingdon act. To put it in good Australian, I shot through to London.

There was nothing impetuous about it. The smouldering fire that Father’s flight had blown into life had burned on ever more fiercely. I was as romantic and itchy-footed as boys come at that age. I’d taken to haunting the docks, intoxicated by the smells of outlandish cargoes and

## The Little Byron

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by Zoe O’Leary

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the babble of strange tongues from ships bunkering up with Sunderland coal, I'd been snubbed and jollied by dozens of ships' officers when I ventured up gangways, begging to be taken on as passage-worker or 'cabin-boy'. Using half the public library tickets of the rest of the family as well as my own, I'd crammed my head with tales of the great adventurers. I'd sat for hours in the reading-room of the library, poring over the 'positions vacant' columns of national newspapers and periodicals, concentrating on the Garden Lover as offering the best chance of the initial breakaway. I was already in possession of a flattering testimonial from my shipowning employer, obtained by telling him, quite truthfully, that I wanted to enrol as a working student at Kew Botanic Gardens in London. I'd done this openly because I was able to explain, also truthfully, that the waiting list was a long one, and my employer took the action no more seriously than did my parents. The original of the flattering testimonial had been returned to me with a letter from the Director of the Gardens informing me that my application had been provisionally approved and that I would, in due time, be required to present myself for an interview.

That testimonial proved to be my trump card. One day I found in the Garden Lover an advertisement inviting applications for a job as "Single gardener. 25/- a week, with room. Write first, with current reference." The given address was on Parkside, Wimbledon.

Using the address of my employer — "Cleadon House" looked good — I wrote what must have been a very fetching letter, because almost by return mail there came a reply saying that I appeared to be the kind of young man the signatory was looking for, stressing the importance of my proving to be of sober habits, warning me that I would be in charge of a very beautiful garden with large greenhouse, and requiring me to indicate immediately when — "*within ten days*" underlined — I would present myself to commence work. Apparently there was no check-up on my employer.

The rest was easy, actual flight being along the path so clearly broken by my father.

Initial considerations were all in favor. My sister, two years older, was living out 'in service'. Of my two younger brothers, one was in the Navy, the other, a victim of tuberculosis, was having one of his periodical sessions in hospital. Mother never got up to prepare breakfast, and Father always had to leave for work before me.

All of which meant that no one was around to see me go up to the boys' attic bedroom — known as "the cock-loft" — and bring down father's old army kit-bag, well packed the night before.

At nine o'clock my employer came into the garden to give me my wages, £1, an important addition to the £2 I had painstakingly saved up over many weeks. At eleven o'clock I stole out with my kit-bag by a gate on a side lane and made my way through the fields to East Bolden railway station. Soon after noon I was on the wharf at Newcastle buying a ticket to London on the well-remembered General Havelock. The last link was broken when I asked the booking-clerk to post what I hoped was a soothing letter to my parents. There was indeed a Saturday afternoon mail delivery in those days, and I had sufficient grace not to want to upset Father and Mother unduly. By and large, youth is selfish and witless in its dealings with the older generation, and many years were to pass before I understood how deeply my action did hurt them, and with what brutal efficiency it was carried out. All that I experienced at the time was an exhilaration, an intoxicating sense of triumph. I was adrift at last. Only a few weeks previously I'd read that magnificent short story by Jack London, "The Apostate", and, with no comparable justification, was identifying myself with the young adventurer lying back on the bags in the railway truck and gazing luxuriously up into the blue sky. I gave hardly a thought to the immediate future, the new job. That was only a means to an end, a jumping off place. In less than twenty-four hours I would be in London, from where the really big ships set out for all points of the compass. I'd been told by more than one good-natured ship's officer: "Passage-worker? Go to London or Liverpool, son. You might make it from there."

Nothing highlighted the night-long voyage down the coast. There was only a dozen or so other passengers. Accommodation was cramped, dingy, stuffy. No food was included in the fare, but a mug of tea and a sandwich was obtainable from a scruffy-looking seaman in the galley. The fact that there was no bedding in the wooden bunks troubled me no more than it did my fellow-travellers. All were men, and most of them passed the time crouched over a game of pontoon for penny bets. Now and then I followed the play, but most of the night I passed on deck, pacing back and forth in the narrow space between coaming and bulwark, or leaning over the side dreamily watching the rise and fall of

the water as the little ship rolled along through an unusually quiet North Sea.

The rest was in the nature of an anti-climax. The new job started promisingly, but it was winter-time, and within a few days I caught a bad dose of flu that made work a sheer misery. My 'bothy', as gardeners' accommodation was known, was the loft of a disused stable. On the fourth night I was aroused out of a restless sleep by an adult son of the house, who demanded peevishly didn't I know that a frost was developing, and why wasn't the greenhouse boiler operating. There was, of course, no getting out of it, but I must have done so with a very bad grace, because in the morning the same peevish son was waiting for me to show up and be informed that he wasn't prepared to put up with insolence from a gardener. At this distance in time I forget exactly how I reacted to that, but I must have given further provocation, because I was prompt-

ly told to **pack my bag** at the end of the week and get back to where I'd come from.

So the big scamper ended as painfully and as humiliating as I probably deserved. A letter to my father brought me my fare home by train, and a few days later I resumed work in the garden of my shipowner. Father must have had a persuasive tongue, because within hours of receiving my S.O.S. he was at the home of that tolerant man pleading the follies of youth and a suspended sentence.

A year later I was gone again, to Australia, but this time all fair and above board.

After the passing of many years my own son did a moonlight flit in a bomb of an old Fiat, and fortified only by a driving licence obtained by overstating his age, a couple of blankets, a few silver coins, a packet of corned beef sandwiches, and enough petrol to take him as far as Sale in east Gippsland. But that's his story.

## STORM cloud

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—Michael Dugan

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

## swag

Ian Turner's *Room for Manoeuvre*—for which there's an ad. in this issue—was launched at a crowded party in Melbourne's Book House late in June. Ian's rum-culls, political allies, former students were crammed into the terrace house in Carlton which is the National Book Council's headquarters in moving (though far from silent) evidence to Ian's influence on the generations and his continuing relevance to our lives. Ian was good-natured—sometimes *too* good-natured—and this good nature comes through in all his writing. Interestingly, it doesn't inhibit the bite of his shorter pieces of writing in *Room for Manoeuvre*, but rather emphasizes the thoughtful, rational nature of Ian's mind and pen. Many Overland readers contributed to the Turner Trust Fund which sponsored the publication of this attractive book.

Another book which has impressed me and my wife Nita very much indeed in recent months has a very odd history indeed. Fred Williams actually recommended it to us. Older readers will remember that extraordinary Englishman Tom Harrisson, a radical social anthropologist with strong interests in Borneo and the Pacific islands who founded and conducted Mass Observation in Britain during the war. Among Mass Observation's many original approaches was to encourage the writing of war diaries. Probably the finest of these has recently been re-discovered in the archives of Mass Observation—the diary of a middle-aged, working-class housewife in Barrow-in-Furness named Nella Last.

Published by Falling Wall Press in Bristol last year, the book created something of a sensation

in England. Absorbing in its detail, courageous in its emotions, with the pace and 'attack' of a natural writer behind it, the book—*Nella Last's War*—is one of those rare and revealing items which sometimes spring in crises from the ranks of "Anon" (as John Manifold has pointed out somewhere, "the greatest poet of them all"). Clifford Last, the sculptor, who lives in Melbourne, is Nella's son, and he features extensively in the book. He says that his father gets rather a raw deal in the book (he never gets mentioned by name), and that his mother, who wasn't 'discovered' in time, died a disappointed and somewhat soured woman. The book has been read recently on that excellent morning ABC program, 'Speaking Personally'.

I have been for some time putting together a *Dictionary of Australian Quotations*, which will be published next year. I have several motives, one of which is that the job badly needs doing and no one is doing it, and another that an attempt to pull together within two covers much of the best that has been thought and written about Australia, and which has been expressed memorably, should add to the understanding and knowledge of the country's past. I'd be very grateful for suggestions from readers as to what should be included—everyone must have their favorite bits and pieces. We will pay for items accepted (and not already included). If possible please give full name of the person being quoted, birth and death dates if possible, the exact quotation and the exact source of that quotation. Generous respondents will be rewarded also with a mention in the book and a copy. Material can be sent to *Overland*, GPO Box 98a, Melbourne 3001.

IAN WILLIAMS **Poor Baby**

She's caught you in the hallway, the old sow. You'd been hoping to get away without being seen. Her watery voice flushing through the hallway like a damp whimper.

"Hugo, is that you?"

"Yes. I'm going out."

She comes out of the kitchen, wiping her hands in a tea towel.

"I thought I heard you." She's small and plump, with a bloated red face.

"Did you want me?" you ask tersely.

"It's about your rent," she explains in a small voice that sounds almost apologetic. "You're two weeks overdue, you know."

"Yes, I know. But I've got a job now. I'll pay you on Thursday, no trouble."

"I don't like to keep on about it," she keeps on, "but I can't afford to keep you for nothing."

"As I said, I'll pay you Thursday." You pause for a second, and then say distantly. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting for it. It's very difficult at the moment."

She smiles thinly at you, her little round face becoming even rounder. "Of course, I know it's hard for you. So many young people out of work. It's a shame, it really is. It never used to be like this, I'm sure."

"No." You move towards the front door, conscious of her waddling up behind you.

"I shouldn't like you to have to go," she continues, "but it's tight all round at the moment. My husband won't stand for it, you see. It's a nice room you've got there, and I'm sure we could get more for it."

"I expect you could," you say with appropriate coldness; and open the door to the street.

"But I'd rather take what we get for it now, and have a nice quiet boy like you in there. You're no trouble, we appreciate that. Some of them are like animals, the way they live. It's no

wonder their mothers won't have them."

You step out into the sharp spring sunshine, glad to be out of the gloomy house, with its odor of damp rotting wood.

"I'll pay you on Thursday," you say again. "I must go now. I'll be in later."

"Will you be back for tea?" she asks hesitantly.

You shake your head. "No, I don't think so. Don't worry about it."

She shuts the door behind you, and you breathe easier. Crossing the road, you turn into Grey Street, and then into Robe Street.

It's a relief that it's spring. Something in the air perhaps. You're hoping you never see another winter like this one. You've had to live on more than your wit: you'd have probably starved on that. Sleeping around. A chair here, a mattress there. You'd been lucky charming this old bat into renting you a room. But what hurt most was the way your friends were reluctant to have much to do with you. They weren't so keen to help anymore, they parted with their resources begrudgingly. Life had become thin and precarious. There was little goodwill about, and even less money. It was no good asking for it anymore; you'd had to plead. It was so *humiliating*. And then they expected it back. Okay, so you've borrowed a lot of money over the years, but then you've lent a lot too, and seen little of it returned. Not that you'd really expected it. It was understood in those days that if you were flush, you gave; if you were hard up, you received. Simple. It wasn't a loan, it was a sort of social security, tacitly agreed to. During the winter it had disintegrated, along with your relationships with the recipients and suppliers.

A block in front of you, a goliath of a man has come out of a gate and turned right, walking in the same direction as yourself. You quicken your



pace, catch him up, tap the man's shoulder as you draw level.

The goliath turns to face you, looking down a little, making you feel shorter than you actually are.

"Oh hello, it's you." He's pleased with his height.

You grin up, and confess, "I was just coming round to see you actually. I thought I'd catch you in."

"Well you nearly didn't." He has a short curly beard, and dark eyes sunk gloomily into large round sockets. "I'm going round to the Prince for a beer. Feel like coming?"

"No, I don't think so. I'm a little short this week."

"Are you working yet?" the goliath asks.

"Yes unfortunately. The C.E.S. has done an admirable job. Still, I suppose I shouldn't complain . . ." Better to say nothing about yesterday's meeting. After all, you're not sure of the outcome yourself yet, though you suspect the worst. You really should have gone . . .

"Something interesting, is it?" a voice is saying.

"Making pallets," you say miserably. "It's an utter bore. All I've done all week is hang out for the weekend."

"Well you made it," your friend says, grinning down at your ear, "and at least it's decent money coming in. Better to be doing something tedious, and paying your way."

"I'd rather be destitute," you lie. "If nothing else, I could spend my time as I pleased. I'd be satisfied."

"I doubt that," the goliath philosophises. "People who have nothing, are nothing. One of the tenets of life, I'm afraid."

You are approaching the corner of Acland Street, where you must part. You will have to ask, you decide irritably, he's certainly not going to offer.

"Look, Stephen," (you only call him Goliath to his back), "I don't like to ask, but could you lend me some money. I'll pay you back on Thursday when I get my first pay."

Stephen laughs stiffly, much as you'd feared. "I'm sorry mate, but I can't. I've only got a few bob myself. If I give you five bucks, I'll be scratching for a dollar by Tuesday. I've had a few expenses lately. The money just isn't there."

You have reached the corner, and pause before parting. Shuffle moodily, that's the thing, dig your hands into your pockets. Make him think they're empty.

"Oh well," you will sigh, "it doesn't matter

really. It's just that my landlady's hounding me for rent. I thought if I gave her something, she'd leave me alone."

"Well she hasn't thrown you out yet, has she?" Stephen asks glibly.

"No."

"Well don't worry about it. Tell the old bag she'll have to wait. Does she know you're working?"

You nod.

"Well there you are then! She knows the position. She's not going to chuck you out with money owing, when there's a chance she'll get paid up."

"No, I suppose not." You grin weakly. "Thanks anyway. I'll see you."

You start to walk across the junction, but your big friend calls after you.

"Look, come to the Prince. I'm sure I can shout you a beer."

You wave him aside. "No, don't worry about it. I don't feel much like drinking today."

He shrugs, and walks away. He probably thinks you're sulking, but you're more annoyed than piqued. The goliath's never that short of money. He's just like the others, conspiring to starve you out.

You continue walking on down Acland Street, towards the Belle. It isn't that you lied to him. It's the truth: you don't feel like drinking. But you must find out what happened at the meeting yesterday. The one you should've attended. But didn't.

Not surprisingly, the bar's nearly empty. It's early yet. Makes you wonder how long you must wait. After all, you hardly know the man. He'd given nothing of himself, other than his name, and that remark about spending most Saturday afternoons in the Belle. You'd told him, rather expectantly, you lived close. But he'd offered nothing further.

You think to have a beer while you wait, but then it occurs to you he may be here already, in the lounge, or that little bar you call the snug. Secretly (now admit it—you can't keep secrets from yourself) you hope not. If you must offer at least one round, for decency's sake, it's better that you pay bar prices.

You try the snug first, because it's the closest. It's dark and probably atmospheric, like a coal mine. But empty of miners. Just to be sure, you poke your head round the side of the door, into the window alcove. There's this woman sat there, pushing forty, you reckon: but the build's

okay. She's sporting thick-rimmed glasses, and looks a bit of a tartar. You smile, because it's rude to stare, and tartar or no, you'd hate her to think you are lacking in manners.

She's supping a beer, so not really in a position to smile back without messing herself. You don't hold it against her, but notice instead a half empty glass on the other side of the table. The tartar has a friend.

To say no woman like that could be with a bloke would be uncharitable. And no one ever said you were short on charity. But because you are being honest with yourself, you doubt that this woman's friend could be any more than another middle-aged frump. Uncharitable yes: and as it proves, wrong. You remind yourself to be less cynical in future.

You had drawn your head back, and were about to leave, when he came out of the dunny, wiping his hands in his trousers. You know at once he hasn't recognised you (or can't place your face) by the way he stares. Or is it glares? (Surely he doesn't suspect you of propositioning his woman?)

Then the penny drops, as your mother used to say, and he half nods, and may have smiled. He makes you wonder if you are intruding, but then even at work you'd found his manner rather bluff. You say, "I thought I'd find you here", so he's sure it's him you're looking for.

He comes between you and the bar, and considers his options.

"Beer?" he offers, and you accept.

It occurs to you that his woman may resent your presence, but you're careful to keep your back to her while your new friend buys you a beer. It is also possible, of course, Saturday afternoons are open house, and you are the first to arrive.

As he approaches, you sit down, and conscious suddenly of a faint whiff of honeysuckle, risk another glance. She's not half bad looking, really, for her age, and you realise it was the way the ten-ounce glass had extended from her nose and lips that had given you such an uncompromising view. You take note of your earlier resolution with respect to cynicism.

Your host has sat opposite you, next to his sweetheart(?). You drink his health. The silence is rather uncomfortable, reinforcing your suspicion that you're intruding. The woman, you have discovered, is staring keenly at you through those abominable thick-rimmed glasses. It is possible, you reflect, that should she remove them, her appearance could be radically improved. Or

are you confusing this real woman with a celluloid image? It's all those midday movies you've seen lately about skinny bespectacled secretaries with emasculated bosses in superannuated pin-stripes.

"Well introduce us, Harry, for Christ's sake!"

Her voice has a certain bluntness, suggesting a temperament on a short fuse. (Acknowledge and file: not the passive type.) As for the introduction, Harry looks as though he may do it, for Christ's sake, if no one else. You know now, he holds it against you. Your absence yesterday, your presence now. He's thinking you mixed them up.

"This is Lil," he throws off like a shrug; and mumbles your name.

"Hugo." She rolls it on her tongue, and you suspect she likes you for it.

You prefer, however, not to concentrate on the woman, but the business in hand. Harry knows that too. He's looking at you with naked indifference, waiting for your confession.

"I never made it yesterday," you submit as your contribution to guilt. "I wondered . . . what happened."

Harry's puckered lips betray him. It's the nearest he can come to sneering politely. He's known you less than a week: you guess he doesn't want to be too hard, too soon.

"Got delayed, did ya," he accuses, "or lose your way."

You'll have to tell him, of course, before he loses faith completely. But at this stage, expediency determines not the truth which may be viewed as irreverent (sucking popcorn with that little tart Suzy/Mell Brooks' beanfart bonanza) but something socially identifiable.

"I was crook," you say. "I had a skinful Thursday night."

"Celebrating!" he winks at you. "Bit premature, eh!"

Any further comment would be redundant. His lop-sided face half grins across at you: he's not sure if you've caught the gist. You nod and remark that you'd expected as much; feigning detachment. It doesn't do to let on.

Lil's still staring at you through those great thick windows. You're sure it's her handicap. You might fancy her yourself otherwise, if you had a mind for the Older Woman.

Harry says, "Well, you'll get three days pay, mate. Better than a kick in the arse!"

About the same, you reflect, if you're into comparisons. You'd like to think about strike pay (is there such a thing?) but they hadn't even got round to signing you up. Technically, you sup-

pose, you're not really on strike. You're sort of Dangling.

"How long?" you wonder aloud.

"Indefinitely, mate! Till the bastards cough up!" He turns to Lil who's still rolling your name round her cavernous mouth. "Crazy bastards down the C.E.S. land him a job just in time for a strike. Beauty eh!"

Lil lacks her lover's joy of irony. "Poor Baby," she murmurs; possibly sympathises. You'd like to think so. But it may have been pure affectation.

"Another meeting next Thursday," Harry is saying. "Better be there this time. For your own sake."

For your own sake then, you'll front. And while you're about it, you may try and discover what

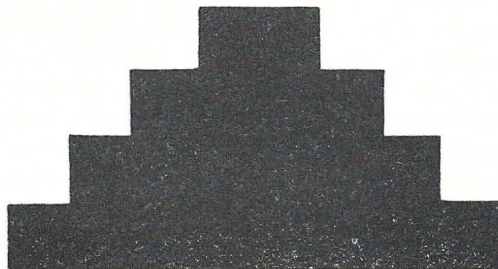
it is these two odd-balls have in common. She must be old enough to be. His older sister. You reckon a young bloke of your standing could do worse than shack up with a woman in her Prime. It's the way she's looking at you through those absurd glasses, though it could be you're drawing inferences that aren't there.

Harry is suggesting you buy a round. You can afford that, after all, and you'd hate this woman to think you were destitute. It's not pride exactly: more calculation. Living one rung above your means is Applying the Art of Deception. The first law of the jungle, you remind yourself, is self preservation. This woman courting a younger man would know that. As you move up to the bar, she murmurs again: "Poor Baby."

## floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Again a most wonderful response to our Floating Fund appeal, all the more touching and all the more effective because of Hard Times. Only half-way through the year our readers' support enabled us to achieve the target set us by the Australia Council of raising \$3000 in donations—as a result of which we will receive an extra \$1000 from the Council, It's a result none of us expected—the level of donations, I mean—and I hope augurs well for the future of the magazine under the acting editorship of Barrett Reid, for the next three issues. I shall be—somewhat reluctantly—abroad; London for a start, and Tristan da Cunha if all goes well. Fare thee well! Oh yes, the total was \$1487.

\$700 VL; \$420 Comalco; \$100 CS; \$84 KS; \$34 GT; \$25 JC; \$20 Vealo; \$14 EW; \$10 HA, CJ; \$9 SMcC, EP, DP, DC; \$8 AW; \$4 MD, JS, DA, GM, GL, RR; \$2 DC.



— *Peter Murphy*

# books

## THE WHITE WATER

Manning Clark

Stephen Holt: *Manning Clark* (University of Queensland Press, \$14.95).

Stephen Holt has written a book which examines the intellectual and family background which he believes throw light on the themes developed in *A History of Australia*. His book is based on the assumption that the ideas in the five volumes published so far used the materials of Australian History to flesh out the experiences and tensions of childhood.

To trace out the history of one man's thinking about Australia's past Stephen Holt dug out all the published work, and had discussions with the schoolboys (now grandfathers), university students, and colleagues who had played a helping hand. I was not surprised to read or to hear from him that Geoffrey Fairbairn, Geoffrey Blainey, Bill Mandle, Don Baker and W. MacMahon Ball had been very helpful. Happily Stephen Holt also pays a gracious tribute to my wife, but stops well short of uncovering personal life.

So my mother and father are mentioned for their contribution to or effect on my class consciousness, but for no other reason Stephen Holt did not ask to see the personal papers, the diaries, the juvenilia and the correspondence which track the mind's course and the heart's astonishment. So it was understandable that he should take as his sources what was read in a library, or published in a school magazine, a university paper, periodical or a book. It could be argued that being a listener or an observer in such places as the Phillip Island Hotel on a Saturday night, the Traveller's Arms (opposite the Melbourne Public Library), the Swanston Family Hotel, the Hotel Civic (before it became glossy), the Faculty of Arts meeting room at the University of Mel-

bourne, and the various meeting rooms at the Australian National University, the banks of the rivers down Kosciusko way, Pyramid Rock, the Nobbies in the days before the Flood, the monument of the Man from Snowy River at Cooma, the Henry Lawson statue in the Sydney Domain, and the portrait of Henry Parkes in the Sydney Art Gallery, and Arthur Boyd's Judas, and Arthur Boyd's ceramics of Romeo and Juliet in the Melbourne Art Gallery played a bigger part than reading books. Or perhaps it was seeing this statement chalked on a car in the main street of Belgrave in 1925, or was it 1926?: "Get you drunk for a bob. Driver guarantees to remain sober," . . . and wondering then as I wonder now what that meant. Who knows?

It is possible such an experience was more relevant than some which have been put forward by those who lack the eye of pity. Who knows? Happily Stephen Holt is a main-line man — and resisted any suggestion to sniff around for indecency, or to take up the drains. He did not look for precious metal in the dirt. The material he read did not tell of that night in the winter of 1937 when I first dipped into Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, or of what went on inside me a few years earlier when I followed the advice given by R. P. Franklin, a few years earlier, to read Dostoevsky: "He might help you to get things straight" — and this at a time when it seemed less and less likely that the crooked would ever be made straight, or the rough places smooth.

Stephen Holt put under his microscope what was happening on the surface of the sea, the white water and not the disturbances in the deep which may explain, or may not explain, so much. In looking at the white water he possibly did not see quite enough of Richard Penrose Franklin, or many of those other friendships which helped

me in my never-ending quest to impose an order on the chaos. There were so many generous people, so many great givers and teachers, and people whose chemistry was right for heart's ease.

It would be invidious and almost silly to single out too many. Among those now dead I was lucky enough to talk about love and death (are there any other subjects?) with David Campbell, Geoffrey Fairbairn, Denis O'Brien, 'Plugger' Bennell, James McAuley, Catherine Clark, Charlie Clark, and Marge Thomson. Among the living there are many who have led me towards grace and freedom — freedom, that is, from the ghosts of the past, as well as the knowledge of how to keep out of the way of the spiritual and intellectual bullies, or how to acquire the strength not to get out of the way when they start another birching.

Perhaps my deepest gratitude to Stephen Holt is just that he understood the difference between the attacks of the late Malcolm Ellis and the attack of 1962 which taught me that I had been living in a fool's paradise. The reception of a book in Australia is one of life's terrors on the dark side of the human heart. It is also, happily, a lesson in just how much human warmth there is. So I am grateful to Stephen Holt for taking such a sympathetic and understanding look at the white water. I can only hope that if anyone dives down into the lower depths he will report what he or she has seen with equally handsome fair-mindedness. The lesson in grace was to come later.

*Manning Clark is Manning Clark.*

## THE POST-SERVICE REVOLUTION

Max Charlesworth

Barry O. Jones: *Sleepers Wake! Technology and the Future of Work* (Oxford, \$25 and \$9.95).

This is the book that the Myers Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change should have written but, alas, did not. After Simon Nora's great pioneering work, *The Computerisation of Society*, Barry Jones' brain-child is perhaps the most perceptive and complete analysis of the effects of the new computer technology on society and the central values on which our society depends. It is not just that the new machines are ushering in a technological revolution which will have massive and far-reaching repercussions on

employment and the economy in general: they will also, so Jones argues, force us to view work itself in a new light. Since we largely define ourselves and establish our identity in terms of our work, this revaluation of the very nature of work will have profound psychological implications; in addition it will subvert the whole set of attitudes — ambition, competitiveness, success, thrift, moral puritanism — which make up the 'work ethic' upon which capitalist society and culture depends.

Faced with this revolution and transvaluation of values, people have so far either taken up a negative Luddite attitude, or (like the Myers Committee) a naively optimistic view that what we lose on the roundabout with the micro-chip we will make up on the swings. Jones, however, argues that it is only if we realise that we are faced with a quantum jump in technology and a consequent social and economic revolution, that we will be able to bend the marvellous new machines to our human purposes. He is a stern opponent of any kind of technological determinism and insists that we can, if we have the knowledge and the will, make sure that the computers and robots serve us instead of us serving them.

Jones' book is so rich and dense with information of all kinds, bright ideas, speculations, asides, curious lore and visionary prophecy that it is formidably difficult to give an adequate summary of it. The first four chapters argue that we are now faced with a 'post-service' society. Just as manufacturing gave place to services as a major area of employment, so now an information based society is replacing the service society. The main features of this post-service society are delineated, and we are offered a new analysis of the labor force and of the different kinds of labor. Chapter 5 then gives an excellent survey of the present state of the computing art and the effects of computers on what Nora calls "the entire nervous system of social organisation". Even those who, like the present reviewer, would not know the back end of a digital computer if they saw one, and who would not be entirely confident about what a "megabit" might be, will be profitably instructed by this chapter.

Broadly speaking, the rest of the book is concerned with a detailed analysis of the likely effects of the new information technology upon our society and with practical and often ingenious proposals for coping with those effects. Jones thinks that in the brave new post-service world, education will come into its own. As he puts it: "We ought to be prepared to accept that the worth of a society can be measured not only by the con-

sumption of goods and physical amenities, but also by its willingness to provide psychological amenities—knowledge, understanding, expanded consciousness, cultural responsiveness and increased creativity. We must recognise that psychological needs are at least as important as physical ones, and that education has always been (and will continue to be) our greatest industry in terms of the employment (meaning ‘occupation’, both paid and unpaid) of vast numbers of people” (p. 160). To my mind this chapter on “Education and Employment” is perhaps the most significant part of the book. It exposes the present gross inequalities in Australian education and its bleak and dismal Benthamite utilitarian outlook. The Williams Report on Education (1979) is rightly castigated by Jones for being based on crude economic and materialistic values, and the benefits of a liberal education are forcefully presented. “Our primary emphasis in education ought still to be on the general rather than the specific and vocational. It is no coincidence that Sweden and Switzerland, the most scientifically innovative of all nations per capita, had the highest literacy rates in Europe two hundred years ago. Their excellence springs from rigorous levels of *general* education and culture: if their educational goals had been set only to meet technological objectives, they would have failed” (p. 168).

One hopes devoutly that the members of the Tertiary Education Commission and others of our educational pastors and masters will read this remarkable chapter and profit from it. If ever Australian education needed a positive and sustaining theory to protect it from razor gangsters and know-nothings, it is now.

*Sleepers, Wake!* ends with a socio-political ‘what is to be done?’ program and Jones concludes with these words: “The fragile consensus which links the Australian community can be shattered if we fail to grasp the interdependence of the skilled and unskilled, rich and poor, market sector and convivial sector. It is essential to recognise the need for employers, trade unions, major political parties and all levels of government to evolve broad policies to ensure that technological change is not used to widen social and economic divisions, and avoid a legacy of increasing bitterness between the powerful and the impotent” (p. 256).

As I have already indicated, I view *Sleepers, Wake!* as a very significant work and I am sure that it will have a large effect in stimulating discussion on the new technology and the social revolution that will follow from it. My only complaint is that Jones bites off too much to chew

in one book, so that the reader at times feels acute pangs of indigestion. Every issue, however remotely connected with the new technology, is mentioned, and every name in this area is dropped, so that some chapters read rather like a series of encyclopedia articles strung together. Again, on occasion the tone of the book becomes remorselessly pedagogical, and we are given short sharp courses on a number of arcane topics. One feels that one must sit still and be instructed, or else! The reader is also provided with a good deal of out-of-the-way information and *curiosa* about the numbers of Volvos and Saabs in the Parliamentary car park in Canberra, sperm banks and breeding for genius, the Pig Principle (if something is good: more is better), Speer’s Syndrome, Jones’ Seven Laws, and much, much more.

These, however, are minor blemishes in a major work and they do not obscure its significance as a substantial piece of social and philosophical analysis. Given the crassness and infantility of political thinking and debate at present in our parliaments, it is all the more extraordinary that it should have been produced by an Australian politician. But then, of course, Barry Jones is no ordinary Australian politician.

*Max Charlesworth is Professor of Philosophy at Deakin University.*

## THE PRIVATE’S EYE

Harry H. Jackman

Bob Holt: *From Ingleburn to Aitape. The Trials and Tribulations of a Four-figure Man* (published by the author, 7/117 Yangoora Road, Lakemba, N.S.W. 2195, \$6.95).

Starkers in the freezing cold drill-hall at Prahran, with attestation papers in one hand and urine sample in the other, and watching the MO deal roughly with the penis of the recruit ahead, I wondered whether I ought not have stayed on the farm at Narre Warren. After reading Bob (“Hooker”) Holt’s account of his induction, I know that VX147583 in June 1942 would have had an even wider awakening as a Four Figure Man at Marrickville in September 1939. I would, for instance, have seen “the white-skinned, pigeon-chested Boxer Dominey who had an oversized whistle slung on his heron-gutted body, with ‘For a Good Girl’ tattooed along the length of his enormous tool”. And, as a Four Figure Man like NX7984 Pte Holt, R.G., I would have belonged to the Thirty-Niners, those enlisted in

the Second AIF during the first three months of World War II and, though sometimes called five-bob-a-day murderers, wife deserters and bums, more often envied by later enlistments.

Most Thirty-Niners would have found it difficult to explain why they had joined up. Not so Hooker: in *From Ingleburn to Aitape* he tells that he was the "proudest lad in Newcastle" when marching alongside his father on Anzac Day, and that two of his uncles had served overseas with the First AIF.

Hooker was not yet sixteen when he became one of the original members of the 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion. The 2/3rd, if its story is anything to go by, played as hard as it fought. Fighting hard it certainly did: of the 3,000 men who belonged to it — some from 1939 until 1946 when it was disbanded — 136 were killed in action, 35 died of wounds, 44 from other causes, and four were missing in action. The battalion earned 56 decorations for bravery and 49 mentions in despatches. No other unit of the Second AIF took part in more battles.

Hooker's first few weeks included brawls with Chocos, signed up for home defence, whose 8/- per day provoked the ire of AIF privates on 5/-. Burning down a dry canteen whose owner was fleecing the troops, playing swy and being drilled by a hardbitten PMF sergeant-major were part of learning the ropes.

The second A.I.F. they call us, the second  
A.I.F. we are;

Bread and jam for breakfast and greasy stew  
for tea,

Marching all day in the sun drilling,

While the mug Militia is up at the pub swilling.

We do most of the work and do all the killing.

Scum, scum, the Militia can kiss my bum.

The life in the canteen is as dry as hell,

The second A.I.F. are we.

Sung to the tune of 'The Legion of the Lost', it was the battle hymn of Hooker and his mates, and they took good care to outnumber the Chocos when turning on a blue. No heroism in Ingleburn camp.

A bout of pneumonia from rescuing a drunken Digger in Colombo harbor, on the journey to the Middle East, caused Hooker's transfer to the 2/2nd Australian General Hospital at Gaza. He went ack-willy when his application for re-posting to the 2/3rd was refused, and was awarded 14 days in Jerusalem detention barracks where everything had to be done at the double, "spare boots had to shine like a shilling on a black gin's wither", and "The Work" consisted of sitting to

attention in the sun, banging two rocks together to make powder of them. The barracks, controlled by Chooms, the infamous Jerusalem Screws, were as weighty a factor as any in making bad blood between Diggers and Chooms. In between hard training in the 2/3rd, to which Hooker was returned after detention, he and his mates were involved in deals with Arabs and Jews, with much dishonesty on both sides. Like some but not all of the Diggers, Hooker had his brutal moments. Then and later, there were instances far exceeding Australian larrikinism, and they do not make pretty reading. Lots of fines for misconduct soon made Hooker's paybook look like a Pakapu ticket, and a spate of court-martial had some of his mates in detention and a few receiving snarlers.

Soon after the 2/3rd had gone into camp near Cairo, Australian and New Zealand soldiers were in a huge brawl in the Berka, the city's brothel district — shades of the First AIF's "Battle of the Wazir" — and, with fine lack of racial discrimination, clobbered each other and the Chooms at least as much as they did the locals. Many of the 2/3rd, Hooker among them, were fined 28 days' pay. Thieving of NAAFI stores, breaking into local establishments and doing what considerate guests never do continued in Alexandria even though, by October 1940, the Desert War was well under way.

The Land of Flies and Sweaty Sox, as Hooker calls it, had its sterner side as well. In December 1940, his battalion was on night patrols near Hellfire (Halfaya) Pass, moving over enemy barbed wire flattened by Bangalore torpedoes fired by intrepid AIF engineers. The capture of Tobruk came on 18 January 1941:

The immediate horizon was lit up with gunflashes and the noise was tremendous. During a short lull in the bombardment, we heard Iti blowing bugle calls . . . We thought the bugle was a call to arms, but it was a false alarm as the Macaronis did not open up on us. Our company was already lined up and a platoon of C Company was settling alongside us on the start line when there was a series of explosions as they touched off trip wires on a heap of booby traps. We could see men being thrown into the air by the explosions and the moaning and groaning were horrific till the stretcherbearers got to work and cleaned up the mess. The C Company platoon lost about twenty men killed and wounded, including battalion identities Rudd and Chisel Holland, Snowy Gallagher, Bluey Cass and Tony Bartello.



In all, 27,000 enemy troops were captured and Prime Minister Menzies came to tell the 2/3rd how proud he and the Australian people were but, "strange to say he failed to mention (as he later did in Parliament) that, in his opinion, we were economic conscripts". More Snowys, Blueys and Tonys were to be KIA as the battalion fought more battles but, if there can be any consolation to widows and orphans, the officers' performance matched that of their troops, and none more so than the CO, Lieut-Col V. T. England, the 'Black Panther', who

popped up all over the place standing in his Bren Carrier even under the heaviest fire. He was completely unafraid and just to see him standing up, cool and calm, giving advice and saying good day occasionally, put heart into the most chicken-hearted of us. He was a man amongst men.

There was looting, too. Hooker "had wristlet watches up both arms and a pocket full of money and rings . . . lifted from Dago officers". And boozing of wines and spirits taken from the enemy.

The 2/3rd was lucky to miss the 'Benghazi Handicap', the retreat from Rommel's armies. But the campaign in Greece soon followed. Even the shenanigans on leave in Athens had a sombre moment when a young lad asked after his brother, Peter Tambakis, and had to be told of Peter's death in action at Bardia. And the brief respite at Larissa was soured by Stukas. It would be difficult to find a more apposite comment on the retreat from Greece than this one: "One soldier, wanting to fight alongside his mates, asked Arthur Carson, DCM, MM, MID, if he knew where his platoon was. 'Get down here, son, there are no platoons now, just A.I.F.'"

The gallant Greeks, civilians and soldiers alike, suffered at least as much as the Diggers, and even Hooker had qualms about thieving from them. The news that the 6th Australian Division and the New Zealand Division had been formed into the 2nd Anzac Corps was but a morale booster; the Germans continued to outnumber and outgun the Allied troops. Hooker was very glad to reach Alexandria at the end of April.

In mid-June, he was severely wounded during the brief but fierce fighting against the Vichy French. An Arab soldier gave him half a lump of stale bread, but it was not until Hooker learnt that the hospital had run out of food that he "fully realised the value of the gift . . . of the big-hearted young Arab". Expert surgery and nursing in a Choom hospital, and a spell in an

Australian convalescent depot followed — and so did boozing and brawling. That Hooker got back to Australia and was medically reclassified A1 says as much for the tolerance of Australian officers as for his constitution and determination.

After leave with parents and friends, Hooker was transferred to the 2/3 Training Battalion at Bathurst. Clashes with provosts, running swy and boozing were part of Hooker's curriculum. The 16th Brigade's march through Sydney on 12 August 1942 was the highlight, though.

Camp at Donadobu near Port Moresby was nothing like camp in the Middle East. There was nowhere to play up after 'working hours' and the sight of 2/3rd men back from Sanananda was salutary:

If I live to be a hundred I will never forget the state the men were in . . . They were thin as rakes, haggard, sick and dead-beat and we were proud of them. The cooks had put on a spread for them and the sick, wounded, LOB and reinforcement drafts had foregone their beer ration so that the returning men had three or four bottles per man. It was a wasted effort, however, for in such a state were these men that they couldn't eat more than a mouthful or two of food. Even such enthusiastic beer drinkers as Joe Hurley and Jika McVicar would drink only half a bottle of beer and then heave everywhere and go to sleep.

The 16th Brigade was in such poor shape that it was sent to the Atherton Tablelands for re-grouping. There the whole of the 3rd Militia Battalion, which had distinguished itself in the Owen Stanley campaign, transferred to the 2/3rd, among them Major Nobby Clark who wore Boer War and World War I ribbons. No Chocos there.

At the end of 1944, the 2/3rd was sent to New Guinea. Hooker had got in some boozing, brawling and other playing up whilst in Australia, but it did not match his 'operations' in the Middle East.

It can be argued that the Aitape-Wewak campaign should not have been contemplated, let alone fought. It did not hasten the end of the war and cost many Australian lives. The 2/3rd suffered a number KIA and through drowning in a flash flood of the Damap river; and many carried malaria, dermatitis and other diseases into civvy street. Hooker was surprised:

I had always imagined the wild New Guinea natives to be savages and it was surprising to find them human beings, with all the faults and frailties of so-called civilized white men.

The carriers were the cleanest people imaginable . . . Most of the men had been forcibly conscripted . . . to help in a war they knew nothing about . . . They suffered real hardships, wounds and sometimes death and for this they were supplied with food and a miserable pittance.

As a 2nd AIF man, Bob 'Hooker' Holt was far from typical. One of his mates asserts that Hooker "was even wilder than Ken Clift and only drew one full pay in his six years of war". Certainly Australian larrikinism, sometimes tinged with brutality, was no more pronounced in the 2/3rd than in other units, and lived side by side with the ways of down-the-middle soldiering by men such as Roy ("Sam") Fluke, Sulman Prize winner, Lyndon Dadswell, renowned sculptor, John Stevenson, clerk of parliament, and Alan Murchison, mayor of Woollahra. But it was the Hooker Holts who gave the distinctive flavor to soldiering that has distinguished the AIF from other British Commonwealth forces since World War I and has greatly influenced how we see ourselves as a people. Hooker is from the same mould as the men of the legend described by C. E. W. Bean.

Some readers, too young to have witnessed World War II, may see *From Ingleburn to Aitape* as nothing but a tale of irresponsible, racist behavior. If they do, they fail to recognise the author's basic human decency, loyalty to his group — in this case, the 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion — and consistent courage in repeated adversity. They would also fail to understand the leadership qualities that contributed to the renown of the Australian infantryman. The infantry battalions of the 2nd AIF had worthier mottoes than *inter arma silent leges*.

Official war histories cannot and do not tell the whole story. As a past president of the NSW Military Historical Society points out, "so much has been written about the War by academics, journalists and high ranking officers, but so little has been written from the ranks, and, if ever mankind is to learn of the futility of war and the meaning of 'blood, sweat and tears', this is where the lessons are to be learned."

Bob Holt is now a tally clerk at a Sydney seatainer terminal. Nothing distinguishes him from the other World War II ex-servicemen marching on Anzac Day. This book, however, ensures that NX7984 is more than just one of the very many numbers listed in Army records.

*Harry Jackman formerly worked in New Gui-*

*nea, and until last year was a lecturer at the Riverina College of Advanced Education. He now lives in Angaston, South Australia. Of the writing of this review he comments: "Your readers may not be interested in the carryings-on of generals, but people who read Ian Turner, Wendy Lowenstein and Leonie Sandercock should take notice too of what the diggers, erks and lowerdecks have to say."*

## RECENT FICTION

Susan McKernan

John Bryson: *Whoring Around* (Penguin, \$4.95).  
Peter Carey: *Bliss* (University of Queensland Press, \$12.95).  
Morris Lurie: *Dirty Friends* (Penguin, \$3.25).  
Fia Moppert: *Out of the Corner of One Eye* (Greenhouse Publications, \$9.95).  
Glen Tomasetti: *Man of Letters* (McPhee Gribble, \$14.95).

This group of books offers a range of entertaining and accomplished fiction. Indeed, accomplishment is so much in evidence that it is surprising to find that all but Carey's novel have been published with the assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council. It seems that few publishers will take the risk of producing unsubsidised Australian fiction, though the works by Morris Lurie, Peter Carey and Glen Tomasetti will be enjoyed by anyone who likes clever and unpretentious writing.

The only risky book among them is Fia Moppert's first novel, *Out of the Corner of One Eye* — risky not only because of the author's youth (21 at the time of writing this novel) but also because of the seriousness and honesty of her account of adolescence. Her characters are not strictly adolescents, being aged between eighteen and about twenty-three. But our society encourages long nurture, so that twenty year-olds may not be fully adult. Moppert's characters are physically mature and sexually active, but they maintain the intense and expectant emotional state of the adolescent.

The two sisters, Coral and Sissel, have left high school and home and found no career worthy of attention (Coral has tried university, Sissel office work). Each is established in a house on the edge of the city and makes some sort of a living out of the dole and odd jobs. But the novel is not concerned with events or the progress of life. Sissel, Coral and their friends have determined never to join the 'underworld' of sub-

urban family life. So, they play at being 'grown up', taking tea in each other's cubby houses.

Moppert plots the small and important changes in the emotional balance as the sisters visit friends or take their lovers. Sissel loves love while Carol waits for something or someone worthy of her strength. At times I became impatient with the passivity or childishness of the characters but had to recognise moments of clear wisdom — especially the depiction of the failure of Sissel's friendship with Ingrid and Coral's disappointment in Jenny.

When Moppert comments on the outside world she can be acute, as in her description of Liz's mother, a woman who had "woken up late in life":

Now she was a member of the Labor Party, rode a bicycle to work, went every Thursday night to an encounter group, and would never again be tricked into marriage by the smooth charms of any selfish and immature man who got away with it because he was a poet.

But for all the careful observation *Out of the Corner of One Eye* has no direction. It is as if Fia Moppert has not yet made her decision as to what this vividly depicted experience means. Perhaps she feels this herself, for a rather lame paragraph at the end of the novel suggests that a new definition of the morals of love might be needed now that sex had become "like a kind of currency". The novel is certainly not about this.

After Moppert's commitment the short stories of Morris Lurie and John Bryson appear contrived and artificial. Lurie is reliable. A reader need never doubt that Lurie knows where his story is going, what it is about and where to stop. Nor need he fear that Lurie will ever shock or upset him. It is only Lurie's characters, such as Isaac Shur of "Africa Wall" or Percival of "Prufrock in Switzerland" who will be upset — part of Lurie's display of the vulnerability of those with possessions.

The stories about Friedlander's Jewish family are the best in this collection because there is emotion, concern, and observation as well as humor within them. The others, particularly "Rattle Bang", "Who is Phillip?" and "Oh Leave the Women to their Ways", reveal a startling tendency to equate women with material possessions. Husbands fall in love with (or just fancy?) the legs or eyes of their wives; the Axelrods of "Rattle Bang" only find sexual excitement with

ever more expensive purchases of antiques. In Lurie's world a man suffers as much at the loss of his Citroen as he does over the unfaithfulness of his wife. Again, if *Playboy* will publish the worst of these stories, why must the Literature Board subsidise the best?

John Bryson dedicates *Whoring Around* to Lurie and the influence of the more experienced writer is clear, particularly in the title story. But Bryson does not have Lurie's discipline, his talent for pruning a story so that its purpose is clear. Bryson insists on providing lengthy background details about his characters, only to reveal these details as irrelevant to the crisis of the story. Or are the details the whole point?

This confusion occurs in "Widows", "Pedigrees" and "Whoring Around", the three long stories of the book. These stories have an unnecessary narrator who suggests an eventual revelation of truth. But Bryson uses the narrator more for style than purpose, and the stories do not fulfil their promise. The shorter stories are much better, particularly "Children Aren't Supposed to Be Here at All", where the child narrator expresses the fear and courage of the weak in an alien world. "Melodrama for a Plastic Heroine" attempts a slightly surreal subject, rather like a Peter Carey story. But essentially Bryson is a straight storyteller working with a simple morality — people should be kind to children, wives should be faithful and so on.

Penguin have published both collections of short stories and though the Lurie cover and title have little relationship to the stories (the story, "Dirty Friends", hasn't got much to do with dirty old men either) they are at least amusing. However, Penguin have done Bryson a disservice in calling his book *Whoring Around* and putting a plastic blow-up adult doll on the cover. The justification for this lies in the stories but it misrepresents the book which, despite its flaws, is elegantly written and could hardly be called erotic or sordid.

For all the carry-on about 'discontinuous narratives' it is only in a novel that a writer can command more than a fleeting interest from his readers. Peter Carey shows in *Bliss* that he can commit himself to the fully-fledged novel without any loss of that inventiveness which characterised his short stories.

*Bliss* tells the story of Harry Joy, successful advertising agent and bon vivant, who dies from a heart attack and is saved by surgery, only to find that the world he has enjoyed is now Hell.

The novel is set in a state of the United States of America rather like Queensland, and New York is the far-away centre of the world.

Carey writes in an appropriately American comic style (Peter de Vries springs to mind). Many of the jokes can be seen coming, and often the characters are set up into a sort of joke tableau — as when Harry Joy “conceals” himself in a tree in the backyard in order to observe his family’s hellish activities. This does not make them any the less funny.

Harry’s travels through Hell include a period living in the Hilton with Honey Barbara, a girl from the bush (more like Li’l Abner’s Daisy Mae than Betsy Bandicoot), a spell in a psychiatric hospital run at a profit from subsidies, and a return to the decadence of his own home. Harry is right to perceive his society as Hell, situated as it is at the centre of the cancer map and economically based on the spread of cancer.

When cancer-stricken Bettina Joy blows up herself and several important cancer promoters Harry must flee arrest. Thus the final stage of Hell is found in the bush with Honey Barbara and her people. Here Harry the advertising man demonstrates a tribal skill for storytelling and lives contentedly and simply to his end.

Carey’s satirical comment on contemporary society is sharp. Harry’s Hell where all the energy and creativity of mankind are marshalled for self-destruction is not too far from a vision of our own society. But Carey loves the crazy world of modern capitalism with all its vulgarity and fundamental immorality. He marvels with Harry at the “richness and variety of life in Hell”. Carey’s imagination only slackens when Harry finds his way to the pure life of the bush. He writes with gusto of Bettina Joy’s wonderful ads or David Joy’s schemes to run drugs in South America. Country life is tedious by comparison.

Carey shows us that life based on greed and glamor is Hell, but he cannot help suggesting that it is more fun than digging holes and eating honey.

Glen Tomasetti has also written a funny novel. In *Man of Letters* the humor stems from her gently ironic view of her characters, rather than from any outrageously comic situations. Her hero, Dorton Serry, also suffers a change of perception in the course of the novel and is consigned briefly to a mental home. But Dorton’s madness passes quickly and his altered vision is occasioned only by the upset of his attitude towards women.

This aging academic, knighted for his efforts

in quelling student riots in the sixties, has spiced his life by flirtations with various women. He has pursued these secret pleasures on the trips which are part and parcel of successful academic life — the Bicentenary Committee meetings, the Film Board conferences and so on. Dorton maintains contact with the women by letter-writing. So far as one can tell he has not produced the goods in bed; his preference is for the delicate nuances of romance rather than physical contact — the legacy of an upbringing which presented women as amusements rather than serious people.

Glen Tomasetti makes Dorton self-opinionated and deceitful — he hasn’t delivered the goods as an academic either. But he is a man constantly amused by his own wit and capable of creating myths about his women as well as about himself. This makes him an irresistible character, though frustrating to his women.

The women characters illustrate the changes in feminine consciousness which make Dorton’s attitudes obsolete. Beth, his long-suffering wife is most admirable, able to maintain her own creative interests despite the duties of wife and mother. Ursula, the oldest of Dorton’s little diversions, has found useful work and rejects his renewed attentions. Doona, university lecturer and single parent, finds him frustrating.

But Tomasetti saves her best efforts for the appearance, jargon and creative notions of the lesbian feminists. She is clever enough to give us the feminist film, Dorton’s criticisms and the feminist defence in terms which are perfectly credible and totally comic. Her only timidity lies in an unwillingness to send the women up too much.

After Doona has exposed her Caesarian scar and Jude and Con have demonstrated lesbian consolation there seems some justification for Dorton’s hatred of women. And when Dorton’s daughter gives birth to her first child with grandparents (bar Dorton), father and movie camera in attendance, Tomasetti overlooks the comic possibilities because she wants Dorton to appreciate his wife’s suffering.

Dorton is after all a model of the male chauvinist who is powerful in our society. He deserves everything Tomasetti gives him. But she could have poured a little more acid on the women who are depicted depending on their bodies for power or attention. *Man of Letters* is far from a feminist tract. If Tomasetti is slightly unfair in her criticism it is only to lead Dorton to a true understanding of the nature of woman.

Both Carey and Tomasetti are now novelists

in control of their art. Their new work should be read widely.

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## EMBATTLED MODERNISM

Richard Haese

Mary Eagle and Jan Minchin: *The George Bell School: Students, Friends, Influences* (Deutscher Art Publications, \$120).

George Bell arrived back in Melbourne in 1920 after sixteen expatriate years in Paris and London. Within a few years he was established as a successful teacher with classes in his Toorak home and continued to teach until well into the 1960s; but it is the school that he established in 1932 with Arnold Shore upon which his reputation as a pioneering modernist rests. The partnership ended in some bitterness after three years, but the school in Bourke Street survived until 1939. It was closed in retaliation for the loss of control by George Bell and his followers of the fledgling Contemporary Art Society that he had helped to found, and which used the school briefly as a studio.

The mere mention of the C.A.S. takes us into the realm of art politics, an arena that the compilers and authors of this book claim to abjure in favor of stylistic reporting. But the discussion of style can scarcely avoid the expression of values and the issue of politics, art or otherwise, does not go away.

There are two sections to the book. One is a biographical section compiled by Jan Minchin, the other an historical account of Bell's teaching and its influence by Mary Eagle. Together the authors have amassed a great deal of new material for which students and scholars will be grateful; though no student and precious few scholars will be able to afford this collector's item.

George Bell's career is bisected by his discovery of modernism somewhere around the late 1920s, a revelation that took him back overseas in 1934-35; a career divided between "Before I saw the light" and "After I saw the light". Quite how illuminating Bell's ideas and teaching practice were in the late 1930s and 1940s is Mary Eagle's main concern in her detailed discussion of the artist and those with whom he had contact.

The central proposition is that the George Bell school was the forge in the 1930s where the

tenets of modernism, and even nationalistic subject matter, were hammered out. In place of these being at issue between competing groups, it is claimed that the rich formal and poetic elements that were to characterize the most dynamic art of the 1940s had their origins in Bell's studio and classes — a bold claim and one argued at length and with some passion.

The list of the more radical figures of the era who had some contact with Bell is remarkably comprehensive. In the 1920s there was Eric Thake, and later Russell Drysdale and Peter Purves Smith. Other artists listed and prominently on show in the exhibition that accompanied this publication include Noel Counihan, Henry de Hartog, Sam Atyeo, Moya Dyring, Ian Fairweather, Danila Vassilieff, Albert Tucker, Lina Bryans, Sali Herman, Fred Williams, Leonard French. Although no mention is made of the fact, even Sunday and John Reed briefly attended classes in the 1930s. The listing of such names looks impressive as their work appeared in the exhibition. Yet herein lies the problem of the whole exercise.

Certainly Thake, Drysdale, Purves Smith, Herman — and perhaps Williams — can be said to have been affected and directed in some measure by the experience. The others clearly were not. Counihan was a youth when he attended some night classes in drawing in 1930-31. Atyeo and Dyring were surely no more than visitors. De Hartog was only taught by Arnold Shore. Fairweather was fêted but was not here to either learn or teach, and there is no evidence of his works having been emulated. Vassilieff's presence was only in the form of a painting that might or might not have been hung in the studio. Albert Tucker paid for a term's tuition but left after a few sessions, finding little of value and unimpressed by Bell's authority: "They treated him as a God". Lina Bryans was disaffected by Bell's teaching. Fred Williams remained for four years but fell hostile — which probably says more about the lack of alternatives than the value of the school. Len French was less tolerant: "He was totally devoid of imagination. For anybody that may have had a creative urge he would be deadly".

Can one argue, then, that "in the 1930s the Bourke Street School was the main centre of a quite widespread movement towards modern styles of painting and sculpture, a movement which extended well beyond the confines of the school" (author's italics)? One might as well argue that, since so many young radical artists

had been students or in contact with students from the National Gallery School, the classes of Charles Wheeler and W. B. McInnes were centres for the modernist revolution. Mere association does not a movement make. The fact was that Melbourne's art scene was so small and concentrated that contact, however ephemeral and superficial, was bound to occur unless a group was so closed and narrow that, like the Meldrumites, they were beyond the pale by the 1930s.

Clearly George Bell did share many of the views of other enlightened early liberals such as Basil Burdett or Adrian Lawlor. Bell could, and did, often surprise by the openness of his aesthetic judgements, whether in his press reviews or in his classes. But what is more significant than what groups of individuals may have in common are the issues and ideas that divide them. And in George Bell's case the limits of his vision soon alienated him from many one-time friends and associates, caused his attempt to destroy the C.A.S., and in later years saw him occupying on the outer rim of Melbourne art.

To speak of George Bell and his ideas as having prepared the ground for, and even having anticipated, the art of the Angry Penguins is ahistorical nonsense and a blurring, if not an outright scrubbing, of real distinctions. Where arguments are advanced they are, as often as not, inconsistent. For example, Bell's views on the creative process are in one breath described as being "not very far from Rimbaud's idea of cultivating the inner self", and in another his conception of that life of the spirit is then judged as "aeons away from the recklessness of this philosophy", as if that daring recklessness was not central to the experience itself and its expression. Certainly one is bound to agree that "there was nothing rushed, blind, visionary about his art and teaching: he was a classicist . . ." Consequently, Nolan's Kelly series could only be thought of as illustration. Bell believed in rules, order, fixed structures and craftsmanship; there could be little sympathy for those questing intellectual spirits he damned as "spare-time geniuses".

No one doubts the quality of Bell's teaching within the boundaries of his élitism. He was far and away the best teacher of his craft that Melbourne had to offer. I use the word "craft" because, unlike Max Meldrum, his artistic liberalism was not harnessed to any bohemian or political liberalism, or to any sense of art possessing a moral dimension. Bell inspired and trained skilled and often sensitive painters, students whose loyalty and myopia was such that they un-

questioningly held ranks and marched out of the Contemporary Art Society immediately their leader quit the field (although not the campaign). The most telling aspect of all of this is that it was just that concern for deference to his *authority* that was a key factor in causing the dispute in the first place. By authority I mean not only a concern for personal allegiance but a respect for those whose training and experience had conferred superior wisdom.

The real revolutionaries of the era were highly suspicious of such claims, especially when employed for censorship and control. If these artists were in flight from the constructions of middle class suburbia, by contrast the majority of students who were drawn to Bell's school found there all the moral comforts of home. As Mary Eagle states: "Because nothing was done to combat it, the suffocating mores of Melbourne's middle and lower classes had their effect on the school and the art that came out of it." Students may have painted from the nude, but pubic hair was studiously painted out. We are told in that in 1939 the presence — albeit brief — of Vic O'Connor, Ailsa Donaldson, Wolfgang Cardamatis and David Strachan offended not only Bell's political but also his moral codes. Reading the whole detailed story one longs for a touch of the rattiness of Monsalvat, the romantic aggression of a Vassiliev, the messianic intensity of a Meldrum, or the bohemianism and dandyism of the rebels at the National Gallery School, where Sidney Nolan could appear in a pale grey flannel suit, pale yellow chamois waist-coat and matching gloves with mother of pearl buttons, fawn spats, and a grey homburg.

In essence George Bell's teaching seems, in the 1930s at least, not to have been much in advance of that of either André Lhote or his mentor in London, Iain McNab — freer perhaps, but very different from the open-ended intuitive enthusiasms of Arnold Shore. He offered, as did Lhote and McNab, certitude and control when the European avant-garde had long since repudiated both. In the end one is perhaps simply sceptical of the value of formal art teaching as such. Art students need to acquire skills, need access to models and space — perhaps also a library and critical responses. That was what drew Albert Tucker to the school; what drove him away was what was being taught.

One is left with the thought that the George Bell school neither nurtured nor retarded anything much in terms of movements. Life and art flowed on around it, eddying occasionally on its

shoal but keeping much to its course. Certainly Drysdale worked his long apprenticeship with Bell, and it shows. Purves Smith appears to have been pretty well unteachable, and Drysdale learnt as much from his imaginative friend as from the master. If an art school has value it usually resides as much in such contacts and friendships as anywhere else.

This is a handsome volume rich in color plates and photographs. The attention to relatively neglected figures of importance such as Eric Thake is welcome, as are the new insights into the key and tragically short-lived Peter Purves Smith. There are also fascinating glimpses into the lives and work of lesser known figures: an almost lost generation. Sybil Craig, Yvonne Atkinson, Geoff Jones, Gordon Hughes, Ian Armstrong, Constance Stokes and Marjorie Woolcock are well worth the discovery.

If the whole project began as an exhibition and study of the successive phases of the Bell school and its influence, it would appear that the irresistible desire to give so much weight to the 1930s has flawed the enterprise. It hovers uneasily somewhere between that latter aim of surveying pioneering modernism in Melbourne and the original more modest aim: there is, it seems to me, a fundamental misconception. This, with its accompanying special pleading, is all the more regrettable in an otherwise important and fascinating book.

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## DISAPPOINTING CROP

Barry Jones

Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8 (Melbourne University Press, \$30).

The latest volume of the *ADB* is longer than most, with 660 pages containing 672 entries, from Clamp, John Burcham to Gibson, William Ralph Boyce, written by 465 authors. Let me declare my interest at once: I was one of the 465. The editors commissioned me to write three entries — the murdered Frederick Deeming, Labor's first Victorian Premier, George Elmslie, and a Victorian barrister and Minister, Henry Isaac Cohen — of which only the first, in my judgment, will attract the slightest interest. My experience suggests the editors' problems in as-

sembling a reference work which is both readable and comprehensive. A careful reading of the volume suggests that few significant Australians flourished in the period 1891-1939, whose surnames began with the letters between Cl and Gib. This contention is confirmed by examining the letter 'E'.

'E' contains entries on sixty people of whom, in my opinion, only four could be described as very interesting — Albert Augustine Edwards (1888-1963), a flamboyant hotelier and politician in Adelaide convicted (while still an MP) and jailed for sodomy in 1931, but who recovered his fortune, became a philanthropist and left a pile; Sir Frederic Eggleston (1875-1954), social philosopher, lawyer, politician and diplomat; Harold Edward ("Pompey") Elliott (1878-1931), a brilliant general in World War I and later a Victorian Senator who nursed a deep grievance at his failure to gain public recognition and killed himself; and Robert Dunlop Elliott (1884-1950), newspaper proprietor, also a Victorian Senator, wartime assistant to Lord Beaverbrook, catalyst, social irritant and art collector. (Of these four, only two were important.)

Another sixteen could be described as moderately interesting: William Eames (soldier and physician), John Earle (Tasmanian Labor Premier and Senator), William Earsman (co-founder of the Australian Communist Party, later a social democrat in Scotland and an OBE), Edward Eddy (NSW railways commissioner), A. R. Edgar (Methodist minister and social reformer in Melbourne), George Edwards (pioneer of radio serials), Sir James Elder (businessman), Edward Embley (anaesthetist), Louis Esson (dramatist), Robert Etheridge (palaentologist and museum director), Ada Evans (first woman barrister in NSW), George Essex Evans (poet), Sir John Evans (Tasmanian Premier), A. J. Ewart (botanist), Robert Ewin (taxation commissioner, later a campaigner for the Kingdom of God who urged the replacement of money transactions by barter), and Sir Thomas Ewing (that rarity, a political wit, MHR and exponent of the "Yellow peril").

Only two of the above named — Evans the poet and A. J. Ewart — are included in the *Dictionary of National Biography* which, in a spirit of imperial largesse, has always opened its pages to colonials. To express doubts about whether the remaining forty entries in 'E' were worth recording, except in the most summary form, is not to be critical of the editors or the authors who have tackled their daunting task

with exemplary diligence. Many of the subjects are made to sound more significant than they actually were, a common occurrence in panegyrics. What I found in letter 'E' is broadly true of the other letters as well.

The longest entries in the ADP are mostly political — Alfred Deakin (15 columns by R. Norris), John Forrest (14 columns by Frank Crowley), Andrew Fisher (11 columns by Denis Murphy), Joseph Cook (7 columns by A. O. Smith), Jock Garden (6 columns by Bede Nairn) and Albert Dunstan (5½ columns by J. B. Paul). The geologist Sir Edgeworth David receives the longest entry for a non-politician (6 columns by T. G. Valence and D. F. Branagan) while Miles Franklin (4½ columns by J. I. Roe) is the longest female subject.

Among the best long articles are Bede Nairn's J. D. Fitzgerald, Manning Clark's Joseph Furphy, and Neville Cain's L. F. Giblin. Many of the liveliest articles deal with criminals or eccentrics — Clement John De Garis, the financier, W. P. Crick, a crook Sydney solicitor and MP, George Alphonse Collingridge de Tourcey, promoter of the 'Portuguese primacy' in discovering eastern Australia, Major Wally Conder, governor of Pentridge, state manager of the ABC, entrepreneur and brewery manager, and Jock Garden, international revolutionary, Labor MHR, con-man and astrologer.

Some of the entries are notably colorless, suggesting an excessive reliance on written sources. Joseph Silver Collings (1865-1955), ALP Senator and Minister under Curtin and Chifley is described as "an archetypal party bureaucrat . . . [who] enjoyed ministerial rank as a reward for long years of dedicated work". This is quite misleading, suggesting an assiduous mole burrowing through files. Collings was a glorious old ratbag who would say the first thing that come into his head — he described Churchill and Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter as the work of "two mad dogs". He cannot be compared to Eddie Ward as a master of abuse because Ward knew exactly what he was saying and Collings did not.

The entry on Dr A. E. Lloyd (1877-1974) is a major disappointment, devoting only sixteen lines to his weekly radio broadcasts. I suspect that the writer never listened to him; the next generation of *ADB* readers will have no idea how he sounded. Dr Floyd aroused strong professional antagonisms: he was deeply disliked by his rival organist A. E. H. Nickson who, as music critic for the *Argus* concluded a long review of one of Bernard Heinze's Handel Festival concerts

with the dismissive words: "After interval Dr. A. E. Floyd essayed a concerto".

The article on Sir Gilbert Dyett (1891-1964), President of the R.S.L. and model for 'Captain Dwyer' in *Power without Glory*, fails to mention his superb physical appearance. I used to see him almost daily as I slid by a tram and he strode along St Kilda Road to the city, in all weathers, in his navy suit complete with bowler hat and furled umbrella. He lived in Florida Mansions (now demolished) well into the 1960s, although the article states that he retired to Olinda in the 1950s.

Some of the headings are misleading: Code, Edward Percival, the musician, was always known as Percy Code but the entry gives no hint of this, while Henry Isaac Cohen appears in the heading (over my strenuous objection) as Cohen, Isaac Henry because that was how the name appeared on his birth certificate.

There are fascinating incidental pieces of information to be picked up — for example: the early life of Edith Cowan (1861-1932), the first woman MP in Australia (1921), was shattered by the murder of her step-mother and the hanging of her father (1876), and the notorious confidence man and cricketer Arthur Coningham (1863-1939) was father of a distinguished Air Marshal and knight.

Some entries omit important details — for example Sir Harold Clapp's death was partly caused by banging his head in the locomotive named for him, and William Dunstan had an extreme sensitivity to noise caused by a war-time injury, and which his son Keith has written about movingly.

There is some evidence that *ADB*'s editors are making a slow transition to metrics: Sir Walter Davidson is described as "over 6 ft (180 cm) tall" while Alfred Deakin is "six feet (about 183 cm) tall". For the record, 180 cm is just under 5'11".

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## THE EXPERIMENTERS

Michael Cotter

David Foster: *Moonlite* (Macmillan, \$9.95); Frank Hardy: *Who Shot George Kirkland?* (Edward Arnold, \$14.95); James McQueen: *The Escape Machine* (University of Queensland Press, \$12.95 and \$7.95);



Laurie Clancy: *The Wife Specialist* (Hyland House Publishing, \$9.95).

There is an impressive variety of modes and vision among these four books. They are some of the most interesting I've read recently, not least because each in its way evokes echoes of the salient past, while intimating possible directions in the twentieth-century history of Australian literary culture. The first two are novels, the others collections of short stories. What they have in common is the adventurous spirit of their authors. This is especially true of the novels, in which Hardy and Foster take technical risks which in the case of the first almost pay off and in the case of the second result is a stylistic *tour de force* the like of which may not have been seen since *Such Is Life*.

Laurie Clancy has in *The Wife Specialist* focused sharply on a region, Melbourne's Carlton. If we can believe what's revealed in these eighteen stories, it is the world capital of academicised buffoonery, of petty-minded barren sexual intrigue and of the wry pathos of urban trendies anywhere, each of them isolating himself-or-herself in the paradoxical self-indulgence of psychologising modernity. Clancy in this collection parallels Thea Astley's *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* in the firmness of his sense of regionalist locale; he follows up Frank Moorhouse's socio-cultural and aesthetic excursions in *The Americans, Baby*. In doing so, he has exemplified admirably the advantages that these limitations of concern have to offer the writer of 'short fictions'. He also reveals the opportunities that wait to be exploited in a cunning disconnectedness of characterisation and episodic structure, whereby his diverse tales assume the unity of a complete narrative pattern. These advantages and opportunities coalesce in the possibility they create for locating the broader significances of what by most of us are generally taken to be the trivialities of contemporary life. Clancy makes the most of this possibility with a characteristic deadpan wit and a sensitive empathy with his characters which emerges, one feels, despite the writer's disgusted conviction as to their hedonistic absurdity, their self-pitying vulpine exploitation of each other, the sometimes bizarre futility of their lives.

James McQueen shows in *The Escape Machine* his own awareness of the futilities and self-inflicted frustrations of his contemporaries, although most of the subjects of his revelations are more apparently and self-consciously ocker in their terms of reference than are Clancy's. That suburbia can be monstrous is well-known to McQueen, who

presents its savage compulsions in many of his stories. From them emerges an overall concern with the wounds inflicted by society on its members, whether its weapons be the blunted repressiveness of petit bourgeois moral notions or the steamy prurience of institutionalised hypocrisy, especially where these are manifest in sexual relations. While the fifteen stories in this collection spread themselves over a broader setting, with a corollary widening of the tonal range in comparison with Clancy's, McQueen shares that writer's sense of the absurdity of modern social destructiveness and of the smallness of the individual in the face of it. He is farther from accepting the inevitability of the defeats that characterise these phenomena, however, which permits the development of a knotty heroism in some of his characters. In general, too, I think the humor with which he wards off the possibility of such an acceptance is more constructively-tuned. Additionally, a vigorous sense of grotesquerie is certainly plain in some of these stories, especially in the more experimental of them.

Experimentation is the keynote of Frank Hardy's *Who Shot George Kirkland?* which its author subtitled, perhaps a little gratuitously, "A Novel about the Nature of Truth". Indeed, from the full-title page onwards (including the acknowledgement made of the use to which Hardy put R. H. Cavenagh's thesis, *The Fiction of Frank Hardy*), he plays the reality-illusion/fiction-history game with such devious energy that the reader is obliged to withdraw from engagement with the narrative and the characters, simply to avoid collapsing defeated by the telescopic complications of the novel's historico-fictional structure. It has, on the surface, the simplest of shapes: it appears to fall neatly into two parts. The first is an assemblage of documents concerning the experiences (literary, imaginative, biographical, and the three fused) of an author, Ross Franklyn. The pun is obviously intentionally thin, and part of the game of the author, who dwells impishly within it. The second half of the book is an account of the investigations conducted by the 'real' I of the narrative, the pirate-researcher-quester who, in the pursuit of truth let it be understood, is not above lifting a manuscript from the effects of the deceased Franklyn, who has suicided. The spectacle of Hardy's fictive self-destruction, itself not far short of tastelessness, is topped by his use of this manuscript as the first half of the novel: curiouser and curiouser. The putative author is bent on solving the mystery posed in the novel's title, so as to establish the

truth about events presented in Franklyn's novel about Australian political corruption, *Power Corrupts*. OK? It is unfortunately typical of the novel that the key discovery is of a misunderstanding, a leaping to false conclusions in the first place. So much depends on the original slip in perception, on the punny slipperiness of language, that I wasn't particularly satisfied with the glibness of the misprision. I found its corniness a little too much to bear after all that unpeeling of motive, all that inspection of structure.

As it is perhaps already apparent, Hardy plays a complicated series of alienating and foregrounding games throughout *his* novel. These bring to mind Joyce Cary's observation that such art is very clever, like farting Anne Laurie through a keyhole: but is it worth the effort? The narrative quotes itself, in epigraphs to its own chapters, from its own chapters. Hardy quotes his own earlier fiction with references to titles so contrivedly punnish as to be somehow more genuine than their real-life originals. His earlier fictional characters, especially Nelly West, take on a chinese-boxes, socio-historical / aesthetic status which makes the real-life existence of their 'originals' seem a fiction. Styles, including the authors' own (Hardy's, Franklyn's and the narrator's) are parodied at various stages, always with a thematic purpose. When they're not cumbersome revelations of machinery, these games work; but sometimes they *are* that. Largely as a result of his management of them, however, Hardy eventually elicits his reader's panting acceptance of the validity of the book's predominant theme: that, as a quotation from a "Franklyn" MS has it, "truth is impossible to comprehend even when one is willing to tell it", since it is distorted by the teller's memory and, in that sense, "the truth, like God, does not exist—only the search for it". The entire novel is then, among many other things, a sometimes-laborious, sometimes-fascinating invitation to ask ourselves: "What price now Lawrence's maxim, that we should never trust the teller, always trust the tale?"

From this very Continental experiment I turn to the last and in many ways most impressive of these books, David Foster's *Moonlite*, which took out last year's N.S.W. Premier's Award and National Book Council award. An astonishing work, it is a fictitious history, that dazzlingly bears out the Hardy theories (albeit more subtly than does their inventor), and more than that, it is a myth of the nature of colonialism: a stylistic interlocution of folklore, scientific and philo-

sophic discourse, hilarious dialogue and situation, sermonic hellfire and a supremely irreverent narrative, whose cynical cheerfulness is sometimes almost overpowering. Perhaps a sample of the latter will illustrate its power, although the author's genuine fictive inventiveness can only be properly appreciated from a reading of the entire novel:

Let there be a statistician. And let that statistician take a coin and toss it a million times. And suppose he obtain, as the result, half a million heads, near enough, and half a million tails: what of it? He may conclude the coin has two sides, a fair, but not infallible, assumption; he may go further, and wish to predict the same thing will happen again: that number which expresses the extent to which his jaw will drop and his eyebrows rise if this prediction is not met, is called probability, a weighty concept, like a learned professor, whose vast, imposing historical theses become, in transit from the past, increasingly suspect and threadbare, and smaller and smaller, till after a final, wild senescence, during which their teeth fall out and their limbs fly off in every direction, they collapse and expire at the feet of that unfortunate presently sitting in class, in respect of whom they are both utterly meaningless and totally irrelevant, like a runaway velocipede careering down a hill, or a dead planet hurtling into a star. The past stops here. It might be thought no man would deal with a bookmaker who, while declining all wagers of under a thousand guineas, refused to pay out on an even money bet; or set up as an oracle a creature who having thrown ten million coins, is none the wiser on the outcome of the next; on the contrary; such is the faith of men in this pathetic oracle, the first of its kind to work on the dispiriting assumption that what has been must be, without providing one shred of evidence as to why this should be so, or indeed, accepting the least responsibility if it is not; that the only way they can be convinced of the existence of precognitive powers, is by finding some person, who, without being correct, is still less in error than the oracle: this, they hold to be unaccountable, and contrary to the laws of nature.

It's not so much as a form guide, however, the oracle finds its chief use, as the means of knobbling every starter in a race but the odds-on favorite. Suppose that over the course of eons the coin has become rational, able to read a newspaper and decide things for itself. Suppose further, that shortly before a mass toss of every coin in the kingdom, a survey be taken of a small sample, carefully selected at random, to produce the following

result: *Massive landslide! Confidence slips! 51 per cent to Fall Heads!* Consider further, the individual coin when confronted with this information: will he reject it as twice irrelevant (at least) to his own situation? It is possible to prove—and this Finbar does—that regardless of the so-called ‘facts’, such a technique will invariably produce, on an unsophisticated readership, a measurable and by no means trivial effect, on the outcome of the final distribution.

(159-60).

To begin with, Foster presents us with semi-pantheistic British Isles clansmen, wonderfully exemplary of “nasty-short-and-brutish” pretechnological society. The MacDuffies of Mugg cover by night in fear of the “Spirit Host”, of which they are atavistically aware in the high cries of the numerous seafoal in the region, bent on migration or merely on the daily pulse of their lives. MacDuffies by day view the world with the vertiginous perception of malnutrition. They totter nauseously through drunken celebration of their major ages and stages and of the dubious benefits afforded them in their indolent survival at the hands of a regime of ice-bowelled place spirits. Erratically they coax some sort of survival from the grudging half-inch or two of topsoil covering the granite that for them is the earth.

At the bilious whim of the MacIshmael, literally arbiter of life and death, Flora, a sceptical clanswoman of Christian pretensions, is packed off in exile to neighboring Hiphoray. There she eventually bears Finbar, an albino manifestation of the Spirit-Host and son of his own second cousin, Flora’s deceased first cousin-husband. Unlike the Gillies and the Murdos of Hiphoray, Finbar is singularly unsuited to the precarious life of this island. For them the fulmar indicates the presence of a brutally inscrutable divinity, as well as being the source of their practical necessities. Their fatalism opposes robustly the demands of the ‘outside world’ that they ‘modernise’ their ways to join the produce-consume-die cycle of life elsewhere.

Only at the hands of mercantile Christianity, as preached by the fearsomely proselytising minister Campbell, does the collapse of the culture and spirit of Hiphoray occur. With the death of paganism begins the real emergence of Finbar, who at his mother’s guileful if anxious insistence has become the minister’s protege. The latter half of the novel accounts for Finbar’s wanderings

through morality and science, visionary experience and the workaday. It is a progress through western rationalism and paganistic imaginings. Finbar’s pursuit of his true vocation and the meaning of things is quietly allegorical in the mode of a number of the earlier venturers along the same path, including the (by comparison) white-livered Rasselas.

Always alien, sometimes saint-naif, sometimes ingenu-prestigitator, philosopher, preacher and mathematician, Finbar enacts the seemingly infinite adaptability of the true picaro. His experience of the world is central to the novel: whether it is of pagan and Christian Britain, including the dreaming spires of “Newbridge”; or of colonial Australia, fictionalised as the goldfields of the New West Highlands, where an alcohol-sodden populace brawls its way to materialistic perdition. It is towards a realisation of these Australian conditions that Foster’s narrative impulse thrusts. Although it has its own integrity too, the rest has been a preparation for his revelations of the not-quite-ultimate awfulness of N.W.H. and its capital Boomtown, where humanity suffers a deprivation so intense, unrelieved even by culmination in spiritual extinction.

It is in that locale that we are most horribly aware of the possibility that human values and incidentally our own existence count for as little as the proverbial bumper. So, anyway, it appears to Finbar, who, upon dying in an Aboriginal ritual, contrived to test his nature as “nother kind”, as “clever fella”, tussles with the Rainbow Fella before reappearing as the spirit he has always really been. His subsequent final rejection of his own humanity cancels notions of resurrection and with them any redemptive comfort towards which Foster has been leading his readers. The futility is immense, the novelist’s judgement utterly cheerless: and all the more for the hilarity with which the doom is presented. Like Furphy before him, Foster initiates within his narrative a compulsion that is at once emotional and philosophical. Like *Such Is Life*, *Moonlite* in the end becomes its own exemplum. Its author’s brilliantly relativistic dramatisation of meaning in language is more than merely experimental. Like Furphy, Foster has written a quicksilver tale.

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## ON UQP'S SELECTION

Graham Rowlands

Andrew Taylor: *Selected Poems* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia 4067, \$5.95).  
R. A. Simpson: *Selected Poems* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia 4067, \$5.95).

In the shrunken world of major press Australian poetry publishing, UQP would have done better to have published two first collections by new poets than Taylor's *Selected Poems*. He's only forty-two. Moreover, his earlier paperback collections are still available. By contrast, Simpson's early hardback collections are out of print. Thus, starting a decade before Taylor's and eighteen-pages shorter, Simpson's *Selected Poems* are a service to readers under forty. I wish I liked them as much as I do the best of Taylor's.

The latter's most consistent facility is vivid visual imagery. Most poems include at least one splendid metaphor or simile. Unless satisfied with Imagism in the late twentieth century, the reader looks for poems where this talent fuses with insight and significance.

There's been a general shift in Taylor's work from the clear, well-made poem to the surreal sequence, although the change isn't mutually exclusive. He usually writes some excellent poems no matter what his specific poetic aim. Still, he wrote more excellent poems in *The Invention of Fire* (1976) than he has written in all his other work. Unfortunately, these include poems not *Selected*.

Taylor has written numerous pieces about his relatives, although never better than the early "Developing a wife", that fully realized poem of psychological tension and complexity:

Or is it I that I'm developing here—  
my dream, my vision of her,  
my sleight of hand?

He's not a partisan political poet. Even so, guns being necessary in the land of the free in "Memorial day, USA 1971" is quite direct. In "The Ice Fisherman, Lake Erie" he's attracted by the fisherman's hope in a revoltingly polluted environment. A decade later he uses a similar technique in "The Fence" where natural landscape is evoked as scenery, only to be overtaken by politics imposed on the landscape. Such poems aren't usually associated with the poet's sensibility. They should be.

The typical Taylor poem before *The Invention*

*of Fire* was always on the verge of saying nothing: sensitive, subtle, pastel and easily dismissed as slight. "The very beautiful winter day in the park" is his major achievement in this area of experience. Just spending the day in the park seems ridiculous. Why should it? Why shouldn't he? But then, why should he? Only a poet in total command of sparkling imagery could make it work. The later "Beyond Silence II" is similar but surreal in structure, a way of opening up either a relationship or just the poet to the complete interpenetration of stunningly effective imagery:

Into this battery of burnt electrodes  
this shipyard of nutshells  
this tenement of broken pianos and wire  
walked a flame naked as grief.

*The Invention of Fire* and his recent "The Gods" express the absence of Metaphysics from life. Rather than delight in bringing various gods crashing down, or perhaps mourning their fall, Taylor invents genuinely beautiful possibilities in their absence. These pieces tend to combine the well-made poem with surreal imagery. Worlds of meaning and make-believe merge as in "The Invention of Fire".

If Taylor's successes are scattered across his whole range, so are his flaws. To judge that he has too many slight poems is both subjective and unavoidable. In crudest terms, his imagery often swamps his subject matter—for example in "The Cat's Chin and Ears" (1975) and other animal poems that are no more than exercises in virtuosity and preciousness. In some of his most pronounced Modernist poems—for example "The Fountain"—wilful obscurity camouflages the absence of anything to say. But the fact that *Selected Poems* is both unnecessary and too long shouldn't blind us to the superb quality and beauty of at least some of his poems.

Simpson's poems are uniformly competent, often rhyming, regular, well-made, intelligible short pieces about the world. They cover a wide range of subjects, public and private, contemporary and historical. While rarely breaking into insights, they always work through to conclusions or, at least, to final questions.

I should be excited by them. I respect their craftsmanship. I often agree with their viewpoints. They don't, however, excite me. They lack magic. Poetic magic, for me, usually consists of vivid visual imagery including metaphors, similes

and the colors of the spectrum; particular rather than general focus and concrete rather than abstract language. Unfortunately the poet achieves uniform competence only at the expense of *neutralizing* his subject matter in and by the tone and composition of his language.

I don't know why Simpson rarely uses colors in his imagery, although it's a remarkable restraint for a lecturer in art. Since metaphors and similes are used sparingly, the world is referred to (it's hardly evoked) by description and categories. These opening lines are typical:

September, and the final mists impose  
Their gentleness on garden, trees and lawns.

The reader learns nothing more about this setting. The state of "gentleness" isn't evoked by mist, garden, tree or lawn imagery. It's "imposed" on them by the poet's use of a verb usually associated with the world of manners, a *non-visual* verb. Hundreds of lines like these make dull reading.

Equally neutralizing is the poet's tendency to use concrete words in a necessarily abstract way:

Yet quickly words undo, melt  
The bulwarks borne by fear  
Till flesh is felt  
Deeply, desire is clear.

In these lines from "Estranged at Midnight" the reader has to make a conscious effort to jettison the visual "bulwarks". Here the *concrete* is metaphorical. We need to read "bulwarks" *non-visually*. Moreover, repetition gives the impression of neutral language that homogenizes its subjects. Well-known poems that should be excluded from this argument—"Diver" and "Lake"—employ fine imagery. How significant!

The neutralizing language isn't all loss. When Simpson writes *about* neutrality of mood and landscape he has a readymade language, as in "New Year's Eve: St Kilda". The neutralizing language doesn't highlight religious *experience*; it does, however, highlight anti-religious *arguments*, as in "Lachryma Christi" and the last stanza of "Words for Our Daughter":

Yet if they could my words would say "believe"  
For there all comfort lies, and thorns and nails  
Will never cause you agony and death  
Unless you doubt, and then the points are real.

I don't know to what extent the poet has used dramatic monologue to avoid his neutraliz-

ing words. When he makes a dingo trapper, an executioner, a pyramid slave, Carboni Raffaello, Cesare Borgia and Napoleon all sound like R. A. Simpson, however, it's pleasing to find that he tries to make Squizzy Taylor sound different, and succeeds in "Tram Driver's Song":

I die. I'm born again.  
The bell is holy and like Mass —  
And look, I rise above the ground.  
The people marvel, can't get on.  
There was no sound.  
I've turned to gas.  
Hold on. Hold on.

Simpson can also vary tone (if not words) to the humorous and playful. The best examples are "All Friends Together" using the first names of Australian poets, "My Funeral" which treats the subject fantastically, and "The Little People", a poem which the poet says he could end anytime. These lines are a relief, no matter how inconsequential.

Despite this, it's disturbing to find that the poet can't heighten his tone and language to express the suffering that's most personally obvious from *The Forbidden City* (1979) onwards. I'd like to believe that this inability stems from some deep-seated language problem rather than a failure of nerve. Knowing his low opinion of Anne Elder's marvellous poetry, however, more than one reader must wonder whether Simpson is determined to avoid any resemblance to Sylvia Plath, Dylan Thomas, G. M. Hopkins. Perhaps the list of writers he finds over-written would include even Shakespeare.

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## SHALLOWS AND MISERIES

Serge Liberman

Joan Clarke: *The Doctor who Dared — The Story of Henry Price . . .* (Tully Press, \$19.95, distributed by A.P.C. Ltd., PO Box 146, Chippendale, NSW 2008.)

What can be avoided

Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?  
What is lacking in this excellent biography of Dr Henry Price, "The Doctor Who Dared", is the Delphic oracle at the outset prophesying that the boy born in Kattowitz in Upper Silesia would, through an inexorable chain of events, end his days in faraway Sydney, Australia, to predict the

inordinately tortuous course of his life through a maze of countries, corridors of officialdom, medical establishments and law courts, against a backdrop of historical events more acutely revolutionary and cataclysmic than in any other period.

Consider the story. There was little doubt that Henry Price, born Hans Preiss in 1904, would follow his revered father, Eduard Preiss, into medicine. The boy pursued his studies (and revelries) in Breslau, Freiburg, Vienna and, finally, Berlin where he graduated MD and, in time, entered hospital practice in obstetrics and gynaecology, his ultimate aim nothing less than a professorship in a famed German university.

But by April 1933 Hans Preiss, being Jewish, was without work. All Jewish doctors were being progressively dismissed from German hospitals. To the older Dr Preiss, a German of Jewish faith, his country's upheavals and regulations were but a temporary madness, a mere aberration which an enlightened cultured German people would soon overcome. Hans Preiss, now unemployed, was more realistic. Hans Preiss settled, married and worked in Lebanon. But that fate that brought him security and a certain renown in Lebanon worked against him when, in 1939, World War II broke out, Germany and France were at war and Hans Preiss, a German national, was arrested and interned as an enemy alien; a bitter irony, this.

Preiss, however, eventually received a commission with the British Royal Army Medical Corps, Palestine Division, and was working at the General Hospital in Cairo when the war ended in 1945. Weary of war, Preiss now sought another haven where there was no war and where his infant son by his second wife Ursula would know freedom and peace. His choice fell upon Australia. It was far away; it was a British-oriented country; and, after a short period of study, he would be permitted to practise medicine there. Yet it was in quiet remote Australia that he was yet to have his toughest fight.

Graduating MB, BS in 1948 after two years' study in Brisbane, he set up practice in Wollongong, south of Sydney, a mining district reminiscent of his childhood Kattowitz and peopled by many new immigrants from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany and other places. His practice flourished. Soon after arrival, he was earning more than many other practitioners who had been in the area a working lifetime. More and more, he became isolated. Jealousy, xenophobia, hints of anti-Semitism, suspicion of his different,

European, operating techniques alienated him from local doctors and Wollongong Hospital nursing staff alike. In due course, his rights as an honorary at the hospital were revoked; he was subjected to the humiliation of being permitted to operate on his patients only under the supervision of his peers, some of them already well past their prime and peak of competence. In this, he saw an attempt to freeze him out of Wollongong.

A lesser man, less set on preserving personal dignity, might have bent to the collective will. Preiss, now Henry Price, however, fought back, making representations to the Wollongong Hospital Board, the local branch of the British Medical Association, members of parliament, the local Labor Party (strong in that industrial area), the Minister of Health. None of these prevailing, he took the last and most difficult resource of all. In July 1952, he issued a writ against the eleven doctors serving on the Board, charging them with defamation, conspiracy and libel. The 'establishment's' defence buckled under the cross-examination of Price's lawyers and, after a prolonged legal battle, he won a private settlement which permitted his reinstatement at the hospital. The case became a cause célèbre, a landmark both in medical and in legal history.

The legal battle was won, but at a personal level, he still had slurs and innuendos to endure and the deliberate difficulties set in his path by the hospital nursing staff. In 1958, Preiss established a practice in Sydney. In 1965 his second wife died of cancer. His two sons grew up and went their separate ways. He contracted a third marriage, this, like the first, a disastrous one. Clinging to whatever joy was still to be had, he died in 1975.

Joan Clarke's is a valuable volume, as much for being a lucid portrait of a strong-willed individual as for being a well-researched historical document covering seventy years of a world in violent flux. As in her previous work about another medical man, Max Herz, her sympathies lie unabashedly with the individual at war with the establishment. But one is led to wonder how much of the opprobrium that fell upon Henry Price might have been of his own making. Hints abound that he may not have been an easy man to get along with. In his own home, he was authoritarian, volatile, impulsive and demanding. Though seeking to work in with his professional colleagues in Wollongong, he may well have been not a little arrogant in the defence of his

methods. Adhering to his German training, he was not one to indulge in the customary idle chatter of the operating theatre, nor to explain to the nursing staff, his underlings, the reasons for his techniques. Further, aware of his station as a doctor, as a man of a high profession, he shuddered at egalitarianism, and, repeatedly penning letters to authorities of every rank and to the press, he gives every evidence of being a particularly prickly customer. Just as he could not lightly suffer fools, officialdom was not such as to suffer men who would stand tall.

Joan Clarke makes much of fate in her book. Given her subject's character, the events that pursued him and compelled him, at every turn, to make momentous decisions or to succumb, combined with those chaotic vagaries of chance that bedevil all men's lives, Henry Price's life could scarcely have evolved in any other way.

*Serge Liberman, a Melbourne medical practitioner, is the author of the recent collection On Firmer Shores.*

*It was a special strength of Victorian poetry that, along with a measureless hospitality to new or strange verse-forms and an often under-regarded readiness to admit unauthorised, even dangerous subject-matter, there went a very firm set of assumptions about the pre-eminence of technique, the poet's duty to be as lucid as the occasion permitted and the perils of affection and self-indulgence — and how mercilessly those who stepped out of line were ridiculed and parodied. This helped not only to make the great poets great but the second-rate ones good and the third-rate ones not too bad. Snatch up Coventry Patmore, James Thomson, Philip Bourke Marston, Jean Ingelow and put them down in the twentieth century, and where would they be?*

*Well, we know where they would probably be, sunk in formlessness and egotism like most of our contemporaries, unable to set about developing their talents, unable even to distinguish their accidental moments of relative success. One of the things that stops the Victorians being too accessible to us is their trick of making us look rather shabby.*

Kingsley Amis, *London Observer*, 25 April 1982.

# Index to Overland Nos. 81-88

(81,10 means Issue 81, page 10)

## FICTION

Best, John: Outline — The Third	87,2	Davis, Faye: A Memo	88,36
Bibby, Peter: The Way to the Port	88,37	Dawe, Bruce: Apotheosis	84,19
Burns, D. R.: The Layman	85,60	Back-stage at the Con	88,30
Clanchy, John: The Boys Won't Leave the Girls Alone	84,31	Birth Rite	84,18
Corris, Peter: After the Bell	86,2	Living in Queensland	87,30
Dawson, Jonathan: A Test for Loving Readers What Jack Deserves	87,36	The Son	82,33
Foster, D. M.: Hiphoray	81,15	Dobson, Rosemary: Daily Living and Daily Dying	81,37
Goldsworthy, Peter: The Intellectual	87,48	Dowling, Barry: Crows with Still Life	84,21
Harwood, Gwen: Gemini	88,2	Drummond, Robert: Nausea in Launceston The Night They Admitted Me to the Psychiatric Ward	87,31
Hyde, Dennis: The Local Legion	84,2		87,50
Martin, David: An Emotional Type	85,2	Dutton, Geoffrey: On Editing a Collection of Unpublished Work	81,29
McQueen, James: The Bush Bronzewing	83,2	Ewart, Gavin: At The Party	86,21
Walsh, Francis: Lights	81,2	Farrar, Jill M.: Friends	88,34
Williams, Ian: Poor Baby	88,46	Featherstone Porter, Dorothy: Bushfire at Waterfall	85,39
Wood, Ray: Smoko	82,2	Wilson's Diary	88,29

## POEMS

Aitken, Michael: Reduced	85,32	Fewer, Bill: Johnny Jack's Squeezebox & A Little Toot	87,29
Auchterlonie, Dorothy: Climbing Everest The Maiden and Death	81,34	Finnin, Mary: Silvereye View	81,29
Bailey, Peter: Shoplifting	85,39	Fitzgerald, Robert D.: Across the Street, 1921	81,28
Beach, Eric: I'm Not Proud Nobody thinks I Look my my Best: an Autobiography	82,29	Gibson, Lucy: Waterford	85,31
	85,38	Giles, Barbara: Toulouse Lautrec's Elles	83,19
	82,36	Gould, Alan: The House from the Road	86,21
	87,31	Habost, Robert: Leaving Jerusalem before Sunrise	84,18
	88,31	Harrington, Terry: Harvest	86,20
Blight, John: 1980's	82,31	Harris, Robert: Bile	82,33
After the Beachcombers	88,34	Either the Barge or the Armchair	85,34
Beach Restoration	88,34	History	85,34
Container-ships	88,34	Letters and Dots	85,34
The Epileptics	81,31	Harris, Rory: The Drunk	85,35
The Modern Poet's Dilemma	84,20	Harry, J. S.: Frame	85,30
The Turtle-Egg Complex	84,21 86,23	Griffith 1977	85,30
Boult, Jenny: Honey-Eaters in a Poinsettia Tree	82,31	Rind/Peels back to Monday	82,31
Poems for my Father	85,36	The Hunting 'Woods'	82,32
The Schooner of Roses	82,30	Time Out of Mind	85,30
Brett, Doris: Between Friends	84,22	Hart-Smith, William: Shell Collection Silver-Eyes	82,34
Flirt's Desserts	88,29	Sinking	81,34
Brett, Lily: Things that Matter	86,21	Smoke Signal	82,35
Brophy, Kevin: Lygon Cowboy	84,19	Harvey, Philip: A tree on a Chair	85,33
Buttrose, Larry: The Politics of Humus	84,23	Harwood, Gwen: A Mature Woman to Larry Buttrose	82,33
Catalano, Gary: Water Music	87,28	Lamplight	82,32
Cato, Nancy: Barometer	81,29	Oyster Cove Pastorals	81,30
India	81,28	Hay, P. R.: Logic and Art	85,31
Catt, Chris: Grose River	88,32	Hay, R. G.: Conceit	81,35
The Antarctic Pilot	88,32	Relatives	86,22
		Healy, Ian: At the National Library	81,36





McCullough, Alan: Dyson	86,27	Deane, Shirley: <i>Ambon, Island of Spices</i> (Charles Coppel)	81,70
McLaren, John: Letter From Cambridge	83,57	De Serville, Paul: <i>Port Phillip Gentlemen</i> (P. L. Brown)	81,64
McQuilton, John: The Legend of Ned Kelly	84,38	Dezsery, Andrew: <i>Neighbours</i> (Patricia Thompson)	83,71
Militunovic, Iris: Letter from Devonport	82,13	Disher, Gary: <i>Approaches</i> (John Tittensor)	87,62
Mitchison, Naomi: Africa and Us	81,10	Dransfield, Michael: <i>The Second Month of Spring</i> (Graham Rowlands)	82,65
Morrison, John: Escape	88,41	Eagle, Mary and Jan Minchin: <i>The George Bell School</i> (Richard Haese)	88,59
Oakley, Barry and Rowan Cahill: Sydney and the Moorhouse Years	82,42	Forbes, John: <i>Stalin's Holidays</i> (Graham Rowlands)	86,62
O'Donnell, G. C.: New Guinea Does Not Exist	81,42	Foster, David: <i>Moonlite</i> (Michael Cotter)	88,62
O'Hearn, D. J.: Re-reading Peter Mathers	85,47	Foster, S. G.: <i>Colonial Improver: Edward Deas Thomson 1800-1879</i> (A. G. Austin)	81,71
Sandercock, Leonie: Castes and Outcasts	84,8	Grono, William and Nicholas Hasluck: <i>On the Edge</i> (Graham Rowlands)	84,71
Sendy, John: Red Retrospect	82,50	Haese, Richard: <i>Revels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art</i> (Terry Smith)	86,60
Shapcott, Tom: Into Europe	82,46	Hardy, Frank: <i>Who shot George Kirkland?</i> (Michael Cotter)	88,62
Sharkey, Michael: Les Murray's Many Sidedness	82,19	Hasluck, Paul: <i>Diplomatic Witness</i> (Walter Crocker)	82,66
Smith, Beverley: Popular Culture Revisited	88,27	Hazzard, Shirley: <i>The Transit of Venus</i> (R. G. Geering)	83,69
Strachan, Frank: The Iron Mask of Australia	84,42	Holloway, Peter: <i>Contemporary Australian Drama: Perspectives since 1955</i> (John Barnes)	85,74
Stretton, Hugh: Communism and the Intellectuals	81,5	Holt, Bob: <i>From Ingleburn to Aitape</i> (Harry H. Jackman)	88,53
Tipping, Richard: Word Works	82,38	Holt, Stephen: <i>Manning Clark</i> (Manning Clark)	88,51
Turner, George: Looking at a Portrait Some Unreceived Wisdom	87,20	Humphries, Barry: <i>A Nice Night's Enter- tainment</i> (Dennis Pryor)	86,63
Turner, Graeme: For the Term of his Natural Life	86,51	Huntford, Roland: <i>Scott and Amundsen</i> (Phillip Law)	82,58
Waten, Judah: Seventy Years	86,16	Ireland, David: <i>City of Women</i> (Helen Daniel)	85,72
Waterson, Duncan: Prescott Clarke	82,55	Jones, Barry O.: <i>Sleepers Wake!</i> (Max Charlesworth)	88,52
Westbrook, Eric: L.F. L.R.	82,27	Kelen, Stephen K.: <i>To the Heart of the World's Electricity</i> (Graham Rowlands)	84,69
Wilding, Michael; Jack Lindsay	86,47	Liberman, Serge: <i>On Firmer Shores</i> (John Tittensor)	87,62
Wran, Neville: A New Consensus?	83,40	Lunn, Richard: <i>Pompeii Deep Fry</i> (Graham Rowlands)	84,69
Yencken, David: The Deep Dung of Cash	81,23	Lurie, Morris: <i>Dirty Friends</i> (Susan McKernan)	88,56
Zable, Arnold: I Want a Hippopotamus	88,5	Macintyre, Stuart: <i>A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-33</i> (Robin Gollan)	83,67
	81,62	<i>Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-War Britain</i> (Robin Gollan)	83,67

## REVIEWS

Author and title of book, reviewer in brackets.

Bennett, Ross: <i>river</i> (Graham Rowlands)	86,62		
Bolton, Geoffrey: <i>Spoils and Spoilers</i> . . . (George Seddon)	87,55		
Boult, Jenny: <i>The Hotel Anonymous</i> (Graham Rowlands)	85,75		
Bray, J. J.: <i>Poems 1972-79</i> (John McLaren)	81,69		
Bryson, John: <i>Whoring Around</i> (Susan McKernan)	88,56		
Brissenden, R. F.: <i>The Whale in Darkness</i> (John McLaren)	81,69		
Buckley, Vincent: <i>Late Winter Child</i> (Graham Rowlands)	82,70		
		<i>The Pattern</i> (Graham Rowlands)	82,70
Burchett, Wilfred: <i>At the Barricades</i> (John Sendy)	85,76		
Carey, Peter: <i>Bliss</i> (Susan McKernan)	88,56		
Catalano, Gary: <i>The Years of Hope</i> . . . (Richard Haese)	85,70		
Clancy, Laurie: <i>The Wife Specialist</i> (Michael Cotter)	88,62		
Clark, Axel: <i>Christopher Brennan</i> (Brian Matthews)	84,66		
Clark, C. M. H.: <i>A History of Australia</i> , vol. 5 (Marian Aveling)	87,60		
Clarke, Joan: <i>The Doctor who Dared</i> (Serge Liberman)	88,67		
Connell, Gordon: <i>The Mystery of Ludwig Leichhardt</i> (Warren Bonython)	82,68		
Cresciani, Gianfranco: <i>Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945</i> (Amirah Inglis)	85,65		
Crossley, Rosemary and Anne McDonald: <i>Annie's Coming Out</i> (Denison Deasey)	87,63		
		McQueen, James: <i>The Escape Machine</i> (Michael Cotter)	88,62
		Martin, A. W.: <i>Henry Parkes: a Biography</i> (Stuart Macintyre)	85,69
		Moppert, Fia: <i>Out of the Corner of One Eye</i> (Susan McKernan)	88,56
		Nairn, Bede and Geoffrey Serle: <i>Australian Dic- tionary of Biography</i> vol. 8 (Barry Jones)	88,61
		Powling, J. W.: <i>Port Fairy — The First Fifty Years</i> (P. L. Brown)	81,64
		Radley, Paul: <i>Jack Rivers and Me</i> (Richard Harris)	85,78
		Reid, Ian: <i>Fiction and the Great Depression</i> (Stuart Macintyre)	82,63
		Rolls, Eric: <i>A Million Wild Acres</i> (George Seddon)	87,55
		Salom, Philip: <i>The Silent Piano</i> (Graham Rowlands)	84,69
		Semmler, Clement: <i>The ABC — Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow</i> (Anthony McAdam)	84,62

Simpson, R. A.: <i>Selected Poems</i> (Graham Rowlands)	88,65	Wallace-Crabbe, Chris: <i>Splinters</i> (John Tittensor)	87,62
Strauss, Jennifer: <i>Winter Driving</i> (Graham Rowlands)	86,62	<i>Toil and Spin: Two directions in modern poetry</i> (L. A. C. Dobrez)	81,67
Talbot, Norman: <i>where two rivers meet</i> (Graham Rowlands)	86,62	Webster, E. M.: <i>Whirlwinds in the Plain</i> (Warren Bonython)	82,68
Taylor, Andrew: <i>Selected Poems</i> (Graham Rowlands)	88,65	Weller, Archie: <i>The Day of the Dog</i> (Richard Harris)	85,78
Tomasetti, Glen: <i>Man of Letters</i> (Susan McKernan)	88,56	Wilde, W. H. and T. Inglis Moore: <i>Letters of Mary Gilmore</i> (A. A. Phillips)	83,65

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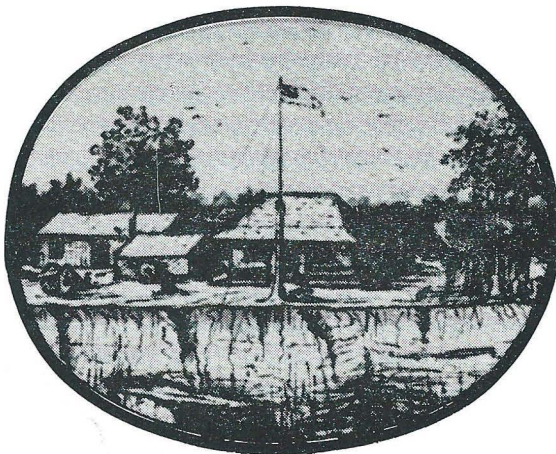
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