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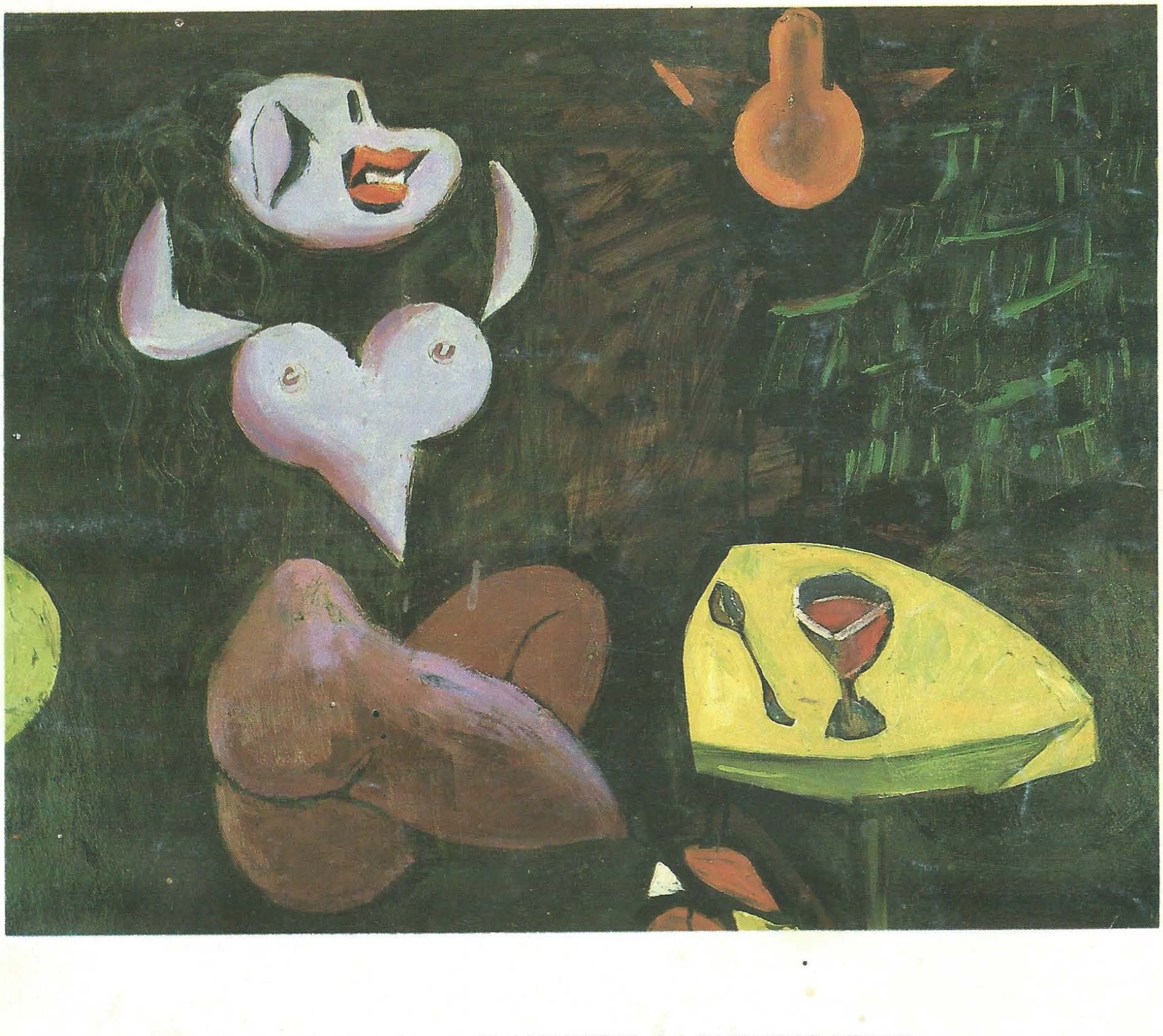

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ELIZABETH JOLLEY

Paper Children

Clara Schultz lying alone in a strange hotel bedroom was suddenly confronted by the most horrible thoughts For a woman accustomed to the idea that she would live for ever, having lived, it seemed for ever, these thoughts were far from welcome. For instead of being concerned with her immortality they were, without doubt, gravely about her own death.

Perhaps it was the long journey by air. She had travelled from Vienna, several hours in an aeroplane with the clock being altered relentlessly while her own body did not change so easily. She was on her way to her daughter. She had not seen her since she was a baby and now she was a grown woman, a stranger, married to a farmer. A man much younger than herself and from a background quite unknown to Clara and so somewhat despised by her. She confided nothing of this thought, rather she boasted of her daughter's marriage.

"I am going to visit Lisa, my daughter, you know," she told her neighbour Irma Rosen. Sometimes they stopped to talk on the stairs in the apartment house in the Lehar Strasse and Clara would impress on Irma forcefully.

"My daughter is married to an Australian farmer and expecting her first child. All these years I have only a paper daughter and now my paper children, my daughter and son in law, they want me to come, they have invited me!" And Irma whose smooth face was like a pink sugar cake on the handworked lace collar of her dress nodded and smiled with admiration.

It was only when she was alone Clara despised the farmer husband, she was able to overlook completely that her despising was in reality a kind of fear of him and his piece of land.

"We are in a valley," Lisa wrote to her mother. Clara tried to imagine the valley. She had in her mind a picture of a narrow green flower splashed place with pine trees on the steep slopes above the clusters of painted wooden houses, like in the Alps, very gay and always in holiday mood. She tried to alter the picture because Lisa described tall trees with white bark and dry leaves which glittered in the bright sunshine, she wrote also of dust and corrugated iron and wire netting and something called weatherboard. Clara found it hard to imagine these things she had never seen.

No one can know when death will come or how. Alone in the hotel, Clara thought what if she should go blind before dying. She thought of her room at home, what if she had to grope in that familiar place unable to find her clothes, unable to see where her books and papers were. She lay with her eyes closed and tried to see her desk and her lamp and her silver inkwell, trying to place things in order in her mind so that she would find her way from one possession to the next.

What if she should go blind now here in this strange room, not knowing any other person here. In a sudden fear she pushed back the bedclothes and put her small white fat feet out of the bed and stood on the strange floor and groped like a blind person for the light switch.

"Lisa," she said to her daughter gently so as not to startle the girl. Lisa turned, she had a very white face, she moved awkwardly and her face was small as if she was in pain. She was much younger than her mother expected her to be. Beside her was a little girl of about two years, she had fair hair cut square across a wan little forehead. The child had been crying.

"What a dear little girl," Clara said as pleasantly as she knew how. "What do you call her?"

"Sharon."

"Cheri?"

"No. Sharon."

"Ach! What a pretty name. Come here to Gross Mutti my darlink," but the little girl hid behind the half open door.

"What a pretty place you have, Lisa," Clara tried. "Pretty! Pretty!" She waved her short plump arm towards the desolate scene of the neglected hillside, cleared years ago, scraped and never planted; patches of prickly secondary growth littered the spaces between collapsing sheds and the tangles of wire netting where some fowls had lived their lives laying eggs.

The house, in decay, cried out for mercy, it was a place quite uncherished. The rust on the iron roof was like a disease, scabs of it scaled off and marked the verandah as if with an infection. Clara wondered why. Poverty perhaps or was Lisa feckless. Clara had no patience with a feckless woman. If they were poor, well she had money, and she would help Lisa. All the tenderness stored up over the empty years was there to be poured forth, now on her child and her child's property.

"Have you hurt yourself, Lisa?" Clara tried again, softly, gently as if speaking in a dream. She had not expected a little girl. She knew only that her daughter was pregnant.

"Lisa wants me to be near when she has her baby, my paper children want me," Clara told Irma on the stairs and Irma nodded her approval. "So I burn up my ships as they say in English and go," Clara had taken many big steps in her life but never such a final one as this one might be. Australia was such a long way off from Vienna, it almost could not exist it was so remote.

"They have fifty cows and sheeps and chickens." Such space was not to be imagined on the dark stairs of the apartment. "Such a long way!" Clara said. "But air travel, you know, makes the world so much smaller."

"Have you hurt yourself, Lisa?" gently she approached the pale young woman who was her unknown daughter.

"Aw, it's nuthin'," the girl replied. "He threw me down the other night, I kept tellin' him 'You're hurtin' my back!' but he took no notice. 'You're hurtin' my back!' I shouted at him!" she rubbed the end of her spine.

Clara flinched with a real hurt.

"Pete, this is my mother," Lisa said as a short, thick-set young man, very sunburned and bullet shaped came round the side of the house. He threw a bucket to his wife. "Mother, this is Pete."

As they stood together the sun slid quickly into the scrub on the far hillside and long shadows raced one after the other across and along the sad valley. Clara had never seen such a pair of people and in such dreary hopeless surroundings. She felt so strange and so alone in the gathering darkness of the evening.

The little muscular husband shouted something at Lisa and marched off with hardly a look at his new mother in law. Clara couldn't help remembering the Gestapo and their friend, they thought he was their friend, the one who became a Gauleiter. That was it! Gauleiter Peter Gregory married to her daughter Lisa.

"This man is my father's friend," proudly Clara had introduced the friend to her husband only to experience in a very short time a depth of betrayal and cruelty quite beyond her comprehension. Friends became enemies overnight. Lisa's husband somehow reminded Clara unexpectedly of those times.

"Have you something to put on your back?" Clara asked.

"Like what?" the girl looked partly amused and partly defiant.

"Menthol Camphor or something like that," Clara felt the remoteness between them, a kind of wandering between experience and dreams. She moved her hand in a circular movement. "Something to massage, you know."

At first Lisa didn't understand, perhaps it was the unusual English her mother spoke, Clara repeated the suggestion slowly.

"Aw, no! Had a ray lamp but he dropped it larst night! Threw it down most likely but he said he dropped it. 'The lamp's died,' he said. I thought I'd die laughin' but I was that mad at him, reely I was!"

"Should we, perhaps, go indoors." Clara was beginning to feel cold. The Gauleiter was coming back. "I just have these few packages," Clara indicated her luggage which was an untidy circle about her. But the young couple had gone into the cottage leaving her to deal with her baggage as well as she could.

Trying to hear some sort of sound she heard the voice of Gauleiter Peter Gregory shouting at his wife, her daughter Lisa, and she heard Lisa scream back at her husband. Voices and words she couldn't hear and understand properly from the doorway of the asbestos porch. She heard the husband push the wife so that she must have stumbled, she heard Lisa fall against a piece of furniture which also fell, a howl of pain from Lisa and the little child, Sharon, began to cry.

Clara entered the airless dishevelled room. Because of all she was carrying it was difficult, so many bundles. "One cannot make such a journey without luggage," Clara explained to Irma as, buried in packages, she said goodbye to her neighbour. "Goodbye, Irma. Goodbye for ever, dear friend."

Besides she had presents for Lisa and even something for that husband.

Lisa looked up almost with trumph at her mother.

"I'm seven months gone," she said, "and he wouldn't care if he killed me!" The husband's sunburned face disappeared in the gloom of the dirty room.

"Oh," Clara said pleasantly, "she is too young to die and far too pretty."

"Huh! me pretty!" Lisa scoffed and, awkwardly, because of the pain in her back, she eased herself into a chair.

"Who's young!" the husband muttered in the dark. Clara didn't know if he was sitting or standing. "Well, we women must back each other up," she said, wasting a smile. Whatever could she do about Lisa's pain.

Clara fumbled with the straps on her bag.

"Come Sharon, my pretty little one. See what your Gross Mutti has brought for you all across the world." The child stood whimpering as far from Clara as possible while the parents watched in silence.

And Clara was quite unable to unfasten the bag.

She had never been frightened of anything in her whole life. Dr. Clara Schultz (she always used an abbreviation of her maiden name), Director of the Clinic for Women (Out Patients' Department), University Lecturer, wife of the Professor of Islamic Studies, he was also an outstanding scholar of Hebrew. Clara Margarethe Carolina, daughter of a Baroness, nothing frightened her, not even the things that frightened women, thunder and mice and cancer.

Even during the occupation she had been without fear. They were living on the outskirts of the city at that time. One afternoon she returned early from the Clinic intending to prepare a lecture and she noticed there was a strange stillness in the garden. The proud bantam cock they had then was not crowing. He was nowhere in sight. Usually he strutted about, an intelligent brightly coloured little bird, and the afternoons were shattered by his voice as he crowed till dusk as if to keep the darkness of the night from coming too soon. The two hens, Cecilia and Gretchen, stood alone and disconsolate like two little pieces of white linen left by the laundress on the green grass.

Clara looked for the little rooster but was unable to find him. His disappearance was an omen.

Calmly Clara transferred money to Switzerland and at once, in spite of difficulties and personal grief, she arranged for her two year old baby daughter to be taken to safety while she remained to do her work.

A few days later she found the bantam cock, he was caught by one little leg in a twisted branch among the junipers and straggling rosemary at the end of the garden. He was hanging upside down dead. Something must have startled him Clara thought to make him fly up suddenly into such a tangled place. When she went indoors, missing her baby's voice so much, she found her husband hanging dead, in his study. She remained unafraid. She knew her husband was unable to face the horror of persecution and the threat of complete loss of personal freedom. She understood his reasons. And she knew she was yearning over her baby but she went on, unafraid, with her work at the Clinic. Every day, day after day, year after year, in her thick lensed spectacles and her white coat she advised, corrected, comforted and cured and, all the time, she was teaching too, passing on knowledge from experience.

But now, this fearless woman trembled as she tried to unfasten two leather straps because now years later, when all the horror was over for her, she was afraid of her daughter's marriage.

As Clara woke in the strange bedroom, it was only partly a relief.

There was still this possibility of blindness before death, because of course she would die. Ultimately everyone did. For how long would she be blind, if she became blind. Both her grandmothers had lost their sight.

"But that was cataract," Clara told herself. "Nowadays one can have operation."

Again in imagination, she blundered about her room at home trying to find things, the treasures of her life. But alone and old she was unable to manage.

And another thing. What if she should go deaf and not be able to listen to Bach or Beethoven any more. She tried to remember a phrase from the Beethoven A Minor String Quartet. The first phrase, the first notes of caution and melancholy and the cascade of cello. She tried to sing to herself but her voice cracked and she could not remember the phrase. Suppose she should become deaf now at this moment in this ugly hotel with no music near and no voices. If she became deaf now she would never again be able to hear the phrase and all the remaining time of her life be unable to recall it.

Again she put her small fat white feet out of the bed and stood on the strange floor and began like a blind and deaf person to grope for the light switch.

"Travelling does not suit everyone," she told herself and she put eau de Cologne on her forehead and leaving the light on, she took her book, one she had written herself, "Some Elementary Contributions to Obstetrics and Gynaecology" and began to read.

This time it really was Lisa, with joy in her heart Clara went towards her. The real Lisa was much older and Clara saw at once that the pregnancy was full term. Lisa walked proudly because of the stoutness of carrying the baby. Though Clara knew it was Lisa, she searched her daughter's face for some family likeness. The white plump face was strange however, framed in dark hair, cut short all round the head. Mother and daughter could not have recognised each other.

"Oh, Lisa, you have a bad bruise on your forehead," Clara gently put out a hand to soothe the bruise. Supposing this husband is the same as the other one, the thought spoiled the pleasure of the meeting.

"It's quite clear you are a doctor, Mother," Lisa laughed. "Really, it's nothing! I banged my head on the shed door trying to get our cow to go inside."

"One cow and I thought they had many," Clara was a little disappointed but she did not show it. Instead she bravely looked at the valley. It was not deep like the wooded ravine in the Alps, not at all, the hills here were hardly hills at all. But the evening sun through the still trees made a changing light and shade of tranquillity, there was a deep rose blue in the evening sky which coloured the white bark and edged the tremulous glittering leaves with quiet mystery. Clara could smell the sharp fragrance of the earth, it was something she had not thought of though now she remembered it from Lisa's letters. All round them was loneliness.

"Where is your little girl?" Clara asked softly. Lisa's plain face was quite pleasant when she smiled; she had grey eyes which were full of light in the smile.

"Little girl? Little boy you mean! He's here," she patted her apron comfortably. "Not born yet. I wrote you the date. Remember?"

"Oh yes of course," Clara adjusted her memory. "Everyone at home is so pleased," she began.

"Here's Peter," Lisa said.

"Peter, this is my mother," Lisa said. "Mother, this is Peter."

The husband came to his mother in law, he was younger than Lisa so much so that Clara was startled. He seemed like a boy, his face quite smooth and it was as if Lisa was old enough to be his mother.

Peter was trying to speak, patiently they waited, but the words when they came were unintelligible. His smile had the innocence of a little child.

"He wants to make you welcome," Lisa explained. She took her husband's arm and pointed across the cleared and scraped yard to a small fowl pen made of wire netting. Beside the pen was a deep pit, the earth, freshly dug, heaped up all round it.

"GO AND GET THE EGGS!" she shouted at him. She took a few quick steps still holding his arm and marched him towards the hen house. "QUICK! MARCH!" she shouted. Gauleiter Lisa Gregory. Clara shivered, the evening was cold already. Her own daughter had become a Gauleiter.

"QUICK! MARCH! ONE TWO! ONE TWO!" Lisa was a Führerin. The valley rang with her command. "DIG THE PIT!"

The sun fell into the scrub and the tree tops in the middle distance between earth and sky became clusters of trembling blackness, silent offerings held up on thin brittle arms like starved people praying into the rose deep, blue swept sky.

Mother and daughter moved in the shadows to the door of the weatherboard and iron cottage.

"I am very strong, mother," Lisa said in a whisper and in the dusk Clara could see her strength, she saw too that her mouth was shining and cruel.

In the tiny house there was no light. Clara was tired and she wondered where they could sleep. In a corner a cot stood in readiness for the baby, there seemed no other beds or furniture at all.

"When my sons are born," Lisa said in a low voice to her mother, "it is to be the survival of the fittest!" She snapped her thick fingers. Clara had no reply. "Only the strong and intelligent shall live," Lisa said. "I tell my husband to dig the pit. I have to. Perhaps it will be for him, we shall see. Every day he must dig the pit to have it ready. There will be no mercy."

Clara reflected, in the past she had overlooked all this, she had taken no part in the crimes as they were committted but, ignoring them, she had continued with her work and because her work was essential no one had interfered. Clara reflected too that Lisa had never known real love, taken away to safety she had lost the most precious love of all. Clara took upon herself the burden of Lisa's cruelty now. She wanted to give Lisa this love, more than anything she wanted to overlook everything and help Lisa and love her. She wanted to open her purse to show Lisa before it was too dark that she had brought plenty of money and could spend whatever was necessary to build up a nice little farm. She wanted to tell Lisa she could buy more cows, electricity, sheds, pay for hired men to work, buy pigs, two hundred pigs if Lisa would like and drains to keep them hygienic. Whatever Lisa wanted she could have. She tried to tell her how much she loved her and how much she wanted to help. She tried to open her purse and Lisa stood very close and watched Clara in severe silence. The cottage was cold and quite bare, Clara longed to be warm and comfortable and she wanted to ask Lisa to unfasten her purse for her but was quite unable to speak, no words came though she moved her mouth as if trying to say something.

She had never been so stupid. Of course she would feel better in the morning. Women like Dr. Clara Schultz simply did not fall ill on a journey. It was just the strange bed in the rather old fashioned hotel. Tomorrow she would take her cold bath as usual and ask for yoghurt at breakfast and all she had to do then was to wait for Lisa and Peter.

The arrangement was that they were driving the two hundred miles to fetch her to their place. Of course it was natural to be a little curious. Lisa was only two years old when she was smuggled out of Vienna. The woman Lisa had become was a complete stranger, and so was the husband. Even their letters were strange, they wrote in English because Lisa had never learned to speak anything else.

Clara knew she would feel better when she had seen them. All these years she had longed to see Lisa, speak with her, hear her voice, touch her and lavish love and gifts on her. She still felt the sad tenderness of the moment when she had had to part with her baby all those years ago.

"Lisa, my bed is damp," Clara said. "The walls are so thin. I never expected it to be so cold."

Lisa had been quite unable to imagine what her mother's visit would be like. In spite of the heat and her advanced pregnancy she cleaned the little room at the side of the house. She washed the louvres and made white muslin curtains. There was scarcely any furniture for the narrow room but Lisa made it as pretty as she could with their best things, her own dressing table and a little white painted chair and Peter fetched a bed from his mother's place.

Lisa tried to look forward to the visit, she knew so little about her mother, an old lady now after a life of hard work as a doctor. Every year they threw away the battered Christmas parcel which always came late, sewn up in waterproofed calico. There seemed no place in the little farmhouse with its patterned linoleum and plastic lamp shades for an Adventskranz and beeswax candles. And the soggy little biscuits, heart shaped or cut out like stars had no flavour. Besides they ate meat mostly and, though Peter liked sweet things, his choice of pudding was always tinned fruit with ice cream. The meaningless little green wreath with its tiny red and white plaster mushrooms and gilded pine cones only served to enhance the strangeness between them and this mother who was on her way to them.

Of course her mother was ill as soon as she arrived. She had not expected the nights to be so cold she explained and it was damp in the sleepout.

"My bed is damp," she said to Lisa. So they moved her into the living room.

"No sooner does your mother arrive and the place is like a 'C' Class Hospital," Peter said. He had to sit for his tea in the kitchen because Clara's bed took up most of the living room. She had all the pillows in the house and the little table beside her bed was covered with cups and glasses and spoons and bottles and packets of tablets.

"It is only a slight inflammation in my chest," she assured Lisa. "A few days of rest and warm and I will be quite well, you will see!"

Lisa worried that her mother was ill and unable to sleep. She tried to keep Peter friendly, but always a silent man, he became more so. She stood in the long damp grass outside the cowshed he had built with home made concrete bricks, waiting for him at dusk, she wanted to speak to him alone, but he, knowing she was standing there, slowly went about his work and did not emerge. From inside the asbestos house came Clara's voice.

"Lisa! Another hot water bottle please, my feet are so cold."

Lisa could not face the days ahead with her mother there. She seemed suddenly to see all her husband's faults and the faults in his family. She had never before realised what a stupid woman Peter's mother, her mother in law, was. She felt she would not be able to endure the life she had. Years of this life lay before her. Fifteen miles to the nearest neighbour, her mother in law, and the small house, too hot in summer and so cold and damp once the rains came, and the drains Peter had made were so slow to soak away she never seemed able to get the sink empty. This baby would be the first of too many. Yet she had been glad, at her age, to find a husband at last and thought she would be proud and happy to bear a farmer a family of sons.

"A spoonful of honey in a glass of hot water is so much better for you!" Clara told them when they were drinking their tea. She disapproved of their meat too. She was a vegetarian herself and prepared salads with her own hands grating carrots and shredding cabbage for them.

Peter picked the dried prunes out of his dinner spoiling the design Clara had made on his plate.

"I'm not eating that!" he scraped his chair back on the linoleum and left the table.

"Oh, Peter, please!" Lisa implored, but he went out of the kitchen and Lisa heard him start up the utility with a tremendous roar.

"He will come back!" Clara said knowingly, nodding her head.

"Come eat! Your little one needs for you to eat. After dinner I show you how to make elastic loop on your skirt," she promised Lisa. "Always I tell my patients 'an elastic loop, not this ugly pin'," she tapped the big safety pin which fastened Lisa's gaping skirt. "After dinner I show you how to make!" Lisa knew her mother was trying to comfort her but she could only listen to Peter driving down the track. He would drive the fifteen miles to his mother and she would, as usual, be standing between the stove and the kitchen table and would fry steak for him and make chips and tea and shake her head over Lisa and that foreign mother of hers.

She listened to the car and could hardly stop herself from crying.

Living, all three together became impossible and, after the birth of the baby, Lisa left Peter and went with her mother to live in town. Clara took a small flat in a suburb and they went for walks with the baby. Two women together in a strange place trying to admire meaningless flowers in other people's gardens.

Lisa tried to love her mother, she tried to understand something of her mother's life. She realised too that her mother had given up everything to come to her, but she missed Peter so dreadfully. The cascading voices of the magpies in the early mornings made her think as she woke that she was back on the farm, but instead of Peter's voice and the lowing of the cows there were cars on the road outside the flat. She missed the cows at milking time and the noise of the fowls. And in the afternoon she longed to be standing at the edge of the paddock where the long slanting rays of the sun lit up the tufted grass and the shadows of the coming evening crept from the edges of the Bush in the distance.

"Oh, Liserl! Just look at this rose," her mother bent over some other person's fence. "Such a fragrance and a beautiful deep colour. Only smell this rose, Lisa!" And then slowly, carrying the baby, on to the next garden to pause and admire where admiration fell lost on unknown paving stones and into unfamiliar leaves and flowers unpossessed by themselves. The loneliness of unpossession waited for them in the tiny flat where a kind of refugee life slowly unpacked itself, just a few things, the rest would remain for ever packed. Only now and then glimpses of forgotten times came to the surface, an unwanted garment or a photograph or an old letter reminding of the reasons why she had grown up in a strange land cared for by people who were not hers.

In the evenings they shaded the lamp with an old woollen cardigan so that the light should not disturb the baby and they sat together. Lisa listened to the cars passing, in her homelessness she wished that one of the cars would stop, because it was Peter's. More than anything she wished Peter would come. Tears filled her eyes and she turned her head so that her mother should not see.

"Oh, Peter!" Lisa woke in the car, "I was having such an awful dream!" She sat up close to the warmth of her husband feeling the comfort of his presence and responsibility.

"Oh! It was so awful!"

She loved Peter, she loved him when he was driving, especially at night. She looked at his clear brow and at the strong shape of his chin. He softly dropped a kiss on her hair and the car devoured the dark road.

"You'll feel better when you actually meet her," he said. "It's because you don't know her. Neither of us do!"

Lisa agreed and sat in safety beside her husband as they continued the long journey.

Clara was able to identify Lisa at once. She had to ask to have the white sheet pulled right down in order to make the identification. Lisa had two tiny deep scars like dimples one on the inside of each thigh.

"She was born with a pyloric stenosis," Clara explained softly. "Projectile vomiting, you know." The scars, she explained, were from the insertion of tiny tubes.

"Subcutaneous feeding, it was done often in those days," she made a little gesture of helplessness, an apology for an old fashioned method.

In the mortuary they were very kind and helpful to the old lady who had travelled so far alone and then had to have this terrible shock.

Apparently the car failed to take a bend and they were plunged two hundred feet off the road into the Bush. Death would have been instantaneous, the bodies were flung far apart, the car rolled. They tried to tell her.

Clara brushed aside the cliches of explanation. She asked her question with a professional directness.

"What time did it happen?" she wanted to know. She had been sitting for some time crouched in a large armchair, for some hours after her yoghurt, wondering if she could leave the appointed meeting place. Outside it was raining.

"Should I make a short rain walk?" she asked herself. And several times she nearly left the chair and then thought, "But no, any moment they come and I am not here!"

A few people came into the vestibule of the hotel and she looked at them through palm fronds and ferns, surreptitiously refreshing herself with eau de Cologne, wondering, hopeful. Every now and then she leaned forward to peer, to see if this was Lisa at last, and every time she sat back as the person went out again. Perhaps she was a little relieved every time she was left alone. She adjusted her wiglet.

Back home in Vienna she was never at a loss as to what to do. Retirement gave her leisure but her time was always filled. She never sat for long hours in an armchair. Back home she could have telephoned her broker or arranged with her dentist to have something expensive done to a tooth.

"Time? It's hard to say exactly," they said. "A passing motorist saw the car upside down against a tree at about five o'clock and reported the accident immediately."

There were only the two bodies in the mortuary. Beneath the white sheets they looked small in death. Dr. Clara Schultz was well acquainted with death, the final diagnosis was the greater part of

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her life's work. And wasn't it after all she herself who, with her own hands, cut the dressing gown cord from her own husband's neck. She had to put a stool on his desk in order to reach as she was such a short person, and furthermore, his neck had swollen, blue, over the cord making the task more difficult.

They supported the old lady with kind hands and offered her a glass of water as she looked at the two pale strangers lying locked in the discolouration of injury and haemorrhage and the deep stillness of death.

Clara looked at her daughter and at her son in law and was unable to know them. She would never be able to know them now.

"I have a photograph, and I have letters," she said. "They were my paper children, you know." She tried to draw from the pocket of her travelling jacket the little leather folder which she took with her everywhere.

In the folder was a photograph of them standing, blurred because of a light leak in the camera, on a track which curved by a tree. And on the tree was nailed a small board with their name on it in white paint. Behind the unknown people and the painted board was a mysterious background of pasture and trees and the light and shade of their land. She pulled at the folder but was unable to pull it from her pocket.

Not being able to speak with them and know them was like being unable ever again to hear the phrase of Beethoven, the cascade of cello. It was like being blind and deaf for the rest of her life and she would not be able to recall anything.

Dr. Clara had never wept about anything but now tears slowly forced themselves from under her eyelids.

"My daughter Lisa, you know, was pregnant," she managed to say at last. "I see she is bandaged. Does this mean?"

"Yes, yes," they explained gently. "That is right. Owing to the nature of the accident and the speed with which it was reported they were able to save the baby. A little girl, her condition is satisfactory. It was a miracle."

Dr. Clara nodded. In spite of the tears she was smiling. As well as knowing about death she understood miracles.

As soon as it was decently possible she would ring for the chambermaid and ask for a glass of hot water. Of course she wasn't blind or deaf and no one had come in with any news of an accident. She was only a little upset with travelling. Her fear of the failure of her body was only the uneasiness of stomach cramp and the result of bad sleep. She would have her cold bath early and then only a very short time to wait after that. Country people had to consider their stock, that was why they were driving overnight to fetch her. It might be a good idea to start getting up now, it would never do to keep them waiting. She put her fat white feet out of the bed and walked across the strange floor to ring the bell. It was a good idea to get up straight away because the telephone was ringing. Dr. Clara, in the old days was used to the telephone in the night. Often she dressed herself with one hand and listened to the Clinic Sister describing the intervals between the labour pains and the position of the baby's head. A little breathless, that was all, she sat on the chair beside her telephone, breathless just with getting up too quickly.

"Dr. Clara Schultz," she said and she thought she heard a faint voice murmur.

"Wait one moment, please. Long distance." And then a fainter sound like a tiny buzzing as if voices were coming from one remote pole to another across continents and under oceans as if a message was trying to come by invisible wires and cables from the other side of the world. Clara waited holding the silent telephone. "Clara Schultz here," she said alone in the dark emptiness of her apartment for of course she had sold all her furniture.

"I have burn up my ships," she told Irma. "Clara Schultz here," her voice sounded strange and she strained into the silence of the telephone trying to hear the other voice, the message, her heart beat more quickly, the beating of her heart seemed to prevent her listening to the silence of the telephone.

"Lisa!" she said. "Is it you, Lisa?"

But there was no sound in the telephone, for a long time just the silence of nothing from the telephone. "Lisa, speak!" But there was no voice.

Clara longed to hear her daughter's voice, of course the voice could not be the same now as the laughter and incoherent chatter of a little two year old. Now as an old woman holding a dead telephone she remembered with a kind of bitterness, that she sent away her little girl and continued her work at the Clinic paying no attention to the evil cruelty of war. She knew she was overlooking what was happening to people but chose to concern herself only with the menstrual cycle and the arched white thighs of women in labour.

"It's a means to an end," she said softly to her frightened patients when they cried out. "Everything will be all right, it's a means to an end," she comforted them.

Clara knew she had neglected to think of the end. Now she wanted, more than anything, to hear Lisa speak. But there was no sound on the telephone. She went slowly out on the dark stairs of the apartment house. On the second landing she met her neighbour.

"Irma, is that you?"

"Clara!"

"Irma, you are quite unchanged."

Irma's pink sugar cake face sat smiling on the lace collar which was like a doily. "Why should I change?" Irma asked.

Clara took Irma's hand, grateful to find her friend. "Only think, Irma," she said, "I am bringing home my daughter's baby!" She laughed softly to Irma. "My paper children had a baby daughter," she said. "I shall call her Lisa."

When Lisa and Peter arrived at the hotel they were unable to understand how it was that Clara must have been crying and laughing when she died.

Irma Rosen tried to explain to them as well as she could with her little English, and of course she was very tired with making the long journey by air at such short notice.

"When I find her you know, outside my door," Irma said, "I know, as her friend, I must come to you myself to tell. On her face this lovely smile and her face quite wet as if she cry in her heart! While she is smiling."

They were as if encapsulated in the strange little meeting in the hotel vestibule. Lisa tried to think of words to say to this neat little old lady, her mother's friend. But Irma spoke again. "Your mother is my friend," she said. "Always she speak of you. Her paper children and she so proud to be preparing to come to you. She would want me to tell you. Now I suppose I go back. Your mother says always 'But air travel, you know, makes the world so much smaller.' Is true of course, but a long way all the same!" She smiled and nodded, pink, on her lace collar. "Sorry my Enklisch iss not good!" she apologised. "Oh, you speak beautifully." Lisa was glad to be able to say something. "Really your English is very good," Lisa shouted a little as if to make it easier for Irma to understand her.

The young couple wanted to thank Irma and look after her but as Lisa's labour pains had started during the long car journey, Peter had to drive her straight to the hospital.

Elizabeth Jolley has published two novels and two collections of short stories. Her third novel and her third collection of stories, Woman In A Lampshade, *will be published soon. She lives in Western Australia.*

floating fund

Although the period between issues of the magazine was much shorter than usual, a total of $243 was donated by readers. Not bad in these difficult times. We are grateful to:

$40 MD; $25 BJ; $20 HJ; $14 AB, RR; $9 RC, SB; $8 SA; $4 DW, RJ, ED, VC, MN, HM, FB, PR, JR, AL, WK, PP, LR, DD, CH, JMcK, AH, AS, PM, GP, HL, BB, TC, CR, DC, JB, WR, BB, CD, KF; $3 JP; $2 LB, RT.

swag

John Reed wrote AN ELTHAM ROAD (p. 46) shortly before his death last December, a few days before his 80th birthday. It was the last of a series of short pieces spanning half a century in which he expressed his delight in art. From first to last his writing is all of a piece and characteristic of the man, straightforward in expression, subtle in taste.

There has been a growing understanding in recent years of the significance of Sunday and John Reed and particularly since their deaths. Their achievement is being fully explored and firmly documented in a biography currently being researched by Richard Haese. Most of these recent tributes have dwelt on their work for the visual arts. Certainly this is where their joint contribution was most original and effective. But their assistance to literature and to a radical criticism of our society will also come to be appreciated as seminal, particularly in their publication of the monthly news magazine *Tomorrow* (1946-47), in their role as book publishers (Reed & Harris) and in the literary magazines *Angry Penguins, Angry Penguins Broadsheet* (1940-46) and *Ern Malley's Journal* (1952-55) of which John Reed was an editor. Peter Cowan writes perceptively of the journals in *Cross Currents; Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature* edited by Bruce Bennett (Longman/Cheshire, $25.00). But studies of the Reed & Harris wartime publishing operation and of *Tomorrow*, that remarkable forerunner of *The Observer* and *Nation Review*, and to which *Overland's* Vane Lindesay as a youngster contributed some splendid satiric drawings, await some pioneer historian.

It was at this time that John Reed received one of his few accolades: in the same week he was called a communist by the *Catholic Worker* and a capitalist stooge by the communist *Guardian!* In all the mud slinging of the time it went unnoticed that the Reeds, with Max Harris and Sidney Nolan, were engaged not only with a local but with an international avant-garde.

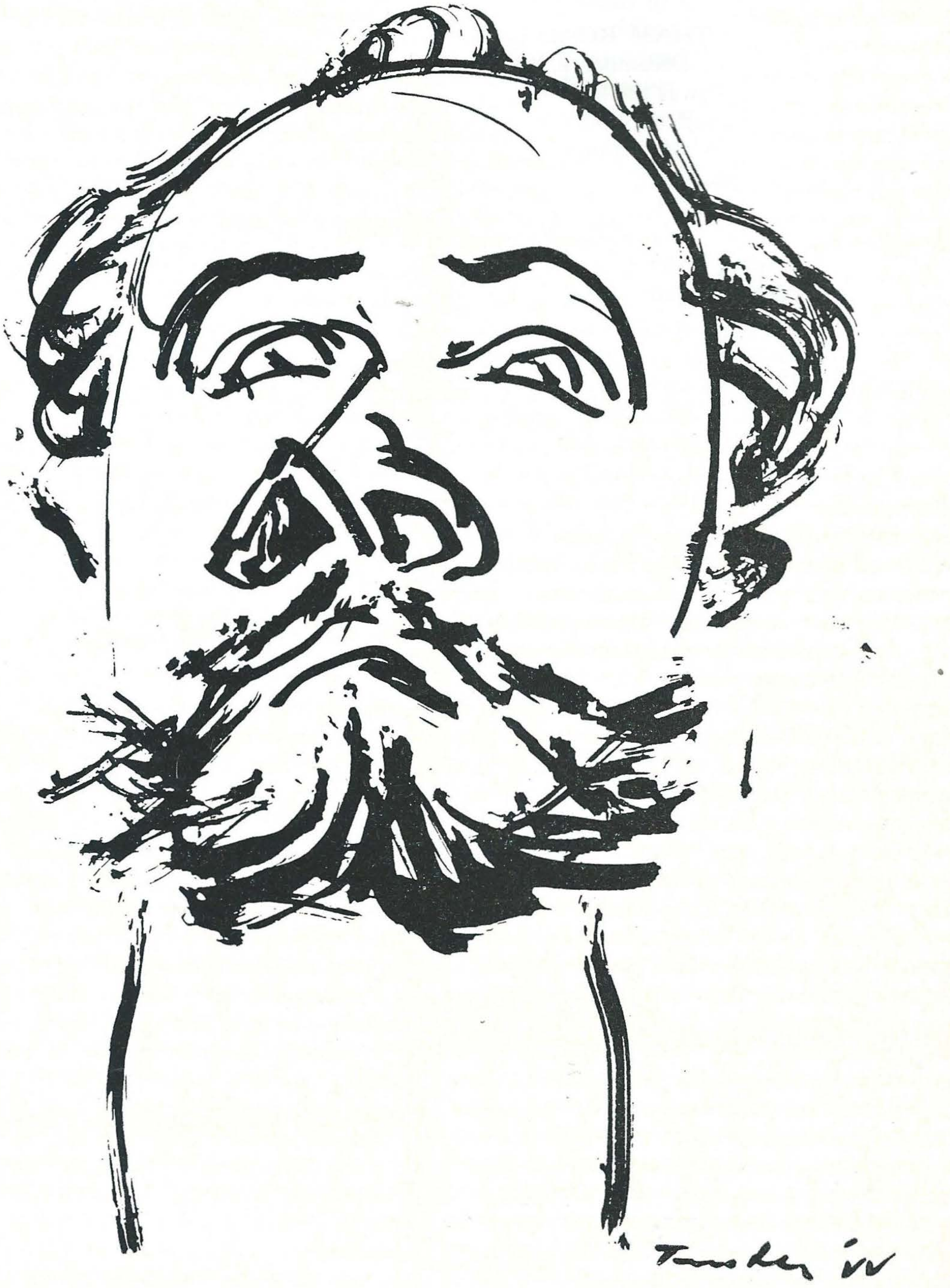
Among the English and American writers published *before* they were famous were Dylan Thomas, George Woodcock, Henry Treece, Robert Penn Warren, James Dickey, Sidney Janis, Kenneth Rexroth and Henry Miller.

John Reed's last weeks were typically controversial. The most cheerful and personally modest of men, courteous to a fault, he nonetheless loved a scrap. Weakened by cancer he still could not allow Bernard Smith's outrageously partial account of *Rebels and Precursors (Age Monthly Review)* to pass without comment and correction as to fact. In particular he took issue with Bernard Smith's assessment of the wartime art of the *Angry Penguins* group (Vassilieff, Tucker, Nolan, Boyd, Hester and Perceval) as being less important than that of the social realists. Those who wish to join this controversy should look, for example, at Albert Tucker's paintings *Victory Girls* (1943) and the series *Images of Modern Evil* (1945-46) now in the Australian National Gallery and superbly reproduced in *Albert Tucker* by James Mollison and Nicholas Bonham (Macmillan). This recent book is memorable not only for the paintings but for Tucker's extraordinarily eloquent statements. It is an essential work.

Dr Smith replied that paintings by this group of the quality Reed attested came only after the war or else were unknown and still "hidden away at Heide" (the Reeds' house). It is a pity John Reed did not live to answer this. Nothing at Heide was ever hidden away. To the contrary. The Reeds showed work from their collection, at considerable expense, in all Australian capitals, in provincial centres and in London, Paris, Rome and New York. At a time when no official gallery would show such work they rented space to exhibit it. In later years they allowed their private lives, time and again, to be disrupted by film and television crews. Scholars, some of them students of Dr Smith, were given countless hours of assistance. So much for snide remarks.

In a final gesture of openness Sunday and John Reed have donated works from their great collection to national, state and provincial galleries and in an extraordinary bequest soon to be announced have given over four hundred works and a large cash endowment to the beautiful Heide Park and Art Gallery established by the Victorian Government.

Barrett Reid.


Tucker

JOHN YULE

Albert Tucker in Rome 1954

I.

At the Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne, an exhibition of 70 paintings conceived and executed by Albert Tucker in Paris and Rome between the years 1945 and 1960 opened in late September.

This extraordinary series came from an extraordinary man at an extraordinary period of his life, a 13 year self-imposed exile during which he survived by sheer willpower, native cunning and an unswerving determination to fight on against all odds. Never a man to compromise Tucker has indeed always been the artist-as-warrior par excellence. Of the reputation he now enjoys there was then no vestige. He was unknown in Europe, forgotten in Australia — except in the minds and hearts of that small magnificent coterie of Melbourne painters and their supporters who were eventually to be seen to have made of the 1940s the most memorable decade in Australian art.

That was 30 years ago. So the other extraordinary thing about this exhibition is its lateness. Only after this great lapse of time does the artist apparently feel the mental climate sufficiently appropriate to release these pictures for public viewing.

The change in climate is also illustrated by the recent acquisition of seven Tucker paintings by the National Gallery of Victoria, by extensive holdings of important works in the Australian National Gallery and by the recent publication of both a major book on his work and a superb full color catalogue.

In the autumn of 1954, in the middle of those expatriate years, I was in Italy and visited Tucker in the medieval Alban hills. It was there in his studio I saw these paintings for the first time. Everything about the man and the works so impressed me that I wrote the following account immediately after leaving. And somehow, like the paintings themselves, the manuscript (which was intended for publication at the time), slipped out of sight. Apart from pruning away some no longer relevant references it appears here substantially as it was written then.

II.

In the late 1930s it was suddenly discovered in Melbourne that a highly individual and concentrated mind was taking the structure of the place and times ruthlessly and intelligently apart — Albert Lee Tucker's ferocious painterly talent was already swinging his artistic vision away from all Australian precedents onto a unique parabolic tangent of his own, while at the same time he was displaying formidable powers as a polemicist. With the birth of the C.A.S. in 1938 he found the necessary public organ through which to express his views and in two years had become its President and a major exhibitor.

He was that peculiarly 20th Century phenomenon, a self-made intellectual with a comprehensive, unacademic world-view. What characterized the man on meeting him was his argumentative self assurance and his phenomenal facility with words. More than any artist I've encountered he spoke with the persuasive authority of first hand knowledge. And it was a knowledge of protean range backed by a memory of amazing surfacing speed: his entire stock of facts seemed active in his mind at all times. By the time he left Australia in August 1947 he had become the acknowledged theorist of the contemporary movement and though other forces were at work his disappearance sounded one of its death knells.

For many he was an uncomfortable presence, an angry critic, a thought revolutionary, an authority baiter. Officialdom, even outside the sphere of art, made life difficult for him whenever it could and not a single work of his was purchased for any public collection. Despite the recognition of his powers and his contribution to local culture by a discerning few, all attempts to get any official acknowledgement or support ran into a brick wall. Yet, he argued, the public owed something to the artist, just as the reverse was true. And in his own case he felt betrayed. Nor could he see any possibility of major art maturing past its protected and private beginnings while the exclusively materialist politico-social set-up in Australia, with what he designated as its "digger mentality" remained as it was.

He returned from a three month official visit to Japan to find his six-year marriage to Joy Hester in ruins. There was nothing left. He made preparations for departure immediately, systematically eliminating all connecting links with the country he felt had so ill used him. His parting statement to a reporter was, "I am a refugee from Australian culture."

His first landfall was London where he arrived late in 1947 without finance or connections. An even more "suicidal leap" (his own phrase) followed: he crossed the Channel from the familiarity of London's culture, where he had the right to earn, to Paris where he had not even that, and where he could speak no word of the language. (No linguist, after several years there he claimed his French vocabulary was only fifty words.) From that point for six years the cauldron of post-war Europe swallowed him without trace.

Australia heard nothing. Then in 1953 the first word came through in an article — the first ever published about him in this country — by an itinerant Australian journalist in Rome. It depicted him as having weathered the storm and established in a small villa near the Pope's estates working on a programme of paintings from which his 1953 Rome show with Nolan developed. He had behind him already three other European exhibitions and a rich saga of personal survival and dramatic exploits.

There is a tendency however to look too much for the explanation of an artist's achievements in the circumstances of his life. Details of where he lived, how his finances operated, whom he loved, how he dressed, constitute fascinating material in which people often hope to perceive that sudden light which familiarizes the extraordinary for us. But character not circumstances moulds genius and the real man is reflected better in his attitudes. "Painting," he used to say, "is not an activity, it is a way of life."

His own position he saw as one consciously displaced from society's median line because Anglo Saxon (and consequently Australian) ethics have never incorporated the aesthetic into their day to day functioning. But the uncompromising nature of Tucker's personality made this displacement in his case more absolute than that of most Australian painters. For them too frequently the mild rebelliousness of Bohemianism is enough, or they sink into a painless schizophrenia in which they hope to inhabit both camps at once, the aesthetic and the socially conformist. Neither of these conditions is, properly speaking, a way of life because both are divorced from the main current of history. The mechanism of Tucker's arrangement is more subtle. Where they tacitly accept their position as practitioners of an outlawed activity he rationalizes from a longer historical basis and steadily refuses to act the outlaw. He conceives the artist rather as pursuing his separate course within the culture but yet remaining an integral part of it, maintaining alliance with it: of creating from inside, not outside the communal stream. And because there is a more conscious continuance of resistance involved in this attitude he suffers a keener and more fundamental distress than they.

Indeed he remarked once: "The worst thing about reality is that it is real. It's a bloody hard gritty process once you leave the world of illusion. You've just got to realize life nowadays is a matter of getting kicked up the arse anyway: but we're given a choice of how we're going to be kicked up the arse: with hob nail boots or razor blades or spikes — we get that much choice!" He does not allow for one moment the choice of backing out of the melee, of self-protection by becoming private. For him struggle is of the essence, and the tensions engendered from such an attitude come through starkly in two paintings of the Rome series, paintings which have a mood reminiscent of Francis Bacon's screaming Popes: like them, the images are disturbingly close to the diabolical. In each case, situated in the symbolically bare room of Valery's Monsieur Teste, a mad dog is tearing a man's face open. In the first the victim is protesting or perhaps screaming; in the second he endures silently, withdrawn in traumatic thought. It is not as though one can walk out of the room and close the door. There is no escape. The victim is not exclusively the artist, but everyman.

Intercommunication with other quarters of society has always been important to Tucker. He has a tolerance for intermediary figures such as the garrulous University eclectic, and he believes the cafe life, especially in Europe, represents a vital link in the social chain, which Australia almost completely lacks. They are the modern centres of interchange. "There in the sidewalk cafes, particularly in Paris," he would say to me, "the important function of liaison takes place between artist and layman — businessmen, politicians, professional men. Such men welcome the chance of talking to artists because they provide a necessary relief and contrast. Being frustrated themselves they like to associate with individuals who lead a life totally different from their own." Tucker's preoccupation with public relations has at times been activist — he has held committee status in political groups.

Certainly the necessity of the historic sense is a cornerstone. He is a man passionately interested in the times he lives in. He claims the artist must see himself and hold himself in historic perspective if he is to hope to integrate his powers significantly — meaning not only world-historic but personal-historic. Speaking of his contemporary and close friend Sidney Nolan he said: "In the early days Nolan produced immense piles of junk. But among them were glimpses of the real ore. And it was his particular genius that he was able to see these from the rest because he had that long historic sense which is essential. He was able to refine them until he was hitting the nail on the head continually. There are thousands of people with genius, high sensibility, insight; but extremely few who can resolve all their impressions to the simple essentials and derive sufficient singleness of focus to carry them through a lifetime concentrated on one set of facts or factors." He himself is a prime example of this virtue and in the present series of paintings he puts himself in the position of the interpreter of a dying culture; one of the last, if perhaps by necessity lesser, heroes on the entablature of Europe.

"Our great advantage," he said to me as a fellow Australian, "is that we are of Europe and at the same time outside it." This unique position gives him, in his opinion, a foothold from which to plunge headlong into the European scene and clamber out "dragging the skulls and relics of the catastrophe" behind him. His pictures, it will be noticed, do not depict what people do but what is happening to them. It is an art of protest and dismay, but in perpetrating it he never falters, never trembles. "For paint, this is the age of the heroic figure," he pronounced, "the casualties around him are enormous, few survive. The waste and carnage are terrific. Nature is recklessly prodigal. More so because the artist these days commits a form of cultural treason: far from drawing material constructively from the life of his people he viciously attacks it, or else extracts his themes from other cultures, other time periods. So one can hardly expect a culture to pay its artists for seeking to undermine it — which it does not!"

As a logical offshoot of this he says he is forced to cultivate something akin to the aristocratic detachment which Bacon, for instance, exhibits in England — but, he insists, this is not an alienist position. "Paintings of this kind," he said, referring to the similarities between that painter's work and his, "are essentially analyzing the psychopathic neuroses of the present world: and the present world dislikes it. Selling the stuff thus becomes immensely difficult. But this is the essential function of painting, to delineate the fundamental attitudes and concepts of the age. Bacon's solution on the personal front is to cultivate a remoteness and inaccessibility." Tucker regards Bacon's success in England as being "a remarkable example of the operation of the pleasure principle: collectors, who undoubtedly buy him, don't hang him. His vision is too uncomfortable. They buy exclusively out of the collector's obsession."

But Tucker's fibre is social. Inaccessability with him therefore operates in regard to one area only: the actual creative process. His studio door is always locked, no one is permitted to be present when he works, and he will never directly discuss any work in progress. For the rest he accepts with whatever good humor a man can the irony of being forced to stand openly, without choice, on the very ground he is so hard at work declaring a lethal quicksand.

There is a tendency, it seems to me, for European intellectuals to be disinclined to take any Australian art seriously because of our lack of cultural roots. Mexican artists, for instance, can draw on Europe but also plunge into an indigenous set of symbols of great antiquity. There is no equivalent to this for the Australian artist. Our dilemma therefore is similar to that of the U.S.A., and a ruinous feature of American attempts at solving it is a tendency to experiment indiscriminately.

But there is another way out of the dilemma of which Tucker is a typical example: the evolution of a set of personal symbols that can be used in the service of some universal visual enquiry.

Tucker allied himself early with the expressionist experiment, especially its parent variety as exemplified in the work of such painters as Dix, Grosz and Beckman. Adhering undeviatingly to these underlying principles he developed a personal mutation by abstracting them towards formalism — and this process is not common. It therefore merits specific examination both for the results he is able to achieve with it and for its general relation to the development of Western art forms. What Cezanne and Seurat did with Impressionism, Tucker and a few others are attempting for Expressionism. His role is that of a consolidating figure tying together the resurgent flashes of lyricism of which this style is mostly constituted, those fleeting and impassioned perceptions which have generally resulted in shorthand gestures of much looseness and mobility. To bind them into a formal net is particularly difficult because solidification of this sort is in the nature of things always an end process of inspiration and few have sufficient emotional stamina to reach it without losing their grasp on the original nexus of feeling. Works usually lose in alertness as they gain in technical structure.

And there is the other danger that as formalization increases, a point of absolute stillness or inertia approaches. However, as the gap narrows, under certain circumstances, the intensity of the work does not diminish as would be expected but actually increases. Picasso has noted that none of his pictures is ever finished, that to finish a picture kills it. Now if Tucker's Rome works can be said on the average to be more "finished" than Picasso's — that is to say more rigidly formalized — it follows that often a Tucker painting must move on a fine line this side of petrification. But whether because his balance is so sure, so consciously co-ordinated, or for some other reason, his projected images strike us rather as being in high tension, like a steel ball caught in a net of magnets: their acute position adds all the time to their impact.

And a similar minimum-gap intensification factor operates on another level, the psychological, in Tucker's use of abstraction. In the process of abstraction in painting there is, it seems to me, a dividing line as sharp as that separating a white drawing on black from a charcoal drawing on white. It is the point where *forms* become *shapes*. Non-representational painters can animate their shapes to such a pitch they affect the beholder almost as forms would, and indeed they sometimes mimic natural forms. While on the other hand

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the natural form can be reduced and staticized to a degree just short of extinction and yet remain intelligible and vital. Doing this latter to the maximum is, as will be seen in a moment, one of Tucker's avowed aims. Therefore this is a second point of finality on the graph of tension which he approaches, that point in other words where his expressionist-realist forms approach non-representationality — but where, paradoxically their reality seems more intense by the very sense of them being so far removed from the living.

He is in his own way a virtuoso of form, an inhabitant of an edge condition between explosive substances.

In the blue ceilinged sitting room of his flat in Rome he was talking one night in that autumn of 1954 with Nolan — who had just come back from the heel of Italy with tales of how much that landscape had seemed to him like the red desert of Australia, but overlaid with age-old civilizations. Earlier Nolan had acted as Australia's representative at the Venice Biennale. The atmosphere of prejudice and political pressure he found there, he said, together with the confusion in the state of painting apparent in the entries as a whole, was still playing on his mind. He suggested that he might diverge for a while from pure painting to see what might be done, say, between painting and the cinema. To this immediately Tucker was all objections. He would have nothing of the idea. True, he admitted, European painting was in a state of confusion: "Someone," he said, "has pulled the invisible plug out on whatever we may call it: modernism. It's the end of that era. Painting has to be directed somewhere else." But not it seemed to him towards motion, nor for that matter the adrenalized catharsis of Italian abstractionism — but the reverse. "My aim," he stated, "is to make the static image more static. That's my aim in life and it'll probably take me a lifetime to do it. To strip the painting of all those moving elements that don't properly belong to the static image."

This brings us to a direct consideration of those images which are exclusively his. At once two things stand out: firstly they are inverse and secondly they are impersonal. Inverse because like those of Goya, Bacon and Tamayo, though essentially works of affection they concentrate exclusively on the oppression and degradation of the human being. They are dominated by a spirit of protest against cruelties, as for instance in the prostitute series. And in doing them Tucker's role has become the finely paradoxical one of simultaneously collaborating with and subverting society. But it would be wrong to think these images had been produced by a man who hates his fellows. If they were merely misanthropic they would be necessarily hollow. On the contrary they express a rich sympathy deeply outraged. They are inverse because though works of love they are concerned only with love's sinister aspect. And they are impersonal because they deal not with private but with social emotions.

Each age confronts civilized man with a certain complex situation differing from preceding and following ones. It is with this Tucker grapples. His images attempt the major task of itemizing the definitive situations of his age. Their range is from the metaphysical where man grimly endures the buffetings of a hostile universe, to the brutally immediate as in the scenes of prostitutes where depravity is shorn of romantic trapping and stares at us with cold and static calculation.

These pictures all are stark, violent and violently controlled. They have immediate impact and often hypnotic "rightness". So startlingly unfamiliar yet in a strange way almost expected are their forms, so fierce the colors, that they momentarily cancel out that sense of the painting being at a remove from us. The images seem actually to inhabit our own space, as if they were living presences and events, not so much objects as situations engulfing us. The colors, greatly intensified from those belonging to his pre-departure paintings, consist of primaries of intense chroma in full opposition — scar reds, screaming yellows, wet oranges and greens, coruscating blacks and vivid flesh purples. They shine out of the frames and assail the eye with much the same power that the "Rites of Spring" bursts on the ear. It is as if the neon lighting of the city has been vitrified and used as pigment. Also, while increasing the weight of the images he has narrowed the spatial depth — everything now happens near the eye. Bringing things close up in this way not only eliminates all muted colors but concentrates edges, clearly opposes each object to the next, and brings the intimate natural surface into graphic detail.

All this is Expressionist method distilled to a lethal concentration. It is passion transmuted through a formal grid, a far cry, methodologically speaking from Kokoschka, but one perhaps carrying further into the future. For if we consider human evolution as the progressive clarification of areas of the mind, then Tucker's formal innovations make of him that kind of mental frontiersman who ties together into a syntax capable of further expansion the divergent threads of an era of haphazard experiment. He is making a logical language out of a lot of startled cries. And it is in this, the sense that they document his age rather than his ego, that these paintings, no longer bound to the incidentalia of personal experience, take on a wider aspect and comment on history itself.

They present a civilization whose values have gone sour, a culture turned destructively back on itself, warping and brutalizing its members, withering and embittering the man of sensibility. And they go even further and become not merely a cry of pain and horror for the sufferings of one particular generation but an outcry against fate and its ravaging of humanity at all times. This undoubtedly is the reason Tucker refers to these paintings as "metaphysical". Man is an actor: environment and his fellow men are his antagonists. He endures or he succumbs — this is the argument. And it is at this point, in the expression of endurance stamped on certain of these faces, that human dignity and nobility begin to make themselves felt, rendered monstrous only by this unwonted environmental distortion.

If this is perceived then these pictures become images neither of horror nor degradation but of tragedy. And as the tragic historically has been the greatest of art forms, so these pictures have something of greatness. The sympathy and tenderness sometimes accompanying tragic art are absent, but what remains is pure in itself and uncompromisingly true. It is both an analysis and expression of an aspect of man's destiny not many painters have dared to depict. It is an exposé of cruelty as an active and conscious agent in the world. It is an admission that values can be irretrievably lost, that history is not necessarily an upward progression. It is the recognition of a morbid and dangerous condition persisting in man, an incipient homicidal quality which our present day gentility prefers to sweep under the carpet, discussion of which is socially and politically taboo and against which therefore no general awareness is directed. Its public manifestations when they occur are treated as monstrous — which they are — but as if they were alien intrusions into our ethos whereas in fact they arise as a direct consequence of our Western outlook.

Against this distortion, obscurantism and fear of facts Tucker throws the whole weight of these paintings, and thus they become far more than mere aesthetic constructions, excellent though they are on those terms. Seen together they constitute a critique of an ethic, a condemnation of a civilization. They are moral paintings, and have a power to haunt our conscience as much as our eye.

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John Yule is a Melbourne painter. He has exhibited widely. After much travel he has resettled in Melbourne to paint and teach.

fin
dolphin

— *Michael Dugan*

MORRIS LURIE

My Son the Pornographer

Pursued by mobsters, massively in debt, disguised as a woman in a large hotel, Fielding, a Professor of Literature, seeks to earn big money fast by penning literary smut, his pen pushed by parody of seven favorite authors. But his dealings with the wily Grossman, purveyor of pornography through his Grossman Press, reveal a far from usual author publisher relationship.

Here is Chapter 6 of Seven Books for Grossman, *and Fielding's sixth visit.*

It was a dingy three-storey frame-house with a tattered grassplot out front and nothing special to mark it save for the flashing neon sign blinking on and off day and night without words but the picture of how it was done for the benefit of the illiterate white trash clientele.

"Miss Ruta Reena," his pappy introduced him, and he looked up for the first time at that large woman in black silk and feathers holding up what at first he thought were two pink-nosed dogs, their wet snouts snivelling, but then he saw they maybe wasn't dogs, they were Miss Reena, a part of her, anyways.

"I brung the boy," his pappy said.

And another dog he saw then, or what at first he thought was a dog, a long-haired black animal with somehow pink lips through the hair showing wet, moiling about between Miss Reena's huge white thighs, where the black silk and the feathers didn't entirely reach over to ward off the chill.

"And I brung four kegs for payment," his pappy said.

And Miss Reena shouted.

"Gals," she shouted. "Git yore workin' parts down here. Pappy's brung his boy aged more than twelve to show him how it's done."

And then the room where he stood side by side with his pappy filled with ladies each one carrying what at first he thought were pink-nosed dogs and long-haired black ones moiling everywhere too, these easier to discern on them than on Miss Reena, she, Miss Reena, being the only one with black silk and feathers, the others all buck naked oblivious to the chill except for the one who wore a gaudy flowered hat.

"Line up. Turn round. Spread your charms, gals," Miss Reena said. "Show pappy and the boy what they kin have."

Then he saw his pappy taking a long time, squinting and sniffing and bending and inspecting, working harder even than when he was making purchase of new denims at the Grope's Landing General Store, the indecision mottling his face red and his tongue lolling, and finally settling on the lady in the gaudy flowered hat.

"What's yore name, honey?" he heard his pappy ask.

"Minnie," she said.

And he saw her mouth open when she said it and the gap where three teeth had gone under the black moustache and her huge white thighs run through with whorls like marbled lard and two smaller black dogs under her arms, one under each, dangling and jumping, from out of the pits.

"Pappy," said Miss Reena. "You always do choose the purtiest."

And then the one called Minnie and his pappy went up the stairs with him following, and then into a room off the landing at the top where there was just a bed.

"Mount it, bawd," his pappy said.

And up went Minnie in her gaudy flowered hat and nothing else, the shucks moving in the thin mattress, and when she was securely

> placed and lying flat on her back and opened and spread her huge white lard-whorled thighs he saw it weren't a mere dog she had in there moiling, it were a bear.
>
> "Stand close, boy," his pappy said to him, simultaneous to dropping off his denim work overall and standing entire buck-naked in the room, his corn-cob huge but flopping with a crab-apple perched on the end.
>
> "Holp me up, boy," his pappy said. "I'm a mite sore from working that bottom forty."
>
> He helped his pappy up onto the bed, listening to the shucks moving in the thin mattress, raised him up to fit between the spread white lard thighs and his pappy coming to rest along the whole vast length of her and his mouth fixing itself on one of those pink-nosed dogs and straightaway setting up a guzzling the likes of which he'd only seen that time old Sam Grope's hog bust out of the pen and got into Mrs Farquarson's greens, that prissy schoolmarm, while Minnie just lay back with her hands tucked away neat behind her gaudy flowered hat and looking up at the ceiling with profound disinterest and whistling softly between the gap in her teeth.
>
> "Now lean close, boy," his pappy said to him then, speaking around the perky pink-nosed dog he seemed in no mind to stop guzzling. "Lean in close and pay tight attention, boy. This is where I is gonna need your real holp."

Exasperated with shaving, his shins a mess, Fielding plunged for woolly leg warmers, raspberry and pistaccio in alternating luscious lollipop bands, followed up with hot pants in sassy satin peach, a silky zip-up baseball jacket and matching peaked cap, completing the ensemble with high-heeled pink sneakers tied with floppy white bows.

Oh cutie-pie Fielding.

Teeny bopper.

Jail bait.

A pervert's dream.

And with a wave and a wink to Miss Barthelmess, oh so fresh and clean and pink and shiny and virginal and innocent at her tidy desk, he sauntered in, flipping the door behind him with an arrogant slam, one hand on a hip, from the other an expertly nonchalant yo-yo whipping through Walkin' the Dog, Around the World, Rockin' the Baby in its Cradle.

"Hi, Pops!" Fielding sang. "Hey, listen, let me have —"

Grossman's voice was a black knife.

"Be quiet! What's the matter with you! Can't you see I'm *reading?*"

Fielding's sassiness fled like smoke.

"Oh . . . sorry . . .," he stammered. "I didn't . . ."

Grossman ignored him.

Spurned him completely.

Didn't even look up.

He sat, Grossman, dour and sour, dumpy and lumpy, suspenders dangling, trouser bottoms clumsily rolled, his eyeglassed eyes moving over the newspaper he gripped with fists an inch from his face, steam rising in the wan light from the tin tub in which he soaked his aged feet.

Sternly, he read.

Grunting.

Growling.

Turning, suddenly, a page, his fists fighting the newspaper as though in a wind, smiting, punching, flattening the battered sheets with impatient, furious slaps.

"Shit!" seethed Fielding. "What a pig! How is anyone supposed to read the paper after he's done that to it? Good God almighty who does he think he is, the only person in the world?"

Grossman shot without apology a dreadful fart.

Fielding closed embarrassed eyes.

Endless minutes ticked.

"Um, Pop . . .?" Fielding finally ventured, his face prepared with a winsome beseeching smile.

Grossman's eyes flicked up.

Murderous as poison.

"Did you wipe your feet?"

"Well . . . no . . . I . . ."

"Dolt! Idiot! How many times do I have to tell you?"

"Sorry . . ." Fielding stammered, retreating backwards, frantically wiping.

"Blockhead!" Grossman gave him for reward. "Filth! Manure! Carrier of cholera!"

A note fell from Fielding's pocket.

"Vot's dat?" Grossman pounced.

"Oh . . ." Fielding blundered awkwardly, blood rushing to his face. "It's just . . ."

"Give it here!"

Grossman snatched it from Fielding's hand, brought it to his eyes, squinted, stared, his thick lips moving as he read the words.

Fielding, on fire, shuffled from foot to foot.

"A Father and Son Night," Grossman arduously read. His eyes swung up. "Vot's dis? Uh?"

"Well . . . " Fielding began, nervously scratching his cheek, "You see . . ."

Grossman's eyes dived back to the note.

"A doctor will be in attendance," he read. His face shot up again. "What? What doctor?"

Fielding's hands didn't know what to do.

"Uh?" Grossman demanded. "Fool! Speak up!"

"Well . . ." Fielding finally managed. "It's . . . it's a kind of . . ."

Grossman whipped his eyes from Fielding's discomfort, shuddering in distaste.

"Feh!" he spat.

And plunged back to the note.

"Aha!" he cried.

He nodded his head.

"So!"

He stroked his chin.

"Sexual education," he read slowly.

His eyebrows rose.

"An illustrated talk with slides and diagrams to explain the mysteries of life."

Grossman smacked his lips.

"Dr Phineas Neugeboren, the esteemed authority and specialist," he read, "will be in personal attendance to answer any questions you may wish to have, following which a supper will be served."

Grossman looked now wholly up at mortified Fielding.

His thick liverish lips moving to form a slow, mocking smile.

"The froggies, uh?" he said. "The rabbits? The bees and the birds and the little pretty flowers?"

Fielding stood redder than a beet.

"Whoo whoo!" cried Grossman. "*Shtupping!*"

Fielding wanted to die.

Now Grossman was brisk, brusque.

"You don't need it!

"Nah!

"What for?

"Foreplay? Backplay?

"All that fancy shit?

"Feh!

"Listen, you stick it in, that's the whole business.

"You don't need doctors to tell you that.

"What?

"Diseases?

"You're worried with diseases?

"Give it a wash!

"All right, before and after, you want to be so fussy.

"What else you want to know?

"Wanking?

"Uh?

"*Not in public, you'll go to jail!*

"Hokay?"

Fielding, eyes down, cheeks aflame, timidly nodded.

Grossman screwed the note into a ball, threw it somewhere away.

"Fucking *goyim,*" he muttered. "Everything they've got to have explained."

Fielding shifted uncomfortably.

Grossman shot him a black glare.

"Yeah, and those suppers," Grossman muttered. "I know those suppers they give you. One bite, you're up half the night, you'll wish you never had it."

And then chortled, pleased with his sagacity.

"Jesus," Fielding silently moaned.

"What?" Grossman volleyed.

"Nothing," Fielding said quickly.

"Nothing?" Grossman shouted. "I'll give you nothing!"

Grossman drew back a hand as though to strike.

Fielding, wide-eyed, ducked and crouched.

Grossman openly sneered at the sight.

But quickly he calmed.

"Oh, another thing," he said. "Not with a broom handle. A cabbage, you wish to employ a cabbage, well, in certain circumstances. But a broom handle — never!"

Fielding promised with wide eyes never ever to have truck with a broom.

"Hokay," said Grossman. "Now you know it. The entire mysteries of life."

And then fell to nodding, head shaking, muttered words.

"The clitoris. The vagina. The pudenda. The labia maximus, for God's sake. Jesus. I never heard such *dreck.* The simultaneous orgasm. Whoosh. Those fucking *goyim.* Who knows what they'll think up next?"

And then suddenly:

"You eat your lunch?"

Fielding's reply was inaudible.

"The turkey sandwiches!" Grossman shouted. "What's the matter with you?"

Fielding again mumbled.

"What? Speak up! I can't hear a word!"

"Getzner stole them," Fielding whispered, his eyes down in shame at his feet.

"Getzner?" said Grossman. "Who's this Getzner?"

"He's bigger than me," Fielding whined.

Grossman stared at Fielding with disbelieving eyes, such words and shouts as he wished to deliver locked in his throat.

"He's bigger than everyone," Fielding croaked, on the edge of tears.

Grossman's outrage, when it came, was truly massive.

"Getzner?" he howled. "Getzner? Don't tell me Getzner! I don't want to hear any Getzner! For Getzner I'm rushing to the market? For Getzner I'm slaving my fingers to the bone? For Getzner I'm spending a fortune with doctors for my feet, which I've got such pains from standing half the night? Huh?"

Fielding quaked before Grossman's empurpled face.

"Getzner stole them," Grossman mimicked, his thick lips twisted with sarcasm. "So kick him one!" he shouted. "Give him a *setz* in the *pilkess,* he won't walk straight for a month!"

Fielding trembled.

"What's the matter with you, you haven't got a *foot?"* Grossman roared. "You haven't got an *eye,* you can't see where he keeps his *pilkess?"*

Fielding sobbed.

Grossman blinked, his disgust giving way to alarm.

"All right, all right," he said. "Stop that! That's enough! It's only a turkey sandwich, don't carry on like it was something different, like he stole your wallet as well."

Fielding broke down in open blubbering.

Grossman stared, aghast.

"Shit!" he cried. "You let him steal the wallet also? The pigskin? The *barmitzvah* gift?"

Fielding's face was a river of wetness and grief.

Grossman had to look away.

"All right," he said at last. "All right. It happens. It happens. Nazis, what can you do? Come on there. That's enough. It's not the last pigskin wallet in the world what cost a hundred forty dollars, and that's after the discount. Come on there. Blow the nose. Better? Ha? Now wipe the face. That's right. Good."

Grossman shook his head, pursed his lips.

"All right," he said, Fielding now composed. "I suppose you want something to eat? Ha? Look over there. See? I bought you a nice cake. With chocolate, your favourite. Take a slice. Go on, a big one. But don't wolf! Eat nicely! And with it, please, a glass of milk!"

Grossman, fingers laced over his stomach, watched as Fielding ate, from time to time shaking his head, letting out a mumbled "I don't know", a "Sometimes I wonder", a "Where will it all end?" and in between each one a "Whoosh!"

"Hokay," said Grossman, when Fielding had finished. "Now bring me the essay, what you wrote."

Fielding handed it to him.

Grossman read.

"Ho ho," he chortled, his eyes brightening at once. "You've done a little William Faulkner here, that great Deep Southern phoney. Ho ho, yes, very nice. A brain you've got there, I won't deny. A real talent. Very nice. Except—" Grossman looked up sternly at Fielding "—this spelling! Gut Gott in Himmel! I've never seen such spelling! Look at this! You can't even spell *asshole!"*

Fielding's cheeks began to redden.

"Or *dick!"*

Fielding sniffed and snivelled.

"Not even *tush!"*

Fielding began once more to blubber.

"Oh, stop it!" Grossman shouted. "Stop that crying! You're making me sick!"

Fielding sobbed gently, holding back the flood, calming down.

"Dat's better," Grossman said. "Dat's nice. Now come here. Come on, I'm not going to hit you. Come here."

Fielding advanced with hesitant steps.

"Bend down."

Grossman patted Fielding gently on the head.

"You're a good boy," he said. "A good boy. The spelling? Well, it's not such a big thing. Dostoyevsky couldn't spell either, look where he is today. Hokay? So calm down. You'll learn, you'll see, it's not so hard. Good. Now hand me there that towel, the feet I have soaked enough."

Fielding looked elsewhere while Grossman dried, the sight of those white aged bunioned toes somehow too much for him, a mixture of obscene and the ultimately intimate. He was pleased when Grossman hid them away in battered felt slippers, pushed the tin tub to one side.

"Ah, dat's better," said Grossman.

He smiled up at Fielding.

"Now fetch the fiddles," he said.

Fielding, from a cupboard, brought out the cello, and from the shelf above, his violin.

"Hokay," said Grossman, bringing his instrument expertly and quickly into tune. "We'll begin a little Mendelssohn, to warm the fingers."

Grossman bent at once with his bow. His tone rang out rich and deep, ringing around the room.

Fielding's violin was a flustered squeak.

"Tuck in, tuck in!" Grossman snapped. "What for you think God gave you a chin?"

"Sorry," Fielding apologized, quickly correcting his stance.

"All right now," said Grossman. "From the top."

Fielding began again, but no less hesitant and clumsy.

"No, no!" Grossman roared. "The elbow, the elbow. Not like that with the elbow!"

Grossman, to show him, surged ahead, bowing with passion, squeaky Fielding scurrying to keep up.

Grossman mopped his brow with an outsize handkerchief.

"We'll move now to the Brahms," he said.

Fielding began, skittery and screechy.

Grossman shuddered at the sound.

"What's the matter with you?" he shouted. "Don't you remember *anything?"*

He glared at Fielding, and was about once more to shout, but suddenly his mood altered.

"All right, all right," he said. "You want the doctor, the questions, the supper afterwards?"

Fielding timidly nodded.

"All right, all right. Big deal. We'll go. Hokay? You happy now?"

Fielding nodded and nodded, his whole face a rhapsodic smile.

"I don't know," Grossman muttered. "In the middle of Brahms, all he thinks is *shtupp."*

Grossman sighed wearily.

And then was all at once businesslike, crisp.

"All right! The Bach! The Bach! We will play now the Bach!"

He looked up at Fielding, bow poised.

"Are you ready there?"

"Yes," Fielding said.

"Then let us begin."

Around them, unnoticed, the windows had darkened. The bright day had fled. Now the portals of night had opened outside.

Grossman and Fielding moved slowly into the Bach.

Grossman leading, Fielding quickly following, then together, locked as one, they moved into the timeless majesty of that bygone stately age.

Slowly the music swelled and grew.

Under his eyeglasses, Grossman silently wept.

Fielding's eyes were no less moist.

One sitting, one standing.

Weeping.

Bowing.

The pornographers together played.

sky

CLIFF

sea

sand

— Michael Dugan

D. J. O'HEARN

Morris Lurie

The Humor of Survival

Morris Lurie must by now be rated as one of our most significant contemporary writers. His output is prolific and highly professional and his work has been warmly received in such creditable journals as the *New York Review of Books* and the *New Statesman*. In the last fifteen years he has given us four novels, four books of short stories, two books of what he calls 'reportage', three children's books, and a book of three plays. He has published in *Esquire, The Transatlantic Review, Argosy, Anteus, The New Yorker*, and in a number of Australian journals and papers.

Among our contemporary writers only Thomas Keneally can rival this productive energy, yet, as I have noted elsewhere, the quality of Keneally's work suffers from the rate of production. Nothing that Keneally has written in the last ten years or so comes near the chiselled beauty of his second novel *Bring Larks & Heroes*. His later novels betray evidence of haste, superficiality and a facility with language that comes too close too often to facileness.

Lurie's work, on the other hand, shows a steadiness of attention, a surprisingly uniform quality where one might expect lapses and Homeric nods. There is evident a growing sophistication of language, a readiness to take risks and a certain daring in his very latest works, but as a corpus of writing the quality is remarkably even.

Lurie's work concentrates mainly on the Jewish sub-culture he knows so well, and some have seen this as a severe limitation, an exercise in repetitiveness. Certainly key characters such as Rappaport, Friedlander, Singer and figures such as the Jewish father and mother, the Australian Jewish boy lost in London, and the Jewish uncle, appear and reappear with great regularity through novels and stories. And, it is also true, situations do tend to recur with what, at a superficial glance, appears to be a certain sameness: the naive Australian boy confronting the worldly-wise English; the Jewish boy baffled by the mystery and reticence of his father; the close-knit family, testing the ambiguity of their relationships.

Such criticisms would have much force if it could be shown that Lurie is merely repetitive: a limited imagination slaving away in a limited field. I would argue, however, that what we have in Lurie's work is as much an exploration as an exposition, more than an accumulation of familiar characters and situations, rather a kind of personal search to discover the essence of certain kinds of mysteries: the relationship between parents and children, the conflict between nature and nurture, the nature of personal identity.

Oddly enough what militates against an immediate acceptance of this claim is Lurie's own excellence as a writer, his basic professionalism. He is a master of the quip, the staccato joke, the dazzling aphorism. He can capture confusion, bewilderment and indecision through an adroit use of tone, question marks and pauses, and he can set a scene or a situation with a few well chosen phrases and epithets. Lurie's dialogue is particularly sharp, natural and full of verve:

> A bus driver is about to murder a man who has got on without paying. "I'm going to visit with my mum, what do ya want from me?" the man shouts. "**You** got a mum?" the bus driver says. "Jeez." The bus laughs, applauding the performance, the volcano subsides. (*Hackwork* 184).

Yossel Shepps is believed to be a medical student and in his spare time he helps his parents in the Cafe Zion. The narrator's father sees him as a shining example to his sons:

> Mrs. Shepps is there too, but you rarely see

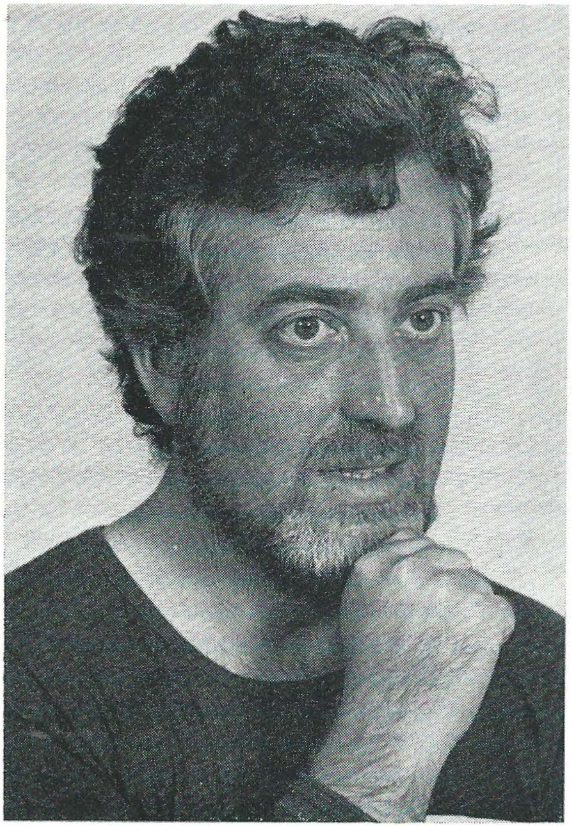
> her. A grey little woman, haggard with work.
>
> "They work very hard, don't they?" I say to my father.
>
> "It's a privilege," says my father. "They're putting a son through medical school."
>
> "But Yossel's always wearing new clothes," I say.
>
> "So?" says my father. "What do you want? You want him to look like a beggar? He mixes with top people, he can't afford to look bad!"
>
> "And the car?"
>
> "Idiot!" says my father, raising crumbs as he bangs the table. "What do you think the car is for? So Yossel can hurry back here from lectures. Not waste time on a slow bus. Don't you understand anything?"
>
> "Sorry, dad," I mumble, and keep my head down for the rest of the meal. *A Beacon in the Night: Inside the Wardrobe* (p 27-8).

Lurie has a perfect ear for this kind of colloquial dialogue. The tone, the pitch is extraordinarliy accurate, and all the more impressive because the creative reportage carries to the reader his own level of irony and humor. There is an intricate web of meaning in the natural brevity of "So? What do you want?" which does more to convey the reality of the father and his relationship with his son than pages of description would do.

In other words Lurie is so often "right" in his re-creation of events and human relationships, in their changing face, their inscrutable depth. There is an understanding in his works of the ways in which language, as the spoken bond between people, can be used both to express and conceal emotions, and often, paradoxically, to do both things simultaneously. Take for example the running friendship-rivalry-conflict between Rappaport and Friedlander. When Rappaport first comes to London, Friedlander is overjoyed but apprehensive. Within a day or so things change:

> "The man's an imposter!" Friedlander howls. "This is not the old Rappaport! This is a shambling shell, this is a lump, this is . . . a golim!"
>
> "A What?"
>
> "Yiddish mythology. I know who he is. He's not Rappaport at all. Rappaport is still in Melbourne cheating old ladies and making antique lamps out of telephones. You know who this is? This is a sleepy Mexican peasant sent by Rappaport, for inscrutably obscure reasons, to drive me mad. The real Rappaport could never grow a moustache like that, he hasn't the strength. The bald spot had me fooled for a while, a clever touch, but—"
>
> "Ssh," says Kerry. "You'll wake him up."
>
> "Oh, I'm sorry," says Friedlander. "Rappaport is sleeping. How thoughtless of me. He must have his basic fourteen hours. Jesus Christ!" (*Rappaport's Revenge* p 69).

Lurie uses the historic present to dramatise events, states of instant passion which are as real and as fickle as the howls and imprecations of the speakers. His prose catches the hurts, pretended and real, that loving relationships always create, and that humor which is particularly Jewish — built of exasperation and exaggeration, running into fantasy with only the slightest backward glance at reality.



That humor infests almost all his work. It can be there in a sentence, "he seemed to sink into the European pillows", an interlude, a situation that runs on page after page. And most frequently, it is humor of a specific kind, self-deprecating, ironic, the humor of survival, sometimes played by the narrator against himself, mostly established by the author against his characters, a bond between author and reader. It is through the use of humor that Lurie seeks not only to expose situations but also to explore them. It is left to the reader to surmise, reflect upon what exactly is being felt between characters when, as so often happens, the oral communication is veiled, defensive, self-protective. Rappaport buys an antique bed with his barmitzvah money.

> "A thousand? The barmitzvah money!" Mr. Rappaport roared. "What madman would sleep in that bed? Good God in heaven, I have given birth to an idiot!"

The bed, however, cost only four dollars, as Rappaport explains, but his father just keeps shouting "Madman! Madman!"

> A week later (I was there), Rappaport casually told his father that he'd sold the bed.
> "I made twenty-five hundred per cent profit," he said.
> "Uh?"
> "I sold it for a hundred dollars."
> You could see the wheels whirling inside Mr. Rappaport's head. You could hear them click into place. It was terrible to watch.
> "Big Deal!" Mr. Rappaport finally announced. "You know what happened, you fool? They opened up the asylum and they gave every madman a hundred dollars and told them to buy stupid beds. That's what happened! You idiot! Get out of here, you're driving me mad! Get out, get out!"
> Mr. Rappaport threw himself into his chair and stared, **stared** at a programme on the cats of London on the television, slowly quietening down.
> "He loves you, Rappie," I said. "He's shy, he's clumsy, he can't express his feelings." (*Running Nicely* p 22).

This is a typical piece of Lurie's humor, zany, fast-moving, somewhat unreal. The imaginative touches are subtle and fine—the T.V. programme, the narrator's clumsiness and confusion, the father's rapid move from astonishment to self-defence. Underlying the humor, however, and driven home by the narrator's fumbling attempt to help Rappie, is the brooding reflection on the relationship between father and son — the bond of love which is there, seeking a voice but a love which cannot be named, cannot be revealed.

Lurie follows and explores this theme through numerous stories, and novels, giving it its finest creative exposition in his fourth novel *Flying Home*.

This novel, rich and sensitive, encapsulates so much of what Lurie, through his other work, seeks to explore. It is at once a love novel, the narrator meeting and seeking to understand the girl Marianne, and, at the same time, a novel of origins, of identity, as the narrator, Leo Axelrod, Australian born, comes to realise that he must go to Israel to exorcise the daemons which haunt him: his parents, his grandfather, his homelessness.

> They swim before me, crowding, pressing down, my mother anxious and alarmed, her eyes circled with darkness, deep with concern, my father hard-faced, mocking, a ceaseless critic, damning and dooming, or worse, saying nothing, too contemptuous to speak, but watching, both of them, my mother and father, always there, whatever I do, wherever I go. They are here now, in this foul room where I sit, a thousand miles from Marianne, the shutters jammed against the endless wind, impossible to move.
> Ah, and there is a third face too. (*Flying Home* p 17).

The third face is that of his grandfather, Zaydeh, and it is these faces which haunt him and eventually drive him to Israel in search of his identity, his being and, in an odd way, his home:

> It was the way I was brought up, it was what *they* felt. They didn't like Australia. Well, it wasn't even a matter of like. They ignored it. They pretended it wasn't there. Australia was an unfortunate thing that had happened to them, that Hitler had done, that's all it was to them. An accident. A terrible accident. It wasn't the real world. The real world was Bialystock, Poland, Europe. . . . So that's where I was born, that's where I grew up, that's where I lived. Nowhere. In a black cage.

These two themes, the mystery of family relationships and the search for a home pervade almost all of Lurie's work. He re-creates the confusion, the pathos, the wondering hurt of the son, desperate for warmth and affection, who cannot understand the taciturnity, the closed world of his father's mind. He writes too of the pain and confusion of the first generation Australian, growing up in a land that is "nowhere", "a black cage", torn between the reality of his birthplace and adolescence and the dreams and memories that are not his but are the only reality for his parents and their friends.

Most of the time Lurie chooses to explore these problems by way of humor. Characters such as Rappaport, Friedlander, Charlie Hope, wander through Europe and London seeking a place in those old societies and finding none. Their innocent and not so innocent activities are confused and clownish, energetically awry. They are the classic misfits, dreamers, planners, romantics in search of a lost Edenic state. Yet underlying the escapades, elaborate jokes, failed schemes, lies that note of pathos — energy on the verge of neuroticism, laughter for survival. Lurie's humor veers towards the cliff of tragedy, poises a moment then rebounds towards safety.

In *Flying Home,* however, a deeper, more searching note pervades the novel — a more direct look at the anguish and confusion which confronts Leo Axelrod in his search to find himself. It is a theme which every so often one can come across in Lurie's stories in *The Somerset Maugham Man, Place, American Slaves,* etc.

The self-protective wall of jokes and quips crumbles and we are left with a certain urgent desperation, a feeling of panic, a sense of alienation. Lurie's prose at these moments is deeply moving, working by understatement to contain the emotional pain his characters experience. Brusque taciturnity, the quality of so many characters in our literature, conceals the pain and stiffens the will to survival. Leo reflects on this quality in his father:

> I never even saw them kissing. Not once. They seemed to ignore each other. They just existed. They were there. But when my mother died, she had cancer, she was sick for a year, longer, my father suddenly changed. He used to be loud, with his jokes, his thumping, running around with the lawn-mower, breaking things, and just like that he stopped. He hardly spoke any more. He just sat. He sat for hours. And then he'd suddenly get up and walk around the house, round and round, go into every room, switch on lights, switch them off again, stand there in the dark. I didn't know what to do. I used to hear him, standing in the dark, breathing. . . . A month later he was dead too. (*Flying Home* p 113).

It is in passages such as this that Lurie's prose reveals its power. The short staccato sentences are not merely reportage — they bear the pain of the speaker as he tries, in retrospect, to understand and conceal the pain he still feels. For a brief moment he brings his father to life, "He used to be loud, with his jokes . . ." and then watches, almost hypnagocically, as his father dies again. It is moving prose, naked in its simplicity, forceful in its very bareness.

Our great writers, Lawson, Furphy, White, Mathers each in their own way employ this mode of reticence, this sharp exposition of pain, compelling because it is just expressed, thrown out there, left without burrowing introspection. It is a quality of the grand epic style, standing alone, to be observed and felt by each reader in his own privacy. Lurie mixes his modes, with competent facility, but, at his best, understands the compelling power of this kind of reticence. It is, in our culture, a pronounced feature both in the colloquial argot: "She'll be right, mate", "No worries", etc. and in that form of badinage we know as "shyacking". It is no surprise that it predominates in so much of our literature. Outbursts of emotion, especially of the gushing sort, are particularly taboo and the interaction between people at moments of high emotion is wordless.

Such a tradition, which is particularly Anglo-Saxon and North European, is the cause of considerable confusion to more expressive people in our community such as Greeks and Italians. It is also intensely painful to the young whose need for shown affection is almost constant. Lurie's work shows not only the phenomenon of taciturnity as a cultural mode but its effect on the young as they create defences against hurt in jokes and forced laughter. He explores the ways by which love and affection, denied their natural outlets, may yet be expressed and given some life of their own. In doing so he exposes the folly of so much restricted social behavior, its strangulation of individual feeling, and he points up the difficulties so many of our migrants feel in shaping their lives and behavior to customs and laws which are not only culturally alien, but alien to their whole sense of themselves as persons.

Ironically, one of the criticisms levelled at Lurie is that none of his characters ever really escapes from "Lurieland" — that created world inhabited by refugee Jews and errant sons. Yet the main thrust of Lurie's work is directed towards escape from that world, towards discovering a locus for the people who are caught between worlds. Whether he is describing Rappaport in London, Burt Britton in New York, or Singer in the outback, Lurie is exploring the frenetic wanderer, searching for some home, for his roots. In doing so, of course, he is also exploring the nature of the solitary.

If taciturnity and reticence in social communication are so deep a part of our culture and its literature, so too is the solitary figure. As A. A. Phillips points out:

> First to the simple fact that the classic Aus-

> tralian writers produced a literature of loneliness. I do not mean that their characters stood alone in an heroic posture or that they were poised in isolation for the purpose of artistic design. I mean that through them we experience the feeling of being lonely. (*The Literary Heritage Re-assessed. Meanjin* 1962).

Lurie seems at first glance an odd bedfellow to Lawson or Furphy since he is clearly an urban man and so are his characters. Yet people such as Leo Axelrod, Singer, Rappaport or Charlie Hope are in essence figures of intense loneliness. Even titles such as *In the Wardrobe, Running Nicely* or *Flying Home,* create the sense of the lone figure escaping from or towards a locus in life, where origins and identity might be discovered. Lurie's work sets before us the problems of the displaced person, that sense of isolation felt where people are strung between two worlds — neither fish nor fowl culturally or geographically. Leo Axelrod speaks for so many of Lurie's characters when he says:

> I can't stand being a tourist, always watching, never inside. I think that's why I'm funny about hotels, about rooms. I can't stand being in a place that doesn't mean anything, even for one night. I feel suddenly small and grey, like a shadow, totally insignificant, as though I didn't really exist.

Lurie's people, like so many displaced persons, are permanent tourists in this sense. The significance of native-land, family, historical traditions is there and haunts them but they cannot feel truly a part of it. Stretched between past and future they are blown about by contrary winds, scarecrows of society whose unwitting antics make them appear merely clownish and conceal the anguish of their situation.

In a curious way then Lurie is part of one of the most distinct traditions in our literature while appearing superficially to be so distant from it. Nothing could seem so discrete as one of Lawson's swaggies or Furphy's bullockies compared with Rappaport or Axelrod yet the same aura of loneliness, of endless wandering, of rootlessness haunts them all. As a defence against the real pain of such loneliness and as a necessary mode of survival there is the protective coat of humor. In Lawson and Furphy that humor is restrained and resigned, dug out of stoicism — in Lurie it is ebullient and mad-cap but in essence it serves the same purpose. It attests to the fact that the emptiness, spiritual and topographical, which has always resided at the heart of this continent, and the spectre of which has dominated so much of our literature, remains there, unassailable, even in so modern and sophisticated a writer as Morris Lurie. His people wander in London, or Greece, or Israel, but that wandering discloses the unbreakable ties with Australia their natal land and the difficulties they encounter in establishing roots and a sense of identity with that land. Underlying almost all of Lurie's work is a kind of poignancy and the vitality of his prose and his characters dances above a void. If he rarely allows us a glimpse into that void it is because, as an author, he is aware of the necessity of distancing pain and erecting defences as a means of survival. This is not, as some might argue, a type of escapism, a refusal to confront, but a form of stoicism. The world and people are attacked with quips and jokes as a means of survival and self-mockery is an absolute defence against self-indulgence. Lurie then, for all his supposed limitation and for all his obvious modernity, speaks underneath it all with an age-old voice — a voice not limited to the Jewish tradition, but centred there; a voice that entertains and searches in the one mode. It is a voice of considerable distinction in our literature.

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A Statement at Writers' Week

JUDITH WRIGHT

A leading Australian poet since she published her first book in 1946, Judith Wright is also widely known for her prose works and for her seminal role in organisations which support aboriginal rights and which work to preserve the environment. Her latest book is the widely praised The Cry For The Dead *(O.U.P.), a history of the effect on the aboriginal people of pastoral expansion from NSW to north Queensland. The statement below is a slightly edited version of that made as a contribution to the Writers' Week Panel on Writing and Social Concern at the Adelaide Festival earlier this year.*

It seems that writers, who have in any case a pretty complex role, have now chosen or been forced into yet another role. They are more and more regarded as some kind of spokesmen against the individual and collective miseries, injustices and sufferings of the victims of a sick and dangerous world.

That role is not only a responsible one, it is in itself dangerous. In a time of savage repressions, public and private persecutions, tortures and imprisonment lie in wait for people foolish enough to step out and complain about what is happening to them and to others. Very few people, even if, like politicians and journalists, they are paid by society to watch over the interests of other people, dare to take the job on nowadays. Why then should writers, who sometimes like to assert that their work depends on their objectivity of observation, be expected to be society's ombudsmen or its exposers of injustice? Even more surprisingly, why should some at least of them accept that thankless and perilous job?

In the nature of the case, writers are likely to be very much like other people, only rather more so. Any collection of writers provides as various a mental and physical spectacle as you could find; probably much more various than a collection, say, of lawyers or doctors or academics or trade unionists. We hold all sorts of views and opinions, often several different and self-contradictory ones a day — that's part of our job, I suppose. We are quite as concerned for the safety of our skins as the next man. Yet, to judge from Amnesty International's recent estimates, writers are in fact among the most likely of professionals to be imprisoned, tortured, exiled or otherwise silenced in the world of today.

Why should this be? Are we in fact more compassionate, more self-sacrificing than lawyers, doctors, builders or farmers, or just more imprudent, more naive and more impulsive, gamblers whose bets seldom come off? What *are* writers anyway?

Of course, many of us are hired hacks, speechwriters for politicians or industry, copywriters for advertising firms, journalists who must toe the editorial line. But for most people the word 'writer' means something different from this. It means a man or woman who can somehow get hold of enough leisure and money to be a 'free creative' writer, subject to no boss or party, scribbling away at midnight not only to entertain, interest, educate and delight his/her readers but to expose and cure the maladies of society and the individual through superior insight and eloquent expression. A person to whom social, political and economic injustice are not to be meekly suffered but to be interpreted and if possible righted. A healer through the power of the word; or if he/she cannot heal, then a human sacrifice, a lightning-rod for the safe disposal of the wrath of authority.

It isn't an attractive job offer. Writers have been society's traditional entertainers, yarnspinners, clowns and resident show-offs, but seldom its gurus, moral authorities or Christ-figures. Yet there are a number of factors which are now pushing us into new roles.

First of course, is the fact that in an increasingly limited, specialised, institutionalised, authoritarian world, what is called 'creative writing' *is* still a fairly free activity. Unlike those categories of writer I mentioned earlier, the free writer can say what he likes and choose the way he/she wants to say it. Sometimes, to earn a living, we double in those other roles, but it is not good for the kind of writing we really want to do, and we know it. Freedom of choice is one of the first conditions for good writing. Moreover, it is hard to write well, to satisfy your standards of good work, when you are cutting off part of the reality you know.

So the fact of freedom becomes also the fact of responsibility; and even if audiences and critics don't always notice the cracks and gaps in our work, we know they are there.

Secondly, our subject is life and the world as we know it — our own life and that of our characters. We are not in fact detached observers; we can't be, for we are whirled in the same currents as our characters or our subjects. We can pick and choose which bits of straw and driftwood we seize on to construct a novel, a poem, a biography, and choose up to a point what particular eddies and parts of the current we allow to influence them; but not even a historical novelist can ignore the direction and speed of the river itself. Our own condition, and that of the world, cannot be ignored without our evasions showing.

Thirdly, we have a problem of audience expectation. Readers, whether of sf, spy stories, straight novels, books for children, poetry, biography or whatever, do not read just for escape from reality, but because in some way they recognise themselves, their world, their preoccupations and needs, in what they read. They wouldn't bother with books, otherwise. There must be some bond of relevance between the work and the audience; and in a world more and more difficult to understand, cope with and even stay alive in, they find a sort of companionship in the books they read. They know, therefore, when the writer is not telling all the truth, just as a child knows when an adult is evading the facts.

Moreover, since they also know that the 'free creative writer' is about the only person still far enough outside the constrictions imposed by the Great Machine, to tell the truth about his/her and their situation, they are unlikely to forgive obvious silences and dodginess, especially if they want the truth told on their own behalf. In a world where the few are increasingly rich, comfortable and in command, and the many correspondingly less so, it may be that the number of people in search of a vicarious spokesman for their problems is increasing.

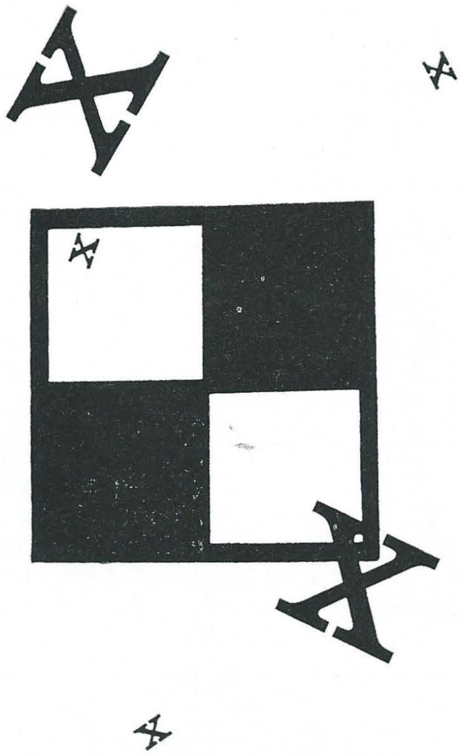
Then there is the participation trap. Writers are, as I said, no less likely on the whole to be arrogant, blind, bloody-minded or on the side of the big battalions than anyone else; but what makes us writers is a certain power of participation, or imagination, or sympathy, or empathy, what you will. This capacity puts us in a position to get some way into the skins of other people, to see rather further into the murk of motive and action, cause and effect than others need to. This gift, or curse, often forces the 'creative writer' to share not only in the pleasures but the pains of others. So it is not necessarily brave or self-sacrificing of some writers to yell 'Stop' when the machine is crushing somebody else. Apart from our intuition that we may ourselves be next on the list if nobody steps in, our damned imagination makes us wince when others scream.

Finally; we *have* to deal with human woe and oppression simply because they are there, and increasingly there. Maybe the sufferings of people and of the planet are no worse today than in earlier times, but today we know more about what is happening than ever before. A Lafcadio Hearn, for instance, could no longer present Japan and the Japanese wholly as sensitive, aesthetic, quaint and charming; that gentle picture has been rounded out by the unsentimental course of history (and the Japanese have thereby become much more like real people to the rest of the world). Nor would it now be possible to write in Australia as though Aboriginals and their plight did not exist or as though the history of the white invasion was unstained and philanthropic; or if we did so, we would have to know what we are doing and why we are doing it.

These are some of the factors which are working to push writers into the uncomfortable role of spokespeople on matters of social conscience. Those who take it on are still sometimes accused of neglecting their duty towards their job of writing, which is supposedly an objective activity in manipulating words, which results in a piece of art, and to which one must devote oneself without regard to outside agencies. There are two points to be made here. It is perfectly true that a poem (or a novel) written with a purpose usually turns out to be an ephemeral bore, a piece of propaganda, which is why I always refuse to write poems 'to order' on any subject. (Well, I couldn't anyway.) But a poem comes of, and is essentially made of, feeling and experience. One can't detach oneself from experience without impoverishing one's capacity as a writer. It may be true that Shakespeare, to take the classic instance, never declares himself as personally for or against cruelty to Jews, for instance, or ingratitude on the part of the daughters of kings, or even murder; but he has certainly provided plenty of useful quotations on such subjects.

Secondly, becoming objectively involved may certainly result in one's having less time for actual writing. But anything may do that, from speculating in gold futures to acquiring or losing a house or a lover, and nobody objects to writers dabbling in such experiences. I think the people who object to writers becoming involved in matters of social conscience simply do so because such questions make them personally uncomfortable.

In Australia, apart from all the usual matters on the conscience of what is called Western civilization, we have two particular ones — the fact that we are living on and despoiling land stolen without agreement or compensation from a people who lived in the most intimate and loving relationship with it, and the tragic situation of the surviving Aboriginals themselves. These have been my own chief social concerns, but I don't think they have done my work as a poet any harm whatever. Indeed, both have provided a spur to writing, and deepened my own knowledge and perceptions in many ways. Both these matters certainly do make white Australians uncomfortable, chiefly because they fear that sooner or later we may have to do something expensive about both; but so far, writers who choose such unpleasant subjects are safe from the kind of fate which awaits outspoken writers in many countries beyond our shores. I am not yet likely to be imprisoned, put under house arrest or to have my works burned by the political censors; though I imagine there are those who might not mind having the power to take such action. It is of those who have suffered and are suffering the penalties that I'm thinking as I speak today.



— Peter Murphy

OVER 3 MILLION READERS EACH WEEK

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programmes

Don Lane's New

Karla deVito pin-up

Princess under pressure–

What Diana can learn from the Queen

17 health emergencies – and what to do

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PLUS cherry chocolate slice, step-by-step

JOHN FISKE and BRIAN COPPING

An Australian Image of the Monarchy

a semiotic approach to a theory of popular culture

Semiotics justifies its existence when it takes to pieces what is normally taken for granted. The monarchy justifies its existence with somewhat greater difficulty: the political arguments in its favor are many, varied and subtle — they need to be to counter the few, repetitive and vigorous ones opposed to it. Interestingly, the monarchy in popular culture never has to justify itself, rather it is used to justify (or as a point of justification for) other aspects of our culture — it is used to justify our version of the family, of the role of women, or even, paradoxically, of democracy.

This article is not concerned with the political dimension of royalty but with its role in our popular culture: royalty is for us a cluster of media images, a composite formed by our cultural accumulation of royal photographs, of royal stories, or royal film clips. So when we see, for instance, a photograph of the Queen we understand it by relating it to the myriad others in our 'image bank', not to the lady in question. So, our *signified* of the Queen is an accumulated concept, an intertextual total of our cultural experience. The 'reality' of the royals is irrelevant: the nature of their existence in the world *out there* is not in question; what matters is how they exist *in here* — they are part of our way of understanding ourselves, our culture. They are one of the myths we use to make sense of our socio-cultural experience, and the fact that we share the common centre of these myths intersubjectively with other members of our culture is one of the ways by which our cultural membership is identified and affirmed. We know we are members of an English speaking, English derived culture because we share, amongst other things, the dominant myths of the royal family. (The fact that we *also* share an anti-royalist counter myth with a particular subculture is, at this stage, beside the point — our anti-royalism is formed by its place within a dominant culture that values royalty positively.)

The royals, then, exist primarily within a meaning system; they are signs operating within the second order vocabulary of our culture; they are, to use Barthes's terms, connotations and myths. Images of them are therefore interesting not for what they tell us about the flesh and blue blood reality, but for what they tell us about ourselves. We made the meaning system, we fit them into it, so that's where our analysis should focus.

Let us take an image (see opposite page) notable only for its ordinariness. It is typical, familiar, instantly readable, and exhibits what Barthes (1977) calls "canonic generality" — the quality of embodying in itself the defining characteristics of the genre, in this case the media made media maid Lady Di.

So how can semiotics help us tease out the meaning of this cover which, we have already indicated, tells us nothing about Lady Di, but a lot about ourselves? First we need to detail what is actually there, what is signified in the denotative order. There are seven main units which have been combined to form a syntagm or statement. They are:

1. A large color photograph of Lady Di wearing a blue, formal, regal gown.
2. Two sepia photos of Lady Di, one reaching up to crowds during a walkabout, the other in formal evening dress, probably at a public function.
3. Two sepia photos of the Queen, each showing her wearing sensible clothes and a warm expression.
4. The red and white title, partly obscured by Lady Di's head.
5. "Princess under pressure" (small blue lettering), "What Diana can learn from the Queen" (large red lettering).

6. The diagonal banner, white on red, detailing some of the contents.
7. More red or blue lettering giving more contents.

The foreground is the color photograph of Lady Di, the background is a collage of sepia pictures of the Queen and Lady Di arranged in the form of a chiasmus (the Queen top left and bottom right, Lady Di top right and bottom left). There is also a confused impression of crowds reaching out to Lady Di as she does to them; the only clear image is that of a child in the top left corner. The sepia background gives a general impression of smiling royalty, smiling subjects and a happy mutual relationship between the two.

There are also words detailing the contents of the magazine. The article that follows up the cover picture is led into thus: "Princess under pressure, what Diana can learn from the Queen". The rest of the contents cover the female interests of cooking, caring for children, understanding men and their interests, and show biz and its personalities.

The main article finds nine areas where Lady Di needs the Queen's advice. We list them in the order they are given:

1. How to discipline herself, to maintain a little reserve.
2. To take an umbrella or raincoat so that she does not look damp and dismal for the crowds who see her at the end of the day.
3. Not to kiss children, because more children can see her if she remains standing up in an open car.
4. How to cope with the press.
5. To continue with her public appearances during pregnancy.
6. To appear fresh for each crowd of people.
7. To train her voice.
8. To maintain a neat, well-groomed appearance always.
9. To choose hats which are appropriate to public appearances.

This list is significantly banal: it establishes royalty, the rights of the public, and feminine concerns as essentially homogeneous. In this essay we wish to dig more deeply into the two explicit themes of monarchy and women, and into the underlying one of the public (i.e. us).

When these denoted objects start to interact with the value system of the reader, when, that is, we pass beyond identifying them and begin to evaluate them, then the meanings shift into the second order of signification. In this order Barthes (1973, 1977) identifies two main ways in which the value systems of the reader interact with the text: myth and connotation. A myth is a culture's way of conceptualising and understanding some significant aspect of its social experience. This text is working through the myths of monarchy and of women, (though, as we shall see later, there are latent but crucial references to the myths of democracy and of Australia). These monarchist and feminist myths exist outside the text in the cultural experience or 'image-bank' of the readers where they interlock with legendary motifs, such as the fairy-tale princess and Prince Charming, to form a complex network of potential meanings into which this particular text inserts itself. So the meaning of this text depends largely upon how the reader exploits this shared 'image-bank' as she engages with the text. The text itself prefers this meaning potential to be realized in a particular way, but it cannot impose its preference upon the reader.

In normal circumstances, we would predict that the reader's preferences and the text's preferences would coincide for this is characteristic of popular culture. The role of the text is not to convey an author's unique and distinct vision (as it is in high culture) but to verify the usefulness of the common 'image bank', to constantly confirm that it works as a means of understanding and making sense of our social experience. In popular culture then, the distinction between artist/text and reader is minimized: it is only in elite culture that the artist is elevated and the text given a sacrosanct status which it rarely deserves.

If myths are ways of understanding facets of our social experience, then connotations are ways of responding to them. Myths are essentially extratextual, they exist intertextually; connotations are too, but they are determined much more by the internal structure and nature of the text. Connotative meanings revolve around the question of *how* reality is reproduced, not *what* is reproduced: they are thus derived from matters of style, from the structure of the text and from the paradigmatic choices that have been made. A detailed textual analysis would analyse each of the stylistic and structural decisions in order to elucidate its significance in the realm of associative, evaluative and emotive meanings. We have space to refer to one or two only.

Thus, the fact that the sepia background pictures have the Queen and Lady Di arranged chiasmically and turned to face inwards, towards the colored portrait connotes the unity of royalty and the homogeneity of succession — the Queen is dead, long live the Queen. The reproduced similarity between the Queen and Lady Di connotes their real life similarity. The happy expressions happily reciprocated by the crowd, particularly the ecstatic child (top left) connote the value of democratic monarchy. The connotations of the page are strongly positive — the prettiness of Lady Di, the warmth of the royal smiles gain our approval and sympathy, which is then transferred to the parallel, if less visible, scale of social and political evaluations. Connoted values work by association — because the women are pretty and warm-hearted, the monarchy is socially desirable.

Articulated like this, it seems nonsense; but the point is that it is not articulated like this. Connotation, like myth, works invisibly, below the threshold at which logic can operate. This is what Barthes refers to when he calls the connotators (the signifiers of connotation) "the rhetoric of ideology". We are justified in extending this to include myth, for it is in the second order of signification as a whole that the abstract work of ideology takes a form that is concrete enough to be analysed. In the same way, the myths and connotations of women's role in society become one. The strongly positive connotations of monarchy slide into an approval of women's role. There is no suggestion that a woman's week whose centre is family health, cooking, husband's interests (realism) and TV, show biz and royalty (escapism) is inadequate: rather the connoted values of the cover lead the female reader into evaluating her socially determined role as satisfying and happy. The colors of Lady Di (red throne and blue gown) are repeated in the colors of the words detailing the contents of the magazine and the women's week. This stylistic choice associates royalty with the reader connotatively and thus encourages the positive connotations of royalty to slide over into the reader's evaluation of herself. Stylistically, connotatively, ideologically, the cover defuses any perceived contradictions in seeing the role of the monarch and the role of the female reader as one.

So the second order myths (of monarch and women) work together with the range of positive connotations in what we must call ideological practice. None of the second order meanings can exist unless they are negotiated within the framework of a dominant ideology.

We have here two interlocking sites of ideological practice — the role of monarchy and the role of women, and we would expect to find evidence of this practice not only in their textual constructions, but also in the wider 'picture of the world' of our culture — that is in the way we conceptualise and evaluate them. These two sites are interesting for our purpose because of one particular characteristic that they share — this is not the manifest one, exploited consciously by the magazine editor, that both are female, but the latent one, working invisibly as all the best ideological practice does, that both are centrally defined in terms of a power relationship, and both these power relationships would appear to work to the disadvantage of the Women's Weekly reader.

A simplistic view of what this cover says to its readers would be a straightforward put down: the monarch is elite, you are subordinate; men are dominant, you are subordinate. We could then say that it sugars this doubly depressant pill by showing how lovely the monarch is (and thus how lucky we are to be subordinate to her) and how happy and complete women are in their role. And in saying this we are beginning to get closer to the way that ideology works because we are perceiving contradictions which are ideologically denied or defused.

The monarchy is clearly founded upon elitism. But our dominant value system is an anti-elitist one which we call democracy. So the monarchy courts popularity in order to incorporate within itself the appearance of democracy; it is then able to use these incorporated democratic values to justify its elite position. The monarchy presents itself as being "of the people, by the people and for the people" — members of the royal family are to be seen by the people, are to have their hands shaken by the people and are even to be kissed by the people. So the Queen's advice to Lady Diana is ideologically appropriate: being a star personality involves maintaining a constant peak of popularity, so that if the 'job' became subject to a vote (like a democratic politician's), the present incumbent would always top the poll.

In popular culture, therefore, the royal family is rarely shown as the greatest landowner and the possessor of the greatest wealth (most of it inherited), or if it is, this enormous privilege is validated in terms of 'wages' — they earn it by being our popular royals. In the same way we willingly consent to their elite position and our subordinate one because they are so 'democratic'.

Marxists would see this as a clear example of hegemony. Hegemony, as Gramsci used the word, is the process by which the subordinate classes willingly consent to their subordination, and by which this subordination is made to appear natural. This involves the dominant class, and those who benefit by the existing order, in presenting this order in two ways: first it must be presented as to be to the benefit of the subordinate class that things remain as they are, for only thus can our willing consent be achieved. The monarchy is always shown as being there for our benefit: never are we shown as existing for theirs. Second, it must be presented as natural, and thus not open to serious question. If it is questioned the criticism can be neutralised by giving it a label (the mere act of labelling shows it is deviant) — 'Marxist' or 'Anarchist' attacks on the monarchy (even 'Royalist' defences of it) are indicated as deviant simply because they can be labelled, and thus their arbitrariness identified. On the other hand the 'naturalness' of the dominant system is so inevitably right, i.e. it can be so faithfully 'taken for granted', that it never needs conceptualising and thus needs no name. It accords so well with the common-sense, lived experience of the majority, that it can remain invisible. Barthes (1973) characterises this as typical bourgeois thought (or lack of thought) and calls it "exnomination".

Analysing ideology at work within the symbolic construction of women leads us into similar territory. On the manifest level, this cover shows us women only — men are significant by their absence. The visually represented world of a woman's week is filled out by the words — preparing food, struggling to understand the terms of her man's game, and fan worshipping show biz personalities. The advice that the Queen gives Lady Di fails to disturb the homogeneity of the picture. It centres around how to look, how to behave and how to be seen. Success in these vital areas of life adds up to what this magazine calls "the overwhelming task of majesty".

But it also adds up to the overwhelming task of femininity. The women's press harps constantly on women's need to understand and exploit fashion, grooming, manners and expression in order to create the right social impression. Women are to be judged by their appearance, they are produced by the perceptions of others. But so too are Queens and Princesses.

The elitism of royalty thus provides the ideological legitimation of the humdrum limits of women's role in a male dominated society. The femininity of the monarchy is an enormous bonus, for if a dominant elite can be shown to share the essence of femininity with a subordinate majority, then that majority is well on the way to consenting willingly to its own subordination. And this set of power relations is naturalised in a self-fulfilling circle. The monarchy is legitimated by the democratic value system which paradoxically justifies its elite position. This legitimation of the elite then confers its validity onto the subordination of the majority. So this subordination is ultimately and paradoxically confirmed by the democratic values that ought logically to oppose it.

But ideology does not operate within the confines of Aristotelean logic, precisely the opposite. Ideological practice works below the threshold of consciousness and it functions to defuse or disguise contradictions. Our social experience is shot through with contradictory elements, of which one is that the few hold power over the many in a social system that purports to give power to the majority. What our ideology does is to defuse this contradiction (which would otherwise justify revolution) by winning the consent of the subordinate majority to the minority's position of power.

But it wins this consent not by reasoned open argument, because this would admit of the alternative, the oppositional view. Rather it works to make this consent appear natural, to be the only possible response to social conditions, and one that *appears* to meet the interests of the majority but *in fact* serves those of the dominant elite. This is what Marxism means when it talks of ideology as 'false consciousness'. And popular texts, such as this one, play a crucial role in this. This cover presents, on the first order, an apparently truthful reproduction of the real world. Lady Diana and the Queen *are* like that. It then uses second order myths and connotations to make sense of the denotation, a process that the obvious denotative objectivity of the photograph renders invisible, and this invisibility is a necessary precondition for ideological practice.

We have preferred the phrase *ideological practice* to the simple word *ideology* because it points up an essential characteristic. Ideology is not a state of mind or a fixed pattern of meanings. It exists only in its practice as a means of making sense. When we respond to the preferred reading of a text such as this cover, when we acknowledge the validity of the myths and connotations by the act of using them, when in other words, we behave as culturally produced subjects, then we are maintaining and continuing the dominant ideology. The ideology is what enables our own cultural experience and the value system of the text to interact in order to produce meaning: both the text and the reader are the products of their respective histories. The text is the contemporary moment in the historical development of the myths and connotations of monarchy and womanhood. The reader is the history of her cultural experience. The act of reading is when the reader's history and the history of the text come together in a form of negotiation — a search for common ground, for shared experience, for a similar 'world view'. When this negotiation is easy, when the shared world view is achieved with no strain, so that the process of achieving it is invisible, then that world view appears natural, inevitable, because it is validated by the reader's history and by the text's history. The text makes not just sense but common-sense, and the ideology has 'worked' yet again. We thus maintain and validate the ideology by allowing our reading to be produced by it.

But ideology is not necessarily the all determining force that such an argument might suppose. The text prefers to be read by the dominant ideology, but it cannot insist that it is. It cannot, in other words, impose its history upon ours.

If our history contains anti-royalist or feminist discourse, then we will read this text within a radically opposed meaning system. We will find it offensive or at least irrelevant. If we have a strong sense of Australian republicanism, this too will affect our reading. Our history *negotiates* with the text, our value system is at least as important as that of the text in producing a meaning. And as any trade unionist will know, the result of negotiation can be to identify points of disagreement just as often as to find common ground.

Stuart Hall (1980) calls this a radically opposed reading and alerts us to the possibility of negotiated readings. These are readings that accept the dominant ideology, but negotiate a special stance or meaning within it, in order to take account of differences in the history of the particular individual or subculture of which he is a member. Thus we can imagine a right wing conservative reading that would agree with the pro-monarchy anti-feminist dominant ideology, but which would find this particular text tasteless, sentimental and even insulting to royalty. A brief audience survey revealed another common negotiated reading: "She's all right, but she'll never be another Queen Mum" — a good example of a negotiated reading for it accepts the pro-monarchist ideology while 'negotiating' a slightly deviant place for Lady Di within it. These readings are categorically different from a radically opposed one and are, in practice, much closer to the reading preferred by the text itself.

One final question is crying out to be asked: is there a specifically Australian inflection to this text, or is it evidence of an ideological practice that crosses national boundaries and is common to all industrialised, capitalist western societies? Could this cover, in other words, sit as happily on a British news stand as it does on an Australian?

In one sense, it clearly could. The ideological framework of popular culture within which readers' meanings are negotiated is clearly transnational, at least at the level of its potential of meaning. This accounts for the easy exportability of popular TV programmes or records, but it does not account for the scope that each nation (or culture or subculture) has to negotiate meanings appropriate for itself.

Does this cover, then, admit or even prefer a specifically Australian reading? We think that it does, but only at a level of subtlety that will be speculative and thus controversial. To discover this level, we need to operate on the level of deeper subconscious meanings, and to use methods of analysis such as those used by Key (1973) in his work on advertisements. Although the following interpretation suggests that much of the impact of this particular cover is subliminal, it does not suggest that the arrangement of material is necessarily or deliberately manipulative. Nevertheless, what has been consciously or subconsciously achieved is a reflection of the predominant ideology, and its impact on the reader is equally powerful. Neither do we suggest that the cover contains 'embeds' (or sub-visual data), but rather that it is the *arrangement* of the material that is significant.

At this level we perceive a tension between the words "Princess under pressure — what Diana can learn from the Queen" (which allots the dominant role to the Queen) and the visual content in which Diana is dominant: (three images to two; large, colored image against small sepia ones). Diana is shown young, looking upwards, reaching out towards the people: the Queen appears ageing, looking down, slightly withdrawn. Diana's youth and informality is opposed to the ageing, formal Queen in a way that would allow the Australian reader subliminally to associate Di with Australia and the Queen with Britain.

The 'revealing' gowns of Lady Di are part of this. She is in the process of loosening some of the traditional constraints of royalty, just as Australia is loosening its traditional ties with Britain. We would also argue that the montage is constructed in a way that allows a similar meaning to be subliminally negotiated. The Queen's image top left makes her appear to be looking at Diana's bosom, and if, subliminally, we accept this, we then begin to see the Queen's smile as slightly strained and pensive, almost disapproving. So the ideology of monarchy and of the homogeneity of succession contains tensions of relationship between the old and the new that are structured into this text in such a way as to enable an Australian reader to perceive subliminally similar tensions in the relationship of Australia and Britain.

The tasteful sexuality of Diana is part of her youth, but also of her fertility. The mystique of royal marriages involves gynaecological inspections to ensure both the virginity and the fertility of the future bride. Lady Di's favorable results were treated respectfully but very comprehensively by the world's press.

So the surface structure of values of this cover can be expressed in a series of binary oppositions:

Lady Diana : The Queen
Young : Ageing
The new : The old
Fertile : Barren
Informal : Formal
Popular : Reserved
The future : The past

The values on the left are applicable to Australia, those on the right to Britain, so the deep structure underlying these surface oppositions is: *Lady Diana is to the Queen as Australia is to Britain.*

Our contention that Lady Di has a particularly Australian significance is supported by the fact that she has appeared on the cover of Women's Weekly at least four times within the preceding six months and at least as often in the Woman's Day and New Idea.

We have found this cover particularly interesting because it has demonstrated how a local inflection of meaning can be generated within a much broader ideological context. The local Australian reading, which is finally the crucial one, finds space for itself within a much wider ideological practice of our understanding of monarchy, women and power relations that crosses national boundaries and is broadly common to western, industrialised, capitalist nations. This cover would make good sense in Britain, Europe or the US — but it would not make Australian sense.

And perhaps it is this fact that the Australian reading is negotiated within a transnational ideological practice that makes the cover safe and reassuring, for the reader is enabled to find an Australian meaning that fits within, but does not undermine, the dominant ideology. It is a negotiated reading, not a radical one, and thus finally demonstrates the ability of the dominant ideological practice to cope with the world as it is: the way that the ideology can admit local deviations is the final guarantee of its effectiveness, its universality. There is no need to question something that is so obviously working well.

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BROADWAY VISION

And in my dream I saw
a man upon a bus on
Broadway at 100th west.
His jaw pure kangaroo, his
nose both wise and black
and bearing spectacles.

Make haste, O God, deliver me
make haste to help, O Lord

No trousers, underpants with
stripes and limp descending
sox. I prayed to wake as
my straphanging neighbour
pressed wise and black
against me on the bus.

O hurry, Lord, speed to help
your homesick servant

I sought to move, to leave the
brutish bus. In vain. His way
was forward. He moved speedily
as I backslid. And as he
pressed, I pleaded with the
driver in my uprightness:

O help me, Lord, to pray
for words are slow to come

Obey my voice, was what I
would have said but tongue
was locked, confounded.
No voice came. Instead, grey
desperate vapours spread
from nostrils, ears and mouth.

O clear the air, dear God,
release my tongue

Besides, the driver wasn't
wearing trousers either.
How can man trust a bus's
destination when no girdle
cleaves the driver's loins?
You cannot and I didn't.

O Lord, make haste
deliver me conventionally

When suddenly a storm smoked
up the windows, towering
clouds blocked out the light
and hail and thunder split
the sky. I strove in silence
with my beast from whose —

O Lord, I can't believe
this bit —

sharp pants were coming
tongues of flame! A trumpet
voice waxed loud in Aramaic:
'Stop the bus! She wants to
leave!' accompanied by balalaika
in the right-hand corner.

O Lord, my swift deliverance?
my help?

Alarmed, the other passengers
divided like the sea. With
faces harder than the rocks
beneath they cursed my *sansculotte*
assailant who then sank
upon his evil kneecaps.

For the day of democratic wrath
is come. And who shall withstand
your communal pressure, O Lord?

Behold, I am standing at the door
of the bus, and am set down at
116th west in Broadway, N.Y.C.
safe from tribulation and untrousered
men with spectacles and heads of
kangaroo (Macropus Rufus).

O blessed Lord, you heard my prayer.
From such tight spots have you delivered
me often enough amid the difficulties
between birth and death. But how much
longer will your patience hold?

And as I sang the praises of my saviour
I looked about me in the busy street
and lo, there hurried men with jaws
like kangaroos, with noses wise and
black and bearing spectacles. No
trousers. Underpants with stripes.

I thought I was awake. It seems you
favour those asleep, O Lord

The women all had pouches on their
bellies, some with young and all
did flee apace with joyful din in
N.Y.C. Only I had neither pouch
nor child. My name was blotted out.
Awake, I longed for home .

I am much afflicted, Lord.
Let me truthfully remember
what is was to be at home.
Quicken me kindly out of
silence to speak the danger
of being too much oneself.

FAY ZWICKY

OVERTIME

I resigned
three months ago
(the job
not myself).

Now
I dream about it
sweat
there's a corridor
someone yells BARK
I bark
I bark down the corridor
BARK
Someone yells BARK
again
and I bark
down the corridor
BARK
Down the corridor
I BARK.
It goes on like this
til morning.

The next night
the corridor
I recognise.
No one there.
I yell BARK
all night.

BARK I yell
BARK
they don't come into
the yellow corridor
but I yell BARK
anyway.

Tomorrow I have an interview
for a different job.
I want the money
not it.
I'm almost certain
there'll be
a corridor there.

CHRIS MANSELL

DRAWN FROM MEMORY

Time draws another line
across the pool of forehead,
the artist's hand sure
and steady on the canvas;
though ripples on the surface
break into ripplets
the more deeply you look
into the canvas pool.

MICHAEL DUGAN

WHAT'S NEW?

Unemployed,
disqualified from the race;

White folk say: "NO SHOE-LACE!"

Disgruntled,
disjointed — nose out of place;

People mutter: "can't hack the pace!"

Referee count to ten —
gotta' get back on my feet again,

Newsfella' got no doubt:
"ZONKED OUT!"

Newsboys shout:
"ZONKED OUT!"
"NO SHOE-LACE!"
"HOPELESS CASE!"

Friends and family better save face!

Hated,
frustrated,
treatment due;
Official word: "JOIN THE QUEUE!"

Hobbled,
nobbled,
wheeled into view;

People mutter: "g'day mate, what's new?"

MICHAEL SAMARCHI

THE MYTH OF THE SUNFLOWER

remembering
the myth of the sunflower
we must never see ourselves as having
died before

she bends her crown before the morning
her supple leaves withered, are singed & are crushed
& rolled & puffed into an eveningful of
transmigratory transparencies, her

solubility setting in a glass
of clear metamorphosis. at that crystal hour
of becoming, we do not pine nor whine out
psalms on all things transcendental

she whispers with the moon & mates
with the wind, then awakening with all her glory
the sun reigns
& we die an idea

RUSSELL SOABA

DRESSING

After, there's nothing to say, so you feel naked,
and the kid's still banging his cot, asking what's next?
Come on, old son, you can make it,
only forty more years. Start with your underdacks.

It's later and cold, pull on a jumper and be warm.
Graphpaper night. Nappies move against the stars.
Lugging the garbage bin, I see them.
That kid with bandaids stuck on imaginary scars.

The mulberry main has burst. There's a shadow of black fruit
beside the palings, on the concrete, in the street light.
Red ones dissolve the stain. That kid's face
when he's frustrated, mulberry scarlet and puce!

DANE THWAITES

RIDING THE BICYCLE

Nothing stirred
except dragonflies.

The mind following each minute tumbling
from a stellazine largactil unconsciousness
every wobble fused into the dance some
feverish nights a gut feeling in here/the
skin glowing in the dark
I do
a few dancesteps. The cold sand under the
blankets cutting an ankle with an overgrown
toenail some mornings rummage with the nightmare/the
doors moving — invisible insects
in the air (beads of sweat quivering on a thick
mat of hair/I am on the edge of a continent
the rain between sea & sky/like the strings
of a harp)
& then you do the dance waking up you do the
actual performance the mime a journey riding
the bycycle a road
a wide paddock in it are statues of animals & hills
the intense crimson giggling over a blur
of horizon also
squirts of yellow/I pedal
into a thin dust.

I ride the bycycle

into a prehistoric light.

nothing stirred
except wild yellow daisies
(like crazy bees swimming in the wind).

ROBERT DRUMMOND

THE COMPANION

She had asked for the tall model to be sent
Of medium build, fully conversational
But softly spoken — she couldn't bear
Someone who would spoil her peace and quiet

Thirty numbered parts were laid out in front of her
All she had to do was assemble them
Tighten a few bolts, turn knobs
Then her companion would walk and talk

Soon he stood before her
With a smile on a skilfully moulded face
Admiringly she touched his cheek
This could be a very pleasant arrangement

"You have skin" he said "I long for metal
To feel cold, stiff hands in mine
Your body is round — I am drawn to
The straight, clean lines of a manufactured woman"

It took her ten minutes to unscrew him
Two more to throw his sections into a corner
His arms and legs were useful as doorstops
Her potplants flourished inside the foolish head

CAROLE WILKINS

SHE

she's surrounded by farmland
pasture extending to the edges
of the house

her domain has no fences
she clears the open drain
before visitors
mows the surrounds
so they'll see the snakes
before they tread on them

these actions are not pretensions
they are jobs in a calendar of jobs
skills as broad as her husband's hat rim
roles that mesh like fence wire

she refuses to build partitions
& turns her shoulders to the present

her strength reoccurs like the seasons

RORY HARRIS

MELBOURNE ON MOGADON

Melbourne you are not good, nor lovely, but home.
I love your beat up trams, and your hoons.
I love your full stops, I love your rotten poetry.
Walking through carparks
looking for the longlegged longing to come true.
A woman painter who screws you shitless and paints well.

That little hoodlum light
banging away in a fucked globe.
But she likes Leonard Cohen so there's an end to it.
It's funny going to the footy
on Mogadon when Fraser's there.
Nothing's real.
You don't even believe the sweet park air.
(Mogadon, the poets' friend).
Ah, sleep on dear park. Fitzroy won today.
They beat poetry by six goals straight.
I was in the milkbar just before,
thinking of nothing but the saintliness of words.
Love is unconscious. Unknowing water from air.
The name of the rose in the third act of joy.
Ah, Fitzroy won today.
That's like getting a poem in *Fascist Weekly*
and getting paid in the poor flowers of spring.

BARRY DICKINS

LOU IS BREAKING HEARTS IN EUROPE

She's the kind of woman
who makes lovers wherever she goes.

Lou is breaking hearts in Europe.
Affairs escalate,
but she knows that she will leave the country:
passion steps away from marriage.

She will blaze a trail
of blissed-out wounded lovers:

one sits lonely in a cafe —
the favoured table echoes the sweet
words of the departed muse;

the flat taken impulsively is
now sublet — its esoteric objets are
a monument to her;

the adventure playground
she discovered
in his home town —
it's a small piece of 'Australia' now.

MICHAEL AITKEN

ESTUARY

Sigh in the sleeping grass, wind of the waking day.
Those petals of the night were lined with blue.
The unclasped stars are put away,
each pool makes one sun two.

Soar in the sky's blue sea, sails of the clouds' white boats,
but leave all longings on our gull-greyed shore.
The sand is loud with the plover's notes,
all of them sung before.

Shimmer among shallows, fragments of shattered light
dodging like moorhens in the restless reeds,
until black sepals of the night
close round, and day recedes.

R. H. MORRISON

ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF POLITICAL ECSTASY IN AUSTRALIA

Bugger history. I stand for
ecstasy. Vote for me,
grope for me under
pink & purple searchlights.
Here you are — sparklers to flint off
your fingers like knuckledusters of lightning.
Groove on this group backing me
in blue, black & orange greasepaint,
their gauze collars up like frilly lizards.
Support the cause. Mine. Yours.
Here, just for you —
your painted pink boomerang.
No fooling.
You can feel the cross-curve
to shoot the wind &
shave the air.
It'll fly. Believe me.
Believe in me.
Hurry. *Have* me now.
For the eighteen & nineteen year old vote
the Liberals have already offered me
the Ministry of Health.
They say it's me
or dope.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

MRS MOTHERS DAY

i am mrs mothers day
i will hire myself out to you
for the 364 other days
i will not be satisfacted by
1 plus 364
grottybunches of whitechrysanthemum
you choose to offer me snottynose
i will not be placated by
a dinner a picnic
a free ride to the cemetery under yr
dog's blanket to look at a chunk of
white stone & think of yr father
yr father was not
cut stone with a jamjar
stuffed with dying flowers he pissed
on alive flowers more than once said
it was good for them

i will be yr mother
yr motherinlaw
pregnant   lover aunt sister & stranger
doing the splits like a millipede
each foot in a different cliché
yr fantasy of me wife immortally
impregnated by you: sons for ever!
i will even be yr fantasy of
how it feels
to be me sucked by you one minute
you're at my tit then it's yr child's turn
old i mix yr faces up
i will wear my sex like
a great figure with no clothes on it
i will wear my sex like a massive ladywrestler's
figure that you would like to imagine covered
i will wear you like a
loved codpiece with added
imaginative advantages
i will be yr nosewiper yr shelter yr stomach
flatterer racing tipster & bible
on all of the 364 other days
you will not believe my racing tips
till the horses win
i will defend you
against fear of yr impotence
that my competence fosters

for it will neuter us i will be strong
in the war you are in
against yr own obsolescence
for it is my war too
i will cherish you like a glass
of milk soothes yr gut & a greasy hamburger
hits yr ulcer

i will take equal money for my work to the money
you get
give or take a few allowances for sex's
unique variations
i cannot feasibly hire myself out
as a sperm donor
        i will be yr psyche's strength
in the war of yr nerve against the steel man

you are seeing yourself as less than

& unman you by over-fuck after   if i am lucky
collecting some child that is wanted

i will pay for you to have sewing lessons to fix
up the holes in yr sox
pump up yr ego & save

every damaged dog cat chicken lizard tadpole
spider duckling you ever
give me to save   from its death   for yr
        temporary interest
that i will have to feed & look after for ever

as yr kodak i will not let a thing you think
shames you but i am proud of
slap to the back of the memory-bureau & lie
with its face down matting with the dust of
        Forgotten
i will preserve the piece of toffee
you made for me in 4th grade inside the
indian headdress you rejected when you were 10
— which headdress you now
wish to give to yr own son   minus toffee —

i will listen to you till yr
voice runs out like bathwater

as yr wife i will never let anyone come between
you & yr mother who is not me

aren't you too stuck on the outskirts
of the day you have set me in
like a cement foot-print outside the theatre?

can we pay
    for us to come inside
        & play like it is

        for the rest of the year?

do you really want   to stick neon lights in my cunt
& worship there   for the 364   other days?

now it's
    yr turn   (off stage)   sotto nervous
who   do you want   me to be   what do you
think to say now that i've gone?

J. S. HARRY

THE PEACH MELBA HAT

Well, I was walking down the street just the other day
with the Snowdrop Kid
and we decided to drop into Y & J,
to see Chloe, you know.
She was going to get sold sometime soon
and we wanted to glance at her just once more.

Anyway, we'd barely poked our noses through the
door
when the manager fronted up,
his arms full spread as if recently crucified,
and he said, "You two out.
Youse's barr'd. Youse's barr'd.
You've already been barr'd for forever before.
Out."

So I gives the Snowdrop Kid a wink and a nudge
in the ribs,
then shoves this bloke aside.
"I'll call the cops," he yelled.
"Go righter'ed," we says
and choofed on through to the bar.

Well, we'd barely had a chance to gaze
at the azure eyes of Chloe
when the jacks, all dressed in blue.
have come in
and just behind them, with triumphant grin
the manager pointing at us.

So we had to hit the toe
go out the other way real fast
and, rather disgusted,
we had to catch a bus.

And on the bus we saw this grande dame
dressed all in white,
and she was 80, maybe 85.
As languid as a wreath of snow she sat
looking superb in her peach melba hat.

So I gave the Kid the nod, sauntered
down the aisle, propped opposite her,
and proceeded to let her know
just how wonderful she looked,
to let her know that her lapis lazuli
eyes were as deep as the sky,
her lips as lewd as the sea,
that the map of her face could be
explored only by a searcher for dreams.

She sat so sweetly
with the hint of a smile,
a mere quirk at the edge of her mouth,
and this idiot bus driver
in the midst of my delighted reveries
has turned to me and said,
"You can't talk to an old lady like that."

Her eyes shrank like anenomes
taken from rocks in the sea.

Bewildered and startled I began to explain
that I had taken great pains to be polite.
"But you've offended her?" yelled
the conductress swaying down the aisle
her eyes obsidian, and from behind her
came this pimpled youth,
old enough to be my son, saying
"I'm a police cadet."
"So fucking what," I cocks my head and says
"Look, hit the toe son,
before somebody here gets hurt.
What's wrong with you lot anyway
when a bloke can't compliment a lady
without copping all this crap?"

Between the bus stops
the bus stopped.
The Snowdrop Kid and I got off
to avoid any blues,
and aloof with sadness
and with tired salutes
we doffed our imaginary caps
to the fast disappearing
peach melba hat.

SHELTON LEA

NIGHTDRESS

There is a woman in a nightdress at the window.
It is a white nightdress & her body
flickers clitoric as candleflame in it.
It is a long white nightdress.
Her hair is wet & coiled up in braids.
It is lamp-coloured hair. There is a lamp
near her side & it holds wax & flame.
Her breasts & hips relax to the shape
& traditional colour of flames or pears
& her nightdress is white & swathes them.
It is a cold night & her fore-arms clench
across her ribs beneath the warmth in flesh.
There is cold light at her hair. There is cold
all around her & shadows of hands
& birds' wings on the walls & the glass
of the closed & coppery window-pane. Night
dresses her in ghosts & breathlessness. I
am restless & I need the lamp for air.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

THE GOLDEN ROSE

"Forking my Strudel, feeling my corset pinch,
mettlesome as the breast-harnessed horses in the Ring Strasse,
I foresee nothing — the family money bags are made
of an excellent canvas, grow in number, that small
black moustachioed man is a century in the future, other
influences spill this gold — today I have
a rendez-vous with the present, by Mozart's statue. The roses
are at their best, my new balloon-sleeved silk is
of their tone. 'Your hair, gold as their stamens,' murmurs Franz.
Life was a dream of love, of wine and roses.

When Papa took to drink, Mama to lovers, I became
a less desirable parti, and in the event was glad to settle
for a pastry-cook, in a large way, of course, but
an apoplexy took him off and there was I, a woman,
alone with eleven children, the eldest of them
a little older than my wedding ring, perhaps, and
inexperienced. The house and business — mortgaged. How
could I endure to set up yet again in lesser style? Who'd
take eleven children, soon to be twelve? I turned
my ring, gold like my hair. Ah, gold! The journals full
of it. Last year California, lately New South Wales.

It was soon done — I will not dwell too long
on the discomforts of that journey, the triplets born
off Buenos Aires. 'Drown them,' said Hans, my eldest, and indeed
it might have been better than to watch them die, all three. So
we landed in Melbourne twelve. It seemed more gold was found
at Ballaarat than Sydney. So to the fields, but
on the way, in the Black Forest, robbed! Most fortunately
between my admired breast I had sufficient, in
a small packet, to set up, in a modest way, a boarding house.
The boys in haste to peg their claims — no luck
at Ballaarat, they scattered, left me with seven girls.
A sound business woman, I engaged my capital
in the most profitable way. 'Austrian Rose' they called me,
my house the gayest and the best in town. My acumen
was proved, the boy's made nothing much, the girls I married off
one by one, to diggers who'd struck it rich, and when
the surface gold ran thin, sat on my profits, economised. Tilling
my patch, I found gold, a heavy lump of it, Austrian
Rose's 'Ballaarat Potato'. A second fortune
and a third life. An empty-pocketed compatriot,
Wilhelm Strauss, offered himself, and Austrian Rose
faded into matron, black-silked, respected.
Under the name of Straughan, we took up land among
the Scots (whom our success convinced, increased it)
and with a last late child founded a dynasty."

I could rehearse in detail, till the nineteen-eighties,
the varied tale of Rose's children's children,
but it's run of the mill, I shan't detain you,
though there's some would. I'll just note for the record
and the joke, that Rosie Straughan, researching for her Master's,
dug up Austrian Rose, published her thesis, *Goldrush Madam,*
last year to great acclaim. Skeletons today are party pieces.
They're making a film about Rose, the Western District
doesn't seem too upset, though in some instances they'll
steer their children away from History as major study.
Some secrets are too black to be let out.

This poem is too long, I'll condense, leave out
dull doings, all the politics, Rose's performance on the
zither, The Prince, the naked ladies, suicides,
madmen, cravats and falls from horses. You've read
such stuff before. You have the nitty-gritty, I save paper.

BARBARA GILES

JOHN REED

An Eltham Road

A Painting by Walter Withers

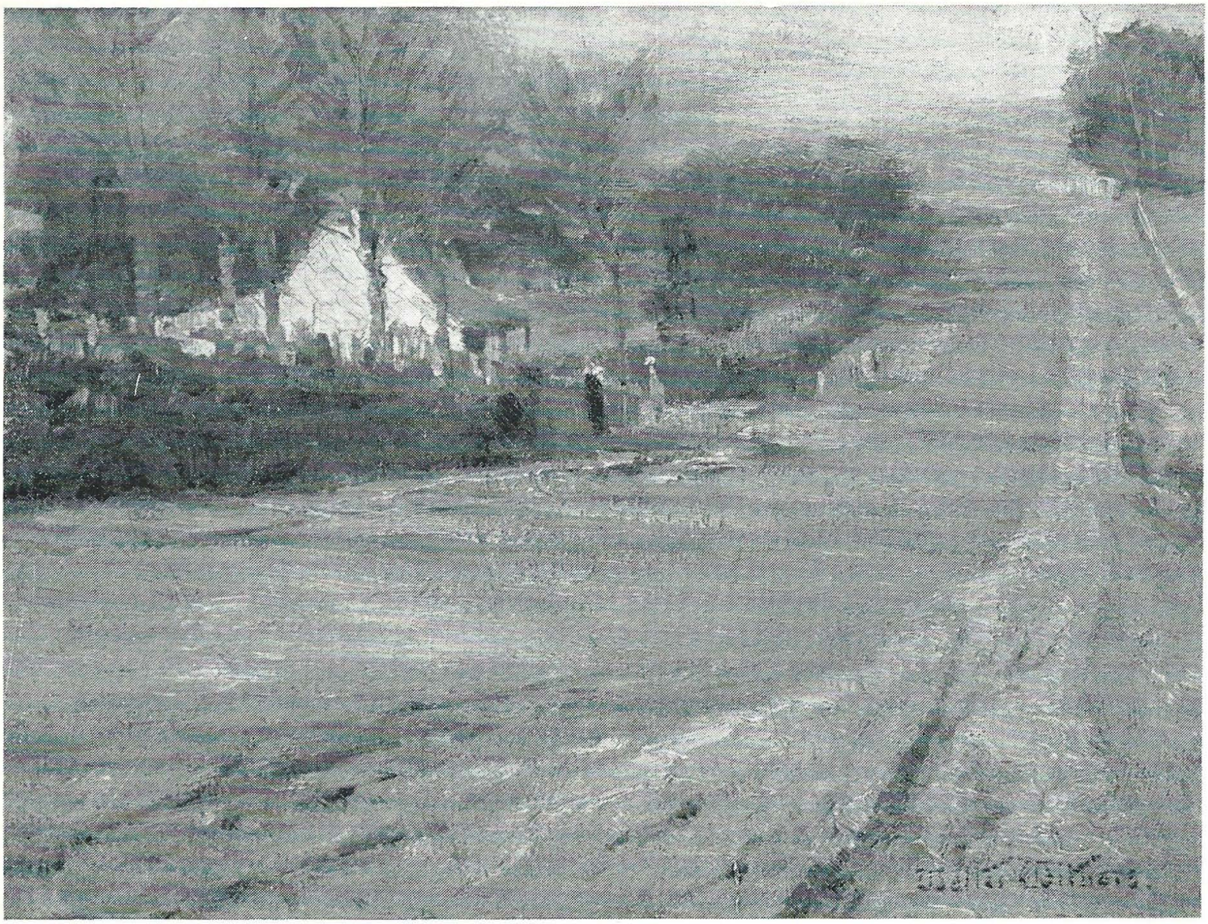
I suppose I have been familiar for over forty years with Walter Withers' "Spring on the Lower Templestowe Road" in the Victorian National Gallery. It has always been there and I have always just accepted it as one of the paintings of the Heidelberg School, a painting I found pleasant enough but which did not impress or affect me as much as others of the same school. I thought of it as a thoroughly nice and acceptable painting, a good painting but lacking a certain allure, a charm (I use the word in a pure sense) one associates with the best work of that group; and, probably for this reason, I did not feel the incentive over the years to follow up his work with any particular enthusiasm, and when I saw any other painting of his I expect that, for the same reason, I only looked at it superficially.

Then, my recollection is — though it seems it must be in some way faulty — that I saw in the Ballarat Art Gallery an 'interior' which immediately struck me as something unexpected among Australian paintings, and discovered it was by Walter Withers. While I was impressed by the sheer lyrical beauty of that gallery's Streetons and Roberts, this painting entered a different field, it was a daring exercise in manipulating a given pictorial scene, and my thoughts immediately went to Vuillard, whose best work I have always placed in this category.

Unfortunately my memory does not always carry details of paintings, even if they have affected me strongly, but the impression itself generally remains with much of its force. So when I returned to Ballarat some years later the painting I most wanted to see was this 'interior', and I at once told the director, Margaret McKeen, my thoughts. To my surprise she looked puzzled and said they did not have a Withers 'interior' and was sure the gallery had never had one, and of course I could not give her a coherent description to back up my own assurance. I did say, however, that I felt there was a piano somewhere in it which played an important part in its formal structure. This brought immediate response, and she said, "Oh, you must mean the McCubbin", and sure enough there was an unusual McCubbin 'interior' with a piano. What could I say? That it had previously been wrongly labelled? That there must have been another painting?

Whatever the explanation I (illogically, no doubt) retained at the back of my mind that same strong image of Withers, so that when a few years later my wife and I came across his "An Eltham Road" at an auction sale, we were at once interested and decided to bid for it. In those days, now some years ago, it was still possible to buy an early Australian painting without having to pay for a masterpiece, and the result was that when the sale took place we bought not only the Withers but also a Carse and a William Short, and it is interesting now to recall that when we got them all home it was these latter two which received most of our attention, and I can even remember saying "if we had to part with any of them it would be the Withers which would have to go".

How differently I feel now, when, in a particular sense, it sustains my interest and admiration in a way no other painting of its period does. For me, it puts Withers as a man apart, a man a long way ahead of his time in Australia, in a way the other painters were not. I know, of course, that they too were innovators, and it is quite possible that their paintings are more beautiful than those of Withers; but, you might say, they merely brought Australian painting up to a certain period, while he leapt ahead: they were intent on achieving, and did achieve a sometimes breath-taking rendering of our landscape, but Withers was producing purely and simply a



painting. It happened to be a landscape, but that was not the important thing; the important thing was that it was a painting, with a landscape, so to say, an excuse for the painting. Streeton painted a landscape, Withers painted a painting.

If you look at "An Eltham Road" purely as landscape, as I expect I did when we first got it, and in your mind's eye measure it up to a Streeton, a Roberts, a Conder, you will probably be disappointed, as I was; but if you can see it just as a painting it is quite another matter. How exciting it then becomes. That awkward, clumsy-looking road, such an arbitrary imposition on the harmony of the landscape, immediately assumes a different character altogether, and lifts the painting into a completely new category, the category of a modern self-contained painting. It is part and parcel of a daring pictorial structure, built up of forms and colors — a white angular cottage, heavy clumps of brown trees, either rounded or ill-defined, asymetrical areas of an unhealthy-green grass, and finally this dominating road, dominating by its form more than by its somewhat murky brown. It might well be considered that none of these things are particularly beautiful in themselves; but they do not have to be; it is what Walter Withers has done with them that affects us so deeply, his lovely and daring organisation of all these features so that he makes them become beautiful in their totality as a painting. That is his incomparable art, the art of a truly modern painter before his time. In this sense he is the most important of them all.

Australian Theatre and the Ghost of Classicism

NOEL MACAINSH

The history of Australian theatre, as Eric Irvin[1] points out, has been dealt with in books "of facts, dates, the names of theatres and stage performers . . ." but only to a small degree as "a complex or organic whole". The present study is an attempt towards understanding this "whole" by considering the role of 'classical' drama in the development of Australian theatre, particularly in the late nineteenth century.

In the progress from early colonial rule by governor into the years of Federation, the orientation of Australian theatre on London remained more or less constant. As Irvin writes:

> Whether we have ever had an Australian theatre in the exact meaning of the phrase is doubtful, but there is not the slightest doubt that for one hundred years or more what we did have was the English theatre in Australia.[2]

The respect for things English is clear in the very titles of the theatres: the word "Royal" was a common prefix, as were "Prince", "Princess", "Victoria", and so on.

It would lead too far afield here to consider in detail the theatrical significance of the developments that culminated in Queen Victoria declaring from her castle at Balmoral that Australia was to exist as a Commonwealth from 1 January 1901. But it is clear that the Australian businessmen of the time, who emerged more and more successfully with increasing independence from London and Bradford, embraced imperialism rather than nationalism as a political faith. The spectre of militant labor led these men to look for defensive alliances with conservative squatters, and it led the theatre, "depending on the support of an emergent middle class, to look exclusively abroad for plays to stage".[3]

One notes here two parallel developments. Firstly, the architectural form of the theatre in Australia changed in the course of the nineteenth century, from the 'Georgian' theatre described by Irvin, to the 'hierarchical' theatre designed by William Pitt and others. Irvin writes of the Georgian theatre that

> Its architecture, its stage equipment, its plays, acting styles, lack of organisation and discipline, the irresponsibility of its actors, the peculiarities of its audiences — all were reproduced in Sydney down to the smallest detail.[4]

Architecturally, this theatre is described as

> a long rectangle, with the stage occupying about one half of the floor space and the auditorium the other . . . There was a pit with benches, and three sides of the auditorium were taken up by boxes in a construction very like the verandahs which surround an inn courtyard.[5]

Irvin quotes Professor Allardyce Nicoll as saying that "it was difficult for a self-respecting, moral London middle-class citizen to take his family to the theatre" and Irvin tells us that this was valid also for the Georgian Theatre in Sydney.[6] This theatre, its architecture and moral tone, stands in contrast with the 'High Victorian' theatres of Australia, as decribed, for example, by Professor J. M. Freeland:

> The inside glowed with red plush and mahogany, plate-glass and gilt, coloured marbles and thick red carpet. There were wide ample staircases, velvet curtains with gold tassels and tiers of balconies supported on cast iron columns. Private boxes looked on to a vast proscenium surrounded by giant Orders, dancing plaster putti and gambolling gods and goddesses and flanked by a pair of huge alabaster urns. In Melbourne

in 1887 William Pitt built, or more strictly redesigned, the Princess Theatre to be the largest and grandest theatre in the land. In it Pitt gave Melbourne the world's first opening roof and ceiling which could be rolled back on balmy nights to give the patrons entertainment under the stars. Sydney got Her Majesty's Theatre in the same spirit at the same time while lesser towns such as Hobart and Brisbane and large provincial towns built theatres for themselves that were different in size but identical in spirit and usually in name.[7]

The experience of a first night at such a theatre impressed many a young mind. When the curtain rose, one saw on stage a nobleman, a villain, a beautiful woman, a hero. In the intervals, the construction of the theatre suggested the form of society, by circles and tiers, and by boxes in which sat people of obvious or presumed superior status. One had one's own place in the social hierarchy of the theatre, and perhaps developed a taste thereby for ceremony and social order generally. It is plain that there was a re-introduction of hierarchy into the theatre in Australia in the late nineteenth century.

This of course follows from events in England. There, the theatre was rehabilitated; it was sumptuously refurbished; its moral tone and standards of decorum were raised in the rise of the business classes toward gentility. The Queen and members of her family began to attend London theatres, the effect being immediate in confirming a new era of theatre.

Secondly, the rising class of the prosperous in Australia, uneasy about the labor movement, and harboring impotent aggression against officialdom and aristocracy at 'Home', mastered this aggression by one of the classical defence-mechanisms investigated by psycho-analysis, namely, by identification with the opponent. Prior to the mid-century, the emergent middle-class with all their weaknesses were strictly concerned with their own status symbols, their own rules of living. After this time, however, they were concerned, even anxiously, with the appropriation of specifically aristocratic symbols. W. C. Wentworth had wanted a council with hereditary titles, a local 'House of Lords', so as to form a colonial aristocracy whose descendants would elect members from their own class. This "bunyip aristocracy" was rejected in theory but not in practice.[8]

The new hierarchy of society in the late nineteenth century had expressed itself in theatre-construction with its subtle system of circles and boxes and place-categories. In his niche of gold and velvet, the rich citizen could forget that he was not present at the palace, the castle. The rank-system of the boxes, however, no longer signalled the will of God, which, according to baroque thinking, placed the people of this earth at various heights, but it seemed nevertheless to be a visible Jacob's Ladder of one's career, which one can and should climb, even if the sparks fly and the weaker — thus still the will of God — should go to the wall. Historically viewed, the re-introduction of hierarchy and the installation of the theatre as the agent of self-confirmation of the emergent middle-class goes together with the emergence of congested areas of slums around the centres of industry.

So much for the overall historical structure. The question which now arises is: What dramatic productions correspond to this new theatre? The answer is: little worth mentioning. There are no new dramatic productions of rank that correspond to the spectacular gleam of the city theatres. It is true, however, that the standards of theatrical presentation in these theatres were so improved as to constitute virtually a new kind of production. It was the American actor-manager J. C. Williamson who played the leading role in this development. As J. C. Dicker, the biographer of Williamson, writes:

> By 1879, large segments of the population were enjoying unaccustomed affluence. Their socio-economic position had outdistanced their access to the cultural and artistic refinements of life . . . Such a society required to satisfy its theatrical needs and to foster its theatrical growth, a man . . . to mount first-class productions . . . who would dare to import great artists . . . Such a man was J. C. Williamson . . . The very plays in which he scored his greatest triumphs were, in fact, the melodramas and farces which appealed so strongly to the colonial taste . . . Williamson added a high degree of artistic and technical proficiency gleaned from the leading playhouses of America and England.[9]

Compared to the earlier colonial theatre of Barnett Levey, the theatre of Williamson indeed added such "a high degree of artistic and technical proficiency" as to express a whole new theory of drama, albeit a theory heavily embedded in the 'practical', with little or no overt reflection on its principles. A brief comparison of Williamson's theatrical practice with that of the Australian Georgian Theatre described by Irvin will already indicate something of the great shift in viewpoint of the producers. Williamson of course was not original here. He had "gleaned" from overseas and knew how to apply the results to Australia. The theory that was implicit in his practice was of determining significance for Australian theatre right to the present day, and became a ghostly image against which all Australian indigenous drama since the 1880s has fitfully turned.

Why ghostly? Firstly, because the theatrical principles of the leading actor-manager, J. C. Williamson, were derivative of the theory of 'classical' drama, and, secondly, because this theory of 'classical' drama itself was a creation of the nineteenth century projected backwards onto the drama of the 'classical' period.

René Wellek, in his essay, "The Term and Concept of Classicism in Literary History" (1969) states that:

> Today it seems impossible to write about English eighteenth-century literature without using the term "classicism" . . . But what seems a matter of course was not so even sixty years ago, and one hundred years ago the term was not used or hardly at all.[10]

Elsewhere, he states that the term "classicism" occurs "first in Italy in 1818, in Germany in 1820, in France in 1822, in Russia in 1830, in England in 1831".[11] This acceptance of classicism as "a matter of course" is illustrated by Leslie Rees, who, contemplating Australian theatre in retrospect, writes:

> This then was the tradition facing all good Australians who felt the urge to write "serious" plays during nearly the whole of the nineteenth century. Little worth imitating was being written in England. The nearest verse-play models seemed to be historical dramas of the classical eighteenth century — for instance, Addison's *Cato* which echoed the formalism of Racine — or those of Shakespeare himself.[12]

What then is the characteristic of this theoretical construction, "classical drama"? Why has it remained effective, to some extent, right to the present day? In its strivings to take advantage of the status-signals of the aristocracy, the Australian middle class could not accept the depiction of itself in art. One cannot present the failure of a sheep-station or a firm of real-estate speculators like the fall of a princely house. In place of the self-reflection of a power-holding class, a new aesthetic principle emerged, the principle of property. Art-works now find their meaning as objects of possession, as property of a higher kind. Their reproduction on the stage has the function of assuring the citizen of rights of possession. The architectural pomp of the theatre-temple is linked to the triumph of the politically hampered middle class. Culture, in Oscar Handlin's words, became "an inert thing to be possessed rather than a medium through which the individual expressed himself. It was good because it helped to establish the status of its owner . . . Society had no standards of its own and sought no meaning in the objects it possessed".[13]

The range of historical subject-matter actually brought to the Australian stage, or in plays written for it by locals and left unperformed, is quite staggering. "Most of the plays," remarks Leslie Rees of the latter, "retold the story (or part of it) of some historical or legendary figure. The rule appeared to be that such a figure must be well removed from the present . . ."[14]

The central thesis runs: now the time has come when perfect drama is possible. The task is to separate the faults from the achievements in each epoch of the stage and, from the sum of all the positive aspects, to formulate the principles of the complete theatrical work. Then this perfect work will become an actual productive possibility for the first time.[15] Accordingly, we find in the nineteenth century increasing regard for 'technique' as a thing in itself. The most important stage-designer and 'archaeological realist' of late nineteenth-century London, E. W. Godwin, invented a new role for himself and for the modern theatre: that of 'producer', a man endowed with final artistic control over a whole production.[16] And the most important principles of the ensuing 'classical' drama were that (1) The hero of the drama is a clearly autonomous being. He is a maker of fate, who might say, with the Victorian poet William Henley, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul", and (2) All events in the drama transpire according to a continuous chain of cause and effect, even if the spectator grasps it only at the end of the production.

These two principles relate to each other as energy and mechanism, and this so-called 'classical' theatre must in truth fulfill precisely those demands which one makes on a machine, although none of its admirers would appear to admit this. Insistence on the concept of "technique" proves to be the very essence of this aesthetic: the aim is the art-object that functions perfectly in itself. This quality is measured according to faultless running, and the 'idea' of the work is merely a factor in the mechanics of the plot. "The consequences of the alliance between Society and culture," writes Handlin, "were far-reaching, both for the producers and consumers of art. The creative work became an abstraction with no relevance to the function it served."[17]

At the same time the basically unlimited reproduceability of the play is achieved: it can 'run' uniformly for an indefinite number of performances. Art becomes in H. G. Kippax's words, "a commodity to be manufactured and distributed".[18] The element of the unknown, of the unfamiliar, of the dangerously strange in the play, becomes deplorable: a technical error. J. C. Williamson, for example, was quite unwilling "to experiment with an unfamiliar form of drama, so much at variance with his own criteria for judging a promising play".[19]

Williamson, like most prominent actor-managers of the nineteenth century, was not particularly concerned with the theoretical aspects of drama. He thought that

> The merits of any piece were to be judged, not by the depth to which it probed the human psyche or the impartial candour with which it exposed or discussed social, moral or political issues, but by its chances of wide and prolonged popular success.[20]

This criterion demanded three elements "for constructing the ideal play", namely, appeal to the eye, plot, and heart-interest. Dialogue was secondary, as was literary merit: "Words are only the clothes, the dress of the drama itself".[21] The chief requirement was "construction": "Painstakingly careful construction was the secret of achieving verisimilitude". Construction, handwork, practicability, these are the qualities praised in Williamson's theatrical philosophy, qualities which he finds so deficient in Australian aspirants to playwriting; a lack such that "your wonder that Australia has not given to the world a really big dramatist must cease".[22]

The preoccupation with rules of handwork finally leads Williamson, as others, to a speechless lack of theory, which can only assert but never establish anything:

> And what do you mean by intellectual drama? "Drama that appeals to the mind rather than the senses." Head plays, eh? Well I don't mind telling you as an old actor, that I like heart plays. I like human interest . . . I'm not a great admirer of Ibsen, if that's what you mean. I'm with the public: I believe in the drama of emotion rather than the drama of ideas. Ideas and words are all very well; but the public want to feel, it wants to laugh and cry with the old human passions, the old dramatic conflicts of good and evil, circumstances and the man; and my notion is that the public is right.[23]

Coupled with this support for "the old dramatic conflicts", is the notion of the perfectly constructed, completely self-contained play, into which playgoers could escape into a world of romance and enchantment, could "submerge their own identities in the heroic identities on stage, the more they enjoyed the play".[24]

In the contemporary theatre of Williamson's time only one direction basically corresponded to this theory, namely that of the French *pièce bien faite*. The world-wide, successful theatre of Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) and Georges Feydeau (1862-1921) offered everything that J. C. Williamson demanded of a "good" play. This theatre strove for nothing other than dramaturgic perfection, and its means are of an exclusively technical kind. The authors were manufacturers who, according to contemporary reports, worked under a dreadful compulsion to produce: the naked dramaturgy, the virtuoso run of the scenes, full of tricks, the need to be ever more striking and compelling because the boulevard-public immediately accustomed itself to the effects and nevertheless wanted to be surprised each time, the resourceful aesthetic apparatus to prevent boredom, all this met the needs of the public with great success.

Earlier, in 1802, the English playwright Thomas Holcroft, whose own work was later to be performed in Australia, had gone to Paris and brought back to London "the libretto of the latest Paris novelty, the melodrama 'The Tale of Mystery', which was at once produced with enormous success".[25] (It was later performed at Barnett Levey's Theatre Royal, Sydney, on 3 January 1833.)[26] Henceforth, the English and American stages were crowded with specimens of this new kind of play. The characteristics of melodrama are to be found in earlier drama, but the French combination of them now set the model. All sorts of matter, including nearly all of Sir Walter Scott's novels, were adapted to the new form.

At the core of melodrama, however, there resides the "old dramatic conflict" of Williamson. It is the popularised version of neo-classical tragedy, with highly artificial, conventional, formal principles, even if robbed of psychological depth and poetic beauty. It observes, or tends to observe the three unities, has a strict structure, a strong conflict and a *dénouement* in which virtue triumphs and vice is punished. One is tempted to say that, just as in Australian architecture there was a schizoid division of styles, Gothic for ecclesiastical buildings, Classical for governmental and public buildings, so in the melodrama was there a division between medieval, romantic, sentimental content and bastardised classical dramatic form.

Williamson took this development further, such that the "classical" perfection of his plays, their autonomous construction and spectacularly effective technique, emerged as the dominant, common signal of all his presentations. An important figure here is Dion Boucicault, the Irish actor-dramatist, for whose plays J. C. Williamson had an "unfailing fondness". Just as Holcroft had gone to Paris in 1802 and brought back the melodrama, so Dion Boucicault went to France in 1844 and brought back the *piéce bien faite*, the "well-made play". Indeed, he spent four years there, acquiring an intimate knowledge of the language and theatre. Subsequently, he was enormously successful, in America, London, and Australia. His association with J. C. Williamson was of long duration.

To Boucicault's dramaturgy, there corresponds the ever more elaborate devices of engineers. As Dicker writes:

> In common with the audiences of nineteenth century Britain and America, Australian audiences delighted in lavish spectacle and startling stage effects: production features in which Williamson delighted no less than they. And no one in Australia was more thoroughly *au fait* with the most modern methods for achieving these effects than Williamson.[28]

The formal complexity of the construction has to compensate for the tacitly agreed-on triviality of the matter presented.

A common aim of these effects was that of "verisimilitude". In Williamson's presentation of "Parsifal", for example,

> A stage crew of fifty-six men shifted the sets and worked the elaborate stage machinery. Amidst thunderclaps and flashes of lightning, the third act concluded as the whole stage seemed to rock and in a few seconds the earth swallowed up all save Parsifal and Kundry, who stood unharmed on the scene of destruction and desolation with shattered columns and broken arches around them.[29]

Like the Wagnerian opera itself, the local Williamson aesthetic would aspire to the condition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the total work of art, and conceal by artificial perfection all the joins of the artefact, including its difference from nature itself. Even the good actor, said Williamson, should "appear natural, not be natural".[30]

This was the kind of theatre that local dramatists had to contend with when, as Arthur Adams put it in 1908, "Our greatest obstacle to the production of a living Australian drama is the importation of machine-made plays from overseas."[31] Modern theatre, in general, is anti-dramaturgy right from the start. It represents a permanent revolt against every model. As various as the principles of a new theatre may be, investigation always shows a core that directs itself sharply and polemically against 'classical drama', against the principle of the work of art as an available object of possession.

The elimination of continuous causality, many claim, is probably the chief feature of the new drama. In truth, however, the decisive break lies elsewhere: in the destruction of that conception of the drama-hero as an independent arbiter of fate. A structural history of modern drama could be developed from basic positions which would be represented earlier by Alfred Jarry and Strindberg, then in a later phase by Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. That would certainly be a great simplification, but from these four positions it is possible nevertheless to represent the significant stage-production of the twentieth century in all essential dimensions. With each of these authors, the key-process is the destruction of the *dramatis persona* as an entirely autonomous being.

The ideal of personal freedom had once formed the beating centre of the great "classical" tragedies around the year 1800. In the late 19th century it had degenerated to the pragmatic principle: Whoever has success, has forged his fortune with his own hand; whoever fails, he himself is to blame. In the England of Disraeli and Gladstone, and in Australia too, the dramaturgy described here had a function of confirmation: the strong man makes his fortune, the weak man his misfortune. The theatre had to reassure its spectators of this social-darwinian axiom. For this axiom described the attitude of the individual to his economic competitors; it also described the attitude of the nation to other nations. As in the technique of drama, the laws of cause and effect in economic life were known, and everything depended on whether the hero had the necessary energy-potential. With this background, it is clear that any theatre would turn against the idea of the hero as the sole maker of his fate was likely to arouse opposition, even if veiled under a seemingly benign tolerance. This conservative stance is instanced by Hugh Hunt, who, in considering the establishment of an Australian national theatre, concludes that

> The national theatre should, therefore, be a permanent home of what is loosely called 'classical' theatre — that body of dramatic literature which time has crowned with its laurels.[32]

He justifies this choice of the "classics" by saying that "At the lowest level they are something to rebel against . . ." He then lets us know what he thinks the true status of any such rebellion is, by saying of the "classics" that "At the highest level they are the summits which the particular art aims to reach."[33] A similar conservatism is implied in a "trend" described by Leslie Rees in his description of recent Australian play-writing:

> Along with all this involvement in immediately contemporary living, the trend towards digging out and isolating historical figures for impartial dramatic treatment went on steadily.[34]

Why has the tension between these two contradictory dramaturgic principles stimulated modern theatre in ever new variations right up to the present day?

The question can be answered on various levels. Essentially, it is a question of theatre-sociology, which is subject to a traditional veto on the grounds that sociology may apply to market-oriented works but not to 'higher' works of art. Here, only a brief indication can be given. The period of the late nineteenth century was re-interpreted after the First World War as a model of well-ordered conditions, as the very epitome of health in the economic, social and political sphere. The nostalgia of an Australian society stranded in its understanding of itself, economically unstable, tended to dredge up even more glowing pictures of those decades and to spontaneously reproduce the basic ideas that possessed validity at that time. Along with this political, social nostalgia for security, there went a complex of aesthetic ideas: a *security of art,* that clung anxiously and touchily to its rules. It is this anxiety, this *security-art* which has kept the theoretical ghost of "classical drama" alive, just as it has also attempted to maintain the great city theatres in their establishment function.

The demand for what is called "classical drama" expresses the longing of the individual to

be momentarily released from the choking experience of his dependence on ever more anonymous systems of power and administrative apparatus. The revolt of modern dramatists against the security-theatre, however, seeks to overcome the political and social shortcomings of this apparatus. If the security-theatre mediates the illusion that social processes are transparent in their cause and effect, are subject to the sovereign decision of the individual and steerable by his sheer force of action, then it is wrong to justify this illusion by its entertainment function on the stage. At the same time, a distorting element in modern dramaturgy is not to be denied. The authentic theatre of our time is, as before, an event from which anxiety arises, tragedy in an old sense, an event that demands thought and which is only bearable when we acknowledge the healing power of truths that may at first increase our pain. Those critics, businessmen, and subsidy-administrators, who seek to promote "classical" drama as the High Drama and national model for Australia are in essence seeking to perpetuate the ideals of Victorian nineteenth century drama, and so support H. G. Kippax's view, that in Australian drama "The period of revolt is still to come."[35]

NOTES

[1] Eric Irvin: *Theatre Comes to Australia,* University of Queensland Press, 1971, page v.

[2] page v.

[3] H. G. Kippax: Drama, in *Australian Society, A Sociological Introduction,* ed. A. F. Davies and S. Encel, Cheshire, 1970, page 501.

[4] Irvin, page vi.

[5] page vii.

[6] page vi.

[7] J. M. Freeland: *Architecture in Australia,* Penguin Books, 1972, page 174.

[8] cf. Charles S. Blackton: Australian Nationality and Nationalism: The Imperial Federationist Interlude 1885-1901, in *Historical Studies,* Second Series, compiled by Margot Beever and F. B. Smith, Melbourne University Press, 1967, pp. 179 ff.

[9] J. C. Dicker: *J.C.W., A Short Biography of James Cassius Williamson,* Elizabeth Tudor Press, Sydney, 1974, pp. 195-6.

[10] René Wellek: The Term and Concept of Classicism in Literary History, in his *Discriminations, Further Concepts in Criticism,* Yale University Press, 1970, page 55.

[11] page 86.

[12] Leslie Rees: *The Making of Australian Drama,* Angus and Robertson, 1973, page 85.

[13] Oscar Handlin: *The American People, The History of a Society,* Penguin, 1966, page 318.

[14] Rees, page 86.

[15] cf. Francisque Sarcey: A Theory of the Theater, 1876, in Barrett H. Clark: *European Theories of the Drama, With a Supplement on the American Drama,* Crown Publishers, New York, 1947, pp. 388 ff.

[16] John Stokes: *Resistible Theatres, Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century,* Paul Elek Books, London, 1972, page 40.

[17] Handlin, page 319.

[18] Kippax, page 510.

[19] Dicker, page 172.

[20] page 162.

[21] page 163.

[22] page 165.

[23] Williamson, quoted in Dicker, page 166.

[24] page

[25] Ashley H. Thorndike: *English Comedy,* Macmillan, New York, 1929, page 475.

[26] Irvin, page

[27] Dicker, page 35.

[28] page 196.

[29] page 151.

[30] page 173.

[31] Rees, page 107.

[32] Hugh Hunt: *The Making of Australian Theatre,* Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960, page 11.

[33] page 11.

[34] Rees, page 425.

[35] Kippax.

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books

A REBEL DAME

Nancy Keesing

Alexandra Hasluck: *Portrait in a Mirror* (Oxford, $22.50).

The obvious way to review this full and interesting account of a full and interesting life would be to notice that Alexandra Hasluck's skills as a notable historian serve her well when she looks into the mirrors of herself, her forbears, her husband and family and when she speaks of scores of major people and events in Australia and the world. The obvious reviewer would then single out and quote from a few significant passages, mention matters about which she can agree with Dame Alexandra and those which strike her as wrong-headed (many in each case) and comment upon the obsessive honesty which may cause some hurts. Possibly, to show how clever she is, the reviewer would mention a couple of misprints and cap a couple of stories and then sum up by stating her certainty that *Portrait in a Mirror* is not only a valuable contribution to Australian, but to women's history.

There's nothing wrong with taking an obvious line except that with this book it would leave little or no space to mention an unexpected and possibly easily overlooked aspect of it. At the core of her autobiography Dame Alexandra deals with questions about herself as a woman and also as it were, an archetype, that increasingly must concern most people in developed countries — women whether feminists or not; men whether husbands, lovers or work colleagues of women; children; industrialists, trades union leaders, educationists — the lot. For Alexandra Hasluck's own life perfectly exemplifies the stresses, dilemmas, divisions and divided loyalties that may confront not only the wife of a successful politician (or businessman) or a Governor General's lady but, to misquote slightly, the hundreds of thousands of Judy O'Gradys who are educated for jobs and careers and ambitious to pursue them both for fulfilment and independent income, but who also love their chosen men and want to make homes and bear children.

A quarter of a century ago few women of my generation (b. 1923) and fewer of Dame Alexandra's (b. 1908) seriously protested if and when our fathers or husbands moved from place to place as their employers thought necessary. When a bank or large company transferred (male) staff few paused to consider whether the intended move would affect the wife's career or responsibilities or seriously disrupt the lives and education of children. Listen to Rollo Hasluck, aged six and speaking of a neighbor's little girl in Perth in 1947:

> "Do you know, Mum, Margaret Anketell has *always* lived *there,* and she knows *everyone.* Couldn't we always live somewhere sometime?" . . . it made me realise what a time of moving about my children had had in their short life. They had crossed the Australian continent six times, the American continent once, and the Pacific Ocean twice, all in six years.

The effect on husbands and families if a *wife* had to contemplate a job transfer from place A to place B was so rare in those days it practically never arose. It is an increasingly common dilemma now. When Dame Alexandra in 1958 took herself off, by herself, to England to further her research for *Thomas Peel of Swan River* she was not only doing a sensible thing to advance her independent career but, whether or not she entirely realises it, making a symbolic gesture as significant for her era as was her own mother's graduation as a B.A. in 1895. Evelyn Hill was one of the first residents of the Women's College of the University of Sydney.

Dame Alexandra several times frankly and truthfully sets forth some of the annoyances and frustrations of her marriage alongside its fulfilments and satisfactions and this is something quite rare in autobiography. Many writers, and not only women, gloss over such matters or transfer them to fiction. But irritations, and some painful and serious illnesses that made standing and walking a torture for her, influence events whether on the large stage of a Governor General's lady or in a suburban house.

"Mr Whitlam . . . had wanted Paul to remain on as Governor General, and Paul would have liked to do so, but I felt I was too much of an encumbrance with my disability, and I also felt I had earned my rest. . . I had liked [Mr Whitlam] and his wife Margaret as the Prime Ministerial couple most congenial during our years, not only for themselves but for their recognition of the proprieties of their position. . . They were a dignified pair of a stature fit to represent a large country . . ." If one adds to that a few hints dropped here and there in these pages one may reflect on how different a year, but for an aching hip and need for a rest, 1975 might have been.

One other point made in the book needs stressing. Alexandra Hasluck, historian, feels strongly about it and rightly so:

> It is really depressing . . . that when one has made well-documented new discoveries . . . one finds the old errors being re-quoted, the old stories re-told, for many historians, even well-known ones, do not bother to read new works. . . . In science, new discoveries are noted and commented on. Not so in history . . . in Australia research has much material still to be discovered, but unless those who ought to, keep up with new discoveries in relation to old material, there will not be much to be gained . . . by those who do research.

I first met Alexandra Hasluck at an Adelaide Festival in the 1960s, introduced by her dear friend Henrietta Drake-Brockman whom I'd known for some years. I am glad to have it 'confirmed in writing' that Sir Paul and Lady Hasluck enjoyed the dinner parties they gave for writers at Admiralty House, for we did too, and also a dinner that Douglas and Margaret Stewart gave for them in their own house and another to which the Haslucks, in retirement, invited me when I was in Perth in 1979. She and Sir Paul, like the Whitlams, understood "the proprieties of their position" but that did not make them stuffy or pompous. The impish toddler pictured on page 50 still lurks behind the first Dame of the Order of Australia; what she says or writes, either of fact, fiction or autobiography is informed by warm feeling, considerable insights and engaging humor.

Nancy Keesing lives in Sydney and is well known for her many books and her major contribution to literary affairs.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY — THE OTHER SIDE

Tom Stannage

Henry Reynolds: *The Other Side of the Frontier* (James Cook University, $7.50).
Lyndall Ryan: *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (University of Queensland Press, $22.50).

These two books have been heralded by most newspaper reviewers and by early reviewers in more academic journals. And with good reason.

Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* and Ryan's *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* are the outcome of a decade's reading, thinking and writing about Aboriginal history. In his early papers on the aftermath of transportation and the gentry in Tasmania Reynolds showed concern for the underdogs — ex-convicts and servants; but it was not until he moved to James Cook University that his empathy with outcast people was transferred to the Aboriginals. He himself dates his 'conversion' at c. 1969. While he certainly responded to the local North Queensland racial environment, perhaps too he was influenced by W. E. H. Stanner's powerful Boyer Lectures, published in 1968 as *After the Dreaming*.

By 1972 Reynolds had published an article on Aboriginal dispossession and the Australian historians, and an edited book of documents, *Aborigines and Settlers 1788-1970*. The book of documents rapidly became a standard reference for tertiary education history courses. With the publication in 1976 of an article titled "The Other Side of the Frontier" *(Historical Studies)* it was clear that Reynolds was moving well beyond an Aboriginal history told largely from a European (missionary, protector, settler) perspective. It took him a further five years to see the larger work of the same title into publishable form. That severe critic of most books not written by himself, Humphrey McQueen, lauded to the skies *The Other Side of the Frontier;* and James Cook University's History Department found that the

National Times readers bought books so reviewed and they had a best-seller on their hands. Well done, Brian Dalton, Henry Reynolds and their colleagues — a more than useful precedent in these troubled publishing times. Penguin has recently re-released the book for still wider sales.

Lyndall Ryan has also been featured in the National Times, as much for her activism as for her academic work. As with Reynolds, she first published papers on Aboriginal history in 1972 — "Outcasts in White Tasmania" *(Mankind)*; and "The Extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines: Myth and Reality" *(Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association)*. Like many a revisionist historian she found that her message was little heeded outside formal classwork and among a few colleagues and friends, Reynolds among them. Her frustration surfaced dramatically in 1978 when the film "The Last Tasmanians" perpetuated a thesis about the extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines which she had demolished in the early 1970s. She asserted publicly then, and restates profoundly in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, the continuing presence of Aboriginal people in contemporary Tasmania. And tragically, as late as 1982, she again had to take up the cudgels in defence of the Islander and other Tasmanian Aboriginals when the Bulletin published an astonishing farrago of distortions about Tasmanian Aboriginal history. Ryan is a fighter for a just cause. Her book stands as a monument to her commitment and scholarship.

Ryan and Reynolds came out of Tasmania and now teach in Queensland. Perhaps not too much should be made of this, for difficult job situations and domestic arrangements tend to determine where people 'settle'. But both are refreshingly unapologetic about the importance of regionalism in Australian history. Reynolds indeed states forthrightly that "we must no longer confuse geographical remoteness with thematic irrelevance" (p. 165). His thesis about Aboriginal response to invasion seems to have been tested first in Queensland, while Ryan is in no doubt that all Australia loses if the Tasmanian Aboriginal story is not told honestly.

Both books deal largely with the nineteenth century. Reynolds tells his story in seven chapters, two of which bear the title "Resistance", but all of which deal with that theme and the related one of "Continuity and Change". In this book the 'passive victim' orthodoxy of the general and school histories is vibrantly overturned, and the Aboriginals become historiographically, as they always were historically, dynamic actors in the drama of the Australian past. In successive chapters Reynolds peels away layer upon layer of the Europeans' misunderstanding about Aboriginal response to their presence. Through a subtle reading of old and new evidence Reynolds demonstrates that the Aboriginals never lost the Aboriginality of their response, including traditional magic (e.g. p. 71). Reynolds shows this to be true of all the colonies of Australia. It is the continuities which explain Noonkanbah, Arukun and Ryan's Tasmanian peoples. Like Ryan, Reynolds is a fighter — a fighter for historiographical revisionism and rights for Aboriginals: "In the long run black Australians will be our equals or our enemies"; and he concludes by quoting approvingly the following lines from a turn-of-the-century Jesuit missionary: "who shall say no day of retribution will come upon Australia".

Ryan too leaves her readers with the Aboriginals' European-problem. In both accounts Aboriginals view Europeans as shallow, fearful and hypocritical — an unflattering image of the "last of the Aryans" (to quote James S. MacDonald). Ryan too employs the word "Resistance" in her chapter headings — indeed all are about resistance and adaptation. Ryan writes a history of back-sliding in high places, deceit ("False Hopes and Broken Promises") and misguided 'assistance.' On her showing the Aboriginals' "Push for Independence" in the 1840s is followed by "Fragments", but followed again by the "Emergence of a New Aboriginal Community". Such spirit *always* represented a challenge to the British invaders, confounding them on the frontier, on the missions and reservations, in the jails and in the towns. Reynolds in particular often points to the creative character of the response to the alteration of ecologies and the disruption of traditional economics (p. 130).

The grounds on which these two books can be criticised are few indeed, for they meet the Hancockian criteria of attachment, justice and span. Perhaps a more class-based analysis might illuminate more the thoughts and actions of Europeans, whether sealers, ex-convicts, free settlers, or London-based company directors. Perhaps too the Aboriginals in time discriminated between different types of Europeans even more than Reynolds allows. Perhaps Reynolds occasionally gives too many examples of a point already well-made; while the awfulness of Ryan's story is numbing enough without overt authorial intrusion, although one is sympathetic to Ryan in this matter for some of her past readers have read without understanding or have wilfully misunderstood her. Some critics may place these books within a 'conscience history' paradigm, and seek thereby to diminish their worth. This would be a pity, for the objectivity of method of both conforms with the canons of the trade, and subjectivity of intent is at the heart of all fine historical writing.

As part of the tradition of resistance and adaptation, some Aboriginals are now researching/recording and writing the history of their own peoples. Robert Bropho's *Fringe dweller* and Phillip Pepper's *You Are What You Make Yourself To Be* are two recent examples, as are the brilliant drama/documentaries "Kullark" and "The Dreamers" by Jack Davis. Where Ryan and Reynolds so brilliantly chart for us the surface eruptions, perhaps the Aboriginals themselves will reveal to us even more fully the underlying turmoil of body and spirit.

Tom Stannage teaches in the School of History at the University of Western Australia. Recent books are People of Perth *and* The New History of Western Australia, *which he edited, and he is co-editor of the journal Aboriginal History.*

SCIENCE AND MORTALITY

John McLaren

George Turner: *Vaneglory: a Science Fiction Novel* (Faber, $14.95).

George Turner's latest novel can be read at several levels. As a story of suspense, intrigue and adventure, it captures the reader's attention with the twin puzzles of what happens next and how what is already happening can be explained. The characters are credible, but they contain within themselves a dimension of experience which is not, at first, explained. We gradually realize that this dimension lies in a future which has experienced technological advance, particularly in the realms of biological and psychological control, and is experiencing technological catastrophe, of a kind which we cannot identify even though we can all too readily envisage the possibility. Finally, the novel offers an elaborate study of the nature and possibilities of political power.

Readers of Turner's earlier work, *Beloved Son,* will be familiar with some of the problems posed, but this work takes us both back and forward in time, so that we learn more of the events which happened while the space travellers of the earlier novel were away on their voyage, and follow further the progress of the Australian revolution they sparked by their return. But whereas *Beloved Son* centred our interest on the possibilities of biological technology and the prospect of a world populated entirely by products of biochemical engineering, to whom the very notion of individual consciousness would be impossible, *Vaneglory* exposes the same universe rather to the issue of mortality.

Turner's latest novel starts and finishes in a Britain where all services have broken down in the process of the world-wide destruction of the biosphere. Britain itself suffers the further fate of being 'dusted' with lethally radioactive clouds as part of an unstated global conflict. The effects of this 'dusting' are analogous to those of a super neutron bomb of the kinds Reagan and Haig and their megalomaniac contemporaries want to use as the ultimate defence of the 'free' world.

Within Turner's world, however, there is also a group of people known ambiguously as "The Company" who, by a chance of evolution, are immortal, and who consequently have learnt all that can be known of human nature and how it can be manipulated. As immortals they are also outsiders, and their interest is not in saving the human race — which, as it appears in this novel, seems to merit little such effort — but in their own survival. To ensure this survival they exact total obedience, and thus provide a case study in totalitarianism, albeit benign.

The centre of the novel's consciousness is not, however, one of these immortals, but a mortal they use and would discard once his usefulness is over — Donald Baird. Baird is a Glaswegian who provides the human agency in the first part of the novel, who acts, with the psychiatrist Lindley, as a conscience in the middle part of the novel, which is set in a twenty-first century Australia in which he has been revived, and who takes command in the final part, when he returns as sole survivor, and thus legitimate government, of the Scotland which had been destroyed by the 'dusting' 45 years earlier. Here, for a time, it seems he will be able to establish a society based on relationships of humanity rather than of power, but these hopes are casually destroyed on the last page of the book. Its final words come from a much earlier time and a forgotten language: "*Timor vitae conturbat me.*" They may be taken as an epitaph not only on Turner's characters, but on civilization as he sees it.

The problem presented by the book, as by its predecessor, is not one of technology, but of human destructiveness. The historic catastrophe of the year 1992 which lies behind both novels is brought about immediately by technological means, but arises ultimately from the same human impulses to control others, the same impulse to power, which governs the actions of the characters who determine Turner's plots. This impulse, in turn, is directed towards making the world safe — whether by means of security services which control all spontaneous impulses or by fake religions which direct them in the interests of the controllers. Behind the impulse in each case lies the fear of life — *timor vitae*, however disguised as *timor mortis*, or fear of death — which leads inevitably to either living death or total destruction.

Turner's novel therefore succeeds not only as a good science fiction yarn, involving us by its awful plausibility, and as a prophecy, interpreting the present by extrapolating its central tendencies into the future, but also as a metaphysical study of the meaning of human life. His study is rigorously materialist, allowing no possibilities but those which are revealed by contemporary science, but because of this is more searching than works which finally succumb to forms of transcendentalism. His viewpoint shows us human nature as our own creation, not as any eternal essence, but then confronts us with the question of how far we can modify it without destroying everything we have put into its creation. He is a humanist writer who is nevertheless thoroughly at home with issues of good and evil.

Yet finally there is something unconvincing in his creation. In part, this is due to his arbitrary ending, which seems to state rather than demonstrate the hopelessness of the human condition. More, perhaps, it is due to the fact that he concerns himself almost entirely with the manipulators of his universe, rather than, except as a mass, with those who endure it. He understands work, but shows it only in the detached passion of the engineer or the biologist. It will be interesting to see whether in the next volume in this series he shows it to us also from the point of view of those who provide the raw materials of his technologically advanced but materially impoverished world. Despite his assertions of poverty, material deprivation and physical labor are the conditions we never see.

John McLaren, critic and editor of Australian Book Review, *teaches at the Footscray Institute of Technology.*

THE PITY WAR DISTILLED

Frank Kellaway

John Millett: *Tail Arse Charlie* (Poetry Australia No. 82, 1982. South Head Press, $20 and $10).

Cecil Day Lewis, trying to explain the paucity of English poetry about the second world war, while it was still in progress, said that it was the logic of our times, 'no subject for immortal verse/that we who lived by honest dreams/defend the bad against the worse', neither a wise nor a very relevant comment since none of the best modern war poetry has been about a struggle between good and evil; nearly all of it has been about what Wilfred Owen called 'the pity of war, the pity war distilled'. And now thirty-five years after the European holocaust an Australian poet has written a sequence of 51 poems about 'the pity war distilled', using his own experience as a tail gunner in Lancasters bombing shipping and German cities. The words are both moving and disturbing and they have the balance and variety allowed the poet by those thirty-five years of reflection. I believe this is amongst the best poetry about war written in English this century.

It often reminds me of Owen though the voice is always John Millett's, absolutely original, spare and muscular.

> The ground crews take them out gently
> brush them away
> blood and bits of hair
> bone splinters and perspex . . .

The poem concludes

> They were my friends
> who stood like trees
> with a headlock on the sky
> who once watched dark boats of wild ducks
> swivel on the wind's river
>
> They might have lit stars
> with matches from their voice
> and filled whole landscapes
> with confetti from their tongue.

But of course this was a different war and Millett's experiences in the air were in many very important ways absolutely different from Owen's in the trenches. Often he emphasises the appalling detachment of dealing death from the air, having no real contact with the people whom one was forced to murder. In the love poems and lyrics which form a part of the splendid total pattern it is at its most poignant.

Now you say nothing
fall through me
opening
for the first time
the women I have killed

You are all of them

That is my punishment
the not-knowing.

There is still torment here, even thirty-five years after the event, but there is also poise and understanding, a sort of acceptance which has a strong, unsentimental dignity.

The fact that for the most part Millett relies on the fashionable prosy rhythms of so called 'free' verse and ignores the metrical resources of English poetry is offset to a large extent by the admirable construction of the sequence. It begins with a reflective piece called *Miniature battle scene — war museum.* The opening lines are:

Who cares if history repeats itself
or if some small truth filters through
an old piece of shrapnel in a war museum . . .

and it concludes

a small heart
swallows the bloodstream of the world.

Then there is an evocation of the poet's present situation in a weatherboard farmhouse, a back reference to childhood and straight into a savage account of how boys are corrupted by military service

Destruction begins here —
Boys lose their faces
in the bull ring . . .

The tone and texture of the sequence are admirably varied, moving from angry satirical accounts of military training into lyrical passages of great delicacy, into elegiac statements and sombre meditations. These lead into narrative passages about the war itself and after that into reflections about the aftermath of war and the poet's son. Through the central poem of action runs a telling refrain which comes sometimes in English, sometimes in German:

Those who return
are not those boys
who go out.

Die zuruckkamen
sind nicht die gleichen
die auszogen.

The concluding lyric harks back to the beginning:

Who cares if history repeats itself
or if some truth filters through
and a man's heart
swallows the bloodstream of the world —

It was an original idea to illustrate the book with photographs but even though some of the air shots do give a sense of the abstract, geometric aspects of air warfare I don't believe they add to the poems or set them off in any useful way.

Tail Arse Charlie remains an impressive achievement. Many Australians (certainly I am one of them) will feel a personal debt of gratitude to John Millett for having relived the agonising experiences of war to build from them this sequence of profound and moving poetry.

Frank Kellaway is well known for his novels and his poetry. He lives in the Snowy country, Eastern Victoria.

A POET AND HER SISTERS

Judith Rodriquez

Fay Zwicky: *Kaddish and Other Poems* (University of Queensland Press, $12.95; $5.95).
Fay Zwicky (ed.): *Journeys:* Poems by Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson, Gwen Harwood, Dorothy Hewett (Sisters Publishing, $5.95).

Fay Zwicky's is a powerful poetic voice, but what she has to say is too complex for it to be found merely strident. In her second book of poems she exploits both the urgent phrase and larger, strikingly varied structures.

Two long works dominate the book, as readers might expect after "Isaac Babel's Fiddle Reaches the Indian Ocean" and "Emily Dickinson Judges the Bread Division . . .".

Zwicky's "Kaddish" for her father possesses singular daring. It is not enough for her to take the Jewish mourner's role which tradition reserves for an adult male, speaking in the presence of the *minyan* of at least ten other men. Like Ginsberg, she disregards the indirectness of the ritual Kaddish, the 2000-year-old 'embodiment of messianic hope' which refers not at all to the dead person. Recollections of her father, a relationship passionately examined, are the poem's substance. But she avoids the anecdotal exuberance of Ginsberg; to speak of a parent is to speak of oneself, and family assumptions lived within, or thrown over — and Zwicky's scrutiny of these secrets is painful. Like Ginsberg she rehearses the ritual praises of God, "Blessed, praised and glorified, exalted, extolled and honoured, magnified and lauded"; she counterpoints these with reductive parodies of "The House That Jack Built", and suggests along with complicity in the ritual slaughter, the ferocities and closeness within families, the endless bonds of an upbringing — its commandment

> Thou shalt not exclude thyself from:
>
> The collective body of the family
> The collective body of the race
> The collective body of the nation
>
> Therefore repeat after me:
>
> "This is done because of what the Eternal did
> For me when I came forth from Egypt."

and its reverence for "death who is our God . . . your failure who is our God."

The declamatory authority behind the rhythmic freedom of the poem is a great achievement; and its rising to an acknowledgment and exorcism beyond what seems, early on, a programme of Lowellian revelations.

Ark Voices gives an monologue each to Mrs Noah and ten animals. The lightness of its short lines is deceptive. There is characteristic vigor in the yearning of these souls on the ark of earth, exposed among hostile forces. So much is unexpected: a glimpse of the happy childhood of hand-wringing, humble Mrs Noah:

> The trees grew tall and now and
> then I pocketed a speckled egg, could climb
> and peer into the nests of starlings.
> Height and blossom.

Most surprising of the animal pieces is the touching "Wolf-Song", a love-ballad to his dead mate. The creatures are highly idiosyncratic — bat, lemur, mouse, hippopotamus, whale . . . a few lines of the tiger's pride also brandish the tempered steel of Zwicky's language.

> I'd lief lick up the swollen waters
> of your wrath than,
> competent to kill, be
> smothered in safety:
>
> who would so starved survive?

Three "The poet does this" poems at the end seem mere throw-away bravado, except that the last ("The Poet Asks Forgiveness") remounts Zwicky's very own strenuous Pegasus. I suspect the others are the result of George MacBeth's "The poet . . ." series, from which he read in Perth in 1979. Unfortunately the targets of Zwicky's satire don't always correspond to her natural intensity; I enjoy watching her recruit Struwelpeter and Pound, but "efforts had been made/to make him normal/ O so normal" . . . no.

A splendid group of short pieces explore high-voltage emotional installations: sexual and artistic identity, love, bitterness. They ought to be read whole, with precautions at the areas of impact — D.H.L.'s gestured-at guts, and the top of the head as mentioned by Emily Dickinson.

Growing up, writing poems, I could not find that there was any line, circle, or any other figure, of women poets in Australia. Indeed, I had very little idea of the work of Eunice Hanger, the dramatist, who taught me at University! I suspect that frequently the serious commitment and talents of women have been belittled by the regard in which they have been held — a local prodigy if publicized, otherwise indulged associate members of the society of writers.

Even in the 'fifties, critics, men to a man, told us which of Wright's poems were "womanly" and which "philosophical" — less appropriate and less happy efforts, these! Since my student days I have continually been re-making a list of her poems that mattered most to me; it crossed the lines those critics drew.

The little anthology *Journeys*, in which Fay Zwicky has assembled groups of poems by Wright and three other poets born round 1920, is the beginning of the end of the situation where a tradition of poetry written by women can be ignored, because it has no mileposts, no publications, and the courtesy 10% of a stock anthology cannot display it. Kate Jennings' *Mother, I'm Rooted* (1975) was an invitation to the unpublished and underpublished, in outcome rather than design; none of the established poets of Zwicky's anthology participated. Now that Sisters is presenting readers with our best poets, well edited in a format suitable for students, it will be possible for the general reader to respond more thoughtfully to suggestions that women's poetry as such, is of interest — that it has, not a corner, but a dominance, in certain subjects and areas of opinion — and an unexpected range — and that it must be seriously regarded on its own merits and also as the manifestation of women's new way of thinking about themselves and the world about them.

These are clearly the four poets to start with. They are profoundly different from one another; and two could be described as late starters, a phenomenon of every generation of women in the arts. A more comprehensive collection could add Anne Elder, and the several others in their sixties who are still publishing, as well as some who've stopped. And these aren't always the poems I'd have chosen; perhaps I am disconcerted not to find Wright's "Ishtar" and "Naked Girl and Mirror", Hewett's "Letters from Osip Mandelstam" . . . this is only to say that the book directs the reader back to the whole works of each of these fine poets.

NOT MUCH ELSE IN ITALY

John Tittensor

David Malouf: *Child's Play* (Chatto and Windus, $12.95).

As a novelist David Malouf must remain, for the time being, an enigma: first the flaccid *Johnno,* with its diffuseness and its prefabricated nostalgia; then, stunningly, the pellucid beauty and intellectual force of *An Imaginary Life,* one of the best novels in English of the last decade or more; and now this tedious, hollow and pointless novella, this desperate series of false starts and solemn pseudo-insights, supported — if that is the word — by two equally dull short stories, *Eustace* and *The Prowler*. When will the real David Malouf stand up — and remain standing?

Child's Play is narrated by a young Italian terrorist, well-educated and from a "gentleman peasant" background. He has been recruited for a single task, the assassination of a venerable writer, and for five weeks goes daily to an office where, in the silent company of others like himself, he studies the data collated for his solitary assignment. At the end of the brief narrative he does what has been asked of him and escapes "in the miraculous assurance of being safe at last".

The reviewer is going to make a dull and literal-minded dog of himself at this point by complaining that there is very little in this book that compels — or even encourages — belief. This is not to say that *Child's Play* actually strains one's credulity; only that it offers the reader very little scope for commitment — a state of affairs traceable directly to the opacity with which Malouf has chosen to surround both his narrator and the circumstances and events of the story.

To begin with the narrator, the terrorist. Although the entire text is proposed as his he remains a paper figure in terms of background, personality and motivation. On a couple of occasions he is permitted to open up just a little: "We are workers, technologists . . ." he declares of his attitude to political killing, and at another point he calls up the image of an athlete "adventuring into the pure space of himself". This kind of thing, taken together with his penchant for self-discipline and "steely impersonality", is the language of fascism, but the notion is explored only in a gestural way, as if the author *doesn't want* the reader to know very much about this character. Similarly a longish passage (and the only portion of the book that really comes to life) dealing with the narrator's relationship with his father at first promises to lighten the reader's darkness, but turns out to be no more than a device for forestalling any Freudian analysis of the intended crime. This withholding of information is clearly intentional; it is also misguided and evasive.

At the cruder level of straightforward coherence, of cause and effect within the narrative, *Child's Play* is equally unsatisfying. The reader is given no inkling of how, why or by whom the narrator came to be recruited, no convincing reason for the choice of victim, no clear indication of the intended impact of the crime. Nor is it readily comprehensible that the assassin must, at the behest of his undefined political masters, spend weeks studying the writings of the man he is to kill — except by way of gingering up a fairly thin plot with the unilateral love-hate relationship that grows out of this study; surely, for such a rank amateur, a little pistol practice would have been more to the point.

These are, as already acknowledged, dreary and prosaic objections; but they are made because this is such a dreary and prosaic — and disjointed — book, devoid of any tension or even any sense of real movement. The false starts referred to earlier are the fleshless bones of which *Child's Play* has been constructed: one ends with the feeling that several attempts at getting a novel under way have been assembled holus-bolus in the belief that their topicality will weld them together. Unsurprisingly the gambit fails and too often the reader is confronted with mere irrelevance and padding: the obligatory obeisances to linguistics ("These are language murders we are committing") are one example, repeated, lengthy and pedantic analysis of virtually content-free photographs another; but the nadir of boredom and humorlessness — for this is a remorselessly earnest book — is probably to be found in the shameless space-filling of "Of course I know that the reality of the crime has a different meaning for the victim. To be alive is one thing, to be dead another." No kidding?

SMALL PRESSES PRESSING ON

Graham Rowlands

Philip Neilsen: *Life Movies* (Queensland Community Press, P.O. Box 36, South Brisbane 4101, $5.95).
Chris Mansell: *Head, Heart & Stone* (Fling Poetry, 25 Fordhams Road, Eltham 3095, $4.95).
Cornelis Vleeskens: *Orange Blizzard* (Queensland Community Press, $5.95).

Most of Australia's small presses could scarcely be smaller. Nevertheless they're now central to our new poetry publishing. More volumes are produced by South Head, Fremantle Arts, Makar, Friendly Street, Nimrod, Glandular, Transit, Queensland Community, Bent and Fling than by sometime major poetry publishers. All you have to do is count the volumes. Moreover, it's anything but clear that the major publishers are still publishing the best poetry. They are, as they say, consolidating. The dodo, I believe, was consolidating.

Neilsen and Mansell are selected from the range of recent collections for their quality. Vleeskens is selected because he's representative of the continued impact of Modernism on post-1966 poetry and because he's probably a good examplar — if you like that sort of thing.

Neilsen was a hit-and-miss poet in his first two collections. In *Life Movies,* he still is. The hitting and missing, however, is increasingly a product of the reader's taste rather than the poet's quality control. I can't find a gauche poem, line or even word in his third collection.

His themes continue to be appearance/reality, illusion / reality, private / public, psycho-sexual knowingness, current events used as Science Fiction, fantasy that's not quite fantasy and not quite "reality" and most importantly, irony. Alternately witty and savage, his irony is as much a theme as the technique of frequent dramatic monologues.

My personal preference is for his sexual psychology. In "Obsession" a man becomes obsessed with not just a beautiful woman in the supermarket but also with her embodiment of the colour blue. "Quasimodo" recalls "the thrill that shook [Esmeralda]/when she touched my hump". In "Four Pieces at the Con" a man is attracted to a woman pianist who orgasms while playing Rachmaninov. All, however, isn't lost. The man has taped the "climax of two and piano". The male poet endorses the viewpoint of "The Woman Who Didn't Trust Men". Similarly pro-woman is "The Golden Holden", a critique of a man who tries to screw all his women hitch-hikers. He's the joke of the poem. Even one of the women finds him funny — without, of course, being amused.

It's revealing that when Neilsen moves beyond sex he arrives at violence. For example, "Agoraphobia" is a marvellous portrayal of homicidal paranoia in seven parts. Instead of summarizing the subject matter of these and other poems, I quote possibly the best example of his private/public poems. In "Taking Personal Orientation" he reveals the impact of science, technology and the media on modern consciousness, perhaps self-consciousness:

> Taking personal orientation from a scientific
>   fact,
> such as, the infinite mass of the black hole,
> and granting that the disappearance of matter
> covers a multitude of sins,
> I only ask that when the fan is hit
> and there's no hiding
> it won't be me who's half-way through a chicken
>   sandwich . . .
> devote Tuesday to nuclear waste-disposal and
>   radio-active
> half-life, Wednesday to the D.N.A. molecule.
> On Thursday you might come down to breakfast
> and find the jargon changed forever.

If you like this you'll love the collection. If you like informed, intelligent, stylish, meaningful poems that you can understand, buy *Life Movies.* You might want to buy Neilsen's earlier booklets too.

Mansell's book contains quality poems across the range of her work, although within each area some are less successful than others. Not all her mainly oral-type poems work on the page. Nevertheless, the repetition with variation in the hilarious "Definition poem: Pissed as a parrot" works well off or on the page:

> In *Collins English Dictionary* (Australian
>   edition)
> you will find definitions for
>   piss
>   piss about

Pissaro
piss artist
and piss off.

By contrast, Mansell can drop the pissants and pissed parrots to achieve genuine lyricism. Despite one or two unrealized short lyrics, her long title sequence using coastal memories of childhood to express a surreal psyche of (urban?) adult challenge and victimization is carefully worked and developed. It's marred only by some inevitable obscurity. Totally unscathed, however, is "Especially at me":

I take my old leather gloves off.
They remain
like peaty bogman replicas
of my hands

the fingers scratching at the desk top
and thumb curled under
in some arthritic cramp.

In their black impression of death
they seem to point everywhere
but at me.

In the minority, but by no means exceptions, these lyrics are perhaps her *only* poems unsuited to public performance.

Another category of Mansell's oral-type poems is difficult to define, being intellectual wit playing with feeling. A conversational but often biting awareness of the psycho-sexual in man-woman relations is the main subject matter of these recurring poems. "Goodbye Blue", "Sex as an adverb", "Coffee", "Rats" and the wickedly epigrammatic "Breakfast" are the best and the best are very good indeed. Have some "Breakfast":

do not talk about your other women
women do not mind queues
when they're not in them

I'd have claimed that Mansell's list-type oral poems — particularly where they list poems and local poets — were her weakest. Here, she suffers from comparison with Eric Beach and Rory Harris. This claim could be sustained, however, only by omitting the delightful and strategically placed opening list of items in the poet's "Room" — an open-ended start to the stylish open-ended second collection.

Vleesken's *Orange Blizzard* (read tangerine, mandarine or purple with green spots, it would make no difference) is at least funny. This Modernist plus saves it from the usual Modernist minuses: flagrant imitation, inspections of the alphabetic navel, self-reference and wilful obscurity. I suppose the reader must allow the poet his moral and political relativity, skipping over a certain drift to the Right so typical of Modernism.

Ezra Pound's influence is clear in the ideograms or pseudo ideograms (who knows the difference?) dividing the sections. In the first Vleeskens tries several times to re-write William Carlos Williams' "Portrait of a Lady", that perfect piece of Modernism by now, of course, quite ancient. Vleeskens' failure is quite inconsequential. What he *has* achieved is a telexing of his literary lineage. His blood brothers are John Tranter, John Forbes and Stephen K. Kelen, large slabs of whose poetry is indistinguishable from Vleeskens. A joint line of theirs might be: "Buddha's tail is a told taled by a vidiot pissed as an ANZAC of alphabet and jury dignifying nothing of the Marilyn Monroe doctrine in *Hong Kong Suicide"* — if you see what I mean. Parodying Modernism is risky, however, because it absorbs parody easily, often *being* parody. At any rate, nothing could be more revealing of this particular poetic mode than the *numbering of each stanza* in an apparent attempt to register the numerical illusion of coherence.

Still, the poet is funny. The juxtaposition of East and West, old and new, popular and high culture is funny. The fantastic imagery is funny. The sheer range of international placenames and other references is funny. Stanza 12 from the title poem is typical:

The orange blizzard blows around the Dutch
  capital
like a royal family and I once found a book
by Simon Vinkenoog at a jazz cafe in Tokyo.
I stole a line for *Hong Kong Suicide*, and now
in my defence, offer another: THIS IS NO
  CHRONICLE
OF FRIENDS. You take it gladly as an alibi.
You'd take almost anything by midnight.

Tough luck for the poet if it's 9 a.m. The only trouble with the humorous typicality of this stanza is that most of the other stanzas are also typical. When you've read one, you feel you've read the lot. To be sure, however, you do read the lot.

Graham Rowlands has published several books of poems and has edited anthologies. He lives in Adelaide.

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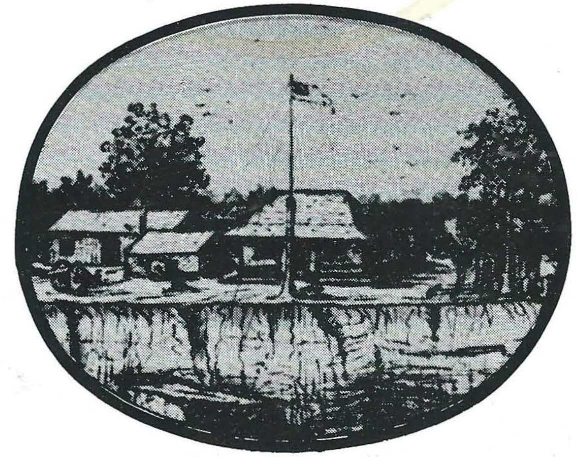

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