

overland

FEATURES
STORIES
POETRY

Registered by Australia Post—publication no.VBP1440 \$4



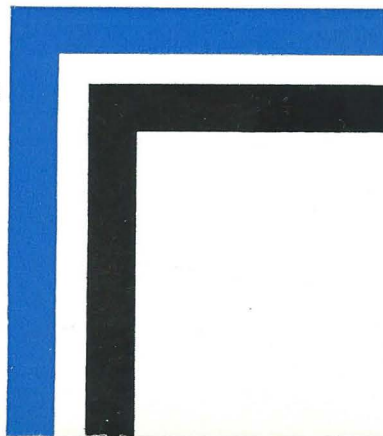
90

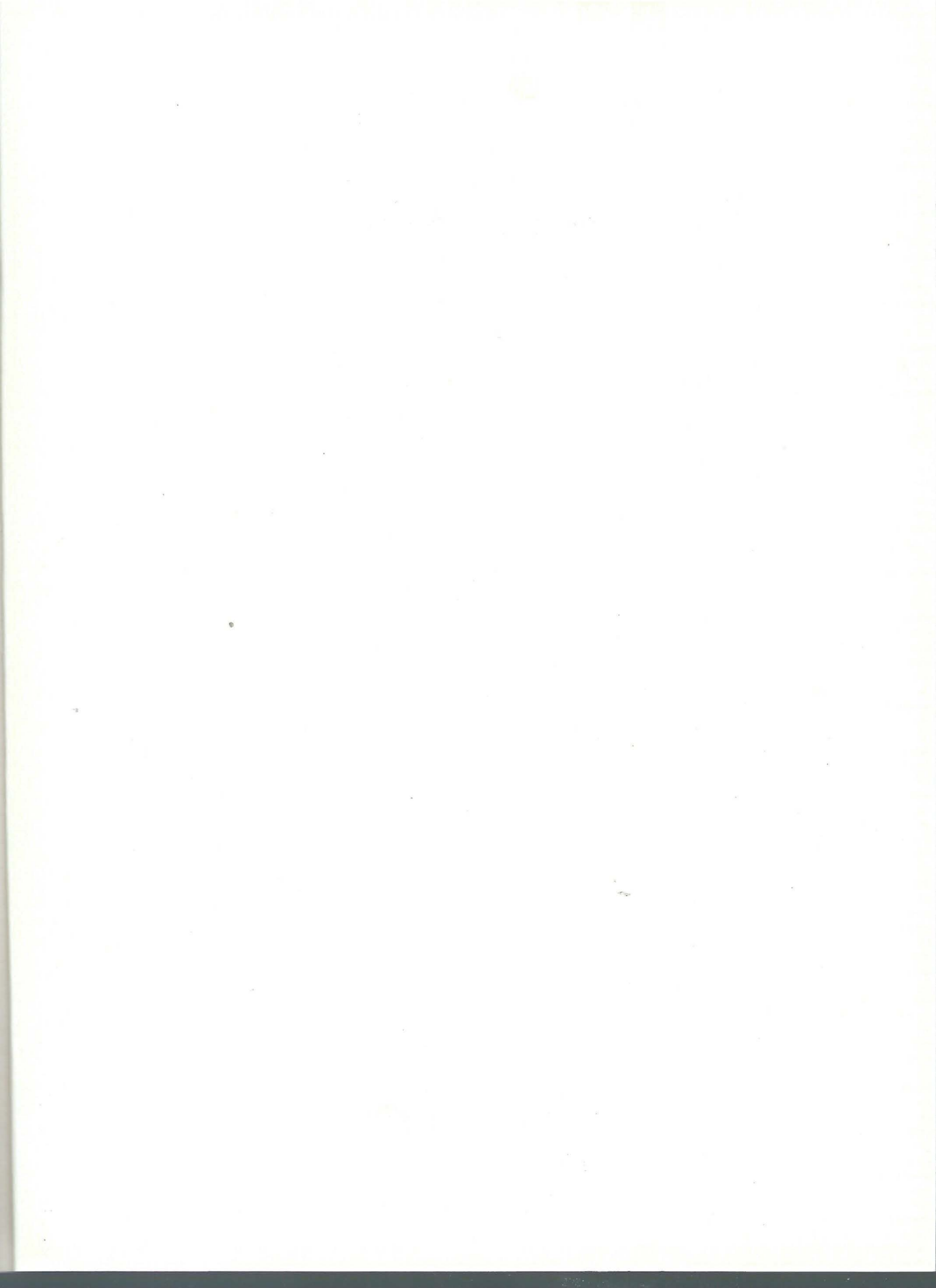
Cecil Holmes: A JOURNEY WITH JOSEPH CONRAD

Stephen Alomes: THE PATRIOT GAME

Andrea Stretton: CHRISSIE AND LEN

D. R. Burns: AUSTRALIAN FICTION versus
AUSTROPHOBIA





features A JOURNEY WITH JOSEPH CONRAD *Cecil Holmes*
THE LATE R.D. *Eric Westbrook* 23
SWAG 25
THE PATRIOT GAME *Stephen Alomes* 34
A RARE INDUSTRIAL BALLAD *Nancy Keesing* 42
AUSTRALIAN FICTION VERSUS AUSTROPHOBIA
D. R. Burns 4
BOOKS 52

poetry *R. G. Hay* 14, *Eric Beach* 28, *John Croyston* 28, *Dipti Sara* 28,
Bill Fewer 29, *Jeff Guess* 29, *Billy Marshall-Stoneking* 30,
Michael Samarchi 30, *Johannes Watermann* 30, *Barbara*
Giles 31, *J. S. Harry* 31, *Joyce Parkes* 31, *Alan Gould* 32,
Robert Harris 33, *John Harwood* 33, *Stephen James* 33,
Jennifer Maiden 33, *Anne Brewster* 64.

graphics *Layout and design, Vane Lindesay. Cover from a drawing*
Brasserie, by Charles Blackman, courtesy the artist and A. H.
and A. W. Reed. Drawing, Torso, by Jiri Tibor Novak, 21.
Drawing, Russell Drysdale, by Rick Amor, 22. Drawing, Cat, by
Charles Blackman, 24.

Printing: Bob Cugley and National Press

Type-setting: Ern Lee

Compositor: Gary Emond

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine.

The subscription rate is sixteen dollars a year (four issues); for students and pensioners the subscription is eight dollars. Life subscriptions are available for \$100 each. Manuscripts are welcomed but s.a.e. required.

Overland receives assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. We pay minimum rates of twenty dollars for a story or feature and ten dollars for a poem.

Address all correspondence:

Editor, *Overland*. GPO Box 98a, Melbourne 3001.

Acting Editor: Barrett Reid.

Editor (on leave): Stephen Murray-Smith.

Associate Editors: Ken Gott, Nancy Keesing, Vane Lindesay, Stuart Macintyre, John McLaren, Leonie Sandercock.

Contributing Editors: Dorothy Hewett (Sydney), Jim Gale (Adelaide), Donald Grant (Perth), Gwen Harwood (Hobart), Martin Duwell (Brisbane), Laurence Collinson (London).

ISSN 0030-7416.

Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

December, 1982

CECIL HOLMES

A Journey with Joseph Conrad

"It was in March, 1893, that I first met Conrad on board the English sailing ship TORRENS in Adelaide Harbour. He was superintending the stowage of cargo. Very dark he looked in the burning sunlight, tanned, with a peaked brown beard, almost black hair, and dark brown eyes, over which the lids were deeply folded. He was thin, not tall, his arms very long, his shoulders broad, his head set rather forward. He spoke to me with a strong foreign accent. He seemed to me strange on an English ship. For fifty-six days I sailed in his company.

The chief mate bears the main burden of a sailing ship. All the first night he was fighting a fire in the hold. None of us seventeen passengers knew of it till long after. It was he who had most truck with the tail of that hurricane off the Leeuwin, and later with another storm: a good seaman, watchful of the weather; quick in handling the ship, considerate with the apprentices—we had a long, unhappy Belgian youth among them, who took unhandily to the sea and dreaded going aloft. Conrad compassionately spared him all he could. With the crew he was popular; they were individuals to him, not a mere gang; and long after he would talk of this or that among them, especially of old Andy the sail-maker: "I liked that old fellow, you know."

With the young second mate, a cheerful capable young seaman, very English, he was friendly; and respectful, if faintly ironic, with the whiskered, stout old captain. Evening watches in fine weather were spent on the poop. Ever the great teller of a tale, he had already nearly twenty years of tales to tell. Tales of ships and storms, of Polish revolution, of his youthful Carlist gun-running adventure, of the Malay seas, and the Congo; and of men and men; all to a listener who had the insatiability of a twenty-five-year-old.

On that ship he told of life, not literature. On my last evening he asked me at the Cape to his cabin, and I remember feeling that he outweighed for me all the other experiences of that voyage. Fascination was Conrad's great characteristic—the fascination of vivid expressiveness and zest, of his deeply affectionate heart, and his far-ranging, subtle mind. He was extraordinarily perceptive and receptive."

Obituary by John Galsworthy 1924.

I walked out of the Lido Cinema into the soft, Italian sunshine and a breeze coming off the Adriatic. A large steam yacht had berthed at the jetty and a stream of flunkeys, ant-like, bore baggage ashore . . . and the inevitable middle-aged American tourist (why do they always wear that chunky, jangling jewellery) said . . . "Why, I do declare that's Barbara . . ." meaning Barbara Hutton.

My modest little feature THREE IN ONE had just had its screening, the half filled theatre had applauded politely and wandered off to better things presumably, and the glory of Venice and its famed Festival in that year of 1956, did not mean too much. After six weeks in Europe, hawking my picture and admittedly picking up a couple of prizes at Edinburgh and Karlovy Vary, nonetheless, my solitary suit was worn, my shoes were worn, and my worn wallet merely contained as of now a few hundred scruffy lira notes . . . it was time to go, to go home, get the train to Milan and the plane from Rome . . . back to Sydney. This mood of gloom and self pity was broken by a touch on the elbow, and there was dear old Alberto Cavalcanti, whom I had last seen in Czechoslovakia of all places. Large, bushy-headed, bespectacled, this great old Brazilian who had made silent films in France and helped found the documentary movement in Britain, who had created a stream of brilliant films at Ealing . . . well there he was, a solitary friend, at this dismal moment of wretched loneliness.

"It's a good film, maybe even a fine film . . . these afternoon audiences don't mean anything . . . why don't you have a look at Conrad . . . there's a story set in Sydney THE PLANTER OF MALATA . . . it's a bit strange . . . but it could make a great picture . . . if you worked at it, if you were patient with the writer . . . just have a look."

He glanced away, towards a couple of men

having a violent argument, Visconti and Grierson, in fact. The former be-cloaked and swinging a silver topped cane dangerously, the latter in his raucous Scottish-American accent trying to out-shout him . . . "I'd better calm those chaps down . . . Visconti is furious, his film hasn't got anywhere."

I knew what he meant, the previous night Grierson had been holding court in Harry's Bar and asserting that the European films this year were no good, and he proposed, as chairman of the jury to see that the anti-war Japanese film HARP OF BURMA, got the top honours. Which indeed it did.

Cavalcanti grasped my hand briefly, walked out of my life, joined the two angry men, the conversation subsided into French and the American tourist asked me to have a drink. I did, followed by a free dinner, then left early next morning.

In an English second-hand book shop in Rome I picked up a battered copy of Conrad's WITHIN THE TIDES, a collection of four novellas. Then I flew off on an KLM Constellation. I tried to read THE PLANTER OF MALATA and failed miserably. It was all too difficult. I was too tired. And in 1956 the arrival of television was wrecking the film business. I would have to join forces with the enemy, for the time at least.

What Cavalcanti hadn't mentioned in this brief encounter was the matter of copyright. Nor had I thought about it. Conrad died in 1924 so it would be fifty years before his works were in the public domain, not until 1974, and it was unlikely that either of his surviving two sons would agree to other than a substantial fee, for the film rights.

I did try the story again, but without success.

Perhaps it eluded me because I had lost my own way in life. I was impatient with this apparently remote classic, feeding too eagerly on the moderns to reinforce my then rather rigid views on man and society.

Conrad had become irritated by being type-cast as a sea writer and decided he could do *anything*, by writing political thrillers, ghost stories and — in this case — a study in obsessional love. In a collection first published in 1915 he prefaced his defence of the story, criticised by even some old friends, as "an essay in description and narrative around a given psychological situation". He set the tale in Sydney at the turn of the century and makes a study of the relationship between a vain and selfish young lady of some wealth and

a South Sea adventurer named Renouard. They each resist the consummation partly out of pride, partly because there is another man — for whom the lady has a commitment, in her mind if not her heart. Yet this "other man", who, and where is he . . . ?

"He may be riding boundaries, or droving cattle, or humping his swag about the back-blocks away to the devil — somewhere. He may be even prospecting at the back of beyond — this very moment."

"Or lying dead drunk in a roadside pub. It's late enough in the day for that."

The editor looked up instinctively. The clock was pointing at a quarter to five. 'Yes, it is,' he admitted. 'But it needn't be. And he may have lit out into the Western Pacific all of a sudden — say in a trading schooner. Though I really don't see in what capacity. Still . . .'

"Or he may be passing at this very moment under this very window."

"Not he . . . and I wish you would get away from it to where one can see your face. I hate talking to a man's back. You stand there like a hermit on a sea-shore growling to yourself. I tell you what it is, Geoffrey, you don't like mankind."

So this is a triangular story, and the other man, where is he, alive, dead, merely missing? The girl must find him. Renouard and she have their attractions. There is a surround of bizarre characters, the editor of a Sydney newspaper, who is a kind of interlocutor, the girl's father, an eccentric professor, a querulous aunt.

In the event a journey is taken to an island named Malata to solve the mystery . . . and the consequences of this odyssey are both comic and terrifying . . .

The tale puzzled me, for like most people, I was accustomed to the more conventional Conrad sea story. This was too different, too disconcerting.

Still it nagged.

The years revolved and it wasn't until the middle seventies, and the copyright thus having elapsed, that I came back to Conrad. Poking around in my local friendly Public Library at Kings Cross, I came upon a recent biography, very detailed and inevitably written by some painstaking American academic. It contained copies of correspondence and illuminated Conrad's association with this country. This old sailorman in his frequent visits to Sydney had not merely patronised the usual shoreside haunts of his trade, but had been a member of the literary push of the period — knew Archibald of the Bulletin, Lawson, Daley

and others. Perhaps, because his providoring had been handled by Burns Philp he had also entered into the large and vulgar homes of the Bunyip aristocracy of the time on Elizabeth Bay and Darling Point. (It was also recorded that he once thrashed a pickpocket in George Street with his cane, took his barque the OTAGO through the Torres Strait without a pilot.)

Moreover by this time I had shaken off some dogmas and shibboleths, and was beginning to regain a respect for the classicists. They had more to say than I had been willing or able to admit.

Maybe I wasn't alone for about this time Penguins began to reprint a positive avalanche of the oldies, including Conrad.

But the tale continued to puzzle, even intimidate me. I needed a colleague. I couldn't work alone on this one. Some instinct told me to get in touch with Dorothy Hewett. I hadn't seen her in years, but she had done a fine job for me back in 1951 writing a rich, poetic commentary for a documentary, and in quick time. Something that in itself always impresses commercially minded film makers. Dorothy had, in the event, been brought up at her father's knee on Conrad, and had used him in her university lecturing chores. Thus we entered into our partnership. Neither of us had any money, therefore little time to spare . . . nonetheless we worked up a treatment, a sort of rough concept of how the story might go cinematically. Then we both went off to do other things and more time slipped by.

Late in 1980 a British film producer, David Puttnam, turned up in town, as a paid guest of the Australian Film Commission—I saw him with producer Tony Buckley to talk about a picture we were preparing, *THE KILLING OF ANGEL STREET*, in the AFC offices. Puttnam had already become famous and successful through *MIDNIGHT EXPRESS*. He had however also produced a Conrad story *THE DUELLISTS*. This had won a prize at Cannes but was very much a "cult" film. It ran fully one week when it opened in Sydney. I had seen it, only just. A minor masterpiece, I thought, this tale of the Napoleonic wars.

It had been a hard meeting, on a tough project . . . and when it collapsed and as Puttnam looked at his watch I wandered over to the window, gazed down at the dreariness of North Sydney, and decided to be ruthless, opportunistic.

I asked, "Why did you make *THE DUEL-*

LISTS?" He answered, "Because it was a study in mindless violence, something that worries me." I sat down, looked with fresh respect at this apparently bright brittle little Cockney of 35 or so who had cut his way to the top through the stratifications of the English class system, who, later, in 1982 was to singe the hide of the Los Angeles Lions by sweeping the board at the Academy Awards with *CHARIOTS OF FIRE*.

Grasping the nettle, I told him of my so far feeble endeavours with Conrad and *THE PLANTER OF MALATA*. He said briefly, "You've got to externalise him like turning a garment inside out" . . . then . . .

"I suppose you've tried to gouge money out of the taxpayer like everyone else around here?" "No," I said, "not yet. I've got a treatment but I could do with some help soon if it's going to move on." He said, "I'll look at it and see what can be done."

Whatever it was, David Puttnam did it, and a few weeks later Dorothy and I had a modest amount from the Film Commission to work away at a transmorgification of this dense tale into a first draft screenplay—five weeks we worked over a Christmas and New Year. Nothing concentrates the mind more wonderfully than cash in the hand.

However, words on paper produce practical problems. In this story was a splendid mansion on the shores of Sydney Harbour, a newspaper of the time, and a Merchant House. Prowling the environs of the Harbour, I discovered Thomas Mitchell's original home, now owned by the Bushell Estate, the old Sydney Morning Herald building in Hunter Street, and Burns Philp in Bridge Street. All extant—even the interiors. Yet where was this island of Malata? Conrad had provided the description but not the location.

Boldly I wrote to the Chairman of Burns Philp, David Burns, the third generation head of that corporation, Australia's very own multi-national . . . — could he or perhaps some of his employees past or present help me . . . after all, no one knew the Pacific better? Burns Philp had been sailing and trading through it for a hundred years.

I had no high expectations, then after three weeks, the call came for an interview with the Chairman.

In his story Conrad describes, with some savagery, such a Company, calling it Dunster and Co. . . .

"I was in Dunster's office before he had finished reading his letters. Have you ever seen young Dunster reading his letters? I had a glimpse of him through the open door. He holds the paper in both hands, hunches his shoulders up to his ugly ears, and brings his long nose and his thick lips on to it like a sucking apparatus. A commercial monster.

'Here we don't consider him a monster,' said the Editor looking at his visitor thoughtfully.

'Probably not. You are used to seeing his face and to seeing other faces. I don't know how it is that, when I come to town, the appearance of the people in the street strikes me with such force. They seem so awfully expressive.'

'And not charming.'

Burns Philp's 19th century building stands at the corner of Bridge and George Streets; before its erection it had been a timber yard where the convicts had split logs . . . a quavering lift bore me to the first floor, there are only three, and I stepped back into Conrad's world—for the first time. The heavy oak panelling, the frosted glass doors, immense oil paintings of storms at sea, ships' bells lovingly polished . . . no fluorescent lighting, no electric typewriters, no air conditioning. Ageing clerks with half-moon glasses moved about with invoices in their grasp. I sank into an old leather couch . . . a middle-aged lady brought news that Mr Burns would now see me . . . at the precise time.

(Burns Philp may still carry the Island Trader image, but in fact they have diversified into such various properties as Avis Rent a Car, Hanimex cameras, and mining in West Australia—they are still amongst the top dogs of Australian capital.)

The Chairman's office had been kept as his grandfather had created it . . . the ancient vast desk with its splendid surface uncontaminated by a mere telephone, worn old cupboards stuffed with documents . . .

Mr Burns, a vigorous and effusive man in his fifties, now sent for a colleague, one John Malcolm (Hebridean this company) who in earlier years had worked for the Shell Company in London. ("I ran their Turkish desk, had to slip out to Ankara every so often when there was a spot of bother . . . we had a very complicated operation there . . .") He was also out of Eton and Cambridge, who ran for England in the 1952 Olympic Games.) He had in fact, to my astonishment and delight, read the Story. He was a Conrad buff.

So I stated my problem. I wanted to find an

island somewhere in the Pacific as described in the tale, which was about six miles or so across, had a headland, a reef, a high point "wreathed in clouds" and a bungalow "much too large for Renouard" . . . it had a copra plantation of course, as well.

Entranced by the challenge the two men set about the solution. John Malcolm hurried off to secure some maps and charts, David Burns started pulling out ancient yellowing documents from the old cupboards . . . all were flung across the desk . . . a magnifying glass was produced, and we were like three schoolboys trying to solve a puzzle. The broad expanses of the South Pacific flowed beneath our eyes . . . and then, there was a dot, an island called MALAITA . . . "He's just dropped the 'i' out," said Malcolm, . . . "It's too big though," I observed, ". . . but it's probably the Solomons, somewhere round there." "Come to think of it, I was out there in the sixties . . . should have remembered," responded David Burns.

Over an hour had gone by and for all anyone cared or knew, Burns Philp shares could have gone to hell on the Exchange . . . indeed there was now a brusque return to reality . . . "God Almighty John, we've got a Board meeting. They'll be furious . . ."

The two men hastened away into their real world, and I was left alone to dream awhile, until gently borne away by a gracious and patient secretary . . . en route to the Solomons.

This is Third World Territory. The pot-holed dusty main street, ancient trucks going God knows where with workers packed on to their trays, old men squatting in doorways of the Chinese Trade Stores, ruined taxis trundling back and forth. And it is the tropics. How good it is to be back again, along the Equator. The sweat beads and shirts stick, the air is heavy, and a thunder shower is just over the green mountains. Black faces and bright white teeth. The shy sideways smiles of the girls, which are without guile. And as one passes the shanties there is always somewhere, a lilt of laughter . . . pursuing, mocking perhaps? The pluck of a guitar, the soundless swoop of the sea eagle, the hoot of a steamer in the bay. And it is the sensuous smell, the faint stench of a mangrove swamp somewhere, the whiff of a copra kiln burning, the exuding black body sweat . . . all mixed and mingled, soothing, yet quickening the senses.

I walk slowly a mile or so along the main street—Mendana Avenue, Honiara—towards

the Prime Minister's Department for an interview with his Information Officer. The first and courteous thing one must do as a self-invited guest in these parts.

It is a single storied fibro building, left over from other times, scabrous, grey paint peeling. In the foyer is a collection of characters lounging about on the concrete floor, women with babes in arms, men of vague ages, spitting betel nut juice.

I wait. One must be patient, not bustle. A young man approaches me. I tell him of my appointment. He takes me upstairs along some arid corridors. The Information Officer is about thirty, black and black bearded, with sharp eyes, wary and watchful. Ah, yes, he knows Conrad, but not this story. I unfold my problem—finding some locations, my proposed itinerary—to Auki on Malaita, Kira Kira on San Cristobal, Munda on New Georgia and Yandina on the Russell Islands. A thousand miles by air and a few hundred more, driving and walking. He seems unabashed by this ambitious programme but a lively thunder storm passing over, which makes us raise our voices, causes him to regard me ironically, if not with pity, at the absurdity of such a venture.

But he goes off to pull out maps, some data—no secretaries, filing clerks, or tea ladies here—shakes my hand softly and I go away—promising to return before departure, which indeed I do.

The shower has settled the dust and I splash through the pot holes, back to the hotel—the Mendana. So named after the Spanish explorer who discovered these parts in 1567, naming the Islands the Solomons for he hoped, even believed, that there was gold thereabouts—a great pre-occupation with the Spaniards at that time. (There is, but not much, only about a million dollars worth a year is mined.)

I proceed to the Guadalcanal Yacht Club, about fifty metres walk along the beach front from this posh pub.

I await the man from Burns Philp who has been telexed from Sydney Head Office to deal with me.

The sea breeze wafts, brown hands dispense drinks, and I contemplate a mix of characters. The International yachting fraternity—French millionaires, American film stars and a gaggle of drug runners.

Jim King, the Burns Philp man, turns up. It must have been a heavy telex for he is, if not unctuous, most anxious to please. He is one of the new breed Burns Philp type (“I don't drink in

the morning”), a fresh faced forty and confesses his last ten years have been in Kavieng, New Ireland, and only just arrived in Honiara . . . still he can help with a contact. He introduces an Australian expatriate in his mid-sixties, in good shape too, lean and weather beaten. (Why do men who have spent their lives in the outdoors, old sailors, bushmen, almost always seem to have those pale blue eyes?)

Bob Gordon, it transpires, is actually a planter of Malaita . . . after World War Two he had carved out a plantation on the island, made a pile, sold it to the newly independent government in 1979 and now lives comfortably in a house up on the hills, above the capital.

Jim King, who had taken head office literally has delivered a planter from the said island right into my lap. Bob readily gives me a list of contacts dotted about the Islands—if rather wryly. Who is this Blow-in anyway? I promise to report back, and I begin my odyssey.

Within the next fourteen days I fly a thousand miles over the Coral Sea to four destinations . . . drive and walk a few hundred more miles. Not counting the eight journeys in the ramshackle bus back and forth between the Mendana Hotel and the airport.

I am early enough now to watch the Air Nauru DC 10 take on board the Chinese Hunan Acrobatic Troupe which is doing a “cultural exchange” tour of the South Pacific . . . in their customary, quietly successful style.

My Solair Cessna hasn't got in yet . . . and as the big jet disappears there is one of those curious silences that sometimes settle in such places. No one is around, everything closed, for the moment. An eerie emptiness prevails . . .

Henderson Field is named after an American flyer who lost his life here in 1942 . . . and there is no lack of plaques to remind one of this, in the airport lounge. I decide to stroll through the silent heat some of the way down the long runway.

Forty years ago this was the scene of one of the most vile and venomous contests in World War Two; young Americans and Japanese literally locked into combat, shooting, stabbing, strangling each other . . . tens of thousands of humans consumed themselves hereabouts . . . yet no graves, no memorials mark it . . . only one reminder, a tall steel tower from which observers would await the arrival of Japanese aircraft, slipping in over the soft sea, out of the gentle sky.

I grasp a pylon of the tower which seems as solid as the day it was so desperately and

hurriedly thrown up. There is a sudden puff of wind . . . I shiver in the heat and for a moment I sense the presence of the dead, the lost, the forgotten, the unremembered. This melancholy mood is broken by the incoming buzz of my Solair Cessna. I hasten towards it, and my journey to Malaita.

Passengers are an old lady clasping a baby and a cardboard box, going back to some remote village no doubt, an American lad, one of the knapsack brigade who wander the world these days, and a farmer from Sale, Victoria, who is working on an Aid Programme . . . the pilot is a tired, desperate nervous redhaired Scotsman of forty or so. He's had a long day and wants to get this trip over and out.

In twenty minutes we have run into a rain-storm . . . the water slashes at the aircraft, nil visibility, and riding the nav aid beam . . . we remorselessly descend to the invisible strip . . . or into the side of one of those beautiful green hills. The pilot sweats and a mood of fatalism encloses the rest of us.

We splash down and roar towards the tiny shelter. There is a pause for the return flight, we wait vaguely for transport, and the pilot is desperately patient. "I want to get out of this for chrissake." A returning passenger eventually turns up . . . a Catholic priest in white flowing robes and a great cross swinging round his neck. He is going to Honiara for ten days, on a Retreat.

Bob Gordon, back in Honiara, has given me a local contact—a Doctor Martin Baker. I call him (at number 27) and he is around within a few minutes.

A tall, fit looking fellow of about 45 ("I walk six miles a day and stay off the sauce") with a Yorkshire accent . . .

We sit on the verandah of the East African style Rest House and he maps out a programme. There is a new road just built across the mountains which would provide some fine views he thinks, named Butarata, then go down along the coast and there are a couple of places which might be suitable for a plantation house . . . of the period. He chatters briefly in Pidgin to the owner who goes off to see his brother who has an old Land-rover for hire. After lunch (a legacy of British colonialism is ghastly food) we proceed to climb some two thousand feet through virgin rainforest of great density. I ponder on how long it will remain thus, how soon it will be consumed by some remote profit seeker . . . we pass villages

where life appears to have remained much the same. I have taken the knapsacked American along for the ride . . . an earnest young man who provides me with a dissertation on Engel's Primitive Communism . . . to the transient eye the passing villages and their colourful looking folk must indeed seem idyllic. But I have lived in Melanesian communities before and harbour no illusions about how hard, bitter and basic life is for the occupants. Some spindly girls lug firewood on their heads, down the road, and stare up at us with tired, empty eyes.

We reach a peak and are well rewarded by some of the most spectacular views in the Pacific. . .

"At last, one morning, in a clear spot of a glassy horizon charged with heraldic masses of black vapours, the Island grew out from the sea, showing here and there its naked members of basaltic rock through the rents of heavy foliage. Later, in the great spilling of all the riches of sunset, Malata stood out green and rosy before turning into a violet shadow in the autumnal light of the expiring day. Then came the night. In the faint airs the schooner crept on past a sturdy squat headland, and it was pitch dark when her head-sails ran down, she turned short on her heel, and her anchor bit into the sandy bottom on the edge of the outer reef; for it was too dangerous then to attempt entering the little bay full of shoals. After the last solemn flutter of the main-sail the murmuring voices of the Moorsom party lingered, very frail, in the black stillness."

We descend rapidly, it's started to rain. Now there is indeed a clearing in the cloying jungle, not just another village but a great spread down a hillside clustered with Brahmin cattle. The Victorian farmer, surrounded by a cluster of helpers, is hammering in some fence posts. I give him a wave but he's too preoccupied on this Saturday afternoon. The cattle look fine.

The rivers are up, so we can't continue. However, my helpful driver suggests that rather than waste the day, we visit a nearby Catholic Mission and meet the Father who has served here for many a year, and who might be helpful.

A muddy track unrolls through murky swamps and the mosquitoes make us welcome. Why did those early Christian zealots always seem to choose, with such infinite care, the most unhealthy, painfully unpleasant spots from which to begin their labours and entice the innocent primitives towards them . . . I could have been in the equally inhospitable Methodist Mission at Millingimbi, Arnhem Land. Perhaps it was some kind of self flagellation.

The Mission is a large rambling complex of

wooden buildings, centred around the church. As is traditional with Catholic churches it is open and I wander around inside. It could contain five hundred of the faithful easily, and there is a mural clearly created by native artists under direction — it depicts a history of Christianity in a simple, graphic manner. Curiously the Protestant churches are given generous space. An interesting priest hereabouts. But he eludes me — indeed he was the white robed figure who had nearly missed the plane to Honiara. However, we are told, you might like to meet the Sister. This takes some time, but I don't mind for it provides an excuse to poke my nose into the deserted living quarters on this Saturday afternoon . . . poor and spartan they are indeed: a primus stove, a dangling kerosene lamp, a meat safe, a red orchid stuck in a jam jar on an oil-clothed table. . .

The Sister emerges, apologising for her appearance, for she has been gardening; her hands are dirt covered and she wipes them nervously on her white habit. She has a soft New England accent and I assume comes from some rich Catholic family, indeed it's New Hampshire. She has laboured here for some twenty years, only been home once and is well content to see out her days here — I guess would be about 45, is very small, eyes like a doe, and as shy and gentle.

I feel annoyed at myself, uncomfortable. Why have I intruded here, so brashly? After a few awkward minutes I take my leave.

I ask the driver what the Sister's name was . . . he says Teresa.

I return to the Rest House, at the turn of light, agreeably exhausted yet despondent. The logistics of making a film hereabouts are formidable indeed, and the weather is unpromising.

From the town below (two Chinese trade stores, a police station and a beer hall named the Black Dragon) the sounds of a Saturday night ascend . . . wild and raucous, flavoured with savagery. I drift asleep beneath a mosquito net and the slowly twirling fan; sweating. The drums pound on persistently . . .

I call on Martin Baker next morning. For more than ten years through the fag end of the colonial period into the awkward time of independence, he has run his tiny hospital, and each year goes around the island, for some weeks, with a medical team. He has a videotape of such a journey. I marvel at the remoteness of life still on this planet; scores of village communities still untouched, unblemished by civilisation. An anthropologists' paradise.

When I ask about the principal health problem

he replies briefly, **malaria; and its study**, his passion. He explains: "After World War Two we thought we had it licked, much of the world was saturated with DDT. For some time it all went away. Then, following the Vietnam War, a new strain started to emerge . . . it's percolated down here, all over, virulent and incurable. Doesn't even show up in blood tests. There would be hundreds, maybe thousands of American tourists who go back to the Middle West every year, and, because their local doctors are temperate zone types and know little of tropical diseases — well, they just die. Of a mysterious fever."

He sketches out a sci-fi scenario . . .

"If I were a foreign power, maybe Indonesia — wanting to reduce Australia to its knees before coming on with a few threats about New Guinea, say, I would select a hundred characters with this strain, turn them loose as tourists in Queensland and within twelve months the East Coast right down to New South Wales would be filled with very sick, useless and incurable people . . ."

But, I ask, feebly, doesn't only some special kind of mosquito carry malaria? "One of the great illusions, old chap. W.H.O. have asked me to go to Manilla to take over their Malaria Control Programme. But I don't want to leave here really. It seems I have been nominated as some sort of world expert on this sad subject."

He regards me quizzically. "You probably don't know much about the Solomons." No, I don't. He pulls down a few publications . . . they are novels, biographies, collections of verse. All written by the Locals — having only previously had an aural language, they now express themselves in written English or Pidgin. Two samples:

"WHITE-LAND

Compatriot, you see that white-man coming?

His name is White-Land.

He was here before too,
during our grandfathers' days
and again during our fathers' times.

He is here again to help you,
help you in selling your land,
in selling your beach
and in selling your place to him
so that you may have lots of money.

But what about it in times to come
when White-Land is well established
where will you be? In the bank?

And compatriot, keep a good look-out
for this White-Land
also come in black skin."

Celo Kulagoe

"POLITICS

A game of words
A gamble a risk
say the right words
strike the right chord
choose a sweet melody
and it will ring in the House for years.

A good talker makes a good politician
well versed in making promises
a clear memory to forget
crocodile skin to take criticism
strong stomach to stomach anything
from beer to strong punches
and glassy unseeing eyes
to over-look us."

Jully Sipolo

I leave for Kira Kira, at the tip of Cristobal Island.

Back in 1922 a young Queensland policeman named Jack Campbell had been despatched to the Pacific to locate some character who had jumped bail in Brisbane. He reached the Island of San Cristobal, occupied by the inevitable Chinese trade store and a string of villages whose occupants, a mix of Melanesian and Polynesian, seemed to him singularly agreeable. Especially the ladies. He married one, settled down to live in Kira Kira, proceeded to carve out a copra plantation and found a dynasty. His superiors assumed he had just disappeared into the void of the Pacific. Today his son, Stanley, a rich man, is known as the King of Kira Kira. I contemplate an interesting encounter. And his plantation house might be in character for Conrad's Renouard — large enough to accommodate that gentleman's assortment of visitors, the Moorsoms.

There is actually a small town of some two hundred souls hereabouts, erected in earlier times by the British. It is centred around a reproduction of a village green on which cricket and soccer would be played (they still are) and on a minute scale, all the appurtenances of a "civilised" community. Shops, a school, a library, even a bank — presumably livings are made by taking in each others' washing, as it were. I stroll about, discover the police station to seek a direction to the Campbell Plantation. Shortly I am provided with some transport, bouncing along raw bush tracks past some smoky, seedy villages (are they the Campbell serfs? Presumably they gather the copra and sell it up at the Big House for a fistful of dollars). But I am to be disappointed. The owner is away — inspecting some island he also owns. It is a splendid mansion in the best tropical style. And

it has been built to last — Jack Campbell having arrived at a decision to cut the painter, was determined to make this totally his new home. I wander around inside — there are no doors — some black faces, servants I guess, peep nervously out of the rooms that adjoin the vast central living area. Hardwood floors, a scatter of old style cane furniture, the radio room . . . a few magazines flung about. And a glass cabinet that is crammed with Queensland law books of some sixty years ago . . . no doubt the policemen in those days travelled with a trunk of such material should they need to set up an ad hoc court.

The kitchen is rudimentary and there is no evidence of liquor. There is something careless, almost contemptuous, in the air. I wander a few yards to the shore, a small surf tumbles in from the South Pacific, a tethered canoe rocks. I feel disconsolate. The place is perfect for my purposes, yet the logistics are once again daunting. No wonder Hollywood prefers to stay in its studios.

Back in town I buy bread from a tiny bakery (the best I've eaten in ages), a fresh lobster and some beer from the trade store . . . at this Rest House one fends for oneself. For six dollars a day it's obviously no tourist trap.

However, old Andrew, the manager, is a helpful man. In half an hour on his primus stove he has dealt with the lobster, cooked up a variety of fresh vegetables, and we live again.

Andrew would be well into his seventies, yet he is fit, alert, moves quickly, birdlike, about his tasks. I sense a story in him and, language problems notwithstanding, it unfolds.

Many years ago before the war he worked in this house as a "boy", a general handyman, and was paid a few shillings a month. His employer was the local District Commissioner, who lived here with his family and there was also a Chinese cook-cum-gardener — it was he who taught Andrew how to cook with such skill, and also to raise vegetables. In 1942, the Japanese came ashore abruptly, massacred the Europeans and Andrew took off into the bush. Eventually he made contact with an Australian coast watcher, relaying information (he proudly produces some medals wrapped in an old handkerchief). After the war, he wandered vaguely about various islands fishing and doing odd jobs.

Then in early 1979, he returned to Kira Kira, and the new government decided to turn this remnant of colonialism, the D.C.'s home, into a Rest House for visitors and transients. And they gave Andrew the job of managing it. Thus does

history revolve.

The only other residents of the establishment are a couple of young Japanese engineers who are supervising, in a somewhat lordly manner, the construction of a cold store for the benefit of their fishing fleet which marauds in these parts.

Andrew, like most of his folk, is a naturally polite man, but finds it difficult to conceal his dislike. When the Japanese depart, after a meal, he expectorates noisily in their direction.

New Georgia is as far to the north-west as San Cristobal to the south-east; the extremities of this Archipelago.

I am not sure why I go to Munda; it's a long way off, and expensive. However, I like collecting characters, and I had heard much of a certain Agnes Wheatley, who runs the local Rest House, and has some other interests hereabouts.

Munda had been a major Japanese base, indeed the mile long strip is still usable, an old hangar still extant. . .

I seem to cart bad weather with me and trudge disconsolately through the now inevitable rain to the hostelry. As I approach, a babble of raucous

Australian voices arises, and my heart sinks—surely this is not a goddam tourist trap, way out here? But there they are, shorts and thongs, feet up, stubbies in hand; some half a dozen blokes and their wives or girl friends, plus a gaggle of kids. (But my judgment is both cruel and wrong. An hour later they have all got into a big canoe and paddled off into the distance, over the horizon . . . in fact they are a group of amateur conservationists from Newcastle, who have rented an uninhabited island for three months, to study life au naturel.)

Agnes welcomes me and apologises for the chaos . . . today is the fourth anniversary of Independence and the locals have been in a state of celebratory uproar . . . not to worry. The room is comfortable and the ocean a few yards off; even in this dreary weather the view is great, a scatter of islands including the one made famous by Jack Kennedy where he landed up with his crew after PT 109 was rammed by a Jap destroyer.

Agnes would be in her seventies, an alert, brown faced lady of great dignity, warmth, and also, I suspect, with a shrewd business head on

meanjin

OUT NOW — SPRING 1982

Graham Little	<i>Fraser and Fraserism</i>
Stanley Gold, Judith Brett and Clara Geroe	<i>Psychoanalysis in Australia</i>
Judith Wright	<i>Interview</i>
Maria Shevtsova	<i>Cultural Politics in Socialist France</i>
Michael Hollington	<i>Hysterionics: D.M. Thomas's The White Hotel</i>

FORTHCOMING — SUMMER 1982

Stuart Macintyre	<i>Manning Clarks' Critics</i>
Greg Dening	<i>The Death of Captain Cook</i>
Peter Pierce	<i>David Malouf's Fiction</i>
David Headon	<i>Frank Wilmot: The First Australian Modernist</i>
Jack Hibberd	<i>Glycerine Tears</i>

SUBSCRIBE

\$18.00 for one year, \$30.00 for two years (\$12.00 for students & unemployed)
Meanjin, C/- University of Melbourne, Parkville Vic 3052

her. We get along easily and thus her story: her father was an Englishman and had come here early in the century to make his fortune. Having established a plantation, he sent for his English fiancée . . . the lady had travelled thus far, had one look, decided she couldn't stand it and went back home for good. Broken-hearted, presumably, Mr Wheatley after a few years married a local girl. Astonishingly, this ancient lady is still alive (I cannot meet her for she is too fragile and vague it seems) so *another* dynasty is founded. Wheatley must have been a man of some energy and acumen, for he experimented in the production of kapok plants and silk-worm cultivation . . . and here indeed is a *suggestion* of the Conrad story, not the story itself of course, but in an odd, eerie way, some documentary elements.

"'Yes,' said the Editor. 'Mr G. Renouard, the explorer, whose indomitable energy, etc., and who is now working for the prosperity of our country in another way on his Malata plantation . . . And, by the way, how's the silk plant — flourishing?'"

'Yes.'

'Did you bring any fibre?'

'Schooner-full.'

'I see. To be transhipped to Liverpool for experimental manufacture, eh? Eminent capitalists at home very much interested, aren't they?'

'They are.'

A silence fell. Then the Editor uttered slowly — 'You will be a rich man some day.'

At breakfast, the morning I leave, Agnes introduces me to her son, proudly. For he is a Member of Parliament, for the Western Solomons. A man in his thirties, and only too willing to air his views. He is also, he is careful to point out, when I offer him a cigarette which he contemptuously brushes aside, a devout Seventh Day Adventist. His unctuousness and conservatism irritate me, so I decide to prick him a bit. How long, I ask, is the government going to tolerate the plundering of their fishing grounds by the Japanese? (Wherever one goes they are evident and it's a large scale operation with thousand ton boats splendidly equipped.) Lamely he says that they do pay royalties, confesses there is no way of checking the catches, the value.

I remark that yesterday I had chatted to an old man sitting dolefully on the wharf who was proud of the fact that he is the greatest fisherman hereabouts — or had been once. Now he has given up. The seas, for him at least, are empty.

Sardonically, he remarked that now he got his fish in the trade store, tinned in Japan.

The M.P. shrugs. He doesn't like it much. Anyway it's time to go. I feel depressed, for nothing much is being achieved.

And my next and last encounter doesn't seem promising — a visit to the Russell Islands, on the way back to Honiara: to the Estate of Unilevers. Both in Sydney and Honiara, I had been warned that visitors are distinctly unwelcome. But I have decided to fly in early and take a late plane out — if needs be, simply sit it out at the strip.

The pilot, a cheery fellow who must be pushing sixty, has recently resigned from Qantas and flying Jumbos ("too bloody boring, might as well drive a bus in Bondi; this is more fun") informs me that the weather is lousy over the Russells and we mightn't get in. But we'll try.

After an hour we come down on a very damp strip. The sun — for once — is out. A large emphatic sign proclaims: "LEVER BROTHERS/SOLOMON ISLANDS PTY. PRIVATE PROPERTY. TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED." A policeman is evident. I ask if there is a restaurant nearby (such naivete) where I could have a meal? He stares at me unblinkingly, smoothly says: "I'm sorry sir, I don't speak English." Well, I think, maybe he'll push off after the plane's gone and I'll go for a little wander. Then a van turns up and out hops a brisk, white lady of about thirty who hands a mail bag to the pilot and accosts me. I explain briefly that I am researching this film, not a documentary, I emphasise, but simply a harmless historical epic . . . she responds with "Well, we'll soon sort you out. Come back to the office."

Lever Brothers (Colgate, Palmolive and other big brand names) have quite a complex here. The hard statistics are fifteen Europeans (air conditioned offices, club, swimming pool, servants) operate it, and there are some twelve hundred native labourers (pay fifty dollars a month) but they get paid holidays once a year back to their home island — most come from Malaita, in fact. The copra trees would be uncountable, certainly in hundreds of thousands, cocoa plants between these. There are six thousand Brahmin cattle — imported originally to keep down the undergrowth and reduce human labour — but turned out to be a profitable by-product. Later, at lunch, which does eventuate, I savour the best steak I have had in a very long time.

Carol Friend is the Administrative Officer, her husband in London for the moment, is an agrono-

mist. Born in Queensland, she has lived in the Solomons since she was four years old. This is her home. Australia has little meaning for her now. They take their leave in Europe.

However, she conducts a mild if persistent inquisition, then disappears for a while, returns, and informs me that the Managing Director will see me. He is, she says, Malaysian, Nahbob Bin Abdullah by name, and an economist out of Cambridge, and, of course, a Muslim.

We proceed.

A couple of years ago when I was in Malaysia, I had met such people, the products of a rich aristocracy — elegant, quietly spoken, infinitely courteous. And no fools.

Mr Nahbob stuffs his English briar pipe with expensive tobacco and informs me that the company has little taste for journalists and film makers. The constant tagging as a supposedly evil multi-national. However . . . we will not be inhospitable here . . . even if you have arrived rather, shall we say, unannounced, even precipitately. . .

For some reason he makes a reference to Somerset Maugham and how he, having accepted the hospitality of the people of the Malay States in earlier years had written so savagely about them, and thus had become no longer welcome. I listen with care to these intriguing remarks, but my eyes wander about . . . there are production charts stuck on the wall . . . the figures are quite impressive . . . airmailed editions of the Wall Street Journal, the London Times and Le Monde are neatly piled . . . I patiently explain about the Conrad story, the need to find some locations as described . . . so far I've not had much luck.

He instructs Carol Friend to take me on a tour of the island: which one, she asks, A, B or C? A, he says briefly, whatever that may signify. He then asks for a copy of the book so he can absorb the story. I hand it over, warning him that it's a hard read, pretty daunting. He smiles, stands up, the meeting is over. He thinks it will only take him a couple of hours and we'll meet at lunch time — returning the book.

The Landrover journey turns out to be most agreeable. A few showers but fine enough to have a look across at the other islands — there are about a couple of dozen of varying sizes in the group.

The port which handles ocean going vessels, the research area (the Company has developed palms with *short* trunks to cut labour costs — very ingenious). The beautiful Brahmin cattle munch contentedly, performing their useful tasks. There

are even some old plantation houses on the hills . . . it's all beginning to look very promising. There is a particular sequence in the story which specifies a location which would be almost impossible to find . . . a steep cliff with three palm trees atop it, and overlooking the sea . . . and suddenly, there it is . . . such absurd luck. I feverishly reload my Rolliflex to make some stills. It is just as if Conrad had been here . . . walking along this very track.

“‘Ah, Mr Renouard . . .’ He came up and smiled, but she was very serious. ‘I can't keep still any longer. Is there time to walk up this headland and back before dark?’

The shadows were lying lengthened on the ground; all was stillness and peace. ‘No,’ said Renouard, feeling suddenly as steady as a rock. ‘But I can show you a view from the central hill which your father has not seen. A view of the reefs and of broken water without end, and of great wheeling clouds of sea-birds.’

She came down the verandah steps at once and they moved off. ‘You go first,’ he proposed, ‘and I'll direct you. To the left.’

She was wearing a short nankin skirt, a muslin blouse; he could see through the thin stuff the skin of her shoulders, of her arms. The noble delicacy of her neck caused him a sort of transport. ‘The path begins where these three palms are. The only palms on the island.’

‘I see.’

She never turned her head. After a while she observed: ‘This path looks as if it had been made recently.’

‘Quite recently,’ he assented very low.

They went on climbing steadily without exchanging another word; and when they stood on the top she gazed a long time before her. The low evening mist veiled the further limit of the reefs. Above the enormous and melancholy confusion, as of a fleet of wrecked islands, the restless myriads of seabirds rolled and unrolled dark ribbons on the sky, gathered in clouds, soared and stooped like a play of shadows, for they were too far for them to hear their cries.

Renouard broke the silence in low tones. ‘They'll be settling for the night presently.’

She made no sound. Round them all was peace and declining sunshine. Nearby the topmost pinnacle of Malata, resembling the top of a buried tower, rose a rock, weather-worn, grey, weary of watching the monotonous centuries of the Pacific. Renouard leaned his shoulders against it. Felicia Moorsom faced him suddenly, her splendid black eyes full on his face as though she had made up her mind at last to destroy his wits once and for all. Dazzled, he lowered his eyelids slowly.

'Mr Renouard! There is something strange in all this. Tell me where he is?'

He answered deliberately.

'On the other side of this rock. I buried him there myself.'

The Managing Director is as good as his word. At lunch he comes to Carol's bungalow (which even has a path coming up from the sea front as also described in the yarn) . . . and discusses the problems. "I can see it has a small cast and you only need to shoot half of it in the Pacific, but you'd have problems with putting a crew down, finding the right kind of schooner and there's the matter of a generator for power . . . you could do it here . . . using one of the other islands as well, perhaps . . ."

Of all the many people who have absorbed, or tried to, this most dense and complex tale, in and out of the film industry, no one has reacted with such perception, let alone so quickly. I am taken aback and ponder on the fact that one could well do with this sort of brain power in my line of business. Still, I suppose only multi-nationals have the resources to hire such people.

However, he smilingly continues, the decision does not lie with me. You will have to go to London to secure that. A soft handshake and Mr Nahbob is about to go out of my life. Then I decide to take a small risk . . . I ask him, as he turns away . . . do you think the new government might expropriate? . . . For the first time he laughs . . . "Oh, yes, that's been tried elsewhere, Indonesia, Nigeria years ago but then they ask us back. It's partly expertise of course . . . but then if they tried it here — and indeed back in 1979 there were such hints — then they would find that our factory in Sydney would not be available. Where would the government send the raw product for processing?" I have no answer.

At the airstrip the Solair aircraft is on time. The policeman is still standing there (or maybe he'd gone for a couple of beers and a meal at the company store and canteen).

Carol Friend waves me off smilingly. But for six hours she has never let me out of her sight.

Now time has run out. I see Bob Gordon at the Yacht Club and he is more impressed with my endeavours. He feels, too, that the Russell Islands would be the best locale, anyway they're close to Honiara, and when you come back, I'll take you around some of the other islands there. In fact, probably that is where Conrad would have been. They've always had a big port, been trading

down to Sydney for about a hundred years . . . he must have called in there . . . probably never went to Malaita, just saw it on the map, liked the sound and look of the name . . . And dropped the "i" out.

We part pleasantly. I walk back to the Mendana Hotel, and John, one of the waiters, chats me up. He has just joined the union, proudly shows me his card (John comes from a village far away, his father said to him get out of this and go and make a fortune in the capital. He gets 35 dollars a week).

The manager, Douglas Haigh, an old hotelier of the tropics (years in Nairobi and other spots, he and his wife have decided to move sideways along the Equator to quieter spots) tells me that in a week a hundred and fifty American veterans are coming back for the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal.

That night, before I leave, there is a floor show by some Gilbert Island dancers (a minority well treated in these parts) and they have been hired to perform one of their wild war dances . . . for a group of Japanese businessmen. The visitors love it. They even adorn themselves with Samurai style costumes for the occasion.

Thus indeed does history shift from tragedy to farce.

The Air Pacific bus picks me up and I take my last ride to Henderson Field. I pass the golf course, really notice it for the first time. The English always took their golf courses with them wherever they went, however remote. And today, it being a Wednesday, is traditionally Ladies Day. But now all the players are black — and ladies. And swinging their irons with some dexterity, too. I ponder on the fact that however poverty stricken this third world country may be, at least the good folk here have recovered their dignity. Not much else, but that at least. The caddies are now the players.

It's three hours to Brisbane and Air Pacific run a fine service. The pilot who looks like a slimmer Idi Amin, bustles aboard, the attractive black and brown hostesses dispense food and drink with style. And I review my successes and failures. Still, I have plenty of notes, made some useful connections, and have a dozen rolls of still film.

Horizons have been opened, extended, and the practical problems approach solution.

The lilting Polynesian music goes off, silence sinks in and I wonder from thirty thousand feet,

how, much further up, where all good sailormen go, what the Old Man might be thinking of all this. Conrad peering down, at this Innocent Abroad who so impertinently wants to transmorgify one of his most disliked (by the critics) and most popular (by the public) yarns? Perhaps he would regard him with a mixture of pity, wryness, admiration? Gazing down through his glittering pince-nez . . . top hat angled, brushing his beard with a gnarled hand . . . what would he say . . . ?

I can only recall one of his quotes:

“A work that aspires however humbly to the condition of art, should carry its justification in every line . . .”

And he concludes his tale THE PLANTER OF MALATA thus:

“Next evening, from the receding schooner, the Editor looked back for the last time at the deserted island. A black cloud hung listlessly over the high rock on the middle hill; and under the mysterious silence of that shadow Malata lay mournful, with an air of anguish in the wild sunset, as if remembering the heart that was broken there.”

Cecil Holmes is a leading Australian film writer and director. For the last two years he has been working on a feature film Morrison of Peking, a television film Mark Twain Down Under, and has begun work on The Planter of Malata.

REFLECTED BY A GRAVE

I suppose there are many reasons to go to Dunk, but Banfield's book must be the best: the one everyone reads—I know he wrote several. So we went. And by some fluke, the hut that is named for him, the only one not named for a navigator or some pom politician. Seemed a kind of omen; even the most rational person — and I'm not sure I'm that—must sometimes meet a coincidence that seems uncannily purposive. Still, when you arrive by aeroplane, stay in a resort with two hundred other guests, and about as many staff to ensure life is comfortable, Dunk seems a bit different from the book. Some things—the sea, the rainforest, the rain and sun, are much the same, though: so we swam on his beach, climbed the hill, and looked at his grave. There were no aborigines, but: just some names on a map in Banfield's spelling of what he thought they said. Seems odd, given that it's an ideal place for people with a simple food-gathering technology. Was Banfield some kind of omen for them too, perhaps?

R. G. HAY

ANDREA STRETTON

Chrissie and Len

Chrissie is due at the old house at 10.00 a.m. She has a long way to go. A train from Essendon. A tram from the city. Another day off school won't matter. School's a dump anyway. It's the after school job that counts. She works the till at the local Woolworths store, and scores a bulls-eye with an occasional dollar she slips into her pocket. The world's a hoax. You have to sneak a bit. That's what her Mum says, too, when they bring her up before the court on shoplifting charges. Bars of soap; stockings; perfume. Dad says he's sick of paying Mum's fines. Mum says she always wins it back from Bingo at the town hall, so he can stop whining.

Chrissie has her bank book with her. There's a hundred dollars in her account. To buy a piece of life, somehow. Get it while you can. Dad says he doesn't care what she does, so long as Woolworths will take her on full time, as soon as possible. Though God knows why they would want to, says Chrissie, if they knew about my Mum's little hobbies. She smiles to herself. She can be quite arrogant. Quite nasty. Chrissie needs a good slap across the face, except she's getting too old for that. God help us, says Mum, she's almost a woman. Hhhmmff, mutters Dad. Chrissie glares. But it makes her want to cry.

Chrissie chews gum as she stares out the window of the train. At her feet is a dilly bag containing her bank book, in case Ross does not turn up. Chrissie would not trust anybody. Along with the book is a doctor's reference, Modess pads, a bottle of Avon cologne, and a Woolworths night-dress.

It is very strange, to be fifteen years old and on the way to an abortion clinic. Chrissie stares at the fresh autumn day outside the window, and for

a moment her mind is so distracted that the gum lies motionless inside her mouth. Her eyes are the color of burnt grass. They do not blink. There are window frames across her eyeballs.

Jude, the receptionist at the clinic, has just arrived at the house, and sits at the desk. It is an old house at the edge of the city. If Jude closes her eyes and tries hard she can detect the ancient smell of moth balls, talcum powder, and hyd-rangeas, drenched with rain from the garden. It takes a stretch of the imagination. There are signs in the hallway. Too many magazines on the coffee table. A grandfather clock remains. It stands outside the ladies room in the hall, ticking away at time.

Hickory Dickory Dock
The mouse ran up the clock,
The clock struck eight,
Women at the gate,
Hickory Dickory Dock.

There are two telephones on Jude's desk. The grey one rings. It is supposed to be a silent number. She hesitates before she answers. No, Eric the Director, is not in yet. It's Len of course, making his morning call. He never says Goodbye. He just hangs up. Jude sits with the receiver held away from her ear, and the dial tone droning on. Bastard, she thinks. Next thing he will be marching up and down on the pavement outside, while the women walk up and down the hall.

Len's alarm clock rang just before eight o'clock. He woke reluctantly, as he had been up late composing letters to newspapers and journals, but he was not too tired to make a phone call to

Jude. Out of the two hundred letters he had written, only five had been published, which is an indication that Satan is present. He removes white tissues from his bedside alarm clock, and places them in the bin. If it were not for his clock he would not know the time, because his flat is insulated against the sights and sounds of St. Kilda with Pink Batts and silver foil. Inside there, he could be anywhere, and is glad of that. He gets back at the whores and homosexuals though, for making him feel estranged in his own suburb. He yells at them in the street.

He takes forty-two vitamin tablets. This, he says, explains the sleek white skin on his face, and the fervent shine in his eyes. Combs back his thick black hair with water. In all his forty-five years he has never been sick, but try telling that to the Department of Social Security. They say Len's a sick man.

Len has only one tram to catch to get to the old house. He hopes the others will be there on time for once. He draws up the shift sheet. He is on every weekday. Has not missed a day for five years. There is no superannuation in this job. Only a guarantee of Heaven at the other end. He would spend all his invalid pension just to get the Director of the clinic jailed. He knows what Eric Dwyer calls Len and his male friends.

"Oh, here's Len and his male harem."

Len overheard one day. He knows the voice of the devil. Now he tries to encourage women and children to join them. The children walk a strange line between terror and boredom. Sometimes no one else turns up. Then Len is a one man band. There is no guitar; no harmonica; no gospels. Just Len, with placards and camera. Sitting in the tram on a golden autumn morning, dressed in baggy 1950s suit, shiny with age. A cheap acrylic shirt clean from the laundromat but already bristling with a nervous sweat.

He knows people stare at him on the tram. He knows the look of respect when he sees it. Sometimes he speaks to them, but his stutter spoils the effect. It is easier just to turn the placards to face them.

STOP MURDERING BABIES.
YOU WERE ONCE A FOETUS.
ARE YOU SCREAMING TOO?

People on tram 452 certainly stare at Len and his placards.

Chrissie is standing in the reception area which used to be an entrance hall. Jude is saying she is sorry. Chrissie has just come back from the city branch of her bank, and placed eighty dollars on the counter. Eighty dollars worth of pushing buttons at Woolworths. Eighty dollars worth of a bit of life. Jude is sorry. She couldn't have paid for another one, just because Christine's boyfriend Ross had not turned up.

"He's not my boyfriend," says Chrissie.

"Well, the father," says Jude.

Chrissie frowns.

Jude knows the anxiety of spending hard earned cash. She is a single parent and Eric pays her under the table, so to speak. Still, she couldn't have relied on any ex-father to turn up, nor to have the money if he did.

No, she couldn't have relied on Christine's father's factory number.

Or on Christine's promises.

They can't take deposits and they can't take instalments.

Not even a cheque.

Jude's heard it all before.

"We don't even take American Express," she says, smiling kindly. "And they say you can get anything in the world on that."

Chrissie stops chewing and stares at Jude.

"American Express?" says Chrissie, bewildered.

No one has ever mentioned American Express at Woolworths.

"Cards, you know," says Jude.

"Oh yes," says Chrissie, suspiciously.

She feels foolish, like a silly child. Wanting, suddenly, to cry.

"Well," she says in confusion, "you've got my money."

She pushes the notes at Jude. Jude bites her lip as she makes out a receipt. Christine would not qualify for hire purchase; much less hire loss.

There's Len yelling on the steps outside; and the grey phone ringing again. Chrissie screws up her receipt and throws it loudly into the bin.

Len walks up and down outside the clinic, all day long. Jude, the red haired receptionist, comes out to water the pathetic little flower garden she has planted next to the concrete steps, in the dry earth. Pretending to nurture life. Len stares coldly. Quite a Jezebel this one. High heeled shoes on her feet. Jewellery hanging from her wrists and ears. Blusher on her cheeks. Sometimes she makes smart remarks to him. The worst she can do is

ignore him as she waters the plants. But she does not, this morning.

"Back again are we?" she says tartly.

"There's no law against w . . . w . . . walking," says Len, glaring at her.

Jude turns to go inside, smiling to herself.

"Don't know why somebody didn't pick you up for the Life Be In It advertisements," she says when she reaches the door.

Jude? Judas more likely. Len's a bit slow in retaliation.

"Better than not b . . . b . . . being in life at ALL!" he shouts.

But too late. Jude has shut the door on Len.

In the room that used to be a diningroom, the women wait. A gas heater is putt-putting away in the corner. Light pours white and translucent through thin polyester curtains. The carpet is like the back of a dog with mange. Chrissie sits on the couch. An older woman next to her cries in a low sob. Chrissie tries not to listen. The sound infuriates her, though she does not know why. She wishes she had a transistor with earplugs; or a talking book. Chrissie often goes to Essendon library to listen to the talking books. The tapes that diminish the world and its worries. She sits there listening to tapes of stories for twelve year olds. She would not admit to her tastes, but she likes them much better than Jane Eyre, her school text. They are comforting. Jane Eyre is full of threat. She sits in the library listening to the tapes, with her eyes closed, and everything feels better. The first piece of life she had intended to buy was a portable stereo that would slip into her pocket, with earplugs to the ears, so she could listen to books when she walked down the street.

Now Chrissie hears the sobbing, and her eyes are open. She sees, out of the corner of one eye, the woman's elbow, crinkled and exposed beneath the drawn-up sleeve of her cardigan. Chrissie is captivated by the elbow that shudders in rhythm with the sobs. She stares for so long that the weeping could be issuing from her own heart.

Chrissie lights a cigarette and looks away.

Len hopes he will see the Director of the clinic, Eric. Len's day is lost without a glimpse. He needs Eric to bring his hatred into focus. Eric has been in the trade for a long time. He is alert to everything. To death threats to his family; to police corruption; to home-made bombs planted

in his Rover. Len's obscenities and phone calls are small fry to Eric, but a never ending nuisance none the less. Eric sometimes feels that everyone is after him, except his patients. The latest objections come from feminist groups who flay him for using general anaesthetics, saying that he is trying to take the women's power and knowledge from them. Making them believe they are just having a fifteen minutes snooze, instead of allowing them to feel the pain and acknowledge the fact. It makes Eric tired. He says it is a matter of preventing pain and movement. He believes in what he does. He is driven by the image of backyard abortions of his childhood. By the image of his sister's haemorrhaging over an ironing table as she died with the hook of a wire coat hanger piercing the lining of her womb.

The Lens of this world can go to Hell.

Eric tricks Len today. He comes up the back lane and through the back doors. Eric is no fool. Some people think he is a god.

Five minutes later Jude gives him a message. According to a call on the grey phone, there is already a bomb in the bonnet of his car.

Chrissie is lying on a table in the old house. She wears a new short nightdress stolen from the Woolworths discount store. She was asked to bring one, especially for the occasion, as if it was a honeymoon. The anaesthetist studies the needle in his hand. He places the spike against the vein that springs out from the porcelain skin inside Chrissie's elbow, between the tourniquet and the forearm.

"When . . .?" mutters Chrissie, slowly, and with fear.

The anaesthetist gives her a strange smile and makes a comment to the doctor.

She watches his face disappearing. A train rushes through her head, dragging the face away.

Chrissie lies anaesthetised on a trolley in the hallway, partially covered with a sheet. The grandfather clock ticks beside the trolley.

Tick. Tock.

She is white faced, unconscious, and open mouthed on the thin pillow. Having a fifteen minute snooze.

A naked foot hangs as if dead over the edge of the trolley.

Five toe nails painted a pink as tender as blossom.

There is shiny lino on the floor of the living room. Chrissie lies there on a narrow operating table with her ankles strapped into stirrups high in the air. She could be having a difficult birth. But she is still, and dreaming, and the instruments are sucking a foetus out of her womb.

The doctor and the anaesthetist are discussing a car accident that was witnessed on the way to the clinic. A new nursing aide scrubs the door of the steel wall incinerator with Jex pads and Ajax. Her predecessor could not stand the death threats any longer. She glances at the unconscious girl's lips. Saliva trickles over them, taking her lip-stick with it.

The incinerator makes a strange howling sound, now and then.

When the wind blows.
And the cradle falls.

In the room that was once a bedroom, used for copulation, quiet talk, and sleep, an assistant claps her hands and calls the girl's name: "Christine! Christine!"

And Christine, fifteen years old, rouses and mutters from the bed. She sees a girl reflected in the long mirror attached to the opposite wall, while the assistant gives her instructions on post abortion care. The girl has a pale acned face, with swollen cheeks and dampness around her eyes. A horrible sight. She closes her eyes. She opens them immediately. She realizes the girl is herself, staring from the bed.

Pads for bleeding. Rest for recovery. Panadol for pain.

Chrissie is a Mentals fan. She has posters of the band on her bedroom wall. She saw them playing at the Essendon Hotel two months ago. She danced and larked around that night. She had make-up on her skin and a friend had dyed one gold streak through her hair. Red tights. Silver jiffy slippers her Mum was going to throw out. When she looked in the mirror she saw a sparkle there, like a touch of magic. She looked almost punk. Almost right.

Mum said she looked like a Christmas fairy gone wrong.

Dad said she looked like a bloody prostitute. "What would you know about it?" said Chrissie angrily, and he smirked.

Ross thought she looked right. She had heard about Ross. He smoked Marlboro and the tiny razor blade in one earlobe was strangely exciting next to his gentle face. He looked an awful lot

like the bass player of Mentals, when he came up close to her and licked the eyelashes beneath the special lock of golden hair that fell across Chrissie's eyes.

Chrissie was an easy pick-up. She wanted to do it with Ross. She had only done it a few times. Her friends knew and it made her feel silly. It was easy really. Finding a half demolished house in a vacant lot. Fucking between a discarded bulldozer and a broken verandah, under the moon. Mum and Dad would not know the difference. It was their Bingo night.

It always hurt a bit. Pretty funny. Not too bad. The sensation of skin against skin was almost as comforting as a talking book. It made her ache for something more.

They came out, hanging onto each other. She had lost a silver jiffy and could not find it in the dark.

Ross said she was really ace, and it gave her the giggles because she did not know what he meant.

Everything would be all right. It only took ten minutes, so it had to be all right. And a girlfriend had given her some packets of contraceptive pills. Pretty packets. Silver foil and tiny red tablets.

Chrissie took one, now and then.

Chrissie is not dancing now. In the living room of the old house there is a squeak as the metal incinerator door is pulled open. A click as it slams shut. There is a smell of metal, disinfectant, and incineration in the air.

Eighty dollars down the drain, in cash.

Pads for bleeding. Rest for recovery. A blind-fold for dreams.

Chrissie has a bus to catch. She closes her eyes, and lets her cup of tea go cold. Her roadside moccasins wait beside the bed. Not a silver slipper in sight.

No one is interested in picking Chrissie up, today.

Eric is ringing the bomb disposal unit of the Police Department. The defusing experts are on the way to check his car. Eric cannot stand it much longer. He has already lost a finger, and great chunks of his soul. There's Chrissie going past his door, carrying her little dilly bag and spraying her neck with eau de cologne. She shuffles along defiantly on the backs of her moccasins like an old lady.

Jude tells him that they should get the number of the grey phone changed again. Telecom are sick to death of it all. No one can trace the caller, ringing from a public telephone booth. The police say it is the lowest of their priorities.

Eric hears a shout from the street. The metal lid slams again, in the living room.

"Lenny's in fine form today," says Jude, tossing her head. "Maybe he's had a letter in *The Australian*."

"Maybe he strangled a prostitute on the way here," says Eric, irritably.

Chrissie walks out of the clinic and the sharp breeze claps its hands in front of her face. Tiny dried leaves run delicately in a continuous wave across the pavement like miniature soldier crabs dancing across an estuary of damp sand, in front of human feet. Len gives Chrissie a long hard stare, without blinking. So do his thin gathering of friends.

The clinic cannot prevent a long hard stare. Its security can prevent women being pushed down the steps and having placard handles poked into their breasts; though it takes all of Len's self control not to do it. But no one can stop him staring. Or taking photographs. Or copying car registration numbers. Or making midnight calls.

No one can stop him rushing around to the back lane when a problem abortion patient was being slid into an intensive care ambulance to be taken to St Vincent's Hospital, and screaming at the unconscious woman, strapped to the stretcher with blood on the sheets:

"Murderer! Murderer!"

Len takes a photograph of Chrissie walking down the steps of the clinic, with a hand across her stomach. Her hair is falling out of red heart clips and over her pale face. She is looking up, sullen and glum. She is looking at the tight white lips beneath the glass eye of Len's camera.

When he steps into her path her arms wrap around the waist of her overcoat like a lover's arms. He casts a shadow over her face when he leans forward and says:

"Do you really LIKE killing babies?"

Chrissie's face blanches and her mouth twists open. She feels suddenly nauseous. Her lower stomach aches. Her womb is contracting, pretending to give birth.

"Get out of my way," she says.

Len cannot resist it. He grabs her shoulder, disentangling her lover's embrace. Smells her cheap cologne.

"You're really into it, aren't you?" he yells. "What does it feel like, to get away with MURDER?"

Chrissie curls her top lip.

"What are you?" she says angrily. "Some kind of nut?"

"Foetus killer. Baby burner," he says fiercely through clenched teeth.

Her face crumples like a child's. She yanks her arm out of his grasp and manages to hold her nausea at bay for long enough to say: "You screwball."

Then she vomits over the side of the steps and onto Jude's flower bed. Jude opens the door and yells at Len. Eric, hearing her, suddenly rushes from his desk out to the door. He arrives in time to see Len whispering violent sweet nothings into Chrissie's ear as she vomits her last drops onto the steps.

"Get the bloody hell away from her!" he shouts.

Len looks up excitedly and raises his camera at Eric. Not another one. Len has more photographs of Eric than Eric's mother.

He swings his camera back to Chrissie when he realizes she is walking down the steps, wiping her mouth. She stares with amazement at Len and then in despair at Jude, who comes down the steps to help her. Christine starts to cry, the instant Jude touches her arm.

"Just . . . LOOK at it!" says Len, taking more photographs.

Eric grabs the camera from Len's pale hands and throws it onto the concrete, saying intensely: "I'm sick to death of you and your bloody camera . . ."

"I'll have you up for assault!" shrieks Len.

"I'll have YOU up for assault if you don't leave the women alone."

"You call them WOMEN?" yells Len, pointing at Chrissie. "No real woman kills babies!"

Chrissie is making a slow wail like an animal. It was meant to be simple, routine, and straightforward. Nothing. Eric pushes Len away from her, and Jude puts an arm around Chrissie's shoulder.

"Don't lay a finger on me," bellows Len, ignoring the mutters of his fellow demonstrators. "I'll call the police."

His face shines. He is riding high. No one can stop him now.

"You'll get"

There is a word on the tip of his wild tongue. Finally it comes off. "You'll get LIFE!"

"Why don't you all go away . . ." wails

Chrissie, placing her hands over her face.

"Come inside before you go," says Jude. "I'll make you a cup of tea."

"No," says Chrissie, bitterly, pulling away. "I'm going home."

She walks slowly onto the pavement. A red heart clip dangles from her lank hair onto her neck, and then falls to the concrete.

"That's right, go home. Leave the foetus here," says Len sarcastically.

Chrissie turns back and says, nastily, "Maybe they'll put it in a glass jar for you . . ."

A thin trail of blood trickles down her naked calf, beneath the overcoat, and into the edge of her moccasin. She bends over in pain when she reaches the pavement. She doubles up near the gutter, rocking back and forth, in a foetal position.

Ross arrives and stands nearby, panting. He is about to speak, but he hesitates and then stops. He can smell vomit and cologne. He feels like a pervert, watching a stranger. He sucks at his inadequate lips and swallows hard, unable to approach her. He watches the leaves that swish around the backs of Chrissie's squashed shoes. He has only ever seen her in silver jiffy slippers, and then only three times. In her dancing shoes.

Chrissie is crying.

"I wish I'd never done it," she is muttering. "I wish I'd never bloody done it."

Len purses his lips together. He looks from one person to another with an expression of victory on his gleaming face. He even looks like this at the two bomb defusing experts who have arrived to find Eric. They ignore him.

Len thinks he knows. But no one, not even herself, knows what Chrissie wishes she had never done, as she rocks back and forth, breaking dead leaves with her heels.

The film from Len's camera is undamaged, and has been instant printed. A rewarding day. The photograph of Chrissie walking out of the clinic is in pride of place on his kitchen wall. Clipped across it is Chrissie's hairclip. Len found it on the pavement. He has clipped the red hearts across her eyes.

He winds his clock and goes to bed. He masturbates in the dark, closing his eyes against some silver foil flickering from the blocked window. He thinks about a particular whore he had yelled at in the street, on the way home.

Len never gives his sperm away. He donates

it all to white tissues. Two of them stick to his hand, but he is too peaceful to worry about it.

Len has never been lonely since he turned his hobby into a profession. He has a whole galaxy of saved and unsaved spirits in his head, shining there like stars in the night. He nestles down into the sheets, and falls asleep straight away. No sound can reach him from outside. Nothing can penetrate his consciousness.

Len sleeps well, curled up, with tissues stuck like small white birds to the pale hands upon his pillow.

Chrissie cannot sleep. She has taken down all the posters from her bedroom walls, and removed trinkets from her dressing table. It was an instinctive act; an attempt to strip the room so that it would correspond with a stripped sensation inside her being. Now she lies in the dark, with an earplug connected to a transistor playing beneath the blankets. She stares at the ceiling. She feels like crying all the time, but does not know why. She cannot pinpoint the what, where, or why of her day. An anaesthetic. An argument. An odd sensation. Leaves and blood in her shoes. Lots of people have abortions, like lots of people have babies. That is what Ross said on the telephone, before she told him to get lost. Chrissie does not want to speak to anyone. She has a sense of loss, as if a physical or emotional shadow that lived inside herself had come out and fled away, and she cannot catch up with it. She closes her eyes against a sudden image of Len's gleaming face. Her stomach cramps badly in the middle of the night and she gets up and creeps to the telephone. She rings the clinic. Surely someone will be there. Eric, or Jude, or an assistant. It is a house, after all, where people could live. The ringing tone bleats eternally, giving birth, inside Chrissie, to a notion of endless loneliness. She goes back to bed, and turns the talk-back show off.

Pads for bleeding. Rest for recovery. Panadol for pain.

Chrissie folds her hands across her stomach. She would give her right arm for a talking book.

Trucks pass the old building that used to be a home, but inside all is silent, save for the ticking of the grandfather clock.

Someone knocks at the front door; a desperate fast knocking.

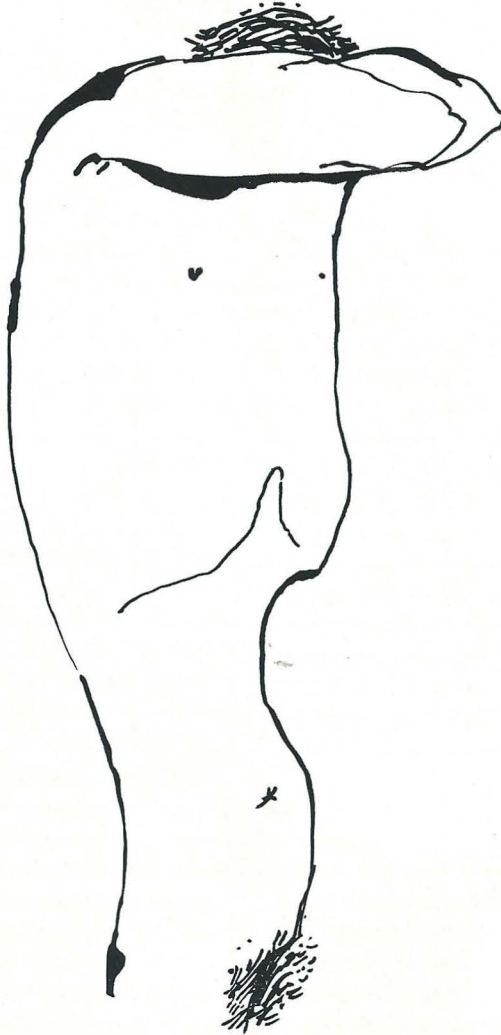
Hickory Dickory Dock
The mouse ran up the clock,
The clock struck four,
Knocking at the door,
Hickory Dickory Dock.

The knocking stops.
The telephone rings. Christine. Not the silent
number, this time.
The ringing stops.

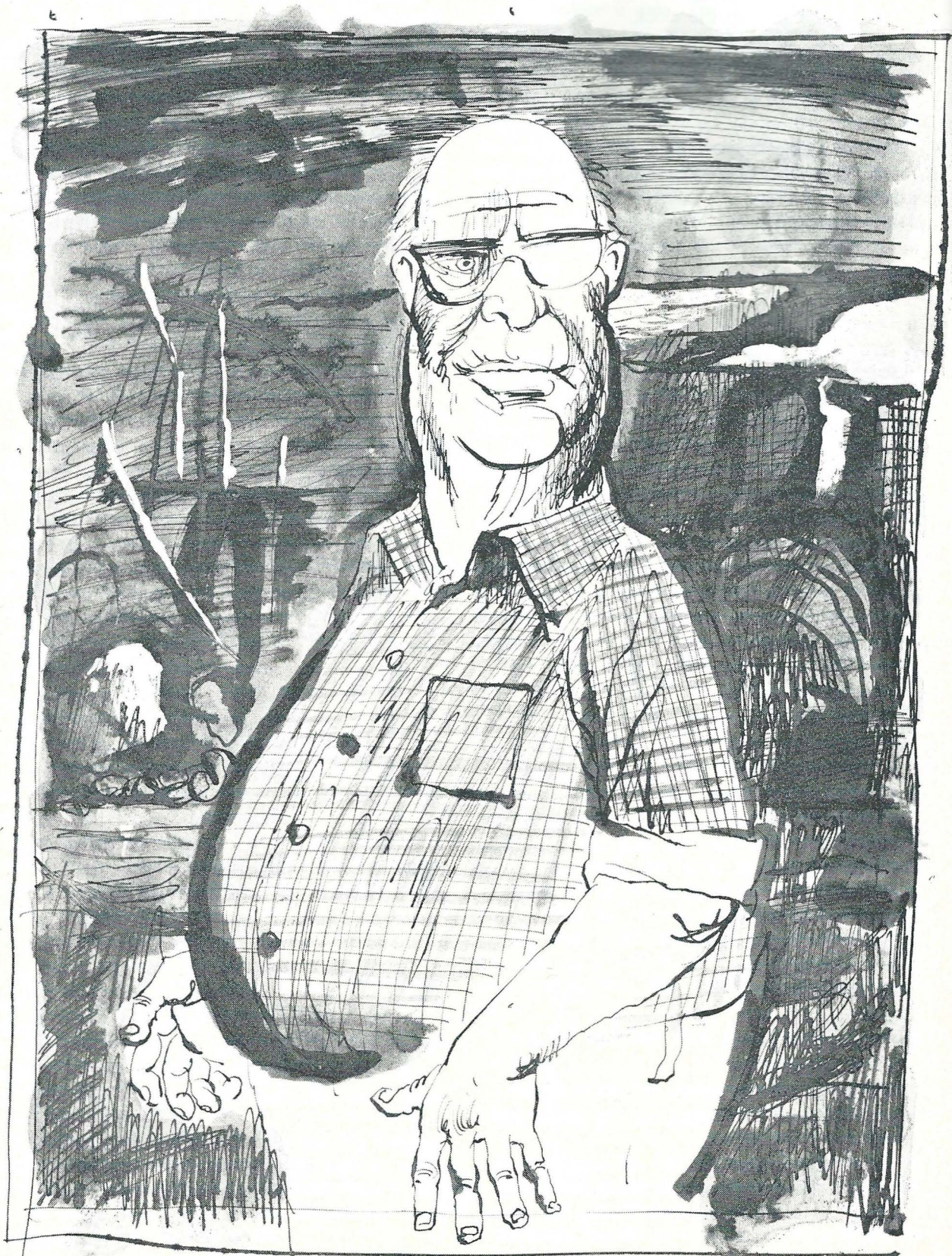
Each room is quiet. Dreaming dreams; catching
up with time.

Even the metal incinerator in the living room,
scrubbed clean and shiny as a pin, sleeps as
quietly as a new born baby.

*Andrea Stretton has published her stories in
Stand, Westerly, The Bulletin and other journals.
She was a co-winner of the Canberra Times short
story prize in 1981 and currently holds a General
Writing Grant from the Literature Board.*



Jiri Tibor Novak



TASS DRYSDALE

RICK AMAR '81

ERIC WESTBROOK **The Late R.D.**

He was born by the sea in comfortable Sussex, a chaste green belt of postcard villages, radical week-end cottages, royal invalids, elegant cricketers and the Brighton Pavilion. But by family networks he was given an escape route which led instead to stranded sun-dried stores and their exiled owners, thin-legged lubras, painted wickets on a wall and Moody's Pub. He was to shape these sacred sights into one of the landscapes which Australians from Caulfield and Cremorne carry with them when they leave the continent, cultural passports as essential as the bottle-opener.

His family had enough money to seed in others the conviction that it should buy patronage rather than breed professionalism; but once he started to draw he found a hunger for image-making which was to be supported but never satisfied by a private income and a place in the family business. He was often a sick child, but bed brought to him books and drawing pads, a doctor with an eye for more than symptoms, and some encouragement to extend a therapy into a passion. When later, sight was taken from one eye and his life balanced precariously on the other, he wore his frosted lens like a badge of courage, for whilst sonnets and the Iliad can be sung without a glance at the page, he knew that a hundred surfaces would be left bare by one slip of the retina and went on to practise what Cézanne had preached about Monet, to be "just an eye, but what an eye".

But before all this he had to climb from clever sketches admired by parents and friends to pictures accepted by artists. London provided text-books and teachers for a tidy and conservative modernism, and in Melbourne he became a Bell boy floating for a while in shallow waters before casting-off into the dangerous currents of the Contemporary Art Society. There, like most of the intelligent members he set his apprentice course by the stars of Post-Impressionism and the School

of Paris as recorded treacherously in the reproductions. The direction was right but the visibility was bad, and so he wisely replaced in Paris the printers' aberrations by real French painting in a marvellous city, a view of which is a palimpsest under the paintings of Australian men and women, at least of the white variety. There, as with others from Pissarro to Picasso, provincialism was wiped away and he might have stayed longer but Paris was too busy preparing for war and occupation to worry much about him, so he left for home and the military service which was refused him.

It seemed that all vital communications were cut off, but soon important messages were coming not from Paris but from England where isolation turned attention to a rich but neglected stream of romanticism in which Blake, Palmer and Martin were seen to flow into Moore's grave-wrapped figures, the agony of Graham Sutherland's landscapes and the peculiarly domesticated Surrealism of Paul Nash's photographs.

At first Australian images became minor works by Englishmen as lines by young poets in the 'thirties became unwritten poems by Auden. When the gnarled roots began to untwist and the Underground shelterers changed at Albury and came out to sleep in the unbombed air, a discipline had been imposed which never again allowed the wrist to slide into the nerveless convulsions which too often became the mark of mid-century Australian painting. At the same time the realised and isolated standing figures suggested that if a guide and a demand had existed he might have become a maker of fine figurative sculpture filling spaces in our cities now planted with tank-traps for an improbable invasion. As he and his work came to their first maturity he dropped his prosaic first name and his friends dropped for him the aristocratic second which was reserved for the books and catalogues. They give him instead one which in its

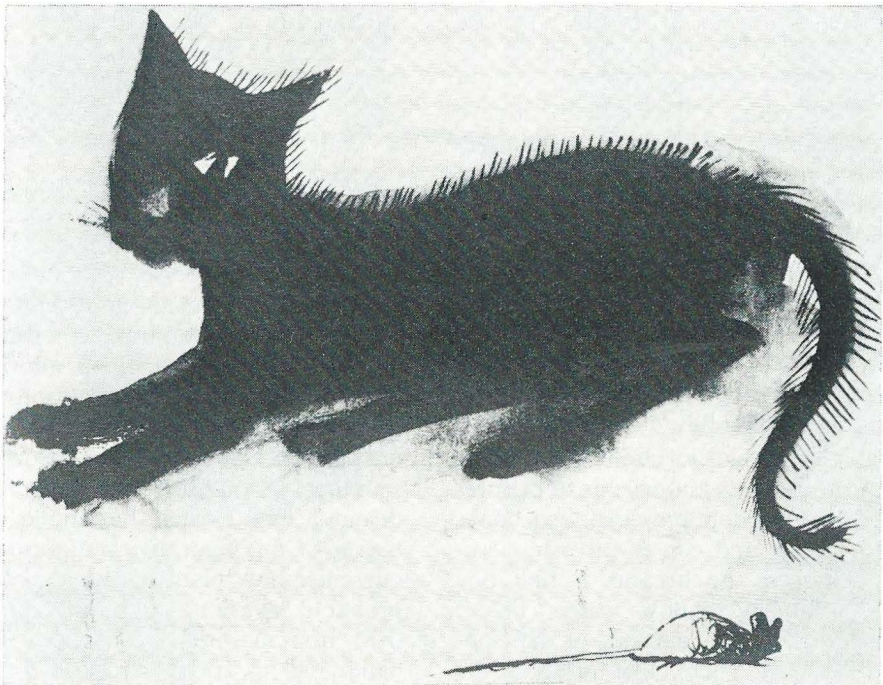
more sentimental form seems oddly inappropriate, for no man is an island.

This painter who had been shaped by cities might have been expected to show concern for that urbanization without urbanity which has crept round the coasts of Australia, but he turned away from the spiritual drought of the cities to the physical drought of the resistant country. Travelling with writers his drawn and painted descriptions became more linear and the lines were those of an illustrator. To illustrate, so the word has gone from Berenson to Fry and back again, is to be damned, but Sickert who hated both of them pointed out that all great art is illustration, and it is difficult to see how *The Blessed Saint Bernard* could explain his Crucifixion, his Annunciations and his attributions without seeing that every picture tells a story. The white men in bars and the black men and women behind them, the children in baths and the Greeks in space, told their stories, and their accounts of the human situa-

tion were recollected first in pen and wash and then in paint. It pleased a part of the press, his publishers and some of his patrons to believe that his chosen journeys were only among men, but in his portraits of women of all colors he did not conceal tenderness and desire and needed no flowery hats and fancy dresses to shield him from their lethal female radiation.

Success in Leicester Square allowed many in Australia to praise him safely without understanding. He sold well and wore his knighthood better than most, and when his family was taken away and the massive Thames and Hudson tombstone was raised above him, he paused only for reflection and then painted on until he was ready to die as a man.

Eric Westbrook, formerly head of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts and Director, National Gallery of Victoria, now has more time for his original talents as draughtsman and writer.



Charles Blackman

swag

BOOKS IN GENERAL. This is the bookbuying season when we choose gifts from those books we ourselves have enjoyed recently. So Swag, this time, is a list of some of this year's books which have caught and held my attention. I exclude books of Australian literature and history reviewed or scheduled for review in these pages.

A book of compelling interest throughout its five hundred pages, full of surprises, written in a masterly prose which often glints and sparkles, is *The Past Has Another Pattern*, the memoirs of George W. Ball (Norton, \$19.95). Did this book get the Pulitzer Prize? Certainly, it should have.

Ball was for many years a force in U.S. foreign policy though defeated on most major issues. He was Under-Secretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and, later, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Beginning as a son of a Standard Oil vice-president and ending, at Lehman Brothers, as a merchant banker to merchant bankers, Ball has lived most of his seventy-two years close to the power centres of capitalism. How odd and refreshing, then, to encounter in this book a liberal and sceptical humanist, one who tried to stop the Bay of Pigs invasion, who from first to weary last totally opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and who was an implacable critic of the Shah of Iran and an accurate prophet of subsequent events in Iran.

In an extraordinary career he has known most of the world's power brokers and his astringent and carefully composed portraits of them are a delight. He was the first to interrogate Albert Speer and no one has better explained him. He is particularly good on his close friends, Jean Monnet and Adlai Stevenson. From a book full of good stories here is one about Stevenson: "Once, when we were practising law together he went to New York to meet with a group of investment

bankers. 'Though it was a cold day,' he reported later, 'greed ran down their faces like sweat.'"

Towards the end of this book George Ball discusses the present status of the nuclear threat and precisely because he is so controlled and pragmatic he makes the blood run cold. This is a major account of central events of our time.

The most beautiful book to look at this year was Charles Blackman's *Paris Dreaming* (A. H. and A. W. Reed, \$80) with, as text, an anthology of excerpts from French literature in translation compiled and sensitively chosen by Nadine Amadio. This large-format book is lavish with color-plates and contains some of the best colored drawings Blackman has done, indeed some are little miracles. Above all Blackman is a draughtsman and his talent, with its intimate, poetic vision, finds its best, most natural expression in this visual diary. In it he records his love affair with Paris and with French literature. One of the drawings from *Paris Dreaming*, *Brasserie*, is shown on our cover.

Nadine Amadio has shown great skill in selecting the text. Again and again we find a passage with an uncanny correspondence with a drawing. One such is the question put to Maeterlinck's *Melisànde* by Pelléas and which he might have put to Blackman: "What are you doing there, at the window, singing like a bird from another land?"

The Blackman-Amadio collaboration has also produced *Alice* (A. H. and A. W. Reed, \$12.95), a delightful marriage of Blackman's famous *Alice in Wonderland* paintings with an abridged text. The quality of the color-plates is high and the publishers have priced the book for the children's market. But I think many adults might hang on to this one. The cat with one eye at alert which

you see in this issue strolled from the pages of *Alice*.

Among the fiction read this year far and away the best, in terms of art, is Alain Robbe-Grillet's very short novel *Djinn* (Grove Pr., \$7.50). First published in France in 1981 it has been most skilfully translated. This, as is usual with Robbe-Grillet, is an ontological thriller told with all the directness, narrative force and economy of a good detective story. But here the killer and the killed are time and memory. For those sick of hum-drum autobiography posing as fiction here is a genuine invention, one of which the author might have said with Jules Renard: "I have a passion for the truth and for the fictions that it authorises."

Nancy Phelan is one of the best Australian writers yet somehow is ignored when contemporary literature is discussed. Why? She is infinitely more rewarding to read than many of the poets and novelists whose works attract critical study. Perhaps the travel book, which is her genre, is discounted as literature. This is an attitude which is changing helped greatly by Paul Fussell's *Abroad; British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (O.U.P.), an enjoyable discussion of the literary merits of travel books by Lawrence, Waugh, Greene, etc.

Nancy Phelan has not written better than in her ninth travel book, *Morocco is a Lion* (Quartet, \$18.95). She is both sensitive and, in the best sense, tough and these are the qualities which enable her to leave the tourist track and engage with the everyday life of Morocco. She "cannot resist the back view of the veiled fat lady with djellaba tucked up, riding pillion on a motorbike, the old woman being trundled along in a handcart, the scores of little boys in T-shirts from Harvard University". Her landscapes are just as vivid: "the mountains are cobbled like clumsy sewing, tucked, pleated like fans, like starched standing-up frills but lower down houses grow out of the earth with the crude splendid shapes of granary fortresses. The terraced river-valley is green with olives and poplars and walnuts; then the green has gone, the hills are low and eroded and lion-coloured, the road becomes flat."

I would like to see a study of Nancy Phelan, a writer of uncommon knowledge and one capable at times of what seems to me to be wisdom.

American poetry is much read in Australia by poets and perhaps some others. The men and

women who wrote some of the most admired poems are brought to memorable, if painful, life by Eileen Simpson in her fine memoir *Poets In Their Youth* (Random House, \$15.50). Eileen Simpson was married, for a time, to the late John Berryman. She emerges as a highly intelligent, independent person in her own right and as a writer born. The book is painful because so many of these writers, most of whom first attracted attention in the 1940s, are already dead. Poetry is a dangerous vocation as the record here of madness and suicide shows. There are full-length portraits of Berryman, Delmore Schwartz, Robert Lowell and Randall Jarrell and incisive sketches of Blackmur, Jean Stafford, Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, Paul Goodman and others. T. S. Eliot makes a striking appearance. Amongst many memorable things is a poignant account of Lowell in his madness seeing communists under the bed, literally. There is another of the generous and lonely Jarrell glimpsed shortly before his death. Bright, compelling, witty these poets certainly were but all of them self-obsessed and hell to know. But not apparently for Eileen Simpson who has written an essential record of them.

On 11 September, 1973, five minutes before noon, General Palacios ordered his 2nd Tank Regiment to fire on La Moneda, the presidential palace of Chile. Allende refused to escape and rejected all offers of safe conduct. At 2 p.m. Captain Roberto Garrido loosed a burst of fire and Allende fell dead.

The C. in C. Army, Augusto Pinochet, assumed the role of President. Ruling with him were Mendoza (police), Merino (navy), and Leigh (air force). Together these men orchestrated a reign of terror and its brutality continues today. A commentator in *Quadrant* a few issues back questioned the truth of the account of these events given in the film *Missing*. I wonder what *Quadrant* has to say of the eye-witness reports assembled in *The Murder of Chile* by Samuel Chavkin (Everest House, \$17.70)? I find it hard to doubt the honesty and accuracy of such a trained observer as the then Swedish ambassador to Chile, Harald Edelstam. This astonishing man saved 1,300 people from imprisonment or death sometimes, as in an episode in a hospital recounted in this book, literally wrestling for their bodies with army officers. How many people were given refuge in the Australian Embassy?

Nor can one question the truthfulness of Joan Turner, the English wife of the poet and singer Victor Jara. Her account of finding her husband's

body in the Santiago morgue surely cannot be denied: "It was an unbelievably gruesome task as we stopped at each body and examined it closely to make sure. There, on the second floor, we found Victor. His beautiful hands were broken and swollen. I stood before his body just staring, unbelieving. His face was so discolored and torn up that I could hardly recognize him."

Chavkin relies mainly on the sober, careful report of a U.S. Senate Committee to describe the C.I.A. part in this shameful business. Quibblings about the accuracy of a particular film compare oddly with this. The operation of American foreign policies under conservative Presidents like Ronald Reagan in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines needs to be much more closely and widely studied here. Australians would do well to learn the lesson of Chile. And to remember that when the junta's ambassador first arrived in Washington he was met by Henry Kissinger who threw his arms out and hugged him.

Most Australians who are at all interested in Pier Paolo Pasolini think of him as a master film maker — *Accattone*, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, *The Decameron*, the infamous *Salo*, etc. — who died in great scandal apparently murdered by a teenage male prostitute. One of the merits of the exhaustive biography by Enzo Siciliano *Pasolini* (Random House, \$20) is the establishment by copious quotation of Pasolini's importance as a poet and novelist. Pasolini was a person continually in tempest and perhaps more than that of any other Italian writer of his time his life seems to embody the major conflicting and shifting strains in contemporary Italy: the Catholic and the communist, the rural and the urban, proletarian realism and stylish dandyism, the traditional and the experimental, international audience and local dialect. I found this story of a man stripped naked and always at the cutting edge of modern life profoundly moving especially in the way Pasolini never retreated from public questioning even, as in the case of attacks by certain younger anarchist writers, when he was being brutally misrepresented.

Unfortunately Siciliano is a plodding pompous writer, at least in this translation by John Shepley, but I think the fault lies in the original. So many French and Italian scholars and critics adopt a portentous, abstract, long-winded style that one is tempted to think it must be taught in the

schools. By contrast the many excerpts from Pasolini's own writings are vividly, even violently, alive and nowhere more so than when he deals with the politics of terror. I get a much more believable and vivid picture of the terrorist and the social and cultural roots of terrorism from Pasolini than I do from a dozen recent novels.

I remember going to see in a suburb of Florence the notorious *Salo*. It sickened me. I thought the analyst had caught his patient's madness. It was not only fascism (Pasolini's father was a fascist army officer) and Christianity which were attacked and rendered vile but all humane belief. I was deeply shocked but the small audience of, it seemed to me, young artists and university students clapped and cheered. And I understood then more about the forces I had recently come close to in the bombing at Trastevere. I still think *Salo* was more a cry of madness than a work of art but I am not so sure of that now; at least, even though it may have failed, it was authentic.

These notes can hardly suggest the richness of Pasolini's life, the major controversies with other artists such as Montale, each encapsulating a complex view of the artist's role, the endless court cases, the challenges to conservative hierarchies of the right *and* the left, the desperate reaching after clarity in his debates with the young, the gestures of a man who would never avoid a challenge.

And it may be that his death, seemingly so private a failure of the man, will yet emerge as politically inspired. If so, it fits the pattern of his life.

How differently "engaged" writers live in Italy and Australia.

So these are some of my "best reads" in 1982. Writing of Italy prompts two footnotes. Giovanni Distefano's translations of the poems of A. D. Hope have been published by la Tipografia Helvetia (S. Polo, Venezia 3022) in a handsome volume *A. D. Hope — Tre Volvi Dell' Amore* with the English and Italian texts in parallel. Also from Italy comes the 29th issue of *Tam Tam* with a section of translations of Australian poems, the first of an anthology to be spread over issues 29-36. The first offering is of poems by David Campbell, Richard Tipping, Eric Beach and Sweeney Reed. Subscription is \$14 for four issues (air mail included) from Bruno Spatola, 43020 Molino di Bazzano, Parma, Italy.

BARRETT REID

TH VISITOR

at th gate
names are taken
& numbers given
leaving one shaken
wonderng
what's been exchanged

th poet finds th poet
in D division
on th other side
of th deaf glass
they talk by telephone

th private rooms
full of lawyers
they find a cage
not unlike a bank teller's
one corrects th other's
held-up notes

a suicide, an echo
of a friend
who disappeared
a while ago
behind locked gates
over there
in A division

rage doesn't write well
gets lost in corridors
knives sharpen
th light under doors
outside, people look for
a more warm, human war

inside, a man stares
thru bars, at a park,
says he wants to sit there
one day, with a bazooka,
th poet is a caution
later, this revolution
is transferred by shrapnel
in a jam jar
to a different prison

staring at walls
swastika & kabbala
wheel like asia
thru a cell
"they make us into
old women here"
it's dull
"th policy is still
to break 'em"

man a boundary of anger
not quite toeing th line
"animals"
"dumb insolence"
men on remand
cursing out pigeons
no poems for seagulls
under this striped sun

verse to women
turns to men
& vice versa
so much unspoken
a page poked under
th grille
love's limit, hunger
th exercise yard
of th will

shadows move without
"unnecessary noise"
no shout
that's not a curse
running would be
foot-notes to freedom
move slowly
one-eyed, those guns

big, awkward, a target,
like "th hulk"
square yr shoulders
take a walk
don't take th first tram
stroll thru coburg
not like th great-I-am
feeling like nothing-on-earth

ERIC BEACH

HOBART, SUNDAY

Out of the hot hotel
to the empty barrel of the street
along which a car explodes
but misses me

The cinema is preparing
for Star Wars

Mark time in the shelter
of the Museum
where cold has frozen
everything alert
mouths open on alarm
teeth bared to challenge

history

Thylacine
skin painted on a wire frame
fleshed with papier mache
a paper tiger

Port Arthur in early photographs
sheafs of sufferings

artefacts

Oil of Truganini
head rounded like a bullet
skin smooth and sheened as aluminium

I can still see the whites
of her eyes

Out of the echoing cold
the streets are alive

I join the queue
for Star Wars

JOHN CROYSTON

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Filling your days with documentaries
from the unconscious, you're sick of
standing up and it's costing a fortune
to keep seeing films.
You smile like milestones and this
breaks up her dance routine.
Now that winter's here and spangled shoes
out of fashion, you don't care if Lauren Bacall
smokes the best cigarette in the world,
you're going to be strong like a body
you never want to loose.

You're becoming a conversation, as you
walk to the station. All you remember seems
purely monochromatic, and you regret this,
knowing you don't walk like that
but it might be educational to
loose yourself before "Serious Undertakings"
you watch the shoulders
you'll still be playing a tune on
however the storm breaks

DIPTI SARA

COLLAROY & THE CRISIS OF ENERGIES

Collaroy!
that selza sound of turquoise swirl
Collaroy by sea
Collaroy breezy

In Collaroy tonight,
in the balmy fish n chip air,
seagulls collide with the rising grease
& slump & crash to earth.
Sweet Fanny Adams, the bistro billboard,
bares her thighs to the queuing Pacific stallions.
a girl staggers from the door.
too drunk to get home
she will be stuffed in a panelvan:
if parked on a headland,
by instant boyfriend;
if parked in lonely scrub,
by rapist.

The council bins toll,
buoys along a reef.
Some are skittled by hallucinating kids.
Plastic bags & paddle pop sticks,
chicken bones & cans,
spill in the belching breeze.

A man wearing crumpled suit & emu badge
coughs at the bus stop.
I ask him for the time.
He squints, suspicious, stubs a nostril,
from the other snorts a glob.
I repeat my question.
He replies with threats & accusations:
I abducted daughter Debbie to Nimbin,
the ratbag who spiked her full
of pot & heroin & solar energy.
In Collaroy he blanches, sags,
pukes a steaming throw.
Surfies, waiting for burgers,
toss nordic locks, bray at him.
I leave the smacking pavement,
the shopkeeper yelling italian,
the fish spluttering in the batter,
the shoplights dull as eggs.

On the pale beach
the waves surge,
scowl back, hide.
I taste the cool salt breath,
wishing I was near her,
the mad girl,
or in the valley
she said was Aboriginal
for the meeting of the waters.
There clouds grazed like fat lambs
& the mountains were old & magical.
Wishing she was near
to hold against the chill;
warm & crazy, she would mock Collaroy.

I collapse on the sand, brooding.
Somehow, beneath the power lines
& neons dazzling the subtle moon,
the traffic outrage at my back,
I see whales.
Out there,
beyond the tide's ceaseless lips,
choked whales,
massive toboggans
rumbling down the polluted ravines,
cluttering the abundant
junkyard of the sea.

BILL FEWER

ON A SKULL FOUND IN A PADDOCK

in the newly turned dark loam
he saw it first white winking
down the long furrowed line a toothless jawbone
and where the discs had clipped the thing

the remnants of a smashed smile
stunned jumping down from the red tractor
left still slamming against the miles
of silent scrub he saw

it now for a second time turned his way
with something behind the empty eye holes
staring him out pushing his gaze
further away finally up to the cold

ploughed earth to look for more of this
though none appeared or lay
within the circle of what he guessed
was possible though who could say

what it was connected to or why
it had come to lie along this newly
harrowed strip of soil high
above the nearest road some thirty

minutes drive where from here few
tracks permitted access he lightly kicked
the thing with the toe of one worn shoe
and it pitched forward faceless pressed

into the deep trench the tyres had made
and then sensing his dilemma alone glanced behind
his shoulder furtively cold afraid
the banging engine and the scraping whine

of plough discs still engaged pushed
at him forcing him up to the seat brought
to the very edges of alarm he clutched
after the controls and fought

at least for order here the tractor backed
bouncing and the slipping wheel got it first
and he almost imagined that he heard the crack
and the slight bump as the bone burst

the rest he knew he could leave to the plough
to inter forever in the dark ground
though he would not forget the place now
marked only by the maps his mind could wind around

a hill or mound and then be able to return
to this same spot from anywhere
and would for years to come now a burned
out place of untilled earth prepared

and given over to refuse the piling
up of torn out trees and stones strangely
cairn like rolled into at random though more for him
a cipher confounded always by something
of his own complicity

JEFF GUESS

'THE WORLD'S GREATEST BOT'
(as Eric called him)

On Tuesday he comes to me and wants
twenty dollars. I give him ten. He goes away.
The next day, oh, maybe little bit of ten dollar again.
He takes it and goes away.
On Thursday, meat and two oranges.
Friday: one can of tuna 'pish' an' halfa bag 'potate'.
Oh, anyway! He says he's 'pension';
he calls me 'a million'.
On Saturday, five dollars is lousey;
I'm a 'mean bugger'.
Sunday: more oranges and a bowl of muesli;
two dollars for 'pitjis' (the movies), and
on Monday he needs paint: red one, blue one,
black one, kala anyway.
Loose change on Tuesday. Cool drink — O.K.
Wednesday: ten dollars and he goes away.
On Friday, pension day — 'pension pride' —
one hundred and six — fuck all!
He gives it all away in five minutes:
Ten to Martha, eighty to Mayiyana, five for a chicken
which he gives to Petra's father, and the rest
falls out of his pockets. Never mind.
Saturday, I'm running him for firewood.
We gotta get waru, we gotta get wood.
On Sunday he wakes me at six.
I'm tired.
He's angry.
He wants to know why I'm so hard,
why can't he come in? I'm a 'hard bugger'.
He abuses me for fifteen minutes until I can't stand it
any more. BULLSHIT! I scream, BULLSHIT!
He laughs. He's not angry any more. I am.
'Oh. Sorry,' he says.

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

**I LICK AND SEAL
THE ENVELOPES**

I'm alone in the flat,
you work at the office so that
we can pay the electricity bills —

I have the light on all day
'cause it's easier to work at the table
away from the window;

There's a degree on the wall,
a diploma on the way,
you pay the bills,

I lick and seal the envelopes.

The stationery on the table has been sorted
and there's some manuscript ready to be mailed;

I ask you for stamps,
you ask:
"how many?"

I feel like a eunuch —
unreal,
contemporary!

MICHAEL SAMARCHI

**THREE POEMS
BY JOHANNES WATERMANN**

THE SOURCE

Grab the ledge of the afternoon
by its warm surface,
its shoulder, a gentle guidance,
reaching from the soft,
loose-limbed sky,
that curves at night.

Something we drank
has disgraced our race;
gestures came running,
silhouettes

from bodies nearby, counting,
what they seemingly gave for free.
It was the textures

of woollen dialogues
and coloured sand in bottles,
which made us want to smell
the skin of distant places;
our corrugated days of drifting
never seemed to end.

Receding floods,
which decorate the dead-wood
and cattle corpses, wedged in trees,
the only letters, sent from home.
By coming back
we have to varnish our journey,
to make it last,
to make it last.

THE CHAIR

Begin with the chair,
you used as a child.
For the first time
in your life
you re-invent self's dilemma.
The casualties?
Still in the distance!
To dust the ear-prints
on the door
demands courage, time unreeled
is safer.

Yet
the stench of childhood
remains stubborn.
Crawl under the chair!
Dare the sensation of becoming
the chair of your childhood!
You discover:
the nursery-rhyme was she!

Life comes and comes,
and then
the streets grow stranger.
Pure love is rare, and
ornament the sign of weakness.
The only sound from
hollowed lips
betray the chair and give
the dates away:
the nest was manufactured.

Cathedrals are carved
from the moments of marble,
productive flesh
has nothing to explain.

THE EYE CHILDREN

Believing
that the real object
was the idea of it
that was grasped by the mind,
a man who swore
that no real or genuine object
was presented to the senses
bumped into his own eyes
coming back from a visit
to the oculist
The immortelles!, his eyes said,
what sights they have seen!
& the oculist
is immortal
as well as immoral;
he backed us into a corner
& proposed us to come & see
with him
in a little house behind the
eye nursery;
he has a scientific imagination
he wants to work us into
Since, as you have taught us,
what we encountered
when we shone into the oculist
was a figment
of our perception,
we are not sure
which of us cried
& which of us said no

The man who had nurtured them
since their childhoods,
whose crannied site
was the one
they'd called their home,
to whom they were talking
as they never had before
when he was bringing them up,
as a younger parent,
said, you were good
eyes, to come back & tell me
all you have gone through
avoiding the evils
of being fascinated
by your percepts
but i can do quite well
without you you may as well
move out & set up life
on your own terms

J. S. HARRY

A VIEW OF THE PROMONTORY: 2

Things that lose by being painted — she lists them.
Sei Shonagan in her Pillow Book. This should be one of
them. Film and photograph distort its distances, the
delicate spread of water, hills and sky,
the height, not great, that we stand on. Huge, simple
landscape, seascape — Turner, perhaps — It's not
in the travel books, this blue end of country.
The sea race, the storms which inhabit the strait
don't come into this scene, just as words don't,
you must stand here silent, it's on the list
of things that lose by being talked about. So
gorge on it, swallow it. This poem ends, silenced.

BARBARA GILES

TWO POEMS BY JOYCE PARKES

AFTER CAMBRIDGE HOURS

Locked in, a concept, how
does a thief feel

When an alarmbell slashes
the (dark) air

On either side of a door
bolted in thrift?

Perplexed to surrender cental
owners' amassed

Margins — is possession's
club, fear?

PANAMA

Seen from a seat across
two arteries, the distance
merged with the horizon —
cloud's spill — sustained

by oceans' sealed descend.
Until the mist, behind a
line of navigation, is
cleared to close a void —

a zone, where children hoe
a sacred lamp — oil-lamp's
martlet glow, may only lift
another room.

**THREE POEMS
BY ALAN GOULD**

EURYNOME

*(Eurynome was the Pelasgian Goddess-of-all-things,
and responsible for creating the Universe.)*

You dance before there is a sea:
the future presses everywhere
and choices grow like imagery.

Blue space is charged with what will be:
the acids twine about their stair:
you dance before there is a sea.

And time entails no memory:
you split the oceans from the air
as choices grow like imagery.

Unique and earliest and free
you give the wave its snowlit flare
and dance out there upon the sea.

Your dance, your heat, will guarantee
the ends our characters prepare
as choices grow like imagery.

Your dance foregoes necessity,
our future burgeons in your care.
Now dance upon the flexing sea,
let choices grow like imagery.

THE SAIL

A crescent sail is out there near the skyline
dancing like a woman dancing alone
in a white shift on a blue-black floor.

It is as if no thought but this exists.
Finding blueness she could now divide
the sea from sky, like one who draws a curtain,

and she could rub the wind her dancing makes
between her hands and make of it a snake,
then dance and dance herself into a heat

to make the snake grow mad with watching her
and coil its single limb around her limbs
so she'll grow ample-bellied like a bird.

A sail a dancing woman and a bird
and somewhere sun and moon and planets tumble
from a broken eggshell; somewhere choice

is hatching out the pictures of itself.
The snake is not yet cast into the deep.
The skyline has not yet engulfed the sail.

SPINNAKERS

Soon they will flow up like genie,
these sudden white and blue and orange wishes
rampant for the world to give them form.

Soon they will exist like thoughts
and all the world, which now is just a thought
will be the world again.

The windward buoy is bobbing like a hat
blown from a lady's head. The sixteen yachts
are squabbling to reach it first,

but we await the spinnakers to swell
like sixteen theorems in topology,
and certainty is burgeoning within us.

For now it is the moment after longing,
the moment just before the fact occurs,
like sunlight picking out an edge of cloud.

Soon, so soon, the spinnakers will bloom,
each one a grin of certainty
like someone breathing 'Yes, I am in love.'

THE CONVERT

He seems to lose pieces of
himself.
Here and there. A habit
no longer grumbles
to be placated,
no longer insists. Or
a preference
fades
to nothingness.
Again,
a bunch of manuscript.
Since every
weight must go,
the fire now is,
simply, fire.
And if the window's
open or shut
it equally lets
the old man out.
He finds himself breaking
softly apart,
just absent
under the early rain.
His mind
gets over being appalled
but watchfully prods
the new liberty . . .
In this he walks out
into parable.
On the filthiest
square in his city
yes, there, is
the seashell below,
and overhead
gold. Gold
& cobalt.

ROBERT HARRIS

DROUGHT

His voice crackled out over the air,
resonant, cool, sounding almost happy,
"Here is the weather report—it will
continue very hot and dry with long
sunny periods—very high fire danger.
No rain is forecast—it looks like a
beaut week-end coming up . . ." His voice
droned on, fighting for supremacy over
the dry sweaty air, the buzz of flies
and the plaintive cry of carrion.
I switched off and walked back through
paddocks of ancient Chinese parchment,
dry of text and devoid of feeling and
whose enigmatic smile proffered no
redress as I proceed to the slaughter
of the last remaining cattle.
And somewhere, far-a-way, Narcissus
reclines by his bay-side pool and smiles—
it looks like a beaut week-end coming up!

STEPHEN JAMES

THE WARM THING

No, I know I will have no candid abstracts yet
no white metaphysic vin, but red. We can call it
turgid, clotted menses—certainly. But so perfectly
ambiguous we will grow, that tense delight
cleaves the loins in great agreements, severs
before starving or surfeit, responds as if good light
exposed itself for fun, sly as the child
in his retarded garden, who held my skirt
& called me "Mrs. Twat" & then laughed out
a noise like weeping which was weapons, but
I answered when I heard my name there,
"yes".

Yes.

Kiss in the street, to paraphrase the French,
and kill in the kitchen. Did you see The Butcher?
Do not confuse this warmth with violence. It
is clarified violence, reliable, & never
scorches in the saucepan with the sweet
hysteria that swells the cheeks like quince
—which brings us to the syrup of white tight
thighs again. I'd risk that Joyce was right
about that "quinceunct". What else do I risk?
Money, markets & the morals, soft
relaxation by recognition, place. The effort
isn't worth it, worth losing people, not
their casualness, their vivid innocence
which makes them beast. This warmth's a pet
with panic-round gaze. Feed it to find it.
It will slink unconvinced away. Wild
darkness abstracts it until night
runs it down like a face & death-death
holds a warm thing, whose pain can't work.
I am not new to true abstracts. Civility
murmurs that ambiguity is a matter
that contrasts and comforts. Cool examiner,
you can come now to compare and contrast
me.

Red thread
now articulates this body for its birth.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

MAXIMUM SECURITY

It's safe enough in here. Clean uniforms daily.
You forget what it's like, outside.
On laundry duty
I can see the colours fading, blue
turning to grey. The press-studs shine
like Woolworth's jewellery

but I'm not tempted. Three times round the yard,
then check the boiler, on to the first load—
it's all you need,
except at lights out, when the bars press in,
faces starched in the observation grille,
taking up air . . .

Parole board Monday. I've a sudden fear
of the immensity of gates, the noise
of hinges bigger than a man,
echoes in numberless streets. I've lost
every address I knew. An unmarked van
waits at the side door.

JOHN HARWOOD

STEPHEN ALOMES

The Patriot Game

How to play Advance Australia in the 1980s.

Old style patriotism, with bands, marching soldiers and grave national anthems, never seemed to find its niche on television. Viewers young and old knew the words of 'Who's the leader of the club that's made for you and me'. They later learnt 'Mum, you ought to be congratulated' for a family-preserving and invigorating choice of margarine. But nationalism failed to get a video guernsey. After two decades, however, patriotism has insinuated itself into the TV-watchers' lounge-room, with even more drama than that football team which used to run out of the set to show how real the picture was. Little cartoon characters prance and dance, sing and jingle, exhorting us to one brand or another of national pride.

The technicolor prophets of video patriotism tell us to 'save our petrol' (and support nudity), declare our heroin hauls for Australia, join the sunstruck crowd and buy Aussie Bonds, or simply do our bit to 'Advance Australia'. However diminutive the cartoon figures, homely and happy the Aussie Bonds chorus, there's nothing small about the campaigns. The largest, the 'Advance Australia' campaign has a budget in the millions. And there are also local pride campaigns from town to state, sequi- and bi-centenary celebrations, and a score of other campaigns to raise our community consciousness.

Why the new orchestrated patriotism? To find the answer we need to first look at the models which have been launched in earlier years. Before television, patriotic exhortations were rhetorically, rather than visually and jingle-istically, presented. In the Great War politicians and men of religion joined military officers in exhorting Australians to give 'the last man' (which didn't include them) and the 'last shilling' to support Britain. For decades such Imperial themes were mechanically trotted out in school speech day orations and Empire Day rhetoric and enunciated lengthily in

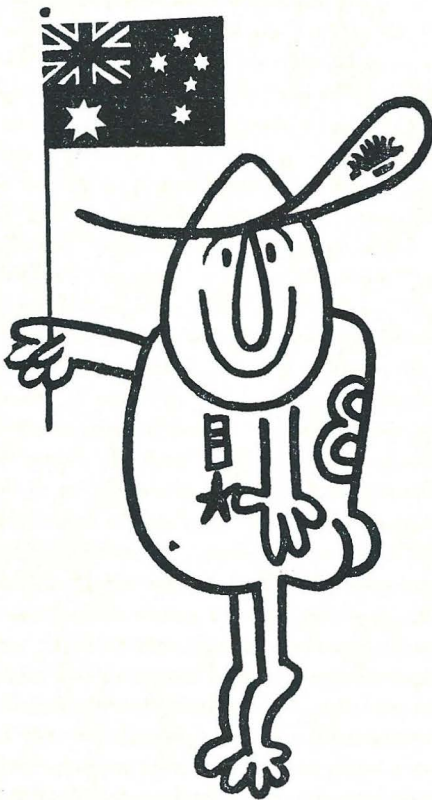
the meanderings of Governors, who were frequently British ex-army officers.

Patriotic exhortations appealed most to conservative politicians who advanced national or Imperial obligation to distract people from the sordid reality of social conflict and differing class interests. During the Great Depression such motifs were linked with the idea of 'national honor' (i.e. paying debts to the City of London) and attacks on the Left as dissidents and traitors. They were useful in maintaining conservative rule. Self-denial (i.e. suffering) was demanded on the grounds that during the 1920s the nation and people had become fat, slothful and self-indulgent. By the 1950s 'subversives' had been added to 'traitors' in the new rhetoric of the Cold War. But exhortations to serve the nation and maintain national unity (i.e. conservative rule) continued. Most notable was 'The Call to the Nation' of 1951 which was made by the whole cast of traditional exhorters to moral good, judges, bishops and generals. Symbolically, it now seems, it was made on November 11th.

Patriotic exhortations in the Imperial mould were still being restated as the Empire faded into the Commonwealth and then into history in the 1960s. Honesty, work, obedience and devotion to duty were similarly stamped on the blazer pockets, if not the chests, of students in suburbs near and far in a Latin from which they were all very far. By the late '60s and early '70s it seemed that such rhetoric was dying completely. New nationalism on the Gorton and Whitlam models, and new populism celebrated young energetic Australia and a social demeanor far from the world of English private school values. A cultural renaissance, built on the informality of the new middle class and older Australian radical nationalist traditions, and funded by the affluence of the age of iron ore, seemed to suggest further movement to a 'New

Australia'. Free of old British or new American shackles a vital new nationalism briefly flourished. Cultural creators, even returning expatriates, enthused about the former desert now lush with ideas and audiences.

Such themes have only modest impact compared to the public and private patriotic campaigns which milkily come to us through television. The medium is no longer the podium, the lectern or the editorial. The speakers are no longer governors or generals and other upholders of decency. The military and Imperial dummies have been cast aside by cartoon characters, as jingoism gives way to jingleism. The theme is usually the old one: 'do more for your country — and stay away



from divisive (i.e. radical) groups and ideas'. The co-ordination in TV decorator colors and the infinite variety of permutations make the campaigns different however.

In the era of social message selling, 'Advance Australia' (AA) is but an elephant in an Ark full of other creatures. There are campaigns for every purpose, four of which will be considered. First,

private company campaigns seek to deny economic reality by buying an Australian image, or to deny truth by pretending that the corporation is big, warm and friendly. Second, government image making on a Federal or State level, is designed to encourage social identifications which lead to support for the incumbent government. Third, there are national, state and local exercises in historical celebration. Focused on anniversaries, they look like leading to some costly public birthday parties. Finally, Enterprise Australia, a different but related campaign, is seen within the context of the larger economic and political implications of the new manufactured nationalism.

The 'Advance Australia' campaign combines the vaguest and the most encyclopaedic of aims with massive resources. An initial \$4.2 million came from the Liberal-Country Party government, and in 1982 Project Australia had a total private income of \$1.7 million (all but \$500,000 of that coming from 12 major companies paying \$100,000 each for a part in the 'corporate partners' TV advertising programme).¹

Small business won't miss out either. If your company has \$1500 to spend on patriotic triangles and other AA promotional aids you can secure a guarantee of national fidelity in the form of the right to use the 'Advance Australia. We're Doing It' logo. One small company which won the right was the 'Carpet Shed' (known for its TV ads of a phallic giant breaking out of a suburban house) which subsequently confessed bankruptcy before a material Great Receiver.

The meaning at first appears to be in the logo and nothing more. But, there is method in this promotional madness, purpose behind this monied mania of advertising. The Project Australia Chairman, Jim Leslie (patriotically chairman of Qantas but also the local front-man for Mobil Oil), described how the body came about. It was, it seems, spontaneously generated by scientific measures of patriotism. 'The campaign came into being,' he declared, 'because opinion polls showed that a large number of people wanted a better way to demonstrate their support for the Australian way of life.'² The campaign's director, advertising whizz, Roland Becker, talks about the sense of obligation we should all possess. 'Being a lucky country is more than a cliché, there is a substance to it, and we have a responsibility to keep it that way.' The nearest to a clear statement of aims comes in one AA publication:

In effect, (the campaign) is asking people to think Australia, think positively, and accept

greater personal responsibility for the advancement of Australia.³

The character of the Advance Australia operation has been more complex than the gay triangles of red, white and blue would suggest, however. Its major supporters have been as Australian as Ronald Reagan, as Antipodean as a London stockbroker or a Japanese industrial conglomerate. The campaign's large corporate sponsors have included Mobil Oil (American), Dunlop (British) and Mitsubishi (Japanese). Ford ('We're taking profits home'), Safeway and International Harvester are other large American sponsors. Project Australia handouts elaborate some of the underlying aims. The idea was originally suggested to the Australian Manufacturing Council; as such it wins support from both manufacturers and some trade unionists who, respectively, see profits and jobs in local industry.

The Project Australia Committee's members are primarily company directors (G. J. Coles, Bonds Coats Patons, Mobil, Dunlop) and, significantly, Geraldine Paton, the publishers of Murdoch's tabloid-with-pretensions, the *Australian*, and Mr. E. S. Owens, C.B.E., the chairman of a different publicity body, Enterprise Australia. The token labor movement representative was Bob Hawke and is now his ACTU successor, Cliff Dolan. Project Australia's regional offices are also located in industry confederations and lobby groups (the Employers' Federation of N.S.W., the Queensland Confederation of Industry, the Confederation of Western Australia Industry &c).⁴

Such backing might suggest only a souped up, modern, softer than soft sell of a 'Buy Australian' campaign, gaily wrapped in images of patriotic delight. Its messages, like its corporate and individual backers, indicate it's not quite so nice. Its own jingle, 'A Million Things', suggests things that can be done for Australia 'to help head off the crunch', to prevent Australia from being, in a nastily convenient rhyme, 'a failure'. They range from 'hit your nail right on the head' for those downstairs to 'skip your business lunch'. With unconscious irony it concludes:

Let's pull together with all our weight
If we're going to make Australia great
'Cause if we don't, it'll be too late.⁵

It may already be too late if we consider the extent of foreign ownership of Australian resources, industry, retailing and finance. In the words of the predominantly multinational mining

companies' TV advertisement 'we'll keep the lucky country rich and free for all our kids'. But if we change 'our' to 'their' and 'lucky country' to 'profits', which are going to wealthy investors abroad, we come to a more accurate statement. The enemy is not without (those hordes) but the Trojan Horse within, the 'yellow backbone' of the country — the multinational companies and their comprador affiliates and servants.

What, then, is 'our' role, that of the ordinary Australian? Metaphors and ironies aside, we are all meant to work harder and knock less. We are meant to give up Australian casualness. In the manner of the happy, jolly cartoon character, Norm, (Becker previously masterminded the 'Life Be In It' campaign) we are meant to build a great wall like the Chinese, not just say a fence will do.

Patriotism for the ordinary person is to be manifested through thinking how lucky we are, adorning ourselves with small or large triangles of patriotic drag, and working harder for the good of . . . ? We should emulate the Australian achievers: the small business successes, the dress designer, Prue Acton; or, even B.H.P. which has, according to Jim Leslie, grown to its current 'status' 'through the initiative and drive of Australians'. The person who likes a flutter on the horses is encouraged to identify with those 'million dollar punters', the 'men of vision' who lead the big corporations and dare to gamble in (big) mining ventures. We should go beyond 'rancorous talk' of royalties and profits, environmental dangers and aborigines' rights in the resources field; instead we should recognize 'the strenuous efforts of dedicated Australians who have successfully met tremendous challenges'.⁶

'Near enough isn't good enough', the present TV theme of the Advance Australia campaign, maintains the productivity orientation. Challenging what campaign executives see as the safety of the male (or 'ocker') peer-group, it seeks to encourage 'individuality' and to discourage 'knocking' and pulling down, rather than admiring, of the 'super-achievers'.⁷ It is a new version of the old story of 'work harder for those important overseas people who praise us if we are good'.

In the current manifestation the aim is the same — to change Australian social attitudes and nurture a compliant workforce in worship of the great gods of productivity and profit. What is different? Simply, that negative tones and moral castigations have given way to positive notes and a bitter pill sugared over with the hedonistic delights offered by cartoons, music and fantasies

of shared national unity. Like British rulers who have failed to persuade Malays or Fijians that they must develop moral character and work harder for the Empire, the rulers now turn to new orchestrated circuses of community harmony and organic contentment.

The transition from moralism to hedonism, from evangelical calls for sacrifice and citizenship to invitations to the happy world of hedonistic, patriotic cartoon characters having fun advancing Australia, has not been simply a tactical one. The ideological change is part of the fundamental transition from traditional production-oriented capitalism to consumer capitalism. Production-oriented capitalism, supported by the evangelical puritanism of the Industrial Revolution, encouraged by the 'virtues' of Thrift, Sobriety, Character, Diligence, and Industry (not to mention Obedience). In the era of consumer capitalism, such values have been overlaid by another set of attitudes and desirable personal traits. Growing consumption has been nurtured by a social and cultural rhetoric of self-expression, individual tastes and 'lifestyles'. Particular thematic expressions have been the contemporary selling motifs of style, sex and nature. The absurdity of the idea of the 'individual' Gemini car or the 'individual' chocolate 'Flake' eater (and the 'unnatural' location of a Country Road factory in deepest industrial Fitzroy) inhibits such advertising little more than the human costs of the Industrial Revolution dampened the rhetoric of 'Progress'. The new ideology is part of the transition from the homogenised industrial order or short hair and grey clothes for men to the colorful seeming heterogeneity of modern mass consumerism.

The old moralism can still be found on the podium. On TV, and elsewhere, it is generally swamped by the 'new' image-world of sunsets and sensuality, consumer or tourist 'freedom' and moments of transcendent, self-gratifying consumer 'experience'. The two sets of values have come into conflict since the rising unemployment of the mid-1970s. Conservative politicians, with their usual vindictiveness in periods of domestic or international conflict, have attacked the young unemployed with the muddied term 'dole-bludgers'; a tried and tested conservative device, it distracts electors from the government's economic irresponsibility through the poison of 'blaming the victim'. Even when expressed in new pseudo-scientific jargon (problems of 'literacy' and 'numeracy' make the young unfit for the non-existent work) the poison was not weakened, only passed through a different pipe.

The challenge to traditional values has had other manifestations including the decline of militaristic patriotism and parochial religion and the weakening of the sense of class once felt in traditional inner working class suburbs. The TV image world of consumerist well-scrubbed middle class families (and advertising of modern consumer fashions in clothing and design, or 'lifestyles'), presents a 'world' different to that directly experienced in the pre-TV era. This new 'world' is ever linked to visual symbols and material consumption. Expressions of loyalty and affiliation have also changed. In the visual language of 'images', the logo takes the place of the crest or shield which had looked towards traditions and achievement. The new, almost animated, colorful symbol suggests happy or warm feelings rather than the respect and dignity normally associated with older emblems.

The transition is apparent in everyday advertising and in the special campaigns of videopatriotism. Other corporate images and State political campaigns follow not far behind the Advance Australia vanguard. Corporate image-making for large companies (and now for parties in government seeking taxpayer funded publicity) has been a thing of the new PR and TV era. In the US during the early 1970s growing public criticism of corporations, whose self-interest did not always coincide with public interest, spawned corporate-image campaigns in reply. In Australia, not only do big companies seek to project a warm, friendly and non-threatening personal images but multinationals search for an Australian profile (that is 'disguise', 'mask', or 'deceptive persona'). The former is expressed in the 'Person to Person' finance company image which would, more accurately, read 'Multinational branch office (of Citibank) to poor little person'.

The fundamental white (?) lie of corporate image advertising is implicit in the unstated answer to 'What's the payoff?', the rhetorical theme question of the April 1981 'Nationalism in Advertising' seminar.⁸ The answer 'profits and bought acceptance' is apparent in the history of the company which gives us the oldest and longest whopper of them all—General Motors. That unlisted American company has given Australians for over three decades the strange idea that the Holden (often an Opel by any other name) is an Australian car.

Government campaigns with similar aims have sprouted in equal profusion over recent years. During 1980, the Australian Government Adver-

tising Service spent \$15 million dollars on advertising. Some of this was spent on press ads for job vacancies but most went on TV PR campaigns. Worried about a communications (or 'credibility') problem the Fraser Government established a 'Government Information Unit' in 1978. Originally it was to have a budget of under \$100,000. It now is organised through 'Federal Information Directors' in each State Office, and costs \$4.1 million.⁹ One specific Public Service PR campaign has a bizarre quality in an era of cutbacks, staff ceilings and low morale. The spring, 1981 recruitment poster for Assistant Research Officers featured a hammer and chisel carrying hand chipping away at a block-like Australian continent and declared, without modesty, 'You Live In The Best Country In The World . . . Help Shape It!' The unconscious irony of the tools chosen or that suggested by the activities of the foreign mining companies offer other symbolic possibilities concerning the rape of Australia's resources.

The problem with patriotic campaigns, or even coffee table books of national rhapsody, is as much what they leave out as what they say. Despite a recycling of old images (though surfboats now outrate sheep) and a suggestion of social and cultural diversity (city and country, Anglos and ethnics) hard facts are missing. The sick, the unemployed, the victims of industrial accident or disease, or those who are simply poor are left out. When inflation ravages the savings of the old and unemployment brings mental and physical scars to the teenager and the over-40 unemployed jingle-ism and colored piccies of national happiness offer only ersatz fulfilment. While the new popular glossies, such as Peter Luck's *The Australians* and that delight for the American tourist who prefers the visual, *A Day in the Life of Australia*, sell for the Christmas market, more realistic books have a harder time. Leon Saunders' *Shadow People*, which features black and white photographs of city tramps, was only published through a Visual Arts Board grant by U.Q.P. after commercial publishers had rejected this 'book of drunks'.¹⁰

The insidious nature of multi-patriotism pills has been complemented by specific political campaigns using taxpayers' money around election time. The 1982 Victorian election saw thinly disguised political campaigns by government authorities following upon years of Government soft-sell. The Minister for Getting His Picture in the Paper (Brian Dixon) and the Premier for Wearing Hats (Rupert Hamer) had often reminded Victorians how lucky they were to live in the 'Garden State'.

Victoria was also the home of 'Life Be In It', 'Craft Victoria' and even a possible monument to Melbourne. In the year before the election the Liberals decided that conservatism obscured by a cosmetically human face was not enough. First came the rediscovery of Progress and the revelation of jargon. A 'New Directions' policy was launched — more through the media than in Parliament — at a cost of \$170,000. Other PR schemes which supported this 'action plan for the eighties' followed. It was also complemented, however, by a smaller gesture which showed the spirit of Bolte and Rylah was still alive in Victorian conservative politics. Schoolchildren were once again compelled to sing patriotic songs and salute the flag in the best of old-fashioned ways; a fitful return to moralism had occurred in the era of hedonism.

The real climax of the Victorian conservatives' patriotic search for political survival came in the 1982 State election campaign. In theory, all those recent waves of video patriotism would rise into a tidal current whereby electors, ecstatically discovering that Victoria was 'the state of the nation', would vote for the Liberal Government which ruled over her. Even more dubious than the logic of this connection was the flood of government and public authority advertising in the three months before the election. Several million dollars were spent by the S.E.C., Gas & Fuel and VicRail (which at least didn't claim the trains ran on time), the Urban Land Authority, and in advertising apprenticeship and other Government schemes. The Liberal theme of 'Let's hear it for Victoria, And for Good Government' was understood differently by the electorate, however. The Liberals failed to sell the unsellable, and drowned in their own mire. Such campaigns have been most professionally executed by the conservative parties, but they are not the sole practitioners of the art. The Wran Government has made similar, if smaller, use of government advertising at convenient times. In Tasmania, the de facto Hydro Electric Commission junta intended a large advertising offensive to prevent any erosion of its power during the May, 1982 election campaign until legal technicalities forced it to abandon the plans.

The 1980s are doing for patriotism what the Sixties did for sex. The great rush to celebrate national and regional anniversaries might even dwarf the advertising campaigns. A sense of shared community is already being spouted by everyone from the Jaycees to national authorities. Like the ad-

vertising campaigns, orchestrated nationalism assumes shared interests, national harmony and achievement and a happy community. This 'we are all Australians' view forgets that some Australians have a larger share than others. The anniversaries may have their socially useful results. Several histories have been publicly or privately commissioned, histories which might deepen awareness of Australian history in the community. A sense of history should contribute to our social memory and help create a more refined political and social consciousness and conscience. The value may be limited, though, if the recurring motif is simply 'how lucky to be an Australian' and the phrase remains devoid of irony.

There have, however, been setbacks for our patriots at large. The February, 1982 idea of the Sydney Australia Day committee of a think-tank to find a new identity was seen as a 'furfy' by many of those who knew the meaning of the word.¹¹ The big serve and grunts of the chairman, John Newcombe, had an historical appeal, and the moustache has a commercial value, but . . . Even Australia Day was having hard times despite the dignity conferred on it by its own logo and a motto, 'One Nation — One Future'. Expenditure was rising, thanks to Malcolm's patriotism again, and even TV commercials were produced for 1982.¹² But the commercial TV stations seemed less than interested in Australia Day.¹³

It is hard, even in patriotic 1982, to envisage the deluge of patriotic birthday parties intended for 1988. The Bicentennial Authority (ABA) talks of 20,000 events and 9,500 projects in all States.¹⁴ Ideally, this would involve not only a massive popular intoxication but even greater injection of funds. One scenario saw \$348 million coming from the Commonwealth, \$288 million from the States, and \$138 million from local government and the local community—a total of \$768 million.¹⁵ Though such amounts have not been forthcoming, the ABA's running costs of \$3.8 million from 1980 to 1982 confirm the picture of a large government commitment to every possible patriotic circus. Regional tensions have also arisen as State authorities reflect on the large bureaucratic apparatus centred in Sydney.¹⁶

Whatever the budget, whatever the disputes, patriotism will be as common as beer in Australia by 1988. The Bicentennial Authority hopes to have 'Community Committees' in each of Australia's 839 local government areas involved with all forms of brief celebration or long-term project. Some of the innumerable activities, like the commendations

to those who have 'Advanced Australia', are sometimes of value. Like the awards of the old order, knighthoods, &c., they occasionally recognise achievement. Much of the time the result will only be in the words of the Chairman of the ABA, 'fun and games' for the community to share. In his language:

Community minded people will recognise the tremendous advantage of being part of a vast family of people working towards a common goal, the sense of sharing in a great unifying celebration.¹⁷

The idealist patriotism suggested by such rhetoric may indicate an organicism comparable with the worst of wartime Imperialism or even with weak diluted totalitarianism. Or merely PR gone mad. What underlies the extravaganza, though, is the Fraser Government's belief that circuses are cheaper than bread for governments which wish to evade social responsibilities. And the ABA didn't get the millions for even here the ideal aim is self-supporting circuses. This may mean that the celebrations will become commercialised completely. If we now know that 'Myer is Melbourne', 'Myer is Autumn' (and all the other seasons) and Esso is 'Energy for Australia', even the riot of celebrations may be double-stamped with corporate logos.

The septic might think that without government money or logo-marketing popular support will not follow. Such a sanguine view forgets our proven record at Imperial flag-waving. It also forgets the Rotary or Apex spirit at the grass roots level which is even better at whipping up civic pride in one form or another than such a Leviathan as the Murdoch tabloid/television empire. In April, 1981 every milk carton in Geelong bore the message 'We Take Pride In Our Nation' and the sponsorship note 'Supported by Geelong Jaycees'. The penetration which is possible is reflected in Advance Australia's success in gaining local publicity. This has had both State and local manifestations. In January, 1981, in each State capital, a leading daily ran a week long Qantas-Advance Australia competition, which drew 50,000 entries. In our visual and hedonist society the prize was 'longer' than the competition—for 15 words on 'We can best Advance Australia by . . .' you and a friend could escape to London. Radio promotions, AA logos on cricket and football grounds and stickers handed out to drive-in patrons added to the penetration. Civic pride particularly appeals to the moralising tones of

local newspaper chains, and the Leader chain in Melbourne has been particularly active in promotions and protestations.

The Bicentennial and Advance Australia media gurus repeatedly decree how non-political their work is. And like most messages from gurus they should be taken with a salt-pan of scepticism. Consider one *Bicentenary 88* pronouncement by an anonymous ABA scribbler: 'It might be said that the real birth of the modern Australian nation was in the birth of stable community life.'¹⁸ Aboriginals, the unemployed or those who fight daily against the injustices of an industrial or bureaucratic workplace might question such a bland idea of stability.

Fraser's message to the nation on Australia Day 1981 reflected the non-technicolor, non-refined version of contemporary patriotism, as sugared pills were ousted by chastening moral exhortation. Reflecting on how lucky we are, compared to other countries which faced a 'difficult future', he rambled on about how the communications satellite would bring us 'closer together as a people'. Private ownership and profits from it went unmentioned. 'Each individual matters' in Australia he chanted, remembering that great era of social conscience, the gold rushes, 'an age in which Australia became recognized as a land of great opportunity for everybody.' Depressions then and now and unemployment were missing from this happy history and present. After twice invoking the magic talisman phrase 'lucky country' he turned to anti-union and anti-worker exhortations with the cold shower theme 'we cannot take our future success for granted'. 'We must be prepared to work for our country and community as well as ourselves.' (Not forgetting the multinationals which he did forget.) And of course 'we must recognise that there are problems, in some areas, very substantial ones'. 'For example', not those of poverty, disadvantage, industrial injury and illness, the environment or class or sex discrimination, but 'the level of industrial disputes' which 'must worry many good trade unionists as it does other Australians'. 'In areas like this, we must increasingly resolve to do better, to work together rather in opposition.' And so, the great believer in competition in the marketplace and survival of the fittest declares that 'if we think about it, our interests, as Australians are not competitive but complementary'.

The speech is no longer flavored milk type patriotism. It sounds increasingly like these Phillip Lynch homilies which argue we must work harder

or Australia will go under, or like that other manifestation of 'patriotism', the anti-strike marches of March, 1981.¹⁹ If only we're like good little hard-working children those big people overseas will like us and buy our handicrafts. Fraser finally returned to speech day refrain proper, with the promise that if the school-children were good they too would become adults like the metropolitans some day:

Australia is today like a young person on the threshold of adulthood, whose limbs are filling out—full of hope and expectation for the future, full of promise and optimism.²⁰

So, if we believe in Australia, wear logos and work harder all will be well as we enter a state of nationalistic nirvana.

The sometimes subtle relationship between old moralism and new happy patriotism illustrates contemporary conflicts. It reflects the tensions in the Liberal Party between those who prefer the 'quality of life' rhetoric of the early 1970s and those who subordinate them to moralism. The aims of 'Selling Australia' or 'Marketing a Bicentenary' are fundamentally conservative. In the introductory words of the *Australian Business* paean to Advance Australia it is seen as 'the business of instilling new enthusiasm into enterprise' and exhorting knockers to 'have a go'. The orchestration is also suggested in the same piece which notes that the campaign 'is gathering pace toward an expected climax in Australia's bicentenary year'.²¹

The fundamental implications are cloudier, even given the key problem of reconciling the stick of moralism with the carrot of consumerist hedonism in maintaining capitalist productivity. If the campaigns are compared with the Enterprise Australia project which is based on American models the answer starts to become clear. The aim is nothing less than the remaking of social ideology as was the goal of American ideological campaigns in the 1940s and 1970s. Note that, according to its publicity, 'Advance Australia retains an apolitical image' and 'it is not seen as a "capitalist" entity by the Labor Party or the trade union movement'. Compare its language with the ideological transformation of reality in American campaigns for 'free enterprise' during the 1940s. 'First, "capitalism" was exchanged for "free enterprise"; then free enterprise became the American system of "economic freedom".'²² This suggests how dangerous is the sugared pill of social or national ideology.

Enterprise Australia (EA), through its videos, commercials, pamphlets and school materials, takes this re-education to a higher level than the old-style endeavors of the Institute of Public Affairs (Victoria) through such things as its booklet *Facts* which is distributed to schools. EA's proposals for glossy employee reports to weaken union morale and strengthen company loyalty and its model sermon for ministers who want to preach about good industrial relations are more refined than old-fashioned moralism.²³ The British-influenced ruling class had brought out Governors and Bishops to give moral lectures to the natives on their work habits. The Americans use neither them nor anthropologists as in Asia; instead sociologists, psychologists and advertising 'whizz-kids' have the responsibility. In the larger context of the anti-union climate of the late 70s and early 80s, and the moves for the Americanisation of Australian working and consuming hours (the end of the Australian weekend and penalty rates, to be replaced by unlimited shopping hours and American business practices in white or blue collar workplaces) the campaigns begin to make sense. The specific target campaigns stemming from business and the extravaganzas of video patriotism and national celebrations are more than circuses and games for distraction. They seek to strengthen the grip of business ideology and to encourage uncritical acceptance of social exploitation and injustice in this offshore industrial zone.

Footnotes

1. 'Selling Australia', *Australian Business*, 3.12.81, p. 71.
2. *ibid*, p. 67.
3. Amanda Lohrey, 'Components of the New Patriotism', *Island Magazine*, 7, 1981, p. 2.
4. *Advance Australia*, nos. 1-4.
5. Howard, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
6. *ibid*, p. 3.
7. 'Selling Australia', p. 71.
8. 'Nationalism in Advertsing — What's the pay-off?', April 1, 1981, International House, Melbourne University, under the auspices of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (Vic. Branch).
9. *National Times*, 16-22.5.82.
10. *AFR*, 11.12.81.
11. *Age*, 9.2.82.
12. *Age*, 25.1.82.
13. *Age*, 27.1.82.
14. *Age*, 2.2.82.
15. *Mercury*, 8.4.82.
16. *Mercury*, 6.4.82.
17. *Bicentenary '88*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 2.
18. *Bicentenary '88*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 3.
19. *Age*, 10.3.81.
20. J. M. Fraser's Australia Day 'Message', released 25.1.81. The adolescence analogy is an old one which finds particular favor in periods of crisis; it was commonly invoked during the Great Depression.
21. *Australian Business*, *op.cit.*, pp. 69, 71.
22. Alex Carey, 'Social Science, Propaganda and Democracy' in Paul Boreham and Geoff Dow, (eds.) *Work and Inequality*, vol. 2, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1980, p. 7.
23. *ibid*.

Stephen Alomes teaches Australian Studies at Deakin University.

floating fund

Spectacular (well, almost) total of \$674.50 in a matter of weeks since the last issue and helped especially by a large donation. Keep this up and we'll get out of the red yet. Happy New Year everyone and our particular thanks to:

GS \$234; CJM \$50; ACJ, GPA \$30; MW, LW \$24; PH, DB, AH \$14; MM, LB, PD, JS \$10; LC, MS, JW, MR, IM \$9; JL \$8; OG \$5; SP, RH, DH, PS, GM, SO'S, EM, AM, JF, JH, DP, MC, JG, JH, JF, JC, RH, LM, NMcL, HUS, AB, LF, ED, RD, JRS, PI, HF, JB, MT, RN, VB, KA \$4; MB \$3; GM, GS, RA \$2; BH \$1; CEGS 50c.

NANCY KEESING

A Rare Industrial Ballad

Australian popular or "folk" balladry is usually strongly anti-police from the defiance of the Wild Colonial Boy and the "informing peelers' pimps" of "The Death of Ben Hall" to the "traps" and "joes" of goldfields scorn to "Cops go soft on Nazi crime" of the 1930s and the ". . . big copper/With baton poised over your head" more recently.

A ballad written by a policeman proud of a strike-breaking job well done is a rarity indeed. Last year, at Rockhampton, Mrs Frances Killion showed me "The Raid of the Broken Hill Proprietary Mine" which was written by her uncle, and kindly gave me permission to publish it.

Constable Donnelly was a member of one of the special police squads brought to Broken Hill during the strikes and lockouts of 1908-9. (The ballad's "ninth day of January" must refer to January, 1909.)

The troubles began with a dispute between two rival union groups; one collapsed, its members joined the Amalgamated Miners' Association and, thus united, the AMA opposed a proposed cut in wages. Three months after the strike began the Commonwealth Arbitration Court brought down an award favorable to the miners; the company conceded and, with some modifications from the conditions of 1908, work resumed. (The 1958 edition of the *Australian Encyclopaedia* has a reasonably full account of these episodes, the 1977 edition a shorter account. Both are in the section "Strikes and Lockouts".)

Tom Mann, so scathingly referred to, was an English-born socialist and member of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). Manning Clark (*A History of Australia*, vol. V, p. 338) describes him as "a theoretician from the United Kingdom on an extended visit to Australia". Mann was more than a theoretician and, with H. E. Holland, a militant socialist later to become a New Zealand

Labour leader, was one of the chief leaders of the striking men. Violence flared at numerous demonstrations over five months and "dynamite was used on various occasions by strikers in attempts to cut off outside contact with the mines".

Mann and Holland were both arrested eventually. Holland was sentenced to two years' gaol. Mann was acquitted "but bound over to refrain from speech-making in New South Wales, with the result that train loads of admirers flocked to Cockburn on Sunday excursion trips to listen to his heady oratory beyond the State's borderline". (Bobbie Hardy in *West of the Darling*.)

The "seven and twenty more" who were, according to Donnelly, arrested with Tom Mann mostly received short sentences for picketing and other provocative behavior although two men were sentenced to three and two years for riot.

My domestic reference library cannot identify "bold Mitchell", who I assume was a company official. Delprat was Guillaume Daniel Delprat, 1856-1937, an "excellent and far-seeing engineer" who was General Manager of the BHP Pty Ltd from 1898-1921.

As to policeman/balladist Donnelly I quote from Frances Killion's note:

Francis Stephen Donnelly,
Born Tamworth, NSW, 1882.
Died Sydney, NSW, 1970.

Spent much of his early life in northern New South Wales, shearing, etc.

Joined New South Wales constabulary in 1903 and served eight years. The "highlight" of his career in the force seems to have been the "Broken Hill Riot" affair. Most of the time though he seems to have been stationed at City Central (this I gleaned from postcards found in his belongings).

He subsequently became an independent carrier, wool classer/shearer . . . in what order I can't ascertain. His latter years were spent in Sydney

in Campsie where he lived with his wife — whom he married after some 50 years of “engagement” — she died not too many years after marrying him. He spent these last 15 or so years of his life generally keeping his own properties — which he rented — in “good order and repair”, even to mending roofs when he was aged 75.

He was always a “dapper” dresser, and in his young days quite popular with the ladies — and, even in his old age quite the “darling” of one of his nieces, anyway!

His brother Charlie was known to have published work in the Bulletin (poems) but that must have been in the Bullie’s early days as Charlie died an alcoholic in his 30s.

The Raid of the Proprietary Mine

It was on the ninth day of January at the hour of half past three

The Socialists of Broken Hill, exuberant with glee

Resolved that they upon that day, would form themselves in line

And unfurl their flag of anarchy, on top of the Big Mine.

Their band it played that afternoon, the day being bright and fair

“Are you coming home, Bill Bailey?” did float upon the air.

The people out at Railway Town, came in both one and all

To enjoy the sight of the rabble flight, that day from the Trades Hall.

The rooks that swarmed surrounding farms, put on a joyous mood

They thought that they upon that day, would have a change of food.

So in they came with one consent, to watch the rabble’s fall

If they should come with fife and drum, that day from the Trades Hall.

A motley throng five thousand strong, marched up the street that day

But when they came to Crystal Lane, how great was their dismay

Fear and despair in front and rear, their numbers did decline

For they saw the way was blocked, they could not reach the Mine.

The blue coat boys did hear the noise, and to themselves did say

Let duty be our watchword, and our Officers obey.

Their spirits rose, their course they chose, to fight and fighting fall

’Ere Tom Mann’s cranks should break the ranks, on their way from the Trades Hall.

Bold Mitchell jumped up to the front, and to Tom Mann did say:

“To right or left Mr Mann, but not another step this way

For not a man of your vile clan, take warning now in time

But will repent if you attempt, to venture on the Mine!”

Tom Mann, he swore and many more, that they Delprat would quell

Should they be killed and the Mine be filled with Devils out of Hell.

So while you wink, clink after clink the blows began to fall

And short work made of the rabble raid, that day from the Trades Hall.

Things looked a little lively, and stones they flew like hail

Tom Mann and seven-and-twenty more, were safely lodged in gaol

There to await their trial, for riot and other serious crime

And you can bet that they won’t forget, their raid upon the Mine.

All honour to the boys in blue, who made the rabble run

They used no deadly weapons, no pistol, knife or gun

It was to chastise not take the lives, their courage never fails

To uphold law and order in Sunny New South Wales.

Ye working men of Broken Hill, to you these lines I send

Oh do not trust in Tommy Mann, he’s not the worker’s friend

He’s only a blatherskite of humbug rot and cheek

And only thinks of grabbing his clear six quid a week.

Australian Fiction versus Austrophobia

D. R. BURNS

In terms of its subjective working, Austrophobia is a state of intellectual rage, of sociological grief, of moral despair. Conceptually described, it is the conviction that the Australian people, viewed from the vantage point of a knowledge of what is and what is not civilized, are not merely bottom of the barrel; they have really no place in the barrel at all. This conviction has generated a considerable body of writing over the past ten years, both in Australia and Fleet Street. Almost all of it is totally condemnatory rather than merely critical. It could not actually be otherwise since, seized by Austrophobia, the writer sees the condition of the Australian people as quite without remedy like that of the Yahoos in Gulliver's Travels. Though the earliest works speak simply of "the Australians" as an undifferentiated mass, a distinction is made, in later ones as the decade of the seventies wears on, between the ungenerate and those who are essentially pure, not Australians in the pejorative sense at all. These latter comprise three sorts of being: Women, Aborigines and Post-War Immigrants from mainland Europe. Members of these groups, though abused and despoiled by the main body, equals the white Anglo-Saxon males, may and indeed are proving to be the salvation of these, according to more recent and slightly more hopeful Austrophobic pronouncements. This salvation will be accomplished, not by leading them to refine their own habits and attitudes, which are irremediable, but by teaching them, through example, to develop quite other ones, of the sorts which flourish in Greek villages and Italian hill towns.

I want, in what follows, like any clinician establishing the nature of a disease, to isolate certain main features of the Austrophobic condition by reference to various works, book length studies, journal articles and Sunday paper features. I want to suggest then, by reference to works of Aus-

tralian fiction, that those aspects of Australian society and belief which generate the Austrophobe's deepest scorn and despair are seen in a much more approving and positive light by Australian novelists and short story writers. By way, perhaps, of being patriotic, I want to go beyond such mild remonstrance, finally, to argue that because these specifically local habits and responses are endorsed, directly or indirectly, in quite different sorts of narrative, written over an extended period, they provide indeed the stuff of continuity and distinctiveness for the Australian narrative tradition. All that, for the inspired Austrophobe, can be signified by a negative sign in our national life, becomes, when laid out in fictional form, a part of the one big plus.

Granted this, it is not such bad news then to learn that Austrophobia does seem to be endemic. It is not, on the evidence now available, just the pathological product of a particular time and set of circumstances, as was the tuberculosis from which Japanese divers suffered during the time that pearl fishing flourished off the north west coast. Certainly, some years back, Austrophobia did seem to be the by-product of a particular epoch. It raged most fiercely among both Fleet Street and local writers, in the earliest seventies, at the time of Australia's shameful involvement in the Vietnamese war, at the time when Mr McMahon was Prime Minister and just after Poseidon shares had plummeted, taking English as well as Australian money with them. Perhaps the most scalding hot of all the Austrophobic articles that were to foam and bubble on the pages of English Sunday papers, over the years, appeared in The Sunday Times colored supplement during 1971. The writer of this article noted, *inter alia*, that the small portion of Australia which is not desert, had suffered "catastrophic mutilation". The most inclusively and completely damning of

all book length studies, Dr Ronald Conway's *The Great Australian Stupor* appeared in 1972, and what might be described as the most hydro-Austrophobic in the same year. This was Robin Boyd's *The Great, Great Australian Dream* described by its author as "a cry of despair for Australia and an hysterical joke about it".

Robin Boyd practised a form of child bashing, in the sweep of his condemnation, it is worth noting. "The sound of children at play, which has a certain innocent tinkle . . . everywhere else in the world" he wrote "has a peculiarly harsh rasping note in Australia." Note here as typical of the view adopted by the Austrophobe—there are the Australians. And quite separate from them, there is everyone else in the world. So Germaine Greer, returning briefly while Austrophobia was raging so widely in the earliest seventies, noted that the Australian habit of the husband emerging from the pub with a beer for his wife, seated in the car, and then slipping back into the bar was a "joke all over the world".

Further attention to Robin Boyd's observation reveals a second main feature of the Austrophobe's attack. This is its totality. Even children's laughter cops it. As, inevitably, does the sexuality of the Australian male. Dr Conway casting a cold and global eye upon it, notes, in his book, that, "Consulting room practice suggests that male sexual activity declines here faster than anywhere else in the world". And you don't escape such condemnation by going gay. "More reserved homosexuals who have travelled widely inform me," writes Dr Conway, "that Australian camp is far more vicious than its European or Asian counterpart."

This gap between us and everyone else, persisting though the spate of Austrophobic publications that occurred in the earliest seventies, seems to have closed somewhat with the acknowledged growth of political and aesthetic self confidence that occurred with the coming of Gough Whitlam and didn't seem to go away again following his defeat. Like small pox, Austrophobia seemed to have been eradicated by the mid seventies. But then, its ineradicability, its likeness to the suburban couch grass menace, always there though sometimes completely underground was established first with the publication of Dr Miriam Dixon's feminist perspective historical study, *The Real Matilda* in 1975. Right at opening, as if to establish the contagious nature of the condition Dr Dixon approvingly quotes Dr Conway's description of the "Australian working man's . . . elementary pelvic conception of sex". Following which, in chapter one, Dr Dixon sets forth her argument

that "Australian women, women in the land of mateship, the 'ocker' keg culture, come close to top rating as the 'doormats of the western world'." This is the work in which the women of Australia are marked out, as suggested earlier, for spiritual salvation even while being beaten, socially, sexually and psychologically into the ground.

What the language I have quoted emphasizes, more sharply than that of earlier works is that it is the Australian *workingman* who is the brute beast, that low down the scale sort of fellow with his pelvic conception of sex, his mates and his "keg culture". Those more middle class males, whose tittle is Mount Pleasant Hermitage or Saltram's Pinot Noir, may at least hope not to be licked by the fires of condemnation. Conway's and Dixon's view of the workingman is also Robin Boyd's. "In Australia," he wrote, "the intellectual is expected to do more than just feel compassion and goodwill for the blokes in the front bar. He is asked to push right up to the bar with them and actually converse with them." The terms of the typical Austrophobic statement, this is to say, reveal another main feature of the condition. It establishes a class perspective. It is essentially a looking down, a looking down upon the habits, social and sexual, of those who can be supposed to engage in the less skilled occupations, and in what an appropriately enlightened person might regard as the less skilled entertainments as well, like merely pelvic sex. The fellow who slipped out of the bar to pass his wife, seated in the family car, a glass of beer, before disappearing again, the one who gives amusement to Germaine Greer and non-Australians all over the world was, we may opine, a plumber or a carpet layer, but certainly not an architect, a brain surgeon or even a university lecturer.

To point up the peculiarly disdainful, disassociating class flavor of the language favored in Austrophobic pronouncements, I draw attention to very recent works. The publication of these puts the endemic nature of the condition, of course, beyond doubt. Firstly there is Mr Don Dunstan's *Australia — A Personal View*, which offers the script of his recent TV series. This revealed salvation descending upon the unregenerate Australians from old Europe. I quote two sentences each of which distances Mr Dunstan from the things of traditional suburbia in what might be called a vertical direction. Firstly, "A nation which could happily see beer sodden mateship as expressing the ideal of Australian manhood was not a nation prepared to examine questions about itself." Secondly, "And as to food, heartland

suburbia created a cuisine which can only be described as incredibly boring.” The second source is volume five of Professor Manning Clark’s *A History of Australia*. The later chapters of this reveal Professor Clark see-sawing between Austrophobia and an equally heated state of Austrophilia.

But the following in which he is describing the wanton behavior on leave of the men of the First AIF are certainly Austrophobic and reveal a class position.

Those who took their leave in Cairo first had their horizontal refreshment with the girls, followed by that other sport Australians seem to love — tormenting the defenceless, the weak and all the creatures whom God seemed to have forgotten. Wherever Australians moved they quickly transformed the place into a ‘vaudeville of devils’.

These are emphatically ‘other ranks’ of course, Australian workingmen with a typically pelvic conception of sex. They are kin to those in Dunstan’s book who love, on Saturday to attend the football which is described by Dunstan as “one of Australia’s major blood sports”. These same First World War soldiers, quoting Clark again, “showed a cheeky deference to those in authority over them and a coarse insolence to those they loathed or deemed inferior”. The *cheekiness* and the *coarseness* both place them. These words place also the pained, sensitive middle class observer.

One further main feature of the condition should be noted. Austrophobes, typically, look to some place, some centre outside of and quite other than Australia to provide the standard of what is ideal. For the Austrophobes of the early seventies the Great Good Place was of course Swinging London. For Dixson it appears to be Finland where there is lots of water and where women walk tall. While for Dunstan it is the compact European community, the city of Perugia for example, where nightly the populace practice the *passeggiata*. The Austrophobe creates, in other words, his own rage and despair by positing as ideal some society which is utterly other than the Australian sort. The societies favored, can all be justified in clear verbal terms — they manifest established attitudes, they embody social and cultural concepts of considerable force. And Australian white society, of the sort established by our pre-war settlers, has no such conceptually sophisticated definition. It looks derivative, and yet it will not fit simply as subdivision of an older well

defined culture, **not exactly**, not that of Mother Church, nor that of what used to be Mother England. Those *New Statesman* writers whose task it is to work up the Austrophobic article which is a biennial feature of that journal discover to their irritation that its members will not even slot neatly into the Fascist category, along with the Hitlerite Germans of the past and the Apartheid practising South Africans of the present. This failure to fit under any established heading is proof for the Austrophobe of the Australians’ non existence in any real sense where “real” equals the conceptually established. The efforts that these pre-War poor whites have made to establish their own separate and distinct rationale is double proof of their unreality. The rough, approximate, home-made nature of this rationale cuts them off even more sharply from the established, the conceptually intricate, the culturally sophisticated. It embodies only one item — egalitarianism, and as the working social model of that ideal, the practice of mateship. But this egalitarianism, as Professor Clark, among others, witheringly seeks to reveal, amounts only to gestures, to that cheeky deference shown by Australian soldiers to their superiors. While mateship was defined, as long ago as the nineteen fifties, in a pioneer work of Austrophobia, as no more than incipient or concealed homosexuality. Later works, quite intricate in their logic, argue that mateship is, demonstrably, fear of the female. The social practice of this ideal involves an extensive use of slightly clandestine cliches, of word and gesture. To say that is to condemn “the keg culture” of Australians. The use of cliches, equals ossified speech forms, is proof indeed that the practitioners of mateship are inwardly atrophied. Considered as individuals, they are the walking dead. So speaks the voice of Austrophobia.

The second part of this paper considers the defence of Australian ways to be discovered in Australian fiction. It is, I emphasize, a temperate and qualified defence. Here the positive aspects are shown up of those very features which arouse the Austrophobe’s scorn. And, first, that there was, there has been, there still is a baldness to the way of life devised by the British and Irish settlers in Australia can certainly not be denied. This baldness, the basis of most Austrophobic pronouncements is something which our fiction writers have confronted, in a spirit of creative challenge. Serious prose narrative feeds on areas of intricacy. Granted none existed of the social or the theoretical sort that had been developed in Europe, granted there was little of the psychological sort that grows

out of these, fiction writers tended to concentrate upon that one area where it was bound to be found. This was the area of work, manipulative work, mainly, involving physical effort, muscular sophistication and an intellectual concentration and dexterity. This area offered intricacy, firstly of a physical, I may say, more broadly, an economic sort, and secondly, as offshoot of that, of a social and a psychological sort. To ensure the sort of urgency, the immediacy that good fiction also requires, the Australian fictionalists concentrated on work which was necessary for survival. Which usually, but not always meant life in the bush, and usually, but not always meant non-affluent battlers as principal characters, and usually, but not always meant that the principal ones, up front, facing the elements etcetera were males. More of the latter point later. Illustrating the general point is this extract from Brian Penton's *Landtakers*.

He walked half a mile across the flats to where the drafting yards were being built. He felt along the high barricades, which would have to hold big herds of half wild cattle driven in for drafting and branding, tested each green-hide lashing and wooden peg with his fingers, each rough mortice, pulled on the rails till his shoulders ached, counted the number of panels finished that day, and paced out the distance still to be done.

Social and psychological intricacy may develop, and it is in the writer's interest that they should. Yet he has accepted, indeed tabulated, a system of priorities and according to this, social and psychological intricacies which become too curly, too divergent from the economic current, are not a good thing. So the best place for a socially well placed, psychologically very curly character like Martin Boyd's Dominic Langton is twelve thousand miles away.

It is, of course, quite in order for the Austrophobe to point then to the way in which this system of cautious, functionally biased priorities is half the trouble with our social life and indeed it is, judged by certain standards. But what I want to emphasize is that it has, as set forth in our remarkably social realistic fiction, its own aesthetic justification. It is not a negative thing any more than say the Puritanism of American life is.

Secondly, granted that extraordinary closeness that exists between writer and material in this particular literature, it is not possible for either author or character to maintain such an unrelenting occupationally engaged stance indefinitely.

Sooner or later, they are forced to look up from the task, to flex tired muscles to relax. And it is then that, in reaction from that grey work, that grey survivalist view of things, the beauty of the land rushes in to flood their sight and their feelings. I will quote here, not from the experience of Patrick White's Stan Parker, though of course I could, but from that of a character in a Frank Dalby Davison story.

We drove along the road to the railhead through a fresh dewy morning. You know what it is like after a drought. The earth was moist and dark and sweet smelling. Between the scattered beards of old grass the soil was covered with a green mist of new blades, just peeping through. Hillsides that had been lost in the white glare of refraction now stood close. On them the box tree trunks were dove grey against the tender green. . . . The bush spiders had come out, following the rain, and spun from wire to wire and from bush to bush.

The Australian fictionalist discovers for us how greyness and color may be intrinsically related, in both the landscape and the life experience of the Australian. If we may read forward, from that into the area of contemporary social life and Austrophobic criticism — possibly there is a persistence of this intrinsicality, possibly the carefully planted suburban front garden is saying something beyond comprising that endless desert to which Don Dunstan objects. Hardly anyone sits there, or otherwise uses them, Dunstan notes in his book. Maybe they don't because it would be, in the owners' system of priorities, the act of a Philistine to do so.

There is something else though to be noted about the land, of which our fiction writers have long been aware and to which the Austrophobes seem oblivious. The latter deplore the failure of the populace to come to grips with it in some central mystical sense, to go out into it, to commune with it rather than huddling about the fringe, rather than cultivating their rather wantonly, defiantly well ordered quarter acres. But what the fiction writers know, what their narratives establish is the fact that you'd better be careful about doing that sort of thing here. Because the vast countryside is metaphysically dangerous. It carries a charge. The metaphysical adventurer, the lone speculator, wanting to follow where D. H. Lawrence is supposed to have led had better be careful. The fates of Richard Mahony and of Michael Baguenault of *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* sound a note of caution, of warning. Each is

AT LAST A MAGAZINE WITHOUT A WINE AND FOOD COLUMN.

Australian Society, a new fortnightly magazine devoted to exploring social issues, was launched on September 29. Its lively and informed reporting gives the real issues facing our society the consistent, analytical attention they deserve.

Australian Society is serious without being stuffy. There are book reviews, a news service, profiles of agencies and people, and special investigations.

There is no more stimulating or entertaining way to be well informed on social issues.

David Scott, Australian Society, 120 Johnston Street, Fitzroy,
Vic. 3065.

Yes, I would like to subscribe to Australian Society.

I enclose a cheque for \$30 being the standard subscription for 25 issues (60 cents a week tax deductible for people in jobs where Australian Society is essential reading).

Name.....

Address.....

.....

AUSTRALIAN
Society

A magazine of social issues.

Keep Australia literate —

Give your friends a subscription to

Australian **BOOK REVIEW**

All about Australian books.

Recent issues have included surveys of Australian biographies, children's books, books on unions and politics, science books, as well as regular reviews of all new writing in Australia.

Ten issues a year — \$20.00 from P.O. Box 89, Parkville, Victoria 3052

thin skinned and both have metaphysical longings. Here is Mahony, down on his luck, near to premature senility practising medicine through an inland summer.

Meanwhile a burning February ran its course. To step off the verandah now was like stepping into a furnace. The sky was white with heat: across its vast pale surface moved a small copper coloured sun. . . . The very air was white with dust while did a wind storm rise, the dust clouds were so dense that everything—trees, lagoon, township, the very garden itself—was blotted out.

The assault here is not so much upon the individual's body but upon his sense of Christian, humanist, Western style significance, if he is, like Mahony, foolish enough, possessing such a thing, to expose himself to this place, this weather of other-ness.

Michael Baguenault is drawn towards the weather that resounds along the barest and most seductive coastline in the world. The forces that reign here exert their power upon one who is too imaginatively thin skinned to resist.

For the last few days the horizon had been red and misty, morning and evening, and the sea had been gathering force in mile long rollers which plunged, with a slow booming sound, into the caves under the roots of the village. Now the wind had much increased, and when the squalls of rain came from the black clouds overhead, it blew exceedingly hard and the short squalls followed each other like charges of shot.

Effectively convinced, as he's always been ready to be, of the negligible nature of human presence in this vast scheme of things, Baguenault advances to the cliff edge, at the Gap, and jumps. The land, it seems, has the power to resist, to lay waste all attempts to fasten any significance which Western conceptualism might attempt to fasten upon it. The blacks in their long residence have learnt to tread very warily indeed. Sound basic Australian sense bids Judd, that archetypal Australian to turn back from inland exploration when the pared down, abstract intention of the landscape begins to be felt. Voss goes forward, superbly equipped with a scheme of references forged in Europe, but even he can only break something like even.

I am emphasizing here not that our fiction states a prohibition on this sort of meddling with the

landscape. It offers something much more like a caution. And the sense of metaphysical potency which lurks in the air, of what is latent in all that distance and seductive half tones gives an added force to fictions which are mainly about battlers, who do their best to keep their heads down, those by Vance Palmer or Peter Cowen as two examples. When Randolph Stow forms and abides by a firm resolve to measure something of this force the result in *Tourmaline* seems to be all sheer literary profit.

Certainly, to turn to another main consideration, the functional view of things, endorsed in much of our fiction, does place emphasis upon those matters which are historically speaking, masculine. And the clear priority granted to male matters in our society is a main target of Austrophobic attack. Women have their due functional place in realist Australian fiction, but it is not usually up front, where the ground is being broken and where the main supply lines are being kept open. Not usually. Yet situations do arise where the woman must play the so-called man's part. And invariably, she does it superbly well. The widowed Mrs Bessie Watt, the true heroine of *Coonardoo*, manages the affairs of a vast cattle station with imperturbable efficiency even after she has begun to die of cancer. Mallee Herrick, the itinerant beekeeper of Kylie Tennant's *The Honey Flow* mixes it uncomplainingly with her male cohorts while the sisters of Eve Langley's superbly colorful narrative *The Pea Pickers* actually send up the male sex while pretending very capably to be members of it. Here the direction pointing, the archetypal figure is The Drover's Wife, in Henry Lawson's short story. This lady is doubly armed of course, with the Australian bush dweller's ability to attack methodically a crisis situation usually assumed to be the male's province, and with a mother's fiercely protective force. And she is awarded double marks in the slightly adulatory comment for her achievement.

The functional view of social life taken, of necessity, I remind you, in our fiction emphasizes that the roles assigned to male and female are not based on any view about innate capacities. More than that, more interestingly, the fiction points up, not merely the efficiency, but the enthusiasm with which Australian females are likely to take up nominally male activities. This sort of gusto on the part of Australian women for upfront activities lives on in more contemporary fiction about more leisured circumstances. Here the trendy young sheilas show enthusiasm for what might be called front bar attitudes. In Frank Moorhouse's narra-

tives, the female may address the lover who has attempted to lean on her as "you authoritarian shit". And, in Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* our heroine, having sighted a desirable guy, asks advice of a mate on how best to "race him off". In feminist literature of the recent past, largely the sort originating in England, the need was expressed to ensure sexual equality by detaching the male from his macho model, by encouraging him to acknowledge and express feelings of a sort traditionally called feminine. Our fiction and, increasingly our social habit, may seem to indicate that for our society the reverse tack towards the ideal is the more desirable one. And if the Australian female, inspired by our fiction, does move, with always more confidence into the possession of upfront roles and modes of behavior, formerly the males territory, a whole central area of Austrophobic attack is, of course, confounded.

I want to make reference, finally, to two novels which seem clearly exceptions to the rule I have been stating, which are overtly both very Austrophobic indeed. They are both quite monumental, one by reason of its quality and the other much more by reason of its verbal quantity. The first is *Riders in the Chariot* and the second is, of course, *Poor Fellow My Country*. There is an oddity about each, I want to suggest, which does tend to support an aspect of my case.

Xavier Herbert's novel, all fourteen hundred pages of it, is certainly an Austrophobic document. That is, largely, its *raison d'être*. And, as part of that, conforming to type, it establishes a class perspective, based here upon the very English model which it effects to despise. Jeremy Delacey, the one just man in Sodom is a one man elite and, in the author's always intrusive judgement, Wholly Different in Nature from the Common Herd. The white Australian populace are condemned by their heredity, most of them being descended from the scum of the London gutters, the very lowest class. The racially mixed part-aboriginals, aping their ways, are even lesser beings. The interesting oddity, though, is that such an Austrophobic document might be supposed, *inter alia*, to oppose the subordination of women by their White Anglo-Saxon husbands. This being such a central part of the general Austrophobic attack. And it doesn't. *Poor Fellow My Country* actually advocates such subordination, on the good authority of the original Australians, the aboriginals. Jeremy, who engages interminably and quite childishly in intellectually snubbing and otherwise putting down uppity young white females, explains that "in aboriginal life women must be left out of cul-

tural education . . . because their part in cultural education is only background . . . which I suppose you could say of most women in all societies anyway."

Towards the end of this interminably violent and increasingly shapeless narrative, the child wife of young Prindy, Jeremy's natural grandson, intrudes upon the all male aboriginal ritual of Prindy's circumcision and initiation. The aboriginal celebrants smash her elbows and her knees, pack rape her, sever her cortex and finally slice both breasts and vulva out of the still quivering corpse. All this is described in close, rapt and one might think, rather approving detail. This is the ultimate in sexism we might say, and it occurs in a work which is the ultimate in Austrophobia. I want to suggest that this may be quite a logical occurrence. Sexism is a form of class discrimination, and the presence of the class awareness has already been noted in earlier quoted documents. Certainly the feeling which is shown in those for suffering Australian womanhood, those doormats of the Western world, is compassion and pity poured from the same great heights which Austrophobes occupy when they bucket their wrath down upon the White Anglo-Saxon Male aggressors. It involves a looking down. It effects the same vertical perspective.

Riders in the Chariot was written of course, while Patrick White was still enduring life in one of those outer Sydney suburbs where the denizens still exist on that cuisine which Don Dunstan finds incredibly boring. Certainly it is a narrative packed with Austrophobic rage, giving Sydney the full technicolor treatment as a latter day Babylon. Austrophobia discovers the stuff of condemnation in even what we would have thought were the most innocent of occasions and people. In Robin Boyd's book it was the little children who copped it. In *Riders in the Chariot* it's the grandmothers. And I quote with reference to the naughty old things.

The blue haired grannies had purpled from the roots of their hair down to the ankles of their pants, not from shame but from neon, as their breasts chafed to escape, from shammy leather back to youth, or roundly asserted themselves like chamberpots in concrete.

But what I want principally to draw attention to is the small but not unimportant part of Mr Ernie Theobalds, foreman of The Brighta Bicycle Lamp Factory on that very violent occasion when Himmelfarb, the orthodox Jew, is strung up in

mock crucifixion. This is done, before gloating workmates, by Blue and his mates, those coarse working class oafs, who are all "as full as pissants" after winning the lottery. Ernie is unflustered, sees it all as a joke which has gone too far. Or pretends to. And calling on the mob to cool it, methodically and calmly unties Himmelfarb and lowers him.

"'Easy does it,' said and laughed the foreman."

I want to point out here the expressive force of the cliché, the brief Australianism, which has been subject of Austrophobic condemnation. Easy is, indeed, what does it, not only on this occasion where Ernie must get Himmelfarb safely down without provoking further drunken wrath. More extensively, easy *always* is what does it, according to the cautious local wisdom, that sense of the way in which things can get out of control, metaphysically speaking, in this peculiar continent, at once so empty and so changed. Here there is no impediment to the good and the bad of European thought remorselessly attempting to devour each other as they do throughout *Riders in the Chariot*. There is provocation on both sides. Mr Ernie Theobalds, apt successor to Judd of the previous novel, is necessary to part the partners of his holy-unholy over-heated symbiotic relationship. "Easy does it" — Ernie uses as few words as possible since it is largely words which have stoked the fires. And the simple phrase is able to perform its complex task. It says much in little. Blessed is the plain Australian peacemaker and his peacemaking phrase.

The expressive force of the local speech cliché would form the subject of a paper in itself. To write this paper though would be to move per-

haps into the Austrophobe's territory. It is they who insist that verbalism in abundance is the sure sign of cultural force.

Interestingly, and this is by way of conclusion, it is the cliché born out of those other survivalist times, that becomes so expressive a force in the fiction of so contemporary and indeed so brilliant a writer as Murray Bail.

Here the comic potential of the cliché is amply discovered, as well as what lies under the comedy, an identity of sorts hardly won and not to be wiped away by smears of the Austrophobic sponge.

I quote, from *Homecomings*, the Australian travellers at the end of their global journeyings, huddled together, talking briefly, cheering each other up.

In Russia they say, you've got to carry your own plugs for the basins. It's hard to get a hot shower in Italy, France. The Japanese in their wisdom, don't believe in street names.

Doug slapped his knee. "I keep saying, we're not bad the more you look around."

"I think we're very lucky," added his spouse.

"There's too much talk."

Fair enough! General consensus at that; pursing of lips.

"We've got ourselves," Gwen said simply. She told the truth. It was vaguely understood: a kind of refuge, always there.

D. R. Burns, novelist and critic of contemporary fiction, teaches at the University of N.S.W. This paper was given at the fourth conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Adelaide, 1982.

books

A MAN FOR OUR SEASONS

Barry Jones

Ian Turner: *Room for Manoeuvre; Writings on History, Politics, Ideas and Play*. Selected and edited by Leonie Sandercock and Stephen Murray-Smith (Drummond, \$15.95).

Ian Turner, as no reader of *Overland* needs to be reminded, was born in Melbourne in 1922 and died suddenly, in the midst of his friends, at Erith Island at the end of 1978. Two of those who loved him most have selected twenty-four of his writings on history, politics, ideas and play, the earliest published in *Outlook* in June 1960, and the last three published posthumously.

Oscar Wilde said of himself that he put his genius into his life and only his talent into his books. The same should be said of Ian Turner. His writing, important though it was, only hints at his vitality, his insights, his courage, and his genius for friendship. The magnetism that drew people to him and made him so extraordinarily persuasive in argument is apparent in these articles, but in a somewhat attenuated form. In *Enemies of Promise*, Cyril Connolly identified conversation and its attendant conviviality as being among the major enemies of what he regarded as the only worthwhile activity in life: the writing of good books. "Many a good book has been talked out" — conversation itself becomes the major creative activity, only to survive in the memories of those who heard it, unless there is a Boswell handy. I suspect that Ian talked out some of his best books, but he saw teaching, conversation and persuasion, with a class, a group, or one-to-one, as a major part of his creative output and he would have dismissed the Connolly view.

Room for Manoeuvre runs to 335 pages, including an index, a not completely satisfactory bibliography, and a foreword by Stephen Murray-

Smith. The bibliography does not make it clear which pieces have been revised or updated: for example the longest article: *The Social Setting*, 45 pages, is merely identified as a contribution to Geoffrey Dutton's *The Literature of Australia* and its date given as 1964 although it refers to the Whitlam Government, the Australian feature film revival and the playwrights associated with Melbourne's Pram Factory. I would have preferred to see a date of publication at the end of each piece, together with some indication of whether there had been a later revision. This is particularly important as we consider Ian Turner's evolution and mark his changes and consistencies in emphasis.

The Foreword places him fairly and firmly in a national context, noting that his death was "front page news in the press around Australia, and generations mourned. Hardly an exaggeration".

Australia, certainly in the twentieth century, has not been strong on original political thinkers. Nor has it been fortunate, as other countries have been fortunate, in having a corps of intellectuals whose strengths in knowledge have been matched with their strengths in imagination and communication. In a world sense Ian was not, of course, a profoundly original political thinker. As he himself often ruefully said, if fate or inclination places you in a provincial situation, you have to abandon some goals (working at the frontiers of thought), but you need not abandon your critical intelligence, and you need not accept a client role.

Turner was of course constrained: by the absence of a tougher intellectual market-place; by the personal circumstances he found himself in; by the nature of the discipline he accepted as part of his Marxism . . . Ian was not the first to apply Marxist categories to Australian problems, but he has been more successful than any others . . .

Surprisingly, there are few references to Marx or Marxism in *Room for Manoeuvre* apart from Turner's 1970 essay *Manning Clark: History and the Voice of Prophecy* where he grieves over the inadequacies of the two great faiths, Marxism and Christianity—the failure of Marxism to recognise that material progress is not a sufficient condition for human happiness and the failure of Christianity to recognise that hunger and pain and social inequality are not necessary conditions for human happiness.

He adopts the language of Norman Mailer (described here as an American socialist):

You might say that the human function of socialism is to raise mankind to a higher level of suffering, for given the hypothesis that man has certain tragic contradictions, the alternative is between a hungry belly and a hungry mind, but fulfilment there is never . . .

In 1966, in his Brian Fitzpatrick Memorial Lecture, Turner quoted Mailer's words (p. 270) but commented that the filling of bellies was great progress, and progress which can be measured. In 1970 he quotes Mailer again (p. 242) but without taking comfort from the full belly: indeed he echoes Captain Ahab: "Born in throes, 'tis fit that man should live in pain and die in pangs! So be it then!"

It was in an attempt to fill voids in the belly and the mind, to satisfy material needs and transcend them at the same time, that Ian Turner flung himself with such manic determination (and such carelessness about his physical strength) into pragmatic politics and the promotion of the arts in the last decade of his life.

Ian Turner played a critical role in the re-organisation of the Victorian A.L.P. after Federal intervention in 1970, and was decisive in preventing a split within the Victorian branch, by persuading the Left that real gains could be made in Government, that seeking electoral victory did not necessarily involve compromising integrity and that room for manoeuvre was morally and intellectually possible. I sat with him on a number of committees during this period and was bowled over by his passion, oratory, shrewdness and unflagging intellectual vitality. Regrettably, he never wrote about the Dantonesque role he played and so not one word of it appears in the book. I have come to the conclusion that without Ian Turner there would have been no A.L.P. gains in Victoria and therefore Labor Government in 1972. Gough

Whitlam acknowledged Ian Turner's central role in his victory by his presence at the cremation at Springvale.

Under Labor he replaced me as Deputy Chairman of the Australia Council (as the Australian Council for the Arts was renamed in 1973) and headed its finance and administration committee. He responded to criticism from *Overland's* editors about the way the Council operated with an essay *On the Australia Council* (1975) which strikes me as unduly defensive in tone, although I agree with his firm rejection of the concept that administering government funds for the arts should be exclusively in the hands of its present practitioners. But there is little of the Turner flavor in this piece which could well have been written for him (although I am sure it was not) by the Council staff.

By far the best parts of the book are his autobiographical essay *The Long March* (1974), *The Long Goodbye* (1970) an account of *Outlook* from its founding in 1957 until it died in 1970 and *The Retreat from Reason* (1966). In the last he predicts an assault on reason from technology—the elimination of meaningful work by machines, people converted to adjuncts of transistorised pop-culture which blocks out perceptions of the world; drug dependence and, I could add, alcohol (although Ian did not include this in his list). He anticipated Gunther Stent's thesis that every doubling of technological capacity is accompanied by a halving of human motivation and skill generally.

The book is handsomely presented with illustrations by Noel Counihan, Rick Amor, Bruce Petty and Vane Lindesay, and a photograph of Ian Turner in characteristic pose.

Barry Jones is federal shadow Minister for Science and Technology. His most recent book is Sleepers Wake! Technology and the Future of Work (O.U.P.).

A HIGH FLIGHT OF FICTION

Mary Lord

Roger McDonald: *Slipstream* (University of Queensland Press, \$12.95).

Peter Shrubbs: *A List of All People and Other Stories* (Hale & Iremonger, \$18.95, \$8.95).

Rodney Hall: *Just Relations* (Penguin, \$7.95).

I have just re-read *Slipstream*, the second novel from Roger McDonald whose first was the multi-

award winning 1915. The first time around I was a little disappointed. Why? I brought the wrong expectations to the book; I expected a neatly written fictional biography of an unusual character, a story which would expose the "real" man behind the public facade. Roy Hilman is a kind of composite of the early aviators, an explorer and an adventurer cast in the mould of Kingsford Smith, Ulm and other pioneers of the aeroplane.

First time around I was charmed by McDonald's style though, I now see, I missed most of its subtleties, and impelled forward by the suspenseful and rather gossipy narrative. Rattling, good stuff, I thought, but felt that I knew little more about his main character at the end than I had at the beginning. Of course, I knew all the worthwhile facts and details about him, but I had never been let into his mind or his imagination; I could not share his thoughts and feelings. If I had been asked what I thought about it, I would probably have said that, although I enjoyed reading *Slipstream*, it failed to come alive for me because the central character never really came alive, seemed to lack dimension.

I had missed the point, hadn't I?

Roy Hilman is a man of action rather than words, or deeds not thoughts. His understanding of engines, while extraordinary, is practical and intuitive, not theoretical and not transferable. If it were not for his genuine passion for flying and his ability to achieve dazzling feats in the air, he would rightly be thought a dull fellow, perhaps even unintelligent. He speaks rarely and says little having a very limited vocabulary at his disposal.

In America he somehow learnt how to talk more than two words consecutively without staring off into space, or at least to utilize his pauses in a semblance of continuing speech.

In many respects he is the typical Australian of folklore — dashing and courageous, modest and laconic, his eyes always fixed on a distant horizon, not at all handsome yet extremely attractive to women; the prototype for Australian heroes like Bradman, Ned Kelly or Kingsford Smith himself.

Slipstream explores Roy Hilman through the eyes of the people who knew him and through detailing his relationships with the men and women who were important influences on his life. He has many liaisons and relationships (both business and personal), many successes and many failures, the latter bolstered by unwavering public support for the man who attempted fearlessly

and usually achieved so many daring feats and won international acclaim. To many his apparent reticence made him an enigma, but to Roger McDonald he is little more than a simple man with a straightforward obsession. He has no inner life to be revealed. He is no philosopher. He is simply an adventurous man who found his own worlds to conquer. The reader must judge for himself the extent to which McDonald is suggesting that his fictional 'hero' is a composite drawn from what is known about our national heroes of the past.

McDonald's ironic view of Hilman emerges very early in the novel and reappears often thereafter, warning us against the unquestioning devotion he arouses in his friends like Claude McKechnie, his self-elected biographer:

Claude McKechnie says that Roy was 'sickened by the slaughter' at Gallipoli, and no doubt he was. But he spent his time making a study of the weather, not allowing his imagination to be coloured by the real phantoms of that place, some of whom bore the names of friends.

The family should have loved Roy's letters home for they contained careful observations of meteorological phenomena — weather was the family's favourite topic of conversation. But they wrote back demanding "news" — what they wanted from Roy were deaths of acquaintances for their stake in grief at Red Cross tea parties.

Slipstream is strongly recommended for those who like more than a dash of subtlety and some very fine writing in their fiction.

Peter Shrubbs is a most accomplished and elegant short story writer but not, one must say, a prolific one. The fourteen stories in *A List of All People and Other Stories* have been published over the last twenty-five years in *Transatlantic Review*, *Antioch Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Bulletin* and *Quadrant* among others. He has won many admirers but this is his first appearance in hard covers (if we disregard anthologies). Being something of a romantic (in my more benign moods) I like to think that Shrubbs has written a good deal more than we have been permitted to see, that he is a perfectionist who won't let anything go until he is completely satisfied with it, and that his standards are exceptionally high.

The stories in this volume are, in their own way, flawless miniatures extracted with love, tenderness and sometimes wry humor from Shrubbs' direct personal experience. No fictions of the imagination here but imaginative re-creations of

times, places, people and events he has privately recorded as milestones in his life. His world is private and domestic and his prevailing tone is one of affectionate nostalgia tinged with gentle humor. It is a polite, even genteel, world where behavior is governed by formal codes of conduct or ritualized into grave benignity and has more than a little in common with the world of Jane Austen.

Characters and situations are re-created with the kind of insightful intimacy which gives them a palpable vitality, an emotional conviction that compels the reader to share in the pleasure or pain. In the story which gives the book its title, a twelve-year-old boy has to play the piano in a mini-concert by the pupils of his music teacher, Miss Bentley, for the edification of their parents — “mothers mostly”:

My Schumann, I realise now, was intended to be the bridge between duets about birds and real music. I was the first nearly full-sized performer to come into the room, and every face my eyes swished over as I thudded towards the piano seemed very expectant. Perhaps they were expecting me to faint, for I have certainly never felt so sweatily close to it. I fell onto the stool, dried my twitching hands in my handkerchief, and, finding no help for it, set to. The first chord turned out to be not a chord but an arpeggio, and from that seed grew the whole flower of my performance. I wrestled those bland keys for two appalling minutes — I could have circumnavigated the world in half the time — and at the end, anxious to be off, played the last bar standing up. I hoped I might give the impression, as I walked quickly away to my mother, that I had always thought a full orchestra the only instrument worth touching; but I probably did not succeed, for what I really felt was that only man is vile, and I was that man. My mother smiled, and whispered to me that it had been just beautiful, but I ignored her. I could not ignore myself so easily. I wondered what it was like to be dead.

Several stories reveal aspects of the turmoil of growing up; *Glimpsed in Marriage* is really a cluster of very short stories linked thematically as the title suggests; *Down at the Works* is similarly constructed but offers some not-so-flattering views of aspects of university life.

The writing gives the impression of having been meticulously honed, like the very best poetry, to convey an exact impression, feeling or idea. It is the kind of prose, becoming rarer these days, where every word is made to work, to play its

part in the total effect, by which I mean that the measured cadences of the language are as important to Shrubbs's meaning as the extractable sense of his plots. The pity is that there aren't many more stories from this fine writer for us to indulge in.

Rodney Hall's new novel, *Just Relations*, although it centres on the mostly-elderly inhabitants of Whitey's Fall, once a thriving mining town but now a dilapidated relic of the past, is panoramic in its scope and in its implications, allowing the present to encompass all the span of recorded time (history) and granting a special percipience and sagacity to those who cherish the past as an essential part of the living present. Hall has a considerable reputation as a poet so it is not surprising that the novel is rich in images which touch all the senses and, perhaps, not surprising also that his strange story about a peculiar place and the queer people who live in it should not take on the resonance of a huge metaphor expressing Hall's philosophical views about life, the world and the future. A hint of this is given quite early when two important characters, the elderly and, to put it mildly, eccentric brother and sister, Sebastian and Felicia Brinsmead, who every day at lunchtime “felt driven to observe the sociability of exchanging words. To protect the silence.”

— You understand as well as I do Felicia that there will be no such thing as a thousand years from now, at least not for this civilization or anything like it.

The sister recoiled as if hit in the face. Her lump of hair patted her on the back. She glared reproachfully, so the offender felt bound to mumble an apology.

— I should be sorry, I dare say. And I am.

— I believe in it, she replied with dignity. I've always believed in our ways. We might be miserable, greedy people but the one thing we hold to is the present. That's why it is worth reliving the past. I've never stopped hating our ways because I've never stopped believing in them. They're the seed of our future. And we do stick together, you mustn't despise that. If we're wicked let's admit it and live with it. I've always said wickedness is full of life if nothing else. At least you can't accuse me of saintliness.

Just Relations, as its punning title suggests, offers revelations at a number of levels; even at the metaphorical level it is capable of yielding a range of meanings, which is as it should be. It has been craftily constructed like an elaborate

tapestry in a myriad of colors with threads which are lost and found again, dense, complex, exuberant, mysterious and visionary. It is a novel which insists on re-reading if its patterns are to be recognised and understood and its many-threaded plot can be completely unravelled.

It is a unique novel in the sense that it establishes its own conventions, has a poetic rather than a literal realism, and is, in my view anyway, a magnificent demonstration of the work of the creative imagination. Some will find it incomprehensible (their misfortune). It will, no doubt, have its detractors especially in those who prefer their literature to be easily accessible and who enjoy a thoughtless 'good read'. In the long run it doesn't really matter: Rodney Hall is not writing for the dim-witted.

Mary Lord's latest book is The Portable Hal Porter (U.Q.P.). She was Foundation President of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and currently is writing a biography of Hal Porter

BOY CONSCRIPTION

Stuart Semple

John Barrett: *Falling In: Australians and 'Boy Conscription' 1911-1915* (Hale & Iremonger, \$9.95, \$18.95).

Magistrate to the defendant: "This is not a matter of conscience, it is only physical education."

Whether or not the result of improved access to archives, the exhausting of traditional military topics, or simply the passing of men who were tellers of heroic tales, the increased interest in the social history of Australia around World War I promises us a better understanding of the men who did the fighting and a more holistic view of the nation and its people. The Anzac tradition, durable though it has been, could not alone describe the Australia of its own time, much less illumine certain aspects of our national life today. Welcome, then, are those works which are now bridging gaps in our understanding of that earlier period; the impact not only of war but also of post-war programmes such as those which settled soldiers on the land, often with consequences disastrous for them as for the native environment. Today, as the old men pass away and the Australian population reflects increasingly the immigration of later years, the need is even more pressing for a deeper and more integrated knowledge of that earlier period as a step toward a better

understanding of ourselves. This would show that national institutions such as compulsory voting and Commonwealth taxation originated in the conscription crisis and the repatriation of the AIF respectively, rather than in any body of theory concerning the Australian democracy or their enshrinement in a document of nationhood. They are legacies, in fact, from the politics of an earlier time.

Among recent contributions to this wider understanding of ourselves is a fascinating study by John Barrett of a remarkable period in our history when boys, many of them below teenage years, were required by law to register for military training. It is his view that public responses to this policy have been misinterpreted and that there was much less resistance to it than has been supposed: not that the policy was popular, but that it was accepted by a people who were largely indifferent, their consent reflecting a native willingness to borrow from overseas rather than a native militarism. Barrett makes no distinction between compulsory training in peacetime and that during war, and he intentionally avoids the more profound questions of moral issues, civil rights, and civic responsibilities. Wisely so; for, if his thesis be correct (and the evidence is persuasive), these issues, together with the role of consent or compliance in the Australian community, deserve greater attention than is possible within the framework of the present book.

Barrett's interest in social history reserves a special place for 'ordinary Australians'. And what a story he has to tell. The industrialist and trade unionist, the squatter and the 'uneducated' bush worker, the movements and parties, the supporters and opponents: all are there in a kaleidoscope of our people as they were in earlier times, their trusting simplicity, black-and-white perception, and frequent naivety bespeaking a time when the ruggedness of life (and not only in rural areas) was compounded by a isolation from much that did not pertain to empire.

The book itself is a well-delimited study which tells the story from the sources in an unadorned but vivid narrative style. It is so engaging that the reader has a sense of looking over Barrett's shoulder as the author peruses the sources, and so packed with information as to generate a wealth of anecdotes according to one's predilections. The author's periodic interventions in the narrative reveal his careful checking of sources. The style is relaxed, flowing, and a little light-hearted; free from cliché and academic jargon, yet with enough Australian usages to mark it as the work

of one of our own. Editing and production are of a high standard, and the many illustrations well chosen, although there is one error which betrays the book's Victorian origin. The cadets from Erskineville, N.S.W., prosecuted for evading training requirements, almost certainly made their court appearance in the adjoining and inner city suburb of *Newtown*, not Newport.

While Barrett offers valuable insight into the positions adopted on conscription by parties of the right and left, it is for the Labor Party that he reserves the major comment; and quite correctly, for no other party has had its fate so closely bound to the issue. A clear account is offered of Labor's position from the time of its initial support in 1908, its change in 1919, and later the modifications necessitated by circumstances in World War II and piloted with statesmanship by John Curtin. It is an enlightening review and one which brings the reader up to the time of the Vietnam war. As Curtin was so acutely aware, and Barrett implicitly recognises by his refusal to differentiate peacetime from wartime conscription, the issue is complex: conscription in Australia has not been able to avoid the dilemma of defining another's territory as essential for the defence of one's own.

As a straightforward account of 'boy conscription' Barrett's book stands securely on its own merit. If further evidence were required of our need of a more comprehensive understanding of Australian history, however, it may readily be found in his intriguing references to the part played in the training scheme by teachers, schools, and state education departments. Though not a major concern to him, it forms almost a sub-plot and its implications belong with those 'profoundest questions' which he says, frankly, are beyond the scope of his book. One instance recounted by Barrett appears so extraordinary to the modern reader as to bear quoting in full:

Registration for senior cadet training went well in 1911, an average of 38,000 boys enrolling from each of the four age groups involved. But at the end of January 1912 only 17,000 new boys had registered, so the worried authorities set out to find the reasons and the boys. The Commonwealth Statistician refused to divulge his confidential information, and the departments of labour in the various states differed in their readiness or ability to assist, but the departments of education agreed to co-operate (except that Queensland 'overlooked' the matter for months). (p. 128)

As Barrett indicates elsewhere with some irony, a lad might have been exempted from training on medical grounds, or even for living too far from a training centre, but, after the High Court's rejection in 1912 of an appeal under Section 116 of the Constitution (relating to freedom of religion), he could not be exempted on grounds of religious conscience. And now, as Barrett has explained, the public school system in the lad's own state was being actively engaged to ensure that he did not evade the obligation to register under Commonwealth law. The image of state education departments willingly divulging information to the Commonwealth about their students, when not even the Commonwealth's own Statistician would do so on principle, can only confirm the worst.

Indeed writers have given very little attention to the fact that the conscription scheme provided an early milestone in the history of Commonwealth involvement in education, being the first instance of direct Commonwealth involvement in an Australian school activity. The programme of cadet training had the force of statutory regulation under the Defence Act and was prescribed in the *Universal Training Regulations 1913-14*. Cadets were to undergo not less than fifteen minutes of physical training on each school day. This was to be done in school playgrounds (although as early as 1912 some of these had had to be withdrawn from use as a result of damage by disorderly cadets!) and it was to be conducted by teachers or by officers recommended by headmasters and required to be appointed honorary teaching staff. The same regulations provided for medical examination of junior cadets as well as their inspection.

In schools whose training was considered inadequate cadets were required the following year to take their training under military instructors. Headmasters and headmistresses were permitted to delegate training duties to teachers "except in respect to personal responsibility for allowances and equipment". Discipline for cadets who failed "to obey the orders of the instructors [who might ordinarily have been their classroom teachers], or give due attention to their training" was usually to consist of additional training to a maximum of one half-hour on each occasion, but serious breaches could be dealt with under the Defence Act. Reports of corporal punishment were not unknown, and accusations concerning it sparked questions in parliament and lively comment in the press.

State departments of education received a por-

tion of the capitation allowance of four shillings, paid by the Commonwealth for each efficient cadet, and expended it chiefly in defraying costs incurred by teachers who attended schools of instruction in physical training operated by defence staff; courses which, according to the 1912 report of the New South Wales minister, had generated "considerable enthusiasm" among his department's teachers.

Thus, quite early in Australian federal history, and empowered by the Defence Act and attendant Statutory Regulations, the Commonwealth was supervising and financially supporting a scheme of physical training in Australian schools. Moreover, it had established training courses for the teachers who were to be instructors and a system of capitation payments based on the efficiency of the cadets. The state departments, on their part, co-operated and thus received grants based on pupil efficiency in a programme prescribed, designed, and supervised by the Commonwealth, even though its clients were under state jurisdiction. And all of this had been accomplished with the administrative concurrence of the state departments: no formal Commonwealth-State Agreement was negotiated.

At least one of the state directors of education — Cecil Andrews in Western Australia — managed to combine his directorship of the state's education system with command of its cadet corps between 1906 and 1912, and the 1921 report of his department spoke of "Organizing Instructors" travelling to Melbourne to attend courses in physical training conducted by defence staff and, upon their return to Western Australia, of groups of teachers being assembled to learn the latest developments from them. The 1922 report expressed disappointment that the Defence Department had discontinued its arrangements for training teachers and felt it unfortunate that each state and private school would thenceforth be left to handle physical training itself, without a co-ordinating staff to ensure identical systems and standards in the various states.

Among the many questions prompted by these events must be that of the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's first venture into Australian schools. A report in May 1914 by the Director of Physical Training for the Australian Military Forces, Lt.-Col. C. Bjelke-Petersen, spoke of 4,000 teachers having attended courses of instruction to that date and it advocated the use of incentives for them to take refresher courses. It was also Bjelke-Petersen's view that a central

school of physical training should be established and that a greater role for physical training be assured in the schools and teachers' colleges. The Joint Standing Committee on Public Works, enquiring in 1928 into a proposed School of Public Health in Sydney, heard evidence, however, that (notwithstanding four years of training) following the 1916 draft of all men 21-35 years of age, 42 per cent of them were rejected as unfit at their first medical examination and many of the remainder did not see active service because they could not withstand the training. Admittedly, all of these would have been senior cadets (14-18 years or older) at the introduction of compulsory training in 1911, but nevertheless between 1915 and 1924 some 17.5 per cent of young men already accepted as senior cadets were rejected for admission to the citizen forces. Altogether it had been a remarkable period in the history of the defence forces — to say nothing of Australian education.

On his major theme of conscription and military performance John Barrett has offered several observations which merit further comment. He states that it would "be sensible to allow that compulsory military training contributed something to the effectiveness of the first AIF as a fighting force". That *might* have been so. Certainly he presents evidence that the organising of the scheme provided experience in military administration. But on the question of battlefield performance the evidence is not conclusive — in spite of the respondents' recollections of sixty years ago; nor is his description of actual activities sufficiently detailed to permit a closer comparison of peacetime training and performance under battle conditions. On the other hand, C. E. W. Bean's relatively little comment on the matter might not have been so much one of dismissal, as Barrett suggests, as one of judgement; for Barrett does not make firmly clear the extent to which the peacetime training was supposed to have contributed to the Official Historian's view that the effectiveness of the AIF was due to the "/comparative/ absence of social barriers and the comparative equality of opportunity" in Australia.

The author's comments on the conscientious objectors present some difficulties, particularly his view that "most who faced fines and fortresses under the Defence Act did not suffer very much, and some (probably many) could only have benefited from them" (p. 199). Avoiding for the moment the question of what benefits teenage boys could possibly have gained from fines and imprisonment, one is still left with the spectacle of a 17 year-old youth being literally dragged

around a parade ground and then, on orders of an NCO, being beaten up by a young bruiser who was himself under detention. Such an incident cannot easily be explained away; not even by a person of the stature of Lt.-Col. Harry Chauvel as he then was. All told, it is too painfully similar to what is known of the intimidation (and worse) practised on fellow convicts, both young and old, in many prisons today. Barrett has sought an open-minded stance on conscription by candidly placing himself with the majority of Australians who historically have been inclined to go along with 'national service' if it seems to be for the good of Australia; and he continues "That it *would* be good for young Australians was a common view among survivors of the 1911 scheme contacted by the writer in 1978" (p. 4). In the latter comment he is undoubtedly correct, for at no time did the treatment of evaders spark the type of deep national division seen later in the 1916 conscription crisis. The majority was either supportive or indifferent. He is mistaken, however, in regarding indifference as any type of counterweight in the debates preceding compulsory training or the protests accompanying its operation. The bitter lesson of history is that indifference is no counterweight at all when moral issues are involved and personal liberty threatened. On the contrary, it is the indifferent majority who pose the greatest threat. Does his statement on fines and fortresses suggest that Barrett would have discounted the penalties being suffered by dissenters, and accepted this as being for the good of Australia? It is to be hoped not because, on pp. 260-63 of the book, he has offered pungent observation of the role of discipline in Australia.

In no way can the preceding remarks detract from Barrett's achievement in re-examining public responses to the compulsory military training of boys. On the contrary, by giving details of activities and much valuable information about the importance of the scheme's urban component, he has helped to redress an image of the first AIF all too often suggesting the valor of the untrained and the rustic. He prefaced the book with a recognition that the more fundamental questions were beyond its scope. His thorough treatment of the issue between 1911 and 1915 has now paved the way for him to address those questions in a wider context. The process might well start with his telling comment that "a ready acceptance of compulsion may not be part of the Australian image, but it is clearly part of Australian history".

Limits of the debate should not be too narrowly drawn.

Stuart Semple is an Australian historian who teaches at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia.

AMONG STRANGERS, DARKLY

Anthony J. Hassall

Randolph Stow: *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (Secker & Warburg, \$17.90).

This is the second novel in quick succession from Randolph Stow after a long silence. With *Visitants*, published in 1979, it forms a pair of novels which relate to and illuminate one another. *The Girl Green as Elderflower* was completed before *Visitants* but, as it is in some sense a sequel, it has been published second.

The novel traces the recovery of Crispin Clare from a physical and mental breakdown which has culminated in a suicide attempt. The breakdown occurred while he was working as an anthropologist for "one of the colonial governments", an experience that inevitably recalls that of Alistair Cawdor in *Visitants*. Unlike Cawdor, however, Clare has survived his attempt at suicide and, after a period of illness and restless wandering, has settled in the Suffolk village where earlier generations of his family lived. The novel follows the course of his psychic regeneration from the first, midwinter day of a new year through the next six months to summer.

The sense of at last belonging to a place, a tradition and a family is crucial in Clare's recovery. Cawdor was in part destroyed by his loss of country, friends, father and wife. Clare is saved in part by discovering that he can belong and relate to such things. There is a stone in the Swainstead churchyard with his name on it — or rather that of an ancestor for whom he may have been named — and there is a family of Clares, a widowed mother and three children, who enjoy having a newly-found relative as a neighbour, and who draw him enthusiastically into their family life. A school-friend of Clare's turns up unexpectedly, having heard of his illness, and demonstrates a sensitive understanding of his ordeal. A casual meeting in a pub leads to another warm and continued friendship, one that is far more therapeutic than the professional treatment Clare has had.

If all that sounds prosaic for Randolph Stow, there is a generous poetic dimension in the re-

writing of medieval Suffolk stories that Clare undertakes as part of his cure. The three main sections of the book each consist of a present-day narrative, followed by Clare's reworking of a related medieval story into a timeless, dream-like blend of past and present. Clare is able to incorporate the people he has come to know in twentieth-century Suffolk into the twelfth-century settings with surprisingly little difficulty.

The stories he retells are tragic accounts of visitants from other worlds who, despite their wish to do so, are unable to relate fully to the humans who befriend them. The first is the spirit of a rejected child, wished to the devil by her mother, and so separated from her human form. Her longing to be human again can never be fulfilled because her mother will not repeal the curse. The second is a merman who is caught by fishermen, and who lives for a time on land. When he tries to take a human friend back to his underwater kingdom the friend is drowned. The third story tells of two green children who stray from their underground home and try to live in human society: the boy soon dies; his sister lives on, but her life is unhappy and she pines for her homeland, and tells many stories about it. In writing of these lost children Clare is both exploring his own experience and enlarging his imaginative sympathy. Though his own story ends more happily, it is with the recognition that: "we are here as shipwrecked mariners on an island, moving among strangers, darkly."

The Girl Green as Elderflower is an impressive complement to *Visitants*. Together the two books constitute an ambitious and finely realized exploration of man's anguished response to his condition of isolation. It is good to have so substantial and so accomplished a pair of novels to confirm Randolph Stow's standing as one of the most thoughtful, sensitive and illuminating of contemporary writers.

Anthony J. Hassall is writing a book on Randolph Stow. He teaches in the Department of English, University of Newcastle.

HAWKE OBSERVED

K. D. Gott

Blanche d'Alpuget: *Robert J. Hawke; a biography* (Schwartz/Lansdowne, \$20.00).

As far as anything can be certain in politics, it seems inevitable that Bob Hawke will play a

major role in shaping Australian society in the next decade, even if he does not achieve his fierce, life-long ambition to become a Labor Prime Minister. His consistent rating in the opinion polls as Australia's favorite son predates his entry into Parliament and is still being maintained. He is a man of his time, but simultaneously an Australian phenomenon and to some extent an international one thanks to the springboard provided for him as a delegate to the International Labor Organization. Blanche d'Alpuget's biography of him was written with the full co-operation of Hawke and obviously also with a lot of help from his admirers, detractors, colleagues, friends and enemies. The book is notable for long verbatim commentaries on Hawke from these sources and for statements made by Hawke himself to the biographer on significant events in his life. The author, moreover, has brought to her task something of the sensitivity and insights of the novelist that she is.

In her preface she describes the 400 page biography as being a "warts and all" picture which shocked the subject when he read it. "This is traumatic—like seeing your face in a mirror with a thousand facets," Hawke said. "Some of the images seem to me grotesque."

The relationships which Hawke formed with his parents, Clem and Ellie, as a child are used by d'Alpuget as a framework for analysis of his subsequent conduct in adulthood. He was an adored child to both parents and the love was reciprocated. Lionel Revelman, Sir Peter Abeles and other men older than Hawke with whom he formed unusually strong friendships are seen as father substitutes. It was his mother, a lifelong crusader against drink, who constituted the focus of youthful rebellion. Both parents are depicted at some length in the book, but the portrait of Ellie is the more sharply etched.

One exception to d'Alpuget's "warts and all" approach is Hawke's relations with his children. Their mother, Hazel, made it clear that the co-operation she provided to the biographer would not be forthcoming if this topic was to be touched upon. Beyond some indications that the Hawke children do not see eye to eye with their father on uranium and other issues, the subject is left alone. In view of the weight placed on Hawke's relations with his parents in interpreting his character and actions, the omission of details of his own role as a parent leaves the book with a certain asymmetry.

The "warts", of course, are mainly boozing and wenching. Many of Hawke's drunken escap-

ades are recalled, some in detail, and many of his drinking companions, such as Ron Hieser and Maxwell Newton, figure in the book. At times he was a bad drunk, often creating embarrassing and even ugly incidents.

The wenching came easily because he was always enormously attractive to many women. One does not expect his paramours to be named in the same way as his drinking companions were and possibly Blanche d'Alpuget found that formulae of "Miss X" or "Mrs Y" were too transparent. Equally, it could be that the wenching was entirely a matter of one-night stands, with sexual but no other content in the relationship, for nowhere is there a hint of sex as an extension of a broader human relationship. If there is nothing significant to tell from his amorous encounters, then that in itself is significant. So too may be his blunt and crude invitations to prospective sexual partners and his reaction on reading de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* at the age of fifty. "It's a disaster! A disaster! I'd not realised . . ."

Other matters raise the question of whether there are lacunae in the book or in the man himself. What are his tastes in music? In fiction, poetry and other works of the imagination? Or, closer to his career interests, in contemporary political and social analysis? Did the biographer overlook these areas, or was there nothing to report other than Hawke's interest in punting, cricket, football and tennis? One is curious, particularly about what might be deemed ideological influences or preferences.

Instead the ideology and principles which Hawke represents must be inferred from the story of the first fifty or so years of his life so admirably presented by d'Alpuget. He was at one time championed by what is now the Socialist Left of the Australian Labor Party and by the then one and only Communist Party. Today he is anathema to both groups and has been relentlessly pilloried in their publications. Issues, such as uranium, which arose to confront labor policymakers, brought the parting of the ways and to Hawke's alignment with other groups.

The inferences as to what Hawke stands for in Australian public life which can be drawn from d'Alpuget's very detailed account of his fifty-two years are, in essence, the same as those which millions of Australians have formed from snippets of him on television and radio and newspaper accounts. He is an articulate fighter for the under-dog, but also a realist who knows that politics is the art of the possible and that we

live in the 1980s, not the 1930s. A bonny fighter for his causes, but also one who knows that often conciliation and fair compromise are preferable to heated confrontation. There are warts on the man still, but also an abiding sense of destiny about him.

POETRY FROM EVERYWHERE

Graham Rowlands

Rae Desmond Jones: *The Palace of Art* (Makar Press, P.O. Box 71, St Lucia 4067, \$5.95).

Susan Hampton: *Costumes* (Transit Poetry, 21A Shepherd St., Chippendale 2008, \$3.95).

Cornelis Vleeskens: *Full Moon Over Lumpini Park* (Fling Poetry, 25 Fordhams Rd., Eltham 3095, \$5.95).

Rudi Krausmann: *Flowers of Emptiness* (Hale & Iremonger, G.P.O. Box 2552, Sydney 2001, \$5.95).

John A. Scott: *From the Flooded City* (Makar Press, P.O. Box 71, St Lucia 4067, \$5.95).

Philip Collier: *Desert Mother* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1 Finnerty St., Fremantle 6160, \$6.95).

Michael Witts: *Dumb Music* (Fling Poetry, 25 Fordhams Rd., Eltham 3095, \$5.95).

Kenneth King: *Strange to Arrange* (Saturday Centre Books, 490-92 King St., Newtown 2042, \$5.50).

Why *these* poetry collections? Why are they reviewed in the following way? Two questions requiring several answers.

I review only review copies. In *Overland* 84 I complained about major publishers not sending books. Shortly after, UQP sent review copies that received generous space. I regret that some publishers' indifference to whether or not their poets are reviewed compels me to ignore them, including Peter Goldsworthy's fine first collection *Readings from Ecclesiastes* (A. & R.).

The reasons why only one woman appears on the present list are undoubtedly more complex than a publisher's indifference. Just for the record, however, I'd like to stress the appearance of only one woman also on the list of poets for whom review space couldn't be found.

Since the late 60s there's been much Australian Modernist poetry — poetry that takes itself as its own subject rather than human life in society. I usually dislike it. Moreover, my increasingly strong impression is that it's largely the invention of certain editors, critics, academics and publishers. Many of the poets packaged and promoted as Modernists don't fit the label. For instance, although John A. Scott *is* Modernist, Rae Desmond Jones, Susan Hampton, Cornelis Vleeskens and Rudi Krausmann only become Modernist if one ignores the bulk of their work.

Jones' fourth collection *The Palace of Art* has something for everyone. Prose as well as poetry. Slang, ironies, intellectualisms. Belly laughs, mock-invocations and Brechtian effects. Above all, there's the pervasive presence of the observational and/or confessional narrative, albeit mainly in montage. The obsession with poetry for the sake of everything *but* poetry isn't as angry as in his earlier book *The Mad Vibe* and the mythic dimension not as strong as in *Shakti*. Even so, there's lots of sex, work, politics, violence, history, technology, religion (including magic and its partial sendup) and the poet's inevitable suffering because of himself, women and the intractability of time and the universe. With ageing, Jones is too honest not to acknowledge some conservatism—although that's not the last word.

The reader's main gain from Jones' increasing eclecticism of form is the opportunity to compare his poems with his short stories from *Walking The Line*. What these stories achieved over and above his poems was a *length* that allowed the reader to experience the *slow* accumulation of detail. Jones had already achieved *rapid* accumulative climax in his poetry. I doubted whether the stories' slow accumulation could be achieved in poetry. I'm pleased to say that doubts are removed by "Dig", "Luggage", "Tap Dance", "Chocolate" and "Angst as a Classical Mode". He's probably learned to write these poems from the stories. Thus, in looking forward to his novel, I also look forward to what effect novel-writing will have on his poetry.

Unfortunately, Jones' eclecticism has increased the abstraction and intellectuality of language in the title poem, "Song", "Mausoleum", "Fraud: Artist: Dictator" and "Mr Fraser". If the poet has attempted the Brechtian, it hasn't worked as it did in *Shakti's* "Flak". "Mr Fraser" is the litmus test. For all its enjoyable vulgarity, it reveals too much similarity between the notoriously difficult-to-stage Brechtian effects and sheer logical confusion. (Language *is* suited to technology, however, in "The Night Shift" and "Software".)

Short quotations convey little of Jones' narrative, that atypical contemporary form. Anything added to *long* quotations, however, seems superfluous. If I've tried to find an exception in "Tap Dance", it's only to give potential new readers a taste of the poet:

of the gap at the back of my mouth where i
have lost a tooth,
the hole in the universe & absence & loss,
of wimp wimp wimp

of poetry & sincerity & literature until i could
puke,
of fire, the symbol of concentrated time the
further you go
into its core & burn, until it ceases to be
time or sensory
or yellow & becomes light the almost
tangible matter
of prayer,
of money, shit i'd like money

I enjoy reading Jones' poetry as much as I enjoy any living poet in English.

In Hampton's first individual collection *Costumes* there isn't one Modernist poem as impressive as both her narratives and her lyrics. Successful pieces closest to Modernism such as the "Red Queen" poems are analysable in terms of T. S. Eliot's objective correlative which aimed to avoid the heart on the sleeve.

There are, of course, other ways of avoiding sentimentality. "Stockton" depicts Hampton's relationship with her grandmother:

I wash the glass on a photo of
Nana at twenty with waist-length thick black
hair, and I
say to her, Violet Lillian Gertrude Murphy.
"That's me," she says. I decide to grow my hair.

"Waiting for the end" explains the importance of past places and memory processes. "Yugoslav Story" is equally clear and detailed. The simple act of dating the story's ending achieves great impact with great restraint.

In Hampton's lyrics the conversion of urban ugliness into something else via music in "Ode to the Car Radio" is an accumulating ecstatic experience where the energy comes from ugliness as much as beauty. "It" is a successful poem about violent feelings induced by painful menstruation while the equally successful "Crafty Butcher" is deliberately cool:

Then there's just the leg bone with that
glowing knuckle white as the lack of pain
after death, and clean as a finishing line.

Instead of stressing slightness, contrived imagery, aimless detail and some trite expressions of social consciousness in traditional forms or finding literary name-dropping tedious in the Modernist poems, the reader is better off re-reading Hampton's best.

Vleeskens, whose *Orange Blizzard* blew Moder-

nist, exhibits other kinds of work in his fifth collection *Full Moon Over Lumpini Park*. The last poem and most of section 1 are like his earlier humorous, Modernist juxtapositions of international placenames that are all, in one way or another, the poem that's being written. Within this framework, however, the best poems avoid self-reference while still effecting relativity and fey impossibilities, as in "South America".

At the other end of Vleeskens' poetic spectrum, there's a lyric voice trying to get out in poems such as "Solution", "Catch" and "Splintering trunks". Consider "Solution 2":

consider suicide.
we all come
to it, so
take it carefully between the fingers
and squeeze.
if you prefer, take life.
hold it against
the light and watch the bubbles
break.
allow to boil. create
a tension on the surface.

hold it there.

Moreover, there are competent descriptive rural poems in section 2. Although less ambitious than the lyrics, they further exemplify Vleeskens' variety.

In Krausmann's third collection, the large *Flowers of Emptiness*, Modernist poems about poems are the exception. Although his plain style can lapse into propaganda and sentimentality, philosophical preference for nothing rather than something is relieved by wit and play. Readability is the book's strength — perfect for his best poems which range from precise social observation in the two party pieces through the moving elegy for Jennifer Rankin to politics in poems on food consumption, Henry Lawson and Albert Speer:

In twenty years imprisonment
(hated from both sides)
circling desperately the inner walls of Spandau
in a broken spirit
helped by a Russian warder
partly on toilet paper
he wrote:
Inside the Third Reich

The lyric-narrative "The Celebration" and what can be called "A—"s experiential blues and "Velocity" s intellectual blues are my preferences

in Scott's second collection *From the Flooded City*. Such preferences, however, are atypical of both his serious and comic Modernism.

With the above exceptions, the reader's choice comes down to the obscure serious Scott or the clear but trivial and even corny Scott. His serious poems are his best art and most characteristic voice. The first two sections place man, woman, flood, city, children, the *notion* of love, possible ritual, possible utterance and the interpenetration of the tangible with the intangible at odd angles, thereby *constituting* relativity and the subconscious in action. Full of impressive imagery, they are refreshingly free of literary references. There's a smaller readership within an already small poetry readership for prose poems beginning with obscurities such as "The skies are one history accepting the graft of animate flesh."

The title of Collier's *Desert Mother* comes from the second part of his second collection. A whole book of such poems could have been damned with faint praise. The first part, however, is called "Radio Time". It's a striking success.

Collier is a master of the urban-suburban sensibility consisting of slang, fad, fashion and media. He sends them up. More importantly, however, he gains his language, rhythms and energy from what he satirizes. Most of "Radio Time" is on a quite distinctive wavelength. "Be-Bop-A-Blue-Bu-Bleed" being his best enactment and satire rock 'n' rolled into one:

n how he moves is
in n out hes a drunk
a punk a loudmoth
lout n when he sing he
make ennui a space you
can dance in n thats
what its all about

From the first (also the first non-urban) poem in *Desert Mother*, however, Collier is in trouble. Techniques from *Radio Time* are unsuited to desert, homely and guilt-wracked material. He becomes a sensibility in search of subject matter until he gives us the sensibility. The rest, however, is pedestrian.

It's easy to like Witts' third collection *Dumb Music*. The poems are easy to read, whether describing country work or inner urban experiences and relationships. He keeps a low profile — accepting the derivative last poem about language.

It's difficult to avoid finding his inner urban

experiences more varied than his rural. "Random poems 2" is a survivor's rejection of street homosexuality. "Night life" and "The room" depict male-female relationships sardonically, although appreciatively. "Blue poem" is a beautiful *semen et al sex* lyric.

Witts' rural poems are sparing in imagery and tend to be slight. "Hunting vermin", however, is vivid, as are "Looking into the sun IX and XII" where in the latter he describes a hare:

Shooting it with those slow
bullets was like
winding it up

In *Strange to Arrange* King's strengths are also his weaknesses. On his main subjects of food, music and people he's lively and amusing. Some

pieces are only slight; the worst, only trite. Most of his appeal comes from his obvious delight in a cacophony of language. "Bank on Sunday" is a more measured example:

I know that skulking monday
watching over the Queen Victoria Street of you
waiting to call the tune in the teeth

sure he's laughing above somewhere
you too
poor thriving you do
don't you
don't you

Although King can treat pain and death sombrely, these poems are less typical than those showing off his linguistic dexterity.

THE COORONG

(for Heather and Phil)

Can you tell me what it was?
When we arrived the waves were high and tossed
coming in with ease like a late conversation.
The bone-white claw of the beach arched
into the distance and spray hung
ethereal as memory, pinkish and cool,
clinging to the warmth of our woollens.
Can you tell me what it was,
why we walked hours over the shell beds
two feet deep, stooped once
in a while to rake through with clammy fingers
sure there was something there
we needed? So many beautiful
abandoned things still living
and empty on the edge of the tide.

Your voices rode through on the sea's breath.
We turned to walk back, laughing
at the erratic tracks before us: a meeting
of footprints and the long divergence of petals
that clustered again.
Later in the humming car
we talked of friends and one who avowed
she could never be content
with solitude. Ah, the inner life,
you mused, your face strained and full
of grace. Outside, a strip of mallee
flashed by, instantly fixed with light. Beyond
the indeterminate horizon darkness waited,
not budging an inch.

ANNE BREWSTER

John Monash

A Biography

by GEOFFREY SERLE

This work is biography in its fullest sense. Monash is shown in his entirety: a man of wide-ranging intellectual and cultural pursuits, an energetic, resourceful and far-sighted civil servant, a totally professional soldier. Geoffrey Serle does not give us an uncritical or unblemished portrait, nonetheless the man who emerges from this penetrating and revealing study is a mighty figure, truly an Australian hero.

cloth: \$27.50 (rrp)

publication: July



Colonial Casualties

Chinese in Victoria

by KATHRYN CRONIN

Attracted by the lure of gold, large numbers of Chinese immigrants had established themselves in Victoria by the 1850s. This important new work provides a detailed and vivid account of their community life and a sobering examination of the place accorded them by their fellow (Caucasian) colonists.

cloth: \$17.95 (rrp)

publication: Sept.

Wit and Wisdom

A Public Affairs Miscellany

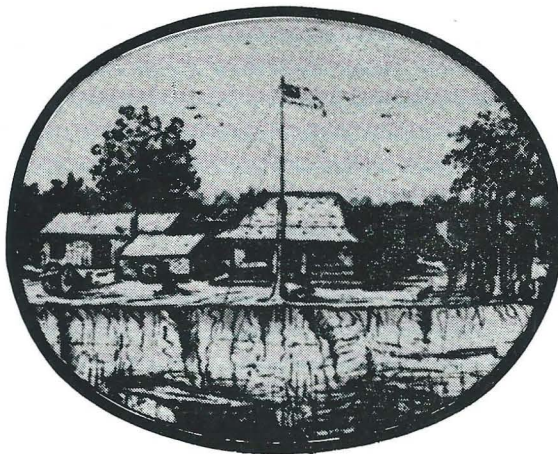
edited by COLIN BINGHAM

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. described an earlier volume of quotations compiled by Colin Bingham as "a rich and fascinating repository of human wisdom and folly". The catholicity of the compiler's reading and his deft discrimination in selecting what is at once fitting and applicable to modern life make this collection equally rich and fascinating.

cloth: \$25 (rrp)

paper: \$15 (rrp)

publication: August



Far Country

A Short History of the Northern Territory

by ALAN POWELL

Starting with a brief review of the prehistory of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Northern Territory, Alan Powell traces the very chequered history of this vast, remote and largely inhospitable land through the period of exploration and settlement by Europeans to the present day. This is the first full, general history of the Territory.

cloth: \$24.50 (rrp)

paper: \$14.95 (rrp)

publication: Sept.

Forthcoming books from
Melbourne University Press



P.O. Box 278, Carlton South, 3053

Tel. (03) 341 6212/3/4

N.S.W.: (02) 92 7633

Qld: (07) 378 6351

W.A.: (09) 380 3182

A NEW YEAR GREETING

which continues all year. A gift your friends will appreciate:

A subscription to *Overland* for 1983.

A subscription for one year, for four issues, is only \$16 (includes postage). Subscribe now and benefit from 1982 rates.

Tick the box provided and we will enclose a gift card from you.

Please send *Overland* as a gift on my behalf to:

Name

Address

..... Postcode

Please send your gift subscription card with the first issue.

Please send *Overland* as a gift on my behalf to:

Name

Address

..... Postcode

Please send your gift subscription card with the first issue.

Subscribe to

overland

Make sure you get every issue of Australia's lively literary magazine.

Subscription rate for one year (four issues) including postage is \$16.

Students and pensioners: \$8.

See back for New Year gift offer.

Overland,
Box 98a,
G.P.O. Melbourne, 3001.

I would like to subscribe to *Overland* from the next issue.

Name

Address

..... Postcode

I enclose my cheque/postal order for my subscription and

..... gift subscription/s. (Make cheque payable to Overland)

Signature: