

# overland

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FEATURES  
STORIES  
POETRY

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92

BARRY JONES REVIEWS GEOFFREY SERLE'S "JOHN MONASH"  
STUART MACINTYRE ON 25 YEARS OF QUADRANT  
A NEW STORY BY ELIZABETH JOLLEY  
KEN INGLIS: TEACHING AUSTRALIAN HISTORY AT HARVARD  
DOUGLAS STEWART: "BETWEEN THE NIGHT AND MORNING"





**stories** BATHROOM DANCE *Elizabeth Jolley* 2  
AND GRANNY MAKES THREE *Warren Straker* 17  
THE BRIDE FROM CENTRAL OFFICE *Philip Neilsen* 30

**features** SOMETIMES GLADNESS *Graham Rowlands* 9  
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE RIGHT *Stuart Macintyre* 21  
TEACHING AUSTRALIAN HISTORY AT HARVARD  
*K. S. Inglis* 35  
SWAG *Stephen Murray-Smith* 41  
THE AMERICAN MODEL *Bruce Clunies Ross* 46  
BOOKS 55

**poetry** *by Barbara Giles, Bruce Dawe, Philip Neilsen, Geoff Sharrock,  
Douglas Stewart, Michael Dugan, Robert Jones, John Blight,  
Robyn Rowland, P. R. Hay, Andrew Donald, Bill Fewer,  
Julian Croft, Jim Gale, Gary Catalano, Coral Fitzpatrick,  
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# overland

August, 1983

ELIZABETH JOLLEY **The Bathroom Dance**

When I try on one of the nurse's caps my friend Helen nearly dies.

"Oh!" she cries, "take it off! I'll die! Oh, if you could see yourself. Oh!" she screams and Miss Besser looks at me with six years of reproach stored in the look.

We are all sewing Helen's uniform in the Domestic Science room. Three pin-stripe dresses with long sleeves, buttoned from the wrist to the elbow, double tucks and innumerable button holes; fourteen white aprons and fourteen little caps which have to be rubbed along the seam with a wet toothbrush before the tapes can be drawn up to make those neat little pleats at the back. Helen looks so sweet in hers. I can't help wishing, when I see myself in the cap, that I am not going to do nursing after all.

Helen ordered her material before persuading me to go to the hospital with her. So, when I order mine it is too late to have my uniform made by the class. It is the end of term, the end of our last year at school. My material is sent home.

Mr Jackson tells us, in the last Sunday evening meeting, that he wants the deepest responsibility for standards and judgements in his pupils, especially those who are about to leave the happy family which is how he likes to think of his school. We must not, he says, believe in doing just what we please. We must always believe in the nourishment of the inner life and in the loving discipline of personal relationships. We must always be concerned with the relentless search for truth at whatever cost to tradition and externals. I leave school carrying his inspiration and his cosiness with me. For some reason I keep thinking about and remembering something about the reed bending and surviving and the sturdy oak blown down.

My mother says the stuff is pillow ticking. She feels there is nothing refined about nursing. The

arrival of the striped material has upset her. She says she has other things in mind for me, travelling on the continent, Europe, she says, studying art and ancient buildings and music.

"But there's a war on," I say.

"Oh well, after the war."

She can see my mind is made up and she is sad and cross for some days. The parcel, with one corner torn open, lies in the hall. She is comforted by the arrival of a letter from the matron saying that all probationer nurses are required to bring warm sensible knickers. She feels the matron must be a very nice person after all and she has my uniform made for me in a shop and pays extra to have it done quickly.

Helen's mother invites me to spend a few days with Helen before we go to St Cuthbert's.

The tiny rooms in Helen's home are full of sunshine. There are bright yellow curtains gently fluttering at the open windows. The garden is full of summer flowers, roses and lupins and delphiniums, light blue and dark blue. The front of the house is covered with a trellis of flowers, some kind of wisteria which is sweetly fragrant at dusk.

Helen's mother is small and quiet and kind. She is anxious and always concerned. She puts laxatives in the puddings she makes.

I like Helen's house and garden, it is peaceful there and I would like to be there all the time but Helen wants to do other things. She is terribly in love with someone called David. Everything is David these few days. We spent a great deal of time outside a milk bar on the corner near David's house or walking endlessly in the streets where he is likely to go. No one, except me, knows of this great love. Because I am a visitor in the house I try to be agreeable. And I try to make an effort to understand intense looks from Helen, mysterious frowns, raised eyebrows, head shakings



or noddings and flustered alterations about arrangements as well as I can.

"I can't think what is the matter with Helen," Mrs Ferguson says softly one evening when Helen rushes from the room to answer the telephone in case it should be David. We are putting up the black-out screens which Mrs Ferguson has made skilfully to go behind the cheerful yellow curtains every night. "I suppose she is excited about her career," she says in her quiet voice, picking up a little table which was in Helen's way.

Everyone is so keen on careers for us. Mr Jackson, at school, was always reading aloud from letters sent by old boys and girls who are having careers, poultry farming, running boys' clubs and digging with the unemployed. He liked the envelopes to match the paper, he said, and sometimes he held up both for us all to see.

Helen is desperate to see David before we leave. We go to all the services at his mother's church and to her Bible class where she makes us hand round plates of rock cakes to the Old Folk between the lantern slides. But there is no David. Helen writes him a postcard with a silly passionate message. During the night she cries and cries and says it is awful being so madly in love and will I pretend I have sent the postcard. Of course I say I won't. Helen begs me, she keeps on begging, saying that she lives in the neighborhood and everyone knows her and will talk about her. She starts to howl and I am afraid Mrs Ferguson will hear and, in the end, I tell her, "All right, if you really want me to."

In the morning I write another card saying that I am sorry about the stupid card which I have sent and I show it to Helen, saying:

"We'll need to wash our hair before we go."

"I'll go up first," she says. While she is in the bathroom using up all the hot water, I add a few words to my postcard, a silly passionate message, and I put Helen's name on it because of being tired and confused with the bad night we had. I go out and post it before she comes down with her hair all done up in a towel, the way she always does.

Mrs Ferguson comes up to London with us when we set off for St Cuthbert's. Helen has to dash back to the house twice, once for her camera and the second time for her raincoat. I wait with Mrs Ferguson on the corner and she points out to me the window in the County Hospital where her husband died the year before. Her blue eyes are the saddest eyes I have ever seen. I say I am sorry about Mr Ferguson's death, but because of

the uneasiness of the journey and the place where we are going, I know that I am not really concerned about her sorrow. Ashamed, I turn away from her.

Helen comes rushing up the hill. She has slammed the front door, she says, forgetting that she has put the key on the kitchen table and will her mother manage to climb through the pantry window in the dark and whatever are we waiting for when we have only a few minutes to get to the train.

David, unseen, goes about his unseen life in the narrow suburb of little streets and houses. Helen seems to forget him easily, straight away.

Just as we are sitting down to lunch there is an air raid warning. It is terrible to have to leave the plates of food which have been placed in front of us. Mrs Ferguson has some paper bags in her handbag.

"Mother! You can't!" Helen's face is red and angry. Mrs Ferguson, ignoring her, slides the salads and the bread and butter into the bags. We have to stand for two hours in the air raid shelter. It is very noisy the A.R.P. wardens say and they will not let us leave. It is too crowded for us to eat in there and, in any case, you can't eat when you are frightened.

Later, in the next train, we have to stand all the way because the whole train is filled with the army. Big bodies, big rosy faces, thick rough great-coats, kit bags, boots and cigarette smoke wherever we look. We stand swaying in the corridor pressed and squeezed by people passing still looking for somewhere to sit. We can't eat there either. We throw the sad bags, beetroot-soaked, out onto the railway lines.

I feel sick as soon as we go into the main hall at St Cuthbert's. It is the hospital smell and the smell of the bread and butter we try to eat in the nurses' dining room. Helen tries to pour two cups of tea but the tea is all gone. The tea pot has a bitter smell of emptiness.

Upstairs in Helen's room on the Peace corridor as it is called because it is over the chapel, we put on our uniforms and she screams with laughter at the sight of me in my cap.

"Oh, you look just like you did at school," she can't stop laughing. How can she laugh like this when we are so late. For wartime security the railway station names have been removed and, though we were counting the stops, we made a mistake and went past our station and had to wait for a bus which would bring us back.

"Lend me a safety pin," I say, "one of my



buttons has broken in half." Helen, with a mouthful of hair grips, busy with her own cap, shakes her head. I go back along the corridor to my own room. It is melancholy in there, dark, because a piece of black-out material has been pinned over the window and is only partly looped up. The afternoon sun of autumn is sad too when I peer out of the bit of window and see the long slanting shadows lying across unfamiliar fields and roads leading to unknown places.

My school trunk, in my room before me, is a kind of betrayal. When I open it books and shoes and clothes spill out. Some of my pressed wild flowers have come unstuck and I put them back between the pages remembering the sweet wet grass near the school where we searched for flowers. I seem to see clearly shining long fingers pulling stalks and holding bunches. Saxifrage, campion, vetch, ragged robin, star of Bethlehem, wild strawberry and sorrel. Quickly I tidy the flowers — violet, buttercup, King cup, cowslip, coltsfoot, wood anemone, shepherd's purse, lady's slipper, jack in the pulpit and bryony . . .

"No Christian names on duty please," staff nurse Sharpe says, so, after six years in the same dormitory, Helen and I make a great effort. Ferguson—Wright, Wright—Ferguson.

"Have you finished with the floor mop — Ferguson?"

"Oh, you have it first — Wright."

"Oh! No! By all means, after you, Ferguson."

"No, after you, Wright."

Staff nurse Sharpe turns her eyes up to the ceiling so that only the whites show. She puts her watch on the window-sill saying:

"Quarter of an hour to get those baths, basins and toilets really clean and the floors done too. So hurry!"

"No Christian names on duty," we remind each other.

We never sleep in our rooms on the Peace corridor. Every night we have to carry our blankets down to the basement where we sleep on straw mattresses. It is supposed to be safe there in air raids. There is no air and the water pipes make noises all night. As soon as I am able to fall asleep Night Sister Bean is banging with the end of her torch saying "Five thirty a.m. nurses, five thirty a.m." And it is time to take up our blankets and carry them back upstairs to our rooms.

I am working with Helen in the children's ward. Because half the hospital is full of soldiers the ward is very crowded. There are sixty chil-

dren; there is always someone laughing and someone crying. I am too slow. My sleeves are always rolled up when they should be rolled down and buttoned into the cuffs. When my sleeves are down and buttoned it seems they have to be rolled up again at once. I can never remember the names of the children and what they have wrong with them.

The weeks go by and I play my secret game of comparisons as I played it at school. On the Peace corridor are some very pretty nurses. They are always washing each other's hair and hanging their delicate underclothes to dry in the bathroom. In the scented steamy atmosphere I can't help comparing their clothes with mine and their faces and bodies with mine. Every time I am always worse than they are and they all look so much more attractive in their uniforms, especially the cap suits them well. Even their finger nails are better than mine.

"Nurse Wright!" Night Sister Bean calls my name at breakfast.

"Yes, Sister," I stand up as I have seen the others do.

"Matron's office nine a.m.," she says and goes on calling the register.

I am worried about my appointment with the matron. Something must be wrong.

"What did Matron want?" Ferguson is waiting for me when I go to the ward to fetch my gas mask and my helmet. I am anxious not to lose these as I am responsible for them and will have to give them back if I leave the hospital or if the War should come to an end.

"What did Matron want?" Ferguson repeats her question, giving me time to think.

"Oh, it is nothing much," I reply.

"Oh, come on! What did she want you for? Are you in trouble?" she asks hopefully.

"Oh no, it's nothing much at all," I wave my gas mask, "if you must know, she wanted to tell me that she is very pleased with my work and she'll be very surprised if I don't win the gold medal." Ferguson stares at me, her mouth wide open, while I collect my clean aprons. She does not notice that one of them is hers. It will give me an extra one for the week. I go to the office to tell the ward sister that I have been transferred to the theatre.

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,*

O'Connor, the theatre staff nurse, is singing. She has an Irish accent and a mellow voice. I would like to tell her I know this poem too.



*The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,*

In the theatre they are all intimate. They have well-bred voices and ways of speaking. They look healthy and well poised and behave with the ease of movement and gesture which comes from years of good breeding. They are a little circle in which I am not included. I do not try to be. I wish every day, though, that I could be a part of their reference and their joke.

In a fog of the incomprehensible and the obscure I strive, more stupid than I have ever been in my life, to anticipate the needs of the theatre sister whose small, hard eyes glitter at me above her white cotton mask. I rush off for the jaconet.

"Why didn't you look at the table!" I piece together her angry masked hiss as I stand offering a carefully opened and held sterilized drum. One frightened glance at the operating table tells me it is catgut she asked for.

"Boil up the trolley," the careless instruction in the soft Irish voice floats towards me at the end of the long morning. Everything is on the instrument trolley.

"Why ever didn't you put the doctors' soap back on the sink first!" The theatre is awash with boiled-over soap suds. Staff nurse O'Connor, lazily amused, is just scornful enough. "And," she says, "what in God's Holy Name is this!" She fishes from the sterilizer a doll-size jumper. She holds it up in the long handled forceps. "I see trouble ahead," she warns, "better not let Sister see this." It is the chief surgeon's real Jaeger woollen vest. He wears it to operate. He has only two and is very particular about them: I have discovered already that sister is afraid of the chief surgeon, consequently I need to be afraid of her. The smell of boiled soap and wool is terrible and it takes me the whole afternoon to clear up.

Theatre sister and staff nurse O'Connor, always in masks, exchange glances of immediate understanding. They, when not in masks, have loud voices and laughs. They talk a great deal about horses and dogs and about Mummy and Daddy. They are quite shameless in all this Mummy and Daddy talk.

The X-ray staff are even more well-bred. They never wear uniform and they sing and laugh and come into the theatre in whatever they happen to be wearing, backless dinner dresses, tennis shorts or their night gowns. All the time they have a sleepy desirable look of mingled charm and efficiency. War time shortages of chocolate and other food stuffs and restrictions on movement, not going up to London at night for instance, do not

seem to affect them. They are always called by pet names, Diamond and Snorter. Diamond is the pretty one, she has a mop of curls and little white teeth in a tiny rosebud mouth. Snorter is horsey. She wears trousers and little yellow waist coats. She always has a cigarette dangling from her bottom lip.

I can't compare myself with these people at all. They never speak to me except to ask me to fetch something. Even Mr Potter, the anaesthetist, who seems kind and has a fatherly voice, never looks in my direction. He says, holding out his syringe, "Evipan" or "Pentothal", and talks to the others. Something about his voice, every day, reminds me of a quality in my father's voice; it makes me wish to be back at home. There is something hopeless in being hopeful that one person can actually match and replace another. It is not possible.

Sometimes Mr Potter tells a joke to the others and I do not know whether I should join in the laugh or not.

I like Snorter's clothes and wish that I had some like them. I possess a three-quarter length oatmeal coat with padded shoulders and gilt buttons which my mother thinks is elegant and useful as it will go with everything. It is so ugly it does not matter what I wear it with. The blue skirt I have is too long, the material is heavy, it sags and makes me tired.

"Not with brown shoes!" Ferguson shakes her head.

It is my day off and I am in her room. The emptiness of the lonely day stretches ahead of me. It is true that the blue skirt and the brown shoes, they are all I have, do look terrible together.

Ferguson and her new friend, Carson, are going out to meet some soldiers to go on something called a pub crawl. Ferguson, I know, has never had anything stronger than ginger beer to drink in her life. I am watching her get ready. She has frizzed her hair all across her baby-round forehead. I can't help admiring her, the blaze of lipstick alters her completely.

Carson comes in balancing on very high-heeled shoes. She has on a halo hat with a cheeky little veil and some bright-pink silk stockings.

"What lovely pink stockings!" I say to please her.

"Salmon, please," Carson says haughtily. Her hair is curled too and she is plastered all over with ornaments, brooches, necklaces, rings and lipstick, a different color from Ferguson's. Ferguson looks bare and chubby and schoolgirlish next to Carson.



Both of them are about to go when I suddenly feel I can't face the whole day alone.

"It's my day off too," I say, "and I don't know where to go."

Ferguson pauses in the doorway.

"Well, why don't you come with us," Carson says. Both of them look at me.

"The trouble is, Wright," Carson says kindly, "the trouble is that you've got no sex appeal."

After they have gone I sit in Ferguson's room for a long time staring at myself in her mirror to see if it shows badly that I have no sex appeal.

I dream my name is Chevalier and I search for my name on the typed lists on the green baize notice boards. The examination results are out. I search for my name in the middle of the names and only find it later at the top.

My name, not the Chevalier of the dream, but my own name is at the top of the lists when they appear.

I work hard in all my free time at the lecture notes and at the essays "Ward Routine", "Nursing as a Career", "Some Aspects of the History of Nursing" and "The Nurse and her Patient".

The one on ward routine pleases me most. As I write the essay, the staff and the patients and the wards of St Cuthbert's seem to unfold about me and I begin to understand what I am trying to do in this hospital. I rewrite the essay collecting the complete working of a hospital ward into two sheets of paper. When it is read aloud to the other nurses, Ferguson stares at me and does not take her eyes off me all through the nursing lecture which follows.

I learn every bone and muscle in the body and all the muscle attachments and all the systems of the body. I begin to understand the destruction of disease and the construction of cure. I find I can use phrases suddenly in speech or on paper which give a correct answer. Formulae for digestion or respiration or for the action of drugs. Word and phrases like 'gaseous interchange' and 'internal combustion' roll from my pen and the name at the top of the lists continues to be mine.

"Don't tell me you'll be top in invalid cookery too!" Ferguson says and she reminds me of the white sauce I made at school which was said to have blocked up the drains for two days. She goes on to remind me how my pastry board, put up at the window to dry, was the one which fell on the headmaster's wife while she was weeding in the garden below, breaking her glasses and altering the shape of her nose for ever.

My invalid carrot is the prettiest of them all. The examiner gives me the highest mark.

"But it's not even cooked properly!" Ferguson is outraged when she tastes it afterwards. She says the sauce is disgusting.

"Oh well, you can't expect the examiner to actually eat all the things she is marking," I say. Ferguson has indigestion, she is very uncomfortable all evening because, in the greedy big taste, she has nearly the whole carrot.

It is the custom, apparently, at St Cuthbert's to move the nurses from one corridor to another. I am given a larger room in a corridor called Industry. It is over the kitchens and is noisy and smells of burning saucepans. This room has a big tall window. I move my bed under the window and, dressed in my school jersey, I lie on the bed for as long as possible to feel the fresh cold air on my face before going down to the basement for the night. Some evenings I fall into a deep and refreshing sleep obediently waking up, when called, to go down to the doubtful safety below.

Every day, after the operations, I go round the theatre with a pail of hot soapy water cleaning everything. There is an orderly peacefulness in the quiet white tranquillity which seems, every afternoon, to follow the strained, blood-stained mornings.

In my new room I copy out my lecture notes:

*. . . infection follows the line of least resistance . . .*

and read my school poetry book:

*Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies  
peep,*

*And round green roots and yellowing stalks*

*I see*

*Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;*

*And air-swept lindens yield*

*Their scent . . .*

I am not able to put out of my mind the eyes of a man who is asleep but unable to close his eyes. The putrid smell of wounded flesh comes with me to my room and I hear, all the time, the sounds of bone surgery and the troubled respiration which accompanies the lengthy periods of deep anaesthetic . . .

*Oft thou hast given them store*

*Of flowers—the frail leaf'd, white anemony,*

*Dark blue bells drench'd with dews of  
summer eyes*

*And purple orchises with spotted leaves . . .*

. . . in the theatre recovery ward there are fifteen amputations, seven above the knee and eight below. The beds are made in two halves so that



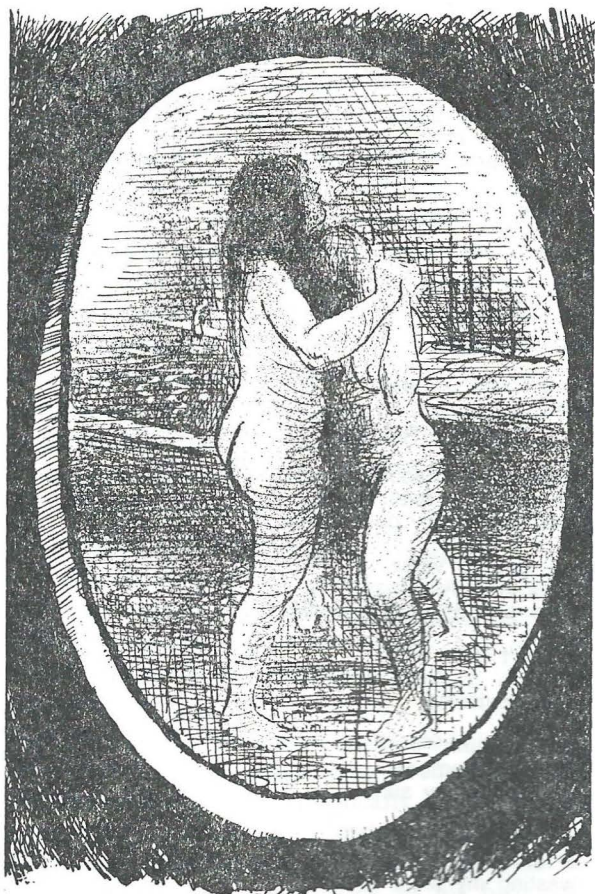
the padded stumps can be watched. Every bed has its own bell and tourniquet . . .

St Cuthbert's is only a drop in the ocean, staff nurse O'Connor did not address the remark to me, I overheard it.

Next to my room is a large room which has been converted into a bathroom. The dividing wall is a wooden partition. The water pipes make a lot of noise and people like to sing there, usually something from an opera.

One night I woke from my evening stolen sleep hearing two voices talking in the bathroom. It is dark in my room; I can see some light from the bathroom through a knot hole high up in the partition. The voices belong to Diamond and Snorter. This is strange because they live somewhere outside the hospital and would not need to use that bathroom. It is not a comfortable place at all, very cold, with a big old bath awkwardly in the middle of the rough floor.

Diamond and Snorter are singing and making a lot of noise, laughing and shrieking above the rushing water.



Singing:

*Give me thy hand O Fairest*

*la la la la la la la*

*I would and yet I would not*

laughter and the huge bath obviously being filled to the brim.

*Our lives would be all pleasure*

*tra la la la la la la*

*tra la la la la la la*

*tum pe te tum*

*tum pe te tum*

“That was some party was it not!”

“Rather!” their rich voices richer over the water.

I stand up on my bed and peer through the hole which is about the size of an egg. I have never looked through before though have heard lots of baths and songs. I have never heard Diamond and Snorter in there before—if it is them.

It is Diamond and Snorter and they are naturally quite naked. There is nothing unusual about their bodies. Their clothes, party clothes, are all in little heaps on the floor. They, the women not the clothes, are holding hands, their arms held up gracefully. They are stepping up towards each other and away again. They have stopped singing and are nodding and smiling and turning to the left and to the right, and, then, with sedate little steps, skipping slowly round and round. It is a dance, a little dance for two people, a minuet, graceful, strange and remote. In the steam the naked bodies are like a pair of sea birds engaged in mating display. They appear and disappear as if seen through a white sea mist on some far-off shore.

The dance quickens. It is more serious. Each pulls the other more fiercely, letting go suddenly, laughing and then not laughing. Dancing still, now serious now amusing. To and fro, together, back and forth and together and round and round they skip and dance. Then, all at once, they drop hands and clasp each other close, as if in a private ballroom, and quick step a foxtrot all round the bathroom.

It is not an ugly dance, it is rhythmic and ridiculous. Their thighs and buttocks shake and tremble and Snorter's hair has come undone and is hanging about her large red ears in wispy strands.

The dance over they climb into the deep hot bath and tenderly wash each other.

The little dance, the bathroom dance, gives me an entirely new outlook. I can't wait to see Diamond and Snorter again. I look at everyone at breakfast, not Ferguson, of course (I know every-



thing there is to know about her life) with a fresh interest.

Later I am standing beside the patient in the anaesthetic room, waiting for Mr Potter, when Snorter comes struggling through the swing doors with her old cricket bag. She flops about the room dragging the bag:

*And on the beach undid his corded bales* she says, as she always does, while rummaging in the bag for her white Wellington boots. I want to tell Snorter, though I never do, that I too know this poem.

I look hard at Snorter. Even now her hair is not combed properly. Her theatre gown has no tapes at the back so that it hangs, untied and crooked. She only has one boot on when Mr Potter comes. The unfairness of it all comes over

me. Why do I have to be neatly and completely dressed at all times. Why do they not speak to me except to ask for something to be fetched or taken away. Suddenly I say to Snorter: "Minuet du Salle de la Bain," in my appalling accent. I am surprised at myself. She is hopping on one foot, a Wellington boot in her hand, she stops hopping for a moment.

"De la salle de bain, surely," she corrects me with a perfect pronunciation and a well mannered smile, "also lower case," she says, "not caps, alters the emphasis."

"Oh yes, of course," I mutter hastily. An apology.

"Pentothal," Mr Potter is perched on his stool at the patient's head. His syringe held out vaguely in my direction.

### BUTTERFLIES, BY TUNG IN TJIEK

*Chinese poetry is a poetry of diffused ideas, precision of meaning being difficult because of the nature of the language.*

*Barbara Giles here gives the most likely interpretation of a poem by the renowned Tung, a poet of the fifth century.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. The butterflies<br>in rain, fold like<br>ancient umbrellas.                      | who can't fly<br>but can eat very fast<br>whatever the weather.             |
| Unable to fly,<br>the dust of their wings<br>scattered,                             | Shoo, white butterflies<br>I'm losing at once<br>my life and my living.     |
| their hold on air<br>now uncertain.<br>Will the sun shine?                          | 4. In the rain<br>I was accosted<br>by a painted lady.                      |
| An hour of this<br>small life lost,<br>and youth is past.                           | I could not run,<br>she had hold<br>of my sleeve,                           |
| 2. The bright, fluttering<br>butterflies of night can't<br>provide for a rainy day. | and I was uncertain<br>she had an air,<br>it was a very wet day.            |
| How can a girl<br>quit this life, unless<br>the heavens open,                       | I was glad to shelter<br>for an hour, but<br>she emptied my pockets.        |
| or earthquake<br>disturbs the old order.<br>Will she be lucky?                      | 5. My painted verse<br>folds butterfly wings,<br>sags like an old umbrella. |
| Will she marry<br>after an hour of love<br>a wealthy merchant?                      | It can't soar,<br>dusty,<br>limp scattered.                                 |
| 3. My rainy cabbages<br>are being bombarded<br>by butterflies.                      | I don't think<br>they'll remember<br>my verses, my sun                      |
| The little pellets<br>they scatter<br>will turn into grubs                          | won't shine. I'm<br>a foolish fellow,<br>wasting my time.                   |

BARBARA GILES



Graham Rowlands

## Sometimes Gladness

*Bruce Dawe's Poetry*

When John Forbes, in his *Stalin's Holidays*, describes the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky as "a sort of Communist Bruce Dawe" he cracks a joke that is more than a joke. He is emphasizing the public stance that both poets have taken and which, in Dawe's case, encapsulates much of Australia's recent literary history.

Dawe's collected poems, under the title *Sometimes Gladness*, have recently been republished in a revised edition (Longman Cheshire, \$12.95 and \$7.70, cassette \$9.95). A retrospective look at his poetry has to cover his Australianness, his suburban perspective and the relationship between his Roman Catholicism and his underdog allegiances. It should be alive to the literary context of his Australianness, the issue of change and transience in the suburbs and the risks of underdog allegiance. It should highlight some of his most famous poems in textual detail. It should consider whether or not sex has been a poetic problem. It should exemplify and put into perspective his most obvious poetic failures.

Dawe has published many poems in newspapers, magazines and collections. He has read at public and literary forums, on record and cassette. His selected poems *Condolences of the Season* and the earlier edition of *Sometimes Gladness* became available for school and tertiary study throughout the 1970s. Indeed, he's so available in schools that tertiary students sometimes object that they've 'done' him at school and don't want to 'do' him again.

For Dawe isn't a poet who happens to live in Australia. He's an *Australian* poet. Almost all his poems are placed specifically in Australian suburb, city or, to a much lesser extent, countryside. Their inhabitants find it difficult to move elsewhere. His work is written in his own and other Australian voices — including Ocker in the

usually satirical dramatic monologues. This isn't what makes his poetry worthwhile. For an Australian reader, however, it certainly helps.

Many of Dawe's poetic predecessors and contemporaries have written in a language scarcely distinguishable from educated British English. The younger Canberra poets (excluding Les Murray) still seem to be as oriented to Europe as A. D. Hope ever was, while the Modernists, of course, imitate their American models. The old Cultural Cringe with a new vengeance. If, however, our film industry succeeds by consisting of Australians making Australian films about Australian experience, why shouldn't the same argument apply to our poetry? Why would Australians want to read anything but Australian poems about Australian experience? The audience for these is small enough; the audience for American and European poems about Australian experience must be minute.

Although Dawe opened up Australian poetry to irregular line lengths, colloquial language and suburban experience in the 1950s, he's been a forerunner rather than a guru. There's no School of Dawe. He wouldn't want a tribe of imitators and adulators. He's too individualistic, independent, uncompromising. Indeed, since moving from suburban Melbourne to 'suburban' Toowoomba in 1970 he's been too isolated. Even so, perhaps it could have been expected that more Australian poets would have been influenced by his poetry.

Dawe is centrally located in the suburban family. He sees the country through city and suburb. He sees the world through the television screen. Most of what he sees annoys and oppresses him — including the commercials which are as important for his imagery as cars both on and off the set. In poems such as "Morning Becomes Electric" with its "expressway of birds", and "Enter Without So Much As Knocking" with "one



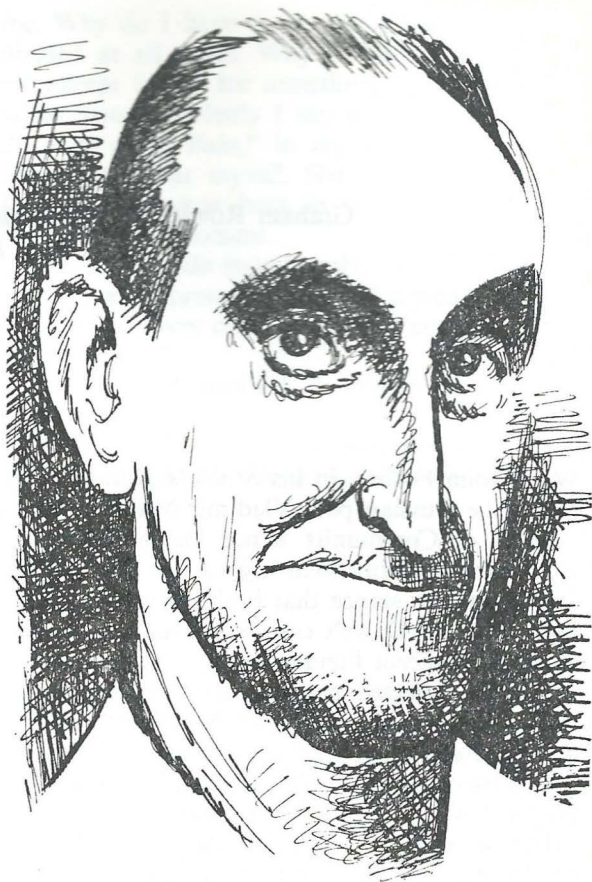
economy-size Mum”, he finds life dominated and manipulated by human-made objects. His scenery is so obviously that of most Australians from the 1950s to the 1980s that the basis of his appeal must be shared contemporary experience.

In considering Dawe’s view of things — his philosophy if that weren’t too pretentious a word — his Roman Catholicism might seem crucial. Not so. True, at least five poems express the notion of ineradicable evil — “Affinity”, “Phantasms of Evening”, “The Museum Attendant”, “What Lies on Us” and “The Privilege”. The wonderful dramatic monologue “The Shadow Broken Free” *implies* ineradicable evil. Martyrdom of any kind usually leads him to the Crucifixion. The book is dedicated to Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Dawe didn’t, however, begin believing in the Fall of Man the instant he converted to Catholicism in 1954, aged 24. On the evidence of his poetry, he *always* believed in it.

Not that it’s specifically *Catholic* poetry. No matter what their metaphysical dimension, his angers and allegiances find political rather than religious voice or voices. He *uses* religious ritual comically to stress the mock-heroic importance of Australian Rules in “Life-cycle”, and of white-collar work in “Beatitudes”. He *uses* mock prayers to evoke a future for cars only in “In the New Landscape”, and to proclaim Queensland’s lack of civil liberties in “Open Invitation” and “The Vision Splendid”. Indeed, there are two poems expressing Existential meaninglessness as distinct from evil — “Flotsam” and “Birthday Poem”. If he fears the spiritual triumph of evil over good, he’s largely preoccupied with the temporal triumph of the strong over the weak.

The weak. The oppressed. The disadvantaged. Dawe is always on their side — or almost always. He’s on the side of the Hungarians and the Balts against Russian control; on the side of the Vietnamese and Central American peasants against American control. He’s against *any* revolution that loses its egalitarian direction, as in “Only the Beards Are Different” and “Everybody Sing”. He opposes anyone being a Cold War scapegoat, as in “Demons”. The Left or Right of the politics don’t matter. If his support for Aboriginal Land Rights, more recently ethnicity and immigration, the greening of the environment and the cause of the unemployed be thought too easy, it’s salutary to read “Looking Down From Bridges” about the difficulty of empathy. Moreover, not all the causes he’s supported have been or remain popularly unpopular.

His support for life over death has led him



to oppose hanging *and* abortion — and to sympathize even with *microbes*, as in “Hospitalized”. While he wrote poems against and lamenting Ronald Ryan’s hanging by the Bolte Liberal government, he also persists in reading his anti-abortion poem “The Wholly Innocent” to audiences including women who’ll be furious. Although “Up the Wall” is clearly sympathetic to suburban mothers, the symbolism of his earlier political poem “Americanized” must be as disturbing for feminists as his anti-abortion poem. He doesn’t ask why the young child’s mother leaves him at home. (In 1964 it could have been lack of child-care facilities.) Obviously, then, he feels his poems deeply. He can’t expect to be popular with everyone everywhere.

It would be easy for poets if nothing changed. Failure to cope with change, however, eliminates too much potential subject matter. Human-made transience is so obvious and so important an experience for the Western world since the Renaissance, let alone since the Industrial Revolution and the silicone chip, that inability or unwillingness to cope with the issues must limit any



writer's claim to a major place in his or her own time. Dawe confronts the issue head on. But does his confrontation mean that his poetry will become outmoded as quickly as William Cullen Bryant claimed would happen with literature using steamboats?

In poems such as "The Not-so-good Earth", Dawe's satire on Australian attitudes to Asian suffering, the 'dated' references to pre-color television and old commercials in no way affect the moral concern of the poet, and the compassion that through political and literary comment sheets home the suffering to its source. I've thought about this poem thousands of times while watching television.

In the famous "Homecoming" the hypnotic repetition, representing the relentless tally of war dead, creates a ritual lament:

All day, day after day, they're bringing them home,  
they're picking them up, those they can find,  
and bringing them home,  
they're bringing them in, piled on the hulls of  
Grants, in trucks, in convoys,  
they're zipping them up in green plastic bags,  
they're tagging them now in Saigon, in the  
mortuary coolness  
they're giving them names, they're rolling them  
out of  
the deep-freeze lockers . . .

(It is worth noting here that here Dawe grieves for the *American* war dead as victims, as elsewhere he refers to American involvement in Vietnam as that "long dishonored *honorable* cause" (our italics). Dawe's agonized ambivalence characterized and reflects the public debate of the time.)

In the savagely satiric dramatic monologue "A Victorian Hangman Tells his Love" —

Dear one, forgive my appearing before you like  
this,  
in a two-piece track-suit, welder's goggles  
and a green cloth cap like some gross bee — this  
is the State's idea . . .

—Dawe has written a poem designed to last longer than the evening's headlines, as it has.

In such poems as these the topicality of the allusions has not affected the continuing status and relevance of the work. Rather, the immediacy of the allusions, indeed their very homeliness, has created a dimension to the poems which has been relevant to their survival. It is an approach common to a great deal of Dawe's work, and is

very much part of his enjoyment of his losers, battlers and potential victims getting their own back.

In "Breakthrough", for instance, a girl dies happily in hospital while singing a commercial. In the hilarious dramatic monologue "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon", the potential customers for encyclopaedias manage to deface the product so much that the salesman just gives up, leaving the books. In the famous comic poem "Condolences of the Season" the baby is indifferent to relatives' speculating on family resemblances:

Lapped in a bunny-rug, you stare them out  
and, smarter than they realize, play it dumb,  
while, slung for burping purposes across  
your mother's shoulder, all is well I see,  
catching your droll heretical wink at me . . .

The ants in "The Little Blokes" are the only species to survive nuclear catastrophe. The much maligned and utterly insignificant "Corn Flake" proves as enduring as Kellogg's commercials. Moreover, the odd flake stuck to the wall can outlast several families. "In Praise of Second-hand Paperbacks" is equally humorous:

(in a torn Penguin copy of Montaigne  
a bug's entombed forever; in the Pan edition  
of John D. McDonald's *Man-Trap* two silver-  
fish,  
a finger-nail paring, and a lone blonde hair  
debate the likelihood of resurrection).

Obviously, then, Dawe doesn't just sympathize with victims. The comic mode of presentation shouldn't blind us to the deeply-felt and fully-realized underdog allegiance: a potential victim of brain-washing by commercials, a working-class family, a baby, a corn flake and second-hand paperbacks. These clear and enjoyable poems are among the best he's written.

Although Dawe's elegies and lyrics aren't his most characteristic and original work, he's nevertheless written some fine poems in this area, including some that defy categorization. "Elegy for Drowned Children" and "Katrina" are well known, the latter a very moving poem about the possible death of his daughter:

And you are still naked between earth and sky.  
Transfusion-wounds in your heels, your dummy  
taped in your mouth.



“Grief” is a powerful evocation of emotion in witch imagery:

and you seem to be moving very carefully  
in the direction of some marzipan cottage  
where understanding stoops in the doorway  
like a dark witch sweeping  
the scrubbed stones with a twig broom  
— in the folds of her woollen skirts  
many centuries  
her one tooth trembling welcome  
and on her haired chin  
a love-wart.

“Going”, however, is a “refusal to mourn” poem about the poet’s mother-in-law’s dying and death. The poem’s optimism is an optimism about life. The very recent “The Cough” is neither elegy nor lyric, while possessing the qualities of both. An art that conceals art tells the story of an inherited parrot that’s acquired the now deceased owner’s cough. It might sound funny. The poem, however, is almost unbearably sad. I predict it will become one of his most famous.

Having rescued the emotions of these four poems from the jaws of sociological determinism, then, I must nevertheless emphasize that similar rescuing across the range of Dawe’s work would waste too much of the poetry. For example, he’s deeply conscious of various kinds of mobility in Australian experience. “One Jump Ahead” presents forced geographical mobility in the suburbs (albeit not all loss) while “Drifters”, on the subject of voluntary moving, comes close to a lyric. “Under Way” deals with a truckie’s sheer thrill at being on the move for its own sake.

In 1969 I heard Dawe publicly proclaim himself “the most sexless poet in Australia”. A defensive remark, I thought. If it were true, of course, it would be relevant to assessment of his overall output. Fortunately, it’s not. While it *is* true that he’s neither confessed nor depicted aspects of his own sex life, it’s equally true that sex recurs throughout his work. The “consummation” between the Victorian hangman and the condemned man is even more savage when one recalls the words, “Come, my love”, are both figurative and literal. What’s even more grotesque, however, is the question as to whether or not the condemned man has been tranquillized. If so, his *whole* body would be slack. Whether that would be better or worse is an open question. In “The Raped Girl’s Father” the father’s inability to accept his daughter’s total rejection of the rape is itself another kind of rape experience. In the obscenely

satirical dramatic monologue “Weapons Training” sex is the main reference point for war. The drill instructor disciplines a recruit by asking whether he’s “a queer”. The “crown-jewels” have to be tucked away during cockpit drill or the recruits won’t be able to turn the key in the ignition on returning home. The magazine isn’t “a woman’s tit”. The sexual references increase the violence in and of this already violent satire.

There’s nothing violent, however, about “Never Again”, which means *until next time* for both the man and the woman. Moreover, the title of the comic “At Shagger’s Funeral” speaks for itself. “Getting It Together” is also comic. Although a possible interpretation could be the irretrievable loss of *male* virginity, the poem works as a narrative about two young men in a jungle who find a large statue with a huge erect penis. They accidentally shatter the penis and can’t put it together again. A sort of Humpty Dumpty plus sex.

The one remaining poem that deals primarily with sex is the comic “Wood-eye”. This man repeats “Would I? Would I, what!” to male audiences every time a woman is sighted or mentioned. A feminist reader who just dismisses Dawe’s enjoyment of this character will fail to understand an important part of our social history. “Wood-eye” fantasizes about women as a means of communicating with other men, as a means to mateship, as a basis of and for equality. To the inevitable complaints that it’s a pity women have to be used to consolidate mateship, I’d suggest that this behavior is at least *understandable* in war or, in this case, in a cancer ward. At any rate, there will be no male reader of this page who won’t vouch for at least the past prevalence of this conspiratorial attitude.

While sex hasn’t proved to be the poetic problem Dawe imagined, it’s only realistic to point to other problems in his poetry. Herman Melville said that genius is full of trash. And so, I suppose, is major talent. Dawe’s description of his own poetic process is revealing. Referring to love, war, cities and dreams he writes in the new edition of *Sometimes Gladness*:

If we succeed to some extent in dealing with these concerns, the skills we have used nevertheless remain mysterious in their origins and occasions. We cannot predict when they will prevail, and when not — and bad poems, like dropped catches, proclaim our common humanity. We all have to write them in order to write better ones, and it does not do to lament them. When the French officer surrendering at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 hesitated, at the entrance



to his bunker, to step on the body of a dead Viet Minh soldier, the Viet Minh commander is reported to have said: 'Step on him. He has done his bit for the revolution.' We should see our least successful poems in a similar phlegmatic light — they, too, have done their bit for our cause.

In other words, *sometimes* success, in a book entitled *Sometimes Gladness*. While Dawe's view of human suffering and oppression underlies the appropriate title — only *sometimes* gladness — I've argued that his successes across a range of work occur more frequently than *sometimes*. Quite often, I've implied. And fairly regularly over the years. Not all writers fit a model of development and maturation. Indeed, many who do fit that model produce little of worth in their early work.

Why do some of Dawe's poems fail? For several reasons. Firstly, there's nothing new in complaining that his choice and handling of subjects can be too easy. In "Reflections on a Benevolent Dictatorship" the mental home warder predictably doesn't know whether or not he's nuts. "Head for the Hills!" provides an excuse for listing stereotypes. Other poems that fail in this way include "Teaching the Syllabus", "Reverie of a Swimmer", "Prison Alphabet" and "Search and Destroy". Secondly, he can be trivial. Examples include "Evening: Night", "Near Murgon" and "Which One's the Dog?" from early work, "Going to a Seminar" from later work and "The Swimming Pool" from recent work. Thirdly, he can be sentimental, as he concedes; for instance, the last lines of "Planning a Service":

and finally, after the Blessing, please leave the  
church-door open,  
in case a little wind, and a few leaves,  
should sneak in out of the cold.

Fourthly, Dawe can over-explain. In "The Privilege" the only lines that work are the nine lines on the By-law 49a of the Right to Laugh legislation. The rest of the poem contains lines such as:

Here we grow policemen on trees like leaves  
and they hang  
from special branches . . .

All "Gorilla gorilla" needs is its approving description of the animal's shitting; not pontification on the subject. Regrettably, "News from Judaea" is spoilt by its superfluous last line.

Fifthly, Dawe's extended metaphors and similes can seem strained. In particular, the poet rarely rises to anything more than banality when using sea and island imagery. Examples include "Happiness Is the Art of Being Broken", "'A' is For Asia" and "Betrayers".

Sixthly, the blank verse rhetoric of his very early poems diminishes only to re-emerge in quite recent work as, yes, pomposity — no matter how odd it may sound. Examples from recent work include "A Double Haunting", "Creative Process" and "Beforehand". Finally, his poems don't always survive their often throw-away subject matter. "Televistas" is the most glaring example. I gain *something* from the poem when I recognize some movies or television programs. There are so many popular references, however, that I'm sure I miss most of the meaning. Although "Falling Asleep over TV" makes the same point effectively, "Televistas" fails to deal with transience without itself being transient. (The transience of his regular verse journalism in the *Toowoomba Chronicle* has been conceded by its omission from the revised edition.)

If these failures seem extensive they can be put into perspective by noting that the poetry of some of his contemporaries isn't entirely without its faults and limitations. Unlike Dawe, R. A. Simpson rarely achieves vivid visual imagery or dramatic monologue voices other than his own. Although Thomas Shapcott shares with Dawe a command of suburban family milieu, his historical poetry, *unlike* Dawe's, has been characterized by unrelieved dullness. Vincent Buckley was middle-aged before writing sequences of poems that non-Irish Catholics could *like* as distinct from respect. Unlike Dawe, throughout the 1950s and 1960s Buckley was more critical of Russia than of the United States. Chris Wallace-Crabbe remains so uncommitted to anything it's not surprising to find oneself muttering "More matter with less art". Remember him expressing boredom over Whitlam's Labor Party having the numbers in Diamond Valley? Compare the world-shattering significance of his poem "Toes" about — wait for it, yes, only toes. Les Murray shares many of Dawe's opinions but can't seem to avoid trying to save the reader's soul for or on the rural atlas — that anti-elitist elitism so remote from the experience of urban and suburban Australians. Comparisons are useful up to a point; invidious, however, in the end. There's little to be gained by blaming Simpson, Shapcott, Buckley, Wallace-Crabbe and Murray for having aims different from Dawe's.

It's unnecessary to bury them in order to praise him.

I would like to make one personal statement. I don't agree with all of Bruce Dawe's views. I'm not a programmatic imitator of his work. It's likely, however, that those that I see as my best political poems, such as "Filmclip" and "Bob Hawke Replies", wouldn't have been written without Dawe expanding the possibilities of

Australian poetry, particularly the political dramatic monologue. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank him for his unwitting influence on me. I'm sure he's too well aware of the Crucifixion to want a disciple.

*Graham Rowlands, poet and free-lance, lives in Adelaide.*

### NEW READERS, BEGIN HERE . . .

*a political synopsis*

Having left Easter Island and its monumental fictions far behind, we find ourselves now in a world of eyebrows and top-heavy hair and suits worth anything up to five thousand votes a piece in crucial electorates (the Eighties Look is smooth, with a touch of wildness lurking underneath, Apollo playing catch-up with Dioynsus), cool blondes to author biographies, a media with a taste for *belle sauvage* to hook into with flat and baleful eyes that corner every question. This is consensus-time in the valley, and summat of this lingers like memories of women embraced in dreams as top execs (reluctant to abandon, at the first sign of winter, warm unlikely arms that beckoned them as recently as April) try to sound tough but eternally tender to the spirit of concord moving creatively on the face of Burley Griffin. . .

The dark, extending beyond the single spot illuminating our peppery maestro as he gestures in the economic tubas, crowds with the underprivileged factions of the left whose feathers droop for want of flying-time or tensile wires to swing them from the wings — it's hard yakka being a saviour in *this* theatre, the galleries filled with pressmen who assume that inside every Mr Fixit languishes a Mr Baggy-Pants they're duty-bound to free from his sleek carapace. . . Ah, wilderness! The Franklin's tale is ushered in with some rude speech while the gerontic Cock o' the North crows in anticipation on the peak of his sub-tropic dunghill — will *Bob Sober beat Joh Drunk* with years of fixing everything from baton-wielding cops to ballot-boxes?!

Now, reader with a stomach for the Flo and Vertigo of politics in this fair foolish land, and half a heart to hope for sense tomorrow, or if not, then at least a chance to say: 'We saw these blocks new-quarried and chiselled into enigmatic shape before they, too, being lichened o'er with lump-sum super benefits sank back into the primal ooze called history' — reader, *read on!*

BRUCE DAWE



## COMING HOME

(after a poem by Bruce Dawe)

They're bringing them home, on Qantas, Singapore  
Airlines  
and Thai International, they're serving them drinks  
— gin and tonic for Debbie and Tracey, beer for Gary  
and Wayne —  
they're making them comfortable and laughing at their  
jokes,  
admiring their duty-free instamatics and recorders,  
their Balinese bangles and carved teak Buddhas.

They're bringing them home —  
junior executive moustaches, pierced ears and streaked  
perms —  
children of nature, tanned and tired, strayed far from  
the T.V. quiz show, the beer garden and the barbecue.

Thirty-thousand feet up, the sun slips over the wings  
and they're telling their boyfriends that the clouds  
look like cotton-wool,  
they're dreaming about ¼ acre blocks, the permanence  
of brick,  
and pastel weddings that would please their mothers;  
crossing the ocean edge  
and they're telling their girlfriends they might get that  
Mazda,  
a red one, and they're thinking about work on Monday  
at the panel-beaters, the bank and the Primary School;  
they're thinking about that last re-entry and an off-shore  
breeze,  
about the warm feeling that comes after a perfect ride,  
like watching American situation comedy.

The seatbelts are fastened over Adidas t-shirts  
and cigarettes are extinguished. In the sunset  
they look down at the Harbour, cradled forever  
by the limits of their imagination.  
The heavy jets exhale like punctured balloons.  
Light travellers in search of the hopeful  
they drive through streets where the multi-nationals  
glitter and flirt with each other,  
toward neat houses and windows  
as familiar as the cover of the Women's Weekly.  
They're bringing them home where summer must never  
end,  
to a smile that has slipped  
before they noticed.

PHILIP NEILSEN

## TEACHER TRAINING

all right now everyone sit down and be  
quiet please we're going to please sit  
down craig now we're going to look at a  
poem by be quiet please julie a poem by a  
man called not now shane in a minute  
the poem is called weapons training and it's  
Put it down craig and leave sonia alone  
stay there sonia he wont bite you Don't  
bite her craig or you'll be in trouble  
all right now the poet's name is bruce  
Julie please be quiet What is it shane no  
you can't you should have gone before all right  
now Sit down Craig for the last time amanda you  
too all right now this poem is by bruce dawe it's  
about BE QUIET ALL OF YOU JUST SIT DOWN AND  
SHUT UP CRAIG GET OUT  
OF THE CLASSROOM AND SEE ME AT THE END OF  
THE LESSON

ALL RIGHT now that you're in the right mood we'll  
begin

GEOFF SHARROCK

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for the Helen Palmer Memorial Committee

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WARREN STRAKER **And Granny Makes Three**

I finally left my parents' home to share a house with people I knew in the city. As my life with one family finished, another was developing to take its place. My hair grew longer, hornrimmed spectacles changed to wire frames, pressed jeans became old and faded and day was replaced by night as the time to live and play. Those gales which blew through the late sixties, bringing change and turmoil, blew down our street, through the front door, spreading the marijuana smoke, depositing people, ideas, movements — then blew it all away agin.

At first I played the role of voyeur on a cast iron balcony, holding high-tea parties, while the other players moved and performed around and below me. The chemist manufactured in the kitchen. The *lovely* lady initiated schoolboys in the shower. Patricia, who worked as a female impersonator, stomped through the house in jackboots, crying out in despair, "But I am a lady. Nobody believes me. I really am a lady." While Hugh, the engineer, came, stayed and watched, then ran away to become a Christian and was never seen again.

On Sundays — every Sunday — I would return to the suburbs to have dinner with my family. There in the twilight of the lounge-room, where the day was filtered through velvet curtains and absorbed in the outcrops of dark massive furniture, my grandmother sat sunk in an armchair sucking tea out of a dunked biscuit, crocheting another in the endless line of doilies as she watched the flicker of the television set and missed her cues in conversation. Her teeth were gone, she was senile and though she grasped at it, time was running away from her.

At the other end of the same room the family, my mother, father, three sisters and myself, sat around the dinner table. It was here I learnt that home cooking wasn't all it was cracked up to be,

as another baked dinner descended heavily onto my Saturday night stomach. The ritual was watched over by a collection of ancestors whose photographs stared down from walls, up from small tables or out from the mantelpiece, china cabinet and the top of the television set. Nobody smiled much.

After we had taken our desserts my father and I would engage in habitual knocking and bunting. My mother signalled the end of the meal by springing from the table, crying and demanding that I return home and make the family whole once more. My father, never an emotional man, would make this request more as an economic proposition: "Return to the fold O Black Sheep or be cut off from thine inheritance and birth-right."

But he was too late — generations too late. As he was trying to call me back, I was flying away towards the sun to burn my wings in any way I could.

Meanwhile in the kitchen, along with the roast lamb, my mother was cooking up a plan basted with a sauce of mysticism and magic.

Let me explain. Both sides of my family were made up of spiritualists. Before I was born my parents and grandparents would take flowers to the spiritualist church to commune with the dead and glimpse the future. My childhood was full of doors that opened by themselves, creaking stairs, wobbling tables—and it all meant something. And of course there was planchette, a flat egg-shaped board mounted on castors with a pencil stub protruding through its apex. With both my parents' hands on its back for guidance, planchette would squeak across blood-spotted butcher-shop paper leaving in its wake swirls of messages from those who had passed over to the other world.

When I was in high school, planchette told



my parents I had a spirit guide, Dominic, a fourteenth century French monk. This explained why I enjoyed cloistered studying and could deal with the conjunctions and translations of high school French. At that time I really wanted to believe it all.

But one day, in a science lesson, I was called out to the front of the class and given a test tube to heat over a bunsen burner. The liquid in the tube changed color. This was greater than magic—it could be explained. The spirits rushed from my life forever. From then and for some time I was to view life from the shade of the spreading chemistry, and later in ways undreamt of by my teachers.

After my grandmother died I claimed her brass bed. This had been her marriage bed. A generation had been conceived in it, one of her children had been born in it and she had died in it. The bed was a shining swirl of Art Nouveau decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays and porcelain knobs. Throughout our childhood my sisters and I climbed its scaffolding, rattling it until the brasses rang like a chorus of tambourines and then once abroad, steering from the bridge, we sailed it out in search of adventure, or defended it, the citadel, with pillows from repeated attacks from the marauders.

Now it was in need of love and polish. I took it to pieces and brought it back with me to the city where, like Aladdin, I rubbed up the brasses and repaired the scaffolding until it gleamed with new life. I was then ready to add chapters of my own to its history.

A giant, lusty lady—we called her The Amazon—came to stay with us, bringing nimble fingers trained in the gentle art of massage. In granny's bed, with the candles burning low and our minds spiced by clouds of grass and incense, those fingers eased peace into my life, while a ribbon of musicians blared out from the cassette player. But every Sunday, as usual, it was back to the homestead for the weekly roast.

The family portraits were buried in a box in the garage after grandmother's death. Curtains were pulled aside and the house became lighter as paint and new furniture were added. My parents were trying so hard to exorcise the past of which they were a part. Then the visions started. My mother speaks:

"Michael? That place where you are staying—what color is it?"

"Black. Why?"

"Oh, nothing." Half-choked laughter. "I had a

strange dream the other night. I told your father about it. I could see this dark house and I followed the path right up to the door. Above the door was a sign which said 'House of Sin'."

"Really?" I replied wondering what they really knew. "Did you go in?"

"Why don't you come home, Michael?" Her words came out in a rush. "We worry so much about you. We could fix up your grandmother's room for you."

"This is not my home any more," I replied quietly.

"But you are our son," she pleaded.

And the following week:

"Michael. Yesterday when I was making a cake for you, I could feel your grandmother there beside me. She was upset and angry. When I asked her what was wrong, she said you shouldn't have let Michael have the bed. What is going on in that house?"

For an instant the roast lamb quivered on the end of my fork. I wanted to drop everything and run back to the comparative sanity of my urban madhouse. Yet I couldn't do it to them. They were my parents. I couldn't show I didn't belong here anymore. I told myself it was only a normal Sunday dinner.

Dark times had fallen on the city in the form of the annual marijuana drought. Telephones rang, people made pilgrimages in search of the green herb, and in the hotels and wine bars voices buzzed like a chorus of locusts until they had almost drowned out the music with their question: "Where? Where? Where is it?"

In our house we had beaten the problem. Months earlier we had started a compost heap. The burnt-out backyard soil had been dug up, fertilised, watered and turned. As the last of the winter rains finished we planted the seeds.

Morning and night, The Amazon and I squatted in the garden, waiting. Our vigil was rewarded at last. The seedlings rose out of the ground waving their shrouded heads as they stretched for the light.

Just as everything appeared to be going smoothly, The Amazon took it upon herself to do a little purse snatching in a local wine bar. It is alleged that a customer noticed a hand scurrying away along the counter grasping his wallet. It is a fact that he stopped it by smashing a bottle over it. In shock, in the casualty ward, The Amazon gave her correct address. Then they found her private pharmacy in her purse and threatened to call the police. I rushed home, ripped up the



garden and buried the plants in the garbage bin.

I remembered the snakes and ladders games I played when I was a kid. There were those long ladders which could take you higher and higher to the top row of the board. Then, when you needed one throw of the dice to win, the wrong number would turn up and you would slide down the back of a particularly long snake to the beginning of the game and be greeted by some corny proverb, like 'pride comes before a fall'.

I sat alone, sunk in my bean bag chair, reflecting on this and feeling sorry for myself. Then I remembered something else, something my mother had told me about. The family once had its own graveyard. I was determined to start planting again.

The cemetery wasn't easy to find. A hatchet-shaped block of land surrounded by project homes crowding in on each other. The old rural resting place of my ancestors had become middle-class suburbia. In death they had made it. Here lay the physical remains of those faces who, in photographs, had haunted and influenced my life. Nobody had been buried here for years and the headstones, some dropping their leaded letters, others enclosed by rusting, pocked iron picket fences were being inundated by a sea of rampant blackberries.

In a flippant mood I thought an indignant letter to the Herald might stir consciences and save me some work: Sir, Something must be done to amend this dreadful neglect. . . But then my mind produced an army of interested bodies: *in situ* historians on the paper chase, landscape gardeners, the church and the curious. Kneeling there amongst the thorns and weeds, carefully remembering my locations, I planted my seedings and left in peace.

Sunday dinner with my parents again. Same setting. Same characters. Same food. As we begin sipping our tea there is the same conversation.

Question: Why do I continue putting myself through this each week?

Answer: They expect it of me and they want to see me.

Question: But isn't it like a television soap opera where you have anticipated the plot yet can't be bothered changing the channel?

Answer: Of course — but I am their son.

Again my mother speaks: "Michael, I don't know what it means. Perhaps you do?" She pauses for effect. "I was having a sleep and when I woke I could see your grandmother standing there at the end of the bed, shaking her head slowly and looking as black as thunder. 'What is it,

Mum?' I asked. But all she said was, 'My boy. My boy' and continued to shake her head. Then she was gone."

I was tired of this game. "I don't know," I answered, pretending to be bored. However I was a little intrigued. I had been the old girl's favorite amongst the grandchildren, and she had always called me her boy. "Perhaps you ought to ask planchette," I suggested cheekily.

"Yes. Yes. Get planchette. Ask planchette," responded the senate of sisters.

We cleared the table while my mother hunted for a clean sheet of white paper and my father brought in planchette.

My parents sat together at the table each placing a hand, one on top of the other, on planchette and slowly moving it over the paper. The room was silent except for the sounds of our breathing, a clock ticking somewhere, and the eerie squeal planchette made as it moved to communicate with the other world.

All of a sudden it was as though planchette had taken on life. It made bold strokes up and down the paper and darted from one corner to another, almost dragging my parents out of their chairs. My youngest sister giggled and was prodded and shushed as the rest of us sat quietly transfixed by this phenomenon.

My father's voice trembled as he spoke, "Is anyone there?"

The board wrote "Yes" then stopped moving. "Could you please give us a sign?" he asked.

Planchette dashed up to the top left-hand corner of the paper and began drawing whorls.

"Look!" my mother gushed. "It's Mum. That's her doily pattern."

"Is that you, Mother?" my father asked.

"Yes," the board wrote again.

"What is troubling you, Mother?" he asked.

"M-I-C-H-A-E-L," the letters were spelt out clearly. All eyes turned to me.

"Ask it what I have done," I whispered, not daring to look at them.

But there was no need to ask. It was moving again. First it drew what appeared to be a tree. Then it drew an oblong shape with another tree in the middle of it and underneath it wrote very clearly: "Near mother's grave."

"You know what this means, Michael?" My mother's question threatened me. Planchette jerked and squeaked once more, finishing with a slash across the paper. This time the letters read "D-R-U-G-S".

"So!" exclaimed my father. He stood up and looked down at planchette's scribbling and then



at me. His face was flushed and wild, forever reminding me of a mask of Kali the Destroyer. "You mean to say you are growing marijuana there," he thumped the paper with his fist. "In the cemetery?"

I had not said a word, nor had my sisters, who like spectators in a gallery turned their eyes from me to our parents then back to me again.

"The police will get you," mother wailed. "Oh, what will the relatives say. How could you bring yourself to do this . . . this to us?"

"Did anyone see you?" my father cut in.

"Of course not. At least I don't think so."

"Then you will get rid of that stuff," he ordered. "What could have possessed you? Your friends in the city made you like this. Never go near that cemetery again."

Of course I did nothing about the plants, but I did keep away from the cemetery. Then some weeks later I telephoned my mother. She had seen Granny again. This time in a dream where she was cradling a flower in her arms and smiling. I went back to the cemetery.

It was a hot, sticky midsummer's day. Cicadas drummed from the trees as I walked up the lane and the perspiration streamed down my forehead, stinging my eyes.

It had all changed. Do-gooders had been about. They had mown between the plots and hacked away the blackberries leaving piles of weeds to dry into dust.

I was too late. I had been found out and it had all been for nothing, I thought. But when I calmed down and looked around carefully I found the crop. It wasn't a huge plantation. Just a few plants, stumpy but resinous and ripe for the picking. I figured it was a miracle.

While it lasted the Granny Grass, as I called it, became almost legendary with my friends. It was the strongest weed I had ever smoked. Then it was gone and so were the others.

The Amazon had long since left me. The last I heard she had sailed away, a guest on a catamaran heading north. My sisters married, vanishing into safe lives of their own. Granny never appeared again, and I lost my parents in psychoanalysis.

I knew my mother and father had conned me with planchette and their contacts with Granny, but I never worked out how they managed it. I told the story to my analyst and asked him what he made of it. He shrugged:

"With you they're experts — after all, they have been manipulating you all your life."





# Righteousness and the Right

STUART MACINTYRE

*Twenty-five years of Quadrant*

To rummage through the early numbers of *Quadrant* in the late 1950s is to be reminded how much has changed and how much remains the same. Among the editorial advisers we find both Manning Clark and Leonie Kramer, while the end-page reveals that *Quadrant* is sponsored by the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom. Its founding editor, James McAuley, sets out a defence of authority and moral order against “a joyless and inhuman industrial society . . . , a squalid mass culture . . . , and boredom and depravity of urban civilization”.<sup>1</sup> The corporate advertisers, on the other hand, insist that mankind and industry form “a partnership that everywhere powers the march towards prosperity and a better way of life”.

These full-page advertisements tell us a good deal about the spirit of the age, the confidence and moral earnestness of corporate capital in an era of full employment when overseas investment still meant industrial growth. Flaunting its steel and glass monolith in North Sydney, the M.L.C. insurance company declares that “The progressive development and economic stability of Australia has evoked the admiration of the world”. General Motors Holden describes itself as “A link in the chain of Australia’s progress”. If Ampol warns that “It is easy for the cynical and the indolent to query just how much real enterprise there is in ‘Free Enterprise’,” Caltex answers that “It’s up to Business Men to tell the story of PROFITS”.

In these first issues McAuley sketches in some of the political consequences and alludes to others. The Left is in retreat. Labor has split, and the issues that divide Evatt and Santamaria make it unlikely that “the old combination of diverse radicals, reformers, utopians, Christians, secularists, crooks, opportunists and totalitarians” can be restored. Expectations associated with the Post-War Reconstruction programme of the Labor

government — that planning can ensure prosperity for all, redistribution can remove inequality, and that a more vital, fulfilling way of life will follow — have vanished. So Menzies reaps the electoral rewards of full employment, and the radicals inveigh against a dead uniformity that they created. “Faith in Democratic Socialism has died almost overnight.” There is a thoroughgoing crisis in social relationships; the family and the very notion of authority are under attack; life is invaded with anxiety, disorder and moral delirium; even “the idea of happiness has been rendered largely unintelligible”. In the arts the bankruptcy of modernism is recognised, and it is seen to be “merely a last writhing, under various disguises, of the naturalistic and romantic traditions it pretended to attack”. In short, the emptiness of secular meliorism is revealed.<sup>2</sup>

But now, overshadowing all of this, there is the fundamental challenge of Communism.

Suddenly [writes McAuley] this one huge glaring visage, this enormous mask of blood and lies, starts up above the horizon and dominates the landscape, a figure of judgement speaking to each person in a different tone or tongue, but with the same question: “And what do you think about *me*?”<sup>3</sup>

The general context of *Quadrant*’s establishment is the Cold War; the immediate context is the Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising which, together with Krushchev’s revelations at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, threw the Australian Left into disarray. Before 1956 it was possible for progressives to follow the advance of Communism with sympathetic interest, and to treat its detractors with scepticism. After 1956, McAuley insists, it is impossible. More than this, the menace of Communism fuses all the other



issues. Historically and culturally it gathers up the modern ills and presents a chance for its opponents to purge society of its sickness. "Truly an exhilarating time!" proclaims McAuley, in which every menace and risk is at the same time a privilege and an opportunity.

In spite of all that can be said against our age, what a moment it is to be alive in! What an epoch for a magazine to emerge in!<sup>4</sup>

The allusion to Wordsworth's "Prelude", inverting its recollection of the revolutionary springtime "when Reason seemed the most to assert her rights", was well chosen. McAuley was a conservative, to use that commonly-misused word in its proper sense. He looked back to a way of life in which the sacred was the "ultimate source of being and order and value", a way of life that had been destroyed.<sup>5</sup> Industrialism had sundered the organic society and left an agglomeration of possessive individuals. The Enlightenment had proclaimed the supremacy of reason and dethroned the authority of revelation and transcendental sources of knowledge. Liberalism had overturned authority. The twentieth century now suffered the ills stored up for it in the nineteenth.

Democratism eats democracy

And brings on, swift or slow, a tyranny.

The framework of the state is up for sale

Ethics put to the vote: will right prevail?

They measure 'values' by a crude amount

And fix their morals by a Kinsey-count;

A formless relativism ends our days,

And good and evil are but culture-traits.<sup>6</sup>

However eclectic McAuley's sense of the traditional order, however unlikely his belief that Australia might reclaim that tradition, his conservatism was authentic.

But at the same time it was lop-sided. In tracing the decline of genuine civilization and the rise of modernity, McAuley concentrated on ideas rather than historical processes, on values rather than social relationships. He was concerned to show how the "tendencies represented by the terms liberalism, positivism, naturalism, agnosticism, materialism, pantheism, panvitalism, secularism, nationalism, socialism, progressivism" became woven into a pattern that dominated modern life.<sup>7</sup> Now the attack on Enlightenment rationalism and its nineteenth-century offshoots occupies an important place in conservative thought. But seldom in such isolation. When contemporary conservatives denounced the doctrines of utilitarianism and political economy, they were reacting against an emergent social and economic order. Above all,

they were reacting against the market, which they saw to be destroying all social bonds, leaving — as Carlyle put it — "cash payment the sole nexus". These conservatives recognised the crucial centrality of industry and wage labour:

Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age . . . Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.<sup>8</sup>

Yet McAuley's conservatism remains silent on these aspects; or rather, evasive. When critics pointed to the advertisements carried in the early numbers of *Quadrant*, messages of celebration for the very creed of material progress that his editorials denounced, then he fell back on the defence that "private business is part of the structure of a free society".<sup>9</sup>

*Quadrant's* target in those early years was liberalism. It was the liberal idea of progress that unleashed the attacks on custom and tradition, liberal naivete that blinded its adherents to the darkness within man. Communism, in essence, was an atavistic reaction to the atomised society that liberals had created. And even when the monster they had set loose returned to confront them, McAuley charged, "we hear the ghosts of rhetorical humanisms, academic positivisms and progressive illuminisms", squeaking and gibbering and imploring us to maintain the most rigorous neutrality.<sup>10</sup> (Soft-hearted do-gooders have remained a perennial cause of annoyance to the tough-minded *Quadrant* cold warriors. Frank Knopfmacher, for example, is quite at home with the ideologues of the right or the left. As he put it in his *Quadrant* piece on "My Political Education", "it is the boyish, angloid academic who gives me the creeps", the "long-haired middle-aged men of fifty who are still behaving like adolescents".<sup>11</sup>)

In his short biography of James McAuley, Peter Coleman recalls that some members of the Australian Committee for Cultural Freedom doubted McAuley's suitability as editor of their magazine. "No one questioned his literary qualifications but some on the committee asked whether his religious and political ideas disqualified him as editor of a liberal cultural magazine."<sup>12</sup> Their aim, after all, was a broad coalition of opinion which would be all the more effective because it was not restricted to a narrow band of the political spectrum, and the committee itself included members of the ALP right wing as well as non-partisan



figures. In its second issue McAuley thought it necessary to rebut the misconception that *Quadrant* was simply a journal of the right. Not at all, he said, it was a journal opposed to totalitarianism; and totalitarian threats came from both left and right. True, the “chief threat today to civilized life” came from the Jacobin-totalitarian tradition which from the French Revolution onwards had been “the hard core of what is called ‘the left.’” But within what he called the bounds of normal civilised politics, *Quadrant* repudiated identification with either camp.<sup>13</sup>

Through the fifties and into the sixties *Quadrant* maintained a distinctive urgency and zeal. Communism, the “archaic monster”, was advancing—in Tibet, then Cuba and then, crucially, in Vietnam. Doomed to extinction, it would still use all its cunning to crush and devour free societies. Convinced as he was that “the long dark winter of modern history may be near its end and a new springtime at hand”, McAuley threw on disputation.<sup>14</sup> Coleman’s biography suggests that his political involvement was reluctant and episodic, that of a poet driven by his sense of duty to do that for which he had little stomach. Vincent Buckley’s memoir seems to me much closer to the mark. He makes the point that McAuley “was not a poet who dabbled in politics, he was a dogmatically based intellectual politician who attacked and was attacked on a political basis”.<sup>15</sup> Even within the Church, his politics were marked by fierce factional intrigue against the bureaucrats and betrayers, those who would not join his crusade. He sought no quarter and gave none.

*Quadrant* was ideologically compulsive. It insisted that the lines be drawn. The menace of Communism was so great and so urgent that it demanded an answer—“And what do you think about *me*?”—and the sin of the liberals was their refusal to give one, or at least one free of qualifications.

In a controversial article that appeared in *Quadrant* in 1958, Frank Knopfelmacher warned of “The Threat to Academic Freedom” in Australian universities. Open pluralistic institutions, he said, were particularly vulnerable to Communist manipulation. In times of strength the Communists promoted their own and worked by open indoctrination; in times of weakness they fell back on whispering campaigns against their enemies and threw their weight behind pliable and colourless neutrals. Such tactics demanded “firm disciplinary measures” on the part of the elite, and “shrewd and resolute politically motivated

action”.<sup>16</sup> Leave aside the contradiction of destroying freedom in the name of freedom that Knopfelmacher, with his characteristic bluntness, reveals. For a conservative there is a further difficulty. From Burke onwards conservatives in the Anglo-Saxon tradition have been wary of excessive ideological fervour and reluctant to tamper with the institutions of civil society. To define a creed and insist that all sections of public life must conform to it was to weaken the force of custom and tradition—worse still, it was to politicise institutions that ought to be beyond politics. Yet this was what *Quadrant* proposed. Its politics were voracious.

Many of these arguments will be all too familiar to older readers of *Overland* who experienced their effects during the late 1950s and 1960s. I am prompted to rehearse them here by reading the recent anthology, *Quadrant. Twenty-five Years*, together with Coleman’s account of the journal in his biography of McAuley. Both seem to me to do less than justice to the distinctiveness of McAuley’s conservatism in the early years, and to play down the subsequent discontinuities.

The decline of the old *Quadrant* was a slow process. It survived the revelation of CIA funding, though not as easily as Coleman suggests. The position taken by McAuley in 1967, when the news broke, was that the submerged link was unfortunate. By channelling money through the Congress for Cultural Freedom to magazines like *Quadrant*, the CIA had made a “well-intentioned blunder and placed those whose independence they meant to respect in an embarrassing position”. Coleman quotes this passage and adds that *Quadrant* had no prior knowledge of the link. “There had been nothing to make anyone aware of the secret CIA funding, since no one had been subjected to pressure”.<sup>17</sup> This is disingenuous. The Australian Association for Cultural Freedom had been established in the closest consultation with its parent body in Paris. From the beginning there was an intimate association with United States agencies, and some of the cheques that supported Australian activities came directly from the United States. The evidence that the Australian secretary was aware of these links is overwhelming (and pressure to pursue intelligence activities was hardly necessary since on his own initiative he was providing reports on the Australian left). That for McAuley is less conclusive, though his confidential report that he felt no impulse to endorse “the hypocritical tone of moral outrage” struck by some Congress members when the CIA link was revealed suggests complicity.<sup>18</sup>



One effect of the relationship was to lock Quadrant into an increasingly discreditable alignment with the United States in Vietnam. That it should have supported the initial military activity of the United States was hardly surprising. Such support followed from its campaign against the totalitarian menace, and the special urgency engendered by Australian participation heightened its commitment. But the war took on a character that was impossible to square with the Cold War polarisation of good and evil. The inability of the Americans to distinguish between the peasantry and the Vietcong, the corruption of their client regimes, the cynical extension of the War into Kampuchea, the mass bombing, napalm, defoliants and other refinements of technological barbarity—all undermined the credibility of Quadrant's case. This and the shabbiness, the dishonesty, the sheer incompetence of the Australian governments led by Holt, Gorton and McMahon allowed the moral initiative to pass to the opponents of the war. More than anything else, it was the defeat in Vietnam that left the journal rudderless, and by the early 1970s it was simply restating a lost cause.<sup>19</sup>

In 1975 the journal was placed on its present footing. Clyde Packer became its financial supporter and chairman of its editorial board. Quadrant became a monthly, its glossy advertising-agency covers enclosing a greatly-increased range of material. Announcing the changes, an editorial set out a restatement of purpose. Quadrant had always been a literary magazine and a magazine of combat. It would continue to be both. It had begun by defending propositions that “may be labelled conservative” and it would continue to do so. But even in this editorial the meaning of conservatism had changed. It no longer possessed, as it had in McAuley's heyday, reverence for the past; nor was there any intention of reclaiming some compelling tradition of order and moral responsibility. The essence of conservatism was now taken to mean simply an attitude towards government. To be conservative was to oppose the growing political control of all departments of life. Or was it? As the writer acknowledged, a restricted conception of politics is more commonly associated with liberalism, at least before liberalism was reduced to “a set of lazy incantations”. Since the aim of Quadrant was “to confine the public sector, to reduce the power of government, to protect the rights of private activity—from writing poetry to doing business”, the editorial hoped that Quadrant's *pages* would become a

“critical forum in which the principles of liberalism may be restated and sharpened”.<sup>20</sup> Caught between revisionism and piety, the editorial announcement genuflects to the past while gesturing to the future.

What was the new direction? We may dispose fairly briefly with the assertion that Quadrant was “to continue to be a journal of opposition”. A brief perusal of the editors and board over the next few years reveals a media magnate, a Liberal member of parliament, a prime ministerial adviser and the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The Prime Minister himself was to be guest of honour at the twenty-fifth celebrations. Even at the beginning of 1975 there was clear evidence of how Quadrant would be more closely involved in the guidance and co-ordination of conservative politics. John Singleton wrote of how he had devised and produced his boots-and-all television advertisements for the Liberal and National parties in the election of 1974, and how his rich and powerful friends all kicked in. As he put it, “The heavies didn't stuff about.”<sup>21</sup>

For a brief period the wisdom of Chairman Singo also appeared in a column, and we were informed that “‘Public’ money is stolen money” and “Australian society is at present more fascist than free”. This strand of Quadrant's new identity, which might be described as the populism of illiterate millionaires, was, thankfully, short-lived. But the ideas on which he drew had a more permanent influence. Drawing on Hayek, Nozick, Friedman and their imitators, Quadrant maintained the assault on “big government”, the welfare state and other forms of public regulation. The threat to freedom from the state joined the threat to freedom from Communism as the journal's dominant concern.

It is tempting to dwell on the opportunism of this new concern for individual freedom. After all, Quadrant had spent much of its first fifteen years insisting on the need to maintain authority and condemning those who undermined the sovereignty of parliament and the law. It is tempting also to point to the irony of conservatives, who had criticised the mimicry of the Left and Australian radicals' uncritical acceptance of overseas mentors, now falling over themselves to get aboard the bandwagon. Praising Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* as “the most masterly book in political philosophy to be published in English in this century”, Lauchlan Chipman predicted it was “going to become fashionable”.<sup>22</sup> Fashionable was the operative word. From Milton Friedman to Paul Johnson to William F. Buckley, a series of inter-



national celebrities was brought to Australia and launched with all the clamour that the public relations industry could generate. Just as a generation of New York liberals recycled themselves as new conservatives, so the first step for any lapsed English socialist, it seemed in the mid-1970s, was to hire a press agent.

I am giving way to temptation. What seems to me much more interesting and significant is the way that the language of small government, even libertarianism, has become tangled up with Quadrant's residual conservative concerns. The attack on progressive education, for example, is directed against new initiatives in the government schools. The defence of the family takes the form of an attack on equal-opportunity legislation and public provision for women. Even the criticism of multiculturalism is aimed at public agencies. In each case the intention is to restore some 'traditional' area of social life, and the method chosen is to throw back the ambit of the state.

I think it is indisputable that the success of the right-wing crusade against the state has been made possible by the failure of the Left. Our conceptions of social progress, our notions of the welfare state, our proposals for breaking down inequality are crippled by our inability to devise forms that can truly enlarge and enrich the lives of those without wealth. In its structure and procedures the public bureaucracy turns out to be little different to the capitalist corporation. But the confusion of the Left is mirrored by the confusion of the Right. The growth of the state was a response to the failure of the market. To think that its reduction will restore prosperity, self-reliance and moral order is to turn one's back on two centuries of conservative experience. As one exasperated Quadrant contributor said of John Singleton's vision of unfettered capitalism, "This is not an ultra-conservative stance by any means; on the contrary, it is a trendy kind of anarchy."<sup>23</sup>

In the anthology *Quadrant. Twenty-five Years* the extent of the change is muffled. The decision to restrict the section entitled "Arguments" to the period 1975 to 1980 means that there is little trace of the earlier conservative optimism. McAuley himself is represented by an essay, "Culture and Counter-culture", written shortly before he died. His polemical cutting edge has not dulled and the counter-culture receives some savage thrusts. But it is also a reflective piece, allowing McAuley to compare his own rejection of the dominant culture (as an anarchist, a student of Eastern thought and finally as a Catholic) in the

1940s and 1950s with that of a subsequent generation. In the end, he concludes, "there is no substitute for sober realism":

society is not a simple transparent thing: it is exceedingly complex and opaque, resistant to attempts to analyse and control its present workings or predict and control its future developments. In this world, we stand on a dimly-lighted present moment, and move forward into dark uncertainties.<sup>24</sup>

That is a good summary of the conservative outlook. But apart from Knopfelmacher's "My Political Education" and Geoffrey Fairbairn's essay on Conrad, there are few other selections that capture its precise Australian nuances. (To these we might add H. W. Arndt's perceptive and generous remarks about another strand of the conservative tradition, that of Manning Clark, and perhaps also Les Murray's "The Coming Republic", which represents a different, populist variant.)

Nor is the libertarian theme well represented. There is Lauchlan Chipman on "The Menace of Multi-Culturalism", but the decision to concentrate on writers working in Australia has excluded the great majority of the apostles of the market — and in so doing reminded us of the derivative character of this doctrine. A proportion of the essays are simply tetchy, the most jaundiced being Peter Shrubbs's diatribe against those "powerful, obsessed, quite bad people", the student activists.

In reading this anthology I am struck also by the disjuncture between the politics and the literature. Granted McAuley's antimodernist emphasis on form, there has never been a party line on creative writing, as the considerable overlap of authors published in Quadrant, Meanjin and Overland demonstrates. (We might go further and say that the relationship between politics and literature in all three of these journals has become more tenuous that it was back in the 1950s. Each one used to possess a distinctive aesthetic that is now much less obvious. Perhaps this question deserves discussion among Overland readers?) It is true, as John McLaren observed in the Australian Book Review, that there is a predilection in this anthology for satire, conceived as a vehicle for conservative criticism; and that most of the writers who attempt satire lack the technique to carry it off. Patricia Rolfe's assault on literary careerists, with its repeated recourse to thought balloons ("But there certainly wasn't a chair in poor old Consuelo") is particularly inept. And there is a tedious Phil Philby script by Barry Humphries. But these longeurs are more than



compensated by the selection of poems which illustrate the high standard *Quadrant* has maintained.

Since conservatism has exercised a powerful influence in Australia for more than a century there ought to be a place for a conservative journal. To be effective it needs to take Australian circumstances seriously, to pay attention both to the historical particularities of our property-owning democracy and to the grave problems thrown up by its present predicament. James McAuley's *Quadrant* made a start towards such a project, but was swamped by its Cold War priorities. In the more recent *Quadrant* the project is even more exiguous. Writers such as Patrick Morgan, always challenging and represented here by his recent essay on "The Paradox of Australian Nationalism", show that it can be done. But not while others treat the market as the philosopher's stone.

*Stuart Macintyre, a historian, is at present working at the Australian National University. Quadrant. Twenty-five Years is published by the University of Queensland Press at \$19.95.*

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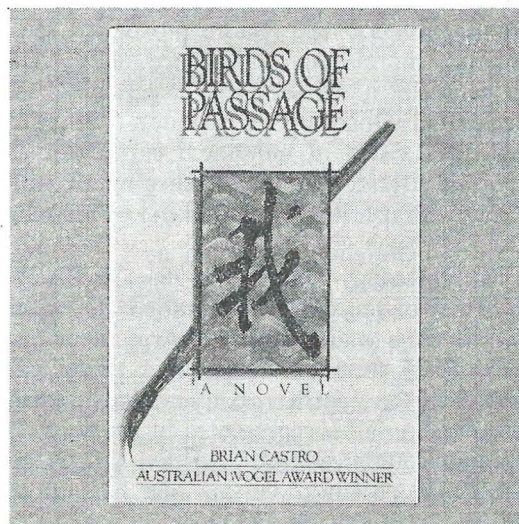
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## BETWEEN THE NIGHT AND MORNING

O hear the magpie sing, my love,  
Between the night and morning,  
And if he says it's four or five  
That's true enough, my darling.

But there's no thought in that sweet bird  
That while the moon's still shining  
Would drive us out of our warm bed  
With song that's meant for warning.

Oh no, his far faint silver flute  
Soft through the moonlight floating  
Is only for his own delight  
And chimes so with our loving

It seems the whole wide world is one  
In light or music ringing,  
Now in our love, now in the moon,  
Now in the magpie's singing.

So if he says how rich it is  
To wake at four or five  
In bed or in the moonlit trees  
And find oneself alive,

Or if he says in that bright tree  
That all things live and breathe  
At last in one deep harmony  
Of song and light and love,

Then while I hold you so, my dear,  
In love's soft music moving,  
How right he is this shining hour  
Between the night and morning.

DOUGLAS STEWART

## SCHIZOPHRENIC

The voice has come again  
to speak to him alone;  
we hear only meaningless  
words of tortured answer,  
though see the voice's echo  
mirrored on his face.  
He knows that we are watching;  
knows he should not listen,  
that a voice without a speaker  
brings no message for translation.  
However, it is there  
to taunt its enclosed listener,  
even though unheard  
by the ears of rationality.  
Will it once again  
scream too loudly in his skull;  
bring on itself its silencing  
with numbing chemical knife?  
Or will it choose its silence,  
to leave his mind awaiting  
the next compelling whisper?

MICHAEL DUGAN

## CHANGING NAMES

*for my brother, David*

There is no sound of water.  
You've nailed the river  
to its stones.  
This dream is so real  
you can't stop living it.

The night opens  
like a lizard's mouth  
and you slide down in.  
You wake to dark so deep  
it becomes someone else's silence.

Try out the name  
you feel on your tongue;  
it sounds almost right.  
Try again and it's closer.  
The river pulls free.

You have to go on, even though  
your memories seem too fresh.  
If you wake at night and feel  
something near, a hand almost touching  
inside your own, roll over and listen.

Forget what you know  
is already there.  
Listen another way.  
There is the sound the river makes  
rehearsing all our names.

ROBERT JONES

## FOR UNIDENTIFIED PURPOSE

the sky drapes limits closing round me each day as  
I re-enter each morning horizons curl over me stars  
forsake my company

this is day too many eyes open to deny

somebody's been smoking a packet cigar stale as grass  
the industrial stacks' addiction

I wake to a sun the color of pearl terminal

that is a word on all tongues knowing the sun has no  
certainty of fixture no nobility in genealogical time  
is of known chemical compound

my purple stocks are hybrids matching the lips and  
languors of yesterday evening's entertainment they hold  
no treasures for bees no generation of seeds for a  
future

as day fails the green looper wriggles to draw the last  
webs of light to bind the pupa to the leaf for the  
staged eons of pupation mocking death

after each daytime stupor I re-enact the struggle  
entering a rainbow-painted bistro where life spreads  
butterfly wings trappings for carriage of an unidenti-  
fied purpose

JOHN BLIGHT

## BELONGING

Writhing body dancing  
hypnotic snake winding  
beckoning to a rhythm not cracked  
by engine sounds,  
the road is my twine  
gathering it up in the hand  
seeking the way back  
into comfort  
in the tracks where the past has gone.  
Embroidery I sewed once  
in thin silks stripped from opal  
spreads now,  
I am stitching myself back into the country,  
into the smooth and boneless flesh  
of this pencilled line.

While I have been away  
trees on the bank  
have crept into the Murray,  
delicate  
have tripped into the deep  
their tips tingling with the change.  
Seduction, this river,  
this stained glass scene  
from which the trees press forward,  
rising.  
Mirror grips their roots.

River and road are threaded  
back into the country further,  
further in,  
where early women pushed  
on a dray with their husbands  
breaking the cords of Corroboree,  
the Rainbow Serpent drained  
with the drying waterholes  
till its color was bitumen  
and the air round its dying carcass  
was sheep.

Women who broke themselves  
along the length of the land's spine,  
drowned in floods,  
desiccated in the sun,  
married as a stopper for his loneliness  
to save him from madness or drink.  
Unable to lance the obdurate  
crust of him,  
she is left month on month  
for roundups or droves,  
looking out across the vast plains of marriage,  
Two of them together working,  
stacking hour on hour, year on year  
against their youth  
that dried with the billabongs,  
a land coughing up bitterness  
while they worked it sternly, slowly  
into their skin, their lungs, and down  
bred into their children:  
the mesmerising earth, lizard-hot,  
hawk-brown, florid in the heat;  
the stumpy scrub that shoots flowers  
wild like fire, in spring;  
and the green that eludes its naming,  
chameleon to our moods.

At Warragul, watering hole  
is now picnic ground,  
the Tarago river  
dribbles creek-like.  
How, sitting in green stillness  
bordered by highway,  
can I hear bellbirds so clear  
and there, behind,  
the rattle of old chains  
as teams roll toward the hills.  
Some drift of memory with the place, perhaps,  
like the slow 'cal-um-pa', 'cal-um-pa'  
sounds of crossing old bridges now gone,  
not rotted but rebuilt  
because we couldn't believe they'd last.  
The sampler fills out,  
each leaf cross-stitched;  
bird and river and road  
are needed in,  
tattooed in the blood.

ROBYN ROWLAND

## ELECTION

We stuffed an orangepaper  
We stuffed a blue paper

We got a leadership crisis  
A run on the exchange  
A flight of foreign capital  
Panic in intelligence  
Rural depression  
A mandate  
A vice-regal luncheon  
A salt mine  
A bureaucrats' conspiracy  
A decent family man  
A new society  
A revolution (Wednesday)  
And bloody rotten pissed  
In someone's party room

In the morning  
Migraines  
Hiatus herniae  
Lawns to mow

Already  
A crisis of credibility

P. R. HAY

## HONEY, THAT'LL BE A HUNDRED BUCKS

but seeing you're a poet  
and I've never screwed a poet  
and today was the first time I dreamed yellow,  
and you look a bit Dantesque  
with a touch of Yeats,  
well, give me a poem  
that'll be my fee,  
and honey,  
when you're famous,  
I'll flog it for two hundred bucks at an auction.

ANDREW DONALD



## VOICES IN THE AIR

After my father died and we moved  
I used to come back to the house, just,  
just in case there was something left behind,  
that it might all change and go back to what it had  
been.

But of course it didn't; there were new people there,  
Peggy and her 2-year-old living the post-war dream:  
and I came into to haunt it. She was kind —  
we'd talk, and I'd follow her around all the new features:  
refrigerator, water-driven dishwasher, American  
plastics, washing machine, and the Triple Throat  
wireless with the three-headed woman open-mouthed:  
she was good fun for me, and I came for her  
now, not father: but in the midst of new dishes,  
lino, curtains there was a presence, that other father,  
her husband, which dulled the chrome, turned  
her voice up a pitch. Amiable and natty  
he brought a fog and depression into her kitchen;  
and thirty years later when the message  
finally arrived, "Peggy? She killed herself—years ago"  
I heard the horrible cries from the boy's playpen  
of the trapped woman coming through the radio:  
choking, retching, crying for the weight to be taken  
away,

for the sky to clear, the westerly to give over,  
for the light to be turned on, the grief to be turned off.  
Idle curiosity had me turning the dial to her tonight,  
another walk around rooms for presences and to hear  
like the confused echoes in a cathedral the static  
and ether that poems come from: catswhisker poet  
with too many voices. Who will I follow tomorrow?

JULIAN CROFT

## ERRAND

a simple errand:  
go to the delicatessen. buy eggs  
cheese & smelly continental meat.

instead  
you met him at the pub.  
you were alone. he was at the bar,  
between shots at the pooltable.  
you liked his shoulders, of all things.  
strong & exposed from the rim of his singlet.  
beers, a rave over a couple of frames,  
records in the jukebox you both believed in,  
& then you followed him.

a small room —  
wetsuit & goggles, cupboard centrefold;  
mattress, beercans on the floor —  
a rusting block of flats  
beside the famous beach  
& famous polluted sea.  
a postcard view, not that you were looking,  
happy in each other's  
new nakedness, new taste, new smell  
while tourists shuffled in the street  
licking ice creams, yelling at children,  
trying to look casual because  
it was that sort of place.

i didn't know what you were doing.  
i thought you'd gone shopping.  
i probably never even thought of you  
as i was playing snooker, lining up  
shots under the frilly lights,  
dull faces over cues watching my hands & eyes.  
all i could see level baize, colored spheres  
beyond my spreading fingers  
& the tip of the cue, steadily prodding.

lost in the silence,  
the cigarette fog, hearing only  
the occasional cough from an opponent  
& the contact of the wood,  
i never knew  
you were in another room,  
alternately  
making loud noises  
& sucking his cock.

BILL FEWER

## LUCIA

My friends have a new daughter  
Lucia  
An orphan from El Salvador

Porque? Why am I here?  
Que? What is it they say to me?  
Como? How can I understand what these Americans  
have done?

Lucia is learning English  
Her "mom" is learning Spanish  
Lucia attends to the world  
And answers move toward the questions

And as she grows older?  
New questions —  
And the old ones expand:

Porque? Why am I here?  
Que? What is it that these Americans have done?  
Como? How can I understand?  
JIM GALE

# The Bride From Central Office

PHILIP NEILSEN

Several people in the street looked at me in a strange way — I remember that clearly. I realize now they must have seen her sitting on my doorstep and suspected something a bit reprehensible, or at least embarrassing, was going on. I had lived in the apartment for nine years, so a lot of people in Pacific Street knew I lived alone and had very few visitors. Living alone, you come to enjoy your own company in a way that others find threatening.

In any case, when I got to the top of the stairs there she was, sitting on a medium-sized white suitcase, and covered from head to toe in fine white lace. The veil suited her very much, though I don't think I ever told her that in the years or months (whichever it was) that followed. I also remember how beautiful she looked, with the kind of large eyes and small nose that I had long ago decided the ideal woman would have. Naturally I assumed she had come to the wrong address and sought to redirect her, but she was adamant.

"No, really, there hasn't been a mistake, the driver escorted me to this door himself."

"The driver?"

"Yes — it was his responsibility to see that I get to the right place."

This was becoming more confusing by the second.

"Do you mean a taxi-driver?"

She laughed a little at this, with a trace of anxiousness. She spoke faster.

"No, no. You see, the driver brought me from Central Office. It's very straight-forward." She smiled again. "I am your wife."

I started to laugh, but her face remained serious. "That's ridiculous — I've never seen you before, and I've certainly never heard of Central Office!"

Then it came to me. I was always too gullible. It was an elaborate joke — a hoax arranged by some of the younger staff at the Polytechnic. They must have been planning this little business, aimed

at embarrassing me, for weeks. I was angry, though I couldn't blame this girl they had talked into helping with their scheme.

"Look, I realize this is a joke and I do have a sense of humor; but I think it's gone far enough."

I certainly didn't expect her reaction. Her face went pale, and lowering her face into her hands she sat quite still. For some reason it unnerved me; changing my tone, I asked her inside, mumbling something about a cup of tea. We could argue later.

In a very short time she seemed to have recovered her composure. We talked for a while about neutral topics. Her name was Sarah, she said, and added, a little hesitantly, that Central Office had not told her to expect any problems. I took the opportunity to question her further.

"Surely, Sarah, there has to be a ceremony before we could possibly be married."

"No — they arrange that; it's all been taken care of — Mr Harris said so."

"Who's Mr Harris?"

Her eyes widened slightly: "Mr Harris is in charge of Central Office, of course — he's Coordinator General."

It was obvious no more progress was going to be made that evening. In a conciliatory way I said that she could stay the night in the lounge if she wished, and we would sort things out in the morning. She seemed cheered by this, and we ate a little and watched television until bedtime. When I looked in later on my way back from the bathroom, I saw that she had made a bed on the couch with the sheets and blankets I had given her, and was wearing a long, white nightdress.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"Yes — it's very nice," I said with some enthusiasm. A relieved smile spread across her face.

"I'm so glad. It's for our honeymoon you know." Tactfully, I gave a vague murmur, wished



her goodnight and went to my room.

That was some years ago. How many I don't know exactly. You see that is part of the problem. From that day on, in subtle ways time stopped behaving for me in the same predictable way as before. I won't bore you with my ordinary pieces of wisdom, except to say that if what happened to me has taught me anything, it is that we live in a way that is confined by our expectations.

Anyway, what grasp I have of consequent events is due largely to notes I wrote at the time, and the remainder of my narrative will be based on these, though I have amended them in places and omitted some sentences that I now find embarrassing. There are no dates. At first I wrote them down, but soon they seemed irrelevant.

This morning when I entered the kitchen I found that she had made breakfast. The kitchen itself was transformed in a way that is hard to explain; she had removed the curtains from the window above the sink, and made various other re-arrangements. She was wearing a pale blue apron and her hair was swept up again, held by two pins in a swirl at the back of her head. She moved about cooking and placing plates before me as she talked. I felt uncomfortable, and it occurred to me that I was being enticed by almost a parody of an old dream. I decided to tell her straight-away that I knew what was going on.

"Sarah, this is very nice, but I don't want a domestic slave." I said it carefully, in a light and reasonable tone. She laughed, and answered over her shoulder.

"You're certainly not getting one. This is just for today, for our honeymoon." Then she added more firmly, "We'll share the domestic work."

An appropriate answer eluded me. In any case, she kept me busy answering questions about my work — and I explained my responsibilities as a language instructor. I was surprised at her obvious interest and found myself telling her everything. I described the other instructors and their jealousy on account of my languages being the most esoteric, my students the most intelligent to contend with, and my examinations renowned as the most difficult. She was eager for more and more details and I told her of my private research into the history of the personal pronoun in border areas of Northern Europe. She was enraptured, her eyes hardly leaving my face for an instant. From her questions and the quick grasp she displays of the matters I outline to her, it is obvious she is highly intelligent.

After breakfast she suggested that since it was Saturday we should do some shopping. I wanted to get to the bottom of this bride business, but she was so happy that I decided not to spoil things just yet, and agreed. Shopping was certainly an interesting affair; we worked well as a team, and I was astonished at the way she transformed the mundane into a game. Various people in the stores, particularly the assistants, who have always seen me on my own, stared at us as we strolled down the aisles with our purchases. I could not help enjoying their curiosity.

That afternoon, Sarah played the piano. I was surprised at the coincidence that we should both admire the late Victorian composers particularly.

"It's not altogether a coincidence," she replied. "I assume Central Office has taken care to match our musical tastes." Again this was an opportunity to tackle her about the Office, but I let it pass.

In the evening she pointed out the way the moon appeared between two dark buildings at the end of the street — it was clearly visible from the diningroom window. I indulge, for the time being, her transparent gestures of romanticism, such as candles at dinner. Tomorrow is another day.

Sarah has been sharing my apartment for a week now. I lie in bed thinking about her out in the lounge room on her own. I pull the sheets up to my chin and listen to the sound of the refrigerator. At times I imagine I can hear her moving on the couch and wonder how well she sleeps. On the dressing table I can see the silhouette of the card she gave me for my birthday; it seems not to belong there. I study the sharpness of its angles, and its illogical substantiality in the darkness; like a doorway in mid-air.

In my bedroom again. Have just been to the lounge and told Sarah that if she wishes she can share my bed and that I will not try to take advantage of her in any way. I return quickly so as not to be embarrassed by her reaction and lie here pretending to sleep. After a few minutes I hear her come in softly carrying her suitcase. She places the bedside lamp on the floor before switching it on, then she puts her things in the second drawer and starts to undress. I pretend to sleep. Her back is turned to me and she is partly outlined by the lamp. My heart pounds as she lifts her nightdress over her head. I have never seen anything more perfect than the curve of her waist and hip. Does she know I am watching? She



crosses to the dressing table again and places two framed photographs there.

It is morning. For hours I listened to her breathing; she seemed to fall asleep quickly. She is sleeping now with her face towards me. Looking at her eyelashes, the hair across her forehead, fills me with many emotions. I feel protective, and at the same time am aware that this is sentimental nonsense. All over this city men and women lie side by side, or make love sleepily before rising, each taking the presence of the other for granted, each perfectly capable of imagining another body replacing the one beside them; no doubt, many long for just that. I am naive and foolish and made to be solitary. Why has she been sent to me? I am unfit for the ordinary happiness of men and women because I cannot believe in it. I find myself saying "I love her" and at the same time am disgusted at my shallowness. I must try to accept that there is nothing extraordinary in what is happening to me.

I can see the photographs she placed on the table now. One is of Sarah and me. We have been photographed at a wedding ceremony. I don't remember ever owning a suit like that, but the face is definitely mine.

Night. I am anxious and excited waiting for her to get undressed. She knows now that I like to watch her, and she watches me. We both enjoy the ritual as she cleans her face and brushes her hair. Only one thing disturbs me; the anklet she wears. My first thought was that it must be connected with Central Office, but it is slender and silver, and she has never said anything about it. It seems a long time since we have mentioned Central Office — months — or perhaps more. I'm not sure.

Today we went to the zoo in the park. Sarah liked all the animals, particularly the monkeys, who stopped fighting when she approached their cage. Did they expect food? She talked to them and they swung down to cluster at the bars where she stood. She made them reach for the peanuts, scolding the greedy ones and laughing at their faces. After we left the cages every one of the monkeys began to fight, racing hysterically around the sides of their cages, falling on another in a fury and shrieking. I saw their little red eyes. Sarah walked on, her scarf wrapped around her throat.

The other zoo visitors seemed ugly and squalid. Perhaps it has something to do with winter; we invented a game in which, when people had

passed by us, we each said the name of the animal we thought they looked like, to see if we had thought of the same one. We laughed until our stomachs ached, then of course, reprimanded ourselves for being cruel.

At night Sarah studies for the course she is doing at the Polytechnic. We often meet for lunch. Today I passed on to her the remark made by an instructor, that she is one of the best students he has taught. I don't think two people could be more happy.

I have another cold; we listen to the wind at night and talk about our friends. Sarah has made several of her own among her fellow students. We may have a party in our flat at the end of the year.

Three days ago I came home to find her playing the piano and singing a new song. She explained it was one an old friend had taught her. The thought of lovers Sarah has had before me, haunts me from time to time. She does not believe in the past, in looking backwards; she says there is only the present, and I agree with her. Too much of our life is squandered on the deceitful shadows of memory.

Today I looked in the mirror and was shocked to see how I have changed. How could I have changed so much in such a short time? I seem so much older, though I cannot isolate any particular alteration in my face to explain this. Perhaps I seem to frown more, perhaps the pores of my skin below the eyes are larger. Sometime I will ask Sarah what she thinks. My body seems the same as it has ever been, though I have been more conscious of the little hairs on my arms and the back of my hands lately. I used to pay more attention to these details when I was a boy.

It is six months now, since I met Sarah. At least I think it is only six months. However, we now have two children, twins, who are toddlers, and Sarah says they are ours, which seems an odd way to acquire a family I know, but there it is. I do have vague memories of her suffering backaches and doing special exercises. Sometimes I even think I remember a hospital room, with flowers and nurses and a peculiar smell. This may be my subconscious supplying fake memories to keep my conscious mind happy. I could have seen all these things in movies long ago. I have given up trying to work it out. The twins are here — they exist, at any rate. It could easily just



*seem* like six months, while it has really been more like two years.

Letters have come from Central Office at regular intervals. Sarah reads them, then carefully burns them. I lack the courage to ask any questions. She would tell me if there was anything important.

We have some favorite places we go to with the children. It is one of the mysterious aspects of our life together that I don't remember finding these places, but Sarah remembers our mutual discovery of them in great detail. She says she loves me for my vagueness. One place, that she says was our first discovery, is a little park quite close to the Polytechnic. It is hidden behind a long row of brick buildings and few people go there. The park is too close to factories and the city centre for its stunted trees and patchy lawn to make more than a passable effort at survival. We like to sit there without talking, just thinking to ourselves while the children play on a creaking roundabout. If I had come to this place on my own, in the days before Sarah, it would have been a setting that depressed me, but with her sitting here it doesn't seem such a forbidding place, but rather a refuge in which to rest and contemplate.

I have taken to sneaking back into the past to select certain memories—scenes perhaps—to take them from the shiny, black box and turn them over in my hands like a narrow street miser. I am not proud of this, nor the effect it has on me. The scenes are all of Sarah, and they always give me an aching erection. Sometimes it can happen when I am alone in the microfilm library; I am weak, I tip-toe to the box, I take out a particular scene, and then I am useless for a while. I can't understand this aching, though it takes such strong control of me at these times. I have only to go and see Sarah to be able to touch the real thing, to smell her hair and feel her lips on my cheek, and yet there is the aching and these scenes that hold me, solitary, in their power.

I will tell you my favorite scene. The main detail is Sarah's mouth—her lips when we make love. The first few times she was embarrassed about her lips—the way they would tingle and go numb. She imagined it was noticeable, and I would assure her it was not. Yet I see her now with her hand over her mouth; the other hand is gripping one of mine. Sometimes I think of this scene—her sharp, rapid breathing, her hand over her mouth, my hand being squeezed hard—

and I do not move from where I am sitting for an hour or more.

Sarah spends a lot of time in the cramped garden at the back of the apartment building. She comes into the kitchen or living room pleased with her tiredness and the dirt on her jeans. Today she explained how she likes the preparation and anticipation but hates to stand and hose the plants once they are established. She forces herself to count to fifty as she waters each plant, so that they receive equal attention. It is puzzling, this mixture of dedication and impatience she displays when she is involved in some project or task. I observe many of these contradictions in her, but I never remember to write them down. Is it normal to be so close to a person and not understand so much about them?

Individual hairs stand out white or silvery in the morning light as I look in the bathroom mirror. Yet I could swear I am only 34. Sarah smiles when I complain and says I am a dear, silly, old thing. It is ridiculous—she looks as young as ever. I am even too tired, and disinclined, for our night games in bed anymore, and barely notice her undressing, though increasingly I picture every detail of this ritual when I am alone during the day. Repeatedly the notion comes to me that I have missed something important—that is, failed to notice something. I make painstaking calculations of my age and the children's but can't make sense of it. Last night I said to Sarah: "Without you, I'm not sure much of me would make logical sense, in the way it used to." As usual she refused to take me seriously.

Sarah is restless. She is quite cruel in her comments about lecturers and students at the Polytechnic; but her criticisms are justified. Her cooking seems to have become an obsession—she attempts more and more elaborate concoctions but refuses to do more than nibble at them herself. She watches me eat. Last night she was playing Brahms and Debussy. I must make a tape-recording of her playing. The children display no interest in music at all; but perhaps it is too early to tell.

A letter came from Central Office today. Sarah said that this time I could read it—but I asked her instead to tell me what was in it. She said it was her recall.

She didn't seem surprised by the letter, but I thought, a little excited. Tomorrow night when she gets undressed I am determined to stay awake



and watch her very closely. Perhaps I will notice some clue to the mystery.

I find it hard to believe that the order would have come unless I had neglected my duties in the marriage in some way. Exactly what the neglect has been I don't know, though I have spent the afternoon trying to work it out.

There is one possibility that keeps returning, but it is so distressing I cannot contemplate it for long: perhaps I have been judged to be emotionally deficient. If this is their justification, it is a grossly unfair judgement, since I have done no more nor less than to match the regard she has shown me. Affection I have most definitely felt, particularly at night when we have sat together watching television, with bedtime drawing near. Often I have thought we are very happy.

What are the charges? They should give me a chance to defend myself. I would tell them how I took her in; how I adjusted to the role of a husband and father. Perhaps I would even tell them, if they seemed to be receptive, how I spent many hours secretly hugging to myself some favorite scene or another from the early days.

Tomorrow I could write to Central Office perhaps, if she is permitted to tell me the address, and request a postponement of her recall.

It is nearly dawn. I am lying here very still, for Sarah is still sleeping. It occurs to me a condemned prisoner must feel something like this in the last hours before execution—does he try to make the time pass faster? Or does he concentrate on each second, trying to make what is left last

as long as possible? I am doing neither. Perhaps later I will regret not making the most of these minutes, but just now I feel too peaceful to care. It is a feeling somewhere between numbness and happiness. I should have expected Sarah would know how to handle our separation, just as she knew about our wedding before we met, the names and features of our children before they were born. She has left me a new scene. Last night as we made love she cried out, not my Christian name only, but my full name.

And she has left me another gift. It is supposed to be a surprise, but last night I saw her put a pale blue envelope in my clean shirt drawer, and a few minutes ago I crept over and took it to the bathroom. In it was a glossy color photograph, and when my eyes grew used to the hard light I could hardly comprehend this extraordinary thing. It is a badly exposed and partly obscured photograph of a man and a woman in bed. The man is a few years younger than I was when I met Sarah, but in fact, looks exactly like me, as far as it is possible to tell, because his face is obscured as he kisses her neck. I am sure the woman is Sarah. One of her hands is held across her mouth, though under that hand I know she is quickly running her tongue over her lips. On the back of the photograph are some words in Sarah's handwriting. They say: "Happy is the unselfish man." Somehow I know she has stolen this for me, to show she understands how I tried to steal.

I am thinking about the gifts now, and I hardly dare breathe, in case I disturb her. One conclusion I have come to; I will not ask her for the address of Central Office. That would be a betrayal.

#### THE WRITER

The writer is seated at his desk. Throughout the long night he will employ the flimsiest of materials, simply in order to inveigle the whole panoply of nature into the retinue of his dreams. He hopes that his words will bestride the world like the fattest of clouds.

On returning in the morning, how do we judge the success of these labors? As to read what he has written may violate his hard-earned rest, I suggest you merely gaze at his slumped form. Your questions are: Is his brow dribbling with rain? Are his lips bloody with stars?

GARY CATALANO



# Teaching Australian History at Harvard

K. S. INGLIS

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

The Government of Australia, as a token of its goodwill to the Government and people of the United States of America on the occasion of the bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution of 1776, conveys to Harvard University a gift of \$US1 million to establish the Australian Studies Endowment Fund.

Harvard University, in receiving the gift of the Australian Government, acknowledges that the purpose of the Australian Studies Endowment Fund is to establish a Chair of Australian Studies and maintain such teaching, research and publication as will help to promote awareness and understanding of Australia in the United States of America.

Perhaps it should have gone to Yale or Duke, which had programs of Commonwealth studies, or Texas, which bought Hartley Grattan's Library of Australiana, or "on the West Coast which shares a Pacific frontier with Australia", as George Shaw suggested in the Australian Historical Association Bulletin. E. Daniel Potts, agreeing with Shaw in a later issue of that Bulletin, proposed Stanford, whose founder's brother lived in Melbourne from 1860 to 1918 and "gave the university his library of books on Australia and his fine collection of Australian art . . ."

When the proposal reached Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister the university named was Yale. Mr Whitlam liked the idea of a Chair of Australian Studies as a bicentennial gift, and altered just one word in the plan, crossing out Yale and writing in Harvard. He did so, as I heard him say later, because Harvard had been kind to his son who studied there and because Harvard seemed to him the greater university, and closer to the world of affairs.

Manning Clark travelled to Harvard late in 1975 with a senior public servant to discuss the revised proposal. When his urbane hosts pro-

posed that the money be used to strengthen programs in Asian studies — without, they insisted, diminishing its effectiveness in promoting the study of Australia — he stuck to his brief, and Harvard agreed to take the gift on the donor's terms. At Harvard, on 30 July 1976, a frosty Malcom Fraser committed his government to putting up the promised \$1 million.

The Memorandum of Understanding said that a Harvard committee on the chair might seek the advice of a committee in Australia, established by the Australian Government and known as the Friends of the Australian Studies Endowment Fund at Harvard. The Friends were duly appointed, under the chairmanship of Sir David Derham, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne; but the initiative in choosing the first occupants of the chair was taken personally by Dr Henry Rosovsky, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science at Harvard. Dr Rosovsky visited Australia in mid-1977. John La Nauze was invited to be the first Professor, and went early in 1978 for one term. He was followed later that year by Manning Clark, who put on the first course, in the History department: "The Making of Australia". The next occupant, early in 1979, was Gough Whitlam, who gave a series of lectures on Australia and its region which were not part of any regular course. Noel Butlin went over for fall term 1979-80, and offered a course in Economics entitled "Comparative Growth of Big Government, 1900-75". Then followed for a term each Alan Davies, in Government, on "The Political Culture of a Small Democracy", and Leonie Kramer, in English, on "Modernism: the Australian Experience". My visit was for spring term 1982. Geoffrey Blainey followed me.

The Friends of the Fund committee has atrophied, and there has appeared another called the Australian Nominating Committee, which publicly



invites applications for the chair and conveys advice to Harvard about appointments. Under that arrangement the economist Bob Gregory is to go next, and after him the prehistorian John Mulvaney.

So the chair has been held by a series of short-term occupants, more in History so far than in any other subject. Nearly everyone has come back thinking that a term is not long enough, and it seems likely that from now on people will go for a year. There is no *program* in Australian studies. It occupies no permanent space: the visitor is lodged in whatever department he or she is attached to. There is no other staff. The Memorandum says "that with the support of Harvard University, . . . a Research Fellow and Research Assistant may be provided to assist the Chair", but that has not happened yet. When Manning Clark finished his term he proposed the creation of an Australian Center, having at least two rooms—one for the professor, and the other to enable Australian reference books, works of art, illustrations and recordings to be seen and heard. He also advised the appointment of someone for three to five years, to provide continuity in the centre and to help with the teaching and examining. (That would imply keeping the chair in one discipline for longer than has happened so far.) He gave Dean Rosovsky a boomerang, suggesting that it might be the first object to go into the Australian Center. The boomerang is still in the Dean's office.

The visitor has to send ahead a course outline and reading guide. Preparing these documents in Canberra, I was lucky to have advice from a senior member of the Harvard History department, John Clive, author of *Scotch Reviewers* and *Thomas Babington Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian*. Thanks to Manning Clark, Professor Clive had developed an interest in Australia, which became more intense when he visited the ANU's Humanities Research Centre in 1981. On his initiative the Australian government now finds money for Australian scholars to attend meetings of the North American Conference for British Studies. On his initiative a major American journal of ideas is hatching a special issue on Australia. He is coming to Canberra again in 1984, and he has provoked his colleague Bernard Bailyn, author of *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, to come over and pursue certain comparative questions in American and Australian history. The enlisting of John Clive as an agent deserves a large place in any account-

ing of what the chair has done. He was a fine mentor.

I offered as title "Empire, Nation, Class and Race: Themes in Australian History", and as description for the course catalogue "A social history with particular reference to Australians' perceptions of themselves and other peoples from the first European settlement in 1788 to World War I". I gave plenty of notice to the Co-operative bookshop — "the Coop" — about books I wanted students to buy, and plenty of notice to the Library about books I wanted put on reserve. The Library responded efficiently. The Coop did not, and I had to arrange emergency shipments of some books after the course began. I asked students to buy Clark, *Select Documents 1851-1900* (but the Coop shipped in instead his *Select Documents 1788-1850*), Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Gammage, *The Broken Years*, my own *The Australian Colonists* and Ward, *The Australian Legend*. I had about twenty titles put on reserve in the main undergraduate library.

For the first lecture I prepared a three-page guide to the course modelled in format on John Clive's for his course in British History since 1850. On his advice I decided to use regularly only two of the three hours a week allotted to me for lectures and to keep the third hour for occasional meetings of the class. I required a one-hour examination at mid-term, and a final three-hour exam, and I made the writing of a paper optional: compulsory papers tended to drive students off, Clive said. I nominated office hours for two periods a week, each of an hour and a half.

There are about 6500 undergraduates at Harvard. The History department alone puts on about sixty courses each semester. George Shaw begins his piece in the AHA Bulletin by recalling a conversation with Alan Davies on the eve of his first lecture. "Alan was both philosophic and apprehensive. 'What if no one turns up tomorrow?' he said." I had a similar feeling, and it was a relief to see the first young figure in chinos, sweatshirt, weatherproof jacket and sneakers saunter in. Noel Butlin had warned me not to be surprised during early lectures if people also sauntered out, as there is a two-week period in which students can shop around before committing themselves. In the event twenty-five enrolled. The group was just large enough to lecture at comfortably, and small enough to get to know as individuals.



Why had they picked Australian history? One was a semi-resident of Australia, daughter of the Australian manager of a New York-based firm which flew her out often to Melbourne. One had an Australian mother, a gynaecologist trained in Sydney who had emigrated about 1950. (She came to Harvard during the semester and talked to the class about Anzac Day as she remembered it in the 1930s and 1940s. She had an unaffected broad Australian accent and broad Australian nationalism, and while she had the platform she told the class how much better preparation for professional life girls at Fort Street had been given than girls she saw anywhere these days in the USA.) One who audited the course without enrolling in it was the son of an Australian journalist who was now editor of the Chicago Tribune. One was the son of a venture capitalist with Australian interests; he and another member of the course had lived on sheep and cattle stations and were better acquainted than the lecturer with pastoral Australia. One had visited a brother-in-law who made winches for yachts in Sydney. One had met Australians in Europe, and was moved to curiosity about this society which produced young people who seemed to him in an almost permanent state of travel, going home only to make the money to set off again. He was in correspondence with two Australians he had met in Europe; he was also a radio ham, and talked on the air with hams in Australia. One had been awarded a Rotary fellowship for post-graduate study in Australia, and wanted to brief herself for the journey.

Others had a vague curiosity about Australia as the last frontier, another America. One was interested in British imperial history. One said she had had enough of being in large classes, and guessed rightly that this one would be small. One looked in the catalogue for something new, a course he could approach with no bias, hoping to discover, as he put it, a new self. That was perhaps the most American of reasons for studying Australia.

There were sixteen men and nine women — proportions similar to those among undergraduates at large. In age they ranged from about nineteen to about twenty-three, spread across all four years — freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors — with seniors predominating: ten out of twenty-five. For more than half it was an elective course, not done to meet a requirement. They were concentrating in a variety of subjects from Biochemistry to Visual and Environmental Studies, more than half of them in the general area of Social Sciences, and only two in History. They tended to live in

the north-east, though there were students from almost every region except the real south, and in that they were typical of Harvard. I had none of the ten per cent of students who are black.

From what I have said about Australian connections it is obvious that some came from rich families, and if you look at Harvard's fees you might think they must all be rich. In 1981-82 the charge was nearly \$7000 for tuition and \$3600 for room and board: over \$10,000 a year. But Harvard makes sure that nobody who is offered a place needs to turn it down for want of money: scholarships, loans, and jobs on campus are there for anybody who has managed to get to the top of a high school that equips him or her for the leap to Harvard. One student in the course described himself as working-class: his father was a post office worker in Boston. One was the son of an official at Boston airport, and was the first member of his family (the grandparents were all immigrants) to get to college. One came from Irish South Boston, where his father was a retired marine. Others were children of doctors, business executives and academics. I think most would have described the condition of their families as comfortable.

My office was deep inside the Widener Library, one of a number occupied by senior scholars and coveted because in Widener you are so close to books and so far from interruption. It is the only great library I have ever worked in which allows open access to the stacks, enabling wonderful bibliographical rambles. My office was near the shelves on Oceania, which is where Australia belongs on the mental map of American academia. The office itself was packed with books about the ocean, many of them written by its normal occupant, John H. Parry. It was a pleasure to sit at the desk of a man from whose *Europe and a Wider World 1415-1715* and *The Age of Reconnaissance* I had burgled many a lecture. When students came in they would look around and say "Ah, Boats!" "Boats", they explained, was the nickname of Professor Parry's freshman history subject Man and the Sea, which had a reputation for being a Gut course: easy to pass on no work other than taking lecture notes. Students came to see me there occasionally during set office hours, especially those who opted to write a paper; and they all came one by one when I asked them to pick a time early in the semester to see me. Evidently this custom was unfamiliar. In the parts of Harvard I glimpsed, serious informal meetings between professors and undergradu-



ates did not appear to be common. At Yale, said one old Harvard professor of History who had worked there, students seem to think the university exists to serve them; at Harvard, he said, students have no such illusion. He knew he was being a bit naughty; but I found in students a recognition, and on the whole an acceptance, of the idea that professors were there first of all to research, to publish, to aim for that Nobel prize. "While you're teaching here," one student asked, "will you be doing any *academic* work?"

Harvard professors, or the ones I saw, are too busy not only to fit in much conversation with students but also to spare time for their junior colleagues. The History department had 28 full professors, two associate professors, 14 assistant professors, seven lecturers and two instructors. Only the full professors had tenure. The department — the roughly equal numbers of tenured and insecure — gathered four times a semester for dinner and business, the untenured leaving when asked to while their seniors remained to discuss confidential matters. There was no such thing as a general departmental seminar, a common-room or even a coffee machine. One assistant professor told me she had met nobody in the department for her first four months, until she could stand it no longer and went pounding on doors. I should add that several members of the department, especially but not only John Clive, were very hospitable towards a visitor and his wife. One reward of the scholarly life is getting to meet people whose books have meant a lot to you, and I treasure the experience at Harvard of conversations with such a man as Oscar Handlin, author of that model piece of imaginative history, *The Uprooted*.

The students themselves could not have been more accessible. We lived in Eliot House, a student residence, and on the short walk between there and all the places we wanted to go in and around Harvard we were always likely to have friendly greetings from increasingly familiar faces. We were invited to other students' residences for what were called Faculty dinners, when anybody could ask a professor and spouse along without having to pay. Several students asked us to restaurants for meals. Were they hoping that their grades would benefit? I don't know; but I have never met young people anywhere who talked so easily with strangers of their parents' generation.

I had to grade the hourly mid-term exam and the papers by those who chose to do them, and then, after the three-hour final exam, I had to award a grade for the whole course. People who

wrote a paper did so in the reasonable hope that they would improve their grades. As elsewhere in the USA, grades run from A to F, with pluses and minuses. When I taught at another American university, Brown, twenty years ago, C used to be regarded as fairly satisfactory. Now, people told me, higher education was suffering from a phenomenon called grade inflation, and everybody expected a B. Even at Brown, those aspiring to graduate school knew that they needed a string of Bs, and at Harvard these days more than ninety per cent of undergraduates are aiming for graduate school, Law and Medicine being the most favored. I ended up giving (with pluses and minuses) six As, eleven Bs, five Cs and two Ds. (That makes 24: one student had withdrawn.) One of the Cs has been the subject of correspondence, Mr S, wondering if it was a clerical error and if not how I can explain it. Mr S took me twice to lunch. I have not found the correspondence easy.

I was advised to expect students to read about 300 pages a week. I found that I had to be quite specific in requests about reading: there was no such category as 'suggested background reading', and even when I did prescribe blocks of pages I doubted whether the class averaged 300 a week. Mr P told me over brunch in North House that on the whole he didn't believe in reading for course, and I noticed evidence in his exam of learning by ear rather than eye, as when he wrote that convicts called recent settlers "new chumps". There may be a similar explanation for Mr C's calling the Busheveldt Carbineers "Bushwhack Cavaliers"; but perhaps that is the sort of accident that can happen to anybody in an exam. The one student who was struggling sent me a note late in the semester intending to assure me that all was well. The note ended: "As I had previously arranged a reciprocal note-taking relationship with Elizabeth G, I am in possession of a representative stock of notes for the lectures which I missed this latter half of the semester. Best regards."

Harvard folklore says you can get fairly good grades even if you have done nothing but attend lectures until the reading period, two weeks before the exams start. Tradition encourages students to do much else besides study. Some had part-time jobs. Mr S played jazz trumpet in the Hasty Pudding Club's revue about the French revolution, "Sealed with a Quiche", which travelled to New York at Easter and to Bermuda in the spring recess. Mr S was captain of the Harvard field (i.e. non-ice) hockey team, and Miss I was cap-



tain of squash. Mr W was in the track team and ran in the Boston marathon. Mr C played Roper in his house's production of "A Man For All Seasons". Mr D was a pop tenor; he gave a recital in his house library and sang with a clever group called the Harvard Krokodiloes. Mr. C ran an art show in which two of his own works were exhibited. I remember Manning Clark saying that applicants for Harvard were so good academically that to get in they had to have some other qualification, such as being black or playing the flute. My wife and I sometimes wondered whether students had been chosen for their health and beauty.

There was only one, Mr F, whom I think of as an intellectual. He had taken Leonie Kramer's course, and scored the highest grade in mine. The rest applied their high intelligence to being all-rounders. They were proficient at assimilating what I said in lectures, and I think there was a lot of skilful speed-reading in the last two weeks. They had occasional difficulties with my accent, as when Miss M asked at the end of a lecture about education what this "prefix" system was about. I meant "prefect" — a word unknown in American schools. I spoke of John Bull without realizing that the students had never heard of that character. (But I found that also, I should have remembered, lecturing to undergraduates in Australia.) They had to work at understanding the language of the colonial parliamentary system, and especially the practice of electing the executive from the legislature. They were momentarily surprised by a continent the size of the USA having a population the size of California's, most of them in one corner. They were surprised too, to discover so many sheep: applying American notions to Australia, they tended to assume that cattle and cattlemen must have been more numerous.

There were gains in having Australia perceived through American eyes. When someone wonders why Australians remained contented members of the British Empire after what happened at Gallipoli, what do you say? It was nice to have the Bulletin's Little Boy from Manly described as "a headstrong tag-along". There were gains, too, in having students with such diverse educational experience, concentrators in science as well as arts: Mr C, writing of the separation of Victoria and Queensland, called it a first mitosis, which I found means the process of division of a cell into minute threads.

I had hoped I might arrange for the class to see

some Australia films, and especially "My Brilliant Career", "Breaker Morant" and "Gallipoli". There was no need for any arranging: "Gallipoli" was on for weeks in a first-run house just off Harvard Square, and the other two were shown more than once at a cinema which has re-runs. Someone told me there are 250,000 college and university students in the State of Massachusetts. I haven't checked the figure, but when I add up the numbers in places I know about, it seems plausible. Certainly the concentration of students in Cambridge — at Harvard, MIT, Brandeis and elsewhere — sustains a wealth of book shops, photocopying places, ice cream parlors and movie theatres. Australian movies were fashionable: the first conversation I overheard between students was about Fred Schepisi. One student told me that for Americans "Breaker Morant" had an extra layer of meaning as a parable about Vietnam. He was surprised when I said I thought the makers had intended that, and amazed to know that Australian soldiers had been sent to Vietnam. Coming out of "My Brilliant Career", Miss M asked "Did Sybilla ever marry Harry?"

"No."

"Oh, how sad!"

(There were no new-wave feminists in the course.)

Mr S asked me where the story was filmed, and when I told him said: "Do you think in a few years I'll be able to *buy* some of that country?"

He may well.

Eight students wrote papers. We talked first about what they might do. Four ended up doing topics more or less on my suggestion, and the other four pursued subjects of their own. Mr C analyzed Humphrey McQueen's critique of Ward and Gollan. He was, as he said, a brash Texan, and he wrote the paper after four weeks' acquaintance with Australian history, having joined the course late because of an altercation with Economics. As he dropped the paper into our apartment he said, "I think you'll like it." I did: he hit all the issues dead centre.

Mr G's paper was called "American Travelers: looking at Australian racial problems and seeing their own." (He was the one who had enrolled in hope of discovering a new self.) Two of the travellers, Mark Twain and a reporter who covered the cruise of the Great White Fleet in 1908, I had suggested; the third, a bird and bug collector named Sherman Denton, who visited in 1889, I hadn't heard of; and the theme was Mr G's own. He explored it well.



Miss G wrote on the film "Gallipoli" as fact and legend. She had taken Manning Clark's course as a freshman, and had written then a paper about Gallipoli which she showed me; now she looked at the subject again using Gammage's book and the script of the film as well as the sources she had used the first time. Her judgment of the film was that it was accurate, for the most part, but omitted facts of squalor and disease in order to maintain the noble image of the soldiers.

Miss I wrote on "Home Town — Australia", reviewing critics of Russel Ward who say he leaves out the towns. She was concentrating in Visual and Environmental Studies, and her approach was influenced by the work of John Stilgoe in that department. She looked at towns as artefacts, documents; but she found too few local histories to do the job properly. It's a strange experience to see how country-town Australia looks to a bright but under-informed American extrapolating from Hal Porter's portrait of Bairnsdale.

Mr M's title was "Australia's Rational Reaction to Chinese Immigration". He himself is American-Chinese, son of Kuomintang exiles from the north, very tall; and he wrote with detachment of all those small Cantonese who once swarmed into Australia.

Mr S wrote on "Australia and America: Observations on the Jewish Immigrant Experience". I discouraged him, thinking that the library had too little on the Australian end; but he went ahead, found Judah Waten's *Alien Son* and bits and pieces on Monash, and interviewed his own grandfather. He noted that Ned Kelly was a hero of Monash and found that his grandfather's childhood hero was General Pershing. Already, through their heroes, it seemed to him, both young Jewish boys had somehow begun to make peace with their new country. He also wrote this: "I grew up with uncles, a mother and a grandfather who have worked in the junk business. They carried on as second generation and third generation entrepreneurs. As I read *Alien Son* I was startled to hear Judah Waten's words fill in the gaps of the many stories my grandfather has told me about the business of junk dealing and the pleasure and agony of growing up in a new and alien world."

Mr S, who had travelled in outback Australia, wrote about Banjo Paterson, but couldn't quite work out what to say. He typed out the whole of "Mulga Bill's Bicycle" and "The Man From Ironbark" just for the pleasure of it. Mr W took "A Look at Australian and American Exploration".

This was his own idea. He is the marathon runner, as evidently drawn to men of stamina. He got a lot of things right, from Phillip to Giles, and he had a compassionate outsider's eye for those explorers who endured so much to find so little, compared with the Americans who discovered some arid regions but also "endless prairies, forests, snow-capped mountains".

The disappointment of Australian explorers also interested a member of the History department, Patricia Nelson Limerick, who teaches a course on The American West after 1850. She wrote a Ph.D. dissertation, soon to be a book, on the desert in American history, and became interested in comparing the American and Australian frontiers. The course she runs was originated by Frederick Jackson Turner, but these days it is, in part, a critique of Turner from the vantage point of a new scholarship in which frontier history is not a study of white men against the wilderness but an encounter between peoples. Patricia Limerick gave a fine lecture on comparative history, drawing in particular on Henry Reynolds' book, *The Other Side of the Frontier*. We arranged a joint meeting of students from the two classes over Foster's Lager (available only in cans the size of billies, which confirmed the view of Australia as a land of frontiersmen) and a manly American beer named Coor's. Here we discussed, among other things, the remarkable similarity between revisionist writing in the USA and Noel Butlin's work-in-progress here on the size of Aboriginal populations when Europeans reached new worlds, suggesting that the received figures of a million in north America and 300,000 in Australia may be far too low.

Even in Frederick Jackson Turner's day I think the frontier was not a fashionable preoccupation in Europophile Harvard, and today Patricia Limerick senses that her senior colleagues don't want to hear much about encounters with the Indians. She proposed at our joint session that the history of the American West and Australian history become the nucleus of a new major, to be called Peripheral Studies. I'm sorry I couldn't stay on a little longer to help create that program.

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I return to Swag and to the editing of *Overland* after a year's respite, or nearly so. Barrett Reid has edited the past three issues, an editorship (so Nancy Keesing has written me) marked by dedication, hard work, attention and imagination. Like our readers, and our other editors, I am very grateful to him. Barrie has always been a great strength, especially on the poetry side, and now that he has retired he will be able to take an active role in the general editing of the magazine as well, and we formally recognize this by styling him "assistant editor". We are approaching our hundredth issue, and as I look back along those thirty years I reflect that none of the many associated with the editorial work of *Overland* (and it is extremely heavy) has ever been paid for his or her work. I mention this partly to excuse our imperfections, partly to remind such funding agencies as support us that we contribute something too, and partly to remark that this is not the case with all the Australian literary magazines. Not that I'm claiming it as a virtue: in a perfect world, as seen from the literary editor's point of view, we *should* be paying for editorial assistance.

The most interesting thing I did when away was to visit Tristan da Cunha, an island fifteen hundred miles west of Cape Town and three hundred miles south. Tristan has three hundred people, descended from a British garrison in Napoleonic times, African women imported for marriage purposes, shipwrecked Italian seamen and other unexpected arrivals. It is not only by far the most isolated community in the world, but has retained its own individuality in a way that few modern communities can have done. Physically, it is a great rock sticking up out of the South Atlantic — as high as Mount Kosciuszko but only seven miles across, an extraordinary sight as one comes up to it after weeks at sea, with its almost permanent cloud-cap and the little level plain on the north-west, running down into the sea, where the Tris-

taners live, grow their potatoes and run their stock. (The sheep are run on "The Base", a plateau two thousand feet up, and are carried up and down to the Base, along precipitous ridges, on the islanders' backs!)

I was looking for clues as to how small, isolated communities survive over long periods of time with little or no administrative apparatus and with considerable harmony and mutual support. (There may be lessons for those of use who live in more complex and competitive communities, for a start!) Tristan has been called a society living by the principles of "modified anarchy". And, incidentally, it is one of the few world communities that has two years' forward revenue already in the bank — from crayfish and stamps. There are two other communities of similar age, origins and composition, Cape Barren Island in Bass Strait and Pitcairn Island in the Pacific. I am working towards, I hope, a comparative study of all three, with some side comments on another island community which lived in almost total isolation for many centuries, that of St Kilda, fifty miles west of the Outer Hebrides, which I visited some years ago. While walking up the Great Glen on St Kilda I exchanged a few words with another traveller. It wasn't until a year or two later that (via *Overland*) David Foster and I discovered we had been talking to each other. His recent novel *Moonlite* is of course set in part on St Kilda.

Travelling to Tristan da Cunha involved some five weeks on a tramp steamer and a visit on the way to the River Congo. I'm fond of the sea and interested in albatrosses but, even so, there were limits to stimulation, and after the first couple of weeks even beer and tobacco failed to offer much pleasure. Fortunately the Australian Consul General in Cape Town lent me a number of books from his library, and I was able to do some reading for a *Dictionary of Australian*



*Quotations* which I have been editing and which I have just, thankfully, sent to bed at 3700 entries. It's been great fun in its way, and taught me a great deal about Australian history and literature that I should have known. Probably no country is as incurious about itself as ours is, and I hope the dictionary will help to rectify this.

My favorite entries? I'm often asked this by my friends. Well, there's a marvellous Xavier Herbert about British sailors on shore in Darwin — "How dare you piss on my country!" — which is too long to repeat here in full. There is of course the Aboriginal bushranger Jimmy Governor's "Bushranging's not the fucking game it's cracked up to be." For subtlety I'm fond of Gilbert Murray's parody of Ramsay MacDonald: "I shall not shrink from hesitating to refuse!" And for poignancy Matthew Flinder's remark on his death-bed: "But it grows late, boys, let us dismiss." I hope there's something in the dictionary for everyone, and suggestions will always be welcome, for future editions if not for this one.

Penguin Books have just put out the splendid *The Portable Edmund Wilson*, edited by Lewis M. Dabney (\$7.95). I was interested and moved by what Larzer Ziff had to say of Edmund Wilson in a recent Times Literary Supplement (15 July 1983):

In weekly pieces over a period of some four decades he not only imposed his opinion but in doing so brought together an audience of readers who came to share his reactions; he transformed, that is, dentists and shopkeepers, architects and bankers into members of the elite community . . . no critic or combination of critics has succeeded after Wilson in becoming the voice of that large and elusive group, the unprofessional readers of serious literature. They have been returned to their isolation and no longer exist as a community . . . The dissolution of the audience he shaped is a diminution of the quality of life in each home to which the mailman brings the weekly magazines, of the quality of life of every intelligent reader whose literary interests are none the weaker for his needing to have complex matters explained — in short, it is a diminution of the quality of cultural life in America.

This noble purpose of keeping art and humane studies out of the hands of the professionals (by which I mean not only the academics but also the hands of the practitioners themselves) as well as out of the hands of the closed-circuit ide-

logists, is one to which I should like to think Overland is dedicated in its own small way.

There are two recent books I'd like to draw your attention to. One is *Helen Palmer's Outlook*, edited by Doreen Bridges, for which an advertisement appears elsewhere in this issue. There was always a close and sympathetic relationship between Overland and the Sydney political journal Outlook, which closed down (ill-advisedly, I have always thought) in 1970. Both tried to speak to and for the democratic Left, and Helen Palmer, daughter of Vance and Nettie Palmer, was a friend of mine and of Overland's. Helen had a high sense of duty and commitment — in some ways perhaps too high, for if she had written more in the relaxed literary mode of her mother's I am sure it would have been to everyone's benefit. For all that, we are given in *Helen Palmer's Outlook* a valuable and interesting collection of Helen's writings on the Vietnam war, education, China and a great deal more besides, including a number of her poems. Like Edmund Wilson, Helen was the conscience of a "large and elusive" group, and it is good to have their existence and her role placed on record.

I'd also like to say a word for Mark O'Connor's *Modern Australian Styles*, available from the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies at James Cook University, Townsville, for \$3. Barrett Reid discussed O'Connor's views on contemporary Australian poetry in the last issue of Overland, and about the poetry side of these lively lectures I will therefore say no more. What I do want to mention, though, is the third of the three essays in this little book, "David Williamson and 'The Australian Sexual Problem'", which I found the most thoughtful and intelligent discussion of male and female sex roles in Australia that I have yet read. The essay or lecture or whatever you care to call it is a minor classic of lucidity, compassion and good sense.

A letter from a widow, explaining that her husband had died and enclosing a cheque for \$20 "as a final donation from him, which I am sure he would have liked me to do": "During the last three years of his life my husband was often in hospital and we always kept a list of requirements handy, to enable his hospital bag to be packed at short notice. First and foremost, the 'something-to-read', was, each time, the latest copy of Overland."



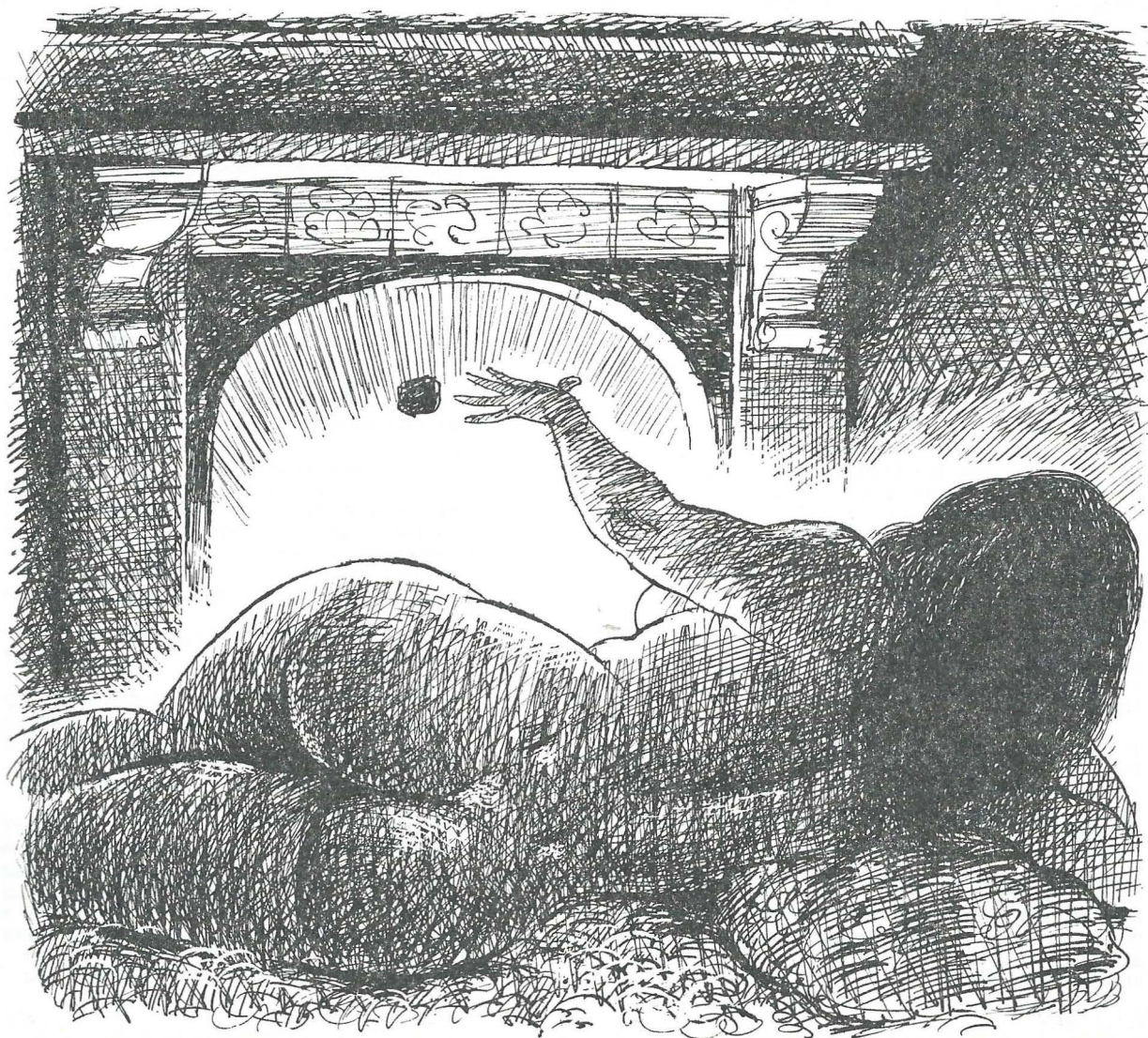
# Whatever Happened to Rosie?

A month or two back Mr James Paxton, now 83 years old, gave some of his reminiscences of early days in Toorak in an article in the *Melbourne Age*.

In these he described how a parlormaid of his mother's was found by her employers, on their return from the theatre, "naked and voluptuously sprawled on the white lamb's wool hearth-rug":

She was languidly throwing chunks of coal at random, some of which landed on target, and was completely and happily blotto in the warmth of the blazing fire. The rest is silence, we never heard what became of Rose. She just vanished from the Toorak scene much faster than its other glories.

Overland offers a prize (a copy of the forthcoming *Dictionary of Australian Quotations*) to the best poetic answer to the question "Whatever happened to Rosie?". Limit thirty lines, preferably fewer. Entries by 30 October, 1983.





## CAPTAIN COOK NAMES PORT KEMBLA

Legend has it that in her death throes  
two mighty blows from Grendel's Mother  
sent shock waves shuddering like visions  
along the earth's crust.

Seabeds shook then,  
serpents uncoiled,  
and grey, retarded creatures with spaceship eyes  
slithered from hissing chasms.

Far from home, continents adjusted their positions,  
geographies rewrote themselves along fault lines,  
and in the queer regions south, beyond the Edge of  
Tomorrow  
the surface layers buckled like roofing iron.

Of the monster herself, it is told  
that although her guts splattered,  
the bowels remained intact,  
to be catapulted, whirling, upon the blackness. . .

On landing, they emptied their foulness on ocean and  
shore,  
where poured over bramble and scree, it lay sloshing  
its tenure:  
a conglomerate muck alternately sweating and steaming,  
like mulch, at the land's edge. . .

Gimlet-eyed Cook had a grim humor.  
It was blacker than a monster's arse.  
Hat Hill he named the mountain behind:  
*it sat upon Shit Head.*

CORAL FITZPATRICK

## SWAMP-PHEASANT

The seaside you'd think seagulls  
mewing and riding the wind:  
but for me it was swamp-pheasants.  
Not that there were no gulls, but  
more was that lovely liquidly falling  
call from the hillside scrub.  
I tried to learn to whistle it  
as a call to my dog, so that,  
on hot dusty dry days, I'd have  
an excuse to call like  
a swamp-pheasant, recall  
sea, beach, and the green moist hills  
that flanked them.

In the open, like trying to cross a road,  
it's a prominently awkward bird:  
in the undergrowth  
hard to see from a few metres and  
remarkably agile.

These days I inhabit two worlds,  
hearing the calls of crows, doves, chippies,  
from my dry home and  
the liquid notes of the swamp-pheasant:  
almost as if lantana had  
invaded the brigalow.

R. G. HAY

## THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

roland barthes is dead  
i killed him

i broke into his study  
& chopped him up

from the pieces  
i stuck together

a great movie  
a masterpiece

finally i confessed  
i told my film tutors

they were more interested  
in the movie

RICHARD JAMES ALLEN

## FOR GLENDA

*Died of cancer, 1982, aged 40*

My mother's wedding:  
sweeping trails of petals,  
and the flowergirl, head back,  
cheeky with her basket of blooms.  
A small blond cousin.

Joyce's wedding  
and there she is again,  
bridesmaid now in apple-green chiffon,  
dark eyes wary of me  
small cousin holding her bouquet.

Her wedding, and here am I  
tall like her, bridesmaid in shock,  
looking elegant, lovely, and surprised,  
thinking of my mother  
and the generations of women, bonded.

The love in her smile that day  
as she hugged grandma close,  
already crippled with Parkinson's,  
is lying in memory like a hand  
loose in the lap, able to pincer or caress.

Today I wear my red shirt,  
bright red, neon red,  
even scarlet,  
the color of life and anger and flames,  
challenging the bleak and gathering sky.

Her bright blond fierceness  
has paled,  
drained away from the breast  
in mockery  
of its living flow.

She is one more on my list now,  
stitched into the tapestry  
of my grieving rug,  
lying across the bed at night,  
winding itself round me in the day.

ROBYN ROWLAND



### THREE FOR CAROLYN

1.  
(After Bob Hunter)

White upon white upon white upon white,  
hexagon, circle, square and triangle;  
one skin's laid on another, the whole weight  
stature and texture of a roll-on angel,

but pull them out until they're standing free,  
faceted pillar, sphere, box, pyramid,  
all gleaming nacre, forms seal perfectly  
exclude time's fungal and corrosive mode

And what of black, the shadow of a shadow,  
no skin, only a thinness, an opaque gap,  
the glass beyond the glass beyond the window  
where beyond mirrors the abysses gape?

2.  
With you I am always standing on a height  
from which the distances burn clear as glass,  
shimmer and sparkle in your noonday heart.  
Though they may shatter easily, the gloss  
of every particle is clear; it glows  
with the rainbow's with the prism's peacock light  
till from the core of each a lily grows  
color cascading back into the white.

From you I fall into a world of fuzz,  
soft focus . . . no color, only greys,  
no definition. No one can be hurt  
for nothing's sharp enough to cut. Thoughts fuse  
wandering eyeless in a drab disguise  
where no one can distinguish love from hate.

3.  
Sappho's measure, passionate spare and stately  
suits your candor, clear as a mountain river,  
sings of Lesbos, island of fairest women,  
home of your longing.

Now you're no-age, Carolyn, you are still the  
Goddess, hanging five on your scallop surf-boat,  
Aphrodite, Queen of the love-whipped sea-foam  
clear eyed and wanton.

Flux of ocean revolving currents' time-swirl  
brings you back to yesterday, flowing coupled,  
present, future alternate, spiral steeply  
lost in your always.

FRANK KELLAWAY

### THE BUTTON ON THE COP

On the sombre jacket  
of the off-duty cop  
the button said:  
MAYOR  
BYRNE

The point was  
not the message  
but — inevitable, perhaps,  
in view of the structure  
it rested on —  
where it was fixed  
not above the heart  
but over the stomach

JIM GALE

### THESE DAYS

the lines are drawn sharp  
triangles & diamond shapes  
from ears: pierced  
across bodies: slashed  
hard times  
hard lines  
prison/sailor/sorbonne stripes

i search for eyes  
find corners of sunglasses, spiked  
like the pink/black hair  
& the cafe conversation  
a sort of binary  
on/off approval/dis o.k./passe

don't put a stove-pipe black-pants  
purple-sock  
white sneaker foot out of place  
unless you want to be stepped on  
with panache  
(of course)

CLIFF SMYTH

### AT THE BUS STOP

"What this country needs,"  
said the little man with bad breath  
"is to nuke the commies  
before they nuke us.  
And Reagan's got the recession  
licked. See where unemployment  
has dropped from 10.4  
to 10.2."

There were ten of us  
at the bus stop.  
Nobody joined him  
in "seeing" anything.

One guy said real slow:  
"If he were listening to hisself  
he'd know he was talking bullshit."

JIM GALE

### POEM FOR ROSEMARY — ON SHARING A HOUSE

the spiral staircase every day  
invites our movements to eclipse  
from every angle, tensely caught  
across my shoulders, through your hips;  
we turn away with every step  
and separate in every view,  
both reluctant to admit  
(for i'm as obstinate as you)  
our level's lower on the stair;  
until each night we let words drop  
and meet each other at the top  
to find, each looking down from there,  
a single spine aligning it

GEOFF SHARROCK



BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS **The American Model?**  
*American writing and Australian poetry*

Joan Kirkby (ed.): *The American Model* (Hale & Iremonger, \$19.95 and \$9.95).

In this book Joan Kirkby has collected the contributions by ten poets, eight of them Australians and the other two Americans, to a conference which originally must have provoked a lot of controversy. They have been assembled in the order in which they were delivered, and convey a faint hint of the original occasion, but not enough to make up for the absence of the discussion which surely must have questioned and qualified some of the extreme or occasionally pretentious ideas and opinions advanced in a few of the papers, and even challenged the idea underlying the conference itself.

A few of the contributions are polemical, opinionated and occasionally wildly inaccurate in their descriptions of recent literary events in the English-speaking world, and taken together, they bristle with disagreements and contradictions. Some of the papers do not appear to have been revised for publication and either do not hang together when read, or have to be re-read slowly to be understood. Robert Gray's contribution illustrates the first of these faults. In its preliminary quasi-philosophical pages, with their inconsequential snippets from the writings of Heidegger, Borges and Wittgenstein (amongst others) and the modest comparison of himself to Nietzsche, the author seems to be defending an unexceptionally sensible premise about poetry with a weapon designed by Heath Robinson. However, after three or four pages, he gives up theoretical argument and proceeds to a discussion of poems by Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams and Charles Reznikoff, and these are some of the most incisive and agreeable passages in the book.

The pieces by John Tranter and Vincent Buckley are laborious to read: in Tranter's case be-

cause he resorts to fashionably obtuse arguments for the obvious, namely, that fiction is fiction, and tries to swamp the reader with approved names and citations; in Buckley's case because he wants to say something about language and experience which it is difficult to express.

This collection demonstrates yet again that one of the enduring aspects of Australian poetry is the hostility which divides some of its practitioners from others, and a few of these took the opportunity afforded by the conference to join battle. Yet despite the pattern of dissent and contradiction which develops in the book until the late entrance of Vincent Buckley and Bruce Dawe as peacemakers, there is surprising agreement between the contributions on a number of points.

Most striking is their acquiescence on the title itself. All the participants were willing to entertain the idea of 'the American model', a notable accord among poets of different generations and otherwise disjunct or opposed ideas. The title could have been interpreted in interesting ways which might have nothing to do with poetry or Australia at all, but only Bruce Dawe flirts with one of these before settling down to consider the proposition as redefined in the subtitle. However, even within these delimiting terms some of the contributors take unexpected positions. Fay Zwicky, for example, talks about the way American Jewish fiction helped her discover her own identity as a writer, and Vincent Buckley describes what he learnt from reading a couple of American novels. Both Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Robert Gray reach diffident conclusions about the impact of American writing on Australian poetry, but it surprises me that none of the contributors challenged the idea of the conference itself. After all, there must be Australian poets who would disdain American models, but perhaps superior tactical insight caused them to decline this engagement.



It is interesting to speculate whether it was this, sheer luck, or plain ignorance which also accounts for the absence from this book of any of Australia's women poets, except Fay Zwicky, and of all poets born west of longitude 140° east.

I find the title disturbing in its use of the definite article and the singular, but mainly in its use of the word "model", which in any relevant sense connotes either a reproduction, or pattern or example to be imitated. Australian poetry as a whole needs no such models, and even aspiring poets, who usually begin by imitation, have to cast off their models before they really become poets. However, it soon becomes evident that this is not a book about *the* American model, or any American *model* at all. The ground is shifted in the subtitle, and all the contributors tacitly agree on a semantic twist by which the word "model" comes to mean 'influence', or rather, 'influences', for the book is really a record of the diverse ways in which eight Australian poets have been influenced by American writing. They are supported by two specimens of the real thing — Galway Kinnell and Louis Simpson — who discuss the work of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams, two poets who have helped to give modern American poetry some of its distinction.

Any writer who has learnt his craft in the English-speaking world (and even in some places outside it) during the last twenty years would inevitably have discovered some American writing. The changes in publishing which have occurred during that period have made sure the market is swamped with it, and the problem for a young writer today is often to avoid the influence of fashionably puffed American writers, and find a corner of the market for his own work. However, as Vincent Buckley, Tom Shapcott and Chris Wallace-Crabbe remind us, the situation in Australia was not always like this. After the second world war, during which some American artists spent time in Australia, and participated in various aspects of its culture (as can be seen from a perusal of the later issues of *Angry Penguins*), Australia was suddenly isolated from American high culture. It was not, however, cut off from American influences. Australians produced and drove a car which was an American model (though an obsolescent one), they listened to American popular music, they watched American films, they played jazz, they ate quantities of Chicken Maryland and competed almost annually with the United States for the Davis Cup. Yet it was a time when American books and

records were almost unobtainable and Americans (unless they were tennis-players or young men in grey suits clutching the *Book of Mormon*, or both) seemed exotic and their ways of thought unfamiliar.

Several poets who grew up in these years describe in this collection the sense of liberation they felt when they discovered American writing, generally poetry, through anthologies like Geoffrey Moore's *Penguin Book of Modern American Verse* (1953), and I do not doubt their testimony. Yet I think they exaggerate the situation. Australia, during those years, was definitely under some American influences, and though American books were hard to get, a lot of American literature reached Australia in English editions, such as the anthology just mentioned. Admittedly, this involved a filtering process which sometimes had insidious results, like the unacknowledged deletions and rewriting in the Penguin edition of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, yet almost all modern American novelists up to Carson McCullers and Jack Kerouac (to name two, at random, who were active at the time) were accessible. The plays of Tennessee Williams were performed; English editions of modern American poets such as Wallace Stevens, e. e. cummings and Ezra Pound were available and Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, H.D., Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Hart Crane, e. e. cummings, Laura Riding and Richard Eberhart were all included in the *Faber Book of Modern Verse*. Moreover, it was not completely impossible to obtain American books. In addition to anthologies like the Hall-Pack-Simpson *New Poets of England and America* (1957) such supposedly rare publications as *Evergreen Review II* were on sale at the bookroom at Adelaide university.

These were years when one did not go to a university for a literary education, but to a bookshop, and in addition to those mentioned by Tom Shapcott and Andrew Taylor in this collection, the original Mary Martin bookshop in Adelaide, and Preece's even before that, as well as Fuller's in Hobart, deserve credit for sustaining the literary culture of their communities. Mary Martin's certainly introduced numerous readers, and probably a few writers, to modern American literature. Max Harris was an active publicist for writers like Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren (as both poet and novelist). He wrote about them in the Mary Martin catalog and in *Mary's Own Paper*, and delivered talks on Faulkner and other modern American writers to the students' literary



society at Adelaide university. At the same time his co-editor, Geoffrey Dutton, then still a university lecturer, was writing a book on Whitman which in its closing pages discussed the renewed influence of that poet on a number of writers who were then contemporary, including those of the Beat generation. No doubt similar activities took place in the other Australian capitals in the post-war decades.

For these reasons I find it hard to accept the idea, maintained by some of the contributors to this collection, that Australian poetry in the post-war years was firmly under the influence of the narrowest mode of British poetry until the arrival in Australia (at a date still earnestly disputed) of Donald Allen's anthology containing the good news from Black Mountain. After all, the reason why most of the poems in that volume were unknown in Australia was that they were barely known in the United States, since those that had been published at all were mostly to be found in regional magazines, broadsheets and pamphlets, as Donald Allen points out in his introduction.

It is depressing to discover that some Australian poets saw themselves (and perhaps still see themselves) confronted with two starkly opposed influences: a negative, constricting and conservative British one and a positive, liberating and radical American one, and it is an unfortunate result of this symposium that it tended to reinforce this antithetical approach. It excludes possible views and influences of poetry in languages other than English, and some Australian poets, like Randolph Stow, for example, were reading Rilke or St John Perse with at least as much interest as they gave to poetry in the English language. They therefore remained untouched by the reactions against experiment which affected, in very different ways, the work of Larkin, Hope or McAuley.

More obviously, it excludes from consideration the work of writers using the English language in Africa, New Zealand, the Caribbean, Canada, India and other parts of the world. While not many of these, perhaps, were well known in Australia, there are nevertheless some intriguing parallels between the English literatures of these regions and that of Australia during the post-war years. For example, there were (and are) writers as different as Stow, or Les Murray, Wilson Harris, Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, Derek Walcott and many others, all seriously concerned with the exploration of myths and legends, something for

which there is no parallel in contemporary American literature, except for a few self-regarding examples which can be discounted because they operate entirely on the level of play with literary conventions, and thus deny the function of myth.

However, the most important negative result of focusing in this way upon 'the American model' is that it eliminates, or at least, subordinates, the possibility of Australian models or influences. Not that this question is ignored: it is raised by Dr Kirkby and several of her contributors, who detect in Australian poetry a vein of reticence, detachment and irony, just the opposite of the narcissism, subjectivity and colloquialism of the American models they cite, notably Whitman and those who have followed his example. Implicit in this opposition is the idea that American 'models' will supply a corrective to the restrained, understated mode of Australian verse, whose characteristic failing is flatness. I am not sure that the diagnosis is correct — flatness can be as much the result of self-centred garrulity as reticence — nor that the antidote would be effective or desirable. Even if Australian poetry is typically restrained, understated and verging on silence because, as Fay Zwicky suggests, these qualities are typical of Australian speech (which is doubtful, since for every quiet Australian there must be at least another who talks to avoid silence) the problem will not be solved, as Tom Shapcott hints, by adopting a more self-indulgent, vulnerable stance, after the American model. That would only deny the attitude implicit in what is held to be typical of speech in Australia, where letting it all hang out is not an absolute virtue.

Australian poets have always had to face the difficulty of creating a language which captures, or somehow suggests, the idioms, tones and cadences of Australian speech, but it is not an intractable problem, still awaiting solution. It has been solved over and over again, in various ways, by Australian poets (and novelists), without recourse to exotic models. If I cite the case of Randolph Stow once again it is because his work (for which I have great admiration) offers a complete counter-example to many of the assumptions made by some of the contributors to this book. It is not 'academic'; it is not constrained by contemporary British influences; it does not distance itself from subjective experience through irony; it is not the extension of a moribund Australian tradition. It is, on the contrary, pervaded by tones, feelings and perceptions which are associated with life in Australia without



being limited to it. As both poet and novelist, in many pieces in *Outrider* (1963) and *A Counterfeit Silence* (1969), in most of the original version of *To The Islands* (1958) and throughout the revised version (1982) in *Tourmaline* (1963) and *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965) (disregarding the fine recent novels), Randolph Stow created an idiom which in its modesty and low-keyed quality accords with the laconic side of Australian speech, while it retains variety, flexibility and expressive power. "The Land's Meaning" (for Sidney Nolan) (1961), a poem which encompasses a range of tones in a relatively short space, exemplifies this precisely. It is one poem, among many that could have been chosen, that refutes John Tranter's claim that "it is fair to say that most of the best Australian poetry from about 1955 to 1965 was essentially conservative in both technique and sentiment", unless "conservative", "technique" and "sentiment" are, for John Tranter, mere Humpty-Dumpty words.

John Tranter's contribution to this symposium is a starkly antithetical account of post-war Australian poetry which opposes an old conservative tradition (explicitly represented by Vincent Buckley, and implicitly by A. D. Hope and James McAuley) to a reaction of young poets liberated by drugs, political involvement and renewed contacts with the culture of the United States. This creates a false picture, because it fails to account for most of the interesting poets of the post-war years, not just Stow, but Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson, R. D. FitzGerald, David Campbell, Kenneth Slessor, David Malouf, Geoffrey Lehmann and many others. It also makes it easy for him to ignore the achievement of Les Murray, whose work cannot be placed in the starkly opposed historical and stylistic categories upon which Tranter's argument depends.

The point Tranter avoids is that while the poets with which he was associated were looking towards American models, Les Murray was creating a distinctly Australian poetic language which is extremely flexible and capable of lyrical, elegaic, celebratory, witty, narrative and dramatic functions. His recent book, *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980) is, amongst other things, a triumph of language which exemplifies this. In that poem and the "Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle" (to mention only two examples), hidden riches in the Australian idiom are discovered which completely controvert the theory that it is flat and barely articulate. Murray has revealed that as well as being terse (as in the first stanza of *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral*) it can be richly

discursive in the manner of the "Song Cycle". There are passages in that poem where he strips the stage-Australian created by Barry Humphries and Patrick White of its burlesque connotations, and introduces it, with a delicate readjustment of tone, to celebrate the rituals of ordinary Australian life.

Murray is certainly not a poet constrained by a conservative technique. He does, indeed, use stanza forms and rhyme with skill and fluency, but both the "Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle" and *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* are innovative successes. It may be that their innovations are of a kind quite unexpected by those whose experiments have been inspired by American models, but they offer Australian models which are perhaps equally relevant.

I am well aware of the answer these thoughts will provoke. It is given in this collection by Andrew Taylor, who maintains that Les Murray is a rural poet, and rural poets (presumably including most of the counter-examples I have suggested) do not reflect American influences. Several things puzzle me about this observation. The first is that it never occurred to Andrew Taylor to ask why (if true) this is the case. He points out that because cities are the focus for the exchange of goods, the cultural borrower will be city-oriented, but this is very superficial. It would take an enormous effort for anyone today, whether city- or country-oriented, to isolate himself from cultural exchanges—though I know poets and musicians who are driven or attracted to it. This is because cultural exchanges create a lot of noise, sometimes called "communications" or "the media", which blocks many creative possibilities, and the 'trash-can' response of recycling bits of this noise as art, in the manner of Warhol, Coover, Barthelme and some of the New York poets mentioned in this collection, rapidly succumbed to the law of diminishing returns and failed to make up for the loss.

In any case, Les Murray has so far not isolated himself from the city, and it is simply wrong to describe him as a poet "who turn(s) away from urban experience for a further exploration of Australia's rural tradition". A quick check through the books by Murray in my possession reveals dozens of poems which are not in any way rural, and quite a number which are specifically concerned with the city; "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow" is a well-known example, and there are plenty more, particularly in *Lunch and Counter Lunch*, but also in later books. Far from



turning away from the city, Murray confronts it. If the confrontation leads to condemnation, this does not make him any the less a poet engaged with urban experience. It is not necessary to be a *pro-city* poet to be a city poet.

Of course, some of Murray's most characteristic poems are concerned with the country *and* the city, and if the two are in fact divided, this does not mean that they cannot be held together in the poet's imagination, nor that the division might be healed. This is the upshot of Murray's controversy with Peter Porter about Boeotian poetry, which was more concerned with the *mode* of poetry than its subject. The modern Boeotian poet cannot ignore the city; he must challenge it by showing what is lost through the Athenian emphasis on wit, polish, artifice, and the things which are called 'urbanity' in verse. Murray's position, backed up by his practice, embraces both sides of the division. It is those who make the distinction between city and country a reason for insisting on the exclusive relevance of the city who are turning away from something, by rejecting the country.

This touches on another problem in Andrew Taylor's position. He expresses the view, which I have heard elsewhere recently, that "(f)or many of us writing today, the bush, the farm life, the world of animals and of manual labor are more remote from us than O'Hara's New York. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of Australia's population lives in cities and that goes for most of the poets as well." I do not know if Andrew Taylor has lived in New York, but he confesses in this very piece that he was brought up in Warrnambool, and developed a passion for beaches, the sea and surfing. I find it sad that these things are now more remote from him than the metropolis evoked by Frank O'Hara. I do not doubt his testimony, but it is surely untypical for anyone, and especially a poet, to be so cut off from childhood experience.

The difficulty I have in appreciating this attitude is that it seems confused and rather literal-minded. I grant the fact that the Lawson-Furphy tradition is exhausted, but rejecting the bush as it was represented in that tradition, with all the values it enshrined, is a different thing from rejecting the bush itself. The tradition might be dead, but the bush is still there. Australia's cities, even Melbourne, are fundamentally different in a number of ways from most of the cities of Europe and the United States. They remain relatively distant from each other but, more importantly, they are at the edge of a hinterland which

is still sparsely cultivated, partly undeveloped and in some places untamed, and this impinges even on the imagination of city-dwellers. The widespread public fascination with the Azaria case suggests that people are still haunted by an idea of the outback, where incredible events might just possibly happen.

Australians who live in cities on the coast cannot help but be aware of the outback behind them, even if they sense it only as a vast space about which they know nothing by experience. One can fear or hate the bush, like the suburban dentist in Murray Bail's story "The Drover's Wife", but one cannot ignore its presence. The fact that a large proportion of Australians live in cities does not imply that they envisage Australia as a city or experience themselves in purely urban terms. To suggest that they do is to understand *experience* very literally, disallowing some of the less easily definable wishes, hopes, fears, dreams and memories which enter into it.

I gather Andrew Taylor now lives in Adelaide, the city in which I was raised when it was not much more than a pleasant, large country town. I revisited it recently and found it utterly changed, yet to me it still seems mistaken to claim that the experience of Adelaide has much in common with the experience of New York. In the first place, New York actually *generates* fashions and forms of culture which Adelaide merely reflects, so that alleging the relevance of New York to Adelaide entails admitting the inequality of the relationship between the two places. The influences, good and bad, can only flow one way: New Yorkers have the opportunity to be trend-setters; Adelaideans responding to New York can only be trend-followers. This realization must qualify any sense of the relevance of New York.

Conversely, the fact that New York is a dominant cultural centre inevitably affects the experience of artists who live there. They have immediate access to the main culture-puffing industry, through which success can be rewarded with power, influence and even money. They know that the city acts as a magnet to artists not just from the hinterland (wherever that is) but on an international scale. They inhabit a place which has become the symbol for up-to-date cultural styles and the host to cultural items from around the world, which are displayed in renowned concert halls and museums. These contribute to the significance of the symbol and acquire value through being associated with it. In such a world one is exposed to dangerous delusions of grandeur; one is tempted to endow ordinary acts and per-



sonal sensations with profound significance, and memorialize them in writing. A great deal of the narcissistic poetry emanating from New York is simply this; a danger from which the inhabitants of Adelaide are mercifully saved, through the proper sense of modesty their city inculcates.

New York is an unfortunate example for Andrew Taylor to have chosen. It is certainly a powerful influence on international culture, but rather than be considered relevant to what is evolving in Australia, it should be viewed with suspicion.

New York is actually a bad influence because it is the main contributor to the noisiness of much contemporary American culture. This can be explained by considering an important change which has occurred since the late forties when Vincent Buckley discovered *As I Lay Dying*. This is the work of a modest artist who shunned the limelight and whose novels, though rich in innovative modes, did not clamor for attention. In fact, for a long time they got very little, though their author went along quietly adding to his *oeuvre*. We know from Malcolm Cowley and other sources that even in the late forties, around the time Vincent Buckley was reading *As I Lay Dying*, "Faulkner's books were little read".<sup>1</sup> Yet he already had most of his masterpieces behind him.

The situation is very different for contemporary American writers. Their works, as well as their lives, are potential subjects for television programs, films, literary reviews, newspaper columns, university courses and professorial *explanations*, and modern publishing is organised to take advantage of all this. Part of the noise of contemporary culture is therefore the sound of the publicity which surrounds it, and the multiplication of the means for creating this noise and imposing it upon the public is one of the main achievements of western civilization in the post-war years.

The worst result of this is the adoption of noisy styles and mannerisms by writers clamoring for attention. Two of the contemporary 'models' or influences discussed by some of the contributors to this symposium exemplify this. Self-referring 'texts' and narcissistic poems can be, and often are, merely antics for drawing attention to the author and the act of writing. They are invitations, or commands, to take notice that culture is being created. If they go no further (and very few do) they are dangerous models to follow, because they reduce art to self-referential gestures evoked by the noise of metropolitan culture and

functional only in that context. It is easy enough to understand why American literature (or at least that part of it focused on New York) is going through a noisy phase, but Australian writers have little to gain by following that trend, since they are on the receiving end, rather than at the source, of the culture-puffing industry.

Noisy writing blocks out quiet writing, and this has a number of damaging effects. Writers who cultivate fine gradations of tone, subtle indirection, delicate understatement or transparent styles tend to go unheard and unnoticed. I am inclined to suggest that some Australian writers appear to be immune from American influences not because they 'turn away from the city' but because they value modest ways of writing. It may be that they are even influenced by quieter forms of American writing. For example, in some of Les Murray's early poems a possible influence of Robert Frost can be detected.

*The American Model* itself shows signs of the damage cultural noise can produce, for although the contributors allude to a range of older American writers like Whitman, Williams, Reznikoff, Faulkner and some others, only a few *recent* American poets are discussed, mainly those associated with New York or Black Mountain, with some reference to the 'confessional' strain in recent American verse. Even from these categories there are surprising omissions, like Sylvia Plath. The participants in this symposium on "the American model" gave no suggestion of the range and variety of contemporary American writing which would be evident to any reader of American Poetry Review or Poetry. There is no mention of Etheridge Knight or any black American poet; barely an allusion to contemporary American women poets, like Louise Glück, for example; no mention of poets such as Norman Dubie and A. R. Ammons whose extensive published work entitles them to consideration, even if it does not exhibit the fashionable tendencies prized in New York; no hint of the regional diversity of contemporary American poetry. I am not blaming the contributors for this. They are not scholars and did not promise their audience a survey. The point of my criticism is that it demonstrates that some of these Australian poets are victims of the noise which blocks out everything else. Their sense of American poetry is confused by it, so that while their testimony must be accepted, their explanations, interpretations and justifications of the American influences to which they are admittedly exposed, are biased. This criticism applies particularly to the contributions of Andrew Taylor and John



Tranter, and also to one or two points made by Tom Shapcott.

Tom Shapcott's comparative anthology of American and Australian poetry covers a much wider selection of poets than is mentioned in this symposium, and he probably knows more about contemporary American poetry than anyone in Australia. It is also fair to point out that his contribution to this collection reaches qualified and reserved conclusions about American models and influences. Yet at the same time, he maintains that "American poetry in English has been the dominant and most exciting poetry (in English) for the last two decades at least". Unless by "dominant and most exciting" he means the same as I mean by "noisiest", it is hard to understand how he arrived at this judgement. It overlooks the work of poets like Derek Walcott and Margaret Atwood, as well as one or two Australians, to mention just a few of the exciting poets using English outside the Anglo-American orbit. But even considering this symposium in the terms tacitly accepted by most of the participants, who oppose 'the American model' to British models, it is misleading.

Just as this book reflects a limited awareness of recent American poetry, it reflects limited awareness of recent British poetry. In some places it is extremist, opposing the excessive modesty of The Movement to the excessive self-indulgence of some American poets, and arguments like John Tranter's depend on this form of extremism. However, to take The Movement, or its main practitioner, Philip Larkin, as typical or representative of post-war British poetry is to load an argument which in any case was effectively refuted twenty years ago in A. Alvarez's anthology *The New Poetry* (1962). Aside from the fact that The Movement had almost no influence in Australia (where the conservative tradition had independent origins which surfaced in the Ern Malley affair), this simply denies the achievement of Ted Hughes, R. S. Thomas, Seamus Heaney, Robert Garioch, Stevie Smith, Norman Maccaig and George Mackay Brown, to mention just a few of the poets of the post-war years whose work in no way conforms to the caricature of British poetry presented by some of the contributors to this symposium. The examples I have cited include Scots, Irishmen and Welshmen, but they write in English, with a strong sense of the vernacular and in the linguistic vitality ascribed by most of these symposiasts specifically to American poetry. It is hard to understand how anyone

familiar with books like *Crow* or *North* (examples I choose deliberately from many other possibilities, because they completely confute John Tranter's speculations about literary values "after Belsen") could claim either that American poetry was the most exciting in English for the last two decades, or that British poetry in that period was dominated by a conservative mode. The fact is that there are, on either side of the Atlantic, very few original and exciting poets, distributed about equally between Britain and the United States, and certainly including Heaney and Hughes.

Vincent Buckley mentions Hughes, in discussing Michael Schmidt's *British Poetry Since 1960: A Critical Survey*. The point Buckley wants to make depends upon what he seems to consider some of Hughes's weaker poems, which are criticised for lacking "clear form". However, since Buckley cites no references or quotations, it is difficult to know which poems he means, or whether he is altogether unenthusiastic about Hughes's poetry.

Buckley's contribution to this symposium is informed by an extensive knowledge of British and American poetry, and he takes an independent view, which introduces complications and qualifications bridging both sides of the opposition assumed by some of the other contributors. His own examples of influential American literature are not verse, or verse theory, but modern fiction, and he cites the opening chapter of *As I Lay Dying* to illustrate the way American writing can have a vernacular naturalness which enacts the processes and sensations it describes. The passage he quotes is certainly a magnificent example from a writer whose imaginative and linguistic power enabled him to do this in a seemingly endless variety of ways. Yet the art of mapping the flow of feeling in the sound and movement of language could also have been illustrated from the poetry of D. H. Lawrence. It is, in fact, characteristic of Lawrence's later poetry, and there are many examples of it in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1920-23) and *Last Poems* (1929). "Snake" and "Bavarian Gentians" are examples so well known they hardly need to be mentioned. Yet it must be admitted that Lawrence never seemed to bring off this effect with the fluent power of Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*, but even the author himself sometimes referred to that book as a *tour de force*.

Bruce Dawe also disengages from controversy in an incisive contribution which demonstrates the importance to him of a number of American poets overlooked by the other contributors (per-



haps because they are disregarded in expositions of American poetry based on schools, groups and movements). It is a fresh piece of criticism, angled from the perspective of a practising poet who sharpens our sense of qualities in the writing of Edward Arlington Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, John Crowe Ransom, e. e. cummings, Kenneth Rearing and Richard Wilbur, by pointing out aspects of their work which influenced him and which have been assimilated and transmuted in his own characteristic style.

Joan Kirkby's introduction counterbalances the American bias of the symposium with an observation by the English poet, Rodney Pybus, that a shift of interest towards American culture during the seventies made it easier to get small editions of American poetry in Australia than to find the British equivalent, so the range and variety of contemporary British poetry remains little known. Most of the symposiasts seem to prove her point.

I am surprised, however, at how readily Dr Kirkby accepts the attack on universities and scholarship which runs through this book. She is, after all, a respected scholar and teacher herself, and the symposium which she organised at Macquarie University, and this book compiled from its proceedings, testify to the appreciation of poetry and poets which exists in many universities. Macquarie University is notable, for it has always employed writers and encouraged creative writing amongst its students, but in universities all over the world now poets are invited to give lectures and readings, or ensconced as teachers and writers-in-residence. I am therefore even more surprised that John Tranter repaid the hospitality of a university by using the opportunity it afforded him to attack, by means of insinuation and aspersion, people he refers to as "academics" without, it appears any shame that he was doing it in their own precincts, at the invitation of one of them.

I have no wish to defend the many sins of modern educational institutions, and there is a case to be made out against the dissemination of literature by means of formal education. Teaching poetry is not the best way of appreciating it (though appreciation is sometimes a side-effect of education) and a lot of what literary scholars do, especially the ones John Tranter seems to read, has nothing to do with literary appreciation, an activity which some of them view with horror. However, the attack running through this book is from another quarter. Scholars, or sometimes university departments of English (as if the latter

had a will of their own), are accused of being conservative, Anglophiliac and incompetent.

The relevant charge here is that Australian universities in the post-war decades denied students an opportunity of discovering and appreciating American literature because they were staffed by British-educated teachers. There is just a grain of truth in this, but it is greatly exaggerated in this book. To some extent universities reflected the general situation already noticed, in which there was a disproportion between the flood into Australia of American styles in 'popular' culture and (as a result of publishing agreements) the trickle of American literature, mainly filtered through Britain. However, this position did not go unchallenged. Vociferous opponents of 'academics', like John Tranter, argue from personal experience which seems to have been scarred by the doctrinaire extremism which infected the English departments of Melbourne and Sydney universities, but a good academic education would have taught him that, before generalizing so confidently, it might have been a good idea to look at all the evidence.

My own experience, in Adelaide, happens to have been very different from his. I was expected to read a lot of American literature, especially poetry, even though I did not take the courses offered on the subject, and I was continually being told by British-educated teachers that the "centre of gravity of English literature has shifted across the Atlantic, to the United States". I quote a remark from Professor M. Bryn Davies, and even now I can see him making it to a room full of startled students as we discussed a poem by Wallace Stevens. While personal experience is being paraded, let me reassure John Tranter that, in the twenty years or more since then, during which I have been associated with several universities, I have never encountered one which remotely resembles the travesty of 'academia' which haunts his imagination.

I will not deny that universities are increasingly rich in subjects for caricature, yet it seems to me that one difference between old-fashioned 'academics' like myself, and free spirits like John Tranter, whose minds have been expanded by less traditional methods, is that at least we old-timers have learnt to recognize nonsense, even when it is delivered in a French accent. I know that sometimes we fail to spot it before it has begun to infect our own domain, and such lapses are regrettable. Yet incompetence afflicts most spheres of human activity, not only the profession of scholarship, but also the new sport of 'academic'



bashing, as John Tranter's sally exemplifies. In its reduction of literature to movements called Romanticism, Classicism, Realism, Expressionism and humanism (Mr Tranter's capitalization), its name-dropping, retailing of half-understood, half-baked Gallic theory and errors of fact, it is a perfect model of the academic mode he deplors in others.

The provocative part of this book is made up of the contributions by the younger poets Andrew Taylor, John Tranter and Robert Gray, and I have found my criticism focusing upon John Tranter's paper because of all the symposiasts, he takes the idea of 'the American model' in its most obvious and narrow sense, and uses it to advertise the claims of a particular poetic 'movement' with which he is associated. Andrew Taylor's is a more carefully qualified contribution, and where Tranter's is political, with its account of poetic wars, coups and the conscription of poets into armies of authoritarian conservatives and young free spirits, Taylor's, like most of the other contributions, is mostly personal. Robert Gray enters the controversy as Tranter's opponent, and

exposes some of the fallacies underlying his position, while at the same time taking a positive approach to American poetry. His discussion of work by William Carlos Williams and Charles Reznikoff is illuminating, and it conveys an appreciation of the quiet achievement of these two writers which contrasts pleasantly with the noise of much contemporary American writing.

This book provokes debate on a variety of issues important to contemporary Australian literature, and other readers are likely to find themselves engaged in agreements and disagreements with some of the contributors I have passed over lightly. We can be grateful to Joan Kirkby for organizing an important conference and editing its proceedings so that readers become belated participants in the debate.

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Cowley, *The Essential Faulkner* (London, 1967), p. vii. Originally *The Portable Faulkner* (New York, 1946).

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# books

## EXPLORATION AND CELEBRATION

Hume Dow

Vincent Buckley: *Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, movements and cultural conflicts in Australia's great decades* (Lane, \$19.95, Penguin \$7.95).

Vincent Buckley tells us that his book is "a hymn, critical yet heartfelt, to two decades in particular, 1945-65". "Hymn" may be too eulogizing a word, but the book does give us an intimate account of the author's role in controversies and movements within the Catholic Church in Melbourne in that period, especially an account of what he calls "the university apostolate". There is much that is more personal but, as he makes only the most oblique references to his private life, we can hardly call the book "autobiography"; nor does he mean us to do so. As a long-time friend, I too wish to avoid the personal, so I propose to let the book in part speak for itself through numerous quotations.

Although it explicitly disdains chronology, it is at times an engaging day-book, a journal of reminiscences, unpretentiously quoting this or that writer, giving us illuminating anecdotes and beguiling reports of encounters with poet-friends, with colleagues in the apostolate, with priests and laymen. There is a palpable honesty of purpose in this testament of youth, this mixture of individual concern and impersonal analysis. The relation of it all rings true.

The book begins with an account of the Irish coming to Australia in the nineteenth century and of his own country childhood, the Irish "living in a slow swirl of poverty and humiliation" in the depression, with nuns teaching football (and boxing!), with intimations of war in 1933 making him hide under the bushes, with missions to the local town badgering the flock for money, with the

"deep reversal of inured hopes". " 'Nobody wants a man,' my father would say despairingly." There was competition between Catholics and Protestants, but "since all the children in the town knew and mixed with one another, the confrontations were the merest good form". Mannix's portrait was on the wall: "the Archbishop was Pope enough for us; and he knew it" — a leader "who took the salute at the top of Bourke Street as if he were the representative of an alternative monarchy". At St Patrick's College, with flogging and classroom repetitiveness, most masters were "bounded and smothered by routinism". There is an oblique allusion to the public service absorbing him when he finished school and to his going into the air force, but no account whatsoever of these two periods in his life. We move straight to his entering the University of Melbourne in 1946, "a disoriented absolutist". (He refers, without elaboration, to his "first anarcho-trotskyist-syndicalist period" before entering the air force.) Student politics showed "little free exploration of concepts; the aim was to win". "Young writers should be as careful of universities as of booze." Boyce Gibson, Chisholm, Alec Hope, Ian Maxwell are evoked, and Geoffrey Blainey "already full of that graceful oblique power, that lateral imagination, which characterizes his books".

By 1949 we come to Buckley's first embroilment in conflicts within the Catholic Church, when he is recruited to the Catholic Worker, with its rather secretive "group rules, rituals and requirements". He seems to see this enterprise as contradictory: freed from provincialism, a communal venture with genuine individuality yet too prone to rely on Church authority. (In his view, one repaired to the bishops "only *in extremis*".) At least some of the staff, however, "resisted the oppressive orthodoxy which the Movement . . . had brought into our lives". (For the benefit of younger readers



perhaps I should note explicitly that the Movement was a clandestine organization of Catholics devoted to a very strong anti-communist policy within the trade union movement through “Industrial Groups”; the Movement, led by B. A. Santamaria, involved the Catholic hierarchy in serious charges of confusing politics and religion, of using Church religious authority to further political ends.)

The Catholic Worker was, in fact, as Buckley points out, notable for *failing* to attack the Movement, being too subject to “forelock-tugging”, but eventually, in 1957, got Buckley to write an anti-Movement article.

This was, of course, the Cold War period, and Buckley was very concerned to resist communist pressure, and indeed, particularly after Hungary, to attack communist actions. But, as he writes, “As well as that pressure, we were subjected to the Movement pressure.” He refers to attempts “to get organizations to which the mover belonged to pass motions favourable to some part of Movement strategy” — identical, one might say, to communist tactics of the time. As Buckley says, Santamaria was “not speculative, but forensic”. In the following chapter, on Mannix himself, he suggests that the Archbishop’s patronage of the Movement was more permissive than dogmatic, that he was not insistent. Buckley thinks that what many felt for Mannix was “an amalgam of reverence, love, and fierce approval”. In a nice touch, he notes that the first three holders of the Mannix travelling scholarships were all opponents of the Movement: Max Charlesworth, Buckley himself, and Bill Ginnane. Buckley is explicit that “the disposition of archbishops played little part in my view of the Christian future; they were like epaulettes on the seamless robe of history”, but his portrait of Mannix is subtle and sympathetic.

The socio-political commentary is interrupted with a delightful “Years of Poets” chapter. We have Buckley and R. D. FitzGerald dancing “proto-jigs and reels” to Irish tunes played by an elderly fiddler in a pub; we have much of Alec Hope, “the most sustaining influence on me”, with his “warmth of scepticism” (“when he was staying with me in Ringwood, I remarked that the district had ‘23,000 souls’. ‘Good,’ he said. ‘How many people?’”); much on Gwen Harwood’s “exuberance of spirit” (she is the only woman referred to at any length in the book); and, by far the longest, an account of his ambiguous relationship with James McAuley, a “charming and graceful man” yet scornful and contemptuous.

In passing, incidentally, Buckley refers to his own university teaching job as leading him “into a psychological and social environment which I found suffocating”, yet he hardly says another word about his three decades in that job, and elaborates the statement not at all.

Buckley writes freshly in calling up his clashes and correspondences with various figures, especially those involved in the student politics of the late 1950s and early 1960s. He gives detailed comments on some who became *ex*-communists in this heady period, and his comments on the editor of this journal may be noted. There is much on the university as a “hotbed of opinion” (“this cliché is used chiefly by people who wouldn’t know a hotbed if it singed their short hairs”), and he devotes a whole chapter to Frank Knopfmacher — mainly a sympathetic portrait, though he does see that doughty in-fighter as increasing the factionalization of student politics and at times displaying “irrational vehemence”.

The last four chapters are largely devoted to the university apostolate, a term not given sufficient substance earlier in the book. It appears as a movement (unfortunate word!) in response to, and reaction against, the intractability, rigidity and explicit politicization of the Catholic Church as seen by Buckley in the 1950s. He paints a vivid picture of the ritual and rules of a rigid Church as “parts of an inescapable system” with a “thread of obsessiveness” which “came close to confusing the precisions of ritual with the prescriptions of morality”. In this context self-censorship was fierce (even in the Catholic Worker); Catholics were “not used to the idea of pluralism in intellectual matters”: “the multiple uses of intelligence will not flourish fully in the Catholic Church until all its structures are changed”. All this, it is obvious, Buckley with his free-ranging mind found obsessive and oppressive.

What was to be the answer? In the eyes of Buckley, Father Golden and Bill Ginnane in particular, it was the grouping together (in the University of Melbourne) of those who were “trying to live the full outgoing Christian life in a number of ways, at a number of levels”. This university apostolate — which I take to mean a group devoted to giving leadership in reform of the way to live one’s life — was religious in intent; “it affected no disloyalty to ecclesiastical authority, yet acted for the most part independent of bishops”. It is not surprising, however, that it was seen by many as going off the rails, as “dissident, subversive, reforming” (he says it was none of these, but, as might be expected, charges



of heresy began to circulate). Buckley insists that the apostolate was not in any way the “alternative power-coalition” that Santamaria thought it was. Buckley’s summation: “Our shared concern was not to run or manage institutions at all, but to change people’s consciousness of institutional needs and possibilities almost beyond recognition.”

There is no doubt that the apostolate was an extraordinary phenomenon. Seemingly a very small drop in the ocean of Australian life — perhaps “over 200 members” in 1954, perhaps more in later 1950s, based in one university — the apostolate nevertheless had a far wider influence in Catholic life, reaching many by its journal, *Prospect* (a forum founded because of the “danger of talking to ourselves”), playing an important role in the University Catholic Federation of Australia, and ameliorating (to choose a pejorative word) the intellectual outlook of a whole generation of Catholic — and some non-Catholic — thinkers. There is no doubt that Vincent Buckley played a key role in this movement.

Looking at the Catholic Church in a broader sense, indeed internationally, Buckley suggests that “Catholicism was never the same again” after the 1967 papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, rejecting all forms of “artificial” birth control. The effect, he says, was because of the expectations of change encouraged by many of the clergy and then blighted by the encyclical; the result was that many left the priesthood, many more left the Church — or stayed within and disregarded the encyclical.

Strangely, Buckley deals with the 1967 *Humanae Vitae* before he discusses the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, surely a far more significant milestone in Catholic history (a point of chronology he omits — assuming we all know the dates of Vatican II?). Buckley speaks of that momentous congregation as “that marathon of renewal-talk of which the apostolate was one of the precursors”. By the time the Council sessions were finished (1964) “half of the Catholics I knew . . . were full of new spirit, and the other half full of bewilderment . . . Change, freedom, and so on were our *duty*, imposed on us by the Holy Father himself . . . All over the world you heard people avowing that the council had liberated them.”

There seems little doubt that Buckley is one of those who felt and feels liberated; there is little doubt too that the apostolate in which he played such a crucial role helped to liberate many. People of our generation have lived through an

Australia that has changed from a society at times rancorously sectarian to one much freer, more open, more genuinely pluralistic. These are changes that deserve profound study, and many of us are trying to come to grips with them. Buckley has been at the centre of it and therefore his book is welcome as history as well as being a personal testament.

Some of the conclusions I have suggested or implied may be based on too literal a reading of some passages, but those conclusions seem to me to be inherent in what Buckley writes. He himself ends the book rather abruptly (with a paean to Father Golden) — it is an inconclusive conclusion. But the whole tenor of the book is exploratory and celebratory rather than dogmatic or conclusive — and basically the better for it. Let us hope another volume is on the way.

## RADICAL VISIONS

John Sendy

Gilbert Giles Roper: Wendy and Allan Scarfe (eds.): *Labor's Titan; The Story of Percy Brookfield, 1878-1921* (Warrnambool Institute Press, no price given).  
A. F. Howells: *Against the Stream; the Memories of a Philosophical Anarchist, 1927-1939* (Hyland House, \$14.95).

Len Fox: *Broad Left, Narrow Left* (published by the author, dist. by APCOL, \$12.95).

Jim Moss: *Representatives of Discontent; History of the Communist Party in South Australia, 1921-1981* (Communist and Labour Movement History Group, 12 Exploration Lane, Melbourne, \$4.00).

Jim Moss’s little book features Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s statement of 1849: “honest chartists and socialists . . . are people of the working class who have got more education than the rest . . .” This may still be the case judging by the growing volume of reminiscences, histories and biographies written by socialists, communists and ex-communists, for the most part men and women of modest education. The amusing old wharfie and Domain orator, Stan Moran, produced his *Reminiscences of a Rebel*. Edgar Ross published *Of Storm and Struggle*. Nancy Wills penned her autobiographical *Shades of Red*. Ralph Gibson contributed *One Woman's Life*, the moving story of his wife, Dorothy. There have been others, and now these four.

Len Fox has written many books and countless articles. He started writing in 1935 and is still hard at it. His booklets *Monopoly* (1940) and *Wealthy Men* (1946) sold widely in the labor



movement. But Arthur Howells, Jim Moss and Gil Roper have not published books before, although as working class activists all wrote articles and booklets over the years.

Gil Roper died in 1974, and Wendy and Allan Scarfe are to be congratulated for editing and publishing the manuscript he left about the life of the legendary Percy Brookfield. Many old-timers still regard Brookfield of Broken Hill as one of the few fair-dinkum ALP parliamentarians who stuck to his radical working-class views as member for the NSW State seat of Sturt.

A union activist and strike leader, Brookfield led the campaign against conscription in Broken Hill during the First World War, supported the Russian Revolution, and was elected to the NSW parliament in 1917. One of his chief concerns, inside and outside parliament, became the successful campaign to get the release of the IWW Twelve imprisoned on charges relating to sedition and sabotage. (That subject is dealt with in Ian Turner's *Sydney's Burning*.)

After his election, as well as working on behalf of the IWW Twelve, Brookfield stood by his principles of opposition to the war and conscription and for the right of people to fly the red flag, in an atmosphere when fear, prejudice and chauvinism were rife. Donald Grant, one of the imprisoned IWW men, claimed that the Twelve were the most unpopular people in Australia. Brookfield came in for tremendous criticism and vilification throughout Australia and inside the ALP. He was branded as a coward. He soon found himself outside the ALP, but retained his support and popularity among the workers of Broken Hill, being re-elected for Sturt in 1920 as a candidate of the Industrial Socialist Labor Party.

In 1921 he was shot on the Riverton Railway Station in South Australia while trying to disarm a demented Russian migrant who had run amok and wounded several people. He died in Adelaide some hours later. Such is the Brookfield legend that many old-timers still maintain that he was deliberately murdered by an assassin hired by 'the bosses'.

The book gives ample evidence of the strength of the militant movement in Broken Hill at that time. It quotes liberally from Brookfield's passionate, colorful speeches, describes the court cases, the huge meetings and the demonstrations held there. One anti-war parody of Onward Christian Soldiers, for the singing of which people were fined, bears repeating:

Onward Christian Soldiers, duty's way is plain,  
Slay your Christian neighbors, or by them be slain.

Pulpiteers are sprouting effervescent swill  
God above is calling you to rob and rape and kill.

So too is Brookfield's charge of 1918 that "the police system of NSW is as rotten as it can be". So what has changed?

The book is very serious. There is little attempt to personalise Brookfield's story. Apart from his physical strength and size, his courage, his powers as an orator and his loyalty to principles and fellow workers, readers unfortunately will find out little about the *man*. The Australian Dictionary of Biography, incidentally, gives Brookfield's year of birth as 1875.

The author, Gil Roper (1905-1974), played a busy part in Australian political life himself. In turn he was active as a communist, a Trotskyist and in the ALP, which he represented as an Alderman on the Sydney City Council.

Arthur Howells covers a dozen years in which depression, the rise of fascism and the threat of war were responsible for his political radicalisation. He first joined the IWW after it had ceased to have any real significance, then became active in the ALP, served as an official of the Victorian Movement Against War and Fascism and, with his wife, Margaret, went to Spain in the latter stages of the war there, in an attempt to become an ambulance driver for the doomed Republican forces.

The Movement Against War and Fascism, the forerunner of the modern anti-war movements, was established in 1932. Its leading international figures were the French writers Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland. Albert Einstein, Upton Sinclair and Bernard Shaw sat upon its world committee. Communists were prominent among its instigators and activists and in Victoria comprised the bulk of its staff, whereas ALP members were sometimes expelled for association with it. Yet, as Jim Moss reveals in his book, important ALP people such as Fred Ward and Jim Cavanagh (both ALP Senators in later years) held key positions in the organisation in South Australia.

Howells never joined the Communist Party, being unable to accept its dogmatism and discipline, but he shared some of its aspirations and befriended many members.

In a straight-forward manner he convincingly tells his simple stories of Domain meetings, sack-



ings, evictions, train jumping, the Egon Kisch affair, Spain. Little pieces and comments about interesting and caring people are sprinkled throughout: Mary Wren, Nettie Palmer, Frank Huelin, Nattie Seeligson, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Margaret Kemp, Len Fox.

His portrait of the IWW activist Charlie Reeve, the last of the Twelve to be released in 1921, is perhaps the most penetrating and memorable.

The English-born Reeve was a capable open-air speaker who cynically attacked everyone and everything when upon the stump. His fellows, according to *Sydney's Burning*, considered him foolhardy and "a bloody madman" who would "fight the world — as long as it was looking on". Howells describes this characteristic but reveals another side. Reeve had a house in Woolloomooloo in a dilapidated terrace. His place had been recently painted, "the door-step was always freshly whitened and the door knocker polished". The house was spotless and full of books and prints of the old masters. Howells loved to visit him on Sunday evenings:

Those Sunday evenings came to mean a great deal to me. Political theory or discussions about current struggles on the industrial and political fronts were mostly forgotten. They had all been aired, or rather had already exploded on the Domain. Sometimes we discussed the books that we had been reading. But more often we listened to Charlie reading stories by Maupassant, O. Henry, Jack London or Poe. Or verse: Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* was a favourite. Being an ex-gaolbird, and a superb elocutionist, Charlie could pour his soul into that. We usually listened to a few records played on the old Rexonala gramophone — and sometimes Charlie would reminisce over his experiences in and out of the Working Class Movement, of his wanderings about the world, or about his experiences in gaol.

Howells realised that the IWW was a moribund force but remained in it because of his friendship with Reeve, Mick Sawtell and others. He notes that Sawtell, who organised for socialism throughout Australia, used to say that his favorite literature was the preamble of the IWW, Shakespeare and the Book of Job.

*Against the Stream* gives only a partial, small appraisal of big events and people. It is only one man's view, not a view from the top, but one from an average participant who really cared.

Len Fox's *Broad Left, Narrow Left* covers a wider

field — his fifty years in the anti-war movement, the CPA, in journalism and as a creative writer, and as an ex-communist. He tells of the Movement Against War and Fascism, the banning of the CPA, the Thomas and Ratliff case, work on the newspapers Progress and Tribune, the journal Australian New Writing, the *Power Without Glory* affair, the days of the Australasian Book Society, the CPA attack upon Overland. He gives his versions of disputes and splits within the CPA.

Fox's writing is usually warm, generous, humane and honest. He is at his best when discussing people he knew. His vignettes and snippets about people such as Bartlett Adamson, William Hatfield, Nettie Palmer and Dick Long are well worthwhile.

In a tribute to William Hatfield he laments that the death of the famous writer in 1969 passed almost unnoticed. How often do such things happen in Australia?

Fox once met the poet Dick Long, an activist in the old Victorian Socialist Party, who had been gaoled during the First World War, as were many others, for flying the red flag which was illegal at the time. Long is virtually unknown today, of course. He was a friend of Vance and Nettie Palmer and of many other writers and socialists. In *The Dandenongs* Nettie Palmer devoted some pages to him and described him as follows:

But the poet of the hills was R. H. Long. This gentle, witty, highly-original character knew them from one end to the other, and there was hardly a cleared space near any of the running creeks that he had not camped in at one time or another. A carpenter by trade, he would work for a while to secure enough for his simple needs and then make for freedom with his light skilfully-built swag — a swag that contained all he needed for sleeping out, its ballast being a copy of perhaps *Walden*, *Lavengro*, or *Moby Dick*. To many people living in the Dandenongs this loveable recluse (half-satirist, half-saint) was a familiar figure.

Fox tells a story about Long in gaol and quotes his poem, "The Foxgloves of Walhalla".

The 1956 Khrushchev exposure of Stalin's crimes, and the bombshell that it was for communists, is discussed frankly by Fox as are his estimates and experiences concerning the CPA top men of the day.

It is a pity that Fox's book becomes scrappy and disjointed towards the end, as if the author could not resist random dipping into his memory bag.



Jim Moss was a full-time CPA official from 1949 until 1973. In the latter ten years he was State Secretary in South Australia. His brief history of the CPA in that state is a matter-of-fact, straight-meat-and-potatoes job written by a man who has a great interest in the history of his State and maintains an abiding loyalty to the CPA and to communist theory. The book is well illustrated with photos of most of the main actors and of some of the events discussed. It is nice to see the photos of the main protagonists of the various factional tendencies over the years, and an acknowledgement of the role of those who eventually resigned or split away.

Moss provides useful material about the spasmodic and somewhat feeble development of the militant left-wing in South Australia early in the century, and about the emergence of the CPA in the 'twenties and 'thirties. The names of Ted Moyle, Ted Dickinson and Jack Zwolsman recur. Moyle, who I remember as a gentlemanly and unassuming old man, was a carpenter who migrated from England in 1910 and became one of the chief initiators of the purely syndicalist Chicago IWW in Australia. Militant wharfies in Port Adelaide who had battled through the 1928 strike used to speak in hushed tones of reverence about Dickinson and Zwolsman, who must have possessed charismatic qualities of leadership.

Moss has done valuable and much-needed research, but his prescription for the regeneration of the flagging socialist movement in Australia seems to boil down to re-uniting the various fragments and remnants of Australian communism and to soldiering on hopefully, albeit in a more democratic and sophisticated way.

The spate of books about experiences in the socialist movement is to be welcomed. One hopes for more to appear. However, supporters of socialist solutions to Australia's problems desperately need more than biographical material, descriptions of past struggles and factual historical details, as important as these may be. There has been virtually no effort from any quarter of the left to attempt to analyse the reasons for the fragmentation, diffuseness and eclipse of the socialist movement in Australia and for the failure of the CPA.

From time to time, within the CPA, self-righteous and triumphalist articles doggedly uphold the validity of the *communist party* approach. Suggestions that the CPA operate under another name is an idea which seems to be gathering momentum, illustrating the depth of the

problems and the shallowness of CPA approaches to them. Talks between the CPA and the Moscow-orientated Socialist Party have been held, and between the CPA and the Chinese-orientated Marxist-Leninist Party of Ted Hill. Calls for the re-formation of a united organisation of communists are 'daringly' uttered by some. Disintegration and demoralisation characterise the already debilitated CPA.

But most communists seem to leave aside the basic issues and search for 'band-aid' solutions. Would a reformed organisation of communists be beneficial to the movement for socialism in Australia? The *communist party* approach has failed in Australia and in many other places. Why cannot this fact be faced?

In 1923 Mayakovsky proudly represented communists as follows:

We are Communists, in  
that, weighing the pros and cons,  
we shall withdraw, dig in,  
and then charge again,  
head-on . . .

The Russian poet saw that quality as a virtue. No doubt it has been so in various places and times. But in modern Australia it has failed in the past and appears certain to capture the hearts and minds of all too few in the future.

The separation of an important section of active, capable Australian socialists from the mainstream of the Australian labor movement has proved to be unproductive, doomed to failure and detrimental to both. Analyses and strategy are required which can reassess basic approaches and revitalise socialist idealism, morale and tactics for ALP socialists, communists, ex-communists and the large number of opponents of capitalist practices and values who exist in most walks of life.

The nuclear threat, the ravaged environment, the unemployed, the majority consumerist attitudes, the decline in idealism in society generally and in the labor movement in particular, the thought that the ALP, despite its sweeping election victory, fails to inspire visionaries, all indicate the need for a specifically socialist organisation dedicated to education and work for a democratic socialist goal within the framework of the indigenous, traditional labor movement, rather than as an alien, separated and opposed force.

As the gutsy, gifted South African, Nadine Gordimer, said about the left and socialism last year, "We must continue to be tormented by the



ideal", and have the will to "tramp towards the possibility".

Those who have been through the mill should be proud of the good fights waged and tell of them, but some must shoulder the responsibility of fearlessly pondering and discussing the basic reasons for ultimate lack of success and for the current low level of support for their cause.

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## THE LEFT: DOUBT AND CERTAINTY

John McLaren

Clement Semmler (ed.): *A Frank Hardy Swag* (Harper and Row, \$7.95).  
Ric Throssell (ed.): *Katharine Susannah Prichard: Straight Left* (Wild & Woolley, \$9.95).

Nothing succeeds like a good court case in bringing literature to the attention of the Australian public. Frank Hardy gained notoriety as a writer when the Victorian government in 1950 charged him with criminal libel on the basis of an episode in his novel *Power Without Glory*. He won that case, and so ensured that the book would be accepted and reprinted as a fictionalised history of Victorian politics from the 1890s on. For many years, there were in circulation unauthorised keys identifying the fictional characters with their historical counterparts, and thus distracting attention from the novel's value as fiction, and from Hardy's own importance as a writer.

Last year, Hardy was again in the headlines, this time because he took libel action against the Australian and its literary columnist, Max Harris. This time Hardy lost, but not before his political career and the political import of his novels had been dragged before the court, again in such a way as to avoid the question of what he has actually achieved in his career as a writer.

The appearance of Clement Semmler's anthology enables this question to be faced squarely. Semmler claims in his introduction that "Hardy is in the mainstream of Australian writers . . . who have written about the ordinary Australian grappling with his environment and in the process unselfconsciously exposing an abiding sense of humour and a philosophic and laconic acceptance of adversity and the consolations of mateship". Yet this opinion seems to reduce Hardy to just

another of our dun-colored realists, and thus to avoid the complexity of what he has actually endeavored and achieved.

Semmler observes that Hardy in his later work has moved beyond simple realism to an exploration of the nature of truth and a "search for the unknowable: the exploration of the nature of human motivation". Hardy himself, while claiming a place in the tradition of social realism, says, in an essay included in this volume, that his aspiration is

to speak for my generation of Australian Communists born at the time of the Russian Revolution, unemployed during the Depression years, who fought in the anti-Fascist war, and lived to see the disenchantment when the Utopian dream was not matched by the grim reality of Stalin's pressure cooker methods of building the new society . . .

This aspiration has forced him to search beyond the kind of reality shown in *Power Without Glory*, the reality of what people say and do, to the deeper truth of how they see the world so that they say and do particular things. The disillusioned communists of his latest books have a reality that we rarely find in John West or the lesser figures in the first novel.

This anthology, commencing with the early story, "The Load of Wood", and finishing with a story of obsessive love and illusion, "Daily Double", and a couple of pieces of critical writing, illustrates both the range and the development of Hardy's writing, although its usefulness as a guide would have been immeasurably increased by at least a select bibliography. The selection does, however, demonstrate just how well Hardy can write, whether he is capturing the laconic drawl of Australian humor, the idiom of everyday speech, or the obsessive compulsions of people on the edge of breakdown.

Semmler's selection does full justice to Hardy's abilities as a polemicist, both in the compassionate account of the early struggle for a fair wage and land rights for Aborigines, taken from *The Unlucky Australians*, and in the clear-eyed analysis both of his own early illusions and of the barbarities of the U.S.S.R. which he gives in the long essay, "Heirs of Stalin", which alone gives the lie to any suggestion that Hardy is now—whatever he may have been in the past—either a stooge or an aspirant dictator.

A writer is however justified not by his politics but by the embodiment of his politics in literature. The short stories in this collection show



Hardy is able to enter into the reality of the common man — his instinctive mateship, his individual loneliness and fear, the weariness of hard labor and the wild dreams of the punter, the urgency of love and the desperation of its loss. The extracts from *Outcasts of Foolgarah* and from his turf and other yarns show him as social satirist and demotic humorist. But inevitably the novels which are his major achievement suffer by being represented only in extract.

The theme of *Power Without Glory* is announced in its first chapter, in the confrontation between John West and Eddie Corrigan. Both are trapped by poverty, but whereas Corrigan chooses solidarity in struggle through the unions as the way of escape, West elects to obtain wealth for himself by exploiting his fellow workers before tackling the bosses. This dramatic confrontation is however not developed through the rest of the book, and Hardy instead chooses to follow West's material rise and moral decline, setting against this power only a Labor movement he shows as already corrupt and open for purchase, and, much later, an impossibly idealistic Communist movement.

By abandoning drama for chronicle, Hardy reduced the interest of his novel to the documentary. Yet this interest is not sustained, because the reader cannot be sure at most times whether he is reading a fictional recreation of history or an imaginative explanation and extension of it. The episode Semmler has selected from the novel, dealing with Nellie West's seduction, tends to the crudely melodramatic, but its crucial weakness is that it is irrelevant to the book's political theme. Its inclusion in the anthology neither does justice to such success as the novel achieves, nor enables a reader unfamiliar with the work to understand the reasons for its failure.

In the introduction to this excerpt, Semmler points out that Hardy returned to the issue of its truth in his most recent novel, *Who Shot George Kirkland?*, but the absence of any extract from this work leaves the Nellie West episode unsatisfactory either in its own terms or as a document of the author's own development as a novelist.

The passage the editor includes from *But the Dead are Many* is more satisfactory. It is a first-person narrative of the last day in the life of John Morel, a failed communist who escapes through suicide. Yet, although it is convincing as a character study, it is, if less so than Nellie West's seduction in the earlier novel, peripheral to the author's central theme, which in this case concerns the political disillusionment which led to

the suicide rather than the method of its enactment. The extract therefore gives the reader evidence of Hardy's matured craftsmanship, but not of his artistic success in embodying a clear perception of important political reality in a fully dramatised narrative.

As an introduction to Hardy's work and a demonstration of his skills Semmler's collection succeeds, but as an indication of his full significance as a novelist and of the precise nature of his contribution to Australian fiction it still falls short.

Ric Throssell's collection of Katharine Susannah Prichard's occasional writings, *Straight Left*, has the more straightforward purpose of bringing together and preserving those writings on politics, literature and women's affairs which complement her novels and fill out the story of her life, already told in Throssell's biography, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*.

The very unevenness of the collection is true to the contradictions in the author's life. The best parts are her vignettes of people she remembers, the worst the simplistic political rhetoric and the attacks on writers and critics who did not share her views, particularly her naive belief in all things Russian.

The most valuable part of the book for those interested in her fiction will be her reflections on the art of literature. On the one hand she argues that the purpose of all art is propaganda, "to dominate the consciousness of the reader, through the mind of the writer and his interpretation of life and its values . . . to galvanise readers into an awareness of the causes which underlie frustration and tragedy, so that the comment arises: 'Well, this is life. What do I think about it? What can be done about it?'" Yet she also twice cites Rodin's view of art as "the joy of the intelligence which sees the universe clearly, and which recreates by illumination of the consciousness", and she emphasises the error of the writer trying to impose her own views on her narrative.

The key to her work is not her crude Marxist theory of literature, which sterilises those essays in which it emerges as completely as Marxist economics and the cult of proletarianism render barren her later novels. Rather, her best work, of these essays as of her fiction, is motivated by a vitalist love of Australia and a passionate faith in its people.

This faith enabled her to see both the strengths and the essential weaknesses of D. H. Lawrence, whose work she discusses in one of the most



interesting essays in the book, where she quotes also from an exchange of letters with him when he visited Australia.

Prichard's patriotic zeal prevented her seeing any merit in *Kangaroo*, despite its diagnosis of fascism, but she gives a convincing account of both the strengths and weaknesses which resulted from his collaboration with Mollie Skinner in writing *The Boy in the Bush*. Her general concluding comment, however, identifies the weakness at the heart of the whole of Lawrence's work: "Behind his self-assertion, pre-occupation with death, vaunting of the dark gods, lay a fear of death and of impotence — maddening to a man of genius who knew that his creative powers in life and literature suffered a blight."

Nevertheless, Prichard generously concedes that Lawrence was a man capable of warmth in his private dealings. No such generosity is extended to Henry Handel Richardson who, despite praise for some of her work, is condemned as woman and author for lacking interest in Australia and faith in its common people. Even stronger is the condemnation reserved for Patrick White, who, we are told, is one of those "Fossickers in the dark of the sub-conscious . . . blind to the tremendous spiritual adventures of mass liberation movements in our day and age."

While this collection may not enhance Prichard's reputation as a critic, it does add to our understanding of her fiction and of the political and literary contradictions of a turbulent period of our history, from the aftermath of the Great War and the miseries of the Depression to the fears and disillusionments of the atomic age. It is fitting that, just as a centrepiece of the Hardy anthology is his account of the struggle of the Gurindji people, so Throssell's collection of the work of a much more unyielding Communist should finish with a compassionate account of Daisy, an Aboriginal woman who played a crucial role in the earlier walk-off by West Australian Aboriginals and the establishment of their co-operative settlement at Yandy-yarra. When Prichard's politics, perception and compassion come together she achieves both the truth and the force to which she aspired.

## UTOPIA — REALISM — SURREALISM

Frank Kellaway

Gerald Murnane: *The Plains* (Norstrilia Press, \$9.95).

Judah Waten: *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* (Angus and Robertson, \$9.95).

Bill Reed: *The* (Hyland House, \$12.95).

Of the three works of fiction under notice the best,

Gerald Murnane's *The Plains*, is not a novel; it belongs to that curious family of books which began in English Literature with Thomas More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *Atlantis*, of which perhaps the most famous, and still widely read, example is Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. They are works of sociological enquiry into imaginary ideal societies and are, by implication, a satirical comment on the society from which the author is writing.

Unlike his famous predecessors in this field, Murnane is not interested in a wide spectrum of society, its agriculture, commerce, medicine, law, military organisation, science; he is concerned only with such cultural aspects as art, philosophy, literature and religion. *The Plains* is an elitist society of patrons of the arts who are squatters, and the artists, priests, film makers, designers, genealogists and others whom they support.

However this is only a description of the framework of the book and it would be absurd to attack it from a political point of view as merely the projection of an elitist Utopia. It is also a haunting and often moving meditation on the nature of time and of appearances, evoking the mystery of both with poetical intensity. This is something difficult to demonstrate in a short quotation (p. 112):

He was prepared to argue, against those who made pretentious claims for the output from cameras, that the apparent similarities in structure between their ingenious toys and the human eye had led them into an absurd error. They supposed that their tinted papers showed something of what a man saw apart from himself—something they called the visible world. But they had never considered where that world must lie. They fondled their scraps of paper and admired the stains and blotches seemingly fixed there. But did they know that all the while the great tide of daylight was ebbing away from all they looked at and pouring through the holes in their faces into a profound darkness? If the visible world was anywhere, it was somewhere in that darkness—an island lapped by the boundless ocean of the invisible.

I don't believe that a profound, consistent philosophical position emerges, but the great virtues of *The Plains* are its inventiveness, its powerful evocation of mysterious realities and the un-failing elegance of its prose.

By contrast Judah Waten's *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* seems gauche and amateur. It is an example, of course, of a very different genre, the



'Socialist Realist' novel. The central character, Tom Graves, a young revolutionary and his girlfriend, a Melbourne and later Oxford academic, Maggie Carlton, are both drawn with genuine insight and sympathy and their love affair is presented with a grasp of the complexities of personal relationships.

Political and social information about the period from spring 1927 to about 1932 in Melbourne, and from then till around 1936 in London, is given in great detail, and usually in dialogue or to explain the action in which the central characters are involved, or as part of the observations or reflections of the protagonists to illuminate states of mind. This is sound novelistic technique and one could not accuse Waten, as one could many another writer in his chosen genre, of writing merely to depict a period and place for their own sakes, separating them from story and character.

The difficulties with this novel derive from its tired, cliché-ridden prose. Waten describes the mother of Bill Fitzhenry, the book's one heroic figure, as "a worn-out-looking, gaunt old woman". Why bother to describe her at all? Some vague information is conveyed but no picture is evoked.

Again and again dialogue is explained by such clumsy amateur devices as "she said, with some bitterness", "he added a little boastfully", "he concluded emotionally", "he stated firmly", "he added belligerently", where the adverbial gloss is either unnecessary, since it is already conveyed by the dialogue, or blunting, since the dialogue already conveys something more or subtly different.

There are horrible magazine convention clichés, such as "Maggie Carlton had miraculously stepped into his life . . ." If this were a device for showing us Tom's romantic immaturity it might be well enough if presented with irony, but the irony is missing and we conclude that it is merely an aspect of Waten's waterlogged sensibility.

There is another coy journalistic mannerism which has a tendency to produce a Humphries 'technicolor yawn', and that is the designation of a character by a supposedly typifying adjective, "the celebrated Nikisch", "the ancient Lotte Mueller". Sometimes the carelessness of expression results in ambiguity as well as lack of definition.

These may seem trivial and pedantic objections, but one could write almost as many words as are in the novel detailing them all and analysing them; they add up to a formidable impression of sloppiness. It is almost as though Waten were taking the

deliberate line that debased usages are understood by the workers and are therefore acceptable.

Bill Reed's novel *Ihe* is a mixture of a naturalistic account of schizophrenic ravings, a surreal fantasy which allows the author scope for satire, and a linguistic free-for-all in which puns, Rabelaisian lists, jokes, quirky juxtapositions are exploited.

The story is important. Ihe is a junior medico, assistant to the Australian Medical Director, Quark, in a battle situation. He treads on an anti-personnel mine. Quark hypnotises him so that he won't move to enable himself and the nurse Be Hunt to get out of the way before it explodes. The mine is a dud. Ihe survives but becomes deranged and identifies with the extinct Tasmanian Wolf. The novel follows him in civilian life. Throughout he is in and out of prisons and mental hospitals, He believes he has a mission to save the wolf from extinction. He tries to contact the American President, then the Australian Prime Minister. In Tasmania he stands as a candidate in an election.

He meets Quark and Be Hunt, to whom he has been writing, telling her she must leave her evil master, who is now a theatrical hypnotist. From then on his intermittent psychic duel with Quark and Be Hunt's frustrated love for Ihe become two of the most interesting threads in the narrative. Another is the love of the little German Ilsa for Ihe her "hairy master".

The book's greatest strength is its inventiveness. There are scenes with the army, with the Special Air Service on Exmoor, with the dog-trainers, in Rome at the statue of Romulus and Remus and the Wolf, in Ireland with the I.R.A., in Moscow at the Olympics, back in Australia in quarantine, and so on.

There is fine satire in a lot of this and Reed has certainly created a pathetic and movingly courageous figure in little Ilsa the German madwoman. However, I don't find the delusions of schizophrenics fascinating, though I know that Reed has recreated the amalgam of sense, delusion, egocentric mania, rage and bewilderment with great veracity.

The prose is very difficult to read. One of the main troubles is the silly unfunny jokes, such as "Ihe on his Ihe horse. 'He hit her!' Mother Ihe, up on hers and much Iher." This sort of thing may be found throughout and unless you think it's funny becomes tedious to say the least.

There are also deliberate mannerisms which seem calculated to irritate. I give only four examples: "If there was anything comforting in



that, then there was little comfort in that.” “They could hear vague poppings of activity from inside the institute as much like a champagne party in a Third Reich gas oven as much is.” Whenever Reed finds himself slipping into clichés he lets them stand and pretends he’s imitating and sending up some popular form of journalism or romance. “They crowded, maleful, fascinated, different khaki individuals with a single image that perhaps she might roll over onto her back in the clover, hay, heather, new-mown grass, however the mixed-up lore of looting soldiery would have it to be.” And there is also the smart-arse correction “. . . arrival back at the old pad. Make that a padded lair.”

In spite of its occasional verbal brilliance, its inventiveness, its genuine pathos at times, I don’t believe *The* pays sufficient rewards to make up for having to struggle through the gobbledy-gook.

*Frank Kelloway, poet, novelist, teacher, bushman, lives at Tubbut, Victoria.*

## BREAKING OUT INTO PROSE

Gerard Windsor

Spiro Zavos: *Faith of Our Fathers* (University of Queensland Press, \$12.95 and \$7.95).

James Legasse: *The Same Old Story* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$6.50).

Nicholas Hasluck: *The Hand That Feeds You* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$10.50).

Thomas Shapcott: *The Birthday Gift* (University of Queensland Press, \$12.95).

David Malouf: *Fly Away Peter* (Chatto & Windus, \$9.95).

Unlike the boom in better-paying Australian resources, that in the short story was never promised, but has become very real. Yet the boom is above all in quantity. The outlets for the short story are more numerous than they have been in many decades, but most of the outlets encourage an inferior product. Competitions, particularly those run by the newspapers, look for straightforward, old-style yarns immediately accessible to the average newspaper reader, and fit fare for an Australian family. At times the papers commission stories from ‘name’ writers, but the same restrictions still apply, and it is irrelevant if the writer happens in fact to be solely a novelist. Prose is prose, the logic runs.

The results are embarrassing. The Weekend Australian’s choice of fiction over the 1982-83 Christmas holiday period provided some breath-taking examples. The notionally adventurous Short

Story Magazine did not get off to an auspicious start. Nor do some of the established literary magazines stand up too well either. (The stolidity of the short story choices of *Quadrant*, for example, has long ceased to be digestible.) Their short story editorial policies bid fair to rival the literary pages of some of the national dailies in their assiduous cultivation of the middlebrow.

Here’s hoping the once-proud University of Queensland Press, only begetter of Murray Bail and Peter Carey, is not going to follow the same path. But Spiro Zavos’ *Faith of Our Fathers* makes me worry. This collection of stories is amateurish and emotionally shallow. It is a multi-cultural blend — Greek migrants, and in particular their son, running cafes and attending Catholic schools, in New Zealand and Australia. The older generation are stock characters, silent simple-minded peasants who have as much claim on the reader’s interest as they obviously do on the author’s.

The most active character in the book is Catholic culture of the 1940s and 1950s. *Faith of Our Fathers* is the sort of book that gives Catholicism as a theme a bad name. Every classic cliché is aired: the sex-ridden adolescent; the sadistic, repressed nun; the young, sensitive priest succumbing to the blandishments of Woman; the variegated system of ceremony, invocation, and pious practice. Catholicism still has much to offer as a literary theme, but not in the form of the umpteenth, seen-it-all-before, repeat. Least of all when the authority of the critique is undermined by such howlers as calling the Sacred Heart’s French devotee Saint Mary Magdalen, and referring to Francis Webb’s beloved Maria Goretti as a Sicilian.

In contrast to the homespun clumsiness of Zavos, James Legasse is a professional. He won’t be winning newspaper competitions. The blurb for his *The Same Old Story* describes the collection as a discontinuous narrative, and this is accurate enough. The book presents scenes from the life of a displaced person — from a spasmodically receding and advancing modernist viewpoint. The writing is detailed, precise and bears the marks of literary sophistication. The stumbling block is the central figure. Neither meant to be, nor even by chance, Prince Hamlet, he is in fact a personality of particularly weedy insignificance. The Prufrockian puniness does not even achieve some representative resonance. He and his concerns remain dull. The most successful items in the collection are the least modernist — the pictures of



the narrator's American upbringing. "The Cow Must Die" is alone worth anthologizing (as it has been) for the line: "I grew up in the slaughterhouse." But the low-key, contemporary American idiom of Legasse shies away from the rhetorical seductions of such splendour.

Legasse, his blurb tells us, has published poetry. This ambidextrousness is becoming an increasingly common talent of Australian writers. In recent years it has usually taken the form of prose as a late development. But the tide of poets encroaching on the prosaic shore has not meant any homogenisation of our fiction. Yet it is a commonplace to remark on the poetic style retained by practitioners of verse who stumble into the production of fiction. But in fact the qualities of style so readily attributable to poets—a range of image and reference, a compactness of expression, a sense of shape—by no means always make the transition.

Nor is there any particular virtue in their doing so. Poets who discover in middle life their latent inclinations really do fly off in all directions. The prevalence of the phenomenon in Australia in recent years is worth extended attention. What mid-life crises are involved? Does the mini-kingdom of poetry generate its own expatriates, seeking wider and more popular recognition? Does the craft itself chafe and constrict? What are the patterns of development—or waywardness—in each writer, within the phenomenon as a whole? Did Randolph Stow and Christopher Koch start the ball rolling, or did their precociously young bi-authoriality differ in kind from the more middle-aged experiments of writers like Rodney Hall or Thomas Shapcott or David Malouf or Roger McDonald or Nicholas Hasluck or Fay Zwicky or Chris Wallace-Crabbe, to say nothing of those yet to come like Geoff Page or Martin Johnston or Alan Gould or . . . (Why for that matter are most of Queensland's leading poets implicated?) What about the conversions working the other way round? Should we expect a volume of verse from Frank Moorhouse or David Ireland? Why doesn't it work that way? Is a literary competition or a thesis the best follow-up to these questions?

The one warrantable, preliminary judgment is that the new-chum novelists have established their credentials. They are sharply professional, and carry the hallmark that demands they be taken seriously.

Nicholas Hasluck's satire, *The Hand That Feeds You*, is his third novel, and a thoroughly unlyrical

book. It is futuristic, set in an Australia that is a republic, and totally inert and bankrupt into the bargain. It would not be too harsh to say the novel is literary union-bashing. It sees egalitarianism and the pursuit of privilege making up a leap-frogging stunt team—that leads to a hell of rancor, inefficiency, and universal impotence. Hasluck's opening sentence has a plane arriving at Sydney airport and having to endure several hours of being towed up and down the runway by a truckload of drunks in braided uniform. They are airport workers, taking their inalienable turn at being pilots. Hasluck's imagination works well in producing such amusing grotesqueries, but the novel is too much just a catalog of them. The thin plot and the drab central character are drowned in a welter of aunt sallies. Common and garden bigotries provide the base for too many of these accusations. They are too shrill, not dispassionate enough to add up to a believable indictment of Australia.

Concern to get Australia right, this time an Australia of the 1940s and 1950s, is an almost unexpected feature of another poet's novel, Thomas Shapcott's *The Birthday Gift*. The work traces the ambivalent relationship between male twins, and does so through a series of minutely detailed vignettes. Shapcott's concern is the twins' attempt to find a balance in their support and energizing of one another, such as they had battled for together on a seesaw, the present they had received for their sixth birthday. The twins follow profoundly different paths, not the least of which is geographical. They end up, respectively, in Ipswich and Tuscany.

Here Shapcott resolves his problem by a leakage of energy from the Australian twin to his Italian brother—which seems to express itself in the latter's decisively asserting his hitherto doubtful heterosexuality. But this transfer potential is eerily like Douglas Fairbanks Jr riding again as the Corsican Brothers. *The Birthday Gift* is ambitious, but the balance is always uneasy between its own poles of quasi-mysticism and scrupulous naturalism. Far from being welded together, neither pole quite convinces in its own right. The mystical bond is gratuitous, and the period detail produces some disconcerting blunders: the artist Jon Molvig has his name misspelt; the referendum to outlaw Communism is stated to have been consequent on the Petrov affair; and, weirdest of all, we get the simile, "her voice clean-bowled them like Bradman". *The Birthday Gift* is trying to start some strange new myths about Australia.



David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* is full of myths, but all of them are resonating quietly in the background. In 1914 a young man is paid to observe the birds on the Queensland Gold Coast property of a young grazier. The property is a sanctuary. Within a couple of years both men have gone to the war. One of them is killed. A first surfboard rider appears off the Gold Coast. Such are the main points of the action. *Fly Away Peter* is a long short story, and a marvellous one at that. It has all the craft, all the compact richness of the genre, and demands to be read in one sitting. The sheer, if terrible, beauty of the work is overwhelming. Its great achievement is to be a story that is so economical and so finely controlled, and yet hums with ambitious implication. The question at the centre of the book is whether there is any point to anything; beyond the apparent futility of everything — bird-watching, or war, or surfing for that matter. The attempted resolution in the last pages of the book is hard-won, and little more than minimal, and therefore moving.

That is what life meant, a unique presence, and it was essential in every creature. To set anything above it . . . was to deny all but a few among the infinite millions what was common and real, and what was also, in the end, most moving. A life wasn't for anything. It simply was. (p. 132)

*Fly Away Peter* has the same thrilling uniqueness.

*Gerard Windsor's first collection of stories, The Harlots Enter First, was published last year by Hale and Tremonger.*

## DEMOCRATIC NOT PERMISSIVE

Keith Simkin

Gwyneth Dow (ed.): *Teacher Learning* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, \$11.50).

The aims and scope of this book are set out clearly and accurately in the first paragraph of the Introduction.

Several connected themes run through this book. Its central concern is with learning — pupils' learning and teachers' learning — in schools. And it argues, sometimes explicitly and sometimes by implication, that there are no quick routes to proper learning because learning is

the acquisition of self-knowledge and an understanding of oneself as part of a particular culture. This ambitious view entails a recognition that learning is achieved by reflective action; that it is stunted by a sense of uselessness and powerlessness as well as by an undue love of power; and that the theories that best inform it defy the exactness of explanatory scientific theories.

Gwyneth Dow has tried to achieve some unity among the various contributions by employing the device of presenting issues as they confront 'Maria', an imaginary young teacher grappling with the many never completely soluble problems to be found in a typical secondary school.

In some parts of the book Maria is used to specify or personify issues in order to bring a sense of reality to problems that is too often lost in debates about principles or theories. The device works well. There is color and an immediacy in much of the writing that helps the reader to understand the complexity of the difficulties faced by teachers and students.

In some contributions we see the development of Maria's thinking as she encounters various viewpoints argued by parents and other teachers. This technique enables us to review recent political and educational changes in the Western world in order to arrive at some explanations of the rather troubled situations of today's secondary schools. It is a happy technique, uncommon in academic education texts. Perhaps its success in this volume will encourage other writers and editors to humanize their material.

Gwyneth Dow argues that one thing common to all contributors "would be a radical belief in democracy that is not marred by the doctrinaire affliction of 'either/or' thinking" (p. 177).

The 'radical' aspect is clear. You won't like this book if you are averse to a democratic approach to learning. Democratic; not permissive education, which is dismissed in this book as being based on poor social analysis, romantic psychological theories and slipshod pedagogy.

The comment about the avoidance of 'either/or' thinking cannot be evaluated so clearly. Several of the contributors express firm views on such issues as curriculum, the disciplines as a basis for teaching, multiculturalism and the politics of education. Some readers will find these views provocative, in several senses of the word. But Dow is right in observing that the contributors do try to salvage the good things from the educational reforms of the sixties and seventies and to refashion them in firm but flexible way to provide



a rationale for effective learning in the schools of the eighties.

Much of the credit for the quality of this book must go to the editor, whose stamp is clear. She authored or co-authored five of the eight chapters, achieved an enviable complementarity among the various contributions, and gave us a thoroughly professional introduction and review. As usual, her prose is limp, elegant and instructive.

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## THE OUTSIDER

Barry Jones

Geoffrey Serle: *John Monash: A Biography* (Melbourne University Press, \$27.50).

Geoffrey Serle's *John Monash* is a monumental work, winner of the 1982 Australian Book of the Year award, critically acclaimed, and a best-seller. The text itself runs to 260,000 words, and Dr Serle tells us that he trimmed 70,000 words from the original version.

It is not, he insists, an 'official' biography, although built around the voluminous Monash Papers, offered to him in 1975 by Sir John Monash's daughter, Mrs Gershon Bennett, and her children David, Elizabeth and Colin.

I first read *John Monash* as soon as it appeared, enjoyed it and admired both the author's awesome command of his source material and the range, diversity and energy of his subject's life. Later, in the pre-election period, I was asked to review it and, given the problems of snatching fragments of time for non-portfolio reading and writing I have found it more difficult than I would ever have imagined. I know far more about what Monash *did* and less about what he *was*. Curiosity is whetted, but not satisfied.

In writing *John Monash*, Geoffrey Serle must have been almost suffocated with material: possibly the most extensive Australian collection of private papers, including up to 75,000 letters, diaries for the early years, weekly accounts, thermometer readings, collections of mementoes, and catalogs not only of functions attended but of those he declined. But, as with Theodore Besterman's *Voltaire* and John Erhmann's *Pitt the Younger*, too much knowledge can be dangerous.

The most interesting things about Monash's life could not be cut out with scissors on Sunday

afternoons and pasted up in his interminable cutting books.

Monash was the great outsider who achieved enormous success in an alien environment: the son of Jewish migrants from Germany who broke into the closed circle of engineering, the militia and Melbourne University (although not the Melbourne Club), gained four degrees in a burst after an erratic start, rising in four years from a colonial militiaman who had never heard a shot fired in anger to a generalship, command of 200,000 troops in the Western front for the final assault on Germany, and to being discussed as a possible Allied Commander-in-Chief if the war had dragged on into 1919.

Monash's post-war achievements were enormous too. He supervised the AIF's demobilisation, became chairman of Victoria's SEC to promote electrification and the exploitation of brown coal, serving as part-time vice-chancellor of Melbourne university, and chairman of ANZAAS, and was a tireless promoter of causes. Perhaps the best part of the book describes his rejection, with great firmness and commonsense, of appeals from wartime associates and the lunatic right to drive out the politicians and assume dictatorial powers to cope with the Depression. In any case he was worn out, dying on 8 October 1931 at the age of 66.

Monash was an agnostic among Jews, suspected as a Germanophile by the British, accused of intellectuality in a philistine society, a civilian among the regular soldiers, with more than a whiff of scandal, due to his tireless philandering, which denied him the Governor-Generalship.

He was always a controversial figure. During World War I, Sir Ian Hamilton recognised his gifts from the outset but Haig and Birdwood were reluctant converts, deeply suspicious of his Jewish and German links. Billy Hughes detested Monash and his feelings were encouraged by the young Keith Murdoch, who played a double game at first but came to acknowledge the general's gifts.

Sir Basil Liddell Hart wrote that Monash "had probably the greatest capacity for command in modern war among all who held command", a view adopted in Lloyd George's memoirs and later by Anthony Eden and A. J. P. Taylor. However it must be conceded that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* fails to give Monash even a line of recognition, either as biographical subject or in its long essay on World War I.

Thomas Blamey, H. E. "Pompey" Elliott, Charles Rosenthal and W. R. McNicoll were his



greatest admirers among the generals, and Sir Robert Garran and W. S. Robinson among civilians.

C. E. W. Bean, Australia's official war historian, disliked and did not understand Monash, and he only paid substantial justice in volume 6 of his *Official History*, published in 1942. Serle argues that Bean's writing was shaped by "the adventure literature of British imperialism, whose ideal Australian soldier was of pastoral background, a horseman and sportsman, and a dashing battle commander; this was the 'true Australian type'". Bean idealised Sir Brudenell White, intrigued with Murdoch to secure his promotion above Monash, and "believed he had put his finger on basic flaws in Monash's character", that he concealed the truth, was sly and shifty. By 1942 Bean compared Monash with Napoleon and wrote "He was naturally humane."

Sir Frederic Eggleston, one of the outstanding Australian liberals, was Minister in charge of the SEC 1924-27. He and Monash detested each other. Eggleston referred to Monash's "ruthless egotism": Monash complained that it "would be impossible to get a worse Minister". While this conflict between two eminent Victorians is described at length it is not adequately explained in the book.

The book describes Monash's cultural interests, with his passionate interest in literature, erotica, music, theatre, astronomy and gardening. How many World War I generals had read Shaw, Keynes, Hasek, Havelock Ellis and Pirandello, or tried their hands at an erotic novel?

His opposition to narrow specialisation in education was similar to the view of John Adams: "The first essential is to be an educated man . . . We should have a knowledge of the laws of Nature, of the history of civilisation, and of art, music and literature. To whatever extent we lack these things, to that extent is our vision and outlook limited and cramped." He was a passionate advocate of funds for basic research, even where practical application was nowhere in sight.

Serle gives us a masterly treatment of the source material and forces us to recognise Monash's immense stature. However I would have welcomed an even longer book, with a chapter of 'overview', relying on the author's intuitions and not at all on the written sources. The book raises a number of questions about Monash and fails to answer them: about his sexuality, his Jewishness, his politics, and the broad Australian historical context of his life.

The diaries and correspondence reveal an in-

satiable love life and most reviewers have commented on Serle's frankness, unusual in an Australian biography. Given the abundant material, Serle's treatment is excessively cautious. Without requiring a full frontal Freudian psychobiography, surely there was room for more speculation about Monash's libido? His parents were long separated, his mother despised his father and one can infer youthful trauma, yet Geoffrey Serle passes it off with a bland comment: "So far as we know, it was a fairly undisturbed and unremarkable childhood . . ."

Monash claimed never to have been adversely affected by anti-Semitism and his high standing is often given as the reason that post-war criticism of the Jews was never widespread, and yet Serle's account makes it clear that prejudice, covert rather than overt, was significant. In 1930 the leading contenders for the Governor-Generalship were both Jewish, but this is passed over very casually. The small number of links Monash had with Isaac Isaacs is itself worthy of comment. Monash was a cultural Jew rather than a believing one but, unlike Isaacs, supported Zionism.

Monash's politics receive only casual treatment. He was never a parliamentarian, but he used political skills of a high order in his active role in administration, advocacy and policy determination for more than two decades. He was highly esteemed in the labor movement for his fairness as an industrial arbitrator, but Serle does not chance his arm in speculation. But how did he win round his opponents?

Serle provides vivid flashes of Australian, especially Victorian, life at varying stages of Monash's career but fails to make the broad generalisation that Monash's civilian life illustrated that something funny happened in Australia between the 1890s and the 1920s, a striking and puzzling decline in national vitality.

We had our own industrial revolution in the 1880s and within a decade primitive motor cars were being built in Malvern, Australia had a flourishing scientific instrument industry, engineers were pioneering the use of reinforced concrete, Melbourne had (briefly) the world's tallest commercial building, our welders had an international reputation, we were leaders in agricultural implements and refrigeration, we had among the earliest electrified cities and telephone networks, and Hargraves was experimenting in aerodynamics. The 'tyranny of distance' actually operated in our favor, throwing Australians on their own resources. 'Here we are at the end of the earth. If we don't do things for ourselves, no one else will



do them for us.' Isolation forced us to be innovators. But in the twentieth century this drive for innovation stalled, then fell. I suspect that World War I was the turning point.

The main lesson of World War I, when Monash's soldiers fought in faraway countries of which they knew nothing, taught Australians that they were just one element in an empire on which the sun never set, that Europe and North America were centres of all significant economic, political and cultural activity. We were, at most, a small and distant branch office.

The nationalist sentiment and vitality of the 1890s, with its republicanism and scorn for titled elites, exemplified by Deakin, Lawson and the Bulletin, went out with Hughes. By the 1920s Australians were more British than the British and Stanley Melbourne Bruce raised the cultural cringe to an art form, even more so than R. G. Menzies a generation later. Britain was 'home', and royal visits by the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York were like glimpses of heaven.

Monash grieved that he was left off the invitation list for the Prince in 1920, but it was far more significant when the Governor-General's speech opening Parliament welcomed Birdwood's visit but ignored Monash's return.

Few Australian writers have attempted the large-scale biography, and the exceptions of Parkes, Deakin, Hughes, T. J. Ryan, Curtin, Chifley, Blamey and Monash stand out. Not all have succeeded but Geoffrey Serle ranks very high on the list.

(Does it seem grudging to add, in parenthesis, that there are some oddities in the index: significant names omitted, George V listed under 'K' for King, knights listed under initials only, Haig (and Eden, but not in the index) described as viscount instead of earl?)

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## THE AUNT'S STORY

Gavin Souter

K. S. Inglis: *This is the ABC: the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Melbourne University Press, \$24.95).

There should be a better generic name for this kind of book. Certainly it is a corporate history; but the subject—in this case the Australian Broadcasting Commission—is one of peculiar abund-

ance and diversity. For the last 51 years Australia's best-known Auntie has been in the business of "putting programs into boxes in people's living rooms"—and there have been hundreds, if not thousands of them.

As onetime biographer of an equally prolific Granny (the Sydney Morning Herald and its related daily and weekly publications on paper and air), I opened Professor Inglis's book with more than usual interest. How had he dealt with the relentless continuity of his subject? And more to the point, how candidly had he been able to tell the Aunt's story?

Professor Inglis, who was invited by the Commission to write this book for its fiftieth anniversary, received unrestricted access to ABC staff and records. The result was altogether more frank than the ABC had expected, and for a time it seemed possible that the Commissioners might not take up their option to arrange publication. To their credit they did so, though not in time for last year's anniversary.

That delay had the virtue of enabling Inglis to tell the story from its beginning in 1932, when a microphone picked up the chimes of Sydney's GPO clock tower and Conrad Charlton said: "This is the Australian Broadcasting Commission . . .", to its end in 1983, when the letters ABC came to stand for the new Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It is a good story, and Inglis tells it with both the enthusiasm of an aficionado and the care of a scholar. He has done the ABC proud.

There are, of course, a thousand and one program and staff details. "Harry Pringle, who had taken over from Wilfred Thomas in 1944, resigned in 1946 to go back to the BBC, and Variety had Hal Percy, normally supervisor in Melbourne, as acting head for the rest of the year . . ." Such minutiae hold little interest for me, but I know only too well the multifarious demands of this species of corporate history that has no name. Inglis heeds such demands, but does not allow them to slow the pace of his very readable narrative.

The narrative has three main threads—Commission, Staff and Government—though sometimes identities inevitably become confused. When the ABC's second and longest serving general manager, Sir Charles Moses, said "the ABC" he meant the staff, and when he said "the Commission" he meant the elderly ladies and gentlemen he met once a month. More than thirty years later, when This Day Tonight included politically sensi-



tive material about overcharging for STD telephone calls — material which the management, out of deference to the Postmaster-General, had forbidden it to use — Bill Peach said: “We thought we were the ABC more than they were.” Moses lobbied more effectively in Canberra than his chairman, W. J. Cleary, even while serving as an Army major on leave of absence from the general manager’s office. One chairman, Sir Henry Bland, sometimes seemed closer to the Government than to his fellow commissioners.

In general, however, it has been tension between staff, commission and government that has determined the changing shape of the ABC. To one commissioner and acting chairman, Dr Earle Hackett, the ABC was a dinosaur “impervious to interference not only by transient pipsqueak Commissioners but also by transient pipsqueak politicians”. The late Selwyn Speight, creator of the radio program AM, saw the organisation rather as “an amorphous animal with a life of its own, both sensitive and resistive to pressure, frequently baffling friend and foe by its ability to change shape when change will ensure its survival or further its purpose”. Inglis seems to prefer this analogy.

The first chairman, Sir Charles Lloyd-Jones, thought the ABC an appropriate set of initials, connoting the beginning of knowledge, and “an appropriate correlative to the abbreviation BBC”. On the other hand, Ben Chifley thought the ABC too educative, and many ‘listeners-in’ found its voices too BBC by far. Dr H. V. Evatt thought that one of them sounded anti-Labor.

One program administrator, Arthur Dibley, made his own attempt in 1952 at rendering phonetically an announcer he considered to be in need of counselling: “The teem is eet minutes parse teet.” But there were already some signs, as Inglis writes of this period, that the hegemony of the English voice would not last forever. If Russ Tyson was by then running the Hospital Half-Hour, could Bill Peach or Norman May be far behind? Thus do amoebas change their shape.

Inglis’s narrative includes a host of deftly sketched characters: Leicester Cotton, the gentle and very professional National News Editor who had to suspend one of his staff for punching a news-reader at four minutes to seven; Cotton’s successor, W. S. Hamilton, who once said, “Australia needs TDT — heaven knows it needs it — even if the ABC doesn’t”; women of the ABC, from Ida Osbourne of the Argonauts to Caroline Jones, “the first women who looked human on TV, as opposed to a mere plastic beauty”; and the

ABC’s two senior intellectuals, Allan Ashbolt and Dr Clement Semmler.

Ashbolt once compared the ABC to a feudal state, in which the general manager was king and departmental heads were barons, owing nominal allegiance to the monarch and to the commissioners (whom he likened to a College of Cardinals) but enjoying some seigniorial autonomy, partly because they bent the knee when occasion demanded, and partly because they were so much closer to the procedures of program-making. “To such an eccentric, even subversive baron as himself,” writes Inglis, “the system allowed only so much latitude. He had been moved out of television, where he might rouse the peasants.”

The ABC’s other senior intellectual, Dr Semmler, retired from his position of Deputy General Manager, moved to the southern highlands of NSW, and wrote his own account of the feudal state. “He was like a mediaeval anchorite regretting his worldly life,” says Inglis, “writing sermons on the evil thing he had abandoned for the pure country air.” His book, *The ABC — Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow*, had strangely little to say about either the reigning monarch, Sir Talbot Duckmanton, or his predecessor, Sir Charles Moses.

“It was not Duckmanton’s style to say anything in public about Semmler,” writes Inglis. “If anyone was to illuminate their relationship it might have to be a novelist.” Inglis does, however, illuminate Sir Talbot’s relationship with others. He was a very efficient, if also somewhat aloof, administrator who nonetheless enjoyed the esteem of most staff officers (including Ashbolt) and most Commissioners (including the staff-elected Marius Webb).

His peaceable style in dealing with the Staff Association was described by one chairman, Sir Henry Bland, as “grovelling on his stomach”, but that has to be weighed against Inglis’s verdict that “no Chairman had ever been so at odds with fellow Commissioners, senior management and staff at large” as Sir Henry during his brief term of office.

Sir Talbot’s style was in marked contrast to that of Sir Charles Moses, who bestrides Inglis’s narrative like a colossus, or perhaps rather a champion axeman at the Royal Easter Show. He had his admirers (at a party to congratulate him on his knighthood, a choir sang “Here’s a health unto Sir Charles”), but he also provoked deep animosity. He clashed with Cleary and worked gingerly with the next chairman, Sir Richard Boyer, never intimate with Boyer yet never having a showdown with him.



From Inglis's evidence one must admire Sir Charles's vitality (he celebrated his fiftieth birthday by walking fifty miles in thirteen and a half hours) and his fierce determination to protect the ABC's independence. In 1962 the Postmaster-General, acting at the direction of Prime Minister Menzies after a conversation between the latter and the French Ambassador, instructed the ABC not to show a television interview with the former French Prime Minister, Georges Bidault, on the ground that it was offensive to a friendly nation. This was done under Section 77 of the Broadcasting and Television Act, which empowered the Minister to "prohibit the Commission from broadcasting or televising any matter".

On the other hand, Section 116 (1) of the same Act provided that the Commission might "determine to what extent and in what manner political matter or controversial matter will be broadcast or televised by the Commission". Believing this to override Section 77, Moses circumvented the government's action by quietly passing the disputed film to a commercial television station, which was only too glad to broadcast it. The Vice-Chairman, Edgar Dawes, agreed with Moses about Section 116 (1), but the Chairman, Dr J. R. Darling, was never quite convinced by their reading of the Act.

Unlike the BBC with its charter and guaranteed source of income, the ABC has always had to guard against erosion of its rights by the government of the day. In 1950 the Minister for External Affairs, P. C. Spender, tried to make the ABC accept foreign policy direction in broadcasts by Radio Australia. When Boyer argued this point in Canberra, External Affairs settled for guidance rather than direction.

Three years later Spender's successor, R. G.

Casey, bitterly attacked an ABC commentator, Professor W. McMahon Ball, for expressing doubt about whether the United States really wanted an armistice in Korea. Boyer, who knew Casey well, and privately shared his view, nonetheless replied: "I would say that the overwhelming majority of the community agreed with your protest . . . but that an equally overwhelming majority would be opposed to [Ball's] banning." Ball was not banned, but from then on he was invited only rarely to talk on his usual program, Australia and the World. He had no doubt that attacks by politicians had damaged his relationship with the ABC.

No government has exercised its ambiguous power under Section 77 since the Bidault affair. There have been other ways of bringing pressure to bear, as the Menzies government demonstrated by stopping an ABC team from visiting Canada to make the Intertel film "Living With a Giant", and as the Fraser government tried less successfully to do by pruning the ABC's budget.

Inglis leaves the reader to judge how successful in general the ABC has been at resisting external pressures of this kind. My own judgment is that its victories have outweighed its defeats, and for that we should all be thankful. This excellent book, produced at Melbourne University Press's highest standard, is likely to evoke from most readers a response not greatly different from the words of the author and ABC writer George Farwell when he was looking back on the 1930s. "But for the ABC," he said, "we would have inhabited a land of perpetual drought."

*Gavin Souter, 54, is on leave from the Sydney Morning Herald to write the bicentennial history of the Commonwealth Parliament. His history of the Sydney Morning Herald, Company of Heralds, was published in 1981.*

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