

DAVID MARTIN ON ARTHUR KOESTLER

CECIL HOLMES ON "JOURNEYS EAST"

SIR WALTER CROCKER ON H.V. EVATT

SOUTH AFRICA SEEN BY ANDRE BRINK

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graphics Cover drawing *Hold Up Ahead* by Richard Tipping, from the *Roadsigned* series, 1983, reflective tape on aluminium, editing of ten, representation Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney. Design by Vane Lindesay. Drawings by Rick Amor

Layout: Tony Quick Printing: Currency Productions

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine.

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

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

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ISSN 0030-7416.

Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

May, 1984

94/95

A Corner of Adelaide that is forever England

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

It was definitely an event, our dear old Dad's sixtieth birthday. Definitely one of the Milestones. The end of youth, he had been joking for months. The beginning of middle-age, he had been joking.

And joking.

The rites of passage were observed, as always, over a family dinner at his club – the Returned Military Officers Club on North Terrace. The same club he had recently begun urging me, of all people, to join.

"But I never was in the military," I reminded him on one particularly insistent occasion. "Let alone the officer-class. The nearest I got was burning my draft-card . . ."

"No matter," he assured me. "The club is moving with the times. Businessmen, professionals – we admit more than just ex-officers these days."

"You admit ex-ratbags?"

He smiled. "I would be more than happy to propose you, son. And I'm sure the committee will give your application every consideration . . ." He paused, and his smile vanished. "Although I wouldn't mention any past indiscretions. Any past . . . unpleasantness. The draft-card business, for one."

Dear old Dad would never have admitted the obvious, of course: club membership was in decline, and the committee was growing increasingly desperate. There had not, after all, been a war of credible proportions – a war you could really get your teeth into – for years.

Oh, there had been the odd Limited Engagement, certainly. The occasional Counter-Insurgency and Justifiable Retaliation and Forward Defensive Strike. And who could deny the various Incursions and Influxions, Interdictions and Interruptions? Quite frankly, there had even been one or two Strategic Withdrawals . . .

But nothing you could truly believe in. No actual Crusade, no Great Adventure. So the Membership Drive was on: as the last of the old soldiers of the First war slowly faded away, and the first signs of transparency began to appear in those of the Second, now regiments of members had to be raised. And raised quickly.

For some odd reason I felt a slight twinge of regret that standards could be lowered so conveniently. I say odd, for I had always thought that the club meant nothing to me – or nothing, at any rate, but caricature. Cloud-cuckoo-land, I had always imagined it: cloud-cuckoo-land by twilight. A last outpost of the Empire, inhabited by all the familiar cardboard

characters and stock types: the rheumatic major-generals spilling their gin-and-tonics, the retired brigadiers struggling to separate the thin, clinging, rice-paper pages of the London Times . . .

So from whence came this twinge of regret? Was the old boy's persistence finally paying off, the attractions of club life finally beginning to exert some sort of pull on me? They were, I had to admit, rather manly attractions. Club membership and a stiff upper lip, misogyny and pheasant-shooting – this stoical British life, these stout British virtues I still felt a sneaking admiration for.

And if such an admiration seems misplaced, or anachronistic, or just plain feeble-minded, blame it on my upbringing. Blame it, specifically, on my education – that convenient repository of all blame. I was educated, I may as well admit, almost exclusively at Eton and Harrow – albeit Eton and Harrow as dreamt through the windows of the school library at Adelaide High. Rider Haggard, I think, must take the greatest share of blame. John Buchan also, and Kipling, and Arthur Conan Doyle. Writers who wrote like true White Men, writers in whose books the British Empire was won and lost and won and lost – but always definitively won again in the last paragraph, on the last page.

"Meet me at my club for lunch," I wanted to be able to quote from those pages – if only to observe the effect on certain friends. "Shall we say two bells, old fruit?"

And why not? All caricature aside, the Officers' Club was quite a place. The premises themselves were magnificent: an old Adelaide bluestone, circa 1850. And behind those distinguished blue stones were amenities to match: billiard rooms, squash courts, dining rooms, a newspaper reading room with all the interstate and overseas dailies.

"I might consider joining," I had reached the point of conceding to Dad – although only, let me add, after a bottle or two of wine. "But certain things would have to change . . ."

"Such as?"

"The ruling on the wearing of neckties, for one."

He smiled. "I don't think the Committee wants your membership that badly, son."

Indeed, they obviously didn't. It was the annual entrance-hall farce all over again as I arrived for the sixtieth birthday celebrations. No sooner was my foot in the door than the doorman was at my side.

"Excuse me, sir," he said before I could penetrate any

further. "Might I enquire as to whether one is wearing a tie?"

I examined his face closely. Apart from the usual ingratiating smile, I could find no defects. Both eyeballs, in particular, seemed to be functioning at peak vision. But if my usually flung-open collar was registering there, he wasn't about to tell me. This subordinate knew his place: any conclusions would have to be mine.

"Don't tell me I forgot the dashed thing," I tempted him.

There was a pause while his gaze moved slowly down to my neck, then just as slowly up again.

"Indeed, it might possibly appear so, sir," was the nearest he would commit himself to an opinion. Or if not those words exactly – for I can't seem to help drifting back into caricature when the situation so begs for it – then words to that effect.

He stood with his hands clasped in front of him, his upper torso tilted so-ever-slightly, ever-so-deferentially towards me: the politest bouncer who had ever stood between me and a drink, I thought. Either that, or he was preparing to hit me rigger-fashion, to hip-and-shoulder me straight back out the door.

Whichever, I was fated not to discover, for at that moment dear old Dad appeared out of the gloom of the Trophies Room behind him.

"I'll take command here, my man," he dismissed the bouncer. "As it happens, I have a few spare neckties with me."

He produced a handful for my approval; a selection from his precious collection of regimental ties.

"Whichever takes your fancy, son."

"Dashed civil of you, Dad," I replied. "You don't have an Old Street-Marcher's tie, perchance? An Old Draft-Dodger's tie? Those were the only campaigns of which I'm a veteran . . ."

"Try this one," he suggested – a trifle abruptly, I thought. "I think it most nearly suits your . . . your attire."

He chose for me a red-and-black striped tie – the tie, he elaborated, of the Military Police. And perhaps it did suit, just a little. I was wearing my favorite bomber jacket, after all – of the softest, purest chamois leather. I had also selected to wear that evening the following ensemble: one khaki army surplus shirt with button-down pockets, one pair of heavy-duty elastic-sided boots – from R.M. Williams – and, from the waist down, standard-issue blue denim.

"Strange," Dad mused aloud as he ushered me in the direction of the washroom. "Strange how the more anti-military some people pretend to be, the more like an army they choose to dress."

Point taken, Dad, I thought to myself as I entered the washroom. Point taken. For the door swung open to reveal a similarly attired army already occupying the place. An army of battalion strength at least, I estimated – in full battledress of leather and khaki and faded denim. I burrowed between the various family platoons, having spotted my brother Nigel in the far corner – wrestling, as was every other member's son in the place, with his tie. Nigel's particular noose was striped in blue-and-red – the colors, he informed me with just a touch of military swagger, of the Coldstream Guards. Our sister Cassie's latest lover was also there – Tim, I think his name was, or maybe Tom – attempting to wear, with some difficulty, the rather loud and busy colors of the Australian Light Horse. It looked for all the world as if a plague of rainbow serpents had

been visited upon the place – a plague of striped cloth pythons, descending out of heaven to choke every improperly attired neck in sight.

Either that, or I had wandered into the washroom of some kinky Bar instead.

"You into bondage too?" Nigel grinned.

"And leather," I said, unzipping my jacket. "Just feel the quality of this . . ."

The three of us spent a good half hour trying to apply those regimental tourniquets. The main problem being, in fact, exactly that: we were trying. Trying a little *too* hard, trying to remember each step in the knotting procedure individually, instead of just letting our hands do the work. How long had it been since we last strapped on ties? A year? Dear old Dad's fifty-ninth? Surely the skill was still there. And yet the more methodically we wound those ties around our fingers, the more knotted things became. My own shirt-front quickly took on the appearance of one of those woven wall-hangings: a sort of macrame bib. Let me put it this way: it was like trying to play the Minute Waltz too slowly – in two minutes, say, or three. Fumble, fumble, fumble. I suspect these skills reside in the muscles of the fingers themselves. They must be performed quickly and unthinkingly, or not at all.

"Heard the one," Nigel finally blurted out, attempting ingeniously to distract us. "Heard the one about the Irishman who . . ."

No-one answered, but encouraged by various ambiguous noises – strangled wheezings and grunts – he pressed on. I won't repeat the particular sequence of double-entendres which followed. Suffice to say that punchline was as predictable as the punchlines of the rest of the genre – and not just because I had, in fact, heard it before. And more than once.

Possibly the first occasion I had managed the usual sociable chuckle. The second, perhaps a forced and weary smile. But by the third . . . well, by the third hearing I was fully resolved to hunger-strike indefinitely if I ever heard another Irish joke again.

A resolve that was mysteriously absent, however, at this fourth hearing of the joke – in the crowded washroom of the Returned Military Officers Club. Suddenly, that jaded punch-line seemed as new and fresh and surprising as ever. At the touch of the most predictable of puns, my tears of rage turned miraculously to tears of laughter, my tears of frustration to tears of joy.

And when I finished laughing – when all three of us finished laughing – we found those regimental ties had somehow knotted themselves immaculately in place.

Back in the Trophies Room, Dad was holding forth across the last of the canapes. The subject, as always: Russia. One or two gin-and-tonics was all it took at the best of times, and during our washroom sojourn his consumption – judging by the row of empty glasses before him – had been considerably higher than that.

The Russians were on the move, we arrived to hear him assuring Cassie. And Mum. And anyone else within earshot willing to listen. The Russians were ready to go at a moment's notice. At the drop of a magnesium flare. The evidence was plain to see – so plain that he had even seen it himself during his recent World Trip. Had photographed it, moreover, with his own camera – on 35 mm Kodachrome color slides.

Not that we needed reminding of that thrilling fact – the compulsory Slide Evenings were still all too fresh in our memories. The whole of Europe, it had been proved to us beyond a shadow of doubt, had been captured by Dad on film. Not one single hectare, not one single square metre had apparently escaped. Like aerial survey maps, those slides could have been laid end to end, side to side, and it would have been there. Europe in Kodachrome – ever fjord and forest, every alp and autobahn, every canton and *arrondissement* and -stadt and -dorf and -burg.

A Europe mysteriously depopulated, however – or populated only by countless replicas of our Mum. There she was in every snap: our Mum waving to the Pope, our Mum inspecting the Guard. Our Mum climbing towers upright and leaning, our Mum admiring vistas alpine and Aegean. Our Mum the gondolier, our Mum the downhill racer, our Mum shouting *Ole!* And finally, most importantly, our Mum against the backdrop of the Kremlin. Our dear old Mum in the very heart of Moscow, standing in the snow in Red Square.

And here, as he fed his cassettes of Russian slides through the projector, Dad's voice softened and grew lyrical. Oh, how he loved those Russian slides – those slides, in particular, of Moscow, of the annual May Day parade in Red Square. Somehow he had even managed to capture all of this on Kodachrome – the whole chest-thumping display. Slide after slide, mile after mile of missiles and tanks, rocket-launchers and troop-carriers – all of them, apparently, taking the salute from our Mum.

Well, as we watched those interminable slides, and listened to that loving commentary, I realised that for Dad this was Culture. This was High Art. This was the very reason he had gone to Europe in the first place. Art for art's sake – an exhibition of human ingenuity at its most brilliant, most creative . . . and most divorced from any practical use.

And who could argue? In the genre of missile-design alone, the level of entries was outstanding. There were wire-guided missiles, he enumerated for us, and heat-seeking missiles. There were Cruise missiles with multiple-independently-targeted-payloads, and Stealth missiles with minimal-radar-profiles. For all I knew there might have been body-odour-seeking-missiles – but I stopped listening after a time.

Then there were the planes: the ugly vicious warplanes with ugly vicious names that Dad could recite by heart. NATO codenames, he told us confidentially – strange mouthfuls like Flogger and Faggott and Fox-bitch. The planes he had snapped as they thundered over Red Square in formation – a sort of moving fresco of aerodynamics and metallurgy. A technological mural far more intricate and beautiful, he obviously believed, than any mere Sistine Chapel ceiling.

"Looks like a lot of papier-mache to me, Dad," Cassie said. "Looks like a lot of movie props . . ."

"I can assure you it's all for real," he replied. "We were close enough to touch the metal, smell the high octane . . ."

There were no snapshots of Dad himself in Moscow, but I could all too easily picture him. Barry McKenzie, Secret Agent – his coat-collar up, his hat-brim down, his Instamatic hidden in his Qantas bag. It was a miracle the KGB hadn't got their hands on him, hadn't misplaced him in the Gulag somewhere with all the other spies and saboteurs. And the more

dangerous musicians and poets.

"I also heard," he confided to us, tapping the side of his nose in the approved inside-information manner, "I also heard that our Russian friends are running down their gold reserves. At an unprecedented rate. Buying up strategic resources. Rare metals, oil, wool . . ."

"Wool?" Cassie's friend Tom interrupted. "Since when is wool a strategic resource?"

"Since the Russians detonated their first Wool Bomb," Cassie couldn't resist. "Since . . ."

But she was silenced by a glance from Dad.

"This is serious, young lady . . ."

I guess it was inevitable, given the particular decor of the Trophies Room – the glass cabinets of campaign ribbons and medals, the framed regimental photographs, the wall displays of captured weaponry – that talk on these occasions should always turn to things military. But then Dad had been turning the talk to things military ever since he stepped back off the Qantas Jumbo onto Terra Australis.

Especially things Russian, and military.

I was never quite sure if he had loved the place, or loathed it – and I think he was equally confused himself. The Reds had been the bad guys all his life – until now. Now he had seen their System with his own two eyes – with his own three eyes, including his Instamatic – and had seen that it worked. All the virtues we seemed to have lost, they seemed to have found: discipline, self-sacrifice, loyalty to commissar and country. In short, perfect Law and Order.

"No anti-war riots in Russia," he enlightened us. "No drug problem. No pornography. And the young folk – neatly dressed, clean-shaven, courteous . . ."

To find these cherished values again, in such an unexpected place, had disturbed him deeply. Disturbed, and moved him.

"You're nostalgic for things that never were, Dad," I tried to tell him. "You've been reading the wrong history books. It was never that simple here . . ."

"It was always that simple," he said. "I was here – you weren't. People had beliefs in the old days. People cared. There was more to life than narcissism . . ."

He eyed my expensive chamois jacket with distaste. One more drink, I realised, and there would be no stopping him – the full Sodom-and-Gomorrah fire-and-brimstone would be upon us. The I-fought-for-you-in-Tobruk sermon, the In-the-Depression-we-lived-on-bread-and-dripping sermon, the End-of-Civilisation-as-we-know-it sermon.

I watched helplessly as he ordered that one more drink.

"I think it's time to eat, Dad," I attempted to distract him. "We're all getting a little hungry."

"Hungry?" he said. "Hungry? You wouldn't know what hungry was! In the Depression we lived on bread and dripping . . ."

Fortunately, he rose from his chair all the same and beckoned a steward. We were immediately ushered through into the dining room, seated with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of military efficiency, and plied with napkins and menus. Although, I must say, the existence of written menus in the Officers' Club has always been a mystery to me. In twenty years of birthday dinners I have never known the cuisine to change. The same stout British fare was the order of

the day, every day: thick pea soup, roast beef with dumplings, spotted dick, and Stilton cheese.

"Dad," Nigel said as we examined those written menus, if only for errors. "Dad – I've been thinking. I've decided you're right . . ."

"Glad to hear it, son . . . Right about what?"

"All of it – the whole Law and Order trip. The Decadence of the West, the Collapse of Values . . ."

Nigel's eyes met mine across the table.

"The Retreat from Certainty, the Paralysis of Will," he waffled on. "We read about it all the time, but it never sinks in . . ."

"My sentiments exactly, son."

Nigel's own self-discipline finally wavered: he leaned back in his chair and sniggered loudly. And this, surely, was his mistake. I think the old boy would have gone ahead and ordered roast beef, if only Nigel hadn't sniggered. If only . . . the theme-song of my brother Nigel's life.

"Steward," Dad summoned a waiter. "Steward – bread and dripping for two."

"Three," said Cassie's friend Tim – Tom? – eager to ingratiate himself. "Make it three . . ."

"Four," said Mum. She turned to Cassie and me. "And I hope, five and six. It is your father's birthday, children . . ."

"You've got to be joking," Cassie said. "I missed lunch for this . . ."



"Then I'm sure you'll agree, Dad," Nigel shut his menu as if shutting a door, "I'm sure you'll agree it would be a nice gesture if we abstained tonight. A test of character, and all that . . ."

"What – no wine with our meal?" Cassie protested.

"No. No meal with our wine! Or only bread and dripping. A fast, Cassie. A symbolic gesture. Show 'em what we're made of!"

Dad lifted his eyes and examined his younger son's face carefully. Nigel's mask, however, remained carefully in place. No trace of irony was detectable.

"A capital suggestion, son. Capital. But we've booked a table. The club expects our patronage tonight."

"We could still pay them, Dad. That would show them even more resolve. Pay them for a three-course meal but eat only bread-and-dripping. What self-discipline! What self-abnegation!"

"I'm with her," I added. "This is grotesque . . ."

"Two roast beefs, and four bread and drippings," Dad completed the order.

The waiter hesitated for a few moments, then summoned another waiter. He, in turn, summoned the headwaiter, who arrived and disappeared – and arrived again with the chef in tow. Words were exchanged – more than a few of them heated – but Dad stood firm. Finally, a few crisp notes changed hands, tempers were somewhat soothed and it was settled.

The food arrived shortly afterwards: two plates of roast beef and dumplings for Cassie and me; and for the rest, a bowl piled with bread, and the *plat du jour* itself: a dripping tray lined with thick white lard.

"Most appetising," Dad stubbornly insisted – although the melody behind his words seemed a little unconvincing. He sliced off a generous wedge of fat, smeared it across half a

bread roll, and began to munch.

Nigel, for once in his life, said nothing. But he wasn't beaten yet. He nonchalantly carved out his own wedge of fat – a slightly larger wedge – and forked it down.

Thus were the terms of the conflict set: a slow escalation of hostilities. For every mouthful of grease Dad swallowed down, Nigel grimly swallowed down a bigger one – by sheer effort of will. If I hadn't witnessed it first hand, I would never have believed he had it in him.

At one stage, I tried to slip him a roast potato beneath the table, but he knocked it off the prongs of my fork.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," he said, his mouth full of slowly churning, slowly revolving lard.

And on it went: a true test of wills.

"Another dripping tray please, Steward," Dad ordered, scraping the bottom of the first.

"Two more trays please, Steward," Nigel raised the bidding, staring Dad squarely in the eye.

Cassie's friend Tom had dropped out of the contest long ago I noticed, and was giving Cassie's roast meat a rather hang-dog look.

"There's a potato on the floor," she said. "If you want it . . ."

Mum, also, had stopped eating – but I think she, like me, was slowly becoming aware of the silence that had fallen over the rest of the dining room. Of the fact that every other face

had turned in our direction – some, granted, with no more than a punter's casual interest in the outcome of any contest, but others, particularly those members of more pronounced military bearing, with barely concealed distaste.

Needless to say, Nigel and Dad were both too preoccupied to notice this growing audience. I have often heard the expression 'turning a shade of green' in the past, but had never, till then, actually witnessed it. It was all over very quickly in the end: two diners, of indisputably greenish hue, rising simultaneously from their seats and rushing neck-to-neck from the room.

I've no idea who won that particular race.

Nigel returned a short time later, his complexion vastly improved, and we all ordered sweets. Dad, however, was unable to rejoin us. A deputation of Committee members had approached him in the washroom, according to Nigel, for a 'quiet word' in his ear.

News of which threw Mum into quite a state.

"Why did you have to goad him on?" she accused us. "He's been in enough trouble at the club as it is, with all his talk about the Russians . . ."

We munched our spotted dick and sipped our port in silence for the rest of the evening. But I couldn't help thinking – if the Committee blackballed dear old Dad, where would that leave my own application for membership?

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: A truly remarkable total in the Floating Fund this time of \$1793 dollars, possibly the highest total we have ever had the pleasure of reporting. As I mention in my Swag column in this issue, and as I have now noticed over thirty years of editing *Overland*, the personal involvement of our readers in this magazine is delightful. It is also humbling.

And it is also, so far as the Floating Fund goes, absolutely necessary to our survival. Many thanks to:

\$700 V.L.; \$200 S.M.S.; \$100 K.I.; \$80 J.B.; \$40 J.M.; \$34 M.E. C.C. R.M.; \$30 J.C.; \$28 A.P.; \$24 J.&W.McD.; \$20 A.D.H.; \$18 B.B.; \$14 P.H. M.B. B.M. P.D. K.B. J.&V.B. M.P.; \$10 J.I.; \$9 A.H. B.W. E.R. E.C. J.K. J.S. H.H.; \$8 J.&A.B. L.F. N.M.G.; \$7 B.N.S.; \$5 R.C. P.N.; \$4 J.C. R.D. G.M. J.S. J.H. L.C. R.H. J.L. S.J. A.M. L.D. E.W. M.T. G.S. F.L. L.B. I.M. P.G. D.B. T.M. C.C. J.H. B.A. R.T. M.R. V.B. N.S. J.B. J.L. J.P. J.B. M.O. R.N. D.M. D.B. D.P. K.F. R.F. J.J. F.O. D.R. C.R. J.S. J.C. M.deBCP. L.W. M.B. B.M. V.W. F.J. P.A. V.N. N.C. B.B. R.W. J.I. G.W. R.S. P.E.; \$3 H.H.

AUGUST 1956. Prague Airport. A grey dawn, grey-faced, grey-clad passengers. We clambered aboard the grey old aircraft, a twin-engined Ilyushkin. Engines spluttered into life, we lifted off and ran swiftly over the soft folding hills and valleys of central Europe, an early sun tipping the tops of the pine forests. Russian pilots in those days reckoned it was a waste of time climbing to some remote altitude, so we sped on at zero feet. Quite exhilarating. Such items as seat belts and inflight service were apparently unknown . . . I was the solitary westerner amidst a mix of ballerinas, engineers, army officers, officials . . . who each and all now began extracting loaves of black bread, salamis, raw onions and bottles of vodka, with which I was merrily plied. A mood of hearty hilarity soon enclosed us. In the evening the lights of Moscow stood out from the darkening plains, and there was the great red star swinging slowly on the top of the Kremlin. My heart lifted: thus one more Pilgrim had made it to his Mecca . . .

Yet, as sobriety settled in, I had forebodings. A few weeks before when I was leaving London, Krushchev's 'secret speech' had appeared in the Manchester Guardian. Its authenticity is undeniable . . . but how were the citizens and comrades of the Motherland adjusting to this revelation. Or did they even know?

I am bedded down in the old National Hotel, one of the more agreeable survivals of Tsarism, and make a call to Ralph Parker – who had covered the Russian front for the London Times, now freelancing for the left-wing press. Friends in London had spoken warmly of him, yet warned that he moved easily in High Places. Just take care. There was a faint suggestion that he might even have sinister connections. Which made me the more anxious to meet with him. Within half an hour he turns up, supporting a bottle of Scotch . . . looks around the room and remarks: "They're doing you proud, old boy, this is the suite John had." John? Yes, John Gunther. I convey greetings from London friends, absorb some Scotch, spirits once again uplift, brashly ask how it was possible that the 'secret speech' could have been leaked, in all that detail and with such apparant accuracy . . .

Ralph grins enigmatically, wags a finger and says, "Old boy, that is my secret and I take it with me to my grave." Which indeed he did.



AUGUST 1983. Canton Airport. The China Airways Boeing lifts off and points north-west to Peking. After some twelve

months waiting and negotiating, we have at last been invited to come and discuss a project with the China Film Co-Production Corporation – a screenplay based on Cyril Pearl's book *Morrison of Peking*. Six weeks earlier a telex from Sydney had been shoved under my door at the Hotel Roosia in Moscow informing me that at long last the trip was on. I had just spent one more numbing day on the jury of the International Film Festival and the commitment would continue for a time yet . . . still, I could make it . . .

So we sally forth. My producer Tony B., our guide and mentor, the distinguished sinologue Stephen F. with myself in tow as the writer of the story, which we well knew was going to be bleakly received. After all, Morrison was a "tool of the Imperialists." And a traffic jam in Canton had made us miss a day, and disrupted a vital appointment with the Director of the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture. Not an auspicious start.

The pretty hostess dispenses tea, bags of lollies and a fan. A security guard, bored as such people always are, sat before the locked cockpit door. (Hijacks to Taiwan are always a prospect. Recently there had been such an attempt and the Chinese passengers had risen up as one and beaten the fellow to death – before the horrified eyes of some American tourists.)

Across the aisle is a large powerful man of some sixty years, clad not in the familiar navy blue, but a sky blue tunic. I wonder to Stephen F. who he may be, what kind of a person? He says, briefly, probably a factory manager going to the capital to seek a favor.

I weave a scenario . . . perhaps an old P.L.A. man put in charge of a cotton mill, no technocrat of course, for there were none in 1949 . . . yet he was probably a good if ruthless organiser. In the period of the Cultural Revolution, of the Gang of Four, where did he stand? Maybe well over on the Left, a supporter of Mao and his Lady, the aspiring Red Empress. Now he is a survivor in a new time . . . now he journeys forth to deal with a fresh face, or perhaps an old adversary who belongs to an opposing faction, who had done 'stoop labour,' like cleaning out pig-pens for a year or two . . . and after the heavy discussion, would he repair for the night with a few cronies to some obscure tea house to gossip and grumble about the 'new ways'? Probably not, all a fantasy. I shrug it off.

At the Peking Hotel, I open the window in the darkening night and listen to the tinkling of ten thousand bicycle bells,

passing far below in peaceful pandemonium.

INTERPRETERS

In such countries interpreters are much more than another pair of ears – they become your alter ego, they enter in various and subtle ways into your whole being. They quickly (as a rule) discern your tastes in food, in entertainment, and bustle you along from dawn to dusk and even beyond for that matter . . . perhaps rather like a kind of old-fashioned servant who manages his master. And they are often your only confidante in a social situation which, while not unfriendly, is still alien – less for reasons of ideology than of cultural remoteness. Usually, as they inevitably disappear out of your life, they fade in the memory. Yet sometimes genuine friendships are established. Love affairs have even been known to blossom.

However . . . on the morning after my arrival in Moscow in 1956, I am breakfasting in the National and a young man introduces himself. He is Sergei, and will be my interpreter for the next three weeks while I do business with Sovexport Film, which involves translating dialogue as I view films, and in what spare time there is, he will conduct me hither and yon. Cloth-capped, red-haired, slight build, always with the same suits of clothes, for he probably has no others, he lives with his family under, I suspect, the grim conditions which were usual in those days. He has a brisk, humorless manner, and employs the jargon that would indicate he had been well conditioned in the Communist Youth League. But he wasn't frightened of hard work. We always took our meals together in the hotel where the menu was long and, I suspected, was a perk of the job. For the populace, milk had just come off the ration. (The Germans in their retreat in 1944 had slaughtered most of the livestock, so new herds were now only developing.)

I turn down a request that I visit the Kremlin, and instead ask for, and am granted, the opportunity to wander in the Gorki Park of Rest and Culture one fine Sunday. I want to penetrate the masses, as they expend some portion of their leisure time. They wander slowly, tiredly about, watching small entertainments, puppet shows and the like, a band of two playing jolly airs. With Sergei's aid I converse with two girls in their teens, sitting on a bench . . . one holds a balloon on a string, the other sucks an ice cream. They come from some country village, work as laborers on a building site, up to sixty hours a week . . . they giggle nervously, shyly, and for some reason Sergei is embarrassed. He needn't be. A middle-aged man and his wife, leaning over a wall gazing down at the river . . . they had just been to a cinema, seen an Italian opera film, loved it. ("We Russians make too many war films.") Once again I think Sergei is annoyed.

I spend a morning at the university to chat up the students and am wily amused at how ardent young Party members elbow aside the more free-wheeling types, so the responses are pat and predictable . . . a bit depressing. Driving back to the hotel for lunch, we pass a large school, and the youngsters are gambolling about in the playground . . . they look pretty fit and healthy, smartly turned out . . . so, well, maybe things will start looking up sometime.

I brace myself with a couple of hefty vodkas and decide to ask Sergei the *big* question . . . what does he think about

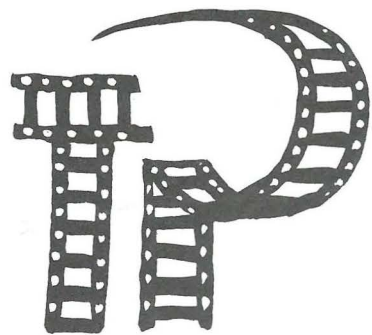
Krushchev's 'secret speech' on Stalin and the 'cult of the personality' . . . (After all it was now some three years since its utterance.) He flushes angrily, speaks sharply. "Comrade Krushchev has already told us these are capitalist lies. That is enough."

I glance across to a couple of characters sitting at a corner table. They are speedily demolishing some bottles of Georgian wine, kidding around with the waitress. Probably up from the country for the Supreme Soviet which is currently meeting, or maybe a couple of middle-level bureaucrats come to town to boast of their production quotas. Who knows? Anywhere else they would merely be a pair of salesmen on the rantan. Then, making an entrance, comes the Dean of Canterbury, all be-gaitered and buttoned up in the black tunic of the Church of England. Tall, hearty, rosy-cheeked, the old man has in tow one Sam Russell, the resident correspondent of the London Daily Worker. I don't care for Sam too much. The night before we had a drink, and his vinegary gossip about Muscovites I find even more distasteful as he fawns on this useful old prelate.

I return attention to poor Sergei, whom I have upset. So I ask him what he's reading these days. He brightens – Hemingway's latest, *Across the River and into the Trees*. It is so strong, yet so touching. Our people are very fond of Hemingway. (Yes, I know, and, boy, we sure could do with a bit of mind-opening around here.)

There is a phone call from dear old Ralph Parker, who has dug up tickets for a jazz concert that night. ("They're tolerated but only just, show the taxi driver the ticket and he will know where to go.") Which indeed happens.

It was an open-air show, thousands of youngsters jumping and jiving away with the performers . . . the jazz is a bit old fashioned and there is a token addition of traditional folk . . . yet it was a fun occasion, a flash of light splashes across the greyness of their lives. And I never confess to Sergei that I have been playing truant.



He is waiting for me in the foyer of the Peking Hotel, hands in pockets, a canvas bag slung around his neck, hatless, loose-necked shirt and an old pair of strides. He has a dreamy look about him, this twenty-five year-old lad, who is to be my interpreter for the next three weeks as I journey about the Middle Kingdom. His name is Ma and he works for the China Co-Production Film Corporation – the outfit that looks after foreigners who want to make movies hereabouts.

We greet each other a bit warily. He knows about our project "Morrison of Peking," and while it is clear we are welcome guests, nonetheless there is not much warmth about the project. For the moment we merely sit down and talk about where we will be going . . . Xian, Nanking, Shanghai. I am curious to know what the competition has been for securing co-production facilities in China, so I enquire as to whom he has been working for lately: Joe Pakula (*All The President's Men*), Robert Wise (*Sound of Music*), Ted Kotchhoff (*Wake in Fright*) and Carl Foreman (*High Noon*) . . . pretty high powered characters. Ma perceives I am a bit over-awed and even downcast. He consoles me – their proposals have been rejected – then he hints that the Americans are so arrogant . . . why do they talk so loudly . . . he mimes by clapping his ears to his hands. This young man is beginning to help already.

However, next day when we are returning from a visit to some film studios he asks me if I know of an English writer named George Orwell. Indeed I do, but become guarded. He's read *Animal Farm*, now wants to get a copy of *1984* – could I send him one? The possibility of this rather absent-minded young man leaving a copy of such a book lying around on his desk and it being spotted by some fanatic, interrogated about how he got it . . . well, this does not greatly appeal. I mumble something about its possibly being out of print but I'll see (in the event, I compromised by sending him *The Road To Wigan Pier*). Then I considered that Ma who, while he cheerfully admits he is a member of the Young Communist League ("I pay my dues but I hardly ever go to a meeting") would have been born ten years after Liberation, too young to have been scathed by the Cultural Revolution: had taken his opportunities and good education for granted ("My father is a clerk in the Tax Department, my mother a primary school teacher"), gone to the Foreign Languages Institute, got his degree, and an agreeable job. Idly I ask him what he'd done for his thesis. A study of the works of Somerset Maugham. Now when I travel abroad I often carry a battered old copy of an anthology entitled *Introduction to Modern English and American Literature* which I had bought in New York back in 1943. It is a wide-ranging collection of poems, essays and short stories, garnered together by Maugham with his comments which reflect, not surprisingly, considerable taste and knowledge. I have never lent this book to anyone. Impulsively I hand it to Ma, for the time we are together. He is touched and I am curious to see, eventually, what strikes him most.

It's the poems that appeal – by Robert Frost, A.E. Housman and, above all, Edna St Vincent Millay. One of her small exquisite works, "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed," Ma makes a translation of, sitting one day in an airport lounge. He explains that it is not only the attraction of the poem, but the challenge he enjoys in undertaking its transference, interpretation in Mandarin. Indeed, in the course of the day, weeks ahead, we were to spend much time pacing airport lounges, waiting for fog to clear, luggage to be collected, and yarning away about books.

Yet Ma has a playful sense of humor. On one fog-bound occasion at Xian airport, a package tour of some fifty Americans are fretting and grumbling away. The P.A. system makes an incomprehensible announcement. Ma does a quick and very audible translation: "The flight is cancelled,

everyone has to go back to the hotel." Outrage, chaos . . . we were crazy to come to this goddam country . . . then the Tour interpreter says no, he is only joking – the flight will leave in ten minutes.

On my last day we visit what remains of the old and fashionable suburbs of early Shanghai, possible locations for our film. In perfect preservation there is the Sassoon Villa – a vast, fake Tudor mansion surrounded by carefully reproduced English gardens, with beech trees, a lake, topiary, and tiny garden houses. (It is now a guest house for folk coming from the country to visit the city.) Ma is clutching my precious volume as usual, and I take it from him, turn to page 257 and read a short poem entitled "Everyone Sang." I inform him that this poem was written by Siegfried Sassoon, who had been born in this very house, was sent to Cambridge, and became one of England's great poets, especially an anti-war poet. We both know of course how old man Sassoon filled his purse with plunder, through the opium trade, gun-running and the other such delectable activities.

Now I retain the book, and in the chaos of Shanghai airport, Ma is lost to me. The call to board for Hong Kong has come while he is on the phone to his girl friend in Peking. It doesn't matter. We have our memories.

MEETINGS I

In August 1983 Europe is gripped by a heat wave. Even here in Moscow it is an unbelievable 35. Fifteen hours air time out of a savage Sydney winter, I am suffering, but the locals, craving for heat, relish it.

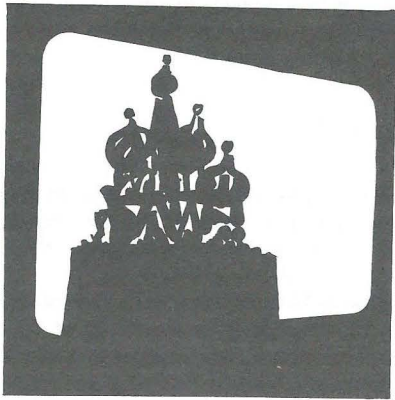
The vast Roosia Hotel (I yearn for the dear old National but it is not to be) is already in the throes of the agreeable confusion that presages all international film festivals. This is my fourth, the others, Venice, Edinburgh, and Karlovy Vary. I have been given a free trip, plus expenses, to serve on the jury. I am bustling off to a formal lunch with my fellow participants, and exposed to some hearty speeches by several ageing comrades. Their leaden jokes subside through the borscht, we titter dutifully and then – the sting in the tail – are informed in no uncertain terms that "you will have to work very hard – day and night." Which means minimal moving about Moscow. In fact within the next ten days I view some seventy films. Well, as long as they keep the booze moving it might not be so rough. And there's always the unexpected, perhaps plans will go pleasantly awry.

And we begin immediately: popped in a bus and, well fed and fumed, merrily buzzed through the old city en route to the first working session.

Perhaps you can only judge a place if you have a time scale to measure. In 1956, my first time as something of a political ingenue . . . Stalin's demise only three years back, there was still a fog of fear penetrating the nooks and crannies. In 1973, en passant, I could make phone calls on a direct line from my hotel room to John Shaw, the Time magazine man then on the Moscow beat, we spoke freely, and the taxi drivers chatted you up and bit you for cigarettes. The gloom and grimness was beginning to wash away, like the discolored snow at the edge of spring . . . swishing down the gutters of history. Oh dear, that Georgian brandy.

We slip past the Bolshoi and up Gorki Street. The traffic was once so thin, just the odd taxis, trucks, and the curtain-drawn Black Ziz's for officials, now at the traffic lights we are jammed up with little Fiats. I recall that a few years ago the Italians got a franchise to produce cars here; they have stamped them out by the thousands and Soviet citizens have busily acquired them. There is a great supermarket, the populace emerging with plastic bags full of goodies. There is a large neon sign proclaiming the virtues of Pepsi Cola. My seat companion remarks: "I hope these poor devils don't get into the grip of galloping consumerism like we have in the West . . ." I turn to him, the Irish accent . . . a big fellow, even looks like Brendan Behan . . . in fact, he is the Director of the Cork Film Festival (a distinguished, but spasmodic event, for like its Director, the Festival is usually hard up) . . .

As we roll gently along, I ask him if he has been here before. "Indeed I have m'boy. Back in 1969. The fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet cinema. I and a few of the lads were disconcerted to observe that dear old Eisenstein had received most minor mention, so we thought we'd better do something



about the matter. Tipped off the media, visiting and local, had a bloody great wreath created, then sallied forth one fine afternoon to place same on, hopefully, the tomb. There was only a little grave, quite neglected in an obscure suburb . . . but find it we did, and placed the flowers thereon – in silence – we spoke not a word."

My heart lifted, the pleasantly unexpected was already happening.

Our venue is the October Hall, a kind of youth club, very grand and quite new, plain but pleasant architecture.

We settle about a long table for the initial discussion and briefing, awkward and curious with one another.

The chairman is inevitably, and rightly, a Russian, early fifties, a bit nervous, boyish smile, but can display a steely manner. A playwright, he spent a few years in the States, has good English and some French. Next, and around the table, a Canadian, a Cuban, a Mongolian, an Arab, an East German, a Hungarian, the Irishman, and a Finn (the only woman). While the Chairman explains the complicated system of voting and decision making, almost laboriously democratic in its intent, I notice the appearance of a fellow down at the opposite end of the long table. He has just quietly slipped in, not introduced, about fortyish, good looking, well dressed, cool

blue eyes; he taps long fingers gently. He interrupts the Chairman briefly in Russian, which is not translated. God Almighty, I think, they're making it a bit obvious. If they want a watchdog, why not ring him in as one of the jury. But about Mischa I am to prove mistaken.

On the final day of the competition, we troop up for the last time to the conference room, bleary-eyed, half-deafened after being exposed to seventy films, mostly indifferent. Yet there were some lively entries. This Festival has been a showcase for Third World films from Africa, South America and Asia: the best films have come from these regions.

Indeed most of the Soviet-bloc and western entries don't amount to much; they seem to lack passion, anger and even, strangely, much sense of humanity, which is what The Show is supposed to be all about.

But now the final decision must be made. Oddly this mix of people have got along very well, no noticeable personal friction, and political attitudes – more various than I had expected – are diplomatically put aside. But there is now tension in the air, for the word is out that the Russians want to make an important award to an American film, "From Hitler to MX" – by any account a rough and ready work, a mess of raw newsreel material, obscure talking heads and a raucously radical commentary. The chairman suggests that this be given a special prize, producing an uncomfortable silence. The East German fiddles nervously with his pen, evades the eyes of the chairman. The Canadian, who has nothing at stake anyway, quietly breaks the silence. He points out that if such a film were released in his country, while it might reinforce the convictions of the converted, it would, because of the crude and extreme way it expresses itself, work against the very thing we are supposed to be *for*. The chairman, who has assumed, fairly enough I suppose, that I am on the side of the angels (his, that is), bluntly asks, what do you think Cecil? I agree with the Canadian . . . the intentions are good but the results are bad. In fact, if Reagan had it at one of his famous private screenings in the White House with his cronies, they would all merely guffaw and, as for a reaction from the American masses – if it ever reached them – I think it would irritate rather than stimulate.

The chairman is annoyed, says tartly, I also know my America. The East German now puts forward a notion (good on you, you old survivor) . . . why not give the producer a special prize for her courage in making the film, something like that. The Finnish girl says, as long as the prize is not awarded for the film itself, for it has so little merit. The chairman has been let off the hook. "I will draft something shortly, we can look at that. Now let's get on with the rest." I glance down the end of the table . . . Mischa remains silent, expressionless.

However, a Yugoslav production has gained most votes and seems the major winner. It is a stunningly shot movie and a mere twenty minutes. "Shepherd on Wheels" is about an old man, a cripple, who is popped into his little cart, plus a couple of faithful dogs, every morning by his old wife, and goes off to attend a small flock of sheep in the paddocks, then, the dogs having cleverly done the work while he sinks a bottle of wine, returns, is decanted by his wife, put to bed, and plays a tin whistle. It is nothing, but everything. One of those quiet attentive observations of a fragment of humanity. Now the

Hungarian, a rather gloomy young man who has been polite but remote throughout the proceedings, rises abruptly to his feet and delivers a violent attack on the film: these people should be supported by the state, why does this poor old woman have to be a mere servant, even a slave, to her husband like this . . . the film is very clever, even brilliant, but it puts forward ideas which are an anathema to me . . . it is not truly humanistic. We are jolted. In a moment the Cuban rises up (a very vital fellow whose films I had seen in Australia and good they are, too; and he also made it clear throughout the proceedings that he is not in the grip of any bear hug) asserts his total disagreement . . . Why, it is splendid in a socialist state that these two old people are able to pursue their lives in such freedom, on their own terms, besides, they seem content, why should they be at the mercy of the bureaucrats? Let them be. This interplay of minds, and politics, becomes distinctly interesting. And I am forced to do a re-think myself, as does everyone else. The Hungarian and the Cuban embark on a furious altercation about the meaning of "humanism" . . . then, inevitably a vote is taken, a compromise is reached and the film given a lesser prize.

But the Irishman has a final say: "In my country and most of the West no-one would even care about such poor old people. They would have died in loneliness and poverty, rejected by society; clearly here they survive, and on their own terms, with dignity." Then he abstains. Good for you, boy. And he shames me into feeling I have thought more carefully about this condition, this principle.

Now the tension has gone out of the room, and we quickly and cheerfully set about shovelling away the coal, selecting some diamonds, rough as they may be. (An embarrassingly bad Soviet film about Afghanistan is wordlessly disposed of; not even the chairman votes for that.) I go into bat for an extraordinary film made by the African National Congress. (It is made by Barry Feinberg, a Johannesburg Jew whom I dig up in his hotel room that evening. Lives in London now, in uncertain exile, a quiet, bespectacled young chap who has abandoned his rich family. BOSS has him on their hit list, it seems. "One day there will be a car accident, something like that." It's a privilege to meet a bloke in the firing line.)

And, finally, a handful of prizes go to work from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Kenya.

Now time for the final toasts and I have made up my mind to propose one to the hired help – a couple of waitresses who have faithfully been dispensing items of food and drink during the course of our consultations, the invisible projectionists who must have been working appalling hours (not one breakdown), and the numerous interpreters.

The chairman must have read my thoughts. He proposes just such a toast – the two girls, in the background, are overwhelmed, they promptly burst into tears, then, recovering, move about us tapping glasses, sipping the vodka.

The chairman gives me a boyish smile as though to say, pipped you at the post, old chap.

Then suddenly I am wearied and worn by the whole affair. The meeting breaks up in a mood of induced jollity, and I wander outside, sit down on a park bench in one of those peaceful shady corners you seem to find in old European cities. There are some young Mums with their tots gently bobbing in the prams in the falling sun. There is a voice at my side. It is Mischa . . . I am interested in the Australian

Aborigines, and I hear you know something of them, lived amongst them . . . if you are here for a day or two after the Festival, could we have a talk? His English is elegant, his manner agreeable. I am disconcerted. Yes, of course . . . then, emboldened by drink, I say, "I have been wondering what your role was at the jury meetings." He laughs. "You were mystified. We Russians love mystery and its cultivation, too much so, perhaps. I am a linguist. I have half-a-dozen languages. I was there to help out, especially if the chairman got into difficulties. His French is not the best. That was all." Thus the beginning of a most pleasant and productive friendship.

MEETINGS II

The Peking Hotel is in fact three hotels, part one built by the Swiss, back at the end of the last century, part two by the Russians in the 1950s, and the last by the Chinese. I am lodged in the Russian region – a suite that is a replica of the one in the Roosia I had tenanted a few weeks earlier: a vast living room with a heavy oak desk fit for a president, and a small bathroom with uncertain plumbing.

Now in the hired minibus we slip through the streets, a half-hour drive to the office of the China Co-Production Film Corporation. It has taken months to reach this point of negotiation, and I feel pretty tense, turning over in my mind what might be put to us, how to reply. The screenplay about this odd, prickly Australian George Ernest Morrison, who spent twenty-five years of his life in China in much earlier days . . . I feel I have created it with as much care, patience and honesty as I can bring to bear. The research has been based on Cyril Pearl's painstaking biography *Morrison of Peking*, plus the labors of Dr. Lo Hui-min, a Merton College man who now works out of the Australian National University.

I know the Chinese are wary of Morrison, and perhaps have good reason to be. He never identified with any radical causes until a bit too late in life. He was, as the Peking correspondent of the London Times, inevitably labelled a spokesman for 'imperialism'. He played an active part in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. And after the Times had been gobbled up in a takeover and he'd lost his job, he acted as adviser to a dreadful old war-lord, one Yuan Shi-kai – who is to this day rightly reviled as one of the villains of China.

Yet . . . Morrison had a genuine love and respect both for the Chinese people and their culture. He accumulated in fact the most extensive library of works on China (now reposing in Tokyo). He detested Christian missionaries, for he perceived that the consequences of their proselytizing would be the fragmentation of a splendid culture.

His other characteristics would be of little interest or relevance in the situation now confronting us: that he was the first man to walk alone, north-to-south, across the Australian continent, that he journeyed over the mountains of New Guinea, exposed the slave trade in the South Seas and was also – a measure of wide-ranging capacities – a graduate in medicine with top honors out of Edinburgh University. In his last years he went to the Versailles Conference in 1919 and pleaded China's case. If only the bloody man hadn't got mixed up in that ill-fated Boxer Rebellion. I feel this will be

the sticking point, a very sensitive one. Yet I know I have tried to present Morrison as a man of time, a period, with all of his follies and absurdities. As an admirer of Robert Bolt, playwright and screen writer, and like myself, an unrepentant Marxist, I have tried to look at the complexity of human nature related to history, events or the interaction of genes and environment, which is what we become, I suppose.

So, moodily, with cheerless premonitions, we drive on. Then suddenly we swing through Tien Mien Square – the broad blocks of government buildings, the mausoleum for Mao (where there is one huge portrait – the only one publicly displayed in the whole city) . . . and there are the children with their dads, flying their lovely kites, taking their leisure with such simplicity. My heart lifts for a moment.

The Co-film office is down a lane in an old part of the city. We alight, pass through small courtyards and there is a traditional house, an echo from the past. I am amazed. It is identical with the house Morrison himself possessed in Peking, as I had seen photographed. Maybe, I think whimsically, it is the same one.

We enter and are pleasantly met, by Mr Zhao, the chairman, and his deputy, one Mr Ling. Tea is dispensed, pleasantries exchanged. Then Tony B., with some aid from Stephen F., opens up the discussion, making the points that we have come for advice and consultation on a frankly difficult story. However, we and others have invested much time and money in the project and are determined somehow to get it made . . .

Mr Zhao, a large moon-faced old man, looks as if he is nearing retirement and doesn't want a taste of painful controversies. He has, I suspect, been one of those who have coasted quietly through life and learned to survive by not annoying, by trying to please everyone. He replies that the script has indeed been widely read for opinions, and he himself thinks that some changes would be needed . . . however, henceforth, I would like Mr Ling to express our views in more detail.

And this comrade is made of sterner stuff. Lean and handsome, fortyish, intense eyes, even to work up a welcoming smile on our arrival was painful for him. He now rises to his feet abruptly, and addresses us like a public meeting, embarks on a tirade. I don't need a translation to comprehend. I have heard it all before, back in the forties and fifties at left-wing meetings: the jumble of jargon, the spitting sentences, the dogmas, dredged up from Marxism-Leninism. Abruptly, he sits down, tapping his feet impatiently, staring fixedly across the room at no-one. He seems quite exhausted.

Patiently we await the translation – maybe Ma has heard it all before – in any case I suspect he softens it up a bit. But the gist is that the whole thing is unacceptable, and most important it would “offend the sensibilities of the Chinese people.” Although the screenplay had been translated, I just wonder if this bloke has read it with care – has he made up his mind to hate it anyway because of the much reviled Morrison, the Tool of the Imperialists?

As I had anticipated, the sticking point, the problem, is really the way in which we deal with the Boxer Rebellion. Amongst the Chinese themselves, to this day, it is a source of controversy – were the Boxers “Good” or “Bad”? Were they true revolutionaries or a mere rabble?

But, it is a stalemate. True, we could adjourn, come back

another day, wear away at the situation, but maybe things would get even worse. So I take the plunge. I am a Marxist, and I believe this is a Marxist interpretation of history. But even Marxists can make mistakes. Can we isolate these mistakes, have a look at the work in detail, instead of merely rejecting it in a general way?

There is a wave of the hand, almost contemptuous, then Mr Ling quotes one of Mao's favourite proverbs: “To travel a thousand miles one must take the first step.”

What does that mean? But Stephen F. understands. He says it's a placatory remark . . . we must make a suggestion now, a concession of some kind. I say, it is true we have tried to do all our research on these facts of Chinese history without being able to come to the very sources. Suppose in the course of our travels it is arranged for us to meet some academics, experts in modern Chinese history, who could advise us?

The old chairman smiles pleasantly, and warmly agrees to arrange this. Mr Ling relaxes, more tea is dispensed, and we go outside to have our photos taken.

Driving back, I muse on the fact that perhaps they have a point, maybe we had come near to making the same mistake I suspect the Americans have, of appearing to be arrogant. After all, suppose some Chinese film-makers turned up in Australia and cheerfully announced they intended to make a film about the Eureka Stockade – and never bothered to consult with any indigenous experts?

These idle musings are broken by Ma asking me with genuine curiosity “What made you become a Marxist?” I ponder a moment then . . . Well, years ago when I was still at school I read a book called *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow . . . it made a deep impression and took me on my first step towards adopting revolutionary ideas, I suppose . . . but I am not a Communist, more like a Christian who doesn't go to church, I guess.

He seems delighted with this response, even intrigued. Then – a quick-witted lad this, not so dreamy after all – he turns and points through the window . . . over there is a cemetery where Edgar Snow lies. He died two years ago and asked to be buried in China. He is one of our most honored foreign friends.

But, as I turn to look, the bus accelerates through the traffic lights and the scene eludes me.

BUREAUCRATS

He was a lowly clerk perched on a stool in the corner of the grey office of Sovexport film. In an hour or two I would leave Moscow and he was the dispenser of air tickets. About my age, perhaps, near-sighted, wearing thick glasses which heightened the effect of the slight enigmatic smile. An Armenian, I guessed, and I was disconcerted by his excellent English. The ticket, however, had been made out to Sydney via Vienna and I badly wanted to call at London to do some business. Would it be possible, I pleaded, to rearrange things? I have my instructions, he smiled, and as you know in the Soviet Union we follow instructions to the letter. He took the ticket from my hand, tore it up, extracted a blank and made another out, via London. I turned at the door, and he gave me an ironic wave.

In 1973, seventeen years later, flying from Tokyo to Paris, I decided to stop over in Moscow for two or three days and have a taste of the lively December weather. I renewed acquaintances with Yuri K., now no longer a lowly clerk, but the director of an outfit called Sovinfilmm which looked after co-productions. We sat in the restaurant of the old National, talked about movies, and parted company once again. Still the enigmatic smile, the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't feeling . . . but he was on his way up in the System.

Ten years on, and I come to Moscow again, invited to be on the jury of the film festival. There is a merry round of receptions and the U.S. Ambassador's wife ("I haven't seen Nancy for *weeks*") extends hospitality in the form of a garden party.

A glittering occasion. All very elegant in the grounds of the Embassy. I meet Jack Valenti (who has sharp memories of a visit to Sydney when some of the local film makers assembled outside the hotel to demonstrate against the American "stranglehold" on the Australian film industry), Stanley Kramer (who is being feted by the Russians with a retrospective of his works), David Wolper ("I'll bet your audiences will like *The Thornbirds*, whatever the critics say"), and Richard Attenborough, just arrived from China where he had tried to sell *Gandhi* ("They hated it, passive resistance is not their bag").

The tap of the shoulder, and there is my old friend Yuri K. The same ironic, enigmatic smile behind the thick glasses. We are well met and to my unasked question he informs me that he is now director of all festivals that are held in Moscow and abroad. ("I'll merely ensure that everything is suitably arranged and goes, hopefully, to plan. The stage manager. I am the one who does *not* make the speeches.")

He hands me his card – his home address and phone, most unusual in this town ("Just in case there is a hitch, you need some help"), then he moves off.

Final days of film festivals anywhere are chaotic and although the Moscow affair went smoothly, the Aeroflot office in the hotel is cracking under the strain of dealing with a thousand or two impatient foreigners now anxious to be off. My request for returning back to Sydney via Paris has been ignored. Indeed there are no tickets at all. And the prospect of being stuck in Moscow when one's visa has run out is not attractive. I extract Yuri K's card, ring and tell him, apologetically, of my plight. He says go down to the office again and by the time you get there the tickets will be ready.

They are.

Mr Shi, I have been warned, is a daunting character. He is the director of the film bureau of the Ministry of Culture.

Tony B. had met him at the Manila Film Festival in 1982 ("he has steely eyes that drill right through you, speaks frighteningly good English, he terrifies me"). Stephen F. informed us that he was a man of great power. ("The Ministry of Culture is a potent body in this country: they run the theatres, book publishing, music, films – Shi is one of their top people.") I rub my hands at the prospect of confronting this formidable man.

Certainly Shi has a Cassius look about him. A lean, fit fellow of about fifty, a dark mop of hair brushed back, almost a mane, and indeed, piercing unwavering eyes . . . clearly a man accustomed to wearing high office, but he is in an

expansive mood this evening. We have gathered in the private banquet room of a restaurant, famed afar for its great cuisine, we three foreigners, plus various middle-level types from the Ministry and Co-Film, not merely to make up the numbers, but in adherence to the communist style of working in committee. Or cynics might say to keep an eye on one another.

Mr Shi politely asks about the comfort of our hotel. We remark on how we are enjoying the food, and he offers up a comment while we await the meal: "One may compare the European and Chinese periods of the middle ages. The aristocracy of the former paid little attention to food or the pursuits of hedonism, and they frequently patronised the arts and sciences. On the other hand, Chinese aristocrats did the reverse. Thus we inherit this legacy, making our country remain backward – for the time – in some important respects."

This intriguing observation is most appropriate as a precursor to the splendid feast about to flow.

I always like to observe how highly placed officials in self-styled socialist countries treat the hired help, the lesser mortals. How 'comradely' are they in real life? Two waitresses are keeping the flow of courses moving with expedition, and Mr Shi makes a comment about the honey prawns. The waitress appears to rebuke him, and a mild argument ensues which finally collapses in laughter all round. An agreeable and pleasantly revealing contretemps.

One of the largest minority groups in Australia happen to be Chinese, who have been migrating off and on for over a hundred years to these shores. I count a few of them among my own circles of friends, and recount anecdotes about some of them and their backgrounds. Mr Shi responds by telling a story of a man called Guo who made a fortune as a fruit farmer in Australia, returned to Shanghai in the late thirties, built a department store and made substantial donations to the then illicit Communist party. After 1949 he was rewarded with the post of mayor of Shanghai. He now lives in retirement in Canton. The concept of a television series in co-production begins to emerge. I ask Mr Shi if he would mind writing a letter about the matter. He nods briefly, shifts the subject, and I let it go. A fortnight later the letter indeed is there in Sydney.

Driving home, Stephen F. reveals a part of Shi's life. Some ten years ago he had been the head of the Shanghai Film Studios. Come the Cultural Revolution, he is given the sack and consigned to "stoop labour". This consisted of cleaning the lavatories around the studio – for four years.

INTELLECTUALS

The Film Festival, having expired, Mischa is as good as his word. He calls up at the hotel, meets my wife, Elizabeth, who happens to have Spanish, French and Italian, so they immediately break into effusive exchanges in the various lingos. Then he suggests we spend a few hours strolling about in the twilight, pausing, occasionally, at some cafe to have ice-cream, coffee and brandy. He knows and loves his Moscow, has a story here, an anecdote there, some sweet, some bitter, about times long ago and not so distant. "I was five years old

on the night Stalin died.’’ Neither of us much want to speak about politics, and his curiosity about the Australian Aboriginal is not anthropological as much as psychological, even metaphysical. Thus, as we prowl the streets, pausing for the odd refreshment, we talk back and forth about Man’s quest to unravel the mystery of life, where were the threads that could be picked up . . . how the Dreamtime concept compared with Biblical notions in Genesis . . . then we drift across to talking about extra-sensory perception, and how I have observed and experienced this in Western Australia and Arnhem Land.

Mischa then expresses views similar to mine – we agree modern man is losing the gift of life, that he is blunting and indeed destroying various sensory perceptions. Modern man, in fact urban man, regardless of what political system he exists within, is becoming so specialised that much of his nervous system, his brain, his very being, is falling into disuse. Thus, having created a technological Frankenstein, he is not merely a servant to that creature, but is diminishing as a human. It’s an old debate, fascinatingly inconclusive, tantalizing.

I spot a queue: Time magazine is right after all. Let us observe the reason for this, is it to seek out some much needed shirts, or socks, or sausages, or saucepans. In hot demand are lottery tickets. Mischa laughs, says, even Soviet citizens hope for quick and easy wealth, and the government reaps some taxes. I confess that it is the same in my neck of the woods.

However, at one of the pauses (marble-top tables, a huge dish of ice-cream is splashed all over with brandy plus black coffee), Elizabeth asks Mischa what he normally does for a living. ‘‘I work for the Trade Department, in Geneva mostly.’’ Then I espy two young ladies sipping and giggling away, and recall my 1956 questionnaire in Gorki Park. I ask Mischa if I can speak with them . . . no worries . . . one of them eagerly sits down with us and chatters away cheerfully. She is from the Republic of Dagestan, very pretty, in a dark Arabic way, is studying at Moscow University to be a librarian. She got a scholarship to come to the capital, has a boy friend in the army (currently in Syria! He may be moved soon to East Germany), plans to get married and hopes to have a lot of children. No, she doesn’t care about pursuing a career and is doing quite nicely at the moment, thank you. Any more questions?

She goes back to her girl friend to continue a seemingly innocent night out. Mischa remarks that it is nearly 11 o’clock and time for the changing of the guard on Lenin’s Tomb. As we stroll down the Prospect, he speaks about cosmic energy, the forces from outer space, the unknown and even the unknowable in terms of the rhythm and balances of the galaxies out there, the eternity.

The guard is ceremoniously changed, and the long summer night finally falls about us. As I listen to the clash of the soldiers’ boots on the Red Square, I look at Mischa. He is a proud Muscovite, no doubt about that.

On the way back to the hotel he speaks about the girl from Dagestan. Well, they were supposed to be a backward people, once a primitive folk, now modernized. Yet where does she really go in life? She is happy by her own lights, has some possessions, an identification with our society. Yet her forebears . . . like the Australian Aboriginal, did they have something that has now been lost to her?

We stop at the metro station – we shake hands, return to our different worlds – or are they the same?

Professor Yang and his wife, Gladys, live over on the west side of Peking, in a block of apartments near the university. Ill-lit, rather grey and gloomy, probably erected by the Russians in more comradely years.

The Yangs are into their seventies, have been married nigh on forty years. They met at Oxford, back in the thirties, he a Chinese scholar studying languages and literature, she an English girl at the same college. In those feverish pre-war years, they journeyed about Europe together, visiting Hitler’s Germany, observing the Spanish Civil War . . . but Japan was slowly consuming China, so Yang decided to return home. Gladys came with him, took out Chinese citizenship. They were then, as now, Leftists with a Cause but without a Party. After 1949 they were both raised to high posts in the Peking University, and became responsible for translating Chinese literature into English.

Stephen F., clearly an old and close friend, hasn’t seen them for a while, so he catches up on the gossip (‘‘Madame Mao is still confined in some remote spot, as impudent as ever . . . asked for an extra bottle of milk a day, they gave it to her . . . I heard that your script on ‘Morrison’ has been discussed by the Central Committee, no less, and produced heated discussion. You should be flattered’’). The conversation ebbs back and forth with the cigarettes and whisky, yet I feel there is something sad and tired, resigned, a tinge of cynicism. Even in old age they are a wonderfully handsome couple, yet the only time they become animated is when they speak of their grandchildren, whom they are about to visit – in America. Odd.

On parting, I am presented with a handful of paperbacks, Panda Books, a collection of translations of short stories and novels, modern ones. Yet there is something about this couple which eludes me. I remark to Stephen F., as we ride back, that they seem to carry the same imprint that I have observed in survivors of the concentration camps, the few I have ever met. As though their minds as well as their bodies have been maimed.

Stephen F. says: ‘‘I was going to tell the story. The Yangs were amongst the first victims of the Cultural Revolution, for they were regarded as intellectuals corrupted by Western influences. They were both put in solitary confinement, for four years. They were sent to different parts of the country to do Stoop Labour, in fact, as often happened, the peasants were sorry for them and they were given light tasks. During this time their eldest son committed suicide. And friends arranged for the escape, exile if you like, of their two teenage daughters to America. There the girls eventually got married. Hence the reference to grandchildren, who are of course now American citizens. It is all the Yangs have left, really, and they are allowed to go to the States often to visit them. It’s a kind of compensation.’’

Mr. Huang, I am delighted to learn, had not only read my screenplay on ‘‘Morrison’’ but now pronounces it the ‘‘best written that has come my way in a long time.’’ In the course of lunch, he proceeds to analyse one or two of the characters, moving cutlery around to demonstrate how they can be shifted about in the plot structure.

Huang is both a screenwriter and a playwright, rattles on in English ("When I was living in Shanghai I ran away to sea, spent years on the West Coast"). He is a devotee, indeed a considerable pundit, on the works of Eugene O'Neill, and has several times visited the O'Neill Theatre Centre in the States. ("Like O'Neill, I even once developed TB.") Yet he does not really want to talk about his life; he just loves to talk story, as we say, and at the moment this one of mine. In the fleeting hour we have together, he makes more sense than all the critiques and assessments I have had back in Sydney. Curiously, he does not make any comment about the politics of the yarn, he simply engages himself with the characters, the people.

However, he reveals, after some prodding, for he is a modest man, that he is finishing a play called "Epic of Cooks," a comedy ("after all, cookery is a big part of Chinese culture").

We part company, he explains that he has to go to Italy tomorrow: "I am supposed to be our country's travelling ambassador for theatre and films . . . but it cuts into my writing time."

I discover later that these trips abroad are also a reward, a compensation for past persecutions. In the course of the Cultural Revolution, Huang had not merely been consigned to the usual Stoop Labour in the fields – at the point of "arrest" by the Red Guards, he had been stripped naked, dragged back and forth over broken glass, and had excrement forced down his throat. Yet he lives – indeed, it seems, with zest.



TRAINS

At ten thirty every night, the Blue Express leaves Moscow, non-stop for Leningrad, arriving promptly at 8 a.m. next morning. We are efficiently installed, some two thousand participants in the film festival, in four-berth cabins. We rattle off into the long summer twilight, through the outskirts (the towering apartment blocks and the sprawling factories), then across the splendid, so achingly sad and lovely, countryside. I slip into an uneasy slumber, it's a rather rough ride. Then I am gripped with a violent stomach pain. I do not relish repairing to the lavatory (although old Moscow hands will be pleased to learn that this department has improved

immeasurably, as it indeed would need to). Nonetheless, I lurch along the bleak corridor, the bloody thing is locked, oh, no. Frantically, stupidly, I tug and bang, then the inevitable babushka appears out of the racketing gloom, wordlessly produces a great key ring, slowly, tortuously, finds the one to fit . . . and I am liberated.

I reel back to the compartment, lie down uneasily. Yet the non-stop train is slowing down, pulling up . . . odd . . . I pull the edge of the blind back: we have been side-tracked and passing by in the watery moonlight is a long procession of flat cars.

For twenty minutes they go clacking by. Laden with tanks, all freshly-minted from the factory. Bound south . . . to Afghanistan, the Chinese border, East Germany? A sombre sight, within embattled fortress Russia. Meantime, unknowingly, two thousand peace lovers snooze on. Then we are rattling along again.

We are indeed decanted at 8 a.m. promptly into the arched and marbled Hall of Leningrad Station – a brass band blares jolly tunes. Some of the masses (*not* a rent-a-crowd) greet us warmly. A middle-aged woman hoists her baby high and, in an emotional moment (rare for me) I give them a little hug. For who does not know about Leningrad, which has endured and survived such agonies?

Boarding the train at Nanking for Shanghai is like a re-enactment of the famous scene out of the film 'Dr Zhivago' when the refugees storm the carriages at Moscow Station.

In fact, we all have numbered seat tickets and there is no reason for the near-violent pandemonium. Still the stop is only for fifteen minutes, and with painful punctuality the train departs on the dot at 10 a.m., regarded by a straggle of sad-faced characters who haven't quite made it.

We are travelling "hard-class" by choice.

Chinese trains, as has been duly reported, are very good indeed. So we make a smooth swift passage through the outskirts of the city (the towering apartment blocks, the sprawl of factories). Then over the flat fields of rice, golden and glimmering in the sunshine. Beyond, the jagged dark blue mountains set into soft dreamy skies, tufted clouds clinging . . . stooping peasants in conical hats swinging scythes . . . the measured movement of the waterwheels. It is a painting from antiquity, unfolding.

And then some great factory looms, a small industrial town, clustered about it, raw and rough in its interruption. How do they live out their days and nights hereabouts? I will never know.

Tony B. and I sit bolt upright, packed in tight, two benches facing each other. The window is open on this hot day, a loud-speaker blares music of a kind, and a woman bustles up and down the aisle swishing up fragments of dirt with a straw broom. Another comes along dispensing hot water for tea (everyone carries their mugs and leaves) and packets of food for some petty sum. We two foreigners are invisible. No-one bothers us, no-one talks with us, nor we with them.

I contemplate our immediate fellow travellers. A roughly dressed man of about forty or so . . . sad, even bitter faced. As the hours go by he does nothing except drink tea. Perhaps he has had some personal tragedy, a relative has died, and he is going to a funeral. An ancient lady, worn and weathered with the years, her crisp black costume laced with gold

thread. She sleeps all the way, nodding up when there is a stop . . .

By the aisle is a girl of about twenty, blue-tuniced with a tiny baby which she suckles occasionally, a placid, pretty girl who even favors me nervously with a shy smile. And there are other mothers in the compartment, each possessing a solitary child. They gather together chatting quietly, no doubt exchanging gossip about the fathers, their families. The propaganda now becomes a reality ("one family, one child"). The law indeed states that if you have more than one child your wage (far from munificent) is cut by twenty per cent. Thus the three mothers with their tots gather together, fondling their offspring, longing for more perhaps, yet agonizing at the prospective penalty.

There is always a 'character' when you put a bunch of people together, anywhere in the world. A teenage lad has a baseball cap on back to front, a T-shirt announcing "Shanghai is the biggest" (not quite, Tokyo is), and he frolics about the carriage chatting up some girls. No-one minds. I muse on the fact that, in the not so remote days of the Gang of Four, he would have been hustled off smartly by some zealous Red Guards and consigned to 'stoop labour.' Maybe he is an ex-Red Guard himself, simply letting off steam in these more relaxed times.

A brief stop at some station for ten minutes. The sad-faced one disappears and Ma and I stretch our legs on the platform. He apologises for disappearing, but had unexpectedly met some folk from his small village in the remote province of Yunan, an old chap and his wife who are family friends. They are just paying a visit to the region, for it was here that he fought in the last days of the Liberation, and had indeed taken part in the fall of Shanghai in 1949.

At the station there is more pandemonium, for the train continues to Hangchow, and those alighting engage in combat with those embarking. We toss our bags through the windows, struggle forth determinedly, joining in the jostle. A smart young lady awaits us, from the Shanghai Studio.

Ma informs us that she is a production manager, but she has been sent to meet us for she is the Senior Cadre at the Studio. (You know the significance of that, don't you? grinning – the rascal – indeed I do. But it is also a signal to us that we are being treated seriously, with respect.)

As we were soon to discover, she is a young lady who could open the most difficult doors.

SUNDRY CITIES

Budapest, early September, 1956, and a Hungarian friend takes me to a popular gypsy-style restaurant. Well, the gypsies were there in full flight, prancing merrily, singing sweetly, but there was no audience, no customers. Odd. I fell in love with the city, for who has not . . . yet there was a stillness, indeed a false calmness about – even allowing for the leaden, atmosphere of Eastern Europe.

I viewed some splendid films, bought a couple (what an outpouring of cinematic talent from this tiny country, from the Korda Brothers onwards), and enjoyed my few days stay in the old Duna Hotel. Perhaps I should have been more perceptive about the young crew-cut Americans hanging over

the cocktail bars chatting up the girls: clearly not conventional tourists. But in those days the CIA were more covert, perhaps. I leave and, seven days later, the Russian tanks roll in. Not only cracking the paving stones of the old city, but splintering the Left in the West, compounding the consequences of Krushchev's 'secret speech' in this very year.

In September 1983, I return, booking in at the Duna again, by telex. But now I am confronted by a twelve-story edifice, the Duna Intercontinental. American style. A symbol of the new Hungary. Supermarkets overflowing, plenty of customers, thronging traffic, smart boutiques, bookshops, record and video outlets crowded, packed restaurants.

To observe further Hungary's march along the path of socialism, I visit a casino – in the Hilton Hotel. It has, I suppose, the style and atmosphere of any great casino (I have only ever been to one, the Playboy in London): the tired desperate faces of rich American women plunging on hopelessly; the worn lizard faces of the professional gamblers all in pursuit of wealth with a cold and silent passion; the click of the roulette wheel, the slap of the black jack cards . . . Idly, I walk to a window, stare down below to an amphitheatre created from an old ruined castle, the Danube beyond. A play is going on, I cannot hear, but the eighteenth century periwigged figures move about, puppet-like, and an orchestra plays soundlessly. It seems to be a Pergolesi opera.

The taxi drums across the cobblestones and I say, take me to some old tavern, anywhere, to get off the goddam tourist belt. He does so, and there are some of the masses sinking pints of beer, consuming good rough peasant food. A violinist swoops about and there is a large party of cripples, in wheel chairs, being attended and entertained by a group of young people wheeling them back and forth to the toilets.

Now I would like to terminate what threatens to be a Kafkaesque journey through night-time Budapest . . . There is a late show of a folk group from the Building Workers Union.

The performance is lively and cheerful, has a certain innocence . . . they have not been formed too long, the program informs us. Whether any of the lads and lasses had swung a hammer or tapped a typewriter, I wouldn't know.

Next morning I wander through the old streets of this rich and busy city, forage about in some newsagents. No word of protest here, no sound of dissent. It is still a closed society.

Years ago at Budapest Airport there was a hoarding exhorting citizens to toil hard, to give all, for the erection of a Marxist-Leninist state. It is now replaced by an ad for Coca Cola.

But discreetly out of sight, tucked away somewhere in the country-side, are quite a few thousand Russian troops.

The Governor of Nanking is a person of great power, the titular head of China's richest province. And this city has often been the nation's alternate capital; it is here that Sun Yat-sen set up the Republic in 1912, is indeed buried nearby. (The Mausoleum is atop a hill requiring the mounting of a thousand steps – a taxing experience.)

Thus when we receive invitations for the National Day celebrations, at short notice, we feel duly honored. It is an agreeable occasion, a few other foreigners, but mostly locals. At our table some venerable Old Revolutionaries and a nervous young lady who, in the course of the Governor's vigorous

account of how this year's production targets have been surpassed, is awarded a scroll for her endeavors.

Schoolchildren prettily perform musical items and the Governor moves from table to table proffering toasts. She is a handsome stout woman of forty-five or so. And, I'll bet she can crack the whip when needed. Well, why not?

Nanking recalls southern France, the leafy streets, the dappled sunshine on the tiny whitewashed cottages. Anyway, we have asked to look at an 'old' part of the city for possible locations. And indeed there they are: the winding lanes, the food stalls, the tiny bird cages, the flapping washing, weathered old folk squatting about playing checkers on the pavement, a rich texture but there is something else. A long high wall is plastered with large posters with a great red tick across them, a dozen or so. I have a fair idea what this is about, but ask anyway to have one translated. Ma says (and our Nanking guide is the deputy director of the Ministry of Culture): "Those are four people who have committed rape and been executed." And the others? . . . for murder, and crimes of violence. We take some photos, walk away, sombrely. Amnesty International will be hand-wringing about this.

That evening in the hotel I strike up an acquaintance with a couple of Sydney lads who have been backpacking about the country. ("We hitch rides in lorries, stay overnight in a commune, the young people couldn't care less about us, but the old peasants really do. Gee, they're great, those old folk.") They had in fact observed, accidentally, a public execution in Kwelling, and been suitable shaken. They are now heading to the capital . . . where can you get a screw in Peking? I am appalled . . . for crissake don't even *think* like that, let alone say it aloud, or you'll end up on one of those posters with a bloody red tick through it.

On a July evening in 1956 Jiri Mucha took me for a walk across the ancient bridge that passes across a steep narrow valley, just by Prague's 600 year-old St Vitus Cathedral. It was warm, quiet and the old city lay light-sprinkled far below, across the river. He clapped his hands and an echo came . . . then he told the story.

"In 1943 the students of Prague rose up against the occupiers, the Germans. A folly, and doomed – nonetheless valiant of course. Those that survived the machine-gunning were brought up on a night like this – their stomachs were slit open and stuffed with straw. Their screams echoed and re-echoed across the city down there . . . *pour encourager les autres.*"



We walked to a little tavern by the cathedral, where an oompah-style band was blaring away, great tankards of ale and heaps of food being plonked down on trestle tables – a scene from Breughel. Jiri, whose short stories I had always admired as they appeared in *New Writing*, slipped out of Prague in 1938, served with the RAF, returned, and was promptly popped in a camp for a few years as a political suspect "contaminated by western ideology" . . . now liberated, he had been rewarded with a small castle and some servants and the right to work on a comfortable salary. We never bothered talking politics, for our shared interest was English poetry.

It is still one of the great hotels of Central Europe, a splendid survivor of an age long since consumed by history. Indeed, as I walk down into it after twenty-seven years, it is as though time has stood still, petrified: the same old waiters in their worn black swallow-tails bobbing about the ornate dining room, the marbled stairways, the vast oppressive paintings, the twinkling chandeliers, an old woman bearing a broom and bucket, the brisk old desk clerk who bangs the bell for the bent old porter, the quavering old lift that wheezes unwillingly upwards.

The Alcron was always engaged by Hitler on his occasional visits, and his satraps therefore favored it. That evening, the dining room had nearly emptied, but I regard with some curiosity an ageing German who has in tow a young couple – clearly his daughter and a servile son-in-law. It is near closing time, the reasonable hour of 11.30, and the two old waiters are plainly anxious to get off home. But the German is proceeding with a long loud monologue about earlier, more exciting days in these parts, orders up some more wine, and settles down to make a night of it, as in days of yore. And the waiters grind their teeth: will we never get these bastards off our backs?

I look through the phone book for Jiri Mucha, but it's such a common name I give up. Then later, in one of the bars, there are a couple of likely-looking lads, seem intellectual types having an intense conversation, so I butt in, having written down the name of my friend. They stare at it politely for a moment, look me over, one says, he is no longer known, then they silently leave. Do they take me for a bloody provocateur? Apparently.

I do manage to ring Professor Brousil, whom I had met a few weeks before in Moscow, having known him at the Karlovy Vary Festival in 1956, but he says although he would like to see me, he isn't well.

There is a shortage of power, so several nights a week Prague appears even greyer and grimmer than it ought to be, but I manage to get some tickets for a show known as the Magic Lantern. It is the most exhilarating experience in the realm of the performing arts I have ever had. It is a mix of cinema and Live, the two elements dissolving and mingling, creating illusions that are wondrous indeed. The story is just a simple fairy tale, almost deliberately cynical, meaningless . . . a supreme exercise in Form. Then out from the flashing brilliance into the gloomy greyness.

True, the shops are full, and the people well dressed by any standards, but there is little sound of laughter in the cafes, and the smiles are sour, bitter.

En route to the airport I chat up the taxi driver, ask him who

he hates more than the Russians. Promptly he says the Arabs – they come here and steal our girls. Indeed I had noticed a number of such characters in the hotel, throwing their weight around. But they come really to buy Skoda arms, the girls are the bonus – or the discount on the deals.

Is Dubchek still working in a timber factory? . . . Oh, yes, he is a manager now . . . we all know where he is. How he is getting on? He is still our hero, our hope.

I hand him a \$20 bill which I know he will switch on the black market for three times the official rate, and slip away from this sad, spiritless city.

Shanghai is a western city filled with Chinese – a couple of hundred years ago this was a fishing village. And the Bund is still the Bund, adored and immortalised by so many writers and film makers. (You can visit the suite where Noel Coward wrote 'Private Lives' in the old Cathay, now called the Peace Hotel.)

I had expected to be impressed by the Bund, yet its aspect, curving down the Yangtze, appears almost forlorn, on October 1st, China's National Day. Most of it was built in the early Twenties in the wake of World War I after the British, Americans and French had disposed of the Germans, who themselves had a considerable stake in China. Yet within a mere thirty years, an eye-blink in history, they have all been tossed out. Now red flags dangle atop these arrogant edifices . . . not a displeasing sight.

I ask the young lady who is our guide, a senior cadre from the film studios, if we may visit one of the more significant places of this city, the building where the Communist Party was founded in 1920. Of course, and off we go. Shanghai has always been a hot bed of radicalism and dissent (including the Cultural Revolution for that matter), underground revolutionary movements have flourished and perished here for a hundred years or so. We arrive at the building, lovingly restored, but it is locked up. Of course – the National Holiday. But the cadre is not to be daunted. She bustles off to dig up the caretaker/curator who, on his day off, is sitting out the back having a beer and watching TV. He readily agrees to come up, and I am provided with a one-man conducted tour. Well, why not, I've paid my dues over the years.

It has been preserved, recreated, the walls lined with old photographs of early revolutionaries, the illegal pamphlets, books of the time. There is a room where the thirteen original central committee members sat . . . there is the door through which Chou En Lai and the others fled when the police came, says our guide . . . and over there, the two chairs on which the comrades from Moscow, the Third International, sat through meetings.

Indeed, I am struck by the relevance of Lenin to these early days. He took an intense interest in the development of the Chinese movement, and this is not forgotten. Do his heirs in Moscow have such good memories? I doubt it.

And Paris was the sanctuary. Chou in fact spent some years there. I am pleased that Mao has not been exorcised (like Stalin, from Soviet history). He has his honored place.

Thus, says the curator at the end of this small tour, there were, at the beginning, fifty-three members, today there are fourteen million.

The Jiang Hotel is in the old French Concession, art deco of

the Thirties, yet with a Gallic flavor, the high doors, the gracious furniture . . . and there are some surviving facilities, an Olympic indoor swimming pool in which some French tourists are frolicking, and a western style restaurant. The food is not very successful – and a band is playing melodies from the thirties: Bye-Bye Baby, Home On The Range. A large group of Americans are quite dislocated by all these mournful melodies, and sing away in a maudlin manner, fall into each other's arms, wipe away tears of homesickness. The Chinese trumpeter is no Harry James, but he manages. It is my last night in China.

Strolling back on this showery, summery evening, Ma slips into a bookshop, buys a volume, presses it on me. It's 'The Blacksmith and the Carpenter' by Sun Li, his favorite Chinese writer . . . indeed a fine collection of short stories. The characters are working-class and cast into savage situations of times gone by, yet the writing is possessed of a flowing elegance.

REFLECTIONS

Slipping south to Sydney, the Flight Captain informs us we are now passing over the Philippines. Indeed, just on the left there, you can make out Manila . . . ah yes, one more fragment of the human race, in all its tumult and torment, moving inexorably towards revolution. The ingredients of the recipe all simmering in the cauldron: a corrupt right-wing dictatorship, angry idealists plus militant workers, a vast amorphous mass of peasants wrung by poverty.

Revolutions neither succeed nor fail. They just happen; the inevitable social earthquakes which come along to jolt humanity every so often, and with the same unexpectedness and unpredictability as the natural event.

Yet such an event having occurred, why do people find it so difficult to rebuild, reconstruct over the ruins?

One of the earlier convulsions in modern history, Cromwell's English Revolution of the 1640s, may have disposed of an effete and burdensome aristocracy, but in turn it reinforced religious bigotry, created the division of Ireland, and spawned a bleak oppressive atmosphere in England herself.

The American Revolution had its aftermath in the slaughter of the Civil War, and the scars remain.

The French Revolutionaries invented the guillotine to speed up the massacre and produced a Bonaparte, for good measure.

The Russian revolution bred Stalinism, and the Chinese a 'Cultural Revolution.'

Yet perhaps the Mas and the Mischas of their worlds – each more similar than different – and after their fashion, with their exploring minds, will find fresh ways, new paths.

One lives in hope – for what else is there?

Cecil Holmes, 62, recently visited China with Stephen Fitzgerald and film producer Anthony Buckley, as described above, and is now revising and completing the screenplay of 'Morrison of Peking'. A film version of Joseph Conrad's 'The Planter of Malata', adapted in association with Dorothy Hewett, is to be produced shortly, and a collection of reportage, One Man's Way, many first published in Overland, is in preparation.

VICTOR YE

The Test

He couldn't sleep after the cocks crowed. A glance at his watch: it was only four in the morning. He wanted to be rid of the recollections which had disturbed him all night through, and rest so as to prepare himself for the long journey.

Perhaps it was an hour or two before he heard someone talking into his ear. He opened his eyes and felt dazed by the morning sun which had risen halfway above the eastern hills, a cloudless day. Stirred by a sudden impulse, he sat up and said, "Aiya, I'm too late!" The only listener, in front of the bed, shouted back, "Teacher Li, you forgot to bolt your door yesterday evening. Aren't you afraid of a thief taking your belongings?"

Li gave the boy an ironical smile. Actually he often had his door open the whole night when he fell sound asleep. This was partly because he didn't care much about his way of life and partly because he had almost nothing to be stolen. His 51.5 yuan per month was reduced to 31.5 yuan after he posted twenty to his widowed mother, who lived with his brother in a distant rural area.

"Hsiao Pan, no thief has ever had any luck in my room." Hurriedly cooking some noodles on an oil-burner, he packed his bag and rolled up his bedding. In a few minutes he set out for the long-distance bus station. He had permission for a week's leave in the provincial capital. It was really a special favour for him, because he had never been absent during his eight years of work at the middle school. A few steps took him out of the school-gate onto the small bridge over the little stream. Willows were already green with new shoots, branches shivering in the breeze, spreading fragrance and swarming with bees. Not exactly knowing the reason, he could not help looking back over his shoulder to the school campus. It was a Sunday morning. Noiseless and empty, the deserted playground presented a scene of extraordinary peace. Red-tiled roofs were dotted in the midst of plane trees, standing tall and straight with their light green leaves. His memory went back eight years to when he was just fresh from graduation and assigned to work as a teacher in this school. It only admitted peasants for elementary education at the time, and he remembered the taste of bitterness he had felt.

It had been a hot summer afternoon that made him take heavy breaths when he set down his luggage in the staff office, a room in a long single-storeyed building. The principal, a person of fifty-odd years, extended a welcome to him, shaking hands and patting him on the shoulder, but his bed-

ding roll was dumped onto a rickety desk in a vacant room adjacent to that of the principal. Disheartened by his appointment, he cursed his luck and listlessly unfolded his bedding. There were no signs of any promising future for him. He just wanted to cry, yet what would be the use of that? Two days' long journey had exhausted him and deprived him of any power to speak or protest. Locking the door, he threw himself on the bed and soon was lost in sleep, not waking until late the next morning.

The principal was a little surprised at the chaos in his room when he came to see him – unpacked suitcase, books scattered over the desk, quilt and clothes out of order on the bed and a total confusion on the ground – shoes, cups, bowls, kerosene-burner. "Hullo, Hsiao Li. Just up?"

He mumbled and heaved a sigh to answer the greeting. He was in too bad a mood to say anything. He felt sick, suffocated. All that had happened two weeks ago was too sudden and unexpected. He was unprepared spiritually and physically for what had happened when the assignment list had been read.

"G County, Li Shih". He had sat still, dumbfounded, unable to utter a word. Once the top student in his class, he was now discredited and sent to work in one of the remotest and poorest areas in the province where none of his fellow students would go. What could he say? What could he do? Any punishment might fall on him if he dared to show any sign of disobedience or irreverence. He bore in mind that he had been labelled a conservative at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and that was only because he had evinced some sympathy for the head of his department. The best idea was to remain quiet and accept what was offered to him.

Half a month elapsed quickly before the new term began. Children from peasants' families were more docile and disciplined than city-bred students, though they still played truant and wild games. He intended to be calm and peaceful, with a mind absorbed by books. But although he had fifteen periods a week for a junior class, the school was dismissed quite early in the afternoon and little homework was ever handed in. Too light a burden was a problem for a young man like him, a mere twenty-three, just started on his career. Except for occasional table tennis games with a few of his colleagues or neighbors close by, the rest of his time went into reading, partly to absorb more knowledge and partly to escape.

The principal was a kind old fellow and often dropped in

for a chat with him. Talkative and funny, he often brought information from out of school. A new Secretary was to replace the old one and army recruitment was to begin in a few days. Of course there were personal enquiries about Li. How many family members did he have to support? How about his parents? Did he have a fiancée? and so on. He was at times embarrassed by these endless questions. But he had to be tolerant as he knew very well he could not offend his superior.

For the first two years his name passed throughout the small town and took on a certain degree of consequence, especially among the families with unmarried daughters. Yet he had no interest in entanglements and preferred to remain single. Rumors immediately ensued. He put on airs, he heard someone unknown behind him say. Indeed the remark sounded reasonable, as he was the sole college graduate in the small town. The local tradition still had it that a college graduate meant an official candidate who had passed the imperial examination. Therefore he could easily win popular favor from the ordinary people, especially when his monthly pay was higher than that of the commune director.

Perhaps on account of this, he had to receive match-makers almost every day, until at last he had to have his door locked and stay away for a couple of days. As fewer and fewer came, more gossip was generated. He behaved too arrogantly, even turned down the offer of the Secretary. He overrated himself too much. He would suffer . . . He only gave a smile. What else could he do?

A stump on the road almost caught his foot, and woke him from his reverie a few steps from the bus station. It was 7:30, and still half an hour before the bus was scheduled to come. Seated in a corner, he glanced around to see if anyone he knew was there. The waiting room was thronged with passengers, coming mostly from the neighboring rural brigades. It was the same small hall he had arrived at. Sooty walls stained with squalid spots, ground littered with bits of paper, cigarette butts, rinds and melon seeds. Chatter, murmurs and loud cries in the local dialect cascaded round him. He sat motionless passing back into the same reverie.

How had he passed all these years? Eight years; never losing count of days, weeks and months. He had been for no long journeys, apart from two visits to his mother. This was partly because he had nowhere to go. None of his classmates corresponded with him, nor did any of his relatives or other acquaintances. Luckily he could find pleasure in his books, and the people at the school were kind to him.

The life in the town presented no grand spectacle which could match that of the big cities. The only entertainment was at the Big Hall, which opened three times a week for a film. Since few films amused him, he preferred on most occasions to stay at home reading. However, there were occasional exceptions when the principal and his wife would come and invite him to a film.

One day he bought five tickets, four of which were presented to the principal for his kindness. It was an unusual thing for him to do, and the principal was very pleased. The hall had long straight benches instead of the armchairs found in the big cities and, arriving late, he had to squeeze into the hall and push past many people to get to the seat the principal had saved him. He found himself sitting next to the princi-

pal's daughter. "Hsiao Mei, make room for Mr. Li," said her mother.

The film was said to be a new one and tickets were sold out. On such occasions the rules allowed people to watch sitting on their own stools. Therefore all the vacant room was occupied. It was impossible for him to move even a bit, let alone change seats. The long benches were meant to seat four, but all had at least six people sitting on them. He gave up the idea of moving and responded, "It's all right". Inwardly he felt uncomfortable. Though he was twenty-five at the time, he had never been to see a film with a girl. He felt his pulse pounding and he dared not turn his head or even move slightly. The girl seemed more natural and less timid when she whispered, "Very kind of you to think of us". Promptly his heart was struck with something hot, and his tongue worked uneasily when he murmured, "Don't mention it".

From then on the girl, who was a part-time worker in a town-run printing workshop, came more often to his room, asking him to do her a favor by lending her some books, giving her some advice about particular issues, or offering to do some washing for him. The girl was frank and enthusiastic as well as diligent. As they were close neighbors, he often asked help with cooking, washing or stitching.

Time passed. It was three years since he had arrived, and he had got used to life and work at the school. Though his major was English, he was a jack-of-all-trades. He taught not just English, but Chinese, physics, even physical culture. He would take the place of any teacher who was absent, even if not the best qualified teacher for that subject; in those days no-one cared about qualifications, since most of the teachers hadn't received any formal training. The longer he stayed the busier and more engaged he became. Due to the extra work he often missed meals and had to cook for himself. However, more than once he found a bowl of hot rice delivered by the girl or her mother as he was about to light his kerosene-burner. Grateful as he was, he seldom spoke his gratitude, because he knew it was not just a matter of saying thanks. He would buy sweets or cakes for the pet boy of the principal's family, and proved himself as a strong carrier when they needed a hand with coal, rice or any other kind of heavy odd jobs.

The girl often made him sleepless. Was there any hope in his dreams? Many times he brushed them away as ridiculous and unrealistic. Even the fall of the Gang of Four two years before, though at first inspiring him, seemed to be going to have little effect on his own career.

Then one day he learned from a newspaper that the post-graduate entrance examination was soon to resume. When he told the principal of his wish to sit for the exam the old man sat silent a while. Perhaps he hadn't expected him to make this move and didn't want him to leave the school. Finally he said "All right, all right, I'll think it over to see if we can afford to let you go". Li was uneasy and restless for days wondering if he would be granted permission. He knew very well that, without the consent of the principal, he could not enrol, and if he lost this chance he might never get another. It was the first chance following the Cultural Revolution, the first for twelve years.

For the next few days Li's uneasiness was aggravated by his encounter with the girl Hsiao Mei, who was apparently

annoyed by his ambition. He felt embarrassed when he saw the coldness on her face. She came into his room to return a book, and said, "You look down on us country people". Li tried to explain the situation to her but she ignored this, and insisted that he simply wanted to leave. Although he couldn't tell how he would do in the exam, he could not deny his intention to move on. He didn't try to explain further.

Once or twice, dreaming, he had met with her hand-in-hand, and they had smiled at each other. Was this what was called "love"? This emotion seemed to increase as the years had passed and might have turned into something more profound if he had not checked it. He looked at her apologetically, saying to himself: "Forgive me, forgive me. I can't help it".

About a week later he was called to the office of the principal to be given permission. In the end the principal's tone turned a bit sarcastic: "Our little temple cannot accommodate a big Buddha like you. We wish you success." He saw the complexity of the principal's mood, kindness mixed with reluctance to part with him. He dared not meet the principal's eyes when he left, feeling guilty in front of the generous old man. He controlled his feelings and managed to utter thanks. In order to achieve something, he had to make some sacrifice. He had to sacrifice part of his genuine feeling for his career. The conclusion gave him solace and strength.

Gossips had said he would soon become the son-in-law of the principal. The rumor sounded credible. Some well-meaning people at times put the question bluntly to him: "Why don't you want to set up a family?" Some were even more plain-spoken. "Hsiao Mei is a good girl, why not marry her?"

Totally embarrassed, he did not know how to get rid of these people. He might have felt a kind of satisfaction if he really had chosen the principal's daughter as his wife. She was good-looking, young, capable and, most important of all, she was related to his leader. He might have easily established a happy and comfortable small family with the help of the principal and his wife who, in accordance with local custom, would provide a set of fashionable furniture and other articles of dowry, though they were not very rich. He could depend upon his mother-in-law and his wife for his meals and the rest of the housework. Even if his wife had a child, he wouldn't have to take care of it because he had a considerate mother-in-law. Compared with his contemporaries, most of whom were scattered in the rural areas, he had a sense of leisure and solace. Yet in spite of all this, he could not ask Hsiao Mei to marry him.

The problem was not just a matter of choice among girls with different characters, appearances and identities, but a matter of how to make such a choice and by what standard to make the choice. He had met dozens of girls who were either recommended to him by match-makers or met with him by accident or design. Yet he had strong feelings for Hsiao Mei, perhaps because he had known her for a longer time. But

these feelings, fostered in the last eight years, couldn't be taken simply as a sort of love, because love appeared to him to be more serious, sacred and imperative.

The issue became more sensitive and substantial when he thought of the wives of a few of his former classmates who were either graduates from colleges or worked at a state-owned school or enterprise. Not that he felt disgrace, but a kind of uneasiness associated with his own social position bothered him intermittently. Was he doomed to stay there for the rest of his life? Was there no possibility for him to make any move? Above all, was he reconciled to his humble position as an obscure rural teacher, giving up his ambition of being a college teacher or translator?

Many times these questions filled his mind and tortured him; many times he tried to seek an answer and considered how to sort out practical solutions.

He remembered moments that had disappointed him to a point of desperation. One of them was occasioned by a letter he had written to a relative who worked at a government office. His answer assured Li that he could manage to transfer him to an office in the city. He sent another letter of thanks and waited for two years. Nothing came of the promise. The same thing happened with one of his classmates, who at first also had made high-sounding promises and seemed very willing to help him. But again nothing happened. By and by he resigned himself to being let down and persuaded himself that he would rather live in the rural area with a clear conscience than move to the city by underhand dealings.

The problem and contradictions seemed impossible to resolve as the political traumas followed one after another. More than once he felt his incapacity to do anything to improve his own lot or to contribute more broadly. Years in the country had made him more calm and serene in temperament and tolerant of the hard times he was faced with. Yet the fire, the desire for the freshness and newness of the future was not extinguished; it was still burning deep inside him.

The noise in the bus station suddenly diminished as many people stood and left. He looked out of the windows and saw the passenger bus outside. He picked up his bags to follow the crowd. Two or three birds were chirping in the branches of the old ginkgo tree, the shadow of which was now sharply defined on the ground. Li grew conscious of the sun and felt a glow fill him. He took a deep breath of the air, so fresh after that of the room, and only then did he realise that it was nearly Spring. "Oh Spring, the sweet Spring", he murmured to himself. Freshness, hope. Let me hope, he said to himself, always hope.

The dust stirred up by the rolling wheels of the bus seemed to make a vague shape, something he could not quite discern. As time went by it would be identified, he was sure of that.

Victor Ye is the pen-name of a Chinese teacher of English, who has recently been in Australia as an exchange student.

With this issue we have commenced what we hope will be a long relationship with our new printers, Currency Productions, of Fitzroy, Victoria. All indications are that we are witnessing the beginning of what should be a beautiful friendship, despite the problems that inevitably come up in a printer-publisher relationship. For a start Tess Baster, one of the principals of Currency, is the daughter of an old friend (which is *not* why we accepted their quote!). We are introducing a few changes to the magazine. Readers will probably not notice that the page height has been reduced by one line, but they may notice type-face changes for both poetry and prose. With the poetry, we have had complaints that the type-size was too small, and have gone over to a type-face that, while technically no larger, does in our view give the visual impression of being so. With the prose, we have adopted a type-size which we always wanted, but could not get from our previous printers. For the technically-minded, we are printing in Times 9 on 10 instead of Times 10 on 11. This gives our readership more for their money and we really do think that the previous size was a little too extravagant of space, but we shall be taking close note of readers' comments, so please let us have them.

Readers will also note that this issue is considerably longer in pages than normal issues. In the interests of economy we have tried to stick to 64 pages as a general rule, going up to 72 pages in 'emergency' situations. This issue is 88 pages. What we are trying to do is to make up a missed issue last year by printing more pages in several successive issues. Since there is no free lunch, and larger issues have to be paid for somehow, we are calling this a double issue (number 94 and 95) and debiting subscribers' accounts accordingly. *However*, subscribers will not be charged extra for subsequent over-length issues of *Overland*, so that over several issues you will end up paying the same number of cents per page as you would have normally. The essential purpose behind this arrangement is to satisfy the requirements of the Literature Board, which of course subsidizes *Overland* and hence your reading, and is guarding readers' interests by requiring that its grant-per-issue should be reflected in a magazine of appropriate length. In other words, without this arrangement we should have lost the Literature Board grant for a whole issue. All of this may bore you, but we like to take our readers into our confidence, because we believe they have always been much more closely woven into the fabric of *Overland* than the readers of most magazines are.

We have prepared an elaborate index to *Overland* which will run from issue no. 1 to issue no. 96. I have it in manuscript and have found it an invaluable aid to locating items in the magazine that might normally take hours to find. Plans to publish this index after number 96 is published are well advanced, but one problem troubles us. Although we would publish at or near cost, if we did a print run of merely two or three hundred copies we might have to charge say \$40 a copy, and expect to sell for the most part mainly to libraries and other institutions. However, if enough readers of *Overland* expressed interest, it might be possible to print a larger edition and bring the price down to say \$20. It is important that readers who might buy a copy of the index let us know, as of course it will affect our decision.

I found this scribbled note to myself in an old *Overland* file, and thought it might be worth exposing to light and air. "There is a continuing fight for peace and social justice. There is no single way forward, and *Overland* exists among other things to support a running critique of our society, avoiding as far as possible dogma, delusion and deceit. To surrender to these makes the role of the mindless and the reactionary that much easier."

Many readers will wonder why no tribute to Alan Marshall, who was such a strong supporter of this magazine over many years, appears in this issue. I'm glad to say that a major tribute to Alan from his old friend John Morrison will appear in our next issue. Discussions are also in progress on the setting up of an Alan Marshall memorial fund by *Overland*. One of our readers has offered to start the fund off with a donation of several thousand dollars, and I would hope that a target of \$10,000 would be achievable. Although the fund has not yet been publicly launched, I should be glad to hear from those prepared to support it, and we should be grateful also for suggestions as to the best purposes such a fund might serve. Bear in mind, please, that assuming the fund *did* reach \$10,000, this would only enable an annual award of some \$1000, or an award every two years of \$2000.

The recent welcome re-issue of *Barnard Eldershaw's Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Virago Press caused me some puzzlement. It was widely stated in reviews

that the cuts in the original edition were imposed by the wartime censors – yet the book was published in 1948, years after the war was over. So I wrote to Marjorie Barnard on the matter. She very generously replied, and told me that, in the first place, the manuscript was voluntarily submitted to the wartime censor by her publisher, Georgian House: “who, having been invited to censor it, did just that.” Miss Barnard also said that the censor’s cuts were retained by the publishers when the book was published because the publishers maintained they constituted an “improvement”, though she herself suspected it was for economy reasons. So are myths built up – and, if we are lucky with the longevity of an author, sometimes demolished!

In a haunting passage written in 1971 (in his introduction to Irving Young’s biography of ‘Red Ted’ Theodore), Gough Whitlam writes of the high strain of tragic failure and frustration that is a mark of so many of the chief actors in Australia’s story: Phillip, Bligh, Macquarie, Macarthur, Wentworth, Parkes, Deakin, Fisher, Bruce, Scullin, Lyons, Curtin. Four years later his own name was to be added to the list. It’s rather strange that Whitlam didn’t mention Herbert Evatt, the subject of Sir Walter Crocker’s appraisal in this issue. Perhaps none of our leaders ever reached so far to fail in the grasp.

Rather oddly, Evatt befriended me in the 1950s. I can’t remember how we met, but I think it was probably because he was battling to overthrow Menzies’ ban on a Commonwealth Literary Fund grant to Overland. Anyway, when he came to Melbourne he would ring to ask me to meet him at Melbourne University’s new Wilson Hall, where he insisted on standing for some time, to admire the Tom Bass sculptures. Then we would go off to lunch somewhere. Certainly I noticed no deterioration in Evatt’s mind at the time: he was a charming and witty host. Once he took me to lunch at the Windsor with Dinny Lovegrove, a legendary Labor Party fixer and numbers man. We were discussing the anti-Communist referendum of 1951. Turning to Lovegrove, Bert Evatt said: “Do you remember the dinner we had of all State and federal Labor members of parliament, in this very room, to celebrate the victory of the ‘No’ case?”. “Yes,” said Dinny, “of course.” “How many of them voted ‘Yes’?” asked Bert. “Eighty-five out of a hundred and twenty” said Dinny. I can’t vouch for the actual figures, but the proportions are right!

The Kelly Gang is far from being dead, it would appear. Barrett Reid, our hard-working poetry editor, has drawn my attention to three mentions that they get in this issue. There is Richard Tipping’s allusion in his cover design, of course. Then there is Robyn Rowland’s poem on the Kelly girls, on page 53, and P.R. Hay’s reference in his Hume Highway poem on page 46. Ian Turner and I used to visit the old Kelly homestead of Greta West when it was still standing, and gaze at Dan Kelly’s initials carved in the back door. Even more atmospheric was the inscribed tree at Stringybark Creek, and the site nearby of the gang’s hideaway camp. I don’t think I’d like to spend a night alone camping in that bush.

The annual Overland-Meanjin Test Match, I think about the twenty-fourth in the series though we have lost some of our records, was played on a lovely day in March at Fawcner Park, Melbourne. Readers will be gratified to know that, although the editor’s personal contribution to the game was inglorious, Overland retained the historic emu egg trophy in an exciting finish which hung on an over and six runs to make. The six was hit on the first ball of the over, to everyone’s delight except that of the Meanjin team and supporters and that of a small boy who inadvertently stopped the ball with his chest. No lasting damage, we believe.

Our literary magazines are sometimes accused of being parochial, inbred or of ‘favoring their own’. Whether it’s true of the others I don’t know, but just for the hell of it I did a count of the place of residence of all poets who appeared in our issues 91, 92 and 93. Twenty-five of these poets hail from New South Wales, seventeen from Victoria, eight from South Australia, seven from Queensland, three from the A.C.T., two from Western Australia and one each from Papua New Guinea and overseas. It seems a very reasonable spread to me, and an indication not only of how wide we spread our net, so to speak, but of how widely we are known to writers and others.

An original piece of historical research, performed by me alone, without any form of grant, while whiling away a glum hour in the basement of Parliament House, Canberra. Of the members of our first Commonwealth parliament, 57 had moustaches, 53 had beards, 5 were clean-shaven, one had sideboards only and one had a moustache *and* sideboards. If some smart-arse tries to tell me the numbers don’t quite add up to the numbers in Parliament One, my defence is that my mind was reeling at the time I had counted them up several times over, and the attendant who helped me was in no better shape. Is our supporter and contributor Barry Jones the last of the hairy men, or the first of a new breed?

Entries for the Mattara Poetry Prize, up to 500 lines, close on 1 June 1984 at the Department of English, University of Newcastle, N.S.W. 2308. Prizes will total \$3000, and one of the judges will be Peter Porter. Details from the above address.

We should like to point out that the section of Andrew Lansdown’s poem, “Far from Home, the Blower”, that we published in the last issue of Overland was only a section of a longer poem. In Overland 92 Conal Fitzpatrick’s poem “Captain Cook Names Port Kembla” was inadvertently ascribed to *Coral* Fitzpatrick.

David Martin’s splendid piece on Arthur Koestler was written in the first place for a collection of essays in homage to Koestler which is to be published in Hungarian. It will be edited by William Hyde, of Belgrave (Victoria), who left Hungary in 1956.

An Interview with Andre Brink

JIM DAVIDSON

Andre Brink, born in 1935, and recently in Australia, was long regarded as the enfant terrible of Afrikaans writing. The main theorist of the experimental group of Sestigters (Sixty-ers), his prodigious output has ranged from novels to travelogues, literary criticism, translations and pornography, all of it written in tandem with an academic career. For nearly twenty years Brink has taught at Rhodes University, Grahamstown; founded by the 1820 settlers, Grahamstown could be described as the most English town in South Africa. Brink is now Professor of Afrikaans and Dutch there. But instead of becoming a fully paid-up member of the establishment, Brink's radicalism has become more pronounced: his novel Kennis van die Aand (1973), eight years in the writing, carries the distinction of having been the first novel written in Afrikaans to be banned by an Afrikaner Nationalist government. Last year Brink's A Chain of Voices was widely acclaimed in America and Europe. His book of essays, Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege has just been published by Faber.

This interview was recorded in Brink's study at Rhodes on 25 October 1982. At the time, Breyten Breytenbach was still in jail; although unduly pessimistic on that point, Brink's assessment of the exceptional nature of the South African government's policy towards writers was borne out by the subsequent acceleration of South African military action against neighboring countries.

JD: Coming to South Africa I was somewhat surprised to find that all your novels appear to be on sale: there's a general impression abroad that many, if not all of them, are banned.

BRINK: Well, I've had considerable problems with several of them in the past, and in fact this is the first time in eight years that they are freely available. I find that a bit difficult to get used to myself, although I'm immensely pleased of course at finally being able to get through to South African audiences with all the books.

It is not very easy to explain this particular phenomenon, but there certainly is a marked change towards liberalisation in censorship in this country – in the application of official censorship perhaps. (One should be very careful about how one words it.) But it does not mean that there is a liberalisation in the regime as such. Generally I tend to take censorship as a barometer of political tendencies in this country, so there must be a number of quite specific reasons for this anomaly at the moment.

The new trend manifested itself towards the end of 1979, in the wake of three specific bans. First came the ban on a leading Afrikaans novelist Etienne Leroux's latest book, *Magersfontein*, which got the Afrikaans literary establishment up in arms: even the reasonably conservative professors of literature felt that this was a very important novel, and having banned it they felt the censors had overstepped the

imaginary line which separated the trash, or the dangerous stuff, from worthwhile literature. There was such an outcry that something had to be done about that. Roughly at the same time there were bans on my *Dry White Season*, and especially on Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*; these also caused outcries. All this came at a peculiar moment in history: in the wake of the Soweto riots, the death of Biko and the school boycotts which followed and lasted well into 1979, South Africa – the government – felt itself in dire need of friends abroad, more than ever before. And with Thatcher on the scene and the possibility of Reagan, I think the authorities realised that the surest way of scaring off would-be friends would be to clamp down on writers. So for very specific reasons, I think, it was decided to let up a little bit on censorship.

JD: That carries the implication that the removal of those specific conditions might in fact lead to a return of fuller censorship.

BRINK: I think that may happen, although with the delicate negotiations going on about Namibia, for instance, I can't see these conditions changing within the immediate foreseeable future. South Africa will need friends abroad more and more. Also, I think an interesting degree of sophistication has crept into the way in which the South African authorities are

handling the situation at the moment. They seem to recognise – they may not have rationalised it completely, but I think it is a factor which enters the situation – that in order to justify the existence of a repressive apparatus like the formidable one they have at their disposal, it is necessary from time to time to show the world why they have this apparatus, and to allow a few dissident authors to make some noise, which may in fact prove their point. This creates a very embarrassing situation for the writer, because it does create the impression (in some minds at least) that we're being used. But I don't think one should be too dismayed by that – I think in any modern society practically everybody is made use of in some way or another by whatever government is in power. The main thing – from the writer's point of view – is to use whatever opportunity one has to get one's word across to as many people as possible.

JD: If that becomes your primary purpose, and I think it's an admirable one, nevertheless it does create a certain instability regarding your sense of audience and therefore even – now that you have been writing lately in English – creates some sense of uncertainty as to whether you should go back and write in Afrikaans first. Would you like to talk about the degree to which you developed Afrikaans as an instrument of prose, and the reasons why you abandoned it? Do you now write directly in English, or into Afrikaans first and then translate?

BRINK: I started writing in English as a direct result of the ban in early 1974 on *Kennis van die Aand*, *Looking on Darkness*, because that – as it would have been for any Afrikaans author – was a completely traumatic experience. If you write in English and you're banned, at least you have the slight comfort of knowing that you can still be read elsewhere; but if Afrikaans is your exclusive language and you're cut off from that, it is a total undermining of your whole *raison d'être* as a writer. So I turned to English, and translated it as *Looking on Darkness*. From then on, I've been writing in both languages all the time. What generally happens is that I write a novel in Afrikaans first, and then . . . it's difficult to say that I then translate it into English, it's really a matter of re-thinking and re-feeling, re-shaping and re-living the whole thing in a new language. So I generally take it through about three drafts in Afrikaans, then re-work it in English, take it through several drafts there, and then sometimes re-translate the final one into Afrikaans. So that I have two final versions which are more or less comparable, although invariably there remain quite a number of differences between the two versions, sometimes as far as whole scenes.

JD: Why is that? Is it partly because of your frame of mind at the time when you are writing the novel, because clearly you work very prolifically, or is it also partly because there are certain cultural attitudes, and therefore certain possibilities, that are built into the linguistic structures . . .

BRINK: I think it's especially the latter. There is a sort of built-in genius in each language which lends itself particularly well to the expression of certain ranges of experience, and not so well to others. And that of course is a challenge to the writer, to try and make it possible for a language to expand its awareness of itself and its intrinsic range of possibilities. That would certainly be more clearly the case with Afrikaans, which is a very young language. When the generation of the

Sestigers began writing in the early sixties, entire spectrums of experience had not yet become accessible to it. But that's a slightly different question.

JD: You are in the relatively rare situation of being on the frontier of almost the whole European language system. In a way, you're the most extreme, exposed form of that, as well as being on the frontier in the other sense, of course.

BRINK: Yes, indeed. Which means that there is a particular exhilaration, a sense of adventure in working in a language like Afrikaans, because with each new work that one publishes one is breaking new ground. You have to find the formula for expressions and experiences which you want to express in that language and which do not yet exist.

JD: I don't know Afrikaans, but it is immediately apparent that it has a laconic forcefulness, which can be used with a certain grace . . .

BRINK: I think it has a certain lapidary quality in the original sense of the word, really: it's very concrete. It's tied to a more earthy experience of the world outside – it also has a much higher emotional threshold than English. One can get away with a heavy load of emotionalism in Afrikaans which when translated directly into English would be totally unacceptable . . . I think I still sometimes step into that pitfall when I rework something in English.

JD: As an Australian, what strikes me about South African English is that it is perhaps the most brittle of the off-shoot Englishes. So that the discrepancy between the languages is probably greater.

BRINK: Yes. But the English language in South Africa has also been developing in a very interesting fashion, over the last decade or two especially. I haven't explored it fully, but I'm getting more and more the impression that Afrikaans writers and English writers in this country are beginning to experience it in very much the same terms, so that it is becoming slightly easier for one to switch from one language to the other. Thirty or forty years ago the English language and its position in South Africa and Africa was so totally different from that of Afrikaans, that to transpose an Afrikaner's experience into the English language became so difficult that one really lost some of the essential qualities of the situation.

JD: Coming back to this country after thirteen years, one hears people switching from one language to the other a lot more commonly.

BRINK: It's happening much more commonly. And so what's been happening in my writing lately is that although I have been writing almost exclusively in Afrikaans first and then re-working it into English, this process has become much more involved from book to book, as it were. In the latest one, *Chain of Voices*, I used both languages; Afrikaans for some of the voices and English for others, simply to create different distances between myself and the different speakers, and to try and get a larger spectrum of nuances into the book.

JD: What evidence is there that you are in fact reaching a wider audience in South Africa, now that the books are available?

BRINK: I think simply in terms of sales. It's quite stunning the difference availability has made. First of all because the English ones are becoming available in paperback, which has added a new dimension to the audience I have in South Africa, in that more and more blacks are reading me. I can judge that from the letters I receive.

JD: When I was here last, you had not very long before translated *Don Quixote* into Afrikaans. What particular problems did that present – presumably you had to translate it via English, or did you do it direct?

BRINK: I did it direct. There was a certain grand formalism about the original, which of course was not only characteristic of Spanish in the seventeenth century, but of almost every language in that particular period. And that does create and did create a number of problems, because Afrikaans is a much less formal language. It was simply a matter of having to find appropriate equivalents. On the other hand I think the Spanish language – which is a very strong, masculine language, also very strongly rooted in realities and in tangible qualities (although, of course, it does have its very strong mystical element as well) – lent itself quite exquisitely to this transposition into Afrikaans.

JD: It is of course another frontier culture in a way . . .

BRINK: Oh yes.

JD: Speaking of frontiers, here we are at Rhodes University, in Grahamstown. How do you find working in an English-language university, and how do you locate yourself in relation to the cult of the 1820 settlers?

BRINK: I think it's not only an English university, but also a very small one and off the beaten track. And in both respects it suits me admirably. If I were to live in Cape Town or Johannesburg I would have very little time to devote to writing; but because this is small, my duties to the university are much fewer than I would have elsewhere – classes are small, marking's a minimum – while simply on a distance level it's rather difficult for people to get hold of me here. I have that bit of withdrawal which a writer needs. There is perhaps a certain amount of awkwardness in teaching Afrikaans in an English-language university, though it has its compensation in that those English-speaking students who do decide to take Afrikaans as a major for the Arts degree must have a particular interest in the language, otherwise they wouldn't take it. So, even if the material isn't always of the best, the interest and the stimulation is such that it is wonderful to deal with students like that. Then on the level of politics it makes it that little bit easier for me to function, because in an Afrikaans university – if ever I were allowed to teach in an Afrikaans university – there would be so many problems on the practical, day-to-day level, politically and otherwise (but especially politically), that again the taxing of one's creative resources would be so great that one would have less left to give to writing. Here, because there is a sense of solidarity with the majority of my colleagues, in periods when I do feel particularly harassed I can at least count on their support. That means an enormous amount to me.

JD: It seems to me – though I might be quite mistaken – that you have probably moved from initially writing primarily for Afrikaners to a situation where now you're writing ambigu-

ously, with one eye to the English world, however that defines itself – whether it's English-speaking South Africans, Africans within the country, or the outside world in general.

BRINK: I think I still have two different focuses, really – and I think that may also explain to some degree the difference between my final Afrikaans text and the final English text. I do think that the Afrikaans version is still aimed almost exclusively at an Afrikaans audience. The other one is aimed at a more general audience. Working in English alongside of Afrikaans has certainly given me this advantage, that it has forced me to broaden my own outlook a bit. Writing exclusively in Afrikaans and living exclusively in Afrikaans tends to narrow one's field of vision, in that one keeps on fighting for things which are taken for granted everywhere else. It takes a little bit of the pressure off to be able to say, "Forget about this petty, parochial subjective issue and just approach it as if it were something general."

JD: So paradoxically, again being here enables you in a sense to manipulate those two channels a little –

BRINK: I think it helps.

JD: – rather than getting them crossed and scrambled, as would probably happen in one of the big cities.

BRINK: Yes. Not that it means I can ever be accepted as an English writer in Grahamstown, or possibly in South Africa. Certainly in the context of the 1820 settlers and their descendants there's a great deal of wariness about me as an Afrikaner, and the temerity I have to write about them. I had the misfortune to write two television series on the British settlers, which I approached initially with great joy and reverence for the people I wrote about. But I didn't see it as anything like an epic of the settlers; in fact I went for the small human elements, and wanted to write a rather light-hearted comedy. But I think because I made the mistake of calling it "The Settlers", the real settler descendants were expecting the definitive statement – and they were devastated. They were furious! I don't think they'll ever forgive me. I got a large number of anonymous letters, including one purportedly coming from a group of a dozen Natal academics, who said that it would serve no point to sign their names, but they'd finally managed to figure it out – that all these years I'd been posing as a liberal so that finally the government could use me to put down the English. Much of the reaction was very amusing indeed, but some of it was quite distressing; in fact it's been one of the most distressing episodes of my whole writing career. Perhaps I should have realised more profoundly how much settler history really means to the community.

JD: Really it's all they've got . . .

BRINK: Yes. And so they simply refuse to accept that the settlers who came to the Eastern Cape – unlike most of those who went to Natal – were of the lower social classes, were really down-and-outers by the time most of them came here. They had a hell of a time – they were poor, they were drunk, they were brutes, many of them.

JD: Whereabouts did you yourself grow up in South Africa?

BRINK: More or less all over the interior, because my father was a magistrate; he was transferred every four or five years.

I was born in the Free State; the major period of my so-called formative years was spent in Griqualand West, near Kimberley, in a tiny little village. Then I matriculated in the Eastern Transvaal, and then went to Potch[efstroom]. So the background was changing all the time, but it remained stable in that all the places in which I grew up were very small, very conservative, almost exclusively Afrikaner villages.

JD: Hence the recurrence in your novels of those marvellous childhood scenes in inland towns.

BRINK: Yes. I think what happened in the sixties, when I formed part of the Sestiger movement, was that all of us had spent shorter or longer periods in Paris – specifically Paris – and came back to find the atmosphere here so stifling and parochial that we started writing in the general European cosmopolitan way – existentialism and all that. We had just caught it in its last throes. It was almost a bit like being ashamed of poor relations. For at least a decade I shied away from the real South African scene and the issues at stake here, and it was only after I came back from another stay in Paris towards the end of the sixties, in fact in 1968, in which I lived through the student revolt there, that I realised the enormous potential of what was here, and of what I'd lived through as a child. And so I started exploring that. It's not only that I can't, but there's no point in trying to compete with, say, a writer like John Fowles, or John Irving, or whoever it might be. One has to explore that particular bit of experience which is really unique to oneself, and I find it more and more fascinating the deeper I delve into it – absolutely inexhaustible!

JD: To what extent is the starting point of any particular novel a real set of circumstances? When you began to write *A Dry White Season*, for example, was there a particular case that preyed on your mind?

BRINK: Usually it takes something very specific to trigger it off. In this case there was a detainee who had allegedly hung himself near King William's Town – Mohapi. The Mdluli case in Durban also contributed to it, but it was mainly the Mohapi one which triggered it. I was knee-deep into the novel when Biko died, and that put me off it altogether for almost a year. I felt it would be obscene to ride on Biko's back as it were, and use him to write a novel about a person dying when a real person – and such a person – had died so close to Grahamstown. In fact the whole thing started when the Security Police arrested him here. It was only after I lived through that whole traumatic thing that I realised that it was also a matter of making sure the people knew about it, and were forced never to allow themselves to forget it, because it's amazing how easily people can just wipe anything as dramatic as that off the slate.

JD: One of the things that recurs in your concern with the kind of glacial drift in South Africa generally, and the way in which things can almost imperceptibly cross a line, become decisive, so that new patterns of behavior are formed – presumably because the tracks are so clearly laid out that the actual examination of what happens along any single one of them is going to be extremely minimal.

BRINK: Exactly.

JD: And so therefore you presumably see it as part of the function of the writer to examine the psychology and the lack

of self-knowledge whereby people here can get themselves into a situation where they may perhaps at the very least acquiesce, or otherwise perpetuate certain deeds or hold habits, which otherwise they'd not perceive as even possible.

BRINK: Yes, indeed. And also to link this specific political, social or even subjective individual aspects of their experience and their perception of experience in South Africa – to, well, that old hackneyed word, universal aspects of human experience. In fact it's been one of the most extraordinary aspects of my experience as a writer that after *A Dry White Season* I got two letters in particular, one from a person in Belfast saying that 'you may think that your novel is set in South Africa, but I can tell you that this is the Irish experience', and another letter from somebody in India, who said that this was what he lived through there. Linking these specifics of the South African political experience to what is always present and always part of human experience is really what I see as the aim of the writer.

JD: I'm interested in that remark you made about *A Dry White Season* of your sense of guilt or unease about the Biko situation, because I think the attachment Ben du Toit has to Gordon in your novel is in fact too much of a given. Obviously it's partly because you were anxious about the subject matter; it's not fully developed, whereas the kind of pressures operating on Ben are beautifully developed, so that it's an absolutely chilling novel.

BRINK: Well, that is really why. It was Biko's death which swung the novel in a different direction altogether, because when I set out working on it first of all, I thought of approaching it from the angle of a black man in detention. Then I realised that it's ridiculous for me to try and explain the suffering of a black man to a black reader. He knows that, he's lived it all his life. What I can do is to try and reveal something of the agony of a white man who's concerned about this sort of experience . . .

JD: And that certainly could be instructive to a basically white reading public.

BRINK: I think there are situations in which an Afrikaans writer in particular may be justified in trying to interpret something of the black experience. There's something which he shares with the black man, because of some remarkable similarities between the histories of blacks and Afrikaners in this country – both have a sort of rustic, pastoral, almost peasant, nomadic past, both have a very great awareness of the tribal experience, and both are very strongly rooted in the realities, the physicalities of Africa. There's a sort of spontaneous awareness of the country which they share that makes it one of the greatest tragedies that these should be the main antagonists in South Africa, whereas really they should be the allies – which they were, on several occasions in the nineteenth century, against the English oppressor. But one has to be so wary of posturing, of presuming and speaking up on behalf of the blacks – they have wonderful writers of their own. One has to try and be as true as possible to one's own experience and one's own perceptions.

JD: To what extent have the Special Branch made you aware of their existence?

BRINK: (*laughs*) That's putting it very mildly! I think in the

course of the past year or so the pressure has eased somewhat – why exactly, again it's difficult to say. I presume one of the reasons is that the authorities feel themselves so much more urgently threatened from other quarters, particularly from the black trade-union movement. Simply in terms of manpower they had to transfer some of their men from watching writers to watching trade unionists. But, especially since the publication of *Looking on Darkness*, I've been under constant surveillance: all my mail is opened, and my phone is tapped – those are the sort of bottom-line things that you have to accept, and if you're not prepared to accept them you simply shouldn't write. But I have been called in for interrogation, I've had my house searched, I've had notes and things seized, my typewriter confiscated . . . So they certainly keep one aware of their existence, yes.

JD: One of the things that comes through in *A Chain of Voices* is the statement that's made at the end by Nicolaas, when he confronts the truth with Galant, and says that really this death represents a failure. The implication is that it is an abdication of responsibility: 'We should have been able to keep up some kind of responsibility for each other.' What I'm wondering is that, given the highly-charged situation in South Africa now, is it open to the reader to draw the inference that you're making a comparison between the rumors of possible emancipation, and the present climate created by the fact of independence in the countries to the north? Further, there is in that novel, and it carries on from an idea in *An Instant In The Wind*, of the importance of suffering, of endurance, as against actual revolt. Would you like to talk about that in terms of a political stance, and what it allows you to do?

BRINK: Yes, it's very difficult to translate this specific novel to a particular practical political program. There are quite a number of different approaches to it. There's the more overtly revolutionary stance of somebody like Abel, for instance, and I think Galant to a large extent towards the end, when he comes to believe that only violence can cure the ills he had to suffer. I think the attitude of enduring is something which is really not an overtly political point of view, but is something which has grown in me over the years – and something which is characteristic perhaps of the whole modern concept of the hero. In the world as it is today there simply isn't scope for the heroic figure to conquer, and be a hero in the sense of striding the narrow world like a colossus. The only real hero in our time seems more and more to be the one who manages to survive somehow, who endures and doesn't allow himself to be obliterated and destroyed by what happens, but who somehow manages to go on and make his voice heard as articulating some sense in the world.

JD: To take it beyond South Africa, even though the pressures are not so peculiarly intense as they are here, if one extrapolates the situation to any contemporary one in which you have an increasing plurality, collapse of a common culture and such-like, then in a sense the existential need to make sense of a life on the best terms you possibly can –

BRINK: I think that certainly entered into it to a very large extent, yes.

JD: But when I say the best terms you possibly can, I mean in a moral sense rather than as Martin Mynhardt . . .

BRINK: Yes, yes. And I think it can be possibly linked up to something I have been feeling about South Africa for a long time, and that is that, in spite of all the terrible things happening in this country, I have for a long time been believing – sometimes hoping against hope, as it were – that there was still a little glimmer of promise left. And that people could still avert the catastrophe; that given the serious soul-searching going on in Afrikaner circles, even reaching the Church, that in all this ferment one could see the possibility of a perception of the need to change radically and drastically – entirely – to adapt and work together for the future. But it is a feeling which is dwindling rapidly. Ever since I came back from another trip overseas in 1981, I've been feeling more and more that violence seems to be inevitable. So this sort of tone in my novels may also be changing.

JD: Two of the recent novels, *Chain of Voices* and *An Instant In The Wind*, could be said to be based on historical circumstances. I know that some novelists confect historical circumstances – I'm thinking particularly of Coetzee, with his *Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*. To what degree have you expanded on existing historical sources, or have you also invented events?

BRINK: These two books are completely different cases. In *A Chain of Voices* I used exclusively and extensively archive documents from Cape Town on the actual slave revolt of 1825. In fact there were some two thousand pages, written in the most atrocious handwriting imaginable, of the court proceedings, consisting of all the depositions made by the accused and the witnesses and everybody even remotely connected with the incident. That in fact suggested the form, with the different voices speaking, each putting his own point of view. Obviously men still had to invent quite a lot of the personal histories, and find the whys for particular utterances; but it was all based on real fact.

In *An Instant In The Wind* it was all fabricated, really. It was inspired by Mrs Fraser, whom I first came across in one of those wonderful Thames & Hudson books on Sidney Nolan. I was fascinated by the story of her shipwreck and her trek across the desert of Australia back to Brisbane, I think, with this escaped convict who promised her that he would take her back to civilisation in exchange for his freedom. And I think she then reneged on that, just as they reached the fringe of Sydney – exactly the same story used by Patrick White in *A Fringe of Leaves*. And the interesting thing was that these two books – my *Instant in the Wind* and his *Fringe of Leaves* – were published within the same week in London, although I have the perverse satisfaction that my Afrikaans edition came out a year before! When I first came across that story I thought I'd like to transpose it to South Africa today, and to have a plane crash somewhere in the south of Angola or north of Namibia, and then get a black SWAPO member to lead this lady back to civilization, but because at that stage I had been reading so extensively in old Cape history for a completely different purpose, it occurred to me that there was such fascinating material in the narratives and the travelogues of the foreigners who visited the Cape in the eighteenth century especially, that it give me a wonderful opportunity for using some of this material and transposing the Australian to the Cape of that time.

JD: One of the things I am struck by is the way that the eighteenth century Cape recurs again and again in your work, and always as a kind of beacon, yet clearly you have no illusions whatsoever as to the kind of society it was. There is just this slight hint of it being a peculiarly flawed idyll.

BRINK: Oh yes. I think it became part of my whole preoccupation with my roots, as it were. Ever since I came back from Paris at the end of 1968 there has been a fascination with this place Africa, where I've been shaped since the first members of my family arrived in the very early eighteenth century, and an attempt to get to grips with the whys and the wherefores. And of course the Cape of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was such a melting pot and meeting place of different cultures and races and societies that I think there's no end to its fascination. I keep on finding new aspects of the whole experience South Africa's living through today in that particular period, so I can foresee going back to it again at some stage.

JD: Speaking of Paris makes me think of Breyten Breytenbach. Would you like to talk about your association with Breyten, and anything else about his significance?

BRINK: I think he is probably the greatest living poet in the Afrikaans language, certainly one of the few great ones produced by the language. The strange thing is that as far as our personal relationship is concerned, we arrived in Paris more or less at the same time – I at the end of 1959, and he in the course of 1960. But we never met then. I came back to South Africa in 1961; about two years later we began corresponding when I became involved with the so-called Sestiger movement – we launched a literary magazine, he started contributing, and when I visited Europe in 1964 we first met. Immediately we became the closest of friends – in 1966 I spent the whole summer with him. Beginning with the end of 1967 I spent the whole year with them, living with them as it were . . . Breyten and I have really become much closer than I think brothers can ever hope to be, and there's been a lot of very interesting cross-pollination in our work – he's given me a couple of titles, and I've given him some titles. We've been interested in many of the same historical and contemporary events.

It came as an enormous personal trauma to me when he was arrested in 1975 in South Africa with his forged passport. It is still not quite clear – neither to me nor I think to any one else – exactly why he came, but . . . I think to a large extent it was prompted by the sort of impotence a poet living in exile must feel when he becomes something of a rallying point for a number of causes from all over the world. Whenever the Greek exiles wanted to hold a demonstration against the Colonels, or whenever the Chileans wanted to hold their demonstration, Breytenbach – as a reasonably well-known figure in Paris at the time – was asked to lend moral or vocal support. I think he became more and more agonised at the thought that here he was, living in exile, writing poetry, and not being able to do anything about what he felt so strongly about. It was Lamartine, I think, who said that "It is not enough to be the first poet of one's country, one must also be the first man of action." It must have been that romantic feeling that in desperation sent him back to South Africa in 1975.

I'm still persuaded that it was simply to explore the possibilities of change in this country, and not even necessarily violent change. His trial was such a travesty of justice that it comes as no surprise that, for the first time as far as I know in the history of the South African judiciary, all the court documents disappeared from the Supreme Court Archives – they're not to be found anywhere. This meant that whenever there were actions in subsequent years to try and re-open the case, it was impossible to proceed. On the occasion of his second trial in 1977, when as you will know he was taken from prison back to court, it was alleged that he had framed the most extravagant plan for a Russian invasion – submarines would come into Robben Island, and there would be a sort of subterranean cave in which there was more ammunition, and from there they would take over the country. This wild poetic flight of fantasy was understood as just that by the judge who presided over the second trial – in fact in the course of this trial it was found by the judge that in all probability the very grounds for Breyten's first conviction never even existed – that the organisation which it was alleged he had founded probably never even existed. On the second series of charges he was found innocent, except for the technicality of smuggling some letters he had out of jail, for which he was sentenced to a fifty rand fine. But the first sentence of nine years remained in force, and at the moment he still has two years to go.

And that's another form of anguish. From time to time there seem to be rumors of an imminent parole, but it's impossible to tell. [*Breyton Breytenbach was released two months later, in December 1982.*]

JD: Do you think there is any particular reason why the Government has been so harsh with him?

BRINK: The fact that he is an Afrikaner had a lot to do with that – to feel betrayed by a member of the family is a particular form of back-stabbing, which doesn't occur when an English-speaker does the same thing. The government expects an English-speaker to be disloyal; when an Afrikaner is, it's so much worse that they really come down much harder. I think it was also a matter of personalities. The then Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger, forever notorious for his mean words on Biko – "Every man has the democratic right to die" – really couldn't stand writers. On one occasion, when Breyten's parents visited the Minister to ask for clemency, he allegedly said that, rather than allow Breyten to come out, he wouldn't rest before all the other writers were in jail as well. And I think the then Prime Minister, Vorster, also had a lot to do with it: he was piqued by one particularly vicious poem which Breyten had written about him. There is the possibility that a little word was whispered in somebody's ear at the time, and that may have contributed to the particularly harsh sentence that he got.

JD: Novels remain your basic concern, but you wrote that television series, so presumably you've written some plays?

BRINK: I've written quite a number of plays. These haven't been translated into English. Somebody's working on an English translation now, and I've thought about the possibility of translating a few of them and seeing how they might work, but novels are really the form I'm interested in . . .

JD: And why's that?

BRINK: I think I like the sense of . . . the expansiveness, the volume of it. One can really work out something at leisure, and get to grips with it. And there's a very practical reason too, because I really was deeply interested in the theatre at one stage. It is simply that the theatre is so much more exposed to censorship than novels are. And because practically all the worthwhile theatre in the country is state-subsidised, it means that a play can be taken off, if ever it is put on, simply when one member of the public lodges a complaint. And if you sit down writing a play, knowing that a play doesn't really exist as a play until it is performed, and that there's no chance that this will ever be performed, then it really does take away your desire to write altogether. With a novel you know there are ways to beat them, that you can get the book circulated even if you have to resort to *samizdat* or some sort of halfway station towards *samizdat*, as I did with *Instant In The Wind* . . .

JD: Is there much drama being written?

BRINK: Very, very little.

JD: Because clearly drama is confrontationist, and naturally homes in on areas of contention.

BRINK: Yes. And it's very sad, because Afrikaans drama finally, after being dormant for a very long time, reached a point in the course of the sixties where it really seemed to explode with new vitality and new explorations; it's just died away. Hardly anything's come of that tremendous promise. Black theatre's not just surviving well but thriving, since black theatre is not dependent on state subsidies. I suppose there is a lesson in that for white writers. Much of its exuberant vitality is due to the fact that so many of these plays are performed on a fly-by-night basis – put on in Soweto tonight, and in New Brighton tomorrow night, and then in Zwile or somewhere, they disappear, and by the time the authorities discover that the play exists, it's gone already. The same applies to the enormous popularity of poetry readings in the black community – an interesting return to oral traditions.

JD: Is there much poetry reading in the white culture?

BRINK: Very little. I think in Johannesburg there's a certain amount of it, and in Cape Town. But it is a sort of dilettante thing, and a patting on the back, whereas in the black community it has become so much an instrument in the struggle

for liberation that it has this surging vitality, this exuberant quality – sometimes very strident, for obvious reasons, but a lot of it is really good stuff.

JD: To return to the issues raised by your novels, if one considers *Rumours of Rain*, say, what kind of reception did it get from the Afrikaners on one side and the English on the other?

BRINK: It's quite startling, the enormous difference in reception one can come across if one writes in two languages. *Rumours of Rain* had an enthusiastic reception from English-speakers in South Africa, but it was absolutely damned by Afrikaans critics and most of the Afrikaans readers, who just loathed the book – I suppose for obvious reasons, since it is the picture of the Ugly Afrikaner. And perhaps for that reason Afrikaners seemed to respond very warmly to *A Dry White Season*, whereas strangely enough English-speaking South Africans reacted with some diffidence towards it. I think they were a bit upset to find that a good loyal Afrikaner like Ben du Toit is also possible! At the same time Afrikaners felt that they could identify with this man because he was so ordinary, so middle-of-the-road, so middle-class. Even good Calvinists in Afrikanerdom couldn't find any fault with his system of values. So they could identify with him, and I think it gave them a sense of well-being that an Afrikaner did the right thing – even though it meant that at the same time they had to side against the authorities.

JD: I find their favorable reaction quite extraordinary, since it's such a steely, frightening novel to read. I really would have thought it would have been cast out absolutely.

BRINK: I think it very strange, but it probably contributed to the fact that the ban was lifted much sooner than I ever thought it would be. But they hated the other one, Martin Mynhardt [in *Rumours of Rain*]. Of course, he was a bit close to the bone for all the *nouveaux riches* Afrikaners, who have settled in cities and pride themselves on having cut themselves off from the past, and on acquiring new values . . .

Jim Davidson was, for a number of years, editor of Meanjin. He is at present completing a biography of Louise Hanson-Dyer.

ROSS FITZGERALD

Education: The Queensland Condition

Here in Queensland there has been a great deal of agitation about returning to 'basics' in education. Apart from the moral 'basics' sought by the pervasive Festival of Light and the Community Standards Organisation, a recent Queensland Select Parliamentary Inquiry into Education (usually known as the Ahern Committee) among other things recommended an annual program testing performance in the 'basics' of the total years three, six and nine Queensland school population. Moreover, the highly effective lobby, Society to Outlaw Pornography and Committee Against Regressive Education (STOP and CARE) has direct access to the National Party cabinet. What STOP and CARE conceive of as effective education may be inferred from the words of their leader, influential educational crusader Rona Joyner, who was quoted as saying:

Children don't go to school to learn to think. They go to learn to read and write and spell correctly. They can start thinking when they're older and their minds are not being manipulated.

(Gold Coast Bulletin, 9 March 1978)

In the last few years Queensland has heard a good deal of empty rhetoric about the aims of education. We have been told by successive Education ministers that Queensland schools provide equality of opportunity for all students, regardless of their background. They are preparing children for 'life'. They provide for a wide range of individual differences. And so on.

But what sort of preparation for life do many Queensland schools provide? Recently I was smuggled, for two half-days, into two typical Queensland high schools; the first school is in Brisbane's affluent western suburbs and the second in a working-class outer suburban area. Such was the fear of reprisals from the Education Department that those teachers who arranged for me to attend requested that their names, and those of their schools, be not made public. I saw some wonderful things — especially the way in which, in the latter school, a cohort of Vietnamese students, so carefully groomed and neat and thin beside their gross Aussie counterparts, were progressing. Also the dedication of a number of young teachers in what to me were appallingly overcrowded and ill-equipped classrooms. But most of all I was able to observe first-hand the stress conditions under which most teachers labored, and the 'burn-out' to which

many are headed. This is due in large part to the cumulative effect of teaching undisciplined, low-achieving, noisy and bored students. I saw the need for teachers to keep asserting authority and maintain 'law and order', to constantly watch pupils and patrol the rooms, yards and corridors. When an ex-Sydney art teacher tried to get a child to pick up some paper he had dropped in the corridor, the response was "Get fucked, man". In both schools, teachers attributed the high rate of schoolgirl pregnancy in part to the total lack of proper sex education in Queensland schools. Rumors of the high incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases abound.

Apart from the attempt to maintain some semblance of control in the corridors and classrooms, 'assessment' figures prominently in Queensland schools. With the abolition of external examinations, entrance to university or college is now dependent upon satisfactory performance in a program of continuing assessment over the final two years of high school. Students soon learn that, if something isn't assessable, it's not worth the time.

Queensland education is primarily concerned with processing students for the workforce. Consequently it stresses the subordination of the child to society and to his/her superiors. It presents a hierarchical and bureaucratized social order, with an unequal distribution of punishments and rewards, as somehow natural and right. The Queensland state-school system's definition of equality of educational opportunity ignores the reality of an antecedent unequalitarian society. Its notion of individual differences is restricted to formal skills and basic competencies. The skills it teaches are likewise 'basic' rather than extended, and it seeks a cheap 'efficiency' in its processing of students. In its stress on preparation for life, it focuses upon the 'real', present, largely-Queensland, Anglo-Saxon world and the 'free enterprise' workplace.

What all this adds up to, according to Drs Richard Smith and John Knight, educationalists from Queensland University, and critics of the National Party government's censorship in schools, is a powerful 'hidden curriculum'. This teaches children the raw facts of inequality: that most people lose most of the time, and that this is their own fault. The classroom and school hierarchy teach them that it is natural for the few to give orders and for most to take them, that work is done only for material rewards — or to escape punishment.

The teaching style of many Queensland schools, in which children still take notes as dictated, work from set texts, and

undergo frequent 'tests', implicitly tells them that they should rely on experts for information on anything important, that co-operation is 'cheating', and that competition is the natural law of life.

Such 'basics' probably fit children for the reality of life in contemporary Queensland, with a gerrymandered electorate, a minority National Party government, an authoritarian and anti-intellectual Premier, a highly politicised Education Department and Police Force. Queensland teachers are not to blame; they too operate in (and are often the products of) this rigidly authoritarian system. Given the pressures of large classes, the requirement for compulsory attendance by students who are often bored or uninterested in the externally prescribed syllabuses, and the demands for academic success in a highly competitive situation, teachers can be seen as victims also. It's no surprise that so many students in the Sunshine State become apathetic or even hostile to the school system in the long haul from year 10 on, and that such a small percentage, compared with other States, proceed to university.

While compulsory education in Queensland was enacted in 1875, around half of Queenslanders have not been to secondary school, since attendance to age fifteen was not legislated till 1963. This, too, does little to foster a positive attitude to education. However, in Queensland things don't have to be like this. At St Thomas More, a progressive Catholic high school in suburban Brisbane, students can undertake practical, relevant courses. They are actively involved in the management of the school which attracts a high level of commitment from students, staff and parents. The same applies to the deliberately anti-authoritarian and aesthetically extremely beautiful Brisbane 'Independent School' at Pinjarra Hills established in 1968. Significantly, students from both schools end up performing well academically. There is a low level of regimentation and a high level of commitment. In marked contrast to state schools, teachers at St Thomas More and the Independent School are eager and enthusiastic about the work they do. Students in both schools exhibit considerable self esteem and self-reliance, vandalism is non-existent and discipline not a problem.

Within the Queensland state system efforts to change or challenge the system have largely failed. There have been proposals for Human Relationship courses, well-researched, squeaky-clean proposals to teach Queensland children how to get on together, to prepare them for adult social relationships and to develop responsibility in dealing with others. But such moves, taken for granted in southern States, were attacked by political conservatives and religious fundamentalists as opening the floodgates to sexual promiscuity, undermining the foundations of the Queensland family, as part of a (humanist, socialist, Zionist, Marxist) plot to subvert free enterprise, development and Queensland democracy. Such rhetoric seems peculiar to Queensland.

In the mid-seventies 'Man: A Course of Study' (MACOS) sought to teach sixth-grade pupils about the basic elements of human society — the family, work, beliefs and meaning systems, technology, social relationships, in a cross-cultural and comparative context: looking at 'primitive' Netsilik Eskimos and comparing their existence with the way Europeans

live. Who knows, it may even have had the potential to help white Queenslanders become more sympathetic to Aborigines and Islanders. Although parents whose children took the course approved, conservative pressure groups saw it as another plot to subvert Queensland democracy, the Christian faith and the family. And Cabinet — some of whose leading members are in tune with this extreme right-wing view of the world — banned it.

Because the same groups said it was 'bad', Queensland Cabinet also banned SEMP (Social Education Materials Project), which had been prepared as resource materials for secondary teachers in a wide range of subjects. For example, SEMP considered the reality of modern society by talking about single-parent families, divorce and extra-marital situations, and made brief mention of homosexuality.

There is now a new, Queensland-prepared multicultural program planned for Queensland schools. Yet Mrs Joyner, the leader of STOP and CARE, damns even such a mild example of multiculturalism as "this insidious anti-Christian, anti-Anglo-Saxon project", and after failing in February 1984 to convince the Education Minister, Mr Powell, she has threatened to take the matter to the Premier. She could well win, for Mr Bjelke-Petersen is the man who said of MACOS and SEMP that "they presented a philosophy which was questionable in the light of our traditional values . . . There is no room for the promotion of alternative life-styles in our classrooms or driving a wedge between parents and children" (Goondiwindi Argus, 5 March 1978). Moreover, some Queensland respondents to the Human Rights Commission (Courier Mail, 13 December 1983) claimed that multiculturalism sought the 'human genocide' of the white race, argued that Mr Hayden should be impeached for supporting interracial marriage, and maintained that the plan to mix the races was part of the prelude to a Zionist plot for world domination.

What is new in 1984 in the Queensland scene is the role of the National Party Cabinet in *directly* intervening in school curriculum and staffing matters, to the extent that the advice of senior public servants and the wishes of interested parents are ignored.

What are the basics which should provide the standards for children in Queensland schools?

If Queensland is ever to become a democratic society, schools should be used to give students an opportunity (in accordance with age and maturity) to experience democracy first-hand. Qualities such as tolerance, open-mindedness, rationality, critical thought and depth of vision are as much a part of civilised culture as are mathematics, art, fine music and good conversation. University of Queensland educationalists have expressed concern that many teachers in Queensland who seek these skills for their students, feel threatened by the paranoia of powerful extremist pressure groups and the direct intervention in educational matters of the National Party Cabinet or the Premier.

Yet as a leading American sociologist, Amitia Etzioni, asserts, the most pressing need in public schools is character formation, mutuality and civility. When these are established, schools have no problem with the three r's. And a leading English study of twelve London inner-city high schools showed that schools which set clear goals for their students, which show real and positive interest in them,

which use praise and reward rather than punishment, which involve their students in decision-making and which provide pleasant facilities are more academically successful. Their students have a better attitude to education and a higher self-esteem. Delinquency and truancy rates are significantly lower. As Etzioni states, to learn the skills of self-discipline and commitment to one's work, pupils need a structured but not authoritarian school setting.

We need more Queensland schools which will give their students opportunities to learn to work together, to gain understanding of other peoples and cultures, to learn insight and compassion for the less fortunate. What is needed is a school structure in which teachers are not forced to be harsh, repressive or dogmatic in their treatment of the Australian citizens of the future and who are not afraid of inquiring into the human situation, no matter how unpalatable this might be to those currently wielding political and economic power in the State. These are the basics which should be restored to Queensland education in 1984.

Sadly, apart from pervasive National Party involvement in education, there is a lot of right-wing opposition to reform within the Queensland education system, as exemplified by a remarkable letter to the editor of the Courier Mail on 23 January 1984 in response to an article of mine. The letter, signed by three teachers, stated in part:

If left-liberals truly want democracy in education, they will stop their meddlesome push for multiculturalism, feminism, peace studies and so on. We want schooling, not social engineering.

It is not State Cabinet we fear and abhor – it is the never-ending influence of those seeking to undermine the social and academic framework of our schools. Show the spirit of democracy and tolerance you espouse, Doctor, and stop vilifying those who do not accept leftist theories.

Direct National Party interference in education affects not only primary and secondary schools, but TAFE, CAE and university education as well. Thus apart from direct interference in matters of curriculum and staffing (as if by chance, ALP candidates don't get their jobs back after standing for election), Queensland has experienced an assault on academic freedom as well. As a result of some lecturers protesting against Queensland Cabinet's banning of MACOS in 1978, one Brisbane college director required all staff to write as private individuals on controversial matters or else submit all material first to him.

In the late 1970s, the Kelvin Grove CAE employed certain lecturers who, because of participating in public protests and attendance at demonstrations, were an irritation to the Bjelke-Petersen government. When in 1979 its director, at a graduation ceremony, appeared to attack government policy on class sizes and employment opportunities for teachers, Cabinet struck swiftly. The then Minister for Education, at Cabinet's direction, wrote to the Board of Advanced Education (the controlling body for CAE's in Queensland) to ask for a report on courses, content, teaching methods, textbooks and staff,

“especially in the light of complaints made to members of Cabinet alleging embarrassment to students”. Reference was made to “alleged indoctrination of students by staff members and the espousal of extremist views”. Details were sought on the appointment and continued employment of one dissident academic “in the light of publicity given to his activities”. Attention was drawn to “the apparently deteriorating reputation of the College”.

In 1982, Cabinet attention again focussed on that college, over an allegedly “anti-Fraser” textbook. When an academic at Kelvin Grove running a course on Australian society made available to students, at cost, copies of an Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights union booklet, *Australia on the Rack*, the Premier was quoted as saying ‘This will not be permitted’. The college administration ordered staff to in future use only the bookshop for textbooks.

In 1983, a draft by-law for CAE's from the Board of Advanced Education proposed that offences against the “public interest”, committed either inside or outside a CAE, should constitute possible grounds for dismissal. Such offences would include participation in illegal marches. Later in the year the Queensland School – a non-party political liberal/left discussion group of which I am a founder – was refused permission by the director of the newly-formed Brisbane CAE to use the Kelvin Grove campus for a series of public meetings on issues such as censorship, civil liberties and the State government's treatment of Aboriginals and Islanders, because “the college grounds were crown lands . . . and were not to be used as a venue where political groups will be making public statements”. Yet only a few weeks previously, the Liberal Party had held a meeting at the Brisbane CAE's Mt Gravatt campus.

As a result of the Peanut Board fiasco, in which funds were apparently misused for overseas junketes, in 1983 Cabinet rejected a number of applications for overseas study leave by CAE academics, including some who were already overseas. While decisions about who should go or should leave have been returned to tertiary institutions, in 1984 Cabinet retains control over attendances at overseas conferences. Moreover, in a procedure unprecedented in Australia, both university and CAE staff in Queensland must now submit reports directly to Cabinet on overseas study or conference programs. Unfortunately, all tertiary administrators in Queensland have appeared to acquiesce in the State government's direct political involvement in the vetting of research. Certainly there has been no public protest. All new Queensland TAFE and CAE courses are now under direct Cabinet control, as are new courses at the James Cook University of North Queensland, since its amalgamation with the Townsville CAE.

Education in Queensland is thus in a beleaguered state. With a development-minded, populist party now in sole control of government, the way is open for a determined anti-intellectual witch-hunt of school teachers and tertiary institutions.

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DAVID MARTIN

Thinking about Koestler

Koestler was born in Budapest in 1905. I was born there in 1915.

Our fathers were Jewish Hungarians, our mothers from Vienna (his) and Cologne (mine). His family resettled in Austria, mine in Germany. I joined a communist youth organisation in Berlin soon after Koestler became a member of the German Communist party in 1932. My first simple-minded literary experiments were returned to me by the newspaper publishing house for which he was an editor. He went to Palestine and entered a *kibbutz* in 1929; I in 1935. Neither of us was an ideal *kibbutz*nik. During the war in Spain he worked against Franco as a journalist and free-lance intelligence gatherer, I as a first-aid man. He went to India in the early 1950s and I in the late 1940s. Our motives were similar, so were our responses.

Koestler, incurably ill, killed himself in March, 1983. Taking your own life has always struck me as a civilized solution to problems which admit of no other. Unfortunately I cannot feel certain that I would do the same in the same circumstances, but then he had a scientific training. I envy him this, for it gave him more facts by which to measure nature – human and non-human – and made him familiar with the pharmacopoeia.

This similitude resulted from extraneous compulsions. It applies to hundreds of people. Communist, Zionist, Spain; a change of language: as stations on the road which European Jews and anti-fascists have travelled they are too common to be remarkable. I also appreciate that it can be tactless for a writer of small fame to make too much of what he shares with a renowned colleague.

True, we were alike in many of our interests and passions. In politics we started from the same premiss. He was, as I still am, puzzled by the predicament which is as old as organised society and which was given a new twist on August 6, 1945, and by whether or not there is a way out. Versatility's itch plagued us both. (He wrote at least one play which hardly anyone remembers.) More importantly, I have arrived, by a route which I did not know he had ingeniously explored, at an enterprise which offers scope for the irony which Hungarians are rarely short of, but for which irony alone is inadequate, namely the investigation of the link between knowledge and faith, or the absence of such a link.

But when I think of Koestler – whom I never met – this concordance is not what first comes to my mind. I am more

intrigued by what his books did for me. My reactions to them, negative as often as they were positive, helped me to define my attitudes at moments when choice seemed possible, or when to elude it was full of meaning.

No other writer touched my life in so many places with books that so subtly and insistently provoked. Not until he was dead could I admit to myself how deeply he had got under my skin. I cannot write about Koestler without writing about myself.

That he was my senior by a round decade played its part. This man was walking in front of me all the time with the annoying assurance of an older brother. More calmly than I, he could contemplate our nursery. The easy-going traditions of the bourgeoisie of the Danube countries had shaped us, and we did not orthodoxly bow before God. Up to 1938, when he was thirty-three years old against my twenty-three, we believed, fitfully, in the same god, with a lower case *g*, although I used to maintain, which today I do a good deal less fervently, that Marx could not have failed me even as a semi-god, because I did not worship his revelations.

Then, for some twenty to twenty-five years, I was avowedly anti-Koestler. Or *overtly* anti-Koestler, since there were misgivings of which I did not try too hard to be aware.

It is now difficult to be certain which of his books I read when. I had heard about Koestler and his Spanish adventures before I encountered him in print, in *Spanish Testament* (1937), which I must have read in London during or just after the Munich crisis, or on the Belgian coast, waiting for my British residence visa and worried about being put across the German frontier before it came through. In *Bricks to Babel* (Pan Books, 1980, an omnibus selection from Koestler's writings, with a commentary by the author, which was serviceable in compiling these notes) he calls it a hastily written propaganda booklet. That did not make me less pleased with it. Koestler was from my own part of the world and was doing beautifully what I was only just beginning to do.

I was unaware that he had already broken with the system he had observed functioning in Russia, or was on the verge of renouncing it. When I discovered that he had, I was indignant. Another turncoat, another *Retour de l'URSS!*

Does that signify I had no doubts of my own? What affects us is simpler than we pretend it to be at the time, and more complicated than we recall later. Even in Berlin, during his early months in the party, Koestler asked questions. But he was loyal. He kept up a decent revolutionary facade through-

out his travels in the Soviet Union, his exile years in Paris and when he was in Spain. I don't think I knew then that he had been a Zionist before he was a communist. With me it was the other way about. As a youth barely out of school, I had rapidly passed from the democratic centre occupied by those members of my family who cared about politics (my step-grandfather had been a friend of Chicherin and Stresemann), through a variety of Leftist splinter groups until coming to rest in the Communist League of Youth.



I owed my radicalism to four factors, in this order of importance: hatred of the injustice and impoverishment I saw around me; the influence of socially conscious writers from Zola, Hauptmann and Hamsun to Jack London and Upton Sinclair; the conviction that in the Soviet Union an heroic attempt was being made to create a better and more attractive world, whereas our timid social democrats were just tinkering with moribund capitalism; contempt for the shallowness of the values prominent in my own *milieu*. I also had an almost physical sense that another great war was approaching. I can't have been more than eleven or twelve when I was allowed to see a book with photographs of the western front. The heart-rending devastation of Arras! The nightmare landscapes of the Somme! I could not shake them off – they are with me still. That did not prevent me, for a time at least, looking upon revolutionary war with equanimity. Though bloody, it would be vastly less terrible, and it would be the last.

When the Nazis took power I did a few amateurishly illegal things. Our organisation was smashed and I became isolated. There could be no home for me in anti-semitic Germany.

Koestler was a Zionist in High School. In a lopsided way he remained one all his life. But it took Hitler to persuade me that I was a Jew, and that to be Jewish meant more than a half-hearted fast on the Day of Atonement. The knowledge took root but did not become instinctual, and it conferred no happiness.

To anticipate: when Koestler published (1976) *The Thirteenth Tribe*, I, not having read it, rushed to the conclusion that this was another of those far-fetched items of Judaeophilia passing themselves off as history. How could the so-called kingdom of the Hebrew Khazars, somewhere between Volga and Don, be more relevant to us moderns than the search for Prester John? I had not digested the fact that A.K. was too rigorous a scholar to play pointless games. My suspicion that he was apt to go off on tangents still persisted. It was only lately that I read *The Thirteenth Tribe*. I had missed benefitting, when it could have done me some good, from Koestler's deduction, adding new strength to an old argument, that there probably is no such thing in the west as a Jewry descended from the Middle East. This mistake of mine stemmed from the notion that Koestler, notwithstanding his protests and the evidence of his work, was tinged with philosophical idealism, that is, accorded primacy to non-material 'reality', which was typical for misunderstandings between him and sections of the Left. It ought not to have been, but naturally was reinforced in his second major period by Koestler's interest in extra-sensory perception. It is fatally easy to get impressions and judgements jumbled up.

Having been parted from my political anchor, I came to feel that it could be replaced with the ideology of the *Hashomer Hatzair* ('Young Guard'), the most radical group in the Left Zionist movement, which was strong in the Jewish streets of Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Poland, and from which derived the main impetus for Israel's socialist *Mapam*, a party vigorously hostile to anti-Arab chauvinism. If I have it right, it once sought admission to the Third International, or even briefly belonged to it. After a training period in Holland and Hungary, I entered first a *Hashomer* and then a politically more relaxed *kibbutz*, which admitted me as a full member. I was, however, no more in my element in this environment than was Koestler in his *Kvutsa Heftseba*, which had rejected him. I surmise that we did not like having to justify ourselves as individuals in the sight of the collective, a process to which there is no end.

I did not sincerely devote myself to mastering Hebrew because I still counted myself a European. Koestler has written that the prospect of being a writer in *Ivrit* did not thrill him. When I took boat from Haifa en route for Marseilles and the Jarrama front, I did it to strike a small blow against facism. It was the truth but not the whole truth. For 1935/6 was the year of an Arab general strike and heavy anti-British rioting. I reached the conclusion that Marxism was incompatible with any branch of Zionism and made contact with the underground Communist Party. But it was too nerve-rackingly illogical to oppose Zionism while 'building up Zion'. Leaving for Spain may also have had to do with getting away from the *Yishuv*, a society which felt too tight under my

arms, although to others it is comfortable enough.

Most *kibbutzim* had good libraries even then. I had access to publications like the *New Leader*, of Britain's Independent Labour Party, which disapproved of incipient Stalinism. Trotsky had long been expelled from Russia and the Fourth International was in being (and already splitting like amoebae). I discussed with my friends what he and his followers had to say, for instance about Rosa Luxemburg and her critique of Leninism. Aged twenty, I was unwittingly catching up with the Koestler of thirty summers. In every stream there are eddies and undercurrents; it does not mean it is flowing in two opposite directions. For all that, the surface may appear more unruffled than what lies beneath.

In Spain too, where my career was much less noteworthy than Koestler's, I met the odd dissenter, particularly among foreigners in Barcelona. *Hommage to Catalonia* I opened later than I might have done – I suppose I thought I knew what was in it – but *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* excited me. When Orwell and I met we did not hit it off. I still hold that the alliance to 'first win the war', forged between Spanish communists and the republic's democratic centre, can be justified as effectively as the line that the war could not be won without winning the revolution in the villages. Koestler loved Orwell for his great honesty. I have no idea what he thought of his view that England had sold itself to fascism in order to make war on German fascism. It certainly didn't chime with Koestler's own.

Here and there I caught a whiff that not everything was clean and noble on our side, for instance when, in Albacete, base town of the International Brigades, I did some work in the prison and discovered inmates whose presence there amazed me, because I could not imagine of what offence they could be guilty. I did not let it trouble me too deeply. We accepted that nothing in life is free of conflict, which we somehow managed to make tally with the concept of the monolithic, conflictless vanguard party and the monolithic workers' and peasants' state. The monster we were fighting – no apologies needed – had many tentacles. One day in February 1937, when things were rough, I picked up, in some trench or dugout, a translation of the new Soviet constitution. It acted on me like wine. Some months later I was profoundly disturbed, without giving it a voice, by the mysterious disappearance of Andres Nin, the leader of the POUM. The talent for reconciling such contradictions may be a trait of the believer, but if his bent is not genuinely for the devout he cannot indulge it for ever.

In *The Invisible Writing* (1954) Koestler alludes to an experience he had in Seville jail, when his execution was a daily expected possibility. It saved him from surrendering to blind fear.

It appears he could see a certain justice in his likely fate. "Thus justice began to assume in my musings a new, double significance as an organic need and an ethical absolute based on the concept of symmetry." Koestler did not want "any mystic mud splashed over the mind's polish", but "as we proceed (to other reflections) in an inward direction they will become more embarrassing and more difficult to put into words."

These reflections were prompted by events which "caused a loosening of psychic strata close to rock-bottom." In a manner which my education does not equip me fully to

comprehend, they were related in his mind to aspects of Euclidean mathematics, the dialectic of prime numbers. This produced a tranquility which left in its wake not an articulate verbal insight but "only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity, a quiver of the arrow in the blue." (The inept use of the word *quiver*, ambiguous in this context, is one of Koestler's enviably rare semantic lapses.) He insists that mystical experiences become vague or maudlin only when we debase them by verbalisation. If one cared to be caustic one could suggest that, on this evidence, something akin to *satori*, at the expense of which Koestler had fun in the second part of *The Lotus and the Robot* (1969), can be achieved through the symmetry of indivisible numbers. As a psychic precipitant it has advantages over the *koan*, which is meant not to lead but to drive us around the bend of ratiocination.

"I was waging," he writes, "a two-front war against the concise, rational, materialistic way of thinking which, in thirty-two years of training in mental cleanliness, had become a habit and a necessity like bodily hygiene – and against the temptation to surrender and creep back into the warm protective womb of faith."

In *The Gladiators* (1939) and *Darkness at Noon* (1941), Koestler strove to develop this theme or, as he put it, "to come to intellectual terms with the intuitive glimpses during the 'hours at the window' " in General Queipo de Llano's jail. These novels tackle the problem of ends and means, morality *versus* expediency.

What a reader takes from a book depends on his willingness to open his ears, which in turn may depend on what he is up to at the time. During much of World War II, I was not in a mood for political novels. The Nazi advance in Russia swept aside, if not away, doubts and uncertainties. When the battle of Stalingrad was fought I was busy making anti-Nazi propaganda. Not long afterwards the first ideological outworks of World War III were constructed and the BBC disengaged itself, not all that gently, from the Grand Alliance. My annual increment was pointedly refused me and my resignation from the European Service politely accepted. During the period, marked chiefly by the Greek civil war, which was no more purely an internal conflict than the Spanish war had been, I was Literary Editor (a weighty title for a job of little weight) of *Reynolds News*, a now defunct London Sunday newspaper owned by the Cooperative Wholesale Society.

I remember little about *The Gladiators*. In *Darkness at Noon* I could see no theme more spiritual than a moral hangover. (I did not know how difficult were the conditions in which it was written.) I could make out that Koestler was ridding himself of guilt, which was the more evident because of the psycho-analytical current which was present in the books which he wrote between the fall of Madrid and the end of the Third Reich.

I could not distinguish much that was new and original. The stress on No was so much stronger than the stress on Yes, as no doubt it had to be. No wordless essence, no fragrance of eternity! The GPU interrogator, Ivanov, in *Darkness at Noon*, sometimes speaks in the accents of Dostoyevsky's Great Inquisitor, but Koestler did not possess Dostoyevsky's gift for allegory.

The interweaving of childhood guilts and political sin may have cut too close to the bone for me, but I also found Arthur

Koestler's Cold War trilogy artistically arid. It is not necessarily a wrong judgement. No writer can excel in all departments. It was in his confessional novels that the journalist got most in Koestler's way. The enormous impact of the books was due to the fact that Koestler was purging himself not only on his own behalf, but for a whole literary generation. The time was ripe for him.

I was then a journalist myself, up to the eyebrows in defending what I thought the war had been fought for, and which was under attack everywhere. A season for standing firm . . . Impatient of soul-searchings in Soviet prisons, some of us could well have reacted differently to a more direct and bold attempt to interpret the "hours at the window". We had heard about those prisons but had habituated ourselves to paying more attention to others, in other places. We distrusted the motives, and the association, of the conscience-joggers.

The Yogi and the Commissar (1945) and *Thieves in the Night* (1946) appeared in quick succession. Unluckily, I chanced upon the latter before I read the former; in fact I reviewed it. I didn't like it. A more recent reading brought home to me its essentially documentary intent. In 1946 it smelled to me of the muscular Judaism of Jabotinsky, whose theories, I have since noticed, inspired the Zionist duelling fraternity to which Koestler belonged as a student. Take into account that British beastliness to the survivors of the holocaust was still in everybody's mind. In 1946 Ted Willis produced my play, *The Shepherd and the Hunter*, at London's Unity Theatre. Written under the influence of Sean O'Casey, it treated Jewish nationalist violence as tragedy. The CPGB, not caring much for tragedy, nearly succeeded in having it withdrawn, which nearly succeeded in teaching me a lesson. My first book of stories, also published that year, contained one which dramatized, and not in Zionist fashion, a situation which is central to *Thieves in the Night*, namely what happens when land is acquired for a *kibbutz* through the Jewish National Fund from absentee Arab landowners.

"Friend Arthur has turned from Moscow to Jerusalem," I said to myself. "He'll be touching down at all the usual stop-overs, until he gets to holy Rome, where he will settle for good."

With a writer like Koestler it is as dangerous to read him out of sequence, or to 'jump titles', as it is to read him out of context. His second book on Palestine, *Promise and Fulfilment* (1949), I only know from the strictures passed on it by conservative Zionists and practising Jews, and the extensive quotations in their reviews. Originally I skipped all this, unable to visualise that anything Koestler produced on this subject could be more to my taste than *Thieves in the Night*. But Koestler is not of one piece. Traditionalism and Talmudism, not to speak of Jewish exclusiveness, rub him up the wrong way exactly as they do me: even then we had more in common than I fancied.

The Yogi and the Commissar should have given me pause. It dealt impartially with two opposing types of mystification, one of the unpleasante tendencies of our epoch. The essays hinted at the possibility of a new synthesis, but the force of the hint escaped me. The idea behind the essays – that the conflict must always lie between those who believe that the New Man can be created through social change, and those who believe

that not before the Old Adam has been conquered in the soul does real change become possible – ought to have attracted me. It roughly corresponded to my own, save that I was convinced that the second alternative had long ago proved to be unworkable. I had not then come to my own synthesis which, for what it is worth, could be summed up thus: Old Adam is immortal. Yet it is with and for him that we have to try as best we can to produce a new, or at any rate a better, society . . . in which he will bumble on as he always has. This sceptical optimism would one day, and after lengthy detours, lead me again into Koestler's neighborhood.

The God that Failed, which to so many people became almost a substitute Bible, put me off by its very title. Yes, brothers, you are bound sooner or later to burn your party cards if it's God's invisible signature you carry about in them! To protect myself against that risk I used to plead that Marxism was an economic theory, not a guide to the perplexed, and that folk who 'lived like communists' were asking for trouble. I protested too much. This ethical detachment, the wetsuit of the romantic, didn't fit well. My unashamed predilection for revolutionary romanticism in poetry indicated a split which by and by would become painful. Koestler, no stranger to this schizophrenic dilemma, could have helped me to confront it sooner.

Of the six contributions to the book – Koestler's was written in 1948 or 1949 – Ignazio Silone's affected me most. I thought him the best of these writers and, better still, he was a proletarian. As to Stephen Spender, his morbid self-absorption jarred on me. I began to feel more charitable towards him when I read *World Within World*.

Since then I have sometimes wondered whether Koestler could have agreed with me when my 'no red god' approach underwent a change. From about 1949 on, when I settled in Australia, I put forward the view (but not in print; there the USSR could claim the benefit of the doubt for another ten years) that communism would not enter the Red Square until Lenin's mummy had been removed, reliquaries being incompatible with dialectical materialism. I believe it still, though you can see the problem: my materialism also discounts 'mass idealism', self-sacrifice on a massive scale, because that, too, eventually ends in the other, the philosophical kind of idealism, in a zeal indistinguishable from 'faith'. In May, 1968, in Moscow, I watched the silent crowds outside the mausoleum. And it dawned on me that since, evidently, most humans need some permanent prop to support them on life's rough trek, any faith is as good as any other, whether you call it religion or a *Weltanschauung*. To the consequential relativist even Humanism is relative. Gods fail to the degree that they cannot be made useful to their disciples. Their utility is not definable by general, objective tests.

Come to think of it, the latter-day Koestler would have jibbed at that, because it can be stretched to defend the neo-Darwinian pessimism which he attacked.

In my middle span, the years when Koestler achieved his creative maturity, I practically lost sight of his work, or read it in the wrong order. I was in India from the night after Gandhi's assassination to early in 1949. I admired Nehru, but what I saw of the spinning-wheel philosophy in action did not tempt me to idealise the spirituality of the East. But the country spoke more strongly to my emotions than it probably

did to Koestler's, and when I put a Mahatma-like character at the centre of a novel, *The Stones of Bombay*, I bungled the attempt to make him a non-hero. My starting point was that non-violence had played India false because it had delivered her straight from foreign into locally-made exploitation. That aspect no longer concerned Koestler. But his conclusions, that Vedic practice had largely degenerated into acrobatic hocus-pocus, cosy enough for the devotee who does not care to syphon the life fluid back into the body through the urethra, was mine as well.

The Lotus and the Robot (1961) delighted me, notwithstanding that it paid excessive attention to Gandhi's sexual quirks. A better examination of his virtues and faults, based on observation, appears in Viscount Wavell's *The Viceroy's Journal* (Ed. Penderel Moon, O.U.P., 1973). Koestler's reservations about Zen, and how he saw its role in Japan's culture, bore out what I felt: that the systematic exercise of irrationality can indeed release us from analytical intelligence, our blessed curse, but only by plunging us into sweet nothing. If, to be free, man must become free of himself, why not by nuclear lobotomy?

In June 1950, when the Cold War was very cold, the Congress for Cultural Freedom assembled in West Berlin. Koestler drafted its manifesto. In a speech he made it clear that the capitalist-socialist alternative had become to him "as meaningless as the dispute between Jansenists and Jesuits and the War of the Roses." The patrons of the Congress were Bertrand Russell, Croce, John Dewey, Karl Jaspers and Jaques Maritain, hardly a bunch of backwoods fanatics. But as the Cultural Freedom people organised themselves and produced their journals, the *Zugzwang* of politics drew many into reactionary alignments. It happened in Australia. It was true especially of those whose inspiration was Roman Catholic and who were not merely anti-liberal, which Koestler also sometimes was, but anti-Humanist, which he was not. (It has been claimed that many intellectuals finished up travelling alongside communists because they started from tolerant – today called permissive – liberalism. Sadly few have completed the journey in the reverse direction.)

What the Cultural Freedom thinkers contributed to contemporary issues turned out to be as predictable as the contents of *Humanité* or *Rude Pravo*, but to rely on preprogrammed ideas is fatal to any freedom. It is debasing when the participants in an argument don't declare their interest. If the Lord is captain of your team, don't pretend you are playing for the sole benefit of Caesar.

I had the impression that Koestler was keeping undesirable company. This made it easier to ignore him. Now and then my complacency was shaken. I read extracts from *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967) in Czechoslovakia, just before, for the second time in my life, I came face to face with Russian tanks in a European city; the first time was in Madrid. A wide-ranging polemic against Behaviorism, the work focuses on the physiological handicaps which prevent *homo sapiens* from becoming sufficiently sapient to ensure his survival. It matched my own growing pessimism. At the same time I felt that Koestler was more oppressed by the tragedy of Hiroshima, and by what it bodes for us all, than were some of his companions, with their stiff spiritual upper-lips. Not until

I read *Janus* (1978), a mere month or two before Koestler's death, did I again respond to him so warmly. His despair was not of Cyril Connolly's exquisite variety, and *Janus* also throws light into the gloom.

Chance, another phenomenon which, in the form of coincidence, stimulated his prodigal curiosity, led me to 'take up' Koestler again when I came to Beechworth, a small hill town where the world's debates sound muted. I am obliged for that to our local library. *Arrow in the Blue* (1952) I opened more than twenty years after it was published; it was the first of his authentically autobiographical books I had come across. It captivated me with its wit and humor. Here, moreover, was not only a scholar but a poet *manqué*. There is a passage wherein he tries to recapture the moment when the infinite first impinged on his consciousness. It elated him. This again replicated an experience of my own. It had come to me at a much earlier age and filled my boyish heart with terror. End without end without end! To Koestler "the idea that infinity would remain an unsolved riddle was unbearable". Characteristically, he resolved to work on the riddle. Mathematics, astronomy, and history . . . it brought him to philosophy and, if such a thing exists, to anthropological psychology.

I cannot handle the tools one uses in this workshop. It needs patience and a special skill. When I read (present tense) Koestler on holism, on Freud or Bergson, or on evolution as a creative process which many tend to expansion rather than to cosmic uniformity and running down, I can repeat his arguments to myself. But I don't feign that they transmute for me into lastingly available, mutually re-inforcing knowledge. Koestler sneers at Shaw's Life Force which, by comparison, is simplicity itself. It stirred me when I was a young man. Koestler stirred me when I was growing old, not so much by his formulations as by how he arrived at them – his integrative grasp. He was an *encyclopédiste*, the last of the *philosophes*. He was one of those popularisers of genius who expand the boundaries of what they popularise. There is a danger that the arrow may disappear in the empyrean, but we accept it when the two cultures cohabit in one brain.

Insight and Outlook appeared as early as 1949, *The Sleepwalkers* in 1959. Had I not let them pass me by, my own search might have been less haphazard. Instead I had to go back to his splendid essays on the Copernican revolution (1968) – almost all that I know about Keppler, Galileo and Copernicus, beyond a schoolboy's recollections, I owe to Koestler – and *The Act of Creation* (1964), and forward to *Janus* (1978).

At the core of these books is the dialectic of creativity, the opposition and apposition of physics and metaphysics. This problem preoccupied me too, but more narrowly: how and where, in the creative personality, observed reality meshes with and becomes imagination. Koestler grappled with a larger challenge: the creating and uncreating of the universe, the juncture of art, science and belief, of order and indetermination. His critical acceptance of paedomorphosis, which is the beneficent retracing of its steps by self-correcting evolution, balanced and softened his despondency about the neurobiological retardation of our mental and social unfolding. Taken at its broadest, the theory holds out hope because it counteracts our growing historical and psychological determinism. But how will it operate for man, the creature that

suicides by murdering his species? Can we rejoin paradise, with the ill-digested apple inside our stomachs? Are there even the faintest signs that enough time is left? I am putting it crudely. To put it subtly one would need to know, and properly, the whole Koestler of the second model, the Koestler of organic hierarchies, including the Koestler who did not deign to write off parapsychology.

After disgorging every morsel of *agitprop*, he did not cease being an agitator, nor did he keep agitating, like so many reformed reformers, exclusively against the romantic fallacies of his beginnings. His polemics against capital punishment were enormously effective. He did a lot more than most one-time political prisoners to help imprisoned people; he actually founded literary and artistic competitions for them, and instituted awards. His stand for voluntary euthanasia still influences opinion, by precept and example.

It is hard for the intellectual who must chart the shallows of enthusiasm to guard his affection for enthusiasts; difficult for men and women who hate war to love every layer of the movement for peace; difficult for the materialist to retain some openness to the rare and rarified dimensions of the material; difficult for the sceptic not to invent surrogate illusions, or to make a cult of not inventing them. All cogni-

tion eventually leads to a compromise: existentialism wants to compromise with the void. *Enfin il faut vivre*, says the sage. His grocer nods, "You've got to carry on, you know." What does Koestler say? Among the jottings on his desk was found this message — "Thou shalt not carry moderation to extremes."

Koestler's quest did not take him to Rome, or neo-Marxism, or to a Pentagon think-tank or, unless I am mistaken, to some novel shoot of platonism trimmed to look like advanced physics. He surmounted, or sidetracked, the contradictions which so enraged me in him when I thought I needed clarity. When at last I realised that I didn't really need it, and that it was not to be had, he cheered me by being so richly unsummarisable. I still do not quite understand what befell him during his "hour by the window", but to have it explained step by step no longer seems important. It does not mean I believe such things cannot or should not be explained.

The best way to find out would be to go back to his books. Methodically.

David Martin's latest book is Armed Neutrality for Australia, which Overland will review shortly.

BULLDOZER DRIVER

Look, I only drive the bloody dozer.
It's 4,500 years old. So what, Prof?
What's 4,500 bloody years? That rock
over there's old as the earth —
it *is* the bloody earth & yer not
dancing the maypole around that, are ya?
Ecological time-capsule. Don't make me laugh.
Look, it's a dirty big hunk of wood.
It *does* nothing. (Birds. Worms. *Grubs*.
Don't give me bloody birds, & grubs.
What der ya think the earth's for, anyway?)
Tell ya what, she'd make one hell of a flagpole.
Reckon she'd have in er ——— awwwww
at least two or even three football stands.
(Crap, I'll Sahara you the bloody Sahara.
Why don't ya take off yer raincoat.)
Tell ya what I'll do when she goes down.
Find yer mate Buddha in the top branches
& I'll turn bloody Buddhist. Fair dinkum.
It'll only take a few more beers. Yeah
& if God shines like a fluorescent tube
up & down the centre of the rings
I'll fix me engine so she won't go
for the rest of the day. Howzzzat?

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

DIGGING IN

I

People are terrified of their souls.
The lownslung pub at the crossroads
goes at night into small huddles
at the bar, on the torn vinyl,
with sparse lights nodding in the bottles.
The brief pagan gulf of time is nearing.
The six hours of full daylight
are hoarded like candles,
shining dull as candle light.
You light a fire. It leans against the winter
with the primitive gesture
of a woman squatting,
grinding earth. The hot ash
at the door cheeps like a fledgling.

II

Tractors catch by day, your heart
rouses and strains all night
as the wind's after-torrents
pour into and out through
those tubes of landscape.
And suddenly midnight
is howling from the north,
dealing the slates off
like hands of cards.

III

Your dream was a rats' tunnel,
you were inside it.
For days you drank in wind, inhaled wind,
and the mares made unsettling runs
at their invisible barrier,
streaming out, the scared coven,
on to a land skin torn like netting.

The children had stopped already
hungering for the snowdrifts. They hung about
weightless as the weights of the clock,
snow filled the rooms with darkness.

IV

You were there while the house swerved
into its quarrelling nights,
filled with lintlike curtains and coarse
eyelashes of smoke, an engine
manoeuvring its nightlights
into the white flux. Caught bags of turf,
heaved churns of water
through the stable doorway,
the kitchen fire straining
to rescue more than it could see,
the stove cracking silently apart,
the panes worked free from their lead strips,
the tall front rooms
arrived finally at the color
they were to keep all winter
as the mind sliced them, a razor
cross-cutting down a turned face.

V

Like waking in a salthouse,
sniffing and coughing up whole mornings,
trying to re-order last night
by the weird line of fire on Brewel Hill,
whose trees heated like iron bars,
so crimson you could smell the resin,
yet windless, utterly silent.

VI

Dogs cleft their tongues.
The ground, where it showed through,
was seal color,
everything except snow was sinking,
Stars clashed on a stiff axis.
A step would break invisible spokes.

VINCENT BUCKLEY

FOUR POEMS FROM AMERICA

I

Father in a Mirror

In the morning mirror
You are here in me my eyes
Surprised as from our bitter Sundays
Cautious hopeful
Silent

You said, *If it weren't for the Americans . . .*
while I fought on the other side,
a sullen parody of independence
back in '46

But Dad, you're here and
I'm the parent now, the shy
explorer taking care and looking
for you at you
in America.

II

Southern Spell

The Apopka Blue Darters are coming to play
Coming to play, coming to play
By Lake Osceola in Spring –

Aloisus and Shad
Sylvie and Tad
Nancie and Tabitha and Quinton and Ziggy
Archello, Idalia, Rocco and Lili
Fleetwood, Cecilia, Wink and Clarissa
Dessie and Ulmo, Tibor and Jitter
Zippa, la Donna, Hub, Thane and Rusty
scamper and nibble by Lake Osceola.

The Apopka Blue Darters are coming to play
The town intellectuals have all run away
It's a great day!

III

Jack Frost in Florida

An unexpected place to take his ease
Will it appease his slow fatigue?

His eyes ablaze with
Oranges Oranges
more
a hundred
thousand burning in the tracings
of his hourless breath

He glides upon them
like a storm
clamping their fires out
one by one

his cloaking dream furls
fouls a green-gold world
to brown to
black to

Sleep, Jack, sleep.
World, button your coat tight.
Black is white.

IV

Band Music for a Grandfather

Why should I fear death today?
My daughter is tooting her bass clarinet
in a real American band.

the high school band
the high school band
the neatest band in this jumping land
she plays with Chuck and Dwight and Wayne
Elvira and Jimmy and Toby and Jane
and O America salves the pain
as the music soars and roars in the rain

The space-shuttle's up and my spirit's away
O say can you hear your little one play?
Say, should I fear old death today?
O say

FAY ZWICKY

HER, HERE

Here
just before moonfall
foot-whisperings
in the sand ridges
toe-holes dipping off
over the last dune

& there
in the swell of sand
& muscle & weed

in the night-surf
dark air & dark fluid
clash

here
a girlboy
with silversmooth skin
cold breasts

raises her hands
frail bones of driftwood

& out of her throat
his song
sung backwards

into the dunes

TERRY HARRINGTON

THE REBELS WERE YOUNGER ONCE

Overland 93 published a poem, "The Rebels Are Older Now", on page 30, and also on page 51.

The rebels were younger once.
They lived in a time when there was
only one poem,
Down with fascism!
They published it on every page and
every wall and
every city building and
every country.

Sometimes the words varied but
it was always the same proud poem,
Down with fascism!
They shall not pass!
Madrid shall be saved!
Death to Franco!
Down with Hitler!
To hell with Tojo!
Smash the Axis!
Peace! ...

The rebels are older now,
They dodder and forget and
tell lies and grow difficult and
publish the same poem on
different pages but
it doesn't matter so long as
there are younger rebels
who publish the same poem on
every page and every wall and
every city building and
every country ...

The same poem
in different words:
Ban the bomb!
Stop the war!
Save the forests!
End racism!
Go home Yanqui!
Solidarity!
Smash imperialism!
Save the children!
Save the world!
Peace! ...

LEN FOX

TRAVELLING HEAVY

Tonight cold residents lounge
on my printed home-screen.

the size
of distress-controllers,
start to relax
under the hard blue light.
Highpitched stewardesses,
strapped to their airborne seats,
already dead, no doubt,

Firm fingers,
felled
by a gush of elongated capsules.

I've managed to live
part of the change,
the sight of bodies, shut-down,
burning froth, only half the mind.
The engines' torn flesh
quivering on the flight-deck...

Somewhere en route
the wind gave a message:
sound of a chime!

Continent-wide
alarmlights were flashing,
the chairman's nod
came from a great height:
"Zero-X-zero, the servant for all..."

The crew,
who could only fill smaller spaces,
gave their applause, then stepped aside.
One of the photos showed him, cold fire,
dark hissing clouds,
washed in white noise.

All the world's ailments,
he and the others!

The warmth
inside this humming barrel...

JOHANNES WATERMANN

WETWORLD

To suffer weeks of rain
is to go back and back,
trudging away from the airfield
closed by low cloud,
down swollen ditches,
streaming gutters and washaways,
sun a dumb blur, blue a child's dream
from another life, only a surly
determination bunching the spirit's fists
– is to rejoin Celt and Northman
whom technology and the Eastern
dispensation have held at bay
with strange and febrile fires.
Now the wet wood and the soured mood
meet, and an older earth
renews itself in the blood;
eyeing each other over
the surly meal, hearing the radio's
bold tales of rescue and fodder-drop,
just beyond where we are thinking now the dark gods
we crossed ocean to lose will rise
again, fierce-bearded, axe-handed, Angelin's
wooded heartland take us in,
the warmth of Woden, and the bonds of kin.

BRUCE DAWE

THE POOL COMPETITION

The big islanders play erratically,
With a certain tropical flamboyance
Despite their overalls and jeans;
It is one or two city-dwellers
Who wear hibiscus-decorated shirts
And play with an earnestness learnt
From many years indoors. The
Normally loud-mouthed habitues make
Good organizers, and call out names
With all the aplomb of doormen
Announcing the arrival of important guests.
A dozen competitors lean on the bar,
Practising deep looks of grim indifference,
Drinking to boost confidence until skill
Splashes out against the urinal's stainless steel.
The night blurs on, the more ruthless
Players last a few games longer.
There is always an ultimate winner
At this game, though only a day later
No one can ever remember his name.

SHANE McCAULEY

WETHER

For Les and Irene

1. Wash your hands of it.
Tell the beetrootarians
there is *already* slaughter in the air,
and hunger rising in your throat,
that needs be met.
2. Read the Farmer's Handbook tract
on the general stupidity of sheep
and the maturing mindlessness
of two-tooth wethers.
3. Wash your hands.
4. Set aside the afternoon
for the grinding of the knife.
Enjoy the wet-stone,
and the long steel shaft
sharp enough to separate sunbeams
into all six colors.
Wank it a bit on a leather strop.
Remember: peace of mind:
meat-on-the-hoof & meat-in-the-freezer
differ only in the temperature of storage.
5. Be convinced of the fate of stupidity
by luring it into the killing shed
with a pat on the buttocks.

Wash your hands.
6. Beware eye-contact.
No mirrors.
No thinking.

Watch the hand
which has separated itself from you
slash its blade
through the pink wind-pipe, pulling the neck back
until it cracks.

Step away from the fountaining blood
not as from the last pumpings
of a yearning heart
but in the belief that it will save you
from cleaning your shoes.

WHEN YOU SEE THE TWO MARYS TELL THEM

that the lines must be cut,
that my lips are no longer sticky-sweet,
that my advantages are no longer splendid,
that my enchantments have all dried up,
that my issue is basically dead,
that I've failed to stay with the face I knew,
that I've smothered my fact with a kiss,
that having peeled the egg I can't eat it raw.
that my procedures are anatomically inadequate,
that my juggler is guilty of an appalling frugality,
that my house is full of half notes,
that I'm fed up with depot music,
that I'm sick of the curled as I am of the straight,
that I'm as bored by the hubble-bubble men
as I am by the cut-&-fly men,
that I'm seriously considering photosynthesis,
that my next plunge will be statutory,
that any hiding, even a small one, would help immensely,
that, ultimately, I long to be said & done.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

7. Hang it up to drain.
Wash your hands.
8. Punch off its coat.
Cut & knot intestines.
Now, approach its inner life with humility.
Make the classic slice right up the belly skin
from anus to throat.

As with the beast (yes, you can call it 'beast' now)
take care not to let your own inner life spill out
at this stage.

Scrub the rib cage until it sparkles!

9. Wash your hands.

TERRY HARRINGTON

BETTE DAVIS STILLS

"Do you try to give us the world
in one small piece each day?"
"Absolutely . . . Uh . . ." Then:

the VTR slips
the cool is superfrozen
with her facial wrinkles
an autobiography
her hair a snowfall. Cameracrews
put on moves in each eye
her mouth is tightly choreographed.
"Today is for . . ." The boys say
that female gravel voices like that
only come from whisky &
fellatio. ". . ." champagne
in brass goblets and
Bette Davis stills."

Her head whips/her hair rains sleet.
If this was 35mm the story
would be on the cutting room floor
but with VTR there need be
no record.

CHRIS CATT

AEROPLANE

constructing
words that do not fit
the thread of the mouth
wooden wings
i strap to my arms
hope these cheap cords hold
JOHN HAWKE

TWO ROCK FANS VIEW THE FUTURE

He is invited out to the opening of her legs.
She is a good girl, he met her at the dance, beautiful
like a shovel killing a snake. Where they live,
mad apostles roam the street clutching new testaments,
new faiths; distance or proximity/which one
will sing in points of reference, words of doom?
Theirs too, the good girl and him, is one of displacement,
a car zooms along his arm/in pale blue ink; she
celebrates the closing of a door (the doctor said
her chest x-rays looked exactly like old ashtrays . . .)
Know there shall be arbitrary pursuits/presume
these will be accomplished; in Hiroshima
a woman screamed "there are horses in the street,
on fire, my baby's head looked like a boiled octopus."
And here they are, fag end of day, two rock fans
dressed in pinks and green, sublime, complacent,
cynical, inebriated, out dancing with the others,
talking about their favorite color, their favorite
song/trapped/sucked/fooled into this myth; fame
she calls it/the seat of power.
He only knows it as revenge; or bullshit.
(Out driving with her
through the red traffic lights
the Saint Christopher medal covered its eyes . . .)

Some nights driving back
it seems the fat orange dawn
would follow the car like a flying saucer,
it seems they looked into the rear vision mirror
and watched their eyes
instead of the road.

(Close the door sweetheart
the sun gets in my eyes . . .)

ROBERT DRUMMOND

**LOSING A LOVER/DISCOVERING A PLACE
TO KEEP SEAGOATS**

the obverse of 'bay'
is a curve of open 'land'
with 'water'
coming into it

perhaps the convicts
used to gather rushes
on the land side
though this may
have been a dream

this tree
& the ones next to it
're white
gloved soft
in doeskin
smelling faintly sweet
faintly dry
& tasting
slightly salty
as if
the breeze from the bay
has often visited
to lick

the little seagoats
rattle their metal bells
& thrust at the sky
as if to break their tethers
if it were corfu & you were blind
you would think
you were hearing donkeys
lonely looking for owners

the gentle bitch who comes to
your hand
is black as the pitch
under trees she is lost in
though if sight came on
she could be
brown
rust or brindle
looking for a voice to put
the dance back in her walking
& the 'pitch' could be a hard strip
for 'bone-breaking' summer ball games
or the dark
intensity of crickets

the full moon
a perfect corncob gold
rises over the house of the
crocodile lady
dead prawns
ooze
out of the hands of
somebody else's lover
the fisherman

the little goats' eyes
twinkle over the water

it is years
since the sun slipped out

it is months
since you started walking

J.S. HARRY

HUME HIGHWAY

Counting mashed galahs instead of cows
Makes a nice change and brings on sleep.
I doze through thick and heavy hours
Of crumbling towns and drought-dead sheep.

The highway overlays a history young and brash
Yet wholly rendered down. At the edge of the past
Monstrous monuments are raised to its taming;
In papier-mache Ned sits on the tucker box, awash
In tacky mementoes made to last
Not beyond the next kamikaze transport's vibrating.

A pain in the bum. And a nerve throbbing free
In my stiffened hip, demanding exercise.
In the Niagara just a hint of Lazy 'Arry,
and laminated Dave and Mabels, in punk disguise.

P.R. HAY

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Relax, love: I'm only doing this interview to be polite. Seventeen weeks work is doubtless a big deal for you: what was it – five weeks temporary in a chainstore when you first left school four years ago? – but we're just playing games. No-one puts it in writing, ever admits there's a policy, but I've done a lot of this: I've learnt the CES send to these interviews one probable, two possibles, and a couple of you make-weights. Maybe it's good for your morale to imagine that once or twice a year you got an interview for a chance at seventeen weeks of more-or-less a job. But look, you got this great 6 in Typing, the rest 3's and 4's: even back in the days when girls got jobs we wouldn't look at anything less than a 7. A 6 in Shorthand – you didn't do that, did you, it was only for the bright ones – might just have made it, if she had good legs, a ready smile, and 6's at least in Maths and English. You don't even have good legs, do you? I suppose someone somewhere is proud of you, but hell, let's face it, you're so forgettable if they send you back next week I'll do an interview from scratch. Not ugly, love: I didn't say ugly. In fact some bloke will find you wonderful some day, or night anyway, but you're no girl in twenty, and that's the best odds you can hope for. Why don't you just forget to take your pill, get yourself on that supporting mother's benefit: a kid might take your mind off things. In twenty years I could be going through this routine with your daughter, wondering why it all seemed vaguely familiar.

R.G. HAY

THURSDAY

Thursday in the park, and a different dog runs beside the grasscutter and the ducklings are diminished from five to four. A storm is coming. We see its orange threat.

If there is to be a particular end, why not now?
Never a more suitable day and hour,
Thor's Day and a sunset
burning out the blue, impending red.
The waterhens tread apprehensively
over the lily pads and there's a wagtail, trivial bird.
Shall we go out together, first glowing, then charred?

This is the day after certain other deaths
in the Sea of Japan so our thoughts are cast
on ourselves as fragments
floating in air and water.
We have no difficulty here. It is easy to assume
a sudden lightness. Petals of the banksia rose
float on the lake above the eels
and the huge elusive fish. So we would float.

Men in cars, still, crouched over the wheel, staring
at the grass,
ponder their middle years. Mothers sleep
while children stumble over tussock reaching for balloons
gone far away. He who is god-king of the cockatoos
empties his bag of bread on the warm hill.

The last thing we shall see
(if not on Thor's Day, on another day)
will be the cockatoos hurling themselves against the sky
and the last sound we shall hear, the screech, and the
beat of wings.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

BURNED OUT BEFORE TH BUSH-FIRES

you were burned out before th bushfires
when th floods came down you gushed
take a pork pie down th frog & toad
you'd make a fire engine blush

you think you've got a brain
you're only an appetite
is that a nose job or a ski lift?
you've got a snob job flying a skite

you've got th latest accoutrements
uranium watch on a plutonium chain
you don't believe in radiation – ah well
another face lift down th drain

yr not so big when you climb off our backs
yr doing the dinosaur stomp
hate is pure don't hit me with facts
y can't argue with a swamp

your politics are hit & run
you'd never take a bus
lady muck marries lord moron
you think yr too good for us

we fight fires, we fight floods
we're battlers in a drought
between th wars, we might give blood
we're reds when th blues get out

ERIC BEACH

SCENES FROM A WINE-DRINKING COUNTRY

Roman Vineyard

"What is that leafy fence
with one rail and endless posts?"
"Those are the trellis-trees
that bear another's fruit.
Two hundred maples, pruned T-shape,
each grafted to the next,
make one tree a kilometre long.
This was the Romans' trick
to hold their vineyards without wire."
"And what is that forest
uprooted there?"
"The same. Our agronomers say
they steal from vines."
"And those white-trunked trees
in the far vineyard?"
"Concrete, my friend."
"Is the wine the same?"
"Three barrels more."

Counting Buds

Each climate, facing,
slope and soil demands
the right quota of winter buds.
Prune more:
you get less wine.
Prune less:
you get less wine.
The magic number
has been settled in each village
for a thousand years. At Pompeii
twenty-four gives a giant
cask-filling liana
that strangles elms,
and a black Plutonic wine.
In short-summered Switzerland
two sturdy buds
on a stock like a standard rose
yield a pale frost-tempered wine
of sweet adversity.

Chianti

Snaking over the hills
on the superstrada's roller-coaster
"What was that gully
so crammed with vines?"
"The Val di Chianti."
"So small?"
"Oh yes,
we say *More wine
washes out of there
than ever rain fell in.*"

MARK O'CONNOR

SUNSET, OYSTER COVE

To the memory of Edwin Tanner

I know better than to lie down
in sunshine in late afternoon
to drowse and wake at twilight with torturing midges
when those who know me so well
they could find me on any shore on earth
take for their breath the nightwind's: exile, exile.

To all, to lovers, to friends
secure beyond falling out of love,
time brings at last their last time on earth together.
Let memory lie like sunlight
on this desolation of weeds.
— You are raked with pain, but alive, and paintings stand

round the cave of your room; in the shadow
of death, your death, they are binding
your life to inviolate space.

For what do we grieve

if death is only an image
in the mirror of time's abyss,
the prior darkness when earth did not contain us?

How long, how late we would talk
of death, love, art, the enchanting
confusion of mortal questions. We could have talked
for a thousand years, and changed
our minds a thousand times,
like Goethe changing "For all must melt away

to nothing", after his friends
had it set in golden letters
for a scientific assembly.

I fear those dreams

where those I loved, now dead,
are speaking to those who died
in earlier times; they did not meet on earth

but smile, and know. They bid me:
restore, repair, remember.
Be with me here as you were, in pain but smiling,
here where the dying race
posed, stiffly as grim dolls,
for their last likeness, history closing round them.

As sunset paints neglected
damson and lively thistle,
and the tide returns to send the semaphore crabs
each to his burrow, flaunting
a pugilistic nipper,
affirm: "No being can dissolve to nothing."

GWEN HARWOOD

HOT FLUSH

in the love camp. Venus, I know,
has initials. Limits, those yokelings,
are only occupational. Sweet
is when you're switched by wealth. Could you
with your mere luggage feed
for even a day the
gentry? How rare
is he who, full-bellied, looks
out; as if on loan
like a radiant morsel & here's
the appetite, the relisher, fore
& aft, of figs
& fame; but look, it's
already lame, the view, gone to leeward
& good riddance. Growing a figure
to cover the din when a lid, alas,
was in your hand – what
presumption! Slice,
if slice you must, from your own
conjecture. Who stays
for the bone of night, we'll know him
by needles, not by skin. One can't, so
horned, over love, so win.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

CAPTIONS FOR A SUBMERGED TOWNSHIP

1. bushfire
in the waterhole
several hours, company of
sitting it out with
large brown snake

burnt though
upper torso.
2. amphitheatres of dead reservoir
beached rubble strewn over
sunlight an indifferent brown
earth appears to be fading.
3. prominent rust
shell thin scooper, sediment infested
crankshaft
heaps of iron
water coming back
moss green surface, an icy stream
charts something like its old course
bridge stumps wedged into hillside.
4. overlooking
grey walls wearing to paper, plots of weeds;
next door, heavy with windows.
she looks out
spruce attention to the present
averting consciousness
of the View.

JENNIFER MACKENZIE

BUSHMAN

He came in from the red plain
Stood, blinked his eyes
Swayed in the midday light

Around him the country sizzled like a donut in fat
Buildings shrivelled
Animals collapsed, abandoned marionettes

He turned his head
And the dust on his hat rose like cockatoos
Skin melted, ran out through the holes in his boots

People on the veranda watched
Until he dissolved between the hotel doors
The sun waited like a vengeful wife

CAROLE WILKINS

THE AMOROUS CANNIBAL

Suppose I were to eat you
I should probably begin
with the fingers, the cheeks and breasts
yet all of you would tempt me,
so powerfully spicy
as to discompose my choice.

While I gobbled you up
delicacy by tidbit
I should lay the little bones
ever so gently round my plate
and caress the bigger bones
like ivory talismans.

When I had quite devoured the edible you
(your tongue informing my voice-box)
I would wake in the groin of night
to feel, ever so slowly,
your plangent, ravishing ghost
munching my fingers and toes.

Here,

with an awkward, delicate gesture
someone slides out his heart
and offers it on a spoon,
garnished with adjectives.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

BRUCE

when you were broke you bit th postman
you went crackers at th policeman's horse
twice decorated & frowned upon
you were always in th wars

& wearing that long hair in protest
you walked like a cheque with bounce
pounds shillings pence & vietnam
& it's one hundred & fifty dollars an ounce

just a degenerate who played ukelele
all greek to you, eureka your flag
maoist denginist in yr thirties in th eighties
on th dole in th pub & a bit of a dag

th time you made that bloke shout th bar
because he was wearing your hat
y hung yself with th venetian blind cord
& that was that

ERIC BEACH

SNOW. AND OPEN SPACES.

The problem of talking to each other
again now that the snow is going
from the open spaces
you come on it
round the corner of a building
like a priest kissing a woman's mouth.
You want to sink into it firm
and cold. You wonder if this
patch so smooth and white
has lasted the winter long
without a footprint. And whether
you can leave it
new.
Like a wife, or a baby.

MARK MACLEOD

BEN BUCKLER, THE ROOF

Pre-dawn pushes the darkness
inland, a roll of silence
banging drums of waves
pushing onto sandstone cliffs
a row of sudden pigeons
flecked metal hues
Sun punching a wedge
through sea, a shower of gold
horizon the camel's eye
dawn's old head
from thrown-open windows
handfuls of wheat
the eager pecking.

RICHARD TIPPING

ALMOST IDEAS

When those almost ideas come,
cool air on skin,
intimations of poems floating past,
they find us dumb;
the flying drifts they spin
shine iridescent but fade fast.

Grass heads, those almost brushes, bob,
dotting the i's
on some invisible script that's sliding through . . .
each evanescent blob
on melting ice
evaporates in the blue,

condenses then in almost spheres
that dive through sand,
their metamorphosis a hardly stain,
shadow of fears
with neither scent nor sound
that dissolves ecstasy and pain.

Then quite ourselves is all we're left,
our bodies dough,
the solid flesh a broken toy,
the guts we heft
are all we have to show
for service in the Goddess's employ.

FRANK KELLAWAY

POEM

Mop your underarms with paper towels,
Talking gibberish in your waking hours.
Spend your money on unbottled beer.
Get drunk.
Wake up in another day –
The rain and wind sounding the same.

In the place where the wild twangies are
You don't say "thank you" for your food.

Scrape price tags off cans.
Weld sculptures out of the empties.
Say shit, ass'ole and laugh a lot.
Line up for your cheque
And when they ask you, "What's your living?"
Say you're a scum.
They can tolerate that.

DAVID CHAMBERS

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

Though mingled nerves and cinders burn
I doff my dunce's hat and turn
To Stevens, Auden, Rilke, the
Weird voices of our century
Who keep on talking through my lips
When all phenomena eclipse
Or are eclipsed. Corrosive art
That feathers filaments apart
Is what I sense upon the air
Saying to language, Who goes there?

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

THE SHADOW MINISTER

What are the black holes?

They seem the incomprehensible
wool of happiness
knitted into a balaclava
with staggered stitches.

Who mislaid them?

I fear it might have been
the shadow minister
or gremlins in his entourage.

Who is he, then?

Archduke of fractures,
maelstrom, carcinogen
and small betrayals.

And his credentials?

Founded the vortex
brown on the face of the waters;
flavor of presence
and overwhelming jonquils;
a strong left arm.

What causes pain?

The shadow minister
whistling through woodwork.

Who knows the name of death?

Only he has rehearsed
its gorgeous nicknames
and by decree can even call
our frosty bones to heel.

Listen closely,
he is on tape
in every bricky shadow.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

THE WATER OF LIFE

1

Stand on the bridge at Asquith, above the highway,
over the advertising gaudiness,
watching an endless stream of salty Sundays
at flick of the lights tie up, or go by, go by.

Whom the gods mean to destroy, they first make mad?
Why do you choose to catch at a tag like that one
to set against the glories and goings-on
of weekly exodus and harlequinade?

Philistine though you take him, jangler of deeds
and days all conjured out of emptiness,
he doesn't go by, go by. Like you, he goes.

The sad sublime, the language of Lucretius,
robs him much more. Make sure he hears and heeds
the mutter of midnight tides in a channel he knows.

2

Cattle cropping among the clumps of whin,
stopping, bunching as you pass, their eyes
friendly out of far-gone distances,
till you too were a child from other days.

At home in the passing day, to raise of a sudden
by night the blind and find with huge surprise
the common runnels, gable-ends, and closes
uncannily estranged with silences.

Very old is any life to live with
and consolation it is to glory in –
the sun and the rain on a kind of Nazareth.

Those swifts that dinged in your boyhood eaves
all summer,
the steeple chime, the shine on quiet water,
are far resurrections, and beginnings again.

J.M. COUPER

SUCH IS LIFE

Maggie Kelly was twenty-three when her brother Ned was hung, and Kate was eighteen. His mother, Ellen, lived into her nineties and bore eleven children. The youngest, Alice King, was being breast-fed when Ellen was wrongly sentenced to three years hard labor (1878), firing Ned's sense of injustice. No books on the Kellys record whether Alice survived.

... enough

To know they dreamed and are dead.

Yeats ("Easter 1916")

Red carnations
burn in the night like beacons
spinning,
whirring me back to
Maggie,
rigged out in black habit
and white Gainsborough hat,
broad scarlet slash of petticoat
flashing round your boots.
Scrunching bark and twigs underfoot
you stride towards the blaze,
Glenrowan Inn.

Feel racing thuds
through your frame
as they bring out Dan
burnt mass of fleshy iron
at nineteen.
Turn them dark and strong
against the singed gums,
the smoky dawn,
your tongue salt-wet
invective whipping the enemy,
your breath tight and hard
against the tears
till they break, smash into
a wail which must have Ireland
at its heart.

Kate's jet eyes had watched you ride
inky flick amongst the trees,
decoy moulded to saddle
swift flow and jerk
of horse dodging
trooper-bulldogs on Ned's tail.
Your laugh
skating across frosted sunrise
sluiced and echoed round the caves, warning.

Kate winces from the acrid aftermath;
a mother jailed, one brother ashed,
the other watching death eating
up time towards him.
It burns like whisky in the throat.
And in through the heart
of this scarlet flower
she sees her son shattered
in the war,
her own slight body, six children on
bluish, bloated,
weighed down with unmarked graves
floating in the lake at Forbes.

The ruins of the homestead now
are shadowed by the Peppercorn,
crinkled fingers of a Tortured Willow
fidget in the dusk.
Flights of cockatoos wheel flat
bright-white against the sky
then turning, slice steel-grey.
Horses graze near the kitchen fire
where Ellen sat and stared
flames goring the blackened stone,
dreaming of quietness, of Irish luck,
of some green land
where children unmolested
reach old age.

Maggie and Kate,
Anne, Ellen and Grace.
I haven't seen you yet
among the 'founding mothers'
but your pain smirches the past,
that madness in your blood
ticks in us.

We have felt the warm feel of the wood
on the gate where your hand rested,
found our feet walking the worn path
footprints patterned in it like maps.
Thrash them with passion and dreams
till they fight,
but there is small comfort at night
in the dead.

ROBYN ROWLAND

THE GIRL ON THE CORNER

The girl on the corner knows more than the street
Her face is like a letter-box

She's got a vocabulary all her own
The residents are working on the code

To her, the cold weather is just like a man
She'll make a great soldier.

GRANT CALDWELL

ANOTHER LIFE

Driving over Pymont Bridge
on this warm, dark night
I think of you and me
in another life —

a blue light is rippling in the water
the floating oil
makes it gleam
makes the serpent dance,
I call across the water
across the city
like a muttering creole
singing the poetry of magical insurrection
fire, blood, the crops black,
blue light be my mirror
let me see my black face
drip and glow
like a chicken on a spit
let me hear
the underground charm
that breaks locks
changes lives —

the industrial murk
is beautiful blue fool's gold
but I spend it in a fever;
I buy back your phantom
and in a grim trance of love
try to throw it in the water —

because when you come back
in another life
I want you glittering
I want you *new* —

but your phantom won't jump
is stronger than me;
the blue water
laps on the dirty shore
in long, shining waves
driving me mad —

this poisoned second finishes
and your phantom punches out my car door
as desperate as you were cruel —

between us
a huge city
blue water
and scores to settle
in another life.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

AFTER HAARST'S BLUFF

1

your lover wears you like an ear-ring
you pierce his flesh
but he needs you
you're good for his image
threatened by separation
he clings to you unsafe & worshipful
parasitic & perishing
& outside the weather's
fresh-scented & up-there-with-it pink

2

under the spring sun
rock rivers flow onto the plain
i remove my jumper wear thongs
this is concession

think of a word
& call it beauty

rock like crumpled fabric
sculpted foam rubber

here people live in tents & caravans
call it permanent like pianos
in wagons the bump & rattle of the landrover
4-wheel drive country tourists
& the temporary release
from the grind of the gears against each other

4

take me into the mountains we'll live
in a cave & paint wallabies & worship
crows let the flies walk
over our eyes i want to be animal

& i want control of myself
to welcome the dawn like an old friend
liberally i want to be real

5

i am incompetent & calculating
see pictures in colored clouds
need a typewriter
to have a relationship with

(& the cavalcade rasps over the gravel
outside the installation)

"honor" he says
with a leer of self-confidence
"you need no definite article
accept & reveal nothing"

i observe cruelty like a rite of passion
one image in the slide projector of space
a donkey on the carousel of distance
i am lonely soliloquize in the gazebo
but i have no need of pity

today i could kill
& ignore compassion

this fusilade of words hurled
into the vortex of imagination
is intended to wound & confuse

now you are
the enemy

6

the boys want to conquer mountains
we women sit at the base camp
with our children & follow
the lines of dreaming we are tepid
explorers when we sought mt leibig
we made do with blanche's towers

peculiar & unapproachable
hover in the distance
the stegosaurus sleeps soundly & i am
awed by the way color
goes back into itself

on the plain we observe freedom
drink the view quietly
acknowledge the sultriness
cloud cover brings & sense relief
when the breeze propels the clouds
fast across the sky

7

the crows laugh at us because we
have no wings self-identity
means nothing & as a poet
i must learn to transcend shame

moonrise even before sunset
we anticipate the fluorescence of clouds
as sonder rests its generous folds
against the flat & wealthy plains

i'll swap you a cold beer & the morning
for a flat tyre & twilight any day

sunset weep then for these inscrutable hills
feminine & dreamfilled
& for the water hole you couldn't find
concentric circles in the sky & the way
you always walk-in-naked to the settlement

you're caught by the echo of a stick
dragged in the distance the vibration
sounds the total destruction of dreams

JENNY BOULT

It has taken ten years for him to bring me to this place he has spoken about. From the window of this empty old house I can see the broad mirror of the harbor as it grows dark. A mattress on the floor, a stack of wood on the hearth. He is outside with the axe, but not chopping – loitering, lingering. Let him have his time out there. In the mantle mirror I see for a moment my own face. Soft about the eyes: I am not a hard woman. Remarkable though, that this face should have turned him in the church that time, that first time. It was Good Friday, my belly groaned, I smelt sorrow, saw this young man's eye on me. And prayed.

By the fire on our mattress, heat and light are upon us as we move, whole as candle and wick. His breasts with their sweat-tears are like eyes upon me. Still he looks. All these years. But in the calm and quiet after, there is a space between us. It is a sadness, a travelling in his eyes.

"This house used to be full of people," he says. There is nothing I can say to this. I pull my hair up off my neck, half-sitting. "We used to have dinner in here with only candlelight and the fire and all of us around the table. Uncle Sid would say Grace and put his little handful of pills on the table beside him and carve the meat and then it was on. Lots of talk: stories, gossip from the harbor, things they'd heard people say. A big family. They fostered me when I was three or four. We used to sit in here after dinner watching the fire jump around in the port glasses, listening to the horns out on the water down there, saying nothing. Uncle Sid would take a handful of pills, pull out a different colored bottle and take some more. He was a terrible hypochondriac."

I have heard this before; I know it well enough to tell it for him. He told me these things on our wedding night in a similar calm, as though he were sharing the uttermost of intimacies with me, as though what had gone before was a shadow of intimacy by comparison.

"They were good people," he says. "They gave me a home, a family."

Somewhere out in the night, a horn sounds. Like a big animal bellowing in the dark.

"Why didn't you bring me down here sooner?" I ask, my fingers on his lips. He avoids my eyes, looks at my breasts instead, holds them hard in his gaze the way a man will, as if you're not there behind those breasts. This long, well-covered abyss between us finally recognized.

"I couldn't."

When I wake he is at the window. The gooseflesh on him makes me think he has been there a while. Sunlight puts a false color to his flesh. Under that pink he is white and cold. I close my eyes and sleep again. Only for a while, I tell myself. Something in my belly tells me to be sad, afraid even, like the time before a period, only much worse.

Late in the morning we walk down the main street of this little town seeing our reflection in the shop-fronts with their obsolete fashions and tarnished decorations. We share the cafe with two men who look like seamen. They wear big rubber boots and commando caps of grey-green wool. They look closely at Mark who doesn't seem to notice. A truck barks, backfiring down the street. I linger over my second coffee, afraid, not knowing what to say. I want to touch him to make certain he is here beside me.

We walk through town. No – he walks, I follow. His eyes are greedy. He spends minutes on the marble bench outside the old church. The school seems to live and breathe for him. I hear sighs. He is drinking this town up. And loneliness, a stranger these past years, is back with me again; I feel it on my back like a load and I want to tell him, but the movement, the pleasure in his eyes prevents me.

Out on the long, dog-legged jetty with its cathedral-like passage of piles and tidal decorations, he leans out over the rail and points.

"See that little landing down there? That's where Uncle Sid and I used to sit."

"What did you do?" I am happy for him, for his memories, but so afraid.

"Oh, we watched the ships come and go. A little fishing. He smoked his pipe." He laughed suddenly. "And I picked my nose."

"It's a nice little town," I say, looking out across the water to the peninsula with its hills and granite faces.

He continues to look down to the landing and the dark water. How was there ever any room for me, an old woman from the city to whom this town, this jetty, this harbor can only be "nice"? I wait for him by the rail in the chill wind.

I wake alone in the firelight. The gnarled roots in the fireplace burn with a sullen heat. Mark is not here. Wrapping a blanket around myself, I wander through rooms lit only by the streetlights shining through the threadbare curtains. There is

no fear of bumping into furniture – there is none. The staircase squawks. The timber is cold on the soles of my feet. Light from above. I follow the cone of light.

Through the crack in the door I see him sitting naked in a corner, back against the wall, eyes closed, head tilted as though deep in contemplation.

“This was the library,” he says, without opening his eyes. It startles me; I give a little cry.

“Come in.”

I sit beside him. Why do I feel so hopeless? Have I suddenly lost him? Why should an old woman be intimidated by a young man’s memories?

“Uncle Sid kept all his books – hundreds of them – in this room.” I see the line around the walls separating the faded sections from those where the bookcases must have stood.

“He had everything: all these tiny gilt editions of Dickens and Tolstoy, George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell . . . encyclopaedias . . . huh, the Kinsey Report, *Mein Kampf*. And in the corner, above the Boccaccios and *Tom Jones* and *Fanny Hill*, was a huge old stuffed eagle with glass eyes that followed you across the room and never left you for a moment. Scared me to death. Auntie had a dust cover for it. She threw it over the bird whenever I wanted to be in here on my own.”

“So this is where you did all that reading.”

“Yes. And thinking.”

“Good times.”

“The best,” he says. He looks at me guiltily. “The best I knew then.”

What does it mean to have memories like this to guard as precious? Not a few, but whole decades of them. I – my friends too – always took pleasure in recounting the agonies of family life, the boredom, the bitchery, the destruction of persons. We had our stories of beatings and bullyings. Hypocrisy was what fed us in our bistro-lunch conversations. “Good God, my parents . . .” we used to say, “. . . you think that’s bad . . .” and we’d take pleasure mounting atrocity upon atrocity, showing our battle scars with pride. How hard would it be to bear memories such as his? Nothing but good treatment to feel responsible for. Why be intimidated by a young man’s memories? Because they might be better. Than me. And I am older than even his memories.

“You look sick,” he murmurs.

“No.”

“You’re bored.”

“No.”

He lets out a long sigh. I pull him close and gave him some blanket. “Why didn’t I bring you here before? Why didn’t I ever come back? Because I was afraid. Same as you.”

“I’m not afraid,” I lie.

“I was afraid I wouldn’t leave,” he says, running his hand through my hair. “So we’re both scared of the same thing.”

I say nothing, still unable to admit it.

“Those two old fellas in the cafe this morning thought you were a rich old thing and I was a kept man,” he laughs.

“If only they knew,” I say, feeling sick.

“If only.”

“It’s a nice town.”

“Yeah. That’s all it is now. Uncle’s dead and Auntie’s locked away and the others are all gone away and nice is all this town can be any more.”

“You’re not staying?”

“No. We’re leaving.”

“In the morning?”

“Now.”

“Now? Mark, good grief, why?”

He pulls the blanket around him. “Just in case.”

“Of what?”

He smiles and takes a handful of my hair to his mouth. “In case I change my mind.”

Our headlights take the harbor and then the little houses and the cobbled streets as we come around to the main street with its half-lit shops and leaning offices. There is no one in sight except a dog whose breath floats up white before him. The engine murmurs.

“Why did you look at me that first time in the church?” I ask, watching him change gears, his earnest features lit greenish in the light of the dash panel.

“You looked hungry,” he says.

“It was Good Friday.”

“I was hungry, too.”

An Adelaide Festival diary, kind of

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

TUESDAY

To the Festival tomorrow. Talked in my room at the university to a Chinese exchange student out here, who has turned in a good and interesting story for *Overland*, obviously partly autobiographical. He tells me that no, he didn't marry the girl in the story. I told him how the teachers at Nita's school had just made all sorts of generous gifts to one of their colleagues who was flying to Hong Kong to adopt a Chinese baby, and added that I didn't think racism a very serious problem in Australia: bad enough, of course, but restrained compared to many lands, presumably because since Federation racism has never had a very effective economic base.

WEDNESDAY

Drove to the airport with Nita, Adelaide bound. In South Melbourne we passed several windows smeared with the slogan, HUNT THE JEWS.

THURSDAY

Writer's Week at the Festival. Pleasant sitting around the tents, listening, yarning, drinking. A friend told us of a leading Australian publisher, very well known, who on being told that the obvious candidate for a post in the firm was named Ruth Goldberg (let us say), replied "We can't employ people with names like that as editors."

In the afternoon told of the opening of the vineyard in the Adelaide hills which we missed by coming late to the Festival. One of the guests said to another of the guests, "I don't see how this is much of an event for Australia. These people are Jews and they only came here to make money." It reminded me of Robert O'Hara Burke's remark I mention in the *Dictionary of Australian Quotations*. His dancing partner complained of the fact that the fellow-guests were fortune-seekers. Burke said: "Why my dear Mrs G—, did not you

and I come out here because we could not get so good a living at home?"

In an Adelaide bookshop read a remark by Richard Ingrams of *Private Eye*: "I'm no racist. I dislike Sir James Goldsmith not because he's a Jew, but because he's a German." Well, that at least adds a touch of black humor.

FRIDAY

Meet an old school acquaintance in the as-ever delightful Adelaide Gallery. Haven't seen him since school, in fact. He's on the land up in the Barossa. Yarning about families with him and his wife, his wife says of her daughter, "She's running around with an American, but it might be worse. He could be black, or a Jew." As usual Nita and I angry with ourselves that we didn't make a straight come-back.

Go to the hardware department at John Martin's and buy a paint-scraper.

Splendid contribution by Tom Keneally at the writer's tent on a controversy about *Schindler's Ark*, and Tom's adventures in Poland and elsewhere in the making of it. Trouble with the customs on leaving Poland at Cracow. Tom's clever and experienced guide says, "But we're making a film about *Polish* heroes." Tom comments: "He was wise to leave out the extra word 'Jewish'."

SATURDAY

D.M. Thomas reads from *The White Hotel*, about Babi Yar, the Jewish massacre site in the Ukraine. There's no memorial there, and the Russians have built apartment blocks over the ravine.

SUNDAY

Fly home. Anxious to get back in time to see "The Boy in the Bush", but we stop in South Melbourne and scrape the graffiti off those windows.

FRANK R. BYRNES

A Taste for Reading

“Books are not seldom talismans and spells”.

William Cowper; “The Task” VI, 98.

“To be a well-favored man is a gift of fortune”, said Dogberry, “but to read and write comes by nature”. That worthy Constable, long before Mrs Malaprop, was an adept in the knack of getting words confused, so he probably meant “by nurture”. Even so, he could still have been wrong: there are indications nowadays that to read and write may not come either by nature or by nurture, since our education system is said to be turning out thousands of school leavers who cannot write a letter, and who never want to look at another book.

As with many other things, proficiency in reading comes easier if we make an early start. When we were young, books were our great stand-by against bad weather, boredom, loneliness, vexations of the spirit and minor illnesses. From the age of ten I was reading at every opportunity; and the more I read, the more I wanted to read. In one week I could be transported to the South Sea Islands, King Solomon’s Mines, Chinatown, the Amazon Jungle, the Bar-20 Ranch, the Spanish Main, the Wembley Cup Final, and Mr Quelch’s Remove Class at Greyfriars School. The transitions were achieved without even a mental ruffle. There were no problems of adjustment, no real preference for one setting rather than another, no fears for tomorrow or regrets for yesterday.

I had no organised schedule of reading; I read whatever I could get and whenever I had time. If a book proved enjoyable I looked for other books by the same author, not always with happy results. P.C. Wren’s *Beau Geste* was magnificent, but its sequels *Beau Sabreur* and *Beau Ideal* were sorry disappointments. I learned later that sequels are generally of inferior quality. I learned also that Queen Victoria had demonstrated for all time the fallacy of reading by authors when, after being delighted with *Alice in Wonderland*, she suggested that the author might like to dedicate his next book to her, only to find it was a scholarly mathematical work entitled *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*.

However, in our primary school library (just one bookcase with glass doors) there was not much choice except to read by authors, since many of the books had been collected there on that basis. They were mostly adventure novels, such as Balantyne’s *Coral Island*, *Martin Rattler* and *The Young Fur Traders*; Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days*, *From the Earth to the Moon*, and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*; Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* and the Deerfoot stories; Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Oliver Twist*; Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy*; Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*; and, for comparison with it, Wyss’s *The Swiss Fam-*

ily Robinson. There were various other miscellaneous volumes, including *King Arthur and The Knights of the Round Table* and *On The Run*, a tale of the current (1920) strife in Ireland.

I think the most memorable landmark in my apprenticeship to reading in those days was *Coral Island*. (So much depends, I suppose, on reading a book at just the right stage in one’s own development: William Golding’s modern version of the same story turned a fantasy into a nightmare.) I did not find Scott exciting, nor Dickens particularly interesting. At that time I would have considered Talbot Baines Reed and Gunby Hadath worthy of superior ranking to Scott and Dickens among English novelists. But, after all, literary judgment is not vital when one is acquiring a taste for reading. One book which impressed its warning on me strongly was Dean Farrar’s *Eric, or Little by Little*. Eric’s decline to ruin and utter degradation began with the smoking of his first cigarette. Yet I was as much impressed by the gradual deterioration of his character as I was by that of Tito Melema when, a decade or so later, I read George Eliot’s *Romola*.

I was luckier than most of the boys in that there were plenty of books available to me in the Railway Institute, where I could borrow two books at a time on my father’s ticket. Many of the books I got from this library were American ‘West-erns’, such as Clarence E. Mulford’s tales of the Bar-20 ranch; Zane Grey’s *The Lone Star Ranger* and *The Roaring U.P. Trail*; and Charles Alden Seltzer’s *Drag Harlan* and *Beau Rand*. It was here I discovered *Tarzan of the Apes*, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and H.deVere Stackpoole’s *The Blue Lagoon*; and no doubt sundry other sophisticated romances whose full implications would have gone over my head. I enjoyed them all. I do not think I ever began a book that I did not finish – and got much enjoyment from many which for the first few chapters had seemed very unpromising. There were times when I sat up late at night reading by lamplight in the old kitchen in order to finish a book I was unable to put down, and then went to bed sorry I had finished it.

Neither at school nor at the Institute were any books by Australian authors to be found. I suppose there were few suitable Australian books available, especially for boys; but Henry Lawson’s *While the Billy Boils* and *In the Days When the World was Wide*, Ethel Turner’s *Seven Little Australians* and Rolf Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* (which Henry Lawson said he read as a boy when it first was published as a

serial in the Sydney Mail last century) would have been a start. Indeed, *Robbery Under Arms* might have surpassed the *Coral Island* and *The Knights of the Round Table* as the pinnacle of my boyhood reading, had I known of the sallies of Starlight and his bushranger gang from the secret entrance of their hide-out in Terrible Hollow.

I already knew, from my parents, some of the bush ballads of Paterson and Lawson, but the first Australian prose works I recall were Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* and *Sandy's Selection* and Thomas Spencer's *The Surprising Adventure of Bridget MacSweeney*. My brother and I found these on my grandfather's farm, itself an original free selection and a place where the struggle for existence was so constant that nobody should ever have had time to read anything. But there they were; and we became so engrossed in them that more than once the cows we were supposed to be supervising in the stubble paddock came within an ace of devastating the potato crop in the adjoining paddock, and we had to race to head them off.

There was another important source of reading material: a great number of boys' weekly magazines were available. Most notable were the Magnet (which featured Harry Wharton and Co., of Greyfriars School) and the Gem (featuring Tom Merry and Co., of St Jim's). There was a third schoolboy magazine called the Popular which featured a medley of shorter stories about these schools, and added a third school, "Rookwood", where the heroes were Jimmy Silver and Co. These magazines cost threepence, and could be ordered from the newsagency of Mr Geo. Baynes. For years these schoolboy groups continued on their merry way, spending their long summer holidays in South America or Canada or Africa (where, on one occasion, Billy Bunter narrowly – if such a word can be applied to him – escaped the cannibal pot). They never grew any older, and never advanced to the next class. I hardly expected that one day my own sons would read, in hard-backed novels, reprints of the doings of William George Bunter, the Fat Owl of the Remove; or that fifty years in the future I myself would read a newspaper headline, BILLY BUNTER HAS BECOME PART OF BRITAIN'S HISTORY. I always thought the Magnet was good, but I never thought it was as good as that!

There were also tales of Buffalo Bill and other scouts in the Aldine series. These were small-page booklets (32 pages) which also cost threepence. We regarded them as rather far-fetched, though we would read any copies which came our way. Credibility was irrevocably lost when one of the scouts, after being trussed up and left to strangle to death slowly, was saved by a timely rain-shower which caused the ropes to loosen and thus enabled him to extricate himself. Even my small experience knew that wetting the ropes would make them ten times harder to undo.

Two other very popular series were "The Boys' Friend" and "Football and Sports". These were 64-page booklets and cost sixpence (expensive!). "The Boys' Friend" carried school stories (mainly about Rookwood), as well as tales of exploration, adventure, war and crime by many different authors. The stories in "Football and Sports" were mainly about English soccer – a recurring theme was the kidnapping of the hero by crooks who had invested heavily on the opposing team; but he invariably managed to escape and rush to the

ground, arriving in the nick of time to take the field and score the winning goal.

There were detective stories, too: Nelson Lee and his assistant, Nipper; Dixon Brett and his assistant, Pat Malone; Sexton Blake and his assistant, Tinker. All of these were of similar mould. Sexton Blake drove a bullet-proof Rolls Royce called "Black Panther"; Dixon Brett had a Mercedes Racer called "Night Hawk". The stories dealt with master criminals, demented scientists, drug-runners, spies, political intriguers, war heroes, bomb maniacs or traitors. The background might be India, Russia, Germany, Africa, or any nook of Britain (particularly Limehouse). The action might take place in a jungle or a desert, on a yacht or a train, in a balloon or a submarine or a sunken wreck. The detective operated all over Europe, often for the most distinguished clients. Sexton Blake refused the position of chief of the German Secret Service when it was offered to him by the Kaiser in person; and he likewise declined a peerage from the Prime Minister of England. He might have become the most illustrious double agent of all time!

It has been estimated that more than a hundred authors contributed over the years to the Sexton Blake series alone. No wonder there was such variety in the stories. By contrast, the stories of all three schools, St Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood, were written by one man under different pen-names. Sexton Blake stories were in vogue a generation before my time and, for many years after I had outgrown them, the master sleuth continued to pit his wits against the Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle, the Red Circle Gang, the Council of Eleven, the Black Trinity and the Spider – not forgetting "The Mummer", that nonpareil of disguise whose real features nobody had ever seen: he once impersonated Sexton Blake himself, and the Scotland Yard men arrested the genuine sleuth by mistake!

Another magazine, not so popular as some of the others, was Chums, which ran a wide range of stories, as well as feature articles on unusual occupations, things-to-make, and out-of-the-way places. Some of the stories were in serial form, extending over a number of weeks – there was always the likelihood of missing an instalment when supplies had to come all the way from England. I think this was the only magazine which brought out an annual at the end of the year. The annual resembled a bound volume of weekly issues, and the serial stories could be read straight through simply by turning from one weekly segment to the next week's. Only once did I have the good fortune to acquire such an annual, and I got it second-hand in exchange for a bag of marbles, a whole season's winnings. It took me a month or more to read it. Among other delights there was a long schoolboy serial set in the backwoods of Canada entitled "Chums to the End", and a short novel called "Into the Golden West" which I expected to be just another 'western' but which turned out to be a fine sea-adventure story.

There were also a variety of 'comics' available. I would read any of these I chanced upon, but I would never buy one: they did not offer sufficient reading value for the threepence that had to be outlaid.

None of us bought more than one or two magazines each week, but several boys would sometimes form a syndicate, each purchasing a different magazine and then interchanging them. They could then be exchanged in wider circles. My

mother classified all of them as ‘‘deadwoods’’. This name originated from a very much earlier magazine in which the star performer was called ‘‘Deadwood Dick’’; but my mother pronounced the word witheringly. Despite her lack of appreciation I built up a fine collection of ‘deadwoods’ which I stored in a large suitcase underneath my bed. Collecting these was my favourite hobby, and I would trade marbles or cards or stamps to get them. Had it survived, my collection might now have contained a number of collector’s items.

There were times when I was told I could be better employed than with ‘‘my nose in a book reading a lot of trash’’, and no doubt there were many other books which would have been a better means of ‘‘improving my mind’’. Yet I think today’s children waste as much time watching trash on television, and gain less than I did. I was acquiring a taste for reading for the sheer delight of it, and thereby consolidating a pastime which has tided me over many a shoal, and given me more pleasure throughout my lifetime than anything except music. I have lived to see men journey ‘‘From the Earth to the Moon’’, and popular films made from *Around the World in*

Eighty Days, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, The Blue Lagoon and many of the ‘westerns’. A splendid musical has been made from *Oliver Twist*, children’s television serials have been based on *Tarzan of the Apes* and others, and not so long ago *Eric* was re-issued. The trash I was reading more than half a century ago must have had some intrinsic merit. Bob Cherry and Arthur Augustus d’Arcy, and Buck Peters and his Bar-20 men, and all the rest of them, by literary standards may not have been such a goodly company, but they were such good company!

Franz Kafka held that the Ideal Place would be one where there were no books at all – a strange notion indeed for one who continued to write them. Personally, I would prefer to let the world get further still out of its depth in the rising flood of books rather than eliminate a single volume.

Frank Byrnes, 74, is a former teacher of classics in New South Wales high schools. He has published a number of autobiographical sketches.

Comment

Stuart Macintyre writes:

I refer back to my article on the Quadrant anthology in Overland 92 and to the reply to that article by Quadrant’s Editor, Peter Coleman, in Overland 93.

I am surprised that the Editor of Quadrant denies what is on public record. But let me take his points in turn.

1. ‘‘The only American-based organisation with which the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom ever had an ‘intimate’ association was the now defunct Congress for Cultural Freedom.’’ But in 1954 Richard Krygier, the secretary of the Australian Committee for Cultural Freedom (as it then was), informed Sir John Latham, the President, that that Congress funds came ‘‘from various foundations in the United States’’.

2. ‘‘No cheque to the Association ever came direct from the United States.’’ But on 26 March 1959 Krygier assured the head office of the Congress that he foresaw ‘‘no difficulties or embarrassment by our cashing or depositing a cheque in U.S. currency on a New York bank’’.

3. ‘‘The Association’s Secretary, Richard Krygier, was unaware of the C.I.A.’s role in secretly funding the Congress for Cultural Freedom.’’ Krygier certainly knew, at least, that agencies of the United States government, including the State Department and the United States Information Service, assisted the work of the Congress.

4. ‘‘The idea of intelligence activities by members of the Congress or any of its associated groups is false.’’ This is wrong. On 14 July 1954 Krygier wrote to Latham proposing that applicants for membership of the Australian Committee be vetted by A.S.I.O. That suggestion was opposed by Latham, but subsequently he agreed that Krygier should send relevant material to Colonel Spry, the head of A.S.I.O.

Some of these details are taken from the Latham Papers in the National Library, others from the article that Humphrey McQueen published in *Nation Review*, 5-11 May 1977, after he had gained access to the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom records in the National Library. Those records were subsequently closed.



JOHN OLSEN

He was in his middle twenties when the sun began to shine on Australian artists. Coming from behind the Depression, the War and the Dobell case it warmed the old who had worked on to keep out the chill (or through habit) and for the young playing out there in the cold, it lit up the world. They were careful at first, for it had been fun even when they were frightened. But soon they found that they could play new games and that now there were people to watch them. The warmth brought the patrons, the critics and the gallery directors into the swim again and as they plunged in at the deep end wearing their bright new costumes, they called to others to join them for it was lovely in there.

Sadly soon some of the old found the weather too hot and wished, strictly for reasons of health, to empty the pool, but other elders who had learnt the movements but had had little chance of performing in public were happy to teach the young. Standing a little stiffly on the edge they showed them not only their own strokes but encouraged the lithe new swimmers to invent their own. In that climate it was bliss to be Australian, to be young and to paint.

For his part he first adapted the style which had moved mountains in Provence and Passmore in Sydney and applied it boldly to Melbourne boys and their bicycles. Then chains and frames constricted his forms, and bearing it no longer, they walked out and he followed. He walked wondering at the world but found the going slow without wheels and with his own maps to make. Strangely then, a ship took these first charts to travel-brochure ports, telling tourists of the new wonder down under. As the good reports were sent home he knew that he still had to school himself and that in old Europe he would find new lessons. Travelling traditionally with a patron to pay, he visited the sacred sites and found that he could best describe them in a poetry full of metaphor and alliteration, rather than by following the badly translated guide-books. For a time he was content, learning something from men and museums every day. He learnt to throw weight rather than wrist behind the brush; to let color and content go their different ways, and that movement was the message which his contemporaries passed to him. In accepting it he

discovered that he could best punish that blank board by whipping it instead of stabbing it, and that each lash left behind its own record.

Then from where the action was and where he was loving it he looked up one day and recognized his own country for the first time and saw that it was beaut. But beaut and beautiful had to mean the same thing before he could go home, and he waited on rock-pool islands until it all came together and he flew.

Still white from Europe he was soon an Australian again and he drew a line and went walkabout with it. The line came alive and lead him a dance and as they turned and twisted together; Ouija-like, it spelt out poems of places and made poems into places. To many these goings on and goings back seemed wild and wilful, but he and the line had formed their way and they plotted their path until they were sure enough to scale a wall on Bennelong Point and come out on top. Now these mad maps of city, harbor and excitement have settled down, and although we no longer use them to find out where we are, sitting as comfortably on the wall as the charts of the navigators they tell us clearly where we have been. What once seemed larrikin now has a blessed elegance, in a world where paint and fury often express nothing superbly.

He might have been content for ever to organize chartered tours through his territory but he did not, being an explorer and not a driver of comfortable coaches, and so leaving the city he followed the birds. We saw him net them for the camera as surely as he had caught the tides for the Collections. Doing so, he became visible and his wide pale face peered from the screen with the same wonder of the world that it had peered before, and as the little Swiss (so Adler tells) had flattened his face against his window. Like Klee he seemed to know all about day and night, sky, sea and air, and like a decent Dylan he made his picture-poems so much part of us that we could paint them again thinking that they were our own.

Eric Westbrook was formerly Director of the National Gallery of Victoria.

It felt good in his hand, like it belonged there. He said:

How much?

\$82.75. It's the cheapest we sell.

He thought for a moment. Yes, he said. I'll take it. It had a nice feel about it. Solid. But not too heavy.

All right, sir. Will that be cash or credit?

Cash.

Fine. Just one or two routine questions, then I'll get you to sign here.

Fifteen days. Drop in another quarter. Focus just there, to the left. Button pressed. Focus. There! Go. Thrust and fire. Thrust. Up. Watch radar. Up. Up further. Bit more. There. Stay level. Right. Keep firing. Right. Down. Good. Hold it there. Into view. Skip that missile. Good. Now, down again. Go low. Lower. Good. Mine. Missed. Keep firing. Missed. Again. Again. Bingo! Fuck you, Juraszek. Bingo! Now what, you bastards?

A core of plutonium. Surround it with high explosives. Light the fuse. Stand back. The shock wave crushes the plutonium into a critical mass: Nagasaki. Should have bought a whopper, minus pickle. Didn't she get fed up, always ordering this Japanese crap? The steam was making his nose run. The windscreen was misting up.

Want one?

She offered him a can. A car with surfboards pulled up. He thought he recognized the driver, one of his students, but no. He said:

Is it cold?

Cold enough.

Yeah. All right.

She opened it, away from her skirt, trying not to spill any. It was a skirt he liked to see her in. He could feel her thighs while he drove. It gave him a sense of power. Here, she said. he took the can.

Introducing the two-in-one video recorder from RCA: Convertible SelectaVision. He was reading. Hell, how long does it take to go to the john? She finished, stood in the doorway. He said:

Guess what.

What?

I bought a gun. In fifteen days it's mine.

She walked towards him, to the side of the bed, brushing

her hair. She was looking at him. He smiled. She said:

You're lying. She was trying to hide her uncertainty. First a grin, then a laugh. It's no good, she said. I know you're lying.

Want to locate your favorite scenes? Press the picture search button, and you can review cassettes in high-speed forward or reverse motion without having the screen go dark. She climbed back into bed. He realized he was grinning like a fool. Try to be serious. He said:

How do you know I'm *not* lying? What if I *have* bought a gun?

I know you haven't, she said. You're the biggest liar . . .

Yeah, but supposing I have?

I don't know, she laughed. Suppose you could always shoot next door's dog.

He was being serious. She never took him seriously when he was being serious. Must be in one of her silly moods. He said:

Seen this? We could use it to make our own movies. She wasn't listening. Off on one of her trips. Romanee-novel addict. She lives out there, snap-frozen, in deep space. Husband to wife. Come in, wife. Over. If he could join her, he would. They could open a ball-bearing factory: molten metal extruded in a weightless environment.

He pulled back the covers, got out of bed. She ignored him. He went to the kitchen, to the refrigerator, poured himself some milk, ate the mince pie she had salvaged from supper. Outside, on the dark streets, he imagined a young woman, a student, powerless, looking back over her shoulder, wishing she'd stayed home. Try to imagine it: 2.2 million pounds of powdered aluminium and ammonium perchlorate vaporizing at the rate of 8.5 tons a second. He wanted to hug someone. There's a U.S. spy satellite in every mind: watching, recording, sending home the goods. Was he mad? For wanting to hug someone, for marvelling at science? He was an American! After a brief exposure your victim will bleed profusely from the nose and mouth, convulse, then die within minutes, sometimes days. She'll wish her head had been blown off.

When he woke up he found the note, scribbled on the reminder pad. It said: Gone shopping. Home 11.00. See you later.

Saturday. Shopping. Would she remember the blades? Probably not. She didn't last time. Miracle she remembers anything. She remembers her headaches. Kafka had headaches. Kafka was a nudist, who thought he belonged in a

zoo. Hadn't he caught her trying to touch up the fender, with chrome paint? She was crazy. He needed the gun. One day the note might read: Wife kidnapped. Do not call police. Await further instructions. He'd have to go bail her out. He'd be ready. No cokes and ice cream for you, buddy. It'll be dark, and there'll be a knock on the window of wherever you're holding her, and your face will appear, and your eyes will be adjusting to the darkness, straining to see, and then you'll see *this* face, and you know what? Bingo! You'll be blown away, face and all. 0.38 Saturday-night special to the rescue. So don't quote *me* crime statistics, you arseholes. I've read *Catch 22*. I know all about crime statistics. 55 million hand-guns tumbling out of the factories, the manna bakeries. Seen that ad in the paper? So what? 10,728 hand-gun homicides last year. It only proved the point. Were they really trying to take away the right to protect himself, or his wife, his possessions? They were crazy. Half his students carried guns. To classes. It gave the local street gang something to think about. Let's get him. Is he armed? It worked. Every second home in America has a gun. In a bedside drawer. In a shoebox, under the bed. Close-by. A precaution, like seatbelts. She would have to understand, that's all. He would have to convince her.

He walked into the store, went to the counter. A woman was putting away her change. She was told to come back in fifteen days. He thought, she'll be clean. At the other end of the counter, a young couple were peering into a glass display case. Just looking. It was his turn to be served.

The assistant smiled, said:

Yes, sir. What can I do for you?

It didn't feel like two weeks. He said:

I've come to pick up a gun. A snub-nose 0.38-calibre special.

I'll need your receipt, sir.

Oh, yes. I've got it here, somewhere. Yes. Here you are.

The assistant took the receipt, said:

Won't be a moment, sir. I'll just check if it's ready.

When he returned he was holding a small cardboard box. It could be anything, he thought. A plastic construction kit. Envelopes. A part for the car. He said:

I'll need some bullets. Two boxes.

Fine. What brand?

He hadn't thought of that. He should have guessed there'd be different brands. He said:

Oh, any.

The assistant smiled, lifted two yellow boxes from under the counter.

Most people stick with these. They do the job.

He looked at the two yellow boxes, next to the larger box. Yes, he said. I'll take them.

Will there be anything else, sir?

Had he forgotten anything? Should he buy more bullets? He thought for a moment. No, he said. No, this will be fine.

Previously Unseen Nude Shots. Hollywood's Ultimate Sex Bomb.

Yes?

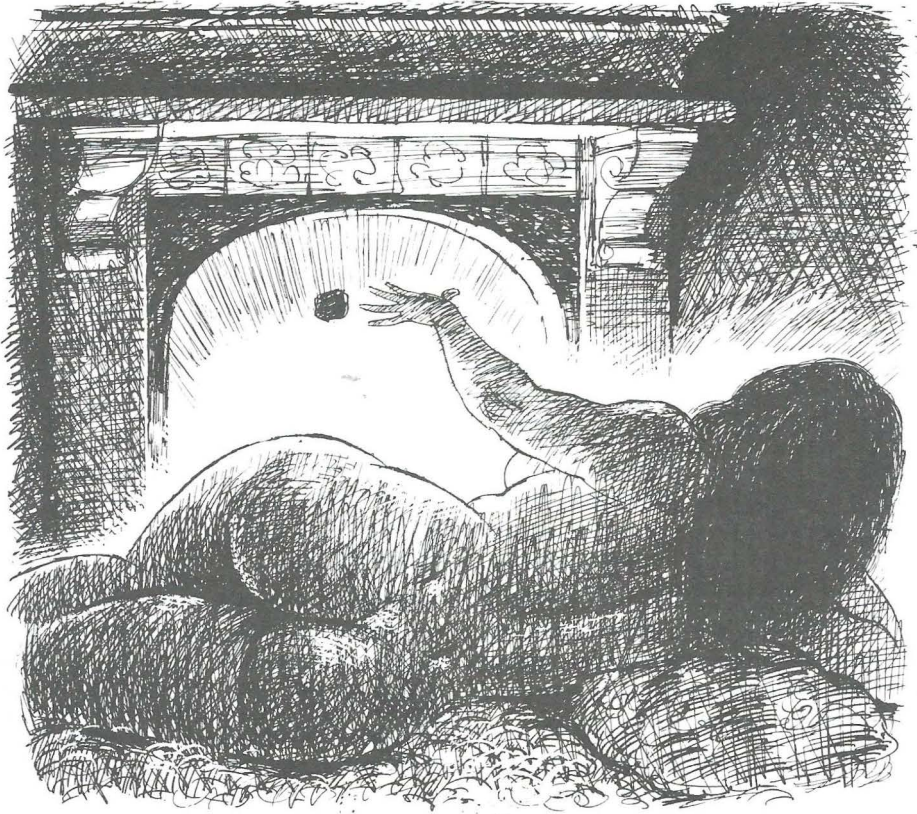
Are Big Ships Doomed? He picked the magazine out, placed the money on the counter.

There you go, buddy.

He walked along the street, towards the car. He felt dizzy. She was crazy. She viewed life like it belonged to a Disney exhibit. She could go to hell. What did she know about life, he thought.

The strange little war in the South Atlantic turned ugly last week as a British nuclear submarine sank a huge Argentine cruiser and a \$200,000 Argentine Exocet missile demolished a \$50 million British destroyer. There! That was life. Not that *she'd* care. You've been drinking. The length, breadth, height and depth of her mentality. He hated her. She was always there, a walking cancer, handcuffed to his life. He should never have listened to her, never allowed her to bite her way in. It was a trap. He'd been duped. Time he showed her who was in charge.

He searched for the keys. Swore. Found them. Soon the freeway sucked him along, past the city, past suburbs. There was little traffic. It cheered him. He drove fast, his anger receding. She was a woman. He'd have to remember that. He remembered the gun, in his pocket, pressing against his thigh. He carried it everywhere. Mine, he thought. He smiled, allowed the alcohol to carry him home.



Whatever Happened to Rosie?

In our issue no. 92, last year, *Overland* launched a literary competition on which we now report. It's success – a large number of excellent entries – was far beyond our expectations, and we had great difficulty in selecting the best from a close field. The prize, a copy of the recently-published *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations*, has been awarded to Ron Stevens, of Hornsby, New South Wales.

His entry, and those of some of the 'highly commended', are printed below, with our thanks to all contributors on behalf of ourselves and our readers.

The competition was based on a statement by Mr James Paxton, of Toorak, Victoria, in an article on his youth published in the *Melbourne Age*. Here he described how a parlormaid of his mother's was found by her employers, "naked and voluptuously sprawled on the white lamb's wool hearth-rug", on their return from the theatre:

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.

We are so pleased with the success of this competition that we are calling on our readers for suggestions for another. Prizes will be awarded for both the accepted suggestion and the eventual winner.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ROSIE

On Prince's Bridge from suicide
poor Rosie was restrained:
a kindly gent, he would provide
a flat where she'd be trained

to entertain some lonely blokes
whose wives were frigid frumps
with fireless hearths, no poking jokes
and most un-rosy rumps.

Supplied with brandy, heat (coal-fired),
libidinous lamb's-wool,
her lustful tale was soon admired
from Kew to Collingwood.

Which frankly troubled Mr West
who feared the hearty story
would reach police, she'd face arrest –
a flower without glory.

So change of name and place-of-work
became the pimpish plan:
"Merino Flo" in Little Bourke;
"Coal-scuttle Kate", Prahran.

In every knock-shop that he chose
she'd lay a lambs-wool sheet.
By any other name this Rose
could make a bedroom sweet.

She died at ninety-two, well-stewed,
while 'at it' by the fire,
roseate with turpitude,
in Toorak, and For Hire.

RON STEVENS

OUR LAST HOUSEMAID

That's our last housemaid painted on the wall,
Looking disturbingly alive. I call
That piece of wonder, now; Bill Dobell's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands –
Well, yes, she lies. Sir, that maid would sprawl
On hearth-mats, bath-mats, in the hall,
Or Mrs. Paxton's drawing-room. The worst thing
Was the coal. The wretched girl would fling
Lumps of the stuff where e'er she chose.
My mother warned her, "Rose,
You must find another home. You can't recline
Forever in this house. Find some nice mine –
Yallourn perhaps would suit." Well, now she rests
In Springvale – or maybe Dandenong ... I think my guests
Await our prompt return. Oh, sir, you didn't understand:
Rose is lying with a bunch of plastic dahlias in her hand
On a fake-fur leopard skin – no, of course she isn't dead,
She is in the Saba slumber section, demonstrator of a
water-bed.

Notice before we go, this sculpture by some Boyd or other,
Picked up in the Toorak Op. Shop about a year ago
by Mother;
I mean those pottery cockies standing on the rosewood
table –
I know it's just a whim, but I've named them Dave
and Mabel.

"LUCKY DAVE"

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ROSIE?

Down from toorak, hot with shame,
Down the princes highway the virgin rosie came
and the band played through berwick and pakenham,
drouin and warragul perched precariously on the back
of their truck,
and the miners all yelled and cavorted,
"there's a new madam in town" and the word sped
like grassfire
that a good fuck could be had for a pound.

she finally settled in morwell, fixed up a house for her
girls,
dressed them in fine lace and baubles,
put velvet curtains on windows
and erotically papered the walls.
Then she opened her doors to the hard men
who worked down in the open cut
and they'd come in with smiles on their faces,
their bodies covered with black dust,
their arm hairs poking like seedlings
while their voices were gravelled and rough.

And the still virgin rosie would near swoon at the smell,
for unlike prometheus, it wasn't the flame that excited her,
it was the coal.

So, late, when all the girls were done,
the dark night would beckon her
and she would wander the fields, feel the brute throbbings
of the ancient seams beneath her feet
and she would dream of lying there and dying,
sinking through the brief compost of the soil
then bonding with her beloved coal.

which, finally, is what she did.

SHELTON LEA

THE LAST (OF THE) ROSE OF TOORAK

Prologue of Paxtons:

*Go wanton Rose, from here this instant, you shame
Our chaste domestic fireplace with your pose!
What's more, oh sottish soul, you've wasted coal!*

The 'glories' of Toorak she left behind.
Clutching her shabby bag she trudged the street
Until she met a police sergeant on his beat.
Suspicious, at this hour of freezing morn
He peered into her beauteous face forlorn.
"You *look* respectable" he growled. "Oh yes!
I am but a flawed flower in distress."

"Come then sweet Rose
To where the Station's cheerful fire glows."
He, gallant seemed not to hear
One last nostalgic hiccup below his ear.

Th' bedraggled beauty
Snoozed gratefully; the constable on desk-duty
Had fetched a rug and cushion for her chair
And, while she slept, fell mad in love with her.

Waking, she pleaded loss of memory.
That day she signed the Pledge and went T.T.
They wed. Sad! Sad! In marriage she was a prude.
He never saw her naked – far too rude!

The Paxtons failed to recognise in the street
Her fecund figure bustling by, discreet –
Baby in pram, fat toddlers round her feet
A Rose, with wedding ring, can swell as sweet.

Only, at home, one whim disturbed her mate:
She'd have no hearthrug set before their grate.
"These polished tiles are sharp and cold" he'd cry.
"But ne'er the Rose without the thorn," she'd sigh.

NANCY KEESING

ROSIE HEADS FOR CLOVER

Been working on it I have, high time to
think about me future, not that I've been
unhappy here, they've been kind even real
good to me, but me mind's now made up

Plenty of time will relax a bit all alone
stoked up the fire there's plentiful supplies
stacked on sideboard shelves, I'll guzzle a bit
tidy up loose ends of my well thought-out plan

Luverly feeling all warm inside and out
blazing fire lights up the room strewn with
empties and me petticoats, I'm thinking of my
well-built miner carrying his hessian bag of gold

Always lounged against the Toorak pub bar he'd
eye me off like, give me the 'come on' he would,
suit me fine I'd have bonza kids, could cook for him
got his address, just one more bottle then call a cab.

CHARLES RIMINGTON

THE TOAST OF TOORAK

Rosie rose with a rosy glow
swaying gently to and fro.

With cheeks bright red and eyes coal black,
each breast a small, plump flour sack,
her belly smooth, and lower down
a patch of thick and curly brown
she smiled at the trio standing there
with unbelieving, wide-eyed stare.

The father knew not what to say
while his wife, low-moaning, swooned away.
"Aw, crumbs!" young Jimmy Paxton said
when his father ordered him to bed.

And now the master took command
and led his servant by the hand
to her attic room, and shouted "Dress!"

(But after what, who'd dare to guess?)

Of course poor Rosie got the sack,
but her fame soon spread all round Toorak
and many a lonely bachelor's digs
as well as those of some big wigs
were open house for voluptuous Rosie
who always made a hearth seem cosy –

For what cheers more when Melbourne's chilly,
with Hughie emptying his billy,
and the Bass Strait demon blowing his trumpet
than a good hot fire and toasted crumpet?

MONA BRAND

WALTER CROCKER

The Riddle of Herbert Evatt

A discussion of Alan Renouf's *Let Justice Be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr H.V. Evatt* (University of Queensland Press, \$19.95).

Justice is done to H.V. Evatt in this book.

The former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Alan Renouf, is well equipped for the task. He has had a long career in international relations, including senior ambassadorships, among others to France and to the USA, and several years inside the UN Secretariat. He has served in Europe, and on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and in Africa as well as in North America. Trained in Law, he also speaks French and Spanish. His colleagues have appreciated his hard work, his commitment and his intellect. Renouf began his career under Evatt and served as his assistant from time to time.

He has been unusual among those who worked with Evatt in that he liked him as well as admired his gifts. His book makes it clear that he had much sympathy and much generosity of spirit for Evatt the man, as well as much understanding of what Evatt the Foreign Minister was driving at, but that this does not impair his objectivity. His probing for the truth is assiduous, and he paints in the warts with relentless veracity. The warts turn out to be far from insignificant.

Renouf is convinced, however, that Evatt's gifts and Evatt's contribution to Australia's foreign relations far outweigh his failings. The latter have been allowed to obscure his achievements. Gifts of the kind which Evatt had, says Renouf, have been uncommon in Australia where "unusual talent is a rarity in national politics, which attracts the mediocre or worse ... little tradition of service to the people."

Beginning with the beginning, Renouf tells us that Evatt, born in 1894, was the fifth of eight children, all sons. His father, born in India, but coming to Australia from Ireland at the age of sixteen, worked his way up to become the licensee of a hotel in East Maitland in NSW. The environment during the first ten years – those highly formative years – of Evatt's life could not have been easy. Poverty was always there. His father died when he was seven. His mother, a woman of character, a survivor, carried on the hotel for three years and then moved to Sydney. How she supported herself and family is not explained. Probably the elder sons helped. She lost two of her sons in World War I. Evatt, spurred on by his mother, put his mental endowment and his capacity for passing examinations to good use, winning first a secondary and then a tertiary education.

He was only seventeen when in 1911 he won a scholarship to the university. He acquired an Arts degree with high honors and the university medal, and then went on to the Law School where he again finished with high honors and the university medal. He was called to the Bar in 1918. Before long he won a Doctorate of Laws, with a thesis on the royal prerogative in colonial legislatures.

He also became engaged to Mary Alice Sheffer, "the daughter of a well-to-do American businessman who had moved to Australia ... an Architecture student with socialist ideas." Evatt and she, Renouf writes, "formed an association the closeness of which never faltered throughout their lives." He does not add that they had no children of their own, though they adopted two, or that her wealth guaranteed Evatt a safe distance henceforth from the poverty which had made his early years harsh.

That milieu was now behind him forever. No man had less affinity with pubs or the proletariat than Evatt the adult, the owner of Picasso and other valuable pictures. The couple could afford to travel overseas. His own success at the Bar, notably in industrial and defamation cases, reinforced the guarantee from poverty. In 1925, when he was thirty-one, he won a seat in the State Parliament as a Labor MP, though in his university days he seems to have been a Liberal insofar as he showed any interest in politics. He spoke little in Parliament. He was active enough at the Bar to be made a KC in 1929. In the following year the Federal Government under Scullin appointed him to the High Court of Australia. At thirty-six he was the youngest ever appointed.

The High Court, it seems, was not enough to absorb Evatt's formidable energy. In 1936 he published *The King and his Dominion Governors*, in 1937 *Injustice within the Law* (on the Tolpuddle martyrs), in 1938 *Rum Rebellion*, and then his biography of W.A. Holman, *Australian Labor Leader*. It was at this time that he visited the United States and performed in the manner that was Evatt at his most characteristic: he wrote a personal letter to no less a person than President Roosevelt criticizing the Supreme Court of the US and recommending that the President appoint Frankfurter to it in order to make it more progressive.

By this time Evatt had decided to enter federal politics if the opportunity arose. It did arise in 1940, and he won the Sydney seat of Barton. The Second World War had arrived, and Evatt seems to have made it known to Menzies, the Prime

Minister, that he would be happy to serve under or with him. Whatever approaches Evatt might have made came to nothing. Menzies was defeated in 1941 and Evatt became Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs, ranking third in Curtin's Cabinet. For the next eight and a half years he continued to hold these two portfolios, becoming Deputy Prime Minister under Chifley in 1946.

Renouf examines Evatt's activities as Foreign Minister in about 250 pages. Reasons of space prevent our going into detail, enlightening though that is. We will have to limit ourselves to the main lines, and with brevity.

During the years 1941-45 Evatt had to give much time and effort to the war and the day-to-day emergencies, including not a little work as Attorney General, but it is clear that his dominating interest was foreign affairs. He was bent on evolving policy, and especially as policy related to the world which would follow on the end of the war. This meant awakening and educating the Cabinet, the Labor Party and, to no small degree, Australians in general. All three of these categories had almost no interest in foreign policy matters. The task was the more demanding because Evatt, though much of his thinking had been foreshadowed by the few Australian Prime Ministers who had any interest in foreign affairs, namely Deakin, Hughes, and Bruce, was innovative over and above the fact that he could rarely do anything without producing an atmosphere of disturbance and tension. Such was his purposefulness, and his courage, that he travelled overseas again and again. This had to be by air. Like Tito and Kenyatta, he had a great fear of air travel under any circumstances, while under the circumstances of war it had extra dangers; but he never avoided the travelling.

His general foreign policy principle according to Renouf was that, while power was a reality and was largely concentrated in a few large states, morality and justice should be made to count for more than in the past. As the great powers had no monopoly on wisdom, there was all the more need to give the small powers a right to be heard. This attitude made Evatt an internationalist, and predisposed him to the UN whenever it should be set up. But it did not make him the simpleton about security which some of his political enemies made out. He never lost sight of Australia's security needs, even if at times he was wrong-headed about them. He never ceased to be, however inconsistently, an Australian nationalist. Thus all along he remained strongly committed to the White Australian Policy, then among the first of our sacred cows and, correlatively, to the rights of domestic jurisdiction. At the UN he insisted on Australia's right to control immigration in whatever way she chose.

His nationalism, once the UN was established, could become strident, at times near to ridiculous. He could certainly be too assertive about Australia's importance in the world, which in truth was relatively slight. Critics, foreign, notably UN members, as well as some Australians, not all in the Opposition, came to feel that the assertiveness often was more about the importance of Evatt than of Australia. He got Australia made a member of the first Security Council, and he got the Presidency of the General Assembly for Australia, that is to say for Evatt.

His loudly avowed concern about human rights – in February 1947 he proposed that the UN set up an international

Court of Human Rights which should be open to aggrieved individuals as well as to states – had elements which would strike this generation as affronting two of its own sacred cows, equality and non-discrimination. Thus he clamored for full vengeance against the war criminals at Nuremberg, and he was loud in damning the failure, forced on the Allies by MacArthur and the Americans in one of their wiser moods, to try the Emperor of Japan as a war criminal; he deplores the fact that only seven Japanese war criminals were executed. He described the mildness of the trials "the greatest defeat of justice, a very travesty of the very principles for which the war was fought." He showed no regrets about the hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians slaughtered within a few terrible weeks by conventional bombing in the Tokyo-Yokohama area, and then by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Evatt's critics after the war, by which time Russia, the erstwhile ally, had taken the place of Germany and Japan as the feared enemy, charged that he was pro-Russian, indeed was pro-Communist. Renouf is convinced that Evatt was always, and firmly, against all totalitarianism, but that he refused to be frightened of Communism. At one point, however, he adds that Evatt's "assessment of Russia's intent was well removed from reality" (p. 113).

The Australian-New Zealand Agreement of January 1944 (on which Sir Paul Hasluck has thrown interesting light in his *Diplomatic Witness*) illustrated Evatt's concern with security for Australia. It also illustrated his flawed judgement and his inadequacies in diplomacy. Renouf goes so far as to describe this agreement as "the biggest mistake Evatt made as a Minister . . . The circumstances were extenuating but not of such an order as to excuse the magnitude of the error" (p. 126). The extenuating circumstances were that in 1943, both in the Moscow Declaration and in the Cairo Declaration, the United States and Britain had failed to consult Australia beforehand. The United States, in particular, was already showing a high-handedness which has since become familiar, and was working out its own spheres of influence. This was exemplified as regards bases in the Pacific; later the Manus island affair typified US, not Evatt's, shortcomings. Evatt countered with the policy of what in effect was to make the Pacific south of the Equator an Australian zone of influence and part of it a zone of defence, and he put this into a treaty, not just into a declaration. He told the United States, or other allies, nothing about it beforehand. The US government learnt of it "with suppressed outrage." Cordell Hull found it "outrageous." Not for the first time, he complained of Evatt's bad manners. He saw the Agreement as a claim for an Australian Monroe Doctrine in the Pacific.

Britain had already taken Evatt's measure. Whether it was with Evatt in mind or not, Churchill is recorded as once bursting out, "Australia is our greatest obstacle in the winning of the War." But later, when Churchill met the redoubtable Bert, he regaled him with such charm that Evatt was won over, so much so that he arranged the difficult exercise of giving Churchill a platypus.

That Evatt's policies were pretentious and unrealistic became more and more an article of faith in Washington. Evatt's visits there and his general demeanor did nothing to dispel distaste. Admiral Leahy, one of Roosevelt's 'czars' at



the time, found Evatt's accent and English as laughable as his pretensions. Evatt was in truth making demands for "forward defence" in the post-war world; and there was virtually no prospect of realizing them. For instance, instead of Australia's being able to police the South Pacific as Evatt adumbrated, there were only a thousand infantrymen in the whole Australian Army by the time Evatt ceased to be Foreign Minister in 1949. There was great difficulty in sending a mere battalion to Korea in 1950. Moreover, Washington was surely right in thinking that "no area in the world was less in need of a special security arrangement than the South West Pacific." Evatt's eyes were on Japan and so on the past, surprisingly little on the future, and with surprisingly little insight into strategy at all.

For us today the main interest of the controversy about the defence of the South Pacific is Evatt's way of working – his deviousness, his untruthfulness, and his taste for intrigue. Renouf gives a number of examples (for instance on p. 152). At one point, referring to 1946, Renouf writes: "Evatt acted extraordinarily. Leaving aside the failure, apparently, to inform Chifley, he acted behind the back of Britain and New Zealand with whom Australia was in negotiations ... he ascribes the Pacific Conference concept to Britain when he himself had invented it ... He was urging joint action by the British Commonwealth yet went off and talked secretly, and differently, to the other party, the US."

As for Australia's newest neighbor, Indonesia, Sukarno in August 1947 declared Indonesia a republic and independent

of the Netherlands. Evatt's part in what followed was complicated, illustrating his good points as well as his bad. The good points were misunderstood in Australia as well as in the outside world, especially in the Netherlands. Renouf shows that Evatt, for some time at least, wanted to preserve the Dutch presence in Indonesia if only in the interests of Australia's security, that personally he was disgusted with the part played by Australian trade unions against the Dutch, and that he disagreed with much of Chifley's pro-Indonesian sympathies. But, writes Renouf, "unhappily the Netherlands did not understand Evatt; his ways were too non-European, he was not a 'gentleman'" (p. 188). The Dutch overlooked the fact too, that this defender of the White Australia Policy "was seldom comfortable with people of non-European countries" (p. 187). And Australian as well as Dutch critics overlooked the fact that Evatt wanted – as later Spender wanted, but Barwick, like Menzies, changed ideas – West Irian to be excluded from Indonesia. On the other hand, during the famous Dutch "police action" in Indonesia in 1948, Evatt as President of the UN General Assembly made a formal communication to the UN which criticized, not only the Dutch, but the US as well. This, Renouf says, "went beyond the reasonable limits ... the US was very angry at Evatt's behaviour."

Matters concerning Japan, greatly important in Australia because so many Australian families had suffered from Japanese action, and public opinion was more hostile to Japan than was American public opinion, illustrates once more the mixture of rightness and wrongness characteristic of so many of Evatt's attitudes and of his way of doing business. Thus he disavowed the work of MacMahon Ball, Australia's representative on the Far Eastern Council, who had been carrying out with loyalty Evatt's policy to stand up to MacArthur – a policy not unheeded in the view of the meglomaniacal pretensions which even the Viceroy Curzon at his most imperial in India would have eschewed – because Evatt suddenly changed course. MacArthur had come around to urge what Evatt wanted, namely an early peace treaty with Japan.

Renouf is at pains to point out that there was more to, or before, Evatt's foreign policy than the United Nations. This is true. But Evatt's biggest achievement, and surely he himself thought so, was firstly, what he did at the San Francisco Conference in April-June 1945 when the constitution of the new body, the United Nations, to replace the old League of Nations was finalized, and secondly, what he did in this body during the first three years of its existence. This culminated in his becoming President in 1948. Indeed Renouf himself says as much: Evatt's UN days were when he:

... reached the pinnacle of his fame ... at the San Francisco Conference he received more acclaim than at any time in his career ... The occasion was made to measure for him. It was the first time he had the opportunity to figure on the world scene ... The nature of the Conference was such that he could display all his great talents – energy, which at San Francisco became demonic, intelligence, and legal skills, his brilliance in constitutional law, in procedure and persuasion ... gave Evatt the chance to try and secure at one and the same time

various objectives of foreign policy – security for Australia and for the world as a whole, justice, and the recognition of his country's worth and its right to be heard. It also gave him the chance to shine, to win yet another prize.

It also, Renouf admits, allowed Evatt to “demonstrate weaknesses in his thinking . . . and in his methods” (pp. 217-18).

Renouf says little of the comic side, occasionally hugely comic, noted by various participants or observers, particularly the battles between the Evatt forces and those of his nominal superior, Forde, the Deputy Prime Minister, during those frenzied months at San Francisco. But he goes into useful detail about the lively issues – the veto, revising the UN Charter, the authority of the General Assembly, membership of the Security Council, regional security, full employment, domestic jurisdiction (including immigration and the White Australia Policy), colonies (on which the US lined up with the USSR against the UK, and Evatt lined up with the US and USSR), and the International Court.

Renouf believes that there is nothing in Australia's diplomatic annals to surpass Evatt's brilliant virtuosity at San Francisco. It “made Australia known universally, and made it known as a country of courage, responsibility and liberalism” (p. 235). There could be and there are other views on Evatt's effects, more especially on how, as regards colonies or as regards his agitation and leadership of the small powers, he had opened Pandora's box. Renouf himself writes how “many years later” he came to see that Evatt's victories were “largely paper gains . . . There is something superficial about Evatt's performance at San Francisco . . . he tended to lose sight of the realities of world politics” (pp 236-7). It was Sir Paul Hasluck, at the conference as a senior adviser to Evatt, who concluded his account of the conference: “we [the Australian delegation] may have helped to make a slightly better document but I don't think that we helped to make a better world situation.”

Evatt's euphoria about the United Nations, and perhaps a strain of megalomania in him, was such by 1945-46 that he, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, had himself designated as Chief of Australia's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. This extraordinary vintage Evattism embarrassed the protocol branch of the UN Secretariat, and it amused Washington while at the same time it confirmed its views on Evatt.

From the time of the conference until his fall from office in 1949, Evatt gave most of his energy to the UN. He was especially active, and indelicate, in lobbying to get himself made President in 1948. The matters which took up much of the time of the UN in those years were, firstly the destruction of Palestine and the expulsion of the Arab majority in order to create Israel; secondly the rise and the explosion of the anti-colonial and the anti-European, almost the anti-White, movement; and thirdly, the sinister development of the Cold War. The nuclear bombs dropped on Japan seemed to us in the UN to have destroyed not only Hiroshima and Nagasaki but the UN world security system itself, such was the fright given to the ever suspicious Russian allies. The United Nations ceased to be United, still less united for peace, its proclaimed *raison d'être*. It became a battleground itself.

Evatt seems to have missed much of the significance of

these three developments. He went on, especially in Australia, grossly ignoring failures and the self-evident limitations of the UN and grossly exaggerating its achievements (which were almost nonexistent in any substantive sense) and its prospects. His final ministerial statement in Parliament in June 1949 carried, in Renouf's words, “commendation almost to the point of absurdity.” The Berlin Blockade at this time had not long been broken too.

The three or four years following Evatt's dazzling days at San Francisco saw him first as Deputy Leader and then as Leader of the Opposition to the Menzies Government, which came to power in 1949. He steadily lost ground, not only with Menzies, for whom he was less and less a match, but with the Australian public. These years were a sorry anti-climax. His abilities were wilting, his nerve was going, and he was subject to vilification, at times to cruel misrepresentation, which by temperament he could not endure. He himself was his own worst enemy. Thus in 1955, when the Menzies Government was making much of the Petrov Affair, Evatt, who was already regarded in certain not insignificant quarters as pro-Communist, wrote to Molotov personally to ask him whether some of the documents brought before the Royal Commission on Petrov were authentic. Molotov replied that the documents were fabrications by persons interested in damaging Australian-Russian relations. This predictable reply led Evatt to argue in Parliament that an international commission, presumably under the UN, should be set up “to settle Australia's dispute with Russia. It will be in a position to prove clearly, definitely and unequivocally that the letters are fabricated.” This intervention of Evatt's made it much too easy for Menzies. He naturally did not lose such an opportunity for moving into the kill. Renouf's judgement is that Evatt committed political suicide: that he displayed “a naivety and a lack of realism which was almost incredible. It also reflected sympathy for the Soviet Union which his behaviour over the years had suggested had long since diminished” (p. 273). It was indeed sad to witness the decay of such aptitudes in a man who for all his faults had tried to do and indeed had done, much for his country, and who still was right in some great but unpopular matters such as the need to recognize Communist China.

Renouf gives his conclusions on Evatt in his final chapter. They are that Evatt was personally ambitious and had a craving to be noticed, neither of which traits, he adds, is a crime. He was an Australian patriot with an intense love of Australia. He was also internationalist. He was assertive, but it was largely to get the attention for Australia which he thought was called for, even if at times he was abrasive, “frequently beyond reason.” What he did was to put Australia on the map and give it a coherent foreign policy. He wanted an Australian diplomatic service of quality. On the other hand he failed to foresee developments in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s; he failed to see the world that was rapidly and drastically re-shaping itself. The UN which he had known consisted of fifty members. Renouf could have added that today it consists of more than three times that number.

Evatt's personality, Renouf concludes, was complex. Most Western diplomats disliked him and distrusted him; they saw in him “excessive egoism, deviousness, unfairness

to staff, and disloyalty to colleagues and to his Prime Ministers." Renouf even concedes a larrikin side to him. Yet, loyal though Evatt was to the Labor Party, at bottom he was both conservative and liberal in the true, as opposed to the Party, sense of those two words, says Renouf. The time has come to make a fair judgement on him. "Silly and ill-informed comments that are still made – such as that Evatt admired the Chinese Communists – should be ended." He was "a world statesman and a great Australian."

Renouf has written an important book on a significant figure at a significant point in Australia's history. He has sought out and expressed the truth to the best of his ability, which is considerable. He is never trivial, never mean, never smart and never ill-informed. His loyalty to an old superior, now dead and gone and little remembered, is admirable.

Some readers are likely to feel, however, that certain gaps have been left unclosed. There is for instance little or nothing about the setting up of ASIO, about the battles between Evatt's Department of External Affairs and the Defence Department, about the Bank Nationalization case (in which Evatt, though not only Minister of External Affairs at the time but also President of the UN General Assembly, insisted on appearing before the Privy Council in person), or about Evatt's role in opposing the appointment of either Spaak or Lester Pearson, and in pushing for the appointment of Trygve Lie, as founding Secretary General of the UN, or about Evatt's part in the creation of Israel, or his relations with Governor Lehmann and other members of *la haute juiverie* of New York, or about Evatt's inner court, such as Burton and the court jester, Atyeo.

He says nothing about certain stories, true or false, bearing on Evatt's character, such as the falsification of age in his application for the Rhodes Scholarship or his efforts at Paris in 1948 to get the *Legion d'Honneur*, and little about his marriage which manifestly was a crucial factor in Evatt's life. He does not raise the question why Evatt, with all his ability, and all his authority for some years, has left no document, no speech, no phrase even, which is remembered or memorable – nothing like Menzies chiding the British that what for them was the Far East was for Australia the Near North. Renouf discusses Evatt's character at several points. He says that Evatt was, among other things, kind to the afflicted, affectionate with children, loyal to those attached to him; but, also, and rather severely for an admirer, that he needed recognition and praise, was suspicious, unforgiving, used people for his own ends, could be mean and devious, and had a strain of larrikinism.

The total impact of the book is that Evatt had gifts of mind above average, he had ideas, some good and much needed, some not, about foreign policy, he made quite a rattle on the world stage for a few years, and he had more private virtues than his critics allowed. But, for one reader at least, he was something of an ass, to put the best construction on his doings.

Those who worked under Evatt or saw him at close quarters are now relatively few. Renouf's impression recollected in tranquility therefore have an added value. They supplement the somewhat different impressions of other contemporaries, notably Sir Alan Watt and Sir Paul Hasluck, both of whom when working with Evatt were at a higher level than Renouf

was. Sir Alan has not written at length about Evatt, only incidentally, as in his review of Kylie Tennant's biography, or, notably, in his *Australian Diplomat*. Sir Alan, could, like the rest of the human race, make mistakes, but the Department of Foreign Affairs never had an acuter mind, a more dedicated or courageous spirit or an integrity more unassailable (if at times somewhat prickly) than his. He wrote, too, with long and high office behind him, including the headship of the Department, and he wrote with a command of English which is uncommon in Canberra, as were his occasional shafts of deadly wit. What he wrote on Evatt cannot be ignored.

Sir Paul Hasluck also had a mind not a tittle inferior to Evatt's, and by the time he came to set down his impressions, notably in *Diplomatic Witness* (not cited in the bibliography, nor is P.G. Edwards), he had had experience of high office, first as Cabinet Minister and then as Governor General, longer and higher than Evatt had known; he also had a knowledge of international relations deeper as well as wider than Evatt's. Renouf's view on Evatt needs to be supplemented by the series of Hasluck's vignettes which are lightly and wittily etched, without meanness or lack of compassion, very revealing and at times devastating.

As for myself, I never worked with or under Evatt but I had some contact with him. I watched him in action during his salad days at the UN between 1946 and 1948; and later I happened to live opposite to him in Canberra for nearly two years. He was always amiable enough with me. But it would have taken more than the honeyed courtesy to make me forget what I heard at the UN – the way he held forth and carried on. I can still see him moving from room to room surrounded by his court, at times a dozen or so of his officers, perhaps including Oliphant the physicist, or a man destined in future years to be Governor General of Australia, and at times loudly berating one or other of the entourage, for all the world to hear, or the court jester Sam Atyeo instigating noisy laughter among the troop. It was a spectacle as authentically Australian as galvanized iron, tomato sauce bottles, or fly covers.

Australia had its identity at the early UN all right. Evatt's officers had to put up with him. Delegates to the UN, or officials inside the UN, did not. In general they disliked and often they distrusted him, and at times they ridiculed him with no diplomatic finesse. C.K. Webster of the British Foreign Office, who had worked out and wrote the basic draft of the UN Charter, complained at San Francisco that Evatt was "a really malignant man . . . egotistical and ambitious." Before San Francisco, close observers in Canberra, like the British High Commissioner and the American Ambassador, while admiring Curtin were shocked by Evatt, especially by his unfairness to his subordinates, disloyalty to his colleagues and the way he vilified R.G. Casey and Owen Dixon in Washington and Bruce in London. Yet such was the complexity of Evatt's make-up that both Sir Keith Officer and Alfred Stirling, both from a non-Labor milieu, praised Evatt to me, and I heard Lord Casey speak up for him.

It was in the UN itself that I could see how unfounded and how misleading were the claims on behalf of the UN made by Evatt and highly publicized in Australia, how damaging in fact the UN could well become. It was in 1947 and 1948 that

one of Evatt's senior officials gave a press interview in New York, but meant mainly for Australia, announcing that "thanks to Dr. Evatt, Australia has now become a major Power." (Renouf does not refer to the alleged directives that Evatt's name had to be mentioned in all Australian interventions in the UN.)

Ten years later the N.S.W Labor Premier of the day, Cahill, was my guest at the Australian residence in Ottawa, for several days. I got him on to Evatt whom he had known for thirty years. His views were more than critical, and he brought in the brother Clive as well. They accorded with much of what Sir Frederick Eggleston used to tell me on my frequent visits to him during his latter, bed-ridden years. He knew Evatt well, he was at the San Francisco Conference, and he had the standards of comparison he gained by working at the Paris Peace Conference with Hughes (whom he described as "a paragon of the cad and the liar"). He had a good deal of admiration for Evatt's performance, but in the end was disappointed.

At the UN Evatt's skills as I saw them were considerable but they were mainly the lawyer's, rarely, if ever, the statesman's, skills, while the skills of the diplomat were nearly always absent. We had no right to expect this version of the wild colonial boy to be like Talleyrand, but it did come as a surprise, as it did to Eggleston, and apparently to Renouf, that he had little knowledge of or interest in history or historical geography. Indeed my own impression was that Evatt, for all his proclaimed interest in modern art, had little culture and virtually no knowledge of literature. He was essentially the examinee type and the legal technician.

His lack of feeling for tradition might have accounted for the contempt for aristocrats mentioned by Renouf, though where or how he saw or knew about aristocrats is not mentioned. His outlook on the world seemed to be oddly blinkered in more than one respect. Africa and Asia, except for the enemy Japan, and to some extent our close neighbor Indonesia, did not exist for him. The exaggerated strategical importance he gave to the South West Pacific was on a par with the exaggerated importance he gave to the UN. He seems to have had little grasp of the fact that strategically speaking the world was rapidly becoming one.

As for the colonial world about which Evatt created so much disturbance, the results of the sudden liquidation of the British, French and other European colonies has turned out to be horrible for the majority in the colonies and damaging for the UN, of whose 150-odd members about two-thirds are

ex-colonies with regimes too often like those of Idi Amin, Obote, Boukassa and the like. Their clamorous delegates at the numerous UN meetings tend to represent cliques of gangsters from the over-big local armies who have usurped power by brutal force, and exercise it with pitiless tyranny.

Evatt's lack of balance in intellectual matters went with a lack of balance in his inner self. He had, remarkably, much in common with Krishna Menon, whom Nehru, to his cost, made his *alter ego* for a while in those years.

Disequilibrium is not rare, even in men of notable intellect. It is clearly not uncommon in public figures, who in any case tend to be driven by an urge to get out in front, an urge to exhibitionism. People seeing Evatt for the first time might well have been struck, as I was, by his face. It showed alertness of mind and an absence of coarseness or hedonism, in some guises a winning face; yet there was also some hint of incompleteness, even of immaturity; and when he was thwarted there was no disguise of an ugly paranoia. Sir Robert Menzies was somewhat less than perfect, but there was no such immaturity in his face, just as in his inner life there was a quiet centre of sanity and happiness. Evatt, *tout court*, lacked balance.

Renouf's book, informative, intelligent and honest, an undeniable contribution to our knowledge, is written with some grace and verve, and it recalls and explains much that should be remembered. But it is not the last word. What he writes needs to be related to what his contemporaries like Sir Paul Hasluck and Sir Alan Watt have written. The last word will probably never be written. It should surely be one of sorrow, not anger, that such big gifts should have gone with such a little spirit.

When one thinks of Evatt one thinks of Meredith's lines:

In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be;
Passions spin the plot,
We are betrayed by what is false
within.

Sir Walter Crocker served in the United Nations Secretariat from 1946 to 1950 as a representative of the British Foreign Office. Subsequently he was the founding Professor of International Relations at the Australian National University, and later served Australia in a number of high diplomatic posts. Sir Walter has recently published an autobiography, Travelling Back, and a biography, Sir Thomas Playford. Until recently he was Lieutenant Governor of South Australia.

TUNNEL VISION

SUPPORT SYD VICIOUS
CUT A SLUT

JESUS SAVES AT THE WALES

WHO ARE YOU IF YOU'RE NOT?

CREAMINESS CONTROLS YOU
OR YOU CONTROL THE CREAMINESS

screaming without words
she runs through the tunnel
straight at them
shock opening like flowers
on the faces of the oncoming
motorists
her purple dress is ripped
to the waist so it has
become skirt only
her bare round creamy breasts
assault the pity
& the rapist
behind the many
masks of 'motorist'
her face is contorted in
the scream everything
in her life is concentrated
behind it
she is either stoned out of her mind
just raped
so hopeless in her life
that whatever happens
will be better
drivers make
stories up
to fit some fiction
to the picture

it is 12 o'clock noon tube
white fluorescent
inside the road tunnel
she is running on
into the citybound traffic
cars part noiselessly
around her the traffic
streams into the city &
her bare feet & bare
breasts & scream
continue outwards towards
rushcutters bay & later
on to rose
bay if she makes it

drivers leaving the tunnel
blink at the sunlight
her image is off
their eyes but she is running
inside them as they enter
the city
all day they wonder
did somebody
rape her? again?
did she find
shelter?
her feet were busted
by the road – they were
bleeding
did some christ-of-the-tunnel
get out of his car
& kiss & wash her feet? *risking*
causing a chain
of deaths
to do so.

she is gone ... going home
through the tunnel
drivers see
SUPPORT SYD VICIOUS CUT A SLUT's
become 'feminised':
SUPPORT C.S.R. ROT
SYD VICIOUS WITH SUGAR

& JESUS FUCKS AT THE WALES
WHO ARE YOU IF YOU'RE NOT
MY GREAT AUNT FANNY

a female
form
its flesh & rags
in fragments
sea-sucked
purple
is fished
out of the
gap –
wash by the calm
voice-of-the-evening-news
a fortnight later

J.S. HARRY

books

Blizzard of Id

Alexander Buzo

Craig McGregor: *Soundtrack for the Eighties* (Hodder and Stoughton, \$24.95 and \$12.95).

Glen Lewis: *Real Men Like Violence* (Kangaroo Press, \$6.95).

The vital transition in which people begin to think for themselves can be traced by many to a reading of the series of books on Australia that appeared between 1958 and 1970. They included *Australian Accent* by John Douglas Pringle, *The Lucky Country* by Donald Horne, *Profile of Australia* by Craig McGregor and *The Great Australian Stupor* by Ronald Conway. Craig McGregor now says the commentators got it all wrong and that the days of all-encompassing survey of Australia have waned in favor of more specialised works. These two books are examples of the changes McGregor refers to. Both adopt a radically different stance from that of the all-seeing narrator of the earlier books and concern themselves with shrill personal comments on aspects of Australian life, particularly the media, suburban attitudes and "sexuality". Both books abandon the serene and fallible style of Pringle and company in favor of pop sociology jargon such as "acculturation", "routinisation", and those old favorites from the seventies "input", "supportive" and "awareness".

Readers know they're in different territory in the introduction to the Lewis book, where the author thanks people for their "emotional support", especially his "women friends Trish, Merri, Karen and Gwenda". Can you imagine Pringle or Horne thanking people for their "emotional support" or having "women friends" with names like Trish, Merri, Karen or Gwenda? I can't imagine their having men friends with names like that, either. If the word "incredible" were to be removed from all these books on Australia, then the earlier ones would still have the same number of pages. The later two would be halved.

In embracing this new style Craig McGregor has not, in my view, done himself a service. A previous book of his essays *People, Politics and Pop* (1968) was an entertaining chaser and still repays rereading for its cleansing views on suburban popular culture. Never a great stylist, McGregor nevertheless

had a good eye and a relentless grip on his subject. These qualities are not apparent in *Soundtrack for the Eighties*, in which the author thrashes about in a welter of quotes from other writers, and willy-nilly endorsements of "sexual liberation" movements, "alternative" people, and secondhand thoughts, mainly Gramsci's. Where the author was always in control of his material in *People*, the reverse is true in *Soundtrack*. Where faith in the good sense of "ordinary people" gave *People* a backbone, endorsements of the dour pseudos who make up the various "alternative cultures" give *Soundtrack* a diffuseness and humorlessness that makes things very difficult for the reader.

Glen Lewis has not, it seems to me, put all that emotional support to good use. Focussing on men and the media, Lewis presents the conventional view of Australian men — that they are unable to express emotion, hostile to women, keener on sport than encounter groups, beastly to the poor old gays, much given to domestic violence, and generally horrid all round. Like the McGregor book, *Real Men Like Violence* expresses an abhorrence of the values that "ordinary people" find sustaining, and paints women and gays as the downtrodden victims of some kind of male ruling class. This gives books an unfortunate bleating note at times, and also fails to substantiate the theories being propounded. If women and gays are so deprived, why is it that they form the bedrock of support for the Liberal Party, the Church of England and the Monarchy? Neither of these authors does much more than import a few 1970s theories (many of them outdated if not discredited) and use them to describe Australian society in a rather threadbare and authoritarian way. By doing this McGregor has thrown away his trump card. He used to be one of the few commentators with an intimate knowledge of popular culture and a genuine sympathy for suburban mores. Now he sounds like a 1974 copy of Tharunka.

As in the McGregor book, the media is given a bucketing when it fails to toe the party line as interpreted by Glen Lewis. ABC reporter Peter Ross (one of the few people in *Real Men Like Violence* to have his name spelled correctly) gets a giant serve for being patronising to a prostitute. Another program, "Towards 2000", is the subject of criticism from the author:

The show used conventional sexist roles in its choice of presenters. Sonia Humphries [sic] covered the most domestically oriented science reports dressed in a never-ending variety of fashionable clothes.

The tone is rather like that of the old Women's Role section of the National Times. I haven't seen a copy of this paper for some time, but there used to be a section in which members of the staff or readers – most of them confirmed spinsters – would highlight an excerpt from some other publication – usually the Orbost Rotary Newsletter – and let it stand condemned as “sexist” or unacceptable to the sensibilities of those who ran the column. What they were really saying was “How dare these people be different from us! How dare they refuse to have the same world-view as a tertiary-educated 1970s divorcee living in a renovated inner city terrace!” Anyone who is flippant about “sexuality” or who defends the family – like Bob Ellis or Lyn Barrow – is a target for aggressive abuse by Lewis and is banished from the index. The tone throughout the book is intolerant, authoritarian and patriarcho-dictatorialative (I just made that term up).

The horrible old nuclear family comes in for a predictable bucketing, too, with much praise being heaped on “soft men” and “sexual experimentation” (a felicitous phrase of McGregor's which conjures up people in white coats banging away at each other) in both of these books. Other practices are not viewed so rosily; “Sexual harassment is the next step up the ladder leading towards rape” warns Lewis in the metaphor of the year. He goes on to praise McGregor and Dennis Altman, author of *Coming Out in the Seventies*. In *Soundtrack*, McGregor praises Altman. In reviewing *Soundtrack*, Altman gave McGregor a bucketing for ignoring the Third World. But the boys are all in agreement when it comes to the nuclear family; this is one institution that must go, and the “rising” divorce rate is a good sign. Lewis is also faced with the problem most pop sociologists have. They wish to condemn the masses from a position which is simultaneously majority and minority. Thus Lewis is all for divorce and cites the current rate (usually put at 50 per cent by social workers; the census says less than 10 per cent) as evidence that he is right. Then he has to wriggle out of approving of the masses. The divorce rate is so high, he says, because the idiots are marrying more. Perfect!

It seems a great pity to me that *Soundtrack* and *Violence*, although promising a lot, fail to deliver much in the way of thought or style. If only these authors, and other surveyors of Australia, could shake off the jargon, the facile insights and the New Class soapbox and get out into the real world, then there would be much to find and discuss in this changing country.

Alex Buzo, 39, lives in Sydney. His latest book is Tautology Too, and his play “The Marginal Farm” was produced last year by the Melbourne Theatre Company. He is working on a novel for Angus & Robertson.

Wharfies Don't Cry

Max Piggot

Wendy Lowenstein and Tom Hills: *Under the Hook. Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember: 1900-1980* (Melbourne Bookworkers Press. \$21.50 and \$15.95).

What is a Western Australian farmer doing reviewing a history of the Melbourne waterfront? Admittedly, my credentials are slight: a depression years' water-rat inhabiting, at weekends and after school, the docks and piers of the lower Yarra and Port Melbourne. And during its most turbulent period, the 1930s. It was my playground then; an arena whose players lives were to this child and teenager all too clearly marked by despair, humor, tragedy and acts of great kindness.

My father may have been one of Inspector Mossop's men recalled by Lowenstein's interviewee, Jim Nagel. The plain-clothes constable perhaps who, on Station Pier, called “Fire in the air, lads” was protecting despised scabs working on Outer East. The year was 1928. Hard times were emerging.

There was a trap door hidden by the plain linoleum which covered our sitting-room floor. When my parents were out of the house my mates and I would enter the cob-webbed space for a spine-chilling prowling among the floor stumps. Lon Chaney had recently scared the wits out of us in “Phantom of the Opera”. Below the trap door was a wooden crate holding lengths of hard rubber hose, axe handles and broken lengths of bicycle chain. For all I know they may still be there. We knew, or assumed, they came from the wharves.

And there had been bombings. The authors tell us McIver, Delaney and O'Connell were each sentenced to fifteen years for the Greek Club bombing in Lonsdale Street. My father had reacted by boarding up the front window of our modest terrace house bordering the Pickles Street gasworks. One of his workmates Constable Jefferies did get a bomb thrown into his house. During that period I often walked the half mile to the Bay Street police station with a lunch or dinner for a father I might not see for several days.

Our immediate neighbors were more scared of what might happen than we were. Many of the wharfies knew I was “Dustcoat Joe's” kid. They nicknamed other plain-clothes men “Baby-Face Nelson” and “Clan Robert”. Warnings to stay away from the waterfront did not stop me mingling freely with wharfies at work or while they rested backs against woolbales and packing cases. Except when an important liner was in, few children inhabited the waterfront. Maybe parents did not consider it a ‘nice’ place to play.

After reading *Under The Hooks*, I like to think it was the burly Tom Hills who kicked my arse when he caught me clambering among the huge fitches of Canadian pine lying by Sharpe's South Wharf timber yard. Having visibly hurt me he then deigned to rub the bruised spot with a coarse-gloved hand. I owe my life to another out-of-work wharfie, “Skeeta” Welch, throwing clothes aside as he ran down the beach and swam out to where I was going under in a rip by the old drainage pier.

Sometimes, late into a summer's night, I'd sit fishing with night-shift wharfies off the end of Station Pier. Did our poets and artists know how beautiful were the lower reaches of the Yarra on those mornings when the sea was still, the winches idle and seamen yawned their heads off after a night on the town? “Of all the jobs I ever had it was the job I enjoyed most. Waterside work was hard but I loved it”, says former watersider John Morrison.

We knew waterfront work was eagerly sought after. As a child you sensed the companionship, if you like the mateship, among the wharfies. Port Melbourne was a ‘stick-together’

suburb, strongly Catholic, at least officially, and its inhabitants cohesive supporters of the "Boroughs", the Port Melbourne Football Team. In the mid-1930s my father committed the cardinal sin. On a Saturday at the Boroughs ground he jumped the fence and arrested their star full-back, Joe Garbett, for digging his boots into the back of a fallen opponent. Joe could have been forgiven. Port were playing their arch rivals Northcote. It was a friendly gesture when compared to the mayhem which went on at the watersiders' game in the Saturday morning league.

I last visited the Melbourne waterfront in 1978. The watersiders look much younger and fitter than in my day. Maybe the old-timers hung on because there was no social service pension to back them up. They seemed to stoop habitually. By and large I suspect many wharfies ate better than most laborers living in port-side suburbs. I never found it difficult to do a little innocent pilfering. Many times I would have helped myself to frozen pears or apples from broken cases – did they fall or were they pushed? When night came the wharves took on a different atmosphere. The men worked more quietly; even the rattle of the winches was more subdued. There seemed no menace when being told to "Fuck off" from under a sling, or when sidling too close to the open hatch. Lascar seamen seemed to grin lasciviously at the boy in made-up overlong shorts, often inherited from an older brother. We port kids knew about lasciviousness at an early age. French letters floating in the shallows under Station and Princes Pier were commonplace.

The girls were always on the pier when the RAN ships came in. We kids ogled and wondered what all the excitement was about. It didn't take too long to find out. Social life around the port seemed to centre on an occasional dance, the Pier Hotel and Saturday nights at the Rex, Empire or Kinema picture theatres.

Lowenstein and Hills' book isn't heavy reading – no need to "neck and arse it", as the old wheat lumpers used to say. They and their twenty-nine interviewees have provided an important contribution to Australian oral history. Wharfies never cried on each other's shoulders, and here they don't cry on ours. I hope someone has sent David Williamson a copy of *Under The Hook*. The scenario and dialogue is already written.

Max Piggott is a Western Australian farmer and agricultural journalist.

Recent Fiction

Michael Sexton

Sara Dowse: *West Block* (Penguin \$5.95).

Robert Drewe: *The Bodysurfers* (James Fraser \$6.95).

Nigel Krauth: *Mátilda, My Darling* (George Allen & Unwin Australia \$12.95).

Georgia Savage: *Slate & Me and Blanche McBride* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin \$6.95).

Trevor Shearston: *Sticks That Kill* (University of Queensland Press \$14.95).

This quintet of recent Australian fiction could hardly be more diverse in terms of subject matter and style. Robert Drewe's *The Bodysurfers* has perhaps had the most exposure, aided by a decision to translate these loosely connected short stories into a television series.

Drewe established himself with *The Savage Crows* and *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* as an elegant and powerful writer. His new work carries on that tradition and may even enhance it. His characters, captured with photographic sharpness, inhabit the beachside regions of Perth, Sydney and Los Angeles. On the sands of Scarborough, Tamarama and Malibu, they absorb the sun and oil, they exude sweat and sensuality.

Drewe is an uncanny observer of his chosen denizens of this coastal world, most of whom are upper-middle-class-with-interesting-job-situations. Like David Lang, a Sydney architect having a sabbatical in San Francisco and his wife, Angela, who teaches screen-writing at home. Their encounters with a Sydney retail scion who is living at Malibu produce one of the best stories in the collection. The conversations ring painfully true, although it may be that David Lang is speaking for Drewe when he welcomes any Australian company after the "hot-tubbing, laid-back silkiness of Californian academe."

The smiling avuncular portrait of Drewe on the back-cover is deceptive. He does not like any of his characters and does not let them like each other. This supplies much of the book's power, but also engenders a rather depressing quality. It is, however, probably an accurate reflection of Drewe's Sydney base. Although much of Sydney's population has little or no access to its beaches, the unthinking ethos of the seaside has left its mark on the whole city. And Drewe is quite right to draw a parallel with Southern California. It would be good if Drewe's writing skills could one day be applied to the less arid social patterns of Melbourne and Canberra. He might even find in those places some characters that he likes. But he won't find any beaches there.

Sara Dowse has written about Canberra. The West Block of the title refers to the offices immediately behind Parliament House, where the Prime Minister's Department was located until 1980. Dowse writes about the bureaucracy, and she does so from first-hand experience. Her central character, Cassie Armstrong, heads the section in the department and deals with women's affairs, a position that Dowse held herself in the late 1970s.

There is a striking contrast between the power and importance of the Canberra bureaucracy and the lack of material, fiction or non-fiction, that provides some insights into its working. Dowse's strength is her ability to bring to life the decision-making processes at the senior levels of the Australian public service. She acknowledges much of the professionalism, but also brings out two of the least attractive aspects. One is the way in which the impact of decisions is dulled by the constant honing of policies to meet the objections of competing interest groups *within* the government. The other is the absence of any interest in the basic functions of government – the provision of certain essential services – by many senior public servants. They see these functions as simply job opportunities in the endless Canberra game of snakes and ladders. In this vein Dowse's portrait of Sir Alan

Carmody, who was Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department during her time there, is a particularly damning one.

The book is divided into five stories with some common characters. The links between them are not always successful, but each is intended to have an independent existence. The one dealing with negotiations between Australian and EEC bureaucrats in Brussels on the question of uranium exports is an excellent portrayal of these exercises in attrition. One of Dowse's constantly intrusive characters is Canberra itself. Its striking physical characteristics, accentuated by well-defined seasons, do intrude upon daily life there, and it would be impossible to write accurately about the national capital without trying to explain this.

Dowse's novel ends with the attempted suicide of Cassie Armstrong. Trevor Shearston's *Sticks That Kill* ends with a successful suicide – by Leslie Tyson, a young Australian lawyer who has come to British New Guinea in 1900 to fill the post of Chief Judicial Officer. Tyson, who has been acting Administrator of the colony for some months, kills himself after an enquiry is announced by the Colonial Secretary in London into an expedition led by Tyson that resulted in the death of several natives. All this is seen through the eyes of John Rhys, another Australian, who arrived on the same ship as Tyson to take up a junior position with a small group of colonial administrators in Port Moresby.

Shearston brings out the irreconcilable tensions between missionaries, traders, civil servants and politicians – all white, of course, and sharing a view of the natives as uncomprehending objects, whatever their differences on methods of treatment. In what seems like an unlikely setting in comparison with *West Block*, he illustrates the political and bureaucratic manoeuvring that is not confined to the great capitals of the world but takes place even in tropical outposts like Port Moresby. Minor characters sometimes make a splendid entrance, such as Lady Lambert, the wife of the former Administrator, who at a Government House function "cruised the gathering relentlessly, a shark in satin." The book's main problem is that it is an epic without heroes. Rhys is an interesting and attractive character, but neither he nor Tyson are large enough to really dramatise the moral issues that Shearston obviously wants to raise. The *Sticks That Kill* (presumably the spears of the natives and the rifles of the whites) cannot help here. They have no life of their own despite the suggestions of the title.

In Shearston's book we live with two hunters. Their native prey is distant and anonymous. Georgia Savage's *Slate & Me and Blanche McBride* is about being on the run. Slate Jackson and his brother, Wyn, kill a policeman during their robbery of a bank in a small New South Wales town on the Murray. The sole witness – a girl from the town's convent school, Blanche McBride – is taken with them in their flight. The book moves easily from past to present, from the reminiscences of one character to another, with a structure that is delicate and effective.

Its strongest chapters deal with Wyn's experiences after Slate has been killed by the police and the girl rescued. He drifts through the black and white communities eking out a tangential existence on the banks of the river. A steady tension mounts as even in this twilight world there are those

who are curious about his past. The tension is momentarily released when Wyn kills a prospective blackmailer with a casual skill that is all too convincing.

The one weakness of the book is the rather cerebral style of Slate and Wyn, and particularly Blanche, when they describe their time together. They are simply too detached and too articulate for their desperate condition. But this does not alter the overall power of the narrative.

Murder is also at the centre of Nigel Krauth's *Matilda, My Darling*. The victim is a shearer named Barret, who finishes up at the bottom of a water hole near Winton in Queensland during the conflict between pastoralists and shearers in the 1890s. There is a range of suspects – the local station owner, his wife who had been sleeping with Barret, Barret's own mates who suspected (rightly) that he was a security risk. A Brisbane private detective, Hammond Niall, commissioned by some unionists in the capital, comes to Winton to investigate Barret's death. His visit coincides with that of the lawyer and poet, Banjo Paterson, whose fiancée is living in Winton. (The song "Waltzing Matilda" was devised by Paterson in Winton in 1895.)

All these elements are woven into a compelling novel that combines an ingenious plot and some intriguing characters. The harsh and brooding quality of the countryside is perfectly captured and allowed to reflect itself in both the squatters and the shearers. For all their mock displays of English county society, the squatters are prepared to kill to keep what they have – and their women are prepared to help. It is a pastoralist's wife who sums up their view for Niall: "We shoot what we cannot trust, Mr. Niall." But the landscape has taken its toll on the unionists as well. In the bitterness of their defeat by the forces of order and property, they have become suspicious of everyone, including each other. The weariness and cynicism of those who lost the struggles of the 1890s lasted well into the next century.

This book is a vivid reminder of how unkind both geography and history have been to Australia. Perhaps they have conspired to produce, a century after the times that Krauth describes and as far as possible from the outback, Robert Drewe's brittle band of coastal dwellers.

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Archibald's "Print Circus"

David Adams

Sylvia Lawson: *The Archibald Paradox. A Strange Case of Authorship* (Allen Lane, \$29.25).

Literary people, through books, almost inevitably become self-commemorating; they have written about their congeners and their literary forebears for centuries. And rightly enough. Recognition and celebration by their peers is the only substan-

tial reward some of them ever received, and then not always in their lifetime.

Of those people who "wrote the Bulletin," it has been the contributors of stories, verse and art who in the past have been best remembered by critics and historians; the staff men (with the exception of founding editor J.F. Archibald) have been mostly mentioned as part of the Bulletin structure, and not much more. Actually Archibald wrote little that went into print other than sharp, expressive paragraphs. His genius lay in recognising, encouraging and shaping the work of others.

Although A.G. Stephens was responsible for arranging many of the Bulletin's first book publications, he later acknowledged that "the Bulletin, by virtue of contrast, became a better book than any of the books that have been made from it."

Sylvia Lawson, in her long-awaited volume, *The Archibald Paradox*, (sub-titled *A Strange Case of Authorship*), says it is possible now to see that what was literary in the Bulletin – its total writing – was much more and other than the stories, the verse and the Red Page. In "The Great Print Circus," as she terms it, "from Edmond's most purposeful essays to the rarefied frivolity of 'Sundry Shows,' 'Brief Mention' and 'Correspondence,' the elements were linked – not in a logical chain, but in something more like a discursive web, playing, shifting, breaking. Page by page, week by week, the Bulletin was telling its own stories incessantly."

In what is, of course, basically a story about Archibald – "not a definitive biography," she cautions – she does give James Edmond, third Bulletin editor, the best acknowledgement he has ever had. Even though the subject-matter is no longer topical, Edmond's humor and perception is still there, and more effective than in his short-stories. "Edmond's work," says Sylvia Lawson, "with its variegated comedy and grotesquerie, was clearly one source of pleasure for the Bulletin's audience; and much was made of the way he combined comedy and 'sound sense,' as A.G. Stephens called it. But the 'sound sense' was not neutral."

Not only Edmond gets mention among the salaried or regular writers. John Haynes, W.H. Traill, "The Pilgrim" and A.G. Stephens are studied for various journalistic or literary reasons. "Mischief" in writing is given a place in the journalistic order of merit.

The Bulletin the author is chiefly interested in is that edited by Archibald (with a five-year break by Traill) from its founding in 1880 up to 1903. It was a picturesque and stirring tail-end colonial period in any case, and Archibald's team of writers made the most of it, with the aid of the artists and the then revolutionary process-engraving methods introduced by Traill during his 1881-86 period of control.

Archibald had an unerring sense in selecting his writers, whether as staff or contributors. Even S.H. Prior, who came in to handle the financial ("Wild Cat") pages after Archibald stepped down as editor and Edmond moved up, had been previously asked twice by "Archie" to come to Sydney from Broken Hill. Prior does not appear in the Lawson story to any extent, but he helped me in my decision to stay on with the Bulletin during my first restless years at 214 George Street, Sydney.

In one of his rare moments of relaxation Prior told me of a visit he took to Callan Park to see Archibald. It was a visiting-day at the mental hospital, and another patient was being

paged loudly by name. The patient protested furiously at his presence there being advertised. Archibald stood-up and called out: "Don't be distressed my friend. Don't be worried. I am J.F. Archibald, and I'm a patient here, too." Prior thought it one of the most generous acts he had ever seen.

Archibald was generous in other ways. Sylvia Lawson quotes from his preserved manuscripts: "I once wrote that William Henry Traill, who came to us for a freer outlet for his opinions . . . was the first real editor of the Bulletin, and now I write it again." Of course, Traill, in his matter-of-fact, businesslike way, had been generous to both Archibald and Haynes. But so often these things are not acknowledged freely among close colleagues – especially as physically close as at the cramped old Pitt Street premises.

In her story on the personal side of Archibald, Sylvia Lawson has brought into her book much information not hitherto published. She has had access to family material which, if available to other researchers, has not been used so extensively or effectively. She specifically thanks Archibald's trustees for permission to quote from his manuscripts in the Mitchell Library. Apparently there are volumes of family papers.

With the aid of these and other records Lawson has been able to fill out and greatly add interest to the previous skeletal stories of Warrnambool childhood and youth; Melbourne, with his name-change to Jules François and adoption of a French-Jewish ancestry, added to his mischief-filled apprenticeship to public service and journalism; and his "lone hand" experience on the Hodgkinson goldfield in Queensland. Then there are his notes made during and after his term in Callan Park mental asylum. Apparently it was not all that easy for his biographer. She observes: "His way of remembering and rewriting contains a grave moral for biography: pursuing himself, with dutiful intentions, he kept on losing the point."

The Archibald paradox, the author says, is simply the paradox of being colonial. "To know enough of the metropolitan world colonials must, in limited ways at least, move and think internationally; to resist it strongly enough for the colony to cease to be colonial and become its own place, they must become nationalists."

Almost inevitably, other paradoxes were to show-up in Archibald's life. That such an inspired sub-editor should be so discursive a writer himself has always seemed a paradox to me. But perhaps by some obscure intellectual compensation process they were two sides of the same coin.

Lawson writes considerably about the Bulletin's "clatter and confusion on women." Archibald's misogyny, she says, was disappointed romanticism – his marriage had been a tragic failure.

The Bulletin's story about women in Australia began with the misogynistic jokes in the first number. Their themes were pursued untiringly thereafter: female vanity and silliness, female incompetence, materialism, snobbishness and opportunism were inexhaustible sources of humor, and pivots for cartooning.

Then she quotes a Bulletin paragraph, with no overt signs of approval:

Two married women and a dog were struck by lightning recently at Dubbo. Half the married men have been trying to get their wives to walk about the vicinity ever since. The dogs are kept tied up.

That was in 1886. My own research uncovered another paragraph – in “Personal Items,” 14 January, 1888:

They say that the effect of being born in the purple is rapidly becoming apparent in her Gracious Majesty’s face. Her cheeks are tinted like the hash-house steak which has been thumped with a rolling-pin to make it cook tender.

It is hard to determine there where misogyny leaves off and republicanism begins. But it does show that offensive abuse in Archibald’s Bulletin was not reserved for the Chinese.

The author contends that literary historians in the past have looked strictly for the “literary” or explicitly political in assessing the Bulletin, and have failed to see the workings of “a vast and extraordinary text.” I would add that the time factor is important in recognising and preserving the humor of the period. While wit may have an almost timeless appeal, humor depends on fellow-feeling and surrounding circumstances. Within recent years there have already been comments that “Steele Rudd” in his *On Our Selection* series wasn’t funny. True, perhaps. But to his contemporaries he was vastly humorous.

Archibald had little regard for the editorial content of the Bulletin after he stepped down from the chair. Perhaps he was, as Sylvia Lawson says, a circus-master. With federation accomplished, much of his old Bulletin’s circus had passed by, and, with over twenty years of his exposure of the social cant and stuffiness that he started out to debunk, there were new journalistic tasks. Odd postures were redundant. For Edmond in particular the embodiment of so much Bulletin policy in federation was a triumph, and imposed a responsibility to try and make it work. That meant years of duller but more constructive journalism, even though the population was now much more individually involved in national self-government and economic policy. The nationalistic rebels had won. There was no sense in going on rebelling.

Lawson says that, after Archibald’s retirement, “The Macleod-Edmond Bulletin ploughed on, immensely busy, full and churning.” But “the first post-colonial years offered no more space for the play of that mischief which had been at once subversive, elegant and generous. The spirit, the golden derision, had gone. Much of it was imprisoned, literally, in the stone walls of Callan Park . . .” Also,

Archibald’s madness is not marginal to the Bulletin’s story but essentially part of it. The madness contained what the newspaper lost, and its loss was greater in the end than his own.

After Archibald died, and during the time in which Smith’s Weekly came and went, the author describes the Bulletin in

its remaining forty years of family-company publication as “compulsively nostalgic and self-commemorative.”

The book is not merely the story of Archibald, she admits. It is also an argument concerning the Bulletin newspaper, including its early republicanism, its later nationalism, and what she calls “its viciously chauvinistic racism,” especially in the late 1880s. Story and argument together took seventeen years to complete. “Archibald was as troublesome as his newspaper”; and “biography, as I knew it, would not do.” Some of her earlier published writings contained “elements and emphases which I would now strongly disavow.”

A quotation from Bertolt Brecht, German playwright and poet, precedes her introduction. I have not studied Brecht, and later references to him made me feel, in reading the book, that I was being dogged by the unknown. (“It is only the unknown which is terrible,” said Archibald.) I could have done without Brecht, as well as without Lawson’s rather spooky style in references to Here, There and the great Elsewhere [capitals hers] in discussing “Metropolis, the centre of language, of the dominant culture and its judgements.”

But putting such philosophic dissertations aside, and however many the arguments and rebuttals Sylvia Lawson’s work may well provoke, within it there is a very substantial addition to published Bulletin history and criticism. In its own particular way it is a carefully written book, with adequate footnotes and references. It adds a great amount to our detailed knowledge of Archibald as a person, and spiritedly opens up the old Bulletin volumes for fresh appraisal.

David Adams, 75, was Editor of the Bulletin from 1948 to 1961. He also edited The Letters of Rachel Henning (1952).

Malignancies

Nancy Keesing

Serge Liberman: *A Universe of Clowns* (Phoenix, \$9.50).

Serge Liberman is a comparatively young but well-established writer whose mastery of his chosen form, the short story, grows as his body of work grows. *A Universe of Clowns* is his latest collection and a fine successor to his first book, *On Firmer Shores*. Both collections won the Alan Marshall Award.

Why then do I find it difficult to review this book?

Is it because all but two of these stories are intensely depressing and distressing? Not really. When I review for weekly newspapers I must often read quickly, even when chance presents a surfeit of books similar in form, tone or mood, and inclination falters. But an article for a quarterly journal allows reasonable time for reading, reflection and for interspersing one kind of reading with another if one feels so inclined.

Agony, ecstasy’s darker side, must be faced if life, art and literature are to be confronted and appreciated. Few moods and modes pall faster than unremitting jollity. A master comic knows when to cry; a tragedian when to release unbear-

able tension. As I re-read these stories I perceive where and how Liberman strikes necessary balances.

To support the points I am trying to make more firmly, I shall analyse a sampling of the stories so briefly that no real disclosure of the tales, or their richness of dialogue and description is intended or, indeed, possible.

The title story, a long one, comes first. A professor of medicine aged forty-eight has a wife who has for years been in a hospital for the incurably insane. He embarks on a lyrical doomed affair with a woman patient half his age who is dying of cancer and has only a few weeks or months of life and of the physical capacity for love-making. He alienates his son but not his daughter, and ruins his career in a teaching hospital. At the end, by terminating his lover's terrible painful dying, he gives her the inestimable gift of final serenity.

In "Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh" an elderly pharmacist who discovers he has terminal cancer confers the boon of death upon himself and his invalid, bedridden wife. There is no boon for the dutiful daughter of "The Next in Line" who nurses her awful, sanctimonious, invalid mother while she herself conceals an ulcerating, untreated breast cancer.

Nor is there any boon for an unwanted small boy orphan with a club foot, who is fostered by successive aunts among boisterous and cruel cousins. Liberman is unsparing in descriptions of human dissolution and decay of flesh and spirit.

Two stories, "Envy's Fire" and "Words", are scary explorations of the dilemmas, each very different, of ageing poets whose audience is restricted, or vanishing, and whose nearest and dearest have no way of understanding or supporting these creative men. Judah Waten has pointed out that for any writer "home is where the heart is", but if there is no heart, for whatever reasons, a creative spirit is doomed indeed.

Balanced against death and decay are "The First Lesson" that is saved from sentimentality by tough writing, and "Moscow! Moscow!" which, for my taste is by far the best story in the collection. The setting leads to a truly splendid evocation of Melbourne's seamier after-dark streets and scenes. Despite its central concern of whether or not to abort an unwanted foetus, this is the story that here most firmly affirms life. Ironically Rosalie, having endured deep heart- and soul-searching, miscarries spontaneously. At the end, even more ironically, she comes to terms with her own existence, and Existence, in a satisfying and compelling way.

The chief character of "The Fortress" is a rich, self-centred and self-deluded man who acquires honesty, humility and grace.

In many of the sixteen stories the central figures are Jews. For some of these the aftermaths of the Holocaust are ennobling, for others embittering or destructive. I am a Jew. No Jewish person can blink the Holocaust in life or literature. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be born in countries like Australia know many with scarred skins and souls. It is inescapable.

Then why am I finding it hard to review this book?

Several years ago Liberman and I worked together on a bibliographical project. We were colleagues who became friends and have remained so long after that first joint effort passed completely into his more-than-capable hands.

Liberman is a physician, a general practitioner in

Melbourne. He is married and has three young children. He is the most obsessed workaholic I know, and I know many. I respect and admire his unsparing exploration and explanation of human woe and human exaltation.

The real reason for my difficulty is not literary, and one that should perhaps disqualify me from writing this article at all – friendship.

I am not worried *about* the book or its themes but *for* a friend. I hope, for him, there are cases when the cancer can be cured, when a grieving mother of delinquent sons has some consolation from one of them; when faeces, ulcers and suppurations do not stink too unbearably; when the noisy disturbance of family tension does not end in violence and murder; when middle-aged doctors themselves find love with their women, pleasure among their children and may, at the least, attain peace of mind in ways that will not continue their problems long after the final words of a fiction.

No one should presume to tell a profound writer how to write or what to write about but, to put it simply, I do and must worry about how this author, my friend, will proceed after this book.

For hope I turn to the brave ending of "Moscow! Moscow!"

After her dark night of soul and bleeding flesh Rosalie, looks down to Cardigan Street and its puppet-sized people from her hospital window, cars and life below. "She touched a window-pane. To her fingers it was cool, it was smooth."

"*'Someday,' she remembered, 'people will know why such things happen and what the purpose of all this suffering is. There won't be any more riddles. Meanwhile, we must go on living and working. Yes, we must just go on working.'*"

Then she murmurs the concluding sentence:

"*Oh God, I am I am I am. We are we are we are.'*"

Nancy Keesing, poet, anthologist, critic, recently published the successful discussion of domestic language, Lily on the Dustbin. She lives in Sydney.

Question Marks and Exclamation Marks

Graham Rowlands

Peter Murphy: *Lies* (Poetry Australia, no. 90).

Philip Salom: *The Projectionist* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$7.50).

Silvana Gardner: *With Open Eyes* (Queensland Community Press, \$5.95).

There are a dozen poems in Murphy's fourth collection. Instead of discussing their qualities and then indicating some typical flaws in the remaining poems, it's more appropriate to analyse his general thrust. Since some fine poems are part of the thrust while other fine poems avoid it, the thrust needs some explanation.

Murphy finds words both real and unreal. Sometimes they are more real than life; other times they are less real. The world itself is often unreal. He feels unreal in certain situa-

tions. So do other people – according to the poet. While modes of capturing reality can make it more real than memory, the reverse can also apply. The amount of past in the present poses a problem when registering the present. This, however, is no worse than the present's distortion of the past. When things and activities *are* real, they are often so mundane, repetitive or limited as to be meaningless.

I have three complaints. Firstly, I see no point in poets' lamenting the inadequacy of language. Much better to revise until there is no cause for lamentation – at least for the poet. Secondly, the unreality experienced by his characters is the same as his own. These people, then, have no existence apart from him. Moreover, *he* thinks certain people lead meaningless lives. I can't help wanting to hear *their* viewpoints. Thirdly, it's impossible for the reader to simply experience these states of unreality or pointlessness. The poet *uses* them in his debate with himself.

Murphy's poetry is sparing in use of literary and other references. Instead, he writes a whole poem about Kubrick's "Barry Lyndon" and two page-length poems about "Hamlet". With "Barry Lyndon" he re-creates parts of the film and engages in interpretative film *criticism*. Lyndon ends up:

not incapable of sensing

a joke is infinite if the punch line
keeps on coming.

In "The Ghost in Hamlet" Murphy adds irony to already ironic plays on mind and body. In "Deep Structure" it's words and body – or bodies. They are amusing poems employing an ideal subject for multiple levels of paradox. Why the poet would want to write numerous other poems on these matters I have no idea. The serious poem "Unreal Fires", about filters producing more real fire in films than actual fire, is the only other poem that reaches their quality.

The other successful poems avoid the debate. "Winter Tennis" finds a habitual environment mentally disturbing. A spooky poem, like some of his earlier work. "Student in Time Capsule", destroys the debate's terms by destroying past, present and future:

Not dying, solid or at ease
she's placed her hands through words, in books,
to time out of mind
where begins ends.

"House on Fire" rounds off human attraction to fire with information that the viewers have come to see the neighbor's house burn down. In "Closing Time" people leave central Melbourne at closing time only to wonder what it's like at night. It's no longer distant *fields* that seem greener. The gun in "Gun" is clean and uninvolved compared with its suicide partner. "Conversation" *denies* the possibility of the poet's hitting a woman – a strong and surprising ending. Finally, "Fluke" remains as marvellous a poem now as it was in his unacknowledged *Escape Victim* a decade ago:

he slammed into the air just once to find
what he didn't really hope to strike

was there

and the canary-coloured ball like a golden falling flame
leapt through the invisible cage

of all his life's impossibilities
and wheeled beneath the sky like light

to go over the line in the opposite court
yet not quite

having formed in its curious winding pattern
a line of flight like the wing of a bird.

I have two responses to Salom's second collection. My first is that he has improved in direct proportion to his abandonment of over-written dogma. My second response, however, is the reverse of my first. Residual Christian spirituality, while less evident in Part I, influences his book until the last poem's last line (which rejects a form of it). Moreover, the best spiritual poems are better than what he has achieved through secular flexibility in Part I.

Whereas Salom's *Silent Piano* could only play his tunes or tunes like his, *The Projectionist* is a perfectly titled book where possible and various aspects of the poet are explored through other voices and characters. His secular land and seascape imagery is often very vivid:

One day ringing brilliant as crystal
or whisky-sharp, snarling in the wind

He connects physical deformity with eroticism and describes epilepsy as orgasm. Even ordinary sensuality is evocative and blissfully guilt-free.

The Salom of Part I is large. If he does not contain Whitman's multitudes, he does toss in references to Islam and Sufism. They are certainly a break from his Christian God. A previously absent irony plays across the surface and through the depths of some poems. There's even some welcome humor:

The landlord's mute as a boulder
(if not stone deaf!)

In Part II there are two magnificent twentieth century Christian poems – "The Fish" and "Know". Before reaching them I was despairing of the poet, because the more I read the more he seemed to be returning to the self of his first book *after* exploring his persona. In order to find these two poems, however, the reader has to suffer insufferable expressions such as "sodomites of ugliness", "machine of sanity", "wounds of life", "each day's death and resurrection", "faith's imperfect storm", "the soul our machine of flight" and so on. Still, we mustn't be ungrateful.

Gardner's third collection comprises two parts. The first deals with people, animals and things around Brisbane; the second, with her response to the United States – mainly the south-west.

The first is a uniformly competent group of well-made poems. They are all understated. Moreover, this understated-

ment is inextricably linked with her studied refusal to impose herself on her material. The poems about other people show a *genuine* interest. Most attractive. She's capable of narrative humor, as in "Shadow Ape", and intellectual humor, as in "Big Words" and "Little Words". The most successful poems, however, are the serious "The Boat of the Empress", about China as revealed to a suburban audience on the voyager's return, and "Linesman":

He cultivated serenity till it hurt
and had the gall to say he was free
up there
with the chains
the leather strap
the suicidal voltage,
that place of sacrifice he surrendered to,
everyday,
and I believed him.

In Part II Gardner's related poetic concerns are the American desert and its pre-white inhabitants. Although the subject matter is exotic to an Australian reader, she tries to avoid the exotic with geography and anthropology. The best poem is "Trading Post" where her *viewpoint* (largely absent from Part I) is called for by the material:

the snake pit collects coins thrown
on the rattler's head; tail-bells toll
the death of my conscience
wishing for itself alone.

Unfortunately, Part I's understatement can't conceal Gardner's missing poetic energy. Her language is flat; the imagery, rarely vivid. Sometimes she seems to use imagery because she feels it's compulsory. For instance, I am sure she doesn't *intend* her sea imagery to be arbitrary. Her choice of mundane subject matter is appealing. I wish she could have made it into more exciting poetry.

Too much of Part II, by contrast, is over-stated. It remains geography and anthropology punctuated by personal exclamation marks. She hasn't assimilated the United States into her poetry. Unfortunately, these last lines from "Sun Temple – Mesa Verda" are typical:

Involuntarily I raise
my arms to the sun supplicating for evil
to become good . . . stunned by the holes
in my civilization, I flee from ritual ground.

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A Journey From Egmont

Robert D. FitzGerald

Douglas Stewart: *Springtime in Taranaki* (Hale & Iremonger, \$19.95).

Pasted among various printed scraps in an old exercise-book I

have cuttings from the Bulletin of several early Douglas Stewart poems afterwards published in his first book, *Green Lions*, one of them being the piece "Crowd":

Each of this salt and sullen mass has once
Felt suddenly, desperately individual,
And mad to lose that loneliness has plunged
Back to the sea, at smothering flesh has plunged
With a hot mouth, with a wild call . . .

Just a typical Stewart poem of the period, but very special where I find it; for round that cutting I had written in now very faded pencil: "B. 16/1/35. Met Stewart the following Friday."

Evidently it was from that following "18th. January" that a friendship of long standing first joined my still expanding admiration for Douglas Stewart's poetry. And since this book now in front of me, his *Springtime in Taranaki*, shows that its author would then have been merely on a visit from the New Zealand of his early twenties, quite three years before he joined the staff of the Bulletin, my guess is that, introduced by Cecil Mann, we met in that journal's office, round which so much of Sydney's literary life revolved. Certainly it must have been from there that I brought him, as his account tells, to lunch with my wife and me in our temporary rented home, where we were then on leave from Fiji.

Such reminiscences, though dragged out of me by this "Autobiography of Youth," must be set aside: the narrative is Stewart's not mine. Yet its clear, simple, conversational style of writing will surely bring any reader so closely to what are another person's experiences as almost to share them. So – have I never really been in that little home town of Eltham, Taranaki?

We are taken to it and its streets and occupants in the early pages of the book. Then beyond it we pass through the adjoined agricultural country into surrounding, encroached-on scenery, intersected by fish-filled rivers and towered over by the superb Mount Egmont. To all of these, not quite so geographically arranged, the author's poems (especially early poems) have brought us before, or have provided us with a kind of index to them; for both in prose and verse they have often been straight-out subject-matters, closely observed during a varied and somewhat vagrant youth. In Stewart's later work they are still a background out of which an expanding environment emerges in the course of later experiences coming to terms with it. The framework of his total achievement in poetry is still partly held together by the mortar of small objects collected by keen eyesight and alert mind from early days onwards.

From a kind of early family and kindergarten stage the autobiography takes us through Eltham Public School and various schoolboy encounters (worth reading about) to New Plymouth High School. There, under encouragement from a praiseworthy schoolmaster, the Stewart youngster started not just writing verses but submitting them here and there for publication. So it was at that stage that poetry entered – and to some extent became – Stewart's life, making ordinary education a mere secondary consideration.

Another kind of education followed; and, as this autobiography shows it, this was the seeking of girl-friends, then the falling in and out of love (teenage love) with first one local

girl, then another – but probably insufficiently, for each young lady love wanted his complete attention; and their Douglas had too many other interests as well, such as shooting and fishing, and soon a small job on a local newspaper, the *Argus*. Then, yet more disturbingly for girl-friends, he left the *Argus* and took, first a job servicing a travelling merry-go-round show and, subsequently, before returning to Eltham, he travelled as a swagman through scattered parts of New Zealand well away from Taranaki.

This section of the autobiography could, perhaps, have been widened a little to tell us more of any direct effects on the writer's poetry then or later; but that is not anywhere its obvious purpose: attention is focussed, rather, on events and circumstances for their own sakes and as they are shown to have occurred. Immediate interest, for instance, at a stage soon reached by the swagman, is aroused by his living for quite a while among Maoris, particularly with one gentle family who completely accepted him – a matter of special appeal to myself since at that date I too was still living in native houses and villages, though among Fijians, not Maoris. Eventually, of course, he returned to his then current girl-friend – with not much welcome, as it turned out – and on to journalism.

It was then that, encouraged by Cecil Mann to whom much credit is due, he started writing far more copiously for the *Bulletin*, and made that visit to Australia when I had the privilege of meeting him. Disappointed, though, at not being given the position sought, he took one or two small jobs, then shortly returned to Eltham.

Incidents and circumstances of the intervening years before he did receive that appointment become a little compressed – largely into visits and interviews – in this next part of the narrative. Stewart's career as a journalist (even a minor editor at times) was advancing; but his "Springtime" was drawing to a close though its items and materials were still being collected half-consciously for poems – some then yet to be written, some written already; for, indeed, his first volume of them, *Green Lions*, was published at just that stage.

Clearly, however, he was feeling some need for experience to expand. The book's concluding pages give us a rather dramatic account of his working his passage to England as a ship's third pantryman. Then they tell of his getting around England and Scotland as a kind of overseas swagman, again making visits and interviews – even, as time passed, with a degree of journalistic success. Yet he found England a country in which, from his point of view, "everything in both verse and prose seemed to have been said before." So finally, he tells of his working passage (as a third purser this time) back south to Sydney and the *Bulletin*. As his concluding words put it: "Springtime in Taranaki was over . . . and summer in Sydney had begun."

The tale is thus almost entirely a New Zealand narrative with Australia broken off it at the end, though broken off by what looks a little like a promise of further autobiography yet to be given us. The question then arises whether this present work, written by a New Zealander now generally recognised as an important Australian poet, and written and published in Sydney, can be regarded as Australian Literature.

The late H.M. Green, in his esteemed *History of Australia*

Literature, rejected Douglas Stewart's two earliest books of poems, *Green Lions* and *The White Cry*, as "two that do not concern us here," since they were written and published beyond Australia and before the poet's Australian days. Yet Green did, with almost his next words, acknowledge Stewart as "one of the principal Australian lyricists of the day" and considered: "No Australian writer has possessed a more varied talent." Then again, however, when Stewart's two now quite famous verse plays, *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, were published in Sydney in 1944 in the one volume, Green esteemed both, and praised *The Golden Lover* as "glowing with bright color," but decided that: "it would not be discussed here, because properly speaking it belongs to New Zealand." Doubtless having a Maori theme gave that play doubly to New Zealand. But what then about Stewart's "Glencoe," his quite Scottish succession of ballads, colored, surely, by his Scottish ancestry and published in Sydney in 1942? Partly because of these ballads Green saw Stewart as "one of the most notable writers in Australia today" – setting literary nationality aside in this Scottish instance.

Apart from what we may be told by the autobiography of the conditions under which and because of which the early poems came to be written, what does really matter is the subsequent course of advancing competence. For example, the poetic development of various kinds of half-rhymes can be observed chronologically in their appropriate interaction with the full rhymes of which they quite become equivalents in the more mature poems. Watch them, just briefly, in this "Grasshopper" extract from "The Birdsville Track" (1953):

And then the red stone hopped
Where all the stones were red
And it had legs like a frog
And a big strange insect's head.
Oh where's the green world gone
When even the grasshopper turns
To a kind of dragon of the sun
In a land of hopping stones?

So read *Springtime in Taranaki*, but preferably with Douglas Stewart's *Collected Poems* open beside it. Not only is it good to have a special occasion for a re-reading of those poems – they are well worth it at any time – but, so placed, a direct purpose is added to their value: they there revive much of the material merely summoned out of the past by the autobiography. The factual narrative itself does enlarge a reader's view of thoughts and meanings underlying the surface words of many early poems, amid the intricacies of technical development; but immediate interest, with or without that aid, will be found too in the narrative itself for its own sake – for its fascinating account of progress through youthful interests and encounters during a journey close to a rich earth, onwards from the morning sunlight beyond Mount Egmont.

Robert D. FitzGerald, the doyen of Australian poets, lives in Sydney.

The Short Story in Australia

Hume Dow

Kerryn Goldsworthy (ed.): *Australian Short Stories* (Everyman's, J.M. Dent, \$9.95).

Frank Moorhouse (ed.): *The State of the Art: The Mood of Contemporary Australia in Short Stories* (Penguin, \$9.95).

The first thing to say about *Australian Short Stories*, edited by Kerryn Goldsworthy, is that it is a very good anthology, fresh, original in selection, readable, satisfying. Goldsworthy in a stimulating introduction explores the principles on which she bases her selection and finally lists her criteria:

the desire for some kind of chronological coherence in showing the development of the Australian short story; the necessity of presenting as wide a spectrum, in form, style and content, as possible; the way the terms "Australian" and "short story" are defined in practice by writers; and the dominant presence in so many stories of "outsiders" like children, females and foreigners.

It is clear that the short story has been a strength in Australian literature. The editor emphasizes three periods in showing the form's development: the 1890s, the 1940s/1950s, and the new generation of the 1970s, but she does not limit herself to these. Perhaps one might cavil at her using, to start with, the first chapter of a novel, though Catherine Spence's piece does make an effective opening. She chooses well from Baynton and, particularly, Lawson, with his sardonic "The Union Buries Its Dead" and his superb "Telling Mrs. Baker," a searching study of the stereotyped roles of male and female in the outback. H.H. Richardson's "Two Hanged Women" is an admirable story, and we are happily introduced to Ethel Anderson – a real find – in two fine pieces, both alive and kicking with fresh conversation and delightful evocations, one striking a blow for children as against adults.

In the 1935-55 period there are mature and satisfying works from K.S. Prichard (her convincing account of the legal abduction of Aboriginal girls, "Flight"), Frank Dalby Davison (the powerful "The Woman at the Mill"), Alan Marshall, two from John Morrison (especially "The Incense Burner"), E.O. Schlunke (a superb farce), and Gavin Casey. But I must say that I find the omission of Vance Palmer and Judah Waten hard to explain: I appreciate Goldsworthy's wish "to steer a middle course between the idiosyncratic and the predictable" and to avoid "standard anthology pieces," but these two authors would seem to contribute particularly well to her themes of female and foreign "outsiders."

The editor's wish to find a wide "spectrum in form, style and content" is largely successful, with some choice of the deliberately exploratory if not experimental. Perhaps the two fantasies from Christina Stead's *The Salzburg Tales* are too self-indulgent (one Poe, the other Branch Cabell), but the variety and liveliness of many of the stories from the 'modern period is certainly impressive. In Hal Porter's two stories his somewhat artificial vocabulary works well: "Say to me Ronald!" is a hilarious farce of a wealthy Chinese student's efforts to repay his Australian schoolmaster; "Brett" is an

incisive portrait of a wayward Australian girl in Italy. Dal Stevens' "Warrigal" shows a sharp wit. Patrick White's "Down at the Dump," first published in *Overland*, is powerful, but fades out at the end. Morris Lurie's "Africa Wall," also first published in *Overland*, is a haunting story of an Australian in Tangier – and how the atmosphere finally gets the better of him. Frank Moorhouse's "A Person of Accomplishment," well shaped, skilful, gives an acidly etched portrait of an egomaniac. The last three stories (Bail, Wilding, Carey), too artificial or fantasies too contrived, are less to my personal taste.

The success of the anthology comes, I think, from the editor's ability to fulfil a number of aims simultaneously. She does give us a conspectus of the Australian short story; she does give us "contrasts between Australian and non-Australian characters and settings" (Morrison, Schlunke, Porter, Forshaw, Jolley, Lurie); she does give us a varied and searching spread of stories about women, especially as "passive objects or victims of male decisions and actions" (Spence, Baynton, Richardson, Ethel Anderson, Prichard, Davison, Casey, White). The book may well become a standard text for the study of the Australian short story, even though she deliberately eschews "standard anthology pieces," even though she is deliberately idiosyncratic in her choice – or perhaps because of this. The book makes very good reading.

Frank Moorhouse's anthology, *The State of the Art*, is, of course, a very different book, based as it is on a selection from some 2700 stories "mostly written in the 1980s." Moorhouse makes a large claim: "Not only is this book a look at the art of story-telling in Australia, it also looks at the state of the art of living in Australia," and he suggests that it gives "a picture of the Australian sensibility." I hardly think that this claim is realized, good as the book may be as an anthology. The life depicted is to a considerable degree on the fringe of the dull everyday life lived by the majority; it is too off-beat, too trendy, to represent Australians generally. But that is minor cavilling – the book is full of life and imagination; although some of the stories don't succeed, there is much vitality and vigor.

The anthology is divided under rather loose headings. The first, "Marriage, Parenthood, Ancestors," is a mixed bag. At first, I thought that nothing here would qualify for a new edition of Kerryn Goldsworthy's, but when I came to Ken Leask's "Games Parents Played" I was not so sure: told by a child, it reveals a crisis in the parents' marriage, resolved by their talking through the child – an impressive story, enhanced by the child's mixed child/adult vocabulary. This section also has Morris Lurie's "Uncle Games," a beautifully crafted portrait of a talkative uncle. (Moorhouse says he excluded the "Master Practitioners," but he includes both Lurie and himself.)

The second section, "Low Life," is less successful – too much self-pity or self-indulgence, bright ideas unrealized, too much raw experience not subject to contemplation. But the third section, "Travelling About, Bumping Around, In Transit" has more meat. There's a fine sketch, "Chicken Street" by Geoffrey Bewley, of a domineering Dutchwoman (perhaps more revealing of the first-person narrator). "The House on Lafayette Street" by Michele Nayman is a well

shaped story of a collector of lame ducks. And "Young Man with Paddy Pallin Walking Boots" by Damien White is a neatly handled sketch of a man who gets a fixation on Caravaggio in Rome.

"Games, Fantasies, Lyricism" is also a mixed bag. There is a well-realized story of a couple alone on an island, "And She Gave One Twirl," by Joanna Murray-Smith. And – perhaps the best thing in the book – "Oh I Do Love to Be Beside the Seaside" by J.M.S. Foster is a chillingly convincing confrontation of two brothers, one normal, the other obsessed to the point of insanity – superbly handled.

The last section, "Growing, Ageing," has much good work, though some pieces are too drawn out. "Skinning Peaches" by Helen Lewis, a sketch of a naked adolescent girl and three young boys, is strangely evocative. Frank Moorhouse's own story, "Going into the heartlands with the Wrong Person at Christmas," is a very well controlled, well shaped story of a middle-aged man. "The Swallow Returning" by Ian Kennedy Williams is a coherent and sensitive triple portrait of a spinster, her lover, and a small boy, and Gerard Windsor's "Virgins, Widows and Penitents" gives powerful images of three diverse nuns.

Moorhouse says, "My preferences are for stories that present an open-ended aesthetic experience . . . I have no taste for the story that leads me firmly to one destination. I like stories that let loose on the way" – perhaps a suggestion of his own idea of "discontinuous narrative." But I must admit that the stories I have singled out, even if they do "let loose," seem to have a very firm direction, seem to demonstrate control and to have shape. This anthology is valuable for its strengths and provides a strong support to Goldsworthy's book.

Hume Dow, until recently Reader in English at the University of Melbourne, is the editor of the recent Memories of Melbourne University.

Fay Zwicky's Stories

Judy Duffy

Fay Zwicky: *Hostages* (Freemantle Arts Centre Press, \$7.50).

Fay Zwicky's first collection of fiction, *Hostages*, raises the question of what we expect, in the way of harmony, from a collection of short stories.

It is not surprising, given the writer's exceptional talent, that almost every story in the collection is competent and well-written. Yet the collection is disturbingly uneven. The standard of excellence which Zwicky achieves in some stories creates an unattainable standard for others. But there is more to the unevenness than this.

In her preface, Zwicky mentions that between the stories there are "varying degrees of stylistic density and . . . shifts in *personae*." This is not worrying until after the first four stories, when sudden shifts in tone, mood, and intensity, and abrupt changes in sensibilities, can often sound quite a discordant note.

In the title story "Hostages," the adolescent narrator, a restless, self-preoccupied girl, feels herself 'isolated' from the "coveted outside world and its tranquil normality." Brash, snobbish, and delightfully arrogant she can be, this "Jew who has everything," but she is also extremely vulnerable, and certainly intelligent enough to know that she is being used as a pawn in her mother's charitable actions.

Determined to help the "unfortunate refugee," Sophie Lindauer-Grunberg, a "grateful recipient of . . . pity," the mother hires the woman as a music teacher for the girl.

We understand that Helen's revulsion and defiance stem, at least in part, from resentment at being 'used' and from a defiant need to assert her independence, her individuality. Stubbornly and persistently she refuses to oblige her well-meaning mother, and inevitably she offends Sophie. More importantly however, she offends her own sensibilities. The sense of shame, one still capable of 'crimping' "the edges of . . . reflection . . . many years after the event," is immediate and convincing. It is presented with honesty, with control, and with a humor which prevents it spilling into any form of self-indulgence.

In "The Last Rites of the Nizam," as in "Teddy," the narrator's arrogance, her determination, her curiosity, and her naivety combine to lead her into situations which cause her acute social embarrassment. In these stories, the frustrations and tensions felt by an imaginative and intelligent girl searching for freedom and truth from within a shallow, protected environment are captured by Fay Zwicky with wit, with humor and with a cutting irony that encompasses not only the society and the family, but the girl herself. Although different in style and mood, these stories, along with the more dramatic "On Your Own," sit well together, each enhancing the other.

The story "The Courts of the Lord" is exceptional, not only for the complex and sensitive way the writer balances the feelings of this couple who, "Growing older . . . have decided to separate," but because her taut, economical prose successfully conveys the tension that exists between them. Throughout the story the unhappy couple are depicted in the unavoidable intimacy of a shared bedroom. In many ways the room is a vacuum, a space without a past or a future. Unable to endure the strain, the boredom, the utter loneliness of a life *together*, the couple are reluctant to face a future apart.

But the story is even more complex. There is the desire for physical contact and the rigid need to suppress that desire. There is the one delicate thread of hope for reconciliation which depends on them being able to break through a formidable barrier, a wall of self-consciousness that has grown between them. But having glimpsed the hope we are quickly shown the reality and we realize that the 'separation' however 'sensible' will indeed be painful.

In her preface, Zwicky tells us that her stories "are all concerned, more or less ironically, with the growth of a writer's consciousness." And this is so, of course. But there is irony also in that stories such as "The Installation," "Neighbours" and "Acceptance," stories about writers, academics, and editors, are among the least interesting of the collection. They are competent stories very forcefully directed at the shallow values and farcical posturing of academics and writers in a university, at the thinly veiled corruption

that can exist between a writer and an editor, or at the pathetically limited attitude of a would-be writer. Yet they lack the intensity, the scope, the depth, of Zwicky at her best.

If the vision in these stories seems to have narrowed, then it widens again with the last story, "Gone West: a Postscript." This is a series of contrasting observations and impressions, made ten or twenty years apart, about the West and about the people who live or travel there.

Fay Zwicky suggests that her stories are autobiographical in that they are a return to "where one has once been." And the best stories do have this personal quality about them. The narrative voice is a strong one, comfortable with its subject matter, able to confront its complex and sensitive themes with confidence. It is when Zwicky is writing from a more 'external' view-point, a young man whose aching back symbolizes his being trapped into marriage, the inadequate thinking of a so-called writer, or when she endeavors to expose the corruption, hypocrisy, or limitations of a literary world, that her work has much less to offer.

Judy Duffy lives at St Andrews, Victoria.

Growing Out Of Exile

Donald Cave

Amirah Inglis: *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood* (Heinemann, \$16.95).

What constituted an "un-Australian" childhood at the time in which Amirah Gutstadt was growing up in Parkville, Brunswick and Elwood, may well, even amidst the exotic family situations transported to Australia by the post-war waves of migration, still qualify as such today, for there can be few children who can boast of Polish/Russian parents who were both atheistic Jews and Communists!

Amira Inglis recounts her experience with a remarkable precision and detachment: the long boat-trip to Australia as a French-speaking two-year-old under the constant surveillance of an over-protective mother; household moves resulting from racist hostility; the loss of cherished books surrendered to the police at the time when the Communist Party was banned; lurking and often violent anti-semitism on the part of school and university acquaintances; the tragic heart-break as exiled Jews collected and pieced together, at the end of the War, the fragments of information which allowed them to assess the person effects of the Holocaust; adolescence in a Melbourne girls' high school in war time.

The book itself is a success-story on several levels. On one level there is the story of a sensitive, well-loved only child (at that time), set adrift in the Australian school system, who triumphs over the odds, not without great pain and confusion, but who completes the course with the highest possible distinction. On another level it is the story of the parents who, arriving with precious little, by dint of hard work, luck and, on the part of Amirah's father, a certain adventurousness in business affairs, become economically successful. On still another level it recounts the success of an immigrant family who create a home environment which provided their daughter, and much later their son, with the love, protection and intellectual stimulus needed to cope with an alien external world, and who at the same time are able to insert themselves, on equal terms with native-born Australians, into the cultural and political life of their adopted land.

The book grips the reader, for the author's prose is well pruned and the history unfolds without unnecessary embellishment. There are several moments, however, where it becomes tiresome, where the author seems to be addressing an in-group, assuming too much knowledge of personages and events, as in the section dealing with her university experience.

Viewed as an aspect of Australian social history, the book is extremely important, for it documents, in fascinating detail, aspects of the lives of certain groups which have become important and integral elements in what has come to be called, all too simplistically, "multi-cultural Australia". In recounting her childhood and in lovingly, but not uncritically, portraying aspects of the lives of her parents and their friends (like many such children, she had no family beyond the home) Amirah Inglis has written a book pleasant to read, but one which raises serious questions in the mind of anyone concerned with education in contemporary Australia.

The author has made it painfully clear how dangerously simplistic it is to speak collectively of "the migrant child". The child Amirah Gutstadt, surrounded by highly articulate, culturally aware and politically-involved parents and friends, had her fears, her shame and her confusion, for she was surrounded also by teachers, peer-groups and a community blissfully unaware of the life-style and interests which were current in the Gutstadt household. She emerges, however, thoroughly able to cope at all levels with the intellectual and cultural life of her parents' adopted country. Many others fail. The reader will certainly be left with a serious educational question. Is Amirah's success the result of some native ability and strength of character, or must one look more closely at the lives of her beloved parents if one would explain the evolution of the child? The second of these possibilities appears to be the one accepted by the author.

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