overland

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A New View**

**Screen and Sound:
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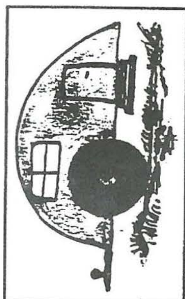
**Michael Wilding
On Humanism**

**Pay TV in Australia:
Content and Discontent**

LIMITED EDITION ARTIST'S T-SHIRTS



Eleven famous Australian artists have donated their work to assist Melbourne Citymission's special outreach for single parent families in the western suburbs.

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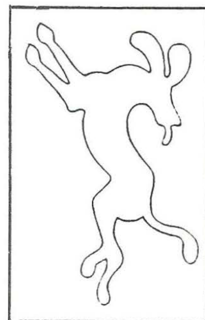

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This is the last issue of Overland that can be posted as a registered publication. From the Spring issue, all copies will be mailed by Print Post, which will raise our costs by almost a dollar a copy. We have kept our price fixed for the last three years so that we could take advantage of the preferential rates, but from the next issue subscription rates will rise to $28.00, and the cover price will be $7.50.

TONY LINTERMANS

Crumbs From the Table

"YOU'RE A SWEET MAN. There are so many things I like about you."

She takes his hand. They are sitting on the faded green couch in her lounge room. The ash tray on the coffee table in front of them is full of butts, all with lipstick stains. There are two wine glasses, and a half-full bottle of Wolf Blass Chardonnay on the table.

"You're kind, affectionate. You make me laugh. You know me."

She lets go his hand. He stares straight ahead, at the wall opposite. The landlord had rendered the bricks with plaster, and painted it cream, which she didn't like. She has stuck posters from old art exhibitions on the wall, to add a bit of interest. There is a print by Matisse, of a naked man's head and upper body. The man's head rests on his folded arms; his eyes are shut. It is called 'La Reve'. Last time he was here, she had told him it was called 'The Dream'.

"What do you think it does to me?"

She waits for an answer, not letting him look away. He shrugs. He has never found it easy to evade those dark eyes. She takes another cigarette from the packet. He reaches for her arm, out of habit, but then changes his mind. She lights up.

"How would you imagine I feel? Do you know what you said?"

The smoke comes from her mouth in a sudden gust. She tilts her head upwards and away from him, directing the smoke to the ceiling in a stream, a trick which always reminds him of a beginning smoker. Her thick brown hair is haloed against the overhead light. It was the hair, so curly and untameable, which he had first noticed at the hotel that night. Now he sees that some of the tips are touched with grey.

"When?"

"The last time you were here. In bed, before you left."

He shakes his head. He picks up his glass, and sips the wine. There is a stain on the lip of the glass, from the pizza they shared earlier. Two anchovies which he had picked off among the butts in the ashtray. Whenever they were together, they never seemed to have time to cook.

"Remind me."

"You said you loved me. You said you felt tossed and turned. You said I gave you complete attention, from the deepest part of me. Remember?"

He nods.

"Well you're right. I have that to give. I'm there for you. Fully there."

She takes another suck on her cigarette. She leans forward on the couch, twisting her body to face him.

"You also said I had opened you up, like an oyster. I was the knife, you said, cutting away the bullshit. With me, you knew who you were." She waits, but still he won't say anything. "Some pearl you turned out to be."

She jams her cigarette into the ash tray.

"Then you got dressed and left. What do you say to all of this?"

The cigarette still smoulders, sending a thin line of smoke at an angle up to the ceiling. He crushes it completely, and smells the tips of his thumb and forefinger. There is something both repellent and seductive in the acrid after-scent.

"I remember. What about it?"

"This."

She draws back her arm, and swings it, putting all her weight into hitting him in the head. His glass flies on to the carpet, spilling wine over his clothes and the couch. She hits

him again, harder, with the side of her hand, across his cheek and eye. He grabs her arm and pushes her away, then stands up, feeling the blood on his face where her ring has cut him.

"Well fuck you!" She is screaming now, jabbing too veed fingers in front of his face. "I'm no instrument. I'm not to be used, then thrown away!"

He stomps out to the kitchen, but immediately comes back to the lounge room. She watches him, afraid, her shoulders now crouched.

"You shouldn't do that," he says. "I'll hit back."

"I really dislike you. Answer the charges. Speak to me!"

He picks up his car keys from the coffee table, and looks for his coat. He sees it on the couch. She puts it behind her, and leans back. He tries to reach behind her and wrench it free but she is too strong.

"Don't go."

"Give it to me."

He reaches for the coat again, but she won't shift. A spot of blood drips on to her blouse, staining the thin material a dull red before she can wipe it off. He wipes his face absently, and walks out of the lounge room, down the hallway to the door. She stands up and rushes after him. He tries to open the door, but it is deadlocked. He jiggles the handle furiously. The sound of a car pulling up outside makes him look through the muslin curtains on the glass panels of the door. Then he glances at his watch.

"Please don't go."

He leans against the wall, closing his eyes, letting the wall take his weight. She puts her head on his chest, rubbing her hand on his waist.

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did I have to find out like that?"

A car door slams outside, a dog barks crazily, yelps, then stops. He opens his eyes, glancing at the door.

"It's all right, no one's coming."

"Who told you?"

"I saw you with her in the supermarket on Saturday. You told me you didn't want another child. You said it was finished."

"It is."

He gently removes her arm.

"It was an accident."

He peers through the glass again. The street-light coming through the door makes the gash on his face seem even redder.

"My God, look at that."

She moves to the door and looks through, then turns and runs down the hallway to her bedroom. She comes back with the key, opens the deadlock, and follows him outside.

There is a dog hanging by its chain from the back of a ute parked in front of her house. The chain is attached to the top of the tray, and is so short that when the dog had jumped off it had not been able to reach the ground. Its eyes are bulging, and there is no movement. He picks it up and lifts it back onto the ute, grunting with the effort. She unclips the chain from its collar. They both climb into the ute, and she cradles its head in her lap. She feels its neck, checking to see if it is broken. As she does this, the Alsatian's eyes glaze over.

"It's dead, isn't it?"

He nods, but still kneels beside the dog and leans on its chest, giving it a sudden thump. There is no response. He does it again, harder, and this time the dog opens its eyes. He pushes hard once more, and the dog is definitely alive.

"It's probably in shock. We should keep it warm until it recovers."

"I'll get a blanket."

She climbs down from the ute, and goes into the house. He strokes the dog on the side of its head, murmuring "You'll be right, fella, you'll be right." People are leaving the nearby pub and walking to their cars. He looks up at the sky. The low clouds are a dull orange, a blanket absorbing the city's neons. She comes back with an old rug, and they manage to wrap it around the dog snugly. It is breathing steadily, but apart from that has not moved at all.

"Shall I call a vet?"

"The owner will probably come back soon. Have you seen this car here before?"

"No." She puts her hand in front of the dog's mouth. Its tongue is hanging out. "It's breathing, I can feel breath. Come inside now."

"I'd like to hang the bastard who did this."

"We both would."

They go inside the house. She locks the door, leaving the key in the deadlock, and takes his hand, leading him to her bedroom. They undress and climb into the bed, holding each other for a moment. She reaches for a cigarette, but he stops her.

"Not in here. Please."

They make love quietly, for a long time, and then lie back against the bed head, drinking the last of the wine which she had gone to get. His glass has a bit of green fluff from the carpet clinging to the base. He flicks it off, looking at their clothes on the floor, at the photographs of her father on the shelf opposite, at the clutter of jars and scarves and brushes on her dresser.

"What are you thinking?"

"About an article I read years ago. In *National Geographic*. It was a diagram, or a photo, of a scent-trail followed by a dog. They had set it up so that the dog could sniff some cooked meat on the far side of this big garden, or field. There were coloured lines everywhere, a lot of zigzags." He smiles. "That's how I feel with you a lot of the time."

"How?"

"You're a lot of trouble. It should be straightforward."

"But I mean to give you trouble."

"I know."

"You don't know why."

She takes his empty glass and puts it on the dresser, then snuggles down beside him.

"I want it to be open between us. I wish you weren't married with kids. I wish you could give me what I can give you."

"It's easy to wish."

After that they are silent, and he falls asleep with his arm around her shoulders. She kisses him, and sets the alarm for six in the morning, then closes her eyes.

HE WAKES the next morning just before the alarm sounds, gets dressed, and shakes her.

"I have to go now."

Her eyes open suddenly, brightly, so that he is not sure whether she was asleep. A dullness comes into them, like a curtain closed against the light.

"Then go."

He hears the sharpness in her voice, but knows better than to try and soften it. It is still dark and wintry when he lets himself out of her house and walks to his car.

She sleeps some more, then wakes and throws on jeans and a thick jumper to go to the milkbar for a packet of cigarettes. It is cold, and an empty potato chip packet skitters across the road. The blanket which they had used to warm the dog has been thrown onto the footpath. She picks it up, carries it to her door and drops it on the steps.

Turning the corner to the street where the milkbar is, she notices a single cloud low in the sky. There is something about it which catches her attention. She stops to look, pulling her jumper close around her body. It is shaped like a hammer, she realises, a definite hammer but as she stops to watch, the cloud changes shape. High, invisible winds are tearing at it, kneading it. Now it looks like a nun, kneeling. It stays like this for a while, but the wind soon teases and smudges it into nothing. She continues walking to the milkbar.

Bev Aisbett

AEROPLANE
after Ardengo Soffici

Fan of light in the chilly zone of death;
sieve of gold, catherine wheel of glass, wind
and colour,
breathing in full sunlight
with an open wing, W. Spezia, 37, in freedom.

The earth? Houses, words, cities,
agriculture, commerce, love, tears, whispers,
flowers, strong drinks,
scattered below in a circle like laundry.

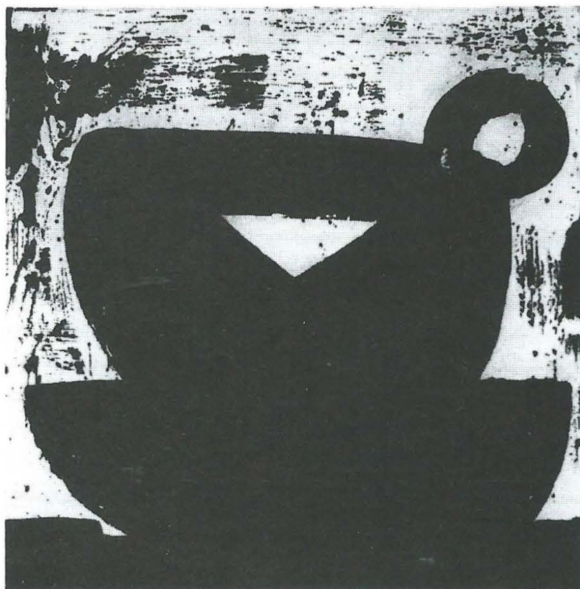
Here's drunkenness stronger than an 1811
Rufina wine:
a memory of location written across the carpet
of the world.
The morning and evening dailies,
friends, lovers, ideas in books
rotate down there, in the dust and spittle.

I grip flight with a glove;
floor the flying-boots;
gorge triangular slices of dark blue,
gulp tankards of cobalt,
founder in a funnel of paradise
(Christ aviator, ascended to glory
on an angle of wood, cloth and wire).
The thought of return is a black cube
shadowing the white quadrant of the spinning
altimeter.

Erotic feathers edge royal peacock clouds;
I glide spermlike into null-space among pink
stars.
For me, solitude; there's no substance left of
my brain
to create anything more definitive.

To 6027 metres incipit vita nova.
The infinite smells of ripe fruit,
of petrol, thighs and breasts,
of hair combed after a shower.
I set fire to a watermelon chilled in the well;
kiss silently the vulva of the firmament.
Sparks of music speckle the enthusiastic
compass of cylinders and propeller;
mimic the whistles of high-flying birds.
I navigate in the absolute, my country,
forgetting omnipresent flesh;
the mathematical shape of the dragonfly is my
destiny,
my history, an ultimate radiotelegram.
If these revelations could be hijacked from the
gloom of common wisdom
(enough not to vomit, amigo Sancho, as we
repeat our masquerade in the mirror of the
homicidal barber:
"Dulcinea of Toboso is *the* most beautiful
woman in the world").

Wes Placek



To sleep, to sing in this burning purity is
difficult.
I have majored in all developments of art and
vice and hold the official certificates.
I have imagined the resurrection of all things,
the transubstantiation of the rainbow,
the evaporation of ethics;
I have spent myself on the keyboard of love:
I have enjoyed the yellow skin of a pumpkin, a
virgin goat;
in a dream I have kissed my dead sister,
and seen God shipwrecked on a large breast
made of pastry
prepared skilfully at the Cafe de deux Magots,
Paris.

Life is a bunch of sour grapes I have too
ardently sucked.
Drying my mouth with a napkin I point to the
sky.
My legs are long and thin
and I wear size 41 like Arthur Rimbaud
(found dead at 37 between pillars of amethyst)
but I don't walk as much as him.

I see the geometry of cities, piazzas, streets,
phosphorus on the black quilt of night:
I look for long trains in famous landscapes,
lost worms on a map of paper trails.
I see the running lights of playhouses:
Romeo and Juliet, King Lear,
The Merry Widow, Hamlet.
Rivers, cramped and restricted, end too soon in
the sea;
flowers obey the botanical tracts,
never trading their colour or scent.

Women, their minds are either too close to
objects, or too distant;
men, they rot thinking of Jesus or their smelly
feet,
of angels dressed by couturiers;
how many of them bake under vermillion
rooftops, in this gulf of Persian green?

Ah! to leave their ashes behind!

With no regret, I gain altitude;
my drunken eyes take aim at the stars;
onward, broaching another trench of
ultramarine!
I take the dog days by assault.

LAURIE DUGGAN

RAMONA BARRY

Learning to Walk, all Over Again

Recent Australian Cinema in Review

WHEN ASKED TO COMMENT on recent films for *Overland,* I proudly came up with a list of over a hundred. My face fell when I was told "Oh no, it was *Australian* films we wanted". I had only listed four. "What Australian films?" I thought. I could hardly write an entire article on *The Silver Brumby* now, could I?

Filled with indignation I trekked off in search of a story. What were the bad things about the industry? The lack of finance? The lack of public support? The list of Aussies making a name for themselves behind the cameras of overseas films? Misjudgement is an exhausting process.

Once I pushed my own prejudices aside and began to dig a little deeper into my own memory of film in this country, more good than bad emerged from the backlot. Many of the films had become cult classics both here and overseas. A sense of optimism came creeping in.

Mad Max, Gallipoli, Dogs in Space, Proof, My Brilliant Career, Bliss and *Strictly Ballroom* were all brought immediately to the surface of any conversation I had regarding my article. This was all the evidence I needed to see that not only is there an Australian film industry, but that Australians are aware of it, no matter how deeply buried the knowledge is beneath the landslide of American and European imports.

To expect to compete on its own terms with a culture that devotes an entire major city to churning out formula produce is literally to dream the impossible dream. Hollywood style, sophistication and slickness shouldn't be something to aim for simply because it is unattainable.

There is a call for Australia's film industry to become more commercially oriented, in order to break through to the international market. This would certainly justify the huge budget that is swallowed by any film – let alone a 'Hollywood' style of film. But the Australian films that have been successful overseas (with the exceptions of *Crocodile Dundee* and *Dead Calm*) have proven that Australia is not, and never will be, famous for its big-budget extravaganza, but for well-crafted and unique films.

This doesn't automatically spell 'arthouse'. *Strictly Ballroom* is a prime example of how a uniquely Australian film can appeal to a mass market. Our own domestic market is so small that no matter how 'commercial' we aim to be, we can never be a major competitor. What we have is a young industry full of innovations, style, and a pioneering spirit.

A HISTORICAL REVIEW of the industry (what little history there is) reveals one in its infancy, but with a strong will to walk its own way. Even the term 'Australian cinema' is elusive in its definition. Just prior to 1974, after lack of distribution killed off the vital local industry pioneered by Ken G. Hall and others during the earlier part of this century, there was no industry to speak of. 'Australian' films were for the most part either British or American. Australia was used as an exotic backdrop full of cattlemen, ocker adventurers, and gollywog-style friendly natives. There were odd exceptions at the latter end of this period: namely *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972) and *Alvin Purple* (1973), but these films only served to further the larrikin image and are not regarded as significant in contributing to a more honest national identity. Arthouse films such as Peter

Weir's *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974) were often critically acclaimed, but were rejected by audiences as too 'strange'.

Australian cinema's true birth came with the release of Weir's following feature *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). Despite its complete rejection of the classic Hollywood narrative in favour of a more esoteric European style, *Picnic* was a huge success both here and overseas. It grossed more than five million dollars in sales and was distributed to more than thirty countries worldwide. *Picnic* proved that success was attainable without having to imitate or compete against the far more established, populist Hollywood style. It was also the beginning of a spate of period films: *The Picture Show Man* (1977), *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), culminating in the now much-loved *My Brilliant Career* (1979).

The industry moved through the late '70s with confidence and creative vigour, although the financial success of *Picnic* was not often repeated. Oddly enough, the next great success in box-office terms was a film so far removed from the gentle world of *Picnic*, to be its true opposite. George Miller's 1979 road-thriller *Mad Max* has been elevated to cult classic status both here and even more so in the United States. The film and its two sequels were seen by some as a sellout to American taste. Its violence horrified critics on one hand and delighted audiences on the other.

If you were to do a superficial study of Australian cinema during the early to mid '80s it would appear to be lost in a quagmire of nostalgia. Big budget epic films like *Phar Lap*, *Gallipoli*, *The Man From Snowy River*, and *Crocodile Dundee* placed Australia firmly back on myth-making turf.

For such an urbanised nation, the need to regurgitate cattlemen, adventurers and friendly natives (*Crocodile Dundee*) is an oddity. It perhaps reflects more on how other people see us than on how we perceive ourselves. *Crocodile Dundee*'s mind-blowing success in America may have been attributed to the fact that half the film was set in New York. But was it not an Aussie doing what the world thinks we do best – cracking jokes, eating bush tucker, and being basically naive to technology and the culture of the civilised world?

The Man From Snowy River (1982) was the highest grossing Australian film in history (later superseded by *Crocodile Dundee*). It was a deceptively un-Australian film. It fell neatly into the Hollywood western genre where boys became men and women fell at their feet no matter how feisty they started out. Even Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas was wheeled in for authenticity. It was a case of Australians looking overseas for their national identity and finding one they could be happy with. We (sort of) knew it was a myth, and the rest of the world had their beliefs about us confirmed on the big screen.

Audiences lapped up this contrived national identity, leaving many of the more realistic cinematic ventures in the box-office dust. Films like *Return Home*, *Shame*, *High Tide*, *The Fringe Dwellers*, and *Grievous Bodily Harm* slipped past audiences despite their entertainment value.

The '90s, though not even half over, have already seen some changes in the types of Australian films that are successful, and a steady increase in audience acceptance of the local industry.

The use of American stars to improve local films' chances of commercial success has continued. Following on in the tradition of *The Man From Snowy River* are: *Dead Calm* (Billy Zane), *Map of the Human Heart* (Patrick Bergen), *Spotswood* (Anthony Hopkins), and *The Piano* (Harvey Keitel and Holly Hunter). However, the overseas-import formula, long criticised by our own Actors' Equity for obvious reasons, has had varied success in recent years. *The Piano*, touted as a women's picture, soared to critical and commercial heights, with Holly Hunter winning an Oscar for her mute performance, whilst arguably a better film – *Map of the Human Heart* – a male fantasy picture, sadly flopped. *Spotswood* didn't do too well at the box-office despite the clout of Anthony Hopkins.

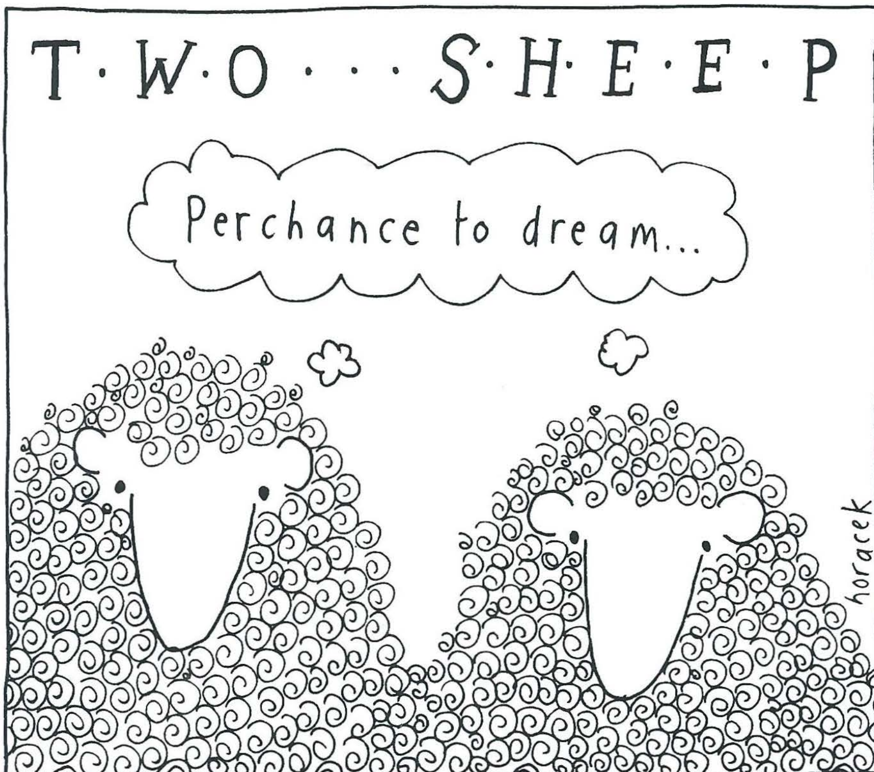
THE TRANSITION from the mountain-man myth into a more city-dwelling film identity continues to be bumpy. It seems a timewarp was needed to bring us more into focus about where we have come from and where we are now going as a culture. Films like *Flirting*, *Secrets*, and *The Nostradamus Kid* placed us firmly in the Fifties. Even *Strictly Ballroom* has a kitschiness attributable to that era despite being set sometime in the present. Australian film-makers edged us closer to the present with films such as

The Big Steal, *Spotswood*, and *Proof*.

In the past eighteen months or so, with the release of the ultra-violent *Romper Stomper* and the ultra-soppy *Heartbreak Kid*, we have been slapped right into the present day. These films, despite being radically different, had one very important thing in common: they were not ashamed to admit that Australian culture is in large part a pastiche of overseas cultures. *Romper Stomper*'s pommy-style skinheads likened themselves to Nazi heroes; *The Heartbreak Kid's* romantic lead woos his teacher girlfriend by rap-dancing out the front of her house, and instructing her in the fine art of rollerblading.

The overseas success of *Proof*, *Strictly Ballroom*, and *The Piano* has made Australians far more ready to buy tickets to Australian films. This is a minor miracle when you consider the extent to which we have adopted U.S.-influenced 'lifestyles'. There has always been a steady stream of American popular culture, particularly on our cinema screens. But in the past fifteen years it has gone beyond what we watch, drink, and listen to. We are now at the point where our own pop culture is merely a small-scale U.S. culture. Australian kids idolise American basketballers, and wear all the right gear, down to caps and running shoes. Maybe we should be glad that we still have Australian accents.

Ramona Barry is a Melbourne-based poet and film reviewer.



CHRIS BERRY

Australian TV Content and its Discontents

AUSTRALIAN CONTENT is the sacred cow of debates on Australian television, and I would like to see this aging and venerable beast dragged off to the slaughterhouse. Year in, year out, every new development is measured against its effect on the percentage of local-content television on our screens. Most recently, the discussion of pay television has been warped by this consideration. However, this tired old standard is erected on the very shaky assumption that a greater percentage of local content equals greater economic and cultural health. Furthermore, it blinds us to the far more important question of where we import from: we still get the great bulk of foreign material from countries of decreasing relevance to our future, the United States and the United Kingdom. It is this excessive dependence on limited sources rather than the percentage of imports that is truly culturally and economically damaging.

Up to twenty years ago, the United Kingdom and the United States may have been our main trading partners as well as cultural sources. However, this is no longer the case. About ten per cent of our exports go to the United States and eighty-seven per cent to East Asia.[1] With the exception of the United States, all our main trading partners are in the same geographical region as we are, and within the next few years the United States will probably be surpassed by South Korea and/or the post-1997 combined China and Hong Kong as our second most important partner.[2]

This fact is well-known, but unfortunately we still know little about the countries we depend upon trade with for our economic well-being. The Australian government's commitment to changing this situation is genuine and has led to the prioritisation of languages from this region in Australian schools. However, how many Australians know or genuinely want to know anything about Korea, for example, other than maybe where it is on the map?

This becomes an even greater cause for alarm when one realises that our trading partners do not have the same ignorance about us. Koreans and Thais may know little more about Australia's specific culture than kangaroos and koalas and, in the case of Thailand in particular, pisspots and paedophiles. However, as a result of the same economic forces that have led to the dominance of American programming in our television imports, they are thoroughly familiar with the general Anglo-Saxon-based multiculture that we form part of. Furthermore, as anyone who has travelled or lived in other parts of our region can attest, people there are eager to know about that culture, not only so they may interact with it to their material advantage but also for what they may adopt and adapt into their own cultures.

Not so in Australia. Programming from other parts of our region is confined almost entirely to SBS, which remains a ghetto channel in terms of ratings. When did you last see a Thai soap opera or a Japanese game show on Australian commercial television? Clearly, general Australian audiences have not yet woken up to the urgent need to know about our neighbours' cultures for pragmatic trading reasons or to the pleasures and cultural enrichment they may get from them. Nor have they identified television programming as one of the quickest and most entertaining ways to answer that need.

Will we wait until this need is forced onto our

consciousness by economic and political adversity? Quite possibly, and the recent contretemps with Malaysia's 'recalcitrant' premier may indicate this will happen sooner than we are anticipating. However, to be optimistic, we can point to some positive trends. Already, the ABC has begun to develop a service designed for the regional market and the SBS has signalled its desire to enter pay-TV.[3] Tune in to the ABC late at night and you can watch the news dished up by the ABC's initiative, Australian Television International. The format is familiar, but the priorities are remarkably different from those of the early evening broadcasts. The major headline items are not local traffic deaths, and the foreign news is not dominated by what is happening in Washington and Downing Street. Rather, the ATVI news prioritises the major events of the region, including Australia. Prime Minister Keating's latest slanging match in Parliament is likely to appear side by side with revelations of further financial scandals in the Japanese Diet, fist fights over the independence issue in the Taiwanese parliament, and rumblings of a new crackdown on students in Burma.

MAYBE THIS IS WHAT the future of Australian television and Australian identity might look like – not a youth culture that continues to construct itself in reference to American baseball and women Liberal senators who model themselves on Margaret Thatcher, but rather one which understands its cultural identity and place in the world in a relation that is in tune with its economic and political situation. And what's more, it's happening right now, thanks to the very thing the Australian content standard has made us fight shy of for so many years – pay television.

Yet, while pay TV might yet benefit Australia, arguing against the obsession with Australian content that has delayed its introduction is still like arguing against the ten commandments. From the earliest days of broadcast regulation, increasing the percentage of local production has been the great beacon for regulators, policy makers and commentators.[4]

If this is true, why is it that even now, after the very considerable achievements already made, Australia still leads the world when it comes to what is framed as the 'cultural colonisation' of our screens?

The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal set television program standard number 14 in 1989, which had a goal of fifty per cent Australian content per licensee as a target to be achieved by the end of 1993. They proudly trumpeted that this had been exceeded in 1990, when the average outside the 'graveyard' hours of midnight to six in the morning was fifty-two per cent.[5] What they neglected to mention was that this is still one of the lowest levels of national content on television in the world. American network television has ninety-eight per cent local content, and the UK between eighty and eighty-five per cent. The Canadian figure is about sixty per cent, and even many Latin American countries, long regarded as the prime example of cultural colonisation in television, have higher rates of local material than Australia.[6]

Not only does Australia have a relatively high level of imported content, but the bulk of it is also from the US. If the transmission time given over to imports in 1990 was forty-eight per cent, over all five networks thirty-four per cent was given over to American programming, and for the high-rating commercial stations, approximately forty per cent was American.[7] This lack of diversification has not only the cultural costs discussed above but also economic costs. Lack of import diversification and competition among the commercial stations for the most popular US programming pushes up the prices US producers can extract from Australian buyers. In 1990, only Canada paid more per million viewers for each half-hour of US television at US$1250 compared to Australia's US$878. By way of comparison, UK television stations paid a quarter that amount; US$209.[8] While it is impossible to predict the prices television producers from countries in our region would demand, it is certain that diversification of import sources would push down the average price paid per million viewers per half hour of material.

Furthermore, if we continue to rely heavily on English-language programming from the United States, pay television will only exacerbate the existing problem, for increased transmission hours will also increase the demand for programming. These increased hours make the

argument that pay television will probably decrease the percentage of local content almost certainly correct.[9] Pay television will not be subject to local content regulation and is therefore very likely to be dominated by HBO, CNN and other foreign channels that are already up, going and ready to be piped into your living room now. One alarmist commentator has even suggested that pay television will follow VCR trends, where only four per cent of titles distributed are Australian.[10] Worry about this was certainly one of the reasons that led government after government to kick pay TV into the too-hard basket until this year. As a result, while the old national network oligopolies have broken up and satellite dishes have sprouted across skylines from Los Angeles to London and Tokyo to Timbuktu, Australia remains the Jurassic Park of broadcast television, dominated by the twin dinosaurs of commercial and public service network broadcasting.[11]

FROM THE VIEWER'S perspective, this delay may be no great tragedy. In the United States, the days when people spoke of the 'cable promise' are long gone. A wonderful world of advertising-free diversity with channels devoted to opera, in-depth news, and other worthy pursuits never did materialise. Neither did the interactive dream of extended participatory democracy with viewers having their say from their living rooms.[12] Instead, America got more of the same old *I Love Lucy* and *Charlie's Angels* re-runs, plus the Home Shopping Network. Nowadays, people talk of the 'cable fable'. Where once cable subscription was promoted with the slogan 'I Want My MTV', Bruce Springsteen has written '57 Channels and Nothing to Watch'.[13]

However, those involved in the local television industry may find that, far from being protected by concerns about local content, the delay in introducing pay television adds up to an opportunity lost. This is because the argument that percentage of local content measures the economic health of the industry rests on two falsehoods. One is the idea that the television cake remains the same size, and the second is the assumption that television is not an export industry.

First, although the introduction of pay television may decrease the value of airtime on broadcast commercial channels, it will still increase the overall size of the television cake, both in terms of companies providing the platforms (i.e. the range of pay and over-the-air channels), and in terms of the demand for programming to fill the schedules. In these circumstances, if pay television is correctly managed, the increased size of the industry may indeed lead to a considerable drop in the percentage of local content but at the same time lead to an increase in the overall size of the local industry. However, the long delay in introducing pay television means that local companies are at a disadvantage because they have neither the experience nor the capital base of long-established foreign pay television players like Ted Turner's CNN and Rupert Murdoch's Sky.[14]

Second, as the success of programs like *Neighbours* in the UK indicates, television is an international business. The percentage of local content standard fails to take into account export earnings and is therefore a poor indicator of industry health. The increased numbers of channels that come with pay means that very few countries can generate all the programming needed to fill the schedules. In fact, Australia's small population base is already a major reason for importing large quantities of foreign material. In the good old days of broadcast-only when scarce airtime and large audiences generated very high advertising revenues, American producers were among the few able to make money on high cost drama productions in their home market. All foreign income was simply icing on the cake, and therefore they could undercut local producers in most nations.

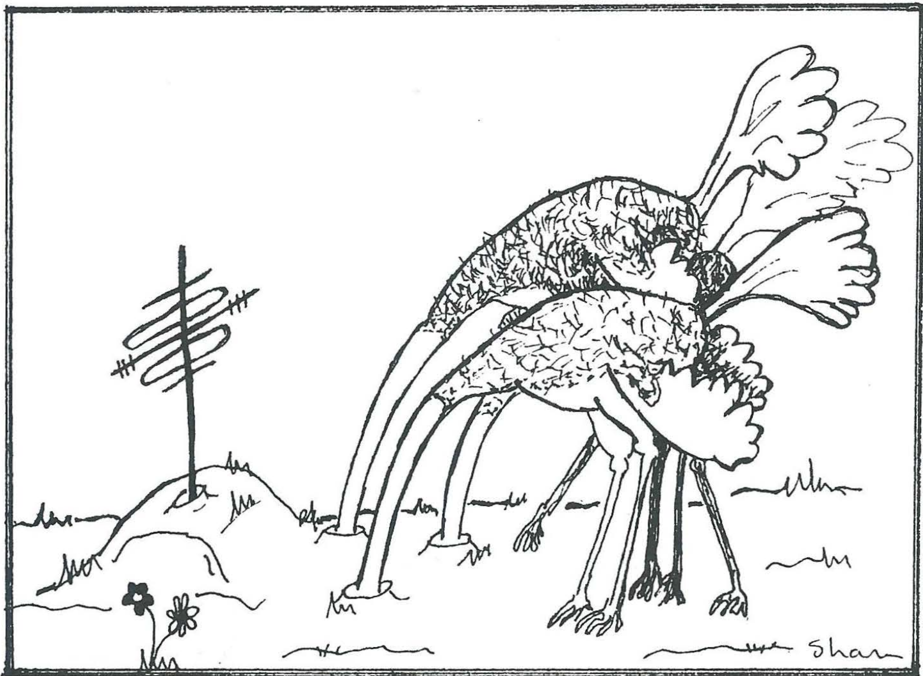
In the case of Australia, it is still commonly estimated that it costs ten times as much to make one hour of prime-time drama than it does to buy the American equivalent. Therefore, although Australian audiences have a demonstrated preference for local material, Australian television channels continue to need to import low-cost American product to maintain their schedules. Of course, if audiences demanded it or responded well to it, there is no reason why some of this material should not come from other countries than America. If it seems absurd to suggest that Australians will ever tune in and

turn on to anything that is not in English, let alone Korean melodramas, for example, that is only a measure of our parochialism. If, as is the case, Koreans happily watch *Dallas* and the Chinese lap up Mexican 'telenovellas', why shouldn't Australian audiences be able to develop a liking for Asian programming?

PAY TELEVISION has made it less possible for any country, even the United States, to supply all its own programming needs. This should provide plenty of opportunity for other English-language producers, including Australia. Indeed, re-runs of *The Sullivans* and *The Young Doctors* have already played on the UK Sky Channel.[15] However, pay television is a very different animal from broadcast network television. With smaller and more specialised 'niche' audiences for each channel, programming has to be equally specialised and produced at a lower cost. However, the delay in the introduction of a local pay television industry means local producers are less experienced at producing and export marketing programming that answers this particular need.[18]

Even if the sacred cow of the Australian content standard is useless as a measure of the health of the Australian television industry, surely it is important as a measure of cultural health? Here, the presumption is that the more Australian television we watch, the healthier Australian culture will be. Again, this rests on two falsehoods. One is the idea that in this age of globalised multicultures there is some clear and essential difference between Australian culture and foreign culture. The second is the idea that it is better for us to watch Australian culture rather than foreign culture. Maybe rather than worrying about the amount of foreign material, we should be more worried about where it comes from; maybe it is the overwhelming predominance of a single source of foreign material that is harmful rather than the fact that it is foreign?

As an English-born man of German extraction who migrated to Australia from China, I think that in an ironic way I am a thoroughly representative 'Australian'. However, I doubt plural hybridity is what most people consider Australian content to be; kangaroos, koalas, swagmen and billabongs are more likely to come to mind.



Indeed, a few years back, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal considered attempting to measure Australian content in terms of an 'Australian look' along such lines. This was nobly intended to block locally produced foreign material such as the Melbourne-based production of *Mission Impossible* being counted as Australian content. However, the idea was droppped in the face of the likelihood that it would boil down to macho Anglo-Celtic nationalism, and that bureaucrats scouring the screen for Flying Doctor planes and men from Snowy River would be unacceptable to Australians from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.[17]

WHAT THIS DEBACLE unmasks is the fact that, like it or not, Australia is largely a settler society. Only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community can make claims for an essentially Australian identity, and if that is to be the Australian content standard, remarkably little would count on network television, although of course there have been notable local indigenous media developments of late.[18] Indeed, with roots all over the world, Australians are just as likely to recognise elements of their Australian cultural identities in foreign or local programming.

Furthermore, much local programming is already based on foreign models. The most obvious examples are the licensed local productions of game shows like *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy*. Steve Vizard's *Tonight Show* was also a direct copy of David Letterman's *Tonight Live* down to the host's hand gestures. On the generic level, *Neighbours'* Ramsay Street can be traced back to the UK's *Coronation Street* and all our sitcoms are grounded in the model developed in the US and the UK. Even the news is based on foreign models: the ABC and SBS's one-newsreader format is based on British public television news; and the commercial networks' dominant older man plus younger woman format derives from the US commercial network model.

The origins of our news formats should remind us that the whole Australian television system is a mix and match combination of the US three commercial network and UK public service model. This is not a cause for panic; it does not necessarily mean that much of the already small amount that counts as Australian content is in fact not. Rather, if our culture is understood not as essential but as based on ongoing multiple and diverse adopting and adapting into what has already been assimilated, much of what counts as foreign now is virtually Australian already.

To deal with the second false assumption in regard to Australian content as a measure of cultural health, even if we were able to satisfactorily designate certain programming as foreign, why assume that it is unhealthy to watch it? This is unutterably parochial. Even from a more pragmatic and less high-minded perspective, for a country as dependent upon successful foreign trade as Australia, it is important to know as much as we can about the countries we do business with, and not be content to remain a cultural satellite of the US and Britain. Furthermore, if we gain a deeper understanding of our region and are able to become culturally integrated into it, who knows, maybe it would become another market for our television producers and even open up the possibility of coproductions and other culturally and economically beneficial ventures?

Endnotes:

1. Greg Sheridan, 'Trading Places', *The Weekend Australian* (September 26-27, 1992), p.19.
2. Florence Chong, 'China trip brings business worth $1bn', *The Weekend Australian* (October 9-10, 1993).
3. Gerard Ryle, 'SBS launches into pay-TV with sights on ethnic market', *The Age* (June 26, 1993), and Lindsay Murdoch, 'ABC joins Asia's cable boom', *The Age* (November 28, 1992).
4. John Docker, 'Popular Culture Versus the State: An Argument Against Australian Content Regulations for Television', *Media Information Australia* 59 (February 1991). Docker cites section 114 of the 1942 Broadcasting Act as decreeing that licensees should make increased use of Australian talent (p.11). I should note here that I do not support Docker's argument against the Australian content standard as paternalistic state interference with the people's freedom of choice because, as I discuss further below, this argument ignores the economic factors that encourage licensees to use foreign material even though audiences prefer Australian material.
5. Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, *Annual Report 1990-91*, (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1991), p.60.
6. Stuart Cunningham, *Framing Culture* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p.59. In film, the situation is even more extreme. Over eighty per cent of box office income is taken by Hollywood movies. Until deep discounting set in this year, our high ticket prices meant we returned more per capita to Hollywood than any other country in the world, including the United States.
7. ABT figures cited in Tom O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), p.67.
8. *Variety*, cited in ibid, p.66.
9. Stuart Cunningham, op.cit., pp.104-136 provides a superb history of the debates around pay television, although I disagree with some of his conclusions for reasons which should become clear.
10. Sam Paltridge, 'Book Review: Department of Transport and Communications, *Future Directions for Pay Television in Australia* (Canberra, AGPS, 1989)', *Prometheus* 7:2 (December 1989), p.405.
11. For an insider account of the decline of the network broadcasters in the United States, see Ken Auletta, *Three Blind Mice* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

12. This particular utopian dream of democracy through technology has been around for a long time in America; see Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), esp. pp.187-215, and Jeanne Allen, 'The Social Matrix of Television: Invention in the United States', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches – An Anthology* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983), pp.109-119.
13. For a history of the utopian 'cable promise' discourse in the United States, see Thomas Streeter, 'The Cable Fable Revisited: Discourse, Policy, and the Making of Cable Television', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (1987), pp.174-200. There are many accounts of the disillusion, but, for example, see J. Fred McDonald, 'Broadcasting Versus Cable', in *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network Television* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), pp.244-263.
14. For further discussion of the economics of pay television in Australia, see Allan Brown, 'Pay TV for Australia?' *Continuum* 4:1 (1990).
15. Paltridge, op.cit., p.405.
16. For a more detailed discussion of the Australian television export industry in general, see Elizabeth Jacka and Stuart Cunningham, 'Australian Television – An International Player', *Media Information Australia* 70 (November 1993), pp.17-27.
17. Albert Moran, 'Australian Television Content: The Wrong and the Right Way', *Culture and Policy* 1 (August 1989); Stuart Cunningham, op.cit., pp.56-7.
18. For further information, see Eric Michaels, *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia 1982-86*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986); Michael Meadows, *A Watering Can in the Desert: the Australian Government Response to Claims for Indigenous Broadcasting Rights* (Brisbane: Institute of Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, draft copy 1992); and Helen Molnar, *Remote Aboriginal Community Broadcasting in Australia: Developments and Priorities* (Paris, UNESCO, 1991).

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BLUE LADIES

There's a particular blue
you never see
except on nuns

It used to be Children-
of-Mary blue
they wore blue cloaks

and white gauze veils
brown stockings
and sensible shoes

they got to play at
being nuns:
special services, just

for them, at odd times.
This blue is dusty
flat powder-blue, like a dull sky

These days, you see it
made up into habits
(are they still called that?)

shapeless and practical
service-blue,
you could say

It's in the same class
of colours that you
find in hospitals

on nurses'-aides
tea-ladies, gift-shop
staff. In Adelaide they're

Lolly-Pink or Lilac,
depending on
the hospital

but, as I say,
you don't see quite this shade
of blue I'm looking at

in the airport lounge
on the discreet back of a
placid, big-bummed nun

There must be mountains of it
in the Vatican
for Mothers Superior to dispense

a blue mist of Lady's Mantle
wafted sighing on the wind
alighting at convent doors

signifying celibacy and
Cleanliness of Mind
to a polychrome world

CATHERINE KENNEALLY

ARTHUR TANAKA

An Encounter with the Japanese Film Industry

WHAT I HAVE TO RELATE here is mostly personal experience. Many in the halls of Academe who have been studying Japanese cinema would be able to tell you about thematic developments or the post-war culture-shock. I am not willing to attempt yet another treatise on Kurosawa sword operas, when I consider myself still a junior scholar in the field. Instead, I wish to present a picture of where things are now, in this borderless era. This article is also about how I went to Japan, testing the waters, looking for interest in some of my projects.

In October 1992, I had the pleasure of attending a function held in honour of four distinguished members of the Japanese film industry, who were visiting at the time. It was held at the Australian Film Television and Radio School, an institution which, in itself, embodies some of the differences between the two industries.

The guests were Mr Masato Hara of Herald-Ace, whose producing credits include Kurosawa's *Ran*, Mr Yo Yamamoto, executive producer with DAIEI, Mr Hideyuki Takai, executive producer for TOHO, and Naonori Kawamura, a veteran freelance producer who has many co-productions under his belt. They all came to town speaking the same big word, 'Kokusai-ka', which in English roughly translates as internationalisation.

To varying degrees they were all interested in distribution in Australia, and the potential of the Australian market. The way they saw it, the Japanese film industry could comfortably remain in its cocoon for some time, simply because a population of over a hundred million guaranteed a market that could support the industry. This factor also accounts for American cinema being so powerful in the marketplace, before it even hits our shores. The long-term problem, as the four visitors defined it, was the fact that American cinema was gradually eating into the market for their domestic productions as well. They needed to expand the audience for Japanese cinema.

The AFTRS, as an entity, took them all by surprise.

"The Government funds this institution?" they asked in turn, with some astonishment.

"Yes", I replied. "The Government of Australia believes that one of the bastions of Australian culture is our film industry. If this goes, we will simply end up as Americans."

The irony was not lost on them. They shook their heads in amazement.

"How much does this institution cost to run each year?"

I told them the figure was somewhere in the vicinity of nine million dollars that year. They still had problems swallowing the fact that the Federal Government would support such an elaborate enterprise for the sole purpose of furthering Australian film-making. I translated for them what I remembered of the AFTRS charter.

Some in Australia would, of course, dispute the success of AFTRS, but that is another discourse entirely.

"In Japan, the government could only be persuaded to help preserve traditional arts, such as Kabuki or Noh. Film is not considered an artform, let alone an indigenous one.

"But what about the successes of our great cinema masters, such as Kurosawa and Ozu, and more recently, Itami?" one of my colleagues asked.

"They are like sparkling bubbles in a vast

ocean of events", Mr Kawamura informed us. "Too many things go on for them to be noticed above all the rest."

Witness the high-output publishing industry of Japan, where even literary journals may sell near a hundred thousand copies each, and it is perhaps easy to see why cinema has a low profile. (Was this a hint that the Japanese studios were not in great shape?)

"Money", Mr Takai smiled. "We've been in Australia for ten days now, and all we hear is discussion about money. What we want is a genuine exchange, not a simplistic formula in which the rich Japanese fund the Australian film industry. Co-productions need to be thought about more along co-operative lines.

"On the one hand, you have the high value of the yen, and then you have National-Panasonic buying out MCA, so you think Japanese studios are rolling in money. I hate to disappoint you, but it is not true."

I think we *were* disappointed to hear this.

Our four Japanese visitors were very congenial people, and true to the style of those who produce, they left me with their business cards and a handshake.

"If you ever come to Tokyo, please come and visit us."

I WENT TO TOKYO in July 1993, with my graduation epic under my arm. It was mostly a trip to visit relatives, but I did manage to sneak in some meetings. The first man I tracked down was Mr Takai, who was more than surprised to see somebody had turned up across the Pacific Ocean on the strength of a business card. I had a look, for a day, at the most recent version of *Godzilla* that was being shot, and even got to quiz the producer.

How do you become a director in Japan these days?

"Well, there are some tried and true paths. Assistant directing gets you up the ladder through Third AD, Second AD, First AD, and then you become a director around the age of forty."

"Forty?" This did not bode well for a relatively young film-maker.

"Yes, it is a problem. They are all technicians who have learnt their technique from the masters. They end up doing the same things in the same ways. Finding new blood is a problem. There are those who come through television, but they don't understand *quality* – that thing which makes cinema what it is, and not something made to a formula. You let television directors shoot drama and they end up with a film with no *range*."

TOHO also has house directors, retained on huge salaries, who are assigned projects that have been developed in-house. The most recent

was *Godzilla Versus Mecha-Godzilla.*

"Don't laugh", Mr Takai said. "It's serious business for us. After all those years, we have discovered that Godzilla is our studio-logo character. He's our flagship, in the same way Mickey Mouse is for Disney, Tom and Jerry and the Roaring Lion are for MGM, and Bugs Bunny is for Warner Brothers. That's why we were very careful when we lent him out to do that joint commercial with Nike: Charles Barkley versus Godzilla."

So TOHO were going to see through the immediate future with a new generation of kids who want Godzilla to be *theirs*. Internationalisation to TOHO and Mr Takai obviously meant seeing what markets were available for distribution in Australia, and nothing more.

I left my graduation masterpiece with him and left. I doubted I was going to land a deal.

MY NEXT APPOINTMENT was with Mr Hara and Mr Kawamura, who seemed more interested in what I was doing. Ideally, I might set up an interpreting service for Japanese film crews flying through Australia.

They had already invested in Pauline Chan's feature film and were planning a co-production of their own in South Australia.

What they said about Australia probably revealed more about the state of the Japanese industry.

"They work so hard", Mr Kawamura gushed."For so little money!"

"They love the industry. They think it's the best job they could possibly have", I told them. It is true, we work like slaves and love it.

"Well, that's not the way people think in Japan. We're really impressed", Mr Hara said.

They asked more questions about AFTRS, and chuckled over the notion that film school graduates of any sort, in any part of the world, could ever amount to much. They believed that the creation of cinema takes talent, and could not be taught.

They were also very impressed with Jane Campion's film at Cannes, *The Piano.*

FINALLY, I HAD a meeting with Mr Yamamoto at DAIEI, which proved the most interesting one. He is executive producer of a smaller company, and the budgets he commands are much tighter than those of his colleagues. The profile of his organisation showed that it had to regularly produce the right sort of features in order to fill the screens. DAIEI occasionally took greater risks, but only when it could bank on something, such as a name. The most recent project Mr Yamamoto had undertaken was with Akira Kurosawa.

He laughed at certain media barons who tied their feature films to the sales of novels, and gave advice over the phone to the 'image division' of a newspaper that was trying to make feature films, but was not making money.

"I originally thought, 'Co-production: What do we have in common?' ... and there were all these well-worn stories about the war. The Second World War. Some pearl-divers before that, and then nothing. Our (the Japanese) relationship with Australia is so new. Australia is so new. It is more intellectually honest to say that we have nothing in particular in common with Australia, and start from there. Our relationship lies more in the future than the past, and that is a virtue. As for co-productions, I don't want to do war films."

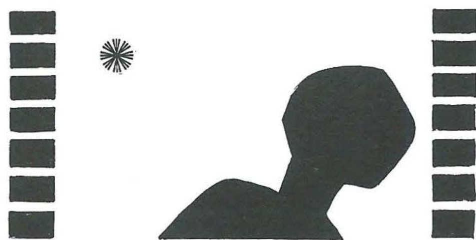
He explained that none of the studios was in a position to invest huge budgets in Australian-based productions. Maybe CBS-Sony could contemplate it, but that was another story altogether. They had bought into the American movie business without having made any films in Japan. Who knew what they really wanted, beside the catalogue of titles for video release?

I gained the impression that the studios remain small and isolated within the big bustling world of Japanese business.

Mr Yamamoto said he is keen to develop projects around more contemporary issues – such as the circumstances surrounding the PKO (Peace Keeping Operation) which was forced through the Diet. Or explore stories that are genuinely positive, in a world which is filled with endless possibilities for ethnic tensions and misunderstandings.

"I like making things", he said. "My background in film is strictly from the studio floor up. I wouldn't otherwise be doing this sort of work. I think we make things for a reason, and that is to try and make our world a better place. A more positive place, and to leave a brighter future for our children."

I was not sure I could swallow the rhetoric whole, yet he spoke passionately and seemed to believe in his mission. A dichotomy between would-be movie-mogul and martyr-for-art seems to characterise everyone in this business, worldwide. It is the nature of the artform/business. Films cost so much to make, and take such a tremendous effort, one cannot help but feel it must be worth something at the end of the day.



Obviously people strike different compromises.

I left Mr Yamamoto's office feeling quite relieved. He had offered to at least read any proposals I might submit.

I WENT TO PICK UP my *meisterwerk* from Mr Takai a few days before I left Tokyo. He seemed quite impressed. It was the best response I had received from anybody.

"You made that film on how much?"

I told him the budget. He sighed deeply.

"I envy you. To be able to make a film at a school like that. It must be something. We will never have a school like that in Japan. It's unthinkable."

"Well", I thought, "Do I get my big break?"

"If you want to do a feature version of this, you can't do it in Japan. We don't have the skills or the technology, let alone the budget ..."

And that was that.

We have many preconceptions in Australia as to what the Japanese film industry is like. The truth is, they are only marginally better off, only because they have a larger population to support a domestic market, which in turn supports a marginally larger but just as feeble industry. There are a few anomalies, where wealthy businesses invest in their own feature films (imagine Kerry Packer with delusions of Orson Welles-hood), but in fact end up losing money (they only re-coup with the tie-in products).

The wall of language persists. We can always sell our films to North America and the UK, with relative ease. A Japanese film is always going to be a lot more anomalous in the international market. The anxiety is greater over there than it is here. They speak the word 'internationalisation', and grasp for hope.

The final lesson for our industry, which may be contemplating large-scale coproductions, is this: if you want big-time Japanese money, then go and talk to the big-wigs who bought Hollywood.

Arthur Tanaka is a Japanese film-maker currently studying in Australia.

Bev Aisbett

MICHAEL GEORGE SMITH

Ozrock: The State of Play

ON FEBRUARY 11 this year, AUSMUSIC, the non-profit organisation set up in 1988 as a joint venture between the music industry and the federal government to assist and develop the industry, launched the first part of a study it had instigated under the title, *Stayin' Alive*. That first paper was titled *Identify The Problem*, and the result of an intensive investigation of the state of live performance in Australia.

The report was prompted by what had been widely perceived as a significant and disturbing deterioration in the opportunities for new *and* established artists and acts that fall within the rock genre, to perform live on any regular basis. With fewer venues available for performance, the new artists and acts would inevitably find it more difficult to develop that one aspect of Australian music that commentators have suggested makes it stand out in the international context – the stage craft of seasoned performance. If true, this could mean that, as the internationally famous artists of today – Crowded House, Midnight Oil, INXS and so on – fade, there would be no 'rising stars' to take their place.

While this might not seem terribly important to some, the fact that the music industry employs the full-time equivalent of 60,000 people, and generated in the financial year 1991/92 approximately $1.4 billion, earning Australia $120 million in exports, makes it of some significance indeed to a federal government trying to come to terms with more than a million unemployed after a recession.

Everyone working in the music industry has a different opinion as to why this "dramatic contraction in the live music scene" is occurring. Some deny that it is happening at all, and certainly in some state capitals, like Adelaide and Melbourne, there does seem some reversal of recent trends with a number of small venues opening catering to the various 'new musics'.

Until the results of the survey are widely circulated, and I can comment upon them in full, I will offer the following observations, which are based on personal experience.

Ironically, despite what is a very real contraction of the live rock music scene, there has been something of a renaissance in the recording of local artists that would indicate a very healthy situation. New acts seem to be getting signed on an almost weekly basis by the 'Big Six' (the multinational companies Sony Music, Warner Music, PolyGram, BMG/RCA and EMI and their subsidiaries, and the Australian 'independent', Festival Records) as well as by independent labels, from Mushroom and Larrikin down to the smaller 'boutique' labels. And those new acts *are* getting significant airplay and media attention, if not the sales figures to push them up to the INXS/Midnight Oil league.

So just exactly what *is* going on? Because here we are with fewer stages available, yet more local artists seeing records released.

The live music scene as we've known it came into being in the 1970s, as promoters and publicans alike became aware of the sales potential of an audience that had lived through the pop explosion of the 1960s and were now demanding more substance from both their live and recorded music.

Before the 1970s, concerts had been held in unlicensed Blue Light Discos, halls and whatever other facilities were available up to 'stadium' level. Once the pubs opened their doors to live music, the various leagues and RSL clubs followed suit to stave off falling bar takings, and the 'golden era' of 'Aussie pub

rock' began. Bands like Billy Thorpe & The Aztecs, Daddy Cool, The Masters Apprentices, Sherbet, Skyhooks, Chain, The Dingoes and hundreds of others were suddenly able to earn a living by touring, and availing themselves of a national network of small, medium and large venues each holding between one hundred and two thousand people. This was big business, and the time when the major promoters, managers and booking agents who, in the main, run the music industry today began their careers.

If there was a period when a truly *Australian* form of rock came into its own, it was in the 1970s. But, in my view, what was happening overseas was soon to tip the whole Aussie pub rock scene on its head, and the live music scene as we know it began to die back in 1979. It might have taken a good eight years for the industry to follow, but what was being signalled in 1979

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(earlier, among those following the exploits of The Sex Pistols in '76/'77 in England), was an attitudinal 'sea change' that would make the demise of the pub/club-based live music scene inevitable.

JIM KEAYS, the lead singer of The Masters Apprentices, recently described what happened to his career after 1979 this way: "There was this period from late '78 to '87 which was like a black hole for people like myself – everybody fell into it – John Farnham, Daryl Braithwaite, Russell Morris, everyone who had achieved anything prior to 1979 was labelled a boring old fart and invalid from there on in – and at times you started to believe it."

What Jim Keays and a host of other Australian musicians began to suffer was not just a diminishing number of places to play, but *two* kinds of related prejudices, both partly inherent in rock music as such, but peculiarly Australian in their emphasis.

The first is the ageism that pervades such an ephemeral 'art form', dictated by its very nature as 'youth' music; and the second is something we'd all assumed had been swept aside during the 'golden years' – cultural cringe.

As a music journalist rather than a performer, I can probably count on one hand the number of press releases I have received from new local acts that cite an Australian influence on their music, other than that of AC/DC and Rose Tattoo. Rock/pop music of course has always been derivative of fashionable trends in the US and UK and currently, the trend is to cite the 'grunge' acts based in Seattle, although that's starting to change now. Five years ago, we had a flurry of bands that were influenced by the 'dance/pop' scene in Manchester in England. There has been the 'girl pop' period where, with overseas labels hitting pay dirt with the likes of Voice Of The Beehive, The B52's, or whatever, bands in Australia ploughing a groove not necessarily too distant from that were being signed. And before that, there was a scramble by Australian labels to sign women singer/songwriters like Robyne Dunn, Gyan and Tania Bowra, as the likes of Enya, Cyndie Lauper and Toni Childs had hits. It's just the nature of the recording industry to try to emulate successes, and the nature of artists to imitate, and hopefully add enough of their own to create something 'new'.

I suggest the element of cultural cringe accounts for the fact that, for the majority of new bands emerging over the past half dozen years, much of Australia's rock 'heritage' might never have existed, for all the cultural impact it seems to have made. Among those Australian acts to influence the current crop I must add the name Radio Birdman. Surprisingly, however, I cannot add the name Cold Chisel, from whose ranks came one of our most successful singers of the late 1980s and early 1990s – Jimmy Barnes.

The attrition rate amongst musicians and 'pop stars' has always been pretty high throughout rock's near forty-year history, the world over. In Australia, after 1979 and the rise of the Punk and then New Wave bands, practically everyone, as Jim Keays suggests, who had had a career of any significance before that date was dismissed out of hand, ridiculed by a music press that was taking its lead from the British industry paper, *New Musical Express* (NME) and later, *Melody Maker*, and then by a broadcasting industry trying to maintain its 'hip' status while reso-

lutely refusing to play the 'New Wave/Punk' anyway. So while Sherbet, as musicians and songwriters, returned from a failed crack at the American market better at their craft, the albums they were making were rejected, leading ultimately to the band's demise.

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The rehabilitation, or perhaps more correctly, the "reaffirmation of creative legitimacy" granted to artists from the pre-punk era – John Farnham and Daryl Braithwaite principally – has been a popular rather than critical phenomenon. These artists, along with James Reyne, formerly of Australian Crawl, and Jimmy Barnes, are barely tolerated by the hip music press.

Similar disdain and derision is directed at acts that choose to explore musical areas deemed irrelevant, such as Southern Sons, a Melbourne rock/pop quartet whose debut album went quadruple platinum (240,000 copies sold) despite the best efforts of the street press, and whose principal songwriter, Phil Buckle, has contributed heavily to the last two Farnham albums. Their latest album, *Nothing But The Truth* (BMG), has just sold gold (50,000) after a year of release.

WHAT, YOU MUST BE wondering, has all this to do with the live music scene? It means a lot when you consider this whole industry is driven mainly by perceptions and images, rather than by musicianship. And the media, on all levels, have had a profound effect on whether or not an artist is allowed to succeed, and that reflects directly on what's happening at live performances.

Paul Gambaccini, a disc jockey with Radio One in London in the early 1980s, commented in *The Listener* in 1980 on the phenomenon I'm trying to explore here. The gist of his essay, as I understand it, was this: as the pop phenomenon of the '60s exploded and the publishing world picked up on it, the problem arose of 'static news copy', as a week would pass with no significant release or artist or act being launched.

Gradually, the commercial pressures on weekly newsstand music papers and fanzines saw each trying to outdo the other in finding 'the Next Big Thing', and as the readership became more cynical so the journalists began to vent their spleen, say in the manner of American Hunter S. Thompson.

This resulted, by 1976, in a deeply cynical kind of music journalism that was almost entirely contemptuous of audiences, and of those artists whom the journalists considered beneath their own obviously high critical standards. Just as pop had started out as a light entertainment and become self-consciously serious, so the journalists started promoting *themselves*, usually at the expense of the artists, as significant arbiters of taste.

When Australia embraced the Punk/New Wave, it embraced also the cynicism of the journalists who were writing about it in Britain, many of whom eventually dismissed Punk itself with as much contempt as they had the 'dinosaur progressive bands' swept aside by punk – bands like Yes, the original Genesis, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin.

What we were seeing, of course, was the first real *generational* change in rock music, as the kids that had been born in the 1960s started demanding a voice of their own. Ironically, however, the Punk/New Wave had as many 'artistic pretensions', of a socio-cultural and post modern/minimalist kind, as the dismissed dinosaur Art Rock bands had had of the musical kind.

In terms of the live music scene, that first generational change in Australia saw the blossoming of the 'independent' music scene, which existed for some years concurrently with the pub rock scene, a true 'alternative', with small bands barely above garage proficiency generating excitement by sheer arrogance, ostensibly recapturing the 'true spirit of rock 'n' roll'.

Of course the truth was that, as those musical survivors who rose to prominence during the punk period got better at playing their instruments, they too gradually grew away from the 'three-chord tricks' of pop/rock and demanded that their work be perceived as 'art'. Unlike the earlier generation, most of these players have

survived relatively unscathed by their fall from prominence.

In her reverential tome on the Australian music scene of the 1980s, *Your Name's On The Door* (ABC Books, 1992), Tracee Hutchinson shows an attitude common to other writers whose careers began with punk. These writers include Stuart Coupe, the highly respected industry journalist, Toby Creswell, editor and founder of *Juice*, and Clinton Walker; and the attitude I think they share is a contempt for all things pre-punk. Actually, that's not quite true. It's a contempt for nearly all things pre-punk that were Australian. My contention is that the audiences of today, having grown up with this kind of contempt in the hip press for Australian music, would inevitably eschew the pubs and clubs that nurtured the live music scene not only of the 1970s but the 1980s.

AUSMUSIC itself, in a preliminary discussion paper announcing the *Stayin' Alive* project, acknowledged the likely impact of generational change, though not the one I've been describing. They have detected what I would suggest is a *second* generational change: a large group for whom rock music is essentially very much an old music form. This generation, thirty years on from the one that originally championed rock, is reacting against established forms as fiercely as those before it. Indeed, today's youth is eschewing, for the most part, 'traditional' forms of entertainment in preference to those parents cannot or choose not to understand. So the video game parlors are packed, and the skate ramps and dance parties. New media for the expression of cultural urges include the VCR, the computer and modem, and the interactive CD-ROM.

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More importantly, however, the current generation has had almost complete access to popular contemporary music of every genre not only through the radio (to which I will return later), but television, the legacy of pioneering programs like Bernie Cannon's *GTK* (Getting To Know) and the much derided *Countdown*, whose impact has been very thoughtfully reassessed by Peter Wilmoth in the excellent *Glad All Over: The Countdown Years 1974-1987* (McPhee Gribble 1993). From the dearth that was popular music television in the 1970s, grew the increasingly video-dominated programs of the 1980s, so it is likely that a CD-buying youth of 16 or 17 in 1994 would probably have seen just about everything that rock/pop has done over the past thirty years. Add to this the 'golden oldie' format of most commercial radio stations, and the cynicism of much that passes for music journalism, and you have an audience already sceptical about the unknown band booked to play at the local pub having anything new to offer.

Of course, the recession is also having a huge impact. Certainly, through the worst of the recession, even the major touring companies were not selling tickets, even for what would have once been surefire international acts. But that is also rapidly changing, and over the past eighteen months the touring of international acts in Australia is actually booming, with up to half a dozen acts passing through in any one month. And young people *are* spending on music, as proved by the success of the recent Sydney Big Day Out festival, which saw more than 27,000 young people cram into the Royal Australian Showgrounds in Moore Park to see a bill dominated by the current crop of hip overseas bands as well as a few survivors like The Ramones, 'original' punks from the late 1970s.

The 'cringe' factor showed itself again a mere fortnight after the Big Day Out in Sydney when a concert at Sydney's Football Stadium was held to raise money to help regenerate the National Parks devastated by New Year bushfires. Two international artists were involved, both highly disliked by the street music press – Canadian, Bryan Adams, and the barely tolerated Englishman, Sting. They appeared with some of this country's biggest artists in terms of record sales – Jimmy Barnes, Hunters & Collectors, Wendy Matthews, Diesel, Daryl Braithwaite, Paul Kelly, Deborah Conway and Ross Wilson, all for forty dollars, for a cause that touched us all. The capacity of the stadium is 100,000 people, but the concert drew barely 21,000.

OTHER REASONS cited by AUSMUSIC for the sick live music scene include the rise of the RBT (random breath testing), changing public attitudes to health and wellbeing, particularly to drinking and smoking, various forms of state legislation that have demanded often expensive structural changes to music venues in order to comply with fire regulations and the introduction of noise pollution levels which permit the complaint of just one local resident to see the closure of a venue.

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Publicans complain that band managers and agents are asking too much money to play in their hotels. And that once an act has developed its following in the hotel, and released a record, managers invariably return to demand hugely increased fees. The manager obviously argues that the now much higher public profile of the act will attract a greater number of people to the hotel, while the publican points out that since the room can only hold a certain number of people, no significant increase in patronage is possible.

In Sydney there are perhaps six significant live rock venues, in Melbourne probably a dozen. I say significant for two reasons – one, that these are the venues which are presenting new, original music on a regular basis and two, these are the rooms to which the local A&R people (Artist & Repertoire, an outmoded term but still widely used) of record companies will go to seek out talent for their labels. If a band doesn't get a gig in these rooms, it does not have more than the slimmest of chances in *every* respect, of achieving anything. The people booking those rooms are as fashion conscious as anyone else in this business and will not take risks on styles they perceive as 'uncool', 'unhip' or whatever. That means that a fairly narrow selection of styles is being presented, which is catering to a very small number of patrons whose tastes are to some extent dictating the direction record companies are taking in signing acts.

There is a distinct regional difference in the types of acts being signed, as well. Melbourne seems to be cultivating the jangly pop end of things with a number of bands also taking up folk elements, such as Things Of Stone & Wood and Overnight Jones. Sydney is thrashier, though it is also moving strongly into what's described as Acid Jazz, with bands like Directions In ·Groove, and soul/funk fusions with Skunkhour and Swoop. Brisbane is definitely sticking to the heavier, grunge end of guitar music, while Adelaide and Perth seem to be producing a very eclectic crop of new music which can even find a place for a twenty-year veteran of the blues circuit, Dave Hole.

Leaving aside the near takeover of the live music scene by standup comedians – such as Rodney Rude, Austen Tayshus and others – in the mid-1980s, and the dire influence of the so-called 'tribute bands' a little later, there was also the interesting phenomenon of the spotlight abandoning the performer and turning back onto the audience.

Again, this might seem an extreme statement, but bear with me. Those grand celebrations of music that were Woodstock and the Isle of Wight were as much about the 'scene' created within the audience as that being created on the stage.

Think about it. If dance music is your thing, you go to a dance party or nightclub and the DJs are playing CDs that have been synchronised to your heartbeat, each seamlessly fading into the next so that the important activity of the evening is not interrupted – your dancing. The music, ultimately, is secondary to *your* performance. Go to any contemporary rock/funk/thrash/fusion performance, from the Red Hot Chili Peppers to Metallica to Nirvana (note, all three are extremely influential American bands that have toured here), and what you'll see is a huge crush of young men with no t-shirts, all sweating and heaving bodily at each other, a performance

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known as moshing, while others are competing with each other as to who can climb the speaker stacks higher and leap off to greater effect – stage-diving. The music, even here, where the audience would defiantly swear almost messianic allegiance to the band on stage, is secondary to the 'event' being generated within the audience.

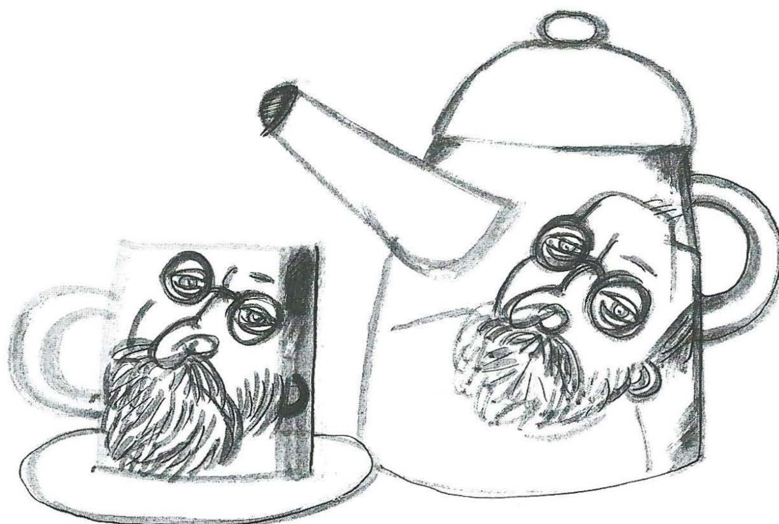
For those of us less than secure about our fashion-consciousness and dance capabilities at the dance party end of the spectrum and tremulous at the thought of being crushed at the thrash end of modern rock, and not committed enough to brave spending hard-earned money on a band of which we've never heard, the alternative is the tribute band, the on-stage live jukebox which plays what we know and therefore allows us to get on with the business of the night, chatting to friends and, hopefully, making new ones.

Of course there *are* young Australians out there committed to seeking out and supporting local original talent, and it is for this group that local labels are obviously catering as they rush to sign bands. But this group is as disparate a group as you could find, fragmented into any number of very specific 'tribes', each fanatical about its own chosen genre to the exclusion of everything else, and demanding to be perceived as different from the rest, the 'true' alternative.

Australia's cities still have punks, goths, ska-loving skinheads, and metal kids, at one end of the spectrum, mods into acid jazz and hippies struggling to keep the peace train running at the other, and the majority, who don their baseball caps backwards and their flannelette shirts firmly tied around their waists, the Seattle/grunge/Guns N' Roses tribe. From such diversity springs an equally diverse range of bands, taking in everything that is currently happening overseas, from thrash to hip hop, groove to rap.

This is an extract from a larger article prepared for Overland *by Michael George Smith. We hope to publish a sequel to it in a future issue.*

Michael George Smith is a Sydney-based rock journalist, and a songwriter, musician and recording artist of many years' experience.



Jiri Tibor

ROSLYN POIGNANT

They ate until they could eat no more

In 1992 Roslyn Poignant took her husband's Nagalarramba photographs back to the community at Maningrida, where the survivors and the descendants of people in the 1952 encampment now live. As a consequence she is working on the production of a book, Encounter at Nagalarramba. *She is a 1994 Harold White Fellow.*

ONLY THE OTHER DAY I received yet another enquiry about the making of the children's book, *Bush Walkabout*, photographed by Axel Poignant in 1952 at Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, and first published as *Piccaninny Walkabout* in 1957. Among the several questions for which answers were boldly requested for an essay with a deadline a week away, one summoned up a veritable concatenation of distant voices.

"Why did five years elapse before it came out?" the writer enquired.

To which I found myself testily replying: "Why indeed? It is a little difficult to thumbnail sketch either the mood of the fifties or personal circumstances."

Nor am I about to address this question here. It triggered another line of thought. Implicit in the question is the assumption that picture stories – unlike written ones – self-assemble. A similar one about a text would not be framed in quite the same way. The idea that the construction of a visual narrative is self-generating is merely an extension of the fallacy that photographs are the real thing. It suggests that to begin with there is all that raw life waiting to be enframed (of course, according to the photographer's cultural construction), then the visual narrative is laid out sequentially, using some well-placed key pictures. After all it is only a simple 'day in the life of' story.

In the case of *Bush Walkabout*, however, it is the choice of a fictional frame, the narrative motif of children lost in the bush, in which daily activities are presented as not only life-sustaining but also life-saving, that provides the key to its authorial/cultural construction.

After their ordeal:

> The children were given yams, honey, fish, nuts and kangaroo meat. They ate until they could eat no more.

Bush Walkabout is all about food: Wanting it, searching for it, preparing it, eating, and being comforted by it. The book begins with a cheerful Nulagundi eating. It could be argued that the whole book is a metaphorical incorporation of an Aboriginal life-view. In *Bush Walkabout* a major theme in Australian settler culture – that of the lost child consumed by the hostile land – is reversed, and the land is presented as a nurturing place. The universality of the lost children motif lends a familiarity which makes for an easy transposition.

THE BOOK WAS photographed in the last three weeks of five months (July-November) spent in several Arnhem Land communities, and it is possible to explore – through selected, and therefore mediated, extracts from letters to me, and from Axel's visual and written notes – the way in which the story-making process developed.

He had visited Milingimbi a year earlier with *Life* photographer, Fritz Goro, and had thought then of its potential as a location for a children's story. On the way back, they overflew the Liverpool River and when he learnt of plans to establish a government station there he resolved that he would return to the area before the inevitable changes occurred in the lives of the people.

After many vicissitudes, the mission lugger dropped him and his three Aboriginal companions at a spot called Nagalarramba on the left

bank of the river in early September. His choice of a place which, at that time, was inaccessible to visitors except by sea, stemmed from a belief, which he shared with others of his period, that minimum contact with non-Aboriginal culture was an indicator of the authentic. Caught up in events at Nagalarramba, however, his notes reveal his struggle to reconcile this view with his stated purpose of photographing the people "without asking them to change anything". He agonised about the bits of clothing worn, often because of his presence, and particularly about the effects of using flash.

The photographs themselves show that the strategies he employed ranged from taking advantage of happenstance, opting for collaborative reconstruction, mainly of processes, and using a technique akin to observational filming in an endeavour to record things "as they are". I have discussed elsewhere (see biographical note) how the dynamics of the encounter between photographer and people at Nagalarramba encampment can be seen, retrospectively, as an interplay between his intentions and Aboriginal expectations, and his response to their shaping of events.

Mainly because of Lamilami's skills as an enabler, it was understood from the beginning that the *balanda* was here to take pictures, and message sticks were sent to gather the people. Consequently the encounter can be visually situated between the images of arrivals and departures of different language speaking groups and the final quiet formality of the line-up at his departure. Towards the end of his stay a performance for him of a Djambidj Rom, a ceremony of friendship and diplomacy, given because he had come "to photograph the people", imposed a signifying structure on the encounter.

From a historical perspective the events at Nagalarramba take on the shape of a visual narrative of an encounter which can be read as an episode in a much longer local Aboriginal history. At the time, however, Axel considered his coverage to be fragmentary. "Oct. 5th ... when I see so much, [I] feel I have failed in what I set out to do. I think you need to be here a couple of years. But I have something I think."

ONCE HE REACHED Milingimbi, although some of his natural ebullience returned, the tensions he felt about what constituted the authentic constantly surfaced in his letters to me. He began a treatment on the theme of lost children.

Back in August he had based an earlier outline on a Bill Harney story of an urbanised Aboriginal family in Darwin who are castaway by a monsoonal storm, and have to relearn survival in the bush. This time he drew on his own recent experiences, and enrolling the help of Beulah Lowe, the schoolteacher, they set about selecting the children. Raiwalla and his wife agreed to play the parents.

On November 5th he wrote: "I have started the story but not the shooting. It has developed into a wonderful story, much better than before ... Raiwalla (you remember him from last year) has attached himself to me for my stay here (on salary and rations) and what a stroke of luck that has turned out to be. ..." For Axel, Raiwalla's participation transformed the story into the "most terrific authentic tale you could imagine."

November 12th: "I must tell you what has happened here. The KID'S STORY. Raiwalla's help has turned it into something terrific. I am now sure that this set of pictures is the most important I have done so far. My only fear is: will my film last out? I think it might. I enclose a FIRST literal translation of his story. Also our shotlist. ... I have circled the shots taken so you will have an idea when you develop them. ... Raiwalla has developed and enlarged so many of the finer points and details, things which only show in the photographs, their clothing, the house they live in, how they do this and that etc. We have copious notes, but at present they are mostly in the native language and have to be translated."

Meanwhile I processed and contact printed the batches of film from Nagalarramba and sent them to him. He replied: "As usual, ... showing some of the pictures ... has a very favourable effect. ..." Then he turned to his overriding preoccupation: "The seeing of the proof, at each stage so soon after taking, has helped me develop and improve, and shows me how very far I have still to go to approach what I feel about the subjects taken. Frankly, on a quick look through I feel I have failed. At least I know

that I have only begun to touch the outside of the material available. I had hoped this time to have finished with the north for a while, but it seems evident that I will have to come back …"

Then he adds the tantalising aside: "This morning I showed the pictures to Raiwalla and he was right on the ball about what was good and what wasn't!" He does not enlarge on the comment, except to say that Raiwalla wants him to return the next year, to work with him.

Raiwalla, like Lamilami, and other Aboriginal men of power Axel met, was a cultural broker, prepared to deal with the *balanda*. Axel's doubts made him responsive to Raiwalla's certainties. His longings meshed with Raiwalla's didactic purpose – the outcome was a bush idyll.

The cloak of a traditional tale provided him with at least a fictional resolution of some of the tensions he had been experiencing over the preceding months in trying to reconcile his stated aim of "making a record" with his desire to convey a more holistic view of Aboriginal life. Why then did it take five years to produce the book?

WHEN HE RETURNED south he began by printing the photographs taken at Nagalarramba. The sheer quantity ("2500 shots!") and breadth of coverage obscured the shape of the narrative, and the process was so time-consuming that economic imperatives dictated he find other assignments.

Individual pictures and sequences were made available for use in the conventional format of a book on material culture by Fred McCarthy, which was then in production, and subsequent similar usages put paid to a book of his own making.

In the case of the children's book he had hoped to continue the active collaboration with Beulah Lowe, and through her with Raiwalla, but "she simply hadn't the time". By May 1954 when she sent the translated notes she wrote, "I think you will have to change the order of events, probably, and even some of the happenings to fit in with your pictures", but by then the book had taken shape.

However, it was 1957 before it was published, and we had already gone abroad.

AT FIRST GLANCE *Bush Walkabout* might be taken for the book of a film. The construction was filmic: what is on the page was determined at the shooting stage. The lay-out, with its simple sequences, and key pictures, was a pioneer of this form of picture story-telling, and the revised edition in 1972 merely presented the same story with more skill.

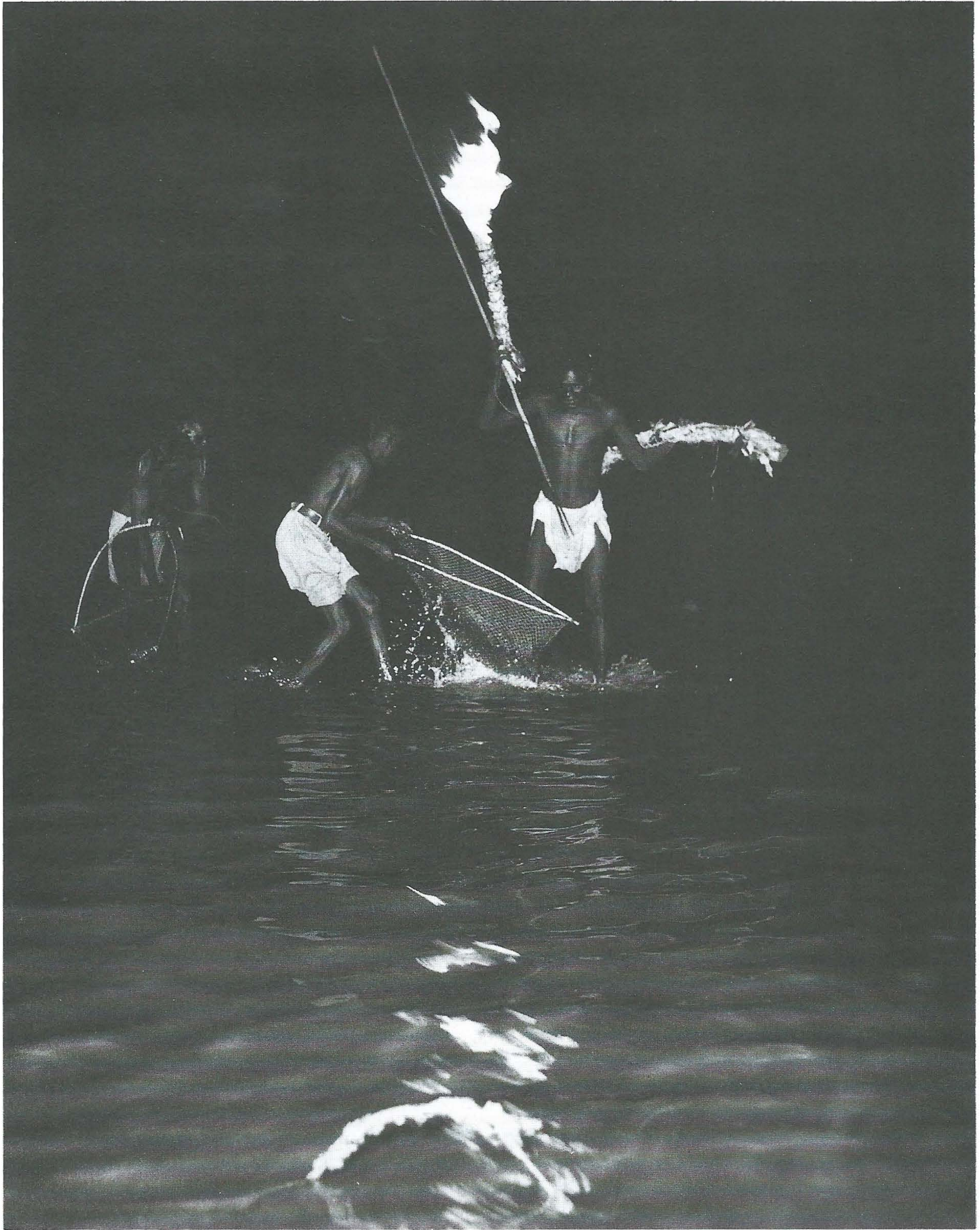
The constant accent is on movement: the extended arm, the flung spear, the swinging billy cans. The perspectively placed figures in the landscape, and the punctuating close-up, are all western visual narrative devices to advance the action. The frequent use of backviews and receding figures reinforces the presence of the onlooker/reader, so that although it appears to be an *inside* story, it remains an outsider's vision.

It is a transposition which familiarises and normalises and in that sense it seems to have functioned to spread cross-cultural understanding for almost three decades. In 1969 we saw it used affirmatively in schools in New Guinea, Fiji and New Zealand. In one almost all-Maori school it was used by readers and non-readers alike to spin their own fanciful story-lines.

Through its pages, Australian children were introduced to the idea that the bush was a sustaining environment, accessible to those who learnt the appropriate skills and became self-reliant. Young readers we met always broke into a litany of food names: "Yams, honey, fish, nuts and kangaroo meat …"

Axel's first experience of reading the country through the eyes of Aboriginal mentors took place while he was working on the Namatjira film in the 1940s and began the process by which he turned to Aboriginal Australia as providing an alternative vision of a nurturing landscape.

Gradually his aerial landscapes – vast, empty and voluptuous – were superseded by a more intimate view of a peopled land. The collaborative effort which launched *Bush Walkabout* brought the various strands together.

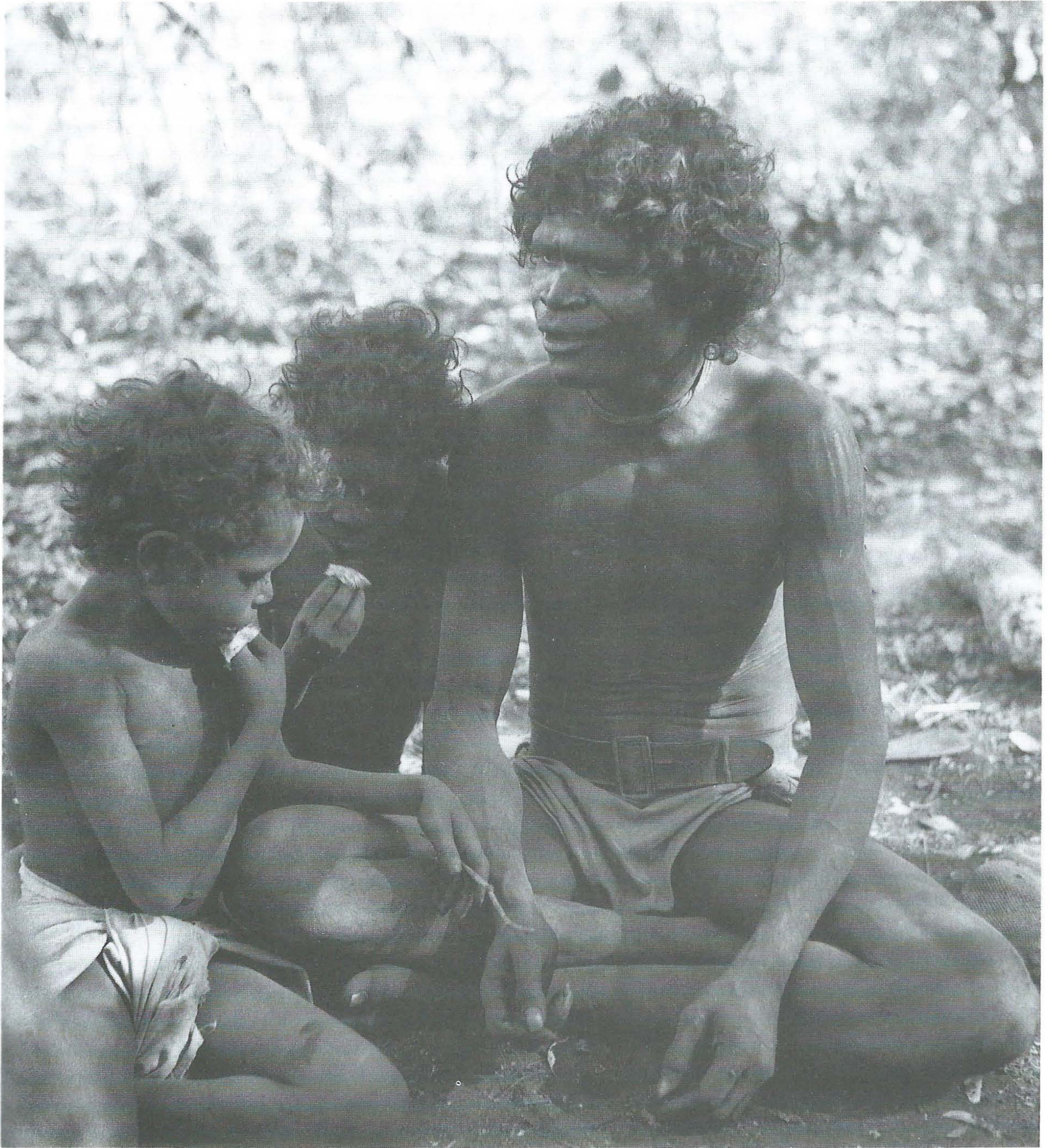


Goulburn Island and Nagalarramba

GOULBURN ISLAND

Left: Fishermen with nets and torches
Below: Dragging Dugong ashore

Early morning, Mankudgja's camp



Narrana and sons

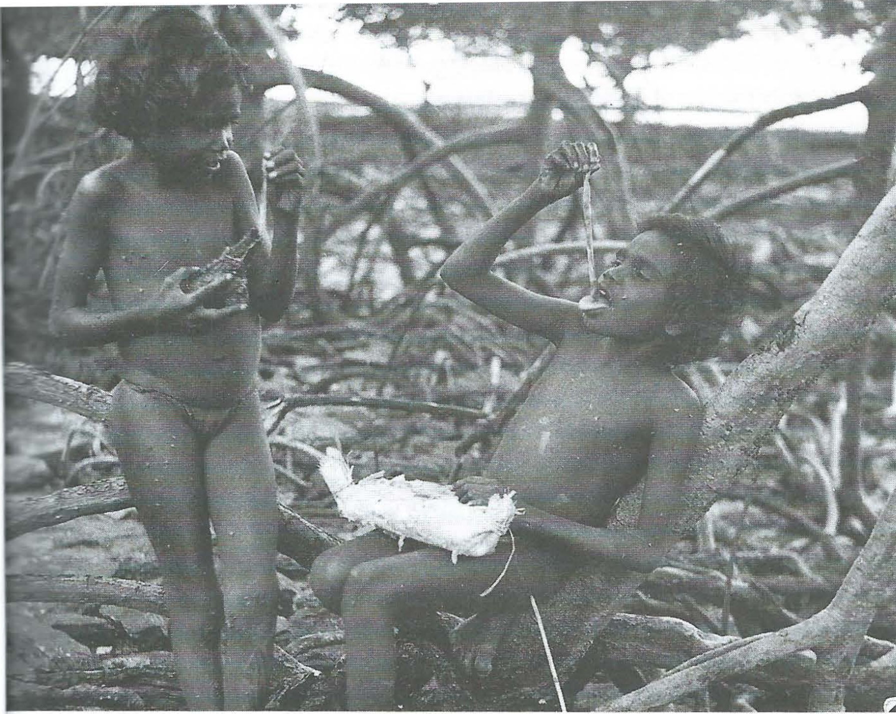
Presentation of the pole

Arrivals at the encampment

Farewell to Axel and the others

The Swimmers

Nulagundi and Rikili catch a goanna



Girls eating mangrove worms

Walking along beach

TIM ROWSE

Aboriginal Underworld

Tony Swain: *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (Cambridge University Press, $29.95).
Peggy Brock: *Outback Ghettos: A History of Aboriginal Institutionalisation and Survival* (Cambridge University Press, $25.00).

TONY SWAIN'S *A Place for Strangers* and Peggy Brock's *Outback Ghettos* are very different accounts of Australia's colonial history, and something of that difference can be captured by thinking about what has gone on at the only point of geographic convergence between the two – Penong, a town on the western base of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula.

Swain mentions Penong because of something Daisy Bates observed there in 1915, the singing of the *Mulunga* corroboree. *Mulunga*, according to Swain, originated in the Diamantina region of south-west Queensland in the late nineteenth century as an Aboriginal response to the slaughter by whites of those who resisted the invasion of their lands. In Swain's view, it is likely that *Mulunga* was a ceremony about vengeance against whites. It took only twenty years, on his estimate, for *Mulunga* to get to Penong, "thus revealing the effectiveness of cultic exchange between Aboriginal societies". His book is devoted to the argument that Aboriginal religion, as Europeans have documented it, is best interpreted as a complex intellectual response to the cosmological puzzle of invasion.

Brock, on the other hand, is fascinated by the ambiguity of missions. One of those she examines, Koonibba, was established by Lutherans in 1898, between Ceduna and Penong. It is not hard to imagine that some of those who took rations at Koonibba were dancing the *Mulunga* when Daisy Bates noticed it in 1915. So strong was Aboriginal law on the Eyre Peninsula then that, according to C.P. Mountford, an Adnyamathanha ceremonial leader revived ceremonies in the Flinders Ranges "by going to the Eyre Peninsula to relearn some of the chants ..."

Brock poses the question of whether and how a place such as Koonibba altered Aborigines' beliefs. At first, the ration camp "remained physically and ideologically separate" from the mission, a "refuge where people were able to maintain their own social and cultural forms". Early conversions, according to the Lutherans' descriptions, were characterised by ambivalence – "the embracing of the Christian message one day followed by a distancing and then reassessment". However, by the 1920s, "the mission had become a total institution". Though secure, as inmates, from increasing government interference with Aboriginal family life elsewhere, Koonibba folk paid the price of surrendering their children to the education that the Mission itself provided, and so "the supply of initiates dwindled. Communal survival, it seems, was considered more important than maintenance of religious forms."

But, she asks in her conclusion, "What use do the colonised make of Christianity once they adopt it? Does it represent submission to the dominant ideology, or is it used selectively to bolster ideological resistance to the missionaries and the culture they represent?"

Tony Swain has something for which Brock, in this question, seems to be reaching. It is not just that, like the scholarly vacuum cleaner he undoubtedly is, he has read Bates' 1918 paper on the Aborigines of the west coast of South Australia. He also wields a conceptual framework derived from the comparative historical

study of religion; he possesses a vocabulary in which he might begin to think about the deep structures and the nuances of Aboriginal thinking about their place in the new world. The terms in which Brock poses her unanswered question are, by contrast, the impoverishing legacy of a sociology in which rational actors 'select' the means to 'resist' "the dominant ideology". If Swain hardly has time for Aborigines once they step outside the ring of ritual performance, Brock, committed though she is to evoking the material minutiae and texture of life, can scarcely imagine the vicissitudes of traditional belief. Her actors walk the blasted heath of a well documented quotidian; his chant and dance the refashioning of their philosophical empyrean. What diverse agencies graced Penong!

POONINDIE, NORTH OF Port Lincoln (SA), was founded by Adelaide's Anglican Archdeacon Mathew Hale in 1850. A Christian agricultural village in what was, until the 1870s, an area isolated from non-Aboriginal habitation, Poonindie paid its Aboriginal workers, rationed their dependents and educated their children. Some residents came from the area, but many others were drawn from the Kaurna (Adelaide) and Ngarrindjerri (Murray River) regions, well to the east. Brock infers that Poonindie attracted adults who had lost confidence that they could survive in these homelands. As well, children (some of mixed descent) were sent there by the government. In Poonindie's first decade, the death rate among residents was high, fifty per cent of the population dying between 1856 and 1860. So the incoming residents' calculations of their survival chances at Poonindie were either poorly informed or a reflection of just how bad conditions were anywhere else they could imagine living. Some refused to go to Poonindie in 1869, word of deaths at Poonindie having reached them.

Brock is keen to present her Aboriginal actors as rational strategists. They "carefully weighed up the pros and cons of accommodation with the colonists". While individuals may have perished, a 'community' survived, in Brock's confident estimate. It was not bound together by traditional religious or kinship links, she suggests, but by prolonged association, "friendships ... out of which a new set of family and extended family relationships developed". Expulsion from Poonindie was the gravest punishment the Anglicans could threaten.

Poonindie was closed in 1894, a victim of Anglican decisions to favour non-Aboriginal claims to land which two generations of Poonindie folk had by then farmed as their own. But well before that calamity, Poonindie had become 'institutionalised', a process which Brock attributes to J.D. Bruce, appointed farm overseer in 1878 and superintendent from 1882 until closure. Brock is not clear what she means by 'institutionalised'. She shows the reader some instances of Bruce clashing with Poonindie persons and families and attempting, without success, to determine who could reside there. Bruce's personal authoritarianism is not necessarily evidence of the tendency which Brock implies by her term – an increased structuring of Aboriginal life by bureaucratic rule. Bruce's most significant and appallingly effective actions, it could be argued, were his dismembering of Poonindie, not his regimentation of its residents.

Whereas on the eastern Eyre Peninsula, the agricultural intensification of non-Aboriginal land use in the 1880s and 1890s induced the Anglicans' dispersal of Poonindie, on the Peninsula's western side, the same new wave of invasion inspired the Lutherans to initiate a mission. Koonibba, set up in 1898, was for those Wirangu, Kokatha and Mining peoples who had worked on large pastoral holdings since around 1860; they found, by century's end, that they were now truly landless and starving among the new farmers.

Brock shows Koonibba to have been divided between the 'camp' – "a refuge where people were able to maintain their own social and cultural forms" – and the 'mission'. The mission consisted of the school and dormitory, which focused white authority over those most receptive to Lutheran teaching – children – and the dining room, from which adults undeserving of rations could be excluded. South Australian government legislation of 1911 included powers to remove children from Aboriginal parents. According to Brock, adults preferred to see their children in Lutheran hands at Koonibba. A children's home opened within Koonibba in 1914.

Brock is again unsure in her use of key terms to identify the internal transformations of the Koonibba regime, especially those changes occa-

sioned by the Depression when the Lutherans, without consulting residents, sold the Koonibba farm. She refers to "the change from ghetto or total institution and employer to a training centre which encouraged adults to seek work away from the mission". The running together of the first three terms is confusing, as she elsewhere distinguishes 'total institution' from 'ghetto' as Chicago sociology has long done, but some clarification could be read into her remark, a page later, about the children's home itself as the persisting 'total institution' within Koonibba. No doubt run under strict rules and subjecting unmarried young women to a confinement and discipline similar to that of children, the children's home may or may not have been a 'total institution' in the specific sense of Erving Goffman's original usage (staff/inmate polarity, clearly policed boundaries, individualisation and degradation of inmates). We would need to know more about the camp/mission interactions to decide that. In the 1940s, according to Brock, Koonibba was "an outback Aboriginal ghetto". She also describes it as a 'haven' whose persistence owed much to the harsh conditions (both environmental and social) facing Aborigines who tried to live away from it.

HER THIRD 'GHETTO' is Nepabunna, home of the Adnyamathanha of the North Flinders Ranges who, she argues, survived "without institutionalisation". Unlike the Poonindie and Koonibba folk, their persisting communal identity "incorporates many elements from their precontact past". Whereas the Poonindie people "made a complete break with their past", the Adnyamathanha sought to maintain continuities, she suggests. By the time the United Aboriginal Mission (UAM) began its work, in 1929 at Ram Paddock's Gate, the Adnyamathanha had been more or less stably adapted to the (at first violent) white pastoral presence, living on police and pastoralists' rations and off the land, with ceremonial life and marriage systems continuing, for about fifty years. Happily for the Adnyamathanha, their homelands were never subject to the denser agricultural land uses.

Adnyamathanha acceptance of the UAM presence must have been conditioned partly by their knowing that the lands of Nepabunna Mission (the successor to Ram Paddock's Gate, from 1931) would become pastoral lease if the missionaries were to leave. Under such duress, they were therefore fortunate that the UAM "did not have the financial resources or church support to establish total institutions" there. Schooling was rudimentary, with no progress beyond primary school until the Education Department stepped in in the early 1960s.

Though Brock remarks that the lack or weakness of schooling at Nepabunna "may have been fortunate for Adnyamathanha communal life", she points to much evidence that the Adnyamathanha, or some of them, did not view such neglect as benign. As early as 1914, some adults were asking the government to school their children. She tells us that some families moved away from Nepabunna (she neglects to say when) so that their children could attend regular primary schools in nearby towns, and others moved still 'later', so that secondary school was available. Though she celebrates the disinclination of Adnyamathanha to move to these towns *for rations* in the pre-mission era, she makes too little of the readiness of some Adnyamathanha to become 'fringe-dwellers', around those same towns, *for the sake of the children's education.*

The claims of traditional education became controversial among Adnyamathanha. From C.P. Mountford's unpublished fieldnotes of the 1930s and 1940s, Brock pieces together a debate about whether initiation of boys and the arrangement of marriages should continue. The 'nos' were triumphant by the 1950s. She characterises the abandonment of ceremonial life in the late 1940s as "a communal decision"; her narrative of the region's history insistently, but always convincingly, presents the deeds of Adnyamathanha as governed by an underlying logic of communal survival, facilitated by UAM rations at Nepabunna.

I will come back to this problem of collective agency in my conclusion. Before that, let us look at a very different approach to 'Aboriginal history'.

SWAIN PERCEIVES A philosophical core within what we know of traditional Aboriginal understanding of the nature of existence. Understandings of what it is to exist vary across cultures, he reminds us. The 'ontology' which

westerners take for granted understands existence to be temporal, as being in time. By contrast, an emphasis on place characterised traditional Aboriginal 'ontology'. It was essential to the nature of every person or creature that he, she or it belonged to a place. The world is a world of places; the persistence in time of the things of the world was of no account in the fundamental categories of Aboriginal thinking. Events were conceived as abiding in their characteristic places rather than as taking up time.

Swain here draws on the classic ethnographic descriptions of 'the Dreaming' and of 'totemism' as thoughtways emphasising the multiplicity and the abidingness of place, and the consubstantiality of creatures and place-based spirits.

What he brings to these orthodoxies, however, is a new question, pursued with impressive persistence: when creatures from Other Places arrived in the Aboriginal world, how did Aborigines adjust their basic map of the universe to make sense of them? Outsiders' pressures have been "driving people from Abiding Events towards temporalised hopes for an otherworldly Utopia; a non-territorial pan Aboriginality and an immortal individual self". Swain's outsiders include Macassans (visiting Arnhem Land) and Melanesians (Torres Strait), but in this review I will restrict my summary to his account of the Aboriginal response to the most transgressive outsiders of all, the Europeans.

Where Aboriginal people first experienced European colonialism, in south eastern Australia, the changes in cosmology have gone furthest. Death (the ravages of small-pox, especially) and dispossession blighted those regions more rapidly, more severely and more universally than in the north and centre of the continent. The new colony's second Christian Mission, set up in Wellington Valley in 1831, thus became a site of religious innovation or "cosmological reformation", as Swain calls it.

At first, Aboriginal people struggled to hang on to their cosmology. The invaders could be understood as returning ancestors, but they persistently behaved in ways that mocked that generous ascription, making it necessary "to establish a means of accommodating what were seen as fundamentally immoral people". Avoiding conversion to Christianity, Aborigines took from it "essential ontological principles which benefited their conceptualisation of post-colonial life". Place, for people now robbed of their places, was disempowered, denuded of its spiritual meaning. Instead of a non-hierarchical plurality of place-based spirits, a powerful 'All-Father' *Baiami* was postulated (and first documented, in European observations, at the Wellington Mission to the Wuradjeri). His defining action was to leave the world which was thus deprecated in favour of a newly-imagined "Utopian skyworld". Evil became, for the first time, an essential feature of this cosmos. Variously conceived as the adversary of the All-Father, as part of the All-Father's dual nature or as a human attribute, evil compromised the self-maintaining qualities of existence, introducing the possibility of lawlessness and underpinning the sad fact that, under colonialism, social life was now characterised by unequal duality.

The trajectory of this shift in the world's meaningfulness to conquered Aboriginal people was that, in time, the greater would subsume the lesser, heaven would destroy earth, and good would vanquish evil. However, the millennial thrust of that innovative sense of future, a redemption in which blacks might crush whites to restore what was lost, was held in check by a conviction that Aborigines enjoyed an irreducible, unsubsumable, separate existence within a world order that, at its best, might be a stable, reciprocal duality of white and black domains. Nineteenth-century *Bora* ceremonies, with their accompanying images of cattle, horses, pigs, cars, trains, ships and whites in effigy, may thus

be interpreted as an attempt "to define invasion as a morally controllable act". With the demise of such ceremonies, the south-east Aboriginal notion of God is not obviously different from the common Christian version.

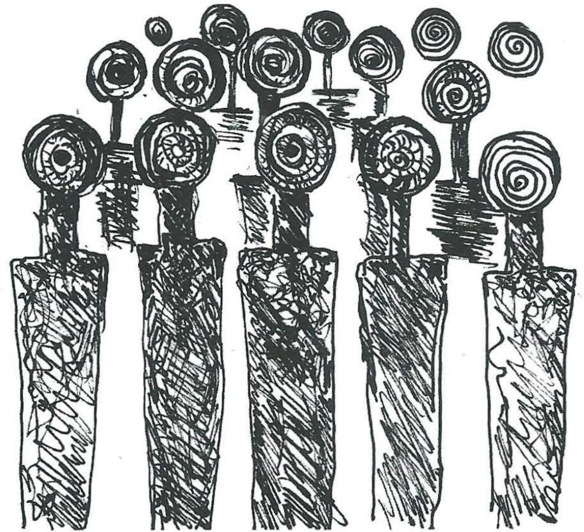
In the more recently conquered parts of Australia, the story of religious innovation has been different. Swain's story begins not with whites' arrival but with the Arnhem Land legacy of visitors from parts of what we now call Indonesia. In that region, men's rituals focus on the life-generating powers for which Mother is a frequent and powerful image. Such imagery reconciled two intellectual imperatives: to see *yolngu* (Aboriginal people) as one people, defined against the aliens; and to preserve a sense of the plurality and place-specific diversity of *yolngu*.

However, if "the All-Mother ... was conceived out of the *threat* of invasion and dislocation caused by Indonesian visits to northern Australia", she was then adapted by people whose connection to place was more tenuous (by virtue of pastoralism) than the All-Mother ontology could handle. So Swain reviews what we know of rituals on the pastoral frontier.

HE BEGINS WITH THE *Mulunga* cult which I mentioned in my introduction. First observed on a late nineteenth-century Queensland pastoral frontier, it was reported by missionary Otto Siebert in a 1910 article in German to concern a clever water-being who attacks and kills rifle-carrying performers; that is, the corroboree enacts revenge on whites. Swain suggests that it stemmed from a large pitched battle between *Kalkatungu* ('Kalkadoons') and white invaders in 1884, and diffused rapidly over the next forty-five years via stock routes. Last seen by Elkin in Aranda country in 1930, it was there noted as 'Red Ochre'.

Later cults were more accepting of the pastoral world. "White economic necessity forced colonial Australians to offer – even coercing Aborigines to accept – a place within their world", a world of cash and rations which "proved to be a means by which Aboriginal people could engage in moral relationships with Whites, ..." The players of what Swain calls "a reckless and dangerous cosmological game" in the north-west of the continent included some of the most trusted Aboriginal workers of the Durack empire in the first half of the twentieth century. The key figure in Aboriginal mythology there has been *Djanba* who embodies a post-colonial understanding of the world, in particular the world of northern pastoralism. A Durack worker called Boxer is said to have been adept at mediating the two sides of this frontier with the help of *Djanba*. *Djanba* hero(es) carried the cult of *Kuranggara*. The transcendent quality of *Kuranggara* derived from the Arnhem Land All-Mother tradition, but *Kuranggara* and other cults which have succeeded it are characterised by a more troubled engagement with the presence of aliens. *Kuranggara*, by the way, may have been a hitherto almost unnoticed accompaniment to Don McLeod's leadership of striking Pilbara Aboriginal workers in the 1940s, writes Swain.

What made such innovations "reckless and dangerous"? In Swain's view, it has to do with



the cosmological import of the acquisition of white man's goods. He discusses the cults of *Djinimin* and *Djulurru*, a creature who kills his father *Kunmanggur* and so gives the world access to fire and water. *Djinimin* also descends to earth to perform *Woagaia* and then takes it back to heaven. He promises redemption through maintenance of Aboriginal law as a law equal with white law. Associated with that redemption is the postulation of eschatological time and a place or end-point through which the redeemed pass – *Dingari*.

Djulurru, according to Swain, is a further development of *Djinimin*. His ritual is structured around analogy with prison (with *Djulurru* as jailer) from which neophytes are eventually released. Non-white aliens (Japanese and Malays) are shown to be potent and white technology to be fallible. The accidental loss of a ship off the Kimberley coast and the Japanese bombing of Broome have been woven into this corroboree. Aboriginal law's potency is vindicated.

Djulurru, Swain argues, is a cargo cult in the sense that that potency is represented as an ability to command white man's goods. However, in his opinion, such goods are not valued in themselves; by demonstrating their powers to command them, Aboriginal people are enacting their sense of the moral equivalence of Aboriginal law with white law. Cargoism is not simple acquisitiveness, it is "an attempt to (re)establish cosmic balance through the symbolic acquisition of equality within a white law expressed in terms of commodity wealth."

The logic of this intellectual development, Swain suggests, would be to transfer what Aboriginal people understand to be spiritual power from place to goods, thus homogenising space and deepening the intellectual foundations of a fragile sense of pan-Aboriginality. However, Swain argues, the recent assertion of Aboriginal claims to their ancestral lands indicates the limits of this intellectual innovation. Not only have Aboriginal people preserved the location aspects of their culture (that is, their strong identification of persons and families with spirits/places), but the colonial state has now begun to honour that view of things in new modes of government: 'land rights' policies and land claims based on 'traditional' ties to specific places.

Both Swain and Brock exhibit their uncertainties about how to characterise the cultural frames in which Aboriginal actions in the past can be made sense of by historians. Swain's is the more self-aware uncertainty. He has experienced at first hand, in field work among the (Baptist-educated) Warlpiri of Central Australia, the accommodating dualism of Aboriginal thinking about the cosmos, their willingness to entertain both place-oriented plurality of spirit-beings and a more monistic, Christian notion of a supreme, singular deity who abides in no place because he is everywhere. Swain is thus ready to say that the evolution of Aboriginal cosmology, under the impact of European invasion, has resulted in an unresolved but flexible condition of belief.

Brock, too, remarks on the dualistic tendency of the Adnyamathanha: converts resented being told that they had to choose one religion or the other. However, she seems to me to acknowledge that she is unable to say what, in general, South Australian Aborigines have made of Christianity. Her subject is behaviour rather than belief.

But to say what people did is to hold some conception of their consciousness in doing it. Brock narrates Aboriginal behaviour as if it drew its coherence from a consistency of belief – not 'religious' belief, but a conviction of communal identity. In this respect, Brock's book is a vivid case of the dangers of the narrative invention of subjects of history. In this instance, the historian proposes that her subjects can be understood as exhibiting an invariant logic of collective human agency, a will to survive as a community – "a very deliberate strategy by the Adnyamathanha to maintain their cultural identity as well as their physical survival".

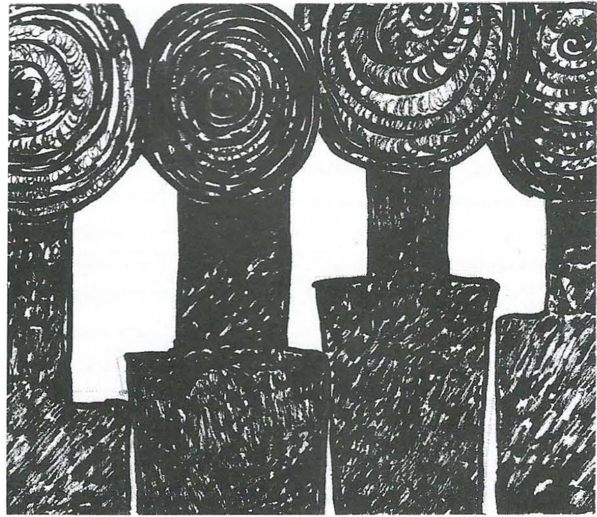
South Australian Aborigines "understood that at their local level they had to redefine themselves if they were to survive. This understanding was not imposed on them, they chose it over other options." They made "assessments of their best strategies for communal survival". Accordingly, the changes which occurred among the Adnyamathanha "occurred with their acquiescence and could be controlled by the people who had a focal point for communal action at Nepabunna". They were "in a position 'to pick and choose from the missionaries' offerings' "; they thus "determined the rate at which they could accommodate change". When the UAM "became more of a liability than an asset, they were asked to leave".

MY PROBLEM WITH THESE formulations is not only that the metaphors (menus of options, cost/benefit judgements) promote, in the language of the financial pages, an heroic clairvoyance; this may be a matter of taste. My greater worry is that differences among the Adnyamathanha are occluded. Educational aspiration, as we have seen, was one differentiator. Some saw

it as essential to their family survival that they get away from Nepabunna's inadequate employment and education – "the behaviour ... of people determined to be independent", comments Brock. Others used Nepabunna as a place to rest between jobs or when they were old or sick, or "as a haven for women and children while the men were absent". Both are encompassed within Brock's term 'the Adnyamathanha'; there would seem to have been two contrasting Adnyamathanha strategies of 'independence' – away from and within the Nepabunna 'ghetto'.

Brock insists on the novelty of contemporary "tensions between those who live at Nepabunna, and those who have temporarily or permanently moved away but still believe they have a stake in the settlement", but perhaps what gives the differences their edge now is that adherents of both points of view lay claim to the (Adnyamathanha identity), newly invigorated by government policies. Since the Great Depression, some families have accepted Christianity, others have not; the latter were unable to maintain their preferred traditional rites. Tensions between such different trajectories might be newly salient, now that governments might grant land or site protection according to people's proofs of traditional attachment, but it is hard to believe that they have never been matters of polarised discussion in the past. Survival strategies were less likely to have been a collective possession than markers of difference and matters of dispute among those now calling themselves Adnyamathanha.

Why does Brock choose to emphasise the singularity over the plurality of Adnyamathanha responses to colonisation? As an historian once active in the Aboriginal Heritage Branch of the South Australian Department of Environment and Planning, Brock has probably found it compelling to put her faith in a notion of Adnymathanha solidarity, for it is not helpful to a government official doing that kind of liaison to probe for difference. When a constituency presents itself as a cultural bloc belonging to a portion of country, it is likely to be easier for government officials to work to uphold such inclusiveness of definition. For governments to consent to any but the most plausibly inclusive definitions of the Adnyamathanha would be to risk entanglement in disputes among families about who really owns what, and about whose



survival has been more 'truly' Adnyamathanha.

If such historical work has been the (or maybe a) source of Brock's attachment to the notion of a continuous, singular Adnyamathanha community, I do not criticise her politics. I merely remark the unfortunate effects of this notion on her way of telling history. She has contrived to read back a contemporary artefact of the political process – "the Adnyamathanha" – and so has given an impression of relatively orderly unity in cultural succession. To have admitted a greater degree of confusion, disjunction and diversity of indigenous response (it's there in her material) might have yielded a more interesting and plausible portrayal of the colonised condition.

Swain's history is characterised by a different cluster of problems of narrative invention. In contrast with Brock, he is wary of employing the language of choice and calculation in accounting for Aboriginal reactions to colonial pressures. In particular, he is scornful of theories of cargo cults which cannot perceive the symbolic dimension of the ritual coveting of western goods by indigenous people (Melanesians, in most studies of such cults). To overlook the moral statement – of the equivalent potency of indigenous law to command the physical world – in cargo cults, Swain suggests, is to fetishise *theoretically* the desired goods, to read indigenous action within the west's materialist cultural frames. Cargoism is a search for parity with white law. Only contemporary urban Aborigines, with their land links so attenuated, are at significant risk of

being "determined by existants other than land", he worries.

If Brock's actors are rational calculators of communal survival, Swain's are moral philosophers teased by the possibility that a world penetrated by colonialism may escape moral intelligibility.

A comparison of the authors can be concluded by looking in yet another direction.

If 'decision' proves to be one of the most tendentious items in Brock's story-telling vocabulary, 'invention' is Swain's most elusive. "The Aboriginal invention of so many doctrines" is almost beyond narration, for the inventors, with one notable exception, are anonymous. In Swain's story-telling it is tradition which 'acts' by persisting and changing; specific doctrines are made into subjects, as in the sentence: "It is in Arnhem Land with the powerful and ambivalent figure of the All-Mother that a fully transcendental Ancestor first stepped into Australian views." Swain is also ingenious and intriguing in suggesting deep affinities between historical circumstance and reported Aboriginal doctrine. "In nineteenth century accounts ... the Supreme Deity had not only amassed all life's essences to himself, but had also removed them to an unknown, and for the living, unknowable, realm above the clouds – a refracted ideology of invasion chilling in its familiarity." But without a category of 'the author' ("tradition and the individual talent", after all), and because little is known about specific masters and innovators of ritual, the drawing of such affinities and analogs substitutes for tales of 'invention'.

Boxer – " 'dreamer' of song cycles and corroborees" who worked for the Durack family in the Kimberley and transformed Kimberley ceremonial life – is the exception to this rule of anonymous creativity. In Swain's account of Boxer, he is a mediator between bush natives and stockmen at the homestead. No doubt he was, but what Swain fails to make explicit is that Boxer's mediations in one instance are reported to have assisted white violence against those who persisted in their 'wild' bush life. His demonstrable mastery of white goods – essential, it seems, to his ritual eminence – cannot be fully dissociated from the ruthless modalities of white power. Shying away from Boxer's ambiguities, Swain loses the chance to suggest that one of the dynamics of invention, of tradition's capacity to renovate itself, might be contention and rivalry among Aboriginal people themselves. At least one recent ethnography, Francoise Dussart's study of Warlpiri women, makes clear the link between ritual innovation and rivalry among ritually prominent persons. So, in his own way, Swain, like Brock, contrives the seamlessness of cultural continuity.

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STONES

Down into drizzle,
down from a skinny ridge,
down from the grey, gnomic standing stones
of gone Picts, the painted men in heather,
we went through tea-brown Brechin like a
packet of salts.

Burling coastward we spotted the queer name
fresh out of oral history, St Vigeans,
tucked in an armpit of old red sandstone,
kirk on a moist green hill:
six rows of namestones back,
in line like Christian soldiers
of the moist mid-nineteenth century,
they were written down,
cut in.
So I found them at unhyphenated last,
Ann Wallace and David Crabb,
wed under Hanoverian enlightenment
but living on down for yonks,

names in a lichened stone.

What shall I say
about the quest for petrified meaning?
Somebody (something) or another
has lifted the very lid
off that pearly northern sky.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

CASSIE

Carisbrook, and on first coming to their place
since her death,
we lie in the wooden planked room in the
double bed and cannot sleep.
The moon comes in to lie on the sheets.
We hear the goats, distant on the hill.

The wattle is loud with the heart beat
of moths' wings, hundreds fly between its
branches,
tingeing the leaves purple with their dust.

She has not left this place. Under the
dark the climbing rose, planted at her birth,
is breathless, waiting for her to brush past its
closed flowers and from the peppercorn tree, a
mopoke owl
watches her. All things still, as she moves
gathering
into halo and shadow.

Above the mollort plains, dying makes this;
a hushed ripple effect with her in the middle.
Even stars are only seeds, the empty husks,
that
scatter, and are thrown high as
she walks through the long night's field.

In the morning, two small cousins play
by the creek. Her son with his huge blue eyes
tells me he loves me. He will soon forget his
mother.

Her father touches the earrings she left on
the window ledge above the sink.
Coming back to retrieve them she
slams the verandah door.
We all want to believe this.

KIRSTY SANGSTER

THE INVISIBLE HAND

Top private schools &
degree after degree after degree –
they had it made. I had to make it.
Two metres down I was striking rock
when some genius came up with
the idea of a jack hammer.
The 20th century in the 1970s.
I didn't forget my pick & shovel
when I went back to school & my
university course was the opposite of
the hammer & sickle union of
my pick & shovel days –
the opposite, but the same.
On the overhead an Invisible Hand
rose above the lecturer's hand &
over the level playing fields –
a reach that can't exceed its grasp
it's so grasping.

My staff flagged & ragtagged
away all their privilege on
Castro & Mao & Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh
& look where they are now
(Ho, Ho, ho ho ho).

They coffee & holiday with me.
They have to. I employ them
on contract & by the hour.
I expand my staff numbers by
contracting other staff hours.
I employ husbands & wives equally
wives *of* husbands, husbands *of* wives.
I employ friends & friends of friends.
Any friend of a friend is at least
a potential employee of mine.
If anyone sees through me, I
just raise my invisible hand.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

AS

Even if you stepped beyond
the parloured gardens
the wrought iron gates

there is only
the soft shade
of peppermint trees

where the world seems

Down the streets
the children play
as safe as a cry

the doors are never locked
dogs don't need to growl
neighbours smile across fences

at the shopping centre
fashionable mothers gently
glide their trolleys

down wide aisles
and the world is edible
on neat counters & freezers

All their daughters
grow beautiful
with private school smiles
and boys learn to be
barristers & surgeons
like father & grandfather

and the world seems

One morning
very quietly
two young girls with everything

hung themselves
from a tree in a vacant block
worth a million dollars

soft as a cry

ROLAND LEACH

TO THE ISLANDS

I will use the sound of wind and the splash
of the cormorant diving and the music
any boatman will hear in the running threads
as they sing about leaving for the Islands.

I will use a sinker's zinc arpeggio as it
rolls across a wooden jetty and the sound
of crabs in the shifting gravel and the scrape
of awls across the hulls of yachts.

I will use the washboard chorus of the sea
and the boats and the skiffler's skirl
of tide-steered surf taken out by the wind
through the cliffs. Look – I don't know

much about how to reach the Islands, only
what I've heard from the boatman's song
and from a man who walked the headland
to find a place in the rocks free of salt

and osprey. But perhaps I can use
the bladderwrack and barnacle, the gull
wafting above the mussels and the bird
diving back to the sea. Perhaps I can use

the song sponge divers sing to time each dive
and then use their gasps as they lift
their bags onto the skiffs. Perhaps
the seapool whispers of the sundowners

or the terns above the harbour are what
the divers sing to as they hold their
breath and swim the silent minutes through
with prayer. I will use the gull's height

and the limpet's splash and the wasps' nest
hanging like a paper lamp under the pier
and the little boat sailing out. Even the
fishermen lugging shoals over the stones,

even the sailors shift-walking the decks,
even the end-blown note of a shell levelled
towards the horizon. I will use the eagle's
flight moored in the eyes of children

and the voices of men, the ones, they say,
who've made it, though perhaps the purlin
creaking on its rafter, the gull squawking
from the jetty, the wind calling

along the moorings and the notes the divers
hear in the quiet waters of their breathing
as they seek release through the depths
are all *I'll* know about finding the Islands.

Meanwhile, I'll use the sound of sunlight
filling the sponges and a diver's saturated
breathing in the lungs of an oarsman
rowing weightless cargo over the reefs.

JUDITH BEVERIDGE

AFTER RAIN
In Sight of Katoomba Falls

Each tree and bush a galaxy as the falls
plummet with a vengeance, strike sparks
from the escarpment. White streams
mantle boulders, sink through undergrowth.
Leaves crowd a grotto untouched by rain
as if, lacking gales or spiral gusts,
to live in that moist air were enough.

Drops dampen my hair, cool my skin,
as I remember the falls split between
day and dusk, mauve or emerald veiling
ferns on a flooded ledge. In the wind,
crimson and cobalt billowed out across
dry rock till dark closed over, that weight
of water arrowing towards dank silence.

DIANE FAHEY

MICHAEL WILDING

Wrecking Humanism

John Carroll: *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (Fontana Press, $16.95).

JOHN CARROLL'S *Humanism* is not a book to turn to for an historical account of its ostensible subject. It is not a scholarly study of humanism. It has no bibliography, no footnotes, no references. Indeed in this, as in many other regards, it is utterly alien to the humanist spirit. In confronting medieval authoritarianism and religious dogmatism, humanism offered argument and discussion. It offered an intellectual procedure in which opinions were weighed against each other. It offered a dialectic of debate, in which evidence and argument could be cited. John Carroll dispenses with all that. He offers his interpretations of Shakespeare, Holbein, Velazquez, Henry James and so on, and nowhere indicates that the works on which he holds forth have been the subject of complex and serious discussion. Indeed, it is hard to see how he could have written such a naive and inept book had he been aware of the opinions and researches of others on the materials with which he deals.

This is an obsessive work of extraordinary pretensions. Dr Carroll writes:

> During the humanist half-millennium the spirit's finest projection has been High Culture. High Culture has its own hierarchy, with a few supreme masterpieces at the top. This study concentrates on these masterpieces. They are worked for all their worth. In other words this is not a cultural history in the sense of looking comprehensively at all the major theorists and artists of a period. It seeks the best, and neglects the rest.

At the end of the book is a list of 'The Works'; there are thirty-one of them, paintings, plays, novels, movies, treatises of theology, philosophy and science. There are immediate problems in this reduction of 500 years of cultural production to thirty-one examples. A consensus on a range of works is not impossible to achieve; but when the range is reduced to so few, questions of judgement are immediately raised. In discussing Shakespeare, are *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* the two "supreme masterpieces"? In discussing the novel would we want to focus attention on Henry James' *The Ambassadors* while making no reference to Balzac or Stendhal?

"... it is hard to see how he could have written such a naive and inept book ..."

This procedure that claims "it seeks the best" yet offers no argument for its massive exclusions, that offers a handful of totemic icons, requires some evidence of taste and judgement. Dr Carroll does not demonstrate any such competence. The literary critical methodology is banal and crass. He writes of *Julius Caesar* "This play is the English language at its peak, a sustained and intoxicating eloquence of precise meanings and beautiful cadences." The approach is inept; it becomes comic when the first quotation offered after this is "Et tu Brute". He writes of *The Ambassadors* that "technically it is without flaw". Yet this is the novel that for decades was reprinted with two of its chapters in the wrong order, and no one noticed. What is this 'technical excellence'?

Archaic belles-lettrism and tedious paraphrase

comprise Dr Carroll's displayed literary skills. This in itself would make us doubt his ability to identify 'only the best' and to discriminate it from the rest. His own writing shows such a dependence on cliché that his sensitivity to verbal expression, to precision of thought, to any sort of aesthetic subtlety, has to be questioned. He writes that Luther "philosophically speaking, hit the nail on the head"; Hamlet is made "a millstone around the neck of the human spirit"; Cervantes "fought tooth and nail"; Luther "was to hit precisely the nerve that was to stop Holbein and Hamlet in their humanist tracks"; Calvinism had an "extraordinary capacity to seize the psychic-spiritual jugular"; "the Protestant nerve was failing"; "another glorious jewel in the crown". This is only a quick sampling.

These weary clichés are allied with a determinedly unbuttoned style that signals not vigorous contemporary immediacy but rather that desperate note that lecturers seize on in an unavailing attempt to demonstrate that they are in touch. But it is a faded, academic colloquial. And so we have such inelegancies as "The consequence of Hamlet's dithering is that in the ensuing chaos everyone gets killed"; "free to choose against duty leave Hamlet bogged down in his own depression"; "but wait a minute, the alternative to Hamlet is now a conception of action in which the heroism of the warrior is identical with the hallucination of a certifiable lunatic"; "if Erasmus won here then Christ was done for"; "the aftermath of the head-on clash between Luther, Calvin and humanism was high cultural volatility. Once the dust had settled notable movement in three quite different directions became visible"; "the alternative conclusion is that Rembrandt himself cracked".

MANY MORE EXAMPLES could be given. The writing is a tissue of cliché and vulgarity. And this is the writer who claims he "seeks the best, and neglects the rest". We can have little confidence in the arrogant claims of cultural discernment of someone who writes in this way. And the quality of writing is an indication of the quality of mind. In his *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, Flaubert collected what he had observed were the clichés uttered in bourgeois society:

> Archimedes. On hearing his name, say "Eureka!" Or else "Give me a fulcrum and I will lift the world". There is also Archimedes' screw, but you aren't expected to know what it is.

Dr Carroll does not disappoint. On page 2 of *Humanism* we read: "The challenge facing it and with it modernity, had been put graphically by Archimedes in a quite different time: 'Give me somewhere to stand and I shall move the earth.' " There is no mention of the screw.

Dr Carroll's procedure is to tell the story of his chosen paintings, plays, novels and, finally, John Ford movies. It is a numbingly tedious string of paraphrases that we are offered. There is no engagement with the language of the literary texts. In describing Holbein's 'The Ambassadors' he tells us that the eyes follow the viewer wherever he walks. It is extraordinary that someone with so little critical competence should focus so narrowly on cultural production to the disregard of the institutions of life. But life has little place in this book. There is a token acknowledgement in the Prologue that "Humanism's lasting achievement has been industrial civilization and its brilliant triumph over most of the trials inflicted on man by age-old Necessity – poverty, starvation, disease and brute labour." But, that said, Dr Carroll's cultural artefacts live in a world of their own. He represses any connections with the world of politics, trade and science. Velazquez' portrait of Philip and his family is not unconnected with the power and wealth arising from the Spanish plunder of the Americas. Developments in anatomy and dissection, part of the humanist project, are an important part of developments in painting. But Dr Carroll ignores all that. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he tells us, "symbolizes modern civilization by the city". The city is a part of Conrad's account, but far more important is his vision of imperialist exploitation in Africa which provides the material base of the city. But

"This is one of those rancorous diatribes that denounces pretty well everything ..."

Dr Carroll utterly represses that. His is a vision of western cultural production that refuses to recognise the imperial plunder that funded so much of it. But Dr Carroll is committed to denying the material base. "Solidly grounded culture is only marginally vulnerable to material change" he tells us. He also tells us that the bourgeois "came from nowhere", and lacked the "name and blood" of the aristocracy. And where does he think the aristocracy came from?

"... the work of only one woman is discussed – Jane Austin; she is given a couple of paragraphs."

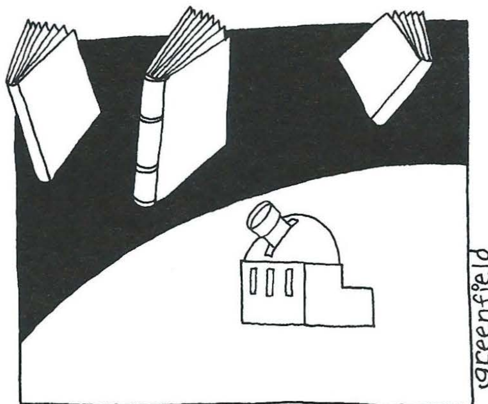
The detail can be challenged and faulted throughout this book. The larger picture is no less questionable. This is one of those rancorous diatribes that denounces pretty well everything (except Poussin) but is never very clear in saying what, if anything, it believes in. There is a preoccupation with death. There are frequent references to demonic forces. But any spiritual positives are not readily apparent.

From the absences we can assemble something of a program. There is no mention of the abolition of slavery and serfdom or the emancipation of women. Indeed the work of only one woman is discussed – Jane Austen; she is given a couple of paragraphs. The advances in social justice which were one of humanism's admirable achievements are not recorded in this book. Erasmus is mentioned but not his friend Thomas More whose *Utopia*, whatever its ambiguities, offered a model of decent human possibility for future ages. Utopian is a word used only dismissively in this book.

The account of Marx finally reveals what is afoot. In dealing with Luther, Calvin, Shakespeare, Velazquez, Holbein, Poussin, Cervantes, John Ford, indeed in dealing with all his subjects, Dr Carroll engages with their ideas or art and ignores the biographical. But when he comes to Marx he disregards the ideas of social justice, ascribes everything to 'rancour', and delivers the most extraordinary *ad hominem* attack on Marx's personal life, behaviour and motives. The only other figure similarly treated is Picasso, also a communist.

The account of Marx, while worthless in itself, clearly reveals the nature of Dr Carroll's project. His book is yet another of those shoddy productions of a bankrupt ideology, unable to offer anything positive, concerned solely to discredit that positive, progressive impulse in human life. Dr Carroll offers us a rather old fashioned, indeed archaic, manifestation of that impulse; there are now more sophisticated apologists for reaction at work. It is perhaps more silly than pernicious. It certainly has nothing to recommend it.

Michael Wilding is a member of the English Department at Sydney University, and has published twelve books of fiction and six books of literary criticism dealing with writers as varied as John Milton, Marcus Clarke and Christina Stead. His most recent book, Social Visions, *is a collection of essays published in the Sydney Studies in Society and Culture series.*



Donald Greenfield

PETER ASCOT

Open Heart

DO YOU REMEMBER what you said to me in the San? You were lying there with tubes taped to your mouth, your nostrils, your arms. Through a jumble of drugs you managed a few short sentences. It was like talking in your sleep, like giving the unconscious an uncustomary solo over the chorus of daily chatter.

I remember the journey. You had called to say that there'd been a car accident, that you were all right, but that there was a pain. That your stiff neck was actually due to a mild heart attack brought on by the stress, that the doctors had said you should have some tests, an angiogram. Next afternoon, another call; you might need a little operation, some of your main arteries are blocked – well, three out of four, and the other partially obstructed. Don't worry, it's pretty routine these days.

I must have looked worried, because my cynical boss didn't even raise an eyebrow as he signed my emergency leave application. No unbelieving shake of the head, no skeptical exhalation as I raced out the door. Within the hour I was passing the Fawkner Cemetery, leaving Melbourne behind and driving into the encroaching night.

It might have been four in the morning when I joined the milkmen on the foggy streets of Liverpool, and still not dawn when I parked outside your house in Normanhurst. The long muddy driveway was choked with sick cars, relics of your motor mechanic days so long ago – but none of them was your old Cortina. And everywhere, clutter. You can't throw anything out. Picking my way to the house I noticed that nothing had changed, save for a few extra obstructions in my way. Just bits and pieces – old kerosene drums, handy lumps of timber, wads of damp carpet, a broken pump, bald tyres – all dotting the path like trinkets dropped by a careless pirate returning to his cave. The one remaining route to the house was all but blocked – kind of like an artery I guess – and in the dark I stubbed my toe on an electric motor out of a washing machine.

The back door was shut and I was locked out. I expected that; you'd told me I needn't come. But, just in case, you'd taped a note to the handle. I sat on the step and rubbed my toe, reading the note. All I remember of it now was the postscript that said in a shaky scrawl "always remember, Pete, I still have my dreams ...". With my eyes a little blurry it was surprising that I didn't bump into anything else as I hobbled back to my car. I sat there for a few moments, taking a cleansing swig from the bottle of water I'd brought from Melbourne. I turned the key and the car started right away, as if it were eager to finish the journey. It was not far to the Sanatorium Hospital, and of course I remembered the way. I never use a street directory in Sydney.

It was light now, but at that early hour the place was still deserted. Your car was the only one in the vast car-park. It looked so funny, so very far from the building, when there were now acres of spots much closer. Fact is, when you parked there, it was quite normal. Until everyone else moved on ... I played with the thought that your motor car was a metaphor, it was you. It was all alone in the car-park, unkempt and battered, albeit with a strong, gutsy engine. Proud and defiant, unapologetic. But were the rings worn out? Was it starting to blow deadly blue smoke? American Indians read smoke signals. Why couldn't I?

No one should have to be alone. I parked next to the dirty Cortina, and ran to the automatic

doors of the hospital. My pulse raced when they told me you were in Intensive Care. But what did I expect, that's obviously what you needed. The lift came, and soon I was walking down the corridor to a glassed-in room, with maybe four beds in it. The beds were separated by internal partitioning, and further insulated from each other by agglomerations of Machiavellian machinery.

I told the nurse that I was your son. "In that case", he said, "you can go in. But there's not much point; he won't come out from the anaesthetic for hours yet." I can hardly begin to describe my feelings when I entered the room. The sound – deathly silent, except for the gentle murmuring of respirator fans, or the lazy beeeep-beep of some other machine. It sounded like the Road Runner overdosed on Valium. And the light. The light was low. But I felt like I was standing in a private envelope of brightness, extending across the room to the bed where you lay sleeping. I was the rabbit in the headlight, transfixed, unable to move. In the incisive glow I saw the thin red slit marching down the centre of your chest. That line was the edge of mortality. It looked like it had been made with a felt-tipped pen. But a surgeon's knife had drawn it. So neat, so fine.

I was suddenly seized by a bizarre notion. I should take a photo of you. It was the obvious thing to do. After all, this was a truly unique moment in your life, unprecedented and unlikely to be repeated. How often do you get filleted? But, just as suddenly, my certainty passed. What a strange thought, how macabre, *take a photo* of a sick man? To photograph you without consent, all tubes and charts and vulnerability. Besides, I've never owned a camera, nor wanted to. Imagine that. *Take a photo.* Well, maybe I could. Perhaps you brought your camera with you. You take it everywhere. I could probably work out how to use it. I looked over my shoulder. The nurse was standing nearby, reading a chart. Nothing was amiss, everything normal. What is definitely not normal is to take a photo. What would he think? Pretty weird. "You may as well come back this afternoon", the nurse said, "and even then he still won't be able to say much." You just lay there, so helpless, so inscrutable, and with a tear in my eye I turned to go. In doing so I stubbed my other toe on a trolley, and knocked a bedpan flying. The nurse caught it before it could clatter to the floor. That's intensive care.

I WENT BACK TO your place. In the morning light the tortured pathway held no terrors for me. I even found your spare key. You live alone but your house is full. Between the piles of books and clothes and boxes and gadgets and ancient typewriters and dissected toasters and tools and papers and notes from the council and firewood and car parts and old TV guides, yes, between them all there are still narrow thoroughfares. These are the channels of your life: bedroom to bathroom to kitchen to lounge-room. Beneath the sediment is a treasury of antique furniture, the everyday items you grew up with, whose value has, like yours, become more apparent as time passed it by. Your somewhat more recent phone was ringing but it stopped before I found it. I wonder who it was.

I went to the bathroom to wash, to feel clean. I could hardly get to the basin, because you'd set up an old washing machine in the middle of the floor. (Never did finish the laundry, did we?) Why can't you let life be easier? You're going to have to take it easy now, at least for a while. Cease the struggle against the imaginary bonds.

I scrubbed the whole room. I built a protective wooden platform over the bath and carefully installed the washing machine on it. Coronary bypass patients don't take baths because they can't hoist themselves out. Pathway clear: toilet – basin – shower – door. I couldn't face the kitchen, but at least you'll be able to wash yourself without rupturing something.

BACK AT THE hospital you were still dozy. I took your hand and your eyes opened. "Peter, you didn't have to come." You were asleep again, but you were smiling. Later you asked me to take some money from the cabinet to buy you some new pyjamas. I laughed when I saw your camera in there. "What's so funny?" you asked, but you fell asleep before I could answer. Do you remember what you said the next time you woke?

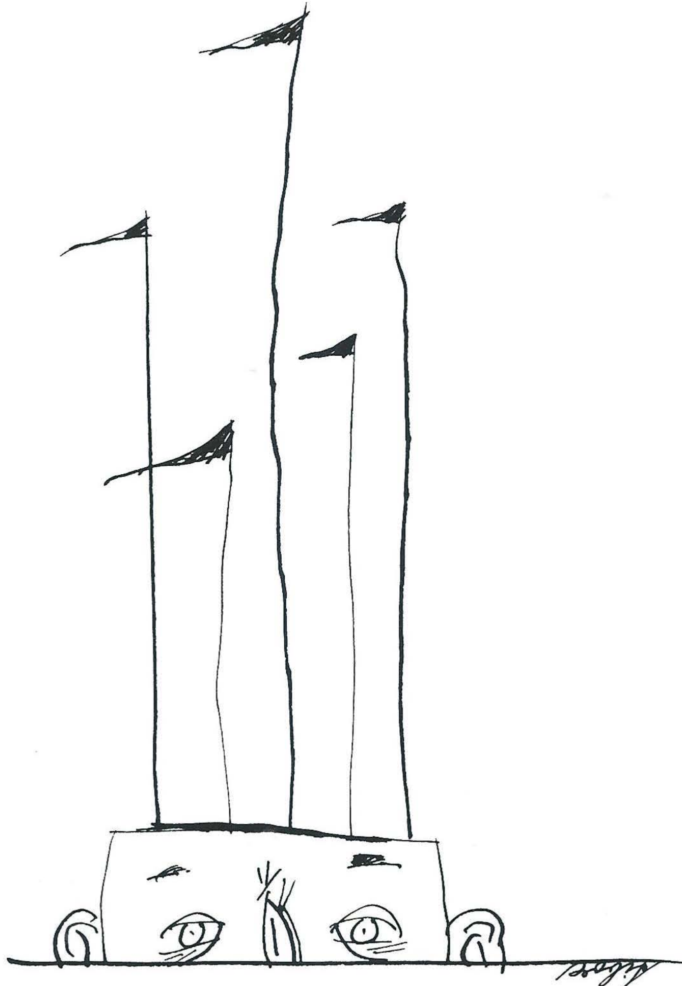
I had to return to Melbourne before you got out of hospital, but at least I knew you were on

the mend. You told me that for years you'd been feeling tireder and tireder, like a car with dirty spark plugs. Bypass surgery was only getting a tune up, a major service. All the things you were going to get around to now, just imagine …

You got home and you put the washing machine back where it came from. God only knows how you didn't pop your stitches lifting it. Tough old bird. When you mentioned that you'd done it, I felt slighted, as if my judgement or efforts had been unwelcome and unappreciated. You're incorrigible. Or maybe we just don't communicate. Not on trivial things anyway. Sometimes, though, I'm sure we do hear each other. You don't remember what you said, all groggy with Pethidine, do you?

"Pete, did the photo turn out?"

Peter Ascot is the winner of the 1993 Farrago *Creative Writing Competition.*



PASSENGERS

And the train moves
over and through
the fluorescent backyards
of rusting tin and ragged banana trees
thinning out to car yards
and into paddocks where
somnolent cows
lift their heads
a moon riding low
like a buoy on a dark wave
over the masses of gums
and break pines
farmhouse lights
the shadows of hills
huge on either side
there is no slowing it
this journey
leaving light trails
in the mind
that imagines from within
the glowing belly of the serpent
cutting like a tunnel
through the night
that is always past
and always
present   pale secret faces
reflected in the glass   opening
onto an unknown country
we are all
only passengers
on this train
some of us sleeping   some
of us sitting bolt
upright

NICOLETTE STASKO

ODYSSEY

For the journey,
they lashed me to the mast,
themselves plugging their ears
not to be lured by the
Siren Madness who sings
sensuously, imploringly, beseechingly.
She carols my name and
the words fall like dew
upon my drooping forehead.
Journey's end recedes into the mist,
there is no homeland
to which I can go to lay to rest
my aching legs and heavy heart.

How could I have known of
the endless journey in
those first mad moments
when the world changed
irrevocably, drastically, despairingly.
I, a lifetime in the making,
and suddenly madness
sounded the fury of the future.

It has been a painful journey
trying to walk the line
through the circle of fire –
a line walked by countless others
known over the years for their
various follies and remarkable deeds.
Some have told their tales
elegantly with beautiful words,
others through calamitous actions.

I, a lifetime in the making,
wander the seas and lands,
forever assailed by the Siren Madness
whose hypnotic will disentangles the rope
and serenades me to her bosom.

SANDY JEFFS

PURPLE STONE ON A WHITE STONE

Imagine an open air museum
in a field – the one you look at when you close
  your eyes
will do – the sky as blue as you care to imagine it,
flushed with white clouds hurtling into
winter, though down here the air is temperate,
this being your dream. The display is every
object you've ever seen in your life. The red
  plastic
convertible, '53, your favorite toy, age 6; the old
mahogany headboard with the diagonal scratch
across it – here the loving was best –
dinosaur scales of the squat palm; your best
  ever
sweatshirt, ripe with decay; calendars,
Moped, lampshades, train sets, subsequent
  prints
of the same Klee; schoolbooks with geometric
  doodles
etched in their covers with ballpoints; antique
medicine bottles frosted amber, lemon,
amethyst, lining the east windowsill overlooking
the river, and the river itself; your favorite
sled that was stolen: your entire phenomenal
world, down to the last blue paperclip.

If you're inclined to stay here,
do, so long as your dream can hold the vision:
remember that waking may mean new
  acquisitions,
the start of a whole new wing. Remember also
that though you may leave the gallery
  temporarily
unattended, it can never leave you; that is,
until it stops.
                But as a single dot
on the snowencrusted lens of the kaleidoscope
becomes a spider web of tinted glass
at a single twist, notice how every object
in your collection gathers its world around it.
The speedboat flies across the harbor,
tossing its wings behind it. The black onyx,
a frozen mist around it like a halo,
returns to its display tray in the gemshop.
A "gentleman's ring, too large for any
  gentleman",
it recognizes you; you purchase it.
The football emanates a playing field
around itself; stubble of yellow grass
burnt brown, and winter puddles in the end
  zone
ten yards off. The ball is snapped; you set off
jogging around right end; the quarterback
pitches out to you, but the ball is twirling
through space as if he'd flipped you a baton.
You catch it by both nose ends; tuck it under
your arm, and run for daylight near the sideline.
2 points. The winning score. By God you've run it.
Laughing, you toss the football into the air;
it spirals, hits its peak, returns to earth.

If undecided by now whether to sleep
or wake before retiring from the gallery
and all its fairings, go back to a place
so near the heart's eye that it can never
be forgotten or consigned to memory only,
it's that close. Water, fire, air and earth
seem safe enough here, your dreams don't
attack you.
As you stare, sometimes, at a bird
without realizing you're staring, until you notice
and it notices too and flies off, look around
and find yourself inside a wooden shack
above a waterfall. The walls are whitewashed;
the door was painted *Forest Green* or
something
by someone thirty years ago. The window
doesn't fit; you stole it from the ruin
of a sister shack say, forty yards back in the
forest;
its wood is grey and splintery. Sheaves of
autumn
chill slide over the sill. Behind you, a wooden
bench holds household candles, notebooks,
papers, books, your pen, a generous old
Smith Corona portable; blacktipped pine cones;
incense evergreen needles lie scattered
around the bench and floor. Your grey glazed
bowl before it, a green gallon jug
of red wine, the doorstop, mirrors the room.
Your bed's a sleeping bag on the plank floor;
mostly you sleep alone.
Wake now, and take
the three steps from bench to door, and walk out
into the night (mind the surprise step down).
Clouds have gathered behind the pines: one star.
The moon, from somewhere across the river,
beams
across the clouds. The first you'll hear of it
is the flat, rapacious sound of water walking;
louder, much louder now. Then, farther down,
the hiss of comets steaming over the dam
and drifting cooling down a thick grey velvet
curtain. No way from here
you'll hear them hit. No way even in daylight
you'd see the stream collect itself below
and recommence. Here in the deeper dream
of yourself not losing yourself somewhere in the
center
of your museum (the world has many centers)
there is only memory, and this. Think of the
waterfall
as the voice of a god who paused in middle-
blessing;
you hear it when awake alone in your house
you listen, for the first time, to its voices.
Or as you walk upstream this morning,
the tender grass of your existence *springing*
out of the earth like clear shining after rain;
the sound of water falling has been constant
in your brain for seven months.
Cross over and take your place: a sandbank,
smelling
more of dirt and water than sand; a little grass.
Beyond the doeskin colored rocks and pebbles
asleep in an element whose rest is motion,
a stand of pine and brush deepens into the
forest
that rides the length of your vision to the ridge
where pinetops start halfheartedly to climb.
Look down, and notice
the purple stone, a diminished pyramid
with rounded corners, lying on the sand;
and some way off, an oblong layered sheet
of whitish quartz. Think now, this is your
signature:
balance the purple stone on the plain of the
white stone
and leave it where no mind can ever move it.
The world in place, there's time to think it over.
One color on a field of every color.
Your totem in a corner of the gallery.

RICHARD DEUTCH

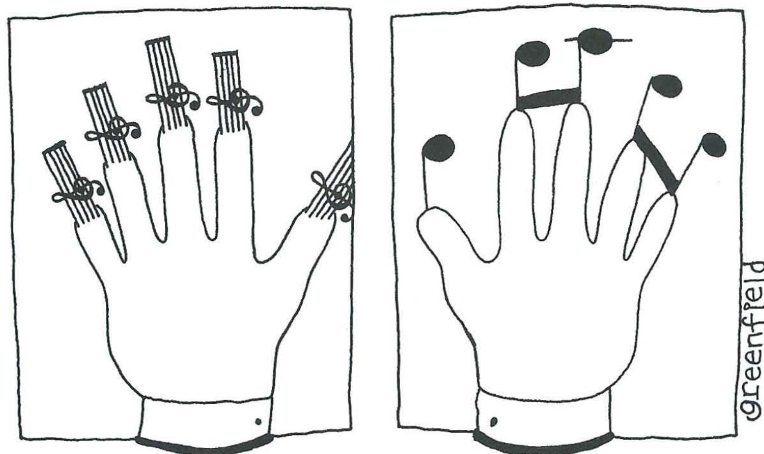
slippage

IN EARLY MARCH this year I attended Writers' Week at the Adelaide Festival. The venue was two large tents next to the Pioneer Women's Memorial Gardens, across the road from the Festival Centre. The weather was perfect, and the sunshine, panel discussions and readings attracted large audiences onto the lawns, and into a third tent full of books and magazines for sale. Day one for me was a Monday, with breakfast under the trees. That morning, I noticed, the mood seemed a little tense and self-conscious among the writers who were chatting on the lawns, cornering publishers or sipping their first mineral water of the day. There were some very well-known faces in the crowd, and the less-than-famous might have been wondering about their comparative status in such company. As the hours stretched out, however, any real or imagined pecking order anxieties (or perhaps merely first-day jitters) evaporated, and the mood lifted along with the level of conversation, which became more relaxed and voluble with each new day. Indeed, as a friend remarked: "The old hands on the circuit seem to be dealing with these situations a lot better these days. Instead of constantly looking over your shoulder every time someone famous walks past – or, worse, dashing off after them while still in mid-conversation – a certain decorum has developed, and they're more likely to say, 'Sorry, I don't want to be rude, but I must talk to X, who might publish a book of mine. I'd rather talk to you, but business first. I'll be back later.' " Meanwhile, in the main arena on Monday afternoon, a huge crowd had arrived to hear 'Sleuths in Skirts', a lively and entertaining discussion about recent women's detective fiction. And Sara Paretsky, Kerry Greenwood, Melissa Chan and Marele Day discussed, among other things, the influence of feminism on their respective re-imaginings of the genre. It was impossible to attend every session during the week, and no doubt there were many gems I missed. That said, my highlights include Frank Moorhouse's description of his almost obsessive research for his novel, *Grand Days*; a session on families and family identity by Yasmine Gooneratne, Fay Zwicky and Alex Miller; a talk by Judith Brett on recent social and political changes in Australia in the years between Menzies and Mabo; some interesting agreements and disagreements between Sudesh Mishra, Michael Wilding and Frank Moorhouse on nationalism, internationalism and various notions of world government; Alex Miller's reading from his novel, *The Ancestor Game*; Robert Dessaix's from his semi-confessional autobiography, *A Mother's Disgrace*; Andrea Goldsmith and Rosie Scott on 'The Modern Heroine'; and poetry from Sudesh Mishra, Jan Owen, Sharon Olds and Philip Salom.

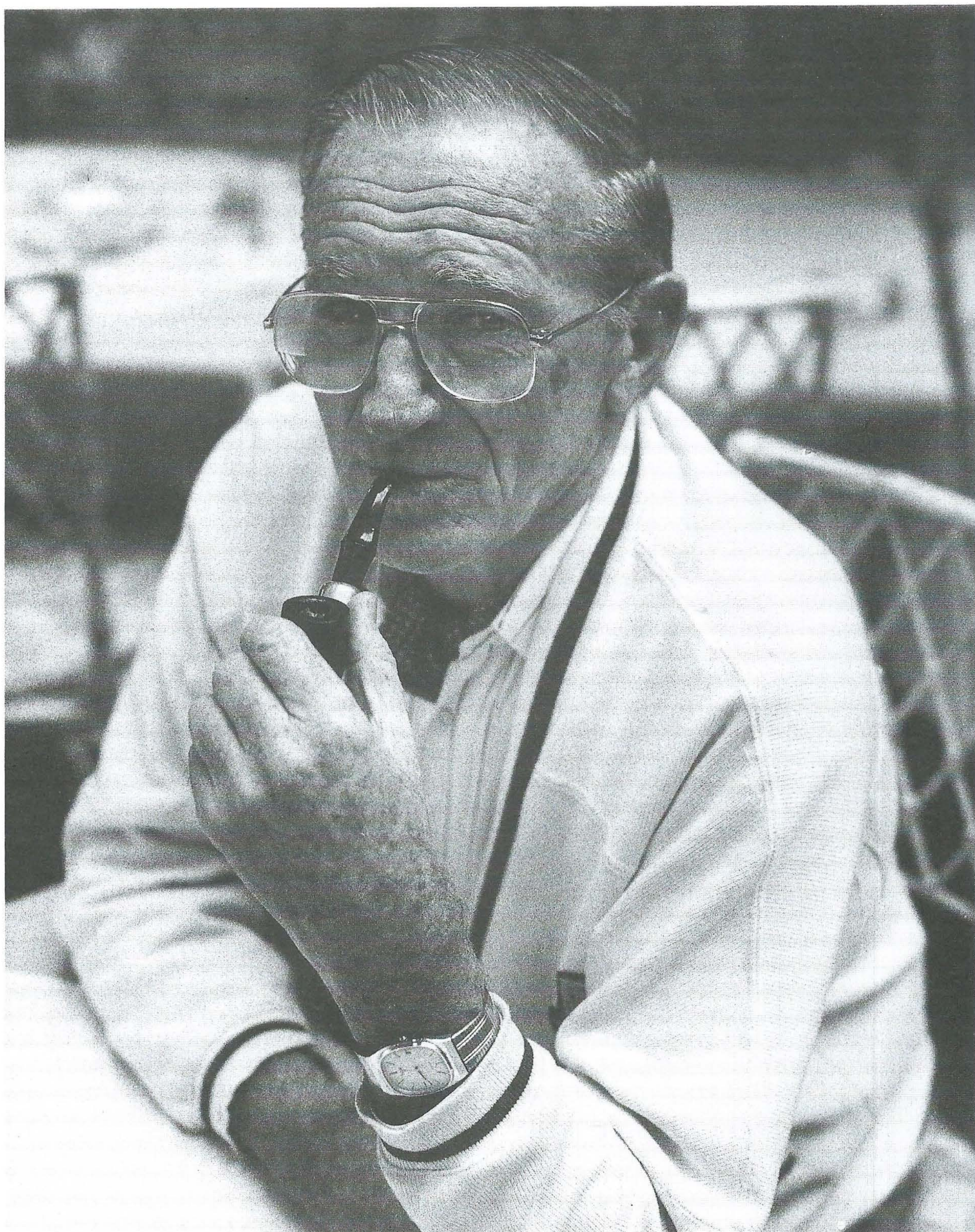
Attendances for most sessions seemed good to overflowing, but it was not just in terms of numbers that this Writers' Week was a success. During the Melbourne Writers' Festival last year I noted something that seemed to be confirmed at Adelaide. The writing scene has become so diverse, and there are so many ideas being discussed and good work being produced, that it is impossible for any particular clique or orthodoxy to prevail. What we seem to have achieved, in our present ecumenical commonwealth of Australian letters, is a new maturity, sophistication and cosmopolitanism. *Overland*, we hope, will reflect and help to further this diversity and excitement.

AUSTRALIANS have one of the highest rates of VCR ownership in the world, and there are hundreds of commercial video libraries scattered throughout the suburbs of our major cities. Municipal libraries also lend out videos, and sometimes offer a greater diversity – in terms of the video's subject matter, and its ethnic/language group appeal – than commercial outlets, which stock a huge range of individual titles mostly made in Hollywood, and often to predictable formulas. But this apparent uniformity is leavened by speciality outlets such as Mykonos Video in Sydney, which stocks more than six thousand titles of Aegean and Middle Eastern origin. The soundtracks, of course, are not in English, and there are no English subtitles. Look closer and you will find Lebanese and Vietnamese outlets in Melbourne, and ones displaying the latest kung-fu movies in Sydney's Dixon Street. In other capitals it is the same: up to a sixth of outlets listed in the phone book will cater to ethnic audiences. In this issue of *Overland*, Chris Berry comments on the introduction of pay-TV in Australia, and its likely impact on our local content laws. He also stresses the importance of export markets for Australian-made television products, and speculates on a possible local demand for those made in neighbouring countries. Clearly, the speciality video outles are evidence that much is already being imported. Some films, with subtitles, are screened on SBS, but none finds its way onto the commercial networks. So far, they are circulating within clearly defined language and ethnic boundaries. Yet, as these barriers blur and become more permeable, it might be just a matter of time before we see the emergence of some of the hybrids that technology could make possible – a Korean game show, perhaps, linked by satellite to studio audiences in Australia; or a sitcom about the trials of a Vietnamese family living in Sydney – that becomes a top-rating series in Hanoi.

John Jenkins



Donald Greenfield



comment

WITH THE DEATH OF Frank Hardy, Australia lost one of its great yarn-spinners and political activists. Yet while his work and his public character have passed into national folklore, through both runs a continuing conflict between literature and politics.

His first novel, *Power Without Glory*, provoked a political trial that failed to suppress the book and instead promoted its author to the status of folk hero. But while the politics of the novel become obscured by the author's fascination with his central character, John West, its value as literature tends to be overridden by the author's determination to write a political tract. He wrote later that after the trial he sensed that "my failure to defend *Power Without Glory* as a literary work confirmed that I had regressed to my earlier stance where politics was more important than literature." It was in this mood that he wrote what he described as "the only dishonest work I ever wrote": *Journey into the Future*, his account of his visit to Russia. Yet his blindness and dogmatism arose from his deep belief in the democratic tradition in Australia and in the power of the workers to bring it to fulfilment under the leadership of the Communist Party. This meant that he was always prepared to put his writing at the service of his politics. Only in *But the Dead Are Many* did he face the consequences of this stance for both life and art.

The largely clandestine activities of publishing the book and distributing it through a network of trade unionists generated the vision of institutions of working-class culture that would unify culture and politics in a single movement of writers, artists and workers. This vision led to the establishment of the Realist Writers Groups from which *Overland* was to emerge. Hardy believed that the journal would develop a left-wing, working class policy that would unite militant workers and progressive intellectuals around "peace, national independence, democratic rights and ... democratic Australian traditions". Yet Hardy's relations with the journal were always ambivalent and stormy.

Hardy was not on the original board of *Overland*, but he promoted and distributed it enthusiastically. In 1955, the editorial board noted that he had sold 1700 copies, and later that he had remitted a cheque for eighty pounds he had received for subscriptions. At other times, however, enthusiasm outran his means, and the editor had to ask him to pay up the money he had collected.

The break between Hardy and *Overland* came after Stephen Murray-Smith and Ian Turner were expelled from the Communist Party and Murray-Smith took *Overland* with him. The Party functionaries claimed ownership of the journal and convened an editorial meeting that purported to dismiss Murray-Smith as editor. In the row that resulted, Murray-Smith successfully maintained that he had established *Overland*, had always accepted full financial responsibility for it, and was its sole proprietor.

Without prospect of regaining control, the Party concentrated on vilifying *Overland*, its editor and all his supporters. Frank Hardy joined in the campaign, writing in *Tribune* that Murray-Smith had betrayed the journal's original objectives, turning it into a working-class journal remote from the interests of the working class. Murray-Smith declared that Hardy's letter was "a highly mendacious and misleading document, skilful though it is in its presentation".

After what he saw as the dereliction of *Overland*, Hardy accepted the editorship of the Sydney-based *Realist Writer*, which attempted to publish the kind of working-class literature he believed should have been *Overland*'s main concern. Yet the principles of collective responsibility for the journal and unanimity of editorial decision meant that its contents were circumscribed by the prevailing orthodoxy of the members of the Realist Writers Groups. Editorial debate was spirited, but the outcome was not. Ironically, this corresponded exactly with the kind of censorship that was exercised over Hardy's own work by a succession of printers, publishers and broadcasters, starting with *Over-*

land's printers who would not allow him to call one of his characters Shagger MacIntosh. Later censors, according to Hardy, included Lord Vestey, who prevailed on the ABC to ban his film on the Gurindji, the ABC itself, which rejected a project called "Mateship – a World of Shame" because it emphasised Australian racism and male chauvinism, and Nelsons, who omitted a chapter from the first edition of his *Outcasts of Foolgarah.*

Yet if Hardy's politics get in the way of his writing, causing an unevenness within even his best works, his commitment gives his work its energy and its vernacular appeal. His short stories show the strength of the male Australian worker at the moment of transformation from an agricultural to an urban society, his reportage of the Aborigines shows the injustices that mateship and prosperity alike ignored, his Carringbush remains an overpopulated, impoverished and betrayed but resilient suburb of the mind. Above all, in *But the Dead Are Many,* he shows the importance of commitment and the strength needed to join it to clarity of vision.

JOHN McLAREN

GRAEME BEATON
On Damien Broderick (in Overland 133)

I FOUND DAMIEN BRODERICK'S article on deconstruction/postmodernism / post-structuralism very educational. I cannot however say that I agreed entirely with his comments. It seems to me that Mr Broderick has trouble focusing his attack. Under the guise of dismantling post-structuralism he attacks the tendency of academics to obfuscate (a laudable endeavour, if ever there was one), but then, not content to stop there, he flays the whole of European philosophy since Kant.

Mr Broderick may have extreme difficulty with any kind of concept of 'nothingness' – yet this concept is central (at least as central as any 'nothingness' can be central) to nearly all modern philosophy. See, for example, the existentialism of Kierkegaard or Nietzsche.

Now Mr Broderick may not care for any of the major modern European philosophers, but he must allow that there are some of us out here who have a lot less difficulty with a concept of 'nothingness' than we do with the concept of the innate 'soundness' of things positive and scientific. There are those of us who doubt the inexorable march of human progress/ there are those of us who doubt the rightness of all technological innovation/there are those of us who even doubt Stephen Hawking's postulate that a "quantally-smeared initial state" in a "wave function model of the universe" will do away with the need for all further questions. Indeed we would say that to demonstrate a belief in these things demonstrates a leap of faith that leaves those of us with a mere concept of 'nothingness' in dread and awe.

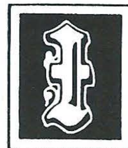
I would also make the observation that just because Walter Kaufmann is made unhappy by Heidegger, hardly warrants Mr Broderick's dismissal of all of Heidegger's work.

I think Mr Broderick's attack on obfuscation by academics is well justified, but haven't academics (particularly, in my experience, academics in literature) always tended to "dote on paradox and over-coding"?

Deconstructionlists may be guilty of increasing this tendency to a new and unwelcome extreme, but I think that in order to counter this tendency one needs to think through the attack a bit more than Mr Broderick has – at least, in this instance.

In any case, last year I read an interesting article on Foucault in the *Guardian* newspaper and then later found myself writing two poems (one comic, one serious) inspired by a quote from that article.

PS: I found the pieces quoted from Baudrillard superb. The writings of Derrida and Foucault may be practically impenetrable, but that piece was brilliant. Surely Mr Broderick could see that Baudrillard was alluding to 'the instant' – a difficult concept to convey in any language or philosophy.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CLIVE MORTON

Francesco Fantin – Masochist or Minor Messiah?

FRANCESCO FANTIN was born in San Vito, Leguzzato on 18 May 1896. He learnt his trade as a loom worker, in a textile factory in the Sehio Province of Vincenza from 1912 until 1924, except for a year in the Italian Army in 1921-1922. He was a financial member of the General Federation of Textile Workers (Federazione Operaia Tessile), Italy, and a social democrat opposed, like its leader Matteotti, to fascism. His brother Luigi had already emigrated to Australia and worked in North Queensland. Another brother, Alfonso, and two sisters still lived in San Vito. Here, too, lived Francisco's estranged wife, Maria. She wanted nothing of politics or being transplanted to a new country.

Luigi successfully nominated his two brothers to Australian authorities as migrants, and they arrived in Melbourne on 24 December 1924 on the ship Regina d'Italia. From here Francesco went to Mourilyan, near Innisfail, and cut cane on various farms until 1928. Like most canecutters, he took part in the migratory wintering in the south after the canecutting season.

In Fantin's case he found employment in the Geelong woollen mills. From here he returned in 1928, not to Mourilyan, but to the farm his brothers Luigi and Alfonso had bought in June that year at Sawmill Pocket, Edmonton, near Cairns, North Queensland. He worked at Geelong and missed the 1932 and 1933 cane season, but returned north in 1933 for another six migratory years. From 1940 to his internment in 1942 he remained at Sawmill Pocket.

In the canefields at Mourilyan that first year of 1924, he found a mentor, the canecutter Frank Carmegnola, a prominent anti-fascist and small 'a' anarchist. While in Geelong he travelled to Melbourne to help with the opening of the Matteotti Club. In North Queensland he distributed Carmagnola's paper, *Il Risviglio.* This contact with Carmagnola brought with it increased attention from the Italian Secret Police (OVRA). As Captain John Hehnir, the Australian master spy, reported in 1944:

> Original documents held by the Melbourne Office show that Fantin was murdered as the result of a long and carefully planned campaign against him which was initiated in Rome as far back as 1927.

Two appeals to free Fantin by his old mentor, Frank Carmagnola went to Brigadier-General Simpson, Director of Security, Sydney in August and November 1942. On both occasions, Simpson suggested to his Queensland counterparts that Fantin could be released. He wrote his last letter on 18 November 1942. He did not know that Fantin had been murdered two days before. Fantin too, had written a letter, three days before his death, to a friend in Sydney:

> During the present week the news is splendid on all fronts. You can hardly imagine how happy this makes me, only I have to tell you that even this joy I have to keep secretly in my heart. I have but a few friends with whom I can communicate. When I hear them talking against the Australian people and all who are fighting fascism, you will understand the reaction of my feelings. At times tears fall from my eyes, and in so doing, give me a feeling of relief. Sometimes I feel deeply downhearted, a feeling I have never experienced during the previous years of my life. It is not because I am enclosed in this camp, for towards the Australian people I have no bitter

feeling, rather, I feel affectionately to them. It is these fascists and all Italians who have lost their sense of reasoning, whom I despise and feel a sense of hatred. I have not yet heard of my appeal.

The trigger to Fantin's murder was an article in *The News*, Adelaide, praising the courage of the Russian people against the Nazi invaders, coupled with a request for contributions to a 'Sheepskins for Russia' appeal. Francesco Fantin responded in one of the worst locations in Australia to try to gather donations for such a project, Loveday Internment Camp 14A. The fascist internees were incensed. Worse was to come, when *The News* reported that anti-fascists in internment camps had collected money for this appeal.

Under the heading 'Fatal Faction Quarrel', the Adelaide *Advertiser* of 17 March 1943 reported Francesco Fantin's death from a blow by another internee, Giovanni Casotti, on 16 November 1942. Two days later, Casotti was found guilty of manslaughter. In passing sentence, His Honour Mr Justice Richards said:

Giovanni Casotti, you have pleaded guilty to a charge of manslaughter. The more serious charge of murder could have been laid against you, but the responsible authorities, acting, no doubt, on the assumption that there may have been truth in your statement that you acted under great provocation, decided to charge you with the lesser crime of manslaughter. But men in this country, whether in internment camps or in freedom, must be made aware that violence leading to serious consequences will be severely punished, and you may consider yourself very fortunate in not receiving a much heavier sentence.

The sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for the term of two years. That sentence will commence from the beginning of the December Session.

Clive Morton's next history, By Strong Arms, *will be released on 20 April 1995. Previous publications include* The Canecutters, *with Geoffrey Burrows (MUP 1986).*

THEY HUNT IN PACKS

What colour light shines in the mist?
"Dense blue light blinds the eyes."
How many shades, dancing in light?
"Hundreds of shadows dance in the mist."

Are those voices calling our names?
"That is the song of the dancing shadows."
Why do they sing if stranded in light?
"Perhaps they are calling out your name."

Listen to the wind blowing through trees.
"That is the sound of footsteps creeping."
I can hear voices what do they say?
"We are the wind that blows through trees."

The night. The night is closing in.
"That is the hand of a dancing shadow."
What colour light shines through the mist?
"Dense blue light closing in."

Is this place where the dawn comes creeping?
"Yes, this is where the shadows fall."
Why do they fall into pools of light?
"They heard the dawn come creeping in."

What colour light shines in the mist?
"Dense blue light blinds your eyes."
Who are you standing beside me?
"I am a shadow dancing in mist."

MICHAEL CRANE

capsule

CAPSULE listings are free, and should be sent to *Overland* at least eight weeks prior to publication. (*Overland* is a quarterly, and appears in early December, March, June and September.) Copy sent to Capsule may be edited, and not all items are used.

A CONFERENCE titled *Media Futures: Policy and Performance,* will be held from July 5 to 8 at the ANA Hotel Gold Coast. For details, contact the Institute of Cultural Studies, School of Humanities, Griffith University. Phone (07) 875 7772/68; fax (07) 875 5511.

A HUGE range of films and videos for home use, or for use in education, is available from Film Australia. They can be selected from catalogues compiled under subject areas, including: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People; Australian Studies; Dance, Performing Arts and Visual Arts; Australia and War;* and *Papua and New Guinea.* To order catalogues and be put on Film Australia's mailing list, write to PO Box 46, Lindfield, NSW 2070. Phone (02) 413 8777; fax (02) 416 5672.

GEORGE Alexander, Kevin D. Murray, Anne Marsh and Nicholas Zurbrugg are just four of the writers and theorists who will be talking about photography, video, film, computer imagery and, more generally, the image in circulation through the mass media, at *Post Photography,* a series of monthly lectures in progress until November at the Victorian Centre for Contemporary Photography. For bookings and details, write to the VCCP, 205 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, 3065; or phone (03) 417 1549.

WIFT (Women in Film and Television), an organisation which aims to improve the status of women working in the film, video and television industries, is holding an exhibition at Linden Gallery from August 31 to Sept. 18. Write to 26A Acland Street, St Kilda, Vic. 3182; or phone (03) 536 1395 for more details. Linden is also one of several venues for *Experimenta '94,* the fourth biennial multi-media event showcasing the latest experimental film, video, installation and performance art. *Experimenta '94* will be held in Melbourne from November 14 to 27.

CDs And Other Things, a book about commodity fetishism, future utopias and dystopias, and the seductive power of consumer capitalism, is available directly from Masterthief Enterprises, 9 Woodburn Rd, Hawthorn, Vic. 3122. The text is by Gyorgy Scinis; photomontages by Peter Lyssiotis. And the price, as for all things, is negotiable.

A NEW co-operatively managed multi-media art space, The Basement Project, has opened in Melbourne, at Basement, 178 Collins St. Open from noon to 6pm, Thursday to Sunday, with two new shows opening every three weeks.

MELBOURNE'S Fringe Network has just moved to a new address: the old St Kilda railway station at 60 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. Phone (03) 534 0722; fax (03) 534 0733 for more details.

ONE of Australia's best-loved children's authors, David Martin, has written a book of poems about his home town in country Victoria. *David Martin's Beechworth Book,* with illustrations supplied by local students, is published by David Lovell Publishing (rrp $9.95). For copies, write to 308 Victoria Street, Brunswick 3056.

YES, The NSW Poets' Union is still alive and kicking. Members (full, $22; conc., $14) receive the monthly magazine *Muse News,* discounts on special union events, and take part in meetings and readings. Write to Box 166 Wentworth Building, University of Sydney 2006. Phone (02) 516 1725.

DETAILS of the 6th International Feminist Book Fair, to be held at the Exhibition Buildings in Mel-

bourne from July 27 to 31, are available from GPO Box 2681X, Melbourne 3000. Or phone 61 3663 3355.

THE Queensland Writers' Centre provides a support network for writers throughout the state. It runs a very comprehensive range of activities and publishes an informative newsletter. For membership details, write to PO Box 12059, Elizabeth Street, Brisbane 4002. Phone (07) 210 0320, fax (07) 210 0354.

THE useful *Handbook for Victorian Writers* ($15 members, $10 non-members, inc. $3 postage and handling) is now available from The Victorian Writers' Centre, 156 George Street, Fitzroy. Phone (03) 415 1077.

REGISTRATION brochures for the Third Annual Women Playwrights' Conference, to be held in Adelaide from July 3 to 10, can be obtained from ICMS Pty Ltd, PO Box 8102 Hindley Street, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone 618 210 6776; fax 618 212 5101.

THE 14th *Going Down Swinging* will be launched in June. It is packed with new prose and poetry from Australian writers, as usual. This is the last issue to be edited by Myron Lysenko, Kevin Brophy and Lauren Williams. GDS will thereafter continue with new editors, Lyn Boughton, Carol Carter and Louise Craig. Write to PO Box 64, Coburg 3058. Subs: $16 for two issues.

THE Fellowship of Australian Writers WA has produced a very attractive calendar listing a wide range of writing events held regularly at Tom Collins House, 9 Servetus Street, Swanbourne. The calendar, plus a monthly newsletter, access to services for writers, readings, competitions, tours, workshops and much more, is available to members. Write to PO Box Cottesloe, WA 6011. Phone and fax, (09) 384 4771.

MIETTA's celebrates its 20th Anniversary this winter with a series of Anniversary Concerts, featuring the best of opera, fine music, jazz, theatre and comedy. Confirmed so far are Kate Ceberano, Wendy Harmer, The Three Chinese Tenors, Benjamin Martin, Miriam Gormley, Tony Delarte, Period Pieces Company, Paul Grabowsky Trio, Debra Byrne, Rosamund Illing, Geoffrey Payne, Ian Munro, The Red Onions, Simon Palomares, Flacco, Michael Harvey, Victorian State Opera, Ronald Farren Price, The Binnaes Quartet and Ormond College Choir. Full program available from: Mietta's, 7 Alfred Place, Melbourne. Phone: 654 2366.

Shan Shnookal

CYBERPUNK BITCHES

Don't bore us with your 4 megabyte RAM
120 Mb hard disc or upgrades to a 486 DX
Get real   Show us hardware that can
open the heavens   We're post glamorous
info-tech hackers trading our software
& expertise through networks of cyber freaks

Don't bother to flaunt motor bikes
We only straddle ergo-designed seats
swivelling before screens day & night
infiltrating where good girls shouldn't go –
NASA, satellites, the world bank, even DSS
Fortnightly cheques have increased
since we inserted additional dependents
Believe us, all secure systems leak

Keep your techno-crap, no information
is neutral & binary systems aren't subtle;
hands off our programs & skill cartel
Our passion is accelerated graphics
& instant fast boots   We're kohl-eyed,
black-jacketed cyberpunk bitches
obsessed with stealth
& dreams of the ultimate shutdown

SUE MOSS

UNCLE BIBLE

Uncle Bible we called him as we grew:
he visited every second month or so
and brought strange habits; strange, stern
words

pronounced in tones that mimicked kindliness
while eating scones and gulping strong dark
tea,
and laughing once or twice uproariously

at nothing funny. No one quite explained
his relationship to us, or why his words
were privileged above the family's.

He always had his stubborn small black book,
"New Testament", he said, "that shows you
kids
how to cleanse yourselves of filthy sin."

At this my aunt seemed discomfited
but did not interrupt. His stares were clubs
heavy with portent, driving doubt in me

so deep I later lay distraught in bed
and felt his hell-fire ripple through my sin,
his awful words black leeches on my skin.

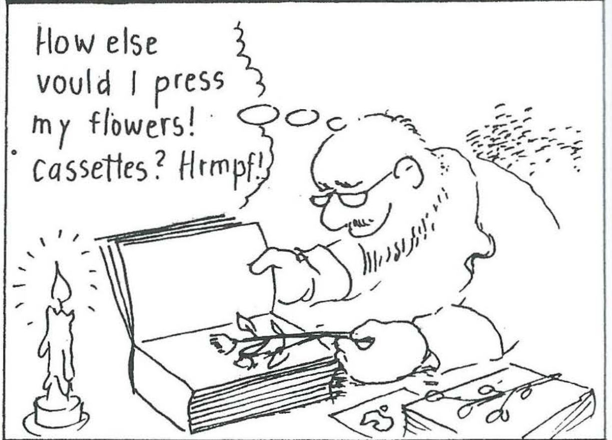
PAUL HETHERINGTON

Books are Better

Lofo compares technologies.

Mrs. Munro puts up a curtain rod.

Ferdinand von Müller on a field trip:

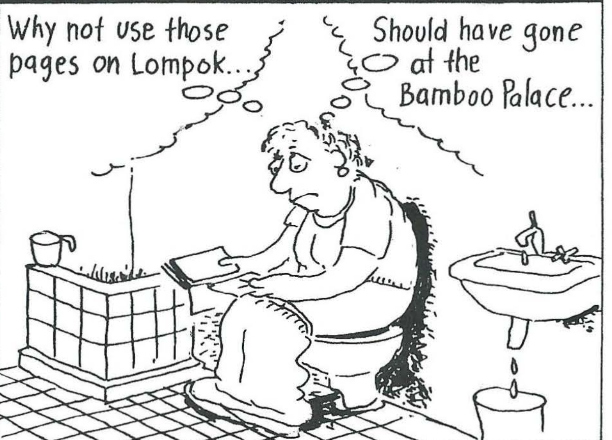


School projects

Finding a rhyme

A Nazi-Rally

Emergency in Bali: no paper...



AND TRY WRITING SOMETHING ON THE MARGIN OF A VIDEO CASSETTE!!!

books

Internment in Australia

PATRICIA CLARKE

Kay Saunders: *War on the Homefront. State Intervention in Queensland 1938-1948* (UQP, $29.95).
Margaret Bevege: *Behind Barbed Wire. Internment in Australia during World War II* (UQP, $29.95).

CIVIL LIBERTIES generally regarded as inviolate during peacetime are inevitably restricted even in democratic countries by the demands of total war. These two books illustrate how the intrusion, surveillance and control of totalitarian countries were so quickly introduced during World War II in an Australia fighting for 'liberty'.

Saunders' book is solely concerned with Queensland, a society with some special features which make it particularly appropriate in understanding the repressive forces operating during the intense crisis of wartime. Queensland was nearer the war zone and the base for Pacific offensives; it was a state with a history of antagonism to unusual or deviant behaviour; and its governments of whatever politics had a marked attachment to states' rights.

War on the Homefront deals with four main aspects of repression – the internment of enemy aliens, the segregation of Black American servicemen, the policing of women's morals under the guise of maintaining public health, and the surveillance and prosecution of Communists during the early part of World War II and during the period of post-war industrial turmoil. It is striking to note that if a similar situation were to occur now, while repression might be as marked, the targets would be different. Changing community attitudes during the past fifty years have eroded the basis for much control specific to World War II. Now, multiculturalist views would prevent the internment of people merely because of their alien nationality; the abandonment of the White Australia policy would prevent discrimination on the grounds of colour; judgemental morality, presumably, would no longer decide attitudes to venereal disease; and adherents of communism would no longer be seen as subversive and threatening.

Reading of the dilemma into which the arrival of Black American troops threw officialdom is to revert to an Australia in which there was bipartisan political agreement and almost universal public support for the White Australia policy. The solution adopted to deal with the influx of black soldiers was to introduce an elaborate system of apartheid, even though this resulted, in a period of an unprecedented national crisis, in a highly inefficient use of manpower. Black Americans were segregated in their own army, then segregated further by Australian authorities. When not confined to remote outback areas, they were stationed in separate areas of cities, always the most run-down and socially undesirable sections.

There were similar contradictions in the treatment of sexuality. Australian women were expected to be hospitable to American service personnel yet those who contracted sexually transmitted diseases were branded contaminators who destroyed the fighting capacity of the Allies. Such women, but not the men who may have been the cause of their infection, were incarcerated in 'lock hospitals'. The ultimate discrimination was the location of these hospitals in prisons. In Brisbane the Female Venereal Disease Isolation Hospital was located behind

the central dormitory for male prisoners in the prison complex at Dutton Park.

Behind Barbed Wire is not so wide-ranging in subject as *War on the Homefront* but it deals in great detail with one important aspect of wartime security.

Australia's wartime internment policies were adopted in a climate in which the overwhelming view was that minority non-English migrants were incapable of being British and so were not true Australians. Huge internment camps sprang up in which thousands of naturalised and long-term residents as well as thousands of enemy aliens were imprisoned.

Some of the internment cases mentioned in this book have been the subject of long-running controversy and publicity, for instance the fate of the refugees who arrived on the *Dunera*, and the imprisonment of P.R. (Inky) Stephenson and Australia First movement members.

The advantage of this book is that it sets these controversies against the background of an overall view of the theoretical and practical problems of internment at a time when civil liberties had to be balanced with the demands of national security.

IT MUST BE concluded that once armed with the power of internment, government authority almost inevitably develops a momentum of its own despite some legal safeguards. In World War II, there were many unpublicised cases of largely innocent newly arrived migrants and refugees as well as Italian farmers from north Queensland who were caught in this web of internment, often unnecessarily. Similarly the strength of Australian antipathy to the Japanese race ensured that any Japanese nationals were interned although many were poor indentured labourers and probably harmless.

Few people were prepared or able, in conditions of censorship, to speak out against unjust internments. Most accepted that because responsible authorities thought internees were dangerous they must be so. In this regard more could have been expected of a Labor Government in preventing or righting injustice. The *Dunera* internees remain the most consistent questioners of Australia's policy, not least because from among this group emerged highly articulate academics.

In wartime it is not always possible to put justice above real security or above the public's need to feel secure. But constant questioning by some who were sacrificed to satisfy the need for security, reminds us that the balance went at times cruelly against certain groups.

A slight quibble – the number of Japanese prisoners of war killed during the outbreak at Cowra on the night of 5 August 1944 is incorrectly stated as 321. The number was 231.

Both *War on the Homefront* and *Behind Barbed Wire* have been published in the University of Queensland Press's admirable series 'Studies in Australian History'. Both have extensive bibliographies and notes which will be valuable to future researchers of wartime Australia.

Patricia Clarke is an author whose latest book, Tasma. The Life of Jessie Couvreur, *will be published in March 1994 (Allen & Unwin). She is editor of the* Canberra Historical Journal.

Ern Malley – National Legend?

EVAN JONES

Michael Heyward: *The Ern Malley Affair* (UQP, $32.95).

THE PUBLICATION OF THIS book raised a rare hullabaloo in the 'high-brow' spots of the media. That hardly makes Ern Malley a "national legend" like Ned Kelly and Phar Lap, as Heyward supposes. If the whizz and bang will not go away, it's mainly because this squib exploded loudly enough to put Australia in the international literary news for the first time. Excitement about *that* betrays intense parochialism.

The issues are of course irresolvable. If we are going to go on taking the Ern Malley affair seriously – and clearly we are – Heyward has done us a real service: he has laid the case as bare as he reasonably could. I have found only minor facts to quarrel with; and though I did not wish to know more about it all, I am now glad that I do. Max Harris, who had always seemed a mixture of cleverness and vain buffoon, emerges shining; I learnt more about Stewart; and even a peripheral figure like Alister Kershaw becomes more interesting.

Heyward scores high marks as an investigative journalist. As is apt to happen, he is more pretentious than is becoming, and his purview is very limited. But he only makes a real fool of himself when, "creatively writing", he tries to "bring his characters to life". This is most bizarre when, as bar-room barrister, he dramatises the obscenity trial from the transcript, scoring points for and against as he goes. He is so pleased with his forensic destruction of the sole witness for the prosecution, the dumb cop Vogelsang, that he cannot resist a rare footnote (there are 16pp of unkeyed endnotes) demonstrating not only the thoroughness of his pursuit but his skill in cross-examination:

> During a visit to Adelaide in mid 1989 I copied from the local directory the number of every Vogelsang in the city, and set about phoning them. The retired police officer, whom his wife retrieved from his vegetable patch, was not pleased to hear from me and poured scorn on the 'research' I earnestly tried to describe to him. "You'd be surprised how many jokers get grants to do this sort of thing," he scoffed. I persisted, tried various tacks, got nowhere and decided to lighten the tone. "It sounds like you must have had some fun with the *Angry Penguins* thing." "Fun!" he exploded. "Is that what you think it was!" I mumbled something about wanting to get all sides of the story. "Look," he said, refusing to mix metaphors, "it's a closed book." And, politely dismissing me, hung up the phone.

Evan Jones is a retired academic.

'Bent by name, Bent by nature'

ROSS FITZGERALD

Margaret Glass: *Tommy Bent* (Melbourne University Press, $24.95).

As WITH ALL CHILDREN brought up and educated in Brighton in the 1950s, one of my lasting memories is of the imposing statue, high above the intersection of Bay Street, Hampton Street and Point Nepean Road, of the mythical Tommy Bent – his left hand outstretched, for what, I was at the time unsure.

"He was a rogue", my Mum and Dad would tell me in our neat East Brighton family home. At the same time, their directions to strangers often began with "Turn left at Tommy Bent's statue" or "It's just near Tommy Bent". When I was a kid, Bill and Edna recounted stories about how Bent – an ex-market gardener – used his position as Railways minister to feather his own nest and how the notorious Tommy entered Victorian Parliament by using his position as Brighton rate-collector to stack the electoral rolls.

In the 1960s the son of our next door neighbour, who was desperate to join the Navy, drove drunk into Tommy Bent's statue. Tragically, as a result of the injuries he sustained in the accident, he was 'shortened' by over an inch and thus could not make the height minimum then required for naval entrance. This was the same year – 1966 – that St Kilda last won the VFL premiership. In perhaps his finest moment, Tommy was beribboned and festooned in the team's colours – red, white and black.

In the main Tommy Bent had a very bad press. Margaret Glass's current offering – which is based on her doctoral thesis and in part also reads like it – continues his vilification.

This biography is subtitled 'Bent by name, Bent by nature'. That Tommy Bent was a blatant land boomer of dubious honesty is beyond dispute. It is certainly true that Bent combined the use of his public position, the provisions of the relevant Acts and an awareness of human foibles to stack the electoral rolls for the Legislative Assembly and help ensure his victory in 1871 over his distinguished opponent George Higinbotham. It is certainly also the case that during Bent's term as Speaker the ceremonial mace disappeared from the Legislative Assembly. (Reputedly it turned up in a Little Lonsdale Street brothel!)

According to Alfred Deakin "Thomas Bent was the most brazen, untrustworthy ... intriguer the Victorian Assembly had ever known." Although this was his unambiguous assessment of Bent who in July 1881 became Railways minister in the government of Sir Bryan O'Loghlen, it is hard to know how Deakin would have described more recent Victorian ministers and premiers, including Jeff Kennett.

Despite his many foibles, the member for Brighton certainly had his admirers, especially after he became premier and treasurer in 1904. A Melbourne publican defended him thus: "Say what they like about Sir Thomas Bent, but he was a man. He mightn't have much honesty, if there was big money to be got, and he liked his gin and tonic strong an' fraiquint, an' [he had] a rovin' eye for women, but outside them matters he was as pure as the drivvelin' snow." This unsurprisingly is not quoted by Glass.

Victorian newspapers certainly gave Tommy heaps. Thus the *Ballarat Courier* on 12 October 1892 asserted that "as plain Mr Thomas Bent his capacity for mischief was large enough; as Mr Speaker Bent that capacity is hugely extended", while in March 1904 the magazine *All About Australians* described Bent's manner as "rude and uncouth","undiplomatic and blunt". Its editor left no doubt about his opinion of the new premier:

> That Mr Thomas Bent can get ten men to associate themselves with him in a cabinet is a striking testimony to the degradation of Victorian politics. That it is possible for such a man to become the head of the Government is a reflection either upon the people of the State, or its system of Parliamentary election.

In August 1907 the *Argus* referred to his "irresponsible gabbling", "violent eccentricity" and habit of "speak[ing] as if he ruled Victoria by right of conquest". This, it seems to me, has a distinctly contemporary resonance!

Glass has gathered together ample evidence of Tommy Bent's many sins. He was, as she quotes from a forthcoming book on Vida Goldstein, "implacably opposed to the suffrage". Bent had said that "he would rather take the ladies to the opera [which he abhorred] than give them the vote"! Yet Bent, who arguably benefits by comparison with some leading contemporary Australian state and federal politicians, also had some virtues. As Geoffrey Bolton pointed out in his elegant essay on 'Hypocrisy' in my recent collection *The Eleven Deadly Sins*, "while cultivating his public image as a bluff, unscrupulous operator", Bent "was in most ways a conscientious administrator".

In many ways Bolton's assessment of Sir Thomas Bent, especially as premier, is much more balanced than that promoted by Margaret Glass. As a brazen, land-booming larrikin he was certainly no worse than those pious wowsers and monumental Melbourne hypocrites James Munro and Sir Matthew Davies. In the words of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, also quoted by Bolton, Bent "must be given credit for supporting the University of Melbourne and the Public Library and Museum when others whose support might have been expected seemed indifferent to their fate". Would that the current Victorian premier should show as much active support for institutions of education and learning as did the bold Tommy.

In 1980 Bent's statue and Mrs Bent's fountain were moved to a small park at the side of the Nepean Highway. As Glass points out: "The base of the statue was lowered and, although it is very close to the original site, it is now far less prominent." However, Tommy's left hand remains outstretched, while the two kinks in his hair which may or may not represent the devil's horns, still remain visible. It remains to be seen what will happen to Tommy's form in the unlikely occurrence that St Kilda should win another (AFL) premiership!

It is a shame that in Glass's otherwise edifying biography, the editors at MUP should allow the author to consistently misuse the word 'decimate'.

Ross Fitzgerald is Associate Professor of History and Politics at Griffith University. His biography of E.G. (Red Ted) Theodore will be published this year by the University of Queensland Press.

Two Heroes of Our Time

KEITH THOMAS

Margaret Simons: *The Ruthless Garden* (Bookworld, $24.95).
Anne Coombs: *No Man's Land* (Simon & Schuster, $12.95).

MARGARET SIMONS' contemporary protagonist in this, her award-winning first novel (she carried off the initial Angus & Robertson Bookworld Prize) is an

uncomfortably fat, youngish woman, Athena Masters, who has sampled various urban jobs and men in Adelaide before, in the narrative, moving in on a lover (Sam), who has already fled the city and is attempting to make a go of the simple life on a sub-standard farm in the South Australian riverland. The district is aptly named Newera, where the "era" would have been spelt "error" if the founding fathers had shown foresight. Athena wrestles her way into the local community, seeking to get to the bottom of the oz bush thing, but more than that, to establish her proprietorship of Sam's body, soul and life.

Hannah Matthews, in *No Man's Land*, is so contemporary that she is an investigative journalist. She returns to the provincial city in which she grew up (if we are allowed to call Newcastle NSW provincial) to take a job on the local paper and appraise the scene for its fiddles, Australianness and relevance to the self she has fashioned herself into in the big world. Most of all, however, she is on a track similar to Athena Masters': Hannah is bent on claiming and establishing some sort of primacy of title in the love-object of her life, who is already dead.

From that conjunction of plotting, the two novels and their heroines take off in totally different directions using utterly different modes of travel. The essence of fiction is always in the particularity of the window through which the novelist offers the spectacle.

Margaret Simons attempts a broad, contrapuntal narrative. In her opening chapters she follows both Athena, through episodes of lumpish childhood, growing up, moving in with Sam and being pregnant, and also Captain Charles Sturt, on his 'discovery' of the riverland in the 1830s, complete with extracts from the explorer's journal. Episodes depicting the bewilderment of the Ngawait (the aboriginal tribe) as the English move into their land are set against others showing how inept the first settlement had been, how dubious the motives of the founding fathers, and how bland and doomed Newera has become. There is adroit management of these threads, but, on the down side, everything is correctly oriented and there are no shocks of surprise or revelation in Simons' general view.

Athena, hot and bothered, has her charm and is the reward for readers of *The Ruthless Garden*. You really do carry away the physical, chafing experience of being very large in a hot country town, scrambling in and out of truck cabins, staring down the town's hoons. There is an awesomeness, and sly wit, in her goings on. She does her housework ruthlessly, in a ferment, rendering those who have offended her helpless, driving away intruders. When challenged, she resorts to a "haughty look". Does Sam have a chance against her? The answers are 'no' and 'yes'. When she asks him what he is thinking, probing for response, feeling, he resorts to a few words about putting in the potatoes. Such is life.

Panoramic novels have their difficulties: some strands almost always tend to fray away from the grand design, and particular story lines turn out to be more interesting than others. *The Ruthless Garden* is not free from these difficulties. The town characters encountered are rather stereotyped and only humorous in a broad way at odds with the subtly funny touches about Athena herself and her battle with Sam. Newera's trouble with salinity and the government scheme to remedy things do not sustain the weight of plot and concern they need to carry.

Nonetheless, *The Ruthless Garden*, seen as Athena carving out, or attempting to carve out space for herself, comes through as an heroic tale, and certainly as one of our time.

Anne Coombs' novella, *No Man's Land*, is, by contrast, a precise fictional construct, a microscope job, suggestive, speaking in a general way, of Conrad and Svevo's concern for tracing the inward narrative, and as measured in its advancement of story, mystery and disclosures as Henry James.

How did Hannah's lover elude her? What was the secret of the lover's attraction, her charisma? How does Hannah's fatal love mesh into her past life, her childhood friendships and special relationships?

There is a desperation in Hannah, engendered, perhaps, by post-existentialist films and texts. It was under her lover's influence and guidance that she created herself, but as she attempts to establish and maintain a persona as the journalist-who-is-a-camera, the dismissed local girl who has returned to the city of her birth as the wise one, that relationship with her mentor, the object of her old, formative crush, floats in her conscience, presenting deception on betrayal, emptiness on fraud.

Pressured and hassled over the products of her investigative reporting, Hannah retreats from the journalist's role to that of the subeditor, from half-involvement with a current lover and the people of the city, to an introspective searching of her memories and her dead friend's journals, diaries and interlineations.

No Man's Land is not a large or long novel; it is understated and controlled and makes no broad cultural references, but within the luminous circle of Hannah's perception of her present and her past Coombs has created a world and a way of looking at the world which has something of the perfection and enigmatic quality of a fairy tale and at the same time the subtlety and artifice of the novel. Hannah names her Rumpelstiltskin, perhaps, but her only prize is to again take flight.

Keith Thomas wrote for Nation *and* The Australian. *His two novels were* There was a Man of our Town *and* Idlers in the Land.

The Georges' Housekeeper, the Georges' Wife

MARY-ELLEN RYAN

Elizabeth Jolly: *The Georges' Wife* (Penguin, $29.95 hb).

WINNER OF The Age Book of the Year award, the Elizabeth Jolley novel, *The Georges' Wife,* continues the detailed account of the life of Vera Wright, a story begun in *My Father's Moon* and carried on through *Cabin Fever*.

By this third book, Vera's life appears to have achieved more equilibrium, and the reader is not left in a similar suspense of wondering what happens to Vera and her small daughter Helena as when, in the previous novels, they are forced to spend the night in a homeless shelter (*My Father's Moon*) or when Vera is overcome by 'cabin fever' and is unable to leave her hotel room in America where she has gone to attend a medical conference (*Cabin Fever*).

It is up to *The Georges' Wife* to block in much detail of what was hinted at and alluded to in both these earlier books. *The Georges' Wife* follows its own more mellow version of the demanding narrative style of the earlier works where much is assumed and exposition comes later, if at all.

As the slight change in style suggests, it is time for Vera to take stock.

> I am a shabby person, I understand, if I look back, that I have treated kind people with an unforgivable shabbiness. For my work a ruthless self-examination is needed. Without understanding something of myself, how can I understand anyone else.

There is no question mark as Vera does not really question.

Arriving on the Georges' Glasgow doorstep, having spent the last of her money on the train fare from London to answer a 'help wanted' in a magazine which was months old, she finds they are 'suited'. Vera is however 'lucky' when the Georges take pity on her and her small daughter Helena and allow them to stay until Vera finds a suitable position.

But Vera has found a position which suits her very well as she once again seeks to fulfil her fantasy of being part of a couple by inappropriately attaching herself to an existing couple, in this case, brother and sister, Eleanor and Oliver George.

Oliver and Vera form a clandestine relationship and within days of arriving at the house, Vera is again pregnant. Mr George, as Vera calls him throughout their life together, never finds the right time to tell his sister of the relationship, which remains unacknowledged up to Miss George's death. Miss George raises the children with Vera and the Georges eventually employ a housekeeper, Vera's original job. She has moved from being the Georges' housekeeper to the Georges' wife.

Years earlier, Vera had been seduced by Dr Jonathan Metcalf, a doctor at the hospital where she started her nursing training. But Vera was as much seduced by his wife Magda and his lifestyle.

Vera's infatuation with upper class intellectuals is mirrored in *The Georges' Wife* when she has another brief but intense relationship with a married couple, Felicity and Noel. Vera is concluding her training as a doctor at the hospital where she had begun her training as a nurse,

when she encounters Felicity and Noel. The straightforward account of her time with Felicity and Noel is in contrast to the sentimental remembrances of her attachments to the Metcalfs and the Georges. Vera begins to see some things as they really are.

Vera tells this story to the Widow, her confidante on the sea voyage from England to Australia. In *The Georges' Wife*, Vera and Mr George move to Australia, leaving Miss George to finish the task of raising the children. As in life, Vera and Mr George travel separately, together, as years on, they still do not publicly acknowledge the relationship.

The Widow gives Vera valuable insight into the life which awaits her in Australia as well as the life she has left behind. Like other 'widows' in Vera's life, she gives her a kind of unconditional love she fails to find with a man.

When Mr George finally accedes to Vera's wish to marry, his sister is dead and he needs someone to look after him in his dotage. At a time when the apostrophe slips and Vera officially becomes the George's wife, she becomes the nurse.

By the close of *The Georges' Wife*, Vera spends hours wheeling Mr George, now a forgetful old man, around Perth in a wheelchair. These long walks give Vera an opportunity to practise an old habit of trying to look through other people's hedges. As a young woman, the high hedges of the middle class homes represented for Vera a tangible barrier which excluded her from the close family relationships she believed characterised life on the other side.

In Australia, the hedges were of different varieties, but the effect was the same.

> The hedges, the streets, the gardens, the houses and the people, the couples. We, Mr George and I, are a couple.
>
> "We do not seem to be like a couple."
>
> "What is it you are saying? What did you say, Vera?" Mr George wants to know.
>
> "We do not", I tell him, "seem to be like a couple."
>
> "Why do you bother, Vera", Mr George replies, "with such an ugly word?"

Mary-Ellen Ryan is completing a doctorate on the recovery of time in women's fiction.

Reports on Life

GARY CATALANO

Chris Wallace-Crabbe: *Rungs of Time* (OUP, $17.95).

Stephen J. Williams: *The Ninth Satire* (Pariah Press, PO Box 85, Chadstone Centre 3185, $12.00).

UNTIL I HAD READ their two books, I would not have thought that Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Stephen J. Williams had all that much in common. These two writers are separated not just by a considerable generational gap (Wallace-Crabbe was born in 1934 and Williams in 1958) but, more importantly, by matters of sensibility. It is obvious that they want to affect their readers in very different ways.

But Wallace-Crabbe and Williams would seem to agree on at least one thing. For what are admittedly quite different reasons, both have been led to question the common-or-garden assumption that literary works should register or express a consistent voice.

Throughout *Rungs of Time* Wallace-Crabbe is preoccupied by the question of just how one should deal with the existence of things like pain and distress. For the most part he chooses to do so in a manner which is so casual and light-hearted that one is tempted to call him unfeeling. The second stanza of 'Like Vibrations of a Bell', the first poem in the book, indicates that the shock engendered by this light-heartedness is quite deliberate:

> But that's the way of it, I'm afraid,
> and, speaking of fear,
> an old friend lies tonight in St V's,
> soon to be torn clean away by cancer,
> the word we cannot say:
> it has replaced the devil in our world
> or a black hole
> where all Pandora's horrors have been
> stowed.

Yet it soon turns out that Wallace-Crabbe believes that most things cannot be spoken of properly. 'Things are in the Saddle and Ride Mankind', a long catalogue-poem, ends with the observation that "the words go on and on failing to give us/ the chunky tangibility of objects,

while/ the yearning remains".

The better poems in the book tend to be those in which Wallace-Crabbe has given that yearning its head. Words may – as he says – be incapable of conveying the chunky tangibility of things, but that does not stop him from testifying to the variousness of the phenomenal world in such poems as 'Sunset Sky over Coober Pedy' and 'Paddocks'. The opening lines of the latter poem call to mind some of the autobiographical essays in *Melbourne or the Bush*:

> I grew up in the first decade of flats,
> tram and icetruck jangling their sweet bells
> four miles from Bushell's Tea or Buckley & Nunn.
>
> Us kids had a mental map of sacred places,
> each little wodge of dusty building block
> dubbed 'paddock' – our version of pastoral.
> Payne's Paddock, the Corner Paddock, our secret paddock ...

Along with 'A Kind of Late Assessment', the most Mozartian poem here, 'Paddocks' also demonstrates that Wallace-Crabbe has a decidedly formal imagination. The suddenness with which these two poems end intensifies their poignancy to an incalculable degree.

THAT STEPHEN J. WILLIAMS wants his poems to affect the reader in a very different way should be evident from 'Flowers for the Dead', which in many ways is his manifesto-poem:

> The purpose of a poem is to say what is – with the force
> Of a hammer. When it comes down, this hammer, the poem
> That comes with it, about that dead lover or that dead father
> Should strike you in the throat and make you speechless.

The flatness of these lines and their awkward handling of metaphor are rather typical of the poems in *The Ninth Satire*.

In a brief author's note, Williams describes his collection (its title refers to one of Juvenal's satires) as "a book of poetry, biographical fiction, non-fiction, dreams, fiction, portraiture, nonsense and comedy" and also tells us that much of the prose is not his own. It appears that some of the stories in the book are based on diaries to which he has been given access.

Williams excels in such stories as 'The Black King' and 'Uncle Stranger', both of which take one into the experience of people who care for sufferers from AIDS on a day-to-day basis. The former story, the more naturalistic of the two, is taut, unsentimental and entirely convincing.

He also excels in such shorter pieces as 'Speech Acts in the Park', 'Big Orchestra' and 'Red Streamer', all of which can probably be classed as prose poems. There are echoes of John Scott's work in these, particularly in the first of the three.

Williams has a strong experimental urge. But this never distracts him from his primary obligation to report on life.

Gary Catalano's most recent book is Selected Poems 1973-1992 *from UQP.*

The Bounty Saga

OSKAR SPATE

Bill Collett: *The Last Mutiny* (Hudson, $29.95); Greg Dening: *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*. (Cambridge University Press, $29.95).

TWO VERY DIFFERENT books, both quirky. *The Last Mutiny* is that of Bligh's long-suffering family, and surely one well justified. The book purports to be Bligh's memoirs written in disgruntled retirement; many neat little touches build up a convincing portrait of a man of daring and iron resolution, but with a monstrously self-righteous ego: "I think I understand my fellow man more than most"! There are some fine descriptive and narrative passages, and a few anachronisms which don't matter. One finds the constant quotations from Marcus Aurelius put into Bligh's mouth rather startling; somehow the two don't seem to go together (perhaps Collett had just read the Roman sage for himself?), but as a whole the book is an amusing tour de force.

Dening's book is more serious, indeed often pretentious and portentous, determined to find cosmic significance in anything, no matter how trivial. This, and a taste for epigram, sometimes lead him into non sequiturs, dubious inferences, and even downright absurdities. Is it even remotely true, for instance, that "In every corner of the earth there are wayside shrines to Captain Cook"? In Bolivia, Tibet, Zaire (which are no inconsiderable corners of the earth)? Hyperbole could hardly go further.

The organisation of the book is unusual, and I found it inconvenient and confusing. There are three 'Acts' – The Ship, The Beach, and The Island (Pitcairn), each divided between Narrative and Reflection (though the distinction between the two is not always clear) and two Entr'actes. There are no specifically numbered references, instead we have 'Notes', which are really little essays on sources for each section.

Dening covers an immense range of topics and his sources are sometimes recondite. One is surprised to find Jonas Hanway, eighteenth century inventor of the umbrella, though he is more relevant than this, the most generally known fact about him, would suggest. Conversely it is surprising that in his discussion of the annual return of Lono to Hawaii, a time when the rigid social order was turned topsy-turvy, Dening passes up the opportunity for comparison with the Roman Saturnalia.

I found the book somewhat disjointed, and it may be helpful to give a summary of its contents. 'The Ship' includes cliometrics and non-cliometrics of violence, notably how any sense of outrage at being flogged depended very much on the circumstances in which the ritual, for such it was, took place. It is hardly necessary nowadays to labour the point that Bligh was far from being the most eager flogger of his century; that invidious distinction seems to belong to Vancouver. Perhaps the most interesting and insightful part of this 'Act' is the discussion of the all-importance of space to scores of men cooped up in what Dr Johnson compared unfavourably to a jail. Anyone who has lived in barracks or an equivalent will understand this all too well.

In 'The Beach' there is just a hint, no more, of the currently fashionable Europhobia – "There are men and women killing one another now because Strangers stepped on Natives' beaches". No doubt, but did wars need strangers – that is, Europeans – as a catalyst? The grim history of Easter Island gives a resounding answer, in the negative. The Narrative to this 'Act' gives little more than passing and inadequate attention to the very interesting mission of the Spanish friars to Tahiti in 1775, an incident in the brief flowering of the Enlightenment in Spain under the best of her Bourbon kings, Carlos III. The mission was a fiasco owing to the abject timidity of the friars, who had been warned, supererogatorily, against excess of zeal. They shut themselves up in their house and left all contact with the locals to their servant Maxímo Rodriguez, who had an observant eye and a lively mind. We could have done with an excerpt from his account, at the expense of the disquisition on the symbolism of Catholic ritual in the 'Interlude on Sacrifice'. One misses also the engagingly lyrical hymn to free love by Bougainville's 'scientist' Commerson, a rhapsody to this happy society where the altars were stained with no blood except that of lost virginities.

'The Island' gives a fairly succinct narrative of the history of Pitcairn Island, from its atrocious beginnings – eighty-six per cent of the founding fathers were murdered – to a fantastically pietistic community, with five compulsory religious services on the Sabbath. This was largely the work of the Reverend Goeorge Nobbs, who "sailed in one day all the way from Callao" – an astounding navigational feat. Dening does not really mean this of course, it is just clumsy writing, easily avoided by using "arrived" for the ambiguous "sailed in".

The book concludes with a survey of Pitcairn as depicted on stage and film, very strange transfigurations indeed, beginning with Ralph Wewitzer in 1790 (an extraordinary performance, whether ballet, mime or operetta was difficult to decide) and finishing with kitsch from Hollywood.

A rich mixture indeed. It could have been better with less 'fine writing'; as it is, a book replete with epigram and insight, not to mention the exciting incident which is the foundation for a rather baroque structure.

Oskar Spate came to the Australian National University in 1951 as Foundation Professor of Geography in the Research School of Pacific Studies, of which he was later Director. Apart from writing a standard geography of India and Pakistan, he is the author of a three-volume history of The Pacific since Magellan.

Sisterly Love

NADINE MYATT

Drusilla Modjeska (ed.): *Sisters* (Angus & Robertson, $16.95).

THE BRIEF WAS A SIMPLE one. Drusilla Modjeska asked some of Australia's leading writers – Elizabeth Jolley, Dorothy Hewett, Gillian Mears, Beth Yahp and Helen Garner – "to write about the vexed relationship between sisters in any way, in any form, they liked ..."

"All six of us have sisters. ... Everyone accepted eagerly", writes Drusilla Modjeska, "and all of us were caught short by how hard it proved: for reasons that have less to do with writing than with the nature of sisters."

Not having a sister myself I learned that "Sisters are good at punishment, and they have long memories." Or as Helen Garner writes "the one who records will never be forgiven. Endured, yes; tolerated, put up with, borne, and still loved; but not forgiven."

Garner tackled the problem by "attempting to vanish, to be swallowed up by the texture of the writing." To her credit she does not succeed. Indeed her piece, based on a taped conversation with her four sisters ("to avoid the tyranny of a single point of view") is one of the clearest insights this work offers into the assorted bag of sisterly relations.

The others mostly fulfilled Garner's avowed aim of allowing themselves to be swallowed up by their writing, blurring feelings behind a density of prose. As Gillian Mears writes, "I think of sisterly love as being pure and flowing. If it had a colour, it would be the kind of blue moving out from one of Yvonne's finest paintbrushes into a jar of water." [and later] "I think of sisterly love as being blue and light or dark and sad, plumbago or plum coloured, prone to change ..."

The authors also remove themselves as if to disentangle themselves from the close ties that bind. Helen Garner (One) depersonalises her sisters by labelling them Two, Three and Four. Gillian Mears and Beth Yahp rope in their mothers with renditions of 'My Mother My Sister'. Elizabeth Jolley centres on her father's sisters and Dorothy Hewett creates the fictionalised Darkling sisters whose ghosts cast their perverse twisted shadows in the sunlight of her Victorian home.

Hewett's sinister shadows become a metaphor for the 'unsaid' that appears in all these pieces. There is something lurking, menacing, in the closeness of sisters and their ability to wound and measure out reprisals. It is as if instinctual childhood fear still lurks in these mature women.

It is evident in the symbolic cuckoo in Modjeska's piece. The bird dumped by its mother who then squeezes the rightful inhabitants (the other sisters?) out of the nest. And it can be glimpsed in the selection of childhood memories. Jolley's sister tearing out a handful of her hair by the roots. The Mears sisters bullying and whipping each other with willow whips. Then there were the kittens put into an Esky and forgotten. "No, that's not true", writes Mears. "That story is about somebody else's sister, but it fits." It is as if there were something universally invidious and menacing in sisterly relations.

It is not that these pieces do not share with us the joys of sisterhood. But in the end it is what is left unsaid that casts a shadow on these family portraits. They may still shop together as do Garner's sisters, and no other friend might "cut the mustard" as does a Mears girl. But beneath the surface words is a nether region of childhood rivalry, resentment and tension-fraught sorority. A closeness too close for comfort it seems, or at least too close to write openly about.

Nadine Myatt is a freelance journalist and reviewer who also teaches in the Professional Writing Courses at both Box Hill and Dandenong TAFE Colleges.

Mobility Among the Metaphors

JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

Shelton Lea: *The Love Poems* with drawings by Jenni Mitchell (Eaglemont Books, $14.00).

POETRY HAS SO often been called into the service of love, the partnership can become banal. Self-conscious poets shrink

from raptures whether delicate, dizzy, or dire, and the darker emotions of doubt and jealousy. They spice their caution with cagey humour, satire, formal sophistication.

Not in Shelton Lea's book. The rapt and the anecdotal are his stuff: salad, dreams, sharing cigarettes – hair, tears, flowers. The obsession, the tension and the *douceurs*, all are there.

Perhaps, after all, we are given a hard edge in the 'domestics' of the first poem. Last night's salad sits in the fridge "like a retribution", right! But "we subside into whispered innuendoes, languid as spies on darkened streets". Really? Spies, languid? Inhabitants of Barataris or maybe Casablanca, and ill-fated, evidently. It doesn't matter, a line later "our glances scatter like leaves ..."

Mobility among the metaphors is Lea's most obvious device. Readers can be positively grateful for the emotional acceleration of ten lines that follow up one idea:

> and I thought then of bulldozers that rape this giant earth
> their huge metal teeth that rip into the ground,
> burying fantastically into the womb of the soil.
> I thought of the uncaring drivers of the machines
> with eyes of steel,
> plunging at levers with certain hands,
> tickling at accelerators
> with their certain, lover's feet, playing boyish games
> vrroom vrrrrooooommm,
> and oh the cut soil bleeds like any other wound.
>
> ('a poem for marianne')

Through the compassion here, and elsewhere among drugs and desperation, with the new madam in the mining town, or trotting out summaries of the world's daily mayhem, we read a craving for stimulus even if it's just the motel's worldweary "dreams of the impossible loves that have been tried before". Here be agonies, nightmares, tremors, tenderness, reverberations, endless caresses. And genuine, memorable, nearly funny crassness:

> Your bum is like a squat
> I could live there all my life
>
> ('your eyes are like agate')

The best of Shelton Lea is his vivid sensuous notation – "tonight you smell of hessian ... your lips are ponds cream/soft with lubricity ... and close to me your underarms are putty" – mingled with faux-naif confidence – "and i have more fun with you/than i do at the two up and nearer still to me your touch gives an elegant thrill/ to my scrotum pouch" (in 'for christine'). Bit of a thrill for us all.

These *Love Poems* have more to do with dramatising the ambivalent poses of the author than with the existence of other people named in them. The talent clearly shown in Lea's *palantine madonna* (1977) and *Poems from a Peach Melba Hat* (1985) is still showing. Penetratingly apt accompaniment is given by Jenni Mitchell's cover portrait and the line drawing facing page 1; after these, the other drawings lack assurance and graphic justification.

Judith Rodriguez is a Melbourne poet who teaches at Deakin University.

Fragile, Present and Future Fictions

JOHN HANRAHAN

Joan London: *Letter to Constantine* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $14.95).
T. R. Edmonds: *North and West of Melrose Street* (Simon & Schuster, $12.95).
D. W. Walker: *Plastic Paradise* (Boris Books).

SAYING TOO MUCH about Joan London's stories runs the same risk as giving a butterfly a rinse and shampoo. You make them discoloured, a bit wet and in danger of drowning. In her second collection, London has created some sturdy, assertive butterflies that wing their way confidently through the imagination.

These stories are fragile yet confident in both mode and mood. The narratives, often in the first person, create a sense of yearning, for another time, another place, another relation-

ship. 'Letter to Constantine', with its images of desert, yearning, loss and desolation reads like the Eliot (of *Four Quartets*) composing a response to the poems of Emily Dickinson.

The rhythms, the events and the tone of 'the letter' move between the shadow and the reality. 'Angels' is set at first in London, but it is really Londonia, Joan London's own country, set, as she says in another story, on the "edge" of "this vast plain".

'The Woman Who Only Answered Yes or No' focuses on making a film of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, and on making a different film on the side. The paintings of Chagall, the 'Russian surrealist', and his personal life are presented in terms of theatre in 'The Second Stage'. "It was like standing on the rim of the world." Into this shadowland, this reality that hovers above reality, London moves with an assured imagination and a delicate responsiveness to human longing. I imagine those earthy yet mystical writers, Juliana of Norwich and Teresa of Avila, cleaning up the canteen with Constantine and his friends, arguing about soup recipes and the dark night of the soul.

Sometimes London moves into a narrative over-cleverness ('Pinch Me, Pinch Me') and sometimes the play between shadow and light moves into a narrative fog ('The Angry Girl'), but generally London's storytelling resonates and lingers in both the imagination and the emotions.

Entering Trevor Edmonds' *North and West of Melrose Street*, you make an imaginative journey in a friendly steam train, and run into Henry Lawson with a laptop. Edmonds' title is clumsy and unilluminating, and the 'Australian Story' subtitle is to wear the Eureka flag as underpants. But the journey over the old country is well worth making with Edmonds as guide.

The stories, going off at various tangents, tell of the Woodley family and the Mallee town of Waddikie from 1912. Occasionally Edmonds tries too hard with tall stories that bend in the middle and with a couple of attempts at humour of the kind that I used to publish – and write – in school magazines forty years ago.

It is Edmonds who invokes Lawson on a number of occasions, and at times the comparison is apt, not forgetting that Henry himself bombed-out quite often. Beyond writing deftly about life in the bush and life in country towns, beyond sensitivity to landscape, Edmonds has the ability to surprise you with sadness, without dumping you into sentimentality. An old man tries to bring meaning and order through his lifetime of photos and diaries; a father and son visit a cemetery and discuss the solitary grave of a Danish sailor who had been lost in the sea of the outback; a woman, convicted of infanticide, tries to re-build herself by outfacing the moral jingoism of her country town.

In spite of its unevenness, this book has many fine moments of sharp and moving story-telling; it is alive with authentic affirmation. While not wide in imaginative range, Edmonds has a fine touch in describing incidents in which we stumble into each other, and almost learn to love or at least understand.

D. W. Walker's *A Plastic Paradise* takes us to Canberra in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Bureaucrats have now taken complete control. In other words, yes, minister, the world has finally flipped its lid. Houses are packed together closer than the bathroom tiles. The world of the Kylies and Jasons who are part of a banana bureaucracy, built of plastic money. Arnold Shwarzenegger has arrived as a Very Big Brother. Rationalist Economics, the only pragmatic philosophy that has evangelised rationality and demanded mindlessness, has come home.

Walker has some flair as an Orwell on rollerblades. He has some wit, satiric energy, and scathing comedy. I welcome his book, as we need all the political and social satire that we can get. But the imaginative level is limited, the targets a bit soft and the anger a bit too well-mannered.

But then I speak as one who lives in the debris of the Victorian educational earthquake. My ruler, king, is Keno Kennett, the Napalm Napoleon, the Volvo Viking, who croaks orders to a pond of frogs who have the grace and cultural vision of canetoads. And they are the ones with sensitivity.

John Hanrahan is a Melbourne reviewer and author of O Excellent Virgin *(Heinemann).*

Once You've Said a Thing, That Fixes It?

KEL SEMMENS

Gavan McDonell (ed.): *Interpretive Psychology, Medicine, Philosophy.*

MEDICAL THEORY and practice are said to have undergone a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense in the last fifty years. Alongside those who assert that physical medicine has become more accurate, more scientific, as a result of laboratory findings are those who now claim that all medicine, like all the natural sciences, is the product of hermeneutic interpretation made in the light of the prevailing cultural ambience. A separate claim that psycho-analysis should be considered a natural science has also provoked discussion.

These two issues were said to lie at the heart of this collection of essays, but the focus was to be on the latter – psychological theory and practice rather than organic medicine – "because tensions between natural science and social science have nowhere been greater than in those organised attempts to make sense of, to find answers for, questions arising from ... the sciences of psychology". The introduction suggests that the organic-empirical will be pitted against the psycho-dynamic interpretive theories and treatment of mental and emotional disability, but I think many physicians and surgeons and neurologists would not recognise their practices from the descriptions given here, and indeed none makes a contribution to the discussion. The assertion that "for this morning, interpretive psychology, medicine, and philosophy move in together" is perhaps an overstatement. In the introduction it is said that hermeneutic processes "go against the idea that scientific method in the natural sciences reveals something more unarguable than do the social sciences about the physical world or human affairs". The focus on free association of ideas, and the interpretation of dreams, or the uncovering and interpretation of repressed memories, does not do enough perhaps to establish this proposition.

The 'correctness' of the analyst's interpretation receives some mention; the 'correctness' of the analysand's recovered memory gets less; the effect of 'incorrectness' of either on the outcome for the patient, or for relationships with people involved in the incidents whose memory was repressed, receives little or no mention; although it might be as important as Lewis Carroll made it seem when he had the Red Queen say to Alice ...

> "Always speak the truth – think before you speak – and write it down afterwards."
>
> "I'm sure I didn't mean – " Alice was beginning, but the Red Queen interrupted her impatiently, "That's just what I complain of! You should have meant! ... When once you've said a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the consequences."

Nevertheless, leaving aside these reservations there are interesting discussions and illuminations. With varying degrees of lucidity, the hermeneutic approach, the phenomenologist's, the Freudian psycho-analyst's, psycho-analysis as a Sherlock Holmes-type detection, each has its explication. Psycho-analysis as a physical science, as a social science, or as a non-science, is presented in various guises. The prose is at times as tortuous as the thought, and is a reminder of how important punctuation can be for understanding – the precise placing of the comma, the correct use of quotation marks.

This is not the place to give a summary of the individual essays, interesting as they are; but to select two almost at random might give an idea of the kind of questions raised. Professor Beaumont provides a helpful synoptic view of the history of psychiatry from its initial medical orientation in eighteenth century France and England. He recounts the discovery of 'general paralysis of the insane' as a manifestation of syphilis of the nervous system and laments that as a medical model "unfortunately it represents an ideal which has seldom been achieved". This deserves instant assent, but one wonders what might have happened to the concept of neurosyphilis had phenomenologists or hermeneuticists got there first. Professor Graeme Smith presents the results of quantitative research into the process of analysis and the accuracy of interpretation judged by the benefit to the patient. He quotes with approval F. Sulloway who said that "the 20th century has become Freudian ... just as the 19th century became Darwinian", and

goes further to say that western psychiatry is psycho-analytic without admitting it. Disturbingly, he concludes that "attempts to establish reliability and validity of interpretation by application of the scientific or its variants are doomed to failure ... Interpretation demands some other type of assessment", which recalls an early essay of Susan Sontag concerning literary criticism, but relevant here: "Interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value ... Interpretation must itself be evaluated."

All of these essays were addresses to an audience of professional peers. A prospective client for psychotherapy who learned of such disagreements about the fundamental nature of the process, and of the difficulty of assessing the outcome, might well lose confidence before starting. Lewis Carroll, where are you now?

The absence of apologists from medical science is to be regretted. In my own medical school, and in most others so far as I am aware, no undergraduate teaching-time at all is devoted to consideration of what that science is about, nor to the possibility of seeing it from a different point of view.

This book is surely to be commended as a step in the right direction.

Kel Semmens is a Melbourne physician and writer.

Alice Henry – An Overview

JILL CARR

Diane Kirkby: *Alice Henry: the power of pen and voice; the life of an Australian-American Labor Reformer* (Cambridge, $45.00).

DR KIRKBY, AN AUSTRALIAN feminist academic, begins with disclaimers: that Alice Henry was not a hero, that the book is not a biography because her subject "left no personal documents". This seems a curious restriction and in fact Dr Kirkby resiles, to use a verb beloved of certain politicians, from this position and does later refer to her book as a biography. She makes some interesting assertions about the nature of feminist biography, e.g., that she believes it to be "about friendship". This too seems a curious restriction: must feminists always like their subjects? What about writing to understand – a biography of Jack the Ripper by Andrea Dworkin, for instance? Victoria Glendinning's recent biography of Anthony Trollope is surely 'feminist' because of her speculations: about his home-work balance for instance, his relations with his wife and his ardent relations with a series of young women.

In 'A Note on Method', Dr Kirkby states that women's perception of themselves must be central in scholarship about them. The absence of records of Alice Henry's view of herself is thus ironic and increases the challenge for the author. Unlike Glendinning, Dr Kirkby rarely speculates, inhibited perhaps by the scrupulousness proper to an academic but misplaced in a biographer.

Has Dr Kirkby succeeded in converting her doctoral thesis into an interesting book? By the end of it, can we look back at the cover photograph of the long, smooth face of Alice Henry under soft white hair, and feel we know her, that we know how she felt when she made speeches, when she wrote her articles late into the night? Does the question even matter, if what we gain is a feeling for those tremendous times of the suffragists and the women labor reformers of whom Alice Henry was one?

Born in 1857 in Victoria to Scots gold rush emigrants, Alice's first years were spent on a farm. Her father gave this up and they moved back to Melbourne where he worked as an accountant. Alice and her one younger brother were educated by tutors at various small private schools and she was among the first females to sit the matriculation exam. Even had her family been able to afford university fees, women were not yet allowed entry.

After the inevitable stint of teaching, Alice began her career in journalism at the age of twenty-seven writing freelance domestic pieces. Soon she was on the staff of the *Australasian* newspaper. Kirkby tells us there were only twenty-eight women registered as journalists or authors in the 1891 Victorian census: one longs to know more about Alice's rapid success – how many other women were on staff? Was she friends with them? Did she have to fight to cover non-domestic issues? Did she know of Louisa

Lawson's battle with male printers to publish her feminist paper? In the absence of factual answers to these questions, one could wish that the author had run the risk of imagining. Miles Franklin's lively description of Alice's eccentric dress when they worked together in Chicago for the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) leaps out of the book. Their correspondence after Miles left is virtually all that remains of Alice's personal correspondence. Miles also left probable portraits of Alice in her novel *On Dearborn Street* written in those shared times in Chicago.

Alice became an ardent suffragist and speaker, though she was never a leader. She had to keep her suffragist and political interests separate from her *Australasian* work, though she did write on social welfare issues, calling for state intervention and reform. She also wrote a daring article, published in an international journal, advocating sex education for girls which is radical in its recognition of female sexuality.

LIKE MANY WOMEN in the 'woman movement' then, she never married and her silence on the topic of intimate relations is, Kirkby says, "stunning". One close female friend was Catherine Spence, the South Australian activist, twenty years older than Alice. It was Catherine's travels in the United States which influenced Alice's own move there in 1905 at the age of forty-eight, after six months in England observing the suffrage movement.

Alice's firsthand account of the radical tactics of Christabel Pankhurst helped revitalise the moribund American suffrage movement. Alice was astonished to find the American movement quite separated from the labor movement and warned of the short-sightedness in the single focus on suffrage as an end rather than a means to enable women to play a more effective role.

Editing the American Women's Trade Union League's national paper *Life and Labor* with Miles Franklin, from 1911 to 1915, was the climax of her career. The paper's collapse was due to conflict with the paper's financial backer who saw Alice as hopeless administratively. Alice then finished the first of her two books, *The Trade Union Woman* and in the 1920s became involved in workers' education, teaching at the Bryn Mawr summer school. In 1923 she published *Women and the Labour Movement*.

Under some pressure now to retire from her paid position with the League, Alice left the States on a study scholarship, travelled through Europe and in 1925, after an absence of twenty years, spent a few months in Australia speaking on the American women's and labor movements. Like Miles Franklin she was disappointed in the scene here, seeing it as conservative and in retreat from the radical social reform of the 1880s.

Alice's retirement with a small pension from the League in 1929 coincided with the onset of the Depression and the last chapter is titled 'The Numbing Defeat of Old Age'. Kirkby stresses the irony of a woman whose life was dedicated to improving women's economic status being reduced in old age to friends' charity.

In 1933, after the League stopped her pension, Alice, now 76, returned to Australia to live with her brother and his wife. She was welcomed by labor activists such as Muriel Heagney but found herself out of step with the left. She continued to speak and write. Her friendship with Miles Franklin, now in Sydney to look after aged parents, was still strong though they could rarely meet. Shaken by the death of her brother, Alice lived on until 1943 when she died aged 86, her death almost unnoticed in the local press, though many tributes came from the States.

"Alice Henry's legacy is, therefore, simply in having been herself." Does Dr Kirkby give us this self, the private as well as the public Alice, the rounded life? Regrettably, the answer is no. The introductory disclaimer that this book is not a biography proves correct: rather, the book is an overview of the intersection of the women's movement and the labor movement in Australia and the United States for several decades round the turn of the century – clear, informative, but oddly flat; there is little leavening, apart from the wonderful Miles Franklin, of the personalities of those passionate women. Perhaps it is Miles' Chicago novel written when she and Alice were key figures in the American progressive reform movement, that might offer a richer sense of the being that was Alice Henry.

Jill Carr has worked in the area of anti-discrimination and employment. Unpaid work includes completing a novel and gardening in central Victoria. Among her passions are anything medieval, opera and feminist history.

God and Landscapes

MARK ROBERTS

Andrew Lansdown: *Between Glances* (William Heinemann Australia, $14.95).
Rhyll McMaster: *On My Empty Feet* (William Heinemann Australia, $14.95).

THERE IS A simple delicacy to many of the poems in Andrew Lansdown's sixth collection of poetry, *Between Glances.* Lansdown moves slowly through the landscape bringing a spiritual intensity to bear on the objects of everyday life. Many of his best poems grow out of a single image. In 'Tea Chest', for example, a robin drinking water out of a discarded tea chest is captured in the centre of the poem:

> The late afternoon light
> duplicates the bird's shape darkly
>
> in the still water as it stoops
> to drink.

The poem is, in fact, almost a fable. Lansdown is suggesting that nature can transform a functional object which is perceived to have outlived its usefulness to an object of beauty and of a different functionality:

> Truly, this moment, that tea chest
> bears a cargo more precious than any
>
> it carried long ago from India or Ceylon.

The title poem of the collection, 'Between Glances', operates on a similar level. The poet has been watching a single autumn leaf on a liquidambar tree all day:

> I glance
> down at my work then out
>
> again, only to find it gone.
> Gone between glances. If only
> I had known that last wave
> was a goodbye, a farewell,
>
> I would not have looked away.

While the transient nature of beauty obviously lies at the heart of this poem, 'Between Glances' can also be read as a fable where the falling leaf represents human mortality. Above all else Lansdown is a religious poet and in the context of the rest of the collection these 'fables' take on a distinct spiritual dimension.

Between Glances contains a number of more obviously religious poems. There is an unevenness to these poems which I feel is probably almost inevitable. Religious poetry is difficult to write and like many poets Lansdown does occasionally fall into cliché. However, *Between Glances* contains some of the best religious poetry I have read for some time.

For most of the collection Lansdown is content to write about his children and the natural landscape, but in the last section there are a number of poems which grew out of a trip to Sydney. These poems lack some of the spiritual intensity which runs through the rest of the book, but I feel that they actually balance the more overtly religious nature poems.

AFTER THE SOFTNESS OF Lansdown's poetry Rhyll McMaster's third collection, *On My Empty Feet*, seems positively hard-edged. In the opening poem, 'Figure in the Landscape', we have a view of the landscape very different from Lansdown's images of transient beauty:

> Sheep lie down in the wind,
> trees tremble their roots
> in underground runnels.
> Cattle pour milkily across
> a world of occurrence.

Whereas Lansdown was content to sit back and watch the robin drink out of the old tea chest, McMaster places herself very firmly in the poem:

> I am the figure in the landscape
> which does not live
> unless I move.

On My Empty Feet is divided into three sections. The tone of the first section is set by 'Figure in the Landscape', which is one of the strongest poems in the collection. Many of the poems in this section explore the relationship of

the poet to both her external physical environment and her internal mental state.

The second section revolves around a sequence of poems called 'My Mother and I Become Victims of a Stroke'. In 'Residues' McMaster records the way her mother was affected by a stroke:

> Her brain is stripped
> to its inessentials.
> She's disposed of the gears.
> Her mind is full of old shoes
>
> that don't fit.

In 'The Mirror', the mother's illness forces the daughter to confront their relationship:

> I look into the mirror of my life
> and see my mother
>
> She glares back at me
> warningly.
> She says, "I'm bitterly disappointed."

In the final section McMaster recalls her childhood, effectively going back to a time before her mother's stroke. Balancing the pain in the poems in the second section, the poems here are nostalgic and safe, as in 'Our Street':

> There I am, aged six, striking home from school.
> I stop to gloat at the crack that grows the ferns.
> At silent number eight the privet hedge
> rampages down the side.

On My Empty Feet is a powerful collection. Its strength lies not only in the individual poems but also in the careful way the collection is structured. My one complaint with McMaster is the length of time between collections. Let's hope we don't have to wait another seven years for her fourth.

Tumbling and Balancing

MARK ROBERTS

Susan Johnson: *A Big Life* (Macmillan Australia $19.95).

IN MANY RESPECTS, *The Big Life* is Susan Johnson's 'big novel'. Published by Macmillan in Australia, it was picked up by Faber in the UK and the US and received some enthusiastic early reviews. While Johnson has established a reputation as one of the more interesting emerging novelists with her first two novels, *The Big Life* represents a number of important departures for her. It is, for example, her first novel where the central character is male and where most of the novel is set outside Australia.

The novel's main character, Billy Hayes, is an Australian tumbler who works the variety stages of England during the 1930s and 40s. *A Big Life* opens with his birth during World War I. The youngest of six children, Billy spends the first few years of his life without his father, who left for the war before his wife knew she was pregnant. Billy's mother Sapphire Hayes runs a happy, loving house full of laughter. She feels Billy to be special, if a little fragile: "Out in the open this baby needed all her comfort, for there was something too tender about him".

Just before Billy turns five his father returns and takes an instant dislike to the son he didn't realise he had. This dislike grows to hatred when Billy meets the young Chinese acrobat Reg Tsang. Eventually Billy's father sells him to a tumbling act returning to England. His 'big life' really begins on the ship on the way to England. He becomes part of 'The Wallabies' with Veron Rome and Connie Connor (who are also his legal guardians). Later he meets and marries Bubbles Drake and leaves 'The Wallabies' to set up his own act with Reg Tsang. After the war Billy produces 'The Hope Show', briefly capturing the imagination of a war-weary nation. Just as his career appears to have reached its climax, however, Bubbles sues for divorce and for the first time in his life Billy has to deal with failure.

There is a naive simplicity to Billy's character which is both endearing and infuriating. He has no sense of direction but, like the tumbler he is, always seems to land on his feet. But while Billy may be able to balance perfectly on stage, in real

life he is too self-obsessed to consider the feelings of those around him. So while he obviously loves Bubbles, he is incapable of reconciling his own desires and ambitions with hers. He is continually demanding more of her and when she finally lets go he overbalances.

In his search for 'the big life' Billy lives the life of an exile. At one point he asks, "How had he ended up so far away? Only economics, politics, or disaster were supposed to force people into exile: no one willingly chose it, or at least not ordinary men like himself." But Billy isn't really in control of his life: he leaves Australia because his father sells him and he stays in England because nobody arranges for him to return to Australia. Bubbles organises his domestic life and his agent organises his professional life. Billy's passivity has effectively made him as much of an exile as any refugee.

The impact of *A Big Life* lies not in the narrative of Billy muddling through his life, but in the strength of Johnson's writing. There is an economy of style which perhaps owes something to her journalistic background. But it is a deceptive economy for, as the narrative progresses, the complexities are building up under the surface. In the same way that Billy can keep tumbling while a depression and a world war unfold around him, the reader can easily find they are being seduced by the carefully understated descriptions so that the border between stage and reality begins to blur.

A Big Life is certainly an impressive novel but it is not without flaws. I found Billy's character to be a little too unsympathetic and, towards the end, I didn't really care what happened to him. As a result the novel lost some of its impact in the final chapters. Nevertheless, *The Big Life* is a major achievement which should serve to further enhance Susan Johnson's reputation.

Mark Roberts is a Sydney-based writer and critic currently undertaking post-graduate study at the University of New South Wales.

Contriving Stanzas

MICHAEL DUGAN

Jan Owen: *Blackberry Season*; Paul Hetherington: *The Dancing Scorpion* (Molonglo Press, 18 Brassey Street, Deakin 2600).

Molonglo Press is a new imprint founded by Ian Templeman. These two books, its first, are very attractively presented, each with its own slipcase. They are available only by subscription to the press at $33 per volume, postage included.

Jan Owen's first collection, *Boy With a Telescope*, won both the Anne Elder and Mary Gilmore awards in its year of publication. In this, her third collection, the poems are short and autobiographical, recounting a childhood spent in suburban Adelaide during and after World War II.

Each poem describes a remembered incident of childhood in a manner that is matter-of-fact and unsentimental. The sum of all the memories is a vivid portrait of childhood and family life. The poem 'Snail Races' captures the tentative fluidity of children's relationships with the adult world:

> When Mrs Perkins waved her fork and trowel
> we ran to help look after all the snails.
>
> Wobbler went crooked. Big led all the way.
> Shy pulled in his eyes and wouldn't play.
>
> The red brick path was Mitcham railway line
> and Mr Perkins was the Bridgewater train:
>
> he puffed up with a strange look on his face
> and lifted his foot and scrunched our snail race.
>
> 'Bugger man!' John kicked him in the boot.
> We ran and hid but They found out.
>
> 'Kicking people's very, very rude.
> Say "Sorry, Mr Perkins!" When we did,

('Bad boys and girls don't go to heaven!')
he gave us Cherry Ripes and was forgiven.

The tentative nature of child-adult relations is a common theme but so is the warm acceptance of adult reassurance in family life with all its rituals and its oddities. This collection will evoke many memories, particularly for those of the author's generation who grew up in suburban Australia.

The Dancing Scorpion is Paul Hetherington's second substantial collection. The poems in it are quietly reflective as Hetherington seeks understanding of his past world and its relation to his present. The poems are well crafted, although I could see no reason for breaking some of them into stanzas as there seemed to be no pause or breath between them. For example, from 'Shop of Masks':

As I tried on plastic masks,
each grimacing and frivolous,
all my close anxieties

dissolved into a heady freedom.
Meanwhile you uneasily
fingered ears, synthetic hair,

until the owner dragged a box . . .

It seems a rather artificial contrivance that detracts from the poems' continuity by breaking at points where sentences would naturally flow on. Similarly contrived stanzas are in Owen's collection.

Apart from this minor criticism there is much to enjoy in Hetherington's collection of thoughtful poems that are evocative of both place and mood.

Michael Dugan is a Melbourne poet and children's author.

Women of the Future

JUDITH RAPHAEL BUCKRICH

Rosaleen Love: *Evolution Annie and Other Stories* (The Women's Press Ltd, $14.95).

HAVING READ AND thoroughly enjoyed Rosaleen Love's first collection of stories *The Total Devotion Machine* (Women's Press 1989), I can only say that I looked forward to her new collection in the same totally open way with which I approach a Laurel and Hardy movie. (I regard Laurel and Hardy as great masters in their field, so this is no small compliment.)

Like Laurel and Hardy, Rosaleen Love has a great sense of the absurd, while remaining utterly human and untouched by cynicism.

The title story was not a disappointment – Evolution Annie is, just as her name implies, a link between the pre-human and the human. She describes herself in hindsight, as though she were speaking from our present, her future by many thousand years:

> I am Annie, a diminutive prosimian, or so they will later describe me. I can tell you I am neither ape nor monkey, but something with the edge on both, as far as brains go, and their skillful manipulation of what brawn I possess. Diminutive I may be, prosimian I am, but never underestimate the sheer animal cunning, the near-human intellect of the humble prosimian. Look at the merry dance our bones have led you, look at the clever way we've let fall a hint here, a hint there, that we were far more than we seemed.

The story proceeds with a critique of present day evolutionary theory. The effect of such things as the discovery of fire is discussed at length and the *Men's* version of evolution shown up to great ridicule. Annie gives us the truth:

> Man harnessing an unruly nature to his own ends. Man bringing woman the tools of cooking, ... Man the Hunter of Fire and Woman the Grateful Recipient.
>
> No. These are the stories they tell but they are truly myths of our beginnings.

After this Annie goes on to describe how almost all useful things including alcoholic drinks, were invented by her own mother and how the social behaviour of men and women was also carved out at this time. The span of Annie's life is much longer than even those long lived first humans of the Old Testament, thus giving her a chance to also describe the Ice Age and how it was dealt with by her 'family'. Annie says towards the end:

> This is why we are here today, and why we worship our Mother, the Earth, and why we still drink gin.

Though there are many equally witty and occasionally bewildering stories in the rest of the anthology (altogether eleven stories), my favourite is the relatively short (six pages), 'Cosmic Dusting'. Here Love brings forth her mastery of the short story by putting a great many of her favourite 'ideas for thinking about' – Love is a philosophy teacher after all – into a minimum of word space. 'Cosmic Dusting' begins:

> I once saw the end of the world and I was quite impressed.

Not too much further down the page it goes on:

> I saw time spread out in space.

'Cosmic Dusting' like 'Evolution Annie' is written in the first person, forcing us to identify and never letting us off the hook. As Love searches for answers so her readers must also search:

> I tried, oh how I tried to get people to talk to me about the end of the world, the true meaning of eternity.

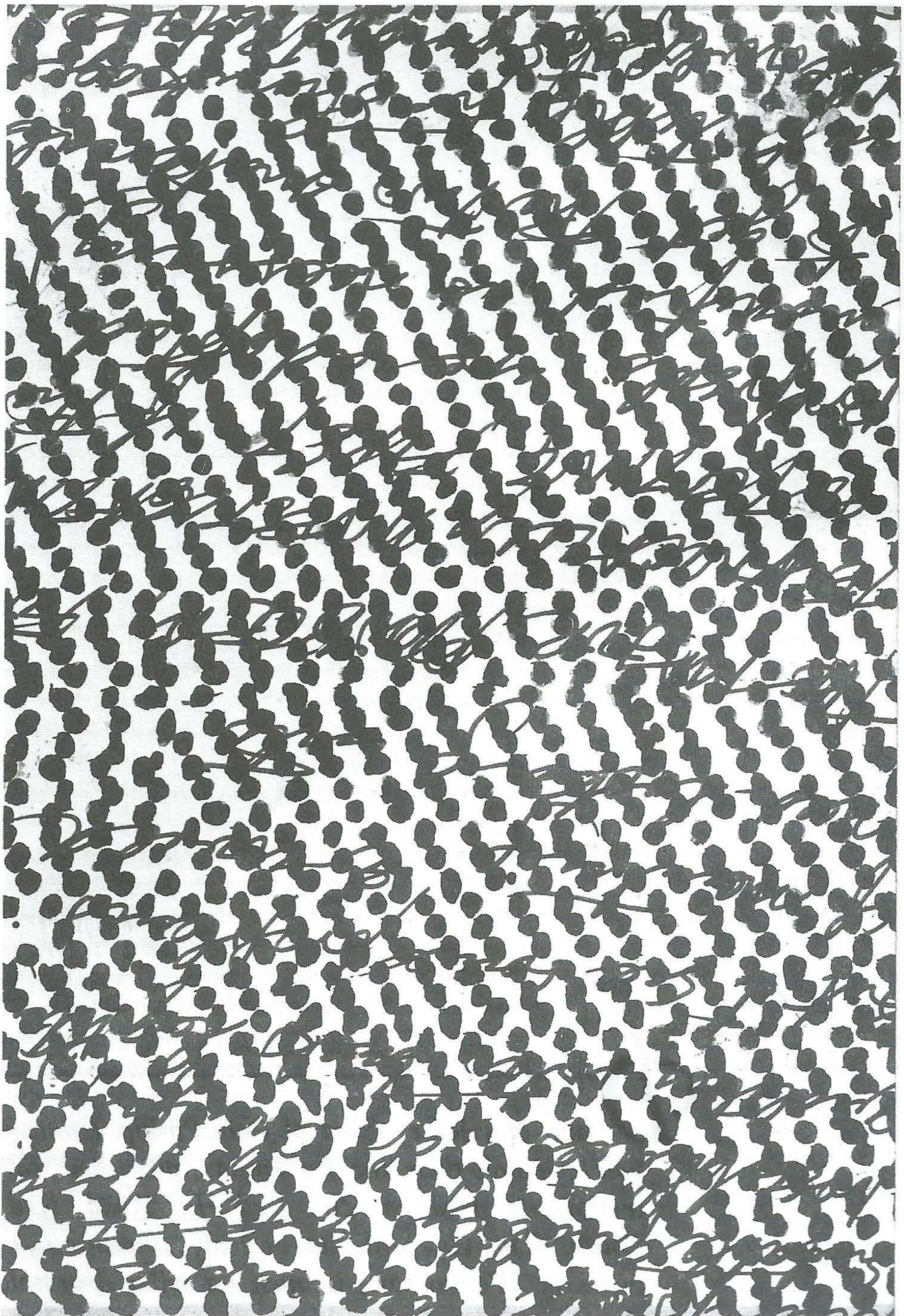
After this Love muses on the idea of a Heavenly City with no conflict and no gossip and decides that it simply cannot be true and that we must get beyond the idea of God the Mother and have a "worker's co-operative" of Messiahs to govern in the new Millennium. "We will know the Millennium is upon us when all committee systems function perfectly", she says. Needless to say a committee will also be set up to provide guidelines for entry to the Heavenly City.

At this point I wondered if Love were really just having a go at the way universities, writing groups and conferences are run. But her longing for order and natural justice is much broader than this, and she goes on to predict that "the just shall inherit the earth", and that at the end of this 1000 years of the new Millennium the earth will "be returned to its pristine Edenic condition".

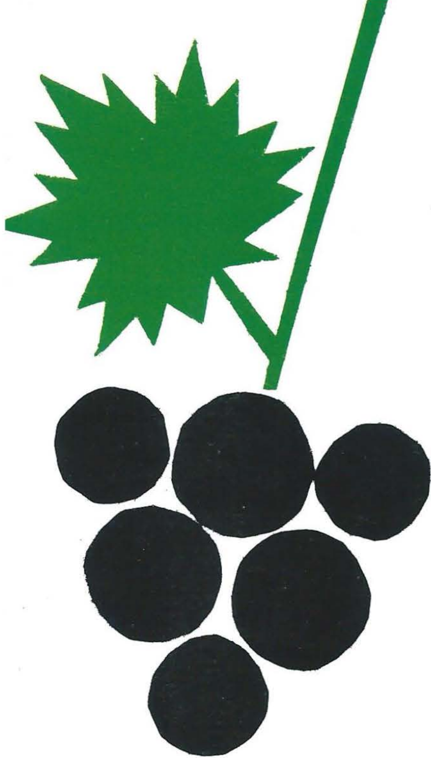
I may have enjoyed this story so much simply because it is so positive and simple. Almost every problem that seems totally beyond solution in the world is tackled and solved. What bliss!

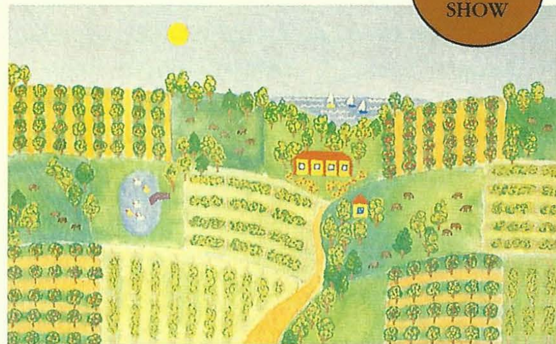
Other stories are more story-like and less like the two I have discussed. And the final story 'The Daughters of Darius' is a novella, being 123 pages long, but they are all full of whimsy and touch the reader lightly without losing any of their power. *Evolution Annie and Other Stories* will not change your life, but it will make you feel better.

Judith Raphael Buckrich is a Melbourne writer and editor.



Ruark Lewis: 'Dot Matrix No. 6'





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