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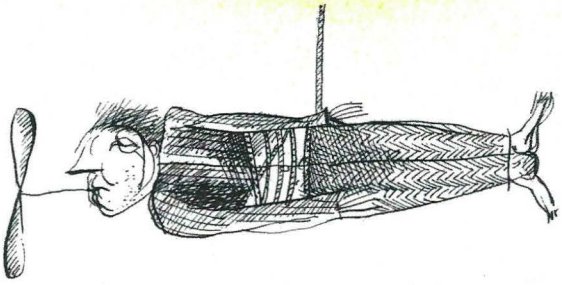

A NEW INVENTION OF AUSTRALIA

CONVERSATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

PETER CAREY'S FICTION

THE OLD AGE OF AQUARIUS

MING THE UNTOUCHABLE

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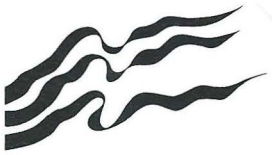

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ELIZABETH ROGERS

Spinach

At a Kitchen Bench Somewhere in Grey Light

DEAR MONKEY,

I've been eating spinach like you told me to and I'm scared because I'm still not moving. There's still no sign of the promise of things to come.

Winter is ghostly here. Its white flesh hangs in the air. Nothing seems to grow, but there is a woman wearing flannel pants and strength in her eyes as she plants potatoes in the nature strip just below my window. She looks for the roots to watch herself growing. This could be seen as crazy, senseless, but I know what it is like to starve while other people bury their excess in the middle of nowhere. Her shoes' tongues ask questions of the stones beneath the snow's surface. Shoes don't miss much being so close to the ground. Answers appear solid, tangible, but that doesn't mean they're right.

I eat spinach for breakfast, lunch and tea. Enough plus more of the recommended daily allowance of iron. A woman needs her *iron*. Especially if she needs a man. I have been growing it in my window boxes and on the back porch in tubs like love and it hurts to pull it from the heart. I'm surprised it grows. In the cold. My brother died from the cold and tells me later that he has never been as warm as now. Most living things need warmth to survive, unless they live in one of the extremities. The leaves are always frozen and look like a Liechtenstein picture without the dots, or a key-ring from Japan where they put koala poo in plastic and send it back to where it came from. You know I don't want to starve, monkey ... and spinach makes us all strong. "Makes me feel green inside", you say, "the colour of chuck after a night gargling whisky or the greenness of future." You want yours to be orange pink, the colour of girls' lips at bars where glasses see up and through dull bored places. Little corridors of fame. Plop. I feel an unexplainable safety in green. I could be on the bottom of a pond where lichen licks it all in or in a New Guinea jungle swinging on a vine. You tell me my tongue is stained and it has something to do with illness. But colours are not contagious.

I am making collage like Alfred Molina in *Prick Up Your Ears*. There are many wordless conversations. Here. Faces peering, lines leading to places all over the world where they stop and finally forget. I suppose. I am surrounded by faces who look and see only themselves. People with no third eye have more lines pointing down the brow along the bridge of the nose. I think. You should take a look at yourself one day monkey.

I am crying.

Even though it was awkward, you vanishing that is, I still enjoy receiving your letters. The photo you sent sits above the kitchen door amongst smells and patterns pirouetting on the wall. I wipe the food from your chin, your ear and your crutch, where the dinner is always five star. You tell me *nibble nobbies nuts* and they taste of macadamia and sweat shipped in from Mexico. The flavour makes me damp which you will see in my smile. The flavour stays all over. Just as a plastic bag stays on a child's head and sucks at its lost smile. Strong.

There is a knock at my door, monkey. Someone wants to come in but is scared 'cause I might not want them to. Must go, but I'll leave you with this thought: a giraffe has a long neck unless the tree is too tall.

She remains seated, folds the letter and places it in an envelope. She licks. Seals. Holds it up to the light. Diamond cutter. "Who could be writing to me at this time of year? Holiday time. I never get letters at holiday time." She starts to open the letter. And stays still.

JOHN RIDLAND

inventing australia

an essay

i have no more business inventing australia than tasman or cook did discovering it, nor writing an essay titled 'inventing australia', especially now that i discover, three drafts into the wind, a new book titled 'REINVENTING AUSTRALIA', which may or must imply a prior book or essay of my very title 'INVENTING AUSTRALIA' but in capital letters. this will be my essay 'inventing australia' in lower-case letters.

i began to invent australia last july although i discovered the continent over a year before, when i flew to it from new zealand which i had been inventing for a month. that had been a good month of thirty-five days driving or driven on narrow roads to the deep south – like basho on the narrow road to the deep north in japan, a chain of islands in the north pacific that is like new zealand's in the south viewed upside-down in a looking-glass. i had begun by re-inventing its shape on the map (new zealand's i mean). i'd heard of it as double: the north island a leaping dolphin, the south island maui's canoe. i thought the leaping part befitted a country that would invent bungee jumping and i saw that the dolphin shape made sense when you tipped the mapbook sideways, putting wellington as its head, northland its tail, and the east cape as its dorsal fin, and the south island looks sort of like a canoe though more like a coal barge, but then i realised that such pictures made sense only on our european maps, beginning with james cook's, which the maoris couldn't have seen when they invented that way of seeing the two islands. so they'd had to make up its shape from what they knew best, canoeing and fishing. the north island dolphin was the biggest fish maui had caught in the south pacific and when he hauled it up from the bottom of the ocean it had people and animals living all over it, all those wingless new zealand birds (who needed wings down under the ocean?) and glorious plants and peaks, sounds, beaches, and skin – maori skin especially when carved with designs. maui in his canoe brought rats to eat which a biologist told me advanced south after they disembarked in "a gray wave" so rapid and devastating its progress could have been photographed from a satellite, eliminating more indigenous species than the maoris themselves, who eliminated more than the europeans, who brought along rabbits and deer and opossums to do the job. i like the cheery sound of that phrase in strine, *a gry wyve.*

the shype i invented the south island into was a big left foot like friday's. robinson crusoe doesn't tell if the footprint *he* found was a right or a left, so it could have been a left, why not? look at the map and tell me i'm wrong. it's even got gaps between the toes where some of those glorious sounds come in, not glorious sounds as in handel's messiah but as in doubtful sound, doubtful because james cook had to doubt if it was a sound or not and couldn't take time to sail in and see. (it was.) i decided to leave the north island as a leaping dolphin because that looks right as rain (and rain it does there) and because one of the great new zealand heroes is opo, the dolphin who made friends with the people at opononi on the west coast of the dolphin island one summer during the war. the second world war, i mean. all summer the dolphin made friends with the people and at the end of it he was killed, "some say accidentally, by illegal dynamite fishers", as the lonely planet travel survival kit to new zealand puts it.

the shape i've invented australia into needs a bit

of explaining. it comes to me from a photograph of my old dog standing in the surf on the far rim of the pacific in california. the sun is shining behind her from the southwest, that is from australia, and she's a shepherd-collie mix with a thick ruff and her shadow makes the shape of this continent. the forelegs merge into that pointy peninsula to the northeast, cape york, the head and mane do the heavily populated densely thoughtful southeastern bulge, the great australian bight is the small of her back, the tail has been cropped out of the picture at the southwest corner all but a stump under which

without prejudice i have to set perth, and the northwest corner of western australia becomes her haunch. tasmania then is the tip of the ear, unless it's a pointed cap which has flown up into the air in surprise at being turned into a dog, melbourne is the ear cavity, and sydney (what else?) the mouth. the bend at brisbane is where the chest cuts down to the legs. the whole picture *de-pends* and i do mean 'hangs down from' the tenth parallel of latitude, so if you want to see the dog itself standing and not its shadow you turn the picture upside down, approaching the continent from the north as on a plane from california, or on the map of the world with 'australia no longer down under' which may only be meant to be funny but seems to me a proper image for australian (and new zealand) children to fix in their minds' eyes.

once you get used to turning the world upside down you can invent australia into another surprising shape, which i did when i almost saw it already invented like this in the australian consulate in los angeles. waiting to talk to the visa official, one of the friendliest men in the world, i noticed a map of australia on which someone had outlined to the same scale the 'continental' or 'contiguous' united states of america (not including alaska and hawaii). they measured within an inch of the same width (and rather more in height). then i turned one of them upside-down in my mind, it didn't matter which, and what do you know: that spiky projection in queensland matched up with baja california which depends geographically from alta california, my state, divided from it by not nearly so many miles of wire as the dingo fence and ours is to keep out people not dogs. the protuberance up by darwin hangs down like texas, resembling a bull's pizzle, florida gets lopped off but as a californian i don't mind that, perth now becomes not the dags under a dog's docked tail but the highly refined productive and populous one-time 'hub of the universe' boston, and melbourne pairs up with cold and drizzly seattle which i think after three months of winter and wintry spring is only fair, sydney with portland, which isn't fair since portland is almost as drizzly as melbourne-seattle and didn't even bid for the olympic games of the year 2000, while lucky brisbane gets to be san francisco and cairns los angeles. when i told my modern american literature students that continental australia was almost as big as the continental united states they were both surprised and proud. the very next day they were even prouder when the 2000 games were awarded to sydney, making two since the war for australia and two for the u.s. plus one each for canada and mexico which makes four for nafta against five for eec and two for asia (i don't know how to count moscow). when it comes to sports this chunk of gondwanaland is getting more than its share, but that's no news. aussies were the boys to beat when i was a young swimmer, and even more so if i'd been a girl. they – you? – swept the tennis courts, left the world behind at running. growing up in california i didn't have an inkling what you were doing at cricket and rugby, which i had heard of, let alone at aussie rules football which i hadn't, and which i couldn't have dreamed of, let alone dreamed *up*, although that i might have done because now i discover it on tv it looks like a game an eleven-year-old boy in bed with fever invented: spread all those blokes around a football-shaped field and have them race all over and kick and bash

the ball and bash each other and kick lots and lots of points.

that was a pretty big paragraph because i had to invent the main features of australia in it.

after inventing two shapes for australia and sizing one of them against the united states, i began to fill it in. first melbourne, crossing the tasman sea from christchurch on a summer afternoon, amazed how many trees and houses passed under the wings as we slowly dropped from the east, though i knew there were over three million people there and they had to live somewhere and probably in houses. from the air i didn't have much idea what kinds of houses they were and i could never have dreamed up the terraces with their double balconies and ironwork lace. on and on and on went the suburbs and no freeways. when you drop slowly from the east to los angeles on a summer afternoon you probably don't see anything but the smog, but on a winter day you might see the housing tracts lying like diagrams of human intestines and long wide loops of freeway passing through like tapeworms. at busy times, twice a day and once on holidays, the tapeworms clog with cars like microscope photographs of cells. in melbourne there seemed to be only a couple of shortish tapeworms, which was lovely until we went driving out of town to fill in more of the map and stopped and started for kilometers and kilometers before we slept.

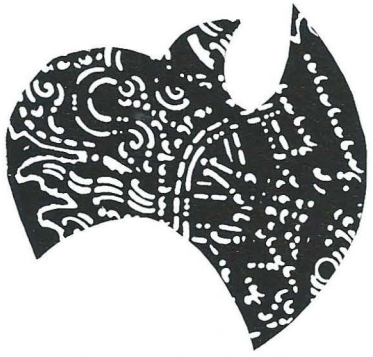
that drive took us first to healesville sanctuary where i invented a long list of beautiful birds and beautiful names for the birds such as white ibises noisy bell miners sulphur-crested cockatoos apostle birds forest bronzewings southern stone curlews crested pigeons major mitchell cockatoos firetails lyrebirds wonga pigeons yellow-billed spoonbills nankeen night herons chestnut-breasted shelducks superb blue wrens welkin swallows and glossy ibises. i also invented the platypus which i admit was a bit of a patch-up job. then we drove on to lake eildon where in a couple of days i invented an echidna crossing the road and crunching itself down into a pin cushion at the base of a small branching tree, and a pair of big wombats lying on the edge of the highway. an american student told me the naughty australian pun defining the wombat as an animal who eats, roots, and leaves, but this poor pair were done with eating and rooting and had been left, stiff legged and puffed up tight, flies starting to crowd them. at eildon dozens of kangaroos came down at dusk to an arm of the lake, gough's bay, to crop the new green grass and lap the dammed and diminishing water, so human-looking in their upper torsos with athletic shoulders and biceps and standing upright and boxing each other, that i had to ask, in the name of adam, madam, what more need they do to prove themselves wholly human – start wars, abuse their young, and destroy the landscape? well i read in a magazine that plagues of them do ravage the cattle ranges in queensland, ripping the grass up by the roots, and dying by butting their heads against the dingo fence like human young in american ghettoes. all the same i later bought a wallet of kangaroo leather, thinking it well suited by nature to make a pouch, and my hostess told me kangaroo made the best steak she'd ever eaten. we also bought soft furry toy echidnas, a wombat, and a platypus, ostensibly as gifts for children but i notice they haven't been given away.

i can't invent queensland or southern australia or the northern territory or tasmania but i was driven on a narrow road out of sydney into new south wales like the road out of melbourne into victoria, stopping and starting and barreling along like an emu for two hours to invent the blue mountains where we ate blue castello cheese under blue gums and then drove back. no freeway. and i did see something from broome, which i couldn't have invented, the musical 'bran neu dae'. i went around afterward singing its great whiteface al jolson final chorus:

there's nothing i would rather be
than be an ab-or-*ig*-i-ne
and watch you take
my precious land
a-way

in the blue hills as i'd rather have called them than mountains, i bought a book about eucalyptus as we still say in california greek or eucalypts as you say in australian english, or euks – which

rhymes too well with nukes to my mind, as in 'nuke the euks'. we grow a dozen or two varieties and i know how many you grow: one for each of the five or six hundred aboriginal languages of this continent. one of the eucalypts we haven't imported yet is the snow gum whose timber line i saw at mt buller and i hope no one tries to plant them in our sierra nevada which means 'snowy range' where they well might thrive since other euks thrive elsewhere in the state. there's a very high-priced spread of eucalypt forest near san diego called rancho santa fe where thousands of acres (how many hectares i don't know) were planted a long time ago by a clever entrepreneur to make a killing on railroad sleepers ('ties') but he'd bought a variety that twists and warps and cracks. nobody sold him red gum, though it's so dense railroads would have become obsolete while he waited for it to grow in california. (all your plants grow slower with us just as ours grow faster with you – the monterey cypress in the royal botanic gardens of melbourne is huger than any on the monterey peninsula.) the back garden of the house i'm in



has stout retaining walls of red gum timber. i lifted a little leftover chunk – like iron or brick: what a wood! and the kitchen has jarrah countertops, too shiny and fine to risk scarring, so we've covered them with an old oilcloth as ugly as they are lovely. how i wish i could claim to have invented the hardwoods of australia (or new zealand).

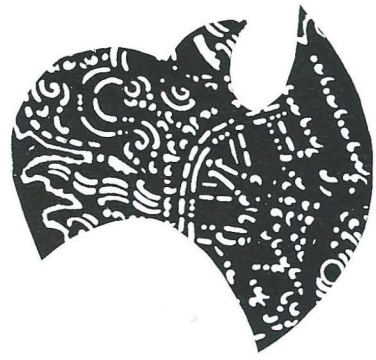
so far the australia i've invented is without politics or politicians, and pretty much without social issues, as when it first broke off from gondwanaland, and for all the knowledge i have it will stay pretty much that way in this essay. (nobody but a mad hatter would invent australian politics and he already did.) anyway, the book on REINVENTING AUSTRALIA in capital letters from thirty years of door-to-door interviews must dispose of all the social and political issues which edna and her mates have not already everaged out. i realised someone must be standing on his or her or their head or heads when i heard what the so-called liberal party stood for, especially through *its* victorian head. my wife has a letter from him welcoming her to the victorian concession card she's entitled to as a new zealander though so far precious little has been conceded: tuesdays at the national gallery, but that's the day we both teach tutes at the uni, and reduced entrance at the zoo. in california we watched a governor who dirtied the word liberal by calling it "the l- word" cut back funds for mental hospitals and schools before going on to become the president who cut back everything except taxes for what he called "defense" spending against the poor soviets but when they tried to keep up with him, why, poof went the soviet union praise the lord and see how much safer the world is for democracies now. but long before that the people in california who needed care in mental hospitals were out on or in the streets without medications, 'homeless' in numbers australia can't begin to match until it cuts back a lot more social services than even the liberal party's victorian head proposes. at the end of our street in brunswick there's a mental hospital which the fire trucks visit every few nights, sometimes on a random readiness check, sometimes when the residents puff cigarettes under the smoke alarms like an indian smoke signal summoning them. neighbours told us that the doors unlock automatically when the alarms go off but we've never seen hordes of patients flowing out like the crowds crossing to flinders street station when the little green man signals them *walk*. indeed we see no patients at all, but who knows if the government turns liberal enough how many institutional doors will automatically unlock and we'll see as many homeless as on the streets of california. someone once said that a state is only as sound as what it does for its mentally unsound. that anti-liberal california governor was a republican though not of the kind the present anti-liberal australian prime minister would like to be and when i see the liberals opposing the republicans i think, just

like the u.s. but upside down. however, politics changes its clothes so fast that a mental health report has caught up with this essay and passed it, which is why there will be no more politics here.

therefore the following is not a political paragraph. when prime minister keating met president clinton, they agreed that the westward movement of american history, having long since reached the pacific was now launching us (u.s.) like non-ballistic missiles across it. that very week i'd been reading my class in american literature the poem robert frost recited at the inauguration of president kennedy, 'the gift outright'. it speaks about "the land vaguely realizing westward" and in fact i happened to be here teaching that class because the university of california looking vaguely westward realised there was one fair-sized continent with a remarkable number of people on it and another with a remarkable number of good english-speaking universities on it and invented a 'pacific rim program' of staff and student exchanges, which i will be working in for two years. i envy whoever thought of calling it the 'rim', which makes the pacific a tea cup, or better, since salt water tea would taste very strange, a very wide bowl of bouillabaisse soup stocked with mammals, fishes, crustaceans, and seaweeds. not to mention plankton, and the islands with people, plants, and birds growing on them which maui pulled up out of the ocean in that maori myth which sounds like something invented by darwin (charles not the city). you view the pacific differently if you look at its rim – as a bowl, as china (the pottery not the country, though the country is a very big part of the view) – than if you look at the ocean – the soup. that's fair enough, especially for university research which has to slice things up to study them. (i read that soviet scientists cut up lenin's brain into thirty or was it sixty thousand slices to see what made it so special. the answer was nothing. on the other hand, an ecologist i know likes working with shrimp because he can cook his research project when he's done with it. (that's cook as in boil not james.) america used to be called a melting pot, creating the image of everyone jumping out of the frying pans of europe and into the stewpot of the u.s. to get 'assimilated'. a great american culinary critic recommended this dish. huck finn, you remember, didn't like the meals the widow douglas fed him because

> everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

right now, in america, some diners are clamoring for the widow's style of cooking, but more are choosing a mixed salad in which the anise and lettuce (european vegetables) the avocado



and tomato (central american) the bell peppers (which you call capsicum in australian latin, lovely name wherever they come from) the pawpaw and pineapple (pacific fruit), tossed together in olive oil and vinegar (from the mediterranean), each add their distinctive flavors (flavours). in old-fashioned american restaurants you had to choose 'soup or salad' (which sounds like 'super salad' now that so many things in the u.s. get promoted to 'super' – football bowls and rock stars, petrol and highways, airplanes and tankers) but now we are having to make that choice which australia also will have to make. i like meals with both soup *and* salad, and the other night we had one in an italian restaurant on lygon street where we were led to our table by a southeast asian hostess and served by a polish waiter.

frost's poem 'the gift outright' observed what happens when a wave of people disembarks and moves westward like a wave of gray rats over a *virgin* as they called it *continent*:

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.

"that's the old country," frost paused to explain at one reading, "london and all that."

Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.

the poem was looking back over two colonial centuries and nearly two post-colonial ones. arithmetically this means that not for another two centuries will an australian robert frost be enabled to survey an equal territory of time as of space – assuming australia soon breaks loose from the grip of england as it once did from that of gondwanaland.

Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward

as the deeds of american war realised westward from the revolutionary and the civil they became indian and mexican. the war of independence is long over in the u.s. and the civil war ('the war between the states') is over too, except for the ken burns tv documentary and a few small pockets which fly the confederate flag. but those later, ethnic battles are still being fought, as they are in australia, now that the concept of *terra nullius* has been nullified. one of the strangest coincidences since i arrived to invent australia was to find that the french-made metric-and-english tape measure i brought along's brand name was 'mabo'. since americans and, even more wilfully, american moviemakers, love guns, the real-life battles in the states are many times still stupidly done in gunsmoke. it's encouraging to see so little of such action here. even robert frost was no pacifist although born within smell of the pacific ocean, in san francisco where the land stopped vaguely realising westward and fell off sharply in cliffs. he closed his poem with the continent

... still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.

however favourably the poem presents the rape, seduction, or marriage of the female landmass by or to the european-american cultural hero, it overlays the artful or storied enhancements the original immigrants had been achieving for forty to sixty thousand years. in the southwest, two days' drive from the pacific rim, these are rather hard to ignore, standing for example under the millennium-abandoned cliff dwellings of mesa verde or among the millennium-occupied pueblos of the hopi (oraibi, shongopovi, hotevilla), but frost worked out of the northeast. the map of australia looks to me like having been vaguely realized (realised) neither westward eastward northward nor southward but inward, seeking its center (centre) in the outback, the umbilical button of uluru and the watery sources of alice springs. but i may have it backward:

> as the novelist [Robert Drewe] was taking his regular run along Bondi Beach, it occurred to him that the myth of the outback, propounded mostly in university English departments, was wrong. It was the beach and the coast – not the inland – that mattered most to the present generation of Australians.

you read those hopi names, and navaho names like lukachukai and tees nos pas and trading post names like two gray hills crystal and ganado, on the automobile club of southern california's 'indian country' roadmap (a map so standard that tony hillerman's navaho detectives chee and leaphorn consult it like a melway or ubd of the reservation). the names on any map are the first stories and enhancements overlaid on the natural landscape and you can tell by their language who's done the most enhancing. in new zealand it's maori by a mile, except for the city streets where it's english, except for dunedin which is so scottish it can teach you the streetmap of edinburgh. the california countryside speaks both spanish and english, and these are spoken almost equally in the city streets, at

least in the city where i live (santa barbara), dusted with a few grains of 'indian', canaliño chumash to be precise: nojoqui, ojai. across the american continent, arizona, oklahoma, tennessee, many other states, many place names are indian: the very big mississippi means in choctaw something like "beyond the ages, or the father of, i.e., the father of waters"). in australia, though, more of the names outside the towns are aboriginal than in the u.s. and more of those inside them are british. one little corner of moonie ponds upends a whole bookshelf of english writers – chaucer browning byron addison wordsworth dickens and kipling. sometimes the intestinal tracts of california get named for eastern colleges and universities and often for assassinated or unassassinated presidents but seldom for writers.

i've said nothing about australian stories arts and enhancements because i couldn't invent them, you already have, two of you made up one great black swan of trespass, and some of you even pretend that he actually lived and wrote the poems you call 'his' although his christian name sounds like a receptacle to be buried in and his surname a eucalypt flourishing in dry regions.

if you see who invented a place's past by reading the names on its maps (and in its stories), you discover who's inventing it now by reading its phonebooks. in melbourne a lot's being invented by tans and tongs and tsangs and trans as well as, still, by taylors and thomases, thomsons and thompsons (not, i trust, tintin's bumbling detectives), torcasios tsekourases and trajevski/-oski/-ova/-ovska/-ovskis. it strikes a californian that australian phonebook people have few first names but one or two or three initials, since most of our first names are listed to enable our telephone solicitors to solicit us familiarly at dinnertime. (listing a single initial has been adopted by single women as a defence against random obscene or harassing calls.) at conferences and sometimes even at parties we pin on nametags saying "hi! i'm (*firstname here*)", and if i wrote *christian* for *first* in california i'd be no less off the mark than in many a suburb of melbourne.

at midnight before going to bed i invent the skyline of melbourne from the upper floor of a house in west brunswick, above it a large portion of the australian sky which is usually hanging low in clouds lit luridly from underneath, and a fringe of feathery eucalypts silhouetted along the lower border. in daytime i'm often too busy to invent that skyline but sometimes i do, in different moods, sunny or partly cloudy, becoming showery, the all-purpose melbourne weather forecast. and there are other places i've invented in victoria: the road to geelong the bellarine peninsula ocean grove the split point lighthouse airey's inlet the angahook shepherd's hut rebuilt after being consumed in the ash wednesday fire of 1983 (a stringybark phoenix) the barwon heads the banners on flagstaffs in princes park like shakespeare's old globe theatre the xavier college swimming pool with water clear as its own glass walls suburban birds royal park and parade the crescent moon over moonee ponds and the view from highpoint shopping centre on the afternoon of the aussie rules football grand final.

on the road to mount buller a sign reads "UNNAMED CORNER" and on remembrance day they brought home australia's unknown soldier from the first world war and buried him in canberra. these are signifiers of something, i suppose, and since the fading discipline if that's the word and not cult of semiotics sees every blessed or unblessed thing on earth as a sign, so everything else i have seen or invented in australia and may or might see or invent in the next two years must signify. and by then i might or would have much more business inventing, or at least writing an essay about inventing australia, but only for the fun of it.

John Ridland is an American poet presently working in Australia.

DANCE OF LIFE

The night is young and full
of secrets, so they say, I hum,
a spring in my heel at ten o'clock
down Uranienborgveien to the
Slottsparken in my trench coat
and red lipstick, the paths are
full of oh so many people, I see the
soldiers in their wooden hut, their fluoro
red coke machine lit up,
one soldier leaning from the back
cigarette smoke wreathing
his hand, that's where they chat
the girls whilst on the other side
they are changing the guard
horsetail hats on their heads.

At ten o'clock the night is ripe
and secrets are still fresh,
my breath barely makes any mist,
it's not too cold. Before I left
the terasse, I stood quiet in a room
full of white organza lace, the sort
that gives the windows an especially soft
diffused light across the body and the face.
My left hand lying pressed against a book
of paintings, one is called
The Singers. Ancient art of joy or
amateur theatricals, three singers
with their coal black mouths
wearing black woollen bathing suits,
the Holocaust Sisters, singing me on now
down through the park and deep into the metro
in the night, the night, with only the horsetail
hats watching me continue down the hill.

The moment comes when a secret held
for many months becomes a habit,
an addiction. In the gallery
full of pale Northern light I dip and swirl
the Dance of Life, you and I gripped
in the seizure of this waltz. It doesn't matter
who we are, we are compelled to two-step
    down the hill
journeying in deep sadness with the night
or blinded by the honest light of day,
but driven to keep dancing
even when our shoes begin to pinch.

VIVIENNE PLUMB

GAVAN McDONELL

Conversations in Central Asia

When the Soviet Union broke up after the failed coup in December, 1991, the Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrghistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan – took their political independence reluctantly. The region has a very strategic location, forming the core of the area which has been called the 'heartland' linking Europe and Asia. From here have come many of the great movements of history. Largely landlocked, and stretching nearly three thousand kilometres east to west, from the Altai Shan ranges to the shores of the Caspian Sea, and two thousand kilometres north to south, from the plains of southern Russia across the deserts to the mountains of China, Afghanistan and Iran, they had mainly been producers of raw materials, for their richer, northern, Soviet neighbours. They were particularly dependent on Russia and, like all the republics, on Moscow, and there are important Russian minorities in each of the new countries. They were unprepared for the changes which occurred in 1991 and 1992. Their former social, political and economic arrangements are now largely disrupted. With populations totalling over fifty million, ethnically diverse but of largely Turkic make-up, and with a long Islamic culture, these countries are now beginning to face outwards, and to revive old relationships.

But in their everyday lives people are engaged with more immediate concerns, as the writer was told while travelling through the region in early 1993.

"I HAVE", Yelena said, getting up from her desk, "a Rossian soul."

The aitch was strongly aspirated. During the long years most Soviet youth spend on English, she and her teachers had laboured over the strange sound.

The telex machine she had left stuttered into silence. She sat down in a padded chair near the counter, straightened her slim body and faced me attentively. She would have a chat, she had said in her earnest way, "about life". She had the time. Outside the Alma-Ata evening would soon start to draw in. There were not many telexes to handle anyway – some for the airlines, some for the many Turkish business groups now in town; and not many faxes either, because only local ones could be sent through the local system. "I am, how do you say it, an old girl", batting her twenty-eight-year-old eyes, and shaking short black hair. "I like only the old things, a hundred years before, I should have been born."

"Old-fashioned", I suggested.

"Per-haps", she said. "I do not like TV, the rock music is horrible, I do not go out now, since perestroika, the situation is ... it is the situation. In former times I would go to ballet, to opera, and with my friends to restaurants, or for coffee, and, and, and" – a break while she rustled through a small dictionary I had been using for my own stumblings – "classical music, I a-dore classical music." A radio nearby had started to play Chopin, "Like this", nodding towards the sound, "I a-dore it, and nature, and", with a big smile and a flash of brown eyes, "that is all, that is all I like now, I come to work, and I go home to my mother and sisters, that is all." A bright laugh.

She repaired again to the dictionary. A sleety snow had begun to fall. Small dark crowds clutching large dark coats had begun to gather for taxis and buses. She found the word.

"The nobility, that is it, the nobility, they were the best people, before, I would have liked to be a nobility. And I cannot, I am Yelena, here in Alma-Ata. But I am Rossian, my father and mother, they are Rossian, they lived here in

Alma-Ata since many years, but they are Rossian, and I am Rossian. I do not like this Kazakh culture, or the other cultures, I like the Rossian culture, the Rossian soul."

She said it all very emphatically, but without rancour. She was defining herself.

"The Rossian art, and music, and the national dances, and the peo-ple, I love Rossian peo-ple and Rossian things, and now, now ... it is **h**orrible." She reflected for a while on how to explain it. She was eager to explain everything. "It is the situation. Prices have go up-ooh, ooh-one **h**undred times, since perestroika. But my wages has not go up one **h**undred times, it is go up", she stopped to calculate, looking ceiling-wards, a long thought, she abandoned the effort, "it has not go up one **h**undred times. But still, I feel Rossian. The Rossian soul, is wonderful." A happy laugh. "I do not know who is doing these things, it is the situation. So I come to work, and I go home, and in the spring I go for walks to see nature. It is beautiful."

I was taken aback by this defiantly lonely scene. She had been bright, amusing, interested. She kept breaking into lively smiles.

"But you have friends? And boyfriends, perhaps?"

"Of course, there are friends, and they have parties" – another dive into the dictionary – "celebrations for their children, they are all marry, I am not marry. And, yes, there are friends, different friends, oh yes, I **h**ave friends", as though describing a state of nature, "and yes, there is, I have, a ... boyfriend ... yes, sort of."

There was a long pause, a smile, a painstaking thought.

"Yes. **He** is married. He is a friend, sort of. Friendship is ..." another swot at the dictionary, " ... mutual, but love, it is not mutual, it is, it is, no, it, it ..."

"Strikes?" I suggested.

A large welcoming smile. "Per-haps. Yes, it strikes, and me more than him. I tell him I love him more than he loves me. He says I am talented."

"Talented?" I queried.

"Yes, talented, he said, at loving, he has beautiful children, and his wife, is beautiful, yes, I know her, they are my friends."

"Ah, does, does she know, does the wife know that you and he are friends, sort of?"

"Yes, she knows, but I see him only sometimes, there is a long time. She knows."

She reflected again and decided to be more explicit. "It is not often." She gave one of her bright smiles, and shook her head in regret.

"Sometime this will be over, and I will have another man, one like me, who is free like me, but now, this is the situation ... it is **my** situation."

The telex started to clack again, and she went over to tend it.

"Come and send another telex when you want, I can send telexes anywhere. The telex is sure, I think, yes? But do not tell that lady from the service bureau who brought you here, she will make you pay much money – five dollars, or six dollars! – tell her the number is out of order, I will tell her the same and I will charge you one dollar", a huge, merry laugh, "it is good for you, and it is good for me. It is better. Since perestroika, all these people charge so much money, in former times it was not like this."

The clacking became insistent, and she turned away.

The night freeze had gripped Central Asia, and outside heavy snow was falling on Gogol Prospekt. Bedraggled queues formed for buses as the dark closed in. The entrepreneurs with the shabby kiosks in front of the hotel packed away their Marlboros, Chinese toys and Russian bras for the night. The security guard at the front door pushed his red banded hat further back on his head, hooked a thumb over his pistol holster, and looked even glummer than before.

"Remember," she called after me, with a flash of smile and a wave, "out of order."

ASKAR HAD PICKED me up on the Tashkent subway, the only one in Central Asia. I was standing in the middle of the ramp leading down to the platforms, gawking and conspicuous, as one is, in the middle of a rushing crowd, when trying to make out signs in the strange Cyrillic script.

"Pazhalustah, sir!"

I looked up, startled, at the Russian "Please, excuse me". I had not expected company on the Tashkent metro.

"Sir, are you American?"

"No, I am Australian." Central Asian attitudes to this country are enthusiastic.

"Australia! That is wonderful!" 'Wonderful' was one of his favourite words. He was seventeen, slim, under middle height, pimply, with dark brown eyes, glinting but soft, and the brilliantly happy smile of the much cherished. "Sir, **wh**ere do you want to go? I will take you, I will speak English with you. My name is Askar." The professional producers of the English aitch sound had been diligently at work with Askar, too. In his case the result was an explosive 'wh'. It came with a small pause, a pursing of the lips, and a sharp gust of air which gave great force to the query.

"I want to visit the bazaar."

"Ah, the bazaar, sir, it is nearly closed, it is late. But we can go, and we can talk as we go." We boarded the train which had just come in.

His hometown was Osh, he told me as we jostled in the crowded carriage, an old and famous town in Kyrghistan, the country to the east, on the Chinese border. Here are the towering Pamir mountains, and their passes into the deserts of Dzungaria, through which came the trade of centuries. It was, and is, a racial mixing-bowl, celebrated for its crafts, literature and poetry. The cultural diversity erupted into savage riots a few years ago. He spoke of his home town, which was calm again, and of the strangeness of Tashkent, the largest city in all of 'Middle Asia'. He had come to the big city only a few weeks before to commence the five year diploma in languages, the equivalent of our bachelor's degree.

The bazaar was, indeed, closing for the day but the fruit market was still open. He instructed me in the ways of bargaining. We bought some grapes.

Askar's English was fluent, though accented, and with curious constructions; but it was not, as I had supposed, his main language interest – that was Chinese, followed by French. These were the languages he was studying at the institute – "Twelve Chinese characters a day!" he exclaimed, with a worried shake of the head. His English he had picked up from his brother, who would complete his diploma in a few weeks, and from his mother, who taught it at an institute in Osh, and both of these he kept invoking as sources of great authority. His brother he referred to on contemporary issues, his mother on matters of wisdom, and of the wide world. But they were not alone.

"All of my family are educated. My mother, my father is an engineer, my brother, my sisters, one is a teacher, one is a scientist. In my town there are many educated people, it is a town of leaders."

"Will you be a leader?"

"Yes," he said simply, "my town makes leaders."

He had a great interest in life, in events, in learning. He had never met a Westerner before, let alone one with academic connections. This latter piece of information he had soon wormed out of me. As I was to discover, it was of special significance. He was delighted with his good fortune. There were many questions, and warm smiles, much wondering, many 'wonderfuls', and a host of questions. His method of proceeding employed a sort of verbal touching, designed to satisfy himself that what he saw was solid; and his instrument was a formula question, "**Wh**at do you have to say about ...?" oft repeated, uttered with great force and an unintentionally demanding tone.

The interrogation started with everyday affairs – the Australian seasons, schooling, the cost of living; but soon it moved to more difficult concerns – the recent political changes, the attitudes of the West, the spreading disorder in the former Soviet Union. We were heading into deep waters. Even so, I was startled at the next question. "Sir, **wh**at do you have to say about French art cinema?" I took a long breath. But he cut me off. "French art cinema is the best. It is wonderful. **Wh**at do you have to say about American and Indian films?" Before I could utter even a platitude he went on. "They are terrible. They have mere commercial production values. This is why we must be careful about perestroika. And their cartoons! American cartoons are mere nonsense, rabbits and mice chasing each other and having tricks, always jokes, fighting, di-versions", he repeated the word, obviously a practised one, "di-versions. The Soviet cartoons are much better. They have ideas and values."

We walked in silence for a while. I thought it was my turn for some questions. "Are you a Moslem? What do you think of them?"

"I? I? I am not a Moslem, my family are not Moslems, I hate the Moslems. They are terrible

people, you must believe what they say, only this, only this, they are against ideas. They do not like cinema." He said this as though it cut them off from all claims as social beings.

"What do you think of the market economy? And President Yeltsin?" He considered my questions carefully as we moved across the asphalt street back towards the metro. On matters of such moment he decided to bring in the big guns.

"My brother says we must have the market economy, and we must keep our values. We do not know how to do this, my brother says. My mother says Russia is in Europe, and in Asia, and so is President Yeltsin. One time he is in Europe, another time he is in Asia. We here in Middle Asia, we are in Asia. My mother has said this many times."

"Your mother speaks about these things?"

"Of course," he said flatly,"my mother knows everything." But he didn't want to spend time on such insights into certainties. Or was it that he had kept the important questions till last, till he had felt me out and was more confident of me? "Sir, do you know how to fill an application form for Harvard University? My brother has the form. What will he do to enter Harvard University? How will he fill it?"

The gap between downtown Tashkent and uptown Boston yawned before me. The smells from the bazaar had not yet faded. The metro had come into sight, but the station entrance was only partly illuminated. Some of the lighting had gone out and had not been replaced.

I said that many people from all over the world tried to get into Harvard University, that it was very difficult, that perhaps his brother should try some other places as well. But he was not to be deterred.

"Sir, how will he fill the application form? How will he enter Harvard University?"

How could I neither overpaint nor disappoint? I fell back on straight bureaucracy, and a small life raft. "I think your brother should come to Tashkent and speak to the American embassy. They should know about these things, that is their job. And if he wants to he can write to me." He thought about this for a long time. Scarcely another word was said until he put me on the metro, waved, and went off to the other platform.

A couple of days later, the evening before I was due to leave, he turned up at the hotel. He was waiting in the lobby. The sober, thoughtful mood had gone. He was bright and chatty. He had a small present of Tashkent postcards and some pomegranates which he handed me with a grave smile. I hastily improvised a return offering – a small collection I had been given of Anna Akhmatova's verse in Russian, with English translations. Akhmatova was the great poetess "who never left", who stayed in her homeland through the Revolution, the terrors, the war, the fifties, the sixties. She is revered among the young. His eyes glowed with that brilliantly happy smile. "Sir, it is wonderful. I will like to read the English."

"And your brother? Have you heard from him?"

"I called him. He is coming to Tashkent tomorrow. He will go to the American embassy. I told him what you said. He will speak with them. He will fill the form." He looked at me very steadily. "I think he will enter Harvard University."

BATIR, AT FIRST GLANCE, was a slimmer, young Yul Brynner, like the monarch in 'The King and I', but with thick, black hair. The same Mongol cheek-bones, the same swirl of a swagger in the walk, the hundred per cent concentration in the gaze, the lofty tilt of the head on address, the confident crackle of tone and gesture.

"In former times", he said, using the phrase commonly used to refer to the whole period of the Soviet experience, "it was not like this", and pointed to the mess, the garbage, and the unswept pavement in the subway. "The First Secretary said, do this, do that, and it was done. It was not like this in the streets. If the First Secretary said, build this road, or that road, like that new road to the mountains we saw this morning, that they said the First Secretary built, it was done. Then there were rules. We often didn't like them, **or** the First Secretary, but there were rules. But now, Tsar Rafferty and Count Mafia, they make the rules. Since the entrepreneurs have come, and Gorbachev, people do not know what to do except make money, and the streets are like this."

The linking of the ideas of Gorbachev and

mess released a flow. "It was Gorbachev in Nagorno-Karabakh that started it all. If he had acted strongly and quickly there, none of the rest would have happened. Abkhazia, Ossetia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Osh", he ran down the sad list of violence and disintegration, "all of them, he just talked. Always talk." He shrugged angrily, and lit yet another cigarette. "And his Russian is appalling."

Batir spoke precise, lightly accented English, fluent and idiomatic. He was now a senior executive in one of the new joint-stock companies springing up, but his 'sideline' was translation, which "in former times" had been a profitable retreat for those who wanted to avoid political alignments. Graham Greene, John Le Carré, Stephen Jay Gould, Iris Murdoch were among his titles. He was a fully paid up member of the Soviet intelligentsia, for many of whom literature and language are passionate loves. The lack of culture, the accent and the grammatical lapses of the hero of perestroika were not merely shortcomings, they were contemptibly amusing, signs of intellectual and moral void.

"They are both bad, both his accent **and** his grammar. People ask, how could he have passed two university diplomas? His grammar!"

The incisive voice trailed off. Words could not be found. For the intellectuals, command of the complex precisions of Russian inflection is a pride, and a bulwark. "And Yeltsin?" I asked.

"Not good either, but not as bad." A serious laugh. "He doesn't talk as much ... You do not know what these people are like – Rutskoi, the Vice President, Khasbulatov, the head of the Congress, Gorbachev, even Yeltsin, and, of course, all those former ones, like Kruschchev, and Brezhnev – they are very changeable, unpredictable, poorly educated. This is why Irina and I and our friends liked Gaidar and some of the reformers with him – not because we are entrepreneurs or speculators, or want to make much money, but because he is a leader; he is young, yes, but a leader who has thought about the world."

We had caught up with Irina, his wife, and Anna, her friend, picking their way through the snow and the palely lit streets. We had had dinner at what had been one of the city's best restaurants, now reduced to serving stale potato salad, cold cuts and tough chicken. They had gone out to dinner, rather than eat at home, only on my insistence. The pain and humiliation at the poverty of the table had shown on both the staff and the diners.

"Before perestroika there were good restaurants here in Central Asia", he had said. "Georgian wines, Ukrainian cognacs, coffee, caviar, and, and, and ..." he gave a wave with his hand indicating plenty, and then dismissed the sorry scene around us.

The meal had not been great, but it was certainly adequate, sauced with an exchange of sardonic witticisms between the guests and the waiters as to its quality. And then we had gone for 'the walk'. I had not yet adapted to the penchant for long walks in the evening, or between times, or at any time indeed, whether it be sunny or snowing. It was snowing lightly, and Anna held a small floral umbrella over us as a social gesture. Soon we were passing a bulky, seven storey building, with three sets of heavy wooden doors, raised on a podium above street level. There were a few lights within.

"Do you know what this building is?" There was a small note of triumph in Batir's voice. I shook my head. "It is the former KGB." As he spoke, a man in brown pants and a brown blouson jacket, who had the unmistakable manner and gaze of a denizen from Le Carre's Moscow Centre, came out of one of the doors. He seemed to look more carefully at Batir than at me, and then wandered off down the street. "My father was a senior KGB officer in this region." He went straight on, without pausing for effect. "I think that in all this space under where we stand", and he gestured out to include the footpath and half the roadway, past the gutter marked by rows of now dark and leafless tree trunks, "there are many rooms and much equipment. Of course, my father rarely spoke about his work. He was an internationalist, he believed in Communism, in bringing a new society to the world for the first time. This was the mission of Russia and Communism, and the KGB were their guardians. Now," and he took a long pull on the cigarette, and gave a derisive grunt, "now the KGB is completely discredited, no one thinks about them any longer. Now we speak freely – but, of course, in perestroika, without them, unless they had permitted it, Gorbachev would not have been possible. And even

now we do not know, it is now the KGB for this Republic, but many are the same people."

He mused a while as we crossed the street to find a taxi. The enormities of the KGB had led to larger themes. "Russians believe that the good is the enemy of ..." he searched for the word.

"The best?" I suggested.

"No, the perfect. They have a deep desire, a wanting of ..."

Irina exploded behind him, indignation triggering her English. She was part Russian, but also part Georgian and part Jewish, and had the mordant wit. "This is what the Russians say, and so they do not 'ave to do nothing. There is no politics in Russia, there is only soul, and so, since they are not perfect – even Russians 'ave to say so – they can drink vodka. This is the wonderful Russian zoul", she said with an angry gesture of dismissal, and with an edge of scorn that cut the night. "The Rossian culture, I **'ate** the Rossian culture, it is so vulgar. Only Ukrainian culture, it is the best, and Georgian, it is nice ..."

Batir broke in, "And Cossack, this is the most regarded culture, the Cossacks are admired everywhere."

Irina was not to be deflected. "When I was in Moscow at the Institute", both of them had had the brains and the family clout to get top Moscow educations, "I 'ave to listen to all this Rossian ..." She broke off, partly embarrassed, partly stumped for a word, partly fuming with the still remembered offence of it all. "... It is all the sexy and lavatory, that is all, always vulgar, always, and there in Moscow I learn about the Russian soul, and its great work, scientific Communism."

Batir, who was half Asian and half Russian, was abashed, but he joined in. "We say that, in politics, the Russian people is a quagmire." He pronounced it as in quack. "That is why Russian politics is so unstable. If a group can take power, then the society just sloshes around, and stays at home and looks after its soul. They both fear and love the power." He gave me a companionable look as he reached into his literary store. "In one of her exchanges with Pasternak, in the twenties, Tsvetayeva referred to the folk story, 'The Vampire'." He had gone back to the beloved poetry, and the poets who had spoken out during the long dark. Marina Tsvetayeva was one of the most tragic of them. "In this story, the central character, Marusya, who is very afraid of the vampire, won't admit to having seen it, even though the admission would save her, for then somebody could chase the vampire away. Why, Tsvetayeva asked, would Marusya not admit to having seen the vampire? Was it fear? Or if fear, was there something else? Fear and ... Fear and what? If someone says, do such and such, and you will be free, and I do not do it, it must be because being unfree is more important? Why should people rather be unfree? This is what Tsvetayeva asked Pasternak. Why? Why can that unfreedom be so much wanted? Because of love. Marusya loved the vampire. She did not admit to having seen him. She lost her family, one by one, finally her life. She both feared and loved her demon."

He waved to an approaching car. There are few taxis and people give lifts out of neighbourliness, and for a little extra income. "Soul, not citizenship, perfection, not compromise, these are the Russian vices. It is their **aura**." It was a word out of P.D. James. He had been reading her and was much taken with her language. "And now," he said with a big smile as he opened the door – I had been introducing him to some Australian vernacular, "it is a big ask – but do you think they have lost the plot?"

Gavan McDonnell works in the School of Science and Technology at UNSW and has travelled professionally in Central Asia.

BUB

World war apparently
&, four years after,
snow
in Seymour, Victoria
so apparently
I'd seen the snow.

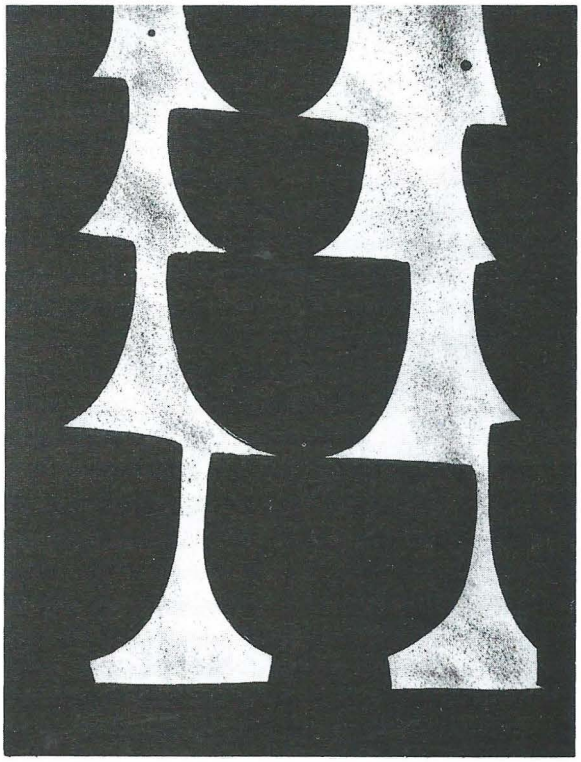
I *have* seen snow –
big smudgy white chunks
in the Lombardy gutters,
picturesque distant snow
on peaks 'round Lago Maggiore
on the Dolomites
on Swiss Alpine peaks on Fujiyama
from an aeroplane window
& snow in Moscow – three metres deep.

I'm told I've *seen* snow
(the way Australians tell you)
I've never
been to the snow.

A snap –
a puzzled bub
with a shiny bump
on a high forehead.
A memory –
a picket gate closes,
home-made cardigans
on this side,
a soldier on the other
(first memory)

One and a half years
of this strange gift (life)
& that's where it begins –
things are no longer merely
apparent.

The homesick toddler
arrives.



'Bowls', by Wes Placek

The pallid mother
smiles out
under a huge raffia hat
she's made
for recovery in the southern air
the fresh air the sanatorium.

The soldier, the father,
follows the foamy wake
of beer & the SS Orcades –
sailing off
into peacetime & a future as simple as
a manual of etiquette & protocol
for a fonder shore England
is still called 'Home'.

Inside the picket fence –
a regulated toddlerhood,
vitamin supplements
at 11 a.m.
to prevent the insalubrious taint –
TB,
& music lessons – first
the tubular vibraphone,
next the mandolin.

Scrapbooks –
a pastel-tinted Royal Family
glued in with flour & water paste.
The unmysterious alphabet –
spelling *exhibition* at the age of three
– the Brisbane Exhibition –
sandwiches, thermos tea,
&, always educational,
historic butter sculpture –
Churchill, Duke of Edinburgh,
Elizabeth II –
near to rancid
in refrigerated rooms.
The Aspro stall –
musky pink pencils & rulers,
the pygmies' side show the mermaid
in a goldfish bowl
burbling from
a silver microphone,
the twins joined at the hip
(& not twins at all)
& Lucky Starr's tent rodeo show.

A slightly haunted
reunion
in Toowoomba, Queensland –
a town atop an extinct volcano –
the site of a memorial
to Raymond Roussel –
RR – gastronomically unimpressed
by Toowoomba –
backyard broad beans
seemed foreign enough
to me
at six years of age
when I, a malleable
& alien bub,
met the others –
mother father sister brother
relatives restored from desuetude
a family up on a volcano
beginning together disconnected
in a strange town
on the edge of nowhere –
a town of floral pageants,
fogbound winters red-dirt dust storms
&, nowadays,
creative writing groups Sky channel
& bible-bashing.

PAM BROWN

FRANCIS E. REISS

A Visit with Ray Ericksen

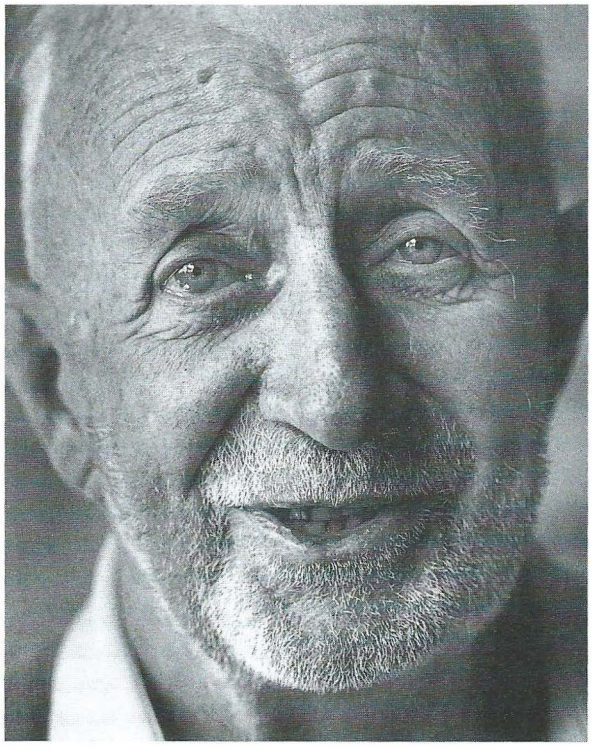
In Overland 105, December 1986, Ray Ericksen wrote "... I roared at the bush around, 'If I were you, and still could think and feel as a human being, I would be working and longing ceaselessly for the immediate extinction of Homo Sapiens.' "

SOME DAYS AGO I called on Ericksen. I had been sent to photograph him, but also I was keen to see how this man who wrote more beautifully about the bush than anyone else I knew, felt about it twenty years on.

At first I was shocked. Here was an old man with several days' growth of grizzle. One eye seemed to be weeping, the other rather less open. Most teeth were there, but badly brown.

Then he made us a pot of tea. Real leaf tea. We sat and talked, sitting comfortably on straight chairs across a small table, not far from the window with the sunshine streaming in. And then, not so slowly, the realisation dawned: here was not an old man. It was me that was in danger of being 'old'. A tremendously lively face, eyes full of meaning and thought as the conversation jumped from bush tucker to the plays of Aristophanes. From the evil of a Pope against birth control to the good sense and wisdom of 'Matey' – the wattlebird flying past level with the window.

After a while the stubble disappeared, there was only the lively interest in never-still eyes – unburdened by spectacles – tales of a not-so-youthful infatuation – the need for independence, the hard and impecunious grind of trying to eke a living out of writing and a not-so-ordinary wife, now divorced but living in the unit next door and actually owning his and obviously still having a measure of care for him.



By the time I left, with the firm intention of coming back, there was a strong feeling for a kindred spirit. Youthful, always forward looking and still revolutionary at heart. The print of 'Humanist Lost', December 1986, had been fleshed out and was as full of life and spirit as any man, of any age, can ever hope to be. "Been there, done that" was a perfect reason for not going over old ground. Shortly there was new territory to be explored, a country from which none had ever returned to describe the way. What would it be like?

A DIFFERENT DREAMING

My dreaming was of a far soft gentle country
where black hills mutilated once
are green again.

Beyond them lie forgotten northern dreams,
where bleak rocks rear and drown
in cold still fiords.

The men of my dreaming roamed, plundered perhaps;
settled, were plundered in turn;
were turned off their fields;

Lost to the light, they starved in grimy towns;
diseases bent their bones;
and coal pits crushed them.

In my dreaming, women buried their children,
six to a grave, and in darkness
grappled with grieving.

Grief followed strong sons, lost to the motherland,
where gold allured, or duty
or lash coerced.

Scattered as clouds, the people of my dreaming
were blown to the harsh embrace
of a different dream.

Nightmares of toil and loss extinguished hope;
the old home vanished in mist,
they cleaved to the new;

Sending their hopes ahead, they built again
in an unfamiliar land,
whose dreams were strange.

Their children knew no distant gentle land.
This heat, this wind, these hills
became their own.

These children wept as knowledge came to them
that they were not the first
to love this land.

Slowly, a larger dream merged from the past,
from the soil and the soul of the land,
its people, its hope.

Here lie the ancient hosts; here guests, in turn
become hosts to wanderers far
from the dreams of their birth.

Weaving the many coloured threads of the past,
the future grows, unique;
my dreaming, my hope.

DOROTHY WILLIAMS

GEORGIA RICHTER

Seaford

THE DAD DROVE THEM to the beach to visit the grandmother. She lived a long way away, in a house that smelt of pine needles, in a house that was dark and damp, as if the summer never came in. The body did not know what to do when it came to the grandmother's. The feet skipped and squealed on the concrete and went uh-uh-uh on the gravel, prickling with it, then stopped just out of range of the door to put on shoes, so the grandmother would not say to the Dad, "Can't you feed and clothe these children properly, Nigel?"

(As if he didn't go off to work every day to somewhere where the children had only ever trailed in a muted queue, shy suddenly, because of all the partitions, and Mop leaning for a moment on the surface of Reception, watching the rushing hands of the receptionist who never looked at the keyboard once, but typed out for them their names, Margaret Petersen, Samuel Petersen, Jeremy Petersen.)

The grandmother had a way of looking at the knees of jeans for holes, or the skin of knees for scabs. Because of this, the Dad stayed at work too late on Friday nights, and he was tired for the drive to Seaford on Saturday mornings.

The Mum met him in the hall each time, standing on her toes for a kiss, shaking her head. "I wish you wouldn't work so late."

"I do it for you", said the Dad, "so that we can own a house, have all the things we need."

"I could go to work again", said the Mum.

"The children are too young", said the Dad and he bent to put his lips in their hair, soft kiss like a blessing.

Mop's thoughts went out like branches, when she thought about that.

The Mum spent all day at home so she could look after the children, and the Dad went off to work. Mr and Mrs Gill were different to Mum and Dad. Mrs Gill worked – she helped Mr Gill in the sandwich shop. Mr and Mrs Gill ran the shop together. Sometimes they dropped round, all shadowed with tiredness.

"Chris and I, we are our own boss", said Mrs Gill. "That's something to be proud of."

The Mum sat at home, with fleeces over her knees, feeding greasy wool into the spinning wheel, feet treadling like the stutter of a sewing machine needle. She had Sam on burrs and carding, and Jerry with his arms out, so that she could wind balls of wool into skeins, round and round. Mop felt the grease on her fingers, thought about the sheep that the wool used to be.

"Why don't you work?" Mop asked the Mum.

The Mum looked up from the wool heaped all around.

"Why don't I *work*?" she asked Mop, serious half laughing, so that Mop knew she had the question not quite right.

"Why don't you go to work like Mrs Gill does? Why do you stay at home with us?"

The Mum looked at her strangely then, so that Mop felt older than she was. "Who would look after you lot?" she asked.

"We are at school all day."

"And the holidays? You'd stay with your grandmother?"

(They slept there infrequently. The beds were like lying on fridges. Jerry poked around in the dark – although his feet shivered in case of crocodiles – so he could find their sweaters and swaddle the grandmother's clock in layers of wool. Even then it tittered all night, like an old man testing the backs of his teeth, but more rapid than that.)

"We could look after ourselves", said Mop.

"I'll be the judge of *that*", said the Mum.

Her hands went around flick flick flick, winding wool onto Jerry's arms. His wrist was still grey-bandaged from where he'd come off the jump.

"Did you used to have a job?" asked Jerry.

"I used to work in the hospital", said the Mum.

"Do you like being at home?" asked Mop.

"It was something Dad and I decided when Sam was born", said Mum.

Mop listened to the Mum talking. She was speaking the quiet way where thoughts are not meant to come out.

Mop liked to see her face in the mirror at the back of the grandmother's cabinet when she thought about these things.

The other thought, the other branch, was about the Dad.

The Dad liked to own a house, own other things, Mop thought, because once when he was small, everything had been taken away.

By the Russians, said the grandmother.

Mop with her nose against the glass, wondered where the cabinet had come from, why the Russians had not taken that.

"There must of been too much snow to shift the big things", said Sam, breathing jellyfish on the glass.

"No", said the grandmother, "even the big things. Our beds even."

Then Mop gazed at the glasses and candles and the grandmother's teacups, and the small things, snowstorms and rock people, that Mop and Jerry and Sam had given the grandmother. A pair of hedgehogs, upright in clothes, an old man and an old woman. The Dad said their names were Mecki and Micki. They came from cartoons on the radio. They were made from funny stuff, a bit like wood. Their faces were falling off, and sawdust was coming out, but their bellies were tight in cotton shirts.

"They're as old as me", said the Dad. "My Oma gave them to me."

Mop wondered about the things that were not there, wondered what the Russians had done with them.

"It was terrible", said the grandmother, and opened the cabinet to take out cups for tea for the Mum and the Dad, and glasses with fruit on for the children. She would not let the children carry these things.

"They are precious and old", she said, "it would break my heart if you dropped them."

The children took timid sips when they used them. They held their breath to drink.

"Lemonade, please", said Sam when they arrived in summer.

Once the grandmother gave them soda water by accident.

The children drank it because she was old. Later Sam was sick in the park.

"It's the soda water", he said to the Dad. He was grey with it.

"It's the whizzy whizzy", said the Dad who had been spinning him round. The Dad laughed, "Poor little tyke." He took them down all three and dropped them into the sea, so that Sam could wash the sick off. He kept laughing to himself.

WHEN IT WAS SUMMER in Seaford, sunshine throbbed in their heads. It was hard to see on the beach, so bright they were squinting. The grandmother kept hats for them in the hall.

"Too hot for me", said the Mum, and she lay under the pines in the grandmother's garden with a book.

The Dad took them for walks.

Mop liked walking with the Dad. She thought about things and then asked him.

"Did you have a Dad?" said Mop.

"Stupid", said Jerry, who was older.

Mop looked up at her father. If she stood behind him, she was blocked off from the sun. In the squat black of their shadows, they were linked at the hands, a bubble chain.

"He was killed in the war", said the Dad.

"Oh", said Jerry.

"He made me sick on a whizzy whizzy though", said the Dad, "after icecream."

"And then there was the war?" asked Mop.

"He died when I was your age."

Mop tried not to think about that.

"It doesn't matter", the Dad said. He squeezed her hand. "Your grandfather would have liked to have met you."

"Me too", said Mop. She looked carefully at old men while they were walking. They were round waisted, like the Dad's hedgehog people.

Now they were on the esplanade that ran

along the beach front. This street had shops with hats for fifty cents and seagulls who were small and hard and made out of something white like feathers. Their legs bent every way. There were mobile birds who lifted up and down on fishing line, and boxes of shells, shiny ones, to buy by the bag, like mixed lollies.

(Mop and Jerry and Sam spent whole days looking for shells like that. Jerry burnt the tops of his feet in the sun, so they were pink raw like the inside of a cowrie. On the beach there were no such shells, only broken bits, and empty crabs, nothing you could sell or swap with the shop.)

There was an aquarium on the esplanade, with tiny turtles, pug noses, and fish the size of thongs and more. There were trampolines, set in a concrete yard, six of them in the ground, and a man in a kiosk to let you in.

"Can we go on the trampolines?" asked Jerry.

"Better not", said the Dad, "let's wait until Sam is a better colour."

So they watched through the fence, the people who bounced so all their skin fell up, fell down, all the bits, and they called across to each other. One man did a somersault, with the sun bright behind him.

"Look at the line of the beach", said the Dad when they were down on the sand. In summertime the bay wavered around (upholstered with dogs and umbrellas and walking people). It shone hot white and made the corners of your eyes run.

Sometimes there was quite a breeze and then the Mum would come with them.

"It's not too hot today", she would say.

Sometimes the grandmother came too.

Mop looked at all their legs when the whole family came.

Jerry and Sam went straight up and down. The Dad had legs that were strong and curly. The Mum wore shorts.

"Am I too old for shorts?" asked the Mum.

"No", said the Dad.

"Really, Nigel? You'd tell me, wouldn't you."

"The old chook is still hanging on", said the Dad, looking at the sky.

Swat! from the Mum with her rolled up towel, or the suncream bottle.

The grandmother was the funniest shape. Her body was square and her legs were small and bent up and loose with skin. With the grandmother's legs, it took them a long time to get there.

"Too cold for swimming", said the Mum.

It was only ever too cold at the end of summer, but the children never said until they were blue with it or until they were so numb they were warm.

"Everybody out!" called the Dad after a bit, and then he sprinted with the children up the beach to where the Mum and the grandmother were sitting in the swift wind, battening down their belongings with their legs. The Mum wrapped them in towels and Mop's head ached with the wind and the water in her ears.

Then it was winter and they were driving to Seaford in rain that melted the car.

"The line of the beach", said the Dad and they were walking in it, in coats over their ears, the beach soggy like a towel, hung at either end with grey curtains. Their footprints wound through the ocean's winter litter, black things and brown things humped up from the sea, but when Mop turned, she could no longer see them, their footprints had dissolved back into sand. They walked and everything glistened.

Near lunch time, the Dad and the Mum took them into the chicken and chip shop, so that the grandmother would not have to cook. The children stood and hugged the cabinet where chickens were kept in trays, felt its warmth seep in. Mop looked at her face in this glass too; Mop, hovering amongst chicken skins. She leant with her brothers and they fogged and dripped and held the glass until the Dad said it was time and the cash register rang and banged shut.

"Nigel!" said the grandmother. "They will catch their death."

But she must have expected it, because she had the bathroom heater humming, and towels for hair and tracksuits and woolly socks the length of rolling pins for the children to pull on.

When they were dry, the grandmother let them eat the chicken with steam curling out, and they became red and orange in the light of the fire, sat quiet and eating, and every so often there was a rush of wind on the front door, a click-bang, as if a shoulder were being thrust hard against it.

In the inside cosiness of Saturday, Sam wiggled his feet and looked at the socks sup-

plied by the grandmother. "Are these yours?" he asked.

"You're so stupid", said Jerry, "look at the size of her feet."

"They belonged to your father, when he was a young man. I knitted them for him."

"I didn't know you could knit", said the Mum.

"You are not the only one, Beryl", said the grandmother. "I had to do something to fill in my time."

SOMETIMES THE grandmother said things that made the Mum sniff. Mop watched her mother, and how the corners of her nose came in, sniff! when the grandmother said that.

The grandmother could not make the Dad sniff, but sometimes he sat up so tall and looked at her direct, and Mop held her breath while they spoke.

"I am sure that could not be so, Nigel."

"Well, it is the case, Mother."

"In my day it was different, that is all."

These sentences were not the ones that made the grandmother smile. Her face fell in on them and she knocked on the ground with her stick, peck peck. They had these discussions while they were walking, when the Dad was so tall next to the grandmother, that he could keep his arm curved under her elbow.

"She makes me feel as if I've done it all wrong", said the Dad to the Mum in the rocking car home. Mop heard them barely, wedged with cushions between Jerry and Sam, everything dark and car lights swishing.

"Mothers do", said the Mum. "They have a way of wishing they were still involved. Up to the hilt."

"We would have killed them long ago if that was the case", said the Dad.

"So, there's no need to work late Fridays because of her", said the Mum.

"I know."

"She's only needling you", said the Mum to the Dad, and Mop thought of her grandmother, the way her needle went in and out, stab peck tug, while she embroidered.

In the car, the Mum put her hand on his knee. Mop slept in the back with her brothers, feeling how tight they all were, bound in together like a family.

Once in the winter, the Mum and the grandmother had an argument.

It happened when the grandmother lay on the couch, made small by pillows, sewing slow like a long afternoon with her needle. Dip tug dip tug into white cloth.

"You are a beautiful sewer", said the Mum, watching.

"I had plenty of time to learn", said the grandmother. "I was a lady of leisure." She said it slowly, because it was a phrase she had just learned. "A lady of leisure, like yourself."

"Leisure!" said the Mum.

"I never did a day's work in my life", said the grandmother. "Except for the war of course."

"Except for the war, when you were working in hospitals, twelve-hour shifts."

"And then I was a lady of leisure again."

"Sometimes", said the Mum, "I wish there was a war."

"You should be happy", said the grandmother, "to have so little to do."

"If you think – "

"I was proud to be a lady of leisure", said the grandmother. Her needle slipped easily through the linen.

"You came out to Australia after the war", said the Dad to the grandmother. "You worked in hospitals here." He said this, but the women were looking hard down, the grandmother at her sewing, the Mum into her cup of tea.

"This is not storytime, Nigel", said the Mum, sharp.

"Beryl", said the Dad, but the Mum pushed his hand away.

The children looked at them. Something was happening to the Mum's face. She looked like someone they didn't know.

Mop thought, do something, do something, and reached for the pot. She was going to pour the Mum a cup of tea, give her something to wrap her hands around. Warm. Mop reached for the pot and knocked a cup off the table. It split, all over, as if it had never been whole.

"Mop!" said the grandmother.

Mop could not bear to look at the old lady, her heart breaking like the cup.

"Mop", said the Mum, "sometimes you are the stone end."

She stood quickly, lit from underneath all

black and yellow from the lamp. "I'm going for a walk", she said.

"Should I come?" asked the Dad.

"Stay with your mother", said the Mum. "Look after the children for a change."

"That's not fair", said the Dad, but the Mum would not look at him. She went carefully, as if she herself might break something.

The grandmother's house was empty when the Mum had gone. The Dad stood up, lit the same way, all sad and strange.

"Sit down", said the grandmother.

But the Dad stood with his back to the window, as if he wanted to turn around, look out of it.

The children were held up by their shoulders in the grandmother's difficult chairs.

"Where's Mum?" asked Sam, although he had watched her go.

"She's gone for a walk", said the Dad.

"She'll be all right", said the grandmother. "I can't think what's got into her." She said sit down to the Dad again, and this time, he sat.

The grandmother got a brush and a pan for Mop's teacup, and then she went to get the game that had a name like Mensch-elger-dichnich, trotting counters around the board. Mop and Jerry and Sam played it with her, rolling the dice.

"Was that a cup from the war?" asked Sam on the second roll.

"No harm done", said the grandmother, "they were made to be broken."

"But they were from the war?" asked Mop, small. She looked at the cups that remained, and the light that shone through. Outside the Mum was somewhere walking. Rain trembled on the windows.

"I'm going for a walk too", said Mop.

"Take a coat", said the Dad. He didn't ask to go with her.

I'm the stone end, thought Mop. She took two coats, wrapped one for the Mum around her shoulders.

The sea had blown winter in. Mop huddled into it, fast walking. She thought about the grandmother's cabinet and the gap she had made with the cup from the war. She thought about the Mum, and how she had gone. Mop walked past the chicken and chips and the trampolines, slick black like seals. Waterproofs hung in the window of the hat shop. She walked past them too.

The water was grey stretching, rumpling with rain. Mop thudded onto the sand, felt how dense it was, how muffling. She walked towards the jetties which in summer gave out splinters from the jetty boards and became (NO DIVING!) platforms for leaping among boats and fisherman hooks.

But now it was winter and the boards were slick. The Mum was at the end of the jetty, red sweater bright, and folded forward. Beyond her, seagulls flew, white on grey, like rain spatters. Something awful, thought Mop, and went forward quickly sliding on the wood before she could get all the words into her mind.

"Mum?" said Mop.

The Mum looked up at Mop. She seemed small and far away.

"Mum", said Mop, "are you okay?"

"It's all a bit silly", said the Mum, "isn't it Mop?"

"I brought your coat", said Mop.

She put the jacket on the Mum's shoulders, careful in case she fell off the jetty and into the sea.

Come here, said the Mum, and Mop sat down next to her, looked at their feet hanging above the water. When Mop looked sideways, she could see the Mum, and still she looked unfamiliar, like a sad woman, not like the Mum at all, so Mop did not know what to say to her. Instead she put her hand on the Mum's knee, pink and wet from the cold. The Mum put her hand over, and sniffed through her nose.

"Am I the stone end?" asked Mop.

"Oh Moppet", said the Mum.

Mop glared hard at the water then, and rain that spat and kicked.

They sat together and their faces were wet as wet, even bent forward like that, with their hoods sheltering their cheeks.

They stayed like that until the Dad came.

"What are you doing?" said the Dad.

Hiss of the rain.

"Has your mother calmed down?" said the Mum, straight ahead.

"She's old", said the Dad, "needling you."

Dip tug like a gull white diving into the sea.

"Will you come home?" said the Dad.

The Mum beat her heels on the wood of the

jetty. Mop felt them thud.

"Beryl", said the Dad to the Mum, and wrapped his arms around her.

Mop wished her arms had been long enough to do that. She sat on the edge of the jetty, listening to them. She held on tight.

Seaford rain came down on their faces. They shivered with it.

"Are you cold?" asked the Dad.

"I'm alive", said the Mum, emerging, pushing her nose with the top of her wrist. She laughed, and her face pulled sideways, pulled two ways. "I'm alive!" she said. Rain and tears and the spattering wind, tearing strips off the ocean, and the mother's mouth open and laughing two ways.

I'm alive, thought Mop. She listened to the noises that her mother made. She walked home beside them, watching their feet go down.

A SUICIDE POSTPONED

On a bed of paralysing suicide
she lays spreadeagled and utterly alone,
pills and wrists carved and rum bottle
neither jointly nor alone extinguishing her pulse.
Her recent acquisition of the nightmare
more terrible than childhood or her lovers,

a casualty from the forgotten wars of innocence
she will linger on this earth a further five years
until experience and desperation reward her slow despair
like the calm of those Tibetan monasteries not yet
put to the invading torch of stronger masters.
Short happiness will taunt her like Ophelia.

And terribly like Ophelia she will drown this time
beneath the unguents of mortality
and leave hardly a thought of her predestinations.
To drown or not to drown was not a question –
as resolute as sailors she would rise to meet the dawn
and walking in the daylight meet the naked day.

Five years of grief and death-wanting
she made pot-pourries for her craft so some would not forget.
But that is the terror of life – the forgetting
against which she gathered roses, attar and small Vegemite jars
and the blessings she counted were sometimes many.
Tonight I lift and smell the faded pot-pourri she left.

JENNIFER HARRISON/GRAHAM HENDERSON/K.F. PEARSON

HER OWN DEPARTURE LOUNGE

Her eyes, like a cat's, are turned towards
the scavenging night until she laughs
shuddering the silence deeper than the stillness
of her imagined deaths; laughter like muffled scream.

The cat mews for milk.
The blinds rattle at windows.

But in the one window left bare, no
screen or privacy disturbs her reflection.
Mirrors draped with towels, self draped with silence,
She discusses with herself the pros and cons of departure.

The path is scattered with leaves.
The door is shut or ajar.

When she stands to leave is it her shoulder
or the animal's which decides?
Is it the beaten animal in her which declines
to face the days' unbecomings?

The possum desires the tree.
The platypus thinks of the creek.

It is predatory – the aloneness of fear.
She is afraid of the voices – they are what haunt her.
But better to hunt the savannah of shadow
and find the white leopard of her delirium.

The winds re-make the sanddunes.
A door is still shut or ajar.

JENNIFER HARRISON/GRAHAM HENDERSON/K.F. PEARSON

SEAN REAGAN

The Old Age of Aquarius

Better to be a happy pessimist than a bitter optimist.
Old French proverb

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE between the young people who flocked to the recent revival of *Hair* and their parental predecessors is that today's flower children are in a far better position to take the show's central message to heart. They are, after all, largely unemployable to begin with.

Not that all foreplay and no work was ever likely to make Craig or Jason anything but an extremely dull boy. Even Richard – Neville of that ilk, author of the drop-out's bible *Play Power* – would put in the occasional appearance at the office or Old Bailey; and as any good accountant will tell you, doing nothing isn't easy. But in those halcyon days of free-range love and dope, the human ideal was essentially one of *homo ludens*; work seen at best as a necessary evil and play what we would naturally choose in this increasingly best of all possible toytowns.

What *we* would naturally choose. The vision splendid, copyright of Bloomsbury through 42nd Street, was never really intended as a mass consumer durable. Keynes himself, who conjured with the idea in his essay *Economic Prospects for Our Grandchildren*, viewed it more with abnegation than confidence. The imminent solution of the 'economic problem' – necessary labour – would create the conditions in which those who are not "strenuous purposeful money-makers ... can keep alive and cultivate into a fuller perfection the art of life itself." But in practice, he thought "with dread", the majority, deprived of their natural purpose, would be unfit to occupy the leisure time that science had made available to them. Three-hour shifts or fifteen-hour weeks, he suggested, might hold the problem off; but the art of life itself would always be quite alien, if not positively threatening, to the reason and self-esteem of ... the others.

Hugh Stretton's answer to the question, 'Whodunnit To Social Democracy?' (*Overland* 132) avoids confronting this pessimistic murmur at the heart of his own proposals for "post-Keynesian repair and modernisation". Yet it cannot be wished away. He does touch on the matter, briefly, in noting "the broad streaks of foot-stamping selfishness in 1960s radicalism". It is also implicit in his apparent acceptance – if only as a fact – of the general demand for minimum hours of work as well as maximum pay (which resignation was echoed in the impressively Olympian reception afforded the Evatt Foundation's 1993 proposal for a 29½ hour working week[1]). But he does not address it head on, this unfashionably élitist misgiving about our kind. Which is a pity, especially for those of us who support the thrust of his alternative policy prescriptions.

Let us examine why; and begin by agreeing, first, that the attack on social democracy, notably via special interest manipulation of the duumvirate of Hawke and Keating, is as Stretton describes it. Let us also agree – it is, after all, ultimately a matter of ethical commitment – that the social democrats' ideals are not only still pertinent but critical to an improvement in the country's economic, social and cultural condition. However, the problems they have to address are not merely the result of the mistakes and intellectual short-sightedness that Stretton lists (nor indeed does he suggest they are). What they represent is a transformation in public culture which goes far deeper than Stretton seems willing to countenance or any government or senior public official would dare admit; for, once acknowledged, it would force to the

forefront of informed debate the very cause of Keynes' original forebodings: what might be expressed simply and without jest as our – the majority's – almost pathological fear of play.

Post-Keynesian, postmodern, post-industrial: however depicted, the world we inhabit is corrosively hostile to the traditional social democratic sentiments mainly, and paradoxically, because they are now largely taken for granted. Or to be more precise: the success of social democracy in establishing certain public goods, like education or health, as basic *commodities* encourages by default the open and (what is considered) morally unexceptional expression of those very values and demands of which the movement was so critical in the first place.

Stretton does not wish to place too much emphasis on the impact of values, maintaining he does "not know whether there has been the general increase in greed and decline in compassion that some observers see", while accepting that "some particular groups seem to have moved in that direction, and they may be politically important". Rightly, he points to the structural adjustments that have occurred, particularly in respect of technological innovation and changing demand and supply patterns – tied of course to the particular and by no means inevitable policy decisions after inflation, financial deregulation and all the other objects of neoclassical enthusiasm since 1983.

Fairness is almost always someone else's responsibility ... Most people ... have no objection to crude materialism: what they object to is not being given a bigger part in the action.

Still, it must be asked, would these changes and these particular groups have had the effect they did without at least the passive consent of the majority? True, the Opposition provided but an even tighter-fisted variant of Government policy; yet their advisers, if greedy, are not stupid. There *was* no public sympathy (at least of any electoral significance) for an alternative manifesto based on something like a Keynesian ideal of the "art of life itself". And without that it is difficult to see what any realistic opposition policy could promote, other than more, less obtrusively, of the same. The frequently invoked survey data on popular belief in 'a fair go' and other ostensibly egalitarian sentiments do not bear witness to the general inclination toward social justice that optimists like to read into it. Fairness is almost always someone else's responsibility and the marginal utility of assuming it yourself, still more of losing your own job to do so, is zero. Most people, that is, have no objection to the nastier side of crude materialism: what they resent is not being given a bigger part in the action.

Keynes' pessimism was not merely cynical. Would that we could be as sanguine about the world-weariness of today's more strenuous purposeful optimists. Their practical belief in the *potential* of post-industrial society, allied to understandable indignation, like Stretton's, at the brutishness and sheer ignorance of those actually influencing policy development, tends to put them at odds with the displeasing detail of ordinary lives: for the latter serves, or would if allowed, as a grim reminder that much of the charm of potential lies just in the fact it has not yet been broken by the stresses and compromise of realisation.

The cargo cult of the Clever Country has been an apt reflection of this, a distorting-mirror of the fate that befell its older brother, Lucky. For whereas the irony of Young Donald's original epithet was soon transformed into a half-baked eulogy, the serious message behind, say, Barry Jones' calls to intellectual arms is in even more serious danger of becoming a self-deluding parody.

Jones' own efforts to allert Australians to the impact of technological change on economic and social life – particularly on work – have been painstaking and tireless; and are all the more admirable for his treatment at the hands of the ALP's tribal elders. Yet, in the dispiriting years since the first publication of *Sleepers, Wake!*, understanding of and attitudes towards the purpose and patterns of work in the real world have changed only to the extent that large-scale unemployment has reinforced the autistic and increasingly shamanic demands of employees and employers alike. (Whadda we want? Lunch! Whenna we wannit? In this day and age ...)

The notion of the 'real world' is, of course,

one of the more popular verbal amulets with which the business and political classes keep the incubus of ideas at bay. It differs from the supposedly unreal world of academia only insofar as its prevarications are generally unwitting rather than self-conscious. But its great rhetorical value lies in the unstated *ad hominem* major premise about the right to pontificate of those who are under the impression they toil – which is a straight pinch from the answer to the universal children's question, Why? *Because I'm your mother.*

Not that this is the only abuse of language to play a significant part in current debate. Indeed, linguistic camouflage is central to the whole (largely self-) deception. The term 'value-added', for instance, is almost always used in a metaphorical, if not metaphysical sense, denoting at most the harrowing insight that when you do things to raw materials they can often be sold for more than they cost. 'Wealth', too, is a term frequently employed but rarely clarified – for the very sound reason that in its ordinary meaning ("All things having a value in money, exchange *or use*": Macquarie Dictionary, emphasis added) it is extremely difficult to quantify and therefore a potentially wild commonsensical card in what would otherwise be a perfectly responsible mathematical subterfuge.

But what does this linguistic camouflage actually keep hidden – from ourselves if not the outside world? It might help if for a moment we tried to see things from the optimist's point of view. In *Sleepers, Wake!*, Jones, following Ivan Illich and others, makes a distinction between two components of the modern liberal economy: the market sector (private or state owned) which provides goods and tangible services and which tends to be hierarchical, centralised and profit-based; and the convivial sector, which comprises activities whose primary purpose is not profit but the promotion of community well-being.

As technological innovation progresses, greater market productivity requires an increasing ratio of capital to labour – in plain language, fewer full-time jobs. Which means that, like it or not, the convivial sector will grow, the only thing we can influence being its direction. Either it will be welfare-driven through mandatory taxation, with the familiar problems that entails; or else culture-driven, with a voluntary growth in (and voluntary redistribution through) useful convivial activities in areas like education, health, leisure services and the arts.

All other things being equal, the second option is far preferable to the first. But in the real world it is barely contemplated. Very few seem willing to accept the long-term contraction of employment opportunities in the market sector, either as a fact or desirable historical development. Both business and unions, traditional left and right, while acknowledging the inevitability of labour-shedding in existing industries, cling to the all-too-pious hope that new, *real* jobs will be generated by unspecified productive innovations elsewhere. Oddest of all is the belief that these jobs will come from a revitalised, 'clever' manufacturing sector, where the irreversible decline in the demand for labour has been the most clearcut.

With more comprehensive and better public education ... the sovereignty of economic rationalists and jumped-up insurance salesmen could be undermined and a more humane set of standards ... introduced.

The obtuseness of these attitudes is often put down to the continuing influence of the 'Protestant Ethic' – another once precise term that has been sociologised into near meaninglessness, to the no doubt wry amusement of our hard-working Protestant neighbours to the north. But one gets the general drift. For various reasons and by various means (there is no need to posit a conspiracy) people have been led to consider as 'natural', values and behaviour that are quite contingent and could be replaced, albeit not easily, by convivial alternatives more conducive to a worthwhile life in post-industrial society. With more comprehensive and better public education – starting with eminently down-to-earth matters like the actual character of the productive sector and the purpose and use of taxation, to take Stretton's own examples – the sovereignty of economic rationalists and jumped-up insurance salesmen could be undermined and a more humane set of standards slowly introduced.

This is where the pessimist has, reluctantly, to take another path. Individuals' values may to a large extent result from particular experience. A less or even more than average intellect may still accommodate a social philosophy that is fundamentally generous. There is no need to posit (despite mounting evidence to this effect) a genetic limitation to our sense of social responsibility. Contingency may indeed be all. But the awkward fact remains: of all the 'post-s' our kind of society can be called, none is more active and ineradicable than that which superintends our overall commitment to 'cleverness': namely, post-literacy.

Take as an explanatory example the prevailing obsession with economics and finance. Proactive, hands-on self-starters who wax positively Delphic over put and call options, Dow Jones, ASE and futures indices, generally know next to nothing about economic history, let alone any of the wider arts and sciences that constituted the normal education of their precursors. Far from accepting, or even having heard of, Keynes' point that the economic problem has been solved – or Jones', that technology itself has perhaps now reached asymptote[2] – they talk and act as though, like hunter-gatherers, they had nothing *but* the economic problem to think about in life.

The syndrome extends, naturally, to government and, as Stretton points out, the public intelligentsia in general. Not that there is anything especially sinister about this. Michael Pusey has convincingly shown in the case of the federal public service that Canberra in recent years has simply been recruiting more economics graduates; who, on the whole, do not know very much about anything other than technical economics. About this we are generally agreed. The interesting, dividing question is how far such cultural illiteracy extends and to what degree it is reinforced by normal behaviour. Or, again, more precisely: to what degree is cultural illiteracy the result of simple post-literacy? The answer we give to this more or less identifies and explains the difference between optimists and pessimists within the social democratic ranks.[3]

Post-literacy is not a matter of technical illiteracy, let alone of low intelligence. It denotes rather a particular *kind* of literacy, which has as much to do with personality as cognitive competence. Paul Corcoran puts it well:

> The literate person – the man of letters – is not merely someone capable of reading, but is rather a person whose character is actually formed by his relation to books, be it as an author or a scholar.[4]

Conversely, the post-literate person, insofar as his relation to new technological media does not replicate in some way his forebear's relation to books, will have an entirely different mental perspective and personal identity. While the late twentieth-century 'aficionado of Mozart CDs' stands in fairly direct descent from the nineteenth-century 'aficionado of Mozart concerts' – the practical differences, though important for other reasons, do not affect the basic content and appreciation of the music – nothing comparable could be said of the relationship between one whose education was primarily through direct or indirect exposure to written material and one who has depended predominantly on the outputs of audio-visual technology.

To press-gang Gramsci and Althusser for a moment, the organic intellectuals of post-industrial Australian society are not men and women of letters but of software and applications; their universe of discourse evolving towards an epistemological break with literate society as significant as the latter's break with purely oral tradition.

The absence of all but an elementary cultural understanding not only prevents these people turning their minds to even question the appropriate place of economic objectives in a civilised community; it also distorts the very discipline of economics itself, forging an increasingly deranged symbiosis between intellectual and general public life.

Economics, beginning with assumptions that, made explicit, would rarely pass muster, becomes econometrics, which factors those assumptions in as objective variables, which then condition politics, which defines itself in terms of economic objectives, which then require economic advice ... The unfortunate Dr Hewson's *Fightback!* was an heroic example of this: six hundred-odd pages of internally consistent mathematical calculations based on the premise that the world is made of rabbit drop-

pings and couched in the sort of Hinchspeak that says next to nothing and therefore appeals to the Tom Keneally, Personal Finance section-reading members of the voting orders. (Hewson's problem was bad PR, not – within the established frame of reference – bad policy.)

THE PRACTICAL UPSHOT of this collective foolishness is the economic wisdom Stretton so effectively derides: that a manufacturing sector which counts the export of a few hundred cars, like the odd diva, a major success will become internationally competitive; that the mass production of vocational qualifications with built-in obsolescence will make the next generation 'clever'; that this or that micro-economic reform will somehow jump-start an historic challenge to the bovine productivity of the sweatshops of Asia.

This is not even wishful thinking, especially in its mooted implications for employment. Australia is *not* in a comparable position vis-à-vis South-East Asia and Japan that those countries were vis-à-vis Europe and the United States in the fifties and sixties. It simply cannot produce the same sort of manufactures as or more cheaply. As a resource-intensive economy, Australia's comparative advantage still lies in primary production. Its most important growing resource is intellectual property, mainly of the kind discouraged by current educational and research reforms. To the degree the country *can* become internationally competitive in manufacturing, it will do so through technological investment requiring less, not more, labour. Just as the world's financial economy is now largely independent of the international trade in goods and (non-financial) services, so the generation and pattern of jobs have little to do with traditional industrial structures.

Where jobs may or could be found is in precisely those areas of convivial, *playful* activity presently neglected or dismissed as 'unreal' by the laptop-toting élites. The paradox is that these very élites, like most executive branches of productive industry and government, have already embraced significant convivial activities themselves, without realising it. The various experts and consultants who do their number in the corridors of corporate 'culture' – in human resource management, power negotiation skills and other postmodernist job-creation schemes – are no more directly productive than troubadours or whores. Their effect, if any, is indirect, in making the productive process more, well, *convivial*. Given which, it is eminently arguable that troubadours and whores would make a far better fist of it.

To some extent, of course, they already do and obviously this sort of thing should be encouraged wherever possible. As Stretton himself points out, it is not at all difficult to foresee a near future in which nine million people, to be fully employed, "would have to work full time at providing each other with labour-intensive services". (Auberon Waugh has often welcomed this development as a possible solution to the servant problem.) He does not think it very likely, for various reasons, cultural as well as financial; but other observers, increasingly on the left, are canvassing options – like voluntary, non-military national service – that a few years ago would have been unthinkable. That, in practice, these would amount to programs little different from America's Workfare may, for the optimist, be depressing – or at any rate *prima facie* evidence of lazy or unimaginative public policy.

While not doubting the extent and size of the obstacles to be overcome, the optimist still maintains the practicability of a social and economic system in which work, available to all, will provide for full human development as well as material sustenance. We may not all be capable of being poets or theoretical scientists, but we do not thereby condemn ourselves to the necessity of pointless, humiliating work or hand-outs. These are human problems which can be resolved by rational, human means.

It is a pity, therefore, they flounder on the facts about the intellectual dynamic of a post-literate order: one that denies, if only by omission, the fundamental criteria of cultural understanding. Where people have no understanding of history, say, or geography or narrative – no depth, because they do not need it – then they cannot play; but have only games. The very terms in which they articulate even their basic interests are such that any counter-factual alternatives – the essence of creative thought – can or will not occur to them. In short, our problem stems not from the Protestant but

the *Women's Weekly* Ethic.

That said, it does not follow we should abandon the ideals on which social democratic argument has long rested. Their practical *projection* will, of course, have to be changed. No major party is going to contemplate policies of the kind Stretton proposes. Nor are the nation's more influential media commentators at all likely to admit their entire enterprise thus far has been seriously misguided. Still less is Middle Australia about to abandon wild consumption through the credit afforded by 'a job' for the civilised enjoyments of play.

But this is not cause for despair or the bitter agonising of the thwarted visionary. The pertinent ideals still hold as a moral lodestar for practical lobbying that can make *some* difference, here and there, to this or that. As environmentalists, feminists and many other of the great and good have found, often to their discomfort, fringe rhetoric and cathexes have a way of finding their way into mainstream discourse; and, with a bit of pressure, staying there. Outside of a totalitarian state, *no* single set of ideals will be realised in practice. There are always trade-offs and frustrations. And intellectuals, as always, find all this profoundly irritating.

That there is a dominant, or hegemonic viewpoint underwriting 'common sense', is not in doubt. But it does not embody any set of coherent, manipulative objectives: indeed its very *in*coherence explains a good part of its appeal. Conservative intellectuals regard the prevailing worldview with as much contempt as do social democrats; believing that much of the trouble stems from the supposed influence of the left, or 'New Class'. And to a degree they are right.

Today's 'common sense' or assumed values embody objectives that twenty or even ten years ago still had to be fought for and were predominantly the concern of socialist sympathisers. The debate about women, for instance, now is largely over remuneration, not participation; or on the environment, over the relative cost of recycling, rather than whether there is any point in it. And likewise with Aboriginal rights, homosexuality, single mothers, ethnic identity and almost every other interest that used to be a minority 'cause'.

In the case of employment policy, there are similar grounds, if not for hope, then certainly for equanimity. Not so long ago, talk about permanent unemployment, lifelong education and the dilemmas that would face a 'leisure' society was confined to small sections of the intelligentsia, and regarded by most others, if regarded at all, as alarmist or 'academic' (in both senses). Now it is at the centre of public debate. Whether or not that debate is proceeding as we would like it is another question, the outcome of which our own willingness to participate may significantly influence.

Social democracy, in other words, is dead only insofar as social democrats prefer to assume the mantle of sensitive cuckold rather than tiresome suitor. Supping with the devil does, of course, become more of a bitch in middle-age and one's sense of playfulness can easily go the way of flares and cheesecloth shirts. The children of the Age of Aquarius may see their priority as keeping up payments on the home extension. But their own offspring – the generation of AIDS, crack and mug'n'roll – have rather more pressing concerns than simply reinventing the wheel.

ENDNOTES:

1. Peter Botsman, *Creating Jobs in Europe: Strategies and Lessons for Australia*, The Evatt Foundation, Canberra, 1993.
2. The "flattening out of a curve after a long exponential rise". *Sleepers, Wake!*, OUP, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 42-44.
3. As well as the extent to which the pessimists break bread with liberal conservatives or old-fashioned Tories.
4. Paul Corcoran: *Political Language and Rhetoric*, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1979, p. 64.

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THE RACE

They're at the barrier now.
Lust is a little fractious.
Rage is kicking at the gate.
Absence is a late scratching.
The red light is on
and they're racing ...

Impetuosity
was the first to get going
followed by Jealousy
pulling fiercely,
Cunning sneakily
placed on the rails,
Rage and Anger
are having a ding-dong
battle, followed by Greed
and Avarice
at each other's throat,
Lust is chasing Desire,
Wisdom is looking
for an inside run
and Innocence
is in a hopeless position
and can't win.

They're at the home turn
and Ambition has careered
to the lead, with Patience
and Persistence
chasing him down hard.
And they're neck and neck.
Ambition. Patience. Persistence.
And the winner is ...
Patience. Patience won
in a photo finish
ahead of Persistence
with Ambition third.
And just behind the place-getters
was Death. Yes siree
look out for Death
over a little more distance.
Then came Greed and Avarice,
Lust and Desire
both chaffing at the bit,
and Impetuosity was last.

MICHAEL CRANE

TERRAINS

I was walking along the aisle
as the aircraft sped through the sky.
A step with my right foot,
and I straddled a river.
Three paces and I traversed a town.
Taking a mountain peak in my stride,
I reached my destination.
But the sign said, 'Engaged'.

PHIL ILTON

RICHARD HILLMAN

The Balance

"I WRITE TO WRITE", I said.

Sometimes stories are told. Sometimes they are not.

Sometimes I begin a story. Then I might take a break from it or I might be interrupted. Sometimes, my enthusiasm to deliver a story gets the better of me, then I tell someone my story. Then I do not finish writing it. The story has been told.

Perhaps I might write as though I were speaking. Perhaps speaking words onto paper might be better than writing things down. Perhaps not. Perhaps I need a great big silence, a gigantic hole into which I might climb, to escape people. Then I wouldn't be able to tell my stories face to face. Then I might be able to finish all my stories. Perhaps stories are not meant to be finished, just started. Then there would be no conclusions, no endings, no assumptions, no expectations, and no death. The writer cheating death by never ending, by never stopping. It's reassuring.

"Why do you write to write?" a voice asked.

And I answered, "Because I do not wish to die."

Between his fingers a blood stain appeared, soft and glistening like an after-birth, and the first betrayal slowly slipped through his pen onto the living surface that was his diary, his flesh.

The tattooist raised an eyebrow, chortling the wry smile, "I hope you don't mind the sight of blood." I shook my head to reassure him that I was not afraid. He resumed his electronic art upon my arm. He kept wiping the blood off with a tissue, the same tissue, over and over again, until he had finished.

The tissue. Symbol of human frailty, my frailty. The skin tear. The pierce of a five-point needle weaving its irredeemable pattern across the landscape, bodyscape of my life. A pretty picture. She wipes her eyes with a tissue, so easily torn. What did that fellow say again, "the body is a symbol because it is a set of tissues"; why now? why am I reminded of those words now? "Mr. Smith's I.V. site has tissued, Doctor." Swelling. The site of representation. The tissues are drifting toward the floor in a subtle swirl of joy. Six-month-old eyes follow the tissues' flight path. Gentle. Tread softly. Wipe up that stain. The tissue.

He has forgotten to let go of the tissue.

"Why don't you use gloves?" I ask.

"No need. Blood's blood. I don't have any open sores or anything like that on my hands. Anyway, my hands sweat too much in gloves and give me an itch. I don't like 'em." And that was that. I paid the man while he told me how to look after my tattoo. Professional. Good man. When I leave he is still holding the tissue in his left hand.

Death is obligatory. Words are not. I write because I write. That is the way it is, the way it's always been.

MY WIFE DIDN'T notice the dressing on my arm till later that night. We were preparing for bed. She wanted to see it straight away. I took the dressing off. The blood had stopped flowing. My wife looked at the girl on my arm for a long while, not saying anything. I wondered what was on her mind. "Here," she said, "put some antiseptic cream on it, it'll keep it clean." She reached into one of her dresser drawers and pulled out a tube of cream. Handed it to me. It stung a bit when I put it on but after a moment or two I couldn't feel a thing. I didn't put the dressing back on. I thanked my wife. Climbed into bed beside her, then went to sleep.

"I don't like it", I heard myself say.

"Then why'd you get it?" my wife turned away. Pressed the remote control button and increased the volume. Noise.

I looked at the girl on my arm, said: "I think I'll get another one, on the other side, to balance it up."

My wife didn't respond. Her eyes were pasted to the TV screen.

There's a formula for everything. Knees and toes. Ears and eyes. Knees and toes. Knees and toes. Head, shoulders, knees and toes ...

"Back again", the tattooist smiled. "That was quick, you sure you haven't changed your mind?"

"No. I'd like another one, maybe a wizard or something, on the other arm, to balance it out."

The tattooist reached for a large leather-bound folder. It looked a little like an old bible. Inside, hundreds of sketches lay together on transparent sheets of paper, like the grease paper mum used to wrap our sandwiches in. Tissues.

"What do you think of this one?" he unfolded one of the transparencies for me to look at. It was a wizard, about the same size as the lady on my left arm. He held the transparency against my right arm, waited for me to approve. I felt tissue on tissue, hot and cold.

"Hey! that's great." I looked at it for a moment in the tattooist's hands.

"How much?"

The Invitation

I READ FROM A TEXT that was not meant to be read ... you may call it 'my diary' but it could be any diary. I do not *read* very often. In that spoken sense, you may say that I am not well read. I have chosen this reading not because it is easy to read out loud but rather, since it is the only thing I possess which you have probably not read yourself ... perhaps 'my diary', any diary, now your diary, appears in this room not out of reluctance at not having anywhere else to appear, and appearances *can* be deceptive, but out of some senseless desire to expose itself; that this diary might reveal ... something much more spontaneous, more original, perhaps, more *personal*, than any other form of text may be capable of doing.

I am not what you might expect. I am comfortable in the anonymity my title provides. I am content when left for long periods of time in the bedside drawer. I am happy in the knowledge that I lie beyond the public eye, the popular eye, after all, I am your inner eye, your private eye, your prohibited eye.

My words are secretive, suggestive, seductive. My words are locked behind bars and look cryptic in mirrors. My words are impatient, nervous, looking over shoulders, peering backwards, or looking *too* toward. My words are senseless, vague, unformed. My words are shadows on bedroom walls, fathers on other people's walls. My words are single, unmarried ... alone. My words are children, and games, and toys, and about never going back. My words are wishes, desires, needs, wants, and promises never kept, and some on which I've overspent. My words are men, women, and sometimes, both. My words are memories, photographs, mowing the lawn on Saturday morn. My words are crystal, transparent, the ice in the tea. My words are floating, ethereal, and never me ... I am, afterall, a diary.

D. R. BURNS

Feasibility Through Fictional Ploys

Peter Carey's accord with Stephen Potter

PETER CAREY'S *Illywhacker* (1985) is the most recent of those voluminous novels which explore the mythic aura and social reality of late twentieth-century Australia. The others are Patrick White's *Riders In The Chariot* (1961) and *The Eye Of The Storm* (1973), Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) and David Ireland's *A Woman Of The Future* (1979). These all discover a state of violent contradiction between the spiritual possibilities which the vast land seems fashioned to set forth and the perverse blindness to such revelation, on the part of the European population. By way of pleasant and surprising contrast, *Illywhacker* celebrates a state of closeness, of accord between contradictory parts – possible and impossible, natural and supernatural, realism and fantasy, personal and impersonal narration, freewill and determinism, freedom and captivity, human and animal being.

The narrator-participant, Herbert Badgery, proves himself an 'illywhacker', meaning 'trickster' or 'spieler', in stylishly orchestrating all this accord. He achieves his most tricky effects, it can be argued, through an international merger of contrasting means. The plain, straightforward narrative commemorates that ultra-Australian realism which goes back to Lawson. But the way opposing parts are reconciled within it often seems ultra-Anglo, as in the work of Stephen Potter, author of *Lifemanship, Gamesmanship* and *One-Upmanship.*

"I am a hundred and thirty-nine years old and something of a celebrity", Herbert states in the book's second sentence. He immediately sets out to prove this statement feasible by using what could be called, in the Potter mode, the Proximity Ploy. He draws the impossible as close as can be to the possible without impairing their contradictoriness. The suggestion seems to be, for one thing, that he has attained this age just a little beyond the contemporary reader's present, in a time when health standards are that much higher. Besides which, as a second thing, his age is not so very far beyond that of those living legends in remote parts of Russia.

Herbert emphasises this closeness to the outer limits of normality by lining up with his normal readers, distancing himself, as far as may be, from his startling and impossible state. The reference to his "celebrity" status is acerbic. He takes the same puzzled vantage point as the scientists who, with suitable irreverence, "poked and prodded me", photographing "my dick, as scaly as a horse's". He insists on presenting himself as a quite ordinarily dirty old man. A rather engaging one – "I think I'm growing tits" is an impish, naive confession inviting complicity.

On two occasions his experience seems to involve supernatural occurrences while still being of a quite natural kind. Minimalist trickery, of the Stephen Potter sort, works again, in both cases.

The first occasion was his 'disappearance', aged nine, in accordance with Chinese magic. A runaway from paternal tyranny, he had become subject to the benign but somewhat stern tuteledge of Goon Tse Ying. In order to disappear, Goon tells him, one has to feel intense terror as did the Chinese diggers, intent upon escaping the murderous wrath of their European counterparts, at Lambing Flats. So then, with coldly consummate theatrical skill, Goon threatens to kill the nine-year-old, already schooled in the method, if he fails to pull it off this final time:

I stood as I was taught. I held my shaking arms high. I teetered on my foot. Urine ran down my leg. I heard the swish of the axe handle. I began to quiver. My whole body began to hum like a tuning fork. My bones vibrated ...

I disappeared and the world disappeared from me. I did not escape from fear, but went to the place where fear lives. I existed like waves from a tuning fork in chloroformed air. I could not see Goon Tse Ying. I was nowhere.

... finally the world came back to me and Goon Tse Ying was squatting a little way from me grinning.

"Now," he said, "we will have a feast and I will teach you to eat chicken's innards."

In the attained state, the subject seems to lose all sense of a unitary, collected self, to become "like waves from a tuning fork." This no-self is, thus, just one step on, in the matter of deprivation, from having already lost emotional comfort, and physical ease in taking up the necessary pose. Impossible is again brought up close to possible in a re-play of the Proximity Ploy.

A second, quite different way of making sure his disappearance seems feasible is also in operation. The state of wave-like passive absence has been produced by a prior, contrasting great effort of will, maintaining his balance and holding his panic in check. The less-than-real state, a sort of relaxing into neutral, has become actual by direct contrast with the rigid, intensely real, fully charged one preceding it. As well as with the one that follows. The prospect of eating chicken's innards becomes a real plus in comparison with which the disappearance is seen as a genuinely minus sort of experience. This is the first use by Herbert of what Potter might have called the Contrast Contrivance.

The other event which brings natural and supernatural into accord involves the use of both Proximity Ploy and Contrast Contrivance. This is the vanishing of little daughter Sonia during the years of the Great Depression when Herbert, deserted by wife Phoebe, must support Sonia and her brother Charles out on the wallaby. The inference from her disappearance is that perversely pious Sonia has followed the example of the Virgin, in imitation of whom she dresses, by ascending into Heaven. She is obsessed with God and "the insubstantial nature of life", as Charles is, by contrast, "with birds and reptiles".

On this never-to-be-forgotten afternoon, they leave Herbert at the camp place and "go up the ridge". Sonia arranges herself in the manner of the Virgin "in the holy picture" while idle, bored, mocking Charles "made vomiting noises. He waved his arms and hooted. But Sonia arranged herself exactly."

Charles' attention is not gathered like hers, which is fastened on the extra-material matters. Her state of ghostly preparedness gains outline, definiteness, conviction when set against his recognisably real, sprawling one (Contrast Contrivance); but also by sharing in it somewhat, by being of the same ordinarily lonesome kind (Proximity Ploy). And now her take-off into Heaven gains a sort of seen reality by the judicious use of the same means:

Charles sighed and squatted with his back against the tree. He picked at a scab. He looked up into the tree's umbrella watching birds flick to and fro. He could identify most of them, even the smallest, by their silhouette. He knew his sister's stubbornness was equal to his own. He waited for the ritual to be over. He yawned, closed his eyes. When he opened them my daughter had gone.

Charles' sight follows the gravity-free birds upwards. It is, in a sense, impelled, carried upward in the way of such gazing, as Sonia will have been too, if she has really taken off (Proximity Ploy). Charles can identify even the smallest birds by their silhouettes. But silhouettes are not quite the real thing. Ascending sister may (almost) possibly be one of those ascending, flickering, sometimes very small spots before his sleepy eyes. (Proximity Ploy working here to keep Sonia and the birds just a little bit apart.)

The other epicentre of this masterfully casual narrative coup is back at the camp where, after his children have headed off, Herbert

... opened a bottle of Ballarat Bertie's famous brew, leaned against a tree and listened to the Buick's hot radiator as it contracted coolly in the hot air. I did not worry about my children. They knew the bush.

The radiator's contraction, in Herbert's hearing, matches the birds' and possibly Sonia's diminution in Charles' sight. The low metallic sound spells out an inevitable physical process like, it just might be, Sonia's ascent into Heaven. (Proximity Ploy in compound form.)

Having set forth so feasibly, in so plausibly understated a way, this impossibility, Herbert concludes the whole episode with the information that "Clunes, in case you do not know it, is bored with mineshafts". The only really possible explanation is offered cursorily, flatly and in a narratively negative way. What reader would accept it for preference?

NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL, like possible and impossible, exist in a cooperative rather than contradictory relationship. Personal and impersonal narration are similarly intersupportive. The rich expansiveness of the all-Australian, Australia-wide narrative is demonstrated by the way it courses on beyond Herbert's first-hand involvement. But he is the illywhacker. He must remain a chatty, casual, authoritative presence when not present. The necessary movement between personal and impersonal narration quickly becomes acceptable through what Potter might have called the Momentum Manoevre. This works because Herbert has that basic Australian feel for the facts of any matter. His superb sense of detail, revealed and proven in personal experience, goes snaking out into areas which are linked to, but sometimes quite remote from, that experience. He rides the rapid succession of facts, it can be said, clear out of first into third person areas.

And vice versa, as in the book's opening. This features the romance between Phoebe and her Hermitage (Geelong) History mistress, Annette Davidson. Annette's Parisian experience, including a brief fling with a very minor Impressionist, draws Phoebe. It is the first act, imaginatively speaking, of her airy upward flight towards aesthetic fulfilment, ultimately into the company of the Sydney art-for-art's-sake coterie ruled by the insufferable Norman Lindsay. When Herbert appears, as pilot of a stalled light plane, she is already primed, in imaginative flight, ready to coincide with his descending male salaciousness. She is all but ready for the rooftop *coitus interruptus* they will practise, two storeys up, just a little later!

Herbert, in a long, thematic play of the Contrast Contrivance, will, however, discover his truer soul mate when he first sights, out in the rough bush, Leah Goldstein wearing the head, neck, wings and body (though not the legs), of an emu, that most earthbound of birds. The extended retrospect on Leah's past history, on how she came to be wearing this gear, her immigrant parents, her marriage to Izzie Kaletski, his frightful mutilation, their involvement in Popular Front activities, her small fame as an entertainer will carry, within it, Herbert's avid realism, his feeling for the mostly gritty facts, a momentum developed in reaction from his experience of Phoebe's airy ways.

In the narrative long haul, this is to indicate, it will become always clearer how the more important result of that first landing was not to mate with Phoebe but to become mates with her father Jack McGrath, the ex-bullocky who struck it lucky.

Jack gives Herbert's concern with the ground level details his patriarchal blessing by emphasising the functional basis of this most Aussie loyalty. As an ex-bullocky he has an appropriate reverence for the inventor of "the Donaldson lash", a very intricate knot:

> "An astonishing man," said Jack, mentally picturing the unsung Donaldson in some draughty shed alone with his ropes, "What a grasp he had of principles. And what a memory. Two over, then back, down, hitch, double hitch and through. It's a knot you need to practise for a week before you get the hang of it."

In offering Jack's description of the knot so exactly Herbert is revealing his own expert ability to follow the always detailed facts into areas sometimes remote from his personal experience.

In his discernment of people, outer facts invariably accord with inner state. The physical sequence shows up the psychological workings of the character in question. So son Charles, in early manhood, riding a motor cycle (an AJS), puts up overnight at the house of a ruined and incapable cocky farmer, Les Chaffey. Who has,

according to his wife, later apologising to Charles, "nothing to challenge his mind ... the mice ate all his books."

> The AJS, Les Chaffey thought, was an interesting machine. He squatted beside it for a moment. Then, like a fellow reaching for his pipe, he pulled a small, wooden-handled screw driver from his back pocket, and, with four fast, neat movements, removed the single screw from the pilgrim pump ... He wanted to know how it worked. He fetched a spanner and disconnected the pipes that led to it ... He removed the little knurled nut on the pump itself and was surprised by the spring loaded cams. He had not expected spring-loading and the spring escaped him, flying beyond the circle of the lamp light ...

Les's actions, both careful and careless, reveal his state of mind which is both calmly concentrated and desperately astray. So a further important accord, between free will and determinism, is painfully evident too. Les has freely decided to satisfy his curiosity. And he is driven by the need to escape from his agonising state of mental inactivity.

SON CHARLES IS socially clumsy, sexually as well as mechanically inept, overtrusting and burdened with a sense of responsibility. As a sort of neurological compensation he exercises an eerie control over wild animal and bird life. He is, in all, the antithesis of his father. Since contradiction signals accord he is well fashioned to fulfil Herbert's furthest narrative ambitions. He takes the story forward in two opposed, meaning complementary directions, down into the ways of Australian wildlife and up, onto the heights of commercial affluence. He exercises gifts which are entirely, idiosyncratically his own. But doing so he is the more closely bound into his father, the illywhacker's all-containing narrative purpose. (Momentum Manoevre.) All the detail shows Charles' conduct as, like Les's, both free and tightly determined.

This (human) accord between free will and determinism is matched by another between freedom and captivity in the wild bird and animal area. That area of accord is first opened when Phoebe asks Herbert to construct "a big cage (a) room" because, she says, she misses colourful birds around their treeless, river-flats house. He is suspicious about entrapping wild life to satisfy her barren aesthetic urges. But he obliges. This initial place of captivity, anticipating the many cages which Charles will have constructed in the Badgery Pet Emporium, acts not only to confine the individual birds but also to release what might be called the native orchestration:

> My family soon included lorikeets and parakeets, western rosellas, gold winged friar birds and a cat bird from Queensland ...
>
> And it was through [Phoebe's] poem that I walked, I took the children on tours of my splendid cages. The birds were clean and healthy. They preened themselves in honour of Spring. The parrots hung upside down on their perches. The friar birds drove their beaks into the sweet white flesh of Bacchus Marsh apples.

The birds are deluded but delighted, feeling free because they are so competently caged.

This accord, between freedom and captivity, is seen at its most complex when Charles' empathy with wild life allows him to remove the goanna off the head of his future wife, country school teacher Emma. The later-to-develop accord between human and animal kind is part of the same scene:

> The goanna had its leathery chin resting above her fringe. It tested the air nervously with its forked tongue. Its front claws gripped her broad shoulders, its baggy muscled body moulded itself to her cotton clad back and its hindquarter claws gripped the soft mound of her generous backside. Its tail, striped yellow like all its body, did not quite touch the ground.
>
> Charles then transformed himself from an acned, red faced, awkward youth into an expert ...
>
> "Get a bag," he told the bank manager, with such terseness the man did as he was told.

The illywhacker's narrative skill flows freely out as the son's animal magnetism. That magnetism

works to remove the goanna from its wild freedom into captivity, but at the same time, to release it into the dominant role it will play as Emma's role model during her marital life. At the same time, Charles is himself being made captive, pinned down, under the weight of his sudden, complete infatuation with Emma, more oppressively than she is by the goanna.

The Proximity Ploy is superbly in operation as Emma and goanna come to accord, in the way that "baggy, muscled body" moulds itself to "broad shoulders", and "hindquarters" grip "the soft mound" of "generous backside". In contrast the Momentum Manoevre works more widely, less specifically – Emma, though pinned under the goanna's weight, is being freed from the patriarchal tyranny of her mincing little dad, as an animal awareness of things flows down from the coiled goanna.

This human-animal accord will lead her to find the goanna's sensual animal freedom, not in the bush but in the secure confines of a cage several floors up in the Badgery Pet Emporium. Freedom will equal voluntary encagement. As well as which her animal posture will not stunt but rather accord with and nourish her womanliness. Being all the more lush human female, particularly to Charles, in playing the flaccid quadruped, she will become, in Leah Goldstein's estimation, "a great courtesan".

Emma taking to her cage draws into accord, then, freedom and captivity and human and animal. But, as with Herbert's great, great age and those possibly supernatural events, there is a wider accord, of narrative forms. Realism lends weight to Emma's destiny, literally and metaphorically, while the theme of woman-goanna driving husband wild with passion is fantasy of a quite Eastern order.

This basic realism-fantasy accord springs from Herbert's equivocal status as an illywhacker, a self-confessed "terrible liar". All the instances of accord between contrasting parts derive from this fact that he can face two ways at the one time. But finally, with the building by Charles of the Badgery Pet Emporium, an honest, single minded concern with social matters seems to come into operation, one which could be viewed as ruinous of Herbert's reputation.

The "whole function" of the emporium is "entrapment" according to Leah Goldstein. She is clear sighted, single minded. She has never been corrupted by Herbert's deviousness. But when he, the illywhacker, endeavours, in accordance with that view, to speak the singular truth, his statements seem textually interruptive. Here he describes the neon sign around his window high up on the emporium wall:

> People came from interstate to look at it. It had a flight of king parrots whizzing in a circle round my window, red, green, red, green. You could see their wings flap and their genuine parrot flight patterns, up, down, wings out, wings flat. All around the edges were little lights representing golden wattle and the wattle blossoms fell in the electric breeze. It was a beautiful thing – a hundred per cent Australiana – and you would never guess that the emporium it advertised was owned thirty-three per cent by Gulf & Western and twenty-five per cent by Schick & Co.

The interplay between natural and artificial, truth and falsity, reality and appearance is offered with the usual dazzling effect. The abrupt and singular intent of the economic addendum seems quite out of accord with this.

Charles' son, Hissao, with his put-together Japanese-Aussie biscuit name, is the main agent of this single minded assessment. Significantly he has no recognisable Aussie realist roots like all preceding participants. Sloe-eyed and beautifully proportioned, he has "somehow slipped through the genetic minefield his ancestors had laid for him". His actions, as eventual owner of the pet emporium, are of a near abstract and directly illustrative sort. He sells it to Mitsubishi before rebuilding it "like a jazz musician", "like a liar". All he does seems the product of free will but is, like his appearance, completely predestined, the proof of a thesis. Certainly the Great Golden Shouldered Parrot Disaster, in the first class back row of the jet taking him to Rome on one last smuggling expedition, is both fanciful and yet realist enough to represent the illywhacker at his two-faced best. But the happening is all hung about with detail pointing towards one end:

> An international Vice-President of Uniroyal, returning from firing the Australian Managing Director, vomited his farewell drinks into a paper bag and somewhere else Hissao could hear a woman crying helplessly.

The worry the reader feels, through this sustained indictment of modern urban Australia, is at Herbert the double dealer's apparent lapse into single mindedness. It is with relief that such a reader (by this stage completely pro-Herbert), sees how these last pages can be viewed as mapping out one final triumphant accord, between that economic single mindedness *and* narrative necessity. Hissao's sale of the emporium to Mitsubishi signals allegorically the end of independent Australia. And it is suitably preceded by a swathe of other endings. Charles shoots the goanna, now twenty-four years old, and then himself while the death of the Golden Shouldered Parrot signals the end of Australia's rarest avine species. Intellectually as well as physically violent means, e.g. those broadly dismissive economic statements, are clearly the only way to halt a narrative process which, displaying accord between so many opposing parts, could just go on quite endlessly. That whole realism-fantasy mixture is so rich, so self generative because Herbert, supremely in charge, telling the gritty Oz truth while working those pommy Potter ploys, is himself so realistic-fantastic, the central, controlling all-too-human accord. It's just not possible to see him as *singularly* devoted to socio-economic truth or anything else.

This essay was to be part of a thematic survey of Australian fiction that D.R. Burns was working on at the time of his death last year.

from "Life on the Edge"

BIRD WITH STRINGS

'The cats from
Koussevitsky's band'
cracks Charlie, strange with pride,
as tiers of strings
are tuning up
for slumming on the side.

Black sax over
white romance
as now the Bird swirls in
to phrase a song
as suddenly
it should have always been

then heads off by
arrangement for
two choruses skating in air.
Violins, cellos
and violas
are smoothly sawn with care

as if on daytime
television.
'Best I ever did'
says Bird in the
baroness' flat
the day before he died.

Fifteen years of
one night stands
and leathery swift sessions
in the joints of
52nd street
converge to contradiction:

November
1949
and set there by the strings
the Bird aloft on
chartered moonlight
darkly spreads his wings.

THE QUILL

Back to the quill
of Governor Gipps
and in the family
since then
this row of ridges,
creeks and skylines

as the eldest home
from the funeral
wonders if the
sweat of seven
wearers of an
honest name

might somehow now
have made it his
the curves of these
recurrent gullies
the easy parkland
of its trees

or whether at the
town's rough edge
three children shrieking
in a Dodge
subsiding there
in high paspalum

might have some darker claim.

THE SEAMSTRESS

The heart beats like a
row of stitching,
accelerating when inclined

across a gap
from dream to daylight.
The past's a single

heart-sewn line,
the future more a
bolt of linen

unrolled in the
darkened air.
Who knows how far

the heart will take us?
Only the seamstress
in her chair.

JULY STARTED WITH the Third International Women Playwrights Conference, and ended with the Sixth International Feminist Book Fair. These events happen every three and every two years respectively, indicating how far such networking developments have come – six to ten years, setting up their tents at Buffalo and Toronto (Playwrights), and for the Book Fair an almost entirely European set of venues –London, Oslo, Montréal, Barcelona, and Amsterdam. Make of that what you will, and meanwhile, Australia can claim a forward role, having first brought both events to the southern hemisphere, with relative proximity to Asia and Oceania.

As to titles, venues, themes and allegiances, personalities, and associated events, we're into a phantasmagoria of different products, different politics.

Some four hundred women from thirty-five countries made it to the conference at the Adelaide Festival Hall venue. High-cost but not overpriced at $500 registration, it offered performance – video, actors in attendance, visitors performing – at every turn. Many speakers simply put on a turn. Lots and lots of show and a little straight tell, including professional advice for writers. What Mona Brand had to say was more than borne out by scenes of her work; and there as background to the commitment of dozens of young playwrights was Dymphna Cusack's painfully real and subtle 1942 staffroom drama *Morning Sacrifice* on a three-week run, forty years after Oriel Gray's *Torrents* shared the Playwrights Advisory Board Prize with *The Doll* and entered oblivion.

Most exotic acts: the revered Joan Littlewood being forced to use a mike; the seemingly playful mime and dance of a Korean shaman; a women's activist theatre from Bombay, with heartening songs and brief scenes outlining the injustices of marriage customs in Indian women's lives. Ria the face-painter was in the foyer while her creations moved on stairways and into theatres. Asia was there, eastern Europe conspicuously hadn't made it. Pol Pelletier impressed me with sophisticated mime from Montréal; she offered to enrol students in her discipline. The most regretted absentee was probably Griselda Gambaro of Argentina, whose astringent political plays were on sale at the Murphy Sisters bookstall. You could buy tapes of most sessions. The whole thing ran on at night to the Lion theatre and several other city performances.

Women or feminists? At least one quiet Western Australian was thrown off balance by the polemic strength of it all. Men conferees there were – a few – as well as a few male actors. Towards the end two did a knock-down-funny two-hander as women. Dicey, brave, and it worked. Lesbians protested insufficient time and attention for their concerns. Exactly one speaker got through the tight timing of a thousand and one plays and players, to voice a theoretical objection (to the almost 'straight' re-use, in Indonesia, of Sophocles). Perhaps the academic drama conference to follow, at Flinders University, took up the slack.

With a conference sub-title "Ngarnna taikurra – Sisters working together", as well as the staged Aboriginal welcome ceremony and several Aboriginal playwrights, delegates and actors, the Adelaide group seemed to score higher satisfaction than the Book Fair, whose explicit emphasis was on Indigenous as well as Asian and Pacific writing and publishing. A difficult brief. Smouldering looks and compressed lips met the acknowledgment of sponsors on its crowded opening night – a clash of priorities that future collaborations will have to manage better. Columns in *Koori Times* and *Melbourne Star Observer*, at least, announced the slighting of Aboriginal elders and disputed the use of time, then and during the public days of the Fair.

Entertainments? Workmen hung and swung, repainting ceiling detail, in the huge ornate barn of the Exhibition Building. Entertainment was hardly possible with the partitioned-off readers – unless you expected poets and storytellers to turn spruiker and top the soundstakes. Booksales and contacts, yes, even against the rain, even with the odd predominance of German books from Europe and the very litte French publishing on show. Lesbian publishers showed all the strength of a position taken. But the

allover winner was probably what went on in discussion-rooms.

There's an unusual directness about debate on population control, when the chairperson observes that she comes of a nation (Bangladesh) many of whose people the audience in general believe should not be alive and should not reproduce. The cartoonists' session was a high point for me, with Kaz Cooke, Barbary O'Brien, and Cath Tate – the politics of published power attending the quirky, lone ranging, aware eye.

In both events there was the always purposeful, unaffected and shining experience of being in a group that's all or nearly all women – I hope the rather few men felt it. It's nothing like the reverse situation, because women in big groups seem much less personally afraid of disappearing than men; there are many fewer Shoulders. Maybe it's the millennia of training as encouragers, with small-s shoulders?

At any rate, in many of the Fair's discussions the "moving among women" feeling grew to the perception that the big big issues are up to women, with feminist initiatives already remaking concepts of community; re-imagining the body and the environment; and training for difference and co-existence.

It got said, in its many guises, to mostly full halls.

Was it a success? Its first success was that it happened, with huge effort and the difficulties of striking a balance in contentious areas; its next, that there *were* stalls and speakers representing indigenous writers and publishing, claiming plenty of attention, as well as Hildegarde of Bingen's music being sung round town. And people walked a long way (that's the Exhibition Building) and met books in great profusion, that they wouldn't usually see for the Other books.

How many of us will get to Bulgaria – or Ireland – any next cultural city of women? We'll all need the trip by then – both the odd citizen who turned tail, and those who celebrated.

Judith Rodriguez

Ross Fitzgerald writes: I was wondering if you or any of your readers have available any information, reminiscences, cartoons or photographs concerning Fred Paterson, Australia's only elected Communist member of parliament (MLA for Bowen from 1944-1950).

Having just completed *Red Ted: A Biography of E.G. Theodore*, which has recently been published by the University of Queensland Press, I am now beginning work on a biography of Fred Paterson, as well as a film for ABC TV tentatively entitled "Fred Paterson and the Red North". Any help you could give me would be very much appreciated. Please reply to Associate Professor Ross Fitzgerald, Faculty of Humanities, Griffith University, Qld 4111.

Bev Aisbett

Metaworlds

THE dozen stories in *Metaworlds*, a new anthology of local science fiction edited by Paul Collins (Penguin, $14.95), were selected (by a computer) on the basis of awards they have won and their ratings in readers' polls. Over the past ten years many local SF writers have been propelled, at near light speed, from relative obscurity to world-wide acclaim, and it's no accident, as Collins notes in his introduction, that themes of birth, rebirth and metamorphosis abound. Newcomers to the genre might be agreeably surprised by the quality of the writing, and by its emotional power and moral authority – particularly in stories by Greg Evan, Terry Dowling and George Turner. Also impressive is the conceptual agility of Damien Broderick and Paul Collins and the humour of Rosaleen Love and Sean McMullen. Rather than stories full of whiz-kid enthusiasm for futuristic gizmos and heroic techno-scientism, there are fictional explorations of ecology, microbiology, medicine and cybernetics, with speculations aplenty to reward and challenge the open-minded.

CD: Hazel Smith

POET Without Language, is a collaboration on CD between poet Hazel Smith (voice, and violin on some tracks) and members of the austraLYSIS ensemble, notably Roger Dean (synthesisers, samples, percussion) and Sandy Evans (saxophone). Recorded on the Rufus label and distributed by Polygram, the seventeen tracks include larger-scale works in which the music/sound component is as important as the words; poems that are given musical accompaniment; performance pieces for solo voice that border on sound poetry; as well as 'straight' readings of poems. The pieces that work best, to my ear, include the impressive title track, in which the formal structure of the poem has been entirely dismantled and text/voice fragments are freely used to achieve larger compositional aims. Also interesting are sections where familiar reading styles and predictable voice inflections are disrupted by multi-tracking, and tracks like 'Signed Original Since' where the voice becomes a truly flexible instrument, working *against*, as much as *with*, predictable verbal gestures suggested by the poem.

Castro coup

OCEAN Press, a small Melbourne-based leftist publishing company with strong Cuban ties, is unusual in that most of its titles are sold in the Americas. Ocean has recently achieved something of a coup with *ZR Rifle: The Plot to Kill Kennedy and Castro*, by Brazilian journalist Claudia Furiati, who has been given unprecedented access to the formerly secret files of the Cuban State Security Department. Apparently filmmaker Oliver Stone is now negotiating with U.S. networks to produce a major documentary based on the book, with Ocean's office in Havana acting as intermediary. *ZR Rifle* is distributed in Australia by Astam Books, and costs $14.95.

Peter Murphy: blinding obscurity

SNAPSHOTS, a small booklet of concrete and other poems by Peter Murphy, published by Collective Effort Press (PO Box 2430V, GPO Melbourne, 3001), has an attractive home-made look. Somehow the format suits these modest, deceptively simple poems, all of which reveal sinister meanings beneath the mundane surface of things. Old tv shows, inane advertisements, suburban car-yards, commuters on a train, pulp fiction, amateur photographs, war memorials, job interviews, funeral chapels, exercise bikes and retirement speeches are the stuff of Murphy's little poetic parables, in which the insinuating ordinariness of things colludes with a sort of vacuous horror that is both pervasive and almost invisible. This world of obvious and empty appearances, automatic conformity, chilling absence of feeling, bloodless compromise and comfortable stagnation is for Murphy a place of deception and evil, as he carefully discloses in these poems.

Teriyaki thriller

ROGER Pulvers, an expatriate American who now calls Australia home, is widely published in Japan, and his novel *General Yamashita's Treasure* (A&R, $14.95) is a double-edged cross-cultural satire about the way Japanese and Westerners have understood and misunderstood each other since World War II. Organised like a playscript – with each chapter a particular character's first-person account of the book's increasingly lurid and farcical events – this black comedy inside a crime thriller tells of rediscovered war booty (a cache of diamonds) being smuggled to Australia in the innards of a corpse. Its main characters are all highly disagreeable and one-dimensional, and they articulate all manner of dislikes and prejudices, exposing the chafing points between the two cultures. What might otherwise cause rancour is said here frankly and with humour. Easy to read and entertaining, this is light pot-boiling fiction with a sting in its tail.

SCARP/Five Islands: six poets

SCARP and Five Islands Press (both based at the University of Wollongong) have jointly published New Poets Series 2, available as an anthology (for $35) or six separate booklets ($7.50 each). *Things in a Glass Box*, by Beth Spencer picks its way through the domestic detritus, media cliches and loveable mess of modern life, foregrounding what remains of truly personal worth – significant others, events and illuminations. The title of James Bradley's collection, *Paper Nautilus*, suggests a delicate lyricism and love of the sea, both of which are present in many of these sensuous love poems and intelligent meditations on places and people. *Coming Home From The World*, by Peter Boyle, ambitiously tackles the big problems of suffering, political violence and injustice on the world stage. Whilst Boyle's poems are not lacking in passion, intelligence and technical muscle, this is a 'big ask' of any book, and this one shows the strain. *The Wolf Problem in Australia*, by Paul Cliff, offers pleasures to both the eye and ear. These quirky and interestingly laid-out poems strive for – and usually achieve – fresh perceptions of everything from seal pups to scale models of buildings and hurricanes. *My Sweet Sex*, by Peta Spear, has a natural and unselfconcious first-person narrative voice that allows the poems to take you effortlessly into their confidence and the poet's world of earthy, angry emotions, where meditations on love won and lost are accompanied by lupine (or is that vulpine?) imaginings. *The Beggar's Codex*, by Adrian Wiggins, is a cluster of wire-tough, sparse, though not unfriendly, poems in which intelligence, lyricism and a sometimes surprisingly sophisticated diction complement the cool poise of one born to brave the sharp edges of urban angst.

Carroll on cassette

KIERAN Carroll, a popular performer on the Melbourne poetry circuit, has recorded a selection of his bright, clever and often very funny poems on cassette tape (send $8 to Banana Arcade, 10/6 Ormond Rd, Ormond, 3163). *One day Business Shirts, The Next Day Flares* contains thirteen tracks, with side one recorded in the studio and side two live. In the studio pieces the poet's voice is supported by a soft, swelling, moody 'industrial' ambience. There is a problem with recording levels and sound quality on some live tracks, and with editing on tracks 12 and 13, but this rawness may denote 'authenticity'. Carroll reads well and is capable of effective shifts in speed, mood and volume, evidenced in his excellent nostalgic-comic satire, 'Melton Personal Poem', the hilarious 'Meaning Of Greed' and 'Brett Kelly', and the tender and eerie 'The Falling'.

John Jenkins

Introduction

"AS MAINSTREAM CULTURE SINKS deeper and deeper into superficiality, the mantle of meaty analysis and serious debate weighs ever more pressingly on the shoulders of the serious quarterlies." – Mark Mitchell.

With these words in mind, *Overland* invited Opposition leader Alexander Downer, Aboriginal athlete Cathy Freeman and the managing director of Western Mining Corporation, Hugh Morgan, to an informal discussion – a Roundtable, if you will, to survey the Aboriginal Reconciliation process.

The *Overland* Roundtable was convened by John Herouvim early in the Spring at a camping spot above Overland Gorge in Kakadu National Park.

Below is an edited transcript.

John
Hi, Al. Hi, Cath. Hi, Hughie.
Al & Cath
Hi, John. Hi, *Overland* readers!
Hughie
Hmphh.
John
Tea?
Al
I'll get the billy.
John
Cathy, congratulations on the Commonwealth Games victories.
Cathy
Thanks. The support's been fantastic, and I think it's been good for the image of Aboriginal people too.
Al
Yes, well I've always believed and, er, believed very sinceely, that we have world class Aborigines and we should be very prard of them.
John
Hughie, congratulations to you, too.
Cath
Yes. Well done, Hughie. You must have been rapt that Western Mining's equity profit after tax and abnormals for the June year rose from $88.3 million to $125 million. Who's for some goanna?
Al
I'll have a bit. Is there any chutney?
Cathy
I'll get some.
WHOOSH! (Cathy disappears in a puff of ancient red dust.)
John
Hughie, the last thing I remember you saying about Aborigines was that they didn't develop a wheeled cart.
Hughie
Yes, that's right. No wheeled cart, no staple crops, and so impoverished were their tribal tongues that they had no word for 'patio'.
Al
Yes, the disadvarntage really is immense. During my trip to the artback I became, well, you know, rather emotional abart the things I saw. It was a profarndly moving experience.
John
Still, you weren't moved enough to endorse the Aboriginal Land Fund.
Al
Yes, well the point here, of course is, er, is, er ... and I think it's a very cleer point ...
WHOOSH! (Cath's back.)
Cath
Is Rosella Fruit Chutney okay? That's all they had at the 7-11.
Hughie
7-11? But that's 300 kilometres away!
John
Yes, well, people without wheeled carts *do* develop amazing leg muscles, Hughie. Hey, Cath; Al was just explaining why he doesn't think you guys should get any of your land back.
Al
I was not! I was abart to say that, er, that we appreciate the, er, the importance of land but that, er, that we'd like to see demonstrable benefits in relation to, er, to health and harzing.
Hughie
What's this stuff?
John
Damper. So what you're saying, Al, is that blacks can have taps and fibro kit homes and so on, but they can't have any land.
Al
Well, er, no, not at all. I mean ...
Cath
I think he's embarrassed because I'm here. You want me to go?
John
You want Cath to leave so you can talk freely, Al? We don't want you

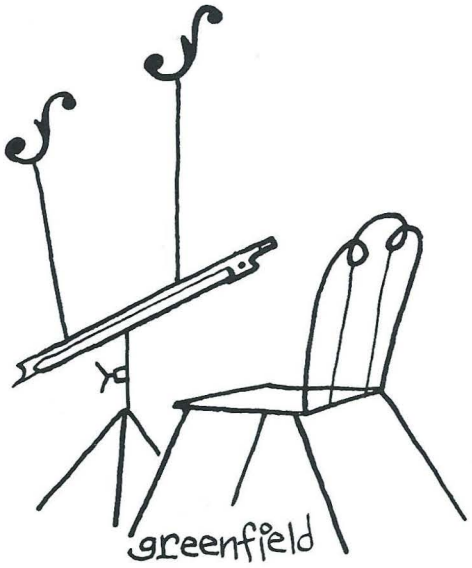
getting emotional again and forgetting your policies ...
Al
I did *not* forget my policies thank you very much if you don't mind. The media didn't tell the full story. A number of journalists quite cleely saw me running art of my tent sharting: "My policies, my policies, a dingo took my policies!".
John
A dingo?
Al
Yes.
Cath
Wow!
John
Um, Al, you said there were journalists there. You got any *credible* witnesses?
WHOOSH! (A willy-willy springs up. Ageless red dust swirls. Timeless rocks tremble. Chutney jar rolls into fire. Dust clears to reveal an Aboriginal warrior of fierce demeanor, adorned with scars and stripes. He carries spear, woomera, stone axe, armalite assault rifle and a radar-guided, ground-to-air missile.)
Pemulwoy
Did someone call for a witness?
Hughie
Who the fuck are you?
Pemulwoy
I am Pemulwoy.
John
Not 'Dead or Alive' Pemulwoy from Parramatta? Leader of the Toongabbie raid of 1797? Scourge of Governor King? Shot to death. Your severed head pickled and sent to Sir Joseph Banks?
Pemulwoy
Yep, that's me, mate. And who are you?
John
John Herouvim. I'm with *Overland*.
Pemulwoy
Oh, right. You must be okay, then. Oh, g'day Cathy.
Cath
Hi, Uncle Pemulwoy.
Pemulwoy
Who are *these* fatheads?
Cathy
That's Mr Morgan, he's a ... um ... a businessman. And that's Mr Downer. He's the leader of the opposition ...
John
... though that might change by the time we go to print. No offence, Al.
Al
None taken.
John
Pemulwoy, did you see what happened to Al's policies?
Pemulwoy
What? Oh, yeah, I saw it all. Dingo took 'em. She took 'em from his tent, and she ate 'em.
Al
There, you see.
Pemulwoy
And then she vomited them up again.
John
Al, whatever the details of your policies, when you strip away the legal jargon and euphemisms, it all comes down to property rights, doesn't it?
Cathy
What's 'euphemisms'?
Pemulwoy
What's 'property rights'?
John
Your ancestors seized a whole continent by armed force, and now you won't give back even a skerrick of it without making a colossal fuss.
Hughie
What arrant rubbish! It's not the land that's at issue: it's an ancient and venerable principle of the common law: Findus Keepus Losus Weepus.
Pemulwoy
I think I'll cut his head off.
Cathy
No, don't. He just doesn't understand. You see, Hughie, we don't think of land the same way you do. The land is our mother, and ...
Hughie
Yes, well, to we miners the land is not your mother, it's *our* wife, and she's doesn't mind a bit of rougher than usual handling. The way you people carry on! We have our traditions too, you know. Our tribal Elders IXL, our bottom-of-the-harbor burial sites. Why don't *you* put yourself in *our* shoes, eh? We poor bugger capitalists suffering with capital gains tax and debts in custody ...
Pemulwoy
Can't I just spear him in the leg?
John
Go on, Cath. What harm can it do?
Cathy
What *good* will it do?
Pemulwoy
Alright! Alright, we'll try it your way. Let's, um, let's ... negotiate.
Al
Negotiate what?
Pemulwoy
A treaty.
Hughie
But you're holding a gun.
Pemulwoy
I'll give you my spear.
Al
That's completely unfair.
Pemulwoy
Think of it as a role-swapping exercise.
Al
Look, er, Mr Pemulwoy. I'm very sorry to hear about your head being pickled and all that, but that was all a long time ago, and the fact is I'm nothing like Hughie: I'm actually a great admahrer of Aboriginal culture. I have all of Albert Namatjira's early records, and ...
Pemulwoy
Rats! I left my backpack at Yuendumu.
Cath
I'll get it.
WHOOSH!
Al
... and I find the Cosby Show extremely moving.
WHOOSH! (Cath returns with a military-style backpack. Pemulwoy fossicks.)
Pemulwoy
Where's me ammo?
Cath

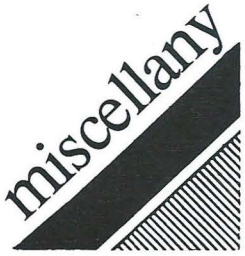
I took it out.
Pemulwoy
What'd you do that for?! Listen, Cath, how can I negotiate without ammo? No ammo, no treaty: that's how it works. You ask the American Indians, or the Maori, or Mandela ...
Hughie
What breathtaking ingratitude! After everything we've done for you!
Pemulwoy
See?
Cath
Maybe you're right. *(She produces a box of ammunition.)* Here.
(Pemulwoy loads the magazine.)
Al
Oh, Hughie, now look what you've done! Um. Mr Pemulwoy, you're not really going to kill us are you?
Pemulwoy
Course not, I'm going to 'disperse' you.
Cath
What's 'disperse' mean?
John
Kill.
Al
Oh, no. You can't! Please. Please don't disperse me! I'm just a backbencher out of my depth.
Cath
I think you've scared them enough, Uncle Pemulwoy.
CLACK! (Pemulwoy loads the magazine into the rifle.)
Hughie
The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in ...
Al
No! No, you can't. Disperse Hughie, not me. He's a bastard. None of us like him. Really. I've got much more in common with you than I have with him.
Pemulwoy
How's that?
Al
Well, I'm a Liberal. We're outcasts, marginalised, excluded from the mainstream. We're just like you. My people have been in opposition for forty tharsand years. *(Sobbing.)* Us. The Liberal Party. The customary owners of government in this country.
Pemulwoy
He really is a sook, isn't he?
Hughie
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ...
(At this point, John presented each guest with an Overland *tie, and the negotiations adjourned to the river bank, where Hughie was taken by a crocodile.)*

(It vomited him up soon after.)

JOHN HEROUVIM

John Herouvim is a Melbourne comedian. A selection of his comedy from Radio Nation's Ramona Koval program is available in ABC Shops on the cassette 'Prime Cuts'.





PHIL ROBINS

Ozymenzias

A critique of Ming the Merciless

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed.
– Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias'.

IT IS PROFOUNDLY IRONIC that Sir Robert Menzies, champion of "the forgotten people", has himself been largely a forgotten man in the quarter of a century since he relinquished the Australian prime ministership.

Now, as new studies of the Menzies era begin to fill the vacuum, the revisionists are hard at work rehabilitating the Grand Old Man. We learn that Menzies, far from being a lickspittle to Winston Churchill, deeply resented the way Australia's interests were subordinated to those of Britain early in World War II. Blocked by Churchill in his ambition to become a member of the British War Cabinet and perhaps even the occupant of 10 Downing Street, Menzies returned to Australia, ignominiously lost office, but then picked up the pieces of a seemingly shattered political career and created the modern Liberal Party.

It's a stirring story – even if Menzies drew upon the strategy of Alfred Deakin by appealing beyond class, and to women as a specific group, in forging what appeared to be an impregnable anti-Labor alliance.

But, as the republican push gathers momentum, it is doubtful whether today's demoralised Liberals should be looking backwards for their inspiration to the last of the Queen's men, a panjandrum who made Australians cringe with his fawning welcome to Queen Elizabeth II ("I did but see her passing by, And yet I love her till I die") and wanted to call our currency unit not the dollar but the royal!

Revisionism is all very well if it brings us new truths and banishes old myths, but nothing revealed so far has changed significantly my memories of the Menzies I worshipped as a schoolboy but came to revile while voting for Labor losers over the next twenty-three years.

Now it's the Menzies mob's turn!

Robert Gordon Menzies died on 15th May, 1978 at the age of eighty-three.

His admirers must be thankful that the old man was spared the agony of watching over the decline and fall of his once great Liberal Party.

Consigned to permanent opposition in Canberra, impotent in Queensland, unpopular in Tasmania, dividing the community in Victoria, stirring racist passions in Western Australia, papering over deep cracks while preparing for a rare victory in South Australia and tottering in New South Wales after having won only ten seats at the recent federal election, the leaderless Liberals are split between wimpish 'Wets' and discredited 'Dries'.

They are reduced to muttering maledictions against Paul Keating and seeking comfort in the Menzies myth. Custom decrees that we speak not ill of the dead. But let us, in praising famous men, not forget the follies they begat.

Menzies was Australia's longest-serving prime minister, a legal luminary, a silver-haired black-browed patriarch with a talent for winning elections. But a great statesman? Or an apologist for privilege and power?

At one time equivocal in his attitude to Hitler and Mussolini, Menzies earned the sobriquet 'Pig-Iron Bob' when, as attorney-general, he had stood up for the sanctity of export contracts signed with a bellicose Japan. Our pig-iron exports went into Japanese armaments.

Within two years of becoming Prime Minister in 1939, Menzies had lost the confidence not only of the public at large but also of many of his colleagues in Parliament. Menzies stood down for Artie Fadden, the Country Party leader.

"For the next 40 days and nights", in the words of historian Humphrey McQueen, "the fate of

Australia rested in the hollow of Artie Fadden's head."

Menzies' second coming lasted from late in 1949 until his retirement early in 1966.

His vote-winning promise to put value back into the pound was soon seen to be hollow. Inflation in 1951 soared to 23.1 per cent – still an Australian record for one year. Menzies, ever the opportunist, was quick to jump on to the McCarthyist bandwaggon. He tried to ban the Communist Party and dramatically set up a royal commission after the defection of KGB man Vladimir Petrov from the Soviet Embassy just before the 1954 election.

These diversions worked, and Menzies was incredibly lucky. In 1954 he was saved from defeat – and political limbo – by an electoral system which gave him a narrow majority of seats even though the Labor Party won well over half the votes cast. For some years after that escape, the Labor Party split made it easy for Menzies (despite his failure as imperialist message boy in Suez Canal negotiations with Egypt's President Nasser in 1956).

Then came the savage credit squeeze which left him with a one-seat majority – achieved when the donkey vote and Communist preferences pushed Jim Killen over the line in Moreton – even though Labor again polled more than half the total vote.

First inflation, then recession: so much for the myth of Menzies the economic manager. During the 'boom years', in fact, Australia trailed comparable countries in economic performance. Still worse, shackled to 'Black Jack' McEwen's protectionist policies, Australia missed the chance to modernise its economy – with the disastrous consequences that we suffer from today.

Finally came the Vietnam deception and its death ballot, Menzies giving the cornucopian Communist can one more almighty kick before fading into the afternoon light. There was a sunset touch during the 1975 constitutional crisis when he was persuaded to resile from some long-held beliefs on the primacy of Parliament.

Menzies was very much a man of style over substance.

MING THE MERCILESS got rid of potential challengers. His legacy was a leaderless Liberal rabble after a generation of one-man rule.

Menzies' mortality was brought home when, at the funeral service of his old Labor adversary Arthur Calwell in 1973, he sat in his official car outside St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, unable to move inside because of the stroke he had suffered. Another elderly man tapped on the car window. Menzies wound it down and the man said, "You'll be next, Bob."

Cruel words, but true. Menzies lingered on for less than five years more.

He will be remembered as a great man, certainly, but, if only he'd had the vision, the Jeparit storekeeper's son could have been so much more. He blew it. Club and comfort came first.

Paul Keating is right. We still have not produced a leader of the stature of a Washington, a Jefferson or a Lincoln.

And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymenzias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair.'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
– Shelley, amended

Phil Robins recently retired from the managing editorship of The Herald, *official organ of the Australian Labor Party in South Australia.*

KEVIN BROPHY

Strange Practices: Anxiety, Power and Assessment in Teaching Creative Writing

THERE WASN'T MUCH pleasure in it. In this my memories of school are probably typical. And in any case, schools are not there to provide us with pleasure – are they?

However, in the course of those long, dutiful mornings and even longer drowsy afternoons at school there were two pleasures I was introduced to: listening to the teacher read a story aloud, and being able to write a 'creative composition'. When a teacher opened a book and read to us I was transported into even the silliest of them. Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld* I loved. The second pleasure was, in a sense, the reverse of this, for when I sat down to write a creative composition the teacher became my audience. To sit in front of a blank page and not know what I would write down – and then look back on it two or three hours later, not knowing really where the story had come from – was an exciting and probably addictive process for me. Added to this was the curious guessing game going on with the reader who was to be won over by the writing not just as reader but as the teacher who assigns a mark to the work. I was never sure how the grades were arrived at, and I didn't want to know. I suspected that the teacher would not be able to say clearly anyway.

Now these pleasures – and confusions – are taking hold in Australian university English departments and higher education institutions where creative writing subjects proliferate. With the grip of the critical essay on literature courses weakened by the presence of folios of creative writing a number of issues and conflicts have arisen.

Local critics of these developments make statements such as, "You can't train creativity", and "Do we invite sheep to woolgrowers' conferences?"[1] This last statement echoes Nabokov's experience in 1956 when he was proposed for a chair at a university. The proposal was defeated in debate: "Gentlemen, even if one allows that he is an important writer, are we next to invite an elephant to be Professor of Zoology?"[2]

Some more post-modern commentators regard creative writing as a manoeuvre by traditional (humanist) forces and like to point out that creative writing courses privilege the author

> by their heavy emphasis on aesthetic experience, on style (as the signature of the subject) and on such notions as 'genius'/'inspiration'/'author'/'authority' ... Emphasis on 'realism' in these programs, for example, is a means of reifying the status quo, since, as we have already indicated, realism is a mode of encoding the cultural reality ... Inside these limits, realism represents such cultural practices as racism, sexism, and heterosexism as the 'way things are,' and by such a representational move it legitimizes the prevailing economic order.[3]

This is, of course, a caricature of what happens in creative writing courses and in the workshops that constitute them, but it does paint a vividly cautionary scenario of dangers ahead for untheorised creative writing activity, or perhaps for *any* creative writing activity.

There are those who want to see a working relationship develop between theory and practice because, as Derrida has reminded us, we are all writers after all. To give some indication of the heat involved in manoeuvres over this issue, Stephen Muecke from the creative writing course at University of Technology, Sydney, has responded to Morton and Zavarzadeh's passage quoted above by branding it "absolutely disastrous", and describing the writers as "juveniles (who) take the remains of a once useful 1970s contribution to criticism and worry it ragged like puppies with an old sock."[4]

For those more suspicious of modern critical theory its presence in creative writing courses is catastrophic. A Masters graduate from Iowa University, the site of America's first tertiary creative writing course in 1936, was recently quoted in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* putting the view that "students often get worse on courses like these. They learn to deconstruct their work and they learn what's wrong with it. They keep hearing contradictory voices ..."[5]

Such contradictory protests and heated exchanges are indicative of the presence of a new and strange practice. This disturbance over the presence of creative writing in universities has to do with the presence of pleasure, the same pleasure I experienced when teachers told me to write whatever came into my head. This pleasure has its relations to power and to notions of what education is.

When creative writing happens in the context of a literature course its power relation to the critical essay remains unsettled over questions of whether the creative writing serves to illuminate the critical, exists in its own right as literature of a kind, is a direct attack on the legitimacy of academic essays, or constitutes itself as a hybrid – the offspring of a liaison between creative freedom and institutional slavery. This tension can be dramatised when professional writers are invited into university English departments. In *The American Writer and the University*, Ben Siegel suggests that, "What the writer inevitably attracts is his academic colleagues' envy and hostility ... the regular faculty members are reacting to what they interpret as this scribbling interloper's genial contempt and his conviction that he alone possesses a creative or imaginative mind."[6] In the American context this has not stopped writers such as Heller, Barth, Roth, Carver, Oates, Bellow and countless others from taking teaching positions at universities – and then writing scathingly about academics. Professor Bailey from Griffith University points to similar tensions in Australia as universities amalgamate with campuses that have a more vocational and commercial emphasis: "Some academics have problems with popular art forms and commercial success believing that commercial success and academic rigour are not appropriate bedfellows."[7]

In addition to pressures generated by these conflicts, there is the institutional imperative for teachers to arrive at assessments of creative work. Assessment becomes more problematic as the focus on the creative writing becomes more open-ended. The problem with assessment in creative writing involves again the problem of power relations between pleasure and education. Any imposed grading re-inserts the authority of the teacher and the institution while the workshopping processes favoured in creative writing courses tend to offer some 'author-ity' to every participant. Nick Rogers has contributed a chapter to *Teaching Creative Writing*,[8] a recent and unique British-American publication, where he explains some of his workshop exercises.

Rogers divides exercises into those aimed at developing technical competence and those which aim to develop what he calls

'material' for writing. Examples of the latter are: pick a partner and tell a story of a significant experience from your past, or write fast and continuously for five minutes. Though presented as a practical strategy, this division between technical and inspirational exercises appears to bring the workshop into line with a traditional humanist model for literature – the Romantic notion of the author as an origin for what is creative in the text. This need not be the case, of course, because after the event, that is, after the production of these open-ended texts, their relations to genre conventions, sexual politics, historical assumptions, mythic patterns, narrative principles, codes of character construction, etc. can be exposed for discussion. Perhaps demystifying notions of inspiration can be accomplished more powerfully in the context of the workshop than through critical commentary – but to claim this is to promote creative writing as a kind of Trojan Writing about to occupy the offices of critical researchers.

IN ANY CASE, exposing the inspirational jottings of workshoppers as sexist, racist, bourgeois, or simply historically located does not constitute an assessment. How *are* the more personal, more open-ended, more exciting, and more humbling productions of creative writers to be assessed? Indeed, how do they survive the normalising pressures insolved in passing a university course? And how do they survive the relatively public glare of the workshop?

One answer is that they do survive. Students are queueing to do it, apparently confident that their creativity can be assessed. Melbourne University English Department is turning away fifty per cent of applicants to its second and third year creative writing program. Overseas, in a 1985 survey for the National Endowment for the Arts, twenty-five per cent of American adults reported they believed they wrote fiction or poetry.[9] The relatively new Victorian Writers' Centre in Melbourne has more than 1000 members who want, most of all, a program of creative writing workshops. In reflecting on forty years of teaching creative writing at American universities Theodore Weiss has observed an 'eruption' of poetry-writing beginning in the sixties and continuing to the present in prodigious proportions. A typical poetry competition in the United States is likely to receive as many as 1600 book-length manuscripts.[10] As editor of the small press literary magazine, *Going Down Swinging*, I have experienced an eruption of poetry writing over the past five years to the point where we receive somewhere between five and seven thousand unsolicited poems a year. Recently the small literary magazine, *SCARP*, promoted a New Poets Program, seeking manuscripts for six small chapbooks. Sixty manuscripts were submitted.

One way of understanding this apparently burgeoning phenomenon of creative writing and the confidence that it can be assessed, is to place it within the power relations of the modern state as a late extension of the use of the technology of the confessional. Foucault has pointed to the confessional as a technique of power characteristic to modern society.[11] We are rewarded, professionalised, flattered, punished, and controlled by submitting to the compulsion to tell the truth about ourselves. This is one of the ways we construct ourselves in submission to the myriad systems of surveillance crucial to the organisation of a modern society. We do our truth-telling to doctors, lawyers, police, counsellors, teachers, parents, lovers, social workers – and, I suggest, to readers. Fiction writers know that what they are doing is making the most private and the most individual experiences public. It should not be surprising that many people want to write like this.

Creative Writing at universities helps further legitimise this manifestation of the technology of the confessional by offering itself as a reward to those who have gained university entrance, and by offering the reward of high grades to those who can please their teachers with their revelations.[12]

But in order to have the subject work effectively teachers must move away from authority and control in the workshops, and allow the free production of writing and flow of responses around a writing group. Just as Pierre Rivière undermined contemporary scientific accounts of his crime of parricide when he documented his own experience,[13] the creative writing process has the potential to highlight the disruptive distinctiveness of each person's relations to norms.

I am arguing that students are attracted to creative writing because it is involved in a process of control we are familiar with in modern society. At the same time it promises enough freedom, or looseness, in the movement of power relations for subversive and unexpected outcomes to emerge.

This experience can become part of the historical struggle for subjects to find ways to construct themselves outside, or to the side of, those objects our culture tends to venerate:

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?[14]

Going beyond that object, 'literature', creative writing involves literature in the modern flow of power relations central to our experience and construction of ourselves. Creative writing is irresistible.

This understanding of creative writing's place in the play of power relations might help us understand its present attraction, and even its apparent importance to an academy which wishes to remain 'relevant' (for 'relevant' we might understand, 'connected to the real flow of power in society'), but we are still faced with the question of whether the assessment of such work in an educational setting is a technical matter, an esoteric judgement made by experts, or a subjective reaction. Is this the moment when the author steps back into view – the "real writer" as Foucault says, "that someone" as Barthes says – and reminds us that the worth of any writing can only be judged by the length and depth of the silence that comes after the reading of it?

ENDNOTES:

1. Comments made at a seminar entitled, 'The Future of Creative Writing', held at Melbourne University in the English Department, 3 June, 1992.
2. A. Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art*, London: 1967: 11.
3. M. Zavarzadeh and D. Morton, eds. *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change*, urbana: University of Illinois, 1991: 17.
4. Unpublished letter to AWP Newsletter, undated (January, 1990?).
5. Morag Preston, 'Creative Tension' *Times Higher Education Supplement*, May 6, 1994: 18.
6. Ben Siegel, ed. *The American Writer and the University*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989: 9.
7. Professor Julie Bailey,"They come out of college and they won't sweep floors ..." *Campus Review*, Nov. 4-10, 1993: 10-11. The full text of this talk is published as 'Griffith University Inaugural Professorial lecture:"They come out of College and they won't sweep floors": What is the future for film and media education?' Professor Julie James Bailey, Queensland; Griffith University, 1993.
8. Moira Monteith and Robert Miles, eds., *Teaching Creative Writing*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992.
9. Janet Burroway, 'The American experience' in *Teaching Creative Writing*: 63.
10. Theodore Weiss, 'A personal view: poetry, pedagogy, and per-versities' in *The American Writer and the University*: 158.
11. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, London: Allen Lane, 1979 (1976): 63.
12. These revelations do not have to be literally autobiographical, but the tone of the confessional is often not far away. Watch the current bizarre television show, *Man O Man*, for another manifestation/mutation of public truth-telling. When each man is forced to find an answer to a sexually provocative question from one of the all female audience, he must come up with something that sounds truthful, is entertaining, perhaps equally as shocking as the question, original enough not to be predictable, and politically correct. This segment is in effect a miniature creative writing workshop. Someone suggested the *Oprah Winfrey* shows are more stunning examples of the compulsion to entertain (with) the truth.
13. Michel Foucault, ed., *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother* ... transl. F. Jellinek, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982 (1973).
14. Michel Foucault, in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin, 1984: 350.

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BRUCE PASCOE

The Richly Tailored Philanthropist

OUR CULTURE IS NOT being pilloried at the post of post modernism but by the writers and artists of the comfortable left. These hail from Kings School, Geelong Grammar and Methodist Ladies College as well as Glenroy and Parramatta High.

The style of the period, whether it be renaissance, modernism, post-modernism or post-carnalism, is neither here nor there, it is the philosophy of those who create it which conjures the environment.

The adoption by western culture of Freudian views of philosophy and human aspiration ensured that this century would turn its gaze away from its navel to the more selfish and self absorbed parts of the body.

Contemporary art and writing seems immersed in the individual and the divine right of individuals to be their self-gloried selves. It is shameful and embarrassing to have concerns and commitments in art today. It is seen as a weakening of intellectual rigour to express belief. We are the age without belief, without ancestors, without responsibility for anything but our own precious art, our New Age foppishness and perhaps a dolphin or two – a beast sleek and lovely, free and intelligent – just like ourselves.

These new armchair leftists in the arts, politics and public service spring around in a thousand dollars worth of clothes and suck their pens thinking about the plight of the western suburbs. Didn't some of you come from the west? Don't some of your parents still live there? How come you're in Toorak and North Shore? More restaurants, theatres and child minding centres? Or is it just the absence of thistles, workers and the noise of second-hand cars and un-neutered dogs?

Too many of our artists and arts administrators seem too comfortably situated with the left of politics – or the party that used to represent the left of politics. This chumminess has created whole areas of correctness which artists seem reluctant to challenge. While it is fashionable to sneer at communism and its crumbling states, how can we rationalise the concept of twelve per cent permanent unemployment? "This is how it's going to be" our politicians tell us and we just accept that the ideal of employment and participation in society, by all members of that society, is dead. The only thing which seems to stir us is the prospect that the rampaging underclass will steal our video. We conjure up theft, drugs and violence to urge governments to give these rascals something to do so they won't invade our suburbs – that is the suburbs on the other side of the river, harbour or lake. Pick a city in the capitalist world and there's always the *other* side.

The concept of injustice and its removal has been replaced by the

concept of selfishness and its entrenchment. Novel after novel bewails the poor child damaged by its parents. The hero of the novel spends one hundred and fifteen pages, on average, in a state of funk because daddy slapped it and mummy never listened to it – never *really* listened. This is meant to explain all inadequacy and the failure of the society itself. The individual has no responsibility for its own actions because its destiny was imprinted during potty training and when mummy smoked during pregnancy.

Ever heard of getting up off your arse!

A KNOWLEDGE OF Freud and his theories does not seem to have produced a generation of more sexually well-mannered people who molest or beat their children less. Nor has it produced a generation of more selfless parents intent on happy childhoods for their kids. A room full of educational toys and non-sex-stereotyped dolls is not going to make a happy child, nor it seems, a world less likely to shoot the shit out of each other or shoot shit up each other's arms.

It seems to me that this cool abdication of responsibility for our own actions, this Freudian fatalism, allows full rein to the ever present corruption in our hearts and the hearts of others. Stampede us with your selfishness for it has been pre-ordained.

The sneerers at the art of Noel Counihan, Frank Hardy, Olga Masters, John Morrison and Kylie Tennant have their arguments and opinions, but I wish to meet one with half the grace and generosity of any of the above. The post-modernist writer does not ask after one's mother and children whereas the old left always did. It mattered to them because people were the thing that mattered in society. If anyone could change anything for the better it was going to be the children.

The great ratbag, Frank Hardy, vilified during his life and after his death by the post-modernists, always asked after my children, whereas the same cannot be said of the smart set, the thousand-dollar costume mob. When John Morrison rings up and Lyn answers the phone that's who he talks to whereas some sisters of Saab often refuse to recognise anyone who they perceive has less power and influence over their precious art. Little do they know.

The right of politics and the arts have fun debunking the affectations of the armchair left, condemn them for the just-add-water correctness endemic in their perception of Aboriginality, homosexuality, the environment, whales, dolphins and everything cuddly, but they never attack the selfish core, because they are partners in perpetuating this philosophy of individualism and the soul as self-sufficient savant.

When the armchair left adopts a new cause and corrupts it with its indulgent breath, the right sits back and smirks and produces a Richard Court or Bronwyn Bishop to belabour the richly tailored backs, but the individualism and pragmatism is never taken to task because both sides are perpetrators of the idea of the self as sacrosanct.

The right might claim that the comfortable left's orthodoxy of no-go areas are health, education, homosexuals, but they never point the finger at Timor and Irian Jaya, for instance, because in policy on both areas left and right confirm their sybaritic support of the pragmatism of economic and military advantage. The artists in the meantime ignore the oppression and instead become passionate about disappearing primates and mammals. Man is both a primate and a mammal and in Timor and Irian Jaya many have disappeared without one pen or paint brush being raised in defiance.

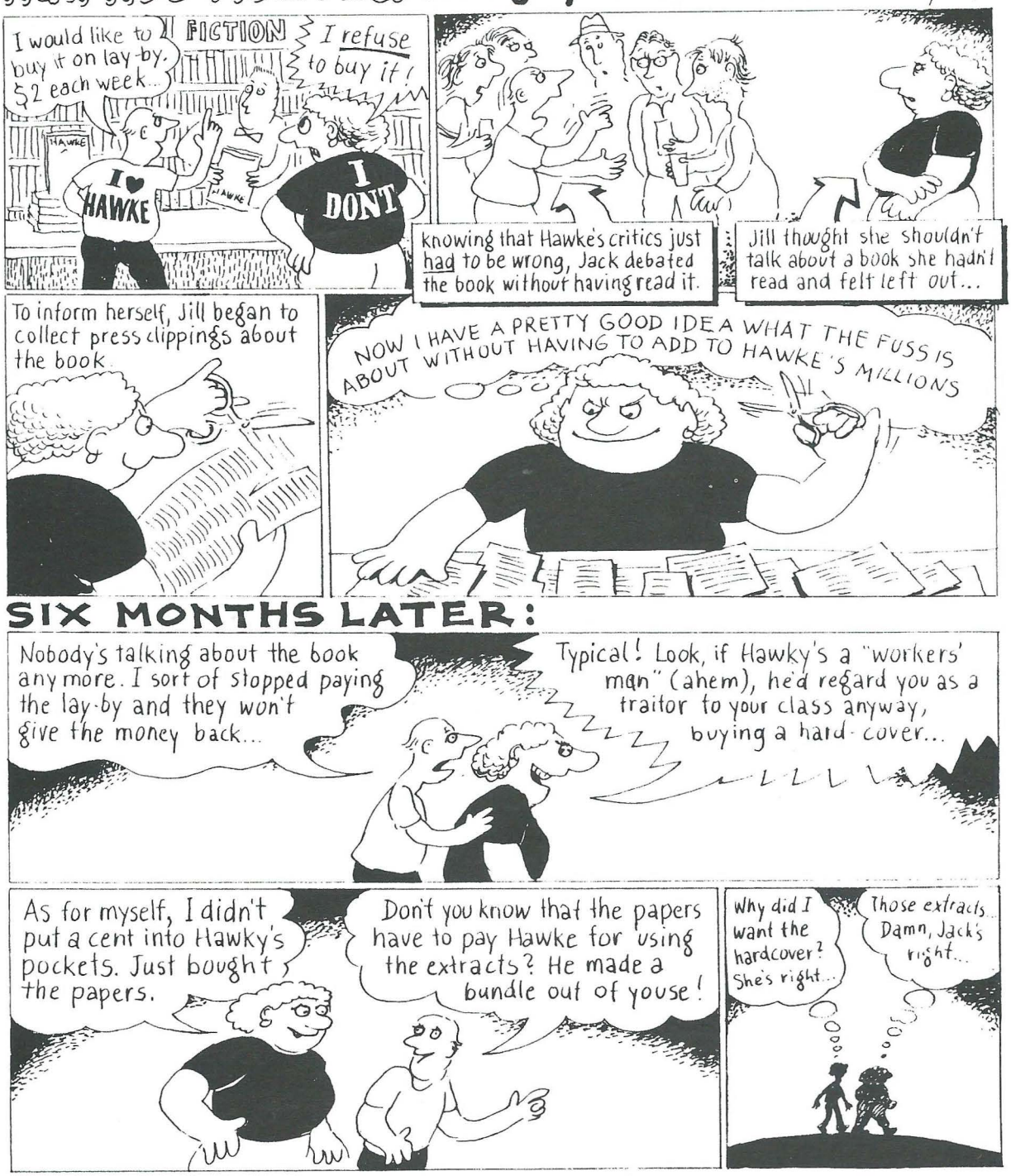
It seems that we prefer the objects of our activism to be passive and helpless rather than active participants in the progress towards justice. It is easier and currently more correct to pour a bucket of water on a stranded whale than it is to rap a Malaysian or Indonesian dictator over the knuckles with an icy pole stick, more intellectually muscular to get all worked up over ensuring that the intellectually handicapped are forced into collective household ghettos whether they like it or not, or to anguish over the rights of an HIV positive pedarist to teach primary school students, than it is to reject the notion that it is in the best interests of the nation that some thirsty and restaurant-free suburbs will have fifty per cent unemployment forever.

Fortunately there is a new breed of writer and artist in the community who eschews the facile contemplation of the nature of art, that dilettante reflection on what is real and what is not. (Any being still confused about what is real never lived in Fawkner or Liverpool or chose to forget that he did.)

And this new breed has taken commitment to their fellows to heart. Their writing and art is not centred on themselves, but struggles with the concept of justice, rather than self-fulfilment. These are the artists who will last even though many of them are black and none have ever had dinner with the richly tailored philanthropists.

Bruce Pascoe and Lyn Harwood are editors and publishers of Australian Short Stories *quarterly magazine and other publications. Bruce Pascoe's books include* Fox *(McPhee-Gribble, novel) and* Night Animals *(Penguin, short stories).*

Hawke's Memoirs. The legacy to common men. by Lofo



WARNING

I'm on the street and I'm violent on the pavement on the sidewalk
not yet in the gutter I'm full of what I need to make trouble I'm
stealthy I creep I crawl I'm quiet so you can't hear me I'm dark
I'm still so you won't see me I have weapons you should be scared of
I have time to kill time to think up ways to get you time to build
defenses I'm on the street and I'm violent I want you to know your
time is up I want you to know I'm ready I want to remind you what
I'm capable of I want to warn you
                                but I won't
I'm on the street and I'm violent and you won't see me I'm a flash of
black at night but mostly I'm still mostly I'm waiting for a chance to
make you pay I'm smaller than you my body trembles my muscles
tremble my heart races my brain is faster faster than yours
nastier than yours learning to be trickier than yours my brain speeds
runs hard grows muscles my brain and I are still in the dark
around corners behind fences we know when to hide we hold
our weapons close we're on the street and we're violent
            don't try your luck you'll lose don't push me
don't think you scare me you pushed too far you're wrong
you're bad you need to watch your back I'm on the street and
        I'm violent

SHERRYL CLARK

OMNIPOTENCE

Drawn irresistibly down to the sea,
boom of voice;
pungent surf
quarrelling through the boulders,
returning to deep denizens
of dark history,

back to turbulent past,
to omnipotent power
of God, Father, Spouse –
back to the same voice,
batter of anger
from the deep.

Prostrate upon sand
open mouth screams;
a small echo bounces
off the escarpment,
almost lost in surf and wind
and scream of gull.

PATRICIA KELSALL

SOUTH OF EASTER

The boy among us named them in the instant
of their passing:
twin streaks of camouflaged cruelty,
a roar of Yeats's terrible beauty,
coupled in their marriage of the air.

The word 'machine' could not contain
the potency of their malice in that place.
All that power, danger, speed;
all the greedy energy poured
into their gracefully rabid breasts.

In their wake, the silence was thunder,
the savage surf a whisper.
Awed, we trudged the untrodden sand,
disquieted in this quiet land.
The bush shrank into itself.

But as one, our eyes were jerked again
to a biblical arc unzipping the blue.
I felt as the three of the orient
must have felt, if only at the moment
of the sky-emblazoned retina.

The void-devouring sign was gone
quicker than belief. We shared theories,
thought of genesis, and were relieved that each
had received their vision on the wild beach.
The news spoke of a light over Eden.

ROGER G McDONALD

books

Man at Ease and Man Alone

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

David Rowbotham: *New and Selected Poems* (Penguin, $16.95).
Geoffrey Dutton: *New and Selected Poems* (Angus & Robertson, $14.95).

BORN TWO YEARS apart – Dutton in 1922 and Rowbotham in 1924 – these two poets have remained outside the Sydney-Melbourne coteries of poetry politics, just as they seem to be part of a missing generation, the one decimated in World War II.

The powerful group just before them – John Blight, John Manifold, Judith Wright, David Campbell, Douglas Stewart – had been busy defining the new energies of Australian poetry in those war years, and just after the Dutton/Rowbotham generation there emerged the self-consciously University linked poets – Buckley, Wallace-Crabbe, the early Bruce Dawe – who were to react against "too many crows in the Australian poetic landscape".

David Rowbotham, as his brief 'Note on this Selection' points out, was jolted into writing by his experiences in the Pacific War. His last poems return to those scars, which as we know never leave the body no matter how often the individual parts are replaced. As a young poet in the late 1940s he was a voice in the lyric-pastoral tradition encouraged by the Sydney *Bulletin*. The Darling Downs of southern Queensland became his first literary territory.

Geoffrey Dutton, on the other hand, was one of the Angry Penguins. Adelaide-based but nonchalant, he wore his education not as an end in itself but as part of the equipment of social and intellectual growth.

Dutton's first poems (from *Night Flight and Sunrise*, 1944) have some of the trappings of then-fashionable metaphysical conceits but what we now read is a trying-out of a more limber lyrical tone and an observant eye for surprise within the commonplace:

> So now she sat lonesome in a cafe, weeping
> On a popular song, seeing sun unfold
> No magic in the post, no mountain leaping
> From the crazy paths, yet normal killed cold.

By Dutton's second, and much praised volume, *Antipodes In Shoes* (1958) two enduring poetic strains have emerged. The first is a refinement of the metaphysical inheritance into a ready-to-hand love poetry, cousin perhaps to David Campbell's verse of this period:

> Love in action stops all actions,
> Empties minds and pockets, frees
> Even those who think they've sinned,
> Or beats by seconds such reactions.

We can now see, in this selection, how this line of development looks forward to the late sappy and celebrative lyrics. Perhaps the more far-reaching formal change in that second collection was expressed in poems such as 'Anlaby', 'The Volcano' and 'Thebarton Hall, 1955' where Dutton used a relaxed, almost discursive mode (with only a passing nod to A.D. Hope) to explore his cultural bases – which were wider and more flexible than those of David Rowbotham, but finally as obsessively based in a sense of absolute place.

In his third collection, *Flowers and Fury*, Dutton took this further in poems that now

breathe an air of relaxed yet fully alive celebration – 'A South Australian Almanac', 'Night Fishing' – while introducing poems of travel and wartime retrospect.

What is interesting to me is that all these things come together solidly in his next book, *Poems Soft and Loud* (1967). This came out at what was perhaps an unfortunate time in Australian poetry: the year before the revolution of 'the poets of 1968' and the Vietnam period of anguished reappraisal. The last thing to be sought out and praised in that frantic era was the voice of a poet writing with wit and affection about his Adelaide establishment heritage. Dutton does this wryly and with wit and insight in 'A Finished Gentleman', 'Thoughts, Home from Abroad' or the great portrait tribute of 'The Smallest Sprout', one of the enduring poems of that decade.

Reading this collection I was also delighted to return to 'An Australian Childhood' with its refrain of local place-names (much more genuinely stylish than A.D. Hope's more frequently anthologised 'Country Places'), and the once-dated now-reanimated 'For the Wry, Ironic Poets'.

The sparse gleanings, here, from his next two collections suggest that Dutton, like others of his generation, went through a period of disquiet and poetic reappraisal. 'The Stranded Whales', the first poem reprinted from *A Body of Words* of a decade later (1977) is a stunner. The anecdotal detail has here been honed into an horrifically credible social commentary. Humour, energy, quiddity, sharp observation: eschewing the trappings of grief or anger, this is one of the great elegies and was certainly seen as such in Greg Gatenby's big international volume, *Whales: A Celebration* (Canada 1983).

The new poems in this remarkably rich and enjoyable selection contain striking examples in this line of personal/social observation, most notably 'A Wreath for Anzac' and 'The Night Sir Robert Menzies Died'. The opening sequence here, 'Amico Amante in Eterno', a set of ten inventions around Byron's loves, establishes the tone: flexible, playful and ardent, they lead into the celebrative love poems with alert urbanity. It is interesting that, over time, these qualities retain their strengths while other once-fashionable poets begin to seem blotchy.

DAVID ROWBOTHAM'S career began as promisingly as Dutton's though he never had the same advantages. He was described in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* as "a prominent Queensland poet since the 1940s and a regular contributor to the *Bulletin* when Douglas Stewart was editor of the Red Page". When Stewart left that position Rowbotham was one of a number of poets (John Blight was another) who lost a regular outlet for their poetry. They probably lost, also, a critical mentor.

Rowbotham's poetry changed. It became more introverted, more gnarled too. The initial lyrical overlay faded, to be replaced by a poetry less involved with sound as a prompt than with unravelling and nudging thought into expression. In the first volumes of this new maturity, *Bungalow and Hurricane* (1967), *The Makers of the Ark* (1970) and *The Pen Of Feathers* (1971) Rowbotham moved the horizons of his thought into a world which, though re-charged through travel, was issue-based and essentially meditative.

Re-reading these poems I am reminded again of the presence of R.D. FitzGerald, a poet who has for some years now been backshelved but who has by no means been replaced by urban mannerists and reflexive punks.

Like Dutton, in the 1970s Rowbotham's poetry was disadvantaged against the new and assertive generation that produced the euphoric and self-destructive lyricism of Michael Dransfield and the filmic cut-ups of John Tranter. There were other Vietnam-and-drug mixtures going the rounds, but by the end of the 1970s John Scott and Alan Wearne were probably moving centre-stage. Wearne shares something of the introverted political sensibilities of Rowbotham of this period: both seem essentially loners, yet deeply aware of the world outside as something they must drag in and confront.

In 'Brisbane', one of his most interesting poems from *A Pen Of Feathers*, Rowbotham seems to make a rare resort to his journalist background to explore his personal unease:

> Born in 1824, by rape;
> whipped, remote-colonial, into shape
> by military British, penal-bent;
> then, martially begun,

left without the teeth to go to war.
No need, perhaps, for barrels full of rage.
But Brisbane lacked the ethical and tough.
It still repeats the meek and musket age ...
Worn-timid town assuming hometown progress,
in every history-book an outpost, or pageless,
your prison is the prisoner, he who thinks
he's power-free, where power slinks.
Still, from ship to shore
there disembark
the rats that nibble in the dark.

It is a poem written before the Bjelke-Petersen era. What that poem unveils however is a dark anger, self-directed. In some poems not reprinted in this selection that anger veers almost to spite, but it is what gives the body of new work in this selection its impressiveness:

Nuns go by as quiet as lust
and drunken men with sober eyes
sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel.
I see things that are not well.
Joy is as short as the blade of a knife.

or again:

This is the season of the overdose
and of the slaughtered pig
with the apple in its mouth for the hearty house ...
and glad tidings of great joy as just a hymn
of habit, like the bottled star of Bethlehem.

But it is in his exploration of the early war experiences that Rowbotham, like Dutton, ropes us in, not only to thought, but to understanding:

The night I heard the soldier
with the death rattle, I knew the game was up
and over – no more banter
between beds about medicinal beer
prescribed to put an edge on appetite,
to slap fat on our jungled bones ...
Never diagnosed – except
perhaps post mortem – he grew dirigibly fat
and yellow as a warning, looked at himself
and joked watch out mate that beer's a pump,
and then began to yell
Get me out of here, I want to go home,
I want Mum. Hell came down on his bravado.
As I listened it did the same to me.
Like dice from a game of ludo
the rattle stuck in his throat, and hit the whole marquee.

These two volumes do the best possible thing for the poets concerned: they force a new appraisal. If we are struck anew by the effortless skill (the book is a remarkably *enjoyable* collection to read) of Dutton's work, we are also impressed, again, by the substance and power of his major poems.

In the case of Rowbotham, the discovery is less comfortable but impressive. What this collection reveals is an individual voice that has gone its own way over the decades and which now gathers together a presence that is much greater than the sum of its parts – though there are, from the outset of his career, individual poems that have been widely anthologised.

One is the voice of a man essentially at ease in the world, who invites us to his feast, even the rich feast of age. The other is the voice of a man alone in his corner; he has allowed us to pull up a chair.

Thomas Shapcott is a widely-published novelist and poet.

Painting a Life

JIM DAVIDSON

Bernard Smith: *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* (Oxford University Press, $59.95).

BIOGRAPHY, WRITES Bernard Smith – acclaimed art historian, essayist, and autobiographer – is "the hardest of all the literary genres". The reason he advances is the elusiveness of the subject, the nigh-impossibility of bringing him to book, together with the difficulties arising from the author from trying to square his understanding of the personality with the perceptions of those who knew him best. For Smith these difficulties were modified in some ways by having a manuscript autobiography to draw on, and the fact that he had known Counihan for more than forty years. His then was the prime task of the first biographer, to set

the life down straight. Even so, the main challenge of the genre (unmentioned by Smith) remained: how to accommodate the fluctuating levels of explanation, from the trivial to the global, within a single narrative.

Smith is particularly good in recreating Counihan's early years. There is a relish to the early chapters, which are rather like a brightly-coloured mosaic; it is as though Smith, having grown up in Sydney, is formulating a variant existence, the antecedents of his own later Melbourne years. Clearly some of the energy here comes from the sideways shift he has taken from his celebrated *The Boy Adeodatus*: rather than continue with a second autobiography, his narrative of that period emerges in *Noel Counihan*. An epilogue helpfully traces the degree of convergence between their lives – Smith began as a painter, and was a member of the Communist Party – but also indicates the significant differences.

I suppose the early chapters are striking because of the varied ingredients: Counihan's unhappy family life, the conservatism of his lower middle class upbringing, his ventures into the foothills of the establishment as a choirboy at St Paul's. It was his own originality and sense of apartness which managed to integrate these worlds. Smith draws attention to the way he always stared at people – faces, rather – trying to extract their secrets; how he would habitually almost stumble along, humming, creating an imaginative zone for himself. This element of the artist in embryo is so well-handled that the reader is put in mind of White's Hurtle Duffield. Later, he is zestfully traced in his introduction to bohemia, to pubs, magazines, and new friends. Counihan finds a niche for himself as a caricaturist, and goes off with Judah Waten on country tours and then to New Zealand. Here he is so active in the cause for peace – Communists still took an anti-war position until the invasion of the Soviet Union – that the New Zealand police were hot on his trail and eventually deported him. Strong stuff; the sub-title of the book is *Artist and Revolutionary*, and the epigraph is appropriate.

The problem is that once personal integration had been achieved, and was then aligned with the CPA, a certain rigidity set in, and creeps into the narrative. The political debates are dealt with adroitly. It is also plain that Counihan's participation – even to committee level – in the World Peace Congress held in Paris in 1949 was highly important to him, perhaps one of the clearest moments of his life; but generally too much space is given to overseas visits. Similarly, reviews are reproduced perhaps too fully, given the fact that there is (intentionally) no real discussion of the works to counter-balance them.

Nevertheless, as the book progresses, Counihan emerges as a man of great strength and increasing flexibility. His letter to a young critic, urging him to be kinder to a minor painter, is as sensible as it is generous; his letter to his son Terry, urging him to fully think out his moves in resisting the draft at the time of Vietnam, nicely balances paternal concern with a respect for his son's independence. At the same time, the trial of Daniel and Sinyavsky and then the invasion of Czechoslovakia compelled him to break with the Party – and with his old friend Judah Waten, which distressed him greatly.

In addition to bringing out the stature of his friend, Bernard Smith points to the paradox: Counihan, the nuggety social realist, emerged as an artist at the very height of the Cold War. Again and again Smith shows how he paid for his cleaving to humanism, even in the face of Party members who wanted him to produce work in the style of socialist realism – i.e. triumphant socialism to the point of no realism at all. More devastating was the trendiness of American-inspired abstract art, which Counihan saw as just another means of fighting the Cold War. Critics and curators repeatedly sidelined him. For this, Bernard Smith explains, he feels he must bear some responsibility: his early identification of the artist as a 'realist' became frozen with the new conservatism. If so, then with this biography Bernard Smith has made amends splendidly.

Jim Davidson is the author of Lyrebird Rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre, *reviewed elsewhere in these pages.*

An Eye for Music?

JOHN RICKARD

Jim Davidson: *Lyrebird Rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre 1884-1962* (Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, $49.95).

MAX ERNST'S surrealist portrait of Louise Dyer (as she then was) is decorative and delicate, but reveals little of her face except for a large, centrally placed eye. It is, unmistakably, Louise's eye, "translucent and compelling, like a sea-creature blankly staring out from beneath the gentlest ripple". Not entirely blank perhaps: compelling as it is, it could also suggest a wide-eyed hunger for the world. When, in the wake of her first husband's death, Louise became romantically involved with Jeff Hanson, she gave him the portrait to hang on his Oxford wall: "it was her way of keeping an eye on him" Davidson tells us.

Louise's appetite for experience was matched by an ability to organise and activate. In more than one sense she was always keeping an eye on things. Even in Tom Roberts' lush portrait of a very poised Louise at the age of four, the eyes follow the reader around the page, sorrowfully daring you to leave her behind.

The musical career of Louise Hanson-Dyer, from Melbourne to Paris via London, is an astonishing one. Yet as the story unfolds in Jim Davidson's masterly narrative, it all seems logical enough – given Louise. Her father was the wealthy doctor and politician, L.L. Smith, a flamboyant identity in Marvellous Melbourne; Louise was the favoured first child of his second marriage. She was always interested in music, but it was her marriage to the rich, elderly widower, Jimmy Dyer, which positioned her to become a patron of Melbourne's music. She tested the water with the Old Collegians' Association of PLC, before spreading her wings in the Alliance Francaise; after the war she virtually founded the Melbourne branch of the British Music Society. In developing her style and persona she looked to Melba as a model.

Jimmy's retirement paved the way in 1927 for a world trip: he was imagining that it was to be just that, a 'trip', but Louise already nursed other ideas. Her British Music Society connections gave her an entree to the English musical scene, but it was a performance at the Newcastle cathedral of Byrd's *Great Service* which converted her to the cause of early music. It was in Paris, however, that the Dyers came to rest. She had always been attracted to French culture, but Davidson argues that the choice was an astute one, for "in France she could escape the colonial taint and simply be a foreign woman, an Englishwoman of a particularly exotic kind who nevertheless had real connections with France". She worked hard to infiltrate the Parisian cultural and musical scene. Holst wrote a song cycle for the house-warming of her art deco apartment, which was attended, among others, by James Joyce, Roussel, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc and Nadia Boulanger. Louise had, literally, arrived.

From her determination to publish in the early music field, particularly the works of Couperin, sprang Editions de L'Oiseau Lyre, which was later to complement its scholarly publications by the making of records. This remarkable, non-profit-making enterprise was sustained by the Dyer fortune back in Australia.

Louise had moulded herself as a cosmopolitan. Yet she remained, like many an expatriate, self-consciously Australian. Her life was patterned by what Davidson calls a "triangulation" of three national cultures – the French, the British and the Australian. (Was it perhaps easier, in this period at least, for a woman to achieve such a delicate balance of loyalties?) And for all the apparent elitism of her commitment to the rarified world of early music, Louise was also an ambassador-at-large for Australia and a publicist who wrote regular articles for the Melbourne *Herald*.

Louise became more formidable over the years: "some blanched when they saw her coming". Demanding that curency regulations be relaxed for her, she "banged her brolly" at Menzies and insisted that he intervene on her behalf. Menzies protested; but Louise got her way. There were times when her performance teetered on the edge of comedy. Her "risible French" and her inability to pronounce her Rs no doubt contributed to this. For the most part Davidson is tactful, but the pictures tell their own story, and Davidson cannot resist caption-

ing a photograph of Louise, gracefully posed in her flower-bedecked library, open book in hand, as "á l'Everage". Nevertheless the combination of charm and steely determination ensured that she won respect.

This is a substantial biography; the text alone runs to 475 pages. There are some dense chapters which detail the history of Oiseau-Lyre, its publications and recordings. But Davidson ensures that we never lose sight of Louise, and there are plenty of Davidsonesque touches to keep up the reader's spirits: such as the British Music Society and its "somewhat Girl Guidesy way" of styling its executive "headquarters", or how "in the mildly irresponsible way of many childless people, Louise could be quite sentimental about [babies]".

At Louise's death Davidson, having to this point studiously observed the old conventions, allows himself a biographical flight of fancy – a collage of Louise's memories which sends us whirling back from Monaco to Melbourne. Turning the page one is brought back to earth with a brief, clinical account of the subsequent history of Oiseau-Lyre, before a telling postscript, "A Pirouette on the Late Empire", in which the cultural significance of Louise's career is persuasively interpreted. One of the welcome by-products of this accomplished biography is the light it throws on Australian cultural life of this period, its impulses and its constraints. Anti-modernist Melbourne (and Menzies in particular) might well have quailed before the Ernst (Ernstine?) eye of Louise.

The book, being one of the Miegunyah Press Series, is handsomely produced with a splendid array of illustrations. My only complaint is that the glossy paper chosen for the text proves something of a hazard when reading by artificial light.

John Rickard is a member of the History Department at Monash University.

Hellfire Editor

JOHN McLAREN

Patrick Buckridge: *The Scandalous Penton: a biography of Brian Penton* (UQP, $34.95).

PATRICK BUCKRIDGE, in this biography, traces the double scandal Brian Penton was to his age – in his writing, an outrager of timid thinking and the loss of freedom it entailed, and in his life an outrage to the timidly respectable.

Buckridge traces the pattern of Penton's life to the insecurities of his childhood, where his paternity was doubtful and he was expected to fill the place of a much-loved brother tragically killed before Brian himself was born. These circumstances, Buckridge suggests, led to the later compulsive womanising and constant search for a mentor, a search satisfied early by Norman Lindsay, in his later years by Frank Packer.

These influences explain the pattern of his intellectual life, accounting for both his early libertarianism and his eventual role as scourge of the left and upholder of stern conservative politics.

Yet not the least achievement of Buckridge's study is to show a consistency between these apparent contradictions.

While Penton's libertarianism rested easily with his personal libertinism, it stemmed from a philosophic liberalism that valued the social life expressed in both conviviality and discourse but resisted attempts to warp it in the interests of sectional advantage, whether of government, business or unions.

So, as editor of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, he fought against both wartime censorship and the attempts of the Australian Journalists' Association to impose its ethical code on his paper, and finished as an opponent of all unions and most of Labor politics.

Yet earlier he had admired Evatt and Curtin, while opposing the authoritarian philistinism that such Labor members as Arthur Calwell shared with conservatives like Archie Cameron.

In retrospect, Penton's greatest legacy to Australia is his novel, *The Landtakers*, and its two successors, the second of which, due to the exigencies of Australian publishing, remains unpublished.

In these novels we see the dark side of Penton's vision, the passion with which he explored the horrors of Australian history that less honest patriots would like expunged from our memory.

These horrors, he believed, had damaged the national psyche and produced a national culture of dependence on overseas powers for both military protection and social models.

This lack of confidence was repeated at every level of national life, and would be overcome, he argued in his polemics, only when intellectuals, artists and political leaders faced the truth of the past and started to plan a future within an international community freed from parochial interests and sectional protection.

Although Penton's ideas for postwar Australia were not adopted, they curiously anticipate the current debates about how we can maintain a national independence while still participating fully in a global polity and economy. Unlike today's media managers, he believed that his role as editor was to create a popular paper that would make these issues plain to its readers and engage them in the debate on their resolution.

This places Penton between those proprietors and editors who saw their papers as agents in their crusades for their particular causes, and the present generation who have no principle except profit and will go to any extreme in pandering to their readers' prejudices in order to gain it.

Penton, by contrast, believed passionately in the role of the popular newspaper as a means of public education and in the function of the press as an instrument of democracy. Not the least value of this biography is to remind us of the potential that these unfashionable ideals still have, and by implication of the price we are paying for their neglect in both public policy and private interest.

Buckridge recovers Penton from the contradictory legends his life generated, and shows the consistency not only between his life, his art and his profession, but also between the apparent contradictions of his conservatism and his radicalism, his nationalism and his idealist internationalism. He shows him as a man of his own time who still merits thoughtful attention in our present.

Yet no emphasis on Penton's intellectual achievements should be allowed to obscure the power of the personality that lay behind them. This is perhaps best summed up in the quotation with which Buckridge concludes the main part of his text:

> When he died, an old sub, Jack Wise, said of him, "I reckon he's editing the Hellfire Gazette now." He may well have been. If he was, I reckon it would have been a bloody good paper, active voice and all.

To this, Buckridge adds a postscript. When Penton was, literally, on his death-bed, his financial editor brought him the script of a leader by Frank Packer to see if he could suggest any improvement. Penton was barely conscious, so the editor left the script by his bed. When he returned, Penton was completely unconscious, and the script lay where it had been left. But the first sentence had been changed. It now read: "The Australian pound is bleeding to death." The passion, the energy and the directness sum up Penton's life.

On the Boundary for Six

CHRIS MANSELL

Jennifer Maiden: *Acoustic Shadow* (Penguin, $16.95).
Lauren Williams: *The Sad Anthropologist* (Five Islands Press, $11.95).
Jan Owen: *Night Rainbows* (William Heinemann Australia, $14.95).
Dorothy Hewett: *Peninsula* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $16.95).
Kathleen Stewart: *Snow* (William Heinemann Australia, $14.95).
Jill Jones: *Flagging Down Time* (Five Islands Press, $12.95).

ON THE LANDSCAPE of contemporary Australian poetry there are few minds as interesting and challenging as Jennifer Maiden's. From the earliest book *Tactics* where (even in the title) the sensuous is entwined with the intellectual, to *Acoustic Shadow* Maiden keeps the reader on the back foot, surprising with an

eclectic but not necessarily fashionable intellectualism which probably serves to marginalise the work for readers who are not fond of ideas. Okay, we're fond of ideas sometimes, provided they come in no more than pairs, and have a nice ironic spin so we can get out of any intellectual complications (or commitments) which might arise.

But Maiden is not a smartarse. Perfectly capable of wit, stylish and controlled, her work overall commits one of the big sins against Australian Poetry – she cares. (*Engage* blips up from another decade.)

Acoustic Shadow has a cooler, less complex surface perhaps than some of her earlier work, but has gained her a maturity which enables her to mix Chomsky, chaos theory, and the Gulf War (all right, so *some* of her themes aren't fashionable) in a single short poem and actually to say something. Maiden can do irony, but it isn't essential to the work.

Lauren Williams' work in *The Sad Anthropologist* is also political – she is engaged with the world outside herself – but not like an old-style anthropologist. This one involves herself in the world in which she is observing, and if the anthropologist is sad she also has a bite to her words which comes from the poet's performance. Most of these words are (literally I think) made to perform, cut down, with an easy diction and uncluttered surface. It's easy to be glib in performance, especially if you're good (as Williams is).

Anything, almost, can be overcome with a canny inflection, an arched eyebrow and a knowing air (Who *hasn't* yet tried to read out bits of the yellow pages in various poets' styles?) What is interesting here is that Williams makes the transition from performance – the decorum of performance, if you like, where it's almost mandatory to keep it simple, keep it smart – to an elegant on-the-page lyricism of which even the likes of Robert Gray would approve. Williams will be one to look out for.

In fact, you could imagine Jan Owens and Lauren Williams having much in common, though Owens' breath is longer and her subject matter, in general, more detached. What delights most in *Night Rainbows* is Owens' 'Impersonations'. Here she shows off her technical skills, impersonating John Tranter, Andrew Taylor, Kate Llewellyn, John Forbes, John A. Scott, and Jennifer Maiden (though for the record, I think she misunderstands Maiden, but then, I would). They are only eight or nine pages out of seventy-one, but they influence the reading of the rest.

Once you have read them and been impressed by them there's a lingering doubt about the rest of the book. It's about then that you remember that all art is artifice, but it makes you uneasy, like a good actor friend might make you uneasy. If they're so good at faking it how can you ever feel you're being told the truth? (Or 'truth'.) This is not a negative criticism of Owens' work by any means, but it raises the question of (Truth in Sentencing! my NSW head calls out from the back of the room – is the canny unconscious calling the poem a prison?) authenticity in contemporary poetry.

IT'S THE QUESTION we have to come back to time and again – what is poetry for? I know it is a question which has been around for a long time, but in the world of millenniarianism and electronic whizzbangs is the artful phrasing of one or two sentences something to be encouraged? What are we actually looking for in a poem? (None of this is fashionable, of course, but people who dismiss the question do so because they have no answer.) Whatever the answer is, it is nevertheless true that you feel the poets genuinely present behind the poems, and there are times when it is just this question which is there with Owens. ("The pen of your aunt is locked/*dans le bureau de Louis Quartorze.*"

There can be no denying that Dorothy Hewett is there in *Peninsula* (of course there can be doubt, she's as artistically wiley as they come) and I was glad to see this book winning prizes. The epigraph, from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, "Out and out one went further and further until at last one seemed to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone over the sea.", not only prefigures the content but also the singular stylistic detachment.

She goes from the short-lined, short-breathed (dare I say it? North American-style, meant for slow reading and significant line breaks) poems to a longer, stronger, feistier Hewett, briefly, briefly in 'The upside down sonnets', then back into the shorter-lined slower-tongued style, although now less-engaged, and less personal.

For Hewett, the personal really is the arena of the political and once out of there the poet seems less interested, less balanced precariously above the water, until returning to the end in the section called 'The Last Peninsula': "I die and the lost womb/and the last light/and the dark mystery/between the thighs/goes with me".

There will be those who very much like Kathleen Stewart's *Snow*, but for me it is undeveloped. Whereas Hewett and Williams in particular can make a short line sing with resonance without losing any of its clarity, Stewart sometimes has a rhetorical archness through which there is occasionally a cannily artless line or two that can retrieve the poem: "I am giving birth to some idea/knowing you don't like babies."

Of all these collections, Jill Jones' *Flagging Down Time* has a sensibility and rhythms most like that of a novelist – although much of her work deals with the large and, at the same time, the personal. The title should, I think, be taken more or less literally. She is interested in time, in space, the sky, planets – or more specifically herself in relation to them. This too is unfashionable, although rooted in widely political consciousness which is becoming more and more essential. From 'Eleven Fifteen, 6': "I never realised how wide streets in the world can be,/made for triumphs, revolutions, fire and sorrow,/but also room for life in public – broad, voluble/ under trees at tables, so much lived in the open/ (except for the secret police, but even they keep moving ...". *Flagging Down Time* is uneven – but who cares – there's challenge enough as it is.

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Poetry as History, Craft and Revolution

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

Elizabeth Riddell: *The Difficult Island* (Molonglo Press, $33 by subscription only).
Manfred Jurgensen: *Shadows of Utopia* (University of Central Queensland Press, $29.95).
Kevin Gilbert: *The Blackside* (Hyland House, $14.95).
Kevin Gilbert: *Black from the Edge* (Hyland House, $24.95).

IN *THE DIFFICULT ISLAND* Elizabeth Riddell aims for a miscellaneous collection of well-made poems. 'The walker' is determined not to look back. 'Unwelcome' evokes political paranoia that may not be paranoia at all. In 'Two Spains' the poet casts a cold eye on life and death in twentieth-century Spain. 'The Dream' is a witty black and white dream about Patrick White. 'Bluebeard' dramatises Bluebeard's choice of women and *their* choice of him:

> Should you meet a women who stares beyond
> your shoulders
> at nothing, she is Bluebeard's. Her eyes slip
> away from yours
> and her hand, and her thoughts slip away
> to the staircase with stair rods made of jade

Unfortunately, not all of Riddell's poems work. Some teach. Some lose focus. Some *tell* rather than *show*. Others such as 'A report on birds' contain unnecessary lines while still others such as 'Maps' are lists rather than poems. Lists should be left to performance poetry.

Manfred Jurgensen's *Shadows of Utopia* isn't well-made; it's massively constructed. Nor is it trendy. Even allowing for Rex Ingamells and James McAuley, the work is unique in Australian poetry. This extraordinarily ambitious 140 (large) page poetic history consists of fifteen historical cantos, Cynthia Breusch's fine commissioned paintings and a wide range of poetic modes that, unlike the basic data of the cantos, are placed centre page and stage.

Most of each canto comprises short (usually verbless) phrases in the long lines of a detailed

historical mosaic. Inevitably some is awkward and much is difficult to follow, despite a few 'epigrams' such as "world capitals of capital". Out of this mosaic, but contrasting with it aesthetically, come the various modes of poems that may be melodious or rhetorical but are nevertheless easy to read. Two-dimensional figures become three-dimensional. Because of the poem's structure, the reader doesn't automatically believe that the poet has selected the main voices and may want to know why other voices haven't broken into lullaby or monologue. For example, Aborigines are heard clearly. Then why not women?

This raises the idea of issue of the passive and the active in history – whether both are determined, whether the passive are oppressed without knowing, whether both categories are historians' constructs and whether or not these categories imply the right historical questions. No matter how exhausting or how accessible various modes of rendering history may be, none can be more important than the totality.

The Blackside (1990) and to a lesser extent the posthumous *Black from the Edge* reveal Kevin Gilbert as *the* most revolutionary Aboriginal writer. Revolutionary writing is always paradoxical. Win and you've nothing more to say; lose and you'd always believed in a lost cause. Gilbert won and lost. He was morally right but outnumbered. After the High Court's Mabo decision and the Commonwealth Government's Native Title Act, the poet's threat of black violence in the 1970s and 1980s should be seen in the following ways. It was both black morale building – a natural crescendo just before major politico-legal reform – and an index of personal frustration. Historians may use him as evidence of one stage of black consciousness, while anthologists may look at his less revolutionary poetry.

While acknowledging the strictness of tribal laws, Gilbert nevertheless celebrated tribal life. His earlier but occasional identification with the land became the main theme of his last book. He combined expressions of love for his partner with increasing self-abnegation when looking at all aspects of nature. Through the land and its living forms he gained a sense of oneness with the universe – Aboriginal spiritual belief that subsumed Christianity. The quality of 'Tree' in *The Blackside* and 'Unity' in his last book is surpassed perhaps only by 'Until you learn' (also in his last book):

> until you hear the singing trees
> the crooning earth
> the living dreams
> until you hear
> the throb of blood
> inside a stone
> I cannot bring you home.

Although Gilbert didn't find black women closer to the earth than black men, he did empathise with black women. They made the better political activists. Moreover he admired the fortitude of individual black women, elegising an unrecognised national heroine:

> Today I visited Alice
> our Alice
> Alice so loving and brave
> the gum-trees were whispering
> Alice is here now
> as I dropped a waratah
> a red waratah
> her own waratah
> on her grave.

Indeed it was black *women* who relaxed him into most of his more humorous poems such as 'Birth Control for Blacks' and 'Suburban Heroine'.

Unfortunately, a Tennysonian tone became too frequent in the poet's last book when he addressed multinationals, nuclear war and the evolutionary stage of the human race. Not his best work. Fortunately, he still managed to write the poignant 'Year of the Black Child': 'we try again / we lose / again / we bleed / we laugh / we try and laugh / away / the hate / we cannot / understand.'

Eleanor Williams' sophisticated color photography in *Black from the Edge* is a loving tribute to Gilbert. Even so, I suspect that he might have preferred their own black and white documentary photographs in *The Blackside*. One photograph shows a bitumen road passing an official roadsign that reads: 'POISONED WATER HOLES CK'.

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War, Hell and the Other

JOHN HANRAHAN

John Bryson: *To the Death, Amic* (Viking, $29.95).
Lily Brett: *Just Like That* (Macmillan, $29.95).
Steven Carroll: *Momoko* (McPhee Gribble, $14.95).

BARCELONA BECOMES a central character in John Bryson's novel about the Spanish Civil War. The story is told by Enric, who looks back on his war-scorched boyhood in the thirties, lived cheekily and dangerously with his twin brother, Josep.

By focusing on one family, Bryson deftly conveys the horrors of civil war, one of the most poisonous fruits of civilisation. Enric's mother is pious; with "cunning" she spirits her twins off to mass, and looks to the Virgin Mother and sons, the bishops, for guidance. This means that, however unwillingly, she is singing hymns not only with but to Franco, and his mates, Hitler and Mussolini.

Enric's father, "secretary of an anarchist union", fights, deviously, for the Republic with Basques and Socialists of every shade of pink and red. Some welcome the late intervention of "dependable", "genial" Joseph Stalin. As one character remarks, "the question is, who is loyal?" "Suspicion infected us, a fever." "Cunning was the currency of the times and I had displayed it."

Bryson deftly re-creates a conflict once illustrious for the International Brigade, "our famous comrades, the foreigners, Hemingway, Spender, Auden, Naruda, Guillen, Dos Passos, Malraux ..." The convincing sense of embattlement grows, as in the words of Enric's father, "now we are fighting each other".

Enric announces at the beginning that he was "born into a golden age of valour". At the end he declares, "I forsake forgiveness of my enemies and embrace hatred everlasting". For all the declarations of passion, my one reservation about this finely-crafted novel is that Enric's voice is curiously passionless, formal, distanced. Bryson's writing is precise and observant, but rather stiff with emotional detachment.

Lily Brett's novel is in some ways also about the thirties and forties and certainly does not suffer from emotional detachment. The main setting is contemporary New York, where Esther Zepler has moved from Australia with her artist husband.

Esther's main preoccupations in life are the Holocaust, survived by her parents, and herself. Here lie the two central problems of the novel. In subsuming the Holocaust experience into her own, Esther runs the risk of diminishing the reality of some of the greatest suffering and injustice in human history.

Esther herself is an unrepentant solipsist and unfortunately there are no sunset clauses in a solipsist's contract with the self. Esther is fascinated with everything about herself, literally from top to bottom, from her headaches to her shit. She professes herself uneasy with the American super-rich, and then drools in detail about the luxuries of a stretch limousine. It is stretching the imagination to find irony in the writing.

Fortunately, Esther is visited by her father, Edek. He appears more frequently as the novel progresses and saves it from its tedium. Brett's writing takes off when she writes about Edek. He is a wonderfully memorable character, funny, sad, an authentically original voice, a man who rises above the horror of sufferings behind him.

Whereas Brett is diffuse and often tedious in her narrative, over-indulging her very considerable talents, Steven Carroll is spare and powerfully economical. Allen 'Spin' Bowler, an academic retired from Melbourne University, is confronted with his past through a chance meeting with an American he had known slightly in Tokyo after World War II.

Because of his knowledge of Japanese, Spin had first worked in London as an interpreter and translator at the beginning of the war. Here he had one meeting with Momoko, the daughter of a Japanese diplomat. When he is transferred to Japan at the end of the war, he meets her again.

John Bryson describes a world at war. Steven Carroll convincingly creates the aftermath of war. He focuses on Momoko, whose physical world had been destroyed and occupied by the conqueror and whose emotional life runs the risk of dying from weariness and denial. "I've

been tired for years", she tells Spin.

Spin, disciple of F. R. Leavis, a believer in salvation – 'Sweetness and Light' – through literature, a lover of Japanese culture, finds himself confronted, in "a defeated, occupied city", with another great tradition when he strides through Tokyo, the male conqueror, gun on hip.

Momoko is subtitled *A Novel of Betrayal*. I am not sure about the wisdom of this subtitle. Even though Carroll invokes the figures of Iago and Othello, I wonder if the crooked path to betrayal isn't taken too quickly to be entirely convincing.

But when betrayal does come, Carroll writes with a powerful control and an understated, emotional force that left me moved, shocked, even devastated. These scenes will long rewind themselves through my memory in a way sharp writing with emotional integrity always does.

"War is hell", said Audie Murphy. "Hell is others", said another distinguished philosopher, Sartre. Each of these three novels confronts, in its own different way, war, hell and the other.

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"Girls don't go to University"

JUNE FACTOR

Gillian Bouras: *Aphrodite and the Others* (McPhee Gribble, $14.95).

OURS IS A LITERATURE rich in tales of migration, with characters (and sometimes their authors) voyaging back and forth between the 'new' land and the old, once nostalgically and determinedly called 'home'. For close to a century and a half after European settlement, 'home' for many with money, connections or cultural ambitions meant somewhere in Britain or Ireland.

We remember the tormented Richard Mahoney, our archetypal rootless nineteenth-century antihero, travelling with increasing desperation, each return 'home' an undermining of memory and hope, every renewal of Australian life a moment of urgent optimism followed by disappointment and disillusion. We know the calmer comings and goings of Boyd's Anglo-Australians, poised with seeming ease in a social class which permitted allegiance to culture and character rather than geography.

Henry Lawson's barely-fictionalised stories of New Zealand rural life suggest a different perspective: an Australian abroad, "green, soft, and poetical ... [with] a literary ambition" ('A Daughter of Maoriland'), unwilling to give up his romantic notion of foreigners but gradually alienated by those very characteristics of difference he first thought exotic and appealing.

In the almost one hundred years since the appearance of 'A Daughter of Maoriland', and especially in the years since World War II, there has been a steady publication of writing centred on migration. More exactly, on *immigration*. In fiction, autobiography and memoir, and to a lesser extent in poetry and drama, the experience of settlement in Australia, common to all non-indigenous Australians either directly or from family memory, weaves a threnody through our literature.

In 1986, Gillian Bouras' first book, *A Foreign Wife*, focused readers' attention on Australian *emigration*. A young, middle-class Melbourne woman marries a Greek immigrant; they live in suburbia, produce two sons, acquire "a house, a mortgage, a Volvo, private education for the boys, and a hectic life-style". Then they visit Greece for holidays, and ultimately settle in the husband's small village in the mountains of the Peloponnese.

A Foreign Wife, an autobiography written with modesty and grace, an intimate and beguilingly frank examination of the pleasures and the pain of cultural, national and linguistic change, ends on an optimistic note: "People are the same, in spite of the apparent differences." That book has done very well in Australia. It has been welcomed for its subject matter (both exotic and familiar), its easy elegance, and, I think, because of its cautious but positive espousal of the commonality of human experience.

Gillian Bouras' second book, *A Fair Exchange*, was published in 1991. It is part family history, part social history, and a large part rumination on the complexities and ambiguities of her native tongue, Australian English, and her adopted, still awkward second tongue, Greek. Although laced with wry humour, a feature of Bouras' writing, this is a denser, more sombre book than its predecessor.

Bouras' most recent book, *Aphrodite and the*

Others (1994) is focused once again on the experience of emigration, but its tone and complexity suggest a sea-change in the author. The voice of the admiring traveller and the more-or-less happily resettled wife, mother and daughter-in-law has been transmuted into something darker, more critical, less pliant. Bouras' determined but unsuccessful struggle to accommodate to her illiterate, confident and disapproving mother-in-law – a constant in this as in the earlier books –is recognised as a lost battle at the very beginning of *Aphrodite and the Others*: "Two women: Aphrodite and Gillian, who are also Yiayia [grandmother] and my self ... for what seems like an eternity, and is in fact at least twelve years, everything came back to Yiayia and me, to the tensions between us, to the fact that we loved the same people, to the fact that we resented each other deeply, to her certainties, to my uncertainties, to our irreconcilable differ ences ... Hers is the triumph ... And mine is the defeat, for, try as I might, and I did try, I could not be what she and others wanted, could not become what her world demanded as a right."

So this is not a book about a 'triumphant journey' of successful emigration and resettlement. The knots which mark out the book's chapters and sub-sections look decorative, a mimicry of Greek folk art, perhaps. They are symmetrical, suggesting balance and order. But Bouras writes of a village culture rooted in hardship, danger, isolation, intolerance. Calamitous and unpredictable events are like boulders in the collective landscape of memory. The lives of the people of Kalamata are no more orderly or balanced than those of introspective, analytical, sometimes sceptical outsiders, including Aphrodite's foreign daughter-in-law. Ignore the illustrative decorations to this book: they mislead.

What Aphrodite and those like her possess, which Bouras alternately envies and rejects, is certainty. There are traditions – of family, worship, work – which until recently were carried from generation to generation in the memory and faith of such small, relatively isolated communities. Even when memory fails with age, she is sustained by habit, routine: "Now that memory, that precious storehouse of the oral/illiterate person, is failing, it is still the routine which is followed and recalled. Births, deaths, people and events are more often than not confused, but the habit of work never is. Nor are the habits of leisure: the church and gossip."

Gillian Bouras, "divided by almost every conceivable factor, gap and chasm" from her mother-in-law, has written her biography. One built from stories into stories, from questions impatiently answered to speculation and reflection, from moments of observed or recollected drama to reading and reverie. It is an interweaving of folk tales with literary texts, the personal voice with historical narrative. Tenses change, perspective alters, but we hardly notice. This is a cunningly constructed work, integrating modes of writing conventionally kept separate. Even the slabs of less digestible formal history and theory do not seriously mar the overall effect.

Bouras has a fine ear for conversation and a quick eye for absurdity, including her own. Some of the most engaging passages in the book are brief vignettes of everyday life:

> Alexander is eight. One Sunday afternoon he and I watch the film *Cromwell* on television.
>
> "Is this a true story?" he wants to know.
>
> "It certainly is," I reply somewhat ruefully.
>
> "How do you know?"
>
> "I learned about it at university."
>
> "No, you didn't."
>
> I would have been half flattened, I reflect, had I contradicted my parents in such a fashion. "What do you mean?"
>
> "You didn't go to university."
>
> "Of course I did."
>
> "No, you didn't."
>
> "*Why* do you say that?" Not only is this conversation becoming ridiculous, but I am becoming exasperated.
>
> "Because girls don't go to university."
>
> I gasp and almost literally fight for breath.
>
> "*This* girl did," I reply grimly, once capable of speech.

Best of all are those moments when Bouras frees herself from the appendages of history and memoir writing and dares to imagine the old woman's life from the inside. For this reader, the most memorable segment of this fine book is the

Epilogue. Now it is Aphrodite whose consciousness is central. As she lies dying the threads of her life are joined and loosened. And it is in the "colour of mud" eyes of the author, the *nifi*, the out-of-place daughter-in-law, that she "sees herself clearly ... clearly and easily". She who never owned a mirror. It is the writer who makes it possible to "let the rope snap, let the final string go". It is a bold writer who dedicates her book to the still-living Aphrodite – "whether she likes it or not" – and then dares to imagine such an ending.

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Crown Placebo

JUDITH ARMSTRONG

John Hirst: *A Republican Manifesto* (Oxford University Press, $16.95).

David Headon, James Warden & Bill Gammage (Eds): *Crown or Country: The Traditions of Australian Republicanism* (Allen and Unwin, $24.95).

AS AGNES HELLER HAS written, "There is no cultural self-identity without history." But she admits that many European nations tend to focus their attention so exclusively on the preservation of the past that their perspective virtually constitutes an admission of defeat. In this country the past must be seen as the source of inspiration for a leap into the future – a leap based on cumulative knowledge, new technological know-how, a vision of the possible and a dream of what may be beyond us.

In actuality, the dynamic nature of the social process means that societies are always in a constant state of unresolved tension between the two poles of stability and change – the retention of the past and the accommodation of the new. In times when change for whatever reason is particularly pressing, that tension is dramatically heightened. If Australia has now reached a critical point in the definition of her own identity, it is no accident that this moment coincides with the turn of the century and the advance of a new millennium. We should be grateful to the republican movement for providing a focus for the arbitrary but deeply human conviction that the end of the nineteen hundreds will demand not just a New Year, but a New Age, resolution. The New Millennium's Eve party will no doubt glitter with the flare of a million fireworks, and ring with the shriek of a thousand hooters, but it may also require a huge birthday cake decorated with a great silver key. For as parties go, it should be a double-bunger – a coming-of-age celebration as well.

Whether it will be, depends entirely on whether or not we have, by then, grown up. That is, whether we will have finally cut the umbilical cord that tied us to the Mother Queen. To do this of course may leave some of us feeling like abandoned children. Again, it is no coincidence that *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, the most recent novel of one of our most prestigious writers, deals with the theme of abandonment. Writers are mouthpieces and prophets, and Peter Carey speaks for us all whether he means to or not. For we have already seen the mother-figure withdraw in order to pursue new liaisons; we have watched Britain join Europe, leaving a Commonwealth good only for Games. We older ones experience betrayal every time we are obliged to enter through the Aliens gate at Heathrow Airport. Under circumstances as traumatic as these, a shocked child may well turn to a sufficiently reliable surrogate – such as the United States; or it may try to strike out on its own amongst the neighbourhood kids, in this case the nearby Asian countries. Especially if it feels it can match their street wisdom with its own 'better' education, instilled by the once-loving parents.

Of course the more Mother consorts with new bedfellows, the more anxious the child becomes to throw off her influence, to establish its own independence and relate principally to its peers. But no child should try to undo, ignore, or repress its past; it can only learn to grow up and make its own friends with its peers, and even its parents, so long as it is no longer in a state of dependency. Then, thankfully, the two can meet as near equals and the sons will not be sacrificed to their parents' battles; as John Hirst puts in a different metaphor, Australia can stop being a footnote to the history of the British Empire.

Whether or not it is because she now prefers

Brussells lace to merino wool, Queen Elizabeth II, as Hirst makes clear, has no wish to keep us in leading-strings, nor occupy "a royalist redoubt in a republican Australia". She does not want to revive the imperial honours system, and has told the Prime Minister that in the issue of republicanism she will be guided by the wishes of the people. In other words, she intends to remain as aloof as when she refused to intervene in the 1975 crisis. This is no doubt a discreet move, if her necessary support of the Common Agricultural Policy, both publicly and on her own farms, represents a policy so damaging to our own agricultural exports that Hirst can label her one of the enemies of rural Australia.

Queen-bashing, though, is not the real point of Hirst's book, nor of its companion piece, which consists of a number of short essays, mostly by academics, plus a few other republican poppies. Two of the more sophisticated points made by, respectively, Helen Irving and Alistair Davidson, remind us that the constitution that we have to change is only an artefact of our previous imperial and sovereign identity, and that the *res publica* uses a plethora of affect-laden languages and discourses which problematise the issue of consent amongst its citizens.

Davidson's contribution is an intellectual rephrasing of the practical questions which shuttle around between the parameters of minimal and maximal republicanism: how do we establish that we want a republic; what would be the powers of the President; and how would we choose that person? As to the first, Hirst is not afraid to go to the people, despite the record of No votes in previous referenda, and the outrageous treatment of our constitution in 1898. Sent back once for amendment by the people of New South Wales, it was finally supported by all the people in all the colonies – only to be high-handedly tampered with by the British Colonial Office in order to protect the interests of British investors by giving greater opportunity for appeals from Australian courts to the Privy Council in London.

Thankfully we have made enough progress since then to be sure that the new republican referendum will not have to endure such indignity; it will not even be put to Australians until there is strong public support, both Liberal and Labor, state and national. But referenda have to pose clear and concise questions if they are to encourage unequivocal responses. There will be no room on the voting paper for the complex issues of constitutional law and history that underlie the decisions about how far we want to go; on that day the republic will resemble a pregnancy. So it will behove us to have done some prior homework if we are going to cast any kind of informed vote; it will be well to have read at least these two books, plus the best the opposition has so far produced, Alan Atkinson's *The Muddle Headed Republic*. That is a matter of Fair Play and Listening to Both Sides of the Case, even if Hirst does, however generously, demolish Atkinson.

We could also look at Stuart Macintyre's essay on how to move from the minimalist to the maximalist position, so that, more than just removing the monarchical forms from the Constitution, we try to develop some enthusiasm for our own civic traditions, as well as greater respect for those of Aborigines and migrants.

As to the vexed question of how to go about choosing our replacement monarch, Hirst is refreshingly sceptical of a popular election, since that is the method most guaranteed to end up with a politician, or someone endorsed by a political party. That possibility, according to the researchers, is the most feared outcome of all. He therefore goes for Sir Rupert Hamer's model: a person clear of politics to be chosen by say twenty eminent Australians and endorsed by a two-thirds vote of the parliament. How to select the twenty? Well, apart from the obvious notables like the Chief Justice and the Speakers from the various parliaments, the rest could be chosen by lot from amongst the Officers and Companions of the Order of Australia. (The Officers have to be included because there are more women in their ranks.) It is a relief that the people are not the sole arbiters of this issue, since they have shown themselves capable in one of our states of electing someone who prefers racing-car exhaust fumes to the positive ions given off by lake-water and whose judgement is disastrous even of musicals.

Hirst and Hamer, on the other hand, may be capable of producing for us the means of electing a states-man or -woman who in turn will provide the wisdom and guidance that we

rather immature adults may be grown up enough to admit we need. It will be therefore a paradoxical coming of age; but we shall not be able to celebrate it unless we have already opted for a republic, a consummation for which – like the millennium – we can hardly wait.

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Fountains of Passion

GWYN DOW

Jennifer Gribble: *Christina Stead* (Oxford University Press, $18.95).

ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE years ago Stephen Murray-Smith, to the horror of the psychologists on the staff of Melbourne's Faculty of Education, pioneered a (Dip.Ed.) course on Literature and Education. In supporting him I was introduced to Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*, one of the main works he chose for study. What truths and insights did he expect Stead to reveal? Jennifer Gribble, of course, asks that very question in her recent book on Stead in the Oxford series on Australian writers; but since then the question has become much more complicated – not because Stead wrote more prolifically after 1970 than before, but because, as a quick glance at Gribble's bibliography will show, it has become increasingly fashionable to write critical and biographical works on Stead. To cut through so much sometimes contradictory material, and to emerge with an unfashionably clear, elegant and judicious thesis in 120 small pages is a masterly achievement – a measure of which is how enjoyable a task it presented to this reader.

Gribble's study points to Stead's "delight in a texture of narratives that circulate around each other [which] might be seen to anticipate post modernism's rejection of narrative as rational and explanatory. But for Stead, to narrate was to discover and affirm meaning". Her express belief was in the paramountcy of passion in her characters – "fountains of passion", as she expressed it to one interviewer in 1935. Gribble elaborates. Stead, she writes, allows her characters' "creative and destructive energy to shape her plots": she sees love as "a means of discovery and self-discovery", "devouring and self-devouring", its urgencies ranging from "predatory hungers to barely conscious manipulativeness" – a perfect description, surely, not only of the famous Sam Pollitt in *The Man Who Loved Children* but also of Nellie Cotter, justly described by Gribble as "one of Stead's most terrible creations [who, while] shaping the socialist struggle in the light of [her] own ego [is] Stead's most powerful embodiment of the corruption of domestic nurture, 'mothering and maundering' over those she purports to save, selling out on the class struggle and her youthful political ideas".

For those readers old enough to remember the Depression and the growth of Nazism in the thirties, the War, the swing to the Left most notably in England's Welfare State, and then the backlash of the Cold War and McCarthyism in the USA, reading Stead is a sentimental political journey – a journey that she portrays sensitively and with brilliant insight. It is interesting that she still speaks eloquently to younger readers – to the Jennifer Gribbles and the Hazel Rowleys. To generalise from two such penetrating and perceptive scholars would indeed be folly; but it gives an indication that Stead's creative and revelatory powers can illuminate the past. This says a great deal about Stead and it may give heart to those who still courageously value the study of history.

Gribble forgives the fault that many readers (including me) find in Stead's sometimes excessively detailed explication by explaining it as a "cinematographic" technique, an "accretion of small scenes" that seem "piecemeal and cumulative", but that catch "the stream of experience as it flows". Yet, despite Stead's intoxicating writing, she sometimes comes close to nagging. In the works I have read (and, unlike Gribble, I certainly haven't read everything she has published) this occurs most notably in *House of all Nations* and *I'm Dying Laughing*. Each is the exploration of an obsession – the first the lust for gold, the second an excessively lusty, if lovable, egotism. Both are fine books. The first, as Gribble affirms, while witty, shows a "prodigious mastery of banking techniques". There is indeed a great deal of writing that is supremely funny and beautifully lyrical, yet, for me, some

of the detail becomes tedious.

In a quite different way much of Emily Howard's maddening raving in *I'm Dying Laughing, nearly* made me give up. In both cases it could be interpreted as a sort of onomatopoeic device – not exactly the sound suggesting the sense but, rather, the reader feeling an artfully devised sharing of the irritation the characters unwittingly cause. Randall Jarrell shared something of this doubt, I suspect, in his laudatory preface to *The Man Who Loved Children*, an appraisal that Gribble approves. Her assessment of *I'm Dying Laughing*, which she writes as the epilogue, is 'purer' Gribble than her treatment of Stead's other books, for it was published in 1986, three years after Stead's death, ten years after her last novel, and far fewer critics had to be taken into account.

Gribble observes that the later novels become increasingly "frenetic" and dark: the characters become more destructive and self-destructive. *I'm Dying Laughing* is, to use Gribble's term, indeed "self-revelatory" as its main character, the writer Emily Howard, progresses from vibrant eccentricity and arresting vivacity to ego-mania and finally to madness. It is impossible to do justice to Stead's brilliant irony in this brief account – irony encapsulated in the clever title of the book.

There is a thread of politics in all Stead's writing; but, as Gribble points out, the "target of Stead's satire in *House of All Nations* is in the end not ideology, but the human nature that creates it" – and that, I think, Gribble would extend to most of Stead's political satire. She suggests that Stead's satirical edge may be the "expression of a wilful ego", and this would seem to be a just description of, for example, *Cotter's England* and its central character, the "most terrible" Nellie. Emily, by contrast, is "a flawed and generous personality", whose "laughter is the physical manifestation of her 'immense energy', tempering despair". True.

Perhaps it is also arguable that *I'm Dying Laughing* expresses a love of life – "that 'pushing into life' Nietzsche finds in the Dionysian energy of Greek tragedy" from which we acquire "a hard-won serenity" for we are "not turned to stone". Gribble concludes, "Stead's powerfully disturbing art has this serenity too".

But these small Gribble/quibbles don't detract from the respect and illumination that this book engenders. At the end, as Gribble affirms of Stead's writing, "there is always the recognition that life is 'indestructibly joyful and powerful' ", and she has presented Stead to us in a way that leads us towards her own powerful and erudite appreciation of so talented a writer.

Gwyn Dow is a Melbourne historian and writer.

The World of Australian Spooks

ROWAN CAHILL

Frank Cain: *The Australian Security Intelligence Organization: An Unofficial History* (Spectrum Publications, $19.95).

David McKnight: *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* (Allen & Unwin, $24.95).

SINCE 1949 THE civilian Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has been a part of Australian life.

Created to make Australia acceptable to the western defence alliance, and the US in particular, ASIO's brief was to guard Australia against subversion, sabotage and espionage. In practice this meant aiming at the home front in an attempt to ferret out 'subversion' coming from the ranks of the Communist Party of Australia, the militant trade unions, and, as the Cold War progressed, from amongst all those people politically anywhere to the left of the Liberal Party.

ASIO also adopted a thought-police role, its cultural 'watchdog' activities having been recently detailed by Fiona Capp (*Writers Defiled*, 1993). Its history, workings and track record protected by special legislation, D-Notices silencing the press and the thirty-year rule governing the release of Commonwealth records, ASIO was able to operate with impunity.

Gradually the iron curtain of secrecy surrounding ASIO was prised open. This was a twenty-year process; contributing factors were Attorney General Lionel Murphy's 'raid' on ASIO headquarters (1973), the Hope Royal Commission into intelligence and security (1974-77), the bold and courageous activities of the Committee for the Abolition of Political Police (CAPP) during the 1970s (and its valuable book

Rooted in Secrecy, 1982), the emergence of researchers interested in clandestine matters and adept at patient archival detective work, and gradual access to information through the thirty-year rule.

Research into the world of Australian spooks is no simple task. Australian spooks do not flaunt their profession; nor have they gone public in the ways of former US and British spooks. Requests for access to archival material can drag on for months. When, and if, access is granted the material is censored in the interests of national security, even when that material relates to matters well over thirty years in the past. Amongst researchers there is considerable frustration. It is obvious too that for unexplained reasons some researchers get access to material more easily than others.

Two new books shed considerable light on the secret world of ASIO. Journalist David McKnight's *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* occupies a hinterland between investigative journalism and academia; Frank Cain's *ASIO: An Unofficial History* is very much a critical institutional history, its author an academic specialising in political history and intelligence studies.

Both authors cover similar territory. ASIO emerges as a quasi military outfit, confidently snooping through the decades, trampling on civil liberties, harassing hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians, compiling millions of dossiers, engaging in legal and illegal activities from phone taps to break-ins, single mindedly waging a war against the Australian left and small 'l' liberals right through to the 1980s. Its most recent public foray was the farcical Combe-Ivanov affair.

McKnight's book is the product of five years of research, interviews with thirty-three former ASIO officers, and court action against ASIO to gain access to material the organisation wanted to eliminate from public scrutiny. The result is a very readable book documenting much that has, up until now, only been suspected. Indeed McKnight takes your breath away with some of his revelations; no matter what one thought ASIO was up to in the years since 1949, its preparedness and ability to get away with almost anything in the execution of its brief is mind-boggling and frightening.

This book documents plans by ASIO and the Menzies government to intern some 10,000 citizens during the Cold War; reveals links between ASIO and the right wing of the NSW Labor Party, the NCC, and right-wing intellectuals; exposes ASIO's use of journalists and select politicians; shows the extent of the use of phone taps, bugs, informers, and the infiltration of organisations; details the confrontations between ASIO and all Federal Labor governments; describes in detail ASIO campaigns against the 1960s-70s student, anti-war, and Aboriginal land rights movements. And much more. It is a very detailed and specific book.

Cain's volume is briefer and not as detailed. He did not have the same access to documents and interviews as did McKnight. But this is no reason to marginalise the book as some commentators have.

There are significant differences between the two books. For example, McKnight treats the Petrov Affair with a reverence similar to that accorded it by the right-wing intellectual Robert Manne (*The Petrov Affair – Politics and Espionage*, 1987). Cain does not, and in three chapters presents a perceptive critique and analysis of the affair's origins and processes. McKnight tends to support the ASIO contention that there was a Cold War Soviet spy ring recruited from amongst left-wing Australians; Cain in his analysis is convincingly contemptuous of the notion.

A major difference between the two books is that McKnight begins his study in post-1945 Australia, while Cain the historian analyses ASIO in the context of an Australian political surveillance tradition from 1914 onwards. As Cain points out, ASIO began its life with extensive files, data, networks and personnel from that tradition. It was a tradition with a military cast of mind and a political leaning that during the 1920s and 30s moved it to expend more energy hounding leftists and leftist 'conspiracies' than it did investigating the burgeoning private right-wing armies and varieties of fascists that were a feature of Australian life between the wars.

Both authors suggest that with the Cold War over, ASIO today is largely a spent force, though Cain concedes a role for the organisation in combating international crime and economic threats

to Australia – providing it can mobilise in this direction. The weight of both books however suggests to me that ASIO still has considerable life. While both authors document the role of Labor governments since the Whitlam years in attempting to curb the free reign ASIO enjoyed prior to 1972, McKnight points out that regulations in place are flawed and with a modicum of spook initiative can be circumvented. Ironically, under post-1972 Labor governments the budget and size of ASIO have increased while its organisation has been streamlined. Cain makes the point that western intelligence organisations form a close, secret, interlocking 'brotherhood', virtually immune to national attempts to impose tighter government controls and institute accountability processes.

McKnight tries to assure his readers that on today's domestic front ASIO is a benign outfit concerned with the violent and racist right. There must be a hell of a lot of dangerous right-wingers to require an ASIO complement of 700 staff and an annual budget of about forty million dollars! As for outsiders knowing what ASIO is up to, both authors acknowledge it is still very much a closed shop. And so far as history is concerned, in practice ASIO does not conform to the thirty-year rule despite Parliamentary recommendations to the contrary.

Rowan Cahill is a labour historian currently working on a biography of Rupert Lockwood.

An Unusual Australian Hero

ROBIN GERSTER

Sue Ebury: *Weary: The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop* (Viking, $45.00).

A BIOGRAPHY OF Sir Edward Dunlop, especially one approved by the man, intimidates the reviewer. Sue Ebury's monumental *Weary* 'is' the towering figure of the Burma-Siam Railway in official literary form. Indisputably courageous, caring, charismatic – who'd want to lay a glove on Weary Dunlop?

Dunlop himself was uncomfortable with the public adulation heaped on him after the remarkable public response to *War Diaries*, published in 1986; Ebury writes that he "shrank inwardly" from the glare of publicity. Yet, driven by the ideal of service that motivated his entire working life, he continued to serve as the living embodiment of a tragic slice of Australian history, supporting countless charities, funds and organisations. In so doing, he was turned – or allowed himself to be turned – into a sort of professional Australian hero. Never having felt the need to "huddle together with the prisoners-of-war", he was, by the end, "fed up with war stuff".

In his declining years Dunlop also complained about being continually presented as "an object". In death, he has become just that. Statues are being planned; in the society pages of the Sunday newspapers his son and pregnant daughter-in-law pose before his portrait to announce the expected birth of his grandchild, with the daughter-in-law reportedly saying that the place of conception was "at the River Kwai Village Resort in a room looking over the river", within marching distance of Hellfire Pass, the site where his ashes were scattered.

Happily, Sue Ebury's biography avoids the crass overkill that customarily greets the popular commemoration of national heroes. This zealously researched biography presents a frankly admiring, but not especially sycophantic view of Dunlop – comparisons with Ulysses and Christ notwithstanding.

But of course Weary Dunlop is an unusual Australia hero. The national war myth is fundamentally premised on the assertion of a specifically *male* virtuosity, on the belief that Australians are bigger, braver and better on the battlefield than the soldiers of other countries. Great killers, in other words. But Weary – the POW medico who never shot a man in anger – was a healer, a nurterer of life rather than a destroyer of it. These are qualities more feminine than those usually associated with the Anzac tradition.

Perhaps Ebury is aware of Dunlop's ambiguity as an Australian hero, as she goes to some lengths to describe the wild streak which co-existed with his capacity for gentleness. Like the larrikin hell-raisers of Australian military legend, Dunlop was somewhat short-tempered and belligerent, a big drinker with "a flair for attracting hell-bent company". We see Weary

getting himself in and out of various scrapes, walloping some hapless fellahin in a hostile Arab village in Gaza (to the horror of his Jewish driver) or beating up the maitre d' in a ritzy hotel in Cairo.

Ebury, however, has the good sense not to try to remake Dunlop into some sort of archetypal 'Digger'. When, near the end of her book, she notes that his life "spanned the reigns of four monarchs" she not only expresses her own sentimental Anglophilia but sets appropriate parameters for an essentially obsolete colonial figure.

Born into a conservative and God-fearing family in rural Victoria, Dunlop came to shed the fundamentalist Christianity of his upbringing but not the political conservatism. At Melbourne University in the early 1930s he was actively anti-Red, violently disrupting a Labour Club debate in company with some boxing and rowing hearties. Later, in a Javan POW camp, he rejected as futile "communism" the suggestion of a British officer (the traveller and author Laurens van der Post) that the officers pool their money for the general good.

As an old man Dunlop publicly romanticised the rural Australia of his youth as a golden age. In private, though, he had little sympathy with that world, shuddering at its "shabby confinement". Lacking "family feeling", he kept his relations at a distance once he had flown the coop. More broadly, Dunlop was an approachable but private man who, according to those who worked with him in the post-war period, "did not give out a great deal". Such revelations, as Ebury herself implies, sit oddly with the man's richly deserved reputation as a great humanitarian.

"They never ask the right questions", Dunlop said in 1991 of an ABC documentary of his life. The same might be argued about this posthumous biography; Ebury, indeed, scarcely ventures a question at all. This is a pity, as Dunlop's story is of significance to the story of twentieth-century Australian culture itself. It is that of an ambitious state school boy who made (and did) good, the 'outsider' who became an 'insider', a member of the Melbourne Club (put up in 1949 by his friend Lord Casey) who became the living embodiment of Anglo-Celtic Australia's most hallowed tradition.

Nevertheless, for all these reservations, Ebury must be applauded not only for the rigour and tact of her research, but for hitting absolutely the right note in summarising Dunlop's life – no easy task in the biography of a man so lavishly lionised. Dunlop, she observes, "worked hard for a living; and inspired a nation". Not a bad epitaph, that.

Robin Gerster is the author of Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing *and co-author of* Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia. *He is a lecturer in the English Department at Monash University.*

Seaweed on Gardens and Speakers for the House

PAM SKUTENKO

Susan Hawthorne & Renate Klein, (eds): *Australia For Women* (Spinifex Press, $29.95).

ELIZABETH JOLLY'S father liked " ... a splendid view" and this is what the editors give us in their selections for *Australia For Women*: a " ... guide to travellers ... with an introduction to ... [non-mainstream] Australian culture ..." As a whole the collection has the feel, if not the spare eloquence, of June Mill's words at The Book Fair: " ... paint me, dance me, sing me all you fellas – I am a sacred site."

The editors keep their word. In Jan Teagle Kapetas' traveller's room in Darwin " ... the liquid fragrance [of frangipani] wafts through ... the hot darkness" and Kate Llewellyn saw a moon rainbow where the water of her coral reefs felt "like melted warm ice". Now this is a soothing distance for me from top-end heroes who educate crocodiles to eat people by teasing them to the side of a boat with strangled chooks.

The collection also excites me with its essence of diversity which I know in women's sensory and intellectual experience. There are images which shock my imaginative mind when Terry Whitebeach draws "blowflies [which] drank my sweat" and then Lisa Bellear's almost poignantly gentle faith in her people seems to live on her breath:

... our ancestors are yarning and laughing
at this Koorie woman
... saying, tidda girl
you're okay ...

"An ancient grandmother" who hates housework speaks with cryptic irony of a female emu's rearing strategy and the daughter of the man who made Sydney's first spring rolls delivers to me her simple delight when "guttering took the rainwater away from the roof" of the house. Jocelynne Scutt chills with a police report and Portia Robinson and Diane Bell's articles chopped at least a month off the research for my current book.

But I need to tell you I fell about, gawked and cried, and transplanting my leeks in the clean winter sunshine some time later, felt other women's experience still stuck to my skin from the eternal moments in photographs lurking among the articles. If all you do is travel the landscape of the editors' selection from this country's women, you could be satisfied enough.

Now a word about the editors' process of selection. Recently, Robyn Archer told an interviewer she no longer included indigenous causes in her repertoire because the people have their own voices today. They are here in this book as clearly as those of women who are saying in other places that they do not want us to speak for them about their culture. I don't know how we solve the dilemma of non-indigenous women who have worked in the academic pursuit of a knowledge we thought may have been lost without their help. Perhaps the *kurinpi* women would say we must talk about that among ourselves, it is *our* story, for has Robyn Archer not made the sort of decision we insist should apply to our own men?

Pam Skutenko's research in Education at La Trobe University used a psychoanalytic framework to analyse traditional reconstructions of human evolution and the representation of women in science documentary film. During the 1980s she was a strong activist in the campaign against Reproductive Technologies. She is working on her second novel.

Piously Bellicose Clergy

JOHN HANRAHAN

Val Noone: *Disturbing the War: Melbourne Catholics and Vietnam* (Spectrum, $29.95).

VAL NOONE'S compelling account of Melbourne Catholic involvement in the peace movement is also a history of the disgrace of Australia's participation in the Vietnam War.

Noone shows clearly that almost to a man (women need not apply), the Catholic Bishops supported both involvement in the war and the sending of unwilling conscripts overseas to fight it.

The cover photo shows Archbishop Mannix and B. A. Santamaria welcoming President Diem to 'Raheen' in Kew. Other clergy, including bishops, are not mentioned in Noone's caption, though they are prominent enough in the photo. They didn't matter much.

Santamaria matters very much to Noone's thesis. While Santamaria has always argued that he is following Church authority, it is a moot point, in the years after Mannix's death in 1963, who was playing the fiddle among Australian Catholics while Americans burned the harvests off Vietnamese fields and the flesh off Vietnamese civilians. Certainly Santamaria, during the sixties, along with the National Civic Council and the DLP (the Unholy Trinity), played a powerful – and gruesome – part in Australian political life.

Pro-war Catholics argued for a "just war", believed in the "Invasion from the North" and "Vietnam request for help" lies, were ignorant of Catholic support for the Revolution in both the North and the South and believed most stories about "Communist persecution of Catholics".

While Pope Paul VI proclaimed his "absolute neutrality in Vietnam", subordinates like Bishop Fox had no such hesitations. Fox raged like a warlike papal bull among the chinaware at first communion breakfasts. For much of the time people like Fox and particularly Santamaria had the support of the Catholic newspapers, *Advocate* and *Tribune*, and the NCC organ, *News Weekly*. Though Noone's figures on this issue are incon-

sistent, the combined circulation of these journals (in the sixties) must have been about 50,000.

Cross to the *Catholic Worker*, an unofficial magazine run by laity. In June 1965, it sold 3065 copies. But after some internal struggles, it became a strong voice for the Catholic peace movement. Noone makes a convincing case for its importance, along with that of such groups as the Pax movement.

Of course there were many other movements outside the Church which Noone acknowledges (the students' movement, the women's movement, trade union activity). There were also the speech and actions of people overseas, like the Americans, the Berrigan brothers and longtime activist Dorothy Day, a special hero to Noone and many others. In Melbourne a few priests like Dennis Kenny and Ron Marstin spoke out, but the rest of the clergy were generally piously bellicose. Noone convicts the Church of what he calls "social sin", a communal failure to follow the gospels in matters of truth, charity and justice.

Much Catholic leadership came from people like Paul and Marie Ormonde and Max Charlesworth. And of course from Arthur Calwell, generally spurned by the clergy but undyingly loyal to his Catholicism.

Noone himself worked as a priest from the mid-sixties and gives the story of how he became heavily involved in the peace movement. He has some interesting stories to tell. His friend and fellow priest Garry McLoughlin had the pulpit microphone grabbed from him by his parish priest while McLoughlin was preaching about peace.

There is no doubt that Noone makes his case that even according to its own teachings the official Catholic Church in Australia failed pathetically during the Vietnam War. "In this view, the role of blind anti-communism, and early on, racism, in preparing for and supporting the war can be seen as rendering to Caesar, in this case the American Empire, of things that are God's, in this case innocent lives, reason and conscience."

This book began life as a thesis and still waits for full resurrection. A second edition could do with a substantial re-write. It is presented in the form of heavily-documented narrative history enhanced by personal anecdote. In a chapter called "Signs of the times, 1969-1972" Noone notes an "appropriate point to conclude this book". He is right but takes no notice of his own words and goes on for almost another hundred pages.

The last quarter of the book is tedious. Noone has made the election of Whitlam the climax of the book, and then goes back over the old ground, sometimes expanding, but often repeating himself. In the last fifty pages he often writes as if he has not read the book he is presently writing.

A restructured version of this important book would give it the wider readership it deserves. For the record, I note that I was left with the impression that the late Vincent Buckley remained opposed to the peace movement. This is not so. Buckley certainly joined the marchers in 1970.

John Hanrahan is a much-published novelist and reviewer living in Melbourne.

Unravelling the Riddle of H.V. Evatt?

PHILLIP DEERY

Peter Crockett: *Evatt: A Life* (Oxford University Press, $44.95).

IN ONE OF THE FIRST reviews of this book, Peter Ryan drew a parallel between Evatt and Stalin: like Stalin this antipodean totalitarian was "an authentic monster" who contaminated all that he touched. This is an exaggerated and one-dimensional assessment that bypasses the profound contradictions in Evatt's character. More apposite to Evatt is Churchill's description of Russia under Stalin: an enigma wrapped up in a mystery.

How, indeed, do we come to terms with a man who, according to Manning Clark, "carried the image of Christ in his heart" but who, around that same heart, stuffed newspapers underneath his shirt to keep out the heat with the result that strange crackling sounds mystified dignitaries when they greeted him? How do we juggle his erudite contributions as political historian, legal scholar and High Court judge, with such child-like fear of flying that he took fishing lines in case the plane should crash into

the sea and food be needed? How do we reconcile the greatness of his international accomplishments at the 1945 San Francisco Conference which framed the UN Charter with Paul Hasluck's judgement that in diplomacy Evatt acted like a small boy who threw stones at street lamps merely because they were bright? How do we explain his sustained repression of 'Inky' Stephenson's ineffectual Australia First Movement in the early 1940s alongside his passionate defence of the Communist Party's legality in the early 1950s?

Peter Crockett's method of unravelling 'the Doc's' complexities in *Evatt: A Life* is to blend character into career, and mix psychological interpretation with historical narrative. Crockett comes from that school of biographers that sees illumination of the private 'inner life' as an indispensable means of understanding public behaviour. This can lead to opinion being disguised as fact. Indicative are the questionable assertions that Evatt "aligned subconscious preoccupations with issues he thought were marked by conservative oppression" or "Like that of his mother, his inquisitive, prying nature was a distasteful facet of a generally intense curiosity."

More importantly, Crockett's methodology determines the book's unusual structure. By discarding the customary chronological framework and by focusing on themes central to Evatt's character, the biography often criss-crosses through time and place. Chapter 11, for example, travels from San Francisco in 1945 to the High Court in Australia 1950 for a discussion on the Communist Party Dissolution Act and then back to Washington for a wartime mission in 1942. Crockett's rationale for this novel arrangement appears to lie in the belief that if issues are relevant to Evatt's character, then their exposition should not be constrained by chronology.

This is a laudable objective insofar as it reveals how particular facets of Evatt's complex personality affected his immense commitment to public life. But revelation is achieved at the cost of readability. On the one hand, in ways none of the other three Evatt biographies has done, Crockett convinces the reader of his subject's recurring character deficiencies. Throughout his life and in a range of contexts Evatt was supremely egotistical, suspicious, capricious, insecure, obsessive, erratic, bullying, duplicitous (the list of frailties could go on). But on the other hand, the reader gains little sense of a life unfolding over time, as lives do, in a roughly sequential order.

The demands this preoccupation with theme and character makes must be weighed up against the fresh insight it provides. For example the perpetual tension between Evatt's libertarian and authoritarian instincts is persuasively explained by Evatt's perverse and often contradictory character. Although he detested oppression he paradoxically required it in order to demonstrate his libertarian credentials. His idealism was expressed more fully when out of power than in office. So we find him a more ardent defender of civil liberties as Opposition Leader than as Attorney General, when he wielded freely the authoritarian stick.

Where the demands of the book become excessive is in the writing style. A firm editorial pen was needed to transform cumbersome and convoluted sentences into crisp, clear prose. A typical example occurs during Crockett's discussion of the important influence on Evatt's thinking of the English socialist, William Morris: "Evatt's displeasure at life misshapen by specialisation invited his admiration for the variety of Morris's pursuits, while anxiety for the well-being of a ravaged culture sharpened in both men a disillusionment with technology. They understandably sought a return to past ages, and if a particularised or impractical attraction to the arts signified elitism, an adherence to political equality mitigated their exclusivity."

If such stylistic deficiencies were rare, to criticise would be churlish. But, at the least, the effect of this and a great many other similarly-written passages is to distance the reader from the subject. It makes the book a chore not a pleasure to read. It also contributes to a sense that empathy is absent. Crockett interprets, dissects and analyses Evatt's mind but never wears his shoes. We are left curiously remote from a life so volatile and so full of drama.

Evatt: A Life is an imaginative, extensively researched but over-written exploration of 'the Doc's' larger-than-life career in relation to his flawed character. The conception surpasses the execution. Despite Crockett's final, generous assessment that he was "an unappreciated

visionary" the overwhelming weight of evidence provided in this biography draws one irresistibly back to Stalin. The words of Lenin seem peculiarly apt for Evatt: in his 'Political Will' he recommended that Stalin be displaced as CPSU general secretary by someone "more patient, more loyal, more tolerant and less capricious". As Crockett's portrait makes abundantly clear, Lenin would not have chosen Evatt as Stalin's replacement.

Phillip Deery lectures in History at Victoria University of Technology

A Brilliant Career

DOROTHY HEWETT

Jill Roe: *My Congenials: Miles Franklin & Friends In Letters*, Vol. 1 1879-1938, Vol. 2 1939-1954 (Angus & Robertson, $19.95 each).

AS PROLIFIC LETTER writers and the keepers of the family story in journals and diaries the early women immigrants have illuminated many shadowy corners of Australian history. Now it is the women writers' turn.

As Good As A Yarn With You, edited by Carole Ferrier, introduced the fascinating correspondence of that extraordinary group of women writers who came into prominence in the thirties. This two-volume collection of letters, edited by Jill Roe, spotlights one of them: the gifted, rebellious, difficult patriot, Stella Miles Franklin.

It was the great era of letter writing and Miles Franklin, describing herself in old age as "surrounded by mobs of letters" was responsible for at least eight thousand of them. What a huge job of dedicated scholarship the collating of these letters must have been.

They begin in 1877 at Brindabella when Franklin was only seven, ten years before she wrote *My Brilliant Career*. They end sixteen days before her death in Sydney in 1954. "Writing is an affliction worse than TB for TB can be cured", she complains to Pixie O'Harris, and to Dymphna Cusack three months earlier: "The only panic angle which may arrest the hydrogen bomb is the delightful suggestion that it can render men sterile at long range."

An ardent nationalist and pacifist through two world wars, a dedicated feminist in an age that saw women "as wood and water joeys", she found much to complain about. Her bush childhood and early years as pupil governess, nurse and domestic gave her first-hand experience of the world of "women's work". The decade in Chicago as secretary to The National Women's Trade Union League educated her as a life-long socialist and feminist. "Life there", she wrote, "enveloped me in my most vigorous years." But like many of her contemporaries she was often racist, bigoted and ungenerous towards those she saw as rivals. (e.g. H.H. Richardson, Marjorie Barnard, the young Ruth Park.) Towards her "congenials", those she approved of, she was always fiercely supportive.

Her attitudes towards her own writing were just as mercurial, veering violently between self congratulation, insecurity, despair and an almost pathological secrecy (e.g. the novels written under the lifelong pseudonym Brent of Bin Bin). In one of her last letters written to Marjorie Pizer she recalls the heroes of her youth: Lawson, Furphy and A.G. Stephens. "He (Lawson) used to look at me with his soft eagle eyes & assert that I was a greater writer than he. Also Furphy. And AGS used to say in a sardonic way that I was a genius & he only a parasitic critic. It embarrassed me as flattery then & as I matured I thought it had been the attitude of middle-aged men to a young female. I have never gained self confidence & my writing fills me with a sense of tortured failure." It is her passionately held convictions, sometimes radical, sometimes embarrassingly prejudiced, and her almost painful honesty, that give Franklin's letters the unmistakable quality of life.

After nearly thirty years abroad she returned to an Australia that disappointed and often enraged her, a country very different from the one she had loved and depicted in her early work. "To the east, amid wild hop scrub and stringybarks, a bridle track threads its way to the crisp main road to Goulburn and on and on to Sydney, where the sea tracks lead on to the world."

She had experienced that world and then come home to a narrow parochial Sydney suburb where the only daughter's responsibility was to look after an increasingly difficult and

unsympathetic mother. But she still worked tirelessly for her vision of Australia in the Fellowship of Australian Writers and in the novels written under her own name and Brent of Bin Bin. Smeared as a red in the cold war, often lonely and ill, she kept on writing to the end, making jam, listening to 'Blue Hills' and corresponding with many of the well known feminists, literary and public figures of the day, her congenials scattered around the globe.

Laughter not for a Cage, a critical book on the Australian novel, *Childhood in Brindabella* and two Brent of Bin Bin novels were published posthumously.

Biographers, she said, added a new dimension to her fear of death. She needn't have worried. Her letters tell her own story, one as dramatic and immediate as *My Brilliant Career* and *All That Swagger*. They bring home to us how much we have lost now that the telephone has replaced the letter as an easy means of communication.

When I think of so many of Katherine Prichard's papers burnt after her death at her own request, of so much of the correspondence of the famous and the unknown gone up in smoke, I want to protest at this mistaken passion for cleaning out the cupboards.

Miles destroyed a few of her love letters but left the bulk of her papers to the Mitchell Library; one hundred and fifty-five volumes of personal, general and family correspondence plus ten volumes of mainly business letters. Because of her generosity and her eye for posterity we can still read these marvellously fresh and cantankerous letters, as lively and provocative today as when she first wrote them.

Dorothy Hewett is a much-published Australian poet and novelist.

Preoccupied by 'Essentials'

S.M. STEWART

Inez Baranay: *Rascal Rain* (Angus & Robertson, $16.95).

AFTER BRIEFING SESSIONS in Australia and Port Moresby, including language studies in pidgin, Inez Baranay arrived at her posting full of enthusiasm to work with the Enja women's council in the highland area of Wabag. Her job was to help expand the social and environmental programs, most particularly its literacy program. She had been briefed that it was an area that had had 'white' contact only in the previous forty years, that it was an isolated highland area and that the local indigenous committee had requested someone to work with them.

There is little evidence in this record of any attempt to discover or articulate the desires of the Papuan-New Guinean women who constituted the final contact organisation of this posting, or to gain any understanding of the complex traditional and transitional society into which the writer had appeared. There is, for example, more information to be gained about *Wantok* clan behaviour from a short story by Graham Sheil, published in the journal *Tirra Lirra* (Winter 1994), than in references to it in *Rascal Rain*.

Educating native women in their 'rights' according to western assumptions, is the theme which runs through the book. This applies particularly when it is concerned with the organisation by the town authorities and with the Provisional Women's council meetings.

But *Rascal Rain* is compelling reading. By that I mean I was compelled to keep reading to find just what Inez Baranay missed during her sojourn in the highlands of Papua New Guinea as an Australian Volunteer Abroad. The 'essentials' that for her made living comfortable included a vegetarian diet supplemented with exotic imports, aromatic perfume and oils, no smoking, proper tropical scenery (beach and palm trees), adequate postal services, favourite records, plentiful hot water for ablutions, her own house, cleanliness and the imperative of feminist philosophy. These are the preoccupations recorded as compensations for the impact of native bureaucracy. There was no noble savage waiting to be enlightened by Inez Baranay. The book does not reveal understanding of the restraining factors determining change in this non-western society. The sophistication of the local officials seems to have outwitted the narrator at every turn.

S.M. Stewart is a Melbourne reviewer with an interest in third world cultures.

Yawp or Yelp? – Violence In/To Poetry

KEVIN BROPHY

Luke Davies: *Absolute Event Horizon* (Angus & Robertson, $14.95).
Ian McBryde: *The Familiar* (Hale & Iremonger, $12.95).

AFTER READING my poetry at an event sponsored by the Melbourne Writers Group last month, one of the writers in the audience said, "But *that* can't be poetry. How can 'I said, you said, he said' be poetry?"

The old debate over the new still tears at us. What has happened to metre? What has happened to rhyme? What has happened to imagery? What has happened to poetry? When Ford Madox Ford spoke for the early modernists, he declared "one unflinching aim – to register my own time in terms of my own time." Ah yes, and in this he was no different to Wordsworth who wanted to speak man-to-man with us, and no different to me in 1994 wanting to say to the writer protesting over ordinary language in poetry, that my poems use the words people use, so that the poetry can talk to people now. But the debate is more confused than this. How many people read this poetry-spoken-in-ordinary-language anyway? The same minority who still read the increasingly-harder-to-find metred, rhyming varieties.

And do the new poets really want to talk the way people talk? In his first manifesto, didn't Breton foresee a time when the world would end, not with a good book but with a beautiful advertisement for heaven or for hell? Don't people talk in clichés? Most people I know do, and I do too. And hasn't modernism won the day anyway? Isn't the official art now free verse? And shouldn't any young poet going in for rhyming iambic pentameters watch out for black holes? Aren't street-speech and poems in free verse, with lines based on the breath (so that poems can emerge "like unknown, unnamed vegetables" in Olson's phrase) *de rigueur*?

So, with new books of poetry in front of me, these questions pressed on the poems.

Absolute Event Horizon is a first book from Luke Davies who is good at titles and writes energetic anti-poetic poetry:

> And we
> are nothing, feel like nil. And God then in his
> infinite etcetera turns on his little pocket-
> torch, viz.
> click!

He can be dotty too, and perhaps it's significant that rhyme and metre are made to look as silly as the images in 'Death':

> Because I could not stop for Death
> he kindly stopped for me.
> We talked about the football
> and we drank a pot of tea.

Ennui gets a look in with echoes of Breton's famously unsettling advice that the only really sane act left for us is to walk outside and shoot indiscriminately:

> TV.
> Unhinged in that endless misery. Five and a
> half
> thousand minutes of this. Four days of
> wanting
> to be somewhere, someone, else. Day five of
> wanting to kill someone, anyone, else ...

I'm not sure what to make of this poetry, which makes me even more unsure of what a poetry reviewer is supposed to do, or can do, so I present these snippets, hopefully indicative ones which might work interestingly against a review. The 'Azaria Sonnet' has some lines of wit and power:"To join a religion like a Book Club .../ ... the knee-length-socks-Bermuda-shorts religion/treads outback where the Butcher-King has trod./She stands ice-cold for the Twelve Tribes of Gosford,/her faith shall be the Bastion of the Bland." But when I read the helpful 'Notes' in the back I find the following bit of unhelpful nonsense about Lindy Chamberlain: "This incident had a deep impact on the Australian psyche." It reads like the earnest Teachers' Guide in the Melbourne *Age* reports

on the Commonwealth Games ("Aboriginal people continue to face great hurdles in 1994 Australia ... How do you feel about Freeman wrapping herself in two flags ...").

The Familiar is a first book too, by Ian McBryde, a Canadian who has been in Australia since 1972. Immediately there is a contrast with Davies' poems because McBryde is a poet of smooth surfaces and dark, interior atmospheres. Though still working the free verse vein, McBryde's poems have an ear for assonance, consonance, and even metre at times. Take these lines from the opening poem:

Arrive

with your black columns
your shadow bell
your squeaky legions.

Trail your thick cape
over my sleepless face,
let its soft grey hem
slip across my lips

Pull the moon down
into this damp jungle.
Present me with that
which leopards smell:
the coming of hunters
the message of weather
the scent of gazelles.

Predatory cats move through this book, and like Rilke's beast, they are barely caged by the poems. In 'Panthers' the cats speak:

Asleep, all we dream of
is prey in the forests
with our quarry's blood
punching out narcotic rhythms
of fear, and mindless flight.

And the prey? The poems bring us back to the quintessential modern deaths of JFK, Sharon Tate, Brett Whiteley, Hoddle Street, Queen Street. Then our own fears are spoken:

Outside the cottage
death set in
like inevitable weather,
uncoiled his fuses
threaded them around
your avenues of escape.

These are fearful poems, but they have style and intensity.

Kevin Brophy is the author of three novels and a collection of poetry.

John McLaren writes: This is the anxious time of the year when we wait to learn whether our applications for government grants have been successful. Over the last few years, these grants have been steadily eroded by inflation and the increase in imposed costs, and were further cut in absolute terms last year. Only the continuing support of subscribers to the Floating Fund has enabled us to avoid major cuts to the journal. In once again thanking those who have contributed, we would like to ask all readers also to consider introducing us to their friends by gift subscriptions. Meanwhile, our deepest gratitude to the following for their donations:

$1000 S.McL.; $100 J.N.; $50 M.V.; $22 P.H.; $20 D.R.N., G.T.; $12 J.G.B., T.G.P., A.S., D.B., J.H.; $10 J.P.; $7 A.L., J.L., L.C., K.P., G.S.; $4 G.E.; $2 B.D., Z.D., S.C., G.L., C.D., F.L.W., D.W., S.M., W.K., P.R.; Totalling $1341.

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