



142

Overland

FEATURES

STORIES

POETRY

\$8

REALLY GRUNGE?

Merv Lilley

Alan Wearne

**Allan Gardiner
on David Martin**

Ian Syson

**Joanna Murray-Smith
on life in New York**

**Delys Bird on
responses to
Helen Garner**

**Life and writings
of Barrett Reid**

Overland

Literature of the Future

The Next Wave *Overland* Issue 1996

Showcasing a new generation of Australian writing
Overland 143 is a special issue
featuring works by contemporary writers thirty years and under.



A collection of new works exploring a diversity of literary forms, cultural influences and voices selected by the editors of tomorrow

Public launch at Next Wave Festival,
Saturday 1 June 1996

For details contact Next Wave Festival on 03 9417.7544
e-mail: nextwave@peg.apc.org

We expect this special issue to sell out quickly, so ensure your copy by subscribing now. Send \$32 for twelve months to *Overland*
PO Box 14146 MCMC, Melbourne 8001.

- editorial** *John McLaren* 2
- stories** THE CALL OF THE RUNNING TIDE *Merv Lilley* 4
THE BRIDGE *C.C. Mitchell* 59
- features** THE LOVEMAKERS *Alan Wearne* 16
SMELLS LIKE MARKET SPIRIT *Ian Syson* 21
PUSHED INTO THE BOURGEOIS CAMP *Allan Gardiner* 27
BARRETT REID 31–40
MEMOIR *John Philip* 31, BARRETT REID – GRAPHIC *Rick Amor* 32, FOR BARRETT REID *Shelton Lea* 34, HIS FATHER'S SON *Rona Arndt* 35, BARJAI DAYS *Vida Horn (with Thea Astley)* 36, DON'T FORGET TH JAZZ BAND *Eric Beach* 37, THREE POEMS BY BARRETT REID 38, REVIEW *Stephen J. Williams* 39
LETTER FROM AMERICA *Joanna Murray-Smith* 41
MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT SEX AND POWER *Delys Bird* 48
HYMNS TO THE OPTIC NERVE *Gary Catalano* 54
HOW EVATT SCUPPERED SANTAMARIA *Paul Ormonde* 62
NO LASTING FRIENDSHIP IN EARLY NSW *George Parsons* 70
THAT "CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD" *Shirley Rowe Drinkwater* 72
- poetry** FOR SCRAPPY *Bruce Dawe* 46, *Diana Fahey* 47, *Stella Turner* 51, *Susan Hawthorne* 52, *Stephen J. Williams* 53, *Peter Murphy* 53, *Sandy Jeffs* 58, *Emma Lew* 61
- miscellany** SLIPPAGE *John McLaren* 67, *Ian Syson* 68,
DIALOGUE *John Barrett* 68
- books** *Davis McCaughey* 76, *Doris Leadbetter* 77, *Evan Jones* 78, *Peter Gerard May* 79, *Michael Wilding* 80, *Michael Roe* 82, *Graham Rowlands* 83, *John Barrett* 84
- graphics** Design: *Vane Lindesay*
Front Cover Photograph: *Chester Eagle*
Jiri Tibor 15, *Wes Placek* 37, *John Copeland* 40, *Zofia Nowicka* 52, *Donald Greenfield* 71, *Bev Aisbett* 75, *Lofo* 86

**Over
land**

Temper democratic, bias Australian

142

Autumn 1996

ISSN 0030 7416

Arts and Minds



THE BEGINNING OF 1996 brings mixed messages, as well as an election. The Australia Council has announced increased total funding for literature, but at the same time is changing the basis on which grants are to be made. Both the state and federal governments have reduced their grants to *Overland*, while increasing them to some contemporaries and restoring them to others. Although it may be possible to justify all or any of these decisions, the Literature Board, now the Literature Fund, has made no attempt to do so. Nor has it yet announced the long awaited changes to its policies of support for literary magazines.

These changes reflect the government's overall market-driven ideology. The Federal Minister responsible for these matters was also responsible for the *Creative Nation* statement, for the continuing dismantling of Telecom, and for the continuing fiasco surrounding the introduction of cable television. He has been consistent in his failure to comprehend the complex interaction between culture, communication and the arts, and in his apparent belief that the arts are merely a branch of the entertainment industry. So his policies are oriented to marketing and consumption rather than to production and distribution. Telecom loses its capacity to create and manufacture technology, and the opportunity of using cable television as a common carrier available to independent producers is lost. The reduction of the arts to a form of consumption weakens our ability to construct our own imaginative and intellectual views of the world, rather than to have it presented to us through the eyes of others.

In a lecture at Victoria University last year, the Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, Kim Beazley, argued that the Hawke and Keating governments have been in the direct tradition of Chifley and Whitlam. All, according to Beazley, have been concerned to promote economic efficiency in order to support social welfare. Up to a point, this is true, and marks the distinction between Labor governments and their conservative opponents, who, as the most recent release of Cabinet papers from the Menzies era demonstrates, stand for nothing but personal greed, fear of difference, and contempt for the people. But, as is argued to the contrary by Robert Leach in *The Alliance Alternative in Australia* (Left Book Club, Box 22 Trades Hall, 22 Goulburn Street, Sydney, 2000: \$12.95), recent Labor governments have lost any alternative vision of the kind that motivated their predecessors. They have

surrendered to the imperatives of economic rationalism and political pragmatism, and to the reductive visions of humanity and human community that underlie them.

The lack of vision, and a corresponding failure to recognise interests beyond those of political elites, extends to our international relations. The most recent issue of *Arena Journal* carries a perspicacious editorial by Geoff Sharp on changes in the way nations are coming to relate to each other. He shows how moral issues are forcing modifications to the concepts of national sovereignty that became entrenched during the Cold War. This change is particularly relevant to Australia's new treaty with Indonesia, which, while representing a desirable break with our earlier policies of relying on imperial alliances with Europe and America, ignores the military brutality and political autocracy that hold Indonesia together as a nation state. The denial of opportunity for public or parliamentary debate before the treaty's ratification disregards both the government's responsibility to its own citizens and our national obligations, as global citizens, to support human rights and environmental sustainability in our region.

At all levels of society, we are failing either to propose alternatives or even to see the need for giving them imaginative being. The republican debate has become concerned with legal niceties rather than human liberty. Political debate has become obsessed with means rather than ends. We risk losing the power to imagine different ways of relating either to each other or to the world.

Globally capitalism is increasing differences between the rich and the poor, spreading social violence and destroying community. The destruction of the public sector, of wilderness areas and human cities, of collective responsibility and the dignity of work, comes to seem inevitable, and individuals retreat into their own regulated privacy. This is, in the worst sense, the inevitable end of capitalism. *Overland* was born from a belief in a socialism grounded in the realisation of the potential of fully imagined experience. In a dismal century, writers of poetry, fiction and essays raise the questions of who and where we are and what we may become. This is what Merv Lilley and Alan Wearne are doing in their contributions to this issue. Work of this kind is essential for the creation of a truly inclusive and republican Commonwealth of Australia.

JOHN McLAREN

MERV LILLEY

The Call of the Running Tide

The Main Bout with Ming the Merciless

from a novel in progress



NINETEEN FIFTY. A good year for ducks. There's so much water running out of that channel country it finds its way into Lake Eyre and keeps on filling. The price of wool is springy, it bounces up too. The shearers' award rates will rise by two pounds a hundred by the end of the shed, in two months' time. They sit in the sheds waiting for the rain to stop, then the sheep to dry out to shear. Lake Eyre fills. It's been so long it's historic. Shearers eating mutton, straight.

The land a quagmire. Tempers frayed; gloom, slow dread, stoicism the trade mark of men sitting, cut off, reminiscing; hides beginning to crack for want of lubrication, home. Hardy souls start to walk to town from outlying sheds, calling in to other sheds for the night, cursing volubly the wool industry, the station owners, vowing never to go into a shed again.

"I'll eat fucken grass before I ever shear agen", one gnarled old shearer says, enough times for it to be forever embedded in the head of anyone listening in the lone land outside Aramac. It's par-for-the-course talk, that old shearer raving on in the darkness in his own cubicle there, no-one replying, he needs no-one to reply.

His venom poured out of him for a long time in the darkened bunkhouse, fewer amenities than any gaol; by day steam rising up off the land and wet sheep, steam lifting a lifetime of hatred and ferocity without guidelines. It might be that old fellow's last shed, but anyone who is going to walk the last twenty miles of black-soil-mud roads isn't finished yet. He will live to pour his philosophies, the like of which have never been heard outside sheds, into other sheds when the west is oozing with water or

dried out like a vast skeleton.

For the wool presser Jack Long or Longfellow John Long, so christened, thirty years ago last September, it didn't matter and yet it mattered extremely. He was driven by other matters. It was OK to lie in the shed awhile, they'd be waiting for him out there; a dangerous red who might shortly be in a concentration camp when Menzies' bill passed through parliament. The men in blue could see that they would soon have important things to do, like looking after the nation's politics, keeping the country free of left-wing vermin.

The 1949 elections that brought Menzies to power had been a wild time. The Party-speakers' trucks surrounded by chanting Catholics, missiles sailing towards the speakers, around their heads, anywhere they landed on man or woman. Long Jack knew it was more than the Catholics, the schoolboys chanting half-heartedly from roneoed song leaflets. It was the philosophers of the richies of Australia pouring all that could be put together into it. It was the most sinister force that could be mustered in Australia, particularly Queensland, and that was something horrific. The federal elections were over, the fun had just begun, the new era of political-religious alliance hopefully being lifted above the rules of fair play, into the global cold war following the redistribution of empires from the hot ashes stench of the 1939-45 war; the great Queen's Man would put the reds down underground in Australia.

Long Jack knew he was a drop in the ocean, but a drop that had to be mopped up. It was a dangerous time, tinged with speculation about concentration camps and life therein if the democratic constitution failed to heel Pig Iron Bob.

IT WAS A BIG 'UP' to fight against, now that the money was down, the betting ring cleared, the coins on the kip ready to sail into the air. An exciting, mysterious time of foreboding. For Long Jack Long, it was time to look for fresh alignments. He'd been torn by love in its many facets – love of many things, of women idealised, little understood except for loin-busting need (unfulfilled for the most part) a victim of all that he had been taught and learned in bush and army days, from the preachers of abstention, of the one true love, the one fidelity, the inevitability of pregnancy should any girl be touched with the lethal weaponry with a mind of its own lying in wait and secrecy, unconsciously attached to the mind at all times.

Word came down from the big house that there had been a phone call for Jack Long. He went up to the station homestead to enquire and met the lady of the house. She was a nice woman, refined, polite, interested. Jack found himself talking volubly to her about things that must have seemed very odd. He heard himself explaining, expounding the Lysenko theory and practice of plant growth in a hostile environment, having recently learned it from a book printed in the Soviet Union, obtained through a Party bookshop. A subject that seemed to fit in with the weather. Later he would hear through her son how impressed she was with his manners and knowledge, when the son and the wool classer were marvelling at the difference in him, at his aggressiveness in the shed, together with his woolpressing in a pair of leather boxing shoes, his tendency to sudden outburst, to roar like a lion now and then. He could have told them it was an act he had learned from others, but he didn't.

At the big house he tried to ring back to where he thought the call would be coming from, but the line was faint, the lines would not carry a voice from Townsville headquarters. He knew he was wanted, but he didn't know for what. It was from Phillippa, who had stood as a candidate in the federal elections when he was campaign director for the Mackay area. He couldn't tell what she was trying to tell him, but he knew she wanted him on some campaign, and he couldn't go. Sunk in mud and sheep on a vast plain, he was impotent as a campaigner. The idea of working with Phillippa at the moment, though seductive, was out. His mind

was often on the complete satisfaction of being with Phillippa at a party school on an island bearing mangoes, pineapples, coconuts and Norfolk pines.

They had found themselves walking on a beach one afternoon and he had suddenly kissed her. She exclaimed immediately: "I couldn't have born it a minute longer if you hadn't kissed me. I just couldn't have stood it!" By this time he had her on the sand and his hand up her ample crutch. She didn't want to just then because they were on a fairly exposed beach and to be seen by other students of Marxism wouldn't be too politic for a married woman high in party ranks and highly educated in a refined bourgeois sense as well, passionate but not given to loose living. A highly jealous husband with a Geelong Grammar accent and a very respectable job travelling some kind of chemistry that led him into the industrial circles of big business, like Mount Isa mines; one of Jack's recent areas of work and struggle.

For Long Jack from the cow tracks pre-war and for Phillippa, at the party school for advanced cadres, a bed of leaves under mango trees after supper and darkness was delicious, commended by Phillippa as "just right", adding, "It's quite an art, you know." Jack didn't know if his art should improve; he would have to be satisfied with being "just right". He had only read Marie Stopes on procedure.

With the party class wound up and the island taken away he wondered was it his climbing coconut trees that had won Phillippa. It certainly was the coconut flesh and milk that quickly put a lot of weight on Jack Long, a young fellow who did put on weight too easily. But he could rely on cane cutting to take it off, and eating in Greek cafes three times a day in the slack – a piece of steak the size of a small hand, a lettuce leaf, two thin slices of tomato, a couple of slices of white bread, a cup of tea or coffee. If anyone got fat on that they were in serious trouble.

As these after-events flashed across him, surrounded by mud and water, he knew that whatever was wanted of him would have to wait. The station-owner's wife delicately standing by, full of sympathy and interest for this fairhaired athletic youth six-foot-one displaying an amazing vocabulary about very odd things, phrases rolling off his

tongue like a practised speaker born to the cloth or an education of some kind, but not answering the unasked query, what was he doing here in the sheds? As he watched deferentially he saw a fifty-odd-year-old woman very much like his mother in build and manner, interest written over her face, a couple of feet from him so that he felt he could take her in his arms and move out of the world of mutton chops and scones, into the forbidden world; but reality kept a firmer grip on him as he excused himself and found his way back to the shearers' quarters, about half a mile away.

George, a solid shearer and rep, loud mouthed, became annoyed at the mutton chops three times a day, and began bellowing for beef when the owner's son appeared on horseback. The station had a small herd of beef cattle, and they brought one in and killed it and got the meat down to the shearers as requested. After a week on meat George began bellowing to the son that if they were sent any more meat he'd put the fucken shed in "the tarpot". Some more killers appeared in the killing yard very promptly and no more was said about wanting beef.

From somewhere or other a bottle of OP Rum appeared, the property of a younger, no-nonsense shearer, black hair and apparently of Italian origin. Suddenly he had a few mates – a couple of very old shearers who appeared out of their wordless cubicles and became affable. George also had a few rums, and then the owner of the rum said unexpectedly to George as we all sat at table and consumed more chops:

"I know all about you, you know."

GEORGE ROSE FROM his seat, moved around on the younger shearer and held his knotted fist up ready to deliver a punch, but the younger man was not to be denied.

"I know about you." Continuing to chew off the chops. George delivered a half punch to the side of the head and followed it up with another couple as the young shearer continued to repeat "I know about you." The old timer helped himself to another rum and talked flat out to ease the situation, to no avail. The swarthy young man with the assistance of rum continued to insist that he knew all about George, and George continued to drop warning punches on the side of his head, not heavy

enough to alter its shape. Listeners wished he'd say a bit more. What had George done? Scabbed? Shorn with wide blades? That was the most likely possibility, but no-one knew and George was prepared to increase the weight of his punches if anything further was said.

It had gone far enough. Shutup or put up. Jack stood up, cleared his chair and facing George said, "No fighting in the sheds." George ignored him, was about to throw another punch. Jack automatically sunk his left hand into George's midriff and tipped him back over the table behind him. The punch seemed to have an astonishing effect on George, who just lay there for a time, then rose and sat down to the rest of his meal as if nothing had happened. He hadn't seen the punch, and no-one else

The punch seemed to have an astonishing effect on George, who just lay there for a time, then rose and sat down to the rest of his meal . . .

had either. There had been the sound of a deep thud, that was all. Long Jack hadn't developed much liking for George, who had chipped him several times about what seemed fairly trivial matters, or so he chose to think. One had to do with a fart in too-close proximity to the smoko in the woolpressing section of the shed, which Jack thought might have had some validity. The reprimand, not the fart. Another was Jack eating some kiss cakes at smoko before the shearers had their 'chop' of little cakes. Jack thought this smacked of social division, but he was willing to bow to George's very wide knowledge of sheds compared to his. In this matter he felt on safe grounds. George wasn't to know that Jack had held quite some ambition to be a light heavyweight champ, and had worked on and off on punching bags in gymnasiums developing the heavy punch that might achieve said ambition, providing it landed on his opponent with a combination of punches and the reverse didn't happen to him.

One afternoon someone produced a set of gloves. Gloves always seemed to have a life of their own and could come out of hiding when men were idly sitting around. No-one took up the gloves, until George couldn't stand it any longer, grabbed up

the two sets, started to shove one set at Jack then changed his mind and gave them to a rouseabout who had at one stage been a strapper. They laced up with some assistance from Jack, and George began in Hollywood fashion, striding after his opponent and throwing leather. The little strapper replied with a will, outpunching George and forcing him backwards, into the schoolboys' primitive way of losing a fight and acknowledging defeat, which George did with hilarity, saying in guffaws of astonishment, "He beat me!" That was good sportsmanship amongst the boys, taken in the right spirit. A way of putting in a bit of idle time.

Jack wasn't so sure about his punch to George's lower ribs, neither was he sure about being one of the boys. With that one punch he had emerged as one of the reps, which is one of the qualifications of the woolpresser anyway. He knew and they knew that he stood to one side watching them, calculating their possibilities.

WHEN THE WEATHER was boiling hot, steaming in the shed on working days and the musterers came in with the sheep, they were welcome to come to the press and drink out of Jack's waterbag – cool water was a wonderful thing, slipping down the throat with steaming heat surrounding everything, waterbag going relentlessly down, but in the interest of the brotherhood of man, what could be done, except to tell the cockies to supply their hands with waterbags and come out worse for wear yourself, Jack Long. The cocky would tell his men not to drink at all. As a canecutter used to say, "A cocky is a very low ground parrot".

The rain in fits and starts stopped long enough to finish the shed. Throw the grips into a mail truck and come to town. The young policeman was inquiring about Jack Long. He confided in the swarthy Italian-style shearer. "We've been told to keep an eye out for him."

The shearer passed the message on to Jack. "You don't care do you?" he asked thoughtfully, "It doesn't matter to you does it?" But puzzled too. You don't ask what the police want to watch him for, every man's business is his own private business in matters where police are concerned. So long as a man can do his work credibly well in the sheds, is clean, he's OK as far as the men are concerned. As long as he's not a Jacky, he's in the clear.

No man breaks a union principle and lives it down in the sheds; what he does otherwise is his own business.

The men in the sheds wouldn't know that Jack Long had recently been a campaign director for the Communist Party in this last federal election. He had been brought off the cane-cut for the job, because of his fighting abilities and experience in industrial matters, his single status that could be transferred around without dislocation, a Party cadre without permanent employment or permanent position in the Party. Some sections of the Party amongst the leadership would have him as an organiser, others wouldn't, claiming he was undisciplined and an anarchist. But as a freelance man he was in his place; a man to be used in frontal assaults where the going was tough, where union control was in the hands of the Fallon-led AWU, the right wing labour party, frothing at the mouth in their filthy rag *The Worker*, backing up Squattocracy and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, and Big Mining.

Long Jack knew that his every movement was followed, particularly now. A marked man, almost like a sheep with raddle on its back, ready for the killing pen. He moved in a life apart. In a sense he felt honoured that he was worthy of their fire. He needed no rodeo, no boxing ring for notoriety. He was in the big fight he'd saved himself for when he stepped clear of the gym, where earnest middle and light heavyweights were intent on altering the shape of his head, on their way to fame and fortune in the roped arena. And yet it was one of his attributes that the Party was interested – in combining fighting with the class struggle could be useful.

His mind wandered back to recent days, as the cowboys say in song – where you did everything that was in the book and a few that were never thought of, searching for gold on the cusp – on the run, through sugar-cane, timber cutting, fencing – sleeping sometimes on railway platforms, waiting for a train. By 'forty-eight, 'forty-nine lead and coal had seeped into his veins. Leaches and ticks had embedded there too, in the rain forests, swinging axe, crosscut saw, boarded up above giant forest tree butts, morning rain and loneliness too much, hard to get a quid to live in towns for awhile, to look and look at the girls. Vaguely aware he was in the grip of a madness that seemed the only sane

thing, stronger even than love of woman. And yet his desperate need for woman, woman, woman. He had no trade that would keep him in the cities, on the run in the head forever. The call of the running tide began to sing insistently in his ears. Back there they were waiting for him. They were to keep an eye on him until they decided to put him away

The business of living under a democratic constitution had foiled the conservatives so many times, and now Bob Menzies still couldn't get it right.

if they couldn't keep him out of industry. The time for them wasn't right, they couldn't get it right. They never had been able to. The business of living under a democratic constitution had foiled the conservatives so many times, and now Bob Menzies still couldn't get it right. The Communist Party Dissolution Bill was on its way through Parliament where Bob held a record majority. By the living God look out now Moriarty! There would soon be no living in the country for those who held the wrong views. The Queen's man was right on their hammer. At last the country would be safe for investment.

Nothing new in that, Jack. It only meant that his name would be more surely in the little books under the counter. The police, the employers, the taxi drivers were pulled into the arena. Their job was to report when they took him to or from a railway station, or a boarding house. Perhaps the stationmaster would tell them where he took a ticket to, where he put up, and boarding house keepers be warned that he was a man being watched by police. Long John thought there was no law that provided for a man to be followed for his politics but then wasn't this why Menzies was introducing such a law, so that a man could be more than followed politically, so that he could also be detained? A political prisoner? Wasn't there something about a war having been fought about this? An army he had served in for a few years?

Names like Father Ryan and Santamaria floated before his haze of deep anger. There were broken bits and pieces of his life floating around him. Slow

train pull out of the country of mirages, get Long Jack back to the country that he knew, to people who had been through the industrial upheavals. There would be somewhere there for a man to back up against a wall and fight Bob Menzies, the man with power in his hands. The Queen's man.

Slow train take this young man along the escape route running before the tide in his head, out of the channel country running with fresh water where there were more plain turkeys than people (more humanity in a plain turkey than a station owner as far as men in the shearing industry were concerned), or the Ringers, the faithful men who made a life out of being faithful to one station owner. Some of them came to town periodically to put up in a pub and drink their cheques out. Others stayed there. To Long Jack it would be hell on earth. His feet were on some road. It might lead to nowhere, but he wouldn't have to stay there. The unanswerable of his life. What was it he was looking for?

WAITING IN LONGREACH to go into the Aramac shed a letter came to him from Joanne. She was the nurse who walked along the Pioneer River with him when off duty, lay down in the sand with him, said that she was bad, but he didn't do anything about her being bad. He had this difficulty, this invisible barrier that wouldn't allow him to move when the message was there, loud and clear. A movement in that direction would be a lifelong contract. He wanted her but he wasn't prepared. He would be breaking some ritualistic law that had grown up with him, perhaps learned from books, from mother, from observation, from the idealism his small life had taught him, and now his learning took over and left him powerless and his girl nonplussed. What sort of man was he to be fighting industrial giants and yet unable to satisfy his girlfriend, or himself? And then a letter came into that slowly moving west saying, "If you want me I will come out to you."

He went out into the shed at Aramac, watched weeks of rain pour down, then replied to her letter with a long discourse on the problems of the wool industry, not mentioning her offer to come to him. This was the girl he had walked for, had almost prayed for. He had met the hostility of her friends, who had decided that he was not the one for her

and refused to let her on the phone when he rang her quarters every night. But now he saw himself out on a limb, ready for what Red Cross Knight battles with windmills. Here was his few years' history since leaving the army repeating itself once more, painfully. It would be like other affairs, the girl in question would not be heard of again, she would go to another choice. He would suffer, knowing that he had no way of getting his life together to be an ordinary citizen, for some indefinable reason yet to reveal itself completely. Was it the revolution that Maxim Gorky wrote about, was there something else he had yet to find out, before his mind was satisfied, ready to let his body rest?

Escape from the army and farming had thrown him into a sea of confusion, restlessness, a man or boy of no fixed abode, no belief in any one kind of life as being sufficient for a man or boy to say, here I plant my roots and raise a family. Somewhere out there he believed, sensed, that he had a big part to play in the scheme of things, but the part was yet unknowable. It had to do with the power to lead. It had been proved that he had a voice that had been heard and respected by groups of working men, a voice that had helped to bend open the coffers of Mount Isa Mines and The Mines' lead-dusted lucre to come pouring out into the pockets of those who delved in the bowels of the earth, twelve hundred feet below.

But he couldn't stay there to go on sharing, with the protection of the men around him, a voice in their midst. He didn't have the binding ties, although the mines, the rugged ragged country, the duststorms, would stay with him while he was compos mentis; all this would stay in his head though his body continually changed.

A company boss, Mr Johnstone, said to him, "You'll never work here again Jack", and he knew this to be true. He fancied that he carried lead away from there in the bloodstream, as many did who worked underground, shooting down bodies of ore into the grizzlies on its way to the mill that blew lead dust all over Mount Isa from the treatment plant. He became convinced that the lead in the blood had taken its revenge on him as it did on hundreds of miners, producing impotency and a shortened life span. He also knew that the devastating dry heat of the place was no friend of the roaring horn, enough on its own to make men,

married men, think they were impotent, saying quietly, reflectively, "I haven't had the slightest stirrings for months." This too was frightening and he could recognise it, wondering if he were stricken and eventually convinced that he was.

A big price to pay for looking for experience: forever going 'further out', seeking new ground in and on which to pour his sweat, his quietness, sudden belligerency, his rejections of place, men,

... the devastating dry heat of the place was no friend of the roaring horn, enough on its own to make men, married men, think they were impotent . . .

women, capitalist society; his search for perfection in men and women which might be lying hidden in these hills of dust, heat, dry river bed of fight, fuck, sleep, heads kicked in, whatever was available; leading the picture hall full of workers away from the company men for a brief moment, enough to upset The Mines, and Clarrie Fallon of the AWU, the right wing Labor Party, not only the Mount Isa branch, but right wing labour throughout Queensland who until that historic moment when the left struck, had held the miners in check over the years of the mine's existence. It might be nearer the truth to say their pay-cheques were held in check over the years of Mount Isa.

Jack Long remembered the words of men who had worked as he was working now, through all the itinerant industries and in the days when men lived in the bed of the river for a year or sometimes years before a job was available in Mount Isa Mines, in depression years. He could sense something of the dilemma of the struggle for a living wage when there was little or no alternative work anywhere in the country, and this big industrial giant working with American money kept going, supplying the world with lead for bullets; supplying copper as a by-product.

It was easy for reformists to argue low wages for the country's good, both in pre-war and war then post-war days, but for the gathering cold war the argument fell flat with Australia just out of the rationing hot war era, a foreign money boom tak-

ing place in Australia and the need to import labour from all over the world. Sheep stations in the central west of Queensland were being covered by sorghum, new breeds of cattle were being introduced by foreign money. Australia had begun rolling in foreign investment. It was bound to spark off wage demands. John Long felt it in his water. It was time. Time to share wealth around, to reward the men and women for the war effort, time to keep promises.

The Communist Party saw it differently from the old timers in union leadership. They were talking about socialism in three years. Capitalism was thinking about capitalism for a hundred and three years and then some; and let the war effort continue into the dedication of capitalism, building a rich man's Australia rolling in wool, wheat, sugar and meat, lead and gold.

LONGFELLOW LONG JOHN shunting in on a goods train, body wise, yet two years earlier in the head, on a slow train to Mount Isa, a place where men were pouring off that slow train every few days, seeking and getting work there at the end of the line now that the sugar season had finished. John Long thought it was like joining the army again.

They were every shape and form, some with army hats pulled down over their foreheads (some foreheads looked like what they used to call pin heads in the army, a term meaning a solid knob on a body, an Australian cynicism). When a blue with employers started they would vanish back to Crow-ajinga-linga-long, that's the place where they belong, the old Australian home – not at all like the track around the mill, up to the mine, where they might shortly be able to line up for a feed and some general refreshment after a long depressing train journey across nor-western plains, getting further and further away from all that was sociable, delectable, comforting – even if those ingredients didn't seem to be there at the time of departure.

The brave road to a living wage can be dreary to a frightening extent, depressing to a man coastal born running smack into a giant mullock heap, a hill on its own, the earth pulverised, turned inside out, crushed into nothing but waste after extraction of coveted bodies of ore.

Walk on then, there is no way back, only for-

ward a short distance to the mine. There is only the mine for the broke, the outcasts, the mullock heaps of seasonal industry. The next train is days away; there will be another line of the disillusioned heading back the way they came. The swap-over of jobs, the reflection of post-war Australia churning round, ringing like cattle tired of walking ahead into nowhere, wanting to go back and having to go on. There is an invisible drover guiding their footsteps. His name is want. He will show you the way whether you want him to or not. Want is in charge of you in the base of your belly.

John Long got off that train for the first time, saw and went in, in the company of a snowy headed no-hoper who had blued their money before they even got on the train. He was a gambler. They

There is an invisible drover guiding their footsteps. His name is want. He will show you the way whether you want him to or not.

worked until the first pay, he went down to the two-up ring and spun out. They worked until next pay and Snowy went straight down to the ring, threw so many heads it was unbelievable, and caught the next train out. Therein lay his only philosophy, including not paying John Long back. It might spoil his holiday. He would be back when it cut out. They weren't friends – just travellers thrown together who had very little in common. Snowy was built on cunning and robbery and whatever views assisted those ends. He wasn't a thief in the accepted sense, he managed to get by by borrowing, working a bit, two up or whatever. He was in fact more of an annoyance to Longfellow Jack Long than anything else, not a man you'd want to work with, but you might have to. He was good riddance departing for the train next day. It wouldn't be lonely without him. Longfellow John was sometimes a victim of the Snowy type because of his belief in the goodness of the brotherhood of man.

He had met the Party faithful, he had become a miner, twelve hundred feet below. He was still unknown except that he had wandered down past a bunkhouse one day and having seen some boys/men sparring, had gone up onto the verandah. A

glance told him he was looking at the best and the hopefuls, getting their heads well punched without being able to reply, and yet enjoying being in such illustrious company where they might learn something. They stopped and offered him a glove with the experienced fighter who was giving them a light pasting.

Longfellow slipped the gloves on, was laced up and almost absently went into action, using his reach, slipping in and out, delivering punches that seemed to leave the brother of a Queensland champion a bit nonplussed and with two very black eyes coming up. There was wonderment amongst the rough eggs standing around. Jack had met them around the bunkhouses and messrooms, the canteen, where the big man amongst them had fought an exhaustive battle one Sunday morning over a pretty girl working there. A hard rough boy but no boxing match for the experienced fighter on that verandah, Johnny Shields, someone who was looked up to amongst the miners as more than a good scrapper; a scientific fighter. Long John didn't know much about the punch he had caught him with, between the eyes, but Shields wanted to know and did want to know for a long time afterwards. Longfellow only knew it was something that had worked well because it was done unconsciously. It had set him up in the area as nothing else could have done, to have sent Johnny Shields around the mine and the town side wearing two black stinkers for a couple of weeks. If he'd believed in the almighty, he'd have put it down to divine assistance, but an atheist could only wonder that he had thrown a glove in a friendly spar that had wreaked havoc on a local's pride and would eventually call for a return settlement.

MEANWHILE, THE STRUGGLE. Long Jack the political hack met the Party in the canvas tents of Mount Isa on The Flat on the banks of the Leichhardt River, bone dry. He had a letter of introduction from Warren Bowden from Townsville office, to Eddie Heilbronn, mill worker in the Isa. Long John was 'in' with the Party boys there, with a letter from the centre.

He met the marvellous *Plod*, flatbed-printed organ of the Party, the underground literature of Mt Isa Mines' miners and mill workers, produced in spite of the few extra people who lived in the town-

ship itself, and of course the clerical staff of The Mine, and the management, who conscientiously filed it away in the head office, making it easy one day for Eddie Heilbronn to get through a window and steal it but that was some years later, when Eddie knew that he too was for the high flyer, the mail train out of Mt Isa for good, along with his large family. At the moment when Long John came to them, there was no suggestion that this would happen, beyond the reasoning that ultimate fate in the form of The Mine with its patient watchdoggism, its snake-like intent, twists and turns which would suddenly present itself in the style of a formal notice with little chance of a stoppage as a result.

Right now it was the moment of a log of claims headed by a request for a lead bonus hooked up to the rising price of lead – and this was the one that did interest all workers signed up to The Mines.

The request was disregarded by The Mines office of course. At that stage it was inconceivable that with the system The Mines had with the Labor Party, and the AWU, under control, any claim could succeed, especially one put forward by a committee comprising the AWU, the Labor Party, and Eddie Heilbronn quietly sitting in there, giving some advice, suggestions, in his unassuming slow way from his little frame of a body under that lean face, caring, querying, tentatively suggesting.

They knew there was a power to be reckoned with from the man who could use a typewriter and a flatbed and cause the word to suddenly appear in the change rooms early in the mornings for the going-on shift to pick up, read as best they could, some printing skew-whiff – the product known as *Plod*, produced on the supper table in the tent or over in the shoemaker's shop, the workplace of a revolutionary Italian who had his own brand of action that should be taken by anyone except himself. It was only in his own shop that he appeared at meetings, which was also the case with a vegetable grower, another thoroughly unorthodox man probably of Yugoslav extraction with English as a second language. There were several other Italian party members, living in makeshift huts on the mine flat on the Leichhardt River before it bent away to the town on the high side of the river; the flat with its rough tents climbing quickly higher

up to the mine, with one gulch running down; the minehouses studded back in the range to the right, around the head of the gulch or old wash-out that had to be there to bring the very occasional storm water away down to the river of sand and gum trees.

As a poet/songwriter once wrote, "The bed of the river is a place where men fight." Long Jack was aware of stories of mighty battles that had taken place in the bed of that river with spectators and police standing on the bank watching them, believing that the bed of the river was beyond law and order, wet or dry. How could that be? John Long was to witness such a fight before his Mt Isa days were done. He was in fact to see Shields in action in a barefisted fight with a black man for fifty pounds' winner-take-all prizemoney put up by a publican after a drunken brawl between them the previous evening in the pub back yard which Shields won with his famous gut punch, taking the wind out of his adversary. He had stopped his own brother, a state champion, with that punch. He would one day sicken Long John with it.

It wasn't a pretty sight, men standing almost still in deep sand, punching it out with the inevitable result, the most experienced fighter wins – a beaten black man, with only one friend, another black man. It's true that the black man had originally been looking for a fight, with anyone at all, suddenly forcing his way through the packed crowd of drinkers until he came to Shields and was taken into the yard behind the pub to fight it out. He was doing very well collecting Shields with heavy punches until the punches steadied Shields up enough to get his head working to save himself. The rest of it in the afternoon of the next day was unnecessary, but it appealed to the blood sport in the resurrection of the bare-knuckle days. It had happened before where the contestants, experienced fighters, were white men in the river, ring men who didn't look too good in the soft sand where you stood and punched.

Shields was an artist, hooking and ripping at the head of a taller man who couldn't move enough to use his reach. Shields had no intention of using his stomach punch to stop the fight, he had the crowd and he kept uppercutting almost at will until his opponent gave it away. Lyle Law, another once a champion, remarked that if he (the black man) had

stayed in there another ten minutes he might have won. Shields didn't have a knockout punch, but the constant hooking and uppercutting had a deadening effect that took the alacrity out of the muscles, and if only one man is getting hit the end is in sight.

It seemed to John Long that the mystique and sanctity of the bed of the river might be a Mount Isa rule, and yet he knew that Fred Paterson, recently MLA for The Burdekin, had once spoken from a boat in the Fitzroy river at Rockhampton during a meatworkers' strike, when refused a speaking permit, and that had worked.

Fred Paterson was a lawyer and knew about these things, so there must have been some truth in the legend of the sanctity of the river; or did it only apply to free speech and fighting? Surely not murder and rape. A kicking perhaps? There had to be a limit somewhere. Fortunately there was a bridge over the Leichhardt, so that all might lawfully pass over.

In the Heilbronn tent the party men sit around the dinner table. Eddie passes pieces of paper to everyone and says "write" – about the mine, the dust on such and such a level, the present struggle for lead bonus reform, the proposed meeting of miners and employees generally. They wonder what tactic to employ. They appeal to the newcomer "from the centre" – Longfellow John Long. He advises them, out of no knowledge of the situation, "Strike". They look doubtful but carry on with the business in hand, the forthcoming meeting of all hands on a particular date, which will be called by the miners' committee of which Eddie is a member, along with Labor Party men, Jack Kelly, Larry Nicholls, several others from down below and the rest from the mill, the treatment plant.

The meeting that follows, with a big body of men gathered around the gulch running down from the mine, both sides of that red dust gulch covered with men, is a historic sight, never to be forgotten by The Mines or men. Everyone has stepped out of line and they know it, and the heightened vibes put bass into Larry Nicholls voice as his words boom out up and down the gully, putting forward the men's demands, their patience, their righteousness in their cause, and everyone listens intently knowing the gravity of what they have done, tweaking the nose of the great American colossus, about which 'plod' has told them many times, so that

even the newcomers know a little bit about it. Other speakers harangue the crowd; Jack Kelly, shaking a bit from grog, and Eddie Heilbronn, who in his careful mild tenor voice advises them to return to work now and to consider a twenty-four-hour stop work meeting unless The Mines meet them on their demands. It is a motion, it is carried, everyone walks towards The Mines gates, but The Mines gates are locked.

EVERYONE IS HANDED a dismissal notice. They can reapply for employment. Immediately outside The Mines gates, the outraged and startled committee men are up on the back of a truck, shouting out orders for the men not to reapply, but to only go back to work when the sackings are withdrawn. Those wily old men knew that heads were going to roll. They knew that their years of servitude were coming to an end unless they fought and fought well. They were on strike. They claimed that the mine was on strike. It was a lock-out. It didn't matter really.

Jack Long knew as well as the migratory birds the direction of struggle. It was his profession, his religion. He was near enough to being a kamikaze man for struggle. He had willingly enough gone below, a strong man twelve stone eight, weight going down under insistent dry heat and toil, loss of sweat from sitting on a throbbing jackhammer for most of a shift, as it burred and fought its way down under him, each man in harness perched on a ledge above a black hole, the grizzleys, where the lead ore is shot into, with holes drilled and charges laid and lit, and men climb back up the ladder out of the level at firing time. It needed the heavier man to press the jackhammer into the lead ore, the lighter and senior miner to fix the charges. They come up covered in grease slush from the hammer, to degrease in the shower room – come up to greater heat under the sun than could be found in the bowels of the earth, down there with his own private thoughts about his own future, his love of life, his search for it, his problems of identification, of the life sought hereafter in a future that could perhaps spell fulfilment for the brotherhood of man first, and then himself. It was always a question of how much you gave of yourself to the despised, the hated bourgeoisie as the search continued for the breakthrough that would

iron out social injustice, its supporters, its system.

Here, right now, was the struggle in motion as it made its way over to the town side to consider the complexity of what had happened, as though unseen forces had taken over, and yet injustice had been put in place when all that had been asked for was a sensible slice of the cake they had poured into moulds every day – with a few currants thrown in now for work faithfully performed, from lives minute by minute poured into the crucibles, blown away by desert gales, in bed with a monastery of lead, locked away from civilised amenities in the world's cities. They were asking for a fair flip of the coin for their curious dedication to the vast nothingness that was nothing yet everything to so many who could now go nowhere else, present day life married to the red hills, the giant belly of faceless American investors.

For Jack Long these thoughts could be put together if you listened carefully to the men and the weather; the vibrations in the air from silent men intent on anonymity for protection; the plaintive Salvos on the street corner once a week asking you to love the Lord Jesus and collect your rewards over there – but just now the men and their invisible women could see only Mt Isa Mines, their leaders and their own selves swirled around in this astonishing duststorm that had come up out of the earth and hit them between the eyes. Thus days and weeks went by, full of accusation, acrimony, between mines and men.

Representatives were sent out to collect money and support from union bodies around Australia and came back, having lost the money or had it stolen from them, or having had to use it to get from place to place and live as they dropped off the message of struggle with Mount Isa Mines and duly received verbal support. Back in the picture theatre in Mt Isa, men moved motion after motion for almost daily meetings to keep them informed from their committee as to when they might once again be allowed to disappear underground to tear out lead; they could only be told: "When the industrial court has met and ruled favourably on the demands."

Later, with the advantage of hindsight, it could be seen that negotiations had been going on between The Mines and the union at top level, on how to get the men back to work above all else; let

such trivial matters as lead bonus demands be settled or preferably forgotten about. The Mines had its own network working overtime – state, nationally, internationally. Lugubrious plain-clothes police came to meetings in the picture theatre. They would take note of who the dissidents were, for future company reference. John Long moved a motion to ask the police to leave the meeting. They stood up with uncertainty and were about to leave, but the ex-fighter Lyle Law spoke in favour of them staying because it was a public meeting, it was a democracy and they had as much right to be there as anyone else. This was a public meeting and the police were members of the public. The motion lapsed. It was too intricate a matter to try and explain the role of police in struggle with the meeting hanging on the return-to-work question. Everyone who had participated vocally so far had been reported anyway.

THERE WAS ONE vital meeting which rebels would see as extremely serious, but with the funny side that can only be described as black humour with its measure of keen insight, on-the-spot awareness of things gone wrong, the recognition of the double-cross as it is happening.

The committee fronted up to another meeting with a recommendation. Eddie Heilbronn sent a message through to the Party boys that the committee was tabling a recommendation to return to work. So there it was, the sellout.

Jimmy Henderson, Party organiser, mutters to Jack Long, "It's up to you now Jack, it's in your hands."

The recommendation turned into a motion, the chair calling for a mover and seconder. Jack rose up and moved a counter motion that no-one return to work until demands were met; but the wily old chairman Jack Kelly said there was a motion before the meeting and a further motion could not be moved. Jack Long immediately moved the same motion as an amendment. Kelly asked for his name and having been told it was Jack Long said, "An amendment has been moved by Jack Lang. Is there a seconder?" and Eddie Heilbronn seconded the amendment.

Larry Nicholls rose from amongst the committee and spoke in favour of the return to work, his dominant voice ringing out confidently, saying how

fair The Mines had been in this dispute and it was time to return to work and leave the question of demands to arbitration. He was going quite well until a voice in the middle of the hall yelled out, "How much were you paid Larry?" and Larry began to falter and finished abruptly. The tension and surprise, the sense of defeat, betrayal, unanswered questions, the atmosphere of seen and unforeseen forces at work, brought on a fight situation, hackles risen.

Unexpectedly a figure rose from the body of the picture theatre and began challenging anyone and everyone to fight. He wasn't a drunk, he was well dressed, he spoke as one used to speaking, but the outburst hadn't been triggered by anything that anyone could see as reasonable, as he yelled, pointed, waved his arms around in an unconvincing way, trying to break up control, to divert.

Terry Peterson, sitting beside Jack Long said to him, "That's Beard. He runs the pay packets. He's a clerk. Son of a mine manager Beard."

An ex-jockey, a down-below man, said "Sit down Beard ya silly cunt. Ya couldn't beat ya sister. We know ya tryin' ta break up the meetin'." The ex-jockey's voice was the one that had silenced Nicholls. Long knew the jockey was a member of the Labor Party, he'd had him along to a Communist Party meeting, but the jockey bloke had only gone along to see what it was all about, had told them he was a member of the Labor Party and had thanked them for having him along. He was a surprise packet whichever way it went. There was still a bit of a fracas going on around Beard still trying desperately to throw a spanner in the works. A voice was calling him Blue Beard, there were laughs going up, another voice trying to connect him organisationally was turning the name Blue Beard into Booguard, but the jockey put him right. "Not Boogard, New Guard ya silly cunt."

Following this fracas an old mill worker and former AWU organiser spoke from a sitting position on the committee in favour of the return to work. Jack Kelly attempted to close the discussion from the chair, calling for a vote before any more damage was done to the committee recommendation, but Jack Long now rose again and claimed the right of reply as the mover, and in doing so falsely represented Pritto as saying that they should not return to work. "As comrade Pluto says,

the only thing to do is to stand firm until all our demands are met, which they will be as soon as the case is heard if we are still on strike. If we go back now we lose our bargaining position and the lead bonus hooked to the price of lead. As the mover of the amendment I now ask the chairman to put the amendment." Jack didn't know that he had got Pritto's name wrong, he'd never seen or heard of him before, and Pluto was the nearest he could get to the name on the spur of the moment. Amendment put and carried, became the motion and was put again and carried.

No further discussion, meeting closed, the men filed out in a body, past the committee, Eddie Heilbronn looking studiously at the papers in front of him, as though there was another problem needing attention, secretly satisfied with the work of his cadres.

LARRY NICHOLLS STOOD out in the street, everyone walking past him without speaking, still a look of disbelief and dismay and trepidation on his face, so much so that Jack Long stopped and spoke to him for a moment, a gesture after a fight; something about another meeting in a week's time, and Larry's mind began to tick over again. But his boast to the committee that he could lead these men wherever he wanted to take them was a blunder shattered by the temperament of the strikers, the Party, and a couple of hard-headed miners who had nothing to lose but their wages, their jobs, if they could be singled out later, as indeed was Jack Long. He was rather relieved about it at the time, a little bit of lead can go a long way, particularly in the bloodstream. The running tide of blood was

drawing him irresistibly back to the coast; as always the circular movement to return to base; the life habit of the itinerant wage worker, and one might say of love.

These thoughts from several years back had time to come through, to be sorted out, as the train from the far west shuddered, squealed on iron rails towards and through other western towns, stop/start/shunt/whistle-scream blowing clouds of coal smoke into the air, wheels clacking clacking endlessly, the motion lulling passengers to sleep.

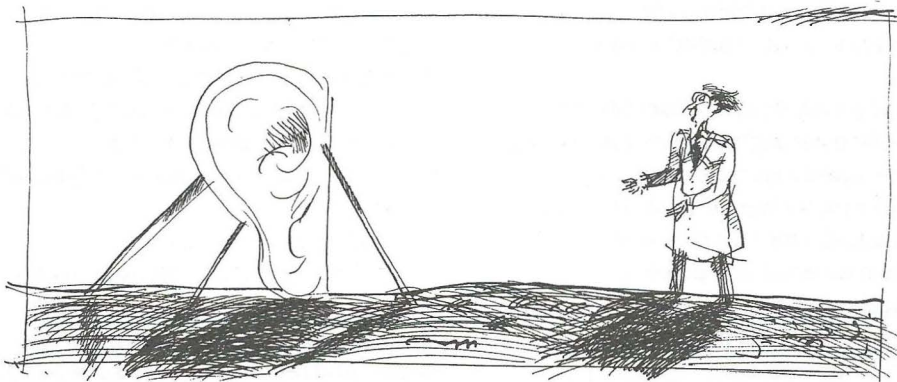
In Longfellow John Long the thoughts had the habit of eventually sorting out events central and symmetrical to the train motion, the symbolic metamorphosing of one precious delicious cultured voice of woman saying, "It's just right. It's quite an art you know!"

Still, onward, ever onward, as the Gorgon Sisters in flight and pursuit, to the big conflict with 'Ming the Merciless'. New heroes would arise out of the political stinking sump of religious conservative fanaticism. Somewhere a great leader would emerge, temper democratic, bias Australian, to belt shit out of Robert Gordon Menzies.

Move on slow indifferent train with the teeming thoughts and trepidations of Longfellow John Long, clenched hands, punchy stare into green startling bushes through train window, fixed immovable bushes that must be turned into teeming millions of people in revolt.

Wake up Longfellow, time to disembark onto Rockhampton platform, go home and see Mum before rushing on again.

Overland gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the SEARCH Foundation in publishing this chapter.



Jiri Tibor

ALAN WEARNE
The Lovemakers

from a novel in progress

"The first thing we do, kill all the economists"

(Canberra, the late seventies; a Friday afternoon in late Autumn)

(i)

*When a household's as finite as ours
thought Hannah,
couldn't we arrange at least one group shot?
To the left: herself, chubby but hardly fleshy;
to the right: Jo, fleshy though not quite chubby;
with, for their centrepiece, Margie: to someone,
once,
The Madonna With The Long Neck.
And though there was such a neck, of course,
try picturing any stray Our Lady with
short ginger hair and this broadcast of freckles:
you weren't to deify anyone that fetching, forget a
woman
that original.*

(ii)

Keith certainly hadn't.
Margie was at work when, wearing his
trademark greasy parka, he hitched in from
Sydney.
Though never appealing much to Hannah, that day
she tried not levelling her sights too much towards
one more square-jawed loser; besides,
at their age, few women (Margie the least of them)
would get besotted with men whose slow,
over-adult voices exceeded any powers
of mimicry (though countless times they'd
attempted 'doing' Keith). Now preferring dress-ups
(and you weren't to call it drag),

she'd half-prepared a comic-turn for Jo:
cloth cap to an angle, chin slanting up,
an eyebrow cocked and, to top all:
bit ov orright eh Guv'nor?

Keith made to smile, Hannah tugged on her
braces.

"A tiny something . . . for my friends . . ."
she tried explaining "should've trod the boards . . .
you know . . ." sounding more a question,
he didn't know. "Yes the boards . . ." she echoed
to her audience, feeling that here, with the Valium
Kid,

she was safe, which was at least a plus.
He might cry a bit but
what else could happen?

(iii)

"One always says," Jo had told her friends,
"that one should take one's guys in stages . . ."
Given the absence of a better creed
this seemed to mirror Margie's.
He'd flummoxed her at first but,
during that grad-trainee induction three years back,
who hadn't noticed Keith:
arriving at seminars in cowboy boots,
quoting what doubtless were Italian Marxists,
but never calling anybody *man*
whilst "Bourgeois?" he asked, killing off the stupid
word
with "Well I am if you are . . ."

A refugee from Sydney's evangelical
underbelly
(the sister taught kinder, the parents
Baptist and retired, his beard checking in at

nineteen)
but more than left enough and cynically proud,
Keith seemed ideal to get *taken in stages*.
His suburb was named. So what was it like?
"Fibro," got replied.

"I've had this boy since
high school," Margie said, "we've broken up . . ."

Whatever his family believed it seemed
almost

your duty to go and get caught doing something;
and he would've, if only there had been
anything suitable and worth the catching.

"Sure I believe in God," Keith wished he
could say, "but I hate him."

This, he knew, was the worst crime:
being guilty of nothing, innocent of the same,
and once the major-est finito stopped,
and the even more major-est infinito commenced,
nothing would save you less.

Art was once suggested and trying to catalogue
what *art*

had bloomed out of the shrivelled bush of faith
that might have been his, Keith reached George
Beverley Shea.

Okay, to have been an LDS was doubtless worse;
he had no greater comfort: not as bad as the
Mormons!

Hearing Margie boo-hooing like Blondie
over a new hat, Keith told her he felt as useful as
that

thin, cheery, white collar family man: Dagwood,
another Baptist!

Taken in stages? Yes well yes,
except that Margie chose an extra stage:
she left him.

(iv)

So what was passing itself as fate
had arranged Hannah's flex
just to make her flat-mate's ex
feel comfy enough.

"Then we haven't heard the last
of the *trickle down effect?*" she asked.

It didn't seem so and Keith's time,
political economy's finest hour was, as he told it
exactly "Upper than up . . ."

"Then if I'm a martyr to fellas you're one
to . . . ?"

Keith shrugged:

"Someone else's romance with the self-interest
ideal?"

and smiling a bit at her he left.

(v)

The man had been brilliant! No verdict
seemed

more damning; for between his soft-drug benders
and those outer circles of ministerial advice
Keith had mislaid Keith.

Someone might have herded him into
the next growth areas: consultancy, branch-
stacking,

but sheer getting-by-with-people
precluded that. "I'll never work again . . ."
he wanted to confess, but feared being challenged.

Somewhere the latest model MBAs
were getting launched and though 'the alternative'
hardly equated with him,

Keith commenced his next career:
hitching up and down the East Coast.

(vi)

Given an hour and Jo was home,
home to Hannah complaining how
"The Economist was round this afternoon."

"You mean," Jo who always qualified,
qualified,

"The Political Economist," not knowing that the joke
had ceased over a year before. There wasn't much
to say to Hannah, and this seemed it; this and

"Were we at home?" near-ignoring her
behind a *Cosmopolitan*: "One-o-one things
to love in a man mmmmm let's see . . ."

The magazine, incongruous it could be felt
in an acting *Nine* ". . . brings out the receptionist in
me . . ."

(More than you'd ever know, thought Hannah.)

". . . *I have a mother gumby cat,
her name is Jennyannyndots . . . so when's he
coming back?*"

Knowing this didn't need a reply

Jo had to continue with something:
"There'll be another big return,
surely but this weekend that's it, it *has* to be."

(vii)

*Any weekend, Hannah thought, that's it for
Canberra,
this girl has to get to Sydney . . .*
where she'd eat
with Charley, her friend/ carer/ confidante
who'd escort her to the Star 'n' Garter's
old and young quean sing-a-long,
with The Silly Man, The Goonie Bird and her
Charley,
*very last of the boy sopranos, wanting a girl
just like the girl that married dear old dad,
still calling Or-strayl-ya home.*
When *who else?* cared for Hannah
don't even mention fag-hagging:
*look, if it weren't for something (I've forgotten what,
God presumably) I'd be a nun . . . and home
they'd taxi, their voices' mingled rasp
advising creation: So if y'wanna fuck y'self/
take a candle off the shelf/ ship ahoy! Sailor boy!*

(viii)

Should've lived on her own, but when
she joined The Board it seemed like
flat mates or not much else. Could choose a
commune,
but The Board would hardly approve of com-
munes.
And set you up to be busted, communes did,
though early next morning someone friendly
(she usually worked at The Board)
arrived to clear your mess, post your bail.
Two hundred dollar fine but since you're a first
offender,
no conviction posted, Miss Little.
Hannah, besides, was hardly commune partial:
you over-did only what you felt
needed over-doing, and she could tank-up
on requisite bohemian bonhomie
at any Sunday craft mart.
Wasn't it enough merely to predict the crabs,

the blocked dunnies, those preposterous
imitation Neil Youngs that used to infect
only uni cafs but now, just like economists,
had spread throughout the planet?

Economists!

Wouldn't it be better if you could only dream of
them?
Sometimes it felt that all Canberra throbbed
with the group migraine of their collective indignity:
that theories should be sullied so, by humans
not perfect enough to want to let them work;
and shameless in such ignorance.
You don't believe in what we're letting you believe!
the economists wailed at Hannah, and
I only believe the earth deserves much better!
another intelligent young woman snapped in return.
She felt, sometimes, as if this god had decreed:
*there must be work for all these economists,
okay, let's create The Economy!* that and the sheer
inevitable
of theories turning nostrums turning fad . . .

(ix)

. . . or men like Keith: one year second division
bound,
the next: just another lumberjack-shirted
leftist droob; who arrives to find Canberra's
a music hall with moi, Hannah,
set to barnstorm him with Gilbert The Filbert
or Burlington Bertie; for if she's probably heartless
as any Baptist congregation, there's times
this girl's just gotta let down the hair.
Though there were ways to pacify him
you'd never cheer-up Keith:
you might run your tongue and lips over
his stubble, strip off the parka and the shirt,
look at the rib cage then listen to
the heart thump, but know that soon
you'd be seduced to hear the reprise
of all his other Political Economy reprises.
Oh taa but no taa.
When you're fattish, near thirty, haven't had
a guy in years, you still can be attached
to a single word, and that word's not *seduction*,
it's *dignity*.

(x)

One day there'd be no more Keith or rather those interested would catch these rumours: the sessional work at some regional TAFE, the eventual girl friend with her bonzai cactus, and how, each seven p.m., their brown rice alternated with their lentils; good reasons all to care and howl about his future, which she didn't and wouldn't since even better reasons informed her: there's this Keith you meet, another that you think about and you'd be hypocritical, Hannah, missing either.

(xi)

Better that she entertain the friends.

"Ready for the tang?" she'd ask them, "ready for the vinegar? C'mon and laugh, clownesses (we three *destined for greater things*) laugh!" And her mode quick-changed into the husky-intimate:

"Ladies, not neurotic enough? How long, madame, since *you* were meaningfully depressed? When *I* really need a problem I choose . . . men! Have I lived this long without you, fellas? Oh how I miss your mess, inconsideration and power! But know what I say?" and Hannah screeched into her macro-pleb: "Try as I may I've never 'ad a decent chin-wag wiv me vibrata!"

"I hardly can with a fella," Jo's candour interrupted.

But the spruik was concluding on its owner's terms and Hannah leapt upon a chair and, like some Irish auctioneer, poked the air:

"Get y'selves a man m'gels, today!"

Life like this should be a musical, Jo thought, and Hannah a kind of ingenue's best friend, her performances weren't unforgettable, just unforgivable. Did men perform amongst themselves like this? Doubtless most times no, and not most women either. Do mates so overload on mates that the only mate response was

to recycle *fair go . . . steady on . . . barley Charley* and all those other cliches of restraint that got the old man through the depression, you name which war, his mum and missus?

Keith would know, no he probably wouldn't. For Keith was feminist.

"A feminist man,"

Hannah groaned, "is kosher pork." For that hour *The Economist* was out, he became *The Sister*.

(xii)

With all the walk and whisper and look of living

why didn't they ask her, she'd write the book: *Farce and Melodrama: How to Play These Allied Manias*.

For someone *that* advanced in arm-chancing Hannah needed to believe in its limits and wanted these limits known.

(xiii)

An example:

she had been a grad clerk in Recruitment and the lift was carrying ten that morning with slurring, lop-sided John, a Registry CA Four, setting-up Debbie or Kelly, this kid with a cold sore:

"Love that cold-sore, sweetheart."

John stared into her face, down at her tits and up again; his prelude was over.

"Say don't he love you anymore, eh darling, isn't he speaking now?"

Time, place and target were perfect weren't they? The girl could only stay mute whilst Hannah forced herself, once more, to understand how this was a world of Johns, of there-there imperfection.

But "Just shuddup!" a man's voice (were it Hannah!) was demanding "why don't you just shuddup?!" till with that crazed, near-joyful men's anarchy (she could admire if it didn't terrify)

here came his over-reaching:

"You're the only spastic I've ever felt like hitting!" Never had time seemed so extended:

wars were piecemeal, cities founded on so much less. Through Hannah's mind all thoughts ran express: *this one's the noble knight, that one's the evil dwarf: oh it's brilliant oh it's hideous oh it's noble and pathetic and it's too early for mythmaking. Please, this morning, let's just play bureaucrats, please?* The door opened at Recruitment. She'd been off blokes for a while and was enjoying it. No wonder.

(xiv)

Oh men. Men. Menmenmen! But haven't we all our brace of routines? When she'd reached Canberra Hannah had *kick-start me* fine-tuned; and Margie, near-sensing that her friend understood how few truths succeed like slapstick truths, would roll up their morning paper, demanding "So no-one looks less like Carly Simon? No-one looks less like Ma Kettle!" and whack the SMH onto their kitchen bench. "You're you!" Okay then, she, being Hannah, would set herself for further male trouble and *oooh la la crème de la crème bon soir* she, with her Two B Honours French, returned to play that sucker-when-I-want-to-be for any Jean-Paul straying through the A.C.T.; providing he wasn't an economist. How could you talk to *them* who'd said it all? (And their it was shit.) Life, though, had undoubted grandeurs, for economists. Didn't a grateful public pay you to intone *trimming the fat?* And Hannah's voice would plunge to that testy, authoritative contralto she didn't do badly. One day, of course, there'd be no public servants, just economists, but till then she'd her two careers: at The Board of course and the other? Well think of this near-to-unknown breakwater set in the path of the New Right high tide. So she imagined that? A woman had to do something.

(xv)

Jo was asking:
"Can you imagine Margie trying to really tell it's over? That last time he must've got a hint, though men like him are made to miss *the* hint, *I*" came the emphasised refrain, "*I* always say" (Jo whose only lack was charity.)

"As Friday night descends on Canberra . . ."

Hannah was moving into travelogue mode and to book-in next weekend Sydney was phoned.

Sorry, came the soft cheeky sound of the homeminder,
Charley was o.s., well sudden was the word: someone having got their friend a conference gig he'd be away a month. ". . . and you're? . . . oh Hannah! . . . yes, certainly, I've heard of *you!*"

(xvi)

She wanted to get into bed and not think about very much at all; but Margie came home, Keith phoned, and Margie went out, returning to tell them how he said he understood and that he'd stay with friends in Queanbeyan; for a reward she lent him her car.

Well we're all single now, Hannah wished to say; and how she loathed the man and wasn't he fascinating. Great: no more of this economist, he'd just wander away.

And this is what she'd do: to compensate for Charley's absence, start to bushwalk; to celebrate Keith's departure, continue tomorrow what jogging she had done before.

But even early Saturday (the week at its most benign) hoons, no let's really say it, *men* could emerge from the mist, set to thump you, or worse. Dumb hoons: Hannah had her whistle and some neat lead piping.

IAN SYSON

Smells Like Market Spirit

Grunge, Literature, Australia



IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG for so-called Grunge literature to wane. No sooner had it emerged as a movement in new Australian writing than its founding father published the first post-Grunge novel in the middle of last year. Andrew McGahan's *1988*, with its ineffectual and forlorn penises, minimal urges, preference for beer over drugs and fleeting but clear political statements about the relationship of *all* Australians to the land might well have put paid to the tradition of young, sexually charged, contemporary, angry, ahistorical, amoral, nihilistic writing thought to be instigated by his first novel *Praise*.

Like many traditions, this one has been generated retrospectively. For a few years *Praise* stood alone, deserving of its moderate accolades (including the *Vogel*) but the progenitor of nothing and seemingly destined to fade into history. Along comes a bunch of novels that seems to share a number of its concerns and there you have it: a tradition. The only trouble is that when we get back to looking at *Praise* it exhibits the same impotent, curiously asexual and most un-angry characteristics as *1988*. Its central character Gordon owes as much to Middleton's rouseabout as he does to any of Bukowski's barflies who, by contrast, brim with opinions and ideas.

Whatever else it might name Grunge also refers to a marketing ploy. Observing the street cred that Grunge bands like Nirvana possessed, elements of the literature industry saw a way of obtaining relatively high levels of credibility and sales among a large and untapped 25–40-year-old market by promoting a set of new writers as being the literary expression of that same sentimental teen spirit. And, if the rumours of the sales of Justine Ettler's *The River Ophelia* fast approaching 40,000 copies

are anywhere near the truth, then the ploy has worked – at least in terms of sales.

AT THE 1995 MELBOURNE WRITERS' FESTIVAL, Linda Jaivin made a point in the session on Grunge that might have laid the label to rest. She asked, "But what is grunge in the literary context?" Maybe it's a bit like trying to work out what the difference is between realist and modernist electric guitar solos – the question doesn't make sense. Each of the writers in this session: Fiona MacGregor, Andrew McGahan, Christos Tsiolkas and Jaivin had serious problems with any attempt to define their works as Grunge. They felt their works were doing such different things that to label them this way threatened their difference, integrity and purpose. Indeed, no matter how briefly you look at the works of Tsiolkas, Ettler, McGahan, Clare Mendes, Edward Berridge, Coral Hull and company, their differences hit you in the face. Demographically, their characters – Tsiolkas's alienated "wog poofter"; the horny hetero honours students through which Ettler shows off her grasp of contemporary French philosophy, erotica and the canon of English literature; McGahan's country boy not quite in phase with the city or the bush; Mendes's country family not at all handling the city; Berridge's yuppie, feral, punk, bikie, druggie, Aboriginal and working class saints; Hull's westies going 'home' to Liverpool – represent a wide cross-section of Australia's population and not a single community, class or ethnic fraction. Even if you look closely at the works in order to speculate on the authors' politics or world-views a broad spectrum is apparent – from Tsiolkas's residual Marxism through Ettler's tentative feminism to Edward Berridge's conservatism.

But I'm not satisfied that the genuine differences that exist among these writers are so substantial that they preclude an important (even fundamental) cohesion between them. Any possible cohesion is not explained, however, by a concept like Grunge. Trite as it might sound, there is an attitude (more 'in-your-face' like a Henry Rollins than tortured and sensitive like a Kurt Cobain) in their work that shares something with the British Angry Young Men like Alan Sillitoe, David Storey and John Osborne who also expressed anger in an age when the causes for their anger had supposedly disappeared. More contemporary literary comparisons can be drawn between writers like Alan Duff in New Zealand and Archie Weller and the Italian migrant writer Rosa Cappiello in Australia. Tsiolkas for one has spoken of the influence of the latter's *Oh Lucky Country* on his writing.

Tsiolkas has also spoken of the importance of acknowledging that literature cannot speak to all people. In an electrifying speech at the Melbourne Writers' Festival he claimed:

I do not believe there is a writing that speaks to everyone. I write in English and my parents cannot read my work. And even if they could my work is dependent on the cultural practices of queer, of experimental writing, of a popular culture and music which makes little attempt to speak to them.

Tsiolkas is operating under something of a paradox here. The truer his claim is, the more general relevance his body of writing has for all Australians. Even as he made this disclaimer, he spoke to the entire audience *and they were all listening*. His speech oozed passion and commitment and made a lot of people think once more, if only for a moment, that literature can be an agent of social change and cultural healing.

THERE IS SOMETHING about good fiction-writing that speaks beyond mere content – and it's not just in the other, aesthetic or stylistic, side of that coin. You don't have to be a young Greek-Australian homosexual to be spoken to by *Loaded*. And you don't have to resort to hoary old chestnuts about the common human condition or absolutist notions of good writing to know that *Loaded*, like

a number of Grunge novels, has the *capacity* to speak to all Australians because it hits some pretty big nails squarely on their heads. Tsiolkas asks critics to "read *Loaded* as an examination of the particular histories of Australian migration and racism". It has captured a moment in Australian history at which some basic cultural promises are in the process of being broken. Its main character, Ari, lives an alienated life in a society in which the long promise of egalitarianism and a fair go for all has been exposed to be a cover-up for the massively unequal distribution of the country's wealth. The more recent promises of the fragmentary politics of identity expressed through, for example, multiculturalist or Gay Liberation rhetoric are also shown to be empty. For Ari:

Ethnicity is a scam, a bullshit, a piece of crock. The fortresses of the rich wogs on the hill are there not to keep the *Australezo* out, but to refuse entry to the uneducated-long-haired-bleached-blond-no-money wog. No matter what the roots of the rich wogs, Greek, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Arab, whatever, I'd like to get a gun and shoot them all. Bang bang. The East is hell. Designed by Americans.

Nor is there much useful solidarity in the gay community for a working class homosexual like Ari:

Maria tells me I'll never make a good faggot. You hate Abba and love early Rolling Stones. She shakes her head at me. What kind of queer are you? Crystal giggles in my face. The Rolling Stones, he squeals, how boring.

– Early Stones, I correct him.

Loaded is a working class novel written in an age when it is not possible to write one. The narrative is crying out for the comfort of an old-fashioned ('Street-Fighting Man') literary politics of class conflict in which Ari's alienation can be explained, soothed and channelled into class action. Tsiolkas is too contemporary a writer to resort to such a simple and schematic frame and so the end of the novel finds Ari in a depressing stasis, staring at the ceiling and unwittingly waiting for the great leap forward. While Ari's autism can be read as an expression of individual existential despair

and loneliness, he nevertheless shares it with a community of contemporary literary characters.

IF SOME WRITERS RESIST the label Grunge, others take it – or one like it – on board happily. Edward Berridge, in a 1994 *Black and White* article ('The Living Dead') was confident that he, along with writers like Neil Boyack and Simon Colvey, was part of a new literary movement, "a developing international tradition" of "urban realism" throwing away the effete, politically correct shackles of the past. For too long Marxism and feminism had held the reins of Australian literary publishing, leading us around the polite bourgeois backroads and suburbs of the Australian literary demography, while those writers of true urban and proletarian grit remained stuck at the publication stop sign:

the problem with Australian literature is, as it has always been, narrowness of vision. At present, there is just one school. Just one blinkered path. It emanates from Bloomsbury, is generally informed by early '70s campus Marxist and feminist orthodoxy, pays a little homage to Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez – and that is it. From Rodney Hall's *Yandilli* trilogy to the Blue Mountains novels of Kate Llewellyn therein lies the model.

Blue-stockinged Bolsheviks humping bluey from Bloomsbury to the Blue Mountains?

This is nonsense. It exhibits very little knowledge about the history of Australian literature and even less of its internal conflicts and differences or its traditions of urban realism and anti-bourgeois writing. What were Paterson and Lawson arguing about in the *Bulletin* if it wasn't about similar antagonisms between urban and bush mythologies in Australian writing? Could Berridge have read Barbara Baynton, for example, and put her into some feeble and bushy new-age Katoomba lineage? Grit, terror and abjection are the very stuff of her writing. The pictures of urban squalor, poverty and despair in William Lane's *Workingman's Paradise* match anything that the Grunge writers can muster in terms of documentary realism. And Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* captures the young urban milieu of its time in a far more penetrating

and transgressive manner than most of the Grunge works – that is, if we think about the matter historically. If we want pictures of depressed and frightened young Australian men expressing their alienation through excessive alcohol consumption, acts of brutality, sexual conquests and active contempt for authority we need look no further than Eric Lambert's war novel, *Twenty Thousand Thieves*. Then there's Elizabeth Harrower's *The Watchtower*, David Ireland's *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* . . . Grunge is much more a continuation of a tradition of Australian literature than it is a new and revolutionary development.

Forgetting the 'distant' past for a moment, Blue Mountain resident Hewett's *The Toucher* still beats the pants off Berridge for sexual transgression and confronting psychological realism. Then again, how could you trust the literary-historical judgement of a critic who argues that *The Tree of Man* is a rare "floodlight illuminating only the nearest trash"? As good as White was, he was not the only decent Australian writer of the 1950s and 1960s. If Berridge's Australian literary history is wobbly, he is just mistaken in relation to the contemporary ideology of major mainstream Australian publishing houses – the idea that they are dominated by Marxism or anything but the most soggy liberal feminism is laughable.

Berridge is at least right to pick up a narrowness of focus in mainstream Australian fiction. Over the last decade a growing economic rationalist spirit has moved into place in Australian cultural policy. The days when mainstream publishers allotted (and were able and encouraged to allot) a significant space on their lists to new, experimental and high-risk writing are, with a few exceptions, over. The massive jump in book prices (beyond CPI) in the early 1980s and the more recent exposure of the Australian industry to predatory international competition has meant a growing timidity among local publishers. Rather than going out on a limb for new audiences, publishers are now niche marketing and targeting, capturing and servicing client groups more than they ever were. Their narrowness of focus is not the result of some Marxist-feminist conspiracy but its exact opposite: the nigh-on overwhelming belief in the logic of capital in the publishing industry.

As a result too many of the structurally crucial decisions about what kind of fiction gets published in Australia are made with middle class tastes in mind. The widespread assumption that it is mainly middle class people who read *good* books (the working class of course reads rubbish) means that the middle class is the target group for the literature industry. Stories about workers and their fami-

. . . too many of the structurally crucial decisions about what kind of fiction gets published in Australia are made with middle class tastes in mind.

lies or working class communities and problems don't have value unless they can be wrapped up in some kind of label which guarantees their attractiveness to middle class readers. This involves either abstracting their working class character into something about 'the human condition' or offering them up as vulgar and violent but poetic and stylish descriptions of excessive human behaviour upon which the middle class reader can gaze voyeuristically. Tsiolkas, for example, is marketed as writing "stark, uncompromising prose"; while "behind the squalor [of Mendes's *Drift Street*], patterns of beauty are at work. As the Washbournes spiral increasingly downwards, it is this beauty, together with the weakest glimmers of hope, that will see them rise" – come and enjoy the show about a working class family tearing itself to pieces in the most poetic way. The mainstream emergence of Berridge's brand of writing is not because of some revolution by the literary underclass; it stems from the recognition by some unusually courageous publishing decision-makers that they had found a genre or body of writing that could be marketed effectively if its more palatable forms were appropriated.

THE ARGUMENT THAT CRITICS like Berridge will never make is the one that draws out the politics of the long-term marginalisation of 'urban realism'. At worst their position looks like mere whingeing because their mob is excluded by the other mob; at best the argument is a generational one which makes valid points about the lack of avenues for young writers without ever really ex-

plaining why there are any number of good older writers of 'Katoomba literature' failing to get published – or why, for example, Jennifer Maiden's 'Complicity' manuscript keeps getting rejected. The irony is that despite writing mostly about (lumpen)proletarian characters in *Lives of the Saints*, Berridge won't speak of the suppression of fiction like his in class terms – an irony which also applies to Alan Duff's writings. Berridge and Duff are important and powerful writers because they simultaneously despise, admire and know the culture from which they come and about which they write. Yet their non-fictional analyses of their respective places in literary culture are, in relation, woeful.

This idea of tension between disgust, sympathy and familiarity is one of the significant aspects of Grunge. Coral Hull writes of western Sydney:

liverpool, you dump you hell hole/
you pollen & pollution collector/ you test tube of
heroin you bucket of liver/
liverpool, you supermarket
culture you checkout chick/ you are responsible for
hair gel & hairdressers like 'antons' & 'classiques'/
& donuts & cake shops & fat legs & summer frocks –
rapraprap gear & tracksuits/

'LIVERPOOL' is four pages of this: a litany of hatred towards the poet's own culture that still finds time to stop and ask the question "& why doesn't anybody write poetry about us?" The intensity of Hull's feelings towards the culture is evidence of her sympathy and identity with it. A poem like 'LIVERPOOL' could only have been written from the inside.

Clare Mendes too writes of the ugliness of suburban working class culture. But rather than merely relaying this ugliness she works on it, transforming it into something else. *Drift Street* is the story of a dysfunctional Melbourne family narrated at various points by each of its five members. The first narrator is the teenage daughter, Sky Washbourne. From her we get a picture of the family: Dad (Colin) – a domestically-violent no-hoper; Mum (Linda) – overweight and depressed into near-uselessness; older brother (Trevor) – a deeply racist quasi-Nazi drug abuser; younger brother (Danny) – intelligent, sensitive and seem-

ingly destined to be destroyed by the family in his turn; herself (Sky) – a scaled down version of her mother. Left at this single narrative perspective the book would remain one more pessimistic representation of the new underclass – despite (or perhaps because of) its jarringly optimistic ending. But the picture is complicated by the prismatic effect of the shifting narrative agents. By the time we get to Danny's chapter, any pity that might have been engendered by the first chapter is exposed to be founded on a superficial and patronising assumption of the Washbournes' lack of agency. Thinking about the negative attitude of outsiders towards his life and family, Danny reflects:

You couldn't really get annoyed at people for being ignorant. But did they really think they could see anything, standing on the outside like they did? Anyway, the kids who said things weren't old enough to have their own opinions. They were just borrowing opinions from other people.

This is also Mendes challenging her readers.

Without ever losing sight of the objective conditions of the Washbournes' existence, Mendes hammers home a subjectivity for each of the family members which transforms their initially apparent abjection into something more positive and fluid. Yet we are still a long way from the sweetness and light foreshadowed by the blurb. Any attempt to read the novel as this optimistic relies on an ending which represents something of a failure on the part of Mendes to follow her own rejection of superficial readings of the culture. *Drift Street* peters out into a morality play, the message of which is "if you keep battling away everything will come good eventually".

A recent *Arena Magazine* article by Kevin McDonald is worth reading in tandem with *Drift Street*. 'Morals is all you've got' focuses on the experiences of young people in the Footscray area. It is about the breakdown of traditional working class formations and the rise of an underclass without the kind of institutional, cultural, emotional and intellectual support structures available to previous generations. As he points out, a residue of class memory remains in the way certain social antagonisms are maintained by young people and the

way in which a provisional form of group identification occurs (depending upon what's at stake). But it is *just* a residue. He shows that the

tradition of trade unionism is totally absent from the experiences of these young people. Most often it is the image of their 'own business' which is the way out of the dilemmas they are confronting, as a space of freedom and autonomy as much as economic activity.

Colin Washbourne's life could have been the evidence for this argument. Very rarely does Colin consider getting a regular proletarian job, despite the fact that he is constantly without work. In the past he had

worked every so often. Every time a job came along that wasn't too hard, or had perks, he'd be first in line. But within the first week he'd've lost the job. It'd be a dispute with the boss, or the work was too hard, or he'd arrive late and resign before they could sack him.

When he does try to earn a living it is of a *petit bourgeois* kind. Despite the fact that he hardly makes any money during these schemes, they are the only times he feels anything like fulfilled. Linda narrates:

And that is what he did all the day, acted like a professional gardener, sitting there, sketching, colouring in. "I'm not just a bloody gardener, I'm a landscape gardener," he growled at me. The phone was connected up again, too, for the calls that he was planning would come in – but not a soul rung, so he kicked it off the hook and rolled his sleeves a tad higher and kept on with the sketches.

Because like Colin said, business was booming.

Whether read on an individual or a social level, Colin's statement is absurd and (because of that) thoroughly poignant.

BUSINESS IN AUSTRALIA is not booming – at least not in any socially beneficial way. Business is not about that. It is about creating consumption

and underclasses and increasing the divide between the rich and the poor. It is about ransacking communities and their cultures and patterns of behaviour in order to commodify and privatise them – whether it be their football, their pools or their parks. It is about the prosecution of the Thatcherite dream of destroying society and replacing it with a world of consuming individuals. Tsiolkas suggested, only half-jokingly, at the Writers' Festival that this perhaps was as good a definition of Grunge as you'd get.

Grunge, in its powerful and directed forms, is more a *response* to that growing market spirit, a response which is in turn being named and appropriated by that very spirit. These elements of Grunge belong to a long tradition of Australian writing that goes back to the convict ballads: the literature of social protest. It is a literature which

If we understand Grunge simply as some ephemeral moment of literary fashion or nihilistic rage then we sell it short.

claims to speak for the alienated and disenfranchised but which risks being muffled as it speaks. If we understand Grunge simply as some ephemeral moment of literary fashion or nihilistic rage then we sell it short. And, while the age, ethnicity, gender and sexuality of its various authors is crucial, the various works are not limited to authorial designs or single issues. They articulate the rumblings of a structure of feeling that is being demolished at its deepest levels.

One encouraging sign to come out of the Grunge phenomenon has been the clear evidence of a large and young audience for Australian literary fiction. But this audience will not keep buying books if it sees future publications as cynical attempts to pander to its presumed literary needs. Grunge is withering as quickly as it grew and it will not be sustained by the marketing boards of multinational publishers alone. And this is the crux of the matter. Organisations other than multinational publishing corporations need to be encouraged by their own memberships and constituencies to think of themselves as being involved in the liter-

ary publishing community. Unions, social clubs, political movements and parties all have a role to play. Indeed publishing in Australia has never been the sole province of capitalist enterprise and the market spirit. For example, one quarter of the novels published in Australia in 1962 were published by the Australasian Book Society, a non-profit organisation closely affiliated with the trade union movement and the Communist party. *Overland*, never having been operated in accordance with the logic of the market (more like the 'irrationalism' of the culturally and politically committed), is responsible for publishing well over 120 different Australian writers per year. And a large proportion of stories and poems published in Australia today are published through vehicles which are the antithesis of capital-accumulating, market-oriented organisations – the literary magazines, the alternative presses and vanity publishers. There is no doubt that these avenues are shrinking in the face of spreading economic rationalism, which (if *Creative Nation*, *Arts 21* and information 'gathering' meetings run by the Literature Board are any guide) is now even well-entrenched in governmental arts policy bodies.

Grunge refers to a growing and exciting force in Australian literature but it also refers to the process in which the same writing is emptied of a lot of the radicalism and force it contains. Only a healthy and diverse alternative publishing network will nourish and keep alive the spirit that Grunge names but does not define.

WORKS CITED

- Edward Berridge, *The Lives of the Saints*, St Lucia: UQP, 1995; 'The Living Dead', *Black and White* 9 (1994): 27–28, 112.
- Rosa Cappiello, *Oh Lucky Country*, St Lucia: UQP, 1984.
- Justine Ettler, *The River Ophelia*, Sydney: Picador, 1995.
- Coral Hull, 'LIVERPOOL', *Meanjin* 54.3 (1995): 441–44.
- Linda Jaivin, 'Grunge Unplugged', *Australian Book Review* 177 (1995): 29–30.
- Kevin McDonald, 'Morals is all you've got', *Arena Magazine* 20 (1995): 18–23.
- Andrew McGahan, 1988, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995; *Praise*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992.
- Clare Mendes, *Drift Street*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Christos Tsiolkas, *Loaded*, Melbourne: Vintage, 1995; Unpublished transcript of an address at Melbourne Writers' Festival, 22 October 1995.

ALLAN GARDINER

Pushed Into the Bourgeois Camp

David Martin and the CPA



DAVID MARTIN joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1951, two years after his arrival in Australia and his writing, especially in the early 1950s, was deeply involved in that political commitment, as can be seen in such verse publications as *Battlefields and Girls* (1942), *From Life* (1953), *Rob the Robber* (1954) and *New World-New Song* (1955).¹ According to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, he left the Party in 1956,² but Martin himself reveals that it was in 1959 that he was, as he puts it in his 1991 autobiography, *My Strange Friend*, “asked to leave” the Party.³ This is a polite way of covering what was in fact a campaign of ostracism, the malice of which is the secret behind Noel Counihan’s 1955 caricature of Martin in the garb of a bishop. It was a campaign that Martin fought with vain energy. But why should a writer like Martin regret so much his expulsion from a post-war Communist cultural scene which is often dismissed as politically and aesthetically bankrupt?

The campaign by the CPA against Martin in 1959 was part of a larger one against *Overland*, for which he continued to write despite its final break from Party discipline. This break was really an intensification of a split in Communist cultural ranks that was visible as early as 1953.⁴ But for a few years before that date Martin, like many other writers, had good reasons to support the cultural manifestations of the leftist phase of the CPA’s united front period.

Even accounts which disparage this phase of socialist realism customarily concede to its vigour by offering a list of the writers and other artists who produced good work at this time, and of the cultural organisations formed to support and distribute their work.⁵ John Docker points out that

those who continued to support a socialist realist stance, often identifiable with the “upper-working class” elements of the Party membership, furthered democratising experiments in cultural debate.⁶ Pat Buckridge gives added importance to this period of Communist cultural growth by focusing on how dominant cultural forms and institutions are decisively shaped in relation to such sub-dominant practices.⁷

Martin’s autobiography, however, explains his attraction to socialist realism by pointing to the influence of Frank Hardy. This is not surprising because it was Hardy who was most responsible for breathing life into the Party’s abstract endorsement of the Comintern’s turn to ‘ideological struggle’ and socialist realism. By the example of his novel, *Power Without Glory*, and by his efforts to ground left writing within the politicised working class, Hardy had made a practical, coherent and inspiring framework for socialist working-class writing.⁸

In the early united front period, Hardy rediscovered some aspects of the work of the Communist writers of the Party’s earlier left-turn in the 1930s. David Carter, for example, calls *Power Without Glory* the post-war Communist novel which most continues the 1930s literary techniques of “juxtaposing documentary, ‘novelistic’, and political discourses.”⁹ As did the 30s writers, inspired by the visit to Australia of the Czech reportage writer Egon Kisch, Hardy and the Melbourne Realist Writers’ Group stressed the importance of experience with work-place settings. This was the particular theme of the eighth edition of the Group’s newsletter, *Realist Writer*, in which group member Lance Loughrey remembered how Eric Lambert, author of *The Twenty Thousand Thieves*, carried

it to extremes. Obeying the principle of writing from participant observation, Lambert searched for a way to be jailed so that he could write about prison life.¹⁰ But the most important participation was in industrial action and, furthermore, the very material and institutional basis for the Realist Writers, apart from that supplied by the Party, was in trade unions, whose journals and meetings provided publication and other essential elements of a literary culture.

David Martin's socialist poetry displays the influence of Hardy and of post-war socialist realism by its focus on exposing the failings of ruling class personages and, secondly, by its positioning within the discourse of striking or organising workers. The nature of the insults that Martin throws at his portraits of powerful figures can be gauged from his 'Dirge for a Press Lord' (presumably Sir Keith Murdoch):

The lord of lies has gone to his last rest,
Mourn him with hymns, all who hold falsehood
dear¹¹

or, again, from his sketch of a policeman in 'Plain-Clothes Man', whose "soul perspires freely through his boots."¹² But his major project along these lines is *Rob the Robber*, a book-length, mock-epic life of Robert Menzies.

Rob the Robber hangs together as a unified comic verse (despite the narrator's complaints that the final chapter is forced upon him because events move on while he searches for a publisher). But the material that Martin has his formal fun with is diverse and piecemeal, being a collection of infamous tales and politically useful slurs against Menzies. This recalls, of course, the way Hardy collected stories against John Wren that were in circulation amongst the left or in underground public opinion. So, in *Rob the Robber*, there are references to Menzies' failure to enlist for battle:

Come laurel, gum and sprig of heather,
Bind him in a wreath – with never a white
feather!

and to historic fights against Menzies – such as the wharf-labourers' strike against pig-iron shipment to Japan. Finally, there are instances of Menzies'

servility to client capitalists. The story of Menzies' battle with the Queensland-based federal politician Arthur Fadden over the activities of Mount Isa mines is included in *Rob the Robber* thanks to Martin's general Party work. This is revealed in a letter Martin wrote in reply to his colleague in the Melbourne Realist Writers Group, Ralph de Boissiere, who wanted to see a "record" Martin had "assembled" as part of a CPA pamphlet on a Royal Commission in the 1930s into the oil industry at which Robert Menzies appeared for the oil companies. Further recalling the influence of Hardy's focus on the figure of John West/John Wren in *Power Without Glory*, Martin admits that he has "steeped" himself in the "whole character and make up" of this man and describes in depth a person whose "main 'thing' is a unique mixture of deftness, vanity and nihilism."¹³

Hardy faced jail for what he wrote about John Wren, and it might seem that writers like Lambert and Martin wished to get into trouble with the law in a childish attempt to match Hardy's notoriety. It is along such lines that Zoe O'Leary explains Lambert's eagerness at this time to publish attacks on the powerful,¹⁴ and Martin makes a similar judgement of himself in *My Strange Friend*. More analysis is needed, however, of this rare moment in Australian literary history when a number of writers were willing to risk legal and political persecution. This eagerness to be in trouble with the law points to the second element of post-war socialist realism, its situation within politicised workers' activities.

Along with the 'workerism' and 'sectarianism' of the Realist Writers' Group came a serious attempt to be, as Hardy often stressed, "the literary organisation of the Labour Movement." Confrontations with the law are unavoidable for industrial militants and hence in any writing that aims to support such militancy. Militant workers draw confidence for their conflicts with authority from their strength in industrial organisation and their political clarity. For the few years around 1950 when such workers were at the base of a viable literary culture, writers could share this orientation and this confidence. If these writers seemed to compete to be the most persecuted by the law, this was only one part of the rivalry for the title of being 'the most working class Australian writer', a

rivalry which led them to pull down all distinctions between themselves and trade unionists. That Martin was a front-runner for the title of the best working class poet is indicated by his editorship of a collection of such poetry, *New World – New Song*. His status caused a jealousy which led the Western Australian, Vic Williams to declare Martin far inferior to himself as a proletarian poet: “I have read David Martin’s *From Life* and he does not yet reflect the mass economic struggles of the people he writes about.” On the other hand, Williams could say of himself that he had “consciously set out to do this and I think that, to the extent that I have succeeded, I am better than most other Australian writers, as I work in a heavy industry and have been in industry since 1946.”¹⁵ Such comments are too easily read as evidence of literary naivety and folly. In fact, however, they are symptoms of the enthusiasm generated by the idea of working class writing.

Martin was neither young nor naive, politically or artistically, when he joined the Realists. His poems in *Battlefields and Girls* show that he engaged in the Spanish Civil War as an already-committed revolutionary and that he wished his writing to reflect this commitment long before he came to Australia. Furthermore, his ways of thinking about his writing were lastingly stimulated by socialist realism.

Even when he broke with Party writing, Martin did not reject the ideas of typicality discussed by the Realists. In his article in *Meanjin* in September 1959, ‘Three Realists in Search of Reality’,¹⁶ he had complained that writers such as Frank Hardy, Judah Waten and John Morrison say

incessantly that life is conflict, but evade the one conflict that *is* life, because they cannot bear a conflict that is unresolvable. They cannot face that part of freedom which is chaos [nor] look into a reality that [W]ill cannot affect – that is, into eternity and nothingness.

Yet the literary theoretical exposition in the essay runs contrary to this argument, exploring instead the plausibility of basing literary observations on philosophically determined ‘typical’ events as opposed to un-theorised, ‘average’ ones. In his criticism of Martin’s article, Ralph de Boissiere was

entitled to ask on what basis left writers should focus on existential doubt.¹⁷

The most frontal attack on Martin was launched in *Tribune* by Rex Chiplin.¹⁸ Martin’s story ‘Moral Persuasion’ in *Overland*, Chiplin wrote in a tone of excommunication, might just as well be written by Billy Graham (the anti-communist US evangelist). In response, Martin wrote to *Tribune* declaring that he did not “intend at all to allow myself to be pushed into the bourgeois camp.” He points out that the religious sentiments used within his story were part of a satire of religion. Chiplin’s claim that the story could have been written by Billy Graham, he says, is not only a lie but a lie transparent to other writers and calculated to terrorise them. After this attack on Martin, other writers would necessarily fear that contact with *Overland*, regardless of what they actually wrote, could result in their being painted as the worst kind of class traitors.¹⁹

Tribune refused to publish Martin’s letter, and his next move was to send the letter to three branches of the Realist Writers Group along with another letter addressed to the Group members asking them to “discuss the whole matter.” As Melbourne RWG secretary, Ralph de Boissiere wrote back to Martin, refusing support and upholding *Tribune*’s criticism of *Overland*. Martin then wrote to de Boissiere personally, showing that he was hurt and angry at what he saw as de Boissiere’s closed mind. At the same time, de Boissiere was able to publish his own views on the subject as a follow-up in *Tribune* to Chiplin’s attack. Martin continued to seek a change of heart from de Boissiere. At the end of 1959, after de Boissiere’s *Tribune* article, there was another exchange of letters between the two.²⁰

Expulsion from the CPA often left the outcast without a sense of identity, a network of relationships and protection from anti-Communist forces. Carole Ferrier has helped to show how vitally important to Jean Devanny, for instance, was her good name within the Party and her ongoing membership.²¹ Martin’s determination to avoid being “pushed into the bourgeois camp” provides another example. But it also shows that Martin did not view his politics or his writing as changing in class allegiance, as the Party alleged.

Martin’s expulsion was not part of a battle be-

tween socialist realism and anti-socialist realism. On his side, Martin denied that he was abandoning working class writing while, on the Party's side, the attacks on Martin and *Overland*, except where some contributors such as de Boissiere tried to keep the debate principled, ignore ideas formulated by the writers and critics who formed the socialist realist movement. The 'case' against Martin was initiated by a Stalinist leadership intent on silencing a dissident faction, and it was 'argued' through cynical, personal slander by 'literary commentators' who knew and cared little about the real cultural activities of Party writers.

After 1959, when Martin was free from the Party and supported by the circle around *Overland*, he substantially re-oriented his work, most notably by moving away from a primary interest in poetry. But it could be argued that his ground-breaking novels of migrant and Aboriginal experience were not a clean break with his socialist realist period. Martin's focus on marginalised groups in novels like *The Young Wife* (1962) and *Hughie* (1971), a focus shared by some of his old comrades (including Ralph de Boissiere who also turned to novels about migrants), was made possible to a large degree by a post-war Communist cultural scene which raised notions of motivated, participant observation.

ENDNOTES

1. *Battlefields and Girls*, Glasgow, 1942; *From Life*, Sydney, 1953; *Rob the Robber*, Sydney, 1954; *New World - New Song*, Sydney, 1955.
2. Wilde, William H. et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 465.
3. David Martin, *My Strange Friend*, Chippendale, 1991, p. 226.
4. Stephen Murray-Smith and Ian Turner were already in 1953 pressing for a broad left nationalism in the policies of the Australasian Book Society and the *Realist Writer*. See for instance 'Tasks to Hand', probably by Murray-Smith, in *Realist Writer* [Melbourne] 7 (September-October 1953), pp. 1-2. (A recantation of this line is clearly forced by the Party upon the editors of the following edition of the journal.) See also debates on Sallie Bannister's ABS novels in *Tribune* throughout 1953.
5. See for example Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes From Inside an Era*, Sydney, 1979, pp. 137-138;
6. Stephen Murray-Smith, *Indirections: A Literary Biography*, James Cook University, 1981, pp. 28-29.
7. John Docker, 'Culture, Society and the Communist Party', in Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (eds.), *Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1953: Volume One: Society, Communism and Culture*, Sydney, 1984, pp. 183-212.
8. Pat Buckridge, 'Intellectual Authority and Critical Traditions in Australian Literature 1945-75', in Brian Head and James Walter (eds.), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 188-213.
9. Hardy's major statement of this perspective is 'Make Literature a Mass Question for the Party and the Working Class', *Communist Review* (December 1952), pp. 374-79. He affirms its practices in references to the Realist Writers in his *The Hard Way*, Sydney, 1961. One example of a strike in which diverse cultural workers contributed is documented in 'Writers and Actors Learn From Workers in the Struggle', *Tribune* (Tuesday March 31 1953).
10. David Carter, 'Documenting and Criticising Society', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Ringwood, 1988, p. 385.
11. Lance Loughrey, 'Realist Writers', in *Australian Short Stories* 37 (1992), pp. 61-3.
12. *From Life*, pp. 15-16.
13. *From Life*, p. 27.
14. David Martin to Ralph de Boissiere, de Boissiere Papers, 8402 Box 1, Australian National Library Manuscripts Library, Canberra.
15. Zoe O'Leary, *The Desolate Market: A Biography of Eric Lambert*, Sydney, 1974.
16. Vic Williams, 'The Importance of Writers', *Realist Writer* 5, March 1953, pp. 4-5.
17. David Martin, 'Three Realists in Search of Reality', *Meanjin* 3 (1959), pp. 305-22.
18. Ralph de Boissiere, 'On Socialist Realism', *Communist Review* 219, 1960, pp. 122-25.
19. Rex Chiplin, 'Overland: Where's It Being Taken?' *Tribune* 13 May 1959.
20. David Martin to Ralph de Boissiere, 8402, Box 1, Folder 1, Australian National Library Manuscripts Library, Canberra.
21. David Martin to Ralph de Boissiere, 8402, Box 1, Folder 1, Australian National Library Manuscripts Library, Canberra.
22. Carole Ferrier, ed., *As Good As a Yarn With You: Letters between Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark*. St Lucia, 1993.
23. Ralph de Boissiere, Homeless in Paradise. TS. dated 1969-1976. MS 8402, Box 2, Folder 3, Australian National Library Manuscripts Library, Canberra.

Allan Gardiner is a researcher at Griffith University.

JOHN PHILIP

Barrett Reid – A Memoir

(Funeral Oration Delivered on 10 August 1995)



BARRETT REID, known to his friends as *Barrie*, the name under which most of his poems were published in magazines and anthologies, died at his home on 7 August 1995, following a long battle with cancer. His long association with *Overland* culminated in his becoming editor for five years following the death of founding editor Stephen Murray-Smith in 1988. He remained a member of the *Overland Board* until his death.

THAT WE ARE SO MANY says more about Barrett Reid than either I or others can say today. Some of us are here out of admiration for the man, some out of deep gratitude, and many out of simple love. If any of you are here out of curiosity, you will be disappointed: there will be so many faces strange to you. There were so many facets to Barrett's life and good works that none of us can hope to know more than a fraction of the people, young and old, obscure or eminent, who say farewell to Barrett today.

At this point I shall stop calling him Barrett and call him Barrie, as I've done for forty-eight years. He was Barrie in the days of *Barjai*, *The Ballad Bookshop*, and the *Pink Elephant*. The Barrett public persona, crisp and well-scrubbed, developed after Melbourne took him to its bosom: but I hope you will indulge his oldest friends and allow us still to call him Barrie; for he really was a relaxed Barrie in shirtsleeves, not a starchy Barrett in coat and tie.

Many of us know Barrie's wry sense of humour; and he has played his little joke on us all today. Over the last forty years Barrie has been the friend and confidant of Melbourne's great and famous, of the wielders of power and the makers of opinion, and of those many personages loaded with talent and creative imagination.

At least a dozen of you, with the advantage of day-to-day contact with Barrie over his many Melbourne years, could have given a vivid picture of him and his life among you. Yet with his disarming but slightly sly smile, he has dragged in for the job an obscure character from the remote sidelines.

We've all been to funerals where the parson dragged in to do the job obviously knows nothing about the corpse, but blandly assumes it is acceptable to God. I'm not quite so remote from this corpse. For example, I most definitely do *not* assume that God is acceptable to Barrie.

It may be trite, but it is certainly true, that this occasion is no sad lamentation over a death, but the glad celebration of a full and fruitful life; for Barrie's life is remarkable for its consistency and completeness.

If we are really to grasp the true dimensions of the man, we must look at samples from his curriculum vitae. His impact has been so great and so diverse that the list is a long one.

- ♦ When he was just 16, he was co-founder of *Barjai*, and he was co-editor from 1943 to 1947; and over those years he was Queensland representative of *Angry Penguins*.
- ♦ He was co-editor of *Ern Malley's Journal* from 1952 to 1955.
- ♦ He was associate and poetry editor of *Overland* from 1967, and its editor from 1988 to 1993.
- ♦ He was founder, and for many years editor, of the Contemporary Arts Society publication *Broadsheet*.
- ♦ He brought into being the current *Australian Book Review*.
- ♦ He was founder, and editor for some years, of *Australian Library News*, and of other important



library publications.

- ♦ He founded the *Bookmark* diary and directory.
- ♦ With Michael Zifcak he founded the National Book Council and was its second chairman.
- ♦ He was a member of the Literature Board of the Australia Council for four years.
- ♦ Over ten years he was either the chairman or a member of the Public Lending Rights Committee.
- ♦ He served on the literature committee of the Victorian Ministry of the Arts.
- ♦ He was an instigator of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, serving variously as chairman or member of the committee.
- ♦ He performed for the ABC as critic on both radio and television, and for ten years regularly broadcast on books for Radio Australia.
- ♦ He wrote many booklets on writers and painters for the Council of Adult Education.
- ♦ With the Blackmans he revived and re-founded the Contemporary Arts Society and was its vice-president.
- ♦ He was a council member of the Museum of Modern Art from its inception, and received the rare honour of Fellowship of the Museum.
- ♦ In the 1940s he was one of the founders of the Miya Studio, the first stirring of modernism in art in Queensland.
- ♦ He edited the volume *Modern Australian Art* and wrote the first major studies of Joy Hester and Edward Tanner.
- ♦ He opened early exhibitions of Blackman, Lawrence Hope, Nolan and many others.
- ♦ He founded the National Book Council literary awards and the Braille Book of the Year awards; and he was active in the Vogel, National Poetry, and Book Design awards.
- ♦ For the Whitlam government he wrote *Westudy*, a book-length report on the cultural and information needs of the urban poor of Melbourne's western suburbs.
- ♦ He instigated the re-publication of Criena Rohan's novels and wrote perceptive introductions to them.
- ♦ He curated the John Perceval retrospective at the National Gallery and wrote its book-length catalogue, *Of Dark and Light*.

Two items of his resumé which gave him great pleasure were:

1. He held Membership Ticket No. 1 of the Australian Sceptics.
2. He was a friend of Mo (and I recall his delight when he found in the main drag of *Aix-en-Provence* the statue of le Roi René).

ALL THESE THINGS, and more, took place at the same time as Barrie, from an early age, was operating at the very forefront of Australian librarianship. I cannot resist mentioning his great work in bringing into being Victoria's all-pervading municipally-based public lending library system, and in defending it from the parsimony of politicians and the censorship of shire councillors.

Who's Who lists Barrie's recreations as gardening and reading. Barrie had a deep knowledge of plants and a real love of gardens and gardening; and, above all, love for the splendid garden at Heide, the setting not only of his later years, but also of many of the great moments of his youth.

As for Barrie the reader, let me say this: I'm not a person much given either to envy or humility; but I have always envied Barrie his magnificent and ever-growing personal library and felt humble in the presence of his vast and labyrinthine learning. He must have been, by far, the best-read person of my acquaintance.

I stress the curious and important fact that, consistently throughout his life, Barrie subjugated his own selfish interest and personal creative urge to the common good. In consequence his was the life of the great facilitator, encourager and producer of poets, humaniser of the Victorian library system, breather of new life into Melbourne contemporary art, curator of exhibitions, and general agent of civilisation in Australia.

It made me sad to see the schoolboyish pleasure that Barrie took in his AM – the miserable bauble (handed out to cheerful doormen and faithful secretaries) that, until recently, was his one public recognition. It was some mitigation when, five months ago, Melbourne University recognised his virtues and good works by bestowing on him an honorary doctorate of laws. The citation read in part:

Barrett Reid's breadth of interests, taste and activities have affirmed the values of an accessible culture of the highest standards. He has

sought to make books and ideas and works of artistic creativity available for the widest audience. His support for young artists, writers and librarians is legendary. Selflessly and often unobtrusively, he has . . . enriched the life of all Australians.

Many of you will know how closely Barrie's life was entwined with those of the homophone Reeds, John and Sunday. The other day I wondered to another old friend of Barrie's how his life might have differed if the Reeds had not existed. The Delphic response was: "If John and Sunday had not existed, Barrie would have invented them." I took this pronouncement to mean that, regardless of persons and circumstances, Barrie had a clear vision of his goals for himself (and indeed for all of us) and the sharp intelligence and gritty determination to achieve them.

I'm not the first to remark on this. At Barrie's famous 60th birthday party, Stephen Murray-Smith recalled that Barrie was a kinsman of Sir George Reid, Australia's (chronologically) third Prime Min-

ister. Alfred Deakin said that Sir George was like a hippopotamus who had clambered into a small boat and was determined to upset it unless given his own way. Stephen added: "Barrie has surely inherited the determination, if not the figure".

Barrie's poems are about to be published in book form. The volume is called *Making Country*, and the poem of that title begins:

We are making country.
Every step we take
into each other's arms
will break

into a desert
or a lake.

Barrie's life was indeed devoted to making country, to making the country of a more civilised Australia. He did it well; and it is up to us to continue the task.

John Philip is a physicist and poet.

FOR BARRETT REID

it is you that is the dangerous one
hugging the curbs of your love of art
with the speed of your need for new libraries,
places where the heart could rule with the brain.
it is you who rides the wild poets' curves,
ministering at crash sites of the absurd,
suffering the loneliness of the written word.
it is you that is strong for those who lag
and who found the dangerous crim with a poet's
soul;
for him, a way of changing the gears on life's
grim roads.
you are always aware of the new.
you are ready to break through the roadblocks
that art often erects against its own kind
and "poets should never go to the police
to solve problems" a line that you drew
and i have never crossed.
you are the outlaw

besuited and slick and as handsome as hell.
you got away with more than most;
rubbed shoulders with premiers
and vitas the drunk cossack poet
who escaped from a bleak russian jail.
you smelled paint and dreamed dreams
with nolan and hope
perceval, boyd, elenberg, sunday and john,
the list just goes on.
and you are the outlaw that bailed me out of the
cells
and taught me that poetry
is not just about metre and rhyme
but also what goes on between the lines.
you are the elegant street bum;
like me, an apostle of the free.
breathless and beguiled
standing at the littoral of your smile
you peer seaward from your edge.

SHELTON LEA

RONA ARNDT
His Father's Son

From a letter to Shelton Lea



AS YOU KNOW my sister Coral and I attended our brother Barrett Reid's funeral service at the Boyd Chapel, Springvale. As we listened to various speakers, friends of Barrie, pay tribute to him with music, poetry, and words of his achievements, and his love for his fellow man, the only person mentioned as kin to his family was our Great Uncle, Sir George Reid. We felt quite isolated from the Barrie we knew and loved. Whilst mention was made of part of his life in Queensland, *Barjai*, university, library, nothing was said about his father, George Barrett Reid.

Barrie was a much loved only son and brother who always kept in touch by letter and visits over forty-three years. Our father before he died, my sister, myself and children visited Melbourne many times to see Barrie. We loved him and were very proud of him. The man he became was largely due to our father who was a very conservative man in his lifestyle but not in his thoughts. A republican, a rationalist, a 'greenie', a man who loved the arts. In the thirties and forties, those beliefs labelled a citizen of Queensland, a 'commie'. He certainly had socialist beliefs but was not quite a communist.

Barrie grew up in a house with much discussion. We were taught to seek and discover for oneself. But our father would say many times over the years, there were many paths to take in life, some harder than the others. Not to give up and choose a lesser path, but to seek and find the path, the one destined to take you the way you believed, would lead you where you really wanted to go. Good advice then when everyone played 'follow the leader'. Our mother died when Barrie was aged two, myself three and our sister five. We were all born at Clayfield, Brisbane. After the death of our mother we moved to St Lucia and lived there for the next eight years.

Can you imagine a man trying to raise three children in the thirties? Our father did this very successfully. He employed housekeepers for eighteen years. He recited poems to us from the day we were born. He loved poetry. Instead of fairy stories he read to us from Arthur Mee's *One Thousand Heroes*. By the time we were ten years old we could remember every hero in the book. He would load us into his car and take us to the Queensland Art Gallery when we were very small and read all the names of paintings and painters to us. We would spend an afternoon there. He also gave us the gift of good music, taking us to symphony concerts in the Brisbane City Hall. He created the love of the arts in all of us.

After *Barjai* came into being our house was home to many young writers and painters. We had a Queensland house with verandahs where two beds were always occupied. Nolan, Laurie Hope, Charles Osborne and Mary Williams (Christina St John) were long-term guests and many others came for shorter stays.

As Barrie grew older he wished to leave home. As he was still a student, not financially independent, our father decided to pay the rent on a house, not far from the university. He paid rent for Barrie for years. Once Barrie moved away from home and lived in his house it was soon overflowing with the "always broke" writers and painters. They at times got jobs at dishwashing etc. to pay for food. Often Barrie would arrive home with a large suitcase and he would fill it with food, raiding the biscuit and cake tins filled by our sister from a morning spent baking.

I'm starting to wander. As Barrie would say, "Edit this."

VIDA HORN (WITH THEA ASTLEY)

Barjai Days

Hello Barrie, Hello Laurie



WE'RE MEETING FOR THE FIRST TIME. You're sixteen and seventeen, I'm eighteen. It's Saturday morning, 1944 Brisbane time, and there we are outside Barker's Bookstore in Adelaide Street with the trams clanking at our backs. I'm shy. We're all shy. Hello.

The previous year, Barrie and Laurie and Cecel, students at South Brisbane High School, have started a magazine for writers under twenty-one. It's name, *Barjai*, is an aboriginal word meaning 'meeting place'. I'm under twenty-one, I'm eligible. So hello.

My life changes. I live through the week for those Sunday afternoon meetings at the Lyceum Club, where we talk books and poetry, and drink tea, and eat Sao biscuits topped with tomato and cheese. I bring a friend, Vida, and hello. We share the poems we already love, or are discovering. In a poll on favourite poets (This Is Not a Competition! warns the announcement in *Barjai* Number 14) readers vote for their favourites. According to a later issue, these are Christopher Brennan, Shelley and Browning. A captive and courteous audience! Barrie reads Rimbaud. He is the young Rimbaud. We examine the portraits in a biography that he has borrowed from the WEA Library.

We sit upstairs in the Astoria Cafe and drink coffee until it's nearly time for the last tram. We go for hikes into the hills near Mount Coot-tha. We go down the bay to Shorncliffe. At his parents' Kangaroo Point flat, Laurie plays a Debussy record, *Clair de Lune*. The music floats across Brisbane River and the rest of my life. We're young – not yet twenty-one – and we talk and talk and talk. Serious talk: the editorial in issue 12 warns that "in these pages" there is "little of that humour and carefree exuberance of spirit so often attributed to Youth". No matter how stern our writing, there is frivolous talk, even witty talk and, yes, laughter, always laughter.

Writers – Tom Inglis Moore, Paul Grano, Judith Wright – are invited to our meetings. Some of us are artists as well as writers. Paintings and drawings by Laurie, Cecel and Pam are reproduced in *Barjai*, and later these three establish Miya Studio. Miya has an exhibition, and we also run an exhibition for Sid Nolan in the basement of the South Brisbane Library. Some of the paintings cost five pounds. Who has five pounds? If only, if only.

Some – but not all – of our fathers worry. "Are they left-wing?" Poetry readings might lead to communism. Most of our mothers worry. Poetry readings might lead to sex – though they never put it so bluntly.

They need not worry. Our politics are as romantic as our poetry, and *Barjai* meetings are desperately respectable. The editors are determined that no scandal should cost us the use of the Lyceum Club rooms.

We go to plays and films and concerts. We hike out to the site of the new university at St Lucia and Cecel brings a delicious fruit torte for lunch: Cecelan Frühstrück, Cecel's Breakfast. We admire a brilliant green grass snake.

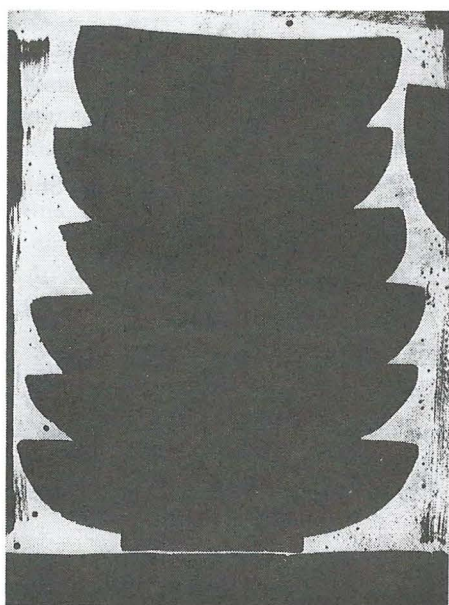
Hello, all of you. You were never boring, not once. I can only wish that today's youth had what we had – best of all, the goodwill of knowing each other. Hello Barrie, Hello Laurie, and Cecel, Thea, Vida, Patricia, Barbara and all those others who, in memory at least, are not yet twenty-one.

One reason why we never had five pounds to buy a Nolan painting is that when we had any money we bought books, usually poetry. In one of the anthologies most of us owned is the poem that later became Barrie's favourite, 'Afterwards' by Thomas Hardy, a poet not mentioned in that *Barjai* poll. Shortly before his death, he asked that it should be read at the conclusion of this service.

DON'T FORGET TH JAZZ BAND

for barrett reid

you were a long time breaking camp my friend
all those testifying poets hovering around
you've done with death-defying
circus is leaving town
tent-hands have dogged out th guy ropes
taken down th centre-pole
you were on th edge all your life
like a kiss breathed out to th cold
don't forget th jazz band
you'd be bop
where a trumpet becomes a well
when you take it from th top
"don't mind me I'm respectable
it helps my friends with th cops"
beneath all talking there's a garden
colouring in th weather
trees with bamboo dragons winding
to forever
corrugated iron cows look askance
on entering visitors shrug off



Wes Placek

th light in their voices
their eyes eddy in th pictures
implacable as a kiddy toy
ned kelly all helmet
noseless mirka mora
blackman's children well met
bonded at th elbows
by stripes of night
children dancing
so quickly turn
to flight
don't forget th jazz band barrie
don't forget baz
take his favourite phrase
"isn't it lovely?"
wattle honking sax
fox-gloves on trumpet
O say there's a colour black
don't forget th jazz band barrie
it's th jazz bob
& a few bars for shelley
don't forget th jazz band barrie
"isn't it lovely?"
sprays of golden wattle
like sun through rain
you rode a breaking tune
like a wave
don't forget th jazz band

ERIC BEACH

THREE POEMS BY BARRETT REID

BARRETT'S GIRL. GEORGE HOTEL. ST KILDA

A bundle of slightly thin sticks,
Grey sticks.
Grey
The colour fragile,
So thin they will not last the hour.
Her bird claw holds coins for a phone-call.
The night cannot see her.
Cannot see the persistence of her life
as her death has become so plain
and no-one hears her life,
how she became so thin,
how her baby "disappeared, just disappeared".
My repugnance frightens me.
I am not known. Cannot make her clear.
I cannot bring her forth.
I cannot.
Death unknowing touches me.
I stand back in pain.
I cannot.
I cannot.
How rare is that?
She is so thin the weight of her sends me
 quickly to the car.
As I write this I know she is dead now.
And we cannot know, do not – so has she gone
 so quickly.
She does not know death is so near.
Tinder dry light as life passing,
As undefended she has no defence.
I cannot bear her, I cannot bear myself.
Death is on us both,
that girl wandering off the pavement of the
 George Hotel.
Already not one, not me, no one,
sees that death is pushing her in dirty newsprint
any wind can blow about.
If she tries to walk properly she will fall,
she will break hollow bones on the kerb . . .

THE UNLOVELY PRIEST

See this unlovely priest so right and tidy,
scrubbing his bright medallion of desire
enter the great bright tunnel which might be you
and ravage his quest with hell and holy fire.

What a phony, his dippy eyes are agleam
with lusts barely invented, never to run
wild and alive, as he has not been,
dismembered, god disordered, under the sickly sun.

WHEN I BUILD A HOUSE

When i build a house
to shelter my pain
i will have tin roofs
to broadcast the rain.

There then i will be
hidden from harm
in my narrow bed
silent and warm.

To like most the poems most needed

STEPHEN J. WILLIAMS

Barrett Reid: *Making Country* (A&R, in association with Paperbark Press, \$16.95).

I HAD READ THESE POEMS many times before they were published here. Barrett Reid worked hard on his poems. Major changes were made to them only months before this book was sent to be set. Many fine poems, I am told – I never read them – were lost in a house fire, years ago. (What is it about poems, even small, apparently easy, poems, that no effort of will can make them come back, force them to be reconstructed or remembered, if a writer should lose them?) So, Barrett Reid's first and last book of poems will be the last we hear of him as a poet, even though there are fragments, some pieces nearly but not quite finished, that might usefully be studied alongside the ones in this book: no future edition could confidently add anything significant to this one.

Shortly before his death, after the manuscript of this book was settled and he had himself had a little time to assess it, Reid commented to several friends on the surprise of noticing he had been an editor who encouraged experimentation and modernity even though his own poems, seen as a whole, seemed a bit "old fashioned". Well, yes, maybe. That would be one way of putting it. As much as I would like to give Barrett Reid the last word on this, I think it is truer to say that Reid did not write an 'old fashioned' kind of poem but that he failed to overcome his influences. He was in some ways a better reader of poems than a writer of them.

These influences sometimes announce themselves very loudly, leaving me with the impression that Reid has borrowed another writer's signature. In 'Seatime', Reid's love of Wallace Stevens competes with the poem's content for my attention:

There is a voice that does not reach the shore.
We do not hear it, walking on the shore.

At other times the influence of reading is more productive when Reid engages with another writer's

ideas. In 'Go Gently' his disagreement with Dylan Thomas is as clear, and as deeply felt, as Randall Jarrell's with Auden:

I will go gently to the unmanned night
where good and bad are left behind the light.

When in life I shared the quiet of nature
why, dying, should I seek to make a stir?

I had some joy, I had some pain,
some sense they may not come again.

Loved much, but too carefully. Do not rage
but love madly to furnish your old age.

But the first couplet is unnecessary; the second (sitting under the same title), in my view, would have been the better, epigrammatic opening.

As 'Go Gently' shows, I believe, Reid's poems are most potent when he is most sure of his meaning. This sounds like a truism, unless we recall what Reid often said, as an editor and reader of poems: that he liked most those poems which were most 'needed'. The first principle of his reading practice was to keep one ear alert to the part of writing's energy that signified this need. And, if that urgency or sense of necessity were present in a poem or story, then there was a good reason to take the writing seriously. It's a liberal urge: to look first for writing's urgency, rather than judge its content or intent.

Measuring Reid's poems in the same way, by his own method, any reasonable estimation would have to conclude they succeed wonderfully. (Examining the poems by a different method might lead me to different conclusions, of course. Why, for example, are there twenty-six references to 'air' (twenty-seven, if I count all senses) in only 117 pages of poems? Can it be because this is an important *leitmotif*, or are there at least a few instances where a too-easy rhyme causes an imprecise image to appear? Close reading of any kind, according to a program or ideology, will have the effect of making a text unwind before your eyes; and at a point somewhere near the reader's exhaustion – or frustration – it isn't hard to imagine the author shrugging his shoulders and saying, "But you weren't meant to read it *like that*. Does

anyone read poems *like that?*" And this imaginary author is right – so I will not read them that way.) There is a marvellous variety of poems here, humorous, philosophical, satirical, generous, on love and lovers, on friendship, on places, on art, cancer, poets and plants. The mixture seems, because it is, a perfectly natural reflection of Reid's interests, preoccupations and ethic.

So, it also seems natural to say that these poems are not about nothing, even when (in at least two poems) that is exactly what they are about. How to make a life, a way of living, of being with others, out of 'nothing'? The atheist's problem: there is no god, so, what now? This appears to have been, going on the evidence of the poems themselves, a theme that Reid struggled to work out and to write down. 'Making Country' offers no solution, except to note what can be done:

So take it easy.
We can do no more
than map precisely
and explore the world we make.

'Nothing' is one of the poems in this book that benefited by being severely cut late in its career: there was a whole fifth section, now gone, that added nothing important to the strange, hopeful conclusion of its final version:

Such is their nakedness.
You would say: their love
has come to nothing after all,
there is no other here, or anywhere –
nothing to take the strain, nothing
between each one. Here
in distance, in exile, above
all, shall love grow.
This is its very air.
For there is nothing here
there are no names for you to go by now
there is no prayer,
only a heart beating, below
all, and being human
free to move
into that nothing which is love.

There are many poets, probably hundreds, whose work has appeared in these pages over the years, who were encouraged by Barrett Reid's intelligent and generous commentary on their work and did not know him personally. Reid did not aspire to be a poet – "You're only a poet when you're writing a poem" – and I'm sure that his reputation will not depend upon the career of this book. But, if anyone who did not have the chance to meet him wanted to know what he was like, *Making Country* is a fine self-portrait.

Stephen J. Williams is a Melbourne writer.



"Oh Lord, have mercy on my knees."

JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH

Letter from America

September 1995



AS MARTIN AMIS PUT IT, in his new novel *The Information*, "coming to America was like dying and going to hell or heaven and finding it all as advertised".

It is not until I am walking through snow and sleet to the subway station on 86th and Broadway one January night, to get to my playwrighting workshop at Columbia University, that it hits me what I have done.

I have arrived in New York for eight months to investigate what sort of writer I am and what sort of writer I might be and whether or not my husband Raymond and I could or would want to move here. Which would not be so ambitious if I had not come with a play to be written (already optimistically advertised by Playbox in its 1995 brochure) and a three-month-old baby, about whom I know very little.

Ray, who is freelancing for *The Age* in New York, has taken a year semi-off in order to help look after Sam while I take up a scholarship to invigorate myself professionally. Before leaving Australia, Frank Moorhouse had greeted my plans with some scepticism: Why do you want to go to America to learn how to write when you know how to write?

His doubts reverberate somewhere within me, but cannot defeat my niggling appetite for talking to other writers, for serious, complex detailed criticism, for living somewhere else. Rightly or not, I feel constrained by the sense of belonging to a country, to a city, to a family even – and want, instead, the frisson of being out-of-place.

So we are in New York, doubly unsure of ourselves by being not only on foreign territory, but on the foreign territory of parenthood. When we arrive at JFK, our child lies placidly in a fabric carry

cot not much bigger than a briefcase. Ray and I have barely begun to negotiate the rhapsodic dementia of parenting.

Within six weeks, we collect the little rituals which make us feel comforted in the midst of a town so fearful, at times, it feels other-worldly. We find the cafes we like, we exchange banter with the post-office clerk, we know the lay-out of our favourite bookshops, the video store, join the gym, subscribe to the *Times*.

I am invited to join an interesting Writer's Unit, which meets once a week for readings, criticism, gossip and dinner. I walk with my friend Ed Napier past the Lincoln Centre and down Ninth to the fringe theatre building over on the western edge of Hell's Kitchen. My pleasure at being included by this group of gracious New Yorkers turns into a bewildering crush and when I read my work, I feel giddy with the will to be liked. While I listen to other people's plays, I look over their shoulders at the boats making their way up the Hudson, and the boxy top of the Empire State and wonder at the speed with which some dreams find form.

At Columbia, in my writing workshops, I sit around a table with other writers, feeling disconcertingly moved by the variety of lives led. We are a disparate lot. I do not know why it should take me by surprise that people who grow up poor, rich, Hispanic, Asian-American, Black, suburban, urban, rural and on and on would feel any differently than I do about writing or home or idealism or children or love, but I am saturated in how the brilliant details of differentness – in words, images, characters, the verisimilitude of other pasts – add up to common feelings. In their company, and with the searing cleverness of the teachers I am so fortu-

nate to have ended up with, the writing flows.

Ray and Sam and I are ensconced in the heart of the Upper West Side, where white professional lives are led largely unharassed. We pay a fortune for a tiny, charming one-bedroom apartment in a turn-of-the-century building on the corner of Columbus Avenue and 85th Street, one block from Central Park West. Fifteen blocks North, fourteen-year-olds are shooting each other in the back for after school entertainment. When we lift our heads from our coffees, our *New Yorkers*, our Sunday brunches, we feel the random rage which floats across this city; fuelled by entrenched, un-turn-roundable misery.

NEW YORK is certainly softened by our own little story, the story of the three of us, about which no-one else is interested, but which is of deepening interest to us. As winter gives over to Spring, and Central Park emerges out of its final February snow-fall, we are falling deeper and deeper in love with our baby boy.

Sam is a joyful child, literally full of joy. He adores roaming Manhattan, bursting with curiosity and good will. It seems appropriate that while he spends the first year of his life trekking from book readings in Soho to gospel in Harlem, Sam displays an astonishing will towards independence. New Yorkers, as they say, are not backward about coming forward and every block we walk down, we are feted with compliments for Sam and long, heartfelt and usually utterly tactless monologues of advice. Motherhood begins to belong to me. I weep with surprise over the endless expansion of feelings I once thought I had reached the limits of: sadness, bewilderment, fear, passion.

Ray and I view Manhattan with a perverse benevolence, as we are drawn into the radiating sense of success Sam bestows on us. We feel smugly liberated from what seems to us the inevitable superficiality of our life before him, the three of us negotiating uncertainty in unison. Ray is a marvellous father, simultaneously practical towards and mysteriously moved by fatherhood.

During the day, I take the bus home from Columbia down Amsterdam, through the fringes of Harlem, where the projects stand as counterpoints to the Upper East Side buildings with their porticos and doormen, minutes away across Central

Park. I sit on the bus thinking about America, because self-consciousness never really slips into the grooves of the city, the way it might elsewhere. There are too many differences for middle-class Australians, who are used to sameness, used – at least – to more subtle differences between privilege and underprivilege. Here, several cities exist overlaid and money is at the heart of it. Like everywhere, money exists as an insulator. In New York, it is a preserver of life itself.

The government schools are full of weapons and populated by crack babies grown into tiny monsters. The private primary schools cost almost as much as the Ivy League Colleges. I find myself battling rage and horror most days about aspects of American life – from the misery of the homeless on virtually every block, to the reintroduction of the death penalty in New York State and the insanity of the gun-laws. While America seems endlessly confident of its own righteousness, a vein of cruelty runs through it.

I ride the subway constantly, although rarely after 11 pm and well aware that we stay within the northern limits of 116th Street. There is no eye contact on the subway, as New Yorkers cast their eyes onto unfixed inner landscapes, in artfully composed meditations. I try to relax, to take the opportunity to read away from the baby in these subterranean snatches of time, but I find myself watching the young boys in their voluminous T-shirts and ostentatious sneakers, wondering what it is they're patting in the pockets of their parkas.

I think how just one incident, a flash of a gun, a threat, would make us know what we only hear about and for the umpteenth time I wonder to myself, do you wait for that moment to happen – and it never happens to most New Yorkers – or do you thank God you have a life in Fitzroy to go back to and go back to it? The wrong train, the wrong hour, the wrong street. How every second, some vast new order is being perpetrated on someone's sense of safety and good fortune, and how that could be us.

There's no point minimising the violence here – it's impossible when every day the Metro section of the *Times* is full of incidents of random violence which make Ray and I feel as if we're sweet-faced country debutantes who've stumbled into a convention of satanists.

AS WE SIT IN OUR pleasant apartment, Chet Baker on the cd, coffee on the stove, baby in his Osh-Kosh, I can almost hear the chorus of anguish our voices now subscribe to. A wave of disbelief which floods over civilised New York, as its residents come to grips with the absence of motive in the new era of violence. One is constantly faced with the lack of reason, here.

Two gas workers fixing pipes on a street corner are shot in the head. An outer borough disco is evacuated as random sub-machine gun fire ripples through the teenagers. Five twenty-year-olds renting a house in a nice neighbourhood are shot in the head by their irate landlord.

And then the horror of the Oklahoma bomb blast with all its connotations of the radical right-wing. Theories spread across the city, a desperate attempt to make a kind of intellectual peace with the television images of the murdered babies.

There is only an intense sense of no-going-back, of the impossibility of defeating an alienation and hopelessness which no longer relates to pride or morality or duty or justice. A community of disillusion which does not even recognise what it has abandoned and so cannot even come to grieve for what it once was.

There just doesn't seem to be any way to confront the violence and the sorrow. Ray and I lie awake at night listening to the sirens which alert insomniacs to the constancy of change. Through the bedroom doorway, we can see Sam sleeping, facing a future of such uncertainty, we quake in each other's arms. I find myself meditating very

A community of disillusion which does not even recognise what it has abandoned and so cannot even come to grieve for what it once was.

self-consciously, on how the plain humanity of most people survives. You have to believe in basic goodness, that most parents love their children, that most children find a path for themselves through misery and confusion, that most souls work their way through their misfortunes.

I think this like a mantra, to break through the fear which sits over this country, this city and us,

hovering inside our little apartment, stunned by the acquisition of a child, whose big eyes stare up at us in a supplication to protect him from a world we are somehow responsible for delivering him into. Around us is a storm we have only heard the first rumblings of. Ray and I mentally work backwards from the big picture to the small, from the newspapers to the neighbourhoods, to the streets, to the houses, to the kitchens, where small children are loved regardless of the misery around them, persuading ourselves that some will love is out there, ready to do battle with the horror.

I WALK OUT OF OUR apartment building one morning and find our neighbour Julie sitting on the front steps weeping. She is a beautiful young paediatrician just back from her long shift in the hospital. She indicates the group of young black men up the street. Six of them are huddled around one, who seems to be gripped by violent grief, his hands clasping his own body as he cries to all of them, to anyone, to the city "I'm so stressed, man . . . I'm so stressed". Julie tells me one of their group was murdered last night.

When we meet in the elevator or the street, Julie talks to me about New York. She is not atypical of the educated middle-class liberal New Yorkers who love the city and refuse to relinquish hope for all the problems it frantically, intensely epitomises for the nation. She goes regularly to meetings of Blacks and Jews, attempting to resolve a fragile present. "There are lots of people", she says to me with a fragile smile, "who care so deeply."

The *Times* runs long features on the prevalence of pre-natal and infant deaths in New York, due to the impossible overcrowding of hospitals and overworking of doctors in the public system. Within those corridors, it's a third world country. Thousands of babies are born on stretchers in any available niche. Doctors are on twenty-four-hour shifts. Most births are handled by midwives, which means many complicated births end in the death of the baby. Women are pushed out of hospital after one or two days, insurance companies refusing to extend recovery.

When I use the health service at Columbia, I am dealt with by numerous form fillers and nurses who ask basic questions. When I see the doctor, I speak to him for two minutes before I am shunted out to

the dispensary for medication. A doctor I talk to at a party says things will get a lot worse before they get better. He says New York is full of the greatest specialists in the world, but if you just need a good GP it's hard to find conscientious treatment.

The tenements up town are crammed with three families in a single room and many residents cannot leave their apartments for fear of being murdered in the hallways and must make their way to the street in groups. Several big Chinese restaurants downtown are being picketed for paying slave-wages to brutalised workers. The poor materialise at every corner, forcing you over and over again to dip into your bag for a quarter, step out of ordinary pursuits and contemplate the mysteries of fate, the meaning of honour.

Newt Gingrich's facile family-values conservatism, full of retro-rhetoric exploiting the desperation and confusion of a society sinking into deeper chaos, is spreading over every social agenda from abortion rights to health care to the dismantling of the National Endowment for the Arts. It is a new barbarism, cutely disguised by the Republican's Leave-It-to-Beaver nostalgia for the white America white Americans are wooed into idealising in the face of a bewildering present.

It interrupts the luminous face of the planet's most beguiling democratic culture, a country I worship for Woody Guthrie and Woody Allen, Elvis Presley and Miles Davis, Raymond Chandler and John Steinbeck, a country which always seemed to me to thrive on its own gorgeous, edgy defiance.

If anywhere, that vein of humanistic wit survives in New York and Ray and I are seduced by the fabulous motion of a city with relentless appetites. The pleasures of the liberal, democratic, cosmopolitan culture, where robust opinion and lucid voices play havoc with all the ideas you once buried away safely, as if you had them organised. Perhaps so many people live with the chaos of America because everywhere you turn are guardians of the soul, arguing amongst themselves looking for the reasons why and the ways ahead.

COULD WE LIVE HERE? At times I feel I will break from sadness at knowing what it is in life you forfeit. That it would be better not to know the shape of lives you might have led, if you had more courage or money or gumption or luck. That we

have somehow glimpsed one way our lives might take us and now have the burden of choosing it or letting go, always to live in the shadow of what might have been.

We suffocate under comparisons – perhaps because we are still young enough to wonder where we might best belong. Judith, our cleaning lady and chief adorer of Sam, invites us to lunch in her projects apartment on the edges of Bensonhurst. She came to New York from Jamaica, raised two charming, talented boys on her own and dreams of a future in Florida. The projects are dismal and we cannot walk from the railway station unescorted. Judith tells us that inviting us is a breakthrough for her, as she has been having therapy to help her get over her shame at living here.

The poverty of her apartment is temporarily disguised by the sumptuous smells of her feast for us: barbecued salmon, corn bread, coconut bread, salads, rum-infused fruit cakes. On the dresser is a photograph of her god-daughter who burnt to death in the infamous Bronx nightclub fire of some years ago. Judith's oldest son has just graduated from the FAME high school, and is an accomplished dancer. I ask her younger boy what he

We walk home up Broadway . . . and reflect on the absence here of some vague but vigorous wit which, generally speaking, informs the Australian imagination.

wants to be and he says without the shadow of a doubt, a high-court judge. Later we walk along the Coney Island boardwalk, with its headless women billboards and its ivy covered dilapidated rollercoasters, wondering about this marvellous woman and the America her children have grown out of and are growing into.

Despite the volume of the arts and arts-discussion, the range of quality in the theatre and visual arts remind us constantly of how much Australians might be proud of, if they knew. The fringe theatre, or rather, the theatrical and visual arts milieus where commercial potential is not the *raison d'être* are much more vital in Melbourne than in Manhattan. From the ordinary Whitney Biennial to the theatre shows I trek downtown to, the search for newness here is ardent, success elusive.

It isn't possible to view our experience dispassionately – everything is viewed through the prism of where we have come from and what we have known. Ray and I saturate ourselves in exhibitions, theatre, opera and see much that is lovely, little that is interesting. We walk home up Broadway, eating ice-creams in summer's midnight heat, and reflect on the absence here of some vague but vigorous wit which, generally speaking, informs the Australian imagination; some jaunty and original provocation which has translated, in a less interesting but more publicised way, to our cinema.

And yet – such a bewilderingly ungenerous arts community we have built for ourselves, charged with a cynicism about success, resentment for peers, for intellectualism, as if ideas in art are contemptible proof of belonging to the bourgeoisie. And arts criticism which too often has no passion, partly because within the journalistic culture there is no respect for the craft, no training, and little value paid to the connection between fine criticism and the evolution of a nation's sense of itself.

YOU CANNOT LIVE in New York without admiring an American simplicity which looks upon success as success and does not belittle it with mean-minded insecurity. Perhaps New York, in this respect as in so many others, is different to the rest of America. The irony which Australians and the English love to deny Americans is very much evident in this city, clothed as it is in Jewishness.

At New York dinner parties, we are astonished to find everyone leaves at 11 pm. They all have proofs to read, deals to do, contracts to sign. New Yorkers, in general, make witty conversationalists but elusive friends. They do not need any more. We are constantly being invited to vague parties and lunches “in the Spring”, which will not materialise. It is not that New Yorkers are insincere, they seem to be embarrassingly gracious as well as exciting, but unlike us, they meet people constantly who are like-minded and interesting and life is short.

We do make some good American friends – and experience that rare euphoria of making new friends after hitting thirty – but we also gravitate towards that peculiar company of exiles out of some deep-seated sense of national intimacy and affection. In their company, the themes of one kind

of absence and one kind of belonging are ever-present. The Australians we befriend balance themselves precariously between two loyalties, one born into, one acquired. Gently tempering their love of this city, which for all its tough profile is the most engaging city on earth, is the dissenter's heretical eye. They echo our own split-feeling for American positiveness, that straightforward and somewhat nerdish good-naturedness which was once emblemised for us in Mr Robertson's advice to Ben: Plastics!

These Australians have the buoyant savvy of those who have sacrificed the known for the unknown and have made some kind of peace with the consequences. Unlike us, they are permanent here. They live in a no-man's land, their sense of themselves heightened by a pleasant awkwardness of being somewhere they have chosen rather than somewhere they were delivered.

I sit in the Columbus bakery, jiggling Sam on my knee, and whinge to Ray about all the things I hate at home: the political correctness which still seems a decade behind the rest of the world; the historical ignorance which infiltrates its way into quality media, literary prize-judging and most fundamentally, education. The fear of returning to a country you feel just a bit too wild for, returning to a country that does not feel secure enough about itself to be generous in some complex, philosophical liking-itself way. The downside of living in such a fabulously livable country. And the irony that Australia has so much to be excited about, but fails to know it and so spirals inward on itself, full of some lazy bitterness. We think that the world is so small, so commutable, but Australia is still so isolated, it's almost quaint.

And yet, when we discuss the logistics of moving here, I feel an indelible pulse of longing for the landscapes and friendships that would be forfeited, the details that distance and time inevitably blur. I loathe jingoism and have long wished for the sense of self-sufficiency that allows you to name who you are and what you belong to. And yet as I walk down Columbus, I feel an Australianness that cannot quite find form in an image or a sentence, some sensibility that is a fusion of Bass Strait wind and complicated history. Something I'm not sure I even want to understand.

FOR SCRAPPY: 1980-1995

I

The everything we do is never enough;
love hauls in loss to gnaw like an old bone.

When you came back from the vet in a cardboard carton
you felt heavy in my arms
but when I lifted you out to place in your garden grave
you were shockingly soft and warm, your mouth curved
in a canine smile, your eyes closed
as in sleep, so that it seemed absurd
to bed you down in bougainvillea blossoms
when I wanted simply to hug you until you woke up again
to fill the absences lying in wait for us everywhere
from now on: in your more athletic days climbing fences;
looking out through the front gate;
sleeping at my wife's feet, nose tucked into an empty shoe;
keeping company by the phone; responding to door-knocking on television
by rushing to the front door;
wagging at visitors . . .

I am not handling this *post-hoc* world very well:
sorrow rising up like those waves that threaten to sweep rock-fishermen from their precarious ledge
casting and trawling alone in the clamorous dark.

II

For days I watched you standing stiffly under the willow,
shoulders hunched, head down, tail drooping.
Called, you'd look up with darkly worried eyes as if asking: What's happening to me? What's slowing me down?

Months since you'd barked, or run, or demanded attention.

I'd have said something, but what could I say
Except that the exhaustion of time had at last caught up with you,
its teeth harrying you now as once you harried rats – relentlessly?

To climb back or front steps was an Herculean labour in the end.

Upstairs or down, you lay for hours on your stomach, head between paws, a defeated sphinx,

But watching me out of dark eyes which even now
watch me and find me answerless as ever, and choked with memories.

III

There was a storm coming up out of the east, the layers of cloud stitched with lightning – my first impulse on going out onto the landing was to think of you as audience to a drama the whole family would be included in later . . . Then I realized that you were beyond such petty theatricals.

In your last week we noticed you wagging your tail vigorously in your sleep;
now you have gone where your dream-quarry led.

IV

All weathers are as one;
I see clouds vaguely pass.
Sun follows daily sun
– Dim counters under glass.

Winds rise and fall and cease.
Clocks whittle at regret.
The body preaches peace,
And yet . . . and yet . . . and yet . . .

BRUCE DAWE

TWO POEMS BY DIANE FAHEY

AT THE MELBOURNE GENERAL CEMETERY

Some interesting angels.
At this time of year, cowslips –
watery sculpture of lemon-meets-yellow.
Lichen-crested, old gravestones cluster
near untried slabs, grey scripted with gold.

I walk here to come back to myself . . .
Today, unhappy beyond knowing much else,
I am grounded by simple acts
of subtraction: contemplate again
how many children have died young;
those thirty-year widowhoods;
a life begun in Canton a long century ago.

There are a few light touches:
a guitar of paper blooms for Elvis,
red bordering white; in veinless marble,
the billiard balls and cue of Walter Lindrum.
Epitaphs graced by kitsch seem fair enough –
death the ultimate test of words.
And of flowers . . . lily, carnation, marigold
so rarely fresh here, except for those
heaped over the newly dead; brought with
weekly care till the grave is re-opened.

A little fine rain is chastening enough –
I need not to be shriven by fear of endings,
or so I tell myself: with a childhood shadowed by
crucifixes, skulls stared at by mad saints . . .
By now I know death as states of suffering
not to be endured, yet endured:
black lakes and seas rowed over
are now a sediment layering the body.

Why blame death if I made a bad bargain with life?

Survivor and witness, I walk the often-turned earth
of this place where cypress and eucalypt
spring up as they can, or will,
against horizons of glass-skinned skyscrapers,
lobelia dream-folds of mountain.

The day's air a cool pressure
to be accepted or denied.

BUDS

A reddishness like a faint hum
in far trees.
Close up, spurs sheathed in
bronze silk;
a collage of rhododendron petals –
sticky bundles
of raw pink . . . Explosive splinters
prick air.
Others are suavely gloved claws,
breasts cupped by
brocade – in black, musky cyclamen,
milk-green.
Soon, frothy handkerchiefs will drop
as from a wrist,
cascades as from an ear, the taste
of them no longer
a layered smoothness in your mouth
as they answer
back with scalloped edges of softness.
Then the valley
studded with tiny antennae will become
a sea of uncountable
greens – with mists and waterfalls
and bowers of it
deepening inside your eye.

DELYS BIRD

More Questions about Sex and Power and *the first stone*



CAST INTO THE ordinarily placid waters of public opinion in Australia, *the first stone*, Helen Garner's book on the 1992 Ormond College sexual harassment case, has had an effect closer to that of a tidal wave than of the traditional ever-widening circles. It's now a year after its first publication, yet the debate that has surrounded it since then is still active. The book's reception surprised its author and must have delighted its publishers. The extent of that reception has included numerous reviews and commentaries, a segment televised immediately after publication on the ABC's Four Corners, radio interviews with Garner, and major public speeches at the Sydney Institute by both Garner and Dr Jenna Mead, the female academic from Melbourne University who advised the women complainants during their long-drawn-out case and who has been a major commentator on *the first stone*. This range of responses by now comprises a textual field in which the original publication, often almost unrecognisable in its many rereadings, is embedded.

It is that uneasy textual field, riddled with competing views and traced by what Fiona Giles in her major review of *the first stone* for *Meanjin* (no. 2, 1995) calls "reprisals [and] recriminations and worse" that is now of such interest. Questions to do with why this book has aroused such widespread public interest and encouraged the display of such vested interests: why the media has taken it up so extensively; why the publication of this particular text at this particular time has been marked by a so-called 'War Between the Women' (the title of a front-page article in *The Weekend Australian Review* [June 24-25, 1995], one of many that has presented *the first stone* as concerned with a generation gap that is allegedly fracturing

feminist politics and practice in Australia at the current time) are now all part of that textual field surrounding Garner's book, and all contribute to what has become its social, political and historical significance.

Helen Garner's name on the cover of *the first stone* is in a typeface at least three times larger than that used for the book's title. It is not perhaps surprising then, that the arguments and acrimony the book has generated are often directed at the author rather than the text itself. Garner is well known to Australian readers for her fiction and journalism. She is a name – and her insistent personalisation of the story she set out to tell was elaborated through that name just as the book was marketed on that name. The book's focus is less on the events that impelled Garner's writing – to which of course no-one had access except the Master and the two women students who accused him of sexually assaulting them during a traditional students' party that followed the Ormond College valedictory dinner – than on Garner's reactions, to versions of those events, to the public assessment of those events by the law, to the participants' actions and demeanour as the case wore on, and to sexual harassment as a contemporary issue of great complexity, in which questions to do with sex and power, as the book's cover describes its preoccupations, are deeply implicated.

Thus *the first stone* is finally Garner's story. Not only is it marketed in this way, but Garner writes herself into the story through her first person narration. Beyond this, Garner was already a character in the drama when she began writing it. Seeing a report of the appearance of the then Master of Ormond College (one of the residential Colleges of Melbourne University) in a magistrate's

court on a charge of indecent assault in *The Age* in August 1992, Garner experienced "rushes of horror" during the day that followed. She then sat down and wrote a letter of sympathy to the Master. It is Garner's spontaneous feeling that this man, whether innocent or guilty, did not deserve what was happening to him that has infuriated many women; it is that act of writing that has seemed to many of the readers and responders to the book a betrayal of feminist principles.

WRITING WOMEN, women who take up the pen to contest the silent spaces to which they are socially consigned, have traditionally been seen as a potential threat to social order. The accusations that have been directed towards Garner, in questions at public appearances as well as in print and other media, often focus on the fact that she wrote a letter to the Master. Those accusations, which extend from what is seen as her misunderstanding of the issues of the case to her using it for her own benefit, fame and fortune, have been personalised to a degree that recalls the kind of vilification women who write challenging books have often attracted. From Mary Wollstonecraft to Harriet Martineau to Charlotte Perkins Gilman to Simone de Beauvoir to Germaine Greer and on, such women are attacked not for the way they write but for the subjects and the politics of their writing.

The difference in the case of *the first stone* is that the vilification of Garner for writing it has come from within her own feminist politics. While debates within feminisms and among feminists are ongoing, depending on divergent views and beliefs and often quite divisive, they characteristically acknowledge the common ground from which feminisms arose and to which they relate. This time that's not the case. There have been many admirers of the book and much informed debate around its perspective on sexual harassment and the history and experience of contemporary feminism in Australia, as well as on the ethics of using a kind of investigative journalism in such a way. Yet *the first stone* has generated often enormous anger among feminist women who oppose it. And it is this anger that has dominated the textual field that now comprises *the first stone*.

Cassandra Pybus's article for the *Australian*

Book Review (May, 1995) exemplifies the kind of accusatory politics that marks much of the commentary on *the first stone*. Itself as subjective as the book is and subtly virulent – throughout the first part of her piece Pybus refers to Garner as "the famous novelist" – it is clearly driven by the sentiment that it would have been better if the book had not been written. Pybus writes that she warned Garner not to persist with the book, to which Garner replied that she had "had enough of [their] feminist bullying" and that she could be a bully herself. "That brief exchange", comments Pybus, "will be our last conversation." Clearly, Garner's not heeding Pybus's warning made her a fair target, and Pybus lets her have it.

Although she describes *the first stone* as "a well-paced narrative", Pybus argues that Helen Garner has evaded "the author's responsibility" in writing such a book. Her purpose should have been "to seek answers to the questions she poses; to interrogate the social, political, moral, and legal issues which coalesce around the moment she seeks to understand", yet for Pybus her motive in writing is self-serving; it is her own feelings she interrogates. The book lacks rigour (although this lack is not explicated) and Garner merely "feeds off the devastation and distress of [her] fellow citizens". One of the most astonishing aspects of Pybus's article is her assumption that those Garner writes for are unselective and unintelligent, seeking "endless titillation", a marketplace characterised by "an insatiable public appetite for damaged lives". Pybus's response is especially interesting since she herself recently wrote, many years after the event, a book on the so-called 'Orr case' of sexual harassment in the 1950s at the University of Tasmania.

This is only one of a range of negative feminist women's responses to *the first stone*. Jenna Mead, who was a tutor at Ormond when the scandal broke, has attacked the book for its transparent representation. In an interview with Karen Kissanne, 'The other side of Ormond' (*The Age*, 6 April, 1995), she claims that "the argument's shaky, there's no research here in terms of the literature about sexual harassment, there's no engagement with other debates, no quotation of other cases". Marilyn Lake has derided Garner's memory in the book of her dismay when her own masseur kissed

her, linking Garner's experience with that of Germaine Greer, who remained silent when she was raped at nineteen. Lake's conclusion from this congruent evidence of the two writers' experience of sexual assault, however divergent, is that each expects that young women undertake their own reprisals, thus making good their own failures.

In Kath Kenny's column, 'Opinion' for *The Australian* (May 17, 1995), she "empathise[s] with Garner's desire to tell a story" as a journalist, but as a young feminist she is "acutely aware of how such a book has fuelled all the sexist and ageist assumptions you care to name". She asserts that at "no point does [Garner] seriously question the ethics of writing such a book" and concludes that the counter attacks by Garner and others on those they have called the "feral feminists" who are supposedly patrolling gender behaviour on university campuses sets up a politics of distrust which establishes the regressive notion that "young women are not to be trusted – they must have a *motive*". At the time of writing the column, Kenny was herself a masters' student at UTS.

Such comments are representative of what Fiona Giles in her enormously well informed review calls "the narrative of polarization". It is a term she uses to refer to the conventional and oppositional perspectives on sexual harassment, "(either in favour of legislation and against harassment, or critical of some of its excesses and too forgiving towards men)". But it is one that fits exactly the way the 'story' of *the first stone* has become the 'story' of the breakdown of contemporary Australian feminist thought as told by the media in the reportage around the book. That 'story' is polarised around older feminists and younger women, and it is told as a warning. The war between women, the struggle of the generations, prefigures the end of feminism.

Of course, *the first stone* does concern itself, importantly, with a contemporary Australian feminist history, one that is personal as well as public and always political. Garner describes herself and the friends to whom she talks in her consternation at first reading of the charge against the Ormond College Master immediately and often as "feminists pushing fifty". The gap between them and the next generation of the college students is one constantly recalled in different ways in the

book, located most poignantly and for many inappropriately in Garner's questions, "*Has the world come to this?*", and "Why are they so angry? . . . Why did they go to the police?" Because Garner's questioning is always of the young women's actions or the results of their actions, such questions have been seen by her antagonists as both signifying and reinforcing that generational gap. *the first stone* can also be read as a mother/daughter narrative. It is the mother's story of the breakdown in communication with her daughter, whose values and responses are often unexpected and unpleasant to her. The daughter's reply takes place after the book's publication, told through the ways younger women have both rejected the feminist politics of *the first stone* and berated its author for her punitive, priggish and pitiless attitude towards them, in exactly the same way that Garner labels the actions of the students in taking their case to court.

NOT ALL THE RESPONSES to *the first stone* are accusatory nor do they all tell the story of deep and apparently irreconcilable division. Yet even an analytical piece as calm and uninvolved as Robert Manne's Opinion-Analysis (*The Age*, 12 April, 1995) is titled 'The painful fallout when eras collide'. In this case, it is what Manne calls "two sexual eras" that have come into collision, and in his opinion the lack of *the first stone* is its inability to deal with the paradoxes of the case which exists in the transition between these two eras. Some commentaries depend on the more familiar story of gender divisions and are narrated in the equally familiar terms of gender politics, from the awesome misogyny of John Laws' reported labelling of the students in the case as "these feminist bitches who told lies to destroy a man's career . . .", to Graeme Duncan's review for *Quadrant* which comments that it "reads as a book written to please a man", to Peter Craven's for *The Weekend Australian Review* (March 25-26, 1995) that lauds *the first stone* as "a brilliant and moving account full of social observation and compassion" and ends paternalistically, "It may not encourage you to send your daughter to college".

It can be argued that the concentration of contemporary western feminist politics and practice on sexuality and the body – on issues to do with

women's oppression being linked to ideologies and representations of femininity that range from those of mothering and nurturing, to those of either the sexualised, desirous female body or the lean, spare, masculinised and always youthful female body, have deflected attention away from major areas of the economic and material exploitation of women. In a similar manner, it can be argued that *the first stone's* concentration on a psychosexual paradigm of explanation for the vexed area of sexual harassment with which it concerns itself diminishes the class-based economies – bodily and monetary – through which gender power is wielded within and outside Ormond College. While I don't think it is true, as Jenna Mead claims in her 'Campus Comment' on *the first stone* (*Campus Review*, September 28, 1995) that Garner, "busy reporting the number of times the young women won't speak to her . . . completely misses this network of powerful men with institutional connections" – attention is paid to invoking the maleness of the College, the patriarchal attitudes of the Chair of the Ormond College Council and so on – issues to do with institutionalised power and its effects are not analysed to any extent.

These issues haunt the gaps in Garner's story. Why, for instance, wasn't Dr Gregory protected by that patriarchal network; what are the proper and the improper relations between a College Master

and students of that College (as many have pointed out, dismissing Dr Gregory's 'passes' at the two female students – if they did occur – as those of an innocent buffoon is not an adequate way of dealing with the power politics of that relationship); how crippling is the effect on women of living among structures of such completely institutionalised masculinity as Garner describes Ormond College to be; why above all is it still not possible to have a set of institutional procedures that can deal adequately with sexual harassment? *the first stone* doesn't – cannot – do everything its critics and even its admirers want it to do. It has, however, created an often violent field of debate around the politics and power and often privilege of one sort or another that enable sexual harassment and within that debate many of these other issues also to do with institutionalised power are being talked about. Narrated as it is through self-reference and within the slippery structures of contemporary relativism, *the first stone* has textualised "some questions about sex and power" in late twentieth-century Australian society in a way that has made them visible, and it has done that memorably.

Delys Bird teaches a post-graduate coursework masters' degree in Australian Studies and Women's Studies at The University of Western Australia.

SEA SECRETS

Have drowned men changed the sea?
The sea has changed drowned men

quenched their fire,
stolen the salt from their blood

and the tears of those who mourn;
turned their sinews to weeds

held fast on rocks from where
their ragged pennants slowly wave

tugged by the tides and the white moon's eye.
Their bones rock on the bottom.

Calm now,
the sea lies still and innocent,
eyelids lowered.

STELLA TURNER

GRAVESIDE MEDITATION

We, the mourners, stand.
The four of us in a line
beside the grave, beside
the coffin.

You, my father – your
face dark and etched with
lines of disbelief – your
white hair stark in this
sunny cemetery – you are
motionless – a grid of
grief.

In the row behind stands
our aunt – our mother's
friend for more than sixty
years

– she, the aunt, leaned
forward and passed to
you, my sister, seven
roses picked from her
rambling garden

– she passed the roses to
you – some pink, some
primrose, some that
lovely mix of pink and
yellow

– she passed them and
you stepped forward and
placed them on the coffin.

I stood halfway between
tears and stony dry eyes.

You, my brother, and I
were empty handed. Soft
fear swirled between us.
The companionship of
childhood made solitary
on this day.

I wondered – what next?
– and shifted my
shoulders over my feet.

You, my brother, turned
your head, our aunt's
hand nudged a whisper.

I stepped forward – as if
in a dream – to the other
side of the grave where so
many bouquets and
wreathes lay.

No-one passed me flowers.

I moved slowly along
where the flowers were
strewn and looked and
looked for the right
flower.

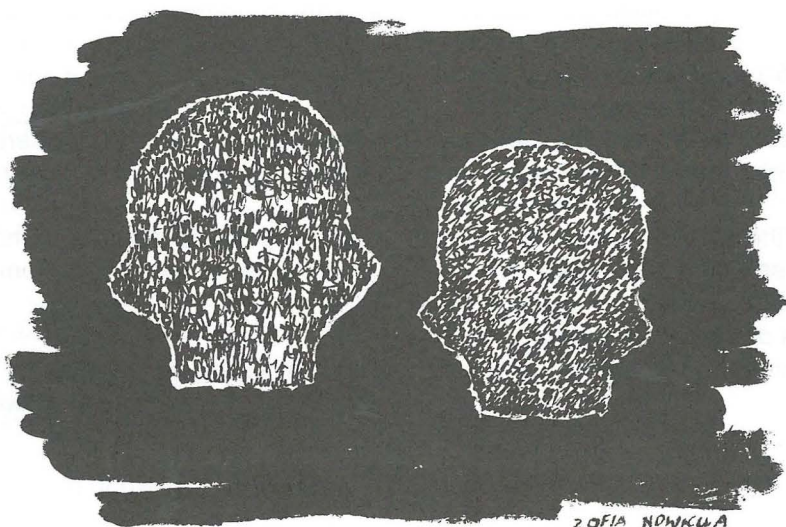
In my mind then came a
phrase I'd written once in
a story – In China white is
the colour of death.

I stood over a bouquet of
white chrysanthemums –
remembering learning to
spell and say the word
with as many letters as
petals –

the chrysanthemum – also
a flower of death – and so
I bent and twisted a stem
which broke unwillingly

– and placed it beside the
roses on the coffin.

SUSAN HAWTHORNE



ZOFIA NOWKWA

TWO POEMS ABOUT LOVE BY STEPHEN J. WILLIAMS

for R.A.

THE WHOLE TRUTH

Clichés tumble out of lovers' minds
Like bargains at a jumble sale.
All the scraps we think are 'finds'
Are hand-me-downs whose colours paled.

New lovers walk around in rags
No decent mum would have her kids in:
Straight, or bi, or screaming fag,
There is no *haute couture* of loving.

Unseemly, smelly, dirty things
No civil person does, or has;
Turgid, horrid, lumpy limbs;
Quantities of juice and gas –

These are what must be endured
For seconds of a feeble pleasure.
Lasting Joy is not assured
By love's insipid, tawdry treasures.

AUSTRALIAN TOURISTS

travelling in Australia
have to be particularly
sensitive
to difference

if they're to believe
they're somewhere else

or that warmer climates or
denser cities

in which they're introduced
to people like themselves

can transfigure
what looks like home
into the exotic

PAINTING SONG

Wanting is the most needed thing
When a head is quiet as a Monday church
And eyes the only celebrant of senses.
A good face or able body fills you up.
It's useful, not as lenders or pimps but
As painters do, to forget possessing,
To take a palette to the search

For the only thing worth capturing, the tense
And vivid second a mind leaps up
And life is colour mixed for joy, mystery
Deeper, simpler than a cello-song.
What I do not need to have I may still need to
want.

Love's curious, blue flight. Skies large as
desire.

The empty house is fuel for fire.

when palms in St Kilda
mirror
those in Cairns.

And though there's no debate
about distance
or change

it's paradoxical
that effort is required
to persuade yourself
you've moved.

PETER MURPHY

GARY CATALANO

Hymns to the Optic Nerve

On Robert Gray and his poetry



ROBERT GRAY SEEMS to be able to invoke a vivid image almost at will. Each of the seven books he has published since 1974 (I'm not counting *Introspect, Retrospect* of 1970, which Gray appears to have disowned and rarely mentions in interviews) is full of images that arrest one by virtue of their freshness and their accuracy.

If many of these images are visual in their nature and thereby form what Gray himself has termed a hymn to the optic nerve, it would be misleading to suggest that he has neglected the claims of the other senses. Indeed, in some of his recent books it is clear that he has begun to make increasing use of tactile, aural and synaesthetic images.

Gray's interest in the processes of perception – in the mechanism of the optic nerve, so to speak – is not matched by a corresponding interest in consciousness, a state whose existence he actually disputes. As he has said in 'Illusions', a long catalogue-poem in *Certain Things* (1993) which enunciates his philosophical theses, "there is only the body's awareness, momentary, ineffable, narrowly-focussed, of what is beyond or within itself." In Gray's poems, words like *now* and *then* are always charged with a special significance.

Gray wants his readers to appreciate the formal variety of his poetry, for each of his books has been carefully assembled so as to include a couple of examples of every form in which he works. Thus we find haiku-like sequences, short lyric poems, longer discursive poems (many of which are autobiographical in their nature) and prose poems all within the one cover.

The lyric poems have been neglected by his commentators, who have concentrated on the long discursive poems and the haiku-like sequences.

This is to be regretted, for it's in his lyric poems that Gray's technique is at its most experimental and adventurous. So, without more ado, here is 'The pine' from *Creekwater Journal* (1974), the book that Gray now regards as his first:

With a pine-cap
only
of needles;
aslant. And the lopped-off
branches of
various lengths
about its trunk.
The rhythm amongst these
such
a music, all
by chance.
Alone
in the back paddock
in the yellow grass.

At least for the moment, I'll put to one side the similarities between this poem and those of the Objectivist, George Oppen. As pronounced as those similarities appear to be, there are other features of the poem which are of more interest at this point in the discussion.

I'm not thinking of the fact that the poem runs to fourteen lines and therefore could be construed as some sort of sonnet. Although he has come to use rhyme in some of his more recent poems, Gray gives every indication that he believes that modern poets should try to evolve new forms.

Nor am I thinking of the lineation of those fourteen lines. Irregular as that lineation is, it could hardly be said to constitute any kind of departure

from the conventions of modern poetry. Even in Australia, free verse did not need any justification in 1974.

'The pine' owes its experimental status to the fact that it dispenses with what we generally regard as an absolutely essential part of speech and is quite clearly no poorer for it. Verbs are said to impart energy and drive to a statement, yet the four verbless sentences of this poem possess energy and drive in abundance.

The verblessness of 'The pine' is far from being an isolated example among Gray's poems. Of the thirty-two poems which make up *Grass Script* (1978), at least seven begin with a sentence that does not contain a main verb. This total includes 'Flames and Dangling Wire' and 'Dharma Vehicle', two of the most important and ambitious poems that Gray has written.

Gray's constructions look awkward – unsure, even – until we grasp the principles or motives which govern them. In a 1981 interview in *Island* he reflected on his avoidance of all ready-made word formations and insisted that a poet had "to think every construction out afresh." Those great ideals in which he believes – freshness, authenticity, clarity – demand as much.

So does his wish to evoke a sense of presence of things and to demonstrate – tangibly demonstrate, enact in the very weave of the canvas – the suddenness with which those things can make their presence felt. Gray knows that because of this suddenness some things appear to exist in an eternal present.

This lyrical desire to evoke a sense of things held in a moment which defeats or suspends the flow of time goes hand-in-hand with its opposite impulse, for Gray also knows that our experience of things can only be transitory. As he is moved to say in 'A Testimony' in *Certain Things*, "for us, all is whirled away and is vanishing, as though it were the sparks of a trampling flame." Fire and water, both of which are natural symbols of transience, have figured in his work with increasing frequency over the years.

Gray has a deep interest in the visual arts and has even gone so far as to say that painting represents his "greatest passion" outside of books. He also draws constantly and thinks that other writers should follow suit:

The value of drawing and painting, to a writer, is that they get you out of your head, save you becoming too intellectual – they're entirely sensuous and wordless.

Yet this interest in the visual arts is hardly apparent from the subject-matter of his poetry. Unlike some other poets with a comparable interest in art, he doesn't write poems about painting and only intermittently refers to artists in his poems. A reader who combs through his volumes will come up with names like Hokusai, Bacon and Botticelli, all of which are well-known, and an occasional reference to an equally well-known work of art:

A workman hoists an unidentifiable mulch
on his fork, throws it in the flame:
something flaps
like the rag held up in 'The Raft of the Medusa'
(*'Flames and Dangling Wire'*)

Gray's *expressed* taste in art is actually rather narrow. Despite the fact that he has written an unpublished book on Dale Hickey and has contributed a chapter to a book on Alun Leach-Jones, he is sceptical about the semantic potentials of abstract art and hostile to anything which depends on a theory for its justification. In his eyes "good art is justified by its immediate sensory appeal."

It is therefore not surprising to discover that his favourite artist is the American realist, Edward Hopper. Gray sees Hopper as a compelling example of an artist who was intimately involved with something outside himself, and believes that all writers can learn something from his work.

To the best of my knowledge, he hasn't explicitly referred to Hopper in any of his poems. But it's not too difficult to see a firm connection between Hopper's famous 'Rooms by the Sea' of 1951 and the following item from '21 Poems' in *Grass Script*:

Sunlight
lying in the opened
empty room.

Brett Whiteley also goes unmentioned in Gray's poems. In some ways this is even more surprising

than the silence over Hopper, for Gray chose to reproduce a work by Whiteley on the cover of *Grass Script* and later wrote an interesting article about him for *Art and Australia* in which he singled out some of his paintings of birds and commented on the synaesthetic qualities of his work.

Some of the poems in *Grass Script* would seem to be indebted to Whiteley. This is surely the case with 'Late Ferry', many details of which evoke the feel, if not the actual appearance, of any number of the celebrated paintings of Sydney Harbour. The artist's habit of floating a slab of glistening white paint on an orange or ultramarine expanse of water has its equivalent in the wonderful concluding image to the poem:

I'll lose sight of the ferry soon –
I can see it while it's on darkness,
and it looks like a honeycomb,
filled as it is with its yellow light.

Gray's interest in the visual arts has probably given him a heightened sense of the way in which things are arranged in a visual field. He certainly arranges details in such a way that they form a coherent and logical sequence:

Two magpies
stepping on the verandah. A ploughed hillside,
smoke, and cumulus.

('16 Poems')

Quite clearly, as each new detail is introduced we move further and further into the distance.

It is likely that Gray's interest in the visual arts has also enhanced his image-making faculty. As generations of collagists and assemblagists have discovered, Gray understands that there is a causal relationship between the success of an image and the surprise it initially induces. The following lines from 'Looking After a Friend's House' in *Grass Script*:

It's down behind the stand
of distant bare trees – those torn bits
of flyscreen
tacked
onto sticks.

even recall what many artists have done with precisely the kinds of material he mentions here.

Gray's most baroque or elaborate images tend to deal with either water or light. Just how complex and studied these images can be is evident from the first stanza of 'Smoke' in *The Skylight* (1984):

As if through a slanted blind,
the sun is made shafts among the immense
rungs
of a Moreton Bay fig –
it comes sliding between that Gaudi-like,
visceral architecture;
a slow,
egg-thickened, steamy
mixture, precisely-sliced and,
in rows, gently conveyor-belted down.
I watch across a road of
cattle-race traffic, and above the wall.

Like some of the other poems in *The Skylight*, 'Smoke' verges on the surreal in the strangeness of its imagery.

What stops these poems from being fully surreal is not too difficult to discern. Even at its most bizarre or far-fetched, Gray's imagery always remains rooted in visual or perceptible fact and often achieves an impressionist accuracy in the rendering of that fact. When he begins 'A Port of Europe' in *Piano* with the following lines:

Like a bandage in a gorse bush, water gleams
on the dark-clouded moor . . .

we may take a moment or two to realise it, but the image they contain is clearly based on visual fact. Given certain conditions of light, a stretch of water can look *exactly* like that.

The same is true of other images which may initially perplex us and lead us to believe that they are irrational (and hence surreal) in nature. When Gray describes how rain collapses and likens it to "a hurled net, the trees slashing and struggling underneath it", his simile is actually a very accurate description of what happens in a violent rain-storm. In no sense does it depart from the observable facts.

Gray has been influenced by a number of American poets. Most of his commentators cite William

Carlos Williams and Charles Reznikoff and neglect to mention Reznikoff's fellow Objectivist, George Oppen. When everything is taken into account, Oppen's influence is at least as strong as that of Reznikoff.

Indeed, it may well be the stronger one. While Reznikoff's legacy can certainly be detected in the small number of poems Gray has written about other people ('Mr Nelson' and 'Memories of the Coast', both of which are in *The Skylight*, are perhaps the most notable examples), it could not be said that his work carries anything like the visual charge we find throughout the whole of Gray. Reznikoff, who was a lawyer by training, respected the real to such an extent that he didn't care to liken one thing to something else.

It's quite likely that George Oppen shared his scruples. Yet throughout his poetry we encounter a very strong sense of the physicality of things – especially that of man-made or manufactured things. As he intimated in 'Workman', Oppen above all admired the kind of workmanship which produces unpretentious, useful and well-made things:

... the carpenter's is a culture
of fitting, of firm dimensions,
of post and lintel.

Gray's sense of form may not be quite as shipshape as Oppen's, but it's clear that he is likewise a poet of things. In addition to repeatedly invoking their presence, he occasionally advances the idea that they are an index to much beyond the physical world. Just how resonant an index they can be is evident from part 6 of 'Aphorisms: On Politics' in *The Skylight*:

One's touch with things, I have seen, is the same
as one's touch with other people.

But perhaps I should explain his relationship to the American in another way. In 1981 or '82 Gray passed on to me his copy of the 1976 paperback edition of Oppen's *Collected Poems*, a book he could well have been reading while he completed many of the poems in *Grass Script*.

Apart from its intrinsic interest, what makes the Oppen volume so interesting and worthy of notice are Gray's pencilled annotations. A number of po-

ems ('Workman' is among them) had been marked by a tick, while two passages had been underlined. Gray had obviously been impressed by part 22 of the long title-poem in Oppen's 1968 volume, *Of Being Numerous*:

Clarity

In the sense of *transparence*,
I don't mean that much can be explained.

Clarity in the sense of silence.

for the first two of these lines had been underlined.

He had underlined a second invocation to clarity in 'Route', another long poem in *Of Being Numerous*:

... surely clarity is the most beautiful thing in
the world,
A limited, limiting clarity

I have not and never did have any motive of
poetry
But to achieve clarity

The relevance of these two quotations will be apparent as soon as we turn to *Grass Script*'s 'Telling the Beads', a poem which many of his commentators rightly consider to be one of his best. The following passage:

Thought balloons,
you infer

that I should fill each one with its
apt word

which must be of a like transparency.
You are the mushrooms

conceived on the pure walls of the air;
anti-pebbles;

doodlings of a Botticellian elegance.
O claritas,

one thinks of lenses, floating upon each other
dreamed by St Benedict Spinoza . . .

would seem to indicate that 'Telling the Beads' is partly indebted to Oppen's 'Route'. But the conclusive evidence is found in the opening line of Oppen's poem, the first three words of which are "Tell the beads".

A moment's reflection will tell us that Gray is able to believe so passionately in clarity because he accepts the evidence of the senses. "The true nature of the world", he has declared, "is not different to the things we see."

Through Robert Gray's eyes, we see everything as though for the first time. Crows rise from the roofs of a town "as if whole bonfires of charred newspaper had burst in the wind"; and at almost every moment we encounter something that has been so vividly transformed:

On the low plank, also, crude soap pieces,
 bright as the fat
 of gutted chickens – but, with a closer look,
 resistant,

darkly-cracked, like old bone handles.

that we instinctively concur with the poet when he declares that "our only paradise is the ordinary." The tableau in 'Nine Bowls of Water' has more than proved his case.

WORKS CITED

Gray, Robert, *Selected Poems 1963-1983*, A&R, 1985; *Piano*, A&R, 1987; *Certain Things*, William Heinemann Australia, 1993; 'A few takes on Brett Whiteley', *Art and Australia*, Summer 1986.

Sant, Andrew, 'An Interview with Robert Gray', *Island*, June 1981.

Williams, Barbara, 'An Interview with Robert Gray', *Southerly* 1/1990.

Robert Gray's *New and Selected Poems*, Heinemann, \$16.95 pb, was published late in 1995.

Gary Catalano is a poet and critic. UQP released his *Selected Poems 1973-1992* in 1993.

THERAPY

Hello!	\$ 10
Sit down	\$ 20
How are you?	\$ 30
What seems to be the problem?	\$ 40
Tell me about it	\$ 50
Could you explain further?	\$ 60
Explore your emotions	\$ 70
Let's go a bit deeper	\$ 80
Be kind to yourself	\$ 90
Get in touch with the inner you	\$100
I hear what you are saying	\$110
Thank you for sharing that	\$120
Our time is up	\$130
See you next week	\$140

Next please!

Hello! \$ 10

WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE DAY

Prothiaden
 Ativan
 Serenace
 Modecate
 Cogentin
 Day Dreams
 Diet Coke
 The Sun
 Music
 Friends
 Animals
 Luck
 Always a miracle

SANDY JEFFS

C.C. MITCHELL

The Bridge



LET US IMAGINE, you and me: we are walking in a city of hills and waterways, of bridges and beaches and a high, broad, flattening light which fills us with a feeling of space. Let us imagine further: this city is known to me and may be known to you; we are walking slowly because we are climbing a hill, and we stop often, so that I might catch my breath. No matter. You are letting me lead because I have promised we shall visit an apartment.

To begin again: there are three apartments, in different cities. It is to the third apartment I lead you because there is something there which I want you to see. While we continue our imagining, our walking slowly up this long hill, me struggling with my body which is no longer healthy, no longer young, and you, comfortable or uncomfortable with yours, while we are so imagining, let me tell you the story of two other apartments.

I did not sleep in the first apartment. I had a meal there with a woman, a cheap meal, a meal she had made herself of vegetables and oriental spices. We had little money between us; with the food we drank one bottle of stout. I remember the light was poor; we sat on stained bentwood chairs at a small deal table; she had spread a square of red gingham; her bed had been placed across one end of the room where it doubled as a sofa because she could afford no other furniture.

After our meal we sat on the bed drinking mugs of weak tea while she smoked roll-your-own cigarettes. She had set a candle by the bed. Gradually, in its unsteady light, we moved closer. She commented later on the knots of tension she had felt in my neck, on how unsure she felt. I remember us talking in low tones for another hour or so before saying goodnight. I travelled underground on a

train; I walked to my lodgings; we slept alone.

What strikes me now, as I recall this evening, is how much I still treasure this memory. I suppose at the time we were both lonely, wanted to create an evening which fitted our fantasies of romance and warmth, wanted to reach out. The image I hold, of our clinging to one another in her spartan flat, is tinged with sadness, with yearning, perhaps with a little fear. Yet despite this, and despite the fact that we did not move again beyond the commerce and masked greetings of our workplace, I remember our evening together as a special time. And I am groping to understand why.

THE SECOND APARTMENT is usually empty. It is owned by a friend who has lived with the same man for over thirty years while afraid of his love. She spoke to me on the telephone one morning in autumn, some years ago. I remember staring at a shedding pin-oak through a dirty window, listening to the high, laughing energy in her voice as she described her tiny apartment.

She said, "I use it as a bolt-hole for a few days, now and then, when I can't hack Gordon's niceness."

As I recount for you now the story of these apartments I have known, I remember her words and I am surprised to discover that when they were uttered by my friend, I did not consider them to be in any way odd.

Let me put it to you again, another way. She had a friend, a lover with whom she shared her home, a man called Gordon, whose 'niceness' on occasions had such a powerful impact on my friend she would flee to an apartment which she had purchased knowing such occasions would arise. (It was a tiny apartment on which she paid rates and

power and telephone charges and maintenance fees, and in which she slept alone, occasionally.)

Sometimes, when I visited the city where she lives, she would permit me to use her apartment for one night or two. There was no need to visit her home, or to take her to lunch. She preferred me to contact her by telephone, to use the key she would leave in the meter-box at the apartment door, to send her flowers or champagne at Christmas. We kept this arrangement for nearly four years without seeing each other once.

When I think of her apartment, I remember two things, always. I remember the bedroom being two feet wider and three feet longer than the three-quarter bed. I remember lying on the bed, on my back, awake in the darkened room, thinking of the girl and boy from the apartment opposite as they parked their bicycles on the concrete landing which separated the two apartments, aware of my timidity, of my wanting their friendship despite the difference in our ages.

THE THIRD APARTMENT is also owned by a friend, a man I have known since 1951. Last week, before he flew to America, he asked me to keep an eye on the place because he does not expect to return before summer. Here we are. I will take you inside in a moment, but first allow me some time to arrange this for you properly; I want to take care describing the feel of things so you will have the whole picture.

The block of apartments to which I have led you is not new or fashionable or old in architectural terms or even in terms of the age of this city and this suburb. It is not pretty or particularly ugly. The external decor and the general state of repair of this nondescript block are not neat and tidy, or decrepit, mismanaged or shabby. Rather, the block exudes an air of tiredness, a sense of disinterestedness.

I find I am hesitating now, without knowing why. It is as though I would rather stand here, in front of the block, to describe the contents of my friend's apartment and that which I have brought you here to see. My hesitation has to do with speed; I do not want to throw open the front door and have you gulp down your impressions like the first beer on a stinking hot day. I do not want you to pick things up and set them down again,

dismissively, knowing nothing of their history and significance. Instead, I want to lead you by the hand, carefully, pausing to consider, weighing things in our minds and hearts.

Can we proceed on that basis, you and I? Will you let me guide you slowly through the story of the third apartment?

FROM THE ENTRANCE, we are looking across a wide hallway, through bevelled-glass doors at the near end of the sitting room and french doors which stand open at the far end, through to a white wrought-iron table and two chairs on a balcony. Do you see how our gaze is led there, naturally?

I stood on the balcony, very early one morning, over twenty years ago. A storm had broken during the night, fragmenting my sleep with sudden flashes of violent light. My friend and I both rose shortly after dawn; we sat out on the balcony to share bowls of fresh fruit salad and a pot of tea. Over the tumble of red roofs below us, we talked of the women who had shared our lives, of our aloneness, of the combined ravages of divorce and death and luck and choice. We stood to watch a southern wind push dark clouds across an horizon streaked indigo and lemon.

This tree which pushes its limb over the balcony rail is the Australian white frangipani, *plumeria rubra*, its name a poem, its flower a message from man to woman, its scent a promise of languorous nights without sleep. Snap a bloom now; watch the sticky, milky, oozing sap. A frangipani grows in the cramped front yard below the terrace house I abandoned to the mother of my children. Sometimes I go there on a summer's night after heavy rain. I love the rich damp smell of clean pavement mingled with the blooms' clinging sweetness. On these nights I look up at the arched windows of the house we used to share, trying to recall the journey of our marriage, to fathom the currents of change which carried us apart.

No matter. Let me lead you to the dining room, to the fish tank. I know nothing of fish so do not ask me to name this little flash of bronze and black. He remains now as my sole reminder of a house full of children. I remember when my friend installed this tank: the setting up of pump and light and heater, of sand and stone and greenery; the ceremonial releasing of fish into fresh water; the

bubbling line of children, laughing and teasing, and their easy acceptance of my presence. They used to call me 'The Hobo' and 'Mr Lizard', though I never understood why.

As the years passed, as his boys and daughter left home and one of the boys returned and left again, I watched and felt the changes in my friend. In the end, he seemed to cloud over, to grow murky and dim and neglected like the fish and their water. One by one, the fish disappeared from the tank; one by one, the bright flashes of mood and energy left my friend. Now we have grown accustomed to afternoons spent together, sipping whisky, reminiscing.

Ah, the language of whisky! Teacher and Bell;

bottle and dimple; White Horse and Dewar, and the smooth golden valley of Glenfiddich. The tales I could tell you of long whisky nights! No matter. We are not here to dally over war stories of old men and their drinking, of their evaporated lifetimes of insights and plans.

Let me show you, instead, the picture which brought us here. It hangs unobtrusively, there, in one corner of the sitting room, over a shelf of books. You see, it is a mock sepia print of a photograph which depicts our most famous bridge in the year before its completion. It shows two curving spans of steel reaching out to one another over water. Above them, above the gap between them, three aeroplanes wheel and loop.

MYTHIC BIRD OF PANIC

After lamentation about the sadness of dying,
I stared at the imprints of tiny hands.
Release was instantaneous; effects have been lasting:
Since I've been back I've gone away again.

I could have been snowed in with promises,
Disarmed at breakfast by unforeseen gifts.
I'm talking about panic in my own private driveway,
The end of quiet on my street.

For memory has more real blood
Than ever ran in beefy dreams,
And there is hollowness in caresses,
The tactical celibacy of the machine.

See: Venus is all wrapped in on herself.
("O if I only had my slave costume and my chains!")
It's forbidden to impersonate Prokofiev,
Unthinkable to remove the madhouse scene.

I'm like a child entrusted with state secrets
Caught knowing too much and too little at once.
A tiny heart pounds under my collar:
No-one knows how to punctuate my work.

EMMA LEW

PAUL ORMONDE

How Evatt Scuppered Santamaria's Religious Vision



FOR FORTY YEARS people have debated the reasons for the split in the Labor Party in 1954/55. The split is popularly remembered as a conflict over the threat communist power in unions posed to the Labor Party and the nation. While not disagreeing with that description, I believe it is only part of the story. The other part is simply this: the split in the Labor Party could not have occurred unless there was an underlying fear within the party of the Australian equivalent of a 'Popish plot'.

Last August, Bob Santamaria, founder of the Movement whose activities were at the centre of the split, turned eighty. His remarkable energy today is undiminished but redirected. Having failed to remake the Labor Party in his own image, he is devoting himself to remaking the Australian Catholic Church in the absolutist mould of Pope John Paul II. The Church, as he sees it, is being destroyed by its theological liberals, in much the same way as he saw the Labor Party being destroyed by its political 'agnostics' in 1954/55.

When the threads of Santamaria's public life are drawn together, he can be seen as a man totally convinced of his own religious righteousness with a mission to implant his religious vision within a party he never saw fit to join.

Santamaria's motives in national affairs have always been fundamentally religious, in the sense that his vision for Australia was of a nation that could be a role model of a Christian society. But he pursued those objectives through political action – and the manipulation of political power. The centrality of religion to Santamaria's political thinking can be seen more clearly by examining his responses to the major wars of his adult life. Wherever communism has been an issue – in the Spanish Civil War, the Korean War and the Viet-

nam War – the Church, in his view, has been at risk and his crusading passions have been aroused. By contrast, in the prelude to World War II, he was a peacemaker, viewing with equal sympathy Anglo-French fears of German aggression and German fears of an Anglo-French policy of encirclement.¹ Throughout the six years of that war, he had little or no advice for governments on defence and foreign policy – a remarkably different position from the one he took during the Vietnam war.

In 1954/55, what brought many Labor people – including prominent Catholics – to support exposure of the Movement was a powerful conviction that Santamaria had a quasi-religious as well as a political vision for the Labor Party, both being pursued by the process of secret permeation. His organisation was in the process of cleansing the Labor movement, not just of its crypto-Communists, but of its political liberals and 'agnostics'. The Movement operated behind the cover of the officially-sponsored ALP Industrial Groups – and the term Grouper ultimately became almost synonymous with being pro-Movement.

Santamaria claims that Labor leader Herbert Vere Evatt precipitated the split by recourse to "the oldest weapon in the Australian political armoury – sectarianism".² He asserts that secrecy about the Movement among key Labor people was a myth and that "Evatt knew the main outlines of my work within the Labor Movement and appeared to agree with it".³

How did Santamaria imagine he could indefinitely get away with using a secret organisation – financed by the Bishops – to renovate the Labor Party towards his own goals without someone blowing the whistle? Helen Demidenko/Darville took on a Ukrainian identity to write her Miles Franklin Award-winning novel and got away with

it for only two years. In retrospect, it seems almost miraculous that Santamaria – operating in a much wider arena – was able to remain unexposed for twelve years (from 1942 to 1954) while he – and the forces he represented – came within a hair's breadth of exercising control of the Labor Party. Where was investigative journalism then? The Herald and Weekly Times – Melbourne's biggest publisher – not only did nothing to discover what was going on behind the scenes in the Labor Party but was party to concealing it.

When R. W. Holt, Victorian Minister for Lands, angrily tore up a Santamaria-inspired land settlement Bill in the Victorian Legislative Assembly in 1952, *The Herald* next day ran an article allegedly explaining the background to the land settlement proposal – a proposal involving the settlement of Italian migrants on land at Caradale, Victoria. The proposal for the scheme came from the National Catholic Rural Movement of which Santamaria was the national secretary. Such was the involvement of *The Herald* in keeping Movement activities camouflaged that the article did not mention the NCRM or Santamaria.⁴

THE LAND SETTLEMENT controversy stirred latent distrust within the Labor Party about organised Catholicism – even among some prominent Catholics, particularly those who felt comfortable in a plural society, and who were disturbed that their Church might be playing politics.

Catholics who understood the mentality of Catholic fundamentalism, with its passion for a complete coincidence of religious and political outlook, saw danger in the growing power of Santamaria's secret organisation. My father Jim

The confusion suited Santamaria well because it meant there were no restraints on his influence.

Ormonde was one such Catholic. As he watched Movement-nominated people being 'stacked' into local party branches, he used to say angrily: "The trouble with these people is that they're not Labor." My father was a member of the central executive of the NSW branch of the Labor Party from 1944 until the early 1950s. He was instinctively

distrustful of the mindless anti-communism promoted by the Movement, while having no sympathy himself for communist ideology. In the Labor split of the 1930s, he had been a member of the anti-communist Lang Labor Party. He lost his seat on the executive in 1953 when the Groupers were at the peak of their power in NSW.

What my father knew in his bones – but could not document at the time – was that the Movement was more than just an anti-communist organisation. Apart from defeating communists in unions, Santamaria had a broader purpose: to use the Labor Party as a vehicle for his religious vision. Thus, there were two layers of secrecy about the Movement.

The outer secret – the undercover activities masterminded by Santamaria within the unions – was known to Evatt and many senior Labor people. Whether Evatt believed that these activities were being carried out by Catholic Action, of which Santamaria was Director, or by a quite separate body, the Movement, is not clear.

They were quite distinct organisations – Catholic Action, in theory at least, being a network of bodies which drew the laity more actively into the spiritual mission of the Church. It was not secret. Inevitably, of course, Santamaria's leadership of both organisations led to widespread assumptions that there was no distinction. Further confusion arose from his leadership of the National Catholic Rural Movement which was a branch of Catholic Action. The confusion suited Santamaria well because it meant there were no restraints on his influence.

The inner secret – a plan to impose Santamaria's version of Catholic social philosophy on the Labor Party – was known to its begetter, to Archbishop Mannix, and perhaps to selected other Bishops and true believers in Santamariaism. Catholics who knew Santamaria well always suspected it but could not prove it. The proof came later.

The Movement began in the early 1940s in Victoria, with Mr Santamaria as leader and Archbishop Mannix as its unofficial spiritual guide. In September 1945, the Catholic Bishops of Australia made a fateful decision. They formally and secretly adopted Santamaria's organisation as its godchild and set up a committee of three bishops to control the Movement "in policy and finance". Its pri-

mary mission was to defeat communists in the unions by galvanising Catholics into a coherent industrial force.

How, one might ask, was a young man (in 1945 Santamaria was only thirty) able to lead the Catholic hierarchy of Australia into a political adventure that was almost certain in time to produce a sectarian backlash? The late Kevin Kelly, a former Australian diplomat who knew Santamaria well, suggested that most Australian Catholics who might have provided a counterweight to Santamaria in his dealings with Mannix – and most of the other Australian bishops – were at the war.

THE MOVEMENT WAS remarkably successful in energising Catholics to challenge communist union power. It was a ready-made ally for the ALP Industrial Groups which had been organising informally since the early 1940s but which were formally backed by the ALP in 1945. The Groups attracted broad support across religious barriers. They also provided the Movement with a shield behind which to hide. The Catholic press was full of praise for the Groups. The Movement was never mentioned. How many Industrial Groupers were also members of the Movement is not known. Robert Murray, in his monumental book *The Split* (Cheshire 1970), says Movement and Group supporters estimated that about 30% of Groupers were Movement people. Others put the figure somewhat higher. The intricate relationship between the Groups and the Movement is a significantly unexplored issue. What is clear is that non-Catholic Groupers knew little or nothing of the Movement's inner workings.

And there was the rub. Here was a secret society operating within the open institutions of the Australian polity. And by the early 1950s, it had a much wider agenda than defeating Communists and left-wingers. Because of union representation at Labor conferences, the Movement's influence in unions (under the shroud of the Industrial Groups) translated into power in the Labor Party – particularly in the States where Labor was then in power – Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania.

In October 1954, when Evatt made the dramatic statement which led to the Movement being flushed into the open, he was certainly familiar with

Santamaria's behind-the-scenes role with the Industrial Groups and of Santamaria's influence within the Catholic Church. In self defence, Santamaria made much of Evatt's consultations with him on internal Labor affairs and of Evatt's invitation to Santamaria to help in the drafting of his policy speech for the 1954 election.

Evatt's interest in keeping Santamaria on side is hardly surprising. Apart from his Movement role, Santamaria had a publicly-known position as Director of the National Secretariat for Catholic Action. In other words, he was the leading layman in a Church whose members overwhelmingly voted Labor.

Almost the whole of the Catholic clergy of Australia lent their influence and authority to the Movement's operations, although individual priests were free to withhold support.

By calculated hearsay, Catholics were led to believe that almost anything Santamaria did or said in the field of politics or international affairs had ecclesiastical approval. Various parish societies became part of the Movement's captive audience for its message.

One recalcitrant priest was my uncle, Father Tom Ormonde, my father's younger brother, and a member of the Sacred Heart order. He had a parish in rural South Australia, about 100 kilometres

By calculated hearsay, Catholics were led to believe that almost anything Santamaria did or said . . . had ecclesiastical approval.

north of Adelaide in the early 1950s. He told me of an instruction he received from his bishop to make parish facilities available for a visit from a well-known Jesuit, Father Harold Lalor, who had been relieved of normal priestly duties to devote himself to Movement work. Lalor was a dramatic orator – and a particularly effective fund-raiser.

Tom Ormonde wrote to me many years later to help me with background to my book *The Movement*, published in 1972. I used the details in full, attributing them to "a country parish priest". His reticence at being identified was typical of the loyalty Catholics felt to their Church, even when it was behaving scandalously. I can identify him now

because he died almost a decade ago. His letter described a meeting of selected Catholic men in his parish as having “the atmosphere of a conspiratorial gathering rather than a gathering of the saviours of the commonweal”. His letter went on:

The secrecy at this distance seems so ridiculous. Father Lalor’s thesis was the danger of imminent takeover of Australia by the communists. He had possession of the plans and he was aware of the location of communist arsenals, machine guns and ammunition. The immediate aim of the meeting was to raise finance for the Movement. Those poor sheep cockies, whose fear was not the loss of faith but the loss of farms and fleeces, took out their cheque books and gave the Movement 800 pounds. A neighbouring parish where a similar meeting was held raised 1300 pounds.

Father Lalor knew I was not a supporter of the Movement and he was very embarrassed by my presence. He began his lecture by saying that all he was going to say was a ‘committed secret’, that is, to repeat anything he said would be a mortal sin – it meant nothing to the sheep farmers present, and was obviously intended only for me. Presumably, I have committed a mortal sin by telling you.

Although I know so much about the Movement, I know you realise I am limited by the same reticence which makes most Catholics unwilling to wash the Church’s dirty linen in public. For most Catholics, the Church remains the family. This is one of the reasons for the passing success of the Movement. The Movement played on the loyalty of such men as Arthur Calwell to blast away at their reputations, confident that these Catholics would not divulge what they knew of the activities of the presbyteries and sodalities in the Movement’s operations. The Movement boys knew that while they were free as crusaders for Christ to tear into their Catholic opponents with both hands, the recipient of the pasting had one hand tied behind his back.⁵

There is another family story, which I never confirmed with him, which tells of Tom Ormonde returning to his home monastery in Kensington,

Sydney, from a stint in the country, and being initially denied admission at the gate because he did not know the password – a Movement meeting was in progress there. True or not, the story highlights the typical cloak-and-dagger atmosphere surrounding Movement operations and is characteristic of the sort of hold the Movement had on the whole Church organisation. Tom Ormonde died peacefully at the same monastery in 1986 aged 83. One of his most treasured memories was to have been at the bedside of Jim Ormonde when Jim died fifteen years earlier.

CATHOLICS WHO UNDERSTOOD the nuances of Santamaria’s thinking were well aware of his religious agenda. He had once written of his vision of Australia being “a mirror of Christianity to Asia”. He had a plan for bringing his vision to reality. It was to use the Movement to control the Labor Party – and Evatt could not have known that with any certainty. It is reasonable to speculate that the shock of Labor’s narrow and surprise defeat in the 1954 election – an election in which the Movement/Grouper faction was less than enthusiastic about his leadership – brought Evatt to desperation. He had been denied his destiny to be Prime Minister of Australia. He therefore exposed those he had earlier seen fit to deal with – but he had the support, indeed the prodding, of many Catholics in doing it.

How much did Evatt know? If he knew the outer secret – the Movement operations within unions – as a certainty, the inner secret – the Santamaria dream of a Labor Party embodying Catholic principles – could only have been a suspicion.

Gerard Henderson (once a Santamaria backroom man, who had access to Movement documents), in his book *Santamaria and the Bishops* revealed that the Movement’s broader objective was the establishment of “a Christian social order in Australia” using the ALP as its vehicle.⁶ Evatt was certainly told of this objective by Catholic Labor loyalists, but could have chosen not to believe it. Certainly, up to the 1954 election, it would have been politically crass of him to have even hinted at it.

According to Henderson, Santamaria advised Archbishop Mannix in a communication in 1952 that the Movement had possibilities “far wider than

the defensive battle against Communism”.

In his communication to his Archbishop, Santamaria claimed that within a few years, the Movement should be able to “completely transform the leadership of the Labor Movement and introduce into the federal and state spheres large numbers of members who possess a clear realisation of what Australia demands of them and the will to carry it out”. Quoting Henderson further:

Santamaria predicted that, as a result of this eventuality, government aid would be available to Catholic schools, and the prospects of settling Catholic immigrants on small agricultural blocks would be favourable. This, in turn, would be of significance to Catholicism since not only would Australia benefit by a continuation of the migration programme, but the Church would be able to gain great accessions of strength because of the religious composition of the migrant groups who would thus be absorbed into Australian life.

In a moment of overwhelming zeal, Santamaria was optimistic enough to proclaim that for the first time “in the Anglo-Saxon world since the advent of Protestantism” the occasion had presented itself for a Catholic-inspired programme to be implemented by government.

Such was the blindness of Santamaria’s hubris.

He has never challenged the authenticity of Henderson’s report. If that document had been leaked in 1952, the split in the Labor Party would have taken place well before 1955. The Movement, under Santamaria, was always a time-bomb.

AFTER EVATT’S STATEMENT in 1954, the Movement apparatus was disbanded in the Sydney and Adelaide dioceses. Two years later, the Vatican, in response to the political chaos in the Australian Church, formally disbanded the Movement as a political organisation. That was not reported in the Catholic media. They hadn’t reported its existence in the first place. They were part of the conspiracy of silence. Just as significantly, the Vatican rulings were not reported in the *Australasian Catholic Record*, the official channeller of Vatican edicts and other formal Church pronouncements.

In 1957, soon after the Vatican decision,

Santamaria formed his National Civic Council, a lay organisation with no formal backing from the Church, but which is still regarded with favour by some bishops.

Santamaria says quite correctly that the process by which the ALP regained control of its own future at the 1955 Hobart federal conference showed a flagrant disregard for the party’s constitutional conventions. He thought he had the numbers and, on paper, he did.

The exclusion of the Movement/Grouper faction delegation of six from Victoria meant that the conference had a nineteen to seventeen weighting towards the Evatt forces. Without that ruthless intervention, the voting would have been twenty-three to thirteen in favour of the Santamaria forces. Santamaria would have been somewhat closer to his dream of controlling a party without even joining it, to bring about a ‘Catholic-inspired’ social program. The Vatican belatedly said thanks, Mr Santamaria, but no thanks.

Evatt was an enigmatic personality – brilliant, visionary, idealistic, eccentric, unpredictable, egotistical – with a fixated sense of destiny. He was a great figure on the world stage as Australia’s External Affairs Minister, but in the petty world of local politics, he was never comfortable. He was naive about many practical political things and relied heavily on people like my father to keep him in touch with the roots of the Labor movement. But Evatt did finally see the Movement for what it really was – a foreign body within the Labor Party. Interestingly, the Vatican, for its own reasons, agreed with him.

ENDNOTES

1. Speech to a rally organised by the ‘Central Catholic Peace Committee’ at the Exhibition Building, Melbourne, in May 1939. Qtd in Paul Ormonde, *The Movement*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1972.
2. B.A. Santamaria, ‘Evatt’s Whipping Boy’, *Weekend Australian*, October 8/9, 1994.
3. *Ibid.*
4. See Robert Murray, *The Split*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1970.
5. Qtd in Ormonde as a statement from an unidentified country priest.
6. Gerard Henderson, *Studies in the Christian Movement*, Sydney, 1982.

Paul Ormonde is a Melbourne writer.

Slippage

THE SHORTCOMINGS of Labor governments in Australia are analysed in *The Alliance Alternative in Australia: Beyond Labor and Liberal* (Catalyst Press/Left Book Co-operative, \$12.95). It also provides a wealth of ideas for new policies on the left. Of particular value are the explanation by Abe David and Ted Wheelwright of the functioning of finance capital in the global capitalist age, and Phil Cleary's discussion of the role of left independents in a political alliance. The contributors clearly outline the changes in national and international markets and the relationships between capital, government and labour that have rendered earlier models of socialist change outmoded. The book's central thesis, however, that the time has come for social democrats to abandon the Labor Party for a new organisation along the lines of the New Zealand Alliance smacks not only of idealism, but of some of the new right panaceas. The contributors who hanker after such schemes as citizen-initiated referenda, recall of members and limitation of terms, have failed to ask whose interests these measures would serve. The underclass in capitalist societies is excluded from power not only because it is denied work, and thus access to the social networks it opens, but also because its members lack the adequate opportunities to make connections between their own situation to wider social structures. Like voluntary voting, schemes that limit parliamentary authority merely strengthen the power of money and the access it offers to education, information and imagination. An even more serious flaw is the belief that the labour movement no longer has the capacity to renew itself and the party that maintains the allegiance of

the vast majority of its members. Without a Labor party, the best that democracy can offer is a sharing of power between capital and intellectuals. While the present Labor Party needs enlivening from both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary ginger groups, it still offers the only realistic vehicle for general social change in our society.

THIS ISSUE OF *Overland* introduces some changes in our presentation, although not in our balance or policy. These changes are the latest stage of a policy that was adopted several years ago to extend the journal's appeal to a larger range of readers and to position it more centrally in debates about the future of Australia, its culture and politics. We believe that these debates have tended to take too little account of the imaginative contributions of writers, and we will continue to seek essays that complement the work of our poets and fiction writers, as well as reviewing books that make a contribution to the continuing debate about the nature and traditions of Australian society and the possibilities of our future. We welcome contributions from our readers on these matters, whether for publication or for the information of the editors as a guide to the way you want us to shape your magazine.

WHEN BUSINESSES and corporations explain that changes they are imposing on us are intended to improve their services to their clients, we properly expect that we are going to have to pay more. A slight exception is Australia Post's announcement that *Overland's* address, in common with everyone holding boxes at the Melbourne Mail Exchange, now the Melbourne City Mail Exchange, has changed to PO Box 14146, MCMC, Melbourne

8001 – yes, that number begins with an eight, not a three. There is no extra charge for this change, but of course all our stationery has been instantly rendered redundant.

John McLaren

Take Three

GIVEN THE LITERATURE BOARD'S ongoing failure to say just where its magazines policy is going, it was good to see McKenzie Wark (in the Australian's Higher Education Supplement on the 17th of January) bringing home the richness and diversity of Australia's little magazine culture. As well as singing the praises of *Overland* 141 for its coverage of the Helen of the D'Urbervilles saga, he rightly promoted a number of Australian magazines for their quality. It's a shame his faith doesn't seem to be shared by the large majority of Australian writers which fails to buy or even read magazines like *Overland*. Not a week goes by without a budding writer phoning the *Overland* office asking what kind of material we publish. We politely suggest they have a look at an issue or maybe even buy one, after all they are on sale at all good bookshops . . .

Perhaps there's something in the shoestring nature of little magazine budgets that gives them their vitality. But it's sobering to consider that if just half the estimated 10,000 creative writers in Australia each bought or subscribed to any 3 magazines (approximately \$100 annually per subscriber) then around \$500,000 would be injected into the system. The quality of the magazines – in size, format and content – would surge. More writers would be published. When published they could expect payment way beyond Australia Council minimums. Editors could be paid for their pains! It's even more sobering to consider that this is not a flight of fancy but a practical possibility.

Cries of poverty won't wash. This kind of support would be an investment in the very medium which in turn supports them at all stages of their careers. Glib it might sound but writers cannot afford *not* to subscribe to what are often their only vehicles for publication. It should go without saying that the health of the little magazines is crucial to the health of Australia's literary culture as a whole.

The magazines, for their part, cannot just sit back and count the money coming in. We will need to heighten our responsiveness to contributors and readers and make sure we gain a clearer picture of our constituency and its needs.

Overland welcomes any dialogue on this or other matters and will publish pieces which keep the argument rolling. And to kick the argument off *Overland* hereby instigates the *Take Three* campaign. Get three magazines and play a role in the advancement of a diverse and healthy Australian magazine culture.

Ian Syson

Dialogue

ROBIN GERSTER (*Overland* 140) had some perceptive and persuasive things to say about World War II remaining comparatively flat between the high significance given to both World War I and Vietnam. He also made some rather strange claims.

One was that the "key events" of World War II were "revolting rather than . . . rousing". Much about every war is totally revolting. What Robin Gerster doesn't seem to realise, and is too young to remember, is that on VE-Day in 1945, and on several following anniversaries and on VP-Day, the centres of our capital cities were crammed by pedestrians almost to the point of immovability. Their euphoria couldn't be bottled up. Joy over what? Victory – very rousing. The thought of boys coming home – wonderful. The end (achieved or in sight) of the Nazism and Fascism that had produced Auschwitz, the Burma-Thailand Railway, and even Dresden and Hiroshima. Now the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter could have their turn. Of course it didn't quite work out like that in the harsh Cold War and the hard cold world, but not all was lost, and it was very rousing at the time. Some of us still recall those heady hopes, and warm our sad hearts with the memory of what we thought we had won.

Another peculiar claim is the suggestion that by being the *Second AIF* its members virtually had to be second-rate. I don't think the Carlton Football Club in 1995 reckoned itself to be second-rate (or sixteenth-rate) because earlier Carlton teams have

won the premiership. Looked at in a more normal way, it's called proudly upholding a tradition, and proving yourselves. When the First AIF went to war, its members were anxious to demonstrate that they were worthy successors of the best British military traditions. Following on is not necessarily to be condemned to an inferior status; it's often a matter of being *inspired* to great achievement.

And where do the Militia, Australia's home defence force, fit in this? By the arrogant AIF they were often called second-raters. Yet they were the first Australian Militia to go into action, and among the first to meet the Japanese in New Guinea, and some of them – say Victoria's 39th Battalion – turned out pretty well. Which leads on to a third Gerster distortion: "The overwhelming technology of the war made declarations of martial virtuosity look silly." Read Peter Brune's little book *Gona's Gone* (Allen & Unwin, 1994). Follow these Australians – AIF and Militia – through those appalling engagements. Then ask if it was technology that counted there, or men – warriors, really. What technology helped on the Kokoda Track? At Milne Bay perhaps RAAF raids on shipping were a matter of technology, and certainly they reduced the number of Japanese who landed there. But after their forces (and tanks) did get ashore, how much technology (like tanks and anti-tank guns) did the Australians have available to inflict on the Japanese their first defeat on land in the course of the whole war? No tanks. No anti-tank guns. A few corroded sticky grenades that wouldn't work. Some artillery and mortars. But victory was mainly won by determined men. So there are places (Kokoda,

Milne Bay, Gona . . .) that mean as much to some of us as Gallipoli does – and mean no less because they came later. They were, after all, battles in Australian territory. Can't we ever learn that, if the Japanese had taken and held Australia from 1942, we wouldn't be publishing *Overland*, writing for it or reading it? And, when we do think about that, there's nothing rousing in the thought?

As for the ultimate horror in war technology, the atomic bombs, there's another angle even on them. No, I don't defend the French tests. Knowing what we do now, let's ban the bomb. Back in 1945, however, those bombs saved the lives of thousands of Allied servicemen (including Australian POWs) by shortening the war and rendering unnecessary an invasion of a fanatically defended Japan. Such an invasion, and the fire-bombing that would have preceded it, would also have cost as many Japanese civilian lives as the atomic bombs did. The Dresden fire-bombing boiled ponds dry and left people merely dark smears on walls. Genetic effects apart, it was not any better than Hiroshima.

Then, in the Gerster view, we have the non-warriors emerging as the heroes of World War II rather than the fighters. The POW surgeon 'Weary' Dunlop is instanced. Well, go around asking people to name an individual Australian hero of World War I. My bet is that, more than any other, you'd get Simpson and his donkey. That's not to end on a triumphal Gerster note: see, World War I again! It's to say that the differences are not as great as Robin Gerster suggests, and that there's much more in all of this than he allows.

John Barrett

HOBO

POETRY MAGAZINE

According to Geoff Page in the Canberra Times, the leading Australian Specialist Poetry Quarterly

Poetry - articles about poetry - reviews of poetry books.

Subscriptions: Still only \$18 for 4 issues posted.

Contributors ... are now paid, thanks to NSW Ministry for Arts funding.

Editor: Dane Thwaites, with Kris Hemensley, Susan Wildman, Janice Bostok.

PO Box 166, Hazelbrook NSW 2779.

Hobo #8 due out in March, 1996

"The excellent HOB0" - Don Anderson, SMH

GEORGE PARSONS

Why was there no lasting friendship in early New South Wales?

The real life of romantic love, after its early flights, is nasty, brutish, and short . . . it deals in false images and false expectations. Marriage is kinder, but it also lives on lies, little tame ones – one makes the best of the bargain. Only friendship is completely real.

Alison Lurie: *Love and Friendship* (Abacus, Glasgow, 1986)

TWO DECADES OF STUDY of the people of early New South Wales reveals one startling social fact: there was very little lasting friendship in the infant colony. There was romantic love, there was lust – the court papers are full of it – there was marriage, there was adultery, the pain and the hurt, the feelings of betrayal leaping from the Bench of Magistrates papers and still searing the reader; but where was friendship? Perhaps one should not expect to find it in the Court of Civil Jurisdiction, the place of broken partnerships and acrimonious disputation, but why is it not in the private correspondence, in the letters between eighteenth-century men and women? The answer to these questions goes to the very heart of the strange European colony which clung precariously to the edge of the vast Australian continent at the end of the eighteenth century.

In early Australia friendship was eaten away by money. Capitalism came to Australia in 1788, bringing with it the cash nexus; money was the great corrosive of custom, cohesion and community. George Suttor, permanently discontented and disenchanted, a representative of the gentry which would never exist, put it well by quoting Horace: "Make money, make it honestly if you can, but above all make money."

Money was all. The paradox was that a convict colony became capitalist before Great Britain. Convicts and ex-convicts suffered not for their crimes but for the fact that they lacked skill, initiative or adaptability. In a labour-scarce economy wages were high and monetary reward was there for bond and free. Government convicts had no barracks until 1819. They worked for themselves from lunchtime each day, acquiring property, businesses and profits. Their colleagues, assigned to

settlers, faced something of a lottery, but good workers were prized and rewarded. Colonel Johnston's Irish servants ate at his table; here was St Paul's world turned upside down.

Capital, as Marx knew, is dead labour. The struggle for wealth in New South Wales was bitter and unending. The market was small, too limited to share with more than a few rivals. Moreover, economic success, measured in money, meant social success. Birth and title were useless without money. Judge Advocate Atkins might appeal for deference, hierarchy and social distinction, but few listened. Dr Samuel Johnson, who had feared such a state of affairs in England, would have found his worst fears confirmed in the colony.

Like an acid, money ate away at society, a series of constantly shifting socio-economic groups, locked in a bitter struggle for wealth and position. Robert Campbell's attempt to engross the trade of New South Wales through his links with Bligh was a cause of the social crisis of 1808 which culminated in rebellion; his fellow merchants appeared regularly in the courts to defend or to improve their fortunes. Indeed, the economic and social history of early Australia is graphically revealed in legal rather than historical documents. A convict colony was consumed by commercial litigation.

Social and economic conflict intruded into private life. Indeed, in the small colony of New South Wales little was private. Those historians who suggest large-scale smuggling of rum ignore the fact that people watched their neighbours closely. Illicit gains for some threatened all. Governor King, amazed by the number of informers in the colony, realised that the cause was the increasing search for profit. Furthermore, he soon sensed that there would be no new monopoly to rival that of the

1790s; individualism, the free play of market forces, competition and capitalism dominated the colony.

IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES friendship was difficult. Patronage networks dominated society, but patron and client demanded deference and obligation on the one hand and reward on the other. Moreover, patronage was eroded by the cash nexus, and the networks were soon replaced by interest groups, a temporary coalescence about one leader, held together by the real (or potential) delivery of wealth.

There were friendships. The best marriages – the Kings, the Reibys, the Kables – were based on ‘real’ friendship; Robert Campbell and his brother-in-law, John Palmer, were lifelong friends; and Henry Kable and Joseph Underwood never wavered in their friendship. Other strong friendships – King, the incomparable George Bass and Matthew Flinders, the Rev. Thomas Palmer and John Boston or W.C. Wentworth and George Johnston Jnr – were ended early by the Angel of Death. Still others – John Macarthur and W.S. Davidson – only survived because distance (Davidson left New South Wales in 1807 never to return) removed economic competition. Few friendships lasted more than a year. Even kinship was no guarantee of lasting relationships as is shown by the vicious dispute between W.S. Davidson and his nephews, the Leslies, the early pioneers of the Darling Downs. Similar disputes

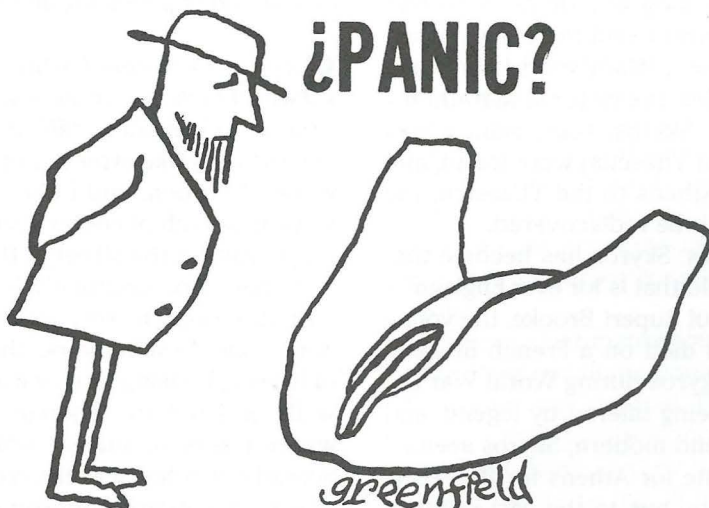
drove deeply into the Suttons, the Macarthurs and the Johnstons. Blood was no match for capital.

Friendship was not a matter of sex. Intimately involved in business and commerce, women were as consumed by the search for wealth as men. They joined in their husbands’ disputes; sometimes they initiated their own conflicts. Capitalism was (and is) no defender of traditional values, especially if these values threaten the cash nexus. And in the matter of gossip there was no difference; in early New South Wales everyone, male and female, gossiped.

This, of course, is history from above. There are hints in the documents of long, lasting friendships among ‘the people’ in, for example, the Hawkesbury, and certainly some soldiers of the New South Wales Corps were friends for over thirty years. The difference between rich and poor – if there was a difference – is explained by money. As in most things, Karl Marx’s thesis is the best explanatory tool we possess.

New South Wales was both convict and capitalist. Based from the beginning on money, it showed the new society stripped clear of custom or the dead hand of the past. In the new world was the new order. It is a pity Marx did not know about New South Wales; it would have provided him with empirical support for his theories.

George Parsons teaches economic and social history at Macquarie University. He is about to publish a book on the NSW Corps and is writing a biography of Governor P.G. King.



SHIRLEY ROWE DRINKWATER

Skyros – that “corner of a foreign field . . .”



GREECE WAS IN THE GRIP of pre-election fever, and the wild political scenes in Athens and Salonika, viewed on the television each night in the kafeneions, had convinced me that Athens would be a good place not to be during the coming weekend, even though I had planned to return there for mail.

Searching my map for an alternative destination where I could ride out election hysteria, I discovered the island of Skyros, off the east coast of Euboea (modern Evvia). According to legend, Achilles' mother Thetis had hidden him, in the guise of a girl, at the court of Lykomedes, king of Skyros, to avoid his being sent to the Trojan War. Unhappily, he was lured away by Ulysses to Troy, where he was killed by Paris's arrow. Achilles' son, Pyrrhos, was brought up on Skyros, and eventually he too was taken by Ulysses to the Trojan War.

Above the town of Skyros there is an almost perpendicular hill which is thought to be the cliff from where Theseus, king of Athens, who had sought asylum on the island, reputedly was pushed to his death by Lykomedes. Many years later, when Kimon – son of Miltiades, the victor at Marathon – invaded and captured Skyros, some giant bones (thought to be those of Theseus) were found, and transported back to Athens to the Theseion, the site of which has yet to be rediscovered.

In more recent times, Skyros has become that “corner of a foreign field that is for ever England” – the final resting place of Rupert Brooke, the young English poet who had died on a French hospital ship off the coast of Skyros during World War I.

With all that was being offered by legend, and history both ancient and modern, Skyros seemed a challenging substitute for Athens for the weekend. Making my way by bus to the east coast of

Euboea, and the tiny port of Paralia below the town of Kimi, I boarded the ferry for the island.

It was Friday afternoon and the elections were to be held on the coming Sunday, making it necessary for all Greeks to return to their place of origin to vote. In the below-deck cafeteria of this overcrowded ferry a volatile voter was haranguing his family and friends with words that rapped from his lips like volleys of pistol shots. I withdrew from the line of fire to find a more peaceful corner on the top deck.

The port of arrival for Skyros is Linaria on the west coast, at the head of a small sheltered bay; and, while the locals went about loading their donkeys – or, in a few cases, their trucks – with supplies from the ferry, nearly all the travellers jumped aboard the waiting bus for the bone-shaking, twelve-kilometre journey across the island to the town of Skyros. Not wishing to be left behind, I also climbed into the ramshackle old bus, instead of first taking a look around Linaria.

SKYROS – A TOWN of whitewashed cubic houses with black, flat roofs – was tiered around the base of Lykomedes' cliff. In the lower town the narrow alley-like streets were oppressive on that warm afternoon, and I climbed the whitewashed steps in search of cooler accommodation, leaving my luggage in the street at the bus stop.

These steps eventually led above the town to an old, though freshly whitewashed chapel with blue-painted timberwork, the traditional colours of Greece. Looking further upwards I could see the walls of a ruined Venetian fortress on the cliff, where traces of ancient walls have been found. Spread out below was the coastline, and a Xenia – one of the many government-run hotels – on

Magazia Beach.

Returning down the steps to the main town, I was constantly plied with spoonfuls of sugary cakes topped with dry icing-sugar and almonds. It was some special day, and black-garbed women of the village were walking around sharing their cakes with neighbours, or sitting on their doorsteps waiting for passers-by. It was unthinkable to refuse; my hands were soon overflowing, and most finished up a gooey mess in the crown of my soft hat, the remainder making a white gash across my face from ear to ear.

Taking another alley, I found a Memorial to Rupert Brooke. Standing on a bastion above the beach, it was a bronze statue made by a Greek sculptor, M. Tombros, in 1931 – a 'statue of an ideal poet', Greek-style. If Brooke had been built as depicted, one would be entitled to suspect that he had died from becoming muscle-bound. And his mother would have blushed for him, the sole adornment being a scroll, presumably of poetry, held in his right hand.

It's quite easy to become lost in the winding streets of a largish Greek village, and I enquired the way back to the plateia, the main square. An ageless woman, in black dress and head-scarf, threw her head in the air, waved her arms and cried "Makria! Makria!" If one has spent an entire lifetime on one island, or in one village, as many have, even a five-minute walk must seem far! far!

My luggage was waiting patiently where I had left it, and I trolleyed it down the steep road to the Xenia on the beach, rather than finding a room in the stifling village. I had intended staying for the weekend while endeavouring to locate the site of Rupert Brooke's grave; but that night I discovered that it was in the wild southern part of the island near the bay of Tris Boukes (three mouthsful), and best approached by hired launch from Linaria, my port of arrival. Therefore, early next morning I returned to the other side of the island and found a simple, sparsely furnished room which saved me many drachmae compared to the Xenia at Skyros.

The room in Linaria was above the local grocer's store on the wharf; but then the whole village was on, or very close to the wharf. It also had a balcony from where I was tempted to join many of the locals in the favourite activity of this sleepy village: watching the daily ferry arrive, and depart,

then going back to sleep until the next one the following day. I was also tempted to enquire the cost of a launch to take me to Tris Boukes, knowing that, comparatively, it wouldn't be expensive; but definitely it would be far more than I was prepared to pay alone.

Investigating the red gravel road which led away from the wharf, I turned left up and over one of the headlands, past the modern church, and began walking towards the reputedly barren, rocky southern part of the island which supports mainly wild goats. It also used to be the home of the wild Skyros ponies for which the island was famous. Now, most of them have been transported to an off-shore islet.

IT WAS A GOOD GRAVEL ROAD for walking, but there was no shade, only the occasional wild fig tree and a few olive trees on private land. After an hour in the heat, I could see that my small bottle of water and scant provisions wouldn't be sufficient for a long day's walk, and I wasn't equipped for an overnight camp, which, judging by my progress, and my map, could be necessary. In Greece, and particularly on this island, probably the only thing to fear would be a hoof in the ear during the night. In other countries I wouldn't be so optimistic.

The following day I arranged for the local taxi to drive me to Tris Boukes.

Our party of three included the driver's seventeen-year-old son, probably returned home for voting purposes. He had never visited the site, and I had no quibble with the uninvited guest at my expense, but could have done without their new toy, a CB radio. If they weren't shouting into it, it was blaring back – for three hours; and it increased our company considerably as the whole island appeared to be joining in our expedition.

The road rapidly deteriorated after some kilometres, and I could see the advantage of others knowing our whereabouts. But I did resent having to share my experience with their cacophonous radio.

We were fortunate enough to come across some of the few remaining ponies on the island – a family of sire, dam and foal. They were magnificent to watch – their eyes wild, nostrils flaring, and manes and tails flying as they paced our car for a brief period before racing off into the scrub.

The last three kilometres of the track were strewn with huge boulders which should have given us a broken axle or two, or at least ripped the tyres to shreds as we lurched from rut to rut. For me to have walked the distance would have taken a good six hours each way, and I saw no signposts where the track diverged.

The grave is in the middle of an olive grove on a small, level area on the slopes of Mt Kokhilas, looking out high over the intensely blue waters of Tris Boukes and the small peaks of two islets. In 1961, the Royal Navy dispatched a party to Skyros to build the present impressive white marble tomb with its black wrought-iron surround – built to last. Around the base of the marble are carved, in Greek, the words “Slave of God”, and my feeling was that the original simple grave would have been more to the liking of the occupant. Maybe the use of rough cut unpolished marble would have been more suitable, the polished marble seeming too civilised for the wild beauty of the area.

MY DRIVER HAD VISITED the site twelve months earlier, when he had brought out an Englishman to install the marble plaque which sits at the foot of the grave. On it is inscribed the complete poem of ‘The Soldier – 1914’.

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made
aware,

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways, to
roam,

A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less

Gives somewhere back the thoughts by
England given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her
day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and
gentleness,

In hearts at peace, under an English
heaven.

Reading this poem while standing on Greek soil, it occurred to me that some may think the fourth line could be rather short on tact. It also occurred to me that I could have been visiting this grave on Turkish soil. The day after Brooke was buried, the expeditionary force, of which he was a member, sailed for the Dardanelles.

Even though this soldier/poet has been debunked by some for his idealistic attitude to war – unlike his contemporary Wilfred Owen who wrote vividly of its horrors – Rupert Brooke is still remembered by many. One month prior to my own pilgrimage, in May 1985, a group of English faithful had landed on the beach at Tris Boukes, and walked up the rough track to the solitary grave in the olive grove to hold a memorial service. It had been the seventieth anniversary of the poet’s death on 23rd April, 1915.

Before leaving the site, the driver picked a branch from an overhanging olive tree and placed it on the marble. If there had been any of the wild red poppies I would have added them to his olive branch; but their season had passed. And my time was up.

On our return journey to Linaria, we were flagged down by an old man leaning heavily on a stick nearly as bent as himself. The son, who was driving us home (for experience) opened the back door, and the islander, with a face like tanned leather, kept me company for the next few kilometres. It would never occur to them to ask if I had any objection to sharing my taxi – which, of course, I hadn’t. There is someone on the road – you pick them up. It’s as uncomplicated as that. The guest list could have been even longer had not the offensive CB radio been available to give a vicarious outing for the islanders in general.

As we approached a turn-off, our geriatric hitchhiker asked to be put down, and he hobbled up the track as we went on our way, I automatically being given the role of ‘rich foreigner’. How could they know that I would be living on a diet of Greek salad (without the olives, they aren’t cheap in Greece) for the next two weeks to pay for my most expensive photographs to date?

RETURNING TO LINARIA, I stopped at the grocery store under my room to talk with Anastasious, the owner, an old man in his eighties. He was

known to the other islanders as 'the friend of Brouk'. As a young boy when the British had used the bay of Tris Boukes as a naval base, he had sat with the poet as he scribbled his verse under the olive trees of Skyros. Now, his hero's only companions in the lonely olive grove above Tris Boukes are the wild goats and an occasional Skyros pony, or the even more occasional devotee.

With fingers as gnarled and twisted as the trunks of the olive trees surrounding Brooke's Monument, Anastasious slowly drew from his desk drawer a plastic folder containing some yellowed clippings from a London *Times*. Years earlier, an English couple had come to the island, and had written an article about the old man and his memories of Rupert Brooke.

That night, eating at the kafeneion on the wharf, I ordered a small bottle of beer with my stuffed tomatoes and Greek salad. (It was still today. Tomorrow I would start pulling in my belt – even further than usual.) When the waiter said "oxi" (no) to my request for beer, I thought they must have had an extraordinarily busy day with boats calling in to the island. Asking instead for retsina, the waiter again shook his head, and to every other request, then pointed to the cooler full of soda water, pepsi, orange, etc. But I could see nothing suitable to drink at the end of such an inspiring day.

Settling for a soda water I felt uneasy, having sensed an embarrassment from the waiter, and

wondered if in some way I had unknowingly committed a cultural gaffe.

A few minutes later the local policeman arrived, pausing to look around before heading straight for my table. With no telephone, the local grapevine must have been well oiled. My gaffe was beginning to look serious.

In a mixture of Greek and English, he explained that alcohol wasn't permitted to be sold on that day.

"Efharisto. Katalamvano." (I thank you. I understand.) I said.

But I didn't understand. My first thought was that it might have been because the day was Sunday, and that the laws on this island could be different from others. Then I realised which Sunday it was. Of course! It was Election Day! The law is that no liquor is permitted to be sold on Election Day. Involved in my own exciting plans, the election had passed me by, even more so than I could possibly have expected.

Returning to Athens for mail on the Monday, I found the streets strewn with election rubbish and everyone looking weary and hung-over. The doors of the Post Office in Sindagma Square were locked. It was a holiday to allow all the voters to return from their original homes. I had been travelling on the two busiest days in the Greek calendar.

Shirley Rowe Drinkwater is an Australian writer currently living in the mountains of northern Victoria. This is an extract from a book on personal travel.



1993

Bev Aisbett

What Makes a Special Man?

DAVIS McCAUGHEY

Geoffrey Serle: *Robin Boyd: A Life* (MUP, \$45).

IN THE NOW FAR-OFF DAYS when I used to try to teach students New Testament or Hellenistic Greek, rightly or wrongly I encouraged them to distinguish between two Greek words for time: *chronos*, from which we get chronometer, chronology, time as it can be measured horizontally, as it were, time which passes; and *kairos*, the appropriate time, the critical hour, the significance of which can only be measured vertically – the hour that stands out, remains significant in human affairs. I have often wondered whether that distinction could be applied to men and women. Most of us live relatively insignificant lives, time passes; but there are a few who encapsulate in their existence something of greater significance. To read *Robin Boyd: A Life*, by Geoffrey Serle, is to have these questions forced upon us again. To employ a simple phrase, much used in my native Ireland, Robin Boyd was a special man: what made, what makes him that? Oddly enough this special quality can only be brought out when the story is told chronologically; and that is what Serle does: he tells Robin's story, sequentially, the story of his family, the family into which he was born and the family which he and Patricia made; his own story from childhood through young manhood, the successes and disappointments of a professional career until we find recorded his relatively early death, so unexpected, so disturbing to all who knew him. At every stage the question arises: what makes the subject of this biography a special man?

One of the merits of this remarkable book is that that question never obtrudes to dominate the narrative so that its repetition becomes boring and in a way self-defeating. Nor however is it ever lost in the story of the times in which he lived, the coming of Modernism to Australia, the story of his family life so like and so unlike that of other families, of his writings and his architecture, all of which is part of the story of our times or of our immediate past. Insistently, but delicately, as befits the subject, without stridency the question is asked: what made him a special man?

Of course family background counted for a lot, with its artistic interests and talents; but, as Geoffrey Serle puts it:

'The Boyds' did not emerge as a public phenomenon until the 1950s when Martin, Robin, Arthur and his brothers and sisters had all won some fame. Before then, Robin and Arthur's grandparents and parents were known, respectfully, only in the art world. Pat (his brother) and Robin acquired their outlook on the primacy of art as a way of life directly from their mother.

Elsewhere he reflects: "How he (Robin Boyd) had become the complete Modern by the age of twenty, in Melbourne, is not easily explained."

Already he had "broad interests and an advanced eye", was largely self-educated, discovered, read and responded to literature that introduced him to a world to which most of his contemporaries were blind.

The Modern movement was chiefly transmitted through overseas journals and magazines, and Robin was shaped far more by these than by

any family influence. But he must be distinguished from most of the avant-garde internationalist Moderns by his strange concern with Australia and much of his originality and distinction lies in his combination of International Modernism with intense local interest.

It is indeed now impossible to see Australia or to think of Australia apart from that wider world which he and others mediated for us, along with a passionate concern for the protection of flora and fauna and for what in a generalised way we call the environment. His writings, the houses and other buildings designed by him, have in the last forty to fifty years helped to bring Australia into contact with some of the best things in the twentieth century before the twenty-first breaks upon us, or perhaps before we slip back into philistinism. While bringing this together, and apparently just telling the story, Serle subtly places all this before us. Like some of the great Renaissance painters he fills his canvas with many characters. Without losing sight of the central figure we find depicted in this corner of the picture or that portraits of his mother, his brother, his close colleagues (Grounds and Romberg) and of some of his clients. It is engaging, and often entertaining, to learn of some of the exploits of Roy Simpson, Peter McIntyre and others still happily with us. It is a book about Robin Boyd, but it is also a book about our world, our failures and our aspirations to better taste. It calls for a greater respect for the profession of architect.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS which we take for granted, but which in large measure we owe to Robin Boyd: a pioneer in writing the history of the Australian home as Robin emerges as an important social historian, and as one who gave us a vocabulary for architectural criticism. Sir Joseph Burke used to say that every time he went into the Australian countryside he found himself distracted by Fred Williams: wherever he looked he saw Fred Williams' landscapes. We cannot look at the buildings around us, our houses and public buildings, and we certainly cannot speak about them one to another without being in Robin's debt. We deplore the ugliness of our streetscapes, the vulgarity of pretentious structures, and we respond to the graceful and the sensitive because he has shown

us the way to think and talk about these things. Our shame and our pride have both been quickened. Some of us also learnt what it is to be a client, and this book brings that home to us. It was my good fortune to learn something of that role in their very different ways from both Frederick Romberg and Robin Boyd. It would be dangerous if as a community – as individuals and public bodies, corporations – we were to lose that respect for the insight, judgement and integrity of the architect.

I began by saying that in Ireland we would speak about "a special man". They also sometimes say: "Och! he's a lovely man." That, too, many of us would say about Robin Boyd, and he has a lovely biographer. In content and in form it is a lovely book with its fine writing and generous illustrations, photographs and drawings so well chosen. Robin deserves such a book.

Dr Davis McCaughey is a theologian and historian, and past Governor of Victoria. This review is based on his speech launching the book.

A Somewhat Stunning Debut

DORIS LEADBETTER

Matt Rubinstein: *Solstice* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

WELL, I'M NOT GOING TO exclaim with shock at the youth of this writer. If he can write as delicious a book as this, I don't care how young he is. Maybe with experience, with age, will come a sharpened ability to tackle the problems of dialogue in the form this book takes (should he ever repeat the form), and maybe age will bring him only age.

Rubinstein has read Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* and loved it. Unlike most of Seth's admirers, Rubinstein sat down to emulate that author's poetic vision and produced his own book written in verse. He didn't have the opportunity to read Dorothy Porter's verse-novel *The Monkey's Mask*, so perhaps his poetry lacks a bit of poetic inspiration but nevertheless it's a somewhat stunning debut.

His other principal inspiration is a pretty good one, too: Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides guidance to the form and to the story itself. However, the story takes place in a less bewitching setting than that of the *Dream*; this is Adelaide, this is a twenty-four-hour slice of Adelaide's life, these are young people we know, people we like, people whose lives and passions rush through the book in iambic tetrameter.

The four main characters are moving through the gamut of emotions from A to Z, from ennui to enchantment, from finding love to losing it, and Rubinstein has them making these journeys seemingly untrammelled by the imposed disciplines of rhymes. The people move as fluently and joyously across the page as the words seem to have fallen from Rubinstein's pen.

Most of the time, Rubinstein keeps his fingers on the pulse of metre and his feet on the ground. But sometimes, quite brilliantly, he soars his way up into imagery and imagination that makes the reader just a little breathless. Here's a sample:

12.25 am

They stroll beside a lake, expecting
 A frog to break its jet-black water
 With golden ball in hand, collecting
 The same for some king's virgin daughter.
 They search the ground for leprechauns,
 And notice now and then a glint
 Of light reflected from the horns
 Of elfin folk – but as they squint
 Against the darkness, fauns and satyrs
 Go scurrying in all directions
 To tend to unknown fairy matters,
 Removed from sight. The lake's reflections
 Hold unsure glimpses, brief and fleeting
 No conversation, only greeting.

When I started reading the book I rather expected the demands of rhyme to become more pressing and the story to flag, succumbing necessarily to those demands. I feared that wit might become banality, the freshness and humour of the writing might stale under the weight of metre and rhyme. I was wrong; there are a few dodgy passages, but what book doesn't have some?

It seems clear that Rubinstein had a lot of fun

with his leap into postmodernism. We can look forward to his next venture, whatever form it takes.

Matt Rubinstein will be twenty-one this year, he is reading Law at University and has an assortment of pastimes, some of which sound highly unlikely.

Doris Leadbetter is a Melbourne poet.

Forty Years' Writing

EVAN JONES

Philip Sargeant: *Something in Between* (available at Readings bookshops, \$29.95).

“ART, IF IT DOESN'T start there, at least ends/ . . . In an attempt to entertain our friends . . .” As a generalisation, the young Auden's assertion seems wildly implausible; but it catches something of the amiable nature of Philip Sargeant's *Something in Between*, poems garnered from forty years' writing.

The title, as is made clear by the first poem in the book, a beautiful lyric called 'Summer Coming', refers to the present (between "anticipation and regret"); and indeed a great many of the poems are occasional, quite a few obviously written to be read at parties ("I think that happiness begins and ends/ Reciting one's own poetry to friends"). The poems have been 'retrieved' in the enforced leisure following a stroke, and are accompanied by Sargeant's own drawings. They testify to a prodigal talent never assiduously cultivated: ingenuous, witty, careless, peremptory, ebullient, endlessly generous.

Sargeant's poems are thronged with people, but apart from myself, in a late poem on renewing friendship after forty years, none is a poet. How refreshing that is! And the kind of openness that this freedom from literary circles seems to afford is not limited to the *vers de société*: there are darker poems in the collection, especially after Sargeant's stroke. Notably, these share with the lighter poems a very individual candour.

Evan Jones is a retired academic.

“Gender Vertigo” and the Elimination of Violence

PETER GERARD MAY

R.W. Connell: *Masculinities* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95).

STUDYING MEN IS BECOMING *de rigueur*. Men's studies are vital to the understanding of gender relations and their transformation. While feminist insights into androcentricism and patriarchy are fundamental to creating a just and more equitable society, studies into men can only but assist this reform agenda. Indeed, the separation of men's and women's studies may well become antiquated and we may begin to speak of gender studies. This would be an interesting and necessary development, but not just yet. A great deal of attention still needs to be given to these separate but related spheres, and it is to the study of men that Connell directs our attention.

Connell's book places men's studies firmly on the map, albeit a gendered one. He wants to transform this map with strategic alliances of men and women that move beyond gender politics and are concerned with questions of social justice. For men the strategy is necessarily a degendering one – “an attempt to dismantle hegemonic masculinity” and the development of a degendered “rights-based politics of social justice”. He recognises that this degendering and recomposing sounds exotic, but argues that in everyday practice it is not. “It is quite practical to combine symbolically gendered activities: bodybuilders can work in kindergartens, lesbians can wear leather jackets, boys can learn to cook”. What results is “a kind of gender multiculturalism” and a politics of masculinity that will engage with “new areas: for instance, the politics of the curriculum, work around AIDS/HIV and anti-racist politics”.

Connell's arguments for the degendering and transformation of hegemonic masculinity are based on a thorough examination of the social science of masculinity, its history and politics. While he acknowledges that his treatment of the history of masculinity is a banal one (and it is) his work on the science of masculinity is excellent. It provides an epistemological overview of masculinity rang-

ing from Freudian clinical analysis of masculinity to the mythopoetic accounts promoted by Robert Bly (of *Iron John* fame) and others.

One of the refreshing things about this book is Connell's critique of mythopoetic accounts of masculinity. These have become popular in America and Australia and are often accompanied by images of hairy naked men, beating drums, and dancing around fires. As well as repudiating the 'scientific' claims of these accounts – for example, “that one third of our brain is a ‘warrior brain’ and that our DNA carries warrior instincts”, he points out that the politics of these accounts and the ensuing ‘therapy’ is to “replace a politics of reform rather than support it”.

Pivotal to Connell's exploration of masculinity are four insightful case studies of diverse groups of men who experience crisis tendencies: “men for whom the construction or the integration of masculinity was under pressure”. These tendencies are analysed in terms of power relations, productions relations or relations of cathexis. Hence, Connell examines working-class youth, men in the environmental movement, in middle-class occupations, and in gay and bisexual networks. While each of these studies into the “dynamics of masculinity” is fascinating and informative, the study of men involved in the environmental movement is poignant. For these men the task of separating themselves from hegemonic masculinity is risky:

The project of having an open, non-assertive self risks having no self at all; it courts annihilation . . . To undo masculinity is to court a loss of personality structure that may be quite terrifying: a kind of gender vertigo.

The notion of “gender vertigo” is significant. Many of the men in the case studies reveal varying degrees of fragility in their masculinity. But the men who take on hegemonic masculinity risk annihilation of the self. It takes great courage to deal with the fragility creatively. As Connell notes:

A response that simply negates mainstream masculinity, that remains in the moment of rejection, does not necessarily move towards social transformation. To move further, in the face of gender vertigo . . . would require a gendered

counter-sexist politics for men who reject hegemonic masculinity.

Moving in the face of "gender vertigo" is a heady task. And while all men may not necessarily have this experience, Connell wants to thoroughly reject hegemonic masculinity.

The importance of this book lies not only in the examination of the dynamics of masculinity and the rejection of its hegemonic forms, but also in placing men's studies on the educational and political agenda. It continues the serious exploration of gender, with men and women strategically aligned in shared concerns with questions of social justice. After all, "gender relations are a major component of social structure . . . and gender politics are the main determinants of our collective fate".

Our collective fate cannot be considered without addressing questions of violence. Unless we address these questions, the sort of future mapped out by Connell is unachievable. Connell denounces men who use violence to sustain dominance over women and over other men – for example, "in heterosexual violence against gay men", but notes that its systematic use, is also a "measure of its imperfection [since] a thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate".

Peter Gerard May is a Master of Arts student with the Australian Centre at Melbourne University. He is currently writing a thesis on secularism and masculinity in Australia.

Witty, Sardonic and Deeply Considered

MICHAEL WILDING

Yi Mun-yol: *The Poet*, trans. Chong-wha Chung and Brother Anthony of Taizé (Harvill Press, \$19.95).

ONCE IN A WHILE, when you despair of contemporary writing, a work comes along that inspires you with hope again. Yi Mun-yol's *The Poet* is such a work, a truly creative in-

vigoration of the novel form, that lodges hauntingly in the memory.

Its subject is the historical figure Kim Pyong-yon. Born in 1807 into a Korean ruling class family, his hopes and fortunes are cataclysmically reversed when his grandfather, a provincial governor, is defeated by rebels. Worse, the grandfather is converted to the rebels' cause. Worse still, he changes sides again and surrenders to the government. He is executed and his heirs to the third generation are condemned to death. Because the family has powerful connexions the death sentence is removed from his heirs, but their property remains confiscated.

It is a moving story. The poet and his brother are brought up by one of his father's freed serfs and reclaimed by their parents after the death sentence is commuted, only to have their father die young from the struggle for survival. The physical hardships of village life are bad enough, but they suffer in addition a recurrent social ostracism each time it is discovered they are descendants of their grandfather, and are driven out of whichever village they have settled in.

The entire retaliatory system against treason was tenacious and thorough. The royal court might have decided against carrying out the penalty directly, but that by no means meant that the system as such had abandoned its malice towards them.

The mother never surrenders her aristocratic pride, and encouraged by her aspirations Kim Pyong-yon plans to regain the family's honour and status by entering the government examinations as a gateway to a public career. The mastery of classical poetic forms was a basic component of this process, and to test his expertise, Kim Pyong-yon entered a competition. The subject posted was "write in celebration of the loyal death of Chong Shi, the country magistrate of Kasan, deploring the terrible crime of Kim Ik-sun." Kim Ik-sun was Kim's grandfather.

Kim wins the competition, but does not claim the prize, fearful of the ignominy of admitting his ancestry. He gets drunk in a tavern, where he meets a wandering poet, Noh Jin. Noh Jin is full of praise for the prize-winning poem, but when he

realises that Kim is the poet, and has castigated his grandfather, his admiration turns to contempt.

This is more than a personal issue. The conflict between the two principles of loyalty to state and to family was a conflict between the two basic principles of Korean society. The rift produces what Yi Mun-yol calls a "haemorrhage" in the individual's consciousness. And in crucial episodes through the novel, the poet does indeed cough up blood.

The later official examinations are a fiasco. The examination hall is overcrowded, the upper classes have sent their servants in advance to secure their places, and in some cases hired scholars to write their papers. Kim, like many others, does not even try to compete, but goes off and gets drunk, and soon after begins the wandering life which is his till the end.

MASTERING THE CLASSICAL poetic forms is the first of the five stages of the poetic life. The novel now follows Kim's career through the rest. For a while he lives as a house guest with Ahn Ung-su, a wealthy man around whom literary figures collected. But when his identity as the grandson of a traitor is discovered he is frozen out of that milieu. He spends a period writing formal poetry for local magistrates and rich gentry, travelling from house to house and village to village, associating with the *kisaeng* girls. The *kisaeng* girls entertained men of the higher class with music, dancing, poetry and sexual favours. Kim Pyong-yon would collaborate with them on poems, writing alternative lines. But tiring of this life, and the magistrates and gentry tiring of him as he returned for their hospitality too often, he then became a popular poet of the markets and streets, expressing the resentments of the people in satiric works.

That phase came to an end when he was captured by bandits. Some bandits were simply thieves, others had a political ideology. This was a political group and he is conscripted by their leader into writing revolutionary poems, which are distributed in the townships the group plans to attack, in order to demoralise the populace. Some of the rich do indeed flee, but those who are unable to go elsewhere prepare to fight more vigorously, while the bandits, inspired by the heady rhetoric of political poetry, become overconfident. The whole episode is a deeply sardonic medita-

tion on the political uses of literature.

Finally the poet ceases to write at all, but when he mutters a few words, things materialise. His son, who has sought him out after the poet abandoned his family, observes that "when his father recited something about birds, the most lovely bird would fly out from somewhere." He speculates that "his father's poetry did not really make things from nowhere, it simply made apparent what had been there all the time." But he is not certain, and the possibility remains that the poet has in his final stage attained a shamanistic unity with nature.

Kim Pyong-yon is known as Kim Sakkat from the bamboo hat he always wore, "symbol of a self-imposed withdrawal from the light of the sun, a recognition that through no particular fault of his own he must for ever bear the burden of an inherited guilt", the translators tell us. Souvenir and art shops sell wood carvings of him today, the bamboo hat his distinguishing mark.

Yi Mun-yol has drawn on the surviving accounts of his life, citing the various traditions and evaluating the likely truth of the episodes. Since there are numerous Korean accounts of the poet, this evaluating strategy is as important as the narrative. It contributes to the unique tone of the work, which has a powerful restraint and veracity. It moves effortlessly from evocative narrative to objective analysis. Occasionally it bursts out into literary efflorescence, with one of Kim Sikkat's poems. The crucial encounters with other poets, like Noh Jin, or like the Old Drunkard, provide extended dramatised interludes within a concise historical narrative.

These are encounters in which the nature of poetry is examined, and in which the distance between Kim's own evolving state, and the developed wisdom of his interlocutors, is the powerful theme.

If poetry is of such great use, those who produce it ought to receive some great gain. Yet the only thing the poet gains is the poem itself

Kim complains. "A poem gained may be considered a great gain," the Old Drunkard explains. "But what is that great gain?" "Something that makes the poet free, and therefore makes others free." "What do you mean by being made free?" "Mind and body casting off their bonds," said the old man.

OVERALL it is a very austere novel, having something of the tone of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, a work of wisdom with that same mixture of the witty, the sardonic and the deeply considered. Its analysis of the historical conditions of Korean society, of official tyranny and of the hardship and poverty of the people co-exists with an equally challenging analysis of the nature of poetry and the poetic vocation.

And its levels are multiple. The author Yi Mun-yol, born in 1948, is the son of a communist who defected to North Korea, leaving his family in a comparable situation to Kim's family after the grandfather's defection to the rebels. Yi Mun-yol writes in the preface:

It was in the summer of 1984 that I first became interested in the life of that unique poet Kim the Bamboo Hat, as a literary topic. I had previously read and heard a fair amount about him, but what provoked my sudden literary interest that year may have been the controversy surrounding publication of my *Yong-ung Si-dae (Heroic Age)*. There is a risk of over-simplification, but essentially *Heroic Age* represents a disavowal of my own father, and people generally believe that the original reason forcing Kim out into a life of wandering was something similar.

This is not a sub-text, but part of the invited context of this extraordinary novel. It is the authorial involvement that gives an added dimension to a most powerful work. The translators, Chong-wha Chung and Brother Anthony of Taizé have done an excellent job. They have provided a preface and elucidatory notes that supply necessary information for non-Korean readers. But their great achievement has been in producing a translation of admirable clarity and subtlety of expression, that lives unforgettably in English.

Michael Wilding is Professor of English and Australian Literature at the University of Sydney.

High Scorer

MICHAEL ROE

Ann Galbally: *Redmond Barry: An Anglo-Irish Australian* (MUP, \$44.95).

REDMOND BARRY was the "most remarkable personage in the annals of Port Phillip", wrote Edmund Finn ('Garryowen'). And the accolade could have a longer span. Born in Ireland in 1813 of 'Ascendancy' background, the young Barry graduated in law from Trinity College Dublin in 1837. Briefs were few and so he emigrated to Australia. Dominant at the Melbourne Bar through the 1840s, Barry became a puisne judge in 1852 and remained so until his death in 1880. Always interested in broader cultural issues and moral enlightenment of the community, Barry has his greatest fame as Chancellor of the University of Melbourne and father-figure of that city's Library and Art Gallery. Always rather conservative and more so with time's passage, he fulfilled that part of his being in condemning Ned Kelly to death and perdition.

The essentials of Barry's life have always had historians' regard, as Edmund Finn showed. Former director of Melbourne University Press, Peter Ryan, wrote fine essays about him. Yet the man deserved more, both for what he did and because he left personal papers worth delving into. Ann Galbally has answered this call.

Two pertinent areas somewhat overcrowd current historiography: sex/women and race/Aborigines. The first benefits very much from those private papers. On his way to Australia Barry engaged in a shipboard romance of great (highly specified) activity; it seems remarkably like that imagined in William Golding's *Rites of Passage*. On settling in Melbourne Barry formed a liaison with a lower-class Irishwoman. This lasted life-long, produced four children who took Barry's name, had a degree of public recognition, yet never led to marriage. The couple's feeling for each other deepened over the years, as did Louisa Barrow's autonomy and force. She merits her own historical place.

Barry's association with the Aborigines dated back to early days, when he appeared as counsel for some of their number. Galbally remarks that

his claims on their behalf had a pre-Mabo ring. This seems fair comment; where she perhaps falters is in not suggesting that, in terms of Henry Reynolds' arguments, such a view might come naturally to one grounded in traditional law. Later in life Barry pursued an interest in Aboriginal language, and prompted sculptor Charles Summers to take casts of sixteen Aborigines.

Barry did much more to enrich the culture of Marvellous Melbourne. His phenomenal energy found best play in work for Gallery, Museum, and Library. Galbally tells this very well indeed. She draws attention to Barry's key role in the building of two wonderful spaces – Queen's Hall in the Public Library, and its counterpart at the Supreme Court. As well, his characteristic power-broking won the funds from which arose the first, glorious Wilson Hall at the University. What a record!

Ann Galbally is an art historian, author of good books in that field. Her expertise resounds when she addresses pertinent issues in Barry's life. It may be mean to say so, but that very skill contrasts with her more general style. At the trivial level one might fuss that one of the few specific references which a Tasmanian can test, is awry – William "Buckwood" was in fact Brickwood. Certainly it is astonishing that Melbourne University Press – publisher of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, one magnificence of which is that it facilitates precision and contextualising – should allow its own author to speak of "a Mr Orton", "a Mr Legge", "a Mr Ham", all names there to be found. The matter goes further. As suggested above, Galbally does not grasp Reynolds' argument about traditional land law; excellent on Charles Summers' sculpting, she gives only the name of A.J. Ellis, who helped with Barry's linguistic research. One more sensitive to feminist analysis might have expanded the story of Louisa Barrow. Comments on political matters, both in Victoria and Ireland, are flat, even jejune. Presumably Barry was little of a jurist, but surely something more could be offered on that subject.

Withal there are two 'general' passages which show much acumen and sensitivity. The first contrasts Barry with George Higinbotham, also a graduate from Trinity but a few crucial years later. "Barry represented the earlier Regency-style figure who proclaimed public adherence to certain

moral standards which were expected of the community while acting quite differently . . . Higinbotham represented the coming Victorian man, intelligent, hard-working and earnest." The second such insight comes in the book's final pages as Galbally shows the crumbling of old-man Barry's world – at the University, as reformers chafed and organised; in his Irish relatives' discovery of the Barrow liaison; above all, in change of the time-spirit, which allowed ever less space for Barry's patronising style. Yet his tally stands, and Ann Galbally has ensured that so it will remain.

Michael Roe, born and educated in Melbourne, has taught history at the University of Tasmania since 1960.

From the Islands

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

Lisa Jacobson: *Hair & Skin & Teeth* (Five Islands Press/SCARP New Poets 3, \$7.50).

Sue L. Nicholls: *ultimately female* (Five Islands Press/SCARP New Poets 3, \$7.50).

Lawrence Bourke: *Eating the Sun* (A&R, \$16.95).

FIVE ISLANDS PRESS is the best poetry small press in the country. Some of the eighteen slim volumes of their New Poets series are more exciting than most poetry from the major publishers. Lisa Jacobson and Sue L. Nicholls are the most accessible poets in the third series.

Walt Whitman to the contrary, Jacobson's first collection, *Hair & Skin & Teeth*, is small but contains multitudes. She's capable of saying two things at once. At the simplest level she spreads bread with daffodils in a breakfast lyric. At the family level, marriage to her husband "unfathered" her. Outside the family there's a lot of Ophelia in her serial arsonist and a lot of serial arsonist in her Ophelia. 'Jewish Sonnet' conveys the poet's sensitivity to the historical inheritance of the Holocaust. Jokes about Jews aren't funny. As if this weren't enough, the last two lines suggest both "the banality of evil" and a Jewish people ready to use attack as the best form of defence:

Outside the day is still; the sky gas blue.
Murder happens on the mildest afternoons.

Jacobson's sequence 'The History of Giraffes' is more social than animal history. No matter how hideously humans have treated giraffes, the ludicrousness of human behaviour creates the more lasting impression. In particular King Charles' Year of the Giraffe (1826) in France is satirical fantasy. Parisians didn't go ape; they went giraffe – decor, dances, clothes, hairdos, cosmetics, medicines, even illnesses.

Nicholls' first collection, *ultimately female*, is uneven but stimulating. She writes effective portraits, lyrics and poems glaring out of attitudes. To label her work confessional would be to overlook her argumentative Joan of Arc and the transfixed and transfixing portrait of a losing woman gambler. Domestic strife is dramatised over 'Tea and Toast' and an ongoing relationship with a man in a car is 'running on empty'. If men are easy targets, it must take courage for a feminist to admit to being overwhelmed by other women. Nicholls has the courage in 'The Novelist is Writing Me' and 'Country Yarns'. She isn't overwhelmed by another potentially overwhelming woman – her dead mother. The poet accepts her mother's house and her mother as teacher if only because she has no time left to find another teacher. In the same house she's surprised to uncover a hidden female nude painting and a delicious sense of good old-fashioned Roman Catholic sin.

LAURENCE BOURKE'S second collection, *Eating the Sun*, divides into three sections – well-made New Zealand poems, a comic, imaginary biography and less well-made Australian poems. Lapsed modernists who have been converted to postmodernism and now risk the heresy of postpostmodernism need only read the middle section. Harry's biographical sequence contains satire but is characterised by parody. It relates to society generally but concentrates on Harry's poetic careerism. Even so, bigotry as the price of populism might be seen as part of a politics and history that critical theory would banish from the earth.

It's hard to convey the quality of Bourke's New Zealand poems because they combine the flowing rhythm of comparatively long lines with accumu-

lating details that go on accumulating beyond anticipated endings. In a sense the poems don't end. They return to the beginning to repeat the enjoyable journey. They don't refer to places; they recreate experiences of those places. They're luminous without being numinous. 'The Manawatu' is representative. The lawn bowlers' bowl is:

... the size of their skull

rolling across lawn
the ball polished and gleaming in its darkness
as it would roll
and go on rolling across the interminable plain

declining westward
if there were no fences guarding the dairy farms
from the afternoon
and as the ball rolls all light is drawn to its dark

Bourke's Australian poems lack the qualities of his New Zealand poems. His social conscience is less than ample substitute. Dwelling on The Big Themes of God, Death and Love, Bourke concedes his unoriginality. Aiming to depict mediocrity and banality, he only succeeds in achieving them himself. Apparently seeking to refer to south-east Queensland as a giant tourist brochure, he achieves only the referential.

Graham Rowlands is an Adelaide poet and editor.

Wanted: A Stouter Comrade in Arms

JOHN BARRETT

Peter Dennis, Jeffrey Grey, Ewan Morris, Robin Prior (eds): *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (OUP, \$69.95).

YOU COULD DO MUCH WORSE than have this *Companion* beside you, but it is disappointing at first dip. It's hard to praise this alphabetically arranged volume when you cannot immediately turn up Gona, Militia, Milne Bay or World

Wars. They can be found in Ian Grant's much less ambitious *A Dictionary of Australian Military History* (Random House, Sydney, 1992).

Missing from both books as entries in their own right, even if only followed by 'see . . .', are many items one would hope to find, especially in a prestigious *Oxford Companion*: Anti-tank guns, Atomic bombs, Australia First Movement, 'Bread Case', British Empire, Communist Party, 'Economic conscripts', Fascism, Motives for enlistment, Nazism, Peace movement, Sticky grenades, War brides/marriages, Women and war. If some of those are not precisely 'military', all are significantly related to our war history.

It's no good the editors protesting that these subjects are mentioned somewhere. Somewhere is nowhere for the innocents who turn in haste to the *Companion* not knowing a cavalry commando from a cut-lunch commando. The book needs expansion, an index, a very full gazetteer or all three. It should also include much more on war's medical and psychological consequences.

This *Companion* reflects the editors' "own interests", as they admit, and the editors are from the Australian Defence Force Academy. They are very much aware of chiefs of staff, government ministers, public service heads, generals and official historians. There need be no harm in that, and it may be a justified reaction to C.E.W. Bean, whom they assess very well in the closing paragraph of his entry and criticise for his ignorance of such people and their roles. But it has probably harmed this volume. There is no animus against Robert O'Neill in suggesting that it is excessive to devote a quarter of a page to him under his own name and another (uncritical) half-page under Official Histories.

Many people have written on Australia and war, and a better *Companion* would steer readers to more of their work. The eight-page appendix listing the Top Brass would have been better devoted to a bibliography, if both couldn't be included. Many entries have no further reading listed, and some have only one book. Alistair Thomson's *Anzac Memories* is admirable, but to list it alone after the Anzac Legend is absurd. The only reading after the Bean entry is McCarthy's biography, which is severely criticised in the McCarthy en-

try. That's how weak this feature of the *Companion* is.

The Literature entry is, as usual, devoted mainly to poets and novelists. The entry on Military History and Historians is too skimpy to compensate, and two paragraph-entries under Bibliographies (already out of date) and MIHILIST (data base) are of limited value even if stumbled across. To improve future editions, this whole area needs attention.

But the *Companion*, like the man who hated dogs and children, can't be *entirely* bad. Indeed it is not. When Militia is at last discovered under Citizen Military Forces (to which there is no reference in the 'Chocko' entry) and under Conscription, the discussion of it is good. Much knowledgeable and careful work has gone into the book, and there's a sense of trustworthiness about the strictly factual contents. The interpretative sections will, as always, satisfy some readers more than others, but the prevailing tone of the volume is judicious balance.

And what *is* both included and readily found? Aboriginal Armed Resistance to White Invasion gets over eight pages. Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Papuan infantrymen in World War II are covered, and so are all of the Services (including the women's), their organisation and weapons (mostly!), and their major engagements and activities over many entries that are informative and generally sound – although, for instance, the change in ALP policy in June 1940 is missed in the Conscription entry. There are shrewd assessments of many individuals, but one regrets the omission of Gerald Campbell (even from the Australian National Defence League entry): he probably did more than any other individual to promote Australia's first compulsory military training. And is there an entry that might have been funny, but wasn't? Yes, the one on Humour.

Throughout the book the writing is notably clear, the maps and photographs are excellent, and it is a handsome, well-designed volume of nearly 700 double-columned pages. In many ways, this is a good book, and much better to have than not to have. It's just that it's not yet good enough.

A retired historian, Dr John Barrett taught Australia and War at La Trobe University from 1972 to 1989 and has written on compulsory military training (Falling In, 1979) and soldiers of World War II (We Were There, 3rd edn, 1995).

Latinum Rejuvenatum ex Lofeum

Latin is not a dead language. Modern translations can revive it.



"Seize the Carp"
(Ideal for Vietnamese fishmongers)



"Get rid of Dog Droppings"
(For Parks and Gardens)



"Fight Ants and Spiders"
(Pestcontrol slogan)



"Good Luck at Dominoes"
(Good luck charm)



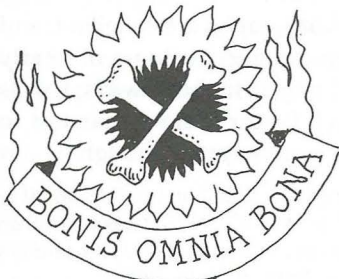
"Azaria will never be Found"
(Plaque at Uluru)



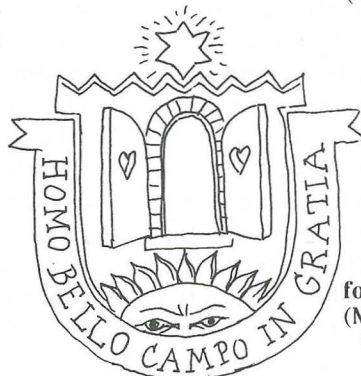
"Used Spare Parts for Fiats and Fords"
(Wreckers Yard)



"No passing Wind in Crowded Bus"
(In Inter-campus transit vehicles)



"Bones, nothing but Bones"
(Undertakers Union)



"No Charge for Homosexuals"
(Marketing device at Gay Mardi Gras)



PO Box 14146, MCMC, Melbourne, Vic. 8001, Australia.

- ◆ Australia's leading radical literary and cultural journal
- ◆ Subscribe today and join the other readers committed to maintaining the strength and diversity of Australian literary culture
- ◆ Get involved in the Take Three campaign and help broaden the opportunities for Australian writers and readers

Please enter a subscription for

- One year \$32
- Overseas \$60
- Donation \$.....
- Please debit my Bankcard, Visa, Mastercard
- Pensioners/Students \$25
- Life Subscription \$500

Expiry Date

Signature.....Name on Card.....

Name.....

Address.....

.....



John McLaren writes: As mentioned elsewhere, both Arts Victoria and the Literature Board of the Australia Council have reduced *Overland's* funding for 1996. The total reduction amounts to \$8000, at a time when costs of printing and distribution are rising. We will maintain our size and the payments to our contributors, but even more of the production and editorial work will have to be done on a voluntary basis. Even so, we will depend even more than in the past on the continuing generosity of our supporters. We are particularly grateful to the following, who have made donations since our last issue:

\$250 G.S.; \$90 J.McL.; \$50 N.B.; \$30 J.E.H., I.McI., M&S.P.; \$28 J.McD.; \$25 D.G., M.M., J.P.; \$20 J.K., M.McL.; \$18 P.B., D.McG., L.R., M.R., V.B., C.C., R.M., E.M.; \$15 D.B.; \$10 E.I., D.H., S.T., P.J., S.G., D.R.; \$8 M.M., B.B., P.H., J.H., L.W., C.F., H.D., P.M., T.S., G.B., B.A.; \$7 J.S.; \$5 O.J., J.W., G.A.R., M.L., J.L.; \$3 S.MacK., J.F., M.T., R.H., D.O'S., M.G.: Totalling \$998.

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine founded in 1954 by Stephen Murray-Smith.

Subscriptions: \$32 a year posted to addresses within Australia; pensioners and students \$25; life subscription \$500; overseas \$60. Payment may be made by Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard.

All correspondence: PO Box 14146, MCMC, Melbourne, Vic. 8001, Australia.
Phone 03 9380 1152. Fax 03 9380 2586.

Manuscripts are welcome, but will be returned only if stamped and addressed envelopes are provided. Material accepted for publication must also be submitted on disk (IBM-compatible, Word 6 preferred). All care will be taken, but no responsibility can be accepted for lost manuscripts. Minimum rates of payment: stories and features: \$90; poems: \$40; reviews: \$60. The Copyright Agency Limited is authorised to collect charges for photo and electronic copying of published material. *Overland* distributes money received for copying in the proportion of 80% to authors and 20% to the publisher. Copyright remains the property of the authors.

Scholarly articles will be refereed, and must be submitted on disk and in triplicate hard copy.

Editor: John McLaren
Associate Editors: Ian Syson, Karin Moses
Editorial Assistance: Louise Craig, Michael Dugan
Editorial Coordinator: Alexandra Skutenko
Design: Vane Lindesay
Publisher: The OL Society Ltd., 361 Pigdon Street, North Carlton 3054,
incorporated in Victoria, ACN 007 402 673

Board: Geoffrey Serle (Chair), Nita Murray-Smith, David Murray-Smith (Secretary), Michael Dugan, Rick Amor, Shirley McLaren (Treasurer), Judith Rodriguez, Richard Llewellyn, John McLaren, Vane Lindesay, Stuart Macintyre.

Correspondents: Dorothy Hewett (Sydney), Donald Grant (Perth), Katherine Gallagher (London), Tim Thorne (Launceston), David Headon (Canberra).

Overland is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. *Overland* acknowledges the financial support of Arts Victoria, a division of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

The *Overland index* is published with the magazine every two years. *Overland* is indexed in APAIS, AUSLIT, *Australian Literary Studies* bibliography, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* bibliography.

Overland is available in microfilm and microfiche from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

Typeset by Vulgar Enterprises of Fitzroy.

Printing: Australian Print Group, Maryborough. ISSN 0030 7416.

© Copyright by the editors and authors.



Australian Book Review

*the essential magazine for
Australian books*

■ history ■ biography ■ fiction ■ poetry ■ politics ■ art
■ crime ■ children's books ■ letters ■ columns ■ essays

In the February/March issue

Joan Kirner reviews
Paul Kelly's *November 1975*

Richard Hall on *The Mackay Reports*

Peter Porter on Philip Hodgins

Geoffrey Dutton on David Foster's
The Glade Within the Grove

Brian Matthews on Bryce Courtenay's
The Potato Factory

Don Anderson, Ivor Indyk and
Peter Craven
on the Demidenko books

In the April issue

Reviews of...

Helen Garner's *True Stories*

the *Double Take* essays

Dorothy Porter's *Crete*

Glenda Adams' new novel
The Tempest of Clemenza

Gay anthologies for
young adult readers

Edward Colless'
The Error of My Ways

New subscribers \$44 for ten issues, with a bonus book

Subscriptions may be phoned or faxed Ph (03) 9663 8657 Fax (03) 9663 8658

Australian Book Review

Suite 3, 21 Drummond Place, Carlton, Vic 3053

Barrett Reid: poet, librarian and editor: John Philip, Vida Horn, Shelton Lea, Eric Beach and others pay tribute to the life and work of the former editor of *Overland*.

Joanna Murray-Smith writes of culture shocks and sensations during a year in New York, in a chapter from an autobiographical novel.

Merv Lilley writes of postwar struggles between unions and management at Mt Isa, of life in the shearing sheds and on the track, and of the competing calls of romance and politics.

“Kill all the economists”: a chapter from “The Lovemakers”, Alan Wearne’s new novel in verse, introduces us to women in love in the Canberra bureaucracy, and the enigmatic figure of the Political Economist, a failure in three worlds.

Shirley Drinkwater writes of a visit to Rupert Brooke’s grave and election day of the island of Skyros.

Ian Syson examines the claims of grunge realism and its writers.

Paul Ormonde provides new material on Santamaria and the Movement.

Gary Catalano examines landscape and vision in the poetry of Robert Gray.

ISSN 0030-7416



9 770030 741006

PRINT POST APPROVED PP 328858/0003