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**Over
land**

FEATURES

STORIES

POETRY

\$ 8

'You would have to be an Aboriginal and my age to understand how hard it was for my Mother with three young kids, me a babe in arms, to walk out and try to make a life of her own, and raise us.'

BLACK WRITING

by Warrigal Anderson

Samuel Wagan Watson

Fabienne Bayet

Mudrooroo

Pat Mamajun Torres

Lisa Bellear





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**Over
 land**

Temper democratic, bias Australian

144

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One Corpse, One Nation, One Hope

THE ONE TRUTH that seems to be universally acknowledged at the end of the twentieth century is that socialism is dead. Even left intellectuals, who affect to believe that nationalism is also dead, do not try to breathe new life into the socialist corpse. At best they organize seminars to offer requiem for lost hopes. In Australia, even the social democracy represented by the Labor Party has been rejected by the electorate, and the one remaining Labor state government staggers from crisis to broken promise to crisis while elsewhere triumphant coalition governments ransack the public purse, sell off public assets, repudiate public responsibility and ride high in public opinion.

This supposed death of socialism represents also a loss of hope. The Communist Party of Australia, while it lived, provided a structure within which, despite the vicious perversions of Stalinism, alternative voices could be heard. At a recent conference in Brisbane, organized by Carol Ferrier through the Australian Studies Centre of the University of Queensland, former activists recalled struggles for the right to organize, for decent wages, for health and safety on the job, for the right to be treated as responsible human beings. Their recollections contrasted with those of former Grouper activists at a 1992 Sydney conference on forty years of Santamaria and the Movement, where the celebrations seemed to be entirely of the occasions they beat the 'Comms', and not at all of any achievements for the members of the unions.

Speakers at the Brisbane conference also recalled the vicious responses of governments and the police to their campaigns. The two symbolic events commemorated in the conference were Emma Miller's use of a hat-pin against the police commissioner and his horse in a 1912 demonstration, and the clubbing and near-death of Fred Paterson during a similar demonstration in 1947. Paterson, the only Communist candidate ever elected to an Australian parliament, was attacked from behind while making notes, in his capacity as a legal observer, on a police assault on one of the demonstrators. The then Labor Premier, Ned Hanlon, defended the police actions and refused any official inquiry. He thus anticipated a later Premier, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, who similarly refused to order an inquiry or acknowledge any impropriety when, in full view of police and journalists, Dan O'Neill was assaulted in Toowoomba during the Springbok demonstrations in 1971. Despite this tradition of repression, however, the left remained

strong in its resistance, and even had its victories. Today, the problem is not so much the oppression of leftist movements as their disintegration, and hope, if not dead, is sleeping.

It is extraordinary that this loss of hope should occur only some ten years after Australian Labor Party governments had come to power federally and in all but one state. To some, this will not be ironic but demonstrative of the weakness of the ALP and the futility of seeking power through parliaments. This view, taken by those who argue against voting for either party, is comforting, for it postpones the possibility of change into a remote future and avoids the necessity of asking how social change may be achieved by democratic means. To others, however, the failure of Labor will be seen not as inevitable but as a consequence of its acceptance of a managerial ideology that moved it apart from its constituency.

We should not underestimate either the reality of the achievements of Labor governments early in the time of their ascendancy, or how close they came to making a permanent change in Australia's political balance. Labor governments in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland made real changes in the social fabric of those states, restoring and initiating services in areas of education, welfare and culture that had suffered from years of conservative neglect. They failed in the southern states when they surrendered their own management to factions, and governmental management to business. The Queensland government fell partly because of internal conflicts, but mainly because of a social and moral conservatism that alienated its own supporters. Federally, Labor embraced a program of radical cultural change, but it tried to integrate this with economic change that fell most heavily on the poorest members of society and spread insecurity throughout the community. Nevertheless, in its first years of office the Accord brought about a redistribution of surplus value through wage agreements and the social wage that enabled Australia to manage the economic crisis change better than any other western democracy. At the same time, it built the kind of alliance between environmentalists, feminists, artists and minority communities that the left had envisaged for decades. Had Labor survived another election, the conservative coalition would have disintegrated, leaving the way open for a complete realignment of democratic forces, with the

Democrats probably providing the core of a new liberal opposition. Instead, it is now the left in disarray.

THE INEVITABLE QUESTION, what is to be done, must be preceded by the necessary inquiry, what went wrong? Part of the answer lies in the managerial style of government, that built the alliance on deals between the leaders – of factions, of the conservation movement, of ethnic groups, of big unions that no longer represented their members, of business – rather than on the kind of patient involvement of the people they represent that is characteristic of the Aboriginal movement. This style allowed the government to ignore its own supporters, or forget their existence, while enabling the opposition parties to paint it as a government of minorities. Howard's version of the one nation policy is of course a fraud, encouraged by populist media that portray politics as simply a contest between leaders offering different choices of consumer goods, rather than as a choice of the kind of society we want to produce. Howard won by promoting the illusion that we can return to an imaginary past of security and harmony, and promptly after the election destroyed the illusion by excluding from his one nation Aborigines, migrants and the unemployed. The truth of course is that we are all members of minorities, and that consensus is built only through the struggle of competing interests for recognition and justice. The Labor government tried to achieve consensus by decree; the conservatives are imposing unity by force.

The thrust of conservative politics is to destroy community by subjecting every aspect of life to market forces. This vision contradicts the dependence of capitalism on a civil society, allowing no space for unions, universities, public arts, or a public sphere. Collective action is made impossible, society is atomised, and individuals are reduced to dependence on multinational businesses for every element of their daily existence. Work loses its meaning and its collective nature as individual contracts reduce workers at every level of society to the day labour of primitive capitalism.

Before the left can recover the initiative and lay the grounds for a just society we need an imaginative vision of what this society might be, of how a true community might be brought into being. In a recent study of one hundred years of European

socialism, Donald Sassoon has argued that socialism and capitalism, rather than being enemies, need each other. Capitalism recognizes the social basis of production, but a controlled market acknowledges the limits of state authority and provides room for the socially produced individual to act both as producer and consumer. At the Marxism conference, Ian Syson showed how older writers responded to the crisis of capitalism by looking forward in hope, whereas the present generation can only look around in anger.

The Aboriginal writers in this issue of *Overland* exhibit a degree of anger, but they also give grounds for hope. They show how much reason they have for anger, how far short of community Australian society has been, as it has built its prosperity on the usurpation of the land and subjected the original inhabitants to the worst power of both state and individual. But they also show the strength they gain from a community that accepts the individu-

als in patience. This may well offer a starting point from which white Australians can begin to construct a wider community that can discover ways of living alongside the Aboriginal community and in harmony with its environment and with the many minorities that constitute its sum. The alternative is to retreat into our own privacies, surrendering the public sphere to the violence and bigotry that the coalition appealed to during the election, and that has been manifest in the opposition to gun control. The federal government's creditable refusal to surrender to this lobby masks the fact that this bigotry is nourished by its refusal to acknowledge the need for community. The left needs to recognize that the bigots are those it has left out of its own search for community. Denied meaningful work or a nurturing relationship with the land, they can fall back only on traditions of exploitation and the spurious mateship of the outsider.

JOHN McLAREN

IN THE GUNSHOP

Yeah, fifty-five
or so, I'd reckon,
said he had this kid, you see,
grandkid more, I would have thought,
judging from the grey,
a kid who's keen to make a start
on forty acres' worth of rabbits
somewhere back past Captains Flat,
or that is what he's telling me,
lining up the sights.
Quite a while
since *he's* been shooting
I had to tell myself
and pulled the next one from the shelf,
good old basic Ruger 10,
best beginner's job I know.
I'd tried the Anschutz 22;
he wasn't that impressed;
"didn't like the feel", he reckoned.
Then left him to himself a while
to see to someone else,
young bloke into spotting roos
who wants a bit more sting.
But then when I come back

he settled pretty quick,
Marlin MA 25,
three hundred bucks the lot,
six fifties, I remember that,
and then the paperwork.
Tossed in a box of ammo too;
There was a phone call as he left.
I don't recall the look, not quite,
and now this bit here in the paper
"no suspicious circumstance".
My neighbour knows the wife, she says;
got all the details off:
family room last Saturday
when everyone was out;
sits down on a sheet of plastic
to save the cleaning up,
pushed the hard end in his mouth
and even with a .22
it makes a decent mess.
Hard to visualize him now.
We don't get many of that type.
Yeah, fifty-five or so, I'd reckon.
Could've used a rope or pills . . .
bound to do it anyway.
And like they say
it's people
not the gun that kills.

GEOFF PAGE

MICHAEL MEEHAN

Where Mr Singh Put His Foot



236 Backhouse Street
Brunswick
July 30

Dear Ted,

no doubt this letter will be a shock to hear from me after all this time. I am in Melbourne again and mother told me you have been writing to know where I am. I have left the bush where I was nearly three years but left on account of me being so ill. I am working in a city hotel and sleeping home. I am not stopping here very long as it is very hard . . .

ALWAYS IT IS AT THE END of the day when he draws his cart up to its usual place beside the stable and she watches him as he sets up his camp, placing the cart so that it forms with the slabs of the stable wall a break to the wind, and then in moments setting out the harness on hooks on the side of the cart in the same way every time so that it does not bend or tangle; and sometimes, in winter or when the wind is high, he throws up a break of split wheatsacks on a frame of mallee pickets thrust into the dirt to protect him from the blowing dust.

Always she finds some small excuse to wander down towards the cart, bringing old Auntie Maggie with her late in the evening, bringing with her meat or potatoes or some stringy vegetables she has raised in the garden, to Mr Singh who never eats with them despite invitations from Ted himself, who never sets foot inside the house or even in the sheds in time of rain, who smiles in appreciation at what she brings and leaves her simply to watch him as he goes about his tasks. She watches him as he sets

out his tiny brickringed fire away from the stable wall but in a sheltered spot below the stump of an ancient gum from which much of the stable timber had once been cut. She watches as he heats the griddle and sets out his things around it and begins to mix and beat and shape his flat and rounded johnny-cakes with a practised hand, frying them then gently in a low-rimmed and blackened pan, the oil spitting and popping pleasantly in the cool silences of the approaching night. She watches as he mixes his curries, and she sees the long care with which he measures and mixes and grinds together the spices with a small mortar and pestle, the fragrant dusty aromas encircling her and taunting her with ideas of taste and place that run beyond the barbed wire and the yellow stubble and the clumps of wispy timber that lie around them, taking her off into unknown territories with rolling liquid names that she can never remember, names that need the voice and tongue, the care of Mr Singh.

They fossick always for some time among the things that he has brought, she knowing and he understanding that she cannot buy, the bolts of unbleached calico and drapery and holland pinafores and galatea shirts, drawing from his cart blouses and dresses and the rolls of printed cotton and then even the gaily coloured baubles from his drawer beneath his cart, the rings and pictures and bangles and coloured stones and boiled sweets and silken scarves, the bottom drawer with all its memories from a childhood and another Mr Singh, the first of the Mr Singhs who passed from farm to farm with just a trunk balanced upon his head and a long stick to wave off the excited dogs. Even he had his special box with bangles and rings and things for children, and even at that time her mother kept them back, not letting them play freely as the boys did with this Mr Singh who came out of the dust

with tales that ran beyond the tracks and fences, with bangles, rings and smiles to break the edges of their world.

Auntie Maggie sits as always on the stump behind them smiling dimly at some lost and secret pleasure, and he gives them curries made from lambs' tails, in the marking season. He invites her to dip a johnny-cake, and she marvels at the layers, the strange durations of the flavours and aromas, and while she eats he talks to them of the country to the north and the abandoned towns and the river that flows through the desert to the east, and the green lands to the south. His tales tell of the river goddess Ganga, and Arjuna the archer, and Bhishma the warrior with his bed of arrows; and occasionally, too, of a child bride and a home and a family far away. She sits like a child crosslegged in the dust, her hands bunched in her lap and her eyes shining in the darkness, staring into the growing gleam of the embers as his voice teases her into worlds beyond the ones that fall away from them as she sits there with the feel of the air cooling upon her bare arms and the sounds of the swarming insects beaten away from the circle by the fragrant odour of the glowing cowpats. He cleans his harness or rearranges his stocks or simply sits under the dark shadow of the pepper tree and smokes his bubble-pipe, the mixed odour of burning tobacco and dried horse dung and the aromatic fumes of curries hanging about her hair and clothing as she comes back to the house, to Ted who sits in the half darkness up on the verandah within his circling crown of moths drawn by the Colman's glow.

... The reason why I am writing is because I see you are going for a divorce well Ted you are intitled to one as it is three years now since I left you but there is one thing I want to ask for and that is Please dont be to Hard on me when you Put in for it you know the blame is not all on my side if mr Singh had not put his foot on our block we would be Happy now. I have led a straight honest life since I left you and can prove it. I cannot say any more as it is you have to get other People to read your letters.

She watches him as he washes himself before setting about the tasks of the day or before harnessing the horse to go. She moves towards the sta-

ble and stops, half hidden amid the shrubs but knowing that he knows she is there, watching him as he moves shirtless about the cart and without the long coil of cloth he wears about his head, his long black hair unwound and falling down his back or in a long loose plait that flicks about his shoulders as he moves. She watches him as he removes his coat and the silk neckscarf that he wears against the dust, and then takes off his shirt to splash his arms and back and shoulders with cold water from the rusty kerosene tin he uses for this purpose, and she marvels each time at the smoothness of his skin and the powerful arch of his back, at the soft brown skin that lacks the savage break of white and sunred tan, the deep red collar, the virgin whiteness and heavy mottled arms that mark her own men's labour in the sun.

She watches as the water runs in rivulets across his muscled shoulders and down in streams that find the contours of his body, over his shoulders and under his arms, broken by the hair into smaller streams, and running down his waist. And she sees the scars that mark his chest and upper arms, the jagged tears and star-like punctures that run across his back and upper stomach. She watches as he throws his hair over his head into the depths of an enamel basin, then dries it with a cloth and separates the long lanks and moves out into the sun so that it will dry, combing it out to its full length, combing his hair in measured strokes down through all its lengths with a care that she has only seen in young women, care of a kind that she and her sisters once offered to each other in the green towns to the south, and she thinks then of the heavy ploughing of her own men, Ted's snorting and hurling of water around the trough in the evenings, muddy water and sweat mingled in the clogged teeth of the comb.

... Poor mother has not been to good and the doctor said if she has any more worry it will kill her. She has to look after little Stevie as my sister goes out to work and mother goes three times a week it is a shame at her age. So you see Ted for her sake don't be too hard. perhaps you want to get married again I dont Blame you if you do. you are a young man yet but I dont need to tell you that.

He comes into the house, one day when Ted is off somewhere with a mob. She brings him to the house for money and for the first time in those years of visits he moves through the shriek of the flywire door and into the warm darkness of the house, his eyes moving about the walls and passages as though he has never been within a house before, as though once crossing over, he might never leave. She brings him in when Auntie Maggie is sleeping or half sleeping out the back, brings him to the centre of the circle he has now traced for many months, the cycle of his visits growing tighter with the binding of desire, he speaking still of the peace that comes with wandering but winding to the centre as they both now know. He comes close to her and reaches over at last just to touch her face, as she knows he would, as she untucks and runs her hands up into the warm spaces beneath his shirt, feeling soon upon her breasts the dark hair that flows down his shoulders, feeling with her hands the sudden roughness of those scars he bears across his back and chest, seeing that Mr Singh, his eyes bright in the warmth of the darkness, is younger than she had thought and taller as he takes her face in both his hands.

She makes love with Mr Singh, not like the heavy kindness of poor Ted feeling a need, and rumpled bedclothes and a lifted nightdress, but in a long and watching way, she half sitting in the heavy armchair with her knees drawn up around him, all clothes removed and long hair entangled, not speaking yet but the two of them watching in the darkness as he moves again and again gently within her, she feeling his body taut and hard against her with the power of an unused strength, and he feeling her lend herself to openness, taking in his hands the soft flesh of her buttocks, those clouds that were at one time her body, and holding her whole self deeply apart, falling upon her and into her one last time, shuddering and falling there in the near dark silence with the only sounds the chickens outside buckberking and picking in the gravel, and the moving of the floorboards on the verandah at the rear with the gentle creak of Aunt Maggie's rocking-chair.

And now he speaks to her in the awkward peace to follow, talking slowly, his face hidden in her hair, talking in ways that sound like yet more stories, but this time in words written up in the scars upon his body, her not knowing, and knowing that she might never know what the words meant or why he tells

her, but holding them close nevertheless, cocooning him and his words there in her arms and between her knees in the heat of the closed house, touching his scars and listening to his muffled voice as she listens also to the sounds around her, to the crack of the iron in the heat and the sound of a fly beating up against a window pane, and the sound of Auntie Maggie's voice outside, of a chair creaking and Auntie Maggie talking and singing to herself, talking perhaps of some secret knowledge that she too had gained when she "went off with that waster", as the family story ran, who took all that she had and wrecked her life and left her with a smile that would not die.

She watches him dressing in hurried and awkward motions, and takes him to the door, she in an old cotton house coat thrown carelessly about her, her hair running in loose sandy strands across her face, she smiling in the feeling of his sweat still drying upon her body and his seed still seeping upon her thighs, the memory in her hands of the arched muscles of his back and the thick smell of horses and the fragrant oil combed deep within the lanks of hair that fell about her face and shoulders and coiled about her arms. He steps out into a hot whiteness of burning midday light, she smiling but he now retreating, no longer a face in all that sudden light but only a tall shape marked out against the vast outside, and she with her blown strands of hair and fragile garment at the door, her breasts unclad and gleaming in the light. She struggles for some word herself, but Mr Singh puts two fingers to her lips so that she can only smile, and then turns out towards the road.

"I see the Indian is about. Again. So soon. I saw the van pass out by Fogarty's."

As Ted returns, later in the day, knowing that he has been. And she draws back another strand of hair that has strayed across her face and replies that indeed the Indian has been and that he has passed on to the west, and that he would no doubt come again.

*... I dont forget I am still your wife until
the day you set me free. it is not for my sake
I ask you to do this but my dear old mother
when you answer this I will tell you more
that is if you intend to answer it. well Seal it
if you do. I am thinking of getting another
Place up the bush as I am always ill in*

Melbourne. I will be here for another fortnight at least. Good bye

Your wife

May

SHE WAITS AND WONDERS for some time why it is he never comes again, and then moves out herself one dusty afternoon on to the roads to find him, months later, with suitcase and a hat against the heat, the flywire door slamming shut behind her and the pups sent back to wait for Ted, and she takes her first lift from old Joe Mitchell coming down from Fogarty's, who could only later say that he had dropped her off to wait for the bus that passed through Ninda. She sets off to look for Mr Singh upon the roads, taking with her all the pain she left behind her and all the unknown pain of Mr Singh, her own anguish not something she ever rightly knows how to think about, but driven by it nevertheless from town to town and months of work mostly in pubs and shops and the coffee palaces to the south, finding out one day that Mr Singh is no longer out upon the roads, discovering by chance from a drowsy afternoon drinker at the bar down in Wycheproof that he has sold his horses and van and shot his dog, and that he has been seen dressed in a suit as no-one has ever seen him before, waiting on the platform for the train that would take him to the city.

So that when the work is finished, she walks from the pub across to the station to look down the line that Mr Singh has taken. She sits on the edge of the platform with the rails winding off below, wonder-

ing about all the meanings of the words that Mr Singh had told or partly told her when he lay there in the darkness with her knees drawn up around him, sweating slowly against each other in the hot shadows of the blind-drawn house in the middle of the day, listening to the slow creak of the verandah and the sound still of the chickens, branded by bright spines of dusty light that ran about the room.

She sits on the platform amid the weeds, looking down the rails to the south, the rails along which Mr Singh has gone, sometimes returning to the child bride and family, and sometimes just gone off to find another web of unknown tracks. She casts yet again for knowledge among those scars upon his body, wondering how long she must stay out upon the roads and deserted sidings to find out if what they did told Mr Singh that he could now go home, that he could sell his van and horse and even shoot his dog and return to the child bride and family far away. Or whether, when he put his fingers upon her lips, he feared she was about to say his name, to call out "Help me, Mr Singh!", with Mr Singh in flight from helpless friendship, gone off again to other roads, another horse and dog. And then her thoughts ran one step back to Mr Singh just lying within her and within that darkened house within the heat and all the vacancy of pain around them in a white heat of unbroken light and beyond that the shattered cycle of Mr Singh's abandoned travels, with his horse and dog and van: now wondering, as she must wonder through all the years and hotels and illness to follow, about all the living and unliving that might have been for all of them, if Mr Singh had not put his foot upon their block.

KEVIN BROPHY

Looking at Sophie



LAST NIGHT I HAD another one of those dreams that complete unfinished incidents from the previous day's experiences – these tidying-up dreams treat my waking life as if it is only ever a half-drawn picture or a half-told story. When Andrea was pregnant with Sophie I had one of these dreams after we viewed an image of our child on the screen of an ultrasound machine. The doctor could not tell us if the image of the swimming foetus was male or female because the position of the legs prevented examination. This did not matter. It was, in a way, a relief not to know. The doctor did show us the heart beating in the chest, the over-sized head, and the arms. Then he counted the fingers on one hand of the image on the screen. There were five fingers. He said that the baby was normal. In the presence of all that humming technology I was surprised at his primitive act of counting fingers.

But we accepted his verdict on our child's normality and thanked him for the small black and white photograph of our child as a fuzzy shape floating in a dark universe. That night I dreamed I was watching my child on the ultrasound screen again and I counted the toes this time because I was aware that the doctor had only counted the fingers. To my relief there were five toes on each foot as well.

The completion-dream I had last night was connected with a book I had bought for Sophie. As parents who have both been teachers we had discussed the fact that though we read books every day with Sophie almost all of them are books of fiction. She should be learning more about science or history, we thought – she should know more facts. Six-year-olds need facts. Andrea mentioned a book she had seen in the shop at the Victorian Museum. It was a book about the human body – a book full of facts, many of them illustrated. Sophie has always

shown some interest in learning about the biological drama going on beneath her skin.

I don't really know if it is true that she has always shown such an interest. She goes along with us when we talk about biology, and she looks at pictures we show her. Perhaps when she's an adult she'll remember that we were the ones interested in biology.

In any case, I was passing the museum yesterday and I stopped and bought the book called *The Body and How It Works*. At home in the afternoon I sat with Sophie looking at the beautifully coloured and highly detailed illustrations of a skeleton, a brain, a heart, stomach and bowels, blood vessels purple and red, and the nervous system.

At the beginning of the book we found an illustration of the beginning of life. On the page floated a large sphere with a yellow yolk-like centre and around this sphere were tiny tadpole-like sperm. One of the sperm was pictured wriggling towards the enormous yellow yolk at the centre of the egg. The following illustrations showed the multiplication of the dividing cells and the growth of the foetus and finally there was a baby pushing its way out of the mother, face wrinkled, hands tightly bunched and legs bent for kicking.

Beginnings, like endings, must abide by a certain logic. When we looked at the illustration of the beginning of life I was a little thrown by the moment the book chose as the 'beginning'. I said something like, "Here is the egg from the mother, and here are the sperm from the father . . ." Sophie accepted this as an arbitrary enough beginning-point and we got on with it.

In the dream I had last night I supplied the beginning the book had avoided. Sophie watched me having intercourse. She watched with the same mild interest she had showed in the book about the body. She seemed slightly amused, and she made

a face, indicating that what she was witnessing was slightly yucky – a bit like finger painting with snot.

My anxieties over finding satisfactory beginnings and endings are the preoccupations of a fiction-writer and poet. But they are also part of my reaction to being a parent – imagining I'm responsible for teaching her everything from the beginning, only to discover that her knowledge blooms and sprouts seemingly overnight in the most unlikely directions.

I thought that being a parent would really mean no more than remembering what it was like to be a child: if I could be truly sympathetic to my child's experience by recalling my own childhood I would know what to do in any circumstance. But of course it's not like that. It soon became clear that I was not a kind of co-child, or even my child's ally – for I had grown another life, one that's not child-like at all. I found myself *in the place of a parent* – with a new responsibility, a fear of failure and an emotional involvement I had not anticipated. Immediately I wondered: did my parents feel like this? They didn't warn me about these feelings. No-one did. My new parent-self had to be invented on the spot – and I found myself repeating those very diatribes and clichés I heard from my own parents, the ones I had vowed I would never use. It's like waking as a character in someone else's story. No wonder I am rewriting the beginnings and the endings in my dreams.

I CANNOT WRITE about Sophie without writing about her arrival, which was another beginning. She was three days overdue when Andrea took a dose of castor oil on the doctor's suggestion. Then her waters broke. At the Women's Hospital we were told to go out walking and eat a spicy meal. We bought a bottle of Drambuie for later celebrations, some bunches of daffodils, stocks and freesias, and we ate vegetarian at a restaurant called Shakahari with Andrea standing up most of the time because of the discomfort and the water still leaking from her. But nothing much happened for another half a day. When Sophie was five days overdue Andrea was induced with a drip. Electrical wires were attached to the baby's head by screwing them into the skull. The wires trailing out of Andrea were attached to her leg and then to a machine that displayed the baby's heartbeat: between 120 and 150 beats a minute. Andrea had another monitor attached to her middle to measure the strength of contractions. A glucose drip and a syntocinon drip were attached

to her wrist. She looked small and vulnerable. She was given a pethidine injection but nothing much changed. The contractions were not building up. My tasks were to change her bedpans, give her sips of water, supply her with butterscotch and keep a record of time between contractions. I was probably mostly in the way of everyone but I needed to keep busy to stop myself panicking. We were told that Andrea could not have another pethidine injection because it would depress the baby too much. This was the first time we had been told that pethidine affected the baby. I noticed that already the baby's heartbeat was lower. Andrea decided to have an epidural injection. The anaesthetist arrived in sloppy green overalls, a paper hat, crooked glasses, five o'clock shadow, pushing a tray on wheels. The epidural drug was fed into Andrea's spine through a slow release mechanism so she had yet another attachment trailing from her body. When the epidural drug was injected the baby's heartbeat went down to below eighty beats per minute. Doctor, anaesthetist and midwife stood watching the monitor in silence. The syntocinon drip was stopped to bring a halt to the contractions. Andrea was given oxygen through a mask. The doctor asked the anaesthetist if the operating theatre was ready for an emergency caesarean.

The heartbeat gradually recovered, the drip was resumed and the midwife went back to giving instructions on how Andrea should push, where her legs should be, how she should breathe. After another hour of screaming and pushing the baby's head showed and the doctor took a large pair of scissors and cut Andrea. The head came out as Andrea made her last and most magnificent scream. The head was purple, its eyes closed. It looked large and rubbery. The doctor put her hand round the neck and unravelled the cord. She took the neck in both hands, turned the head, tugged, tugged again. She tugged until the neck stretched. I was afraid she would pull the head off the neck. Finally one shoulder came out, white, then with another pull the whole body slid out and landed on its back between Andrea's legs. It didn't move. It was dark purple. I could see we had a daughter, but the doctor and the midwife were still calling it 'he'. I wondered if she was alive. The midwife lifted her up and the baby gave a short cry. "He's a girl!" the midwife announced and I burst into tears and reached for the camera. The midwife said I should

wait until she had cleaned the baby up before I took photographs. The midwife too was anxious about proper beginnings.

TO HAVE A DAUGHTER. What does this mean? Of course it meant at once another beginning – a chance to rewrite the history of gender politics. Is the parent always like the witch in Hansel and Gretel's story – always caging the child or pushing the child into that oven where the child will be re-made into all that's desired, all that's correct? We spend so much time feeding them – food, stories, information, lies, speeches, values, history, prejudices and the rest of it. We thought we would give her a name that was not gender specific, a name which was strong and would have enough variations to give her a choice later in life. Though we had joked that she was Sophie Brophy before she was born, we decided to call her Josephine. Then she could be Jo, Josie or even Joe if she wanted. I rang the newspapers and dictated the birth announcement with her name as Josephine Jane Lloyd. An hour later we decided to call her Sophie Jane Lloyd so I rang the newspapers back and changed the announcements. Even in the naming of the child we could not be sure how much control we had, what our motives were, why one name should come before another.

At the beginning I thought it would be a relatively simple matter to play ball games with Sophie, take her to the football, give her confidence in climbing and running, and generally save her from some of the more obvious social and physical restrictions imposed on girls. We did go to the football together. The Carlton football ground is a short walk from our home in Brunswick. But by the time she was three she made it clear that she did not want to keep going to the football because she could not see any women out there playing. Sophie now has marvellous skills in running, jumping and climbing, but she is not yet interested in ball games and she has put football aside as a game that only (merely?) boys insist on playing. Sophie also made it clear to us after only a few days at creche at the age of eighteen months that her favourite colour was pink and all things feminine would be explored thoroughly. Dolls, cheap jewellery, dress-ups, fairy wings, make-up, treasure-boxes and beads galore litter her room. I am a bystander to this world and I see that in it she has found a freedom and a confidence which I

had not considered possible. I am that clumsy witch at the oven door who is pushed into his own trap and dismissed while the children get on with their adventures.

She calls herself Sophie and she says she is a girl. There is no sophistry in her. When we tried to correct some bad-mannered talk, we put it to her that we might disapprove of what she says, but we still love *her*. She pointed out that what she says and what she is are the same thing. When she was upset last week at something someone said to her at school I reminded her of the rhyme, 'Sticks and stones' and she told me that her version of the rhyme is:

*Sticks and stones can break my bones
but worms can never hurt me.*

... because words can hurt her.

WE DECIDED THAT if Andrea spent the first twelve months at home with Sophie then it was only fair that I should spend a similar time at home as Sophie's carer. Our agreement was that after Andrea's year at home I would spend two years caring for Sophie so that Andrea could then take another year's leave to have our second child. This arrangement appealed to my sense of symmetry as well as a sense of justice. During this time I asked other couples why they hadn't come to similar arrangements and almost always the reason was that families did not want to forego the higher income the father earned. The decision was made easier for us because we earned similar incomes. We agreed that the cooking of meals, washing of clothes and the cleaning of the house would still be shared or divided equally. We treated caring for Sophie as the equivalent of a full-time job.

When I explained at work that I was taking leave to care for my year-old daughter the women laughed and warned me that my IQ would immediately drop by fifteen or twenty points.

Blake wrote that the fool who persists in his folly will become wise. I don't know if this is so – it seems unlikely that it could be true – but I've comforted myself with this thought when about to try something that might be foolish. I went wholeheartedly at the task of caring for Sophie. Within a week I was exhausted. When Sophie slept I would watch her with my emotions wavering between love and fear – love of the outlandishly beautiful child in front of me and fear of this child renewing her energies for an assault on the next day's activities.

I learned to plan my time with the precision of an air-traffic controller. I would never be so far away from home that I could not get Sophie back for her day-time sleep. No occasion was important enough to disturb this routine. I needed her sleep time for my own writing and study. At night I was determined to have her asleep before *my* energies were sapped. My network of friends was severely reduced, and spontaneous nights out were not only difficult for babysitting reasons, but I had no life left in me at the end of a day. Most of my social life was now through meeting mothers at playgroup or in the playgrounds. One friend was nanny to a child in Carlton so we would meet in parks or cafés. Sophie had to learn early to sit in cafés and eat croissants.

Parents at home with toddlers want to talk endlessly and passionately about their children's sleeping patterns, eating habits, first haircut, bumps, bruises, illnesses, bowel movements, strange ways with words, the staggeringly beautiful simplicity of them – and I was no different. It suited me to be away from friends who weren't caring for a child. I could talk endlessly about Sophie. This involvement reached such intensity that I was convinced I was the only person who really understood Sophie, the only one who could really handle Sophie – and for her sake she shouldn't be out of my sight. I found myself imagining her drowning in a friend's bath when I left her for a few hours.

I understand in a different way now the importance of public places around the city. No matter how many stimulating activities I provided for Sophie at home (covering bodies or toys with shaving cream was fun for a while), a whole day with each other in the house was unbearable. We had to get out. We were saved by the parks, the zoo, the museum, the city shops, the beaches, Victoria Market, Melbourne University, even churches, the Botanical Gardens (where the swans bullied her) and public transport. Sometimes just a tram ride along Sydney Road was exciting and diverting enough for both of us.

Apart from the physical work of carrying or pushing her and lugging along a bag full of nappies, spare clothes and food, there was the intense concentration on her safety – which showed me again and again both how careless and how resourceful I could be. We shared a muesli-bar on a tram one afternoon and Sophie choked on a piece of it. She was turning blue in the pusher there in front of me. In an instant, it seemed, I had her up in the air by

her feet and I banged her on her back until the lump of muesli shot out onto the tram floor. A small triumph for presence of mind. In the local park I liked to toss her into the air and catch her under the arms as she fell back to me. Once I let her slip as she came down and her eye banged onto my chin. This was her first black eye, and it came only a day after she'd cut her forehead walking into the edge of a stereo speaker. For a week I endured the evidence of my carelessness on her happy face.

Often during our activity sessions at home my role was to be her audience. For some weeks I trailed along behind her in the backyard as we looked for the monkey she *knew* was hiding somewhere. I would set up the paints in the backyard on a warm afternoon and put a smock on her and point her at the butcher's paper. After many of these painting workshops I wrote a poem:

She can't paint without taking her clothes off
and painting her body.

Beginning with her hands and finally covering
all she can reach,
pushing the paint in aboriginal circles,
she says,
"Look, now I have a blue belly."

When I give her the containers to wash out
with a hose, she licks them out,
seriously comparing the tastes of red, blue and
yellow.

My bland contribution
is to remind her that if she mixes colours
all she'll have in the end is a muddy brown.
She nods like a wise monkey and disregards me.

I have a blue demon, blue-eyed, rolled in blue,
tonguing the blue air here in the yard.
I hose her back to something like my child.
I am calm, distant, middle-aged,
the colours barely showing in my face,
all colours flaring wildly between us.¹

In his poem 'Fatherhood' (written in the 1930s and banned by the Fascists), César Pavese writes of "the dancing woman and the old man who made her, who once had her in his blood, who fathered her one night in bed, stark naked, with pleasure and joy".² One section of this poem goes:

She leaps
dancing, and the men are all eyes, all devouring
her strong young legs, but the old men shiver;
watching.

The girl is almost naked . . .

A deep joy
seizes the darkness in front of the living girl,
all the bodies fuse into one, a single moving
body, everybody's gaze is riveted on her.
The blood that runs in the girl's springing legs
is the blood that freezes in the old men's veins.
Her father is smoking in silence, he's warm:
he doesn't dance, he made the daughter who's
dancing.

I don't quite know how to read a poem that is sometimes so lustful of the daughter's body, so vivid about the fantasies of old age and yet so fatherly in its pride. I know that it is the fathers of daughters who are most dangerous, for it is the fathers who are most often the abusers of daughters. I've read many children's story books which attempt to deal with abuse and give advice to children about their rights and choices when they're abused. Nearly always it is an uncle or a trusted family friend who is represented as the abuser. Never the father. Even Freud at first obscured the fact that his female clients were claiming their fathers had abused them. I suppose parents would not buy those worthy books for their children if fathers were depicted as the culprits.

What kind of a culprit am I? About two years ago I was sitting in a summer holiday house with another father. He was a close friend and our daughters were close in age, so together we were learning to be fathers and to see each other as fathers. In some of his qualities I discovered my own limitations. He was patient and dogged in a way that was beyond me. He was also capable of showing the sensual pleasure he took in his daughter. We were watching our daughters play, naked, around the lounge room. Sophie had invented a game of chasey which required the girls to grab at each other's vulvas. My friend delighted in his daughter's 'delicious' body and her beautiful bum, and in the beauty of all children's bodies. I didn't quite know how to take this way of talking about a daughter's body, in the way I don't quite know how to read César Pavese's poem. Remembering this now, I become aware of my inhibitions. In my own childhood

family I do not remember seeing my parents hug or hold hands. I did see my father run down to the street in the middle of the night to chase away a young man kissing one of his daughters. (Do my memories shape me, or do I conveniently shape my memories? When I showed one of my sisters a draft of this essay, she said she clearly remembers our parents hugging and holding hands.)

At dinner in the holiday house a few days later my friend told us that his daughter had woken the previous night disturbed by a dream. She had dreamed that I was in the bedroom and I was trying to get into her bed with her and she was afraid of me. He said that as a responsible father he must discuss this with me. He must ask me if I had done anything to cause his daughter to be distressed in this way. It was as though I was talking with a different father. This one seemed too serious and too protective to have ever allowed that other father his risqué patter about the daughter's body. We are not ever simply in the place of a parent, but the parent is always ready to be in several places at once. I marvelled at the way he could put aside one kind of father to become another kind.

I'm not sure that I know yet what all the roles are, but I do know that I can't play them all: teacher, companion, playmate, protector, audience, law-giver, cook, storyteller, holder-of-explanations, source of history, owner of transport, slave and master, the one who is sometimes inadequate . . . Simone de Beauvoir wrote that the life of the father has a mysterious prestige because it is the father who incarnates that immense, difficult and marvelous world outside the family. He comes (briefly) and goes (back to the world). I have given up this prestige by being so much at home with my daughter. I have discovered instead that humdrum joy of being present for whole days, weeks and years in a child's life. I count myself fortunate.

Bombay. In my obsessional way I have become hypnotised by the father-daughter relationship. Just now, between the galled ponies and the piles of green coconuts, a bespectacled man passes by, carrying on his crooked elbow a little girl. She is dressed in a burst of petticoats and a red nylon dress with a frill. He is kissing her round cheek as if he could not get enough of it, and she rests her head in the hollow at the base of his neck, using his tall body for a palanquin. Her hair

is oiled and curled, her eyes darkened with kohl, and small knobs of gold stand in her ears.³

IT WAS ONLY AFTER COMING BACK from six weeks in China that I realized how rare it is to see a father and a daughter in the streets in Melbourne. In China it seemed that fathers went everywhere with their children. For my birthday last week Sophie gave me a yellow glass vase and a bunch of flowers. We put the vase on the window ledge where a magic tree had once lodged. The vase glows with yellow light and above its long neck are the flowers Sophie took from a suburban garden. I remember that when Sophie was a baby I would lie next to her and stare at her, marvelling at every movement and every sound. I could spend whole afternoons gazing at her face, and hours at night watching her sleep. I used to say it was *like* being in love, but it was a falling-in-love. I could not get enough of her. I was taken by surprise. No-one had warned me of this passion a new parent experiences. We watched her constantly and carried her with us everywhere. She

She asks me when I will die because, she says, she wants to watch me do it

went to films, art galleries, book launches and restaurants wrapped in a cloth on my front or on Andrea's. I wheeled her through the local parks in the middle of the night when I thought their rough, stony paths were the key to soothing her to sleep. For the first six months of her life she rarely cried (though I had read that studies reported the normal child cries for at least two hours a day). When my mother saw us pick her up at the first sign of restlessness she asked, "What about her lungs?"

It was a kind of greediness I think now – greed for the presence of a loved one. Sophie is the first child, and I was not only the new parent greedy for her presence, but I was the new parent anxious over what I had in my hands now. My repeated nightmare is of her falling into the muddy Yarra River and disappearing forever. For how many Melbourne parents does the Yarra River hold this dream-place? My arms go into the water to pull her out but the current has taken her into itself, greedily. I used to go to her at night or in the afternoons when she was asleep to check that she was still breathing. It

was as if she could not live without my eyes on her.

I watched her play elaborate games with her first friends: Dida, Pook, Huffy and Bonny. All of them were invisible to us. But their presence was accepted in the family. I wrote down some of those first, strangely poetic conversations as she began to use and misuse language:

"The sun's gone," Sophie said one night.

"Where do you think it's gone?"

"It's landed."

Our second child, Raphael, arrived when she was three years old and this, of course, altered radically what had become a cosy and predictable threesome. I suppose Sophie won't remember us being without Raph, but I can't help seeing occasionally the evidence of her ambivalence about him suddenly being here so sure of himself and his place in the family. Yesterday Sophie was talking to her friend Philippa in the back of the car. They were talking about seeing people they know in newspaper photographs and Sophie said that once she had seen a photo of me and Raph in the local paper (I was on my bicycle and Raph was on the child-seat at the back. The story under the photo was promoting a bicycle safety course). Sophie told Philippa that she tore the photo out of the paper and ate it, and that after eating it her tongue was black.

And what about her lungs? They are strong. The lungs that in my dream fill with mud and water are now filling her six-year-old chest with a riot of air in the playground at school. She spends a lot of time at home balancing on her head on the couch as she asks the impossible: *Is there any part of me that's not growing?* This morning she fell off her chair while watching television. Last week she walked off the edge of a railway platform and fell down onto the track.

She asks me when I will die because, she says, she wants to watch me do it. This week I read a book of poems by Sharon Olds called *The Father*. It is her record of sitting by her father as she watched him die. One poem begins, "I wanted to be there when my father died because I wanted to see him die." She writes of the details of his death, even his smell:

In the last days of my father's life
I tried to name his smell – like yeast,
ochre catalyst feeding in liquid,
eating malt, excreting mash –

sour ferment, intoxicant, exultant, the strong drink of my father's sweat, I bent down over the hospital bed and smelled it. It smelled like wet cement . . .

and I am reminded of Sophie holding her nose in the morning when I come too close to her. "Something stinks," she lets me know.

She makes drawings of women with enormous shoulders, fantastically high heels and exotically coloured dresses. I have a folder full of them. On the wall in front of me is her drawing of children's balloons floating up into the impossible distance in the sky. I look at her, to quote Mayakovsky, "as an Eskimo gapes at a train".⁴

And I question those fairy stories with the exacting eye of a father: why did Anna agree to marry that scheming and miserly king who imprisoned her and forced her to spin straw into gold? Why couldn't Cinderella simply have a good night out without having to marry the prince? How can Gretel ever trust her father again? Aren't those dwarves taking advantage of Snow White's willingness to please? Wasn't Molly Whuppie's woodcutting father incredibly careless to lose three daughters so easily?

It becomes difficult to remember not being Sophie's father. Before I was Sophie's father I went to a clairvoyant who told me about my past lives. She told me I was – or some previous version of me was – a sailor. Apparently I (he?) left a wife and children to go off on ships. And now, in this life, the clairvoyant said, you must learn about children. You must learn everything you refused to learn when you went off to be a sailor.

And now, in this small life as the father of Sophie, I sometimes think I would like to be an ocean-skimming albatross. Some nights, after reading facts about life in the oceans, I tell her the wingspan of an albatross could fill her bedroom, and even then the bird would be cramped. I look forward to her telling me one day that she has dreamed of flying. In our next lives, I will say, we might be albatrosses. Even those books of facts can't anchor me.

Wherever we go Sophie manages to pick one flower, or one small weed, for each of us. Sometimes I find them days later, small dry splashes of colour on the floor of the car or on the vinyl hood of the pusher.

IT WAS A TREE THAT GREW by 'magic'. The magic tree came in a box with instructions. We pushed the

two cardboard halves of the tree together and bent its cardboard branches out and placed it on a plastic dish into which we poured the liquid from a sachet. Sophie couldn't wait until the morning. She kept checking it every few minutes. I told her that we would see the changes in the morning, but still she wanted to see it again just before she went to sleep.

In the morning green and yellow clouds of crystals had grown on it, giving it a tree-like look. White crystals were forming on the trunk and it did seem magical. Sophie climbed up on the table to get close to where it sat on a small window ledge in the kitchen. She touched the crystals and they were immediately crushed into powdery flakes that fell to the floor. "Ah, Sophie, don't touch it," I said. "It's for looking at, not touching."

How did I say this to her? I suppose I said it in that tired and annoyed way I have of talking when I'm making her school lunch, toasting her breakfast bread, and making my own coffee and at the same time wanting the tree to last more than a few minutes. Sometimes the morning routine is a derisive dance of efficiency in our kitchen and sometimes the simplest acts won't come right.

Sophie jumped off the table in a sulk and went into the corner of the room, refusing to get dressed or finish her breakfast or clean her teeth. She didn't like the way I had talked to her. I was upset with her then. I suppose I was angry; it's always difficult for me to admit to being angry or even to recognize my anger when it arrives. But I have come to know how it lodges in my chest and in my head as a kind of pressure. Anyway, I cajoled her out of the corner and eventually the three of us were off down the street – Raph in the pusher, me pushing, and Sophie on her bike. We were taking Raph to the child-care centre, then we would follow the paths through Brunswick, Parkville and Carlton parklands to Sophie's school.

At first our journey went well. We made our way across two roads, avoided fresh dog shit on the narrow footpath and looked out for the familiar cats, Cloudy and Tiger. Then Sophie stopped. She was upset because the pusher had inched in front of the bike. I waited for her to catch up and made sure that the pusher stayed behind the bike. Then she stopped again, blocking the pusher. She said she wanted to be with Andrea, not me, and that the footpath was too bumpy. By this time I had passed her again so I stood waiting for her to catch up, know-

ing that if this kept happening we'd be late for school. She sat on her bike and cried. Was she crying or whining? I don't know now, but at the time I would have said she was making a whining noise. Sophie wanted me to come back and 'get' her. I stood my ground, saying I didn't want to backtrack. She whined again.

I can only write this down now in a flat manner, because I'm embarrassed – and defeated. I gave way to the anger in my chest and my head. I shouted at her that she could stay where she was or go back home, I didn't care. I wheeled the pusher away down the street towards the child-care centre and Sophie sat on her bike and screamed and Raph cried for Sophie. I turned the pusher around and came back towards her. I took her school bag from the pusher's handle where it had been hanging and hurled it towards her, shouting that I had had enough. The bag flew in a high arc and caught on a fence. I pulled the bag free and gripped the handlebars of her bike and began pushing both her and Raph back towards home, shouting something at her about not being able to take her to school if she kept propping her bike in front of the pusher (I don't really know what I was shouting at her in my wild speech of sustained fury). A man in a parked white van watched me marching past with two children. He had probably seen the whole episode.

"Haven't you heard of child abuse?" he called across to me.

"Fuck you! Fucking call the police if you're so worried about child abuse!" I screamed at him, suddenly relieved to be properly angry at some adult figure who probably wouldn't get out of his comfortable van and confront me. I kept pushing and dragging the children down the street, partly righteously furious and partly humiliated. Raph looked back towards the van and said, "He's got a gun. I saw a gun. He's going to shoot us. Is he a policeman? Is he going to shoot us? I saw a gun."

Back at home Andrea was calm. She felt my heart beating in my chest and told me to sit down and read the paper and have a cup of coffee. But I couldn't leave the task (or was it the journey?) unfinished. We took the children to the school and the child-care centre together in the car. Sophie actually skipped into school holding my hand as if nothing unusual had happened.

Later that day, when I picked Raph up from the child-care centre he asked me if I was still angry "at

da world". I asked him if he felt all right about being with me and he said he was happy to be with me. But what choice does he have?

This is one of those incidents which would have been well and truly forgotten now if I had not been foolish and compulsive enough to write it down. I wrote it down not as a record of a time when I 'failed' as a parent, but because it was such an intense failure. The parent is like an author whose text and whose characters have got riotously out of control – but in ways that make the writer see, briefly, what he is.

I suppose at some time in the future I will be asked to play the part of the parent who has failed to live up to the child's standards, or the parent who has failed to understand the child's needs (Sharon Olds has written, "I think at some point I looked at my father/and thought *He's full of shit*"). Already I can see that this will also be me. I hope that I will be, in the end, as relaxed and resilient about it all as Sophie can be.

The magic tree lasted for a few more days and then, because it seemed to have survived a reasonable time for such a fragile construction, it did not matter that Sophie touched it until all of it crumbled away.

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2. César Pavese's poem 'Fatherhood' is quoted by Peter Boyle in his article, 'Gaining lift off – some paradigms of modern poetry' in *Scarp* 26 (May 1995).
3. Germaine Greer, *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989.
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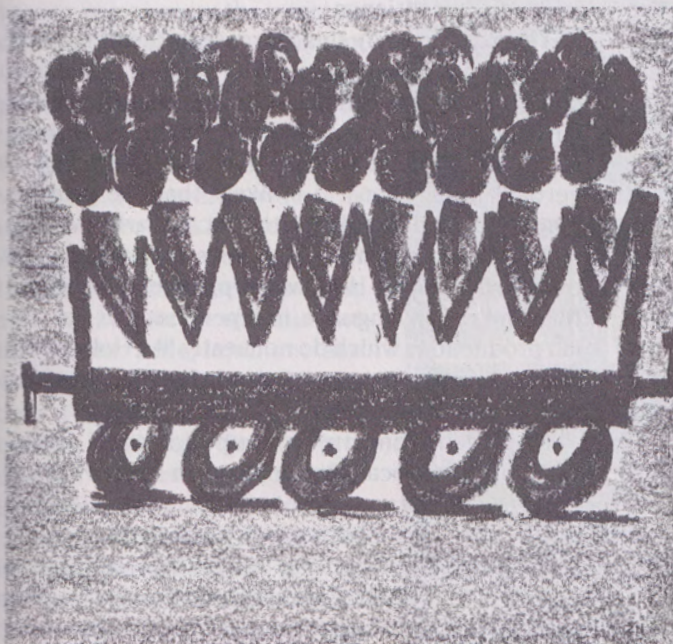
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A founding editor of Going Down Swinging, Kevin Brophy is a novelist, poet, psychologist and lecturer. This essay will be published in Fathers & Daughters edited by Carmel Bird (UQP) in 1997.

LEWIS

He does not believe in photographs though he takes them
Beautiful in silver black
And textures of skin and hair and being
Knowing the secret smile of the soul and capturing it
Magician of the lens
Denying magic and acclaim
Haunted by what he sees of mankind
Disturbed by the power of the black box that he holds to his eye
And whilst fishing for faces
An image emerges through the water in the darkened room
He sighs deep down and darkly
Darker than before
And he turns his back on the face
On faces and eyes of many years
And casts the camera into water
Deep down and darkly
Only to see as the ripples clear
A silver image staring back
And the secret smile of his own soul

TESSA HUMPHRIES



Zofia Nowicka

SOUTH GRAFTON
1948

Standing neatly
at our desks

South Grafton, 1948
Miss Gillett leading

with her ruler
we'd sing last thing

each afternoon
the 'Lullaby' by Brahms

and feel the sunset
through its bars

before we caught the bus.
Surrounded by the

smell of pencils
we sang, aged eight,

almost in tune
those words I can't recall . . .

and were nostalgic
even then

for something further back.

GEOFF PAGE

BEN GOLDSMITH

Through Ned Kelly's Helmet, or What Are You Looking At?

A View of Cinema and Audience in Australia



IN TERMS OF PRODUCTION and spectatorship, the history of cinema in Australia has been cyclical, with periods of frantic activity followed by inertia and decline. Newspaper reports on the state of the medium have oscillated between ecstatic expectation and proclamations of impending doom. At present the messengers are excited; cinema in Australia appears to be enjoying boom times.

Within the last ten years, the audience for cinema in Australia has grown markedly. Box office receipts have roughly trebled in this time, and in 1995 over sixty million cinema tickets were sold.

In apparent response to the increasing interest and enthusiasm for the medium of film, both of the major exhibition chains have recently announced large-scale cinema construction programs. Plans have been unveiled by the Greater Union chain in conjunction with its partners Village Roadshow Ltd., and Warner Bros. for the building of eighteen 'megaplexes' over the next three years at a cost of \$350 million. Each of these megaplexes is projected to house between twenty and twenty-five screens. Seven will be sited in Westfield Shoppingtowns in major urban centres. Meanwhile Australia's other major cinema exhibitor, Hoyts is also reportedly planning to build between ten and fifteen megaplexes in suburban shopping centres across the country.

These announcements come in the wake of plans by the American-owned exhibition company Reading to enter the lucrative Australian market. Their first project will be a twenty-five-screen cinema to be built in the Melbourne suburb of Burwood. Reading's appearance on the scene has sparked a price war, with Hoyts reducing their admission price to \$6.50 in an attempt to retain their market share.

On the surface, the growth in the number of screens may appear to offer the movie audience a

greater choice of viewing. In reality however the construction boom is not motivated by an altruistic desire on the part of the exhibition chains to increase access to the pleasures of cinema. Instead the boom represents an acknowledgment of cinema's fundamental place as a capitalist institution, and exhibits a view of the cinema audience as first and foremost consumers of cinematic entertainment. The siting of a large number of the new cinemas as appendages to suburban shopping malls is noteworthy; a trip to the mall takes on added status as a cultural event at the same time as cinema-going becomes inescapably part of the modern consumer experience.

Yet paradoxically this increase in the number of screens may actually serve to restrict consumer choice. Given the exhibition chains' ties to particular Hollywood studios (which constitutes an indirect form of the monopolistic industrial practice of vertical integration), it is likely that the primary place of American film in the local market will be further reinforced if these screens are mainly given over to the latest Hollywood product. The space for non-English language, independent and Australian productions which do not neatly fit a Hollywood-prescribed commercial model will therefore proportionally decline.

At present concern for the provision of exhibition space for local films may seem somewhat untimely. Optimists will point to the commercial (and mostly critical) success of high profile projects such as *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Babe* and, most recently, *Cosi*. Indeed, these films, following in the sizeable wake of *Strictly Ballroom*, are credited with 'rediscovering' the audience for Australian film – with the consequence that distributors and exhibitors are now more willing to handle local productions.

The technical and visual sophistication of these films has focused the attention of American money-men on the Antipodes. Australian directors, cinematographers, costume designers and scriptwriters are being lured in record numbers to Hollywood. Many more aspirants will hope to find work here once the production facilities being built for Rupert Murdoch's Fox Studios at the Sydney Showgrounds (subsidized by the New South Wales state government) are complete.

But this injection of funds and interest has inevitably raised questions of commercial and cultural control, with much opposition within the industry being directed at the Fox Studios development and the role played by the federal and state governments in facilitating the deal.

In a recent overview of the studio saga for *Metro* magazine, Tina Kaufmann suggests that the original idea for the studio came from the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating. The studios were seen to complement the intention of the cultural policy statement *Creative Nation* to continue support for the industry while simultaneously encouraging a higher level of private and corporate investment. However, a variety of industry groups, including the Australian Writers Guild, the Australian Screen Director's Guild and the industry's trade union, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, have voiced concern that the issues of local content and locally directed production were not addressed in the initial contract. These organizations have written to the NSW Premier asking the state government to insert into the contract "guarantees that no less than fifty per cent of the productions made by Fox in any two-year period will be Australian". Without these guarantees, the industry groups

warn that there is the potential for the Fox Studios to become "little more than a facility for productions that are creatively controlled by non-Australians and expatriate their profits offshore".

Once again some might argue that these concerns appear inappropriate at a time when local productions are enjoying such widespread commercial and critical success. But in many cases it may be precisely this success that threatens the films' local accent.

At the 1995 Australian Movie Convention, film producer Tony Buckley (one of the leading lights in the campaign to revive the industry in the 1960s and early 1970s) warned his colleagues that the box office success of recent Australian films had raised commercial expectations to an unrealistic, and unsustainable level. Buckley's assertion that the film industry had "nearly been too successful" raised again one of the Australian cinema's historic preoccupations, the negotiation of film's place between the spheres of culture and commerce.

THE REVIVAL of the film industry in the early 70s, achieved primarily through government investment and subsidy, was predicated upon two assumptions. The first was cultural, holding that film could assist in the construction and representation of Australian cultural identity. The second was primarily economic, but closely related to the cultural function: the domination of the Australian film market by foreign interests in production, distribution and exhibition was held to be detrimental to Australian economic autonomy. Government intervention, it was argued, was essential to protect local interests in the film industry.

Although this argument had been circulating around the Australian film industry since the

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 Specially taken by
 MESSRS JOHNSON & GIBSON, Melbourne.
 An Entirely NEW and EXQUISITE Pictorial Representation of
 The Thrilling Story of The KELLYS
 POPULAR PRICES!
 10. ROAD PRICES IN 1917 POST OFFICE 1918. YEAR Date of ISSUE

Courtesy of the National Film & Sound Archives Documentation Collection and the Australian Film Institute, Melbourne.

First World War, it was not until the late 1960s that an Australian government considered it politically expedient to support local industry interests. As part of the attempt to redefine the Liberal Party's image as the party of concerned nationalism, the Gorton government embarked on an economic program which aimed to provide financial support for locally owned industrial, manufacturing, mineral and agricultural interests. This program of subsidy was intended to counter what was seen as the growing menace of foreign ownership and control of the local economy. Support for the local film industry then provided the government with the irresistible opportunity to flaunt both its economic and cultural nationalist credentials.

Yet despite its setting up of the Australian Film Development Corporation in 1970, the Gorton government's commitment to film and the sincerity of its wider economic program has been widely questioned. No genuine attempt was made to intervene in the distribution and exhibition sectors, both of which were dominated by foreign-controlled companies. This appears a little odd, given the emphasis laid by the government on the prospective industry's profitability as the only guarantee of survival. Although the cultural importance of film had been frequently invoked as a motivation for inter-

One of the many Australians who took the opportunity to invest in Australian film at this time was Senator Richard Alston, now the Minister for Communications

vention, in the era of the Australian Film Development Corporation (1970–75), the primary intent of subsidy was to generate an economically viable industry which, it was hoped, would provide valuable financial returns to the state. To this end, the government appointed two merchant bankers to the original board of the AFDC, including its chairman, John Darling. The burden of building a cultured and profitable industry was intended to be borne equally by the government and the private sector; initially the AFDC was prohibited from investing (i.e. *lending*) more than fifty per cent of the budget of any project, and would only commit funds to projects with "a good chance of economic success" once a certain level of private investment had been assured.

The overarching emphasis on the economics of the industry during the first half of the 1970s has encouraged many critics and academics to dismiss many of the films made between 1970 and 1975 as culturally insignificant. For many, the real revival did not begin until the replacement of the AFDC by the Australian Film Commission in 1975 which signalled a shift in policy priorities, with the cultural function of film now appearing to be paramount. The release of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* in that year initiated a period of consciously cultural cinema which worked to construct and project an image of Australia, and Australian film, as genteel, sophisticated, artistic, cultured, safe, in short as comfortably middle class.

In the years since 1975, the industry has oscillated between the demands of these two positions, with the result that certain kinds of film have been favoured at particular times. In the 10BA period of the early 1980s, private investment in film production was again actively encouraged by the federal government. With the tax write-off on investment in film originally set at 150% (and with 50% of the returns tax-free), the commercial imperative once more gained ascendancy, and the nationalist project was shuffled into the background. One of the many Australians who took the opportunity to invest in Australian film at this time was Senator Richard Alston, now the new Minister for Communications, whose hard-earned cash in part enabled the making of *The Coolangatta Gold* and *Burke and Wills*.

The cultural irrelevance and financial failure of the majority of the films made under 10BA however occasioned a further shift, which has culminated in the 1990s with the release of a series of distinctively Australian, technically sophisticated movies with a more diverse approach to cultural representation than their predecessors. Yet now, midway through the 1990s, concerns are again being raised that the Australian cinema may find itself pigeon-holed if it seeks solely to emulate the successes of the quirky, offbeat comedy, *Strictly Muriel* style.

Both Cathy Robinson and Sue Milliken, respectively chief executive and chairwoman of the Australian Film Commission, have urged diversity in the style and subject matter of local productions. But given the new federal government's plans for the restructuring of finance provisions for the industry which appear to place the onus for investment back on the private sector, the urge to repeat

tried and trusted commercially successful formulae may prove too great.

The defence of this position places great emphasis on the power of market forces to regulate the industry. This is backed up by the fatuous and simplistic assertion that the audience will be given what it wants, which cunningly elides the operation of cultural and economic power by implying that the will of the audience is the primary determinant of the style and subject matter of film.

Historically the audience has participated in debates over the place of cinema in Australia only in marginal terms. The history of cinema in Australia is in many ways a map of the struggle between dominant and emergent or aspirant social groups for economic and cultural power. The audience has primarily been invoked not as participants in this struggle, but rather as a passive mass in need of protection and direction in its negotiation of cultural meaning.

The Royal Commission into the Moving Picture Industry of 1927–8, the first attempt to confront the questions of cultural and economic control raised by the dominance of American products and companies in the local market, gathered a wealth of evidence from concerned community groups of the deleterious effects of American film on the Australian working class. (Remembering that this was at a time when the price of cinema attendance for a worker and his family was one of the calculations used to determine the minimum wage.) Much of this debate concerned itself with the perceived ideological effects of cinema, and of the power of film to arouse passionate and revolutionary emotions. The Commission's chairman, Walter Marks, remarked that films could "make and mar nations, can foment riots and control them; in fact, can do anything . . ."

This assumption of the direct effects of film on the audience effectively presupposes that a naive, uncomplicated, homogeneous, mass audience requires guidance in its negotiation of the meanings and intent of the medium. In other words, the best interests of the audience cannot be determined by audience members themselves, but rather must be identified by an enlightened group of cultural arbiters whose own ability to withstand the pernicious effects of the films' harmful content is never in question.

IN THE 1960s, concerns were again raised over the harmful effects of American film on local cultural

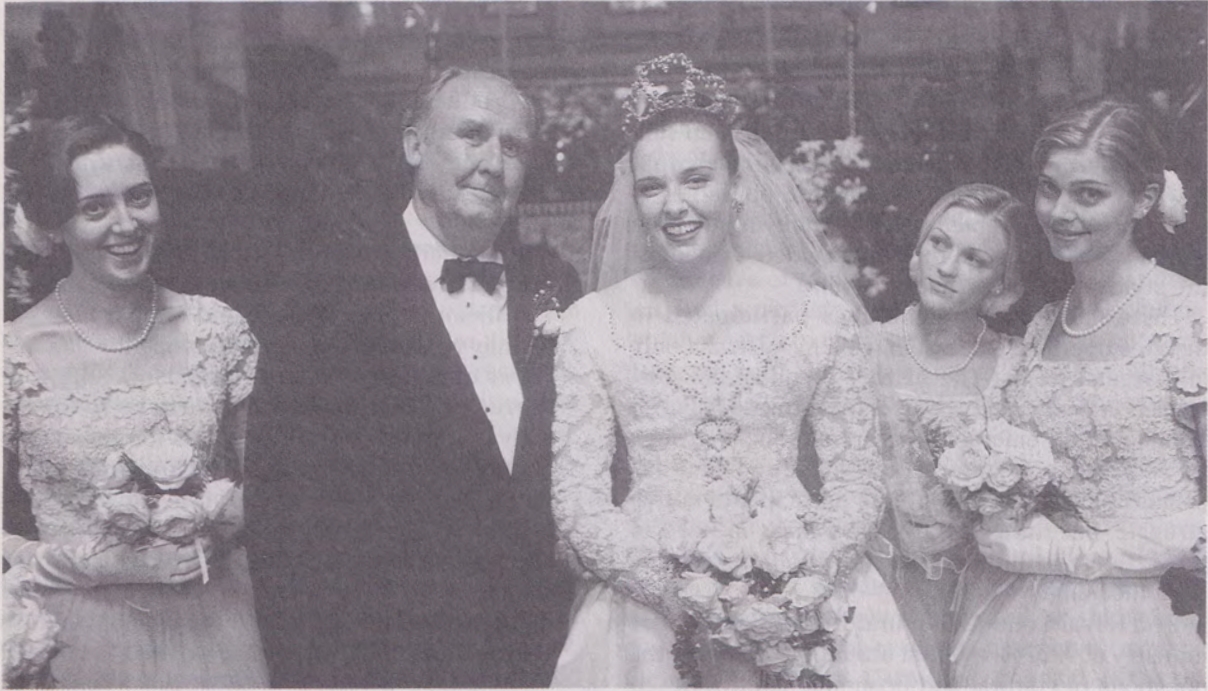
identity, with particular reference to those films which used Australia as an exotic backdrop. As Sylvia Lawson observed in a review of the Hollywood production of *The Sundowners* in 1961, these films were of value to the local community only insofar as they located a market for films with Australian themes and settings:

It is not merely pathetic that people should gasp in ecstasy when the camera picks out a koala and the shearers play two-up, and should chuckle joyfully when Mitchum utters a stone-the-flamin'-crows or Rafferty, "what's this, bush week?" It is horrifying – that we should have to be so touchingly grateful to Warner Brothers for giving this continent a pat on the head, for throwing a few pink galahs on the screen, for showing us ourselves, or our country cousins, in terms proper to folksy radio-serial or the domestic comic strip. Those gasps of joy were the clearest possible demonstration that we need our own film industry to show us who and what we are.

It is this question of 'appropriate representation' that provides a link to past and present constructions of the function of cinema in Australia. Lawson's argument that films like *The Sundowners* are incapable of showing Australians who and what they were or are implicitly evokes the ideological function of cinema. Lawson was effectively arguing that the ways in which these films interpellate the Australian audience, and the ideology they transmit, was inappropriate and inauthentic in the local context. Australian subjects would only truly recognize themselves when hailed by Australian films.

But the revival of local film production in the early 1970s again raised the question of what appropriate representation means, and in whose interests it works. Under the cultural direction of the Australian Film Commission, the period drama epitomized by Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* became, for a time at least, the dominant mode of Australian cinematic representation.

If we consider that the period dramas perform the function of repeating and re-enacting formative scenes in the nation's psychological development, then examination of their intended address becomes crucial. As a host of commentators have observed, these films constructed a particular version of Australianness and of Australian culture which



Publicity still from *Muriel's Wedding* courtesy of *House and Moorhouse* and the Australian Film Institute, Melbourne

largely elided racial and social complexities in an appeal to an homogenous national identity. The anachronism and ambiguity of these representations is all the more surprising given that at this time multiculturalism was being adopted as official policy.

Indeed, it is only in the last few years that the Australian cinema has exhibited signs of coming to grips with the plural, multicultural society from which it springs. The programs of assistance to aspiring film-makers have been expanded to provide opportunities for previously marginalized groups to engage in the process of representation, and to counter the stereotypical practices of the earlier cinema. Although the current Australian mainstream – those films labelled 'quirky' – still exhibit a relatively narrow view of contemporary Australian society, they do appear to acknowledge and attempt to accommodate the variety of perspectives a diverse local audience brings to its viewing practices.

This acknowledgment of at least the potential for difference is evident in one of the central motifs of the new Australian cinema, its preoccupation with guise and disguise. From the sparkling sequins of

Strictly Ballroom, to Muriel's wedding fantasies; from aspiring guitarist Mick's transvestism in *All Men are Liars*, to the wonderful ragbag collection of costumes in the opera performance scenes of *Cosi*, the quirky cinema displays a determined consciousness of the interrelationships between image and identity. The act of cloaking, of dressing up, often becomes an emblem of transition as characters attempt to come to terms with who they are, and with what and where they want to be.

It is in this light that these films might best be viewed. Their play with established nationalist stereotypes represents an attempt to engage with contemporary realities, but they certainly do not pretend (as much of the 'cultural flagship' cinema of the 1970s did) to act as definitive markers of the cultural and social concerns of the national collective. They are instead themselves emblems of a society in transition, where questions of image and identity remain subjects of debate and concern, albeit in a much less anxious way than in previous years.

In the years leading to the revival in film production in the early 1970s, as in the 1920s and thirties

in relation to Australian literature, the myth of the unresponsive, uncultured audience was widely invoked. The purpose of this construction was to arouse interest in local cultural production, and to propagate the idea that Australian film-makers (and writers) *mattered*, that the perspectives that they could offer were valuable to the imagining of Australia. The development of the film industry over the last twenty-five years, and in particular the growing audience for a diverse and eclectic range of films (evidenced by the burgeoning success of film festivals around the country) should finally put the lie to this myth. In relation to local films, interest in and engagement with their concerns and practices has never been higher.

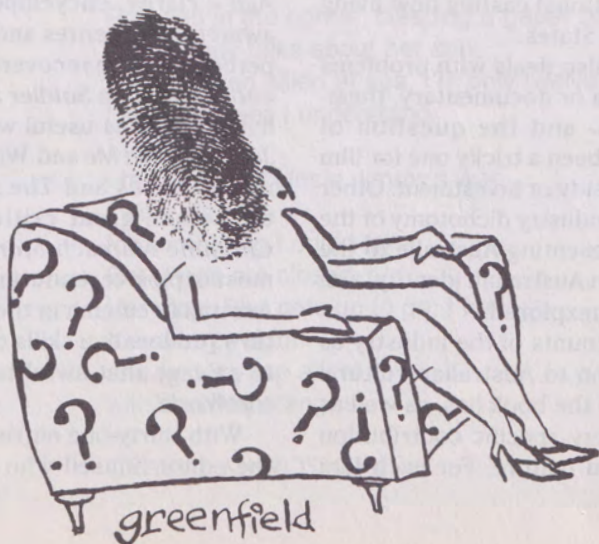
The historical tension within the industry between the demands of culture and commerce has tended to ensure that the Australian cinema has been conservative in its approach to both the subject matter of local films, and to the possibility of diversity within the local audience. Within the last few years we have witnessed the beginnings of an attempt to experiment with storylines, to problematize previous representations of the nation and to explore the potential for film to speak in a variety of voices to the hybrid, heterogenous society it serves.

Yet with the recent change in government, these attempts to negotiate the complex realities of contemporary Australia may be compromised. The Coalition gained power on the back of promises to return to 'traditional values', meaning (it appears) the reassertion of the dominant position of a white, anglocentric establishment in all areas, including

that of cultural representation. Predicated upon a false notion of inclusion, the return to 'traditional values' will serve to elide diversity and the possibilities of a multicultural and multivocal approach to cinema that the industry has tentatively begun to explore.

Similarly, if what we are witnessing in the new government's (albeit poorly articulated) proposals for film funding and in the large scale investment in cinema exhibition space is a return to the 'dollars and sense' mentality which characterized local cinema in the 1980s, there is a very real danger that conservatism in the choice of films to be funded will again be the order of the day. And although the boom in cinema construction and the boost to local film-making offered by the new Fox Studios production facilities in Sydney may appear to offer audiences greater choice, it is unlikely that those projects which do not promise to return at least a small profit will ever reach the screen. Recent successes have highlighted the technical sophistication of Australian film-making, but more importantly they have begun the process of articulating the diversity of contemporary Australian society. The challenge now is to build on these beginnings, to continue the processes of experimentation and exploration, and to avoid the recourse to the safe option which views the audience solely as an homogenous mass, and which sees cultural value purely in terms of box office returns.

Ben Goldsmith is a PhD student at the University of Queensland. He is a noted after-dinner speaker.



Critical Record

JACK CLANCY

Scott Murray (ed): *Australian Film 1978–1994* New Edition (OUP in association with the Australian Film Commission and *Cinema Papers* 2.2, \$49.95).

THIS IS THE SECOND, updated, edition of a work which, together with Pike and Cooper's earlier OUP volume, *Australian Cinema 1900–1977*, forms an absolutely indispensable record of the production of Australian feature films over the century of the motion picture's existence. The present edition adds two years or thirty-three films and provides credits for 341 films, an average of twenty per year. Five Super 8 and video features are dealt with in appendices as are the very large number, ninety-four in all, of unreleased or to-be-completed features and tele-features from the years 1992–1995. Crude arithmetic suggests a total production slate over that four-year period of well over one hundred feature films, which raises the question of whether this is more than a viable and healthy industry should be producing.

Other contentious matters to do with the Australian industry are, from the nature of the book's format and structure, largely ignored – although editor Scott Murray, in one of his critical contributions, makes passing reference to the dispute over local versus foreign acting talent. Speaking of a film made in 1982 he remarks with appropriate irony, "It is easier to be objective today with many of the harshest critics of international casting now living and working in the United States."

Murray's introduction also deals with problems of definition – acted drama or documentary, theatrical or non-theatrical – and the question of Australianness which has been a tricky one for film bureaucrats awarding subsidy or investment. Other familiar issues like the art/industry dichotomy or the grandiloquent aims of 'presenting Australia to the world' or the 'defining of an Australian identity' are, perhaps mercifully, left unexplored.

But if any overview accounts of the industry as a whole, or its contribution to Australian cultural life, are left to be inferred, the book has, as well as its value as a record, a very specific contribution to make to Australian film culture. For each film

there is, as well as full credits, a brief plot summary and critical comment, an abbreviated form of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (now *Sight and Sound*) model. Most of these appear to be original contributions although some are *Cinema Papers* reviews at the time of release, a reasonable solution since the journal is co-publisher with OUP and the Australian Film Commission and many of the films, especially from the early years, may not have been available for viewing. The two sources provide no less than fifty-six reviewers, which casts doubt on the publishers' claim that each film is critically discussed by "one of Australia's leading film critics", especially since most of the reviewers would appear to come from Victoria, the home state of the journal. Thus there is no contribution from (regrettably) David Stratton or (less regrettably) his *Australian* reviewing partner Evan Williams.

THE RESULTING RANGE of critical views, methods and approaches makes the book a fascinating compendium. Despite the frequent recurrence of the word 'unfortunately', usually to begin a sentence of mild or ironic qualification, there seems to be a genuine attempt by most contributors to heed the editor's request to be "as non-pejorative as possible". Thus many films are rescued from undeserving critical fates while others are deservedly left to continue languishing in critical opprobrium. For still others – usually popular successes – the gentle editorial request is defied and harsh justice, or more often injustice, is meted out. In the first group, the admirable work of Adrian Martin is most notable. With the qualities that distinguish his work with *The Age* – clarity, encyclopedic film knowledge, keen awareness of genres and their audiences and great perception – he recovers such films as *Long Weekend*, *Death of a Soldier* and *BMX Bandits* from oblivion, gives us useful ways of looking at films like *Jenny Kissed Me* and *Windrider* and effectively dismisses *Sirens* and *The Nostradamus Kid* in terms that make great critical sense. *Hostage: The Christine Maresch Story* emerges as "one of the most explosive, enduring and significant movies of Australian cinema in the 1980s". But not even Martin's provocative skills can convince when he tries to salvage that awful turkey *Les Patterson Saves the World*.

With thirty-one entries Martin is second only to the editor himself who in forty-one contributions

manages to meet his own editorial request with the sympathy of a fellow film-maker but where necessary refuses to allow generous instincts to overcome critical truth.

Most revealing though are the critical pieces where the editor's request stands no chance against rigid ideology. Thus the treatment by Rose Lucas of *The Man From Snowy River*: "a shameless opportunist pandering to the box-office and to American markets in particular" refers to the "enormity" of its popular success. Is this an ignorant error of usage or are we really meant to agree that popular success is a crime?

The pity of this kind of approach is that, obsessed with "the objectionable aspects of . . . its stereotypical equation of women with a passive landscape to be cultivated or a horse to be ridden", it totally fails to see and understand how a local manipulation of Hollywood genre, far from imposing "Hollywood values and conventions onto a 'virginal' Australian cinema" allows for fascinating implications at the structural level. Perhaps the source of the great popular Australian response to the film lies precisely at this sub-textual level. Ideo-

logical condemnation both here and in the same writer's treatment of that fine film *Shame* (1988) has blinkered all but the narrowest of critical responses, and reveals a sad incomprehension of the workings of popular culture.

Contributors range from journalists (Jim Schembri, Keith Connolly) to academics (the Caputos, Brian McFarlane) and all have enlightening things to say, although the quality is inevitably uneven. The treatment of *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) for example is rough both in its prose and its judgments while *In Search of Anna* (1979) is justly described as "waiting to be re-discovered for the mini-masterpiece that it is".

As a record of the Australian industry's achievement, the book is invaluable; as a demonstration of the range and variety of critical talent, it is at the very least provocative and stimulating. Compulsory purchase for anyone interested in this most fascinating of industries.

Jack Clancy is past Professor of Communication Studies at RMIT. He began teaching cinema studies at tertiary level in 1963 and has published widely on Australian cinema.

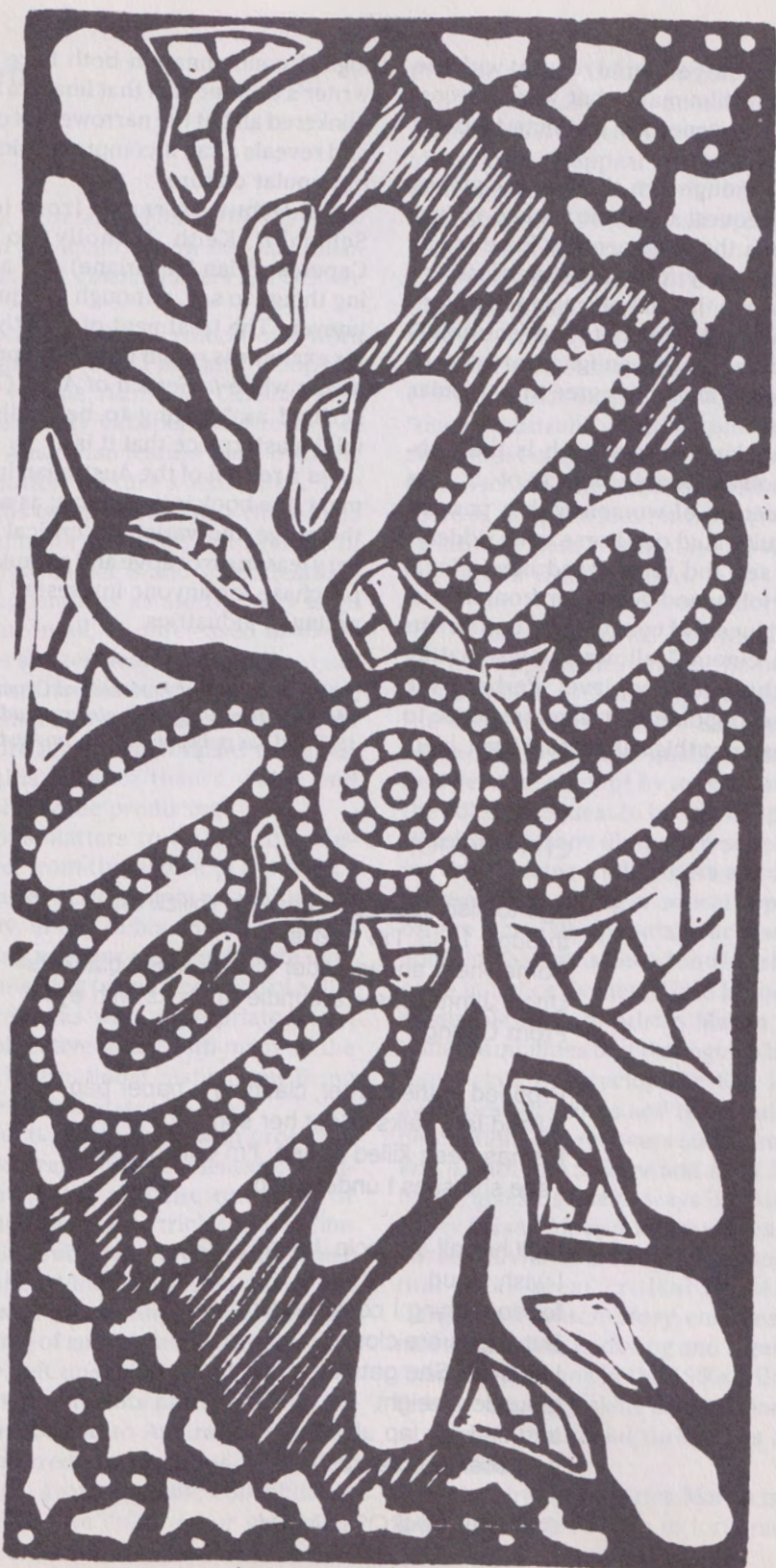
CITY SECTION

I go to visit death by tram. We rollick on
through 1945. I'm twelve.
Somewhere ahead under blue-crossed blankets
Uncle Jimmy lies – a bundle of sticks with eyes.
From Changi.

Propped in the corner, clasping a paper bag,
a lined lady talks about her son.
He has been killed at sea. I'm only twelve.
I see she sees I understand.

I tell her all of Uncle Jimmy's war.
I wish aloud
for something I could take.
But shops are closed.
Her stop. She gets up to go. I feel
a sudden weight
and find my lap alight
with scented oranges.

GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH



Bush potato Fabrianne Peterson 96

WARRIGAL ANDERSON

Mum and Me



I DON'T REMEMBER MY OLD MAN, I was much too young, but Mum told me about him one night when she was down in her cups and drinking wine. He was her second husband. (Her first husband and my half-brother died in 1930 – something of measles.) Mum said the old man was a top bloke, but the war had turned him strange and he did dreadful things. Like bashing her something terrible and scarring her for life with his stock whip. Breaking bones and kicking her for such crimes as not going to bed with one of his drunken mates when he was feeling generous, or serving up his tea cold when he came home from the pub at some ungodly hour. And other small petty things, like breaking my brother Gordon's nose and cheekbone when he ran to the door and was greeted by a casual backhander, just like you would swat a fly. *It didn't stop there.* Mum said he tried to rape Pauline, my oldest sister, when she was about nine. That was the last straw for Mum.

You would have to be Aboriginal and my age to understand how hard it was for my Mother with three young kids, me a babe in arms, to walk out and try to make a life of her own, and raise us. Particularly in the days when you were considered less than a white man's dog. (At least they had to be registered.) From what I've been told we shifted into a shack on the outskirts of Swan Hill. That's where Pauline was taken from. I was too young to remember her, so we have never met. (So if you're about sixty, have green eyes and remember being called Kylie as a child, get in touch, Sister.)

Among my early memories is a policeman and a big bloke in a black suit, taking Gordon away in a black car. Mum said the Black Suit was from the department and that he had a warrant. I didn't know what a department was, or a warrant, but that big bloke in the suit put the fear of God into me for

years. I have no idea why they didn't take me. Maybe I was too young, or they didn't know about me. Anyway, Mum and I took off. We played hide and seek with that department all over the place, endless towns, staying two to three weeks. Sometimes Mum got work in a pub and I would have to hide in a room. We even camped in a big dry water tank for a week before we went back to Swan Hill. Mum got a job picking grapes, but the old man found us and gave her a belting until the local people bashed him and she got away. You know, for the life of me I can't remember it, although Mum says I was there.

We went to Melbourne from there. I was about to turn ten. Mum wasn't sure of the date but this was the year. "Early in March '48. March, that's your birthday, love. Dunno the day. We had no calendar on the road that year. 1958, yeah, you be ten this March." So with no trumpets or drums my birthday came and went. We were living in a shed in the backyard of Cobby and Marge's place, friends of Mum's. Mum was making really good money and killing herself working two jobs. The city was full up for some reason, and there was plenty of work about. We went back to rooms after Mum had a row with Cobby, as he wanted to put the rent up on the shed. So I spent the next nine months hiding in rooms, flats, friendly houses. I was rarely allowed out to play and we were always ready to flee in an instant. Mum as usual was working in a pub housemaiding or doing washing. I was at home, pretty young and dumb. I had never gone to school. Being classed as a government ward, with an arrest warrant on me, it wasn't a good idea to go wandering about if I wanted to stay out of a welfare home. "Like a jail, love, with locks and bars on the windows and iron doors. That's where they got Pauline and Gordon, the Department welfare home."

The Department, Mum called them. I didn't know just what a department was, but I knew it was big and the people wore black suits and hung around with police. Any big bloke in a black suit could trigger fear in me, because of the one who took Gordon. Even to this day, I'm uncomfortable around authority.

ONE DAY MUM CAME RUNNING in through the door of the flat we had over the top of a shop on the main street of Moonee Ponds. "Quick love, grab your port, they're coming." She didn't have to tell me who. "I can't come with you, and there's no time to go to the bank, so take this." And she gave me her pay, five pounds. "Go to Halls Gap and ring Fred. He'll take you out to Auntie Rose. Wait for me there, alright?" I gave her a hug and put my sandals on, grabbed my port, one last hug, and Mum said, "Don't come back here, love. You bolt and keep going. If they catch you they will lock you away in a big room, so you hit the frog, keep out of trouble and tell Fred I'll ring him." With that I was out the door and off, not realizing that would be the last time I would ever see my Mum.

I hurried down the street, looking back over my shoulder for a mob of blokes in black suits trying to catch me. I got to the Moonee Ponds railway station just as the train came in, so I shot in and jumped aboard. Although I had been to town on the train with Mum, I had never bought a ticket in my life and didn't know how. I got off at Flinders Street station and a bloke asked me for my ticket. "Mum's got it," I said and kept walking. It was late afternoon, half past three or thereabouts. The streets were crowded with people knocking off and going home

tomato they were, and they had gone all soggy. I ate them because I was hungry, then sat and watched the people walk past. I noticed a fat bloke in a black suit who was eyeing me off, and I was convinced he was a spy from the Department. (I have no idea, to this day, who he was.) He scared the hell out of me and shot me into instant action. A lady was going through the ticket barrier with a heap of kids, so I tacked on behind. Once on the



platform the handiest place to hide was the train standing at the platform. We came to Melbourne from Swan Hill on the train, so this one would take me back again, I reasoned, and I jumped onto it like a drunk finding a bottle of whiskey.

Walking along the carriage looking for somewhere to sit, this real old lady (she must have been all of twenty-something) said, "You can sit here, love. Are you going to Sydney on your own?" *Sydney!* I thought. I'm goin' to Swan Hill. This Sydney must be on the way. So I told the lady "Yes," and sat quietly. The train moved out and ran for a bit. Miss Twenty had nodded off, and the guard came through, "Tickets, all tickets please." I told him Mum had mine up front and he was happy. He gave Miss Twenty a shake, and she gave him her ticket, and he moved off happy. I never got asked again. It was a good trip, but I started to miss Mum real bad. I was feeling sad and a bit down in the mouth. Miss Twenty, who said to call her Nancy, had a big basket full of tucker and a tube full of hot tea (she said it was a flask). She fed me and looked after me a treat, but kept asking questions I couldn't understand. When she asked me why I was going to Sydney, I told her I was going to see Uncle Fred and Auntie Nellie who would take me to see my Nana Rose. They were no relation really, but Wemba Wemba people, and probably my Mum's oldest friends. But Lady Twenty was happy and she said to call her Nancy again. She told me about her boyfriend Peter (the pig), who had been telling her lies (lying pig) and reckoned he wanted to marry her



from work – cars, trams, buses, trucks, *noise* like I never heard before. It was so confusing. I was feeling lost and a bit frightened, and I walked around looking in shop windows till dark. I really didn't know what to do, but as luck had it, I found myself at Spencer Street station. I went into the station and bought an orange drink and a packet of sandwiches,

(lying pig), but he was already married and had been telling her big porkies all the time (big lying pig). She was a pretty girl, long black hair and blue eyes, so I think he's also a silly pig.

We got to Seymore and a big mob of soldiers got on, and as I had never been close to many drunk blokes before, I thought they were all mad. One was a loudmouth who fancied himself quite a bit. He tried to chat up Nancy who didn't want a bar of him. He told me to shift, but she told me not to, then he got real nasty and started calling her names and yelling at her. Another Army bloke came and asked Nancy was this Herbert bothering her. She said yes, and this bloke went *wallop!* and knocked the Herbert rotten, then carted him away. Well, that scared the crap out of me and I headed for Nancy's lap. She met me halfway, and soon as she opened her arms I was there. I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke Nancy said, "Come on, let's go for a cuppa." We were at Cootamundra, I think. We got a cup of tea and some sandwiches and got back on the train. I was thinkin', this Sydney's a long way.

I asked Nancy, "Are we nearly there yet?"

She smiled. "We're about three-quarters of the way but we won't be there until breakfast." So I snuggled up and went back to sleep.

I woke with Nancy shaking my shoulder. "Wake up, Ed, we're nearly there. About another five minutes."

I sat up and combed my hair with my fingers and looked out the window. I'm not sure what I expected to see, but the sight of all the big buildings crowded around made me wonder if we had left Melbourne. To me it looked the same.

"Is this Sydney?" I asked Nancy.

"Yes. Why?" she answered.

"It doesn't look any different to Melbourne."

The train pulled in and I gathered up my little port, and we walked down the platform to the lobby. Nancy asked, "Are you being met?" I didn't know what to say, so I said yes, but I had to wait. So she gave me a great big hug, and wrote her phone number and address on a bit of paper for me, and told me to come and see her any time, made me promise. What a nice lady. I waited a while in the lobby, then picked up my port and walked out of the station, straight into chaos.

Warrigal Anderson was the winner of the 1995 David Unaipon Award with his entry Warrigal's Way, from which 'Mum and Me' is an extract. Warrigal's Way will be published this year by UQP.



THREE POEMS BY SAMUEL WAGAN WATSON

A BLACK BIRD OF MY MIND

migrating thoughts
of bitter sweet anxieties
come once
in a curse,

or on a
road
of stone,

harshly cut rocks
of little chance
that walks a man
of word,
of time
of sacrifice,

and lay against the grain,

why walk a road of bitter sweet
when easier
to cut one's throat
and watch a sea of
death
red,
swimming in the
rain.

AFTER 2AM

I wept along with the night;
two, black, hideous dimensions,
myself and 3am,
releasing a crystal tide of bottled insanity
while the shadows mocked
our embrace,
and from then on,
I knew that forever
night
would be my mistress . . .

UNTITLED

raindrops fall in vain
and abuse the kindness of my soul,
I hear them landing outside
an audience to a short lived affair
continuum of vertigo song,
soothing, yet, absolute,
a spiral dance to an unwelcoming ground
where they are of little regard
but slaves and remedy to dry spirits
that one can envy such courage to fall
in the open
and share their end
alone.

FABIENNE BAYET

Fractals in the Landscape



I'M FLYING UP HERE, the plane drones, ringing in my ears, making me nauseous. The sun glares through the small windows, hurting my eyes. The air-conditioning somehow defies the sun beating its heat into this metal plane. I have to crane my neck to look outside, to see the clouds, to see the land below. My body is confused, suspended so far above the earth, cramping from the cold air around me, blinded by the sun coming through the windows. The air hostess, comfortable in this totally unnatural state, offers me reconstituted orange juice and dried cake. I'm physically suspended fifteen thousand feet above the earth, every pore on my skin is screaming to be down, to be on the solid ground, and she wants me to eat. I accept the House and Gardens magazines. Their artificiality makes me even more nauseous. I want to be home, by the sea, or safe in my mother's dug-out at Coober Pedy, even enduring the twelve-hour bus trip on the Stuart Highway. I do not want to be up here. I try to concentrate on the landscape below, on its patterns, on how the sun and dust feel on my skin when I'm way below, down on the ground, walking the earth, like I'm supposed to.

From up here it is a marbled landscape. Fractals in hues of browns, rose browns, mushroom pinks, red the colour of dried blood, swirling, splitting into thousands of branches. These are the rivers of the Pleistocene. All dried up now but their patterns still remain.

The trees that line the river beds, almost in perpetual hope, look black from up here. Their deep dark green is an indication that somewhere, deep below, there is cool water seeping through the rocks, through the black. Maybe the trees suck this darkness from below into their leaves. They know where the water is. They know it's dark and cool. Pale men venture out here, into what they call the

middle of nowhere. Forty degree heat is not uncommon. The stones shatter into thousands of pieces because of the ice-like nights. But pale men think they are stronger than stones and smarter than trees and they come 'out here' in their arrogant ways. They think they don't need the darkness of the trees. They won't follow the patterns. They ignore the laws of this landscape, and think a change of government will change the land.

But the landscape teaches the men, it whispers to them, as softly and as incessant as the wind, "You must become part of me, one way or the other. Either you take on my features, you must take in the brown, the dust. You must learn from the stones and the trees or you become dust." This is what the patterns whisper to me. These men, they become weathered. Their faces take on the patterns of the landscape. They learn or they die.

I lean back into my cold seat. I can't cramp my neck any more. The air hostess asks if I'd like another magazine. I refuse. She notices how ill I am. She suggests a Panadol or Disprin. I shake my head. She leaves me alone. I think about why I am here.

I know all about distance. I've lived either up or down the Stuart Highway ever since I was two months old. My Nana has lived in Coober Pedy ever since I've known her. Now, nine hundred and sixty kilometres may not seem like such a distance to those who have relatives across the world, but the distance between a coastal, provincial city and a dusty mining town is not so much in the miles but in the mind.

People that visit Coober Pedy say it's like the other side of the moon. Not everybody gets to go to the moon, so I wonder where that analogy comes from. It was my home for six years so it was the centre of my universe. Suburbia and the cityscape

are my alienation, my moonscape. There is nothing quite as familiar as a flat horizon, the smell and feel of dust and the sun glaring down on my face.

Why am I here in this plane, flying away from Coober Pedy?

MY NANA HAD A STROKE. Simple as that. She was just bending down to pick up a packet of cigarettes.

At the top of the ramp.

In her dug-out.

Nothing sophisticated in that.

Then she fell.

But she couldn't get up.

One side of her body was paralyzed.

When Bruno found her.

I don't know which side.

I flew up to meet her.

I'd never heard my Nana sound like that before.

I had to see for myself.

She was tired. Still is.

She looked so tired her eyes didn't even recognize me.

Didn't even recognize me.

I'm supposed to be her grand-daughter, her daughter's daughter.

She is my matriarch, my listener.

Some would say she is my goddess-crone, but she would be embarrassed going that far.

She would say, 'I'm not a bloody goddess. I'm your Nana.'

Simple as that.

And I wouldn't care. I'd love her anyway.

My Nana was a no-frills Nana.

She would say "bullshit", "bloody" and "fuck" with no problems at all.

She'd also say, "Pig's arse. Pigs might fly", and "It's up to you Fub - you do whatever you want."

She'd say, "Yeah well." She'd laugh, even about rude things.

I remember she told a friend of mine that it was so cold you could "freeze your tits off".

My friend didn't know how to react.

Nana threw her head back and laughed.

My Nana didn't blink an eyelid when I told her I'd lost my virginity.

She backed me up when I repeated year twelve.

She was there for me when I ran away.

She was even there for me at my graduation.

Me and Mum never really got on very well.

I could never cope with her calling a spade a "fucking shovel".

My sister and I used to run around Nana's dug-out with our knickers on our heads, when we were little.

Nana was always there for me. I would stay over her dug-out the best part of the week when I lived in Coober Pedy.

Sleep-overs, sanctuaries, company and the like.

Bruno would go to bed and it would be just me and Nana.

Talking about everything and anything.

Then I'd go to bed.

When I got older it would be Nana who would fall asleep in her chair.

And I'd say "Go to bed Nana."

And she used to sleep in a big lumpy double bed.

And I used to sleep next to her.

Until I used to sleep with others. Then I'd sleep in the single bed.

And I'd used to say in my sleep, "Stop snoring Nana."

And she used to stop.

She'd roll over and stop snoring . . . at least for a little while.

Nana used to make fairy bread from thick slices of continental bread. Frothy egg nogs with a whisk in a dented saucepan.

The first time Nana used a blender we left the lid off to see how it would work. Egg Nog splashed up into our faces . . . and dripped off the ceiling. We laughed.

Pork chops with apple sauce and wonderfully soft mashed potatoes.

Pumpkin scones. Chicken soup when we were sick. Ox-tail or kangaroo-tail soup after Ken had gone shooting.

Self-saucing puddings, especially on Christmas days, dripping with Golden Syrup.

Toasty-toasties with hot milo – with lots of milk – for supper.

Lasagna, gnocchi and spaghetti that you would make you forget that you were vegetarian . . . of three years.

She'd spread the Flora thick and make sure there was plenty of rain water in the fridge. Golden Syrup, Vegemite and Jasol could always be found in her kitchen.

She came down for my 21st. I have a photo of us on the mantelpiece. She came down for my graduation. I was proud.

I only wish she could've seen my wedding.

But I'm not getting married.

We believed in her puddings, her three-colours-punch and her castor sugar encrusted strawberries.

I believed in her advice, in her acceptance and her company in front of the telly watching Australia thrash England, on the ABC broadcast 'direct' from Queensland.

I believed in her Aboriginality, in her pride to be Australian.

I believe in her fight to bring up seven kids alone. I believe in her sassiness to attract Bruno to her.

I love her.

I remember when she used to have long silver-grey hair down to her waist. She used to brush forever, and put it up in a big bun.

She has a gallery of art and photos of us all at different ages constantly surrounding her. Kymy in her deb gown. Me, Sam and Jacqui going through Coober Pedy Area School. Each sister progressively

more attractive than the other.

Clumsy art work from school tacked onto every clear surface around her. Knick-knacks and jasper add to the memorabilia.

She is never alone and never will be with a partner and seven children.

I remember drawing pictures on the dug-out walls, in chalk and ochre.

I remember putting paintings up and "Welcome home Nana" banners on the walls to greet her returns from visiting relatives across the country.

I remember her telling me that she never knew who her father was; that her husband went to war; that our totem was the dolphin. That the dolphin visited her grandfather in the Clarence River to tell him that she was born.

I remember her telling me more about our family tree in fifteen minutes flat – more than she'd ever told anybody before in her entire life. I was in such a rush that I wrote it down on a napkin.

She was always there for me. Even last Christmas she understood why I had to be in peace and quiet at her dugout. She understood. She knew.

Now it's my turn to understand, to know why.

The last lucid thing she ever said to me was, "I knew you wouldn't come back for a long time.

"I know I won't be seeing you for a long time."

Now it's my turn to be an adult. Now it's my turn to move against the odds. But there's nothing else to be done in Coober Pedy. Now it's going to take time.

Fabienne Bayet lives in Adelaide. Her family originally comes from Bundjalung country in northern NSW.

MUDROOROO

EVOLVING A POEM AT A POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE CONFERENCE
IN SRI LANKA, AUGUST 1995

ISLAND INCONTINENT

Version One

Alternatively, the government minister explodes
his political program
Contending between peace and war with
gestures
Loud and violent, declaring for the post-colonial
At this conference, ripe with the slogan
'Love conquers all' as Chaucer trots towards
Canterbury
Savoring the 'love' in a female guerrilla's suicide

Lingering history explodes a man into a collaps-
ing building
The strength of his cause lies in the history they
find
To thread through, go beyond and attain
Ending what has been destroyed to make anew
Debts are to be repaid and a homeland gained
Each to his own, each to disown, to render into
Victory without victims as the flag unfurls
Olive branch flutters beside the Buddha's smile
Like is like, not dislike to what we think we hate
Under us the lion and tiger contend in sullen
strife
To mask the passions of a martial arts display
Intent on winning the forlorn prize,
Of attaining without loss of face, or mask
Nuzzling at the ripening fruit of disharmony

Version Two

Assuming a pose that few of the participants
ponder
Contending that his way is the road to peace
Love and the cliches of understanding and justice
Although, allow me to intrude a thought
Lots of us seek a homeland of our own
Sighing, I let the minister have his say

Lashing out, plastic explosives render sterile
The insult you have done to our flesh – our blood
That you seek a rifle-pistol-machine-gun solution to
Ending what you seek, our beliefs we die for
Dead, dying, done, we'll pain your memories
Etched into the plaque of a king importing
mercenaries
Victory to us, no surrender as your buildings
collapse
Over your promises mouthed in a search for visions
Love denied in a cynical posturing beneath the
Buddha's smile
Under the lion, the tiger's claws rip and shred
Towards an understanding of history too long denied
Intransigent, who pays you our souls to kill
Onward towards where Rama and Ravana contend
No, beyond your gaze, Hanuman humbles them
in poetry

Third Version

At the conference, the minister delivers the opening speech
Concentrating on the problems of the island
Leaving some to wonder if soldiers and literature mix
Almost in a metaphor beyond despair
Love falters at the thought, then gathers strength
Smiling the Buddha grimaces in bleak disbelief

Lashing plastic explodes impotent
They insult our flesh, our blood
That seeks a pistol-rifle-machine-gun
Ending to what is sought – homeland to die for
Dying, dead, done in and over as memory's
Etched plaque, mercenaries imploring
Victory – false promises of buildings
Over-under, failing visions state
While love-lost, Buddha smiles tolerance
Untamed, unheeding, the noble beast rips
Towards, into the womb of history
Intransigent, the child falls free
Onto earth where Rama and Ravana contend
Now sadness, Hanuman counts the cost in poetry
Death, sad-faced doll tossed from boy to girl
Endless discords stumble over corpses
And the island glows
The chariot dawn merges with sky dreams
Hurt, we hesitate to awaken from our nightmares



Version Four

Attention to the opening speech
Conferencing island problems incontinent
Literature and soldiers mix and merge
Armies are battered metaphors
Love poses armed in strength
Smiling the Buddha forgives in peace

Lashing, plastic impotent
They insult our flesh, our blood
That seek pistol-rifle-machine-gun solution
Ending what was sought – homelands die too
Dying, dead, done in – memory's
Etched plaque imaging king importing mercenar-
ies
Victory, as your buildings, false promises col-
lapse
Over frantic search of visions beyond the state
Love lost Buddha smiles tolerance
Untamed, the lion's body the tiger rips
Towards the womb of history suddenly present
Intransigent, the child falls forth
Onto the earth disputed by Rama and Ravana.
Now sadness, Hanuman counts the cost and
vanquishes Yama
Death is a sad-faced doll for girls and boys to
toss about
Eyes high they see the dawn embrace the sky
And run to escape the sudden falling drops
That wash away the stains of blood
Healing the wounds that we inflict on our island

ALF TAYLOR

The Wool Pickers



WHEN THE WARM MONTHS take effect on the dry land, after the crops have been taken and the grass has been singed by the hot summer sun, that's the reminder of the fully fleeced sheep that perished during the bitterly cold winter. That's when Barney and his nephew Bill go wool picking (with the farmer's permission of course).

"Well," said Barney to his nephew, "It's a good day for the wool pickin', unna."

"Yeah, Unc," said Bill, looking up at the early morning sun, "It's gunna get hot later on."

"What ya reckon, feel like comin' out?" asked Barney.

"Course, you know me Uncle, bugger all else to do, runnin' low on tucker, dole cheque next week. Hell, dunno how we gunna live 'til then," responded Bill.

"Right," said the old fella, "I'll get the ute ready, an' tell Auntie Florrie you an' me goin' out. You tell your yorgah too."

"Course Unc, gotta tell my yorgah, she growlin' cruel already . . ."

"Get off your black hole Bill an' do somethin' solid, not wanna muntj alla time," said Bill mimicking his woman. The old Uncle laughed as he watched his nephew walk away. *When you an' your yorgah fight, even the good Lord ducks for cover*, he thought, laughing to himself, making off to tell his wife Florrie.

Barney and Florrie were in their late sixties, and fifty of those years were together. Through thick and thin, through the days of alcoholic stupor and nights of alcoholic amnesia – and they were still together. Their three children, two boys and a girl, were living in Perth. All had good jobs and most importantly, they had lives of their own.

Barney often cursed himself for not having a clear head when they were growing up. Thankfully

they understood now, stating a lack of opportunities for the Nyungah community in a small wheat-belt town.

"Me an' Bill goin' out to see if we can get some wool," said Barney to his wife Florrie.

"You might gotta go long way out. Nyungahs bin pickin' close here," she said.

"Boyyah any?" he asked and in the same breath added, "You know petrol." Knowing his wife usually had some put away somewhere. Ever since they both gave up the grog, about fifteen years ago, she always had enough till next Pension Day.

"Ready Unc?" asked Bill carrying his waterbag. Seeing Auntie Florrie he added, "How you bin Auntie Florrie?"

"I bin good since I chuck away that stinken gerbah," she replied, shaking her head.

"Yeah, you two look solid now," said Bill. *Since these two gave up the gerbah, they seem so full of life. They looked better than the younger ones still on the gerbah*, he thought.

"Boyyah wa or you gimme, unna?" Bill asked, searching his pockets.

"Take em here," Florrie said, passing a ten dollar note to Barney.

"How many bags you got Unc?" asked Bill.

"'Bout five empty wheat bags," replied Barney.

"Let's bullyaka then," suggested Bill.

"You gottem gun?" asked Florrie.

"Yeah, under seat, you make em big damper. Might get yonga," he said as he and Bill prepared to leave. He started the ute and pulled away from the house, both waving to Florrie.

As they headed north, they could see that the hot summer's sun had already done its damage to the landscape. About five months ago, the land was covered by lush green crops of wheat and a thick carpet of glistening green grass. Seeing the land

now, with its lack of rain, even had the sand restless. The sands seemed to move with the strong breeze, although the gentle winds slowly stirring in the summer, were very few and far between. The soil with its great patience, suffered the onslaught of the menacing sun.

Nothing was said between the uncle and nephew. Barney moved along at a steady pace. He didn't want to go too fast in this heat, he was afraid the radiator might boil.

Gotta get it fixed next Pension Day, he thought. Come next Pension it'll still be the same. When he was home travelling within his own Shire boundary, he never had to worry, but trips like this it always came to his attention. He cursed himself out aloud.

"Hey, wassa matter Unc?" asked Bill and wondering if his old Uncle had lost his marbles.

"Nothing . . . um orright, juss diss bloody radiator. Keep meanin' to get him fixed. I don't worry about him, till I go on trips like diss," he growled.

"How far you reckon we come Unc?" asked Bill.

Keeping his eye on the temperature gauge, "Might be twenty miles, might be more," he replied.

"Let's try the first farm we come to Unc," said Bill, not wanting to be stuck in the middle of nowhere on this hot day. Barney slowed the ute down; it was a left turn towards the farm house. He could see that the sheep were thin as they ran away from the oncoming vehicle. *Rain and feed obviously very scarce out this way too,* thought Barney.

"Reckon he got some dead ones here," said Bill, noticing the condition of the sheep.

"By gee, that cold weather we had in the winter musta downed a few," replied Barney.

"Wonder if any Nyungahs been this way?" asked Bill as he slowed the ute down in front of the house, only to be greeted by barking dogs that seemed to come from nowhere.

"Where in the hell these poxy dawgs come from?" called out Barney as he wound his window up. There were about five sheep dogs running around his ute, barking and pissing all over the tyres. One big bastard was standing on his hind legs, his front paws leaning against Barney's door, barking furiously at him.

"Bugger diss!" said Barney, counting the fangs on the mutt's jaw.

"Shoo! Gone! Get!" shouted Bill also winding his window up very quickly.

Barney looked at his nephew and with a smile on his face said, "Gone, go up to the house an' knock on the front door."

"You gotta be jokin' Uncle! I'd rather fight ten drunken Nyungahs than wrestle with these poxy dawgs."

"Ni, Boss comin' now," said Barney, pointing towards the house.

"Duss him orright," replied Bill as he watched him come towards the ute.

"Go on, piss off you bastards!" shouted the Boss. The dogs slinked off on his command. Winding the window down Barney said, "Thanks Boss, I was a bit frightened for awhile."

"Don't have to worry about them," said the Boss, "More likely to lick you to death."

Duss what you reckon, thought Barney. "That big bastard lookin' me in the eye, would frighten the shit out of the devil himself. He got more teeth than a crocodile, an' more sharper."

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the Boss.

Good, thought Barney, *no Nyungahs been out here.* Getting out of the ute and looking to see if the coast was clear, he asked, "Wondering if you got any dead wool around the place?"

"Dead wool?" asked the Boss confused.

"You know," said Barney, "any sheep died over the winter months."

"Oh, I understand now," replied the Boss. "As a matter of fact I have. That cold snap we had at the end of May and the beginning of June, that really took its toll on the sheep," as he pointed towards the west paddock. "There were quite a few that didn't survive."

"Be orright if we have a look?" asked Barney.

"I suppose it's okay. As long as you shut the gates behind you and try not to frighten the sheep. I hate to see my sheep running around on a day like this," he said.

"Duss true Boss," said Barney. "We be careful orright."

"Also beware of your exhaust pipe when you travel over the stubble," said the Boss pointing to the back of the ute. Barney got out and both he and the Boss checked under the ute.

"Your exhaust looks safe. Okay then . . . and don't forget the gates," said the Boss.

"We won't," said Barney.

"By the way," said the Boss, walking away and laughing, "I guess you blokes wouldn't have won

that four million in last night's Lotto draw!"

What datt yortj talkin' 'bout, thought Barney, "Four million dollars. I wouldn't be here pickin' your dead wool, would I?" Shaking his head and getting into the ute.

"Choo, you solid Unc," said Bill with the dollar signs in his eyes.

"Yeah," said Barney. "As soon as he said, what can I do for you, I knew Nyungahs never been here."

They had to go through three gates before hitting their jackpot. Barney drove carefully through the paddocks, keeping away from the high stubble. Barney himself also climbed out with Bill to shut the gates.

"Here, look Unc!" shouted Bill, pointing. There before their very eyes, dead sheep were everywhere. The winter had been cruel to these sheep, which had yet to be shorn. Barney and Bill quickly and happily ripped the wool from the dead carcasses. These dead sheep had been lying here for at least three months or more. Perished in the winter and dried by the summer. The stench and the blowflies didn't deter the eager hands that shook the fleece from the bones and brushed the blowflies away at the same time. Their work exposed the maggots to the deadly sun, from which they cringed in the onslaught. The crows cawed out joyfully, as the rotting flesh was to be their feast when left behind by the eager hands. For the dead wool, when sold in all its stinking glory would put food on the table, petrol in the tank and smoke back into the lungs of the two men.

"Dass all Unc!" cried Bill, sweating profusely as he hoisted the last of the five fully packed bags into the back of the ute.

"Gawd, diss place stinks," called out Barney, not realizing he had been right in the middle of the stench for the last two hours.

"Let's bullyaka then Unc," said Bill with a satisfied smile on his face.

"Yeah, you have boyyah till your day now," smiled Barney as he edged his way through the gates and past the farmhouse. He wanted to thank the farmer for giving him permission to pick his dead wool.

There was no life around except the dogs and he wanted to get away from them quickly as possible. The drive back was even slower than the drive coming out, for he and Bill did quite a job back there.

"How much we get for this lot?" asked Bill.

"Orrr, dunno. Might be hundred dollars, might be more," said the old fella with a twinge of tiredness in his voice.

"Never mind Unc. Long as my yorgah get some money, she'll be happy," said Bill.

"The first thing um gunna do, is have a shower an' tell Florrie to get some mutton flaps," he said, feeling the hunger pangs starting to attack his stomach. He was also beginning to realize that the stench was quite powerful in the cab of the ute.

"I hope Aunty Florrie made that big damper. I wanna get some off youse," said Bill feeling the same.

"Nearly home soon," said Barney, not worrying about the radiator as he put his foot down on the pedal.

"Hey, Unc, what that watjella said back at his farm. Something 'bout four million dollars. I thought he said four million sheep was dead. I was happy cruel, look," laughed Bill.

"Naw," Barney said, laughing. "Four million Lotto draw last night."

"What if you had four million dollars Unc? What you do?" asked Bill

"Well," laughed Barney, "first thing I do is give my kids a million each."

"What you an' Aunty Florrie gunna do with your million?" asked Bill laughing.

"Um gunna take Auntie Florrie to dat French River place, somewhere. And next we be goin' to see that Nyungah bloke. You know he was locked up in jail for twenty years an' come out to run his own country. Wass his name?" asked Barney.

"Or yeah Unc, I know. Or . . . Nelson Mandela. Yeah Unc, dass him. Anyway Unc, what you wanna meet him for?" wondered Bill.

"Look young Bill, all I wanna do is shake his han' an' tell him he horse of a Nyungah orright. After bein' locked up alla time. Come out an' be boss of his own country. He moorditj orright."

"But he not Nyungah Unc. He South African," Bill explained to his old Uncle.

"He still moorditj anyway," said Barney. They were now driving through town and slowly making their way to the Woolbuyers. As he pulled up outside Willie the Woolbuyer's shed, Bill said to his old Uncle, "Never mind Unc, you sit here an' rest. I'll take em into Willie's." Barney watched his young nephew unload and take the old wool into the woolshed. It wasn't all that long before Bill came

out with a smile on his face. As he passed the cheque to Barney, Bill said, "We got one hundred dollars for that lot, one dollar a kilo he gave. Dass orright, unna."

Barney was pleased. He headed for the bank where they cashed it. He gave forty dollars to Bill, whilst he in turn, kept sixty – fuel for the car. He dropped Bill off, who didn't live all that far and then headed home for a shower.

"You get em newspaper?" asked Florrie as Barney stepped inside.

"What you wanna paper for?" he asked. "Anyway um gonna have a shower. Here boyyah, cause you goin' down town. An' get me some flaps," he said passing the money to her.

After he'd showered and got himself cleaned up, he sat and had a cup of tea. It was peaceful and quiet. He kept wondering why Florrie wanted that paper. Barney couldn't read or write and he often got Florrie to read for him. He knew she was a good reader. Even at the ripe age of seventy. *Moorditj Yorgah*, he thought. Florrie came in carrying the shopping and put it on the table.

"Gawd, still warm outside," she said.

"You get em paper?" he grunted.

"Course," she said, grabbing the newspaper and taking off into the bedroom. Barney watched as she stopped to pick up her reading glasses and then watched her back disappear into the other room. Within minutes, the warm peaceful and quiet humidity of the early evening was shattered by a piercing scream.

"Choo, aye wassa matta?" shouted Barney, jolting back to reality and running into the bedroom. He froze in his tracks as he saw his wife sprawled on her back across the bed, white as a ghost shouting, "Gawd, gawd. Thank you Granny Maud!"

Barney was speechless. Granny Maud had died forty years ago. When he and Florrie first got together as pups. Granny Maud had always called them that, and she was eighty when she died. Their first child was two then.

"I think I win plenty of boyyah!" was Florrie's only response when she came to. She composed herself and told him about the other day. She was lying on the bed, having a cry and thinking of Barney – old as he was – always going out to pick dead wool to put food on the table. Then she looked up and saw the spirit of Granny Maud, clapping her hands and smiling at her, then she disappeared. After that Florrie walked down town and saw on a poster at the newsagent's in big bold letters "FOUR MILLION DOLLARS" to be won that night. She went in and bought a ticket. She had just checked her numbers with the paper, and she had gotten six numbers correct.

Still trembling, he asked, "What Granny Maud got to do with it?"

Florrie told him when she had the last two children, Grannie Maud's spirit was by the bed, smiling and clapping as she was giving birth.

"Look at our beautiful children now. Granny Maud only brought good luck to me," she whispered. She was thinking of Barney and the kids. Especially Barney – to take 'im to see the black man, who was put in jail an' came out to be boss of his own country, before they both passed away.

Barney grabbed and hugged her. With tears in his eyes, he whispered in her ear, "He not Nyungah, he South African!"

Alf Taylor was born in the late 1940s in Perth. He has published short stories and has two books of poetry: Singer Songwriter and Winds, published by Magabala Books.



PAT MAMAJUN TORRES

Miyalur and Wulgudany, the Two Snakes



A LONG LONG TIME AGO in the country of the Yawuru people there lived two snake men. One was called *Miyalur* and the other one was called *Wulgudany*. *Miyalur* was *Wulgudany's* uncle or *Gaga*.

Miyalur the uncle lived a very quiet and peaceful life in the shade of the mangrove or *Gundurung* trees which grew on the edge of the tidal mudflats of *Niliri-Banjin*, or as it is now called, Roebuck Bay. Roebuck Bay is near the town of Broome in the West Kimberleys of Western Australia.

Miyalur's nephew, *Wulgudany* lived further inland in the rocky and sandy areas where life was very hard and sometimes very cruel.

In this area there also lived many enemies and dangers that waited for unsuspecting travellers. Sometimes, men would come in small hunting groups to chase their wounded prey or maybe to steal the women from neighbouring groups for wives, or for revenge killings to right a wrong.

One day *Wulgudany* decided that he wanted to go and visit a special place called *Winagul* which was not too far from where the town of Derby is today. But first he decided that he must make everything ready for this important trip because of the dangers that lay before him.

He had noticed that his spear was now old and blunt and so it would not be good for hunting down the larger animals for his food, and he could not stand and fight against enemies or any aggressive people that might stand in his way as he travelled on his journey.

So *Wulgudany* decided to visit his uncle *Miyalur* at *Niliri-Banjin* and ask him for his spear. *Wulgudany* had remembered that his uncle *Miyalur* had a very sharp and beautifully crafted wooden spear. *Wulgudany* knew that if he asked him for it his uncle would have to give it to him as this was the right way.

Meanwhile, down at *Niliri-Banjin*, *Miyalur* waited for his nephew *Wulgudany* to arrive. The special power he possessed had already told him this important message about *Wulgudany's* trip for the spear.

Miyalur knew that he must give the spear if his nephew asked for it, but he was very fond of his cleverly made spear, his beautiful spear called *Windibin*, and he did not want to give it away to anyone.

Miyalur decided to hide it away in the thick leafy branches of his *Rumban*, the wind-break home that he lived in on the banks of Roebuck Bay. *Miyalur* carefully pushed the beautiful spear deep into the dry leafy branches of the wind-break so that it could not be easily seen, and he sat down near the sandhills near *Niliri-Banjin* and waited for his nephew to come.

Miyalur did not have to wait too long and soon *Wulgudany* could be seen coming down towards the opening of the sandhills and *Miyalur* looked towards him and felt uneasy.

"*Ngaji mingan wuba*", he said.

(How are you feeling son?)

"*Gala ngangan mabu, gagajanu!*" replied *Wulgudany*.

(Oh, I feel good my uncle!)

"*Yangki juyu walangayu windibinjiya?*" he asked.

(Can you give me your spear?) "*Nyamba mabu windibinjiya.*" (That good spear of yours.)

Miyalur was feeling uncomfortable, "I haven't got it any more!" he said. "I must have lost it somewhere."

Windibin was no ordinary spear and he had been listening to the conversation between *Miyalur* and *Wulgudany*. *Windibin* had made up his own mind. He was a very special spear, with his own spirit and his own mind and he was anxious to go on the journey. He started to rise up through the leafy

branches whilst he listened to their conversation.

Wulgudany asked his uncle again for the spear, telling him how much he needed it compared to his uncle. "You live by the sea uncle, there is plenty of food there, *Marnja warli-mayi*. "You do not need a sharp spear to hunt for your food or to kill your enemies. In the desert areas I must be quick to catch my food or I won't get another chance for a long time. What if I come up against some bad enemies? I cannot defend myself against them with this very blunt and old spear! Please uncle, give me your spear, your sharp and beautiful spear so that I may defend myself against my enemies."

"I haven't got it!" said the angry uncle again, but the spear had already made up his own mind and was rising up high into the air pushing itself from underneath the dry leafy branches of the wind-break.

"Here I am," said *Windibin*, the spear.

He had made up his mind that he wanted to travel again, he was so sharp and he had a spirit and mind of his own like many a good spear. "Here I am," said the spear again.

"It's your spear, Uncle," said *Wulgudany*.

"I will take yours and leave you mine. It's not sharp like yours but never mind, it will be good enough for you to take it and hunt with it in the shallow waters of the tidal creeks inside the mangroves for your food."

Miyalur was not very happy but he had to let *Wulgudany* take his beautifully crafted spear on the long and dangerous journey up north to King Sound. *Wulgudany* was very happy and pleased with him-

self and he left his uncle sitting on the banks of the *Niliri-Banjin*, or Roebuck Bay and began his momentous journey singing a song and carrying *Windibin*, the spear on his shoulders.

Today *Miyalur* and *Wulgudany* are both snakes that live in the Broome area of the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. *Miyalur* the uncle is a small brownish-grey snake much smaller than *Wulgudany*, very shy and not so poisonous. He keeps away from people, not wanting to bite them. *Wulgudany* is the One-Eye Snake, a great powerful snake, one of the most quick and deadly snakes of the Kimberley, maybe the world. He has needle-sharp teeth and is very aggressive if confronted head on.

Wulgudany raises his head to look around, just like *Windibin*, the spear from the time of the Dreaming when *Miyalur* and *Wulgudany*, two important Dreaming snakes, had to exchange their spears on the banks of *Niliri-Banjin* on that fateful day.

Today along the shores of Roebuck Bay there are many sharp razor-shells to be found, that carry the same name of *Windibin*, to remind us of this story of the spear.

Pat Mamajun Torres, storyteller and writer, is based in Broome. She has spent several years collecting stories and other information from the Yawuru and Nyul Nyul tribal elders in their own language. The Story of Crow, her second book, features the Nyul Nyul language and Jalygurr-Aussie Animal Rhymes features the Yawuru language. Both are published by the Aboriginal publishing house Magabala. This story will be in a new collection Yawuru Dreamings to be published early next year.



POEMS BY LISA BELLEAR

THE BEGINNING?

(For Toni Lawson)

Three weeks have passed
and tomorrow
Three weeks and one
day will have passed
since we – you and I
held hands
sweet isn't it
falling down across
backwards sideways
totally totally totally
in love

WRITER'S BLOCK

To warm my hands
I boil the kettle,
two teaspoons
of ideologically unsound
coffee go lovingly
into a medium size
porcelain mug
half a desertspoon of
made in Australia honey
dash of carnation milk.

I remove my gloves
grasp the mug
with both hands
and tell myself
blue sky, sunshine
and central heating.

My hands warmed
I begin to
write.

MR DON'T SCRATCH MY ROLEX

Him, that fulla over there,
from the Lands Council
he doesn't care
how us women feel,
about mining,
we milk our children
our tomorrow
on breasts filled with poisons
comes from that sludge
in the river
'member how we could walk into
mmm the clearest sweet
water

and the
barramundi,
all
gone,
true, him that fulla up there!
I seen his
mobile phone,
toyota dreaming,
nothin' but first class
travel,

where to now,
Canberra?
New York City?
I'd love to see them mob
at Geneva,
the ILO,
I'd tell 'em
our story,
women's business,
and show 'em, this is not our
way,
Aboriginal country
is seeping
in misery,
death.

I weep for our dreaming
hold
me
sister
I
need

Your strength,
got to keep believing
that
somewhere
someone
cares.

A SUITCASE FULL OF MOULD

Imagine alienation
Imagine a bonding process of
23 years of lies,
Of 23 years of guilt
Of being estranged
Of trying to let go . . .
Of wanting to but . . .

Imagine being 12
Of being home and sick
And have someone who you trust
Or someone who you think you trust . . .
Imagine not being able to tell,
Of wanting to
But you have no one to tell

Hey where are all the social workers,
When you need them,
Or when you think you do.

Imagine being 13,
Coming home from boarding school
To care for a person
Called mum who has once again collapsed
Too much booze,
Too much mental torture
Too much, too much, too much

Try being 14 and look out
Your lounge room window,
It's dark now but someone who you love,
Or someone who you think you love
Is gardening
Imagine gardening at 9 pm
What is her fascination
With the gladiolies, the daffodils,
Those beautiful blue, pink and purple petunias

Oh that's right there's beer cans
Strategically placed in different
Sections of our beautiful beautifully
Manicured flower beds.

They say flowers grow for beauty
No, not for me
Flowers grow to hide

The inability to cope
Too much, too much, too much

Forget forget forget
As much as I try
I cannot, there must be
Some reason, some reason
Why so many, so many
Kooris, Noongahs, Murries, Nungas,
Go through
The nightmare

Why, why, why
I don't know why
All I know is here I am at 23, 24 at
26, 36 and 46
If I live that long
I'm wondering, searching, questioning
I don't know why
Should it matter, I'm one
Of the lucky ones

A suitcase full of mould
Contains those few precious memories
Of my years, without my people
The photos
The children's books
A painting of a lighthouse I drew at 12

Short sharp memories
A collection of
My life which,
If I could have a child
If I wanted to, I would
Give to them

*Hey tell us about
Your life growing up . . .*

A suitcase full of mould
Is my childhood
A suitcase full of mould
A suitcase full of mould.

*These poems are from the forthcoming collection, Dreaming
in Urban Areas (UQP).*

LEE CATALDI

The End of the Dreaming?

Understandings of history in a Warlpiri narrative of the Coniston massacres

THE 'CONISTON MASSACRES', savage reprisals following the death of a white man near Coniston (Yurrkuru) in the North of Australia in 1928, were pivotal events in the experience of the impact of white settlement on the Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people of the Lander River.

This account of the events at Yurrkuru and their significance, is informed by Bain Attwood's proposition:

some historians have failed to realise that . . . for many Aboriginals . . . 'history' is not fixed in the past and so irreversible, but something which is shifting and amenable to intervention and so can be used as a way of reaffirming or even changing the present. The nature of this very different historiographical tradition needs to be both understood and respected by academic scholars.¹

While it is commonly accepted that the narratives of the *jukurrpa* (normally translated as 'the Dreaming') are 'timeless', it might be better to see them as interventions in time, as active agents, along with song, dance, design and ceremony, in the repetitive but temporal task of renewal. If the religious narratives of the Warlpiri are directed to the maintenance of the productive capacities of the cosmos through the agency of their power, through repetition, of renewing the designs (using the word in both senses) of the ancestral beings, then it may be that a similar intention of affecting the future operates in those narratives of personal experience and past event which are 'true' narratives, *junga yimi* but not *jukurrpa*. The Coniston narrative is one of these.

In Dick Morton's narrative these events occur. A white man employs three Aboriginal men, two cousins (*makuntarlangu*), one Japanangka and one Japaljarri, who both belong to the country they are

in, and one other Aboriginal man, whom Dick calls Keeper Jakamarra.² These men are employed to look after the camels and make charcoal. They are treated well, fed good cooked food, and given tobacco. However, the white man begins to keep the wives of the two cousins back at his camp until very late, finally keeping them until morning. The cousins decide the white man is sleeping with Japanangka's wife; about the other they speculate, suggesting she might be going with Keeper.

Japanangka finds his wife sleeping with the white man and kills him with an axe, and the narrative suggests the two men also spear Japanangka's wife. They both flee. Japanangka eventually hides in a cave not far away, while Japaljarri goes further off, over a nearby hill. Keeper returns from rounding up the camels, finds the dead man, and goes to Coniston station where he tells the manager, Randall, everything, and tells him to get the police. Randall writes this down on paper, and Keeper goes with the message to another white man who goes to town for Constable Murray.

Murray comes to Yurrkuru with a group of people to search for the fugitives. They round up various groups of local people, who had nothing to do with the murder, and shoot many of them. Murray travels to the north, and to the west, shooting people. However, he does not find the two men, who escaped and lived until peaceful old age.

In another study of Aboriginal narratives about the recent past, those of the Ngalakan people, Howard and Frances Morphy concluded that those narratives were "based not on the ideology of the Dreamtime, but on the transforming relationship between Aborigines and white Australians in the Roper valley."³ While this fits in very well with what we know of the way people adapt to economic and social necessity, and accept the restrictions their

position places on what they may aspire to, we need to balance this function of Aboriginal narrative as adaptation with its continuing function of trying to beneficently influence the future.

The new relations of production that the period of the Coniston events introduced into the Lander area are marked in the narrative right at the beginning:

Ngulapalangu warrkiki mardarnu, warrkilpala karrija.

He kept them there at work.

The Warlpiri word for 'work', *warrki*, is a borrowing from English. The relationship between the Warlpiri men and the white man is a new one, in that they are working for him. However, as the narrator perceives it, the appropriate return for work is to be looked after properly. When the white man takes to keeping the women all night, the narrative describes him as married, *married-ilpa ngunaja*. The cousins decide after a decent interval to kill him, *jalangurlu karli pinyi* (we kill him today). Clearly at the level of the narrative, and without any interpretation derived from a wider knowledge of Warlpiri culture, we can see that keeping the wives is experienced by the protagonists and the narrator as intolerable.

We know that one consequence of the reprisals that followed the killing was the departure of all but the fittest of the survivors from the areas where the killings took place, and their displacement from their traditional and sacred land holdings. At the same time more and more of the permanent water was being sequestered by the expanding pastoral enterprises. The Lander people in this period lost their traditional lands, and their domestic arrangements were transformed from hunting and gathering on these lands to spending most of the year in some kind of permanent camp, depending on rations either in return for work on the stations, or from government and mission organizations, supplemented by hunting and gathering where possible. We know from other accounts of this period that the rations were often less than generous.⁴

THE HEART of the developing conflict between black and white was clearly the means of production for both groups, the land. However, Dick Morton's narrative suggests that conflict was ex-

perienced most acutely at a site that, for the Warlpiri men involved, was not separable from rights and obligations in relation to land, namely marriage. The narrator does not perceive the white man as a threat to Warlpiri land tenure as such; however, his taking and keeping the wives is a breach of the Warlpiri law which establishes a man's right to his land and his wife at the same time, at initiation. One could even say that for the Warlpiri men the white man's taking and keeping their wives expressed an intention with respect to the whole, which of course, subsequent experience of white settlement did nothing to contradict. The punishment under Warlpiri law is the inflicting of a severe wound, usually fatal, for both the man and the woman.

This conflict at the site of Warlpiri law between what constituted allowable use of land and legitimate exchange, and what did not, is complicated by a related conflict at the site of European law, between what land the 'natives' were permitted to

Both sides were trying to inscribe the Other into their own system of law.

own (none, since the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* prevailed), and what restraints they were permitted to impose on the invaders, and what the natives actually thought and did. Both sides were trying to inscribe the Other into their own system of law. At the level of the narrative the imposition of European law is experienced as an inexplicably random and excessive punishment meted out by the police to people over a wide area, *Panukaripukalpalujana muku-luwarnu, different mob-puka, karnuru, nothing to do. Luwarninja-yanujana*. (They shot many, many other Aboriginal people, a completely different group of people, who, poor things, had had nothing to do with the murder.)

The triumphant escape of the two murderers, *Walypali-luwarnu* (the old man who killed the white man), their justified escape, is the point of the narrative, and it marks the victory of Warlpiri over European law. This emphasis in the narrative is over-determined, in relation to both past and present, in that the narrative was told at Yurrkuru in 1990 at a time when negotiations for the return to Dick Morton and his extended family of an exci-

sion, an area including the main places mentioned in the narrative, were nearly complete. I would argue that in this narrative there is a reinvestment of Warlpiri law in both the terrain and its recent history. Warlpiri ownership of land is confirmed, at least in part by the handing back of the excision. Warlpiri law is confirmed by the escape and the living to die peacefully in their old age of the two men.

A number of passages in the narrative show this. The killing of the white man is according to Warlpiri due process, and one of the errant wives is speared at the same time. The adultery is re-established within normal power relationships and is not seen as the result of the white man's superior force. More interesting is the account of what Japanangka does after his escape:

I'll show you that, nyanungu yujuku.
Walyangkalpa nyinaja pirnki. Jalangurlu-
karnangka show-mani, jalangurlukarnangka
show-mani. Kutujala, isn't it? There,
Yilpijiminirla, not far. It's half-mile.
Nyanunguwanaju pirnkirlangu karlipa nyanyi.

Ngulajangkaju, yuwayi pirnkingka yukaja,
yukaja tarnngaju. Well, pirli, round one there
witawangu nyina, well nyampujulparla
jirnganja shut up-jarrija, yunparnulpa, shut him
up-manu, marnta. Yunparnulpa shut him up-
manu, shut him up-manu yali pirli.

(I can show you that today. It is not far. It is
there, at Yilpijimini, not far, half a mile, just
over there. We can see the cave as well.

He used to go into the cave. There has always
been a big round stone there. Well, with the
stone, he would shut up the cave, while singing
to it, to make a closed-in space. He used to sing
to close up the cave with the stone.)

JAPANANGKA'S SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE from the police, and his continuing to remain at large is attributed to his finding a suitable hiding place, and entering into a spiritual relationship with that place. The place embraces him. In any process of decolonization, those who have triumphed over the oppressor become the new culture heroes. What is particularly interesting here is that for the Warlpiri narrator the form of this process is that of the hero

congealing into place, becoming a new ancestral being, as Yilpijimini is becoming a sacred site. In this narrative not only is the terrain reinscribed with Warlpiri law, it is reinscribed with the Dreaming, and the places the two men visited in their flight become the sacred locations of that Dreaming. In this way we can see in this narrative the relationship between history and an intention "of reaffirming or even changing the present"⁵ in that the events represented reinscribe Warlpiri *jukurrpa* and law across Yurrkuru and assert their triumph over adversity in the past and their continuation into the future, ensured by their presence in the places into which *jukurrpa* and law have congealed in the course of these events.

This narrative shares with *Jukurrpa* narratives the function of repeating and renewing the sacred designs of place, which at the level of the secular (history) is to celebrate the triumphs of the past (the escape of the two men) in order to inspire the future. The other person present when Dick told this story was his son, and one purpose of telling the story was certainly to impress these matters on the boy. This is what this narrative has in common with respect to temporality with what I will loosely call 'traditional' Warlpiri narrative. However, there are also features of the way Dick Morton deals with time and causality in this narrative which are very different from the procedures of traditional narrative.

In the Yurrkuru story the law and the Dreaming are reinscribed. The events in the story mark a point at which continuity with the past was broken. This return of Warlpiri law to Yurrkuru and its surroundings actually confirms the break in the ontology of the *jukurrpa* that opened with European settlement of the Coniston area. Although in the new circumstances this narrative celebrates the *jukurrpa* as reinscribed, at least partly, into the organization of everyday life, it is the reinscription of a contingent, not an eternal. The confirmation of the continued presence of Warlpiri law is the return, under the Northern Territory Land Rights Act, of some of the land, an event whose trajectory is a series of contingencies, some of which were the events recounted in this narrative.

The narrator, Dick Morton, is acutely aware of this. He begins the story precisely in the field of the contingent, of the European, *Ngulapalangu warrkiki mardarnu* (He kept them there at work).

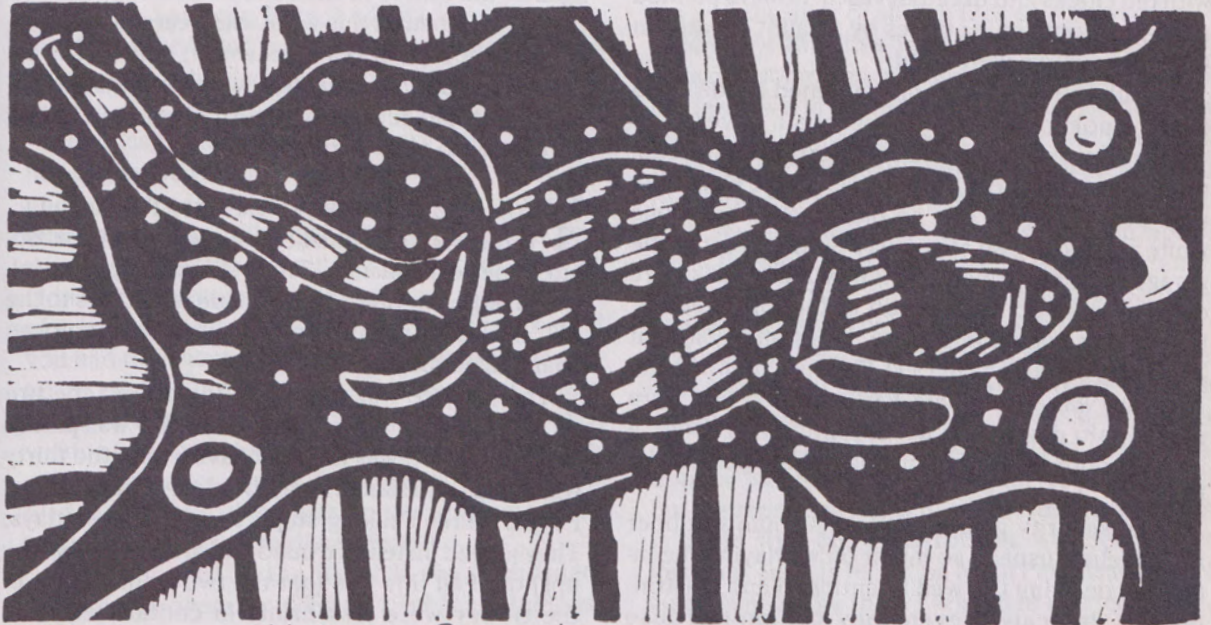
Work is the reason for their being there. This new, contractual relationship between the Warlpiri men and the white man initiates a series of events linked by cause. This is quite unlike the pattern of *jukurra* narratives whose sequencing is based on linked places and whose function is to map.⁶ Although the narrative celebrates a return of the *jukurra*, the ancestral being now inscribed in the cave at Yilpijamini is the Japanangka who got away. Land which has been sequestered and then returned can be sequestered again.

Dick Morton has reinterpreted the traditional narratives so that their temporal, repetitive dimension has been modified or enlarged to incorporate the sequence of changes linked by human action and reaction introduced by European settlement. The *jukurra* has not been abandoned. It returns but its return is now part of that causal chain, hopefully the decisive part.

ENDNOTES

1. Attwood, Bain, *The Making of the Aborigines*, 1989, Allen & Unwin, p. 143.
2. Japanangka, Japaljarri and Jakamarra are three of the eight Warlpiri kin classifications for men, and are called in colloquial English "skin names".
3. Morphy, Howard and Frances, "The "myths" of Ngalakan history: ideology and images of the past in Northern Australia", *Man (new series)*, 1984, vol 19, pp 459-78, p 462.
4. See Vaarzon-Morel, P. (ed) *Warlpiri karnta-karntakurlangu yimi: Warlpiri Women's Voices*, 1995, IAD Press, for an excellent collection of accounts of life in the Lander area by Warlpiri women from that area.
5. Attwood, *ibid*, p143.
6. For an example of a Warlpiri narrative constructed according to place, see Jacko Ross Jakamarra, "Yarmurnturngukurra karna pina kulpa ngurrakurra Yajarlukurra", *Warlpiri Dreamings and Histories*, and my comment, pp 51-2.

Lee Cataldi worked as a linguist and teacher in the Northern Territory.



"Lizard from the ground" Eunice Woods '96

BRUCE PASCOE

Crop



NO-ONE WORE A CARDIGAN like Arthur Ventnall. Even after work, hunched in his vinyl coat, he looked like a badly upholstered chair.

Something about the shoulders, the tones of brown, the out-of-date morning tea tickets you suspected were lost in the lint ravines of his pockets, the ugly wool-nylon blend assuming the sag of unsupported life.

People looked at him and imagined a mantelpiece with old clocks and dreadful vases, flowers painted awkwardly onto china plates by an aunt cheated in love. The people were right.

A snub brown teapot was darkened inside like a chain smoker's teeth. A club chair covered in leatherette, designed for discomfort, had given up, the left side pot-holed, bum size. There were slippers nearby, and a dog so old its eyes had gone white and looked up at you like Golum. A car in the garage so rarely driven that the cylinder walls were dry and arthritic, the speedo in the low twenties, the service book immaculate. Plugs and points at 23,187 km on March 30, 1990. Eighteen months ago.

Arthur was an archivist. Parliamentary files were shut into drawers in an airconditioned room, a long corridor bricked off inside the old parliament house.

Even security guards, with their bum-scrubber moustaches, usually so intent on waylaying the innocent, delaying the well intentioned and frustrating the dedicated, even they couldn't arouse sufficient interest to wonder in what dead task of government Arthur was employed. They imagined a mantelpiece with old clocks and dreadful vases.

THERE WERE FORMS TO FILL, files to accept and record, morning and afternoon tea tickets to procure and exchange for tea. And biscuits, Edinburghs. And once every few months, a new

department head, or deputy commissioner, or assistant director, or eighteenth in line for chief buying clerk to meet.

After getting themselves used to their new status, government cars at their service, lunch with the minister, or minister assisting the minister, they'd play with their Commander phone, ring their friends, make a few tentatively threatening phone calls, instigate a system of white-ant intelligence against the officer in the salary subdivision above them. And when all this work was cleared from their semi-executive desk, blackwood, three-drawer, they would discover that they were responsible for, or at least had access to, the Archives. And they'd determine to meet Arthur.

YOU COULD HEAR THE TEA TROLLEY. The manufacturer won the contract for a trolley with absolutely perfect balance. Their submission was followed more circumspectly by a dozen tickets to the AFL Grand Final. And an air ticket. And a dozen champagne. Brut.

The balance was perfect until you put the urn on it. A twenty-litre urn full of hot water was placed at the back and was always heavier than the thirty white cups and saucers and the plate of Edinburghs. People weren't taking sugar as much these days. They jogged instead. Around and around grass. The upshot of all this was that the two front wheels of the trolley were less firmly in contact with the brown linoleum. And rattled.

You could hear the tea trolley. Arthur was there to meet it with his red morning tea ticket. Ten for five dollars. Some department wag, a rascal, a jokester, a radical with summerweight shoes, once bought an identical roll of tickets from the newsagent and handed them out. He was disciplined later by seven senior bureaucrats and then went before

the Public Service Tribunal to answer charges. Theft of government property. To whit, urn tea. He's now with Ports and Harbours. In Goulburn.

But Arthur didn't know this because he wasn't the sort of person you'd invite to join a lurk, or buy a ticket in the office Cup sweep. Take too long to explain.

So Arthur met the trolley. An equal opportunities sub-committee had insisted that the job be given to a man. Kevin. Sylvia, who had the job for nine years, went to Ports and Harbours. In Goulburn.

Kevin gave Arthur a cup of white tea, three sugars and an Edinburgh, and told him that the new SCO grade 4 was on the way. Kevin had seen the SCO turn into the corridor which led to only one room. The Archives. Arthur nodded and returned to his desk and grimaced at his cup. What a pity.

“SO THESE ARE THE ARCHIVES THEN, and you must be Arthur Ventnall?”

“Yes.”

“I'm Jan Smorgon from the PMO.”

“How do you do?” said Arthur, who hadn't been to a private school and was taught to be polite. To anyone.

Such visits happened once every now and then, but largely he was left alone to concentrate on the proper accession of unwanted records. You wouldn't find an office lag sitting on his desk and swinging a leg. Arthur wouldn't gossip. Couldn't. He didn't know anyone. He was an oasis in the desert of internecine intrigue. And what use was that? If you had to have the soft arteries of your heart cauterized by the hot iron of politics' indolent sword, then why not do so in the frisson of breathlessness, waiting to deliver the casual blow or to feel the steel of bored malice sneak between your shoulder blades. Arthur's office was an oasis never visited by the unemployed soldiers of strife.

Arthur looked at the file that she'd returned. *Macassar-Arnhem Land Trade 1939*. Some lobbyist had approached a backbencher to test the legality of a suspension of trade between Macassans and Arnhemlanders in 1939. They must have killed that one off. An inscrutable reply full of sub-sections and precedential legislative memos.

His tea was cold. The Edinburgh was sweet. Arthur's face was reflected by the windows which had been made opaque with green paint. The re-

flection always made him look unwell. Gradually he began to feel unwell. Where he shaved, the mown lawn of bristle, normally grey, became the pallid green of cabbage forgotten at the back of the fridge, the skin of his face concave between cheek and jaw as if some slow suction was creating a vacuum you never noticed until your skull surfaced to die. The boiled frog principle. Age. Unwanted whiskers sent forth by the spring of forgotten hormones.

The eyes were grey. Light grey. In a different era with a different Prime Minister determining bureaucratic taste they might have matched the flannel of public service suits. But certainly, if you caught him kneeling between rows of cabinets so that he was forced to turn and look up at you, there was the unnerving pale gaze of a deep fathom sea creature.

But hardly anyone came. There was a rosewood box at his door marked IN by a calligraphy so careful and obscure it must have come with the initial furniture in 1951. Files could be shuted into Archives from the corridor. And he could shute them out. For weeks his only communication with others was the slick of sliding files on rosewood.

Most of the files were unreadable without a sneaking somnolence mugging the reader from behind with warm lambswool. Take the Health Department's legislative proceedings for kindergartens. Apart from the unusual sink height which bore directly on the height of the future users and thus their age, and innocence, and laughter. Fun. Splashing in the sink. Apart from that, it was very routine. Skirting boards of a certain width, pegboard ceilings so far from roof battens, window catches of style 651 or 0264 in the case of sash windows except those with internal side-mounted lever-locks.

But the proceedings of the Royal Australian Ornithological Union could be savoured. The legislation for the protection of species was dry enough, but the reports of the naturalists were often idiosyncratic in style and construction. A.B. Sempter, for instance, and his report on Night Parrots in Queensland. Why did he think Parliament needed to know quite so much about how to construct a bush camp? Why forked poles of mulga, for instance? Why only oat bags for the stretcher and not those previously used for millet or straw? All was explained for the parliamentarian determined to follow the steps of Lawson or Lasseter.

Arthur didn't like deserts so he skipped whole passages of Sempter's exhaustive, if eclectic, re-

search, and found himself engrossed in a study by S. Corovin Rourke on sightings of a bird he called Erin's Ruby-Eyed Coucal. Ruby for its eye and Erin for a group of three wing feathers of a vivid emerald green. The Erin would be bound to lose out in any more rigorous classificatory system in favour of Prince Albert or some name more befitting a Royal Society. Certainly not Seppelt Coucal as suggested by the Queensland dogger K.W. (Billy) Scanlan after the sheen on the wine manufacturer's distinctive label for Ruby Port.

Rourke had investigated all six reported sightings and his research was crude but exhaustive and not given to so much fancy as was the case with Scanlan.

Rumours have suggested the bird's presence from very early on in white settlement. To be sure, those strange small Aborigines of northern Queensland had drawings of something very similar to the post 1788 reports. Even Bernard O'Reilly in his book Green Mountains alluded to its existence (but he also mentioned strange wavering lights or Min-Mins).

Yes, thought Arthur, who believes those who live wild, mad and alone in the deepest reaches of the bush? And blacks, well?

The fabled bird is reported, in three of the six sightings, to have contained in its crop, diamonds, small rubies, brilliantines and feldspar gravel. It seems apparent that, in the manner of other fowl, it seeks out hard stones for its digestive purposes. In the case of Erin's Ruby-Eyed Coucal, however, its access to such material is quite limited, as it appears to inhabit only the deepest jungles where the forest floor is thick with humus. It must resort, therefore, to small mountain rivulets which spring spontaneously from fissures in the earth to form narrow, often subterranean, streams. Originating at such depth, these springs wash gemstones and other hard material into pockets in the stream bed.

Here Rourke displays one of his few wanderings into faerie.

At death, the bird's crop is so full of small diamonds and rubies that it resembles the small chamois purses worn round the necks of fleeing kings.

But later he recovers his normal precision, as if suddenly woken from the seduction of the bird's fabulous embrace.

One specimen was acquired by the Dutch anthropologist, Pulz, in 1769. Local hunters speared it and brought it to his camp. They slit its crop and showed

him the collection of bright stones.

This revelation was probably instrumental in bringing the birds to the brink of extinction and the natives' habit of drying the crop and wearing it around the neck as a purse brings to mind the kings' secret chamois, and certainly brought about the total extinction of that particular tribe as described by Beswick in Mountain Notes 1884. (From a copy held at Innisfail Public Library).

The second specimen was found in Queensland in 1940 by an army sergeant while troops were training in the jungle somewhere near Mt Tozer. Sergeant Wursler couldn't be sure of the location as he'd become lost and separated from his company, and shot the bird for food. The contents of the crop were never investigated as the bird was flayed and the skin sent to the Museum of Perth. The soldier was from Albany.

The third specimen was found in 1943 when a mountain near Fak Fak in New Guinea was dynamited, and an Australian geologist with the AIF sent a specimen packed in ice to the University of Sydney. But that specimen was neither received nor recorded, and if it was received it soon became separated from the geologist's letter, in which he claimed that even though the bird seemed to be a juvenile, three diamonds and a small number of brilliantines were found in its stomach. Vecchia, the geologist, claimed that the entire collection of gemstones was sewn back into the crop before dispatch to Sydney. At any rate, no specimens have been acquired since then, and only three reports of sightings, including my own, the last, at Archer River in 1952.

ROURKE MUST HAVE BEEN EIGHTY-NINE when he wrote that report. Arthur looked up Archer River in the map at the back of Rourke's report. A strange reference by Rourke to the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt led Arthur to borrow several volumes of his journals from the parliamentary library. In the third of these exhaustive accounts of exploration there occurred this brief and apparently inconsequential paragraph:

Several of these natives wore long emerald green feathers bound at the hip by cords of human hair. And some weeks later one of my men became lost while in the process of trying to recover an escaped horse. One night he stumbled on a native encampment where large numbers of adult men danced by

firelight. All wore the green feathers at their hip and, reports my man, their eyes shone ruby red as if some material had been used as a lens or colouring agent. None of this can be confirmed as at the time of writing this journal I have had reports from T.L. Mitchell and others that this group is no more.

Erin's ruby-eyed coucal stalked Arthur's dreams, sometimes gliding in the greenish light of the north Queensland jungles and at others dancing in the shape of short black men in the shifting wreaths of firelight. Ruby glowed the eyes, emerald gleamed the feathers. Only the shush of files on rosewood could snatch Arthur from his red and green reverie. And so July passed.

It was only rarely that any of Arthur Ventnall's entombed ruminations ran at confluence to the processes of the parliament he served as Archivist Grade 5. But this was one of those occasions.

JAN SMORGON HAD RETURNED the file on Macassar-Arnhem Land Trade, after preparing a 'ministerial' on the Supreme Court action of Father Father, the defrocked Aboriginal priest. He had kept the title Father added to the name appointed to his family by a group of eccentric Dutch priests, whose principal occupation, apart from giving names to people already named by their ancestors, was to drink Bols Brandy.

Father Father believed, in the stunning logic of his race, that your name was what your people called you. His people liked to call him Father Father. They wanted a black priest and couldn't see why he shouldn't sleep with the correctly totemed and incredibly well proportioned Diriki Nunagai. What sensible man would have forgone such an importunate invitation by one so beautiful, swimming as she was between the rafts of waterlilies in Katherine Gorge?

So they kept him as their priest and her in her place. Father Father got married. Tjurrugin Sailor did the marrying on the instigation of his mother Grace Sailor who worked on the prawn boats out of Groote Eylandt. Nothing's simple.

And nothing is quite as likely to succeed as the unexpected. Father Father had Dalton Vincent Beswick against the wall. How could Beswick have known the nigger could read? Even if he had been a priest. Monkeys can learn Latin. For instance, their name *Macacus Rhesus*. Beswick repeated that joke several times at the golf club before realizing that

while monkeys might know Latin most golfers didn't. Beswick had failed to win pre-selection for the seat of Kooyong in Victoria after it became known that he had used the wrong fork for fish in the Melbourne Club. He was unlucky that Gladstone Cairncross, the kingmaker and numbers man of the Liberal Party, was sitting behind him. With the correct fork. Nothing's simple.

Anyway, Dalton Vincent Beswick went to the Northern Territory where his father owned half the world's uranium, and won the seat of Roper River. All the voters except Grace Sailor's sister, Fairweather, worked for Beswick's father. Even so, he only got in on the back of preferences from the League of Australia Party.

Some Australian workers can't be told anything. Nothing's simple.

Dalton Vincent Beswick, from a long line of Northumberland Beswicks, was known throughout the Territory as 'that cunt Beswick'. He chose not to take the name given to him by the people.

Father Father had him against the wall. After listening to the tales of Grace Sailor and her father, Tuppence, who had worked for Macassans boiling down beché de mer at Yirrkala, Father Father came

The canny refusal to acknowledge the pre-contact lives of Aborigines pervaded the whole jurisprudence of the land.

to the conclusion that the Northern Trade Act which was instigated to stop Indonesians visiting Australia before World War II, was in fact an unlawful restraint of trade. That trade was also the last concrete deed of title to the land of Australia, the only thing which proved their pre-contact ownership of the continent. The Macassans respected that title, as did the French it seems. But not the English. The canny refusal to acknowledge the pre-contact lives of Aborigines pervaded the whole jurisprudence of the land.

Father Father instituted a Supreme Court challenge to the Act with every chance of victory. That's where bureaucracy came into action. Jan Smorgon had been delegated to prepare a brief on a course of action to frustrate the Northern Land Council. Arthur Ventnall didn't realize this, engrossed as he was in the ruby phantoms of Leichhardt's journals.

What Arthur realized was of no consequence to an action researcher like Jan Smorgon.

Father Father, however, was more than a match for Dalton Beswick. As Minister for Trade it was Beswick's duty to frustrate the Aboriginal cause until they forgot about Macassar and went walkabout again. This would have been a bureaucratically simple task of establishing advisory committees, review committees and parliamentary sub-committees. Except that Barry Everett, the head of Asian Experience, had been using the port of Darwin to import cane furniture, batik and spices from Indonesia and the Philippines. Because the Northern Territory was still a territory there was a small but significant tax advantage in shipping goods through Darwin. But if Father Father's restraint of trade action was successful Darwin would become a tax haven like the Cook Islands. Barry Everett was on the side of the niggers. Some things are very simple.

AFTERNOON TEA IS DISTINGUISHED by the absence of Edinburghs. It is good strong tea. Green Signal. No complaint there. Kevin makes a good brew, likes a cup himself. Arthur held the cup below his nose and smelt the infusion, let it wreath his face in fragrance and steam. Such solace.

The glaucous slants of light threatened to send Arthur into a drifting sea-sleep, but his eye focused on the word, green, written on a piece of paper protruding from the Macassar-Arnhem Land Trade file. He opened the file and found the paper belonged to the appendix where twenty or thirty letters, memos and maps were tied together with a piece of bias binding.

Arthur read the paragraph which enclosed the word green.

It is obvious that the Indonesians were accepting these green feathers in exchange for bamboo poles so favoured by the natives in the construction of barramundi and crocodile traps. The sea cucumbers or beché de mer are not prized by the Australian natives despite their abundance in the Gulf of Carpentaria, so the Macassan fishermen bring a deck load of bamboo poles in order to express their goodwill and to acquire the green feathers of the jungle bird brought down the trade routes from the ranges of Cape York.

That bird again. Arthur turned to the next letter in the appendix.

As you are aware, our northern coast is as good as indefensible, and these fishermen are able to approach it without detection. Their seamanship is of the highest order and their knowledge of this coast, gathered over a period of some several centuries, is immaculate. Their relation with the local tribes is based solely on trade, the cultural and religious intermingling being restricted to some appellations of headdress rather than any dependence on philosophy. There remains a certain aloofness between the two peoples but so harmonious and established is the relationship that it must be seen as a territorial threat to our nation. The loyalty of the Aborigines to the national cause is most questionable indeed, most do not perceive themselves as in any way responsible to the government of this country. Our war effort could be strategically disadvantaged by the continued economic allegiance of these two peoples.

Other letters gave the specification of all ships that had been boarded over the past eighteen months by the Australian Navy. Another listed the names of all native people who were known to fraternize with the visitors. Arthur read the names but they meant nothing to him. Amongst them, however, were the names of Grace Sailor, Tuppence Sailor and Ruby Father, the mother of Father Father.

The last letter, by a consular official from the Department of Foreign Affairs, encapsulated the random strands of Arthur Ventnall's knowledge of the whole subject.

The trade is legitimate and of critical importance to the economics of the Macassans in their trade with China and to the Aborigines in their need for bamboo to maximize their returns from fishing as a result of competition from Europeans for certain varieties of fish and animal life – most importantly dugong, crocodile and barramundi. Not only is the trade important to these people, it maintains a cultural link which goes back further than either group can say.

Sir Justice Petrie's definition of terra nullius is founded not on the declaration of territoriality by the inhabitants, but on the assumption of its existence by the nearest neighbours. This term must be void while the Macassans continue to trade with the Aborigines of Australia.

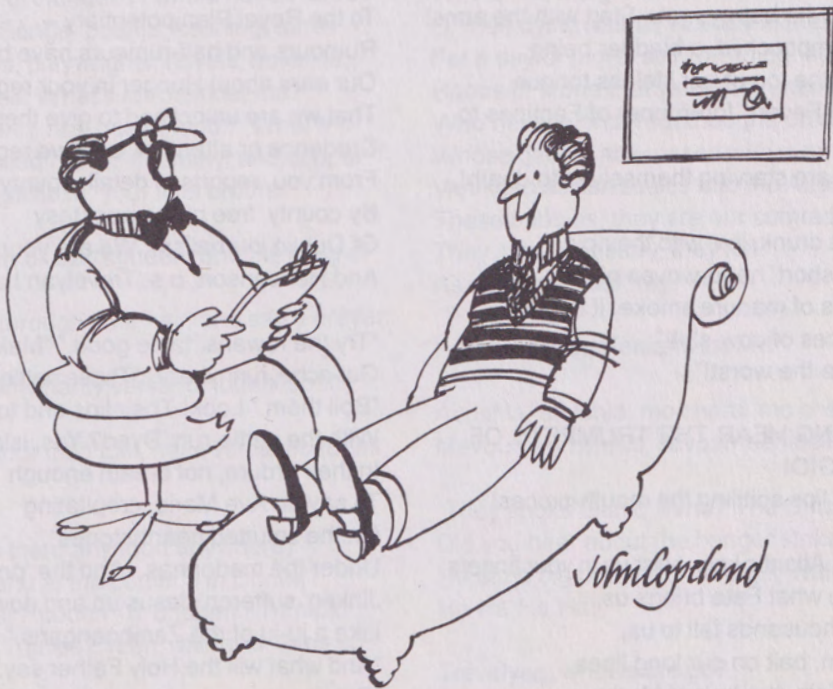
One of the symbols of this trade is the exchange of feathers. The feathers from the Macassans have

the subtlest difference from the Australian feathers, in that they include a minute window of vibrant blue near the tip. These feathers seem to serve as a reinforcement of both similarity and difference. We are friends but not brothers. We live in different lands.

Arthur took a photocopy of each of the letters and sent them, with a copy of Jan Smorgon's 'ministerial', to Father Father, care of the Northern Land Council. Arthur Ventnall, archivist, found it easiest

to communicate with new friends anonymously by mail. They may not be brothers, but two sea-green people, even if they were black and white, could be friends.

Bruce Pascoe was born in Richmond Victoria in 1947. He now edits and publishes Australian Short Stories with his wife, Lyn. He lives at Cape Otway where he is a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative. His books include *Night Animals* (Penguin, 1986) and *Fox* (Magabala, 1988).



"I'm a normal, happy, well-adjusted person, and I just come here to talk to my shoes."

DENIS KEVANS
An Gorta Mor



O'Connell, why don't you come and see our eyes
Melting like jelly on a dish of tears?
"Is this some kind of Hunger Strike?" One swallow
And then no more. "Why don't we get the chalice
From the bog?" "What would the Holy Father say?"
The 'caoin' is in the toothless wind
Rasping the biscuit-stone; strops of kelp
Are blood-glued strands of the passionate 'cat';

Breasts are melting, paps of twisted string,
'Praties' of mist. No long speeches now, O'Connell,
About the lover who betrays you. Start with the arms!
Easy to lift an empty child, a bladder being,
A host glued to the top of her lifeless tongue.
"Viva la Famine Fever!" forerunner of Famines to
come,
Look! The Irish are starving themselves to death!

"They're always drunk, live with their pigs,
Smoke dribbly, short, hand-woven pipes,
And blow clouds of manure smoke. It is dung
In there! Furnaces of cow-shit!"
"The women are the worst!"

HELP IS COMING HEAR THE TRUMPETS OF
CARAVAGGIO!
See the angels' lips spitting the mouth-pieces!

We are the kelp, Atlantic kelp, twist us in your fingers,
A love knot, see what Fate brings us,
Hundreds and thousands fall to us,
We mother them, bait on our long lines.
Bait for what? Kelp, the hair of Medusa,
Winding and waving, wending and weaving,
Twisting a love-knot, binding it tight,
Untie the knots, tell us why? O why? O why?

Listen to the long strop, the long slithery
Paw of the 'cat', who loves you passionately.

"Triangles or tree, Sir?"
"Hang him in chains!" "But, Sir,
He's only twelve years old!"
"He's a twelve year old Irish Prince,
And I have his lands now.
And don't question my commands, Sergeant!"

'Why' is not a good word. Take a letter
To the Royal Plenipotentiary –
Rumours and half-rumours have been reaching
Our ears about Hunger in your region. We feel
That we are uninclined to give these reports
Credence or attention, until we receive
From you, reports in detail, county
By county, free of the apostasy
Of Dublin journalism. We are your Queen
And Her consort, p.s. Trevelyan has corn.

"Try the rowans, taste good." "Make you pawky
Gut-ache, runnybelly." "These nettle-leaves are sweet."
"Boil them." Look! Their lips and tongues are dyed
With the nettle-run. Dyed? Yes, islanded
In their ordure, not breath enough
To say an Ave Maria, crepitating
On the smutted hearthstones,
Under the madonnas. "And the 'praist'
Jinken' sufferen' Jasus up and down,
Like a ju-ju of the Zamboangans," she said.
"And what will the Holy Father say?"
"Did anyone collect these eyes?" "Some sketches."
"Film?" "No." "So none of these eyes can be seen?"
"Of course they can. Look at any Irish child."
"What was its name?" "Orta Gor, the Great Hunger."

"Is there a greater?" "Its equal, and its better,
Esquimaux, Benghalis, Ukrainians, Armenians,
And many others." "Why didn't they feed them?"

"Gertie Moore, Gertie Moore.
They called the Hunger, Gertie Moore,
Gertie Moore, the dirty whore,
With raggy pants, and tatty drawers.
Down Fenians Down!
Gertie Moore's a dirty whore
With raggy pants, and scabby sores.
Down Fenians Down! Ha Ha Ha Ha!"

The Irish are starving themselves to death,
Again! Whose beeves are these,
Booing in the oakribs of ships? Play louder
Subaltern, so we cannot smell the stench.
That is not a stench, Madame. That is death's
Own perfume. Morticians we. Christ, we have
To draw the line somewhere. Solomon
Drew the line and saved the baby.
Solomon Grundy, born on Monday, christened
On Tuesday, died of Hunger. A whole nation turned
Into a graveyard. Songs, poems, keening, tunes,
Symphonies, plays, playwrights, novels, novellas,
Charnelled! Parnell! What's for brekkie, ma?
"Stewed carragheen, real health food." "What's
For tea, ma?" "Boiled rocks." "Yummy, and supper?"
"We will eat strange flesh, your little brother."

And did the Queen of Carragheen, and the King of
Timbuctoo,
Run their fingers through your hair, and say a prayer
for you?
It's no use chanten' shanty verse, or jotten' snotty
rhyme,
These sweet 'n' sour Irish folk, have vanished for all
time.

Is it a Famine? Is there any food anywhere?
What's on the menu at the cottier's in Dorset?
Bread 'n' scrapes! Pudden' 'n' drippen'! Turnips!
Turnips? Turnips! Turnips? Yeah, whatever 'turns up'!

"Gertie Moore, Gertie Moore,
They called the Hunger, Gertie Moore,
Gertie Moore, the dirty whore,
With raggy pants, and tatty drawers,
Down Fenians Down! Ha Ha Ha!"

"Sentimentality! Brushing off the Famine dead,
Dolls of disaster, fluffing their balding coats,
Setting them in plastic straw, with Briege's knot,
To ooze a tear, dry a mouth, and fox the gold
For your vicious fanaticism, you murderers!
Now you want to murder these turnip-headed dolls
All over again. Let them die but once, let the spur
Of time rowel them to dust but once.
Peace to them all. Pax Sanctorum Hibernicorum."

They died but once, did they? No, Hunger, Famine,
Starvation is not one death. They lay under the Dead,
They lie by the Dead, they live with the Dead,
Who, dying untimely, did not die. Their smarting
Spirits walk, mist ghosts, in cerements of moss,
Looking for their lives. We are them. Look at us.
Look at our chins, our walks, our cheekbones.
Above all, look at the sun in our eyes.

Me? Us? Using these comrades, these little children,
These tiny babbies, who never enjoyed
A full mouth of sweet mother's milk,
Who smelt the green stench
Of their dying Mums, who lay in their stick arms,
For a day or more, still breathing, against stones,
Hoops of stone that were their mammy's ribs,
Who never wondered, thought, dreamed, imagined,
Whose genes, abacussed with symphonies,
Vanished as fish scales into the Atlantic;
These babbies, they are our comrades,
They are our History, they fell
As soldiers in the fray.

Fanatic! Down Fenians Down!

Acushla, acushla, mo chara, mo chara,
Mavourneen meilis, savourneen deilis.

"They spoke Garlic. Who? The Oirush!
Did you hear about the hunger striker?
He did a big promo for 'Weight Watchers'.
Ha Ha Ha Ha!"

Trevelyan, what is the go?
"We have corn. Pitt has moved me in the House.
I will buy corn for these famished grounddwellers.
I do not wish to visit there, and see them,
Nor take into my nostrils the stench
Of their descanting flesh, nor hear

The hollow, howling women, as they tear
Bonebag children from gnawn teats,
And brain them on the hearth stones,
Carrying the dripping skull, on their hips,
To long devices of famine graves. No, not I,
Not Trevelyan." "But, Sir, you say you are
Going to charge them for the corn?"

"Yes, beggary is poverty is beggary is idleness!
Rebels, are they? Let 'em feed on loaves
Of secrecy, and crusts of sedition!
They have money! Hidden money in jars, pots,
Tins, cracks, inside their bodies, too, filthy beasts!
All peasants keep a pinch of coin
For a rainy day." "Sir, I have been to Ireland, sir,
And I must say this, anyone who would charge them
Sir has lost the word of God."
"You are out of order, ensign. Correspondence."

Were they my mother? Were they you, Dark Rosaleen?
Were they you, roses white, and roses red
Of Thomas Moore? Were they you, Grace O'Malley,
Queen of the Galway pirates? Diver
On Spanish gold? Man spitter on your rapier?
Were they you, Luke of the long cadences,
Red mop larval in stage lighting? Were they you
My Auntie? My grandmother? Were they you,
Mairead?

What is grief? What does this word mean?
Sorrow, how many millions can you put in it?
Sadness, does it sop the pools of children's blood?
Dismay, can that sweep up their clothes
For a cleansing fire? What are your words?
Surely your poets see these words as gaol bars.
What words do you have? Where do you live?

I have seen things for which there are no words,
For which there will never ever be words.

"I'll reduce the price of the corn a farthing."

Acushla, acushla, mo chara, mo chara,
Mavourneen meilis, savourneen deilis.

Ah, the long keening cry, against the greening sky,
The long wail of mothers for their young,
The golden sheaves and the barrels of beeves
That are leaving Ireland – while we eat the dung!

"Total exaggeration." "Mr Trevelyan, sir, they don't
Know how to cook the Indian corn."

"Well, what more do you want to know?"

They are starving, and their children
Beg them with turnipy arms, their eyes
Like glaubs of sick snot, and they can't
Cook the corn. I bet they can play
Their damned infernal music!"

"Sir, Mr Trevelyan, sir, can we send cooks?"

"Send twenty cooks to teach them to cook."

"When?" "Tomorrow. Thank you, ensign.

Correspondence."

Acushla, acushla, mo chara, mo chara,
Mavourneen meilis, savourneen deilis.

Denis Kevans was first published in Overland 17 (1960) and has been a poet and activist for over thirty years. He was Secretary of the Sydney Branch of the Realist Writers and won the Mary Gilmore Award in 1962 for 'For Rebecca' a poem about Auschwitz. He has published three books: The Great Prawn War and Other Poems (1983); Ah, White Man, Have You any Sacred Sites? (1985) and The Bastard Who Squashed the Grapes in Me Bag (1991). He lives in the Blue Mountains.



MARGARET DUNKLE

David Martin: Children's Champion



DAVID MARTIN: poet, journalist, freedom fighter, tilter at windmills; for twenty-six years (nine of them in Australia) an established novelist when, in 1971, his first children's book appeared, firmly demonstrating his lifelong commitment to doing things his way, often against – or ahead of – the tide.

In 1971 writing for children was still considered beneath the dignity of a 'real' author; very few adult writers published children's books as well. David Martin took his children's novels as seriously as those written for an adult audience, explaining that they simply have a slightly different focus: "For me it is impossible to consider my young novels apart from my other work. The inspiration is the same and the criteria are fundamentally the same . . . I do not see myself as a children's writer. Simply as a writer who, in different books, expresses different parts of himself." (quoted in Walter McVitty's *Innocence and Experience*, p. 191).

Between 1971 and 1988 David Martin's publications for young readers included fourteen novels, two picture books, a volume of poetry and one of autobiography. His novels range through farce, fantasy, historical and contemporary fiction, but there are a number of constants: strong threads that link them all, each one carrying the author's unmistakable hallmark; a passionate championship of the underdog, an abhorrence of racism and prejudice in all its forms, a caring concern for humanity and all living things. David Martin rapidly became a phenomenon in the world of children's literature, a restless, exotic spirit who did not fit into the comfortable and well-worn patterns, one who confounded and often alienated adult critics – while the children cheered.

David Martin was born in Budapest in 1915, the son of a cultured middle-class Jewish family. He grew up in Germany, in the troubled days of the

Depression that culminated in Hitler's rise to power. Always an avid reader, the boy steeped himself in stories of romance and adventure, myths and heroic legends. His reading included Dumas, Dickens, Jack London, Mark Twain; Huckleberry Finn and Don Quixote remained powerful and lasting friends. Given this wide-ranging vicarious experience, plus the cruel anti-Semitism he and his twin brother personally endured as schoolboys, it is no wonder Martin's books embody his own strongly liberal, humanist, anti-authoritarian beliefs. That they are also indebted to his early training as a journalist gives them a flavour unique among his contemporary writers, and is both a strength and a weakness in his storytelling.

Hughie was David Martin's first children's novel. It was written, improbably, in a small Northern Italian town while the Martins were travelling in Europe. Its theme, equally improbable, was the plight of Aboriginal Australians. As recently as 1971 only three novels for young people that dealt with contemporary Aboriginal issues had appeared. None was as political or confrontational as Martin's story, sparked by the first of the now famous 'Freedom Rides' of 1965 which exposed the segregationist policies existing in rural towns in New South Wales. *Hughie* is set in a town called Merringee (Moree?) whose pride and glory is the new Olympic swimming pool, out of bounds to all the Aboriginal kids, who must swim in the dangerously snag-infested local creek. When a young child drowns, Hughie and his white mate Clancy try unsuccessfully to get the colour bar removed from the pool, offering Martin an opportunity for some fine satire on white racism and pungent comment on small-town mores. Eventually Hughie ends up in Sydney where his cousin (modelled on the young Charles Perkins) is a university student, and the student protest ride is born. Nothing changes in Merringee, but Hughie

and Clancy remain friends – costing Clancy his chance at international swimming competition – and the book itself stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy in the world of children's literature.

WITH A JOURNALIST'S SIXTH SENSE for timely issues, Martin seems often to have been a step or two ahead of his contemporaries in the subjects he chose to write about. Aboriginal injustice when this was an unheard-of topic; women's rights before they were an issue; migrant experiences when other writers wrote as though we were all still calling Britain 'home'. And, repeatedly, tension between class and culture, between haves and have-nots, in both historical and contemporary settings.

David Martin's second young novel, *Frank and Francesca*, set in inner-suburban Melbourne, has a gallery of migrant characters, chiefly Italian, plus a theme of alienation that links Sicilian Francesca and her colourful family with parentless Aussie Frank in a budding romance laced with slapstick comedy and boy's-own melodrama. His next novel, *The Chinese Boy*, was the first to have an historical setting, as meticulously researched and realized as his contemporary stories. It is also the first children's novel to explore the treatment of the Chinese goldseekers, an uncomfortable facet of Australian history as glossed over by other writers as the discriminatory treatment of contemporary Aboriginal Australians. Young Ho has accompanied his uncle to the New South Wales goldfields in the 1860s, arriving in Kiandra at the time of the persecutions that culminated with the massacre at Lambing Flat, which he barely survives.

Martin's next historical novel is set in 1903, in Martin's own well-known territory, Beechworth (here called Mayhill). *The Cabby's Daughter* is plucky young Bess, trying to take her dead mother's place while her father drowns his self-pity in alcohol. Bess's efforts to feed and clothe the family are doomed to failure, but with this recognition comes personal strength and authority. Bess will be less a victim than her mother was.

The Man in the Red Turban (1978) and *The Girl Who Didn't Know Kelly* (1985) complete Martin's historical stories. The latter is also set in 'Mayhill', but the date is 1880, when the Kelly Gang roamed the bush. Kit is the daughter of a local bank manager, brought up in comfortable affluence, but her loyalty is to dark, handsome Dan Trevena and his

battling Cornish farming family, burdened with the accumulated debt of a succession of bad years. When Dan needs her help to deliver a mysterious parcel she has no compunction about misleading her parents; she has already had a strange, romantic encounter with a horseman who could only be Ned Kelly himself. *The Man in the Red Turban* is Ganda Singh, one of the many Indian hawkers whose horse carts traversed the roads of rural Victoria in the 1930s. Ganda befriends young Griff, on the road in search of his father who is wanted by the law for his efforts as a union organizer. There are many richly comic moments in between discussions about human rights.

A novel about a lonely boy and the pigeon he trains to be a racer, two fantasies (one with a conservationist, the other with a women's lib theme), a trio of stories about a ten-year-old Italian boy who migrates with his family to a tobacco-growing property on the Murray, and the moving story of *Clowning Sim*, a lonely outsider who runs away from a foster home and is befriended by an ageing clown, complete Martin's novels for young readers. None has had as wide a readership as they deserved because critics and reviewers have often disliked the very enthusiasm that makes his stories popular with those children who have had the opportunity to read them. Certainly his dialogue can be erratic, his plots filled with melodrama, laced with richly Dickensian characters who appear briefly and are (maddeningly) never seen again. But my own suspicion is that Martin, as always, was ahead of his time; a quixotic idealist who liked to stir, who expected his audience to think.

There remains *I Rhyme My Time*, a beautifully presented collection of Martin's poetry, which he explains are "Poems to grow with – poems that may grow with you". And finally there is *Fox on my Door*, a warm, wry, fascinating ramble through the memories of a memorable lifetime, written primarily for his two grandchildren, Toby and Sophy, but packed with the wisdom and humour he gave so generously to all children through his stories. Both are out of print, along with all but the latest of the novels. Perhaps it is time for some publisher to have another look, for I have a suspicion that time may have caught up with David Martin, and a new generation of readers is waiting in the wings.

Margaret Dunkle is a Melbourne writer and scholar of children's literature.

Slippage

IT WAS GOOD TO RECEIVE some positive responses to the Take Three campaign announced in *Overland* 142. A numbers of readers, editors, publishers and writers' groups' representatives commented on the campaign, thinking it worthwhile. Two responses are printed in 'Dialogue' below. The issue was even argued about on Austlit, an e-mail discussion group. Meanwhile the writers targeted have almost unanimously ignored it. As we suggested, Australian literary culture is in serious trouble if the majority of writers feel they genuinely can't afford to subscribe to little magazines, often the only avenue of publication for emerging writers.

THE RESPONSE to *Overland* 143 (the Next Wave issue) has been mixed. The score so far is new subscriptions 3, cancellations 2. Much of the criticism and praise has focused on design. Some felt it was too much of a departure from the *Overland* they could recognize whereas others felt it was a brave and successful move which might well suggest some design ideas for the future. One commentator found the lack of the "temper democratic, bias Australian" motto (an oversight which we regret) to be so offensive that he has become an ex-subscriber. We hope to woo him back with the return to a more recognizable format. On the other hand, a leading radio broadcaster – and long-time subscriber – felt that *Overland* has never looked better. However, too few of the comments (positive and negative) actually discussed the quality of the writing itself. While we the editors believe that the writing was of a standard that might indicate Australian literary culture has a bright future, we'd like to know what our readership felt about it. Was it too distanced from the *Overland* tradition or was it an exciting glimpse of the next wave of Australian writing?

MANY *OVERLAND* READERS will be looking on at the various literary squabbles and conflicts doing the rounds, and wondering when a position they find relevant and worthy of discussion will get a mainstream airing. We've had the Demidenko-Darville lunacy and the critical silence about her adoption of a working class persona (and the way this might relate to a widespread intellectual arrogance in discussions of Australian working class life) and her gleeful, indiscriminate hatred of communists (whether Stalinist apparatchik or grassroots activist); we've had the Craven-During stoush (perhaps feather dust-off is more accurate) in which, by implication, a whole host of Australia's postwar writers have been dismissed as unimportant. White, one of Australia's many great writers, was never as significant or progenerative as either combatant suggests. A good, solid six months reading the works of David Martin, Criena Rohan, Gavin Casey, Dymphna Cusack, Frank Hardy, Katharine Prichard and a number of others would give During, Craven and any other upholder of the Patrick White Australia Policy some food for thought.

In the latest skirmish, Christopher Koch (recent winner of the Miles Franklin Award for the best novelistic celebration of anticommunism) is fighting the good fight against left wing (or was it right wing?), soggy, liberal, relativist, pluralist, totalitarian, academic deconstructionism. Had Koch (or Williamson, or Henderson, or any other stellar moderate) even a vague look at the work going on in the humanities he would have noticed that deconstructionism (an ideological force that ran out of puff well before he won his *first* Miles Franklin Award) holds very little sway. It lost its power around the time that J. Hillis Miller, a leading American exponent of the vice, admitted that the aims of deconstruction were very close to those of the New Criticism *to which he remained faithful*. It seemed that the evil commie business of finding the absence

at the heart of the great works was only a short step away from that thoroughly conservative New Critical business of grovelling (in a craven manner) before their paradoxes, mysteries and transhistorical truths. Many of us on the literary left rejected deconstruction a long time ago, largely because of its ahistorical and conservative effects on reading practices.

Sure, something called poststructuralism, especially the works of Michel Foucault, has had a great degree of influence in the academy, but it's worthwhile trying to understand it before dismissing it as nonsense. The opening pages of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* contain some of the most riveting and powerful images one might ever read and the argument stemming from them is at least worth thinking about. It is certainly not couched in polysyllabic jargon. Nor is Foucault averse to making the odd assertion of historical fact. His great crime is having had the temerity to suggest that our analysis of power should be local and specific and not global and general. And while there is a lot to disagree with in that assertion – especially in a world where the difference between the local and the global is rapidly collapsing – critics like Koch and David Williamson (whose evil poststructuralist character in *Dead White Males* was a silly combination of poorly digested and contradictory influences) don't seem to understand either the aims, influence or diversity of poststructuralism enough to know where to begin their rejection of it.

AS WE GO TO PRESS we learn that Mr Murdoch (that great literary philanthropist) is starting a monthly literary supplement in the *Australian*. He's getting by with more than a little help from some of his friends in funding circles. *Overland* will, of course, soldier on with the support of its own little army of supporters, volunteers and part-time workers.

OVERLAND has appointed three new corresponding editors: Sean Scalmer (Sydney); Margaret Henderson and Ben Goldsmith (Brisbane). We would like to follow this up with more new links in Perth, Adelaide, Tasmania and the Top End. Sean is a labour historian with a deep sense of the history of postwar Australian literature and the role of *Overland* in that history. Margaret has a strong interest in contemporary Australian writing and

popular culture. She is also a distinguished athlete, having represented Australia in cycling. Ben is a film historian and critic who also has a long-standing interest in Australian radical literature.

Ian Syson

THE MEDAL POETS SERIES founded by Dennis Davison and published by the Monash University English Department has been taken over by Lyn Wilson following Dennis Davison's death. The series is now being published by Denlyne Publications and the first two titles under the new imprint, both by *Overland* poetry contributors, are *Capsules* by Phil Ilton and *Enter Your House With Care* by Connie Barber. The books are available from Denlyne Publications, PO Box 604, Kuranda Q 4872 @ \$10 per title.

NOW THAT THE NEW federal Minister for Communications and the Arts has received his briefings and made his first ministerial decisions, he has time to sit back and consider what he might do with his portfolio over the next three years. They could receive no better assistance for this than from reading Robyn Williams' autobiography, *And Now for Something Completely Different* (Penguin, \$22.95). Williams shows how his footloose, improvident and generally improvisatory style of life developed the qualities necessary for his later career in the ABC, where he not only survived but produced, on a shoe-string budget, his amazing Science Show, a program which alone would justify the whole ABC radio network, and which does more to inform its audience of the realities and challenges of the world we inhabit than do a hundred television documentaries or a thousand talk-show hosts. As importantly for the new ministers, Williams shows both the importance of a national broadcaster and the catastrophic effects on it of political philistinism, economic parsimony and mean-minded bureaucracy. Gareth Evans is one minister to emerge from Williams' book with credit for applying both intelligence and political creativity to the broadcaster's problems and possibilities. The book makes clear the principles that would enable the new ministers to make a similar contribution to national welfare.

JOSEPH FURPHY is in the news this year. Last May, at the Old School House at Kangaroo Ground, near Melbourne, where Furphy had his early schooling, there was a festival that included the

unveiling of a plaque and an inscribed casting of the famous Furphy water-cart, made in his brother's foundry at Shepparton, where Joseph worked while writing *Such Is Life*. The Festival also included a talk by John Barnes, Furphy's biographer, the launch of a previously unpublished story by Furphy, *A Boy of the Old Brigade*, and the announcement of the results of the Furphy Poetry Award for 1996. In connection with the Festival, a special offer was made of the new Furphy publication, together with the local history and the *Reminiscences of Andrew Ross*, the schoolteacher of Furphy's time, for \$38.50, including postage. Furphy's story can be bought on its own for \$4, including post (Australia only) from Andrew Ross Museum Publications, PO Box 164, Kangaroo Ground Vic 3097.

Meanwhile in Western Australia, Tom Collins House, built by Joseph Furphy in 1906, and for many years the home of the Fellowship of Australian Writers of WA, has at last, thanks to the efforts of members of the FAW and the Nedlands City Council, found a refuge from the builders who want to bulldoze a highway through its present site. The house presently standing on the new site is in bushland across the park from his first home, and was built for his son Samuel. It was here that Joseph died in 1912. Unfortunately, the purchase money of the block is not sufficient to meet the costs of relocation and renovation, so the FAWWA has established a Tom Collins House Foundation to seek private and public sponsorship.

John McLaren

Dialogue

Audrey Blake writes:

I AM VERY IMPRESSED with *Overland 142* and I'm responding to your expression of interest in your readers' opinions. The whole issue was one which I found stimulating and satisfying, but I'll concentrate on a few things.

It was good to read your editorial, and the matters raised in the *Miscellany*: first your points made about the *Alliance* book, rejecting the idea of a new organization to challenge the Labor Party. It would be better if the painful struggles of the Old Left to free itself from the Tweedledee/ Tweedledum theory, and all its residues, did not have to be repeated, even in different forms and a new context.

The question is, of course, not closed and the

very welcome electoral success of the *Olive Tree Alliance* in Italy (with the anti-Stalinist forces of the PDS at its heart) will bring the strategy to the attention of Left forces elsewhere. But Italian and Australian history are very different in all respects.

In connection with the deepest matters underlying all these questions we have been interested in the English *New Left Review's* extended discussion on Eric Hobsbaum's *Age of Extremes* (issue no. 214). One matter of relevance is his opinion on the defeat of the fascism of our time, Hitler's Germany. He writes: "this period of Communist-capitalist alliance against fascism . . . forms the hinge of twentieth century history and its decisive moment". Speaking of the communist project and its parties as the product of the Age of Catastrophe, as a defensible option in a time of darkness when few good options were available, Hobsbaum writes: "A rebirth of this pattern of socialism is neither possible, desirable nor – even assuming conditions were to favour it – necessary." I hasten to add that all this is from the *NLR's* discussion. We ourselves have only just bought the book (on the basis of the discussion).

The questions implied in this issue of *Overland* were also brought to our minds in the starkest possible way by an article in the February 29 copy of the *New York Review of Books*. It is called *The New Ruthless Economy* and is by Simon Head. Reading it, it is not to be wondered at that the old 'What Is To be Done?' question is again coming up sharply.

Secondly, I very much support your *Take Three* campaign. The old working class is gone and the new workforce is central to all the concerns at issue. A crucial matter for us all is to get to know it as well as we did the old working class: its diversity of formation with the tertiary trained as its skilled component, but with its middle sector, its lower echelons (low paid and often horribly exploited) and its unemployed mass. Its general and political culture should be a question of our intense interest.

Taking the long view, the old Labor Party is also gone, and its complicated struggle to represent the new workforce and the nation (of which it forms the largest and increasingly significant part) in the changed world of today and tomorrow, is the question I can't see being by-passed. Certainly not yet. The future surely depends on how successful this effort is – that made by the ALP itself, and the answer given to the question, by the new workforce, of whether or not to commit its forces to assisting

the Labor Party's evolution into an adequate political expression of its and the nation's interest.

We find the three Australian journals we take – *Overland*, *Arena* and *Eureka Street* absolutely necessary for thinking about these matters. Our thanks to all who make *Overland* possible.

My best wishes, Jack's too.

Yours, Audrey Blake.

Our sub. enclosed.

Bruce Pascoe writes about the Take Three Campaign:

CONGRATULATIONS on your encouragement of all readers and writers to take three literary journals.

We've been saying the same for years. I think there are more than 10,000 writers in the country. We get above 5000 stories each year. What about poets? [Ed: *Overland* received 2250 poems in 1994 and 2000 poems in 1995.]

Anyway it's a good idea and worth pursuing. More important in our view, however, is the fact that the large book chains refuse to stock the books of independent publishers and their distributors: solve that one and we don't have to chase writers.

Phillip Deery writes:

PAUL ORMONDE'S RECENT PIECE on the 1954 ALP Split, 'How Evatt Scuppered Santamaria's Religious Vision' (*Overland* 142), goes much further than his 1972 study *The Movement*. He suggests that quite apart from undercover activities masterminded by the Movement for defeating communists in the trade unions, Santamaria had another agenda which was the 'inner secret': a rather more sinister plan to impose his version of Catholic social philosophy via Movement control of the Labor Party. Had not Evatt blown the whistle on the Movement in his declamatory speech of 5 October 1954, Santamaria would have come perilously close to realizing his secret dream. Evatt did this, Ormonde concludes, because he finally saw the Movement for what it really was – "a foreign body within the Labor Party".

A far less conspiratorial interpretation is possible if one accepts in good faith the testimony of Catholic activists operating inside the Movement itself during the 1950s. Several of these activists were interviewed, separately, during 1992; that their views may be jaundiced and their analyses flawed is quite possible. But, even allowing for an element of retrospective justification, there is no

reason to doubt that all the interviewees believed in the truth of what they saw then and said now. Historical judgement should not blank out beliefs because they now appear incorrect.

Several common positions emerged from these interviews. All classed themselves as authentically 'Labor', and believed in the ALP, before 1955, was the only organization whose political perspectives were congruent with their own. All equated 'Labor' with Christian ideals in which anti-communism was a central but not sole element. And all saw the Labor Party under the leadership of H.V. Evatt relinquishing these ideals between 1951 and 1955 as it diverged from its 'true' ideological path.

So according to Father Paul Duffy, Santamaria's secretary in 1949–50, the ALP before 1955 was the "only" political organization for Catholics: it was "the natural party" through which Catholics could obtain social justice and the Movement was an institution "within Labor" that helped produce this form of social justice. For John Maynes, president of the Clerical Workers' ALP Industrial Group from 1946, it was the Labor Party, not he, which lost its 'Labor' characteristics. To Bruno De Lea, 'Labor' meant a political movement that enunciated Christian ideals; thus, he had "always been a Labor man". Two other Movement members, F.X. Duffy and A.J. Bailey, similarly thought of themselves as belonging to an authentic Labor tradition and that it was Dr. Evatt, not they, whose values and behaviour became increasingly alien to that tradition. None was asked for their views on whether the Movement had been "a foreign body within the Labor Party"; if they had, the response most likely would have been dismissive contempt or genuine astonishment.

ΠO writes:

PETER SALMON TELLS US that thru the Internet, CD-Rom, and spoken word, the adequacy of the Printed Text is being challenged as tho the Internet, CD-Rom and Spoken word were working together towards a common cause. I can't see why these three 'media' are being bracketed together. The Internet uses a Printed Text. Ditto: CD-Roms and Spoken Word 'performances' or 'happenings' often (but not always) have a HIDDEN Printed Text behind 'em.

The way i read Peter Salmon's article, it's a product of either 'wishful thinking' i.e. The Death Of The Poem/Novel, or else a nod towards a 'Future' i.e. Progress The New Technology. And he tries to con-

vince us of this by positing that 'Spoken Word' IS different from the 'older' forms of literary genres like 'performance poetry'. I say CRAP!

He sez: One of the constants of a book is the absence of the AUTHOR . . . since WHEN???? The Author of a poem has ALWAYS been present . . . even when the AUTHOR doesn't show up in the poem. IN FACT one of the problems is you CAN'T get rid of the AUTHOR, no matter how hard you try! And when you do go looking for them you don't know where to look, or what they look like when you find 'em!! In 'Spoken Word' Peter Salmon sez, this is not the case: Does he mean 'Spoken Word' on CD-Rom??? or On the Internet??? or in Performance??? The way the article is written he means the Author in Performance is NOT missing. It's One to One or more accurately One-to-Many, or Some-to-Many, or Many-to-Many. And this is where i think the article is WRONG. Whilst arguing for 'the' FUTURE he uses Micro-juices, Silicon-chips, satellite technology, and marries these to HANDS-ON poetry readings as tho there was a direct relationship . . . well there ISN'T! In fact, computer technology will/does and will continue to degrade DIRECT contact OF THE SENSE WITH EACH OTHER, and no CD-Rom is going to be very helpful.

Peter Salmon sez the TEXT of a literary production (traditionally) is 'complete' after it's written and distributed: IT ISN'T!!!! Its Life as a text has just begun! It's the beginning! The Bible is still being listened to for what it's saying Now! Ditto the Roman + Greek classics.

The TEXT is NOT constant. The TEXT turns into 'THE WORK', and becomes bigger than the TEXT itself as it takes on its new LIFE . . . I don't know about him, but i've often MUSED half way thru a BOOK only to find that the poet or novelist has talked-it back to me . . . and i do MISREAD, RE-READ, LAUGH, and CRY, at what is being said of what was said, or what i thought was said, and when it was boring i said THAT'S SHIT! not Oh, That's boring.

Yes, the book IS a commodity, ditto the CD-ROM, Ditto LOGING-ON on the Internet, and ditto the 'Spoken Word' Reading at which you pay a Door-fee, or Patronage-fee etc etc . . .

And if you don't believe me start talking with EMI (or such) and you watch the COPYRIGHT HOLDER come out of the woodwork!

A writer is a cacophony of VOICES! Even if the writer doesn't think they are, a poet is a whole

community...even in the smallest poems, cos 'words' are the sum-total of all that has gone into them & Poetry is a PUBLIC act even in private. It's IMPOSSIBLE to have a MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP to a LANGUAGE (as is being suggested here). Peter Salmon sez "as long as the relationship between the writer and the words and between the words and the audience, remains monogamous the performance is not SPOKEN WORD...it can only be EXHIBITIONISM" – CRAP! – or VOYEURISM – Double Crap! – Exhibitionism + Voyeurism here belong to the Cult of Personality, which alot of traditional literature doesn't bother with. But the video clip, CD-Roms etc do. The distancing of the Artist at a reading doesn't occur we're told. Crap! The Cult of Personality distances and re-distances itself from the audience all the time so it can CASH IN on a new cool.

If you want to be 'DIFFERENT' well and good, find your ancestors, learn and study underneath them and hopefully we'll develop a REAL literature without having to re-invent Oral or Performance or Spoken Word literatures over + over & over again from America!

First read at RMIT Storey Hall Next Wave Festival 2nd June 1996

Book Chronicle

Elizabeth Riddell (ed.): *With Fond Regards: Private Lives through Letters* (NLA, \$24.95).

FROM JOSEPH BANKS' views of the strange but beguiling beauties and customs of Tahiti, to Vance and Nettie Palmer on their lives and on Spain, to Dame Enid Lyons and one of her public admirers, to Andrew Taylor on the food and customs of Scotch College, Melbourne, this collection of letters from the files of the National Library offers tantalizing glimpses into other peoples' lives and minds – the pleasure of the voyeur, as the editor suggests in her introduction. Handsomely produced, with biographical notes and illustrations, the book is a browser's delight. Like Andrew Taylor's room in Florence, it would go splendidly with a fire and a glass of wine.

John McLaren

MARK IT IN YOUR DIARY! The Melbourne Launch of *Overland 144* will be held on Tuesday 24 September at 8:00 pm in the Lounge, 243 Swanston Street. Keep an eye out for the Sydney event.

BRUCE ANDERSON
Vietnam and the Media



There was one guy on the Melbourne Age we did not have to fund.

CIA agent attached to US Consulate-General, quoted by Brian Toohey in *Nation Review*

I may have to go to gaol for what I need to do to silence Anderson.

Graham Perkin overheard at lunch at the Melbourne Club

WHILE ONE AMERICAN VETERAN declared that, "The whole Vietnam thing was a lie", many little fibs make up the big whopper. One was that 'the war was lost in the media'.

It is now generally accepted that this was a politicians' war, engaged in, on the whole, for domestic purposes – the Tonkin Gulf fraud was engineered to show Johnson was not 'soft on communism' – and maybe this is a clue to most foreign policy decisions: they could never have got away with it without media support.

There was little preliminary debate and the question quickly changed from whether we should send troops to, "How can we be disloyal to the boys already, or about to be, sacrificed?"

In no time, anyone against the war was labelled 'disloyal', 'Communist', 'paid demonstrator', 'peacenik', 'dupe', 'unwashed crackpot', and so on. I learnt this very early on when the Lord Mayor of Melbourne denounced a demonstration in this manner. I phoned the news desk of every radio, television and newspaper. Each person I spoke to disagreed with him but this was not reflected in their news presentations. Quite the reverse, in fact. They soon succeeded in creating circumstances where if you wanted to register any protest there seemed to be no other way than by throwing rocks through Consulate windows, dropping balloons filled with red and green paint on the presidential Lincoln or marbles under the hooves of the police horses. The media would then claim that only 'crazies' opposed the war and many waverers were intimidated.

This stereotype has proved to be remarkably enduring. Even the ABC, in Geraldine Doogue's 'Hindsight' program gave the impression that Jean McLean, Jim Cairns and a few students such as Albert Langer, Harry van Moorst and Michael Hamel-Green – not discounting their importance –

were the only ones to oppose the war. Many young people might find this puzzling. The same misinformation is burnt into the American psyche by fantasy movies (how else?) like 'Forrest Gump'. People such as Harry Seidler, Richard McGarvie, Prudence Myer and the hundreds of doctors, solicitors, engineers, artists, academics and so on (including Sister Marjorie Isles, who walked down Bourke Street in the Moratorium march, carrying a placard announcing, "I am a pack-raping bikie" – Prime Minister Billy Snedden's epithet for the demonstrators) are never asked about their role at critical stages of the most divisive issue of our time. Mr Gorton now says he had his doubts but at the time said, "Only a few nuts oppose the war". Many of my friends said they opposed the war but "could not afford to say so openly".

Another reason why we never heard the other side arose from the situation in the briefing sessions – the Five O'clock Follies – in the Hotel Caravelle in Saigon. Journalists could file reports critical of some minor aspects of how the war was being run but could never question any fundamental assumptions without finding their press privileges revoked. They lost their seats on the helicopters or were shipped home on the first available flight. Then their reports were edited or emasculated. To question the rationale for the war was not a good career move.

The mainstream media supported the war from day one. If you wanted to find the other point of view you had to look elsewhere, in academic journals like *China Quarterly*, published in London, which carried some first-hand, penetrating despatches from Phillipe Devillers (he had been drafted into the French forces in Vietnam) published in *Le Monde*, which alerted me to how the Americans were turning a war which was essentially for national independence into a civil war, or the columns

have seen it. It would be printed on a left hand page in the second half, "somewhere after the financial pages". Moreover every name had to be accompanied by a signed slip agreeing to their name being published in *The Age*. It was not sufficient that all the names were already accompanied by signed slips agreeing to their names being published.

"He means to bury it", I said. "You could say that", said McFarlane.

We decided to by-pass *The Age* and booked space in the Melbourne *Herald*. This created a problem. The *Herald* in those days was more expensive and we were not holding sufficient funds. We decided to gamble so that by carrying a further appeal we would have enough when the account came in. The *Herald* was very co-operative in a difficult job and until the last minute I was in the composing room adding names as they came in. We had a great response and were able to repeat it in *The Australian* with a page and a half of signatures and in other interstate papers. Thus we can claim not only to have organized the largest protest statement of its kind in the history of the Australian press – in relation to population it was larger than the 6400 signatures in *The New York Times* – but to have invented a new form of self-paying system.

A few days after the statement appeared in the *Herald*, Mr McFarlane phoned to ask if he could come and see me. He said "Mr Anderson, I have been instructed to tell you that since our last meeting there has been a major, and I mean major, upheaval on the board of *The Age*, and we will now accept your copy on the same conditions as the *Herald*. I can promise an early right hand page and there will be no special limitations".

"Thank you, Mr McFarlane," I said, "but it's a bit late."

A FEW WEEKS LATER, Keith Sinclair resigned and was replaced by Graham Perkin. Sir Robert Menzies was reported in the *Herald*, "I am extremely sorry to hear of Mr Sinclair's resignation . . . I have a great respect for the way he edited *The Age* and maintained its great tradition of independence, information and judgement. I subscribe myself as a great personal admirer."

Almost instantly, Sinclair was invited by Mr Holt, Prime Minister at the time, to join his personal staff chiefly, as I understand, in the capacity of speech-writer. His major achievement in this new position is generally recognized to be Mr Holt's famous

speech when he dismissed the Arab-Israeli tension as a "lot of huffing and puffing". Full scale war broke out in a matter of hours.

We had no further problems with *The Age* and contributed greatly to their revenue by paying for the publication of excerpts from John Kenneth Galbraith's *How to get out of Vietnam* and from Dr Spock on Vietnam, but there was no improvement under Perkin to the custom of 'selecting' letters.

At that time only one letter of many I had addressed to The Editor of *The Age* had been published. Significantly it was a comment on some remarks Lance Barnard was alleged to have made in Saigon which appeared to weaken Labor's attitude to the war. When Mr Barnard returned I wrote to him and he confirmed he had been misreported but this was not mentioned in *The Age*.

Meanwhile *The Age* continued to print letters demeaning the protest movement and to print reports from their Washington correspondent, Roy Macartney, like the following (p.11 November 9, 1968): "But for the Vietnam war critics, Johnson would probably have sought re-nomination and with timely promises on the restoration of law and order been re-elected. But the critics destroyed Johnson politically, lured Bobby Kennedy out four years before his time and destroyed him physically and helped elect Richard Nixon, the closest copy of Lyndon Johnson you could find in this year's field."

I wrote saying that some people might regard these remarks as the product of a disordered mind, while others might just regard them as filth but the fact that they can be printed in *The Age* and no objection will be recorded, makes *The Age's* claim to be 'one of the world's great newspapers' a very sick joke indeed.

Needless to say, my letter was not published but Perkin replied as follows:

In the last few months you have written me two letters relating to Vietnam, our coverage of the Vietnam war and our policy towards it. Quite insultingly, copies were also sent to my Managing Director.

You can do either of two things; you can keep writing insulting letters and be ignored, or you can talk to me, reasonably about any point of disagreement.

I might also remind you that we publish letters from rational and intelligent critics of our

policy or staff. So far, your letters don't meet these criteria.

No point I had raised was answered. The 'Barnard' episode made nonsense of his last paragraph. There was no mention of how he got his job or even a suggestion of a bottle of Scotch.

Not long after I had a letter from Galbraith advising that some substantial business leaders had come out against the war and that Stewart Alsop, writing in *Newsweek*, arguing for a quick wind-up of the war, said it was now opposed by most major newspapers, along with most of the senior statesmen, virtually the entire education community, most of the major political parties, a substantial section of the minor parties and a growing section of the business community, including the head of IBM, Allied Chemical and the Bank of America.

The contrast with Australia was startling. *The Age* had played a major part in stifling the truth about the war, maligning those opposed to it, betraying the best traditions of the press and our confidence in democratic institutions.

The war was not lost in the media. It failed for many reasons despite media support. It could never have got under way nor lasted so long without it.

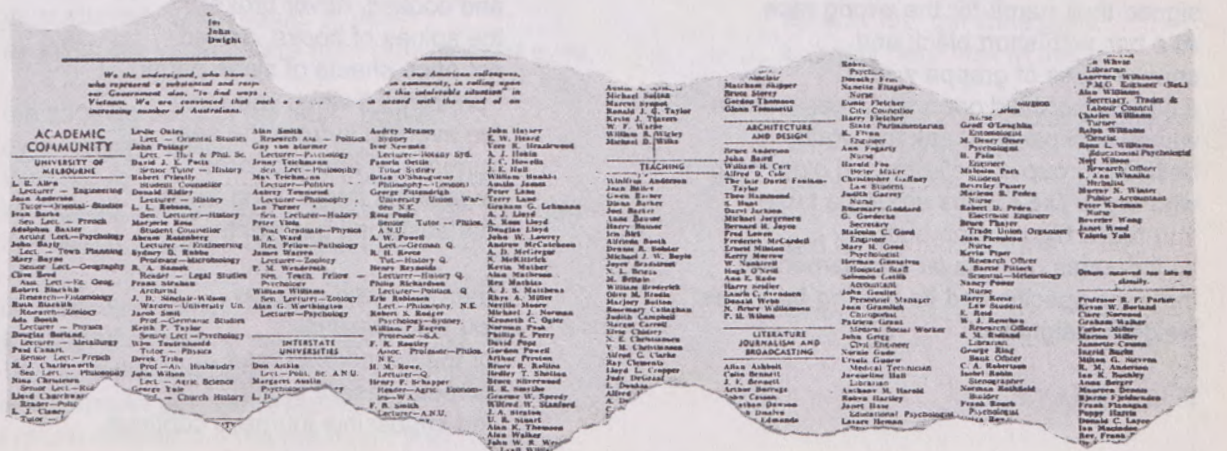
Many spontaneous groups sprang up to oppose it - women's groups, like 'Save Our Sons' which was one of the first, Trevor Ashton's 'Youth Against Conscription', church groups, student groups, returned soldiers, ordinary citizens on all sides of the political spectrum. This is the story of one of them.

It is thirty years since 'The Statement on Viet-

nam' was published. At about the same time, Robert McNamara, US Secretary of Defense, had also concluded the war should be wound up and put similar proposals for ending it to President Johnson who told him to keep quiet and appointed him head of the World Bank. The war ground on for nearly nine more years. The hardliners in Hanoi tightened their grip and it would be more than twenty years before it was relaxed. Some forty thousand more Americans, some hundreds of Australians and at least a million Vietnamese were to die before the longest American war in history was to end in scuttle and run.

Bruce Anderson was on the 'Committee for the Statement on Vietnam' along with Max Charlesworth, Arthur Preston and Max Teichmann, Warren Jordan, Richard Dunstan and Phillip Adams. Frank Cavell contributed graphics and Laurie Tilley the printing. They organized publications and public meetings against the war and brought out speakers such as Jonathan Mirsky and Gene Stoltzfus from Vietnam and America. The committee was established in 1965 and disbanded in 1971 after its final appeal (graced by a donated cartoon from Bruce Petty) for funds for medical aid in association with 'Aid to Children of Vietnam'. Bruce went to Saigon, visited hospitals and orphanages and met Australian nurses and American doctors to ascertain what was needed. The supplies were sent to Saigon on the 'Jeparit', courtesy of Andrew Peacock, then Minister of the Army, and distributed by Bob Lossey of 'Project Concern'.

A copy of the whole statement is available from Bruce Anderson, 8 Fairview Street Hawthorn, 3122.



STILLNESS

If you take off what you know
from people waiting – like the island in the
roadway,
two orange buses braking for the queue,
the sick-full-empty feeling of depression
from what cannot now be changed,
the stillness flies up like swans from black water,
necks peaked to red, suffusing sunset . . .
as you're waiting there . . . If you peel this
art away, like a transfer, from daylight,
take the cold wind of October from her hair
awash on your arm as you cross the palazzo,
knowing you cannot kiss her stillness
you cannot handle permanence.
If you move light through the layers
of language, which must feel at times
like two films merging or like two
halves of something indefinable
as moonlight / on black water
you are layering difference. You are
inside him but feel him inside you like
flesh inside the grapeskin. All your life
you've known this sit up like a patient
from an operating table,
it's the heavy stone pavilion by the ocean
or the cattle standing motionless in water
all the clatter of the world gone.
Traffic growls past a cafe as you see
between the housing blocks the weather
like thunderwalking, the question always
catching up like a pale runner who
signed their name for the wrong race.
At a bar, with short black and
chunky glass of grappa with
a newspaper held open and three women
whose backpacks speak the world
beside a group of well-dressed older men
who argue like toughs around a table . . .
You feel it bigger than history
as it dreams down layer and sameness
the quite specific and its baffling balances:
weighty, weightless.

PHILIP SALOM

SOMEWHERE THAT SUMMER

This is somewhere above the sea,
a crack in the cliffs
that gather the booming winds.
Shaken by the big tides,
our borrowed window is painted
with salt flowers of weather.
All summer we've worked
at rest.

You found a thin girl
and entertained
too many thoughts we name
forbidden. They danced
as thoughts do, on the beach
between a wish and the horizon
till she went, hiking over the hill
to the flat station where the mail train
twice a week rattles through
the old cutting.

My paint had a bloom of despair
until January. Ideas curdled
in lead tubes until the heat
made them rupture.
I even painted your longing
as if it were an explosion
of orange light though I know
you only spoke of blue,
in her eyes and spread before us.

The rest of summer you walked
and cooked, never broke
the spines of books, defiled
not once sheets of clean paper.
I preferred it when you sang
the evening in from the sea,
nurtured oil and scattered
vegetables into a lilting feast
that absorbed our nights.

Then you said one day
you were waiting
for the sound of brakes,
as metal resists metal
and impossible journeys continue.

JILL JONES

WANDERMENT

Forty eight hours from the northern chill,
twenty four from the aircraft door
opening onto the oven that was the city.
Then the burning journey into a further
bewilderment of heat and size.

Distance, primly defined in atlas pinks and blues,
seems fatally beautiful to me here.
Trees that are not trees but eucalypt grammar;
that writhe in their olive stillness;
that tease my sense of place; that trick me in time,

force crude questions from my parchment lips.
I am victim to imagined spectres
blurring out of and melting into
the darkness of a history
I could never own and cannot sell

to soothe the torment of my final hours.
In all this endlessness, the few signs
of humankind themselves deceive:
the straitened fence stitches nature
into paradoxical radii;

crazed structures, blood-rusted, salt-scarred,
pulse in the haze like tin toads, yet disappear
from the corner of my gritty eye.
A blur of kangaroo sends foreignness
unravelling like a clock spring

through my apprehensive gut.
The panic metre hammers in my chest.
Verdant sentiments, cool English thoughts
joust clumsily with images of death
by thirst: my vacant stare from crow-pecked eyes;

the sagging putty of my flesh, pocked
by a teeming calligraphy of flies.
Who would mourn this abandoned flap-bag;
who could embrace bone that once held my form
in a matrix of desire bleached to dust?

But suddenly, a riot of relief,
a clanging, rib-compressing ache of joy.
There, in the fifth quadrant of the compass
is the smoke of hope-restoring life.
I return despair like the repentant thief.

roger g mcdonald

THE VIRTUOSO

Unattended, unconsolated
the dog is hauling up the dawn
in concert with a town of roosters.

He's singing like a sad trombonist
locked out from his hotel,
his howl each time a long glissando

starting from the yelps,
two little ones to find the key
and then the long descent . . .

Or maybe he's a Spanish *perro*
falling in a lost flamenco
through all the gypsy scales.

Most certainly it's *cante jondo* –
but also now a delta blues
coming in across the cotton,

a field hand crying in falsetto
for how his "gal done gone . . ."
but right here now at five a.m.

such art is surplus to requirements.
Why won't they just
swing back the door

and let the mongrel in?

GEOFF PAGE

Migrant, Defiant, Working-Class

CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS

π O: *24 Hours* (Collective Effort Press, \$45).

I FIRST CAME ACROSS π O'S POEMS in my late teens. They were a revelation. I discovered an Australian writing that communicated the fractured language of migration. This was not the grammatically-correct colonial English of Australian capital-literate, nor was it a retreat into the fetishized Greek of the 'classics'. Instead, π O's work gave voice to the mutations of migration, mutations that allowed language to sing. It would be a mistake to argue that π O's work is simply a recording, a straightforward translation of wog-speak into Australian English. This diminishes his achievements and ignores his romantic poet's sensibility. The mutations of imperial European language are not unique or specific to Australia. π O writes a poetry that speaks to the shifts, the changes, the fissures of the globe. That is the danger of migration that cannot be contained by Multiculturalism; it respects no borders.

24 Hours is 740 pages long, self-published and a testimonial work. To disengage the poet from the activist from the aesthete strikes me as another mistake. The book is a long and loving elegy to a microcosm of the world, the streets and characters of the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. It is in this suburb – migrant, defiant, working-class – that π O lives and works. The characters who come in and out of the poems are small-time migrant gamblers, kitchen hands and waitresses, kids on junk and women working the beats. The beauty of the poetry (often a harsh and caustic beauty) is that its dialect, argot and slang ricochet against each other. An abusive curse from an anglo boy is reinterpreted by a Greek man in a coffee shop and then both are

wrapped around a tight, tender description of a young junkie coming in to score a coffee and a cigarette, some time out from the world. This is a whirlwind of a book. I guess that's what the world sounds like.

I began reading *24 Hours* straight through. This did not work for me. It may work for others but I think it is more enjoyable if you approach it as a work that allows movement in and across it. There is not a classic narrative but there is a purpose that became clearer the further I went into the book. π O is giving voice to generations that have been ignored by Aussie literature, particularly the pain and struggles of the women and men whose language could not be listened to in the academy or in the world of publishing. It is predominantly a migrant voice but not *only* that. It is also a proletarian voice.

There is a romance to *24 Hours*, a romance with Fitzroy and its working-class communities. These are communities which are rapidly changing as inner-city urban centres become increasingly gentrified. What is striking about *24 Hours* is that it makes the reader aware that these changes are not monolithic. The world π O describes has not vanished; the migrants, junkies and whores have not gone away, but they now live parallel to the boutique owners and professionals who have moved into Fitzroy. *24 Hours* does not engage with this change; π O's domain is still largely the world of the gambling dens and Greek taverns of the inner city. But this disengagement is not a falsehood and it is why the separation between π O the poet and π O the anarchist is impossible to make. π O has chosen to work and live with the Fitzroy of the *kafenio*, not the Fitzroy of the up-market cafe. His work is crucial because there are too few writers prepared to make this commitment. It is a romance I respect because it sings that the proletariat, the migrant has not gone away. The continuing mutations of Australian language will be interpreted through other voices, from other poets, who will speak a poetry of Vietnamese-English or write a

prose that is Arabic and English. And it is possible that future Australian working-class writing will reflect the outer suburbs more than it does the inner-city. π O's poetry does not, cannot, speak all of the new world. It is a direction not a blueprint.

24 Hours was knocked back by six publishers, not assisted by any Australia Council grant and therefore had to rely on a community of people for its existence. I think that the publishers have made a big mistake. Just as I was blown away by his poems in the anarchist magazine *925* when I was a teen, people will come across *24 Hours* and be excited and knocked out by the rhythmic discord of π O's songs. Yeah, I'm using the word songs deliberately. This is how the best poetry strikes me – a child of pop culture and the migrant clan – as a music that can be a joy or a lament. *24 Hours* will have a life that is long and influential because it is singing a new and contemporary song, unbound by the Queen's English, not constrained by the marketing department fashion.

The publishers were wrong but maybe the freedom of self-publishing has allowed π O an opportunity to create a book that is laid-out and constructed with a level of control that is not possible in the mainstream of Australian publishing. From the typeface which recalls the typewriter keys, to the up-yours effrontery of the cover and acknowledgments, *24 Hours* is π O's book completely. His work, his travels, his friendships and communities. The poetry is a lament; that has to be, because a boy from Bonegilla knows the violence of migration. The book itself is a joy.

Christos Tsiolkas is the author of Loaded and, with Sasha Soldatow, Jump Cuts.

Small is Beautiful: A Beautifully Modest Story

GWYNETH DOW

Helen Ferber: *Stagecoach to Birdsville* (Kangaroo Press, \$19.95).

IT'S A HARD WORLD for the thousands of us who have worked on family histories: publishers are, to say the least, unresponsive. But *Stagecoach*

to *Birdsville* is distinguished boutique family history, and Kangaroo Press had the wit to recognize this. Anyone experienced in 'pedigree' research will realize how many mountains of raw information would have been collected for this book only to be pushed to one side so that the narrative could be told with elegant simplicity and yet historical sincerity. What a sad, enlightening tale it is, and where should one start in warmly commending it to readers?

On reflection three main historical themes seem to emerge. First, the country's natural brutality, focusing on the peculiar fascination of Birdsville, perhaps the colony's most isolated, untameable and yet magnetic town. Why, even in 1991, would five thousand people fly or drive there for a rort lasting at least a week and centred on the annual race meeting? Why, to be more specific, would a young, highly educated couple (Ferber's grandparents) decide to take their two toddlers and baby to settle there in 1893? Edward Hoche, a qualified migrant medico from an intellectual, fastidious Hamburg family, had married Nellie Ferry in 1888. Meanwhile, Nellie had had two miscarriages, one of them leaving her seriously ill.

The title of this book indicates the centrality of the nightmarish trip from Maree to Birdsville. It was there, in temperatures constantly over 40 degrees, in a small corrugated iron cottage, that Nellie suffered typhoid fever. Although Edward insisted on nursing her personally and she seemed at one stage to have recovered, she died, but not before lamenting her inability to breast feed their baby. A friend, she wrote sadly to her sister, had kindly taken the infant and weaned him – "Yesterday afternoon he came on to the bed for the first time and he has quite forgotten his titty. I could have cried when he turned from me and put out his arms for Mrs W."

This book is, in part, an exploration of the fate of late nineteenth century migrants in Australia, and it captures something of pre-Federation colonialism – very timely as we think about the move towards republicanism. In the nineties, just over a century ago, there were extraordinary disparities in the Australian colonies. Birdsville, just north of the South Australian boundary, was the customs centre for trade between Queensland and the south. Custom duty at the border for each head of cattle going south cost £1, shortly to be £2, the same amount as the Hoche family of five paid each week to the local hotel for their food.

Nellie's father, John Ferry, having emigrated from London in 1853, had by 1880 fourteen children to support on a teacher's pitiful salary. For educational historians the book has a special interest. We are used to the idea of payment by results for teachers, but Ferber briefly examines the working of the system with stark detail about the chance fluctuations it caused in John Ferry's small income. The family was often on the move, as John sought to improve his income; but this entailed moving house, and in some areas only two rooms were provided and the family, in one case, was forced to rent a second house, whereas at another the pupils' only access to their schoolroom was through one of the Ferry's two 'private' rooms.

EDWARD HOCHÉ, who also came from a teaching family, exemplifies a quite different chapter in educational history. We understand, though Edward's misdemeanours are never fully understood, that he was an escapee from a tyrannical, austere father, Professor Richard Hoche, who was headmaster of an academically distinguished school and then Superintendent of Secondary Schools in Hamburg. An inexplicit theme runs through this wonderfully condensed saga – the strength of ties of the extended family brought out especially in the perils facing so many families in the last century. The Ferrys epitomize this. Even before Edward's mysterious suicide after Nellie's death, when three orphaned babes had to be brought up, the reader must marvel at the solidarity of relatives and close friends in troubled times. The bonds were so strong in the Ferry family that they came to embrace the more undemonstrative German family: the reader senses that kinship overrode social divisions, and that the Hoche family welcomed joining this closely knit, generous but poor family.

We are left with an abiding puzzle – I suppose a psychological-cum literary teaser. What sort of a man was Hoche? Why had he run away from Germany? What anti-German prejudices hampered him in colonial Australia? How deep was his love of Nellie, and how much was it/did it remain a marriage of convenience? Ferber, I suspect, ends up with the same question marks herself; but whatever side she might come down on, she's subtle enough to leave the reader with her uncertainty.

Gwyneth Dow is a Melbourne historian and writer.

New Writing from the North

JOHN McLAREN

Shirley Geok-lin Lim: *Writing S.E./Asia in English: Against the Grain: focus on Asian English-language Literature* (Skoob Books Publishing, £12.99; \$US24.99).

Adib Khan: *Seasonal Adjustments* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

F. Sionil José: *Viajero* (Solidaridad, Manila. Price on enquiry).

K. S. Maniam: *Sensuous Horizons: the stories and the plays* (Skoob Books, £6.99; \$US11.99).

C. Y. Loh and I. K. Ong (eds): *Skoob Pacifica Anthology No. 2: the pen is mightier than the sword* (Skoob Books, £6.99).

Skoob Books, 11A-17 Sicilian Row, London WC1A 2QH UK

A NECESSARY PART of citizenship is the feeling of belonging, in the senses both of belonging to the country and of the country belonging to its citizens. Writings in English from the new nations of Southeast Asia are concerned both with how their citizens can be at home in the countries they have inherited from their former imperial masters, and how they can be at home in the global society that has been created as a consequence of the modernization and westernization that have displaced peoples from their homelands while still denying citizens of the new nations the right of full participation in the new world orders.

While the translator or the expatriate writes home from strange circumstances, diaspora writers have the different problem of writing themselves a home in countries or languages that belong to them by adoption rather than by inherited culture. Shirley Lim, herself an accomplished poet and short-story writer, in these essays deals with the theory and experience of expatriation, and in doing so brings into question western ideas of feminism and nationality. Coming from a Malaysian-Chinese family, and now living in the United States and writing in English, she has experienced all sides of these problems. Further, in her childhood her father's financial collapse and her mother's disappearance had already displaced her from relative affluence to the social and economic margins of her native

city. For her, home is defined by the material circumstances in which the work of a particular writer – the consciousness, the sensibility – is first determined. In her case, as with an increasing number of writers, this initial sensibility includes English: but not the English of England. Lim's English is that of Malaysia – that is, a minority language, formerly a colonial language, now a language offering an escape from a colonial situation. Formerly an imposed language; now, for writers like Lim, a language of choice that has enabled her to become part of a diaspora, a part of a new migration. Through it she can define for herself the space she now occupies in an America that has offered her privileges but still wants to keep her on the outside.

Lim's Malaysia had similarly tried to define her identity, to imprison her in a particular national language and ideology. In America she found that she at least shared a language, and with its assistance could enjoy a privileged position in an elite institution – the University of California at Santa Barbara. Yet in this academy she remains in a minority, both as a woman and as an Asian. She therefore speaks from a different position from that of her colleagues and of the authors of the theories she works with. Further, she is in a minority because she comes from a background of material deprivation that most of the people she works with are unable to comprehend. So, even though she has moved from the national to the transnational, from the local to the global, she is still 'writing home', still using the language that she first chose as a means of escape, using it now to explain those circumstances that first determined her and that now determine the way she writes. Her essays provide a context for considering some of the new fiction that is exploring similar problems in the various countries of the region.

WHILE SHIRLEY LIM FLED Malaysia in search of Freedom, the Philippines forces its citizens to leave so that they and their families may survive. In *Viajero*, F. Sionil José tells the story of a country whose chief export is its own citizens, and where even those who remain at home are displaced from the centre of their own lives. The central character of the novel, Salvador dela Raza, is the observer through whose eyes we discover the history of his people, and a metonymic figure of that history. Even his name is given to him by aliens. The black American serviceman who adopts him names him after

the place where he has found him, deep in the jungle. His earliest memories are blurred images of his mother and father, and of masses of people and men with guns, and of his father hiding him in a corner "under the awning of a huge building", and of waking alone among the dead. He is found by an old man, Apo Tale, who takes him far off to live safely in the country. These years with Apo Tale and his blind but visionary daughter, Malale, constitute a brief Edenic interval before the war again erupts into them and Japanese soldiers kill Apo and Malale. Although the soldier, Captain James Wack, takes him back to America and brings him up as his own son, his Edenic memories gradually draw Salvador, or Bud as he is more usually known, back to the Philippines and to the place where he had most known peace. Here he lives as a hermit and writer, becoming teacher to a revolutionary movement that is, in effect, trying to make over the Philippines in terms of his Edenic memory, where people live in harmony, caring for the land and for each other. His life ends when he is burnt to death by the military in a raid that goes wrong, but his hopes live on in the recordings he leaves of his life and researches. The name Salvador dela Raza, combining the name by which he was known and the place where he was found, links him to both the Philippines and its Spanish legacy. By adoption, citizenship and upbringing he becomes thoroughly American, yet he is drawn back first to Philippine history and then to the country itself.

His life, alternately ravaged and succoured by invaders, given vision from abroad yet alienated from its own sources, participating in the diaspora yet longing for home, seeking a universal future but destroyed by the casual violence of the present, parallels the history of his people that he discovers through his research around the world. In the novel, these historical episodes alternate with the stages of Salvador's own travels in search of himself. As an American, Salvador has the money and education to shelter him from any problems arising from his identity as a coloured man, an outsider. For him, America is a welcoming and open society. But as the question of his origins comes to trouble him, and he travels first in history and then in space back to his native country, he finds as a Filipino that his problem is that his countrymen have identity only as the displaced and dispossessed. "Ah, my countrymen", he laments at the beginning of his

memoir, "dislodged from the warmth of their homes, to make a living no matter how perilous and demeaning, to strike out in alien geographies and eke from there with their sweat and cunning what they can." Although, like them, he has travelled, he explains that "in another sense I have never left the place where I was born", so that in telling his story he is telling theirs. This image of the past brought into the present is both postcolonial and postmodern. By cutting beyond the immediate origins of America, including the institutions of slavery, to the more distant past of the various components of its nation of immigrants, Salvador restores the past that was disrupted by imperialism. Yet in Buddy's mind this is not an actual past so much as a simulacrum, a virtual reality of ancestral dreaming to add to the dreams and illusions of affluent America. It does not engage with the realities of power and production, past and present, that have produced this affluence. Wack emphasizes the importance of the engagement with a material past when he corrects Buddy's initial enthusiasm:

"I am convinced that the Filipinos – or the inhabitants of those islands – had contacts with Chinese and other Southeast Asian cultures before the Spaniards came," Buddy said with conviction. The professor interrupted him. "Buddy, never say you are convinced until you have the document in your hand. Say you are 'of the mind'. In the event that you cannot prove your thesis, then there is always a way out."

While Buddy's search for his own identity is a way of placing himself within the shifting boundaries of the present, as Salvador de la Raza his researches are an effort to bring a material continuity to that present. The action of the novel thus challenges the postmodernist concept from which it starts, that neither place nor time has any fixed reality. Buddy's journey to the past becomes a journey to the future, as he travels back to his ancestral home and forward to the hopes of the revolutionary movement that is trying to transform the material circumstances of the people who still live there. The place of his origins is implicated in the contemporary world through the structures of the landlords – agents of capitalism, the soldiers – agents of the state, and the revolutionaries – agents of an ideology of resistance. In his hut, linked as it is to

the global electronic network, Salvador finds the intersection of time and space beyond this network that gives him the Archimedean point of purchase on the world it controls. In his isolation he is able to escape from the prison of "the concepts that the white man made" and that James Wack realizes continues to hold "all of us who are not white". Although the army finally destroys him with his refuge, the legacy of his words remains as a form of empowerment against the concepts of colonialism, even for the Filipino colonel who is responsible for his death. The power of his legacy comes from his success in identifying with his Filipino ancestry without losing the detachment given by his American education. Despite their American citizenship, neither he nor his adopted father and sister are accepted as full members of an American community that will "never be colour-blind" any more than "will other regions of the earth be freed from the distinctions that people impose because they are different." Yet his ideal America, his love for Serena Fong, his other loves across the boundaries of race and religion, and above all the loving care bestowed on him by his successive foster parents, and returned by him on his wayward and troubled sister, Jessica, suggest a potential community that will transcend differences while recognizing them.

The question his historical researches constantly raises is why the Filipinos, who he discovers have been citizens of the world for some 1000 years, have failed to produce a community of citizens even at home. The answer in part is the imperialism that has constantly denied recognition to their place at home and abroad. In José's imagined, but not imaginary, history, the islander who was the first man to circumnavigate the earth, returning home as pilot to Magellan, was a slave whose stories have been lost to Europeans. Similarly, the men who built and manned the galleons that enriched the Spaniards with the fruits of their Pacific crossings, like the members of the diaspora who contributed their labour to the posterity of California, and the heroes of successive struggles against Spaniards and Americans, have been written out even of Filipino history. Finally, the Japanese, who had given people throughout Asia the confidence that they could free themselves from European control, by the brutality of their military occupation betrayed the hopes they had inspired. Yet this is not the whole answer. José identifies the responsi-

bility of the Filipinos for their own fate. Salvador concludes that the church taught a piety that concealed the cruelty of colonialism and the greed that motivated it. "The native peoples . . . submitted themselves to the lash and . . . became infected themselves." Their elite, seeking power within the Spanish dominion rather than freedom from it, adopted the worst qualities of the colonizers, while the people became "willing victims long after the conquistador was gone, and the legacy of cruelty and intolerance still prevailed."

The suffering of the *Indios* under their own leaders was equivalent to the situation of black Americans under white leaders. Church and state conspired to deny the people their past. This past includes courage, adventure, creativity and collective endeavour, but it also includes cruelty and exploitation. The first of the historical episodes tells of how, a thousand years ago, the ruler of *Daya* sent a military expedition to recapture his daughter from Chinese traders, only to sacrifice her to his pride, disguised as the greater interest of his kingdom. In later episodes we learn how the navigator who guided Magellan had been sold into slavery by his own people, how the contractors who built the galleons for their Spanish masters whipped and hanged their own workers, how the nineteenth century revolutionaries were abandoned by their supporters or destroyed themselves by their own pride, and how guerrillas degenerate into hoodlums, and how, from the end of the Second World War until the Marcos regime, the *ilustrados*, the old ruling class, take power back from the resistance. But, in the concluding episodes of the novel, when Salvador finally returns to the Philippines, he learns how the people betray themselves. The priest, Father Jess, sums up the answer to Salvador's question for him:

There is no mystery at all about how this nation deteriorated, how it has been colonized by its own leaders. But this internal colonization wouldn't have happened if the Filipinos did not want it, but they permitted it through their ignorance, their incapacity to look at the Filipino elite as their exploiters.

But, throwing in his lot with the resistance, Salvador also learns that in successive generations the people produce their own leaders to renew the

struggle, and how children of the ruling classes continue to join them. By the time he dies – possibly of a congenital disease that first struck him in Spain, rather than in the fire lit by the army's flare – he has recovered the roots of his own identity both by returning to his Edenic mountain and by his again finding love with the revolutionary, *Namnana*. He has accepted that the history of documents is a lie that says nothing of the lives of "those who have supported all these years the profligacy of the rich". He has supported his black sister *Jessie* through the years of her personal rebellion to safety, and is confident in the vision of the future burning in the bellies of the revolutionaries around him. He has returned to where he came from. Yet this ending is not simply one of hope, and certainly not of reconciliation with the injustice of the world. Salvador has also learned from his research that the people betray themselves, and from his life with the revolutionaries that revolution will never succeed as long as "collaboration with the enemy, with evil, was never recognized and condemned". Although the history of the Filipinos, with its potential and its evil, is created in the novel from the imagination and purely in words, these are grounded in experience that goes beyond words. As the guerrilla leader *Pepe Samson*, like *Father Jess* a figure from *José's* earlier *Rosales* quintology, says in response to Salvador's anguished search for identity, "That's a lot of crap, Professor . . . We all know who we are, where we are headed." Questions of history, source and identity are for "those who have all the leisure, who are not concerned with society or people."

José's novel constantly points us beyond its words, beyond its fictional characters and events, to lived experiences of loss and oppression, to their material causes, and to the moral truths they embody. It is the product of long meditation on the twin subjects of Philippines national history and the present plight of the Filipinos. We can understand this in terms of *Jakobson's* account of the communicative function of language. The text of his history given to *José*, and to every other colonial reader, was narrated by western writers using the code that places the imperialist as agent of civilization and the Filipino as object, mere 'Indio' or 'Chino', heir to an uncouth past who can be redeemed only by assimilating to the west. The narrative places its readers as a part of the civilizing

force, either, if they are European, by birth, or by assimilation. Reproduced through national education systems and the mass media, the narrative thus imposes on the native peoples the disempowering image of their own inferiority. It corrupts the rulers who have succeeded colonialism by offering them only western images of national or individual success, and influences even those who oppose them by offering western ideologies of power. *Viajero* reverses this narrative by retelling the history through the words of the Filipino narrators that Salvador discovers through his researches. Crucially, he actually gives us a page of one of these narratives transliterated from its archaic Filipino text. This has somewhat the same effect as Tolkien's invented scripts and languages, which confront the reader with a code he can never decipher. In this case, however, the indecipherable code signifies not a possible world of the imagination, but a world of meaning that belongs to others, a reality we can never know as our own. Within this code, the westerner is signified as the intruder, dependent on the skills of the Asians even as he appropriates them for his own enrichment. The text in turn situates its western reader as outsider, and its Filipino reader as agent, identified with those who have responsibility for his past and therefore potentially an agent who can determine his own future. By reversing the positions of narrator and object, the narrative frees its readers from the power structures of the imperial era. At the same time, it offers its Filipino readers a collective answer to the question insistently posed by the modern world, "Who are you?" As Tom Nairn points out in the context of Scottish nationalism, "the most useful, all-purpose handle here remains one's nation. Nationality is not in the genes, but it is in the structure of the modern world . . ." By remaking the history of the Philippines, José remakes the history of modernism to allow a place for Filipino identity.

THE RATHER MORE REALISTIC narratives of K.S. Maniam and Adib Khan are also concerned with the legacies of imperialism, and particularly with the consequences of the migrations of subject peoples to the various colonies. Maniam writes of the third generation of the Indians who came to the Malay peninsula and are torn between the pull of their past and their material ambitions in a modern nation committed to multiculturalism but alienating

to all cultures. Adib Khan deals with a more recent migration, from Bangladesh to Australia, and the attempt of his protagonist to overcome the consequent split in his own and his daughter's sensibility.

In the opening chapter of K.S. Maniam's *In a Far Country*, the narrator, Rajan, recalls the deaths of his father, of Mani, the village goat slaughtered for the festival of Deepavali, and of Muniandy, the nearly anonymous tender of the smoke-house. In each case, the indignity of the death is a betrayal of everything the creature has stood for. They reinforce the narrator's need to escape from the village, to find an education and a career, but their memory returns to him at the height of his fortunes to render his own life futile. The rest of the novel traces his attempts to recover a sense of life that the pressures of life in the village and his attempt to escape from it through education and career had all but denied him. He recalls an earlier experience of time as "pure sound which interlaced road, tree, flower and sky into an unimpressed and unmarked fluidity". His career commits him to the attempt to contain the forces of land and sea within the disciplines of material progress. He works for a developer, cutting down trees and building bulwarks against the sea. He establishes his own business, buying and selling land without troubling himself about its meaning to the people who work it. But three people intrude on this life, tormenting him with visions of a reality beyond the material. They remind him that, just as his father, leaving his stories behind in India, had been trapped in the dreams of the colonists, so he is trapped in the dream of progress. His father brought no stories to give meaning to the new country, which he came to hate. Rajan has to find these stories from others.

On the plantation, Lee Shin's flute sings with the beauty of an older order, but Rajan joins with the others to destroy this beauty, to reduce Lee to their own measure, and so to bring about his death. Sivasurian, with no family of his own but calling himself after the lord of the sun who gives life without himself changing, brings the vision of life founded on a community of work. This vision, however, is destroyed by the war, which brings violence and division. When the Malay, Zulkifli, takes Rajan to see the tiger, the spirit of the land, he runs away, for he is not ready for the vision. But Zulkifli's son sees it, only to be destroyed by the violence, corruption and oppression of the cities that represent

the new world being imposed on the older communities. Rajan in a dream finds the tiger, drawing from it the wisdom to accept, to abandon attempts to impose his will on the country and its people. This resolve is then lost as he again dreams of the death of Mani, which now becomes a symbol of the fate of all who resist authority by trying to be themselves. This dream leads to him returning to the events leading up to Lee Shin's death, and his recognition of his own complicity in them as he tried to reduce Lee to conformity with the ways of the community. Finally, he is forced to acknowledge that he has done the same thing to his own wife, and on this recognition is able to start rebuilding a true marriage that, in terms of mutual forbearance and respect, offers a model of what the community of a nation state could be. His acceptance of his role in the deaths of Mani the sacrificial goat and Lee Shin the outsider with spiritual vision free him from his entrapment in either the disappointed past of his father or in his own frenetic pursuit of a future of change and destruction.

ADIB KHAN'S NOVEL – which deservedly won the NSW Premier's Literary Award – is about returns and the search for home. The narrator, Iqbal Chaudhary, returns to Bangladesh from Australia to give his daughter the opportunity of discovering her antecedents and himself the space to reflect on his marriage and his conflicting loyalties. Although his immediate reactions to the country of his birth are antagonistic, as he rejects traditional superstitions and oppressions, he bears in mind the parting injunction from Claire, his Australian counsellor: "The good things from the past can never be taken away. They are a part of you. Don't neglect them. Treat your memories well and they will work for you." His problem is that his memories are the site of the oppositions he is seeking to resolve, between the Christian and Islamic traditions of his schooling and now of his marriage, between the privileges of his family and the poverty that now surrounds it, between the ideals of family and the integrity of the individual, between loyalty and betrayal. These oppositions tear not only at Iqbal, but also at his daughter, whose struggle to understand what is happening to her and to those around her symbolizes the complementary attempts of both Australia and Bangladesh to create new identities from the traditions that strangle them even as they nourish them.

In a central episode of the novel, Iqbal visits his student friend, Iftiqar. In place of the charismatic, sexually knowing and idealistic figure of their student days, Iqbal finds an impoverished and unemployed journalist, whom he parts from with the reflection "I know we are not friends any more." Their meeting is however overshadowed by Iqbal's recollection that, when Iftiqar followed his convictions to the front line of the fighting against Pakistan, he remained behind and conjugated with the mistress Iftiqar had entrusted to his care. When Iftiqar returned from the fighting, he destroyed his career by championing the Biharis against their persecution by the victorious Bangalis, while Iqbal merely allowed his revulsion to take him into exile in an Australia that initially made him welcome, but which has subsequently become lost and proven racist. Yet Iqbal remains incapable of returning to his Bangladeshi inheritance. While his brother can return to his origins, gain a new wife and accept Islam for its cultural importance, Iqbal can neither accept his family's past nor the indiscriminate slaughter that gave birth to his natal country. Equally, he cannot accept the smug hypocrisies of his adopted country. In an episode that matches the dying child in Camus's *The Plague*, both Islam and Christianity are condemned by the leper without a face, as well as by their own complementary intransigence. Yet Adib Khan's novel finds in these images not despair but high comedy, as Iqbal, lost in his memories, is suddenly judged awake to the realization that he has been singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' aloud during the service in the Mosque. His refusal of his brother's offer to restore the family fortunes, his decision to return to Australia and the doubtful prospects of his marriage, is a choice of indeterminacy as much as a gesture of revulsion against the family's abandonment of tradition in favour of a prosperity that could only be justified in the name of tradition.

THE *SKOOB PACIFICA ANTHOLOGY*, by making accessible a representative sample of English language writing from Southeast Asia and the Pacific, demonstrates this continuing conflict between tradition and the modernization that is needed to preserve it and the westernization that will destroy it. Through the writing in this collection we can glimpse the complexity of currents shaping the new nationalisms of this area and the problems facing

writers trying to cope with them. Some of the writers explicitly reject the political nationalism pursued by their governments. The Malaysian poet-painter Latiff Mohidin, to whom the volume is dedicated, brings to his drawing the energetic line of German expressionism, and to his poetry the sense of a world of signs waiting for the poet to interpret in terms of his own passions and doubts. So his 'encounter' with his beloved is also a passage from darkness into light and into his "one true home" which is also the place and history of his country. This country both gives him his being and takes its shape from his life. But if this life is given, it can also be taken away by doubt and deceit: "who will be there who will bear the news of dawn if the night is already out of sunder by the bright keen edge of fear?" The poem locates only the questioner, not the object of the question, which may equally be the speaker, his country or his love. The poem sets the "bud's unfolding glory", image of hope, beauty or love, against the "fine cinder" that is all that is left by the fires of doubt. The poem is then not simply a text signifying hope and doubt, but a work that both makes real the excitement of hope – personal or national – and undermines it with the reminder of human weakness. The hope lives because it is placed against the threat of its extinction, and the doubt about its reception. The poet's doubt about whether there will be anyone to hear produces the listener whose absence he fears. The poem thus resists the easy sentiments of nationalism while producing the fragile circumstances from which personal and communal identity may emerge. The other writers in the collection similarly work in English to produce an identity which is neither English nor contained within the ideologies or traditions of their own countries. Mohidin's translator, Wong Phui Nam, in 'A Night Easter', produces a Christ figure who is both Everyman and the suffering victim of colonial power, but who offers no hope except the "rice and fish" he has shared with other sufferers, and his own example, offered not as vicarious sacrifice but as an experience that must be shared if we are to find salvation.

ENDNOTE

1. Tom Nairn, 'Upper and Lower Cases', *London Review of Books*, 24 Aug. 1995, p.17.

The Meaning of Mount Isa

DAVID PALMER

Betty Collins: *The Copper Crucible* (UQP, \$16.95).

I N 1993 I DECIDED TO DRIVE to Mount Isa, having had no luck in reaching anyone in the town by phone or letter from Adelaide. I wanted to write a history of unionism in the mining town, which was famous for having once been the largest underground copper mine in the world, as well as for having some of Australia's hottest weather. After four days' drive, I came upon one of the strangest places I had ever been, accurately described as the fictional 'Mount Irene' by Betty Collins in her novel *The Copper Crucible*:

And there was the Mine . . . a sprawling cluster of blackened buildings, towering poppet head, a slowly turning wheel, hills of black slag, and the smelter chimney, striped red and white like a giant stick of candy – its smoke was a gold-edged, orange plume drifting off until it became lost in faint, white swirling streaks in the bright sky.

The rest of the scene Collins describes, however, was quite different from what I found some three decades later. The residential roads full of bulldust, makeshift housing and barracks, the open air movie theatre with its iron roof, and public parks with only stunted trees had given way to a modern, commercial – and green – outback city. Mount Isa today is a relatively comfortable place, the summer weather and the mine work aside.

I did find that one thing had not changed much: the people. The workers I interviewed such as Tony Stridi and 'Con' Constantinides, people I saw and talked with in the clubs and stores, and those I read about in daily court cases published in the local press were not very different from those Collins portrayed. Mount Isa was and continues to be one of the most multicultural towns in Australia outside of the big eastern cities, although these days there are immigrants from Africa, Asia, and the Americas, not just Europe. It also is overwhelmingly working class. For the most part, however, the lives of women (who are still excluded from mine work) remained hidden from me. It is this

side of the story of Mount Isa that Collins develops best in her novel.

Collins's straightforward narrative is not so much on 'the workers' struggle', although this is the focus of the last section, as it is on the daily lives of men who work for the Mount Irene Mine (MIM of course) and the women who maintain the homes and families. The drama surrounding unions and the company serves as a backdrop for portraying the lives of these people. Ian Syson, who worked with Collins to reintegrate material into this new edition, material that the previous editors had excised, has given life to the novel by helping to restore the centrality of gender to the story. At times there is as much tension between non-traditional working class women of Australian birth and their traditional husbands born overseas as there is between union men and company managers. The main characters in the story are Julie, an Australian from Sydney, and Nick, a Greek-born building construction worker. Julie comes to Mount Irene with their young child hoping that she and Nick can save enough to move and make a better life elsewhere. Their relationship falls apart under the pressures of Nick's overbearing expectations of his wife and his being blacklisted by the Mine for union activity.

Julie hardly is making radical demands on Nick. At his urging, she takes a clerical job with the town's overburdened, alcoholic lawyer and virtually runs his operation for him. But eventually she quits because she wants to spend all her time with her son Johnny and hates covering up for her employer's incompetence. By this time, Nick has begun to lapse into his traditional Greek ways and expects Julie to treat him the way old world Greek wives do their husbands. He buys a plot and starts to build a permanent house, contrary to the couple's original plan. Then he starts going out at night, spending all his time with his male (and we suspect, female) mates.

A prisoner in her own house, Julie finds freedom through her female friends, especially New Zealand-born Bronwyn, and by assisting the Industrial Council (the Mount Irene unions other than the AWU). What is happening to her is the experience of many Mount Irene women who are married to 'new Australians'. It is a kind of triple oppression resulting from class, an institutionalized Australian male chauvinism, and the acceptance of immigrant male patriarchy by immigrant women themselves:

Julie listened sometimes to the Australian women talking over a cup of tea, laying bare their innermost secrets, letting the bitterness of their lives in the Irene spill over, casually talking about their husbands as if they were strangers. She knew what motivated them, had shared the relief of talking, of finding that they had similar problems.

But she knew that the migrant women would have been shocked and horrified. Many of them had not even chosen their own husbands, had not known them before they became their wives . . . They accepted their life, loved their men, and in the long run seemed happier than their Australian sisters . . . They lived according to a tradition she could not fully understand.

There are numerous subplots to the novel, with other relationships and difficulties portrayed. The work is relatively brief for a work of fiction (213 pages), making it difficult to fully develop these characters. At times the dialogue among the men – in the pubs, at the Workers' Club, and elsewhere – is a bit wooden, but the talk among the women has a very real sense to it. More to the point, however, this work should not be read simply as 'literature', for it is part of a genre of 'participant' working class fiction found in most countries, such as *Out of This Furnace* (1941) by American author Thomas Bell on turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh immigrant steel workers. This type of fiction is not simply remade 'socialist realism', but is better described as fiction grounded in thoroughly accurate social history. It dates back to the last century when Dickens, Melville and Zola wrote about the complex and difficult lives of working people. Works as artistically diverse as Bell's and Dickens's have today come to be seen as outstanding examples of social history and honest depictions of a nation's working class life. Collins' novel, whatever its artistic merits and limitations, brings new light to the experience of Australia's workers, especially those who are women.

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They Walk the Line

MARGARET HENDERSON

Andrea Lemon: *Rodeo Girls go Round the Outside* (McPhee Gribble, \$19.95).

I REMEMBER THE DAY I discovered that June Carter wrote 'Ring of Fire', not the man in black himself, or the night I saw Roseanne Cash play – all dressed in black and a mixture of cool and fierce pride. These moments suggested there were other things going on in Country music, other roles for women and stories that get left offstage in the clichés surrounding our perceptions and the marketing of Country music. It is this hidden history of women in Country music and rodeo in Australia that Andrea Lemon's *Rodeo Girls go Round the Outside* attempts to provide. In a series of interviews with past and present cowgirls and performers, Lemon constructs an oral history that traces the changing roles and fortunes for women in the rodeo and Country music industries, providing insights into the contradictions women must negotiate between the desire for freedom, and the demands and barriers of patriarchal ideologies and expectations.

Country music and the rodeo scene are often burdened as bastions of redneck bigotry, chauvinism, racism, and American mass cultural kitsch; yet Lemon gets beyond these images by letting her subjects speak of their lives, work, aspirations, and position within alternative traditions. Perhaps because the women are already marginalized by gender (and for the Aboriginal women, race) within their subculture, they tend not to mythologize rodeo and Country music, instead giving a blood, sweat, and tears account of its workings, while also explaining its importance to them as lived culture. As the Country music legend Jean Stafford explains: "I've got to keep as much Jean Stafford around me as I can, otherwise I lose track of everything that really belongs to her and I can very easily slip back into the housewife that has got no creative ability whatsoever. To be creative I've got to be Jean Stafford."

The interviews are very entertaining, the women's lives reading like a Country and Western song – full of heartbreak, determination, stoic pride, and a great sense of humour in the face of discrimination and material hardship. Their work as rodeo

riders and musicians tends to challenge stereotypical and masculinist notions of the Aussie Battler, the agricultural labourer, the cowboy, the courageous athlete, and Country music. For example, Sandra Gilchrist has one of the more 'glamorous' jobs as national Rodeo Queen, yet behind this typically feminine role is hard manual labour and juggling domestic demands:

trying to be Rodeo Queen and secretary of the rodeo committee and work and keep a house and work horses, it was hard to get it all together. I work for my husband doing his paperwork and I also go out and work as a concreter's labourer. I can lay lots. And I also do mustering and fencing.

Her story is repeated throughout the collection, the women working to finance their lives on the road in outback Australia as rodeo riders, singers, and songwriters (since there is little financial reward available to them).

The interviews with the older rodeo riders such as Beryl Chick, provide insights into life in the travelling Wild West shows, pre-television. And the past and present riders' struggles with male officialdom over what events they can and can't compete in, are stories familiar to many women athletes. The threat posed to the social order by physically capable and brave women seems particularly apparent throughout.

The women in the Country music industry also suffer from a lack of recognition and financial rewards. June Mills of the Mills Sisters claims, "You see all these bands that come into Darwin – men's bands – and people up and get them and run around and do the business for them, and take them under their wing, and Mills Sisters have been going here in Darwin longer than anybody." The performing and songwriting talents of the McKean sisters and Anne Kirkpatrick make them Australia's version of the Carter family, yet it is Slim Dusty and Reg Lindsay that we are far more familiar with. And *Rodeo Girls go Round the Outside* goes some way to locating and highlighting the contribution made by Aboriginal women to Country music, such as Auriel Andrews, the first Aboriginal woman to record or sing on television. Ruby Hunter explains the relationship between Country music and Aboriginal people thus:

See, when they took our music away from us, our didjeridu playing and our songs and our language, we had nothing else but the Country and Western music that they were playing around the camps. That music was introduced to our people. "Don't speak your language. And don't sing your songs. Sing these songs. Learn this language."

Ruby's comment signals one of the book's weaknesses: its lack of a critical perspective on some of the contradictions inherent in Country music and rodeo. While the interviews themselves are interesting, overall the book would have been strengthened by more authorial intervention in some of the interviews, to draw out the contradictions voiced by some of the interviewees, and which Lemon superficially discusses periodically throughout the book (for example, the conflict between being a 'do right woman' and how the women actually live).

Lemon uses oral history in an uncritical manner, and as a replacement rather than adjunct to further research and analysis. *Rodeo Girls go Round the Outside* has the beginnings of an important and unusual cultural and historical document, but it is limited by its approach. So many fascinating and troubling connections are there to be made – for example, the class position of the women, the role of fantasy in Country music and rodeo, the urban fascination with these subcultures, and Aboriginal cultural dispossession and Country music – yet the links are barely hinted at. Such interventions would also have functioned to break up the interviews somewhat (as do the excellent photographs by Ponch Hawkes), and to provide a commentary and a context.

Although *Rodeo Girls go Round the Outside* is marred by a lack of supporting research and analysis, it does begin to free a subculture (and indirectly, Australia) from its own constricting mythologies, while not being dismissive of rodeo and Country music's role and iconography. Like those two moments I noted at the beginning of the review, these personal narratives provide a "shock of recognition" for female readers¹ – not only in their struggles against the denigration or ignoring of women's histories and achievements, but also in their yearning for a different way of life. As Betty Good describes her forced retirement because of marriage: "It took me a long time to settle down in one place.

I sort of had to fight myself, you know . . . If I go to rodeos now I get sort of high and I can't come down to earth for a while."

ENDNOTE

1. Elspeth Probyn uses this phrase in her theorising of women's experience, to describe a female's moment of recognition that there are other women 'here', with both commonalities and differences (*Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* London: Routledge, 1993, p.33).

Margaret Henderson is not particularly interested in k.d. lang, but has walked the streets of Flagstaff, Arizona, to get a deadly pair of boots.

Flannelette Shirts and Black Beanies

EDWARD BERRIDGE

Neil Boyack: *Golden Greats* – spoken word cassette (Anonymous Sources, \$12.95).

THE MEDIA did get one thing wrong. It was never *Grunge* literature, it was always *Punk* literature.

I suppose Nirvana was more prominent in people's minds in 1995. And Seattle-sound guitar rock does share several traits in common with the writing of, say, Justine Ettler, Christos Tsiolkas, Clare Mendes and, well, me ("round up the usual suspects"). There is the same dark, muddy tone and a similar self-conscious 'whatever' sensibility for example.

But, (so-called) Grunge lit is also decadent and stylised. Which Grunge music never was. I mean, take *The River Ophelia*. Yes, it is as murky as any Mudhoney or Dinosaur Junior CD. But it also has the bold, pay-attention-to-me sass of bright red tartan bondage pants. Listen to Ettler (and I swear, I just let the pages fall open anywhere):

The drug started to take effect and I started to ache between my legs so I grabbed a pillow and rammed it up there, pushing the cotton-covered feathers inside my wide open wet throbbing cunt. My cunt continued to ache despite the pillow and

I looked around for something more satisfying. I picked up the empty bottle and rammed it neck first up my cunt and that felt a little better. I started whimpering and lay writhing on the bed, on the verge of an orgasm, but unable to bring myself to a climax.

It's like, "do I dye my hair pink or write a cool anti-sex book. What will people *notice*". Justine even met with her own THE FILTH AND THE FURY-type response in Rosemary Sorensen's *Herald* review. Now, true Grunge rock has always been very nervous in the spotlight. That is why Kurt Cobain is dead. *The River Ophelia* is anything but shy. It is the literary equivalent of Cherry Vanilla in studded leather 'Eat Me' knickers. And of course Cherry is still very much alive.

Like Punk too, Grunge writing flamed brightly and intensely, but rapidly burned itself out. From *The River Ophelia* to *Drift Street* we are talking of a six month time frame at most. A period only slightly shorter than that between the release of the Damned's New Rose single and the end of the Anarchy tour. Of course, Punk rock is mimicked to this day. And I expect that there will still be Grunge type novels written in ten years' time by people who loved *The River Ophelia* and *Loaded*. But if they are any good they will echo the irony of Rancid and Green Day CDs. The audience will know it is all in good fun.

In contrast, Grunge rock has ploughed on unaltered in terms of style or presentation since 1991 (though the lead singer of Stone Temple Pilots has had a haircut) and shows no real sign of fading away. Pearl Jam, for example, look the same, sound the same and are selling to more or less the same audience four years after their debut CD, *Ten*. Which is not a negative criticism per se. It is just to illustrate the fact that Grunge is going to be one of those popular cultural forms – like Heavy Metal music, say, or US family sit-coms – which plots a fairly constant, unwavering course without any real hint of self consciousness.

Which is, of course, most unlike Grunge writers. In the finest tradition of Punk rock, they are already sick of the whole thing.

Which dovetails neatly into my review of Neil Boyack's new spoken word cassette *Golden Greats*. Because Neil is perhaps the strongest emerging example of Post-punk lit. If Justine Ettler is, say, the

Sex Pistols of Grunge writing, if Christos Tsiolkas is the Clash (and, hey, I want to be the Generation X because Billy Idol made the most money and got the best Hollywood chicks), then Neil is something like the Joy Division. Or the Fall. Or Wire. He mines the same Punk seam of darkness and alienation, but strips it of all brashness, colour and irony.

By way of background, Neil is, in fact, one of the very original Grunge writers. Along with Simon Colvey, he co-authored two self-published volumes of short fiction, *Black* (1993) and *Snakeskin/Vanilla* (1995). Content-wise he has *always* tended to the bleak. Even in context of the dark literary milieu of Ettler, Tsiolkas, Mendes etc. His setting is a coldly stylised Melbourne; a Melbourne of shabby rented houses and cloying rock venues, flannelette shirts and black beanies, white skin and brown Valiants. His characters are disengaged twentysomethings, bright but under-educated, immersed in popular culture but ignorant of any cultural forms beyond that, universally poor but intrinsically bad managers of whatever money they do have.

In many ways he explores a similar fictional world to that of *Praise*-period Andrew MacGahan (the Dr Feelgood of Punk lit?). But where MacGahan is self-deprecatory and ultimately hopeful because he is at least funny, Boyack is bitter and fatalistic. His tone echoes Wasteland Eliot or Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*. Except there is no sense of deterioration in Boyack's urban psyche-scape, just of a flat, unabated despair that stretches backward and forward in time. Not that Boyack's characters are particularly conscious of any real history or future. Even their memories are functions of a claustrophobic present.

Golden Greats sees Boyack focusing on similar themes, settings and characterizations. But he has refined his style since the Punk lit of *Black* and much of *Snakeskin/Vanilla*. There is now less sense of his using stark imagery solely to disturb, and more of a sense of his using this imagery to map his own fictional territory with greater precision. Take a trip through his outer suburbs:

... the vacant blocks behind outer suburban service stations – those palaces of light. Cruising half built housing estates where there are no people, no lights, no dogs, no grass, just virgin power poles and white gutters. New suburbs for the fuck of it, to keep people in jobs. New houses

for new lives that'll turn stiff after a couple of days of looking out past the cream coloured curtains of the lounge room to the vacant lot opposite the new Dream home. Hear the trucks, they sound like waves on the ocean, using the freeway out the back. This good for nothing place on the east west north south side of town.

Indeed, this territory is evoked even more unnervingly by the particular form Boyack has chosen. Though the work is essentially prosaic, there is strong evidence of an emerging poetic sensitivity. Neil seems to be growing confident reading his material aloud and the increased rhythmic cadences within his writing reflect his prolific live performance schedule. His bitter delivery and the accompanying music cut-ups underscore the discomforting nature of the text.

Several of the pieces featured on *Golden Greats* are, in fact, drawn from a novel in progress; the story of a lounge musician going nowhere (not that there is anywhere really to go in Boyack's Melbourne). It is these excerpts which are immediately the strongest even though, ostensibly, they are drawn out of context. They work powerfully in isolation as ugly, compelling vignettes. Here, for example, the husk-like protagonist is sized up by his audience:

You take your jacket off and they can see through your thin shirt, they see the backyard tattoos, the markings, the faded stars and crosses, the tattered lost lovers up your forearms. The eagle that looks like a puffin. That was the important first tattoo and you remember the backside of the school library. The crucial first tattoo. You'd stolen a compass from some new kid and you hand it to Brett. Brett has a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. Shouldn't be on school grounds, expelled last year. He holds your forearm like a fish. Looks at you through the smoke, squints at your arm as he clears his throat. In the quick flashing drags he takes you hear the tobacco of his cigarette burn. "It's all gonna be worth it. It's comin out real good. It's all gonna be okay . . ."

As a package (music, text and voice), *Golden Greats* echoes the de-personalized minimalism of late seventies British Post-punk. It is a far cry from the meticulously produced, stylish conservatism of

Grunge rock. It is not so far from the grimy fictional underworld of *The River Ophelia* or *Loaded*. But it is less flamboyant and more consciously pessimistic. In this sense, it is one of the first second wave Grunge lit pieces to be released.

Given the direction that Boyack has taken, it will now be interesting to see where Justine Ettler, Christos Tsiolkas, Clare Mendes et al decide to take us next. After all, Punk rock gave us everything from Adam and the Ants to Surgical Penis Klinik, US Hardcore to Blur. Grunge lit could easily be just as cool.

(Sigh!) We can only be grateful that it happened.

Edward Berridge's The Lives of the Saints was published by UQP in 1995.

Warm Comfort Zone

LUDMILLA FORSYTH

John McLaren (ed.): *Prophet From The Desert; Critical Essays on Patrick White* (Red Hill Press, \$25).

Robert Dixon: *Writing The Colonial Adventure; Race, gender and nation in Anglo-Australian popular fiction, 1875-1914* (CUP, \$29.95).

Peter Pierce: *Australian Melodramas; Thomas Keneally's Fiction* (UQP, \$14.95).

Jennifer Strauss: *Judith Wright* (OUP, \$18.95).

IT'S A RELIEF NOT TO DO BATTLE WITH WORDS. To follow easily the flow of line and argument and information and to hear lucidity in sound and sense and not to wrestle with the Other, nor to fill in the great Silences, nor to be dislocated by logos and locus – this is indeed a pleasure. And this is what the four critical studies gave me – old fashioned, non-confrontational (on the whole), accessible and therefore comfortable experience with words. But it is not to say that all was bland and that I absorbed ideas passively. A good critical work should provide active interaction and, although sometimes I felt the shadow of the Leavisite ideology, nevertheless there was enough for me to contend with.

I still have a desire to be startled by an insight, to be rattled by provocative interpretation and to feel the weight of an intelligent analysis. John

McLaren's edited collection of essays *Prophet From the Desert*, provided me with comfort that old approaches were not being disregarded. It also stimulated my ire, challenged my predispositions and provided enough hostility to prove the collection was worth the reading.

In the Introduction, McLaren gives a succinct overview of Patrick White's place in the Australian literary canon. He also briefly outlines White's personal history and introduces the critics by way of a synopsis of their essays. This is a good way of alerting the reader to the content of critical analysis because today, with our desire to seduce the eye by a catch-phrase, we may tend to subvert the content.

The strategy of this text is to confront the reader with a historically mapped critical path. Or should I say that McLaren has chosen to order the essays so that the reader is eased gently into various critical approaches. I think this is a deliberate ploy to appeal to the 'older' as well as the uninitiated readers. McLaren points out in his Introduction that the concentration of this collection is to be "on the novels most frequently studied". It is therefore appropriate that Brian Kiernan's solid overview and close engagement with the text begins the collection. The essay is easily digestible, providing, in McLaren's words, "what has become the standard interpretation of White's earlier work".

Most of us know that Michael Wilding's reading of White is much more contested because it challenges assumptions about style and content. Readers tend to be intoxicated by White's flights into the "viewless wings of Poesy" and therefore retarded from asking important questions regarding values inherent in White's images, characterization and plot. Wilding's analysis uncovers "endemic snobberies of taste and class (which) spread from the local particularity of accent to larger disabling conceptual ineptness". Unlike Wilding, most other critics in this collection, and elsewhere, prefer to concentrate on transcendence and leave questions of making one's daily bread, behind.

David Tacey's work on White is possibly as controversial as Wilding's. McLaren makes a pertinent observation about the nature of Tacey's thesis. Because Tacey asks the reader to "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale", McLaren wonders whether "he does not force . . . [the novels'] structure into his own preconceived patterns". I would take this

further. If we accept the often cited premise that the critic is the artist/writer, and that critical writing has its own narrative and ideological permutation, then this teller is also not to be trusted. His desires are also creating a specific (or non-specific) textual strategy.

In his essay, 'In the Lap of the Land; Misogyny and Earth-Mother Worship in *The Tree of Man*', Tacey often conflates Stan Parker and Patrick White. At other times, Tacey sees them as distinct. Taking the proposition that we should not trust White's overt statements – either as protagonist or author and certainly not ex-cathedrally – we are left with trusting the re-writer of the work, Tacey. I, however, find difficulty in accepting statements such as the following:

From this we can see how similar Stan's situation is to Leo's. Yet the author, apparently unconscious of the parallel, converts the adultery episode into a gigantic moral argument, an attack on Amy's integrity. The Mother Goddess supports him in this: she strives to turn women into whores, while maintaining for herself an illusion of sanctity and purity.

I'm not certain whether one needs an elaborate theory to arrive at the kind of interpretation which Tacey offers the reader regarding the characterization of Amy. Tacey states that, "We have noted White's dislike for Amy, but when he contrives three successive adulterous episodes with Leo, in which she becomes 'brazen' and 'one of the flash women', the reader feels that the author has lost his control." Sometimes I think that can also apply to the critic.

What I enjoyed most about Rick Wallach's essay was the concentration on close reading of the text. But the hypnotic effect of new-critical-speak tended to draw one into a linguistic vortex which, although very seductive, was disconcerting in its capacity to displace the original text. Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, figures of awesome authority, make their apocalyptic appearance. Contemporary critical discourse cannot do without them.

As is expected today, there must be gender balance. The essays by Carolyn Bliss, Veronica Brady, Mary-ellen Ryan and Ann McCulloch concentrate on White's female figures, however, the approach is not highly steeped in feminist theory and pro-

vides a close reading of the texts accessible to any reader. The desire for clarity and background is perhaps too prominent in Ryan's work which includes too much story outline as if not trusting the reader to be familiar with the work.

In her essay, 'Queen Lear Down Under: *The Eye of the Storm*', Ann McCulloch proposes that Elizabeth Hunter "exists in a rational world, that precludes the expression of tragic theatre, which belongs to a pre-rational phase of history". Pronouncements such as this do set my pre-rational blood racing. McCulloch contends that "Elizabeth Hunter is White's last attempt to give expression to a 'superbeing'." White is judged as attempting but failing: "Symbolically, the tragic sense involved in her death is that she is not dramatically realized in language as the superbeing." Therefore, according to McCulloch, Elizabeth Hunter is not a tragic Lear because she exists in a rational world and because she "is portrayed as the Shakespearean fool". I feel challenged by McCulloch's argument which, however, appears to have a tragic flaw.

McCulloch works hard at making White's Hunter into Lear in drag or a fool is disguise but Veronica Brady's travail is to extricate White from a charge of appropriating "Aboriginals" in ways suggested by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha and Wilson Harris. It is a labour of love. Unfortunately Brady, in every move she makes, seems to reinforce the significance of Aborigines in *A Fringe of Leaves*, as a system of symbols. Whether positive or negative, as generalized entities, White's Aborigines are part of Said's *Orientalism*. Brady uses the above cited authorities on 'appropriation' and yet is still capable of making statements such as the following:

The Aborigines are an essential of this exploration since their sufferings are the consequence of our actions and culture. In this way they represent us, embodying what we do not want to recognise in ourselves, what we fear and dislike.

'The Significance of Christian Myth Structures in *Voss*' by Joan Newman provides a nice counterpoint to Tacey's work. This analysis reinforces the complexity of cultural patterning in White's novels and shows the erasures which occur when theories become templates for interpreting works. The impulsion to dismember to recreate in one's image

also reveals that the effects on the critic/reader provide very similar responses no matter what theoretical background lurks in each consciousness.

Of all the essays in this collection, it is only Wilding's which is negative. Even Tacey, who accuses White of not understanding the impetus forging his creations, becomes the dutiful son who succumbs to the legend of father the saviour:

In *A Fringe of Leaves* Patrick White can be seen as a healer of our age, for through the life of his representative character he shows how by entering into the shadow side of life and by striving toward a new total ethic the disastrous rift in humanity can be healed.

Amen.

ROBERT DIXON'S *Writing the Colonial Adventure* is an adventure in itself. From the outset a quest is set up. The original source of the illustration which is used on the cover has been lost and the publishers appeal to the holder of copyright to come forward.

Analysis of popular fiction by Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart from the old Birmingham school alerted one to the importance of cultural studies and drew attention to the values inscribed in pulp fiction. In this study, Dixon sets out to follow the tradition of 'the ripping yarn'. He does this with scholarly intent and provides not only skeletal plots but also unearths the hidden treasure troves of imperialist values.

'Post-colonial studies' has become a site for much excavation and now we plunder literature for PhD theses and leave the natives alone – or so we say. In our post-everything culture we see everything through our theories clearly and are able to identify our fears as they are projected onto the grotesque other. For example, Dixon tells us:

Like other Australian examples of imperial romance *The Last Lemurian* is a paranoid text displaying anxieties about various forms of cultural regression, especially related to race and gender. These anxieties are manifest in the hybrid Lemurian material, the second grotesque, which erupts in the space between English and Aboriginal culture.

These imperialist values which we identify as a failure, a fissure in the soul of humanist impulses, is something we perhaps do not see clearly within ourselves. Reading a text from the past for values is much less problematic than seeing the self-righteousness in our own. If we are able to identify these values in imperialist warlords like Lord Curzon who saw the outskirts of Empire as a place of "ennobling and invigorating stimulus for our youth", so much the better. Residues of Freudianism, Jungianism, Feminism, Bhabhaism and Saidism cannot be washed out from much which is written today. And so I follow the imperative within Robert Dixon's rhetoric – only occasionally resisting.

However there is something in me that does not like the argument in Peter Pierce's study of Thomas Keneally. The cover presents a smiling Keneally. In the Preface, Peter Pierce states:

In press and publicity photographs, Keneally has grown younger, ageing from earnestness to impishness. This reflects his belief that the alienation with which initially he confronted the world gave place to an affirmation of its riches.

In this study of Keneally's fiction, Pierce creates a curious parallel between the writer's personal journey and Australia's cultural history.

A central contention of this study is that Keneally's apprehension of his literary subjects has been melodramatic. This is, perhaps, his temperamental inclination, but it is also informed by Keneally's perception of Australians' insecurities: their sense of being but tenuously lodged in their own country, besides the spiritual void which many of them privately acknowledge.

In identifying Keneally's *oeuvre* as melodrama, Pierce is able to launch an attack on critics who have not understood the nature of his work. Pierce argues because of his popularity, Keneally has suffered from "opponents" from "within the academic ranks" many of whom display "incontinent envy". On the other hand, Pierce suggests that Keneally has "profited from, and cunningly shaped" his work in response to appraisals of his work from some of these critics. In a moment of negative introspection, Pierce "wonders whether critics have made Keneally the scapegoats (sic) for their own distaste

for Australian culture, so that the attacks on his art, subjects and politics signify a cultural death-wish". There appears to be an ambivalent element in this study.

On the other hand there is no ambivalence in Jennifer Strauss's contribution to the Australian Writers Series on Judith Wright. It is a homage to Wright as poet and woman of integrity and moral responsibility.

Strauss sets out to fulfil the parameters of the series which is to examine "in succinct form the lives and works of Australia's major writers". Its brief was also to take into account "new cultural formations and developments in literary theory". Strauss, I believe, makes gestures towards the new critical theories but her heart does not seem to be committed to the cause. Strauss is a feminist but her reading of Wright is not overly informed by this discourse. The study is lucid, intelligent and non-confrontational. In her own poetry, Strauss is often lively, witty and ironic and I wished that some of this spirit would erupt from the restrained tenor which informed this work. This was especially the case in her discussion of A.D. Hope's and Vincent Buckley's appraisal of Wright's poetry which abounds in patronising judgements. I longed for a rapier thrust which would puncture their pronouncements. As a study, *Judith Wright* is comprehensive but perhaps a little too solemnly dutiful.

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Middle Period

JENNIFER MAIDEN

- Bruce Dawe: *Mortal Instruments: Poems 1990–1995* (Longman, \$12.95).
Anthony Lawrence: *Cold Wires of Rain* (Penguin, \$16.95).
Marjorie Pizer: *Winds of Change* (Pinchgut Press, \$16.95 + postage, from publisher: 6 Oaks Avenue, Cremorne 2090).
John Kinsella (ed.): *A Salt Reader* (Folio, \$19.95).
Nigel Roberts: *Deja vu tours* (Hale & Iremonger, \$14.95).
Mal Morgan: *Throwaway Moon: New and Selected Poems* (Hyland House, \$19.95).
John Kinsella: *The Silo: a Pastoral Symphony* (FACP, \$16.95); *Erratum/Frame(d)* (Folio/FACP, \$16.95).

I HAD SPENT PART of my last two *Overland* reviews of Australian fiction digging for things which probed and did justice to the problem of evil (the ontological, ethical one, not the religious one), and the unexpected arrival of this miscellany of poetry books at first suggested to me that Providence or some other judicious editor was trying to point that search in a likelier direction. Maybe "my old workbench" (that phrase Eva Peron used when broadcasting from her sickbed) – in this case, poetry – was a more likely quarry for such problems, and therefore perhaps for more approaches to solutions. Sublimity and beauty, of course, being part of all that . . .

Certainly some of these books do have an enormous air of moral gravity. And certainly I have always stated that poetry more than most other arts was a form of three-dimensional philosophy . . .

It's just that so much of this batch (like so many of those novels) is so peculiarly one-dimensional. In fact, even admirable writers like Bruce Dawe – who began decades ago in vigour and iconoclasm – now seem to be trumpeting out paper-thin moral conventions in a way which almost smothers their natural freshness and empathy. He retains his special skill for warm individual character studies but his topical pieces – including those on the Gulf War – are simplistic and he has begun to use words like "Vietnik" seriously. As in many books from this batch, metaphor is only used to ground the subject in the sensual and physical, rather than to emancipate it into another dimension as well. There is rarely any sense of metaphor having its full binary function.

Kinsella's *Salt* anthology has a similar narrow feeling, despite some typically limpid, lucent and elegant pieces by Harry, Stasko, Brooks and others, and π O's marvellous marathon *tour de force* against the seventies. This anthology takes its tone from the critical pieces at the back and the two most memorable of these are a nostalgic John Tranter article and interview. Some of his salvaged early poems made me remember how moodily powerful his novitiate was, but I doubt if his static, still-current Middle Period, inhibited as it is by excessive humour and stylization, deserves this much attention.

Over-stylization is a problem in Kinsella himself, of course. One of his books here, *Silo: A Pastoral Symphony*, is a brilliant facsimile of modern referential rural verse, and the other, *Erratum/Frame(d)*,

of non-referential postmodernism. The latter juggles with reference points and sense-data without really transcending them. Pain and death are treated too attentively and impressively for either work to be parody, but the reader of both Kinsella's styles might wish for lightning to hit Kinsella's test tube and produce a more fecund miscegenation between them. As a pastoral symphony, *Silo* certainly has the chiaroscuro of Beethoven, but not his compulsion towards philosophical liberty.

NIGEL ROBERTS' COLLECTION has dangerous performance poetry elements. The line "go. & until you find a place, stay with the Tranters" indicates how communal is his audience. Tranter's own *Salt* article refers to his family's pet African dogs, and in Draconian moments I felt that many of these books would be most perfectly understood by people (including me) who had woken at least once with a Basenji. Roberts' range is much better than this suggests, though. He maintains an engaging theme of individual personality and choice and fastens firmly on difficult sexual and political encounters. I would like to hear that voice speaking more to itself and less to the cynical fast-food audience, however endearing his affection for them may be.

Marjorie Pizer also communicates a fine, sympathetic personality. But she seems so addicted to stressing solutions to the tragic internal and external human condition that she often hardly bothers to investigate the nature of its problems. Her style and philosophy lack the necessary complexity to convince us of such profound emancipation for our own selves. But the simplicity of her style is not a technical irritation. I was impressed by its candour and felt that part of its function might be poignant, repetitive self-reassurance. A function which I suggest Pizer herself most certainly has the courage and talent to enjoy exploring.

Anthony Lawrence's chiaroscuro *Cold Wires of Rain* is full of succinct, sensuous physicalities (he's particularly good at the weather) and conveys the sense of a strong, difficult, dignified central character who is never quite sure where to place his wit in strange rooms. This can result in Lawrence's poems about others' death and grief having almost a whimsical sadism in their punning on the difference between physical and metaphysical states, without quickening into any exuberance of unusual compassion or speculation.

Mal Morgan has a vivacious scope and style and a poised, tender air of avant-garde experience which it is hard to challenge. It may be impossible to leave the book without feeling that one has shared a glass of red with him in the gritty Melbourne sun.

Poets have almost too readily what Virginia Woolf called "the genius of personality". In most of these works there is evidence of real attempts to make those well-conveyed personalities (more than deliberate personae) not only important but in a Montaigne-like sense more mature, dating and benign. I would like to read more of those attempts, to hear more of the voice that can speak to itself – and so to someone else – more freely and more truly in the dark: that restless voice which summons metaphor not just to re-create the real but also to access other lives – and newer answers.

Jennifer Maiden is a NSW writer and freelance tutor.

Tribes and Bands

MICHAEL GEORGE SMITH

Neil Murray: *Sing For Me, Countryman* (Sceptre, \$14.95).

“THE DESERT BLACKS . . . don't want to be involved with or tainted by 'the radical city blacks'.” (Alison Anderson, a commissioner with the Aboriginal Development Commission living in Papunya in 1986, quoted in *Strict Rules*, Andrew McMillan, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988.)

Neil Murray has good reason to feel a little disinclined to be involved with “the radical city blacks”. As the white guitarist with the all-Aboriginal Warumpi Band in the early 1980s, he had already experienced the suspicions of those city blacks who saw him as exploiting the band in order to gain recognition as a musician. The volatile nature of that suspicion literally exploded in his face backstage at an ANC anti-apartheid benefit concert in Sydney at which he performed. According to the account of the 'altercation' presented by McMillan, Gary Foley, then Director of the Aboriginal Arts Board, took exception to a comment of frustration directed at him by Murray and Murray ended up with a broken nose.

In *Sing for Me, Countryman*, a thinly-disguised autobiographical novel, the central character, Paul Munro, faces a more brutal response to his irritated comment to black activist turned bureaucrat Len Bower. The irony for both the fictional and real recipients of this aggressive reverse racism is that the Warumpi Band, unlike say Yothu Yindi, had never been a 'political' band. It had only ever been a 'good time rock'n'roll band' that happened to 'evolve' around Neil/Paul during his time in the central desert community of Papunya/Mandara.

Just why Murray has chosen to present *Sing for Me, Countryman* as fiction may be more personal than to merely create enough of an illusion of fictional 'distance' to avoid being criticised by 'radical city blacks'. Either way it's an intriguing and thoroughly irritating book. In fact it's two books, though the second is, to some extent, contingent on the first. The irritation comes not from the subject matter but from the almost constant slipping from past to present tense, sometimes within a single paragraph, which suggests that the editor, like the proofreader, was asleep through considerable periods of the production of the book. The fact that *Sing for Me, Countryman* is two books rather than one is due to the episodic nature of the life being recounted.

The facts of Neil Murray's life, and therefore the journey his fictional hero takes, have been reported extensively in the nation's popular and music press and are an essential part of the story Andrew McMillan tells in *Strict Rules*, his account of the Blackfella/Whitefella tour of the remote Aboriginal settlements of the Northern Territory by Midnight Oil (renamed Hidden Gold in Murray's 'novel') and the Warumpi Band in the winter of 1986. Murray, born in rural Victoria, moved out to Papunya in the late 1970s, initially driving the local store's truck around the out-stations that sprang up after the various tribal groups brought together by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Papunya decided, for the sake of their survival, to go 'bush'. He then taught in those out-stations for a couple of years before he got bored and frustrated and decided to get serious about a musical career that had come about by chance through his having taken a guitar and amplifier with him to Papunya years before.

What makes *Sing for Me, Countryman* two books is the fact that in the first half, Murray, through his character Paul Munro, is trying to explain why he

decided to trek off into the central desert in the first place, while the second half is a fairly straightforward account of the rise and fall of the Warumpi Band. And it's the first half of the book which is the more intriguing, for all the tumultuousness of life on the road with the Warumpi/Mandara Band.

"In some ways . . . I guess the other guys in the band are really politically naive, in terms of the overall Australian thing", McMillan quotes Murray as saying. It's a far more naive Paul Munro who, apparently besotted by some stereotypical idea of the 'noble savage', quits tertiary studies in Adelaide to hop on the Ghan and head for the central desert. As desperate as Munro seems to be to 'become' a real part of the community into which he has stumbled, he never overcomes the cultural baggage with which he arrived, and it is this 'baggage' that ultimately leads to his attempt to make of his erratic fellow musicians a professional recording unit. For all the bush 'knowledge' he attains, and the acceptance of Munro by the community, he cannot submit himself to initiation or give up his ambition to 'achieve something', which must forever separate him from that community.

MUNRO FINDS IT DIFFICULT to discard his preconceptions, despite the very different realities that confront him in the outback communities. Even he finds it difficult to cope with the petrol-sniffing children. The alcoholism becomes a real problem only when it affects the performance of the band, and after a while, he can accommodate the car theft and vandalism, and yet that very western image of the untainted 'noble savage' stubbornly persists: Ultimately, of course, Munro can no more 'connect' with these 'untainted' tribal Aborigines than he can with his visiting parents. The settlement blacks understand far more quickly Munro's real malaise. He has no contact with his own 'tribe', no connection with any part of the land.

If the second half of the book tells us anything about Munro, it is that for all that he has shared with the members of his band and the rest of the settlement and outstation blacks, he still hasn't understood that his values and ambitions can never be theirs. He is continually frustrated by the apparent indifference to tour schedules and professionalism his band mates exhibit. Only when the parents of two brothers in the band die does Munro concede there is adequate reason to behave so errati-

cally with the career of the band.

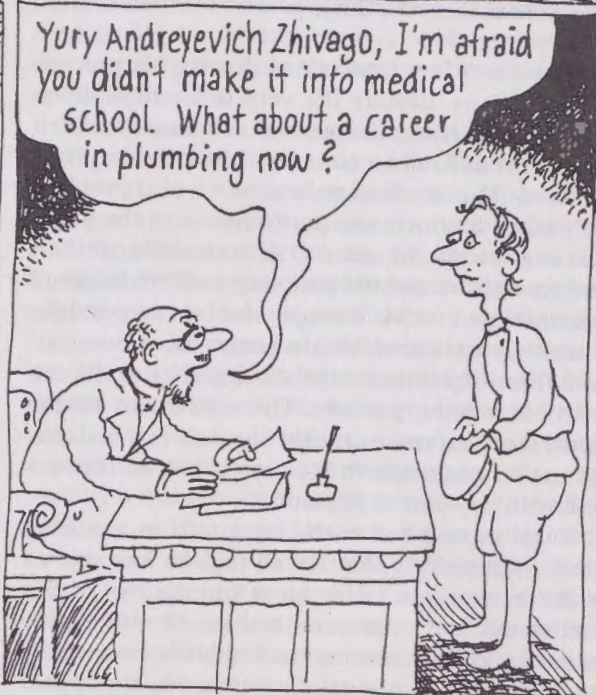
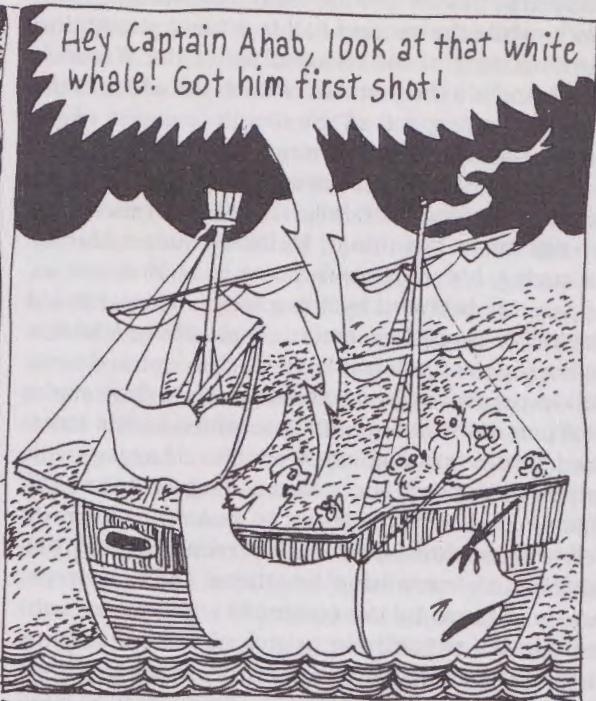
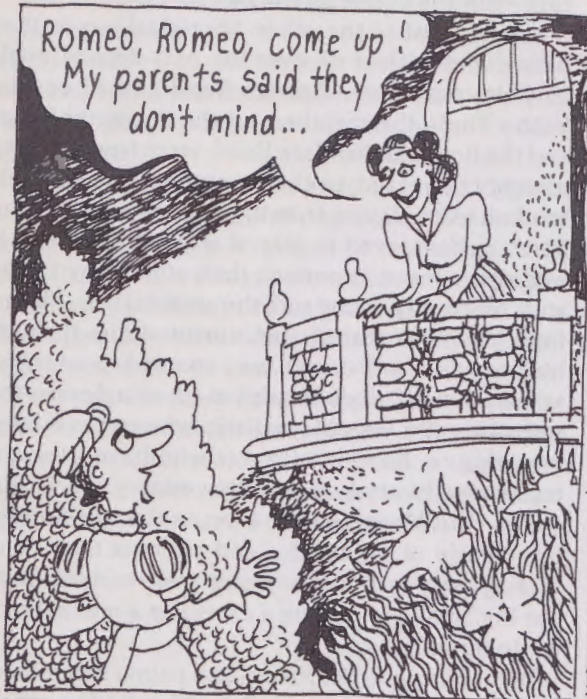
Unlike most of the other Aboriginal bands that have come to the fore over the past decade, such as Coloured Stone, Sunrize Band and of course Yothu Yindi, the members of the Warumpi Band, and the fictional Mandara Band, were far more intimately connected to their community and their football team-playing than to music as a profession. Much as they loved to play, it was only ever fun. It was never more important than staying by family and community. In the end, the artificial tribe Munro (and Murray) created, that nurtured him through his periods of self-doubt, was doomed to crumble, as are all such 'tribes/bands', as meaningless as the sedentary life we paternalistic whites have been imposing on hunter gatherers who have been living perfectly attuned to this country for 40,000 years. Paul Munro finally accepts the inevitable – the demise of the band – and after six months of 'hiding away', playing at being a native, returns to the Big Smoke to pursue a career as a musician on white terms.

McMillan, in *Strict Rules*, also paints himself out of the story, choosing to dub himself "The Hitchhiker". As Midnight Oil, the Warumpis and the attendant media circus quit an evening by Uluru, the hitch-hiker recalls "he'd been through this country before and he'd seen little hope". For all the shortcomings of style, and the political incorrectness of his casual affairs with Aboriginal women, the story Paul Munro tells in *Sing For Me, Countryman* is one of a robust, ebullient people positively bursting with hope, rooted in their land, their dreaming, and accommodating only that part of white civilization that suits their needs. For that alone, *Sing For Me, Countryman* is a worthwhile addition to our literature.

Michael George Smith is the Associate Editor of The Drum Media, a Sydney-based youth arts and entertainment weekly newspaper.

Major Spoilsports,

by LofO



THEN THERE WAS THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER WHO HADA HANG-OVER AND TOLD HIS MATES TO BUGGER OFF. AND LONG JOHN SILVER, AFTER HE LOST THE MAP OF TREASURE ISLAND, DECIDED TO GIVE UP THE SEA AND BECOME A SALES REPRESENTATIVE FOR MEN'S UNDERGARMENTS.

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ifc – inside front cover
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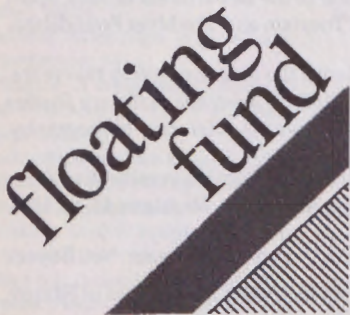
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