

THOUGHTS AFTER PORT ARTHUR  
MARY MARTIN OPENS HER BOOKSHOP  
LETTERS FROM CHINA  
SLOUCHING TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM  
NED KELLY ON TOUR

Features  
Stories  
Poetry  
\$8

# Over land

145

# INVITATION

OVERLAND Invites all its readers to the Melbourne launch of issue 145 at Budinski's 103-105 Smith St Fitzroy (ph: 9417 5801) 8.00 pm 17 December 1996.

Launched by Shelton Lea with readings by OVERLAND writers. Music supplied, refreshments available.

And if that's not enough,  
come along and barrack for the OVERLAND team in its annual flannelled struggle against the might of MEANJIN at the McAllister Oval (Melways 29, F10) Sunday 2 March 1997 from 11.00 am.

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*HOB0* 11: Dec 1. *HOB0* 12: Mar 1 1997.

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### STOP PRESS

*Overland* extends its congratulations to long-time contributor and supporter David Martin, whose work as a novelist, poet, critic, reviewer and essayist has been honoured by the Literature Fund of the Australia Council with the award of an Emeritus Fellowship.

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# Overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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## Bias Australian



IN HIS 'SLOUCHING TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM', Brian Matthews laments Australia's loss of the visionary opportunities afforded by the otherwise purely arbitrary occasion of our passage into the third millennium of the Christian era. Some, of course, might argue that 2000 years of monotheistic religions based on the unalterable, if irrecoverable, truth of the word supply a reason for lamentation rather than rejoicing. Others might argue that the Australian tradition of scepticism has always been hostile to grand visions, and that the standard of federal parliamentary conduct is not such as to give anything particularly worth celebrating in the fact that our entry to the next millennium coincides with the centenary of federation. Australian nationalism was probably healthier when the only thing Australia Day signified was a long weekend than now, when the holiday has become a moveable feast of chauvinistic display.

As in any other country, the Australian tradition is a mixture of imagery. On the one hand, as the American poet John Ridland recounts with wry affection in this issue, it includes the figure of Ned Kelly, laid-back, opportunistic yet determined. On the other, it contains savage images of racism that generate the fear and loathing being retailed, as I write, to the applause of a Queensland National Party audience by a renegade Liberal member of the federal parliament. Undoubtedly she, like the renegade Labor member who has become her ally, speaks to the feelings of many Australians, but that is no reason to defend her remarks in the name of free speech. Freedom of speech does not impose obligations on the speaker so much as on the listener. Those who hear vile words without responding with contempt and indignation, or with calm but determined recitation of the facts, become complicit in the offence.

Whether we wish it or not, our tradition is being constantly refashioned. If it is to carry us into a worthwhile future, we need to acknowledge the bleak elements of our history and the exclusions and injustices of our present, as well as celebrate the richness of difference. In a recent talk, which we hope to publish in the following year, Brian Gould spoke of how people have been taught to distrust their own experience. The continuing task of *Overland* is both to give voice to the present experience of Australians in all walks of life, and to provide the history and analysis that will enable us to make sense of it. Among the writers we plan to publish next year, Wendy Lowenstein will write about interviewing Australians about work, or the lack of it; Tom Heenan will write about growing up in Collingwood; and Sean Scalmer about imagining class in twentieth century Australia.

JOHN McLAREN

ANTHONY WEARE

## Everybody knows somebody who knows someone . . .



**T**HAT'S THE WAY IT IS IN TASMANIA, or the way it seems when something big happens. The appalling event at Port Arthur was something big. Soon after, everybody was talking about it and I was hearing stories. The alleged killer had lived among us; he had grown up alongside us and had said and done this and that. As the shock waves of the event radiated, our collective memories were jogged.

On the day, I was at work on the fifth floor of the Hobart hospital. That's important because from the east-facing side of A-block I got a grandstand view of the helicopters carrying the wounded, landing on the Domain. It was like the opening from M.A.S.H. – but it wasn't – the barren hills of South Korea were no comparison to this chocolate box setting. Bridge, blue river, gardens and the war memorial stele – all this and the sun shining. The ambulances lined up and figures moved haltingly backwards and forwards in a tightly knit interplay of machines and men. The unreality or perhaps the total novelty of this scene has ensured I will not forget it. In the background the football commentary was interrupted to let us know that a massacre had occurred at Port Arthur with possibly twelve dead. "Looks like Tassie's on the map," said the footy commentator when the broadcast resumed.

About an hour earlier, I had been sitting writing notes about a patient when the ward cleaner came into the office. The hospital was on 'Code Brown' (external disaster) but we hadn't been told why.

"Got any relatives at Nubeena?" she asked.

I thought about it. My grandmother on my father's side had left Taranna on the Peninsula in 1905 – there would still be family thereabouts. My brother's wife's mother grew up at Nubeena – I remembered seeing her grave about six years ago. I thought of saying "sort of" but decided not to.

"No."

"Good, 'cause there's been about twelve people shot there." Her eyes opened wide.

"Jesus." An image of a family barbecue, family tensions over divorce, bitterness. An enraged, estranged ex turning up with an automatic pump-action shotgun. Blood and mayhem. Later the mother of all narcissistic suicides. That was easy. Truth is nearly always stranger than fiction. Information trickled through. A man had attacked Port Arthur with a bag of guns. He had started killing people at one point and continued in an apparently orderly fashion to somewhere else in the town.

**A** LONG SIX WEEKS LATER I travelled to Port Arthur. I hadn't been to look at the ruins for at least fifteen years. During that six weeks my house was being renovated and a number of workmen had been around. My birthday had fallen, so I had seen many friends and relatives. Everybody talked without much prompting. The alleged killer had grown up in my part of Hobart and occasionally holidayed on the Peninsula. It seemed that everyone I spoke to had some connection to him or his life.

I knew the road to Port Arthur pretty well and there were no big changes noticeable until Eaglehawk Neck, where the scenic route had been bypassed. I wouldn't have gone at all but Sandra, a German student friend of my wife Cheryl, had come to stay and was interested in our "convict past". My oldest daughter, nine years old, loved the place and my youngest, three, would have a great time running around.

All the way I thought about the things I was going to see: the rising slope of the grass where he had hunted down a six-year-old girl after killing her mother and little sister locked in each other's arms; the queuing area for cars at the entrance where he

had blasted the waiting occupants in a methodical manner; the remains of Seascope where he had holed up; and the graceless jerry-built Broad Arrow Cafe. I wasn't disappointed. Seascope's blackened remains were still being sifted through. Marked out with ribbons, the scene looked like a romantic jigsaw puzzle with a vital piece missing from the middle. The wait in the queue at the entrance, overhung by large ornamental trees hardly lit by weak morning light, gave me the creeps. The cost of getting in didn't improve my mood – free when I was in my twenties, it now cost \$42 to do almost the same things.

The women and girls headed off for a tour and I tried to find some privacy to study for an interview I had the next day.

The church and the shell of the military quarters were empty so I sat on a verandah base and began to think about my work. Looking down the hill it was hard to ignore the grassy slope leading down to the Broad Arrow. Later, as I walked down a path beside it, I tried to imagine how the alleged killer had exercised his powers of discrimination. Maybe he thought, "Shoot everyone, shoot all the humans you see," but someone told me of one victim he could have killed but didn't. He left her badly wounded and walked off. Perhaps a more inviting target beckoned. Like a child squashing ants out of boredom he chooses this one – no that one – then out of interest lets a plucky one go and so on. The

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*... sites of Port Arthur's size are difficult to erase.*

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hatred I felt for him on that grassy slope. I mused over suitable punishments: tied behind a car and dragged around the main block in Hobart; trussed up in stocks in the mall for all to vent their anger on. Then I thought of the argument that society itself is brutalized by such responses.

The replacement for the Broad Arrow was being hastily assembled within metres of its now loathed predecessor. Why there? I was stunned. On the wooden seats outside there were bleach stains. Surely not blood stains, not still there six weeks later? It felt ghoulish to look so closely but I really didn't believe my eyes.

The original Broad Arrow itself was going to be demolished in an act of erasure. This stain was going to be totally cleansed. This was not a new idea in history and someone had even suggested to me that the entire site should now be bulldozed. Since the dawn of civilization cultures, cults, subcults, societies and their structures have occasionally been 'wiped off the map'. 'No trace, no influence,' I guess has been the rationale.

**I**N THE LATE 1870S a twenty-year struggle by the locals over the housing of transported convicts was won and debate focused on ways to remove outward signs of our stain, the convict system. The convict institutions were closed, leased and tendered out for spare building parts. Locals adopted a collective muteness on their ancestry if it was in any way connected with that stain. I found out only ten years ago that my great-great-grandfather was transported for forgery. A great-great-great-grandmother on my mother's side was sent here in 1841 for stealing an oatmeal bun in Belfast – and so on. There are almost certainly others. In 1845, half of the population were convicts or ex-convicts.

But sites of Port Arthur's size are difficult to erase. In the 1970s when tourism was a bit breezy and the ruins were still officially tumbling down, I mucked around with girlfriends and mates getting behind bars and screaming, or going into the pitch black isolation cells where someone would pretend to bolt you in. I remember a photograph of my girlfriend, head up against a theatrical stone lion, pretending to roar. The convicts looked jolly in yellow and black garb, hanging off key-rings or on silly postcards plotting mischief against their guards. Their sweat could be bought in little bottles.

From the 'antiquities purchased and tours arranged' approach of my childhood, the site has been transformed into a slickly organized 'this is our past – examine in detail' open museum which, according to my nine-year-old daughter, is crowned by the 'Ghost Tour'. I hope no-one looks too hard now for tortured souls or despairing heartbroken spirits.

**I**MET THE WOMEN AND GIRLS for a picnic on the quay. Here was the parking area where the coaches lined up. After shooting all moving humans in the Broad Arrow (and a few not moving, so someone told me) he looked to the buses for more ants to squash.

The sun came out and we ate and swapped stories. In front of the cafe a news crew appeared to be interviewing people and taking footage. I leaned across to Cheryl and said, "Quick, think of something to say, we're going to be interviewed." Cheryl and Sandra were doubtful and we watched with apprehension and amusement as they talked to other people around the new memorial. Inevitably they made their way towards us. The reporter asked me why I had come and I said simply to bring our German friend Sandra to see the ruins. Cheryl said we should, as a community, give the Peninsula support and Sandra said she was interested in convicts. Next week on national news it was clear that Cheryl's had been the attitude they were looking for – Sandra and I hit the cutting-room floor.

Later in the afternoon I was sitting in a tea-room with Cheryl, and the waitress turned out to be a former student of hers. The entry pass into the site

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***In Tasmania, rumours involving infamy  
and misdeeds move in all directions  
like rain squalls.***

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asked visitors not to quiz staff on their experiences so we made small talk; but we could tell she wanted to say something about them. "I really like it here, but I've only been here a few months, and . . . well . . .", and so on. Eventually she told us that on 'that' afternoon, the rooms had been full. When the shooting started they lay on the floor for a good while, hoping he would not come. She was getting ongoing help to deal with the thought that she might have died at the hands of an unknown gunman. That would be her story. Others in Tasmania would be remembering the time a gun had been pointed in their direction and being told they were going to die. The massacre had rekindled those memories and the victims were all over Tasmania and beyond.

Some weeks later someone else from Hobart was involved in a rampage in Darwin. I was at work when the news report came on television. My eye was initially caught by a sweeping panorama of New Town from a hill looking east. The report said that this latest unbalanced character was from New Town, like the alleged killer at Port Arthur. The footage showed New Town High, which both suspects

attended in the late 1970s. I left in 1972. The report established a connection. New Town: New Town High: crazy use of guns. I had strange feelings as the camera panned. I felt the focus of the nation. Was it thinking 'streets of evil' or 'suburb of shame'?

The alleged killer was around after I had grown up but he did live a few doors up from my brother and his family in the late seventies. I was told that one time he had walked past my brother's back fence, where my sister-in-law was picking raspberries, and said, with a dead-pan face, "I'd like to fuck you."

I heard of other threats and intimidations uttered and for various reasons not acted on. A lot of people aren't sure what to do when they are menaced by somebody who knows who they are. Better to let it pass. After the massacre, when the alleged killer had been arrested, all the threats were remembered and repeated. In Tasmania, rumours involving infamy and misdeeds move in all directions like rain squalls.

My own solid connection with the alleged killer is that I liked the house he lived in – so much so that one day a couple of years ago, I left my phone number in his letter box asking if he was interested in selling. I did it that way because the house didn't look lived-in. I knew the house well (as an adolescent I had delivered papers there) – two-storey, brick painted white, large rambling front garden, built in the 1930s – almost a mansion. When I made the offer I thought it had been vacant for at least two years. The upstairs blinds were always down, the garden was rampant with blackberries, berry trees and weeds, and I had never seen anyone about (I passed fairly often). Strangely, it appeared that someone visited regularly. The backyard looked tidy and there was a security system. I thought that perhaps someone had died and the title was in dispute. Perhaps I might offer at exactly the right time and it would be sold to me grossly underpriced to spite someone. No-one replied to the note; I'm grateful he didn't take offence at me for intruding. I still think it's a good-looking house, but now it sits stark. Stripped of surrounding vegetation, lit up twenty-four hours a day, security men vigilant. The garden even appears to have been dug up in several spots. Somebody told me it had been broken into not long after the massacre.

**O**N A GREY AFTERNOON, soon after my trip to Port Arthur, I took Sandra and my youngest daugh-

ter for a walk. After we mounted the rise above New Town, the alleged killer's house came into view. I pointed it out to Sandra. She said it gave her the creeps. Sitting in a park and looking at the house, our topics of conversation drifted through German politics, German Catholicism, the war, belief in God and then her disbelief in God. If God existed, how could he allow evil things to exist and events like Port Arthur to happen? I argued that God gave us free will and we have a choice; you can reject certain ideas because they are repugnant to you. Sometimes circumstances allow unpalatable happenings to co-exist with everyday life, such as in Germany under Hitler. To speak out meant that you could also be a candidate for extermination. People stopped hearing and seeing certain things.

I knew I was getting close to the bone when Sandra became defensive. She pointed out that in this country we can talk about the war, its significance, heroism and sacrifice if we choose; in her country things had swung the other way and people talked about and looked at relics of shame and humiliation. The far right says that what happened was a good thing and they would do it again if the chance arose. She said that Port Arthur was terrible but in her part of the world bombs went off, ambushes occurred at traffic lights, and migrant hostels were set alight so their occupants could burn.

I tried to put things into perspective by saying that Port Arthur was the biggest spree-killing in the world yet – here, in Tasmania, at the end of the world. Later when I thought about the conversation, other massacres came to mind. I don't think massacres are exactly unheard of in Tasmania, but you have to go back a bit. During the 'Black War' (1825–31) there were some, but records are a bit sketchy because it was a nasty business and the political intent of the British Government didn't always translate to the field where communications were poor, discipline patchy and hatred strong. Official losses for both sides weren't that different but somehow a couple of thousand Aborigines disappeared and they can't all be put down to infections and disease.

There is a family rumour that my great-great-great-great-grandfather was involved in the trapping of a tribe on a barren cape. He and others slaughtered them all by shooting and driving them over cliffs into the sea. Some histories have referred to the event but admit records are sketchy. For a while it was total war and my feeling is that random massacres were considered lucky breaks by those committing them . . .

**B**ACK TO THE HOSPITAL and the day I watched the helicopters land on the Domain. I could see the wind blustering down the valley, pushing at the line of pines that were planted after the Boer War as symbols of death. The simple memorial to that war ran in a direct line to the later one, commemorating World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Malaysian emergency and the Indonesian uprising. The Boer War had lost its impact after World War II and now the Tasman Highway split Memorial Drive and sliced into Hobart from the east.

The ambulances moved down from the Domain lawns, down the Tasman Highway and into Argyle Street past the front of the hospital to Casualty. The streets were roped off, with police at key points. They looked twitchy and I know that everyone looking from that fifth floor window was nervous about the future. We didn't even know when we'd be allowed home let alone who'd done it and why or who was dead. A pall hung over the office as the motorized procession moved into the city. It all looked strangely out of place in Tasmania; a bit like war, I imagine. One thought occurred to me then and has recurred many times since – Port Arthur had been attacked. I knew then that the wounds of the past would re-open.

My father's attitude to the past is "let sleeping dogs lie". Someone told him that because he wasn't told by his grandmother that his great-grandfather was a convict. Whatever motives the alleged killer had, the site he chose and the way he did it hit hard into Tasmania's core.

*Anthony Weare is a psychiatric nurse from Hobart. His interests include local history and the Geelong Football Club.*



BOBBY FENWICK  
**Rainbow Legs**



“**T**HANK HEAVENS IT’S STOPPED raining,” Mum says, tucking stray hairs under her head scarf.

“It’s some consolation.” Even with her hair concealed, Mum looks lovely. From where I squat, on the veranda, I watch Dad and the removalist, with the aid of hessian ropes, ease our cedar chifionier down the front steps. Jimmy flies through the front door and flicks my head with the rolled up rug he’s carrying.

“Come and help you lazy thing.”

“I’ve been helping.” Lifting the cardboard box beside me, I crunch across the gravel driveway to the furniture van. Dad lowers his end of the chifionier, takes a deep breath and rubs his back.

“I must confess it’s quite a wrench leaving here after ten years,” he says to the removalist.

“Ya wuz lucky to find a place like this, mate,” the man replies, sliding his cigarette to the corner of his mouth with his tongue, and spitting into the rhododendron bed. Dad glances away.

“Oh, the bank arranged it. We moved straight in when we arrived from England.”

Ten years. I couldn’t remember that far back. I’d have been just two and Jimmy four. Ten years. Nearly my whole life spent growing up in this house, this garden; they seemed part of my bones. Orange blossom scent that floated into the tree-house Dad built, transporting me to exciting dream worlds. Secret places. The small tower on top of the house from where, on a clear day, you could see to the far side of the Yarra River where factory chimneys smoked like giant candles.

I wonder if some part of me could’ve seeped into the walls of the house, so that whoever came next would sense who’d been here. It would need to be a girl. A boy would think the idea stupid. I pick two sprigs of lavender, leave one on the marble mantel-

piece and breathe deeply of the other before securing it inside the elastic of my bloomers.

Dad said, with his banking experience, he’d have no trouble finding a job once business picks up.

As we leave, wind whips the bare branches of the silver birches lining the driveway against their ghost-white trunks. Dad and Jimmy are in the first van and I sit between Mum and the driver of the second van. I try to squirm from his sweaty smell but a protruding seat spring pricks the back of my knees. Mum clutches a basket containing her collection of fragile ruby glass secured inside a tartan rug. Her mouth twists as if she’s sucking a lemon. She doesn’t look back. I bite off a piece of nail and chew it.

As we cross Princes Bridge and head for Carlton, the past seems to fold up like a telescope.

Near the Trades Hall the vans are forced to a halt, as a procession of cloth-capped men straggles past. They carry flapping banners with red print on them:

STOP IMMIGRATION  
WE WANT JOBS  
PAYMENT FOR RELIEF WORK  
ONE IN THREE UNEMPLOYED

“Poor sods,” our driver says. “Mind if I have a fag?”

Before Mum can reply, he lights a cigarette and smoke fills the cabin.

I sneeze.

“Sorry luv.” He slides a window open.

A weak sun soothes the bruised sky as the vans turn into Drummond Street, which is wide and lined with time-wizened trees. Fat budded branches curve above the roadway to almost form an arch. Beneath this a prattle of barefoot children kick a football made from newspaper.

Two-storey terrace houses rub shoulders in a friendly fashion and the vans pull up in front of one standing on a corner of a wide, bluestone laneway.

Jimmy lays claim to our new house by cocking his leg over the banister and whizzing downstairs at a frightening pace. I lean my arms over and slide down slowly.

The fourth stair squeaks and we bounce up and down on it singing:

Half a pound of tuppenny rice  
Half a pound of treacle  
That's the way the mo - o - ney goes  
Pop goes the weasel.

While I explore the small room under the stairs Jimmy locks me in its spooked darkness. Cramped smells spike around me. Something plops into my hair – I scream!

Dad jerks the door open. "What the hell's going on?"

I screech as I thrash at my head.

"There's something crawly in my hair!"

Dad pulls a fat cockroach from my hair and squashes it under his heel. UGH!

"I'll fix that Jimmy later," he says.

I begin to hum at the thought and do a little dance up the front hallway. Sunlight streams through the stained-glass fanlight above the front door. It paints an arc of colours across my legs.

"Look Dad." He turns from inching the piano into the front room. "Rainbow legs," he quips.

I start to feel happy and bubbly inside, then he says, "Now off you go, make yourself scarce."

I wander down the sideway to the stone-floored kitchen where Mum is struggling to light the wood stove.

"Goodness knows when you'll get lunch," she says, dabbing at smoke tears with a corner of her apron.

My belly makes noises like someone talking under water. I hop from one foot to the other.

"Where's the lavatory?"

"Near the back fence. And don't forget to wash your hands."

"I mean the inside one."

"There's no inside one."

Arms of blue creeper hug the lavatory, almost hiding it. Its wooden seat warms my bottom. Stuck under the seat is a glob of chewing gum. I leave it

there. Keep close watch on a huntsman spider watching me from a corner of the roof. How can I come here after dark? Standing on tiptoe, I manage to pull the chain. That Jimmy can stop calling me Shorty.

When I come out Jimmy's astride the side fence. "Dad's going to get you," I say. "Scaredy cat . . . Scaredy cat . . . you can't take a joke." I grab an empty tea-chest and scramble up beside him. Perfume, from sweet peas spiralling up the fence, greets me. Next door a girl sits in a green wicker chair brushing her hair. Red hair. Red and wavy; it tumbles to her shoulders like a swirl of autumn leaves. She smiles. Her smile seems to leap at us. She has buck teeth. Jimmy stutters, "My name's J - J - Jimmy," and thumbing in my direction, "and this is Emily."

"Hello there, I'm Jeannie Hellyer. I wondered who was moving in."

"Oh, Mum sings a song, 'I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair'," Jimmy says, then turns the colour of Jeannie's hair and looks away.

Jeannie laughs, "It'll be good fun having you next door."

"I'm starving," I say. "Mum can't get the stove going."

Just then Mum's voice calls, "Jaaames, Emilyyy."

"Jaaames, Emilyyy," echoes from beneath Jeannie's chair. Was she a ventriloquist? We'd heard one when Mum took us to see 'Toad of Toad Hall', at the Tivoli.

"That's our cocky, Wobble-Gabble," Jeannie laughs and pulls at a chain attached to the leg of her chair. Out wobbles a cockatoo with one leg shorter than the other.

"Dad found him caught in a rabbit trap. He's real quick at mimicking voices."

Seeming to sense he is the centre of attraction, Wobble-Gabble struts around, unfurls his crest and squawks, "Up there Cazaly!"

"Who's Cazaly?" Jimmy asks.

"Don't tell me you've never heard of Cazaly the famous South Melbourne footballer."

Jimmy bit his top lip and stretched his head from side to side.

"Wobble-Gabble climbs on the end of Mum's and Dad's bed on Sunday mornings screeching, 'Up there Cazaly!'"

"Dad says one day he'll kill him."

Mum's voice calls again in a tone not to be ignored. We hurry to the kitchen and discover Dad

with his arms around Mum, patting her back.

"Don't worry, Florrie, we'll sell the oak desk and buy a new gas stove."

"You can't do that," Mum snuffles into his shoulder. "It's been in your family for generations."

"There, there, it won't be the end of the world."

Just as we sit down to cheese sandwiches and cold milk a large woman appears in the doorway.

"I'm Maisie, Jeannie's Mum," she says, handing Mum a large saucepan and – I couldn't believe it – a pineapple. "Careful Missus, the soup's hot. I know what it's like movin' house." She winks. "Done a few moonlight flits in me time." She laughs. A laugh that seems to zigzag from her feet and up through her body until her breasts bob above her blouse like dumplings in a stew.

"Oh, how kind of you," Mum says, with an embarrassed smile. "Not-at-all." She seems anxious to leave.

"I'd have sent Jeannie in but she's had polio y'know; god luvva. Now, I won't hold you up. Just giv'us a hoy, over the fence, if you want a hand to fix that goddam stove. I had one like it before we lost the farm."

She ambles out.

"Well," says Mum, in a surprised voice, "She didn't even ring the bell or wait to be introduced."

"You can't expect social graces here," Dad says. "She's a horse of a different colour. At least she's trying to be friendly."

Social graces? People here were only a fingertip away. In our old street houses were set widely apart. I wonder if that makes a difference? Not waiting to be invited seems somehow – somehow what? Seems somehow warmer.

The smell of the pineapple, as Mum slices it up, makes my mouth water. "What's polio?" I ask.

"Poliomyelitis. It's commonly known as Infantile Paralysis. If Jeannie can't walk it must have affected her legs." Dad clicks his tongue. "Poor little blighter."

"But what is it?" Jimmy persists, grabbing a serviette to mop pineapple juice running down his wrist into the sleeve of his jumper.

"For goodness' sake, questions, questions!" Mum clattered plates into the wash-up dish. "Can't you see how busy I am? Look it up for yourself in the dictionary."

The dictionary; where would it be in the cartons of books? How to spell it? Dad scribbles the word on a torn-off corner of paper bag. POLIOMYELITIS.

Days fly by. Jimmy explores the neighbourhood. Mum teaches me to clean brass.

Doors and windows are flung open and musty corners cringe from scouring with sandsoap and phenyl. The house shudders, stretches, shakes itself and settles back onto its bluestone foundations.

Does it smile?

The tree on the front pavement unfurls a leaf as delicate as a baby's fist. Cradled in it, a dewdrop reflects a world almost without defects.

"What's the world coming to?" Dad asks one morning, as he rustles through the *Argus* newspaper during breakfast. "Yesterday, police shot a man as he fought to stop them evicting his wife and six children from their home. How on earth do they expect the poor devil to pay rent when he's unemployed?"

"Tch, tch, tch," Mum sighs. She shakes her head hard as if to remove this sudden, undeserved death from her mind. Slowly, an apple corer turns in my middle, leaving a hole.

What if Dad can't find a job?



Bev Aisbett

Roget's insomnia

BRIAN MATTHEWS

## Slouching Towards the Millennium



*The world is about to end. Mountains will split asunder; seas will overflow their quaking shores; the air – static with unimaginable power and burdened with thunder – will be sucked out of the heavens in one cosmic gasp; the planets, flung from their orbits, will hurtle into the expanding black holes of deep space; and death will at last have dominion.* In the afternoon, however, conditions will moderate, rain will contract to the east and a deep high over the gulf should produce average temperatures for this time of year . . .

**A**SIDE FROM THE BORROWED JOKE, that is a version of millenarian language, though it is the conventional version, the kind most associated with off-hand ideas of the millennium, ideas often vaguely garnered from stereotypical accounts of the arrival of the year one thousand. Like it or not, we are all to some extent in the millenarian grip. To be among that number that sees the clock hands edge dispassionately into a new century and the new millennium, will be to account oneself somehow privileged by time and fate. This is the potency, the allure, of the chiliastic – that obsession with, or the ascription of certain powers to, the passing of a thousand years.

The lure is such that somehow it ceases to matter that the numbering system we have imposed on the ages is entirely irrelevant to and totally unimportant upon, the magisterial sweep of solar, lunar and sidereal patterns across our unfathomable skies; somehow the mere, yet also momentous, fact that the first figure of the year will become two after having been immemorially one, and that all the rest will be noughts, convinces us we are living through a temporal revolution that even Dr Who might have respected. The talismanic nature of the mere numbers is underlined by the fact that, though

some argue the millenarian date is actually 2001, no one really cares: 2000 will do fine – it represents such a cataclysmic leap from 1999. Numerology makes the future another country.

It was in pondering this unruly bundle of ideas and fugitive snippets that I became more and more interested in millenarian phenomena. Millenarianism, the idea of the millennial, turns out to be made of sterner stuff than is implied in my opening, stereotypical adumbrations – which are made up partly of superstition, partly of half digested legend, and which depend wholly on the mystery and the awe of the thousand-year moment. To begin altering our focus a bit, here is a somewhat different kind of millenarian incident described by Michael Adas in his book, *Prophets of Rebellion*:

Near the town of Dedaye in Lower Burma in January 1931, a well-armed party of colonial police was confronted by an irregular mass of nearly seven hundred Burman peasants. Despite warnings from the British officer in command that they would be fired upon, the peasants, armed only with knives, spears, and a few antique firearms, advanced fearlessly across open ground towards the ready guns of the Indian and Burman mercenaries who made up the bulk of the colonial military forces. As they marched, the leaders of the rebel throng chanted cabalistic incantations to stupefy the enemy troops and . . . render their [weapons] useless. [The peasants] clutched protective talismans . . . and displayed magic symbols . . . intended to confer invulnerability. [They] did not hesitate, for . . . [A]ll signs indicated that the forces of the cosmos were on their side.

Through their prophet leader, the peasants sought to usher in a golden age of harmony and

prosperity. They thought themselves invincible. No threats, no show of force, could turn them back. As the closely packed ranks of the rebel band drew near to the embankment where the colonial forces had taken cover, the police opened fire. Nearly two hours later the bewildered remnants of the rebel force withdrew leaving hundreds of their comrades dead or wounded on the field of battle . . .

The American anthropologist, Anthony Wallace ('Revitalization Moments' *American Anthropologist* 58, 1956, pp 264–81), identifies the kind of movement involved here as "revitalization", which he defines as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture". Many different social movements are included in Wallace's perception of revitalization – the nativistic, the messianic, the sectarian, the revivalist and – most pertinently for us at the moment – the millennial. Millennium refers to a thousand years, most especially that of Christ's prophesied reign on earth (Revelation 20: 1-5); but we also use millennium to mean a period of good government, stability, prosperity – halcyon days: we say something might happen 'come the millennium', meaning not necessarily or at all the elapse of a thousand years but rather the onset of ideal circumstances which, we imply, are extremely unlikely to eventuate. The Burmese rebellion just described is not millennial in the chronological sense but it does meet conditions involved in revitalization – a conscious effort to attain a more satisfying culture.

So does the following incident, described by John Bryson at the start of his famous book, *Evil Angels*, on the Chamberlain case in Australia:

It was Autumn. Roadside aspens and hickories were already lean and spiky. Leaves lay in the wagon ruts and grass in the field was still damp in the late afternoon. This field was at Phoenixville, on the south bank of the Schuylkill, in 1844 . . . [it] was owned by Josiah Levitt [whose family] had invited friends to pass a day there in prayer though it was not the Sabbath but a Monday.

Nearly twenty families arrived . . . Some had come from Vermont, some from New Jersey . . . Some of these folk had not met before . . .

[N]ewcomers were welcomed with the words 'Brother' and 'Sister', and with familiar phrases from the Bible.

. . . This was the twenty-second day of October. Everyone was here to watch the second coming of Christ and to be drawn up into the heavenly throng.

You can see that a species of revitalization is also central to this incident, though it is not the earthly culture that is to be transformed by the millennial event but the spirits of the people – they are to become pure spirit and reap their eternal reward. (The failure of the millennial moment to eventuate on that occasion became known among Seventh Day Adventists as 'The Great Disappointment'). Incidentally, in describing two events culturally, historically and emotionally very dissimilar, both writers, you'll notice, drop into a tense prose of ambivalent portent (in both these cases, successfully I think): the millennial seems to demand a sort of understated dramatic utterance, which Bryson and Adas achieve in the same way – by obsessive specification of place, careful attention to times and dates, which take on great significance, and emphasis on the deployment of groups and on their movements. Both build to a denouement (though I don't have space properly to detail Bryson's) which, after these tensions, is almost sickening in its finality of failure, even while failure, as far as we reasonable readers are concerned, was always inevitable. Of course the Burman peasants will be mown down; of course Christ won't appear: but the 'millennial prose', as we might call it, almost suspends those disbeliefs with its dramatic sweep.

Before advancing matters a bit further, here is one last example – different again:

[This] is a case of fear, it is a case of despair: we say we fear what may come. We despair that we have the ability to create something better: do we really imagine this is . . . the best of all possible worlds we live in? Are we really incapable of improving it?

One hundred years ago, our forefathers . . . spent a great deal of time and [commitment] creating a federation . . . it was a huge feat of imagination and creation . . . and one hundred years ago Australians had that capacity to do something really big, and I find it extraordinary to hear that

we don't have that capacity today.

Perhaps I am overly optimistic. Perhaps I am naive. But I would rather have confidence in our ability to imagine the future and make it happen, in our ability to create institutions that are meaningful and that are genuinely Australian . . . This debate does divide people: there is no doubt about that. It divides the brave from the fearful, the hopeful from those who despair. I have little doubt that, in years to come, we will see that all Australians . . . will be on the side of courage, hope and confidence and on the side of making the future work rather than . . . of those who wring their hands and wish for days gone [by].

As many of you will know, this is from Malcolm Turnbull's summing up in his debate with Geoffrey Blainey; it was partly off the cuff and is therefore less precise and calculated than the other two. But it is deeply millennial – full of revitalizing fervour, full of faith in a better future, full of that same certainty that drove the Burman peasants into the guns and the Seventh Day Adventists to their tryst with the second coming. It is less portentous because the future Turnbull is investing in has a good deal more chance of eventuating than the future espoused in the other two incidents.

Implicit in all three of these episodes, but much more obvious in Turnbull's speech because less mediated by the exigencies of narrative, is the one further crucial ingredient of millenarianism. A popular movement energized by the presence, in whatever form and however attenuated, of millenarian/revivalist aspirations is not on its own enough:

Popular discontent and millenarian tendencies (argues Michael Adas) must be amalgamated and articulated either by a prophetic leader . . . or by prominent figures in socio-religious organizations . . . Though prophetic leaders do not necessarily proclaim millenarian visions, in the great majority of cases prophets have been central to the process by which diffuse millennial ideas have been forged into ideologies capable of generating sustained protest movements.

Malcolm Turnbull is clearly not speaking as a prophet but his utterance often partakes, as we say, of the prophetic in a non-mystic, thoroughly modern way. His statement thus has all the ingredients,

if somewhat under-emphasized, of the millennial; he yokes the ideology of republicanism to the powerful momentum of millenarianism.

AUSTRALIANS HAVE NOT been terribly strong on millennial tendencies or thinking. This is understandable in a migrant society which has, in a short time, made enormous physical and material progress: our white history has been too busy, our discontents less drastic than those, say, of the Burmese peasants of the 1930s; our protests have been focused and explicit and sufficiently endowed with ways and means to make falling back on the pronouncements and charisma of prophets very unlikely (until the present day, ironically enough, when militant fundamentalism of various colours has revived the would-be charismatics). There have been moments: at the turn of this century, metaphysical considerations were not readily canvassed in Australia (as they were for example in *fin-de-siècle* England and France), but Bernard O'Dowd went against the trend in his poem 'Australia' – famous for its sentiments though not for its prosody:

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,  
Are you a drift Sargasso where the West  
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?  
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race  
Are you for light, and trimmed, with oil in place,  
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?  
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?  
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The cenotaph of species dead elsewhere  
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,  
Or trail uncanny harp strings from your trees,  
Mix omens with the auguries that dare  
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,  
A virgin helpmate ocean at your knees.

Here, traces of apocalyptic vision mix with strong strains of Wallace's revitalization, except that in this case Australia is seen as a possible revitalizing force not only for her own people and culture but for the world.

A few years earlier, William Lane had been making similar pronouncements and, prophet-like, he led his followers to Paraguay where the revitalization of society and culture might be achieved after

Australia had proved inimical to his message and his plans. Messianism and millennialism mixed with more pragmatic considerations in the formation of Cosme. In general though, despite the fact that it seems likely that the calendar's jump from 1899 to 1900 was a contributory pressure leading to the achievement of federation against the odds by 1901, Australians – as the nineteenth century poised to turn into the twentieth – were exercised by the pragmatic rather than the apocalyptic. Newspapers and the *Bulletin* looked forward to prosperity, maturity, identity – but without the spice of Revelation. Putative prophets like William Lane were dispensed with: our turn-of-the-century ancestors observed the moment with due *gravitas* but were not much given, collectively anyway, to omens or the talismanic.

NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS LATER, at just about the time Paul Keating was beginning to elbow Bob Hawke aside for the Prime Ministership of Australia, Helen Daniel, critic, journalist and editor (presently of *ABR*), had the idea of commissioning contributions from a range of Australian philosophers, intellectuals, writers, historians and academics to an anthology entitled *Millennium*. Writing in 1991, she saw the looming millennium as “a critical aspect of contemporary consciousness” and “one of the most remarkable features of contemporary culture”.

Despite her splendid track record in these matters – her previous anthology, *Expressway*, based on her own off-beat idea, had been a brilliant success – and despite having contributors like Elizabeth Jolley, Rod Jones, Dennis Altman, John Bryson, Humphrey McQueen, Marion Halligan, Janette Turner-Hospital, Max Charlesworth and many more – Daniel's *Millennium* was not a great success. But, despite its rapid demise, *Millennium* constitutes a very interesting, consciously constructed insight into at least some lines of Australian millenarian thinking at a time when Australians had not begun to think that way very much at all and would probably only do so if prompted.

One reason for the failure of the book might have been that Daniel made her move too early: the book was published half-way through 1991, and though she remarks that the year 2000 is “now very close” it wasn't as close then as it is now; moreover, the collective awareness of entering the nineties – the last decade of the millennium – had faded, a pro-

cess aided by the massive distraction of the Gulf War, and it would not revive again quickly. So that millenarian ideas and speculations had not been matched by their hour. In my view, though, a more important reason for its failure was its rather bland sameness and that in turn is attributable to the fact that, with only very rare exceptions, contributors' conceptions of the millennial are doggedly apocalyptic, dystopian, utopian or science fictional. They are almost never connected to a world that might *really* eventuate in 2000 – a world, that is, coterminous with our own. It's only one book, of course: but there's not much other evidence at the start of the nineties, and certainly nothing so concentrated and so potentially weighty, to give an insight into how Australians were regarding the prospect of the millennium.

So, if a concentration of some of our best minds and imagination didn't succeed in generating significant millennial vibrations, have we in Australia ever experienced what Adas calls “diffuse millennial ideas”? In my view we have: for a few years in the

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1990s, closely following upon though, needless to say, entirely unconnected with the disappointing glimpses of the *Millennium* book, Australia was a place in which “diffuse millennial ideas” – though rarely explicitly styled as such – were articulated by a leader who often spoke and behaved in the manner of a latter day, non-fundamentalist prophet; though never explicitly styled as such, he mightn't have minded if he had been. Paul Keating came to the leadership of his party and his country in a spirit, eventually, of inevitability. Within months of his accession, importantly influenced by the views and visions of Don Watson, Keating proffered to the nation a revisionist version of its recent and colonial history on the basis of which he then sought to lead Australians, prophet-like you might say, into a revitalized future. Revitalization would be distin-

guished at a purely symbolic level by new semiotics (the flag, the anthem); at a global level by radical geographical revisionism (Australia as Asia); at a constitutional level by the espousal of republicanism, the establishment of a new national independence and identity; and, perhaps most important of all, within the country's domestic life, by reconciliation with the Aborigines. (Because this sort of outline, especially post-Keating, is sometimes offered

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or received as satire, I should emphasize here that I deeply admired the whole program.)

These were, of course, aspirations intricately ramified and qualified by many predictable and unpredictable forces: Keating's own personality as it emerged after the 1993 election; his own and his government's mistakes; and a plethora of external political and economic factors that simply wouldn't stay in the visionary net. But it was a vision – it was what Keating called "The Big Picture" and it was millenarian, revitalizing – tied to the year 2000 as a notional deadline and to 2001 as an especially Australian one, thus picking up both the dates in contention. In this way, he was able to endow his projects with readily available millenarian urgencies, mystiques, opportunities. As a millennial aspiration, 'The Big Picture' also took on a global significance – this was no mere parochial show, this was Australia revitalizing itself for the new era. For a few years, of all the millenarian plans putatively available – Britain's project-based Millennium Commission, America's grand party of the nation – Australia's had the possibility of events, decisions and achievements truly worthy of the epochal moment.

One of the reasons Keating was so rivettingly interesting as a leader – if not always palatable or attractive – was his capacity to set his face brazenly against orthodoxies and bring them into sudden and massive doubt. As the book, *Millennium*, showed,

the natural tendency of people when asked to consider the millennial is to come down on the side of the chiliastic: western intellectuals live in an age of endings, our age has a temperamental inclination towards closure. The 'end' of the communist regimes, the fall of the wall, was the 'end' of history, the death of God, the 'end' of nature, the death of the novel, the death of the book culture, the bonfire of the vanities, the end of ideology, and so on and on and on . . . Don Anderson lists many more in his contribution to Daniels' *Millennium*. To these closures Australians add their own variation in the form of the exultant destruction of those works and reputations on the basis of which – however flawed they might be – our national self-knowledge can be deepened. (The attacks on Manning Clark are an example.) Yet, as I've already elaborated, the evidence of many millennial movements suggests that they have much more to do with revitalization than endings, despite popular views to the contrary. Keating, no doubt characteristically, turned his back on closure and gave us revitalization. As Donald Horne has remarked of him:

One of the most significant expressions of Paul Keating's erratic genius has been that he comes every now and again with his spray can and sketches a big, bright picture that stays on the wall as a new part of the political scene. He does this with boldness and belief . . .

Though it was – and it remains – easy to scorn the idea of Keating as the Prophet-ingredient in the Australian millenarian mix (and this was especially so because Keating himself so often seemed to be living the role rather pompously or at too great a remove from the people), nevertheless, his leadership was not at all mere gesture; and it was from the front and it was courageous. Various of his colleagues have now made it clear, off the record – the details will no doubt emerge in due course – that Keating had to flog many of his Cabinet colleagues through the Native Title legislation; that he told them they must have Keating and the Mabo legislation or nothing – the one went with the other. He might have felt reasonably confident in delivering this ultimatum at that time, but there is no doubt that Keating put his job on the line for Native Title. Curiously, in years to come, this toughest and most controversially head-kicking of prime ministers will



probably be remembered above all for his dedication to a great humanitarian, non vote-winning cause.

WHEN LABOR WON the 1993 election, I took it (from twelve thousand miles away) as evidence of a sophistication on the part of the electorate because, in a negative and dull campaign, Keating's one uncharacteristically flamboyant move was a presentation at the Sydney Opera House where he announced a vision for Australia embodying cultural growth, republicanism and Aboriginal reconciliation: these were to be the entry tickets that Australians would brandish at the gates of the new millennium – hard won, expensive, but unquestionably among the most valuable that any nation would command as all filed into Arena 2000. This, I thought at the time, was what had fired up Australians, despite pressing electoral realities like unemployment, industrial relations policy and, in 1993, the GST. Even the *Guardian* admired what it saw and envied as the Australian electorate's wisdom in rejecting a Thatcherite program for something both humane and idealistic (it was one of those times when Australia appeared in the British press without requiring the trigger of someone being eaten by a shark or the pinging of a royal bra strap). We now know, however, that the result was aberrant, that if it was billed as the unlosable election for the Coalition it was also, the psephologists tell us, the election Labor should not have won.

In the end – the end being March 1996 – Australians rejected Keating's 'Big Picture' and they did so in a way and with a trenchancy that brooks no cavilling and no argument and certainly no whingeing. With Keating and most of his party went Australian millenarianism: the Republic remained as an aim, but much less idealistically espoused, and surrounded by doubts, equivocations and delays; the possibilities of a millennial reconciliation with the Aborigines retreated rapidly amidst threats to amend the Mabo legislation and a massive attack on ATSIC which has even its Aboriginal *opponents* saying that the cause of reconciliation has been set back decades; as for a truly Australian cultural revolution, the scorched earth, take-no-prisoners approach to the ABC, tertiary education, the Australia Council, and foreign cultural diplomacy have left artistic, creative and intellectual pursuits in turmoil.

Despite his personally abrasive style, his apparent loftiness and the fact that, as a result, he lost many otherwise potential supporters, Keating did for a while offer to the nation a *deliberate, organized conscious effort . . . to construct a more satisfying culture* and the symbolism, actualities and momentum of millenarianism were convenient, imminent and potent components which gradually became integral to his campaign. Like a football team that peaks too early, Keating perhaps both mis-timed his run and misread some of the signs. Whatever the explanation, Australians' millenarian attention and interests now focus almost utterly and exclusively on the Sydney Olympic Games in the year 2000; apart from the Games, there are only parties of various degrees of ostentation and something as yet unformed to do with Federation. This, to put it mildly, is a great pity, because a concentration on the Games as its millenarian focus has specific disadvantages for Australia: first, it looks as if it's a genuine millenarian project and a truly Australian

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salute to the millennium, but it is not of course – it belongs to the world, to commercialism and to nationalist agendas; second, it entrenches the stereotype that Australians are physical, win-oriented and uninterested in culture – a useful reinforcement for any government unwilling to spend on the arts and suspicious of intellectuals; third, it puts all our eggs into a basket already made tawdry by others, already irredeemably commercial; fourth, it places a premium on a form of display – large-scale celebratory postures and gestures – which we have never been very good at: you only have to watch the half-time entertainment at the Grand Final of the Australian Football League or the Australian Rugby League to see how imitative, impoverished and desperate are our commercially initiated public imaginings in connection with sport; if that doesn't convince you, have a look at the truly wince-

making goodies paraded at the end of the Atlanta Games as a foretaste of Sydney 2000: as Diana Simmonds lamented in the *Bulletin* (27 August 1996, p.89), "If . . . the inflatable bicycling kangaroos are anything to go by, we're doomed to kitsch, cliché and stereotype"; fifth, hosting the Games will force us into a national posture which our failure to achieve Aboriginal reconciliation simply won't bear; Atlanta apparently swept its social problems out of town, but the days are well and truly gone when we can pretend that the Aborigines, with their catastrophic infant mortality statistics and the appallingly large number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, to mention only two evils, aren't really there. "In the lead-up to the Olympic Games in 2000," wrote Marcia Langton in *The Australian* (18 April 1996, p. 13) "Australians will have either the support of indigenous people in hosting that prestigious event on this continent, or they will have our derision."

Whatever the actual impotence of chiliasm, millennial impulses, beliefs and fanaticisms do

exist and they exist powerfully: they can drive believers on in the face of machine guns; they can bring people to lonely hilltops convinced of the second coming; they can give focus, excitement and energy to national resolutions like the desire for a republic or the determination to heal national rifts and scars. Keating saw this, but he wasn't quite the right type of prophet. For whatever reason, Australians have summarily and incontestably ended their brief flirtation with millenarian headiness and all the indications are that our encounter with 2000 will be marked by merely ephemeral gestures. If so, this will be – as Josiah Levitt and his friends styled their equally shattering let-down – a 'great disappointment'. More important, it will be a complex and profound national opportunity squandered on bread and circuses.

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JULIE LEWIS

## Mary Martin Opens Her Bookshop



*"I have, as you doubtless see by the unimposing sticker, once more changed my address."<sup>1</sup>*

THE LETTER TO EDGAR CASTLE was dated August 1945, a few months after Mary Martin first opened her bookshop in a room in Brookman Buildings. There are no records relating to her occupancy and it seems possible that this room, made available by David Painter,<sup>2</sup> had been the former office of Reed & Harris, which became vacant when Max Harris moved to Melbourne early in 1945, because "he would always be at risk of further prosecution if he continued to edit *Angry Penguins* in his own city".<sup>3</sup> Harris had been fined £5 in lieu of six months jail as a result of the obscenity trial relating to the Ern Malley issue of *Angry Penguins*.<sup>4</sup> The "unimposing sticker" (which names 13 Alma Chambers as her current address) obscures the intervening location, at 6 Commercial House, Featherstone Place (off Gawler Place). The reasons for the changes are unknown: curtailment of lease, the landlord's need or the possibility of cheaper rental perhaps, but moving to new premises involved a lot of effort – the shifting of books, shelves, boxes, stationery, typewriter and the obligatory coffee-making equipment. Family and friends could be relied on to help.

Mary Martin had been sending Edgar Castle books of her own choosing during the closing months of the war while he was away in the navy, the parcel (and the bill) arriving every few weeks. "She always chose rightly."<sup>5</sup> On this occasion though, he had requested a book – *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* – which she was unable to provide. "I cannot – much as I hate to admit it. I send you a list. Some on it you would not admit to your shelves; amongst the rest there may be some of interest to you."<sup>6</sup> The accompanying list was extensive and included books on art – *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* 22/-, *What is Modern Painting?* 6/-, *Indian Art in the United States* 30/-; music –

*Handbook of Soviet Musicians*; psychology – Freud: *A General Selection* 6/9 and several on psychoanalysis; Australian literature (including Peter Cowan's *Drift* 9/-, Max Harris' *The Vegetative Eye* 10/6 and the 1943 *Coast to Coast* 7/6). There were a number of collections of poetry as well as a selection of books of literary criticism, a swag of works on Soviet Russia and socialism, and a scattering of periodicals including *Meanjin* 2/6 and *Southerly* 2/-. Considering she had only been in business six months and was operating on a limited budget, the scope of her stock was quite remarkable. Many of the books were probably from her own library and discounted as second-hand. This may explain why Robert Clark, a lawyer and poet, and one of her early customers, found the book he had bought was annotated, something he put down to Mary's willingness to let customers buy 'on approval' and return if unsuitable. It is possible that the annotations were her own.

The rest of her letter (one of the few that remain to people other than family) gives some indication of Mary's kind of humour and "sweet irony".<sup>7</sup>

Your letter went through a series of what must have been fascinating adventures, and was finally delivered – by hand – by some important gentleman who was the post-office incarnate. To begin: I have, as you doubtless see by the unimposing sticker, once more changed my address. In spite of instructions written out on a long and complicated form, duly signed at least a dozen times, some of my letters continued to go to Featherstone Place. At Featherstone Place there resided a young lady who should have been a lady-novelist – one who had a great desire to see how others lived. The address on your envelope – Mary Martins Infamous Bookshop –

– was far too great a temptation for her. A really first class scandal seemed to have come her way quite unsought for. Dropped from the gods. Doubtless she opened it all agog for the secret of the Infamy. A letter from an ex-customer of the wicked Brothel??? Or what?? Imagine the poor lass’s bewilderment when she opened your letter. Full of the most erudite references to T.S.Eliot – here we go round the prickly pear – Shakespeare – ballads – and finally a pun on a certain Jewish Psychologist which the poor lass probably wouldn’t know how to pronounce, and so would miss that most glorious of all puns. It is a wonder she did not forward the whole thing to the war-office. Pink paper too. Anyway the Post-office found the letter in her bag – though what the post-office was doing going through a strange woman’s handbag I don’t know – it’s this Labour [sic] Government you know. The post-office then came to explain to me why my private correspondence had not only been opened, but was long overdue.

May God bless you; and the Navy not keep you. M.

Here is a letter freed from the somewhat hectoring tone of those *On Dit*<sup>8</sup> protests. According to Edgar Castle it demonstrates Mary’s self-effacement. It also reveals something of her desire to please, her warmth, her humour – and her detachment. The final salutation is ambiguous; fond, but whimsical.

Both Brian Medlin and Edgar Castle first met Mary Martin in the Reed & Harris office in 1944. They were young poets, Medlin still at school and Castle a sailor and they had each been published in a magazine (*Barjai*) which specifically took the work of young contributors. They had read each other’s work and arranged to meet at the Reed & Harris room in Brookman Buildings. Brian Medlin says,

there was this beautiful, immense golden-bearded sailor, half cut at least, sitting cross-legged on the floor with a portable typewriter. I said “I’m Medlin” to which the response was “You can’t be, I’m just writing to that bastard.”<sup>9</sup>

Edgar Castle says, “I took him to my house – I was on leave I imagine – and made myself sick on Australian Vermouth, trying to show him how naval in-

tellectuals took their booze.”<sup>10</sup> The following year when Mary started her bookshop, they both dropped in regularly.

Edgar Castle was the first official customer “with Invoice 1 and Receipt 1 on her brand new commercial stationery . . . the book was Karl Mannheim: *Diagnosis of Our Time*.” Brian Medlin remembers that “she used to sell me books . . . [let me] run up accounts which I had no foreseeable hope of paying – I did pay for them eventually. It was through the Mary Martin Bookshop I discovered Rilke and Kafka.”<sup>11</sup>

Women too remember the special significance of the bookshop for them. Carlene Evans (now Kate O’Neill) was eleven when she visited the bookshop the day it opened for business and recalls Mary’s “naive honesty that was very engaging . . . she treated children as she did adults and had none of that insufferable coy condescension which passed as ‘getting on with children’ in those days”.<sup>12</sup> She too became a regular customer.

The bookshop in that first year was a very low-key place: a lot of browsing, endless discussions and coffee perpetually on the brew. There was the occasional purchase but no pressure to buy. Robert Clark would visit the shop of a lunch hour. “I had no intention of buying . . . just enjoyed looking at the titles, browsing and listening.”<sup>13</sup> Many of the books, like those of the Everyman series, were favourites of Mary’s. She liked to be able to recommend books from personal experience, ones that she had enjoyed. She didn’t appear too concerned about profit, it was enough that her shop was well patronized. Yet if it was to survive as a business she would have to take turnover and profit into account. At first this did not seem important and in 1945 the novelty of such a shop ensured a steady stream of customers.

Adelaide already had its bookshops, but none like Mary Martin’s.

The difference that Mary Martin’s Bookshop made was that it brought a brave new face into available public knowledge, made a point of being challenging, of being unafraid of challenging accepted thought, gave strength to those who wished to put a (at that time) revolutionary set of ideas. I recall when Hans Magnus Enzensberger came to an early Festival of Arts and talked about revolution – to 1000 frozen Adelaide establish-

ment faces! Mary Martin's was a bit like that – and too many of the children of establishment families were involved in the new thoughts for the old establishment people to wholly blast Mary M. out of the water.<sup>14</sup>

PRIOR TO THE 1940s British publishers had dominated the Australian market and bookshops reflected this bias. Their shelves carried the expected range of English classics, but rarely the work of controversial contemporary writers. Such books had a limited readership and many of the titles were

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**Adelaide already had its bookshops, but none like Mary Martin's.**

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banned. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were all banned. Censorship was arbitrary and at the whim of the (often non-literate) officer examining the list of titles. Books with titles that might be interpreted as salacious or titillating were not given the benefit of the doubt. Out went *The Life of The Virgin* and the *Autobiography of A. Trollope*. Travel books, collections of essays, biographies and works like Beverley Nicholls' *Down the Garden Path*, Freya Stark's *Valley of the Assassins* and H.G. Wells' *Short History of the World* were good sellers. And there was always a steady market for popular works by romantic novelists like Cecil Roberts, Ruby M. Ayres and historical novelist Georgette Heyer. As for Australian authors, most were published overseas; while within Australia Angus & Robertson virtually had the market to themselves, preferring to publish "descriptive and travel writing [because it was] safer and more lucrative than socially conscious fiction".<sup>15</sup> Booksellers were reluctant to display Australian works and "a request for an Australian book would have them rummaging into obscure corners".<sup>16</sup> There was also active discrimination against Australian works, and readers were encouraged to purchase overseas titles rather than "waste time and money on the local product".<sup>17</sup>

Mary Martin resolved to reverse these prejudices, and was committed to stocking books that were hard to come by; books for discerning read-

ers who were not catered for elsewhere; and Australian titles. As with her taste in pictures, her private reading was not as adventurous as the shelves of the bookshop might suggest. She returned to old favourites, and works on philosophy, religion, art and architecture remained her preferred reading.

It might be assumed, given the circumstances – her age, her family support, her history – that Martin had chosen the path of a self-indulgent dilettante who did not need to work but wanted to do something. If this were so, a gallery or bookshop would have been the obvious choice. It's an easy assumption and one that won't do for several reasons. No matter how much books meant to her, her motivation was more complex. She had already demonstrated that she was less interested in the literary debate that raged during the deflating (or inflating) of egos in the months of the Ern Malley Affair, than in the effect of the issue upon individuals' lives – her friends' lives. While "respectable burghers of Adelaide . . . from an obscure and uneasy conviction . . . that arty people like Harris and his supporters were a threat to morals and stability and that the mysteries they practised – incomprehensible, non-rhyming poetry and unrecognizable art – were unnatural and ought to be suppressed",<sup>18</sup> she was prepared to defend them because they were her friends. She was also part of that collective of "arty people"; aware of what was going on in Adelaide (and elsewhere) at the time, and prepared to offer moral support for those she admired and respected. Opening the bookshop meant that she could continue this support, but in a more tangible way. Edgar Castle is right when he describes her as a "wholly good person", a description which invites derision. But he goes on to say, "Mary was unthankable: you don't thank people who are doing what comes naturally".<sup>19</sup>

For most of her life Martin appears to have brought into sharp focus those with whom she was associated; people who in many ways came over as larger than life (and were for the most part men). She cosseted their egos while suppressing her own – a necessary back-stage presence that enabled their public performance. Only through a prismatic flash shafted unconsciously from their perceptions of her, is it possible to catch a glimpse of the woman behind that shadowy presence. The bookshop gave her a base and in one sense she was its heart. Because she was essentially a kind and modest woman

– the lessons of Unitarian self-effacement had been well learnt – she appeared to be content to remain in the background quietly working while others enjoyed the limelight. At least that is how it would seem, and the memories of those who knew her at this early stage of her career endorse this view.

**I**N THE BOOKSHOP'S FIRST YEAR Martin found herself the hub of an ever-widening circle of people whose interests were quite diverse – poets, painters, students, parents with their children and former colleagues and teachers. She ran it as a kind of coffee club: "There wasn't a great deal of bookselling going on, but [there was] a lot of conversation."<sup>20</sup> The coffee was provided free. Brian Medlin recalls being attracted to Mary because "she seemed an absolutely terrific person. It was the first friendship I'd ever had with a woman who wasn't an aunt. She treated me, callow as I was, as an equal." Alex Cohen,<sup>21</sup> a young medical student at

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*Mary . . . had begun to realize that  
the bookshop could not be  
all things to all people.*

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the time, found "the bookshop an absolute Mecca, because of the strange explorations and adventures she stimulated into literature. She [gave] me an opportunity to widen my horizons". Martin had a capacity for total absorption in each person's needs – her own seemed to be satisfied incidentally – and for this reason her friendship was liberating rather than binding. Younger male students were drawn to the bookshop, swarming there like bees around a hive while Martin listened to their ideas, their problems, their hopes and aspirations. They found Mary's lack of guile refreshing; they were "liberated from sexual vanity",<sup>22</sup> and did not have to prove themselves in any way. They were accepted unconditionally. What's more, she was always good for a loan if they were temporarily short of cash. These loans were nearly always repaid, if not by the men themselves then by their girl-friends or wives to be. These women, younger and on the whole socially and sexually more sophisticated than Mary – but not understanding Mary's motives – were inclined to regard her generosity cynically, as Mary's way of retaining a kind of power. Perhaps it was. She

knew she couldn't compete in terms of allure, but she also believed that love meant more than sexual fulfilment. She was quite prepared to use any weapons she could, and to flout convention, but only for what she regarded as the right reasons. She did not see love as limited or limiting. At the same time she had an aura of innocence and uncertainty – Edgar Castle recalls hearing the words "Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary/ Please make up your mind" sung to a Sunday school tune. Some of her young admirers would doss down on a couch in her cottage. They found her attractive, but rarely it seems, sexually. "Sex never came into it," says Brian Medlin, "which was why I could stay." And John Clayton, who may have carried a torch, held her in such high regard, he placed her out of reach. "If you ever want to get anywhere with me," he recalls her saying, "you'll have to take me down off my pedestal." It was too late, he was leaving for Melbourne.

Mary was heard to say many times that marriage and family responsibilities did not interest her. Whether this was true or whether she was dissembling, as a young woman she was certainly in love – at least twice. The first time with Max Harris, a personal commitment that endured for years. She could apparently live with his romantic attachment to Yvonne Hutton during the early 1940s, and was prepared to accept the personal limitations of an intellectual relationship. There was a kind of edge to such arrangements, perhaps she secretly envisaged the possibility of a Victorian *ménage à trois* . . . She was quite devastated when she learnt of their marriage. Don Filmer was with her when they heard the news and recalls Mary weeping inconsolably. Yet the friendship did continue and, with some reservations on Mary's part, was extended to include Yvonne.

**I**N OCTOBER 1946 Max Harris returned from Melbourne. His partnership with John Reed was over and if not in debt, then he was certainly hard up. What is more, he not only had himself to support: his marriage to Yvonne Hutton brought responsibilities. Adelaide was slow to forget the Ern Malley Hoax and even slower to forgive Harris his former cockiness. Mary, understanding this, saw what had to be done and did it. She invited him to join her in her bookshop.

A cynical reading of Martin's gesture would suggest that it was an unexpected flash of genius com-

bined with shrewd business sense that prompted the invitation. The bookshop may have fulfilled a need among book buyers (and, more significantly, browsers) but it was not a startling commercial success. Running costs, while kept to a minimum, had to be met, and it is unlikely that she managed to break even the first couple of years. Like many small business ventures, especially in those difficult post war years, the bookshop may well have sunk without trace. But Martin was not a pessimist. Nor was she a devious woman. While aware of Harris' vision, imagination and entrepreneurial flair, she was motivated by compassion not commerce. What is more, a business partnership would mean that her long-standing friendship with Max Harris could be resumed at close quarters – a “bookish relationship”<sup>23</sup> to be sure, but satisfying in its way; she had missed the stimulation of their mental sparring while he had been in Melbourne. Their business arrangements were informal – a “gentlemen's agreement”<sup>24</sup> – to share the work and the profits; something that would lead to later complications.

With the partnership the bookshop began to change direction – slowly and subtly at first, although Brian Medlin (at the time droving in the Northern Territory) recalls receiving a letter from Ivor Francis “one of the Dallwitz clan”<sup>25</sup> complaining that Max had “turfed them out of the bookshop” where they were drinking coffee and exchanging banter, “because they were keeping genuine customers out”.<sup>26</sup>

If Mary felt a twinge of regret she kept it to herself; she had begun to realize that the bookshop could not be all things to all people. What's more, she was having the time of her life. It was almost like undergraduate days again: the jokes, the fun, the ad hoc lunches concocted on a gas ring and Max's incredible sense of humour, his versatility, his vast literary knowledge.

By the end of the first year of joint operation, the bookshop showed a minimal profit. The trend was encouraging and Mary and Max soon found they had more work than they could cope with. They shared the work. Max became the 'front' person, a presence who was intrinsic to the bookshop, and who later, with his silver-topped cane would sit near the entrance, exuding confidence, ready to discuss a new title, the latest film, a current play, or an exhibition of paintings. Opinion, analysis, guidance, he was ready with them all. The window over-

looking the street became a show case where books – often new titles – were displayed. Customers could have a preview of covers before venturing inside. Mary played a less public role; people were drawn to her for different reasons, especially those who felt intimidated by Max's robust enthusiasms. She was always available to discuss a customer's needs, to jot down requests and to follow up orders. Together they would prepare lists of books to send to mail-order customers; make selections from new books in print to order for their shelves; there were invoices to be typed, and orders to be packed and despatched or hand-delivered. It soon became obvious they needed someone to help with the routine work – a junior, preferably, to keep wage costs to a minimum. In the late 1940s Pru Lethbridge joined them. Pru found Mary down to earth, practical and “not particularly spiritual”,<sup>27</sup> someone who spoke briefly on the telephone, explaining her brevity with a brisk, “What's the point, you can see people and have long conversations.”<sup>28</sup> She still regards Mary as one of the most important people in her life.

IN MAY 1947 a small pamphlet appeared – *Books and Prints*, produced laboriously on a duplicating machine. Although different in form and style, it was the forerunner of what were later to become the famous booklists. Unlike later newsheets and *Mary's Own Paper (MOP)* this first issue carries Mary's stamp and is written in a folksy, rather apologetic style such as an aunt might offer. She explains that the bookshop is hard to find as it is located in a back street because of lack of office space due to restrictions on postwar building. She regrets that the supply of books is haphazard and begs patience of customers while promising exciting things in the future. Promotion was not Mary's forte; the overall impression is of sobriety – rather like a carefully prepared school program. When Max took over the bookshop's publicity, the tone brightened. He knew how to catch the customer's eye and how to entice them to dig in their pockets.

The pamphlet is useful because it reveals the scope of the bookshop at the time. There was a card index system listing clients and their interests. It was possible to request books and prints 'on approval' from anywhere in the Commonwealth. A continuous exhibition of prints hung on the walls. There was provision for a “research and procurement” service (it's fortunate that the mysterious

lady at Featherstone Place hadn't seen that or her suspicions may have been confirmed) and a quarterly bulletin kept clients informed about the book world. It was a comprehensive service and must have kept Mary and Max on the stretch to provide all that was offered. Yet informative and detailed as it was it had none of the sharp wit and pithy asides that were to become part of Harris's style in *Mary's Own Paper*. There appears to be no further issue of *Books and Prints*, although a monthly review did begin in 1949 but also lapsed after a few months due to roneo problems.

*Mary's Own Paper* first appeared in 1948 and continued into the sixties. It was Max's creation although named for Mary, and inevitably carried the authorization, "Printed, distributed and authorized by Mary Martin of the Mary Martin Bookshop, 13 Alma Chambers, Commercial Place", or variations on that theme. This kind of authorization has always been a legal requirement – someone has to take responsibility for written material available to the public – and Mary was the logical person. When the shop first opened it was owned and run solely by her; there had been no need to register the shop's name as it was that of its owner. Such an arrangement was not uncommon, especially in the 1940s. With no formal partnership to alter the situation, technically nothing had changed and she was still legally responsible for the business and its promotional material. She would have scoffed at any suggestion that the informal arrangement between herself and Max Harris was unbusinesslike. Legal agreements were unnecessary she felt: it was a matter of trust and you trusted your friends. In any case the shop had few assets apart from stock and good will.

Mary's life had settled into a comfortable pattern. She was doing something she enjoyed and was at last financially independent. Her friendship with Max, which had never quite lapsed during his time in Melbourne, was stronger than ever and intellectually satisfying, with an edge of unpredictability. If she had once hoped for something more from Max, she had by this time accepted the fact of his marriage and was a frequent visitor to the Harris home. She had her admirers; she was rarely alone; she was uncommitted. She would have said that she was happy.

## ENDNOTES

1. Mary Martin to Edgar Castle 3 Sept. 1945
2. Room 83, Second Floor, Brookman Buildings Grenfell St. Adelaide.
3. Michael Heyward: *The Ern Malley Affair*. UQP. 1993
4. *ibid.*
5. Edgar Castle to JL 26 Oct. 1994
6. *op. cit.* 1
7. *op. cit.* 5
8. *On Dit* was the University of Adelaide's student magazine.
9. Brian Medlin to JL 5 Oct. 1993
10. *op. cit.* 5
11. *op. cit.* 9
12. Kate O'Neill [formerly Carlene Evans] to JL Letter undated (received Mar. 1994)
13. Robert Clark to JL 29 August 1994
14. Betty Fisher to JL 15 Sept. 1993
15. Richard Nile & David Walker, 'Marketing Literary Imagination' *New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan, Penguin 1988
16. *ibid.*
17. *ibid.*
18. Brian Matthews, 'Literature and Conflict' *New Literary History of Australia* [*op. cit.* 15]
19. *op. cit.* 5
20. *op. cit.* 9
21. Now Professor Alex Cohen, Director of Post Graduate Medicine, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Perth, to JL 3 July 1995
22. *op. cit.* 9
23. Samela Harris to JL. Letter undated (received November 1994)
24. The obvious person to confirm this was Max Harris, but at the time of writing he was terminally ill and unable to give interviews. Nor were his papers available to me. His daughter Samela, who did respond to my enquiries, but briefly, was a child during the late 1940s. Her information about the period is not first-hand. It is only from Martin's family and friends and business records kept by the bookshop's accountant, David Painter, and lawyer, Robert Clark, that these facts have been pieced together. This is one version of the story of the partnership's beginnings, based on available sources.
25. *op. cit.* 9
26. *ibid.*
27. Pru LaMotte (formerly Medlin, nee Lethbridge) to JL 30 Sept 1993
28. *ibid.*

*Julie Lewis writes fiction and biography. The above extract is from her present work, Passages to India: Mary Martin's Double Life, a biography to be published by UQP in 1997.*



LAU SIEW MEI  
                      
The Old Men



She was a malicious little thing; her eyes were crescent-shaped, upside down slices of moons that peered perniciously and short-sightedly. Right then she was focusing on her aunt who stood before her like a battleship that had hit an iceberg. She declared,

– I saw them.

But her aunt would have none of it.

– You're a liar, she said tightly, through a mouth with lips like the cold clasps of a purse, opening for words to fall out like small change.

– I don't want to hear another word from you, do you hear? the woman said. She thought there were some battles that one could not win. The best strategy in such circumstances was to retreat, so she went to her bedroom and lay on the bed. She *had* seen them, she knew. Those old men, like dream creatures of a night's tale, she remembered them, and how mother or the amah would say,

– Don't look! Don't point at them. Never, never laugh, do you hear? Or you will grow a bag like them.

The old men, shabby, grizzled beards in sailors' knots, grey-white hairs upon their scalps, walking around in their singlets and cotton corded pyjamas, their faces heavy with those sagging brown-skinned bags, protruding heavily from the bottom of their faces, out from the jawline or under the chin, like pouches of coins, which they have decided to keep near at hand.

– What is it? she asked.

– Bad luck. Don't look.

She thought these men had to be cursed, they incited such fear.

– Tumors, father boomed when she told him.

– Those poor sods have the cancer.

– Why don't they get it cut off?

– They're too poor and some of them are afraid. Modern doctors and so on.

In the marketplace of her night-time dreaming she still sees them, as she clings to whoever holds her hand, averting her eyes, to avoid the curse.

There were some things one never looked at, or pointed to. She had to turn away from the sight of a funeral procession in case she saw the coffin. She could not point at pregnant women or at a full moon. She was one of the three monkeys who could see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.

– Why?

– Because of bad luck.

Bad luck dogged her at all corners. She had to be careful in case she tripped over it.

Her amah said they had had to buy luck so that she could be born. Her sister before her had been born with flat feet. The next two babies after her had been still-born. The wisewoman said she had jealously trampled on them in the womb.

– You mean she jumped on mother's tummy? she asked, wide-eyed to think of her sister's daring.

– No, not her. Her flat feet. They killed the babies.

– You mean her feet went and jumped . . . ?

– No, you're not listening. It was just the flat feet.

She still did not understand but at the time of her birth her older sister had been sent away to live with her aunty. Amulets had guarded the door where mother was confined. There was great rejoicing when she was born.

– Liar! her sister said.

– Liar yourself, she replied pleasantly.

As a child, her sister was often violent when playing with her, kicking and pushing if she did not get her way. She wondered if it had anything to do with the flat feet.

– Hey, flat face! her sister shouted. Switch on the light for me! Pick up my book! Bring me a glass of iced water! She stood facing her sister and ob-scenely picked her own nose.

– Bet you can't pick your nose faster than me.

Her sister stood facing her. Both of them picked their noses furiously. Then they started laughing.

– Ali Ahmad says you're in love with him.

– Tell him to put his head down the *jumban* and flush it!

– Ha, ha, she laughed.

Amah told her other stories. Once she told her a story about an old man who was actually very wealthy, but looked like any shabby old man on the streets. He liked to dress simply and clump about in wooden clogs. One day he went inside a bar and asked for a drink and the waiters ignored him. They were too busy serving the more prosperous looking customers. The old man waited and waited and fumed. Finally he left. Twenty minutes later he was back with a large copper pot which he had filled to the brim with notes and coins. There would easily have been tens of hundreds of dollars in there. The old man walked up to the bar counter and waited till the waiter noticed him standing there, glaring. He dumped the pot in front of him and shouted,

– Fill it to the brim with cognac!

They took the money and filled it, as the old man desired, with the finest French brandy and by now, everyone in the bar was openly staring. When the pot was in front of the old man, he leaned forwards, picked it up and placed it on the floor. He dunked his coarse feet into it and began to wash from them the dust picked up from the road.

– And this shows, said her amah, who liked a tale with a moral, you must never snub anyone on appearance. You never know who they might be.

– Ah, she said. He should have just bought up the bar and sacked the waiters. Stupid old man. Her amah was cross. She never liked her to contradict her or question the validity of what she said. She was just to listen.

One day, she heard that a black-and-white amah had been killed crossing the road. Her body flew up in the air and came down and splashed all over the road, said her older sister.

– Like this!

She shivered. In her mind's eye she saw the black pigtailed amah in her white *samfoo* and black cotton pants carrying her groceries in a bamboo basket crossing the road and then smack, modern technology caught up with her and splat, there she was.

Here was a tale with a moral indeed.

She told her amah the tale but the amah only

answered,

– Why do you listen to old women's talk?

THEY LIVED IN A COMMUNITY, with the neighbours close by. A small brown river under mangrove trees made for the children's playground: it was the swimming pool, the fishing area and the battleground for rivalling teams. One of the games she liked to play was stringing fat conkers and then swinging them out at others. The conker that lasted all battles was made King Conker.

She liked to lie with her nose to the mud and scabble in the surrounding bushes for black ants and batik spiders. The nut grass would tickle her nostrils.

– This is a touch-me-not, said her sister.

– See how the leaves close up when you touch them. That's because they don't like you. If they liked you they wouldn't close up. See!

She brushed her hand lightly over what looked like a similar plant and the leaves stayed open.

They had been rich before the war. Father owned huge rubber plantations on the footslopes of the Penang hills. It was part of his inheritance. Then the Japanese came and took the land. They had to flee. Her mother contracted tuberculosis during the war, and father spent immense amounts of his plantation wealth to pay for medicines and doctors. It was while hiding in the hills that father's mother, their grandmother, died. Father found her hanging from the end of a rope tied to the branch of a tree.

After the war, they returned to the city but mother was never to be well. She died soon after their return. She was eight when her mother died. They had kept her away from her mother for fear that she would catch her illness. She saw her but once during the time of her confinement through the swinging doors when the doctor had come, and then she was lying in bed very pale, her hair very black against the pillow case, in white and blue pyjamas.

– Mother's going to die, her older sister announced to her, one day in the garden.

– She is not, she said, just to contradict her, but she knew mother would, like her sister had said.

She saw mother again a week after her death. It was at the end of her wake. Father had hired the mourners and Buddhist priest and prayers had been chanted and the relatives had been coming in and out. Father was silent most of the time. He took little interest in the proceedings. But she saw

mother again. It was the night before they would take her body to the burial ground. Mother came to the door of her bedroom, looking very pretty. Mother had been a reputed beauty in her lifetime. She stood in the doorway and smiled at her. She was not afraid, but she hid her head under the blanket and then peeked out again, testing her vision. She was still there. She watched her until somehow she fell asleep.

FATHER WAS NEVER TO MARRY AGAIN. He spent a lot of time in his study with his books, reading and writing. He was busy translating English Romantic poets into Mandarin. A year after mother's death, father received a marriage proposal from a wealthy woman, a widow.

– I am alone, the wealthy woman said, reclining supinely against a red lacquer cabinet.

– And you are alone. You have a small child who needs a mother. And I think you need a wife.

It was a proposal indeed. But father rejected it, even though by then his circumstances were straitened, and she was a child he had to bring up on his own without a woman's help. But father had loved mother with a devotion. It had been love at first sight. He had seen her in the waiting room before her interview at the school his philanthropist brother had founded for girls. He had whispered to his brother that she looked a very suitable candidate. She was hired.

Her mother was a liberated woman for her time. Beautiful, intelligent and witty, she hosted father's parties when they were still wealthy, was elected the president of the Chinese women's association for ten years, made public speeches on behalf of charities, danced at balls with Chiang Kai-shek and his wife. She was fluent in Mandarin and English, played the guitar and began a correspondence with father in English which was to last their lifetime.

They remember her still, the old men of the city. Ah, they say on hearing her mother's name mentioned, ah, she was a beauty!

For the elderly, a beautiful woman meant many things: but she had to be refined.

Refinement was class, it was the factor that separated the peasantry from the aristocracy, or apparently. Mother had been refined.

AFTER THE WAR THEY WERE POOR. She used to eat nothing but tapioca and occasionally *chee*

*cheong fun* which the hawker woman sold to them on credit. She was a poor old woman herself but she would insist that they take the white noodles and eat,

– Pay later! she would say.

– Eat!

And then the relatives descended upon them and asked for money. These relatives had never come round when mother had been ill, but now here they were, their faces pinched with post-war hunger. Father gave them what he could which they never returned to him even after their fortunes bettered.

But that was father all over. If a man asked him for a shirt he would give the trousers, and in one incident he gave a thief his coat as well.

A story is told of how he was robbed of his best pair of trousers, which he always hung behind the door before putting on an old pair to go out to the fields. In the back pocket he had left his wallet filled with dollar notes. Her father knew it could well be one of his employees who had stolen from him. The next day, he brought the coat that went with his best pair of trousers. He hung it behind the door. He meant it to be stolen. His theory was that the coat was no good without the trousers and he would give the thief his coat. All his men saw his action and thought him a fool. All except one.

At the day's end, the guilty one came to him. It had been Ah Lim, one of his poorest workers.

– Master, he said.

– Forgive me, here are the trousers and the wallet. I have spent the money, but I will make up for it in work.

He knelt and wept. The master raised him to his feet. He told him gently that he had already given him the coat and trousers. The worker wept some more and from that time did as much overtime without pay as he could. He became one of the master's best workers and eventually became a manager overlooking the master's estates. Perhaps father was not such a bad businessman after all. Or perhaps there was honour even among thieves in those days.

SHE AND FATHER LIVED ALONE happily with only an old woman to come in during the day to clean and cook. She would sit with her matchboxes which she made-believe were dolls and play while father sat with her in the garden reading. He would ask her how her day went and she would tell him, em-

bellishing little incidents as she went along. They lived like that for a long time. Then father died when she was twelve. Sometimes she thought the hospital could have saved him, maybe prolonged his life, but the nurses disappeared when his oxygen tank ran out and she was left running up and down the corridors calling for help. He was dead when she returned. They laid his body on a marble slab in the hospital's mortuary and a solitary Buddhist priest chanted prayers over him. That was his funeral. None of the relatives would pay for a more decent burial. After father died she and her sister were sent to her aunty's place. The woman was her guardian and her dead father's sister. She was an orphan.

Her aunty lived in a big house and had three children. She was just a hanger-on, never part of them. Eating her rice she had to be grateful. Always grateful for every grain.

- Be thankful you get to eat. Think of the poor starving orphans.

She thought of them.

In her troubles, she thought her father would be watching over her, his kindly face smiling at her, encouragingly. And she prayed for the safe journey of his soul in the otherworld. She prayed too that she would never dream of him, not because she would be terrified, no, she loved her father too dearly, but because the waking up from the dream would be too hurtful. Sometimes she did not want to think too much of him. It was better to leave some things aside for a time like moth-balled hats in a cupboard, and when the right time came, she could take them out calmly and look at them. That was the best strategy.

But today she had seen an old man with his tumorous bag dangling from his chin, as she rode by on the bus. By journey's end she knew he would be a collection of old men, milling around, their brown dangling bags arousing fear, old men with their pyjama trousers stained with tobacco or betel nut, their sharp old eyes like vultures, preying upon passers-by, old men from a nightmare, and she had remembered.



So it's agreed then - we'll share childcare equally

JOHN RIDLAND

## Ned Kelly Tours the Kelly Country



### NED KELLY CHECKS INTO GLENROWAN MOTEL

All his gear in his white-painted square metal trailer behind an old red Holden parked under a veranda. Thank you, Mr Kelly, enjoy your stay.

*Enjoy? Enjoy your meal, enjoy your sex, enjoy Enjoy – bloody California rubbish. Enjoy this bullet, enjoy your widow's tears.*

A good motel, though – all the necessaries plus enough luxuries to make a man feel like a gentleman – folded towels, personal soap bars, small fridge with jug of milk, *titles of still life paintings, each of them* – TV – 2 channels – AM/FM radio, ABC Fine Music from Shepparton – Shepparton where they feared him also – sleep. He sleeps well, it is very quiet except when a helicopter chops the midnight air in two, still hunting for Ned Kelly? He smiles, turns over, covers his ear with a pillow. The last time he stayed in an Inn in Glenrowan had not been so entirely pleasant.

The breakfast pushed in on a tray through a little pass-through door in the wall like the ones in the lock-up on *The Bill*, 8:30 Saturday nights, he'd never miss it. He notices half the crims have brogues, of course.

It's Easter, the toast slice kneels like a cute little bunny, but Ned knows what the English Adam's bunnies have done – are doing – to Felix Australia, gives it both barrels.

Eating the bits of blown bread he reads about his gang in the *Wangaratta and District Visitors Guide*:

There is a lot of speculation as to what drove these men into the lifestyle they led.

*Lifestyle! Ned scoffs, Hah! Such is Lifestyle? Life!* he bellows, ripping out the offending page.

There is however no real doubt that the pressures of social upheaval brought on by the sudden influx of people, many of whom were from differing cultures, the instant wealth for some and the devastating poverty of others combined with the general impact of rapid change all contributed to the behaviour of these people.

*Surely other scholars have other interpretations of such dodgy data?* He turns to another source, Roslyn Hogg in *The Hume Corridor*:

The politics of the time, the influx of squatters, new Government legislation, which designed [*sic*], for the poor but badly administered and interpreted, together with the growing resentment among the community ...

*Community*, Ned nods, and skips,

... stock stealing and other practices became necessary *and* acceptable behaviour in order to survive.

Ned notices, how *behaviourist* both these analyses – is it the Age?

Skinner has much to answer for when he's called up before his Maker. In Ned's day, nothing like that. *Behave* meant slap your mouth, brat, mind your manners.

It was clear that the Kellys were victimized unduly.

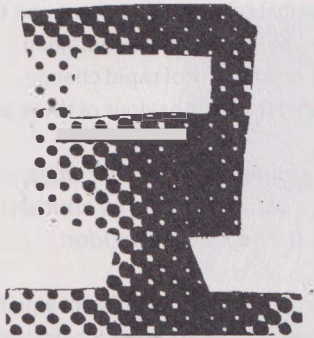
*If only we had only been victimized duly, we couldn't complain,* he keens stage-Irishly.

In spite of this, after Ned was released in 1874 from three years of hard labour for receiving a horse he had no idea was stolen,

*No sir, I'd no i-de-a that horse was stolen.*

he stayed out of trouble for the next six years. That same year, in a well-staged boxing match, Ned won the title of unofficial bare knuckle heavyweight boxing champion.

*No sir.*



## ON THE NED KELLY MUSEUM STRIP

He makes a quick circuit only, sees quickly they are out to rob the poor, the highway families. Bushy long grey beards like brooms – like his – actors from movie versions of his life – “Wanta cuppa, young fella?” that *young's* a joke, anyone can see he's a hundred and forty, “Second one's on the house.” *No thanks,*

he strides on down the misty highway verge back to his car for a camera: a shot of himself gigantic, 7 meters tall – *What's that in feet? Twenty-one, twenty-two?* with a pancake chef on a signboard in the foreground, toting a spatula matching his large revolver. Next door's the show:

semi-live theatre production fully air-conditioned ... through the brilliance of animation and computerized robots ...

He in his metal ploughboard helmet and vest and skirt, “clumsy and bizarre”, had terrified the cringing police who thought that he must be a bunyip or a ghost, bullets bounced off him, he clanked along like a robot, computerized and animated, semi-live – he'd show them animation ...

Persons with heart conditions be advized.  
No Refunds Given.

*Ah,* that was his kind of show. His kind of showman.

Out on the boardwalk, however, facetious cartoons: Himself in helmet, “A little off the top” to a barber with acetylene torch. Clanking faceplate with baffled damsel: “An Australian Romance.” *Hah!* mutters Ned under his breath – his breath? What breath? He has no breath – no wife, nor life. He's just a bunyip or a ghost, all that he has is death, hard work to make a living out of that, but they scrape by there in Glenrowan, heart of the Kelly Country.

## IN A MILAWA VINEYARD: AUTUMN

Down the vine rows after the harvesting steady among the head-high plants Ned gleans two mouthfuls of blue grapes sweeter with juice than even Keats' upon his palate fine – sweeter than wine, sweeter than kisses sweeter than wine they make from pre-gleaned bunches. He spits the seeds out singly, rapid fire over the yellow curled high arching shoots.

## AT THE FINEST RESTAURANT IN BEECHWORTH

“Simply Scrumptious Fine Foods”

A rich woman laughing lightly to her smooth-browed consort blocks Ned's way and forces him to walk around three tables heading back to shut the door she has left open letting the draft in. With Black Irish black looks he kills her – looks can kill.

He takes the table nearest the door. Facing the door. The wine list is a booklet. One winemaker “after a brief stint in New Zealand studied at Davis University in California.” Ned scoffs. Davis is not no University, it's the *University of California, Davis*. Ned drills it into the wine list writer's thick metal-plated skull.

Ned loves the eggplant paté – a little zing to it, like the bullets passing behind the boulders in Tom Roberts' “In a Corner on the Macintyre” which at first sight looks like mere landscape, gray granite blocky boulders, a pool, a stiff-legged horse, about as exciting as an unpolished, or a polished, eggplant – “an interpretation, and, as such, untrue”.

An old white-haloed woman's antique chairback shoves up against Ned's shooting arm as she stands to cross-examine the glass display case of sweet desserts – she bumps his shooting arm, which automatically fires, missing her, the slug plows into a dark wedge of Chocky Fig Fudge cake, disgusting, Ned hates chocolate anyway.

Ned wishes he could bring his mother here, his sainted mother, break her out of prison – “jailed for three years for a bogus crime” – and make them feed her the best food in the house, and make them bring her two desserts, or three, as many as she wants. And if they don't . . .

To cappuccino, or not to cappuccino, that was Ned's question. Whether after the rabbit

and chicken pastie, polenta a Napoli, and mixed green salad, to order a fluff-capped capp? or perhaps a decaf latte? Yes, if they have it. And if they don't . . . They do. Ned lowers the barrel onto his knees. Blow's off the latte's head, partitions the small coconut macaroon into three smaller pieces. The bit of fluff he's sitting with nicks one, she'll wish she hadn't . . . The latte's capp? yes, but, rich as it is, served in a cup – a *cuppa*, not a *glassa*. Furthermore, the handle's so badly designed his middle finger's middle joint's pressed against the hot part, burning. Lattes belong in glasses. He bites off the handle, *bloody* comes onto his tongue, blood flecks on the milk froth.

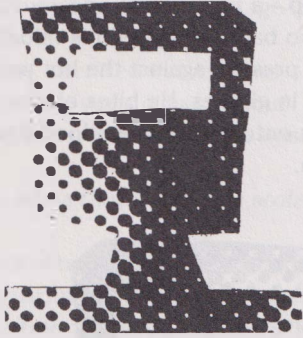


## OUTSIDE THE RESTAURANT

Strolling it off, up Little Nostalgia Street a secondhand dealer, Searchers Paradise – and he's been a Searcher always, always searching for Paradise, but then, so has everyone – tries him, teasing with books in the window, spines faced inside, white and yellowing pages showing, thick, thicker, none of them thin, no poetry? – Irish love poetry – Ned jams a boot through the quaint pane, reads titles never scanned or searched for, titles measureless to man . . .

Then in the new shop Corner Shop and Crafts Cottage: white or black leather cockatoos, blue stoneware pottery, frilled baby dresses (he'd buy them for his granddaughter, if he had a granddaughter, if they weren't so bloody *cute*) –

and then: Ned Kelly in his pompadour and broom beard, a black photograph on a tea towel, big letters: "SUCH IS LIFE" BEECHWORTH (Next morning, passing by, again looks in: strange thing, the tea towel's made a getaway, escaped, leaving the usual lyrebirds, wattles, koalas. *Strange thing?* Ned chuckles, tucking his shirt in over a ripple of Irish linen.)



Stunned as a mullet – an “African Heritage” shop! He knows where Africa is, of course – near England. But *Heritage? Sure, that's the Nostalgia racket – business, sorry. But African Heritage?* In Beechworth – Kelly Country?

Off in the night, bright lights, big city bright excitement, Ned's all with it, evening flows into the night life, Ned goes with the flow, where flow goes, out along the Sydney Road, beyond tall trees, Von Mueller's, and what is it? Her Majesty's Training Prison at Beechworth, he'd forgotten, dating from 1859.

Ned and his mother both were here on a visit, she for those “bogus crimes”, he for – well, never mind. Disgusted, he walks back to his motel. The box marked “Breakfast Menus” by the office is overflowing. He pulls out the top one, Room 22, writes numerals in several empty squares:

- 7 Bacon and Tomatoes,
- 5 Baked Beans,
- 14 Homemade Muesli.

Sniggering, stuffs it back on top of his own

- 1 Scrambled Eggs on Toast.

## NED KELLY CLEANS OUT A SMALL TOWN POST OFFICE

Standing up close to the counter buying – Yeh! – *stamps*, Ned glances sideways as usual at a small rack of postcards: famous Australian movies – *On Our Selection, Jedda, Strictly Ballroom, Picnic at Hanging Rock* – postcards and stamps – *What's this?* he swivels: something “Entirely NEW AND EXQUISITE, a Thrilling Pictorial Representation by Biograph *Specially Taken* in Melbourne by Johnson and Gibson” (Mel?) in *elegante* capital letters THE STORY OF – now swell it, Maestro, with cinema organpipes – *THE KELLY GANG*, black slanting letters on red. Inset, five stills: “Glenrowan – The Kellys at Bay”; “The Notorious Kelly Quartet”; “Policemen locked in their own cells – Jerilderie”; “Dan Kelly and Steve Hart shouting at each other” (over a corpse); and “NED KELLY”. Himself in his helmet of ploughboard, toting two pop-guns. *How many left?* Five. *Thanks, I'll take them,*

Ned sweeps 'em up, dropping behind in his hurry a pink note – the Queen of England flanked by a gum bough.

## TOURING THE COUNTRYSIDE

Dark glasses – (Ned is checking his pockets) – sunscreen, he's no fool, although he may die young it won't be of skin cancer – melanoma, a pirate's Black Spot, likeliest for blue-eyed dark-haired Celts – his own complexion. Slip-slop-slap in his long sleeved shirt, his metal ploughboard helmet – and the clouds help out cutting through under the spare little ribs of cirrus.



Outside the pottery shop at One Tree Hill a pile of shards, a midden in the making, Ned enters the shop itself – pots on the shelves, cups, jugs, plates, eggcups, platters, and chopstick holders – chopsticks! *Ah Fook!* he shouts, a flying kick takes out a shelf of milk jugs and sugar bowls. *Ah Fook* his first accuser. His first defense:



Ah Fook had used his stick three times on Kelly's bare legs. Ned ran away after being hit, *chased by a Chinaman*. Ned takes revenge. *More for the midden*. He walks free as a tree.

⌘

To the Powder Magazine: it's Closed for Lunch. Ned shoots the lock out, shoulders through the gate, lights him a lucifer and drops the match on a black trail – not gunpowder but – *ants!* Ned pulls his gun out in the tea-trees bringing one two three cars down the road. He pees in their gazes.

⌘

Ned picnics by a bridge above the gorge where Spring Creek tumbles down from Beechworth rolling over smooth granite, cutting whirlpool tubs, in a wide swath through the bush. A picnic table has been constructed almost as if for him alone, and a gray hen has been released from captivity to forage in the wild. It takes bread from his hand, and then it ranges busily seeking with a continual change, forgetting Ned is Ned. Chicken for dinner? But no, the day is mild, an autumn mist sifts the hard sunlight particle by particle, staying his hand. *Go little chook*, he smiles, among the wattles and messmate eucalypts.

⌘

He snoozes in the car while the rest of the gang raids the apple shed up the slopes. High apple country is not Ned Kelly country, the autumn gold of leaves is not worth stealing? Apples, though, red and gold load on load of apples rumbling into the cellar bin? Worth lifting *that!* He steals a wink or two, far short of forty.

## NED CRASHES THE STUDIO OF A PAINTER OF LOCAL LANDSCAPES

(J. Colin Angus, Wandana, El Dorado)

He knows just what to expect: trees, paddocks, trees, still water, mountains, air, blue air, blue trees,

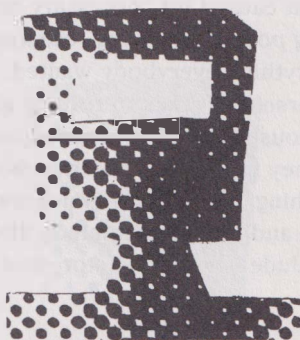
white clouds, green trees, gray-green trees, yellow, red – red? Why that block of red in the middle?

“Why?”

There was a red brick dunny, the finest building on the property. The owners wanted it out – of the picture. It made the picture. They didn't buy it. The National Gallery of Victoria did.”

*I see*, Ned nods. *And all those trees?*

“In 1929 when I came back to El Dorado, where I had grown up – the landscape here was very different then. The mines had scarred it and the trees were gone to stoke the boilers of the mines' power-houses – thirty-six cords of wood per day, before the switch to Electricity . . . The land was also unlucky because the people thought of themselves as transients. They were going away some day so what was the use of caring to put in trees? They planted none, *not even for fruit*, though many of them ended up squatting on the same ground for thirty years. They felt so temporary that they laughed when I obtained trees from the Forests Commission and gave them out for them to plant. They said, ‘Look at him! It's taken all this time to get the trees off, now he's putting them back.’” From the studio window he could see trees and rocks coated with lichens like a coat of paint, a hill of them behind – above – the house.



“The landscape always comforted me. I feel it as my natural environment. Certainly, I've never had to do battle with it, and some who have seem to have picked the fight themselves.”

(Ned has to laugh, *the bugger's caught me there.*)  
"My fortunes have been always intimately  
connected with the land. I've taken it  
into myself as well as fitting into it.  
I wanted to do something to make up,  
if you like, for the things that had been done to it."

Ned's worried. Could it happen – by what stretch  
of the Australian imagination? –  
this gentle, firm, deliberate, persistent  
perpetual painter, 88 years old  
with a large case of canvases he still  
intends to fill, might overshadow *him* –  
*Ned Kelly*? And the countryside become  
not **The Ned Kelly Country** but **The Colin  
Angus Country**? Art pilgrims be bused through  
to view The Reid's Creek Bridge, The Kiewa River  
at Gundowring, to swim in The Ovens River,  
and Approaching El Dorado see the store  
which Colin kept for 39 years before  
filling the empty canvas of Kelly Country  
block by block – and all with palette knives!  
no brush in hand, no beard brush on his chin –  
the store at El Dorado where on one

summer evening before pay-day, Colin, working late  
after a refreshing swim in a dredge hole, answered a  
tap on the door to be met by a man wielding an eight-  
pound spanner.

Ned blinks – he met that bloke in gaol of course  
and knows what caused his "necessary behaviour",  
the *devastating poverty, growing resentment* –  
Colin sold everything everybody wanted,  
"hairpins to horsefeed, rakes to reading glasses,  
marbles and mousetraps to 'art mantelpieces'" –  
as well as all they needed – "groceries, books,  
hardware, clothing, fuel" – a general store,  
the general life and lives, the common life,  
the church, St Jude – he helped store and restore.

## EL DORADO CEMETERY

Lives came and went. Three came from him, two  
stayed,  
the third one fled at forty. In the graveyard  
over the hill behind the house a girl

in light chemise of bronze sits on a rock,  
her glance drills through the hill, lifts past the house  
and studio and over El Dorado.

Rosemary burgeons from the rocks beneath her.  
The other stones like pre-cut store-bought bread,  
hers rough with earth, from earth, alive with lichens,  
and round them rosemary. "Here, take a sprig",  
the young son offers Ned, who lets it fall.

*Here's rosemary, that's for remembrance?*  
That's not for him, Ned needs forgetfulness,  
and every day they dig him up again  
naming this country his. What he needs is  
some Chinese herbal pill, Ziziphus, Ginseng,  
*Angelicae sinensis (Oliv.) Diels*



TIEN WANG PU HSIN TAN  
TIAN WAN BU XIN WAN

To benefit the heart and relieve  
the uneasiness. For the treatment  
of heart failure, palpitation,  
sleeplessness, dreamfulness, canker  
sore and lingual ulcer,  
as well as for forgetful.

LANZHOU FO CI  
PHARMACEUTICAL FACTORY  
LANZHOU CHINA

## CAPTURED, REMANDED, AND RETURNED

Apprehending Ned in the corner Tourist Bureau  
Policeman One enters through the pet shop door,  
Two through the Gems & Minerals claps the handcuffs,  
And puts the hard word on him. Over the way  
Three lolls against the Bank, obtrusively.

It is reported that when Ned left the courthouse the following day to return to the gaol, he raised his finger at some children running behind the prison wagon and pretended to shoot them.

## THE ROAD TO MELBOURNE

In the Art Gallery at Benalla – Ballarat feared him, too – “costume designs for a stage production of ‘Ned Kelly’, title role by Leo McKern (later Rumpole of the Bailey)” “Portrayed”? *Betrayed* – fat cheeks, fat chin. Shoot out his liver and lights, and the gallery lights, and the plate windows overlooking the plate glass lake. And the public poetry readings all over town! Shoot all the poets – *liars*, for Ned’s a neo-Platonist at bottom.

Lunch break, Euroa – *Europa after a rest stop*, Ned thinks, *she’s dropped her p*. The waitress brings a soup spoon, studies it, “A bit of fluff”, and takes it back. *A bit of fluff* meant *skirt*, a *girl*. Ned hates to feel the language lose its punch. He’d stop it with a plug of lead but knows it won’t stay dead. Over his head a rock song falls, “Kill him before he kills you” with a dead beat, Ned likes that style of message, & rocks along. The waitressing distracts him – done, with the best will in the world, not quite *right*: the decaf powder *in* the cup before the tepid water, the way Americans make tea; nor has she tasted either soup, zucchini or potato-leek, to recommend; playing the old rock too loud; fishing for compliments too avidly; lifting the saucer away leaving him with the cup. Regretfully – she’s young and pretty and polite but *not quite right* – she has to go the only way he knows to make corrections. One two three.

## DOWN INTO MELBOURNE TO BE TRIED AND HANGED

The roadway narrows the closer to town it draws, of course, three lanes to two, then first the left lane blocked by parked cars, then the right by turners,

Ned switches lanes like the blade he’d like to slash across the tires of every other driver. ‘Staying Alive’ pumps off the Nostalgia station. And the sun switches in and out of the clouds, Ned has to flick his eye shades up and down, and when the sun is in he feels the thin wedge of winter. Such Is Life, in Melbourne. “Booze Cruisers operate in this area.” He’d rather be elsewhere, even down the hatch after the hangman drops it, anywhere but Melbourne, and he will be. Such Is Life? *Sucks Life* a graffito backwards on a wall sprays like a kookaburra. Ned goes dead.

## NED HEADS FOR HOME

Ned Kelly is nearing the end of his latest visit – They only let you out for a limited term Of natural life when you have *crossed the bar*. And his spirit drifts northeastward over his country, His would-be Irish Republic of Northern Victoria. It pauses over Canberra. *No such city* When Ned was young. And no such city now But a gathering of committees, a corroboree (*Canberra* meant ‘a meeting place’ from the beginning). Alert to art from his El Dorado drubbing He drops down into the National Gallery To see himself as Sidney Nolan saw him: The blue sky through the mail-slot in his headbucket. All of it’s true, and equally false. *Ah fook it*.



MANDY BRENT

## From the Legend Garden Villas

*Letters from an Australian in Beijing, China, August 1995*



*In 1994, Mandy Brent went with her family to China, where she became involved in volunteer activities within the Beijing expatriate community preparing for the 1995 Women's Conference. In these extracts from her letters home she describes her reactions to life in China and to the organization of the Conference, and offers her response to the Conference itself.*

THE INTERNATIONAL LIFESTYLE while exciting is a tough life for many men in a lot of ways. The expatriate community seems to be populated by manic men. These men live the hype of *The Far Eastern Economic Review*. They work long hours, they are extremely competitive and somewhat driven. This is the land of the large but sensitive ego. The men network but it is hard to make friends, or not the sort that you can reveal any weakness to. Naturally there are noticeable exceptions to this rule and it is a pleasure to meet them. They manage to balance the stresses of an international corporate lifestyle by developing a range of other interests. This includes things like buying a 1938-designed motorbike with sidecar (which is still manufactured new in China) or developing an interest in history, antiques or even high quality embroidery! My husband is very tempted by the bike and borrowed a friend's and took me for a spin around Legend Garden Villas (LGV). Unfortunately many people, driven by their companies to excel, contract 'Company virus' brought on by overwork. The result is that they become irritable, bad tempered and irascible, with childlike ego needs. If they were a computer you would insert an anti-viral disc into every orifice to give them a good clean-out.

Women (with few exceptions) are largely the accompanying spouses and thus it is the men's jobs which are the focus of conversation. Second only to questions about the length of time one plans to

stay in China and previous expat locations. It has a tendency to give one a distorted view of the world. A solid diet of *Far Eastern Economic Review* ideas is not good for anyone. This was brought home to me when I had the opportunity to meet two highly educated Chinese women with a background in sociology. Their conversation was quite a contrast and a very enjoyable one. A career in education is not highly regarded by businessmen in the international community. When you say you are a speech pathologist with a background in education, their eyes glaze over and it is the end of the conversation. Talking to you will be a waste of time because you have no Chinese business contacts which will be useful. All these things have combined to give me a very modest view of my abilities and my place in the scheme of things! I have kept the Mandy brand of wit well hidden from businessmen where it would not be appreciated and instead have saved it for my letters to you!

Obsession with exercise is not uncommon among the males in the international community. It is a good tension release and you might as well have the best of everything. The best body, the best business . . . it's all the same. One of the Australian women here was telling me that her husband has to exercise every day or otherwise he can't cope. They were here prior to Tiananmen and she and the children were evacuated to Australia. Her husband remained behind and she did not see him for six months. It was a very lonely and stressful time for him as he remained in China and the expatriate community was very small. He took to exercising with such obsessiveness that after six months he had the physique of a body-builder, which according to his wife he hated. Others of course have let themselves go entirely, and given the round of banquets they endure their physical shape is not a pretty sight.

The other thing is that most of the men have a short fuse. Or put another way I wouldn't want to be around any of these guys if something went wrong. It is a group who don't like mistakes. This is understandable. Failure is not treated kindly in the international community. A woman member of the 20th century Chinese literature group returned to America on five days' notice after the powers that be decided that her husband was not performing to their satisfaction. She told me that he would most likely be fired on his return. It all sounded rather unpleasant, not to mention disruptive to a family.

The short fuse is complicated by the cultural difficulties which are part of life in China. A friend told me the story of a businessman who had been in China too long without a break, and he was at the Bank of China. Expats go into the bank smiling but no one has ever come out that way! He wanted to change \$US700 in \$100 notes. The teller carefully inspected them all and put them under a light. Chinese bank staff can be very officious at times and no doubt the process was a lengthy one and the businessman was in a hurry. The teller decided to accept all the notes bar one which had a small biro mark on it and a minuscule tear. It was too much for the businessman who had spent months accepting pretty tatty Yuan notes from the Bank and he literally lost his cool. Fortunately he was accompanied by his interpreter who restrained him from leaping over the counter to strangle the teller. After all the yelling and screaming had stopped the interpreter managed to persuade the teller that it was in his best interests to accept the \$100 bill. The teller gave the businessman his Chinese money (about 5,600 Yuan) whereupon the businessman, in what can only be described as passive aggressive revenge inspected it all, removed any notes that were not perfect and demanded new ones. To give the teller his due he silently obliged. The only cure for this state of affairs is home leave.

Why do they do it, you may well ask, and so I did. One man assured me that interest and ego aside, he was going to give it up when he got his 'Fuck You' money. "What is that?" I asked. "Well," he said, "when you've got enough and your company upsets you, you say 'Fuck You' and walk out." I don't think being in education I will ever earn that sort of money but I'd sure like to say those immortal words to a few people I know!

THE TALENT AMONG WOMEN in the international community is astounding and while some of them have paid work, many do not. Women of this ability would not be at home in their country of origin. Those who work full time live a life not much different from other women around the world. The trick seems to be to make a meaningful life for yourself in what could be a very meaningless existence. Planning holidays, endless shopping and pining for home soon lead to depression and a sense of futility. Some women take on the challenge of becoming fluent in the language of the country they live in and pursue this goal full time so that after two years they are highly skilled. Thus it is common to meet women who are fluent in two or three languages. I have joined a singing group at LGV and on my first evening found myself singing in French in the soprano section! We were all struggling with the French when the organizer, who spoke fluent French, English and Chinese, suggested casually that we could sing it in Italian because it was easier and she wasn't even showing off! I enjoyed the evening immensely but left feeling very monolingual and wondered yet again about how we could improve language training in Australia.

Others get involved in organizing social events for the international community which they do with enormous flair and success. Others pursue a life of adventure and set off for the day or weekend exploring. My Canadian friend who is an artist is using the time to take painting lessons from a Chinese painter which she then hopes to use on her pottery when she returns to Canada. Some women get involved in small businesses like selling peasant paintings or books.

Women in the international community strongly focus on care and support for their husbands and children. While the men have enormous pressures they also have enormous support from their wives, many of whom live an up-market lifestyle closer to the 1950s than the 1990s. Their social life and friendships often fit in around their husbands and the companies' needs. Any complaints they have are not treated seriously because of the many perceived benefits of an expat lifestyle. If they do get a job overseas it is usually on what is termed 'local conditions'. One woman medical practitioner I know who has accompanied her husband around the world refers to the expat women as an "exploited skilled labour force".

13 October 1995

THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE. As I promised this letter will be about the conference in Beijing with its focus on action for equality, development and peace. The official UN conference was only open to government delegates but anyone was able to attend the Non-Government Organizations (NGO) forum at Huairuo. It has been an amazing experience and one of the highlights of my time in China. I just hope I can convey to you some of the colour and excitement of this diverse international gathering. Despite the inclement weather, the mud, the unfinished buildings, the traffic hassle and the Chinese security, I had a wonderful time and wouldn't have missed it for anything. The Chinese were not really ready for the opening but I was and had organized to take my own lunch, drinks and toilet paper. My friends at Dragon Villas had seen trucks of portaloos on the road to Huairuo so I had everything I needed!

EVEN BEFORE THE CONFERENCE BEGAN its impact was already being felt by the residents of Beijing. The place was crawling with people and the Chinese infrastructure began to experience difficulties. At times the power volume was so low in The Lido Complex (of which the International School is part) that lifts in the school would not operate and the light bulbs started popping (six hundred globes popped in the Lido Complex). Phone and fax systems everywhere struggled to cope with the extra demands placed on them.

This is the first time I have ever been in a totalitarian country during an important event. They have the political power to close factories, shut down roads, tell people to go home and requisition buses and staff from all sorts of areas, public and private. It is a controlling, obsessive person's dream. Most of the state-run enterprises closed down their coal smokestacks. The result was a beautiful blue, clear sky in Beijing and we could see the mountains! One night we joined friends around the pool at the Movenpick and saw stars! The dirty trucks were banned from the roads during the day. It was a joy to have fresh air! The locals got their food and went to ground and the streets were relatively bare.

24 - 25 August 1995

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO GET RELIABLE information, particularly as the rules keep changing. First we were told that cars (except those with black numberplates indicating a foreign joint venture) were not allowed into the centre of the city. The new rule is that even cars with black numberplates (we have one of these cars) are not allowed in the city centre between two and five in the afternoon. Poor Mr Chi, he has been back and forth to information and the police clarifying the changes. I suspect this is part of an effective control technique. You don't put out the rules in advance but let them dribble out and change them and make them tighter and tighter as you get closer to the event. It is confusing to say the least and rather unsettling as you seem to be inadvertently breaking the law. Mr Chi also bravely went and asked the authorities if he could drive me to the Huairuo site. They seemed unimpressed by the idea, or as Mr Chi reported, "It is a sensitive issue." They want me to use the bus. This would be OK except that my information package says that there will be shuttle buses but contains no information on the places and times for the buses. Mr Chi asked the Chinese at the Workers Stadium but they said that there is no timetable yet! (The conference starts in two days).

Matthew is very concerned about me going and wants me to take Mr Chi with me in case something goes wrong. I have heard that 650 buses have been requisitioned to get people to the site. I think I'd have more faith in Mr Chi. Mr Chi is very anxious about the whole thing. The Chinese have been told that participants at the NGO forum are prostitutes, lesbians and have AIDS. This extraordinary piece of information has spread through the Chinese community like wildfire largely by word of mouth and work unit briefings. The cleaners at the International school have been told that they may see naked women and they are not to look at them. The Chinese seem to be scaring the life out of the locals. Do the Chinese people believe this propaganda? Unfortunately they seem to. Anxiety caused by propaganda is so effective that common sense seems to desert people. It is like a whisper campaign. I decided to rise above it and I have assured Mr Chi that I will be attending with my clothes on and I passed the AIDS test to be admitted into China.

27 August 1995

**A** RELUCTANT MR CHI arrived bright and early this morning at 7.30 to take me to the Workers Stadium to collect my official pass. He was rather subdued and anxious about the whole thing and drove at 130 kph down the freeway past all the 110 kph signs. I collected Rachel Knight who, as an experienced China queue-sitter, had a backpack with books and a drink! We arrived at the Workers Stadium and drove straight to the official building, right to the front steps! There was not a queue in sight. There were only three other foreign women to be seen. We walked straight in and were greeted in perfect English by a young Chinese woman who explained that we went to the line that had the last number on our registration. I went to number six and was immediately attended to, got my pass, collected my information bag and was out the door in two minutes to be greeted by an amazed and relieved Mr Chi, who despite looking anxiously around, did not see any radical, nude, lesbian women. We drove straight out and back to LGV. Mr Chi went home for a rest. Matthew will no doubt give Mr Chi all the credit for my safe passage but if the Chinese are this well organized the event should be a pleasure.

29 August 1995

**G**ETTING THERE WAS NO PROBLEM but it was coming back that the fun started. The really smart people like the Japanese had organized their own bus (you can learn from the Japanese wherever you go in the world!). Those of us relying on the Chinese Organizing Committee with the unfortunate acronym COC were in for an unexpected surprise. Instead of a shuttle service the Chinese were offering one bus at 7.30 to take you out and one bus at 5.00 to bring you home. The idea of a twenty-minute shuttle seemed to have evaporated somewhere along the way. The thing that drives the participants crazy is that you can see empty buses sitting at hotels. They can't move because they haven't had instructions or it is 8.00 and not 7.30. Meanwhile empty buses are plying the roads of Huairuo. These buses are not allowed to take people. It is like being in a *Yes Minister* script when they had empty hospitals because patients would interfere with the smooth running of the hospital. Yes, I can report

that the bus service on day one was a complete COC-up!

**I** FOUND THE RIBBON OF HOPE and all the people sewing it together. It truly was women weaving the world together. This mammoth task was done with much pleasure in the Cambodian women's corner of the Asian tent and it was very touching to read the hopes of women all around the world for peace and equality. You will be pleased to know that Australia was well represented although I could not find Auntie Moira's group. The Ribbon of Hope was displayed in a number of venues around the site. It was also stretched out and held by women on the Great Wall. As well as being a visually dramatic sight it was also somehow fitting that the Great Wall, built with so much forced labour and brutality, should be host to women of the world.

The Egyptian lawyer, Anaf Mahfouz, who is apparently noted for her skills in finding bridges between cultures, spoke about the increase in some cultural practises like genital mutilation (countries which practise this often prefer to call it female circumcision) which is on the increase in parts of the Middle East after a decline in the 1950s and 1960s. She talked about the importance of maintaining an open dialogue with people who are doing this by finding examples in our own culture as a basis for discussion (e.g. facelifts and cosmetic vaginal reconstruction which I had never heard of but which has occurred in some Nordic countries). This was one area of difficulty for the panel and a constant theme in other sessions at the conference. What to do when a cultural practice violates the rights and freedom of women? Another theme was how to involve men in the changes that will be required to bring about peace, equality and freedom because "Women cannot hold up more than half the sky". It was a wise and diverse panel. It was refreshing to hear views from all around the world. Why don't we see these people on television? I would like to see a truly international station which promotes this diversity and dialogue into the public arena so that ordinary people like me can see and hear it.

**T**HERE ARE OF COURSE groups of women who feel very frustrated that women still make up seventy per cent of the world's poor and are the victims of violence on every continent and their access to power and equity under the law is so limited.

Their frustration is such that they are advocating the opposite to the panel I attended. Their view is that if men won't share the power then we will have to take it from them violently as violence seems to be the only thing men understand. This group form a small but angry minority who would make any patriarchy very anxious. It is interesting to see the look on men's faces when hearing that women would consider violence as an option. It is a combination of fear, horror and shock. I think that some of these angry women have read the male psyche more accurately than I would probably like to admit. There is an assumption by men and many women that violence to achieve goals is not an option for women. Some of the more extreme ideas make other women (and men) anxious about feminism and provide good media copy. Despite these views, the feeling at the forum as I walked around was peaceful but purposeful. My favourite comment about feminism came from a Pacific island woman who when interviewed said, "Of course I'm a feminist, I've got fifteen children and you can't be more feminist than that!"

I WENT TO A PLENARY SESSION on one of the themes of the conference, 'Globalization of the economy and the rise of conservatism'. This was an excellent session and examined the issue of why conservatism, fundamentalism and patriarchy seek to

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***"There is nothing that doesn't eventually become soft. There is nothing inside a man's trousers that is more important than what is in a woman's head."***

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control women's lives, often through religion. It was then I became aware of the religious and population undercurrents at the conference. Frances Kissing from Catholics for a Free Choice argued that the Church gives men enormous latitude to take life in war and murder but gives no latitude for women to make the same choices in regard to birth control. She also said that Catholicism is a religion and as such belongs at the NGO forum and not at the government conference. She was a powerful speaker with some wonderful quotes including one from a Roman Catholic nun who said "The core of

courage is rage". Kissing said she remained within the Church structure to fight the forces of conservatism from within and she held strongly to Jesus' words, "Be not afraid for I am with you always." She advocated sophisticated use of the media and high quality and careful research of the issues.

The next speaker was from Africa. She was a younger woman in her thirties. What stayed with me the most from what she said was that she wrote to her grandmother who is an illiterate old woman who has lived all her life in the same village in Africa. She explained to her grandmother that she was going to a conference of all the women of the world to try to improve the life of women. Her grandmother dictated a note via a village member who could write and sent this message:

There is nothing that doesn't eventually become soft. There is nothing inside a man's trousers that is more important than what is in a woman's head. May the spirit of our ancestors go with you.

This had the auditorium in peals of laughter and some members in the audience called out: "Please tell your grandmother, thank you."

THE NEXT SPEAKER was an Islamic scholar, Riffat Hassan (originally from Pakistan). I must admit I thought that this could have been a little boring after the previous speakers but how wrong I was. This woman was not only good, she was entertaining. She proceeded to describe to us how she became involved in the women's perspective in Islam. It all started when she was appointed as the head of Islamic studies at a university in America, in a town I think was called Still Waters (she said it lived up to its name and nothing much was happening there). Each club at the university had to have as its head a faculty member and much to the horror of the predominantly Saudi Arabian male-dominated Islamic group she was assigned to the Islamic Club. This was a group that would not allow women to speak, as simply hearing a woman's voice was for some reason in their interpretation of Islam anathema. Their wives could not attend the Islamic Club because they were women. It was the custom for each faculty head to address the club once a year and they asked her to speak on women's place in Islam (because as she said they didn't think she



was capable of speaking on anything else!). This started her on a ten-year study of what the Koran and other Islamic documents had to say about women. I also gather that the young Saudi Arabian men heard things about women's role in Islam which they would rather not have heard and they may have been relieved that their wives were not allowed to be members!

She then systematically developed her argument. It is regarded as self-evident in Muslim (and Christian and Jewish) societies that men are superior and women are inferior. Men believe it and so do women. Where does this idea come from? She felt that it is based on three theological assumptions or myths. They are: 1) that God's primary creation was Man and that Woman was created second; 2) that while women are second in creation they are primary in guilt (concept of feminine as evil); 3) they were created from and for man.

These assumptions are not found in the Koran but are found only in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. The referral to the Genesis literature is found in some other religious Islamic documents but they do not hold the same importance for Islam as the Koran. Her quotes from these texts were delivered in an effective way; she made great use of repetition and alliteration and humour about ribs and bending ribs. She concluded by saying that you will not reach the majority of Muslim women by asking them to give up their religion but it would be more effective to reach women through their religious beliefs and improve their knowledge of Islam. After she had finished she was engaged in some pretty heated debate with other Muslim women, who like the Islamic Club in Still Waters, didn't seem to like what she was saying.

I have reported this in great detail to you because it was not until I attended this conference that I became aware of the antagonism between the Women's Movement and the religious groups of Catholicism and Islam (known by their antagonists as the UNholy alliance). They are arguing for different social roles for men and women rather than equality. I have some sympathy for their views on the unique role of women in bearing children but they seem to have failed to take into account that this role may take up a more limited time in a woman's life than previously.

It is obviously extraordinarily distressing to some women that others do not find the meaning and security in religious structures that they do. I heard one Islamic woman say, "But Islam covers every aspect of your life from the waking to sleeping at night. There are rules for everything." She obviously intended this to be comforting to the people who disagreed with her. But while she found comfort and security in this approach others were appalled and said, "But I don't want rules like that." It may all seem irrelevant down in the land of Oz but it isn't. Don't underestimate the power that these groups will exert on women over the next ten years or the enormous need people have to create meaning and spirituality in their lives. I think the Catholic Church is struggling to maintain its hold over women's reproduction and even countries like Peru are now moving against the Church decree and providing birth control to women. Islam seems to be an entirely different matter and I sense it is important to know more about it.

31 October 1995

LEGEND GARDEN VILLAS is an expatriate housing development near the international airport in Beijing. It is a joint venture between the Chinese army and a Honk Kong developer. The management of the compound send explanatory letters to the residents using a rather quaint style of English. We recently received a lovely letter from the management of LGV. It says:

Dear Sir/Madame,

Thanks a lot for renting the above mentioned premises for more than a year. In order to memorize our happy cooperation, we are going to send a little Christmas gift to you, which is to entrust the building department to give you a carpet shampooing at our expenses. Please take this notice to register with the Building Department before December 20, 1995, people there will arrange a suitable date for you. Please note that the notice is non transferable and duplicate of this is invalid.

*Mandy Brent is a speech pathologist and educational consultant. She lives and works in China.*

## SUMMER ODE TO THE SPORTING 70s

Bring back the moustache!  
Boony retires, the essential trademark dies.  
Forget all those inner city cafe latte goatees.  
There was unity in that piece of hair.  
The Chappells. not forgetting Trevor, a young  
Border,  
Yallop, Marshy, Tangles, those back-slapping  
openers  
Laird and Wood – and the lesser lights the ABC  
would show me  
after school, those Victorian test peripherals:  
Hurst, Callen, Moss – men who saw the MCG on  
too many  
empty days beside their sun-smarter mates who  
added beards:  
the mild spinner Ray Bright  
the astute Richie Robinson  
the swashbuckling party boy Gary Cozier.

But to be a summer idol! A holiday God!  
Only two men: D.K. Lillee and John Newcombe  
Could stand up for the count. Don't you remember?

Women fainting in days before slip slop slap.  
Men pruning their new addition at sunrise every  
morning.  
Boys wishing they were old enough to grow one.  
Girls climbing onto their fathers' knees at barbe-  
cues,  
pressing their fingers above the lip chanting  
"Lillee Lillee".

It must have been just prior to World Series,  
the Windies out to bat on the first morning,  
Lillee and Thommo ripping up the top order  
and when D.K went to third man after yet an-  
other threatening over,  
he turned, bowed graciously to the crowd;  
his long gold chain dangling to his knees.  
My Mum remarked to my Dad:  
"He's a bit of a trick, isn't he Frank?"

Newk – and nearing the end of a big career:  
tired body, suave smile,  
taking on the brash young Jimmy Connors,  
akin to an alien in the summer of '75;  
his steel racquets glistening in the Kooyong  
heatwave.

The crowd spilled across the grass,  
Marlboro girls in red cowboy hats handed out  
cigarettes.  
In the commentary box, Mike Williamson  
donned  
an immaculate safari suit. And yes, it was a  
fairytale victory:  
battling cramp, November weight problems,  
the critical eyes of a thirsty nation – Newk in four

and when he leapt the net to shake hands,  
I wanted to go straight outside and try it –  
because it was like that back then,  
under 10 in a beachside suburb.  
Everything happened in the streets.  
There was never any fun indoors.

I knew then that all I wanted to be  
was a sporting hero. Who depended on the  
season  
and that each morning as I was told to comb my  
hair  
in the bathroom mirror, a secret plan evolved.  
I was diligently preparing myself for the oncoming  
of the charming  
swooning  
celebrity  
endless girlfriends  
endless shouts at the bar  
c'mon summer  
let's take our shirts off  
and have a swim,  
I'll cook the steaks later . . .

MOUSTACHE!

KIERAN CARROLL

## POEM BEGINNING WITH A LINE ALMOST ENTIRELY FROM BROWNING

Ah, did you once see Shelley playin'?  
Keats was on the other wing,  
Byron had a roving commission, stayin'  
Back for the crumbs that hit-outs bring . . .

Wordsworth, as I recall, began  
On the forward-line at centre-half,  
Blake was as usual the loose man,  
And once I thought I heard him laugh.

That was at Vic Park, the skies  
Dark as a Romantic could desire  
A small voice cried, "Come on, the 'Pies!",  
With Tennyson the one high-flier . . .

Those big hands of his could hold  
A spiralling torp on the wettest days  
(He took a screamer, knees on the shoulders  
of a defender of the 'Crays.)

Who won, who lost, I couldn't say,  
I only remember an Aussie Terrier  
Ripping to shreds at the close of play.  
The *Biographia Literaria* . . .

BRUCE DAWE

## STOP GRUNTING

The umpire doesn't grunt  
the linespeople don't grunt  
the ballboys & girls don't grunt  
but the microphones are grunting  
your grunts, say the old men of tennis.  
A grunt's a grunt & a grunt & a grunt  
add up to a double grunt &  
a double grunt's a double fault  
say the old men of tennis.  
If you double grunt your ace or ace  
your double grunt with multiple grunts  
there'll be no end to your grunting  
they grunt, the old, old men of tennis.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

## THE EVENING MEAL

She knows better  
than argue against  
his drunken amnesia  
though evidence  
of a wolfed steak  
congeals on a plate  
in the kitchen sink:  
she reaches for the toaster  
and a can of beans.  
No point telling him  
he's just eaten:  
he is in fighting mode  
hand clenched to thump  
foot poised to kick.  
She shoves the kids  
beyond reach of boot.

Investigating screams  
and a frightful thud  
(her head meeting  
the kitchen stove)  
neighbours find quiet  
on the violence front:  
mother and kids  
in curtain-drawn bedrooms  
father slumped beer in hand  
watching The Footy Show.

The doctor suspects man-handling:  
fear pinching the woman's face  
bruises purpling the belly  
a bloody miscarriage . . .  
She swears no ill-treatment  
insists she aborted  
after a fall  
from a playgroup swing.  
He places a question mark  
in the family file.

JEAN THORNTON

## EXPO DAY

Terminology Expo Day  
is with us once again! The gay  
bunting of booth-holders flaps  
in the morning breeze, as visual traps  
for seekers of the latest loot  
(the you-beaut words designed to suit  
those whose wish it is to drive  
Oz cultural highways and survive).  
They mingle, chatting, making notes,  
examining new words, clearing throats,  
imaginatively placing parts  
in the slick engines of their hearts,  
taste, in advance, the turbo-power  
of those who've matched up with the hour  
linguistic-lasered skills to burn  
fudduddies off at every turn

– what, after all, has life unfurled  
in this *post hoc* postmodernist world,  
that can compare with being 'tops'  
with all those thought-policing cops  
parked by the black-top, outside town,  
eager to flag each dawdler down?

So now, from booth to booth they go  
on zestful quest: their need to know  
the new trade-terms of race and gender,  
carburettor, piston, fender  
– once loaded up with every sort  
of synchromeshing goodie bought,  
they join the ever-moving swarm  
of those who feel (while they conform)  
comforted they're not the norm . . .

BRUCE DAWE

## USER'S LAMENT

A boy was wandering in the streets as though the night would never have an end.  
He said: What sort of world is this, where you've got to, in a needle, seek a friend?  
He said: I've been this way so long I've lost all track of days and nights and time,  
I've lost a home and family and grabbed at every straw and done some crime,  
I sleep where I can find a 'pad' and often as not out-of-doors as in,  
I eat when there's a buck to spare, that's why just like a hungry dog I'm thin.  
I'm feeding this bad habit that carries me away just like a wave,  
A wave that lifts me up and then dumps me in a dark and raging cave  
Where the sun has never shone and the rocks are sharp as jaws of broken teeth  
And you're just some rotten seaweed torn and tugged this way and that down there beneath.  
I've tried the lot and nothing in the end works very long  
– As I wander through my life I have lost the words and music of the song  
While I still can see the singers and can see their lips around the music move  
I'm a cracked and broken record with a needle stuck forever in a groove . . .

BRUCE DAWE

MOIRA BURKE

## Muscle



SHE TAKES OFF HER SHOES, her well-worn neatly polished shoes, sees the holes in her black stockings and her painted toenails sticking out. She promises herself yet again to put the bills on hold and buy herself a new pair of shoes. Not just any shoes. Good shoes, shoes that will last, shoes that can take her anywhere, not shoes that she has to disguise by crossing her feet and tucking them up, not shoes that are tight around her feet containing her steps, the sway of her hips. Good shoes. Smart shoes. Durable shoes.

And she thinks about going to prison.

Solitude presses in around her and all she wants to do is drink. She bends herself into the sharp angles of her solitude that make her cornered and dark in the shadows; all she wants to do is drink. And she doesn't turn her heater on, not tonight, she's alone tonight, it's just her alone at home in her flat so she puts on some extra layers. Thick socks, her slippers, her shawl and her black beanie with the pompom, and she catches sight of herself in the lounge room window in her daggy old track-suit pants and accoutrements and she has a little giggle at her image, gives herself a little wave, and she draws the curtains over the windows. Shadows and corners are softened within.

She is cooking. She chops her vegies she wants to just get drunk but she won't, she will cook, she will make herself a good meal and she chops, she is chopping beetroot beans and carrots and spinach, onions and garlic are frying in spices and at least the kitchen is warm, the kitchen is fragrant and she is cooking, cooking just for her and she is not crying and she is not drunk, she won't, she won't, she won't get drunk.

The door bangs muffled shut above her, her upstairs neighbour clumps across the wooden floor. Goes to his answering machine. She hears beeps

and voices more beeps another voice and a double beep at the end. The clunks and slides of metal on metal and the wooden floor creaking to reps and curls as he pumps his nightly weights. Same time. Every evening. Same routine.

The floor is creaking above her in the kitchen that is warm, that is fragrant, she is cooking, she is not crying, she is angled and sharp within and cannot see a way out.

SHE IS SITTING AT AN OUTDOOR CAFE in the middle of the city, tall buildings poking up from concrete into a sky that is grey. It's winter. She is wearing her loveliest green woollen fitted dress, her hair in a neat bun, her lipstick on her neat mouth. She thinks about going to prison.

In front of her on the table at which she is sitting is a caffe latte and a little chocolate. Her hands are on her lap, her bag slung over the back of her chair, her feet crossed. She looks at the window opposite in which she can see the reflections of the suited men around her, at tables in twos and threes. The sky's grey. It's not raining.

She bites her little chocolate. It is creamy, heavenly. She sucks it.

There are suited men around her. One – whom she gauges is in his fifties, in a well-cut jacket and softly striped tie at the table closest to hers, saying “. . . pulled up in front of me and gets out of this expensive German car, honks at me, I mean – honks! and waves, I nearly jumped out of my skin – very funny man, very funny . . .” – sees her suck her chocolate. She considers asking him for two thousand dollars if she gives him the blow job of his life.

Without facing him, she lifts her latte in time to him lifting his wine. They sip simultaneously. She places her glass on the table, lingering deliberately so that her glass reaches the smooth surface mo-

ments after his. He sees this action. She sucks her chocolate again, licks it, watching his reflection in the window opposite. The angles within her are sharp and bright.

A young woman with missing teeth, pushing a pram, walks by her at the outdoor cafe in the middle of the city, interrupting her vision, dangling a grubby pink toy rabbit from one hand. She is wearing reflective sunglasses and a sloppy green t-shirt. It is winter. Her child cries, and without looking down, the young woman with missing teeth drops the toy rabbit into the pram, her tattoos slipping in and out of the muscles of her forearm.

Smoothing the folds of her loveliest green woolen dress, she walks up five concrete steps and into the foyer of one of the city buildings growing upward from street to sky, travels up through the heart of it in an elevator, a small cube of interior mirrors.

Her bag slung over the back of her chair, hair in a neat bun, touched up lipstick on her neat mouth, she looks at her hands neatly folded on her lap and reaches up to tuck back a strand of hair behind her ear. She is sitting in an oak-panelled office on the eighth floor of the city building, an oak-panelled office of a barrister, the friend of a friend, on the other side of a wooden table on which there is a lamp, a photograph of a smiling fair-haired woman and another photograph of two laughing blonde children playing in a garden. She looks out of the floor-to-ceiling windows into the space between herself and the buildings on the other side of the street. A seagull slices a winged curve across the grey. It doesn't rain. She shifts a little in the leather chair she is sitting on.

She has no money, she says, and cannot foresee having any money in the near future. She has no savings, she has no assets that the sheriff's office can repossess. She has tried to keep up the payments, she has fallen way behind, she has only enough money for day-to-day living. She says the only way out of it is to go to prison, and her voice cracks.

She looks at her neatly polished well-worn shoes, and she knows that under her loveliest green woolen dress the holes in her stockings are hidden. She crosses her feet and slides them under her chair. She is tatty. Her dress is old, ill-fitting, cheap. She is stupid, she is worthless, it's her own fault she is in this situation. The vision in her mind of her home has no warmth, it's an old shabby flat, rips in the lino, cracks in the walls, cobwebs and dust.

THE OTHER NIGHT, IT WAS RAINING. She was drunk, the alcohol making her slip and lurch through the corners and catches of the dark. She had been at the pub for six hours, drinking. She had eaten nothing all day. Tunnel vision. Sharp angles, no comfort in any of the corners. Yellow lights. Flash of familiar faces in a shadowy crowd. Outdoors, the sparkle of wet asphalt and delirium in her veins. The sound of rain. The sound of rain.

A car splashed to the gutter, pulling up a little way in front of her. It was after 3 am. Tail lights red, white panel van dim in a dark street. This time, she thought, I'll open that door. Sharp and shadowed angles encroaching. She faltered only momentarily as she grasped the handle.

"I'm not working, but you can drive me home if you like."

The driver looks at her. Sees her wet, sees her in the rain, sees her drunk through the car doorway.

"Really, all I'm looking for is a lift home."

"That's OK," he says.

"Really?" she asks.

"Sure," he says. "Get in."

So she does, pulling the door to a creaking shut. And they make a little chit-chat. she says thanks, he says it's fine, she gives him directions, he says how wet it is, how late it is, and she doesn't care about his chit-chat, she thinks about going to prison, she sees his glasses glint under the passing street lights, he actually seems like a nice man, not weird, just a bit lonely. He seems trustworthy. So she says,

"So what are you looking for?"

He is startled.

"What?"

Hoping she sounds like she knows what she is saying, trying to make a new phrase sound well-worn, resonant with use, she asks again,

"What are you looking for?"

And he weighs it up.

"How much?" he asks.

And she weighs it up.

"One hundred and twenty."

He says, "I can't afford a hundred and twenty."

She shrugs.

Then he says, "What do I get for a hundred and twenty?"

She says, "Regular."

He says, "How long?"

She says, "45 minutes," hoping that is reasonable.

He says, "How much for a head job?"

She says, "Fifty."

He says, "Forty."

She says, "Fifty."

He says, "That's too much."

She says, "Oh, well."

Rain bounces off the windscreen. She reaches up and tucks a strand of wet hair behind her ear. Then she says,

"You can let me out here if you like."

He says, "I thought you wanted a lift home."

She says, "This is far enough."

He says, "Here?"

She says, "Yeah."

He slows to a stop, engine running, and she gets out. The asphalt trips and splashes black and sparkling under her feet, the man in the panel van drives on. She catches the vision of square houses and the straight road looming, wavering, fitting the night and the angular shapes inside her.

SHE HOPES SHE WON'T START CRYING as the barrister is saying things to her. She catches some words – community service, unnecessary stress, archaic – and he mentions Sue who owes him a favour. He dials a number on his mobile, glances at her hands neatly folded on her lap, and smiles.

The barrister says stuff into the phone, stuff about her, talking to Sue who owes him a favour. He says stuff, he says words – convert the charges to a CSO, heard before a magistrate, dire financial straits – he says yes, he says hmmm, he says who?

She watches the barrister as he says this stuff into the phone, hears the known phrases slip easily out of his mouth, and they're not words that are unfamiliar to her, she too knows these words, these phrases. She doesn't know this particular combination though, of words and noises with silences in the right places delivered to the right person, who can answer with other, promising, words and noises and silences. She doesn't have anyone who owes her favours.

She sees him look out of the window into the space between himself and the buildings on the other side of the street, sees the way his eyebrows arch, making his brow crinkle a little. She looks at the photo of the smiling fair-haired woman, at the photo of two children, and she wonders where he lives, what home he must have with his family. She sees his wedding ring glint. She imagines fucking him over the wooden table, as she watches him talk-

ing into the phone, watches his hands finely-boned, his finger tapping twice just by the softness of his earlobe, hearing him say these words. She imagines kissing him, hard and definite, kissing him on his beautiful mouth that is forming these words, these words for her, holding him in her hands that are neatly folded on her lap.

She reaches up to tuck back the strand of hair that has escaped from behind her ear again.

He scribbles something on the pad in front of him.

He glances up at her, smiles a real smile at her. She gives him one back, a bright sharpness bursts within.

She cries, without noise, as he says some more stuff into the phone, and she brushes a quick hand over either cheek, and she stops herself from crying too much. She stops crying, it was only for a moment.

She shifts a little in the leather chair she is sitting on in the oak-panelled barrister's office on the eighth floor of a city building that stretches from street to sky, enjoying the folds of the soft green woollen fabric of her dress that is no longer ill-fitting. She smooths the lipstick on her neat mouth with a single finger, she looks forward to being at home in her lovely flat, she can put the bills on hold and buy herself new shoes next week.

She and the barrister leave his office together and travel the eight floors down in the small elevator, standing together in the mirrored cube, travelling down through the heart of the city building. They get off at the ground floor and walk through the foyer, down the five concrete steps, into the street. She thinks, I could easily just fall in love with him, and they shake hands.

She says, "Thank you."

He says, "It's nothing."

She says, "It is, I really appreciate it."

They are shaking hands, she holds his hand, puts her other one on it too, smiling a real smile and so is he and they are looking into each other, she is soft inside.

He says, "I'll see you soon."

She says, "Yes."

And they drop hands and he goes off around the corner, taking him down another street. She catches sight of herself in a passing shop window, gives herself a little wave, and walks on, feeling the sway of her hips and the way her feet are touching, then lifting off, the concrete city ground, the folds of her

dress around her. It's winter. It is drizzling. And she thinks about her barrister, about how she could easily just fall in love with him, and she knows her barrister has a wife with fair hair and two blonde children who play in a garden, so it's safe for her to think about falling in love with him, where they would live, what kind of home they could have together, it's safe for her to think about fucking him

over the wooden table and kissing, kissing his beautiful mouth, his hands holding her, and warm, and she lets herself think, and she keeps on thinking, she keeps on fantasizing about being with him, about being safe, about being secure, with a beautiful home and two laughing children and lots of doors to go in and out of, the tall city buildings above her making angled shapes in the grey sky.

### A BREAK IN THE STORM

Clatter of dishes against background  
of television music talk  
usual routines evening sounds

A rattle of hail crosses the roof

Profound blackness silence disorientation  
the world has vanished

Find the emergency torch a candle  
any light

Flickering candle-flame  
creates unfamiliar shadows  
around the familiar room.  
Warmth within, cold without.  
Through misted windows the garden glimmers  
in diffused light of moon behind clouds.  
The lawn is a shallow silver lake  
treetops are bunches of blossoming reflections  
swaying in gusts of wind.

Somewhere there is noise enough  
to jangle nerves and raise demons,  
but here at the edge of storm  
is a silence  
until wires are uncrossed  
and our world comes crashing back.

MARGUERITE VARDAY

### WHEN TOO MUCH NEWS IS BARELY ENOUGH

After the News  
we watch programs  
about the News  
then the News update  
and a little later an update  
on the update  
even a preview of tomorrow  
night's news.  
We can't get enough.  
Soon we'll have cable.  
24 hour News.  
We won't get any  
sleep then.  
My friend's concerned.  
Calls us News junkies.  
Says we should break  
the habit.  
That there should be withdrawal  
programs for people  
like us.  
A sort of methadone program  
of soft news to ease us off.  
Warnings in newspapers  
and on news channels.  
Little yellow boxes outside  
public toilets to deposit  
our used papers.  
And in every corner of  
the country  
News Free Zones  
where no News is good News.  
Now, he says, that'd be news.

john malone



LEONIE STEVENS  
**Rosary Beads**



**H**I. WE CAME AS SOON AS WE HEARD. You don't have to open your eyes or anything. We know it's hard.

Hey, on the way over here we saw a beat-up Torana, and we got to thinking about the time we went camping. Remember?

We were the slackest thing on wheels, out of it from the moment we drove out of Melbourne. We held the bong for you and you smoked it while you drove, remember? The last of the opium from the St Vincent's Gardens raid crackled in the cone, loud and sweet-smelling. You were bumping up and down, cramped and awkward with your long limbs around the wheel, making the suburbs disappear, telling us stories of drug-induced mysticism between pulls. Remember?

You'd been there before. You remembered where to go. Past Mallacoota, twenty minutes down a fire trail – god, we'd be up shit creek if there was a bushfire – the Torana's exhaust pipe fell off. We bodgied it back on with a coathanger and it rattled along the trail until the landscape of Lake Genoa suddenly unfolded. The water, the trees, the absence of plastic: we'd never seen anything like it.

You cooked fish and chips with gold-top mushrooms on the side. Magic fungi. We hung upside down off the jetty so the sky was liquid, and the blood rushed to our heads, and you willed down the UFOs, whispering, "Come on, come on." We were sure they would come.

Was that a blink? You remember that?

What about the next morning, when the park rangers came round in their boat?

"What's going on here?" one of them said. "Ya look like a pack of flamin' refugees! You ain't been fishing, have ya?"

You stood right beside your rods and gear and said "Nup".

They told us to move and we were off again, doing Ranger impressions all the way to Merimbula.

"Yep, that's a town." "Yep, that's another town." "Yep, that's a brown truck."

Merimbula. What a debacle. The car bogged itself in an endless mud slick and it took two hours to get fifty metres. We set up camp on the back beach and cooked jaffles on the fire, and you sat so close one of your boots started to melt. You gave us a book to read. *Supernature*. We took more mushies and flicked through it till they came on. Remember that night?

We walked along the beach and explored a pier, giggling and clumsy, until some dogs came after us. Shit, they sounded like a pack of wolves, scrapping and snarling and headed right for us. You said to try the Gurdjieff trick, kneel down, keep still, but we were too terrified. A flashlight came up behind them, blinding like torture.

"What the hell are you doing here? This is private property!"

We peered into the edges of the light and saw a man with an inordinate amount of facial hair. Shit, we thought, the Wolfman! He growled and dribbled – or maybe that was the dogs.

"Sorry," you said. "Just looking 'round, mate." We tried not to laugh or scream. The dogs were snarling, closer and closer.

"Freaks!" the guy said. "Get out of here."

And we were off again, scrambling down the pier, along the beach and back to our fire. Just when it couldn't have got any worse, it rained. Everything got wet, and we spent four hours cramped in your car. We'd left your *Supernature* book out by the fire, and it was wrecked. You never forgave us for that. At dawn we decided to call it a trip. Off again.

We had no money, remember, so we went to the Court House. The clerk looked at us, wet and smelly and looking like leftovers from the Manson ranch, and gave us forty bucks out of the poor box for petrol. Move along.

We filled the tank, bought a new coathanger for

the exhaust pipe and stopped at a pub for cigarettes. You came back from the toilets and told us you'd seen a syringe on the floor. Your skin was grey: the junk magnet was pulling you home. We went west, your *Supernature* book swollen and wrinkled on the dash.

The gammy return leg. First the tape player chewed your Circle Jerks tape. You were SO pissed off. Then, just out of Pambula, the Torana started making lethal noises. You got out and started fiddling and somehow you lost the radiator cap. We rolled into town, bought some balsa wood and carved a new one. Every fifteen minutes it'd pop and we'd have to carve another. That, or the exhaust pipe would go clunk. The passenger door handle fell off at Lakes Entrance, and we had to stop at Moe and wedge the window shut with a twig.

At Sale, we stopped for munchies and when we got back the dashboard was on fire. *Supernature*, up in flames. The smell of burnt vinyl stayed with us right along the highway. You must remember that smell.

We hit Melbourne in the early evening, the car disintegrating, smouldering, petrol gauge on empty. We went straight to your place so you could score, loud sudden blast of television and electricity and other people in the world. They all came out to see the Torana, burnt out and wasted. We laughed at the limp car's expense, then we lost sight of you. We took the bus home.

Did you wince? No, you didn't.

We just worked out what that is on your chest. The autopsy scar. Don't worry, it's not completely gross. It looks like rosary beads.

## TWO POEMS BY EMMA LEW

### TRENCH MUSIC

There's an old heaven at work in me,  
innocent as a cemetery.

It starts with the sound and speed of barricades,  
more pillage and more homage.

Dancing with the bones of the lamb  
near that delicate Stalingrad.

Entombed, bungled, fogged with breath;  
naked never naked enough.

I cannot evade these forms in the bone,  
the slow tunes from oblivion.

I fill up with shooting stars:  
let my human half sing out.

### REMNANT OF SUNSET

To be born  
with a sound  
but always  
float  
on a breath

to sing  
on the breath  
and  
on  
the word

to see  
you  
in arctic  
light

pure  
and  
strange

rising  
dark  
and  
loud

JOHN MCLAREN

## Citizenship, Government and Identity



Nicholas Brown: *Governing Prosperity: social change and social analysis in Australia in the 1950s* (CUP, \$29.95).

Graeme Turner: *Making It National: nationalism and Australian popular culture* (Allen & Unwin, \$19.95).

Ann-Mari Jordens: *Redefining Australians: immigration, citizenship and national identity* (Hale & Iremonger, \$24.95).

John F. Williams: *The Quarantined Culture: Australian reactions to modernism, 1913-1939* (CUP, \$29.95).

Gregory Melleuish: *Cultural Liberalism in Australia: a study in intellectual and cultural history* (CUP, \$29.95).

Paul Hasluck: *Light That Time Has Made*, with an introduction and postscript by Nicholas Hasluck (NLA, \$24.95).

Livio Dobrez (ed.): *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times* (Bibliotheca, ANU, \$20).

AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY, most political theorists and activists believed that nationalism was dead. The enthusiastic national mobilizations at the beginning of the war might seem to have refuted their belief, as might the current waves of destruction in Bosnia or Chechnya or Kashmir or Tibet or Sri Lanka or Afghanistan or Rwanda – the list is seemingly endless. Yet, as the last two examples show, the boundary between nationalism and tribalism, historically distinct, is in practice blurred. Similarly, the meaning and function of nationalism are matters of dispute. On the one hand, it may be our only security against social integration or global absorption. On the other, it may be used as a justification for mass murder and genocide. The authors of this collection of books, focusing on nationalism and the national tradition in Australia, agree in regarding both

as the products of history, but on little else. While the historians tend to assume an unbroken tradition, others, like Graeme Turner, emphasize the construction of this tradition from the interplay of particular interests. Livio Dobrez, in his collection of essays, proposes a way between the clashing rocks of theory and practice by suggesting national identity as the starting point of a historical development through which it finally abolishes itself.

Nicholas Brown works from the assumption that a nation is a political unit defined by its institutions of government. His book argues that during the 1950s the conduct and discussion of public affairs in Australia moved from a concern with managing a nation to governing a prosperity that was seen both as a source of possibility and a threat to stability. The economic discipline of the 1930s and the social mobilization of the wartime years were subsumed in a rhetoric of individualism and a concern for responsible citizenship. Rather than seeking structural change to meet perceived problems, political theorists and practitioners sought to shape the citizen, as consumer, family member, worker or student, so that individual conduct contributed to social stability. This ambition in turn leads to a concentration on the means rather than the ends of action.

By government Brown refers not to explicit acts by the state but to the Foucaultian concept of the meeting point between the everyday operation of regimes of state domination and the practices that “shape individual conduct and subjectivity”. He supports his analysis by examining changing Australian relationships with Asia and New Guinea, the ambivalent response to the “milkbar economy” of postwar prosperity, the continuing campaign for decentralization and local community, the efforts made through adult education, the media and

social psychology to prepare the responsible citizen and family member, and, finally, the change in the role of universities from the education of a managing elite to the training of professionals expert in their particular spheres.

Brown shows how the concepts of citizenship, community and stability have become objects of contest between the left and the right of politics. Thus the right, drawing on ideas of the organic community, saw Asia as a place where modernism and westernization were bringing instability to a traditional culture. Its tradition provided a model for our society, and its instability gave a cause for political and military intervention in countries that the left believed should be left alone to find their own paths to democracy. At home, the right identified citizenship with both individualism and conformity, while the left sought, by way of education and social planning, to provide the basis for community that the right saw as already existing in the country towns that were the objects of its drive for decentralization and the source of its model of tradition and national virtue.

**G**RAEME TURNER'S *Making It National* deals with the later period in our history when state management of business had been largely abandoned, and the nation, due to media frenzy, became identified with the activity and interests of larrikin entrepreneurs like Bond and Murdoch. Citizens are still perceived as individuals, but their desires are enlisted in the direct interests of entrepreneurial capital rather than of stability and the production of wealth. Although Turner acknowledges the excitement of watching Australian businessmen and lawyers challenging stuffy American and British establishments, and recognizes the importance of nationalism in symbolizing reality, his book presents a sustained argument against the use of narrow forms of nationalism to conceal real social and economic problems and displace responsibility for them.

Turner's theme is the way nationalism has been captured by the 'usual suspects' in the media, who

project the activities of small groups of businessmen as an embodiment of the ideal type of an undifferentiated national community. Their ideology ignores social and cultural issues, instead placing the economy at the centre of political debate, portraying the law, health and education merely as effects of a "rationally conceived economy", and excluding any sustained criticism of political or business endeavours that are portrayed as promoting Australia's global identity.

The concentration by the media on national heroes and villains conceals, for example, the contradiction between the law's responsibility to individual clients and its function of protecting the national interest. The reporting of the Maralinga Royal Commission in terms of cheeky Australians revealing British

perfidy served to cover up the failure of any government to provide adequate compensation to the victims of the atomic tests, the complicity of the Australian government in concealing the residual levels of radiation, and the disgrace of its own treatment of the Aborigines. Interestingly, A.P. Elkin, who appears in Brown's book as one of the prewar advocates of social unity and Aboriginal assimilation, appears again in Turner's account, now as advising the government that the natives had no lasting interest in the land on which the tests were to be conducted. The anti-British sentiments of eighties nationalism prevented either the premises or the consequences of this postwar policy from being considered. Similarly, the ecstatic celebration of the award of the Olympic Games to Sydney as a national victory excluded any consideration of either direct or indirect costs, or of the involvement of the media companies themselves in the bid.

Turner is particularly interesting in his discussion of Australia's ambivalent attitude to the United States, which is viewed both as the symbol of the modernity towards which we all aspire, and as the imperial power that seeks to subject the rest of the world to its economic and cultural sway. Looking at the film *Crocodile Dundee*, he contrasts the responses of American and Australian audi-



Cartoon by  
Tony Champ,  
Graeme Turner,  
*Making It National*, p.35

ences, and notes how it allows us to play at being American rather than having to choose between the alternatives of resistance and surrender to alien models. Similarly, he argues that our film industry both resists and exploits American assistance and the American market. The real risk to cultural independence, he argues, comes from the tourist industry, which first simplifies our national identity to market it abroad, and then re-imports it as the standard to measure our own expectations.

Central to Turner's book is his argument that, although nationalism can be misused to simplify issues, deny difference and promote the least savoury elements of tradition, it remains an important element of individual and social consciousness. Unlike critics who treat popular enthusiasms with elitist contempt, Turner frankly admits his own enjoyment of national successes and celebrations, recognizing that they evoke as well as manipulate genuine enthusiasms. His ability to identify as well as to criticize enables him to be optimistic about the future of Australian nationalism, finding signs that we have embarked on the necessary task of establishing an open sense of our identity, one based on difference rather than similarity, and one moving beyond a shallow pluralism towards hybridity, where the celebration of mutual change is as important as the acknowledgment of separate origins.

**I**N A FOREWORD to Ann-Mari Jordens' *Redefining Australians*, Donald Horne vigorously defends the linked concepts of nationalism and citizenship. "It is only through the idea of citizenship," he writes, "that the questions of 'national identity' will ever be settled . . . It will only be through a sense of belonging to a common political community that we will be able to find those declarations, essential in any state, of the common beliefs that hold citizens together." He argues that the reality of our multicultural society and the need to belong to a society rather than merely to a collection of consumers make these twinned issues matters of immediate practical importance. Horne acknowledges the racism and exclusions that have in the past been a part of Australian definitions of national identity, and rejects similar notions of enforced ethnic, national or even cultural identity. As he points out, the importance of Jordens' book is her demonstration of the way we have shed earlier impediments to an inclusive idea of citizenship and identity.

Jordens notes that Australia adopted citizenship as a legal category only in response to its introduction in Canada. She constructs her discussion of the development of the new concept of citizenship around the opposition between earlier normative ideas of identity, defined in terms of an ideal that all Australians shared, and the emerging concept of citizenship based on an equality of civil, political and social rights. She begins by contrasting the comparative success of Australia's postwar migration program with the official and unofficial discrimination faced by migrants in other contemporary societies. She identifies the sources of the difference as our ability to manage the immigration program, together with the provision of bridging services, elimination of legislative discrimination, and political leadership that has produced an acceptance of the migrant community. Notably, each of these elements of our polity is under attack from the present government.

Although Australian citizenship became a legal category in 1948, it remained almost as restrictive in its scope as it was empty of content. Aborigines, women born outside British territories, children born out of both wedlock and the Empire, all Asians born outside Australia, and the physically and mentally handicapped children of migrants, were excluded. Jordens' detailed examination of migration policies shows how the initial success of the program depended on a rhetoric of assimilation and a practice of discrimination that ensured that the newcomers would not be perceived as competing with the majority or diluting their Anglo-Celtic tradition. The move from enclosed to open conceptions of citizenship has involved a process of re-imagining the nation, assisted by such visionary politicians as Arthur Calwell and Al Grassby, but constantly hindered by the paranoiacs who saw communist plots and socialist republics behind every attempt to move beyond a British definition of Australian identity. Surprisingly, these critics have included not only the RSL, but even Malcolm Fraser. Eventually, Australian citizenship was separated from the legal status of British subject only in 1987, six years after Britain itself had abandoned that concept.

The postwar program of migration to Australia, designed to strengthen an established society, challenged and eventually changed its whole identity. Although John Hirst has argued that the success of the program depended on a level of tolerance and

egalitarianism that was integral to this identity, Jordens' book demonstrates the level of intolerance that migrants, and other minority groups nevertheless had to overcome. John F. Williams' study of *The Quarantined Culture* shows how this prejudice had its roots in a prejudice against modernism and difference, against anything that might allow citizens again to be subjects of their history, that became deeply embedded in Australia between the two world wars.

WILLIAMS LAYS THE BLAME for Australia's social and intellectual stagnation between the wars firmly at the feet of nationalists like Charles Bean and James MacDonal, who promoted as a national ideal the image of the bushman-turned-soldier at Anzac. They set this ideal, which promoted the image of Australia as a rural Arcadia populated by tens of millions of industrious yeomen farmers, against the twin evils of industrialism and modernism, both of which they saw as seedbeds of vice, human degradation and Bolshevism. Their vision of the true Australia was both profoundly racist and quite out of contact with the reality of a slowly industrializing and already urbanized dominion, but gave life to the illusion that Australians could thrive as southern Britons protected by the security of the British Empire. Their vision was deeply anti-Semitic, seeing Jewish control behind economic crisis, Bolshevik revolution and modern art.

Williams argues convincingly that in 1913 Australians were confident in themselves and their future, well-informed about intellectual developments and artistic movements in Europe and North America, and easy about their own role on this world stage. After the war, they retreated into themselves and a mythical version of their past that celebrated Gallipoli as the scene of a bush people's coming-of-age. The disasters of soldier settlement, the restrictions of citizenship rights, and the opposition to any inclusion of Japan in world councils were among the consequences of this retreat. Attention that had once been given to arts and ideas was turned to sport, and, despite the anti-British sentiments aroused by controversies over the role of Australian troops under British command, the arrogance of Otto Niemeyer's delegation from the Bank of England, or the outrageous behaviour of visiting English sports teams, renewed energy was invested in the idea of the British empire as a guar-

antee of Australia's global importance. These futile political ideals were appropriately represented by artistic forms that converted the radical ideals of the 1890s into a reactionary orthodoxy that could provide "no substitute in a living, vital culture for a living, vital art."

One of the most interesting speculations in Williams' book is his suggestion that the unique status of the first AIF as the only fully volunteer force among the allied armies contributed to postwar isolationism. The exaltation of the image of the digger led to the exclusion of those who had stayed at home, and the cult of manliness excluded women and the arts. At the same time, the custodians of wartime values, particularly the RSL, maintained a wartime chauvinism, in contrast to the disgust and disillusion expressed by the conscripts who came to prominence in European cultural life.

As the 1920s rolled on, a kind of chauvinistic disaffection was manifested by old diggers and their leaders, aimed not at the insanity of war . . . but at British officers and even the poor . . . British tommy . . . Unlike so many continental Europeans and Britons, they had volunteered to offer up their lives for the state and if their lives were to retain meaning, they were hardly likely to disown the idea of war as just, sane and worthwhile after all. . . conscription . . . by throwing the AIF open to the radical, socialist or pacifist elements, . . . may actually have worked as democratising, radicalising, or liberalising on all the soldiers in that army. (p.239)

Thus Australia missed out on the brief flowering of the arts enjoyed by America and Europe until the depression, fascism and Stalinism snuffed them out.

IN *CULTURAL LIBERALISM IN AUSTRALIA*, Gregory Melleuish agrees with Williams that the first world war "broke that international network of cultural exchanges in which Australians previously had participated", but he argues that the causes of this break can be found much earlier than the war: the "malaise . . . was the consequence not of the thwarting of the ideals of the first decade but of their consummation." Melleuish identifies these ideals as those of the protectionist liberalism that defeated free-trade liberalism in the first years of federation, repudiating modernism and looking to the state to guarantee a racially homogeneous, equitable and

just society. While Williams concentrates on the progressive outlook of artists, Melleuish points out that Australian society was largely working class, and its cherished aspirations for justice and equality were based on traditional rather than radical values. The professions were dominated by doctors and lawyers, the humanities depended on teacher training, and the few intellectuals were generally conservative. While this society may have regarded itself as an advanced part of the modern world, it was in fact an economy heavily dependent on imported goods and capital, paid for by the export of primary products.

Melleuish is at pains to point out the moral basis of the ideals of both free trade and protectionist liberals, but his sympathies are clearly with the former. He valuably points out that the free-traders did not advocate greed as the only basis for society, but sought an economy based on co-operation rather than protected private interests. Protectionist liberals, on the other hand, failed to escape from "the obvious contradiction between the ideal state of a humanity released for higher efforts and the reality of a state seeking to protect and regulate the actions of its members." He identifies this protectionist mentality with Melbourne protestantism and Calvinist beliefs in original sin and the inevitable degeneration of humankind, yet both his examples of protectionist ideology come from Sydney, in the forms of the *Bulletin* and Billy Hughes, and his severest critic of liberal practices at the turn of the century is the Victorian politician, Charles Henry Pearson.

These examples indicate the central problem of Melleuish's study. Despite the welcome insight he gives into the ideals of the free-traders, he fails to distinguish their motives from their ideology. Their ideal of Christian co-operation may have been sincere, and was free from the racism that infected Labor and protectionist politics, but it offered no alternative to the reality of an industrial system that denied the communal nature of industrial production and left all power in the hands of owners who had neither an interest in ideals nor the power to nurture the ideals of craftsmanship and an organic community that the free-marketeers lauded.

Melleuish's defence of the free-traders is located as much in the contemporary assault on commonwealth and collective rights as it is in an attempt to understand how we reached our present impasse.

His account, drawn from Hayek's work, of the way capitalist practices at the turn of the century turned from British individualism to German organization and to a conception of order as imposed by science rather than inherent in nature, does nothing to explain why the German model triumphed in Europe and through the capitalist world. He offers neither a Marxist nor, like Nicholas Brown, a Foucaultian analysis to explain changes in the way we perceive relations between the state and the individual, or of the way the idea of the individual is constructed. Rather, he relies on an unexamined concept of freedom as the liberty of the individual to choose. From this point of view, state activity is both an interference with individual freedom and a check on the ability of an organic society to develop naturally in response to individual choices.

MELLEUSH SEES HIS WORK specifically as a correction to Tim Rowse's *Australian Liberalism and National Character*. Both writers share an understanding of the division in social thought between realists, who believe that nature and the market determine all, and idealists, who believe that the task of government is to impose human values on amoral nature. Rowse rejects liberalism for not recognizing the power of natural forces and the kind of human intervention needed to control them. Melleuish claims, without offering evidence, that Rowse is incapable of recognizing the simple fact, understood by a liberal like Keith Hancock, that "ideals, once put into practice, do have real consequences." Rowse's criticism of Hancock's *Australia* is that it employs an account of nationalist ideals to avoid explaining the particular conditions of capitalist accumulation and production in Australian history. Melleuish reads the same text as a realist study of the way Australian ideals of opportunity, justice and equity have led to state systems of industrial protection, wage control and welfare that have produced only inefficiency, privilege and waste. His criticism is that Hancock does not follow through his identification of the failure of the Australian national experiment to a renunciation of the ideals that produced it. The writers agree that liberalism has been the dominant ideology in Australia, but whereas Melleuish sees it as thwarting the natural forces that, unchecked, would lead to personal and cultural liberation, Rowse sees it as precluding an understanding of these forces that would allow decisive

intervention in order to avoid the disasters of unchecked capitalism. While fashion may be on the side of Melleuish, the history of a disastrous century seems to support Rowse.

Yet Melleuish is not so much a crude libertarian as a universalist with an Augustinian sense of the limitations on the individual will and the tragic consequences of totalizing beliefs in the power of science or ideology. His sympathies lie with Gordon Childe, a realist who retains an evolutionary idealism, and with idealistic critics of liberalism, like Elton Mayo or Frederick Eggleston, but he finds they tend to collapse into tenuous utopianism. His book concludes with an epilogue on two spurners of modernity and the cultural liberalism that expressed it, but who nevertheless cannot escape liberalism's protestant and evangelical legacies: Manning Clark and James McAuley. Both these writers rejected liberalism, seeing it as the source of despair, yet Melleuish finds in their work the sense of spirituality that, alongside the hope in science and a sense of civic duty, was at the heart of cultural liberalism. This tradition he finds now excluded from the universities that had once been its home. Yet he believes it is kept alive in the work of independent thinkers like Charles Birch or Ronald Conway, and remains a potent source to illumine the otherwise sterile nationalist and economic debates.

**P**AUL HASLUCK WAS A LATER POLITICIAN whom Melleuish would no doubt have placed within the tradition of cultural liberalism. In a graceful essay included with this collection of his father's writings, Nicholas Hasluck expresses the combination of the local and the international when he recalls his father saying that "Australians should not become so involved in their own tradition that they forget they are a part of civilisation". The writings show how Hasluck's own career was devoted to this ideal, placing his understanding of civilization at the service of his country, which was undoubtedly a better place for his efforts. The book includes shrewd but generous assessments of Curtin, Evatt and Menzies, a demolition of Alan Reid's writings on Gorton, and perceptive reflections on the constitution and political convention.

Yet Hasluck's words show also the limitation of liberalism. A clue is given in his remark, relating to his conduct of Aboriginal affairs, that he "had always been more interested in administration than

politics." Despite his humble origins, he is the patrician expert, properly respectful of others, but effectively excluding them from the conduct of their own affairs. At the same time, his emphasis on the needs and responsibility of the individual means that he resents moves to provide the communal support services, like social workers, that may enable individuals better to meet their responsibilities. He rejects the Pelagian heresy that encourages us to hope for perfectability within this life. This disposition, which he shared with others of his time and responsibility during the long years of the Menzies government and its bungling successors, accounts more than economic neglect for the feelings of resentment that are now bubbling up in society as its marginal people – gun-owners, farmers, displaced workers – come to realize that the years of managing prosperity have left a society that, denying its earlier social contract, now denies them a place. Like Melleuish, Hasluck is concerned with ideas and the management of people rather than with the material forces that shaped the communities he managed.

**T**HE EMPHASIS IN THE COLLECTION of essays edited by Livio Dobrez is not so much on the development or construction of a national tradition as on the way we perceive it. Although the contributors do not agree with each other, there is an underlying concern with nationalism as a performance constructing a future, and consequently, in most of the essays, an understanding of the relationship between ideas and material history.

In an introduction that goes to the nub of current theoretical debates, Dobrez exposes the fallacy of attempts to define national identity as either an essential quality or a subjective construct. Instead, he describes it as the starting point of our individual and collective trajectories, a fact indubitably given but open to all possibilities. His essayists then examine Australian identity as it is coming into being, both as we work back to rediscover earlier identities through the Mabo judgement and its implications, and forward to inscribe our realities on time and space.

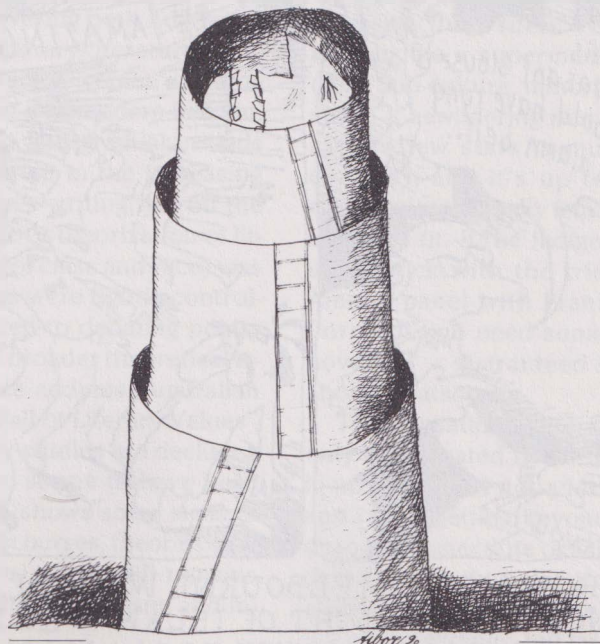
Of the essayists, Paul Carter on the inscription of space by the proliferating mimicry of a community of migrants, Bill Ashcroft and John Salter on Australia as a rhizomic text, and Dobrez himself are variously theoretical. Dobrez traces the develop-



ment of identity from the first white settlement, where it involved both appropriation and making exotic, through its ramifications as plurality, to his forecast of its loss in the global net of postmodernism. The following essays, more grounded in history, include David Goodman's account of historical critiques of older concepts of nationalism, Joy Hooton's criticism of the legend in autobiography and contrast with a wider alternative view, and Patrick O'Farrell's sanguine account of an optimistic Australian developing in spite of government policy. Gregory Melleuish, in a rehearsal of the argument of his book on liberalism in Australia, rejects the picture O'Farrell gives of steady progress to liberal ideals, claiming rather that the settlers brought traditional ideals that animated them to reproduce the order they had left behind. J.M. Powell provides a convincing critique of recent popular environmental histories by S.J. Pyne and W.J. Lines, arguing that they are both misleading and dangerously obstructive to the urgent task of understanding the historical process of interaction between humans and nature in Australia. Ivor Indyk examines land as a source of value in Australian literature, forcing Xavier Herbert's destructive landscapes into service in the process. Rosemary Foxton, focusing on the nineteenth century, is more successful in her

examination of the dual aspects of the land. The remaining essays raise the issue of the place of Aborigines in the nation state or its representations. Eleanor Burke examines the possibilities and realities of the recognition of Aboriginal autonomy within the state. A playful essay by Jerry Everard deconstructs ideas of state and constitution to open possibilities for both recognition of Aborigines and the institution of a republic. Finally, Barbara Nicholson and Roberta Sykes examine the development of Aboriginal identity and its appropriation by whites, and argue that, as part of the search for an Australian identity, "non-Aboriginal people have an obligation . . . to honour not only the spirit embedded in the actualization of justice for Aboriginal people which was led by the High Court and continued by the government, but to seek out their own paths for the realization of this country's destiny. If Australians are able to acknowledge and suspend their sense of guilt about the recent history of the country, they will be able to surrender to the truth that . . . they *know* 'Aboriginal' is synonymous with Australia. Such an acknowledgement will enable them to grow."

*John McLaren is Professor of Humanities at Victoria University and is the editor of Overland.*



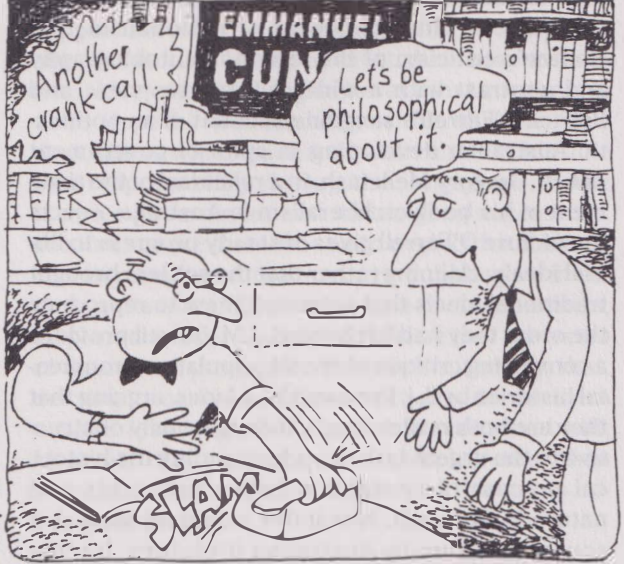
# Publishing Errors.

Publishers! Learn from the mistakes of others! by LofO

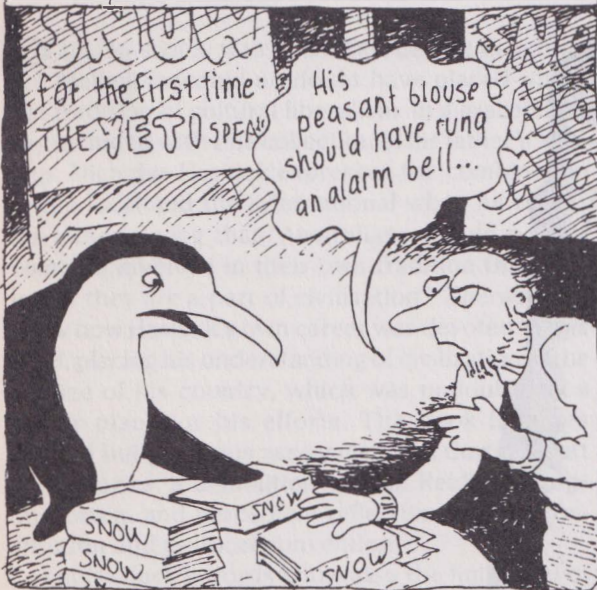
When Angus and Robinson launched the novel "The Lion Prince", they decided to do it in the lion enclosure of the Melbourne Zoo. Bad mistake.



When Noxford University Press decided to spell all foreign names phonetically, they also did so with the collected works of German philosopher Emmanuel Kant.



Shortly after Penguin had printed all publicity material for "SNOW", it became known that this alleged autobiography of the Yeti was actually the work of Ukrainian Dave Demidenka.



When Roland Harvey published their hundredth maze book, they celebrated it by also launching author Rolf Heimann's own fragrance: "Mace 100".



AND THE DALLAS BROOKS HALL MELBOURNE WAS A BEAUTIFUL BUILDING BEFORE THE LAUNCH OF 'THE LIGHT OF ISLAM' WHEN A TASMANIAN CATERING FIRM AGREED TO "RUSH IN SALMON" FOR IT.

## Brisbane Line

IF WE MODIFY BJELKE-PETERSEN'S indicators of economic development (namely, count how many cranes are part of the Brisbane skyline) to fit literary matters, then the recent number of conferences and festivals suggests that Brisbane might almost be a happening thang. QUT hosted the Association for the Study of Australian Literature's 1996 conference in July, followed soon after by the Brisbane Writer's Fringe Festival 'Seriously Fishy', and most recently, the Brisbane Writers' Festival. But like Joh's period of supposed economic boom in Queensland, it's important not to let all this activity mask some underlying conditions and contradictions in Oz Lit, which I can only suggest here.

ASAL '96, a five-day conference, was well-organized and reasonably well-attended. A wide variety of papers was presented, covering both Australian literary history and contemporary literature, from Christina Stead to autobiography, women's writing and the debates surrounding postmodern-ism and postcolonialism. The impact and gradual inroads made by feminism are apparent in the increasing number of papers on women's writing, yet on the whole, overt political critique or theorization of literature (including questions of class and race) was fairly muted. The discussions were tightly controlled and anaemic, often limited to debating points of interpretation rather than broader theoretical issues. Simon During's keynote address 'Australian Literature and the Rise and Fall of Literary Values', where he argued that literary studies are declining in influence and importance, seems to have been enacted at ASAL. While ASAL shows some signs of opening up to more recent discourses, theories, and approaches to literary studies, there still remains an impression of conservatism, humanism, and insularity around Club Oz Lit.

THERE WASN'T A TWEED JACKET IN SIGHT at the Brisbane Writers' Fringe Festival, a series of events, poetry readings, performance nights, cabarets, and book and magazine launches. Irreverence, energy, participation and humour were everywhere, whether at the Poetry State of Origin, The Jack Kerouac Spontaneous Poetry competition, or 'On the Footpath' – an open invitation to read anyone's poems but your own. The Fringe promotes writing as something pleasurable and accessible to both writer and reader. Words can be magic, but aren't sacred.

The mainstream festival, however, was problematic. It comprised a huge number and range of events: panels, parties, lunches, book launches, readings and films. To the festival's credit, the majority of events were free, and in the sheer number of topics discussed, most readers' tastes would have been catered for. Yet in all this pluralism and diversity, the Writers' Festival seemed to operate almost like a supermarket – every product line (read sub-culture, minority group or genre) was in stock, a bewildering number of brands were available (a few stars, a much larger mass of newcomers), and it's up to the consumer (older, middle-class, usually female) to pick and choose as one sees fit. If the indigenous writers aren't your style, stick with the tried and true 'Blokes and Ammo' panel with Frank Moorhouse and Peter Corris. If you need some titillation, try 'Women/Love/Sex' – guaranteed for a few laughs and no shock whatsoever.

This sensation of literary window shopping was only exacerbated by the writers themselves: often ill-prepared and not addressing the session topic, and rarely getting beyond the 'writers' festival as chance for anecdote or sales pitch' mode. After five days like this, the point of a writers' festival remains elusive. There were some entertaining moments, a few great readings, but far more reactionary or just

plain banal statements than expected. This suggests that the myth of creative imagination as being above self-reflexivity or politics, is alive and well (for both writers and readers). Yet there were some 'hot spots' in this largely pluralist sheen – for example, 'Indigenous Writing, Indigenous Lives', and the Gay and Lesbian writing sessions. Here, writers spoke with some commitment, passion, and an awareness of their specific historical location. A pity that these were two of the few sessions that were no more than two-thirds full.

So while it appears books and writing are still popular and dynamic, some of the old structural flaws remain: a resistance to theory, critique and politics, and a continuing centre–margins model of literary values, which are masked by an attractive pluralism and diversity.

Margaret Henderson

## Newsfront

**I**F I HAVE ONE REGRET IN LIFE, it is that I was not in the audience at the Rialto cinema in West End watching *A Clockwork Orange* the day the roof blew off. Somehow I don't think psychoanalytic theory could ever adequately explain that cinematic experience. Wisely perhaps, the organizers of the 5th Brisbane International Film Festival (BIFF) did not include *A Clockwork Orange* in this year's festival as part of the Kubrick retrospective. Would it have been tempting fate? Whatever, it would have been wonderful publicity. But given the size of audiences for the Kubrick screenings, perhaps it wasn't necessary.

Less celebrated than its southern counterparts, BIFF has had a chequered history. Beginning in the 1960s, the Brisbane Film Festival managed to survive fitfully into the 1980s before disappearing in the dead of night like the Bellevue hotel which exists now only in the rubble of memory. Fortunately, those dark times appear to be behind us (although night-time demolitions of historic or landmark buildings remain a feature of Brisbane life) as we bathe in the glorious light of cultural (if not political) renaissance. Within the space of a few short months Brisbane has hosted a rapidly growing Writers' Festival, the biennial Brisbane Festival of performing arts, and *Livid*, not to mention the second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (which runs until January) and the rebirth of the Queensland

Theatre Company. If BIFF is not quite the icing on the cake, it is certainly an essential ingredient in the cultural mix.

Ambitiously titled *From Silents to Cyber*, BIFF displayed an admirable desire to provide something for everyone in its efforts to build and maintain a committed festival-going audience. The range of features and ancillary activities was undoubtedly the festival's most impressive aspect. Sandwiched between guaranteed audience drawcards like Mike Leigh's superb *Secrets and Lies*, Robert Altman's patchy *Kansas City*, the Kubrick and Jackie Chan retrospectives, were events and screenings which amply demonstrated the organizers' willingness to take risks with theme and form. The night before the festival's opening, the winners of the national short film competition *Fast Films* were screened to a diverse and responsive audience of shoppers and filmies in the Queen Street Mall. Cinema's past was well represented at the State Library, with screenings of early German cinema, a short Melies retrospective, a selection of Queensland films from the turn of the century and one of the highlights of the festival for me, *Lumiere et Compagnie*, in which forty contemporary filmmakers used an antique Lumiere camera to shoot a series of one minute homages to two of the architects of modern cinema. Elsewhere at the Hub Cafe festival patrons could sample the medium's future possibilities via interactive multimedia technology.

**I**T WAS ENCOURAGING TO SEE a strong lesbian and gay contingent of films (unthinkable just a few short years ago), among which was the buzz film of the festival, British director Chris Newby's *Madagascar Skin*. The rather disappointing selection of Asian cinema was counterbalanced by the range of films from around the world, and it was particularly heartening to see the depth of Australian material on show (nine features, and countless shorts). The festival also managed to attract an impressive range of international guests including film historian Ian Christie and the closing night film's director, Shu Kei. The Australian industry was well represented, with the audience highlight being the surprise appearance of David Helfgott after the Queensland premiere of *Shine*.

And on top of all this, I heard the best joke to come my way for a longtime in Lawrence Johnston's *Life* (okay, so I don't get out much). Apparently Jeff

Fenech is to star in an Aussie remake of *The Silence of the Lambs*. It'll be called *Shut up Youse*. Now that would be a film to build a festival around.

Ben Goldsmith

## Sydneyside

IT IS A BANAL CONSERVATIVE HOMILY that the young revolutionary inevitably becomes the old moderate, established figure. That charge has been levelled at the journal *Overland* in the past, as it has at the labour movement as a whole. However, one of the few virtues of the current political context has been its clear demonstration of the fragile, temporary footing that the cultural and political institutions of the Australian labour movement actually possess. In most of the countries of Western Europe, museums exist to document the struggle of labour to build a better society, to store important historical documents, and to publicize the ongoing relevance of labour's history. This is not so in Australia, an unfortunate absence in this moment of industrial and political transformation. Howard may want to put us to work under nineteenth century conditions, but we have no place to educate ourselves about how those conditions have been improved. For this reason, the beginnings of a Labour Heritage Register, to record items of Labour History significance for eventual inclusion in a museum, is a welcome development. For those who have old posters, badges, letters or ephemera currently gathering dust, please write to: *Labour Heritage Register, Faculty of Economics, University of Sydney, NSW 2006. Ph: (02) 9351 3786.*

WHILE THE RISE of the French theorists of post-structuralism should not be repudiated without thought, the uncritical embrace of the philosophy as a hip fashion accessory is equally paralysing. The latter is most prevalent amongst younger members of the intelligentsia, casting off socialism as anachronistic, and parroting Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault with an earnestness that would put an old communist with a copy of Lenin to shame. The phenomenon of French philosopher as hero reached its most comical extreme with the appearance of Jacques Derrida via satellite at the '100 Years of Cruelty' Artaud Conference in Sydney. Derrida's planned appearance was greeted with acclaim in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and adherents cram-

med the University of NSW in September in expectation. However, in a cruel intrusion of the material context, the satellite link failed, and poor sound quality marred the address. But no-one dared interrupt Professor Derrida, and reports suggest that he was allowed to speak for nearly half an hour before organizers summoned the courage to tell him that he could not be understood. For a thinker famous for interrogating the practices of writing and speaking, appearance and disappearance, this was an unwelcome convergence of theory and practice.

THIS SUMMER WILL SEE Sydney's second Fringe Writers' Festival. The event has expanded greatly from its small beginnings last year, and a range of readings and happenings is planned for between 17 January and 2 February. Proposed events include a panel discussion on the status of poetry in Australia and a focus on the writing that has been coming out of Sydney's West over the past few years. The Festival's growth is an expression of the growing diversity of Sydney's literary scene, and of dissatisfaction with the mainstream and overseas writers who inevitably secure attention at major festivals. The new literary journals *HEAT* and *CORDITE* will also present a series of performances. The Festival offers an opportunity to expand the audience for young, alternative Australian writers of quality. All power to it, and don't forget to Take Three afterwards.

Sean Scalmer

## Francis Adams

FRANCIS WILLIAM LAUDERDALE ADAMS (1862–93), a child of his age, prophet of socialism and culture, neglected, forgotten, brilliant and charismatic – these are the images, memories and phrases that come down through the decades. It is just over a century since his death in a boarding-house at Margate, and the erection by his young Australian widow of a broken column on his grave, planted around with his favourite flowers, daffodils. Stephen and Nita Murray-Smith visited that grave in 1971; when I went to Margate last year, I was conscious not only of the biographical path I was tracing, but of treading in their tracks. Stephen Murray-Smith had a long-standing interest in Francis Adams, publishing essays on him in China and Russia in the 1950s, researching his life and work, and prepar-

ing an anthology of his poetry and prose. The entry on Adams in the Australian Dictionary of Biography is signed SMS.

The daffodils around the broken column are no longer to be seen, and the inscription is practically illegible now. Fortunately, transcripts had been made; Adams' reputation lives on in Australian literary, political and historical memories, rather than the English seaside towns (Ventnor, Bournemouth, Margate) where he lived and died. The broken column, symbolizing the early and childless death of a remarkable writer who was just beginning to achieve the literary recognition he craved, could well have reminded me of the breaking off (with the sudden death of Stephen Murray-Smith in 1988) of the most sustained effort toward republishing his work this century. That parallel is very present to me now, as I write on Francis Adams for *Overland*, the journal Murray-Smith founded and edited for so long.

My initial contact with Francis Adams, however, was through the University of Queensland – appropriate enough, since Adams spent most of his six years in Australia living in Brisbane. He was, in fact, 'adopted' by William Lane's *Boomerang* as a Queenslander in its "all Queensland" cast of writers for the 1888 Christmas edition. Adams worked as a journalist, although he produced a constant supply of stories and poems, many published in the *Bulletin*, others in the *Queenslander*, *Boomerang* and, later, the *Worker*. The *Worker* was founded in March 1890, just after Adams had returned to England to pursue his literary career, but he left it with its signature poem, 'Fling out the Flag'.

Francis Adams had come to Australia at the end of 1884, a young man with weak lungs, a strong will, and a precocious talent, who in 1883 had joined H.M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Foundation with his friend Frank Harris. He was later to write of this time in a letter to William Michael Rossetti:

Five years ago I broke up my health in the struggle, then just beginning, to organize the unskilled London labour. It seemed a failure. But I never despaired, or saw cause to despair.

What practical part Adams played in the labour movement, in England or Australia, is hard to determine apart from the use of his writing to support the cause and argue its case. There is a rumour, however, that he was one of the guiding minds be-

hind the formation of the Australian Labour Federation in 1888, and the organization of the labour movement along political lines.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, it is as a socialist poet and analyst of Australian society that Francis Adams is best remembered. Mary Gilmore wrote in 1953:

No one today knows the way Francis Adams swept the feeling, young, and just-awaking minds of Australia when he wrote. I wd. say that ninety percent of the revolutionary verse & feeling (social and, from it, otherwise) sprang from Adams.<sup>2</sup>

The book that inspired this feeling was *Songs of the Army of the Night*, first published by the Federal Steam Printing and Binding Works in Sydney at the end of 1887. A review in the *Brisbane Courier* was patronizing, dismissing Adams as scarcely literate because of his adoption of a low style and disregard of poetic conventions. Ironically, R.S. (Spencer) Browne, in his *A Journalist's Memories* (1927), was to write: "Adams was a brilliant man, and some of his *Courier* leaders were wonderful evidences of scholarly English and sustained energy."<sup>3</sup>

Writing editorial leaders for the *Brisbane Courier* was relatively mainstream work, compared to *Songs of the Army of the Night* and the journalism and poetry published in William Lane's working class newspapers. Francis Adams' writing is remarkable in its range and variety – as his friend Sydney Jephcott wrote in a memoir: "Consumed always by surient ambition Adams left unattempted only, so far as I know, one form of literary affliction – the Epic – and Epics are 'off' just now, or doubtless he would have committed one."<sup>4</sup>

Most critics agree that Adams' strongest writing is to be found in his social and literary criticism. His output was prodigious, and at times hasty, but his analyses of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Bush in *The Australians* are remarkably perceptive and still of interest to the cultural as well as the literary historian. After his return to England in 1890, Adams set out to explain Australia to the English in a series of articles for the *Fortnightly Review*, refuting what he dismissed as the "Anglo-Australian" line on Imperial Federation and stressing the need for British bureaucrats and politicians to acknowledge the strength and independence of the Australian people. Whether or not Australia was to stay in the Empire depended on this, he said: "If

the dice of empire are cast to-morrow, it will, I believe, be the nervous, Herculean fingers of Labour that will hold the box."<sup>5</sup>

Even one of Adams' more arcane pieces of writing, to the reader of the 1990s at least, has an interesting connection to his involvement in the political and social life of Australia. This is the verse-drama *Tiberius* on which he was working while in Australia, and which he regarded as his finest literary achievement. It was published posthumously in London with an introduction by Rossetti, but a connection with Australia is made in the dedicatory poem written at "JIMBOUR, QUEENSLAND DOWNS, New Year, 1889." Jimbour House was at that time owned by the Queensland Premier and entrepreneur Sir Thomas McIlwraith's pastoral lands company, and it seems that Adams stayed there as McIlwraith's guest on one of his health trips to the Darling Downs.

The friendship with McIlwraith was to prove Adams' Achilles heel politically – or perhaps it brought out the latent hero-worshipper in him to the detriment of his labour movement loyalties. At any rate, he appeared willing to excuse McIlwraith's role in breaking the Great Strike of 1891 on the grounds that effective labour reform was more likely to come through political organization than direct industrial action.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this apparent compromise, Adams maintained his fierce opposition to British imperialism, and his last work, *England in Egypt*,<sup>7</sup> was close to completion when he finally succumbed to the diseases that had driven him around the world in search of a healthy climate. It was in the throes of a violent haemorrhage (whether tubercular or from the cancer in his throat is unclear) that Adams took out his revolver and, in the presence of his wife, shot himself. Asked at the inquest whether she could have prevented him, Edith replied: "Of course I could, but I should have considered myself a contemptible coward if I had done so, when things were as they were."<sup>8</sup> Her own subsequent history, of her second marriage to an English artist which ended in separation, her inability to have children to replace the babies that she and Francis Adams had lost, the scandal and intrigue that ended her own brief journalistic career in South Africa, and her period of supposed insanity, sheltered by Rossetti's family, ends in obscurity. I have been unable to find her final resting place, but she could well share the epitaph she had inscribed on her husband's tomb:

BURY ME WITH CLENCHED HANDS  
AND EYES OPEN WIDE  
FOR IN STORM AND STRUGGLE I LIVED  
AND IN STRUGGLE AND STORM I DIED

#### ENDNOTES

1. The 'rumour' comes from Bernard O'Dowd's statement in the *Socialist*: "I have been informed on good authority that the real originators of the A.W.U. and Labor Party of Australia were William Lane, Francis Adams, and an inventor-shearer-miner named Davis, at Davis' house in Toowoomba, Queensland" ('Francis Adams' 1 Sept. 1911:3) and Adams' own account of the two ideas as being developed by "a certain person" at the beginning of 1888.
2. W.H. Wilde & T. Inglis Moore, ed., *Letters of Mary Gilmore* (Melbourne: MUP, 1980) p. 296.
3. R.S. (Spencer) Browne, *A Journalist's Memories* (Brisbane: 1927) pp. 74-75.
4. Palmer Papers, NLA MS 1174.
5. 'The Labour Movement in Australia,' *Fortnightly Review*, August 1891:181-95.
6. *ibid.*
7. See Stephen Murray-Smith's article 'I Heard the Wild Fife's Cry', *Tribune* 10/10/1956 p. 6.
8. Inquest report, Age 13/10/1893:7 (includes Frank Harris' report in *Daily Chronicle*).

Meg Tasker

#### The Rock

I FIRST VISITED ULURU about the time that Barry Hill finished his book, *The Rock: Travelling to Uluru*. I found myself on a 'Trekabout' tour 'for the Young and the Young-at-heart'. I was definitely the 'Young-at-heart', for almost all the other members of the tour were at least fifteen years younger than I was, in their late teens or early twenties, and they were overwhelmingly women from Japan, Europe and America. I was surprised by their 'macho' attitude to the Rock. They were determined to climb it – to 'knock it off'. Such a conquest was to be the undoubted climax of their three-day camping tour of central Australia. When three of the young women failed to reach the top of Uluru due to the rigour of the climb, they felt humiliated and said so. One of them wept in shame and disappointment. Their competitive urge to conquer the monolith, combined with our tour guide's evident disdain for Aborigines, virtually isolated them from any Aboriginal meanings of Uluru. I can see why Anangu, the Aboriginal owners, encourage *minga* ('ants', i.e. tour-

ists) to walk *around* the Rock, where its massive, luminous, secretive presence most impresses and where its continuing Aboriginal usage is most evident. But my own decision to do just that – to walk around and not to climb – was interpreted by my tour group as the understandable choice of one who was merely *Young-at-heart*.

I wish I'd had Barry Hill's book with me on my pilgrimage. He superbly explores the variety of readings and experiences of this place from the perspective of a whitefella who yearns to plumb some of the Aboriginal meanings of Uluru, who wants to go beyond the tourist experience of such an iconic site, who wishes to be more than a *minga*.

There is not much romance in these pages, in spite of the author's quest for public poetry. Much of the history of the Centre is grubby, violent and depressing – and much of its present, too – and Hill allows his southern innocence and idealism to be bruised by experience. The gaps between Aboriginal and settler cultures remain immense, the communication barriers at times insurmountable, the social problems bewildering. But the book remains defiantly hopeful about the opportunities for 'cultural convergence' as Bernard Smith has called it, particularly over a site that is powerful in both Aboriginal and settler mythology.

And not just vaguely hopeful, but quite practically and specifically so, for Hill offers readings of some positive cross-cultural dialogues and endeavours such as the *Uluru Fauna Study*, the park walk booklet *An Insight into Uluru*, the Uluru land claim gearings, and shared management of the park and its tourists. I like the way Hill's frank and self-revealing reportage takes you right there to the negotiation table or the guided walk or the awkward social moment, so that the challenges of the Centre are no longer abstract but immediate, personalized and complex.

Two particular aspects of *The Rock* are unusual and pioneering in Australian studies. One is its attention to the cross-cultural politics of national parks, an aspect of Australian environmental history that has been greatly neglected but which is now very much on the agenda with native title claims and regional land-use agreements between Aborigines, conservationists and industry. A recent example of this historiography from South Africa is Jane Carruthers' immensely stimulating history of *The Kruger National Park* (University of Natal Press,

1995) where she explores "the very close connection between nature conservation and national politics" and demonstrates the manipulation of the 'wilderness' ideal in the interests of Afrikaner nationalism. The other aspect of *The Rock* that warrants special mention is its exploration of the parallels and dialogues between western science and indigenous knowledge; there is an intriguing chapter called 'Science Dreaming'. Another recent work in this field is Deborah Bird Rose's *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996). Hill and Bird Rose are both fascinated by the poetry of science and the science of poetry, in both cultures.

There was one shock that even Barry Hill wouldn't have prepared me for, and now I wonder if I dreamt it. "Can you see the four-letter word written on the Rock?" asked our guide as the luminous pink icon came into view for the first time, looking from afar like a plastic lapel button pinned on the horizon. We saw the word, but with disbelief. 'LOVE' is naturally etched in cliff-high letters on Uluru's ancient face. It seemed the ultimate appropriation, a corny sacrilege conspired by nature. It seemed more than ever to make the Rock into a tourist souvenir, a sassy late-twentieth-century artefact fashioned for the western market, a trophy for the Young-at-heart. It was at that moment that I needed to reach for Barry's book.

*Tom Griffiths' Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia (CUP, Melbourne, 1996) won the 1996 NSW and Victorian Premiers' Literary Awards for non-fiction.*

### John Leonard writes

**I**N THIS ROUND OF LITERARY GRANTS by the Australia Council my poetry collection, *100 Elegies for Modernity*, was refused a grant on the grounds of "insufficient literary merit".

However I am informed by my publisher, Hale & Iremonger, that the manuscript of my collection, in common with other manuscripts presented by them, was not even called for. In other words the Literature Board entered into a literary judgement on my work, and other works, only having seen the summary and report by two readers presented by the publishers. It strikes me as most insulting that the Board should pretend to judge my collection without having read it and it also strikes me as a



most worrying precedent – if the Board does not read the manuscripts, but relies on the summary and readers' reports, then it is in danger of judging books by their political stance, rather than by their rhetorical competence, which is what it is supposed to be judging them by. It also seems to me to be the height of laziness for the Board not to read each manuscript submitted; this is, after all, what they are being paid to do.

I am writing this open letter in the hope that other writers and readers will support me by writing to protest at this development. Letters could be sent either to the Chair of the Literature Board, Australia Council, PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012, or to the Minister, Senator Richard Alston, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600.

### Textual Presentness A Few Comments on Art and Time

IT IS NOT UNUSUAL to come across reviewers who question why theatre or cinema directors neglect contemporary texts and instead choose to go back to classical texts over and over again. Sometimes this questioning takes the form of rebuke, as directed at the Melbourne theatre company IRAA Theatre, whose trilogy of the water includes a personal and free adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* and Shakespeare's *Othello*. Obviously those reviewers firmly believe in an intrinsic difference between what they perceive as two different categories. But why and in which way is a contemporary text different from, say, a text written a thousand or more years ago? The question becomes rhetoric only if, in answering it, one applies the arbitrariness of conventional time.

This is precisely what these reviewers are doing: in other words they utilize the linear concept of time, the clock machine, to discriminate between something that thus happens to find itself in the past and something that, on the contrary, is placed in the present. As a result, they believe in the possibility of measuring a text, including its aesthetic and formal constituents, by using a calendar. The issue is not however that simple. In fact it revolves around one of the most problematic and evergreen issues ever debated, that is time and its perception.

Myriads of pages have been written to solve what during the years has acquired, and still has, the sta-

tus of dilemma. St Augustine believed that the past and the future, being immeasurable, cannot exist. The only tangible way of comprehending time is by focusing on its measurable element, the present.

St Augustine's thought has, in various and different ways, influenced many philosophers, writers and scientists, from Bergson to Heidegger, from Gadamer to Ricoeur, from Borges to Murnane to the most recent studies on memory. The debate is centred around the concept of present and its relation to the past and the future.

Current research in the field of neuroscience has proven that memory works as a set of categories which enable us to recognize rather than remember. That is to say that our memory does not work as a store for fixed images, but rather as a network which uses context meanings to recognize similar context meanings which took place in the past.<sup>1</sup> What does this entail? Basically that we cannot retrieve the past as it was; the past, in that form, has irreversibly gone, lost forever. It can only reappear, transformed, through the experience and the contextualized situations of the present.

On this premise, it is possible to understand the position of Heidegger for whom time can only exist as an event shaped by the context in which it takes place.<sup>2</sup> If we now apply this reading of time to art, as the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer does, it will become clear that the calendar-time concept is a false issue.

Gadamer understands art as a transformative process, in which something opaque and obscure, good only for the individual who perceived it from within, permutes into something intelligible and readable to the majority. "Transformation into structure", he says, "is not simply transposition into another world . . . it produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn."<sup>3</sup>

From what Gadamer says, it is possible to infer a further passage, the move from unspoken thoughts to form. What we read, listen to, observe, watch, is not that generative idea, but rather the way in which it has taken shape in order to be presented and consumed in the interlocution of the artistic exchange. It would be arduous if not impossible to find the original intention which structured a piece of writing for that same intention is often obscure, even to the author.

The only possible interpretative endeavour is to follow closely the way in which the writer's or the

painter's idea is apprehended; an image, rage, perhaps a metaphor which, as it is represented, renews itself continuously. The interpretation gradually assumes a shape, welds itself and becomes visible; a new work which is also a mirroring image, or rather a re-creation which emerges from the mould and rises before our eyes in its different form.

Interpretation, as Gadamer says, is re-creation. Indeed it is a powerful event which, however, cannot recreate the unattainable, namely the creative act. While this has vanished forever, the created work is concrete yet chameleon-like, susceptible to transformation.

For these same reasons, the process of transformation into structure should legitimately, indeed necessarily, be applied to a classic book or play since only by being interpreted/re-created will it be lifted from its pastness and firmly grounded in the present. The hermeneutic act performed by a reader, a theatre director, or a musician, confers a-temporality on a text, what Gadamer calls its "timelessness".

It is therefore ambiguous if not misleading to distinguish between a contemporary and a classic work depending on its year of composition. A classic work, once it is read and interpreted by a contemporary artist, becomes as contemporary as any other work produced, say, in that same year. It is the interpreter who gives it contemporaneity, who colours it through his/her present experience and sensitivity.

A text, in the words of Gadamer, "affirms itself by 'killing' other things or using them to complement itself".<sup>4</sup> It is not the same killing that Barthes refers to when he speaks of the author's death at the hands of the reader; it is rather a killing of time which brings about a renewal, an explosion of life as opposed to the motionless and skeletal concept of a museum filled with *classic objects of art*.

#### ENDNOTES

1. In his comprehensive book on memory, *The Invention of Memory: A New Vision of the Brain* (Basic Books, New York, 1988), Israel Rosenfield claims that "the world around us is constantly changing, and we must be able to react to it not in terms of previously stored, fixed images that no longer match anything in our surrounding, but in a way that will take account of the new and unexpected, as well as of our individual past experience. We need not stored images but PROCEDURES that will help us manipulate and understand the world." p.8. See also the work of Gerald Edelman, especially *The Remembered Present* (Basic Books, New York, 1989).
2. See Heidegger, Martin, *The Concept of Time* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992).

3. Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (Crossroad, New York, 1989). p.112
4. *Ibid.* p.120.

Paolo Bartoloni

#### Richard Hillman writes

IN YOUR 'One Corpse, One Nation, One Hope' (issue 144), I couldn't help but genuflect to the trinity your title leans toward. I guess that there is something admirable to be said for a political appellation that aspires to be worn like a Crucifix around the neck, though I don't think my admiration would go so far as to encourage its emulation. . . . Your editorial also points out that older writers responded with hope to crises in the capitalist system and that newer writers respond with anger. Anger, of course, is a corollary of fear, not part of a process of legitimation (such as Senator Herron's recent attempts to justify the dispersion of Aboriginal people). So, what you are saying is that hope and fear are two extremes, perhaps enemies; but the angry Aboriginal writing is based in hope, so it's OK. Or, are you saying that angry writing is a basis for hope, which would mean that all angry writing is a basis for hope; so, all angry writing is OK?

#### Take Three

AT LAST! Someone prepared to offer a viewpoint as to why little literary magazines fare so badly in Australia. Your 'blame' it seems, is directed solely towards creative writers who you say prefer to write and submit (with high expectations of remuneration for their pains) rather than to contribute, read and subscribe. Perhaps this is true. It is difficult for a writer to accept that theirs is generally not a well rewarded occupation. It is probably more difficult to accept that editors of literary journals, even those well known and well established require ongoing financial support . . .

. . . I would like to share your belief that if all writers subscribed consistently to just three publications, the 'writer seeks publication (plus remuneration): editor seeks manuscripts (plus subscriptions)' cycle may become less vicious – although I believe we have to apportion some of the blame for writer and editor struggle and disillusionment on Australia's cultural cringe – sadly few of our small literary publications are pursued for enjoyment by the gen-

eral reading populace. However, I'm all for a healthier literary society – and more writer remuneration. If 'Take Three' is what it takes, I am one writer prepared to give it a go.

Theresa Mobbs

### A Literary Correspondence

THIS CORRESPONDENCE between the Australian author, David Martin, well-known to *Overland* readers, and Rajani Palme Dutt, the editor of *Labour Monthly* and the leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was found in the Dutt papers located in the Labour History and Archive Centre, Manchester, U.K. It concerns one of Martin's lesser-known novels and underscores the often unheralded role of this British intellectual in fostering, even from a great distance, the work of left-wing Australian writers such as Martin and Judah Waten (with whom a steady correspondence was maintained) in the postwar period.

23. IX. 1950  
Mr R. Palme Dutt  
The Trinity Trust  
134 Ballards Lane  
London – N.3

Dear Palme Dutt,  
Perhaps you remember that, two years ago, just before going to India, I called on you and we had a talk. I have often wanted to write to you since, but somehow I never did.

Some of the things I have seen and felt in India have gone into a novel, *The Stones of Bombay*, which is to be published in a few weeks by Allan Wingate in London. I have dedicated the book to R.P.D., in gratitude for the help and inspiration the *Labour Monthly*, and especially your 'Notes of the Month' have proved to me over the years. And also because your writings on India have helped me to see clearer and to understand better what modern India really is. I only fear that the book itself – a novel – does not sufficient honour to its dedication.

I am asking the publisher to send you a copy now and hope it will reach you safely.

With all good wishes,  
Yours very sincerely,  
David Martin

December 28th 1950  
Mr. David Martin  
c/o Bank of N.S.Wales  
341 George Street  
Sydney, Australia.

Dear David Martin,  
I have read *The Stones of Bombay* with the greatest interest and appreciation, and am therefore in a position to thank you sincerely for the honour you have done me in your dedication. I am arranging for a review in the *Labour Monthly*, and will approach the leader of our Indian Group here.

You have written a novel of remarkable insight of post-1947 India and especially present day Bombay which will help enormously both inside and outside India to give understanding through your living pictures of people.

Have you ever thought of trying to do the same kind of job for present day England under Labour rule, which, in spite of all the difference of conditions reveals essentially the same mixture of confusion, frustrations and stirrings. It has not been attempted yet (all our newer writers seem to prefer other countries – understandably) and a successful living picture of England as it is today could help to open people's eyes more than any political analysis.

All good wishes,  
Yours sincerely,  
R. Palme Dutt

Phillip Deery

### Kate Baker Exhibition in the State Library of Victoria (4 November–30 December)

FRIEND OF JOSEPH FURPHY and a long-term resident of Williamstown, Kate Baker OBE (1861–1953) is an important figure in Australian literary history. Apart from promoting Furphy's work she was a staunch supporter of Australian literature in general. A letter from Miles Franklin and examples of Baker's correspondence with Victor Kennedy, Robert Henderson Croll and Hugh McCrae will be on display. Also on display for the first time will be private family material. For further information contact Sandra Burt, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. Ph. 9669 9014 or e-mail SANDRAB@newvenus.slv.vic.gov.au

## Julian Woods writes

WHAT A STIMULATING ISSUE of *Overland*, no. 142! The Barrie Reid features and poems, Paul Ormonde and especially Merv Lilley, a shadowy figure in the past, known to me only through the anecdotes of a mutual friend, Jim Bennett, bookseller and left-wing agitator – a real rebel with no kow-towing to anybody especially the self-appointed ‘vanguards’. Temper democratic, bias Australian, yes, indeed.

The only wet meringue as far as I can tell is the work of Robin Gerster in issue 140 and John Barrett in issue 142. Especially relevant given the point made on the very same page about the importance, the richness and diversity of little magazine culture. Straight howlers abound showing that these authors don’t know their war histories but are content merely to repeat the current Murdoch–Packer crap of the recent anniversaries which in turn only regurgitated the propaganda current in 1945. These guys have nothing to add to this as though no research has been done since. Partly this is due to their ‘man in the street’ view – you ‘ask around’ for the name of an individual Australian hero of World War I. We can all ‘ask around’ for ourselves thanks chaps. Historical clarity and real controversy however does not depend on Alan Jones and company and more especially not on the well-thought-out justifications of politicians and their military allies.

In magazines like *Overland* discussion of Bean and others implies that at least they are read, that the ‘Simpson and his donkey level’ of history, if you must take moron-level polls, is only perpetuated forgetting the Blacks, the Jackas and others. Are you writing for *Overland* or for the old *Mirror* historical feature page?

THE SIMPLER ERRORS are really unforgivable, quite apart from the goodies and baddies tone. It leads one to think how easy it is these days to manipulate even the literate and educated. Too much watching of crappy commercial TV (and the ABC) one supposes for ‘sociological reasons’. One error – dozens of Japanese cities had already been gutted by August 1945 including seventy thousand deaths in just one raid on Tokyo. The earthquake that hit Kobe-Osaka was nothing compared to the state of those cities at the end of the war. A basic piece of information – the U.S. knew the Red Army was to attack Japan on August the 8th or thereabouts, apart from any other reckoning that they and

Churchill had asked Stalin to join in this conflict at the Yalta conference which he said he would, but could not until three months after Germany was finished. Three months after May the 8th, that is. Thus the haste to deliver the atomic bombs which was even brought out in the Hollywood movie version, with the usual crap about ‘saving lives’. If any person can show me a military leader or government of this century or of any century for that matter whose agenda includes ‘saving lives’ then I’ll start reading history again from scratch. The use of the atomic bomb on Japan was a brilliant piece of politics well hidden under this guise and to a weary world at the time, we all naturally welcomed the abrupt end to the conflict. To continue this welcome after decades of analysis and examination of government archives, and given the facts of Japan’s efforts to end the war earlier, which are controversial to this whole question, to say the least is deliberate stupidity and at the extreme edge of jingoism. It was the most brilliant political stroke of the entire war as Japan surrendered to the U.S. alone (even Britain and Australia were excluded) thus avoiding the post-war situation in Germany, with Russia firmly in the Japanese heartland. Please, let’s start cutting the sentimental shit. One doesn’t mind prejudice but inaccuracy of this depth is unforgivable.

Like climes that are always ‘distant’ the foe is invariably ‘fanatic’. It is a continual wonder to me that for some reason the invasion of Japan had to go ahead and quickly, in any case. Siege of a starving population has a long and respectable military history, as has the listening to overtures of surrender. Of course if invaded, the Japanese would have fought, but in the light of what we know now the use of this inevitability is either cynicism or ignorance.

## Jennifer Maiden writes

PENGUIN HAVE ALLOWED my *Selected Poems* (still set for next year’s HSC) to go out of print without telling me, have decided not to reprint and have no copies left at all. I’m in the very awkward position, therefore of having only one copy (very dog-eared) left myself. If anyone happens to have a spare copy (or comes across one in a bookshop) I’d be pleased to reimburse them the full price and postage for it. I’d be delighted to have a few more copies as my daughter is on its cover with me. My postal address is PO Box 4, Penrith, NSW 2751.

## OFF THE HOOK?

I worm the knife  
in above the gill.  
The point grates,  
bone resists.  
The flapping  
of the fish intensifies  
against the pier's planks.

Each crested swell  
threatens to swamp me;  
metal-grey troughs  
intent on sucking me in.  
Each roll under the pier  
does not lessen the next.

The dark rings  
of the cumulo-nimbus  
become a groper,  
the light shining through  
its baring teeth.

I waver  
under the elements' threat.

The greed of the  
circling landing gulls  
triggers my thought  
all's fair in the war  
for sustenance.

I press the blade.

A cough ejects  
from the fish.

I drop the knife.  
A gull darts,  
snatches my undersized guilt,  
reels into the wind,  
chased by the frenzied bevy  
of squawking peers.

There's no comfort  
in being an accessory.

PHIL ILTON

## UNDER THE BRIDGE

The happiest place on earth  
Is when a child discovers  
The cool low tide of a river  
And walks across the sandbanks  
To the middle pylon of the bridge  
And leans against the concrete limbs  
That carry the weight of dreams,  
Listening to the thunder of traffic above  
As the waves lick the jagged rocks.  
Sitting alone you imagine one day  
Diving from the railing of the bridge  
A hundred feet down in slow motion  
The screams of delight and fear  
From those close to you, faraway.  
In your happiest moment you planned  
Your first death and then waded slowly  
To the other side, never looking back.  
You have seen many bridges since then.

MICHAEL CRANE

## FRONTIERS

In America, the frontier was where 'we' met  
'them' . . .

In Australia, being met nothingness.  
The assumption of *terra nullius* joined with  
the expectation of a dying race  
creating imaginative  
. . . as well as actual . . .  
genocide,  
leaving a frontier with no 'them'  
so 'we' had no heroes.

LIBBY ROBIN

## STORAGE SPACE

Wandering  
at the back of old shops, down  
lanes cobbled the same time  
last century. Visiting students then  
I knew –

George South, splitting  
wood on axe effortlessly  
in one hand; hovering over,  
stoking up the fire using  
poker – by end shift-levering  
logs off to allow it  
draw air.

Camped down  
in house like a campsite  
for gypsies, chock wedges  
under caravan wheels to stop  
rolling, steps lowered down under  
pitched roof.

Only flames flaring  
out of splittings in the wood lit  
the room – lath and plaster up to  
picture rail no frames, now that  
the Heidelberg School prints George'd  
jerked off 'd been put out  
for storage with lumber in the back  
shed. Late Victorian, too

the house, yard, lane, even  
the suburbs, and as far away from us  
then as those discussions into the  
wee hours of the morning thirty  
years ago are remote from us  
now. And George too, only

a year later, in ground floor  
rented flat, cast iron  
railings out by steps down  
to the basement, met head-on by  
himself some problem over  
his right to live and took his own  
life, putting his head into  
a gas oven, closing its door back  
in upon himself, and turning  
the jets on. I never saw

the flat, nor learnt  
what year, model, brand had been  
the gas oven, stamped on  
in letters onto its cast-iron  
door, what precisely by the  
tape measure were the dimensions  
of the area.

My friend anyhow  
had gone, gone whiff  
of the gas that had asphyxiated  
and killed him, by any time  
I could've gotten there. Thirty years

on, his absence isolable  
as all events then. I will bury  
any memories in repository  
with myself, to retain as reliquaries  
of them all.

CLIVE FAUST

## Politics and Letters

SEAN SCALMER

John McLaren: *Writing in Hope and Fear: Literature as Politics in Postwar Australia* (CUP, \$29.95).

THE CULTURAL HISTORY of postwar Australia is not only the story of the great writers and their search for the perfect word. It is also the story of politics and letters, and their inextricable relationship. In the hands of John McLaren, it is the history of writing in hope and fear, a valuable history with implications for our own hopes and fears today.

McLaren is concerned with literature as politics. For him, writing is part of the struggle to interpret the past, and therefore to control the future. Not only is he interested in those writers who were politically engaged, he refuses to accept that the work of apparently apolitical artists did not contain its own implicit prescriptions for action (or inaction). Certainly, texts can no longer be reduced to their support for or stymieing of proletarian revolt. Nevertheless, it remains possible to explore the truths produced by writers, and to document the political implications of such truths. From Frank Hardy to Patrick White to Helen Darville, every text embodies a moral viewpoint and a political intervention, and McLaren both defends and uses this neglected insight in his survey of Australian writing.

Australian literature is also political in the more material sense that it has primarily been supported by political institutions and received by politicized audiences. McLaren understands this, and chronicles the political nature of the literary relations of

production and consumption with important, original research. The work produced by social realists is placed in the context of the Communist Party, and the battle to build a working class culture in Australia. The output of *Quadrant* is understood in relation to the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, and its funding by the CIA. The emergence of a tertiary educated audience in the 1960s is used to explain the rise of the new journalism. *Writing in Hope and Fear* gives a detailed picture of the networks and resources that sustained Australian writers, and provides the building blocks of a materialist history of postwar Australian culture.

But if this is a book about the inevitably political nature of literature, it is also a book about literature as a *form of politics*, and the slow, painful process through which this was accepted. The left/right antagonism of the early postwar years was accompanied by a shared separation of the public from the private. Writing was understood as political to the extent that it was about issues and conflicts in the public sphere, with Hardy's *Power Without Glory* the classic case. McLaren's point is that this lack of trust in the tenor of private experience devalued realist writing, and prevented it from responding to the changing environment of postwar Australia. At its root, this was an inability to understand imaginative writing as itself part of the struggle for freedom, an inability that was to freeze the prospects of an advancing working class culture and politics into cold Soviet formulas. It was not until the voices of Manning Clark and Patrick White were heard that the importance of inner need and private experience became recognized in Australian letters. The outright realization that culture is at the centre of politics had to wait until the new journalism of the sixties, and the notion of 'the personal as political' practised by the generation of '68.

AS HE WOULD NO DOUBT CONCEDE, McLaren's own politics are vital to his analysis. These are a politics expressed in the notion of an oppositional community, bound together in democratic conversation. They are a politics embodied in the broad, inclusive editorial practice of *Overland* under Stephen Murray-Smith, rather than the tight, disciplined control of the Communist Party. Such politics respect temperance in argument, and defend liberalism against its Marxist critics, but they are opposed to capitalism and in favour of socialism. *Writing in Hope and Fear* expresses the virtues of these politics in its willingness to discuss conservative, liberal and Marxist thinkers seriously, but it also expresses the prejudices of these politics in its treatment of the Communist Party of Australia. Because Communist organizing did not accept the virtues of democratic conversation, McLaren is unable to see it as anything but restrictive and disabling. He blames the extremisms of left and right equally for keeping social democracy from the centre of public debate in the Cold War, rather than addressing the role of state repression in keeping communism even further from serious public discussion. He rightfully sees that the Communist Party attempted to control writers through the theory of socialist realism, but he does not see that the theory also gave a sense of cultural self-confidence to working class Party members. He notes that the audience of *Overland* fell without the centralist organization of the Party behind it, but does not fully accept the extent to which the Party's networks were therefore vital and enabling for Australian working class writing.

McLaren's politics also lead him to a sympathy with the contributions of Manning Clark and Patrick White. Their emphasis upon metaphysical questions, inner experience, and human tragedy is generously accepted as a contribution which makes "the issue of community both more urgent and more precarious". That is, they enriched the politics of 'community' that McLaren treasures by their focus on inner experience – an argument that he first made in relation to Patrick White many years ago. This argument should be regarded with caution, because it misunderstands the political context in which Clark and White wrote. This was not only a moment of stale left/right conflict, it was also a moment in which the Australian intelligentsia was fleeing from the prospects of postwar reform to-

wards the world of the spiritual. Placed in this context, Clark and White look more like the mystic intellectuals that Trotsky saw in Russia after 1905, and less like the harbingers of an expanded politics of community. In a similar way, McLaren sees Helen Garner's *the first stone* as an attempt to find a politics "grounded in the complexities of human relations", when others would see it in the context of the retreat of the contemporary intelligentsia from its past radical aspirations. This is not to say that the work of White, Clark or Garner is entirely pernicious, but to widen our view to document its full political implications.

McLAREN'S UNWILLINGNESS to see the full political implications of such work seems to rest upon a blindness to the ongoing existence of the intelligentsia. The stratum of intellectuals that provided an audience for the new journalism of the 1960s existed prior to this period. They provided a constituency for postwar reconstruction, and for the cultural renaissance which galvanized Australia during World War II. In this sense, journals like *Angry Penguins* which catered to the intelligentsia were not devoid of a political agenda, as McLaren argues, but intimately concerned with the political identity and political aspirations of these new public servants, educators and artists. For all of McLaren's sensitivity to the political nature of literature and of its institutional support, his work suffers from this failure to take the mood, opportunities and interests of the intelligentsia into full account.

In a sense, McLaren has a number of the most important pieces necessary for an understanding of politics and culture in postwar Australia. He has an understanding of the institutions which supported that culture. He has a detailed series of portraits of the intellectuals who constructed that culture. He has a partial sense of the different audiences which consumed and received that culture. In his identification of the working class and the 'tertiary educated class' (read intelligentsia) as the two primary audiences, he has grasped a broad historical truth. However, a more comprehensive analysis would need a fuller understanding of the interactions between these two audiences, their historical trajectory and levels of political power. It would need a more detailed analysis of the political shifts that corresponded to the cultural transformations McLaren has documented. Such an



analysis would also teach us more about the possibilities of rebuilding a popular, radical working class culture in contemporary Australia.

None of this is cause to repudiate McLaren's work. It is an attempt to engage it in conversation, and to give others a spur to take up the challenge of this rich, suggestive book. That challenge cannot only be taken up in historical study, but in cultural intervention today, and in the attempt to build upon the democratic, socialist culture that McLaren describes and embodies.

*Sean Scalmer is a labour historian at Sydney University.*

## Variations on Sincere Dishonesty

NICOLE MOORE

Anne Coombs: *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push* (Viking, \$29.95).

'SINCERE DISHONESTY' is the title and assessment of a review of Dorothy Hewett's first novel *Bobbin Up*, written by Ray Mathew and published in *The Observer*, in October 1959. Hewett accepted this assessment of her politics retrospectively, as a repudiation of both her CPA membership and the socialist realist aesthetic of *Bobbin Up*, but I want to re-animate the epithet in a different political direction. Sincere dishonesty is a phrase I'm inclined to apply to Anne Coombs' account of the life and loves of the Sydney Push for several reasons, but not because the book is in any way bad history. Made of multifarious voices extracted from interviews and written with a careful and explicit respect for context, events and timelines, *Sex and Anarchy* achieves a tone of interested reflection combined with a sort of gentle teasing. The almost-insider status of Coombs, whose partner Susan Varga features in the later parts of the narrative, means this tone can tread lightly between a gossipy affection for the familiar and a sense of revelation, of a secret world opened to the ordinarily excluded. 'Sincere dishonesty', coined in a magazine set up by an ex-Libertarian gone conservative to describe a social realist novel by a communist, provides a useful double-edged

irony. Something like this, a dynamic of paradox, can describe much of the narratives and directions going on around the Push. As well, and usefully again, sincere dishonesty seems to describe exactly the historical method which a mid-nineties account of what can seem the formative years of Australian postmodern intellectualism, must employ. A self-conscious and self-respecting undermining of its own authority, in a playful and suggestive way, frames the book, beginning and ending by questioning the distinct existence of the Push. The apocryphal anecdote doesn't become solid in Coombs' narrative, but its story remains, its joking possibility continues its myth-making, this time to a non-Push reader, in an outsider's history.

In some ways, sincere dishonesty labels the politics of Push libertarians much more accurately than it does Hewett's commitment to the aesthetics of social change. Coombs declares: "Essentially, the Push was a leftist movement that did not believe in the goals of the left". Descriptions of the Push's political philosophy range from Sydney scepticism, pessimistic anarchism, Moorehouse's "the discipline of indiscipline", Andrew Kaighin's "calculating hedonism", the infamous 'futilitarianism' and just "tilting at windmills" on occasion. Perhaps in their refusal of programmatic ideology, political vision and responsibility, in the characteristic pessimism and cynicism coupled with rigorous intellectual debate and theoretical discipline, we can read an origin for the formulas of some forms of Australian postmodernism. Some form of sincere dishonesty sustained the contradictory umbrella of the Push, maintaining its leftist and anarchist affiliations while ex-Push members established liberal and conservative magazines, occupied positions of power and influence and acted directly against later radical elements of the Push, finally 'pushed' into radical action for liberation by the emerging new social movements and the Vietnam war.

In reanimating the *Bobbin Up* review I want to highlight the 1940s and 50s guise of the Push, in contrast to most reviewers' discussion of the book via the 1960s and 70s, its fragmentation and elaboration into the new social movements. *Sex and Anarchy* enables a complication of oppositions that place the Push as anti-socialist, while it was strenuously resisting the Cold-War fallacies of Menzies and the CIA was funding the anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom, publishing *Quadrant*.

Coombs describes the Libertarians and the groups around *Quadrant* as “two sides of the one coin”, their shared Andersonian heritage made to do very different work. In an article on Libertarianism in *The UTS Review*, Andrew Kaighin of Melbourne University casts *Overland*, not *Quadrant*, as “that quintessentially anti-libertarian . . . quarterly”. Communist and Libertarian conflicts and crossovers seem elaborated as oppositional positions by post-cold war rhetoric, disarming the intellectual potency of fellow travelling, the popularity of realist writers like Frank Hardy reading at Liberty Hall. Coombs is careful to note left critiques in *Overland*, and from many Push members, including Eva Cox, Jack the Anarchist, Wendy Bacon and others, of the deliberate disengagement of the Push, the concerted passive individualism. Reading *Sex and Anarchy*, the push can operate as a bridge between the radical alliances of pre-WWII politics and the occasionally ahistorical New Left and women’s movement; but this bridge is wobbly without adequate attention to the intellectual rigours and struggles of the Australian labour movement and the CPA, working as they did as a crucial and critical reference point for the Push. The writing of the history of Push also builds another bridge, which links with a further generation (mine), for whom the members of the Push are often well-known identities, cultural critics and powerbrokers (a lecturer, Germaine Greer, the newspaper columnist, a bookshop owner, a journo, a barrister, a novelist, a judge, a publisher, an adviser to a minister), and their political trajectories and affiliations can often seem opaque without the Push.

In *Jump Cuts*, Christos Tsiolkas asks: “What was sexual liberation? It’s time to answer this question, Sasha.” As part of his answer, Soldatow says:

I repeat, we wanted to change the world. And the means we chose was our sexuality, in part because it was pleasurable, in part because it was dangerous, but also because it was the site of the obvious rebellion that late twentieth-century capitalism had not yet stormed in to exploit. Well it has now.

Sex and sexual liberation are perhaps the most pertinent, definitely the most important, of all Push concerns to label sincerely dishonest. The explosive insight of the feminist understanding of the personal as political seems to have hit the Push with

the force of a jemmying crowbar. Ann Curthoys has placed the origins of the women’s liberation movement in Australia in the milieu of the Push, arguing that “feminist ideas sprang directly from the New Left milieu of the 1960s, with its strongly anarchist suspicion of all governments”. Wendy Bacon lists as one of the positive influences of the Push “a strong critique of separatism and puritanism in the Sydney women’s movement”. The ‘toughness’ of Push-type women, the hard-headed aggressive arguing style and the practised sexual detachment of Push “bachelor girls” has coloured much of Australian second wave feminism, and Garner’s *the first stone* enacts its rejection of other facets of the women’s movement that appear anti-liberal to a Push ethos. But the Push was certainly not a feminist environment, despite avowedly ‘equal treatment’ for women. Coombs begins to suggest that second wave feminism was the inevitable and thorough downfall of the Push, that it called into question the crucial private/public divide, as well as (of course) the myth of the vaginal orgasm, that allowed the practice of masculine-style sexual ‘polygamy’ (as Jack the Anarchist calls it) and thus revolutionized the logics of Push association to an extent that rendered it unrecognizable.

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## Our Queer Careers

GALINA LAURIE

Sasha Soldatow & Christos Tsiolkas: *Jump Cuts: An Autobiography* (Vintage 1996, \$16.95).

**J**UMP CUTS IS OSTENSIBLY ABOUT Revolution, Ethics, History, Love, Age, Aesthetics and Work. At least that’s what its chapter titles would suggest. What it really seems to be about is shitting and fucking, not to mention cock-sucking, armpit-sucking and drug-taking, all of which mark this as an autobiographical account of deviance – sexual, political, racial. In his reminiscences of the Pram Factory in *Jump Cuts*, Sasha Soldatow laments the sanitizing of history: “No-one in the highly bi-

ased movie on the Pram Factory talked of cooking or eating or washing clothes or buying the toilet paper . . . It is a bit like all the preserved historic houses of Australia – the kitchens, bathrooms, laundries, toilets all go missing, replaced by the need for administrative spaces.” (53–4) This statement metaphorizes one aspect of this autobiography. Soldatow and his co-writer, Christos Tsiolkas, are interested in life’s plumbing, in the sordid and intimate details which are so often euphemized or simply left out of life drawings.

The title *Jump Cuts* is taken from the innovations of French New Wave cinema, particularly the work of Jean Luc Godard. Tsiolkas and Soldatow’s autobiographical collaboration borrows stylistically from these innovations, playing with temporal continuity and narrative reality to produce a written text which is impressionistic and anti-linear. Within the seven sections, Tsiolkas and Soldatow take turns to write, creating a dialogue with one another textually, without resorting simply to a ‘question and answer’ conversational format. Anecdote, argument, reminiscence, polemic – the fragments are woven together to produce a whole text which self-consciously remembers itself as fragmentary. This transposing of cinematic technique into written text, along with their emergent respective self-representations as gay men, demonstrates an attempt on the part of these writers to ‘queer’ autobiography, to think about autobiographical writing in new ways, just as Godard transgressed the boundaries of cinema in the 1960s.

Early in the book Tsiolkas accentuates the “grand impact” that the phrase “the personal is political” has had on both writers. My question is, “But is this personal interesting?” Certainly, some of it is. Tsiolkas and Soldatow are in the business of creating an alternative history – in fact, a plethora of alternatives – which they do through a succession of anecdotes. The beauty of anecdote is that in accessing certain histories, there is no pretension to any kind of absolute truth about the past or even about the self. The anecdotes are about travel, adolescence, politics, sexuality, eating, ethnicity, the quotidian, music, paedophilia, fascism, fashion, feminism, masculinity . . . This technique of constructing autobiography from non-sequential anecdotes locates this text in the realm of the postmodern and in the realm of the destabilized subject. The anecdotal nature of this text also ex-

tends the dialogue between Tsiolkas and Soldatow to the reader of *Jump Cuts* – through tantalizing and sometimes juicy tidbits, the reader senses him- or herself to be included in the conversation.

Thematically, I thought the most interesting thing about *Jump Cuts* was the place occupied by ethnicity in these autobiographical *soupsçons*. Sasha Soldatow is the child of Russian immigrants who came with his family to Australia post World War II. Christos Tsiolkas was born in Australia to Greek-Australian parents. Both writers grapple with a sense of being ethnic outsiders, “wogs” whose ethnicity as much as their (homo)sexuality defines their sense of otherness in relation to middle Australia. Both insist on the importance of maintaining connections with their cultural heritage: each recounts the difficulties of juggling these various identity positions.

I found the relationship between Soldatow and Tsiolkas which emerges in *Jump Cuts* to be fascinating, even if at times nauseating. They make frequent reference to the generational difference which separates them. They refer explicitly to their relationship as a “love-friendship” which began with sex but has become friendship without sex. Soldatow seems at times to be unnervingly worshipful of Tsiolkas, as evinced by the adulation he expresses for the smell of Tsiolkas’ armpits. I was overwhelmingly struck by the pedagogical nature of their relationship, with the older Soldatow emerging as the corrective teacher figure weighing his experience in years against the impetuosity of Tsiolkas’ youth. This is not, however, static, as Soldatow is at times humbled by Tsiolkas, which emphasizes the exchange upon which any pedagogical relationship is based. The emergent relationship is an interesting take on the notion of Greek Love, which functioned historically on a pedagogical model, in which older men imparted knowledge to adolescent boys. It is a model Tsiolkas explicitly rejects in *Jump Cuts*, because of the reductionist use of Greek ethnicity to denote male homosexuality in general, a reduction which, for Tsiolkas, elides the multifarious nature of contemporary Greek culture.

*Jump Cuts* is an interesting project, and its dialogic format works well to destabilize further any notion that autobiographical accounts should be chronological or narratively linear. I was, however, disappointed by this book, perhaps put off by the tone of each voice. Soldatow is at times incredibly

pompous, and Tsiolkas endeared himself to me by undercutting this pomposity but his own self-importance makes his voice equally difficult to like. Ultimately it was hard to understand why one would be interested in a polemical intervention by these two particular men with regard to the large topics they negotiate.

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## (Political) Power in the Union?

ALLAN GARDINER

Verity Burgmann: *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (CUP, \$29.95).

Stuart Svenson: *Industrial War: The Great Strikes 1890-94* (Ram Press, \$15).

WITH TORY PARTIES ENSCONCED in most parliaments and workers on the defensive, can the past tell us about the future of socialism? In Verity Burgmann's readable and affordable history the perspective of yesterday's revolutionaries allows a clear view of the way forward.

For Burgmann, the "lost cause of the IWW is worth rescuing from the dustbin of history, if only to examine its critique of the labour movement ideologies and practices, of Communism and Laborism, that triumphed over it." Wobblies can provide "an example of more effective oppositional politics" than those currently on offer. Received images present Wobblies as comical or else criminal sub-proletarians, mostly in the USA. In fact, Wobblies spread elaborate ideas very widely, and the special conditions in Australia allowed their project, spearheaded by men and women of astonishing talents and courage, to develop further here than in the States.

Most active between 1910 and the mid-1920s, the IWW were Marxists seeking to educate all workers into an alternate culture as a first step towards their organization along industrial and class-wide lines. Their socialist emancipation would then be achieved by workers themselves. Its insistence on

class unity made the IWW a virulent opponent of racism. Membership was for wage workers, and this limited female participation, yet they moved well ahead of other Australian currents in their gender politics, as was highlighted a few years ago with the re-publication of the writing of Lesbia Harford.

By contrast with the wave of failed strikes that established Laborism, the Wobblies grew with successful strikes that they had aided. More importantly, they brought about innumerable on-the-job slow-downs and direct seizures of wages and conditions. Burgmann shows how revolutionary industrial unionism was dominant amongst many groups of workers; in north Queensland meat-works and in pastoralism, mining and transport in other centres, including Broken Hill. Wobblies were the most active component in the successful anti-conscription movement. Their trace is also present in the form of the ACTU, which was formed by officialdom as a way to deflect the Wobbly-inspired demand for One Big Union with industry-wide departments.

The scale of the IWW's achievements is also seen in the great force raised against it by defenders of existing society. The IWW was more of a demon in the press than the Communist Party would become. The IWW was hated by employers for furthering workers' interests and challenging dominant ideology. However the attacks by bosses paled next to those mounted by the ALP and trades halls. The early Labor governments, which lost no time in crushing strikes, were no less vigorous in persecuting Wobblies. Draconian anti-IWW laws were introduced in particular by Billy Hughes, and Wobblies were deported, jailed and beaten *en masse*. Burgmann details the shockingly corrupt trial that sent a dozen Wobbly leaders to prison with hard labour and 'special treatment' for many years.

Burgmann is least convincing when she says that the IWW would have compromised its politics had it gone underground to avoid the state repression that crushed them. In fact, it was simply wrong in its response. Burgmann's other sins are those of omission. She somehow manages not to mention Ray Evans's work on Brisbane's Red Flag Riots. Her relative indifference to literary matters means that many other events and people are also missing. She should have made explicit her frequent implied contrasts between the IWW's advocacy of go-slow tactics and the current capitulation by unions to production speed-ups.

Burgmann might also have looked beyond the actual existence of specific IWW organizations and drawn conclusions about the conditions under which direct action can thrive. For example, she rightly points to Wobbly influences on Frank Hardy, but Hardy was allowed to express his influences at a time when the Communist Party (for ulterior reasons) took a left turn toward industrial militancy. If Laborism takes a similar turn in the present context, opportunities will again arise for advanced workers to take these tactics beyond the aims of union officials and Labor politicians.

STUART SVENSON ALSO MAKES revolutionaries central to his well-researched, entertaining history, but he could have learned much from Burgmann's book. Svenson's early work on the 1891 shearers' strike was a welcome injection of research and analysis into debate around the ALP's centenary celebrations at Barcaldine, and he has also published on the maritime and shearers' strikes linked to the 1891 events. His current short collection of essays encapsulates this earlier work with some additions. Svenson's shortcomings stem from his admitted failure to achieve a specifically working class history, and also from his narrow focus.

Working class writing must proceed primarily from the author's desire to advance workers' interests. Svenson's main impulse, however, is in filling gaps in what is best called *labour* history, the standard scholarly accounts of past events in arbitration courts and political circles. Even when he writes a chapter in the voice of Frank Hardy's Billy Borker he cannot see that intervention in history on behalf of wage slaves is the essence of Hardy's yarns. Svenson's contribution to discussion of the origin of A. B. Paterson's song 'Waltzing Matilda' is a petty and unconvincing attack on the work of Richard Magoffin, but even if his argument was sound it would have missed the point for a working class historian.

Svenson apologizes for the tendencies towards revolutionary politics displayed by the militant unionists of the 1890s but says that these tendencies helped them to keep sight of the goal of making a just society. Their example, he suggests, can help stiffen the backbone of today's ALP and trade union leaders. But if Svenson was less concerned with pedantic expertise in his chosen period of study he would have approached the 1890s strikes with less naive judgements about their political implications.

The failure of these 1890s strikes led workers to put faith in top-down legalistic and parliamentary channels. By the time the IWW emerged it could point to the failure of this faith and gain support anew for direct action. (Meanwhile in the USA the IWW could not fully develop its opposition to 'political' labour movements in a context where even 'respectable' unionism was effectively illegal.) Unfortunately, however, Labor had quickly grown strong enough to crush such rank-and-file opposition. Knowledge of these effects of the nineties strikes would prevent Svenson from presenting the strike leaders as models for some simple renovation of Laborism. Burgmann shows that the official labour 'movement' will always be the first opponent of bottom-up socialism, never a means for its achievement.

Where Burgmann shows that unionists must doubt any substitution of political and legal processes in place of their own industrial strength, Svenson ignores or is unaware of this fundamental question, one that exercised the minds of his own historical protagonists. For Burgmann there is political power implicit in the union of workers. For Svenson there is power, of some kind, somewhere or other, sometimes, in Labor politicians and union leaders.

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## Aboriginal Sovereignty

GRANT ANDERSON

Henry Reynolds: *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Three Nations, One Australia?* (Allen & Unwin, \$17.95).

IN *MABO V STATE OF QUEENSLAND (No.2)*<sup>1</sup>, the High Court held that, when the British Crown acquired sovereignty over Australia, it did not obtain the beneficial ownership of such of that land as was occupied and used by the indigenous inhabitants. In other words, that assumption of sovereignty did not of itself 'dispossess' the indigenous inhabitants; instead, they were entitled to continue to occupy and use the land. This entitlement is of-

ten referred to as 'native title'. However, as a concomitant of acquiring sovereignty, the British Crown did obtain the radical (or paramount) title to the land – that is, the Crown obtained the right to deal with that land as it saw fit, including the right to extinguish native title. Of course, this is precisely what has progressively occurred since 1788: the Crown has granted interests in land or otherwise dealt with it in ways which are inconsistent with the continued existence of native title over that land and has thereby extinguished that native title. In short, according to the High Court, the common law (which was the law introduced into Australia when the British Crown assumed sovereignty over it) recognized the continued existence of native title despite that assumption of sovereignty, but the Crown, in the exercise of its sovereign authority, has subsequently extinguished native title to a considerable amount of land in Australia.

In arriving at this conclusion, the Court rejected the hitherto accepted legal proposition that, when the British Crown assumed sovereignty over it, Australia was '*terra nullius*' – in other words, that Australia was uninhabited in the sense of not being inhabited by a 'civilized' population. The categorization of Australia as *terra nullius* or otherwise has two important legal implications. The first is that sovereignty over a territory can generally only be legitimately acquired by conquest, cession or occupation but, for sovereignty over a territory to be acquired by occupation, that territory must be *terra nullius*. The second is that, where the Crown acquires sovereignty over a territory by conquest or cession, the laws applying throughout that territory generally continue unaffected until they are altered by the Crown, but where the territory is *terra nullius* (and so is acquired by occupation) the law that applies throughout the territory is the common law.

The Court's rejection of the proposition that, as a matter of law, Australia was *terra nullius* when it was first colonized by the British was not relevant to the finding that the common law nevertheless was valid and recognized native title<sup>2</sup>. This is by no means to deny that its rejection accords with the facts and the more enlightened views of the twentieth century. Its rejection does, however, raise the issue of the manner in which the British Crown acquired sovereignty over Australia.

It is this issue, and the legal and political conse-

quences that follow from it, that are the subject of Professor Henry Reynolds' book *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Three Nations, One Australia?* At the outset, as Reynolds acknowledges, it is highly unlikely that Australian courts will entertain a challenge to the legitimacy of the British Crown's assumption of sovereignty over Australia. Indeed, all such challenges to date have been unequivocally dismissed<sup>3</sup>. This is because such a challenge questions the very source of the legal authority of the Australian court system. Similarly, it is unlikely that Australian courts will feel able, at this late stage, to entertain a challenge to the categorization of Australia as settled (rather than conquered)<sup>4</sup>. To this extent, Reynolds' arguments are largely academic. However, they may be used to further the political demands of Australia's indigenous inhabitants for redress for past injustices.

REYNOLDS' CONTENTION IS THAT, just as native title survived the British Crown's assumption of sovereignty over Australia, so too did the laws and the political system of the indigenous inhabitants. Two principal arguments are put forward to support this contention.

The first is that the British Crown acquired sovereignty over Australia by conquest, the evidence of this conquest being the numerous bloody skirmishes between the colonists and the indigenous inhabitants. Applying the principles referred to previously, the laws of the indigenous inhabitants would therefore continue in operation until altered by the Crown. Under this approach, native title would continue, as under *Mabo*. However, while *Mabo* proceeded on the basis that the common law applied to Australia's indigenous inhabitants, Reynolds' approach proceeds on the basis that the common law does not apply to the indigenous inhabitants, who continue to be governed exclusively by their own laws. That is, this approach does not depend on whether the common law recognizes native title or any other customs or laws of the indigenous inhabitants. A significant hurdle to the success of this argument is that the introduction of the common law into Australia has been put beyond doubt by legislation<sup>5</sup> and, on its face, the statute law of Australia applies to indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants alike (irrespective of any conflicting customs or laws of the indigenous inhabitants). These factors strongly suggest that, if

any laws of the indigenous inhabitants survived the assumption of sovereignty, they have since been abrogated by necessary implication.

The second argument is that, irrespective of how the British Crown acquired sovereignty over Australia, it initially only acquired external sovereignty (i.e. sovereignty vis-a-vis foreign states). Under this approach, the indigenous inhabitants retained internal sovereignty (i.e. the power to govern themselves and to regulate their internal relations)<sup>6</sup>. This internal sovereignty was only surrendered as settlement progressed and the indigenous inhabitants were conquered or submitted to the British system of government and laws to the exclusion of their own. This approach is analogous to the approach in the United States which characterizes the 'native Indian' communities as "domestic dependent nations"<sup>7</sup> who, largely as a result of treaty arrangements through which the United States government obtained the land occupied by them, are governed by their own laws but are subject to the overriding sovereignty of the United States federal government (which retains the power to change those laws). However, the forced removal of many of Australia's aboriginal tribes from their traditional lands, the absence of any treaties (or similar 'inter-governmental' arrangements) with the Crown and the entire history of the relations between the Crown and Australia's indigenous inhabitants (including the introduction into Australia of a foreign body of law and system of government in apparent disregard of that of the indigenous inhabitants) would seem to be more consistent with the Crown asserting exclusive sovereignty over the indigenous inhabitants to the exclusion of any internal sovereignty that they might have previously exercised.

Because neither of these arguments is likely to be accepted by Australian courts, Australia's indigenous inhabitants will probably only be able to realize their aspirations for some degree of self-determination<sup>8</sup> (or 'sovereignty') through the political process. It is for this reason that Reynolds' discussion of the possible political solutions is more relevant and thought-provoking.

AS REYNOLDS POINTS OUT, there is a distinction between nations and states. While a nation is a group of people who identify themselves as a community with a common history and culture, a state comprises legal, political and constitutional insti-

tutions. According to Reynolds, the survival of the culture of Australia's indigenous inhabitants is dependent upon those inhabitants retaining a sense of nationhood and so the crucial issue is how best to preserve and foster this sense of nationhood. There is, of course, a whole spectrum of possibilities, ranging from a recognition of the special status and cultural identity of the indigenous inhabitants (e.g. by way of a statement to that effect in the Constitution) to a separate state (with its own territorial land base and exclusive jurisdiction over its people). One possibility between these two extremes is an indigenous political and legal system which, in some respects, operates autonomously from that applying to non-indigenous Australians. This could well have the practical effect of conferring on Australia's indigenous inhabitants a status akin to that of domestic dependent nations, as is the case with the native communities of the United States. Such a nation could function without exercising territorial sovereignty over particular land<sup>9</sup>, although this need not preclude individual communities from continuing to exercise their rights of native title.

Reynolds therefore identifies three nations within the one Australia: non-indigenous peoples (who have chosen to come to Australia and submit to its laws and institutions), Aborigines, and Torres Strait Islanders (this assumes that the various Aboriginal and Islander communities view themselves as two distinct nations and not as a greater number of separate nations). The nature of the relationship between these separate nations is a matter that will continue to be debated widely and this book is a useful contribution to that debate.

#### ENDNOTES

1. (1992) 175 CLR 1.
2. See further Ritter D, *The 'Rejection of Terra Nullius' in Mabo* (1996) 18 Sydney Law Review 5.
3. *Coe v Commonwealth of Australia* (1979) 24 ALR 118; (1993) 118 ALR 193. See also *New South Wales v Commonwealth* (1975) 135 CLR 337 at p.388.
4. See *Mabo*, at pp.18–19, 20–21 cf. *Coe*, at pp.411,412. See also Simpson G, *Mabo, International Law, Terra Nullius and the Stories of Settlement: An Unresolved Jurisprudence* (1993) 19 Melbourne University Law Review 195, at pp.197–198, 208–209.
5. *Australian Courts Act 1828 (Imp)* (9 Geo IV c 83), s.24.
6. A similar argument is advanced by Hocking B, *Aboriginal Law Does Now Run in Australia* (1993) 15 Sydney Law Review 187, at pp.192–194; see also Nettheim G, *The Consent of the Natives: Mabo and Indigenous Political Rights* (1993) 15 Sydney Law Review 223, at pp.228–232.

7. See *Cherokee Nation v Georgia* 30 US (5 Pet) 1 (1831), per Marshall CJ at p.31.
8. Self-determination is the right of a people to practise and maintain a particular way of life, which includes the right to determine their own political status and to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development; it presumes the non-interference of others within a legitimate sphere of autonomy (See Pearce EA, *Self-Determination for Native Americans: Land Rights and the Utility of Domestic and International Law* (1991) 22 Columbia Human Rights Law Review 361, at p.361.
9. See, for example, Hall GR, *The Quest for Native Self-Government: The Challenge of Territorial Sovereignty* (1992) 50 Toronto Faculty of Law Review 39.

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## Enduring White

LYN MCCREDDEN

Simon During: *Patrick White* (OUP, \$18.95).

**P**ATRICK WHITE IS THE LATEST, and one of the last, in the Oxford *Australian Writers Series*. It resists one push of the series, to present a close, canonical reading of an individual writer, and has ruffled a considerable number of feathers in its emphasis on the institutional and social forces which formed the Great Australian Novelist. White is placed by Melbourne academic Simon During in a cascade of contexts; Australian and international academic and publishing institutions, literary modernism, colonialism and the emergence of post-colonialism, and psychoanalysis: "White's canonization is part of a larger cultural shift, which saw the development of many kinds of institutions and critiques aimed at making Australia culturally richer and more autonomous . . . White's reputation is an event in [a] series." It's not unhealthy to ruffle feathers, even pluck a few out by the roots, so this volume, by an academic of considerable standing in postcolonial and cultural studies scholarship, promises much.

From the outset, During's methodology is to trace the gap between older, broadly humanist and celebratory criticism of White, and the ways in which such "celebratory rhetoric does not accurately reflect White's aggressive sexualized fictions". This

tracing is done through a setting up of polar or binary readings or approaches (celebratory/aggressive sexualized) and a fixing upon the supposedly underemphasized element of the polarity, in order to more "accurately reflect" White. This critical approach is well-known and problematic. The larger context of During's anti-romantic, anti-canonical, materialist critique, here and elsewhere, is enabled by the growth in poststructural literary theory. Such theory has, in a range of ways, fostered "not seven but seventy times seven" interpretive and critical approaches. It seems a little jejune here to be claiming 'accuracy' as a criterion, especially accuracy which relies so solidly on a critical methodology of binarisms.

The binarisms which, During argues, structure White, and which certainly structure this critical volume, are almost plethoric: spiritual/theatrical, colonial/postcolonial, romanticism/materialism, transcendentalist/postcolonialist, institutional/private. Such binary thinking, with its foundationist ideology, is rife in critical practice, and had been around long before Hegel and Derrida did their different kinds of magic with it. Feminism, in writings by Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous for example, has struggled with and revealed the aggressively hierarchical nature of much (masculine) binary thinking. Yet it still inscribes so much intellectual practice. Is it inevitable, inescapable, as Derrida claims? If it is, then it's also possible and necessary to tackle the grounds of such a binaristic mindset.

Take for example During's interesting discussion of early White as a transcendentalist:

Instead of grasping the full implications of postcolonialism, transcendentalists like the young White replaced appeals to the colonialist past with appeals to various universal themes, which were often called 'metaphysical' . . . Invoking the universal tragedy of the human condition (a classic Eurocentric theme) was so seductive locally because it expressed the travails and horrors of white settlement while simultaneously concealing them.

During's foundational idea then is anti- 'metaphysical':

Transcendentalism joined Australian literature to Australian history in terms grand enough to bypass everyday contexts . . . Indeed the hard Australian politics of 1910–1950 is absent from



White's oeuvre: that is one sign of his international transcendentalism.

During is reading White, and the "transitional moment" of colonialism into postcolonialism from "Today, from a postcolonial point of view", and accusing White of a kind of political and historical blindness. He claims, with such retrospective and political 'accuracy' or correctness, that the 1950s and 1960s "are most usefully analysed as a recodifying of old ideas of Australian 'emptiness'", as merely metaphysical, merely "nostalgic for Europe and (signs) of a disavowed white guilt over the invasion of the land." It's necessary at this point to ask: 'useful' to whom, and in whose context? Is such 'emptiness' a recurrent trope in White and in many other writers, merely nostalgic, or a sign of guilt? It could be argued that substantial elements of geography and space have something to do with such tropes.

During's are fairly damning political claims, not just of an *individual* with certain class and aesthetic blindnesses, but of a whole cluster of Australian critics and writers, and indeed of a whole order of Australian culture. If During was merely enunciating the blindnesses of an individual writer, there would be a lot less at stake. And it's not just that he also embraces other individual worthies such as A.A. Phillips, Harry Heseltine and Martin Boyd in this mantle of transcendentalism and historical blindness. There is much, much more at stake in thrusting home the hierarchy between the transcendental and the historical.

Ownership of history is a prophetic claim, and is most usually done by attempting to obliterate the 'opposition's' credentials. So, the transcendentalists, named above and including White, were merely 'importing' from Europe, in a weaker, shrunken form, "a return to the timeless and spiritual, which was used to negotiate both Europe's crisis of faith in its own history and colonialism's loss of legitimacy." Now *there's* a double pike on the cultural cringe. Further, such transcendentalists, with their "mythical resonances" and "secret cores", their Australian emptiness, their "stress on the terror at the basis of being" were avoiding or blind to "hard Australian politics" and the realities of history. White is quoted dismissively in his desire to "convey a splendour, a transcendence . . . above the human realities . . . to suggest my own faith in these superhuman realities." How truly sad that such

desire, and such fear of human realities, have not, in this volume, been seen as readable historically *and* with respect for the transcendental desires of a range of cultural producers. These are the writers who have just actively lived through the second world war, who are living in a post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima world. Is their dread, their dwelling on the "terror at the basis of being", so ahistorical, so neglectful of real history? Is the stress on 'emptiness' merely a metaphysical blindness? White's quote above claims it was "my own faith", which inscribed his representations of the relationships between historical and transcendental realities. It seems that what we have here is one foundational truth against another: *Patrick White* by Simon During.

Yet During is a self-reflexive and intelligent critic. No sooner has he set up such dichotomies than he is able to question his own schema:

useful as these terms are in providing us with the pattern of historical transformation during White's early working life, neither his work nor his life wholly fits such abstract patterns. On the one hand, no schema can account for White's tangled, overdetermined relation to Australia. On the other, he did not live out his relation to Australia simply as an individual.

The volume goes on to examine a range of White's writing with this tension at work in the criticism. *Patrick White* is provoking and intelligent, partly because the critic at the helm is able, at best, to use and to question his own dichotomies. But it's the reader's job to keep questioning them too.

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## The Knowledge Class

ANDREW MILNER

John Frow: *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (OUP, \$26.95).

**J**OHN FROW IS one of Australia's better-known 'post-Marxist' literary theorists. Trained in Comparative Literature in the United States, he

is Professor of English Literature at the University of Queensland and one of the key figures in the development of Australian 'Cultural Studies'. Historically, both Comparative Literature and English Literature have defined their respective subject matters in relation to a canon of authoritatively valuable 'literary' texts: Goethe's *Weltliteratur* on the one hand, Leavis's 'Great Tradition' on the other. If post-structuralist literary criticism has tended to undermine these older certainties, there is nonetheless much in the very notion of 'Literature' that resolutely sets out to reconstruct them. As Harold Bloom has it, the aim of literary study is precisely "the search for a kind of value that transcends the particular prejudices and needs of societies at fixed points in time." By comparison, Cultural Studies has tended towards a much more characteristically postmodern form of value relativism. Tony Bennett, for example, has argued very persuasively for the view that literary judgements are only ever the socially-specific application of the particular rules of value that happen to be shared by a particular valuing community. Frow's *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* is an attempt to locate a workable theory of value somewhere in this space between Bloomian literary absolutism and Bennett's neo-Foucauldian cultural relativism.

The problem, as Frow defines it, is that of "critical movement across the spaces between *incommensurate* evaluative regimes." His solution to this "problem of commensuration" borrows from Arjun Appadurai the concept of a "regime of value", meaning "a semiotic institution generating evaluative regularities under certain conditions of use, and in which particular empirical audiences or communities may be more or less fully imbricated." The point about these institutions is that, although they can be correlated with such extratextual determinations as social position, they nonetheless have "no directly expressive relation to social groups." Logically, different regimes of value may be incommensurate, Frow acknowledges, but in the practicalities of social life they are in fact commensurated by the institutions of mass education and mass culture. And these institutions are controlled by the "knowledge class", that is, the class of intellectuals. By their very nature as intellectuals, this class is both enabled to speak (uneasily) 'for' others and possessed of a common class interest in what Frow terms "the implementation

of modernity." His conclusion, though hedged with qualifications and finally left to a quotation from Alvin Gouldner, is that the intelligentsia has a necessarily "progressive political potential", which informs its capacities for commensuration.

This conclusion hinges on a prior argument that the intelligentsia – writers, critics, academics and so on – do in fact constitute a distinct social class, in the sociological sense of the term, an argument Frow develops in part by way of a critique of Pierre Bourdieu. The intelligentsia is not, as Bourdieu had argued, a dominated part of the bourgeoisie, Frow concludes, but rather a "new middle class", a "knowledge class" dealing in education-generated information. It is "a more or less coherent class in some respects, but not in others"; it is a "weakly formed" class because formed around claims to knowledge rather than property; but it has a common class interest, nonetheless, in the "institutions of cultural capital".

**B**UT ARE INTELLECTUALS A SOCIAL CLASS in any meaningful sense of the term? As Frow is well aware, they were by no means thus for Marxism, where class had been defined as a group sharing a common relation to the means of economic production. Intellectuals, most Marxists were agreed, clearly share no such relation, neither to land nor to capital nor to labour power. Only if knowledge itself has become a means of production in contemporary 'late' capitalism, does it then become possible to treat the intelligentsia as a class by virtue of a common relation to knowledge. This is Frow's position, as I understand it. But it seems ultimately unpersuasive, if only because the 'liberal' intelligentsia, as we once used to describe ourselves, are much better characterized by an expertise in legitimation than by possession of economically 'productive' knowledge. The surplus generating qualities of deconstruction are by no means clear, not even to the initiate. It then becomes increasingly difficult to share in Frow's (relative) optimism as to the intellectuals' capacity for quasi-altruistic commensuration between regimes of value. Indeed, a more suspicious hermeneutic might well cast considerable doubt on any such claim, not least insofar as it applies to the intersection between postmodern cultural theory and contemporary identity politics. Which is not to reject the theoretical possibility of value commensuration out of hand, merely to won-

der why Frow finds the issue so pressing.

Why is it such a problem – even for a leading exponent of Cultural Studies – that value should exist only in time and in space? Why does art have to be either transcendental (as for Bloom) or commensurated (as for Frow) to be either interesting or ‘valued’? One can and one should distinguish between texts and institutions – and between writers and readers, camera-operators and film-goers – and all of these warrant study both in their interrelationships and independently. One can and should distinguish between different kinds of texts – ‘print’ as distinct from ‘film’, ‘narrative’ as distinct from ‘lyric’, and so on. And undoubtedly, some texts are better than others, when judged by the value criteria applied either by their own immediate audience or by subsequent audiences for subsequent readings.

If Shakespeare really is as ‘great’ as literary humanism proclaimed, then this is a meaningful proposition only insofar as we really can speak of a near-universal valuing community (humanity) able to sustain such judgements over a prolonged period of time. Which seems to me as close as we are ever likely to get to a plausible theory of value. Whether judgements of this kind are ever established remains necessarily an empirical rather than a theoretical question, as much a matter for historical and sociological investigation as for literary theory or cultural theory.

*Andrew Milner is Associate Professor in the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at Monash University.*

## Intellectual Pioneers of Melbourne

PATSY POPPENBEEK

Peter Fitzpatrick: *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson* (CUP, \$29.95).

**H**ILDA ESSON GAZES in composed loveliness, something passionate about the mouth, and Louis in beaky torment from the purplish cover of this fascinating twin biography. It is an apt representation of the content. Placed left, Hilda’s image is the one to which the eye goes first, and

while Louis’ name appears first in the sub-title, I kept thinking of *Pioneer Players* as the lives of Hilda and Louis Esson. Perhaps this is because Louis’s well-known title of ‘father of Australian drama’ sounds rather stuffy and ponderous. Perhaps it is because, after having his famous one-act play *The Drovers* appear in so many anthologies, he seems to disappear from history. Perhaps it is because the beautiful Hilda is so intriguing.

One of Melbourne’s earliest female doctors, she conducted the diphtheria immunization campaigns without which many later Melburnians probably would not exist, and at fifty-two became a New Theatre director. She was Louis’ constant companion, a mother, acted in his plays, getting everything backstage organized (Louis’ comment that “Hilda managed everything” is characteristic) and supported him both emotionally and materially. At forty she became a kind of Guinevere figure, beginning a twenty-year love affair with her boss, ravishingly handsome Dr John Dale. Her marriage with Louis continued till his death, though some years previously he had moved to Sydney “for his health”: he had “neuritis”. Hilda corresponded daily with him, visited him in her holidays, and nursed him in his final illness. She wrote after his death,

All the bitterness and regrets, and the overwhelming passionate longing to make up for what he had suffered, for what I had made him suffer, I can’t speak about it dear –

There was no one like him – there never will be . . .

So Louis had his own fascination. He kept Hilda’s regard if not her desire, helped create the concept of an Australian theatre and succeeded in writing plays which are part of any Australian drama ‘canon’ and eminently actable today, though modern directors would probably make some changes. *Andeganora* (1937), for example, was amazingly insightful into the situation of rural Aborigines: you can easily visualize someone like Ernie Dingo in the main part today. It is when thinking of things like casting and direction that you realize the immense difficulties Louis faced. Not only were Aboriginal actors unavailable to him, so were trained theatricals and resources of any kind. He was denied the kind of workshopping that all plays need. One of the biography’s many strengths is that, while

Fitzpatrick does indicate the contribution Louis' personality made to his failure to make a more substantial contribution to Australian literature, he details how heartbreakingly difficult being a playwright was. It was rather like Leonardo da Vinci trying to invent the aeroplane all by himself.

Another of the book's strengths is that it is a damned good read. As in a murder mystery, we are immediately confronted with the corpses of Louis' career and marriage, and we want to find out why things turned out as they did. How did Hilda manage to legitimize her affair? How were the Essons able to live an income-free life for so long? How was Hilda able to say to her daughter-in-law that she had never scrubbed a floor in her life?

Still another of the book's good points is that possible answers are only suggested. Fitzpatrick usually leaves it to the reader to make up her own mind, though he does sometimes succumb to the biographer's tendency to quote and then explain. Thus Hilda wrote to Prichard after Dale's death that

every word, every movement, every inch of him lives again in my ears, under my tender hands – so dear, so familiar, so eternally with me, that I seem to lose all touch with the world, and lie cold and lifeless, scarcely breathing.

Such passion is self-explanatory, but Fitzpatrick points out that it "came from a longing that could never again be satisfied, and it revealed that she felt she could hardly live without him". This lapse is rare, however. More typical is Fitzpatrick's awareness of the biographer's various ethical problems, and of "the danger that the demands of the story would lead the predator [biographer] to create the scent of unhappiness even when it could not be detected."

This is a scholarly and exciting work. It illuminates the lives of a stimulating couple whose marital and career problems will be familiar to modern spouses, and it fills in an important gap in the history of Australian drama. It also contributes to the human resonance of Melbourne. Carlton, Chrystobel Crescent Hawthorn, Queensberry Street . . . it's nice to know that Louis and Hilda and the Palmers and other Australian intellectuals lived there, delightful to think of Louis the aesthete barracking for Carlton at Princes Park.

*Patsy Poppenbeek is a Communication Skills teacher at RMIT. Her theses were in the area of Australian drama.*

## Surf Writing

DOMINIQUE HECQ

Fiona Capp: *Night Surfing* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

**N**IGHT SURFING, Fiona Capp's first novel, tells the story of Hannah, a spirited young woman who is interested in surfing and in making sense of human relationships. It opens with a powerfully evocative prologue which, through its use of sea imagery, draws subtle parallels between surfing, struggling with desire and writing. The sea is here the realm of dreams, woman, mother and death.

Thus, like a wave throwing back shells and slivers of shells on the shore and perpetually shifting its traces, the narrative moves from one character to another, recasting images or passages from the prologue in order to explore emotional depths. By sustaining the parallel between the life of action and the life of imagination, Capp manages to highlight the motivations of her characters with stunning economy. Each character is in fact engaged in a personal quest originating in one form of grief or grievance. And it is the nature of each quest which determines whether these characters are drawn towards, or apart from, each other, in the text whilst also suggesting intertextual analogies.

This is an alluring book indeed, which works at many levels. It is, for instance, informed by feminist thought. Deftly so, particularly in those passages which examine dramatically the politics of the gaze, but feminist concerns as such are never pursued for their own sake: these tend to crop up under the guise of witty remarks or poetic images. In fact, most theoretical concerns are toned down, under water as it were, to highlight what might tentatively be called here a metafictional poetics.

The book's metafictional concerns are exciting. The relationship between surfing and dreaming and writing is made clear when Hannah first goes out surfing with Jake. Hannah tells Jake about 'The Surfer', a poem by Judith Wright, that bewitched her as an adolescent and instilled in her the desire to learn how to surf. Hannah's voice and tale of dreams make Jake uneasy: Jake distrusts the worlds of dreams and poets and words, for his dreams are dark ones, and their black tide is like a shroud that threatens to drag him down to the bottomless sea of murky

beginnings. The metaphorical relationship at work in the text, which is here epitomized in the parallel between the life of action and the life of the imagination counterpointed by what hinders Hannah and Jake in their amorous pursuits, is in fact heralded in the novel's two epigraphs. It is then explored further and from different vantage points during the course of the narrative. Ultimately, the *mise en abyme* functions as an embedded representation of Jake's final vision at the close of the novel.

*Dominique Hecq teaches at Swinburne.*

## Some Stick for Old England

KEL SEMMENS

Baron Charles von Hugel, *New Holland Journal or The Viennese Observer*, trans. and ed. Dymphna Clark (MUP, \$49.95).

**T**HIS BEAUTIFULLY PRODUCED BOOK is the account of the way by which Baron von Hugel tried to overcome the hurt at the thwarting of his betrothal to the niece of Prince Metternich. Thereafter he described himself as "a man who sought healing and oblivion in every land on earth".

He was an industrious man who sought distraction, not in alcohol or other commonplace refuges, but in botanical and anthropological collecting in remote countries. In 1833–34 this "soldier, diplomat, courtier, naturalist, geographer, traveller, and horticulturalist", as Dymphna Clark portrays him, was an important observer of early Australia, if only because he was an outsider. He was an upper-class European. He was if anything, anti-British. He was cultivated (in the old sense), perhaps self-educated in Botany. He was abstemious!

How did such a man see our development?

His observations jolted me as did my first reading of the American War of Independence by an American after my schooling in British history. He thought that as colonizers the British were unwise, often unjust, usually rapacious. The vast areas of uninhabited land seemed immensely monotonous, although he came to see that in wildflower season it could be surpassingly beautiful. His earliest im-

pressions near Fremantle – "not a track, nor a hut, nor a living soul . . . Perhaps no other foot had ever trodden this patch of earth" – might help us to understand how the concept of *terra nullius* could gain initial acceptance by Europeans. He thought later our towns were ill-planned, often ill-placed; he thought the efforts of the missionaries among the Aborigines so misguided as to be useless; that the few priests appointed for the many Irish Catholic convicts and immigrants was deplorable, as was the lack of moral guidance for convicts, single women whose migration had been encouraged and free settlers.

In the century which saw the development of botanical physiologists and evolutionists, and at the time of the refinement of the microscope which allowed the study of plant cells, his work seems to have been restricted to collection, identification and classification of morphology, but this was no mean feat for a young amateur in a world unexplored and unknown. Comparison with other earlier visiting botanists, like the great Robert Brown, would be invidious. Von Hugel's contribution was considerable, and was the result of undeflectable physical and intellectual exertion.

No matter how arduous the day or how inconvenient the resting place, each day ended in preserving, recording and identifying the collected specimens. Travel, whether on foot, horseback, or gig, was uncomfortable, lonely, and dangerous because of bushrangers and the absence of help in case of accident; but he covered considerable distances in a short time. He made the wry comment that where there is a choice among unsignposted tracks through the bush, the wrong tracks are always better marked than the right ones because the traveller both goes and comes on the wrong track!

Von Hugel's first impressions of the Aborigines convey the gap in understanding between indigines and newcomers from Europe: "Their mouth always suggests brutality, but not stupidity . . . but most striking of all is the expression in their uncommonly dark eyes. When you look deep into them, there is nothing there . . . This absence of intellectual activity may be the reason why this race has never yet formulated any idea of God." Later he wrote "they have no curiosity or desire for knowledge".

Yet a few months later he observed that "whenever I had the chance to talk seriously with the New Hollanders, I found them anything but stupid, and was astonished at their powers of perception and

their replies, which always went straight to the point." He then compares the common Englishman in Australia very unfavourably with the Aborigine.

Just as von Hugel's views about Aborigines changed over time, so did his views about the convicts and their treatment. In Western Australia he thought that, however unpleasant it might be, "transportation [of felons] supplies a better type of person than those who can be hired in the Swan River Colony . . . where the majority of the free men, having led an indolent life in England, emigrate solely to find greater opportunities for drinking" – although he did refer to convicts shortly after as "the scum of humanity".

Old England came in for a bit more stick when von Hugel remarked:

its complicated legal system did the young colony a great disservice by not granting a simple legal code . . . with strict laws against all forms of chicanery . . . the majority lack – honour, religion, fear of perjury.

He condemned the favouritism exhibited in the allocation of free grants of land, and the "drunkenness which is the chief vice of the newcomers", and the fact that members of the professions were engaged in the sale of spirits. Coming as he did from Viennese court circles, it is not surprising that von Hugel was happiest in the occasional households of educated, well-read people; was scornful of the pretensions of the merely rich; and was disgusted by the drunken loutishness of many others. Perhaps it was also because he was accustomed to the polity of the Habsburgs that he would deprecate the desire in Australia to have a representative local government independent of England. His lack of sympathy for things English may be understandable, but were there no injustices and oppressions in the Habsburg empire? At least he did write, around 1834, "the original annexation of New Holland by the British Crown [was] in accordance with the scandalous but as yet unrepealed law decreeing that the whole of the earth is the birthright of Europe".

Brief as was his stay, and unsympathetic as were his views, his record is important, and adds significantly to our understanding of where we as a people have grown from. Dymphna Clark has rendered us a great service in making this journal accessible to the general reader.

*Kel Semmens is a Victorian physician and writer.*

## A Broad and Deep Talent

DORIS LEADBETTER

J.S. Harry: *Selected Poems* (Penguin, \$16.95).

**T**HIS IS HARRY'S FIFTH BOOK. It contains some work not previously available in book form and excludes poems in her most recently published collection: *The life on water and the life beneath*.

One of the special delights in reading poetry is the freedom to open a book randomly, let the mind flicker through a few poems and settle on one to read carefully, diligently and with pleasure. So far, this book has defeated that casual, sybaritic approach to its contents. This reviewer read the Acknowledgments, as any good reviewer will, and turned to the first poem. Immediately engaged, I moved on to the second poem, the third – and paused for breath after a few hours.

J. S. Harry's poetry seems to range across a broad territory of experience, some of it not very comfortable and all of it observed with spiky irony and an awareness of the folly of being too accepting. There is a sense in which some of Harry's poems are 'collectibles'; small pieces of virtu having only a tenuous connection to others. An idea seems to strike her, she mulls over it for a while and writes a pointed, one-off poem which leaves the reader wondering where the idea came from, and thinking how very apt it is.

I like so very much the small poem called: *Sex, B Grade Movies, (Invisible Censors). 1. Made in France*. Here Harry makes the point that the French language allows filmmakers to eschew explanations when a couple emerge from a room as fully dressed as when they entered it some time earlier. In French, they begin to 'tutoyer'; to use the intimate form of address. No need here to nod-nod-wink-wink or show that they are wearing each other's socks (although I think I saw that in a French movie). Somehow this observation of Harry's makes a neat comment on all her work. She sometimes writes about the obvious, the unspoken, the simple truths – but she does so with point.

Here is the first stanza of 'mrs mothers' day':  
i am mrs mothers' day

i will hire myself out to you  
 for the 364 other days  
 i will not be satisfied by  
 1 plus 364  
 grottybunches of whitechrysanthemum  
 you choose to offer me snottynose  
 i will not be placated by  
 a dinner a picnic  
 a free ride to the cemetery under yr  
 dog's blanket to look at a chunk of  
 white stone & think of yr father  
 yr father was not  
 cut stone with a jamjar  
 stuffed with dying flowers he pissed  
 on alive flowers more than once said  
 it was good for them

Harry is certainly not sentimental. Her poems, such as this, never lose their edge. And yet Harry's wit, her dry observation of the world around her, are tempered by a lyrical quality when she chooses to exercise it. Some of her poems about the landscape of Australia, its animals and plants, are fresh and delightful. But this reviewer likes best Harry's mordant humour, the hint of acid in her pen. This is how 'Mousepoem' begins:

Her lover departed  
 to the warm purry  
 bed of his wife,  
 with pale blue hands  
 in the cold dawnlight  
 she has written a poem so slight  
 she thinks if a mouse breathed on it,  
 it would collapse (the  
 poem, not  
     the mouse which is made  
 of tough, mouse material, whiskers, ears,  
 small, quick, risk-assessing eyes; the poem  
 is so slight it seems to float, not stand;  
 the mouse . . . stands on firm mouse-muscles  
 & potato-crispy, cat-delighting  
 bones.)

And so on. 'Potato-crispy bones . . .' J. S. Harry is not simply one who watches what happens around her and translates it into poetry; she listens, touches, tastes and smells the world and all these experiences inform her work. Picking out snippets to give a sense of Harry's skills is not an easy task,

nor does it flatter the whole poem to put a section of it on display. For this reason, there are no more quotations in this review. If these two samples have not tempted you into buying the book, other samples would have done so. Harry's talent is broad as well as deep. In my view, she is one of the best poets around. I have never spoken to her. I have watched her read several times and wondered at the small space she seems to inhabit as she reads. She sits small on her chair, knees together, elbows tucked in, face partly obscured behind her hair. I have thought her unapproachable, but once the words start to flow, there is no such reserve. Next time I hear her read, I shall tell her how much I admire her work.

*Doris Leadbetter is a Melbourne poet.*

## Making Love in Public

ΠΟ

Eric Beach: *Weeping For Lost Babylon* (A&R, \$17.95).

IT'S NOT EASY MAKING LOVE to someone in public, but i guess that's what a book-launch is all about . . .

Whenever eric shows-up everyone i know drops whatever they're doing, and ends-up going to a coffee shop, or church or stadium, or pub, park festival or whatever else is going.

It's a strange phenomenon really . . . cos it doesn't seem to happen with too many other people . . . but then not many other people affect us like eric does . . .

So why do we do it . . . ?

I think it's a 'habit' acquired over years of anticipation mixed with excitement. It's a habit (or feature) of what we call in poetry: Street Life! . . . and we like it. In fact, we like it so much, we are always on the look-out for it and eric is one 'sign-post' we can all read.

To a lot of us, eric showing-up means: music, poetry, talk, talk talk talk music smoke talk and poetry . . . until we can't take any more . . . so for a

lot of us today the next two weeks is going to be a fucken LONG TIME!

P.S. Hanging-out with each other does help the POETRY, and even if it didn't, we'd say it did.

So why am i saying all this . . . ?

Well, i'm saying all this cos eric's poetry comes off the footpaths and streets of our cities, and talks to us in our own language. In fact, i think he's a plagiarist! Cos his poems drip with other people's dreams . . . and, i've even found some of my own in them. I don't know how he does it. He's a master of nightmares and the human condition. And he seems to know it off by heart . . . maybe he does it by watering-down the beer + wine: who cares – the standard of the poetry is GREAT.

Eric's one of a handful of poets, in this country, who can honestly say they have informed the culture, and will continue to do so without fear, and against all odds . . . and the struggle to write . . . to be a writer and to be seen to be a writer, is one of the greatest of all obstacles eric has had to fight.

**A**LITTLE KNOWN FACT about eric's career . . . is that i helped eric a great deal in the early days. Hard to believe, i know. But in 1973 or so i was editing a magazine called *Fitzrot* and i received about ten poems off a relatively obscure poet called eric beach . . . well, i read the poems and they were terrible! real BAD!

But to MY credit, i decided to publish one of them (not cos i thought it was good) but to encourage him. And now look at him – AUTHOR of an A&R CLASSIC – it's amazing what a little encouragement can do – you wouldn't have thought it possible.

P.S. We were all writing BAD POEMS then!

**B**UT ALL HUMOUR ASIDE . . . i'm thankful . . . truly thankful that eric has finally got a substantial book out . . . If there's one person in the poetry-world who has hung in there and INSISTED on being called a POET (even on his dole form) it's been eric, and i hope he gets rewarded for it from now on, and in the future: With more books, CDs, invitations, festivals + writer-in-residences.

I should point-out that for a lot of writers, the 'WAIT' for recognition would have destroyed them, but not in the case of eric, cos there were and are a lot of people around who had committed his poems to memory and wouldn't let them be consigned

to the dust bin of History. By hook and by crook his poems would have found the Light of Day . . . cos his poems ARE highly memorable and memorizable (to reiterate).

I'd like to read a poem called 'Evolution' from his book:

I've worked it out

I come from an ape which laid an egg

it's all there in th fossils

th missing link

th famous egg-laying ape

which became extinct

because it couldn't stop

crossing th road

evolution's taught me

pigs can fly

black stars eat space

a quasar

is god turned inside out

we all come from a big bang

th universe's hairline is receding

from a single point

which probably explains why we're forced

to watch

th fate of our world be decided

by one sick & now almost extinct bald-headed

eagle

screaming red, white & blue murder at a bear

I chose that poem . . . cos it reminded me of one of Jas Duke's called 'Darwin Explained', which goes something like this: "Those animals/ that survive/ and reproduce/ are those animals/ that survive/ and reproduce" . . . and if there's one thing that eric's poetry has got plenty of is CHILDREN, lots + lots of imitators (i.e. people who've been inspired to appropriate, steal, plagiarize or simply borrow).

I'd like to finish off with a few words from William Stoneking (in Sydney) who wrote me a few days ago when he heard i was going to launch eric's book.

I am glad that you are launching eric's book. You owe him. We owe each other. The illusion of a journey is sometimes worth promoting if it springs full-blown as a metaphor of love. How long we have travelled by different routes to wind up in the midst of each other's lives . . . There is some old karma going on in all of this. I wish I could be there in the flesh to add to the good things I'm sure you will say. Tell eric I wish him



all the best for the night. The poems are already published in heaven. We have been reading them for a million years. We have committed their shape and sound, their true heart, to an ancient memory, bad lines included . . . and there's bound to be three or four or five of those tucked away within the hundred-odd pages – for the sake of our friend, we'll call it a sign of humility. Never mind. The reviews are great. They always were. No one writes beach like beach. No one ever will. Make a night of it for him, Π. He deserves it. And give him a hug from me.

*This is a transcript of the speech given by ΠΟ at the recent launch of Weeping for Lost Babylon. ΠΟ is a Fitzroy poet and anarchist.*

## Modernism Revisited

MCKENZIE WARK

Terry Smith: *Making The Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America* (Chicago UP, \$69.95).

SO IF THE 'MODERN' IS ALL OVER, what the hell was it anyway? There's no shortage of instant textbook guides to postmodernism, but before we slide forever into the endless cut and paste of pomo slogans from one textbook to another, it's high time for another look at what went on before it.

Fortunately, Terry Smith's monumental *Making The Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* is now out in paperback. It's an excellent place to start thinking about the whole modernism thing. It is a book about the visual imagery of modernity, and in particular about how certain images came to be the staple and stable representations of the modern world, and how those images recruited people to many and very varied versions of the modernist project.

Smith himself has an interesting connection to modernism, having been associated with the Art & Language group, who combined the formalism of high modern aesthetics with a critical approach to the art institution. Indeed, they used the self-interrogation of formalism as a way of exploring the nexus between aesthetics and power. He is pres-

ently director of the Power Institute for Fine Arts at Sydney University, an institution that has been instrumental in introducing to Sydney culture the equally formalist inspired, and equally institutionally challenging discourses of poststructuralism. Smith's own roots seem very much to be in an open and innovative Marxism. I think it would be fair to say that his approach to the various enthusiasms that passed into Australian cultural life through the Power Institute and the Faculty of Fine Arts while he has been there would be something like a sceptical tolerance. But Smith's approach to the theoretical challenges presented by a history of the modern image have been enriched by an engagement with so-called 'postmodern' theory. So too has his conception of intellectual practice in the academy, a topic I want to pick up again later.

But first, the book.

**M**AKING THE MODERN has the same combination of detailed regard for visual images and deep understanding of their place in an historically volatile social totality as a work like Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*, or T. J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life*. Bernard Smith's book focused on the place of the image in the organization of the mercantile age, and Clark's on that of an emerging liberal bourgeois world. Terry Smith has added a third instalment: an examination of what was once called state monopoly capital, or in more recent literature 'Fordism', as seen from the point of view of the production and circulation of images.

One of the most valuable aspects of this book is the way Smith looks at images from a range of visual registers, from high art to low commerce, and shows the same image repertoires deployed across the visual spectrum. Modernism was a way of seeing designed to cut across class and cultural divides. Or rather, variations on the same images of the modern were produced for people in a wide range of contexts.

Smith finds six images, and they come in pairs: industries and workers, cities and crowds, products and consumers. This is the 'iconology' of the modern, a sort of machine for making sense of the world the machine has made – and could be made to make over. Through the production, distribution and reception of these images, a certain sensibility emerges. A modern sensibility that is trained by these images to view the world through them. A sensibility that at

one and the same time sees the virtues of rational and ordered production and sees also the pleasure and desirability of the objects so produced.

Perhaps the best part of the book is the first section on Henry Ford's factories, like the famous River Rouge plant, and how Ford's production engineers came to see the space of production for what it was and order it accordingly. Smith reads the Ford Motor Company as a "site onto which enormous inventive and repressive energies were concentrated around the goal of quite literal mass production." Smith recounts the experiments and tinkering through which the space of production is made abstract and grid-like, with moving surfaces replacing the old workbenches, with orderly flows and repeated actions developing step by step.

Smith's own text becomes a model of modern scholarly production, as he assembles the details that show how work became organized around machines rather than humans. As Marx argued in the remarkable chapter of *Capital* on large scale machinery, machines, though products of human labour, become a power over and against labour. Smith follows this process to its apogee in Fordist production, where not only is labour subordinated to the machine, but individual machines are fitted into a linear flow, in the abstracted space of the factory. As a point of method, Smith follows the logic underlying the abstraction of the machines. The result is a clear and powerful analysis of the way in which each individual action within the factory is subordinated into the totality as a whole – if not in actual practice, at least in goal and tendency. If modernism means the abstraction of the plane of action and the integration of differences into functioning totalities, then Smith finds a key locus of that process on the factory floor.

A fundamentally new idea about what the work process is, is born here. It is based on "a precision of timing, of coordinated human/machine action unprecedented in industrial work . . . Eventually, Ford was to see it as the essence of a universal philosophy. All other relationships become subordinate to maintaining the Flow." But in order to become Flow, everything must be broken up into bits that can be measured and managed, including the workers and their time. They are no longer men making things, they are parts of men making parts of things. This one puts a nut on the bolt, this one turns it.

That kind of order comes at a price. "Ford com-

pany's clarity of vision depended crucially on the exercise of power unchecked, on the exclusion of any ameliorating structures so totally that nothing remained but the abstract elements of mass production itself." And so was born the kind of architecture that one can now see in any industrial park – where space is as abstract as possible, a calculus of space, air and light for the minimum price.

Space has not only to be remade in the image of this ordered, endless Flow of production, but people as well. The story of the thugs Ford hired to bully his workers is well known, as is the fact that the corruption and violence they brought to industrial relations nearly ruined the company. To that coercive story of modernity Smith adds the attempts to win workers to consenting to the modern. Here Smith looks at the advertising and corporate image building exercises of Ford, as the company learns not only to produce cars but to sell them, and to sell them not least through producing a flow of images of itself as modern. The ordering of the space of the factory as the Flow has to be extended out into the world, into flows of cars sold, and to do that the company sets up a flow of images both of its product and of the company itself. The modern production of images is in this case an extension out into the world of the modern production of things. Smith finds one of the sources of the modernization of the cultural sphere in the need to extend the Flow out into the sphere of consumption.

Smith goes on to complicate this vision of the organization of work and consumption with readings of aspects of the modern ranging from *Fortune* magazine to funfairs, from mural artist Diego Rivera to modern furniture design. What makes the book so valuable is the way that Smith shows the various kinds of commodity production and image production being linked together. Without reducing everything to the economic, and without assuming that some neat functional whole actually comes to pass, Smith shows how the visual organization of modernity was indeed a process that refashioned work and leisure, people and products, images and concepts into components of a process that colonized social space and cultural mores. The cover image, of a hand caressing a shiny car wheel, neatly sums up the way that the visual regime of the modern reached out into social space, offering images that made the products of the factory system into objects of fetish and desire, recruiting people to its

promise of dreams fulfilled through things.

When looked at as a linked series of productions of things and the signs of things, circulating through workplaces, homes and the public sphere, it seems pretty clear that the modern is still with us. This is Smith's contribution to the vexed and vexing question of a postmodern world. In order to establish what exactly the postmodern might be, we need to know what the modern was in the first place, beyond a few slide-test clichés of the kind regularly trotted out in art schools. We also need a far more highly trained eye for the image than cultural studies presently offers. It is still a text-based body of knowledge, by and large, with a lot to learn from those like Smith who are rigorously trained in the visual.

THE MODERN IS STILL WITH US, only now on a global scale. The same regime of factory production and mass consumption, to which people are moulded by coercion and consent, by the visual regimes of surveillance and modern image making, this is all alive and well and chugging along as the Asia-Pacific economic 'miracle' that we keep hearing so much about. The Fordist regime of integrated production and consumption on a national scale has broken up, as Michel Aglietta, Alain Lipietz and other economists who have studied it tell us. Perhaps to some extent the postmodern is the cultural experience, in the old industrial heartlands of Fordism, of its dislocation. The *Robocop* movies, for example, are set in a decaying, postindustrial Detroit, and the crucial action takes place in a rusted and decaying River Rouge plant. Perhaps the sense of fragmentation so often associated with the postmodern experience forms part of a wider dislocation of the production and circulation of products and images.

The modern might be a shadow of its former self in old Detroit, but it was alive and well in the Dawkins era reform of Australian higher education, where the former minister of education plays the role of Henry Ford, reshaping the universities into great abstract workhouses of Flow. Economic rationalism is the logic of modernity applied to the nation itself as factory of Flow. Professor Smith has had something to say about this, and his proposal that Sydney University create a humanities institute seems to me to be an astute reading of the impact of the modernization of education on the University of Sydney and how best to respond to it.

While everyone complains – to no great effect –

about the economic rationalist side of educational modernity, Smith sees more deeply into the problem. Perhaps more disturbing in the long run is the way modernity in education chops the business up into bits and parcels them out to different 'shops' for finishing. Discipline is separated from discipline, teacher from student, scholar from manager, school from community.

As I mentioned earlier, *Making the Modern* is a worthy sequel to that great work by Smith's illustrious predecessor at the Power Institute, Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*. The older Smith showed how a series of visual rhetorics were implicated in the way the imperial centres imagined, catalogued and made 'useful' as a resource the peoples and places of the antipodes. Terry Smith has now shown what became of that intertwining of images with power in the era that gave birth to the military industrial complex, from the 1920s to the 1960s. It's a solid basis upon which to figure out the iconology of the emergent military entertainment complex that characterizes first world economies and cultures today.

But there is a quite practical purpose behind such a knowledge, beyond its theoretical currency. One hopes that we can create the spaces within the humanities where such research can be done without being separated from the communities that are obliged to live with it. What universities and communities have in common is that they can be repositories of diversity and connection in a world of standardization and separation.

I suspect that having looked deeply into the transformations of scale on which the modern comes to operate in and on the world, Smith has seen the need for a response to the limits of modernity that is on a somewhat larger scale than that of the individual artist. The Art and Language group's work showed just how much of the individual artist's space of engagement was defined by institutional constraints. Smith's researches into Fordist modernity reveal organization of image culture on an even greater scale. In the light of this understanding of the organization of modernity, the modern idea of the intellectual as sole agent of critique finds its limits. There is a hint of nostalgia in the pages Smith devotes, however lovingly, to Diego Riviera and Frida Kahlo, for no matter how much they still stand as images themselves of a modern critical aesthetic practice, perhaps there

really is a break in historical time that separates them from us.

McKenzie Wark lectures in media studies at Macquarie University and is a columnist for the Australian newspaper.

## Integrity at Some Cost

GILLIAN WHITLOCK

David McCooley: *Artful Histories. Modern Australian Autobiography* (CUP, \$29.50).

“CRITICS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY sometimes feel compelled to write autobiographically . . . That will not happen here.” I read these, the very first sentences in *Artful Histories*, and immediately warmed to McCooley, his desire for anonymity, and his approach to autobiography. It is an occupational hazard for those of us who mark, assess and review writings about autobiography to find essays, theses, articles almost inevitably swerve from life writing to ‘my life’, the urge to chronicle what is frequently, alas, the mundane life told mundanely. You can experience this by posting ‘autobiography’ into any internet search engine. Why do so many high schools in Wisconsin encourage high school seniors to record their daily life on a Web page? As McCooley generously points out, the experience of reading autobiography is unique in the degree to which it forces the reader to reconsider his or her own life. It also spurs many on to write their own!

McCooley gives in to this autobiographical urge sufficiently to record that this book began as a doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney. The marks of these origins remain in a thesis-like order to some of the chapters, that urge to read texts in sequence, and the epigraphs from the likes of Milton, Vaughan, Traherne. More profitably, these origins may account for one of its strengths too: the rigor and care with which he examines the difficult questions about the boundaries of autobiographical writing in the first chapters of the book. The boundaries of autobiography have always been fragile, breaking down into memoir, fiction or diary. This fragility has been compounded due to the pressure of post-

structuralist and post-modern concepts of text and author. Much of the energy in recent autobiography and readings of it are due to not only these ‘posts’ but also to feminism and queer theory.

These aren’t of much interest to McCooley. His book is scarcely touched by the raft of books about autobiography, gender, race and sexuality from, for example, Sidonie Smith, Leigh Gilmore, Carolyn Steedman, Francoise Lionnet, Skip Gates among others. Australian critics who tap into these feminist and post-modern/colonial/structuralist debates, notably Joy Hooton, Sneja Gunew and Joan Newman, figure in passing. In part this is because McCooley isn’t much interested in meta-critique, where critics write about other critics rather than autobiographical texts themselves. He is decidedly impatient with the encrustation of critical mass around *My Place*. This cacophony of critical views is addressed with some reluctance, in part because, in his view the issue of authenticity, “ultimately unresolvable”, diverts attention from other, more profitable, kinds of enquiry. This is a brave gesture, for so many of us have been engrossed in the debates about identity and authenticity which circulate in various ways around Morgan, Demidenko and, more recently, Mudrooroo and Donna Williams. Who and what is aboriginal/ethnic/autistic etc has been both defined and contested in recent Australian autobiographical writing, and issues of authenticity and identity and the so-called ‘authority of experience’ are large issues to put to one side.

What McCooley is interested in is set out with care and precision at the start in a very useful chapter which seeks to relate autobiography to history. This takes McCooley to Carr and Dilthey rather than Olney and Lejeune or Smith *et al.* He takes on, convincingly, the argument that autobiography and fiction are generically the same. By placing autobiography in relation to the writing of history, as an intended narrative account of the past, McCooley distinguishes it from the autobiographical, which he defines as a product of other forms of writing (such as fiction or travel journals). By looking to debates about the place of narrative in historiography he argues for autobiography as a type of history, as a social document which is based on a form of truthfulness.

This argument cuts *Artful Histories* free of many of those messy autobiographical writings like *Poppy*, *Gatton Man*, *Searching for Charmian*, *A Body of Wa-*

ter, *Oh Lucky Country* and *Unbecoming*, to name a few. This is a good and a bad thing. It allows McCooley to be quite authoritative about generic boundaries – observing, for example, when Judah Waten slides from autobiography to travel memoir. It brings to centre stage Porter, Boyd, Johnston, Ker Conway, Riemer, Clark, Buckley, Greer, Langford, Morgan, Malouf, Colebrook, James Murray, Milliss, McInnes, Adam-Smith – all of these receive substantial attention in terms of categories which characterize literary criticism of autobiography: childhood, place, education, history. There are some surprising omissions, even given McCooley's frame of reference, for example Ric Throssell's *My Father's Son*, Aboriginal autobiography other than *My Place* and *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Hugh Lunn and Tony Maniatty (Barry Humphries is not the only comic autobiographer), Russel Ward and A.B. Facey.

This is perhaps unfair, for the discussions which are offered can be extrapolated to include these to some extent, and McCooley at no stage sets himself up as writing a literary history of modern autobiography. He does, however, set out to comment upon the particularly Australian articulation of autobiography, which makes some of these absences a worry and the book itself not representative of patterns of reading, writing and debate about autobiography since the early 1980s. As it stands as the only monograph in the field and will certainly become the standard reference, this is a pity. It is the attention to Aboriginal and to left-wing autobiographies which I missed the most. Somehow placing Sally Morgan in a chapter on 'Past and Personal History' alongside Adam-Smith and McInnes, whilst releasing some new insights, also submerges a number of issues particular to *My Place* and Aboriginal autobiography. Similarly the trio of Milliss, Conway and Murray. I rather like Milliss' *Serpent's Tooth*; McCooley doesn't and, I must confess, the extracts he selects did make me wince. However the influence of left-wing politics on Australian autobiographers from Ward through to Hewett, Smith, Gray, Inglis, Roland, and Throssell is enormous. It is one of the primary historical references for understanding a set of ideas about identity and Australianness which gives *Serpent's Tooth*, for all its flaws, interest.

Along with useful discussions of all the autobiographers mentioned above, there are also a couple of very interesting chapters which foreground

some little-known writing. 'Autobiographies of Displacement', for example, includes Riemer as one might expect, but it also comments on those histories which move from a tortured past (mainly due to the Holocaust) to a 'safe' present. It is a breath of fresh air here to see McCooley import some of Sneja Gunew's thinking on these issues and to engage with debate. Similarly in the final chapter 'Fiction and Autobiography', where he turns from autobiography to the autobiographical as he defines it, the discussion of George Johnston's writing and writing about George Johnston is innovative and full of interest.

McCooley's book has been well received and well reviewed by the literary community, and deservedly so. He navigates a minefield of primary and secondary texts with skill, and presents some useful insights into that perennial dilemma of the relationship between autobiography and the autobiographical, between fiction and history. The cover blurb marks the book as a challenge to post-structuralist theories of autobiography, and so it is. However this reader was left with a sense of missing the critical cacophony and messy brilliance of autobiographical writing and criticism with a post-structuralist flavour. Modjeska and Michaels enticed me to read Australian autobiography in the first place; a critical landscape in which they do not appear has generic integrity at some cost.

*Gillian Whitlock teaches at Griffith University. Her anthology, Autographs, was launched by UQP in August.*

## Up and Running

BEN GOLDSMITH

James Sabine (ed.): *A Century of Australian Cinema* (Mandarin, \$29.95).

*Australian Feature Films* CD-ROM (Informit, \$79.95).

AS PART OF THE CELEBRATION of the centenary of cinema, the AFI has produced *A Century of Australian Cinema* (first published in 1995, now reissued in softcover). This is an interesting, informative and beautifully illustrated book of essays covering the history of film in Australia over the last hundred years. It contains articles on early

Australian cinema (Pat Laughren, William D. Routt), exhibition sites and practices (Diane Collins, Conrad Hamann, Albert Moran), government involvement in the industry (Ina Bertrand on censorship, Barrett Hodsdon on government funding agencies), films of the revival (Peter Kemp), a look to the future (McKenzie Wark) as well as Deb Verhoeven's meditation on cinema between 1927 and 1970.

Verhoeven relates the story of Australian cinema's darkest hour. During the making of the third screen version of *For the Term of His Natural Life* in 1927, director Norman Dawn wanted to shoot a scene which required a burning ship. The ageing *Inca* was loaded with twenty-five pounds of dynamite and two tonnes of highly flammable nitrate film, towed out to sea off the Sydney heads, and set alight. This spectacular set piece, in what to date was the most expensive film made in Australia, was also a spectacular tragedy; the film used as fuel for the blaze included prints and outtakes of many early Australian films. In one brief moment, much of Australia's silent film history literally went up in smoke before the audience's eyes.

Such criminal neglect of local films and blindness to their historical value is now thankfully a thing of the past. Renewed interest in the history and trials of Australian film was a spur to the campaign for industrial revival in the 1960s and 1970s. The realization that Australian cinema had a past marked its absence in those decades as both a cultural failure and a betrayal of history. Documenting that history then (as now) served to confirm the value of its presence.

Equally not so long ago, Australian cinema was not considered sufficiently worthy or academically challenging to be a worthwhile subject for study. Film scholars here tended to regard local films as little more than interesting diversions; they were certainly not to be confused with the serious objects of film studies. "Back in 1981," Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka wrote in *The Screening of Australia* "it was regarded as a bit odd, at least in academic circles, to be openly interested in a serious study of recent Australian cinema . . . Australian film and its 'problems' were, frankly, a bit lowbrow, un-French, and not at all Nietzschean." However, those who performed this peculiar and elitist manifestation of the cultural cringe had misread the historical connections between universities and

cinema in Australia. As Albert Moran notes in his chapter on non-mainstream exhibition in *A Century of Australian Cinema*, the Sydney Film Festival, for example, grew out of screenings organized by the Sydney University film group. In the 1950s, as today, university cinemas and film groups were important sites for the exhibition of non-mainstream, independent and experimental work.

The growing academic interest in Australian film as a legitimate object of study has been due to the efforts of pioneering Australian film scholars like Dermody and Jacka, Chris Long, John Tulloch, Graeme Turner, Ina Bertrand, Tom O'Regan and Albert Moran (I could go on, the list is now a long one). Thanks to them, the tradition of critical discussion and debate surrounding the local film industry and its products is now rich indeed.

Australian film is now highly visible, with news and reviews appearing in a variety of newspapers, magazines and journals. Longer critical articles and interviews with major players can be found in two publications which take Australian film as their primary object, *Cinema Papers* and *Metro*. For anyone genuinely interested in the local industry and local films, the information is out there. There is no longer any justification for the question "What Australian films?" – asked by one contributor to this journal just a couple of years ago. Every year it seems the resources available to students and observers of Australian film and its history are increasing, for which much credit must go to the archivists and researchers at the National Film and Sound Archive and the Australian Film Institute.

Given this available body of material, new productions and publications must be judged on just how fresh or incisive they are. New perspectives on old material, or additions to the sum of knowledge are of course to be lauded, and the space certainly exists for such innovative work. But the temptation simply to recycle existing knowledges, to dress them in colourful new clothes without actually fashioning anything novel, original or substantial in the process needs to be resisted.

This is the problem facing the CD-ROM *Australian Feature Films*, produced by Informit in association with The Australian Catalogue of New Films and Videos Ltd. The novelty of this production is entirely in its form rather than its content. As a filmography or database of Australian films, this CD-ROM adds little to the information available in

Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper's *Australian Film 1900-1977* or Scott Murray's *Australian Film 1978-1994*. The essays which accompany the film listings are sketchy and suffer in comparison with those in *A Century of Australian Cinema*. The only thing the CD-ROM does offer that the books cannot is the collection of short clips from twenty-six films. But even here there is a problem. The clips are poor in quality when played on any but the latest (and most expensive) computers.

McKenzie Wark is correct in everything but grammar in arguing in *A Century of Australian Cinema* that "CD-ROM is a temporary phenomena". The novelty of the technology does not make up for its drawbacks. It is expensive, and image resolution is generally poor. This situation may change over time, but at present the CD-ROM is little more than an interesting diversion. As a research tool, I found *Australian Feature Films* much less useful than the print sources upon which it draws. On this evidence at least, the death of the book is still some way off.

*Ben Goldsmith is a film historian studying at the University of Queensland.*

## A Curious Absence of Loyalty

ROBERT PASCOE

Andrew Moore: *The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League* (Pan Macmillan, \$39.95).

**R**UGBY LEAGUE REMAINS a mysterious code of football to many Australians who live outside its thrall. This handsome and well-constructed local history is particularly welcome in widening the debate between Rugby and Rules. Why a nation with so few cultural and linguistic differences should be divided between Rugby League in Sydney and Australian Rules football in Melbourne has many implications for other aspects of Australian social life.

One is the gendered construction of community. Like other Rugby League clubs, North Sydney's following was traditionally working-class and male. Owing to the strict zoning requirements of the League competition, its players were originally drawn from the maritime and manufacturing indus-

tries which dominated North Sydney before the Harbour Bridge. Their supporters were their workmates and friends, who shared in the masculine brotherhood of the code. Women made up a small fraction of the supporter base, at least until the 1980s.

There were several consequences of this phenomenon. One was that League crowds were surprisingly small. Another was the curious absence of family loyalty to one's club. As the working-class families left North Sydney under the pressure of inner-urban gentrification, they appear not to have taken their loyalty out into the suburbs. Moore comments on the demise of Fitzroy in the Victorian competition, without realizing that all the other inner-suburban clubs throughout Melbourne have survived, partly because families have carried their traditional allegiances out into the leafier neighbourhoods.

A second key difference between Rugby and Rules was the capacity of clubs like North Sydney to develop as commercial enterprises. It was a local Labor Independent who broke the monopoly of the breweries and enabled Leagues Clubs to run their own social amenities, complete with poker machines, thirty years before the same developments in Melbourne. Similarly, a club like North Sydney succeeded in winning a major sponsor (Avco) while the Australian Rules clubs were still tuppence-halfpenny operations. (Of course, even these commercially shrewd clubs were not seduced by Murdoch's inducements in 1995, as Moore narates.)

North Sydney responded to the embourgeoisement of its local community by transforming itself into a middle-class club, chaired by the ABC's ex-Chairman David Hill. (The closest parallel in the Australian Rules competition is North Melbourne.) This was an important development not merely for the club's survival, but rather for the broadened social base for Rugby League itself than such a metamorphosis implied. Rules always had its share of middle-class clubs: their Sydney equivalents played Union, not League.

Whether the game itself can accommodate and maintain the loyalty of this wider social base remains to be seen, especially with the recent success of the Sydney Football Club playing in the national Australian Rules competition. Rugby League is by contrast a relatively static game. Club

histories such as this one do not dwell on changing styles, tactics and skills in the game because little does change from one era to the next. Australian Rules by contrast is an evolving and dynamic code where old skills (the drop kick) disappear and new ones (the offensive handball) emerge with comparative speed.

The codes of Rugby League and Rules have much in common. One is the importance of vernacular discourse (this whole book is like an endless pub narrative), such as the epithet 'Blood-stained niggers' (a nickname for both North Sydney and Essendon); another is the ready acceptance of Aboriginal and other dark-skinned players long before

they were permitted in American professional sport; both codes also have patent political linkages, the rise of Ted Mack in North Sydney a case in point.

Moore questions my own thesis about the playing out of Sydney's brutal military origins in League, but does not propose an alternative explanation. The debate is important, as it gets to some underlying issues within the national culture. This book is valuable in its own right and also contributes to that debate.

*Professor Pascoe is the Dean of Arts at Victoria University and the author of The Winter Game, a social history of Australian Rules football.*





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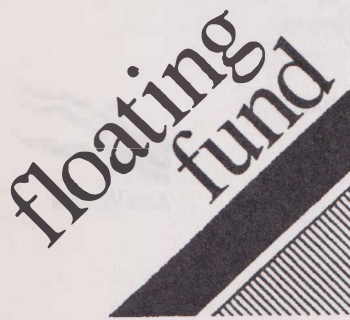
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John McLaren writes: Overland has since its first issue relied on donations from generous readers. The Floating Fund was established in 1960, when in issue number 17 the journal published an appeal for five hundred pounds – a target reached by August, 1961. This sum was needed “to enable us to plan ahead with assurance and certainty over the next year at least.” The appeal became more urgent when the then Commonwealth Literature Fund, after intervention by Prime Minister Menzies, refused a subsidy. Although the journal later received a subsidy, which has continued to this year – we do not yet know about next – the need has never ceased. Stephen Murray-Smith’s words in issue 20 remain true today, subject to amendment for decimals and inflation: “It’s only fair . . . to point out that the generosity of a few individuals is responsible for most of this

sum, and that the pound notes, ten bobs and five bobs are desperately needed in a steady flow. . . Donations are especially welcome in the form of annual pledges. . . ” Our sincere thanks to the following who have responded in the last three months:

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*“ . . . millennial impulses . . . can give focus, excitement and energy to national resolutions like the desire for a republic or the determination to heal national rifts and scars.” Brian Matthews*

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*“Adelaide already had its bookshops, but none like Mary Martin’s.” Julie Lewis*

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*“She was a delicious little thing; her eyes were crescent-shaped, upside down slices of moons that peered perniciously and short-sightedly.” Lau Siew Mei*

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*“There is nothing that doesn’t eventually become soft. There is nothing inside a man’s trousers that is more important than what is in a woman’s head.” Delegate at the International Women’s Conference*

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*“The gaps between Aboriginal and settler cultures remain immense, the communication barriers at times insurmountable, the social problems bewildering. But the book remains defiantly hopeful . . . ” Tom Griffiths*

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