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RETREAT OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT
JENNIFER MAIDEN'S *BLOOD JUDGE*
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overland
Temper democratic, bias Australian
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Temper Democratic

"UNEMPLOYED AT LAST!" With these immortal words, which open the novel from which *Overland* took its motto, 'Temper democratic, bias Australian', Joseph Furphy identified a central aspiration of Australia's democratic impulse. He did not of course mean that Australians should be without jobs, and would have been among the first to condemn the obscene policies of the economic rationalists who, seeking an abdication of government, leave everything to the market, with the consequent destruction of hope for the individual, the strength of communities at home and in the workplace, and the independence and identity of the nation. As Furphy's biographers point out, he himself worked all his life, first for his family, then in succession for himself, his brother and children.

The words of Furphy's narrator, Tom Collins, reflect the excitement of escaping the oppressions of bureaucratic hierarchies and of the petty tyrants and opportunists who come between the job and the real work. Freed of their controls, Collins is able to give himself to his real work: the assemblage of his diaries and the presentation to the world of his conclusions about the meaning of life. Although Furphy shows him as deluded, his elaborate theories preventing him from recognizing what is actually happening around him, Collins is in many ways a parody of Furphy himself. Yet, for all its elements of parody, the novel is serious in endorsing Collins' dedication to the life of the mind, through both scepticism and speculation; of society, in his ease with others from all stations of life; and of the spirit, in the compassion that despite his folly illuminates his narrative and transcends its exclusions.

John Barnes, in *The Order of Things* (OUP, Melbourne), his meticulously detailed biography of Furphy, shows the centrality of writing to Furphy's life, and the dedication to his art that enabled him to escape into it from the tedium of daily work, the emotional failure of his marriage and the calls made on his physical energies by the needs of his family. Julian Croft, in *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins* (UQP, St Lucia), analyzes in Furphy's work "the deep division in his imagination between his democratic aspirations and his display of learning", or between the author's democratic aspirations and Collins' Tory leanings. But this conflict can also be explained as the application of Australian scepticism to intellectual and social pretension. The book's ultimate democracy is the way that it sets all the traps for its readers while leaving them to make final judgement on the actors as well as on their affairs.

Collins himself does, of course, try to bully us into accepting his opinion of the outsiders: Scots, English, Chinese, and anyone else who fails to pass the test of genuine Australian mateship. But his mates are severe in their condemnation of each other, as soon as they are out of earshot, while in the central episode of the novel, the search for the lost child, all types, even the otherwise excluded Aborigines, are united in common endeavour. The lost child, symbol of innocence trapped in the maze of a hostile environment, has been emblematic of the Australian experience – Phil May's 'Little Boy from Manly' comes to mind as a political version of the image – and could be taken as a metaphor for Collins himself. Furphy however chooses to place his emphasis on the child's loss as a product of intolerance and of the delusions of self-importance, and on the unity elicited by compassion in the face of adversity. Furphy's clear-eyed humour, and his perception of the purposeful solidarity of a diversity of people engaged in the search, provide a sounder basis for an ideal of democracy than does Lawson's often defeatist concept of bush mateship.

Although Furphy shared many of the prejudices of his time, his tolerance based on a scepticism towards all pretension, and his recognition of the strength, skill and understanding that can be found in the least pretentious of people, enable his work to exceed its geographic and historic boundaries. Paddy MacNamara's instructions, published in this issue, on how to muster the Flying Fox country, show the kind of understanding of place that arises only from hard and skilled work, and is now sadly neglected by theorists and polemicists of all varieties. Like the Aboriginal hunters and gatherers before him, Paddy MacNamara and his generation of stockmen, many of them Aboriginal, made the land their own not by rules of law but by the right of dwelling fully in it in mind and body. The possibility of reconciliation with the first dwellers rests on mutual recognition of this right, just as MacNamara's words earn their place by their unpretentious understanding of an ancient relationship. They share with Furphy, and with such contemporary poets as Judith Wright or Les Murray (at his best), a vernacular that expresses the extraordinary achievements of the ordinary. Bruce Dawe and ΠO are among the few who can do the same for the relationships produced by urban reality.

In adapting Furphy's motto for the new journal, Stephen Murray-Smith, the founder of *Overland*, wisely omitted the word 'offensively'. His background inclined him to a belief in the politics of community rather than the rhetoric of offence, and its corollary of military aggression. He was a man of his time in sharing with the other founding supporters of *Overland* the hope that the Russian Revolution, eighty years ago this year, provided the model and the agent for the liberation of the toiling masses of the world. Today, with the Soviet Union dismembered and extinguished, its ideology discredited, and its practices exposed as tyrannical, these hopes seem naive at best, treacherous at worst. Yet, in Eric Hobsbawm's words, the revolution, "with all its brutality and excess, will not be wished away by retrospective (or prospective) denunciation. It must be understood."

Such understanding must take into account the enormous support the Revolution enlisted at home and the idealism it aroused abroad. For a time it did seem that the masses had thrown off the shackles of Tsardom and its ramshackle bureaucracy and won their freedom. In the work that Hobsbawm is reviewing, *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891–1924*, the author, Orlando Figes, argues that the first stage of the revolution was indeed a success, and that the Bolsheviks won the subsequent civil war, "in spite of a comparable ruthlessness, brutality and terror against peasants and workers on both sides, because the workers and peasants . . . rejected the side that would bring back the days before the Revolution." Yet, during its first five years in power, the Party that commanded the loyalty of the masses also built the means of dictatorship that led to the destruction of the peasantry and the imposition of state terror. That, in Figes' terms, constituted the tragedy of the people. The Party's continued proclamation of the original ideals of the revolution hid the extent of this tragedy from its supporters abroad.

TO UNDERSTAND THIS global appeal of the communist ideal we need to recognize the perceived weakness of democracy in the earlier part of this century. Fascism had strong support in the western world, succeeding in Italy and, later, Spain, and in many of the countries of eastern Europe. Tom Garvin, in *1922: the Birth of Irish Democracy* (St Martins, New York), a work as important to theorists of national-

ism as to historians of Ireland, shows what a hard and in many ways unlikely victory democracy achieved in the Irish Republic. The Great Depression and the consequent horrors of the Second World War showed the inability of democracies to control capitalism or to sustain the welfare of their own people.

The idea of a liberation movement controlled by a dedicated vanguard had, and continues to have, significant appeal. Its failure in Australia had much to do with the economic prosperity of the postwar years, but it also owed much, as Murray-Smith soon came to realize, to a scepticism towards all authority that he shared with the Australian people. The democratic assertion of the *Overland* masthead was thus aimed as much at the authoritarian leadership of the Communist Party as at the bland and timid regime of the Menzies government.

The fact that the international Communist movement is now thoroughly discredited does not, however, mean that democracy has been proven successful. The spectre that now stalks it is not Communism, but triumphant capitalism. Certainly, some kind of market economy seems necessary to liberal democracy, but the market alone neither guarantees nor needs democracy. Capitalism has proved that it can thrive with authoritarian governments or worse in parts of Asia, it condones environmental and human degradation in Nigeria, it is unable to ameliorate problems of poverty and population in India or Latin America, and even in developed countries it produces worsening disruption and social alienation. As Sean Scalmer shows elsewhere in this issue, class divisions still control access to power, and Gore Vidal has argued that the power of wealth in America is now such that the United States can no longer be considered in any sense a democracy. Yet if democracy is to exist anywhere, we must consider not only these global issues, but as importantly what it means at the local level, and to what extent individuals can participate in their immediate communities. These questions cannot be answered by appealing to formal mechanisms, but by considering both the obstacles placed by the state or by the neighbourhood on the opportunities extended to dissenters and minorities, and the extent to which formal and informal institutions of community can thrive. The answers to these questions are not comforting.

Despite the contribution of the Internet to multiplying the opportunities for individuals to participate in the exchange of ideas and in political action, access to this system remains unequal, and outside it, despite expanding technologies, public debate is increasingly monopolized. In the press and the mass media, angry, simplistic responses are preferred to complex argument or the subtleties of art. This climate nurtures bigotry and encourages the closed community, seeking scapegoats rather than causes for its problems. The emphasis on competition among producers and the abolition of job security destroys community in the workplace, as well as ignoring the collective nature of industrial and intellectual production. The assault on the unions, and the reduction of professions and institutions to service providers, remove alternative sources of community. The supposed focus on the family to the exclusion of society, and the narrowing focus of welfare benefits, trap the most vulnerable in the cycle of poverty and dependence while forcing others to seek security and physical safety in exclusive private ghettos. Christopher Skase becomes the prophet of the new social order.

In this depressing fag-end of another century, the role of *Overland* and like-minded journals is critical in maintaining an awareness of human possibilities and in publishing work that seeks to understand our past and confront our present without illusion. The hopes of the Russian Revolution were destroyed not only by the brutality of those in power, but also by the failure of idealists to confront this truth. In the words of Nadezdha Mandelstam, the best of the past will be preserved and the future obtained only as we learn to hope against hope. We have never had to maintain our hope in Australia against the desperate odds that she faced in Russia, although many among us have done so before beginning new lives here. Yet now we have a government that, while sacrificing our culture and industry on the altar of global competition, wants to compensate by leading us back emotionally into the insecurity of the years when we tried to shut ourselves from awareness of the outside world or of fear and misery at home. To regain our hope, we need to return to Furphy's robust faith in the ability of ordinary people to work together in adversity, his scorn for pedants and snobs, and his rich enjoyment of human absurdity.

JOHN McLAREN

TOM HEENAN

The Block

I WAS A WATCHER. I thought I didn't belong so I watched. By watching I imagined a place into life. That is how places live and watchers survive.

The patch I watched over had it all. Struggle. Humour. Survivors. Women who cried, teased and held families together. Men who worked hard, drank to forget, but always seemed to remember. And children who probably knew too much, too soon. There was crime, but most of the criminals had honour; and there was death. Even as I walk it today, I hear the voices and their stories, although the tellers are gone and I live elsewhere.

I was from the caste of Catholic hoteliers who were commonplace in Collingwood throughout the 1950s and 1960s. There were the Kearneys at the Raglan, the O'Gormans at the Peel, the Reardons at the Renown and the MacNamaras at the Powell. We were from the British Crown. If you go down Smith Street today, you won't find it or its patrons. The old bloodhouses with their swills and beery yarns are now trendy bistros, where suited salesmen and solicitors tell different lies from those told by Murphy, Chook, Gus and Johnny Kimpton thirty years ago. They played to their audience for free.

If you cross over Mason Street and head towards Victoria Parade, you may find a step. It was outside the auction room that's no longer there. I used to sit there and watch. Two doors up was Solomons, the newsagents, where Uncle Jim read his girlie magazines. Bill the Barman told me that, and he knew everybody's business. Next door was the Antonios' fruit shop. They were blamed for everything on the wrong side of the ordinary. I remember a Monday night when there was no Pick-a-Box or electricity. My father said, "Must be the Antonio kids." The next morning's *Sun* had a photo of Claudio in a hospital bed. He'd chased a pigeon into the local power station. Twenty years on he was – for a day – the Russell Street bomber. But he was too petty, too friendly, and – in his way – too honourable for that.

Across Smith Street, in Fitzroy, lived the Rush with his mother and brother. His house, along with Mrs Leddingham's, Dr O'Sullivan's and my father's mate, Alf O'Brien's, no longer stand. They were double- and triple-tiered Victorian terraces, knocked down by scabs who drank alone. The houses had grandeur and pasts. Squizzy Taylor lived in one of them, according to Aunty Nell. Only one survived. It was a brothel at the time the others went. I saw some of the scabs – amongst others – go in there. I watched and wondered why it stayed, but never found out.

I saw my first big car crash on the corner of Smith Street and Victoria Parade. A woman was killed. Later, I would sit and wait for Diane Streader there. Once she had come and gone on her way home from school, so would I. I only wanted to watch her. And why spoil the illusion that she may, when in all probability she wouldn't.

As you walked down Victoria Parade from the corner, there was the Jensen's house. Graeme lived there when he was a good footballer. Thirty years on he is a dead petty criminal. Even as a kid he didn't like the police. Two doors down lived Mrs Mobilo. Her son was once an axe murderer on *Homicide*. When he visited mum we always stared at him. He was a real celebrity.

Next to the After Care Hospital was a hamburger shop. My father lived there with his sisters when he first moved down from Bacchus Marsh. When he went for a drink at the local in Smith Street, he met my mother. She was behind the bar with Aunty Nell and Uncle Pat. Legend has it that she was dux of Star of the Sea and a budding Judy Garland. Other legends have it that he was a promising footballer

with a good job in the post office. I remember him as a quiet painter of farm machinery whom everybody wanted to know. Later I thought I knew why.

As you turn into Cambridge Street, there stands the Powell. The Chamings drank there. They were union men – Painters and Dockers. One of them was shot dead in the lane behind the hotel. Union politics was brutally swift in voting out its members. From that time on there was always the fear of violence in the bar.

Susan Isherwood's father was a union man too. I heard Aunty Nell say he was a 'commo'. Susan was the girl most likely, aggressively sexual. She made me feel uncomfortable, so I watched from a distance. One day she grabbed Strass's crutch while kissing him. Months later she moved and nobody said why, except Bill the barman. "Fourteen and preggers," he moaned, and walked off shaking his head.

The Cambridge Street State School was our dreamland. In its playground Sam roved like Mickey Bone, the Ant kicked goals like Terry Waters and the Rush bowled like Davo. Somebody said they'd seen Stacky in Smith Street, so we all batted like him for a week. We were going to be stars. Of course none of us made it.

Louie and Bobby Black played too. Louie was artistic, a skilled drawer of nudes on brick walls. Understandably, he was popular. But he wasn't cut out for the rough and tumble. Bobby lived next door to him in Cambridge Street, and kept an eye on him. "Somebody's gotta look after the little dago," I heard him say once. He left Collingwood soon after and was killed in Vietnam. Louie still lives and draws in Cambridge Street.

Around the corner in Derby Street was an old men's boarding house. My father called it the House of Horrors. He would often go around there with Uncle Pat when someone wasn't answering their door. Afterwards, they'd go to the morgue and identify the body. When I was older, I went with Uncle Pat to identify Old Lalla. His eyes were frozen in fright, and his jaw was where it shouldn't have been. I never went again. The pub buried Old Lalla, amongst others. Loyalties were always repaid.

As you turned back into Smith Street from Derby Street and looked up towards Victoria Parade, you saw the old vicarage. The last vicar was murdered there, and his killer hanged. When Ryan and Walker were on the run, the house was deserted. At night there were noises from inside, but nobody was game to check. The Ant said the place was haunted, while Strass saw a white lady in the garden when he looked through a crack in the fence on a moonlit night. Aunty Nell said it was "them", while Dad said "just mind your own business." One hot afternoon. police came from everywhere with their guns ready. They smashed a few windows, kicked in a door. and did a lot of yelling. Eventually, they marched out about a dozen harmless metho drinkers. One kept falling over. He couldn't walk with his hands by his side, let alone with his arms stretched upwards. Still, the cops persisted and the pub's chorus laughed. A few weeks later the vicarage was demolished. A box-shaped warehouse replaced it.

IF YOU LOOK OUT FROM Smith Street, over Mason Street and Abbotsford, you can see Kew and the Dandenongs. Sam lived half-way up Mason Street. We lived in the pub at its peak. He was always "goin' up Smith Street", while we were always "goin' down" it. He once said to me, "You think you're better than everybody else, especially when yer cousins are around." I didn't answer. He was older and my hero. I began to realize that I had a bedroom, and he had a couch by the kitchen table. With his parents and three sisters, he lived in a squat two-bedroom terrace.

Behind them lived the Rusts in a draughty and rat-ridden weatherboard. One morning Mrs Rust asked Sam and me to check a 'dero'. She said he was asleep in the lane at the back of her place. He was dead and fungal.

Down from Sam lived Val. She was probably in her mid-thirties, but it was hard to tell. She painted over her wrinkles and tucked in her tummy. She was all bum and bust. Val was the first woman I ever heard say "If you've got it, flaunt it." The trouble was, she was rapidly losing it, and it was all she thought she had. One night, when I was in the bar and older, she asked if I had a girlfriend. When I said "No", she asked if I'd know what to do with one. anyway. She pushed herself forward and invited me to come down and see her. At the time, her husband was in gaol. When he came out, he dragged me off the street to shift their bed. "We're goin' to have some fun tonight," he said, "but you wouldn't know much about that, wouldya?" I just laughed it away. I was convinced he was madder than her. I wasn't at the stage of understanding that

they were human. Instead, I was glad that I was better than them, although I often fantasized about her. Lust is a great leveller, especially when you're sixteen.

It certainly was for Tommy Ball. He once took the pub's hose from the side fence, only to apologetically return it. "Paddy," he said to my mother, "I'm sorry, but I can't help meself." Tommy was a top-ten criminal in his heyday, but nobody in the pub cared. "Only a police matter," declared Gus. Later Tommy ran off with Dot's thirteen-year-old daughter. After that Dot just drank and smoked all day. She spent the rest of her life trying to die, while we watched. Finally, she did and the pub buried her. The usually urbane Johnny Kimpton was heard to mutter at the grave, "I hope they get the bastard." Tommy was now an outcast.

At the back of the pub were the furniture factory and the coal yard. At three o'clock each afternoon, carpenters and blackened figures would run to the pub's side door, throw down a quick one, and run back to work.

The toilets were also at the back of the pub. If you were in the schoolyard and late for tea, it was best to take a short-cut through them. When I was young, I was stopped by a large, bushy eyebrowed man. "Piss into the bowl," he growled. I don't remember, or have chosen not to remember, much else. I told my father. He was going to "cut the bastard's throat". Years later, I heard Aunty Nell say "He was such a normal little boy, then that." On the way to school one morning, I stood next to him in the tram. I threw up over his bag and ran home. I was given two days off for an upset stomach. For years I looked out for him – sometimes in fear, but more often for revenge.

At three o'clock each afternoon, carpenters and blackened figures would run to the pub's side door, throw down a quick one, and run back to work.

I always crouched behind flimsy partitions or boxes of beer, and listened to the pub-talk. There was some truth in it, but embellishment was its captivating component. If the teller couldn't have power over his story, then he had power over nothing. Gus was a master embellisher. He told his chorus that he bathed in his underclothes because his cockatoo, which sat on the windowsill and watched, was sensitive to nudity. "Why should he look at me, when even I find the sight appalling", Gus said one day. Chook also had a cocky. According to Gus, when they laid Chook out in the lounge after he died, it was brought in for one last look. But it was quickly put back in the yard when it began insulting certain mourners by name, and telling them that they'd get nothing from Chook's will. Lonely men have dogs, while very lonely men have cockies. I heard Gus call them "sheila substitutes". Gus would talk to his cocky about football and de factos, the union and the factory, fishing and shooting, and all things out of the ordinary. His cocky was racist and sexist, spoke well of saints and wickedly of sinners, and knew who Gus's mates were. It should have. It sat at the bar with them each night and listened to Gus's stories. And at ten it would say like a good wife, "I can only go home with Gus." He, the cocky and the chorus are all dead now.

But we were different, according to mum and Aunty Nell. It was why I watched, and had to catch the Mont Albert tram to school. Strass and the Rush went to the tech, and Sam went to the high, while I went to leafy Camberwell and mixed with boys befitting a pub pedigree. The Kearneys from the Raglan and the Reardons from the Renown also came along. We were meant to be thrashed into shape and university by the brothers. Instead, we were novelties. Most Camberwell boys had never been to Collingwood. It was a football team, not a suburb. I pandered to their curiosity by inventing Collingwood atrocity stories. It was here I learnt about the power of myth and the limitations of truth. Collingwood was too much a part of me for me not to become an embellisher. But by being a Camberwell schoolboy, I was not part of it.

In Camberwell we were taught that it was wrong to lie. We were there to be Catholic, middle-class and educated for the professions. Of course, this meant telling the truth. All the families seemed to be professionals. There were solicitors, accountants, teachers, even a dentist, and numerous publicans.

WE WERE GIVEN THE KEY to the pub's side door. No longer was there the need to go through the bar or the toilet. More of life was lived upstairs,

and I now watched from windows. Old neighbourhood friends were scrutinized for habits unbecoming of Camberwell boys. Sam was cast as a "user", the Ant had fleas, Strass never washed and had a "filthy tongue", and Sherry Rust was growing breasts that turned boys' heads. Worst of all she knew it. Increasingly, they weren't allowed upstairs. Instead, the Camberwellians came. And I went to Camberwell to taste middle-class respectability. I dressed like them, had my hair cropped to their standards, and mastered their accent. I was on the way to gentlemanliness, despite neither liking, nor belonging to, their place.

Each night, when I came home from school, I'd watch from an upstairs window. Later, I'd sit on a box of bottles at the back of the bar, hidden from sight but not from sound. But now there were truths to be learnt – God, mathematics and business principles. Literature was last and safely Dickensian. If you had to be a solicitor, minimalist language was a prerequisite, and imagination a disqualification. Upstairs, God was everywhere; in the bleeding heart pictures, the font bowls tacked onto bedheads, the rosary beads hanging from nails, and the cheap plaster statues of the virgin crushing the serpent's head. The brothers said that to love God was to fear him. I loved my mother, but did not fear her. God was easier to understand if you ignored the anomalies, and learnt your lines.

Lonely men have dogs, while very lonely men have cockies.

"Who made the world?"

"God made the world."

"What did God give you?"

"God gave me a body and a soul."

My sister once said a "bottle and a soul". She was a true hotelier's daughter. At school we'd recite the rosary. I listened once from outside the classroom. It was a long solemn groan. Every Sunday, we went to Sunday mass at ten. It was a convenient time. I could listen to Newsbeat at nine, to hear what the sinners had done on the streets the night before. At Sunday lunch, the sermon was mentioned, along with who was there and, more importantly, who wasn't. Life was about learning God's lines and thwarting temptations. As we sat siege-like over the roast, we thought that sin was all around us. Outside seemed horrifying, but exciting. With each mouthful I forced myself to remember, God's fight was the good fight.

So too was the DLP's. McManus, Gair, Kane, Dowling and – of course – B. A. Santamaria were men to be obeyed. They were the Archbishop's helpers in keeping the 'commos' out, and the fatherly Mr Menzies in. The 'commos' were to the north, bayoneting babies and shooting nuns and priests. Sister Loretta had told us so, in grade two. They were also in the bar, talking about "givin' the workin' man a go". When the pub closed on Saturday night, the aunties and uncles would sit around and talk commos. They weren't sure about the Ant's old man, but Sam's father was one, and "as for Mr Strassberg". Vietnam was right, and Cairns was another "soft Commie stooge". Uncle Jim even said there were commos at the Collingwood Football Club. "Thank God," he added, "Tuddy's a Catholic." But I heard Gus say Tuddy was God.

But there were deviant influences too. Nanna Hos came to live with us as children and stayed for ten years. Previously, she had lived in Mason Street with her husband who was once in the British Army. When he died she became ours. At bath times, I'd hear about Dover and the Blitz, the bazaars of Cairo and Aden, and the "black babies" of Colombo. She was loyal to the Queen and Mr Menzies, rather than to Mannix and the DLP, and she liked a good story. As she got older, she'd sit in front of *Coronation Street* and barrack for Elsie Tanner. I'd wonder why. She was the show's Val. For half-an-hour Nan was home. Meanwhile, I would read her English novels and watch her. She was disarmingly different.

I BEGAN TO REALIZE that my father was different too. I was always aware that the pub belonged to my mother's side. My father was often on the other side of the bar, drinking with his sombre-faced mates. There was Nathan Goldie, the bookmaker, the neatly turned-out Alf O'Brien, and the sad-eyed Frank McDonald. My father's favourite was Mick Shelton who always looked a little frayed at the edges. No matter how much they drank, their manner never changed; and if they joked at all, it was done quietly. One night my father said to Uncle Jim that he supported a strike. The rest of the family were outraged. I was doing economics at the time

and suspected his sanity. Our teacher, Mr Burnie, had told us that strikes were wrong, and strikers were 'commos'.

There was a solidarity in Dad's group. All except Mick Shelton had fought in New Guinea. He had won his Military Medal at Flanders, in the Great War, thirty years before. He died in a Fitzroy boarding house with my father by his bed. Dad buried him, came home and, with the others, sat silently drinking.

When we watched war movies, Dad would shake before walking out. Although he went to church, he never took communion or entered the confessional. He never explained why, so I asked mum. "He thinks it's silly to humiliate yourself in front of a priest," she replied. "But," she firmly warned, "don't think you'll take a leaf out of his book."

I asked her what she thought of Vietnam. She didn't answer. A few days later she said to me, "I always wanted a girl, boys have to go to war." At school, Schultz was handing out the 'beat the draft' kits; while at home Aunty Jean's sons tried to sway the other aunties and uncles during after-hours drinking bouts. They were uni students and full of Marx, Mao and the Moratorium. But the oldies believed B.A. Santamaria. They had just voted 'Mac back' to the Senate, and put Whitlam's arrival back three years. But as the body bags came home, and the nightly news turned ugly, even they began to wonder. But still, they obeyed. They were brought up on learning their lines, rather than questioning the words' validity.

Nan's grandson went to Vietnam. Before he left, he'd got Nora pregnant and married her. While he was away, Nan would sit silently in front of the news. Sometimes she'd shift in her chair, or her brow would crease. Nora came to see her every Saturday, but never watched the news with Nan. Usually, she sat swollenly in front of a stereo speaker, listening to 'This is dedicated to the one I love'. She'd always cry. When he came home, Mum and Nan threw a dinner for him. Nan couldn't stop smiling, while Nora couldn't stop crying. But he had hardened. He drank quickly and smoked incessantly. My father said to him, "It's a habit you'll never break."

OUTSIDE, THE BLOCK WAS CHANGING. At night, gangs sat on car bonnets outside the pub, drinking beer and talking about beating up the mods in Balwyn. I watched and listened from my upstairs window. They had a uniform of flared pants and collared tee-shirts. I knew that Sherry had joined the gang. I heard her whine and whimper as a gang member jerked inside her against the auction room wall. One night, the ringleader took a paling from a fence and hit his mate of a few beers before over the head. The police came, but nobody had seen anything. My father always said, "You know nothing if they ask you." Soon the gang moved on, but Sherry stayed. She didn't like boys looking at her anymore. Mum said she could come upstairs, if she wanted to. She did.

In old Mr Wilson's grocery shop, a new crew had moved in. I missed Mr Wilson. We went to the stadium together to watch the Rose and Famechon fights. But a supermarket was opening down Smith Street, and Mr Wilson was getting on. The new crew had long hair and beads, and badges tacked all over them. They usually sat in the lounge bar, talking about Vietnam, blacks, the coming of Gough, the going of Billy, and the whereabouts of their dope shipments. They handed around leaflets on Uncle Ho, John Zarb, workers' revolution and cannabis law reform. Gus asked them why they wanted to change the law on people eating each other. One day he asked Coral from Caulfield who specialized in whale leaflets what she fancied in the last at Flemington. "Thought you'd know," said Gus, "coming from a horse flesh district, yerself." Mum and Aunty Nell liked them, because they were polite, but Uncle Pat worried about who paid their way. He suspected the 'Red Chinese'. I suspected he was as far removed from reality as they were. The only difference was, they offered escape and change, rather than the old 'reds under the bed' rigidity.

Uncle Jim even said there were commos at the Collingwood Football Club. "Thank God," he added, "Tuddy's a Catholic." But I heard Gus say Tuddy was God.

Down in Mason Street, the coal workers were sacked and their storehouse demolished. Strass's house went too. They moved west where the rents were cheaper. A large warehouse was built in Mason Street and an importer moved in. Down in Cam-

bridge Street, the boot factory where Gus worked shut down. He never found another job. "Too old Pat, too old," I heard him say. He was only fifty at the time. The hospital bought a row of terraces and knocked them down for a car park. From the front window of the pub, I watched the old Presbyterian Ladies College go. Gothic splendour gave way to a box-like Masonic hall. On the sight of the Rush's old place stood the Venereal Diseases Clinic. On the other corner of Victoria and Smith, they built a McDonalds which put the local hamburger place out of business. Within a year, McDonalds bought the Jensen's old place, and turned it into a car park.

Soon, the first solicitor moved into Mason Street to be followed by a teacher. I heard Val complain one night about her rent. Within a week she was gone. Sam also moved out. His father packed the family off to Los Angeles. An architect bought his house, and put up a high fence. He opened an office in Smith Street specializing in the renovation of workers' cottages. He filled his garden with 'natives', and within a year the house had disappeared behind them. I heard that he wanted the Rusts out so as he could put a pool in, but they didn't budge. One night he dropped into the bottle shop for his daily drop of red. I heard him tell Uncle Pat that Collingwood had "a communal ambience". Later, Uncle Pat told Gus. "Sounds like bullshit to me," said Gus, "but I'll ask me cockie, anyway."

Just before I left school, my father pulled me aside. "There's going to be a spread in the family," he said, "we all can't go on like this." Within weeks, Nan's heart gave out. I walked the block that day worrying about her. I walked it the next mourning her.

Within two years Mum was dead. We thought she had hepatitis, but her liver was full of cancer. I'd just passed an exam and was full of the future. I was going to tell her all about it. Instead the doctor told me that she had no future. I sat with her for an hour after being told. I watched the clock and made small talk. The last time I saw her, her eyes rolled back in her head and her mouth was stretched open. I thought of Old Lalla. After she died my father hugged me. Later he said, "I'm staying alive for you." I never went back to my course. Instead, I hid in a government department, photocopied, and read Russian and French novels. For a while I escaped to London. When I came back, Gus walked up to me, shook my hand, and said "Welcome home." The morning Mum was buried he also shook my hand, but said nothing. He just looked into my eyes and turned away.

We never realized how much we depended on her. The void was immense. Aunties tried to be mother, uncles tried to be joint-fathers, and my sister and I tried to be barman and housekeeper. I had little idea what to do, despite my watching. But there was always helpful advice from the other side of the counter, especially if the change was short. I listened to Gus's 'remember when' stories. One day he asked whatever happened to that Collingwood rover, Mickey Bone, and I thought of Sam. I told the time by Johnny Kimpton. He'd arrive at four, and quietly sip on a pot. At six he'd buy a packet of potato chips for tea. At eight he'd start following me, saying, "Ah! but she was a marvellous woman." At ten he'd go home.

I EAVESDROPPED ON THE GOSSIP of the world revolutionaries in the lounge. One day I heard Julian say that there was "no working class consciousness in Australia". He, as usual, was in the wrong bar. But their dope shipments were running on time. After eight they'd giggle through their agendas. Slumped at the bar were weary women hoping for one more fling. At night they'd sit, sip and dream in front of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.

After two each day I'd escape. I'd lock myself in an upstairs room, put my feet up on the windowsill, watch and read Dickens. Somebody had locked his complete works in a cabinet and forgotten about them. After the pub closed there was money to be counted, floors to sweep, benches to wipe and stories to listen to. Then, I'd head upstairs to see what Pip and Miss Haversham were doing.

From then on the pub and I drifted. The government job broke the routine, but Collingwood was changing. Public bars were becoming bistros, and the old generation was either leaving or dying. God botherers bought the House of Horrors. They put the rent up and the old men moved out. Young, stay-at-home professionals moved into the block. The public bar was emptying, while the world revolutionaries were talking of Eltham, mud bricks and getting a nine-to-fiver.

I still didn't realize that life was about loss and coping with it. I thought that if you lost something, you went out and got another one. It was a dangerous attitude for a detached watcher to have. Except for Mum and assorted aunties, women were

foreigners. Of course, those you grew up with were exceptions. They were just there, and you got along with them. Camberwell only prepared you for a boys' own life. Not surprisingly, many of the old school's puritans turned into rampant rooters at university. I once brought a girl home, but she was frisked for signs of unsuitability. The poor girl wasn't a Catholic, and didn't act like a virgin, either. Her faults were pointed out after she left. When I pleaded that she was "only a good friend", Aunty Nell said, "It's friends like that, that get you into trouble." My father always said, "Keep your footwork moving."

But that was about to change. Con was a con who wanted to be a Constance. She was my mum substitute, the so-called replacement model; a butter-wouldn't-melt-in-the-mouth type with an eye for an acquisition. But she had a temper when life or the acquisitions weren't running her way. She was also company. She was a good talker, and a shocking listener, but she was always there. It was never love, only routine. When Aunty Jean asked me what love was, I said "Respect." She shook her head and walked away. My father now kept asking if I was going to marry the girl. One night he implored, "For God's sake, get it over with, the suspense's killin' me." He even offered financial inducements to get us to the altar. There was nobody to talk to. The deed was done.

I MOVED AWAY FROM THE BLOCK. Clifton Hill became my new home. It was too quiet. I liked the clutter of Collingwood. I missed the comforting noises of the bar and the Smith Street trams. Sometimes, I'd walk back and say hello to Gus and Johnny Kimpton, and sit with my uncle and father while they ate dinner. I had no interest in gardens or home improvements, or in the Hill's costume dramas. As soon as kids dropped out of the womb, they were decked out in the latest designer gear from London. When they were old enough for parties, they had to look better than Mango, Tantra or Dravidia. When Seb was three he went to a party in his first Panama hat. Each child performed tricks for their parents. When they threw fruit salad at each other they were sharing; and when they yelled, they were only being creative.

The Hill's dinner parties were not much better with their talk of fine wines, renovations, the latest tarot card findings, and the career path. Luke was an artist turned teacher who married Peckie, a teacher turned artist. In time, both would be unemployed. They built a studio in their backyard and drew torsos. We often went there for dinner with Dave and Jackie. One night Luke asked if we'd heard about the mucus method of contraception. I looked into my handkerchief and was kicked under the table. When I told Dirk, a drinking mate from elsewhere, he suggested that I'd been reading too much Williamson. So I didn't tell him about the torsos. Dave asked which one was Bimbo's. "Oh! that one," said Luke pointing to a large-breasted figure. After that I noticed that Dave nestled up to Bimbo at other dinner parties. I wondered what went on between them. It was hard to shake off the block's habits.

The public bar was emptying, while the world revolutionaries were talking of Eltham, mud bricks and getting a nine-to-fiver.

One Sunday, the phone rang. My father was found on the bar's floor unable to move. Two weeks later a tumor was cut from his brain. Three weeks after that another was sliced from his lung. As he lay in intensive care he whispered, "The next time I get any bright ideas . . ." He lived on for two years. Each day I'd walk to the Studley Park hospital, and watch him die. Often we'd sit and say nothing. Then at the end he'd say, "Thanks . . . see you tomorrow."

One Monday morning the phone rang. He was dead. I sat alone in a room for days, but came out to go to the funeral. I'd never seen the priest before, but he was a mate of my father's. I didn't know half the men who pumped my hand and said they'd heard so much about me. The priest said, "We who were with him in New Guinea owe him so much." The debt was their secret, and remains so. I felt proud but hollow. I went back to the block and walked it. I tried to remember how it was. I wished it back.

Two months later the pub was sold, and I walked out of it for the last time. Gus shook my hand and said nothing. The contract was signed, the deed was done. And then the money problems. You don't deserve this, and we deserve that. I rarely talk to my mother's side now. I go to their funerals to remember how they were.

Every now and then I'd go back to the block, particularly when I was a bit lost on the Hill. The routine began to falter in the marriage, and I walked out. Opposites don't attract. They just argue, and end up hating each other.

Months later I walked down Smith Street. There was now a Safeway in an almost gutted building. There were opp shops, boutiques and Asian groceries. I met Gus and Johnny Kimpton. "The new bloke threw us out," said John. "Said we didn't dress well enough." Gus added, "Yeah, things have changed." They drank at the Grace now. It was the only pub in the street that would have them.

One afternoon, I went back and sat in the old schoolyard. It had changed. It was little more than a carpark now. It seemed smaller, not as vital. I realized that there were no constants in life, only change. As I walked up Mason Street, I saw that Gus's place was up for sale. Nan's house was no more, and neither was Val's. The Rusts' place was also gone, and they'd pulled down the pub's old toilets. I met Louie on the corner. He still lived in Cambridge Street. "Come up, come up, have a beer," he said. "Sam's back, and the Rush's in town." They met every Saturday in the old pub. They talked about the old times, before heading off to watch the Maggies.

I never went; and I don't walk the block much now. I'd learnt its lesson. Dispossession was a way of life.

WHAT THE PAINTER SEES

mixing pigments with water onto
heavy soft paper   he showed me how
yellow and blue   ochre and cobalt
make greens

so light might shine through
my grandfather's eyes trying to
adjust to this new element

he asked himself how paints
could shape the difference
in this south so nearly the same but
brighter   more windy   something refracted
in the broken surfaces

only the outpost
islands of Europe have this
breathtaking and breathless
ocean rush

on the coast he made his home
it flowed like water
across the contours of stone   dripped and
  shone
from the hard leaves   oozed
out of soft honey-coloured rock   lay
outstretched over warm sand

brush-stroke by brush-stroke the waves took on
the colours of welcome   a beach made by hand
a tree   a fence   a house
clothes on the line   a door open

LEE CATALDI

ROSALEEN LOVE

In the shade of an argusia bush I sat down and raved

I SETTLE IN A LARGE SANDY HOLE previously excavated by a turtle. Above me the pale green furry leaves of an argusia bush provide some shade. The south-east trade wind blows softly from the Coral Sea. Before me white shingle shelves steeply down into clear blue-green water. A large white black-masked gannet and its equally large fluffy white chick peer from their makeshift nest on the high water line. The heady whiff of coral cay rises from guano-encrusted sand.

I am on French Territory, Renard Island in the Chesterfield Islands some 800 kilometres north-east of Noumea. Yesterday morning a French military jet zipped by and took a swift look at us, and later a helicopter camouflage-painted in brown and green flew out to examine us more closely. Last week we cruised out of Gladstone on a luxurious charter ship, the *Spirit of Freedom*. It is early December 1995, and we have not heard the latest news from Muroroa. Our expedition leader Jim Charley has obtained the necessary permission for us to sail to the French Economic Exclusion Zone in the Chesterfields, at least from the French High Commission in Canberra, but the information may not yet have reached the skies above Noumea. We like to think we are worrying the French, just a little.

On the trip there've been plenty of anti-French jokes. As we approached Sandy Cay, a small patch of sand barely visible above the high water mark, the skipper commented: "Look what's left of Tahiti after the French got to it."

If as I sit in the shade of an argusia bush, I turn and look at the flat expanse of the island I see hundreds of thousands of nesting sooty terns. This place must be like Muroroa before the French, or the Monte Bello Islands before the British bombed them, or Johnson Atoll before the US government decided this was the place for a high temperature intractable waste incinerator. There is something about a coral atoll which seems to inspire acts of mindless violence against birds. Boobies do not nest on the banks of the Thames, nor noddies in the streets of Paris. To the military mind an uninhabited island the other side of the world represents target practice. Some local people got in the way of some of the tests, but that has been officially regretted. No one pretends to regret the birds.

Three years ago a cyclone centred on the Chesterfield islands. Most of the birds unable to fly would have died in the wind and rain. What we saw here were populations of birds at all stages of the nesting cycle, in the process of recovering from natural disaster. At Avon Island a rough estimate of nine terns per square metre of nesting site gave a bird population of 400,000.

One evening at Avon Island we leave a group of terns sitting on eggs. Next day we find newly hatched chicks taking their first perilous steps. They toddle along oblivious to the harsh fact that one wrong step into a neighbour's territory may lead to ferocious attack. Many chicks do not survive this hard first day of life. Though one parent tern took a second chick, not its own, under its wing for protection. Kathy spotted this and captured it on film. She is a professional wild-life photographer and this act of avian altruism made her day.

The chicks congregate together at their different stages of development. After they leave the nursery there is less territorial mayhem. The chicks are larger and adept at getting out of the way fast. Down by the shore a flock of fully fledged young wait for their parents to return from the sea. Avon Island is one extremely busy child-care centre catering for all stages from creche to university, with special attention paid to teaching the harsh lessons of existence to the very young.

I have my flock before me. This is the place from which to start a new world religion. First tenet: ban the bomb. My flock will follow me. Then I shall have to preach the Golden Rule to sooty terns hell-bent on murderous assault: 'Do unto others . . .' On second thoughts, forget it. Preaching to birds is . . . strictly for the birds.

The shape of the Chesterfield island and reef system accurately reflects the shape of the submarine surface upon which the corals are growing. Here corals grow to the light from the rim of a subsiding sea mountain. Further south the submarine mountain chain rises to the surface in Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands.

Under us, the mountain. Around us, the reef. Within the Chesterfields you look out and see a horizon of islands and white water breaking on reef. We are at the centre of this small universe of sea and sky and birds. At Loop Island we anchored in water so clear that we could see *bêche-de-mer* fifteen metres down sifting their way through sand. Reef sharks crowd in to investigate when the anchor is lowered and the propeller vibrations cease. Some fifteen sharks may call by, including, one day (and I missed it) a huge but harmless tiger shark, a plankton feeder.

The white rim of breakers all round, the sea calm and flat, the waters clear, the blue sky brilliant above, with this comes the exhilarating feeling of travelling off-planet and arriving at another world. We have sailed to the islands that lie beyond the Great Barrier of the Reef into another place. We are halfway to the Islands of the Blessed.

In this other world I float over a coral plateau to the rim of the reef and out over the edge. The reef face plunges steeply down. It is like swimming in the sky. Look up and see the surface of the sea above your head. The waves viewed from below are sculpted with light. Silence reigns.

The cliche of 'the coral garden' gains new meaning in weird ways. The coral garden is a living, sprouting *rock* garden. The plants, the algae, fade into insignificance. It is the rock which boasts whirls and curlicues, coral polyps for flowers, the annual spawn a mass seeding of the oceans. This rock will vigorously defend its territory. The coral polyp extrudes a mesenterial filament which latches onto a too-close neighbouring coral and sucks it dry. Plant-forms also live *inside* this rock. Polyp cavities are lined with single-celled algae, zooxanthellae. These absorb wastes from the animal tissues, catch sunlight, and produce sugars, proteins and oxygen for the living rock.

If I were to write like this about the landscape of a planet in another solar system, who would believe me? It would be a fiction.

Danger is part of the thrill of the other world. Sharks swim by underneath, overhead, at the periphery of vision. Sea snakes make a swift vertical dash from the sea floor to the surface to take in a gulp of air. Sharks, sea-snakes, rays – they pass by, with, for us, no close encounters of the fatal kind. I am suspended as privileged observer of their everyday life. Back home danger is hidden: the sudden car crash, the body in increasing internal disorder, the meteor which falls from the sky.

ONE DAY WE SWAM among manta rays – babies, these at only three metres wing-tip to wing-tip. Adults grow to nine metres across. Here the sense of danger was an illusion. Although the rays had mouths, always open, and large enough to swallow a human whole, they are plankton feeders and will not mistake a human for krill. Fish swim before their open mouths, hitching a ride on the bow wave. The manta rays stayed with us for the afternoon. Anne and I went out snorkelling from the ship to get a closer look. Max, the skipper, figuring we were well on the way to being swept towards South America, leapt into the dingy and shepherded the rays toward us. Over they came, swooping below, wide mouths open, black backs gliding, white wings flapping gracefully, powerfully. For Daniel, for whom auras and the Celestine Prophecy are a fact of everyday life, hitching a ride with a manta ray was the best day of his young life. It was pretty good for the rest of us, too.

C. S. Lewis once wrote that it is one thing to enter another world, quite another to work out what to do afterwards. He was talking about the creation of other worlds in science fiction, where sometimes all the author's effort seems expended in the task of getting to the other world. Then the ideas run out. Equally the notion of 'what to do?' applies to members of our expedition. It is not enough simply to be here, one must be doing something. Hence I sit with pad and paper in the scant shade of an argusia bush. The divers spend endless hours taking their underwater photography gear apart, cleaning and reassembling it in an elaborate communal ritual to which the act of taking photographs some-

how seems secondary. Jim and Jan, Errol and Anne are busy with gear for their research on nutrient recycling on the coral cay.

Myriam, now, she is one person to whom this other world is the everyday world. She has lived on Heron Island for fifteen years as a scientific resources officer for the research station. Myriam dons her dive gear, takes her camera and assorted plastic bags for specimens, and slips into the water with the consummate ease of someone who has done this some 6000 times before. (She gave up counting after 6000 dives.) Each time she surfaces she brings with her a kilo of sand from the lagoon floor and some hydroids for her research collection. The sand is for a researcher who is studying a new phylum of interstitial microfauna. Myriam showed us a delicate drawing of one of the creatures, with its bell shaped body from which tentacles and feelers flow out in octopus fashion.

We enter the other world and we collect things: sand, photos, shells, memories. Between 1804 and 1817 British whalers slaughtered some 15,000 whales a year in these waters. Late twentieth century travellers sight one whale and count themselves highly privileged.

The Chesterfield Islands, named after a British whaler, were discovered by Captain William Bampton of the *Shah Hormazier* and Captain Matthew B. Alt of the *Chesterfield* when they sailed from Norfolk Island in 1793. Their purpose was to explore the passage through Torres Strait to Timor. Bampton gave his name to a large cay in the north of the group. The trip from Norfolk Island to Timor took longer for some crew members. Shaw, the chief officer of the *Chesterfield* took a group of five men ashore in a small boat on an island in the Torres Strait. In the confusion of poor weather, they became lost and had to make their own way across to Timor. Three men survived the trip.

I'd rather be travelling now than then.

Closer to New Caledonia than to Australia, the Chesterfields were later claimed as French territory.

Many of the Chesterfields were mined for guano, contributing to the revolution in chemical agriculture in Europe in the nineteenth century. One island, one of the Avons, was left untouched, and shows what the islands must have once been like. It has a most attractive cliff of phosphatic beach rock, some ten metres high. Still, islands which are supporting a population of 400,000 birds are well on the way to replenishing the guano deposits, given another thousand years.

Matthew Flinders in *A Voyage to Terra Australis* suggested a name for the region: the Corallian Sea.

Within the Chesterfields there is tremendous variation in island and reef shape and size. The Bellona Reefs on the southern extremity are islands in the making. All that is visible above the waterline are some outcrops of dead coral rock. Wind and waves will combine to destroy the point of the reef, but in transferring the broken coral to the rear, they help create a sand flat. Soon beach rock will form, and the sandy area will grow in size and stabilize above the high water mark. The rocky outcrops will join in a circle, enclosing a small lagoon. Birds will stop by, bringing plant seeds in their plumage and digestive tracts. Grasses germinate first, then the low deep-rooted Boerhaavia shrub, later the argusia bush. On Renard Island three small straggly Casuarinas bent low under the weight of some tree-nesting terns. Observatory Island boasted two large coconut palms.

The birds begin building their nests as soon as the sandy cay rises above the high water mark, adding their phosphatic guano to the sand. As the island grows in size brackish fresh water collects underneath and the soil is enriched with dead leaves, guano, and the debris of dead birds. Jim Charley's research charts the relationships between seabirds, ground water, mineralization, and plant-soil cycling.

BACK TO MY HOLE in the shade of the argusia bush. Above my head a red-footed booby chick, soft brown feathers the size of a large domestic chook is not going to move just because I have temporarily claimed this site of turtle excavation for myself. The red footed boobies are known only in this region. French birds, tres chic. They nest in trees and lay one egg only. Ground-nesting boobies lay two eggs from which usually only one chick will survive. The red-footed booby has tree-nesting as a survival strategy but since there are so few trees, it has made a certain choice of ecological niche which limits other choices.

A shady hole large enough to fit a human or three comfortably and easily gives one a certain perspective upon this universe and others.

The argusia bush is commonly known as the octopus bush. Living as it does, as the advance guard

of the greening of a coral cay, it has evolved a brilliant strategy for surviving the single-minded sand-churning activities of female turtles. As one arm dies on the octopus tree, a new branch sprouts from the base of the gnarled dead wood, and eventually the dead branch falls to the ground. I look around and count eight holes around the base of my bush, but dead branches prevent the bush being totally undermined. On Bennet Cay a turtle stuck in an argusia bush could neither go forward nor back. Its skeleton made a shady home for hermit crabs, packed closely in on top of each other in the heat of the day.

On the sands in front of me, on the edge of the tide line, a masked booby and its equally large chick will not move away just because I have arrived. But if I go too close they will squawk extremely loudly. Father has a high-pitched squawk, mother lower and noisier. Baby squawks longest and loudest of all, but this is its only defence.

Further down the beach a small booby chick is feeding itself. It thrusts its small beak well down into its parent's throat and slurps up liquefied fish. There are two pairs of birds with young on this part of the beach. From time to time the adults jab at each other. To a human eye, they have the whole beach upon which they can spread out. But clearly to both sets of parents their place is the best place on the beach, to be defended against all comers. The chicks vibrate their throats, like ululating Arabs, except no noise emerges, just the shiver and shake of feathers on their long necks. Their mouths hang open. Endurance is all, as the day wears on. On the water the fledged booby chicks sit and dip their heads underneath, peering around as if having a private snorkel.

A small plastic bottle of unknown provenance surfaces under my lightly digging fingers. Plastic refuse pops up everywhere, as do small black hopping creatures the size of fleas. They are fleas. Or lice. In the sand beneath, who knows what micro arthropods are lurking, whole small worlds of interstitial fauna. The leaves of the argusia bush are a soft apple green. A small white spider parachutes from a leaf at the top of the bush onto the open page of my book. The turtle who dug this hole will not be back to reclaim it. She will never see her young hatch some three months hence. What if the turtles hatch and I am sitting on them? What if my skin starts crawling with baby turtles? I have been assured it will not happen, not in December.

HIGH IN THE SKY the frigate birds circle. They never alight on the surface of the sea, and either catch flying fish, or harass the boobies and force them to regurgitate their fish. I identify a female lesser frigate, not the greater, by the black bars on its belly. On another argusia bush nearby sits a large juvenile frigate chick, brown faced, hook beaked. Already it is a strong flier, but will not achieve full maturity for two years.

A shark slides by in the shallows. They come in so close to the shore. I read that the stomach contents of white tipped reef sharks in Australian waters are one quarter composed of terrestrial snakes. There are no terrestrial snakes in the Chesterfields. I wonder what this shark eats.

One day we saw copulating turtles. "They can go on for three days", said Len. Kathryn looks through binoculars and reports flippers everywhere. The turtles disappear from sight. Mike says, sadly, "*Turtilis interruptus*."

A small fish lives inside the gut of holothurians, *bêche-de-mer*. It feeds off the gonads. When it wants to leave its host, it exits through the anus, swimming backwards. It is a tidy commensal feeding relationship where the *bêche-de-mer* gut is the table, excess sex cells the food, and the fish in return provides an internal house-cleaning service. What might it be like, to cast one's eye behind and see a fish swimming backwards out of one's nether end? The forces of natural selection have not endowed the *bêche-de-mer* with eyes. Just as well.

The traveller returns from a place as marvellous as this with a sense of both the fragility of this life and its robustness. The Chesterfields have recovered from the man-made disaster of guano mining, and the natural disaster of cyclones. These reefs are far out to sea. They do not suffer the destruction inshore reefs face, with the run-off of fertilizer nutrients from the Queensland coast. Once the Ice Age destroyed much of this reef as the water levels dropped and the corals died back. The Greenhouse effect may cause the oceans to rise, but if the corals can keep pace in their growth, the reef may still be there, if not the islands. There are continual cycles of destruction, with so far, cycles of renewal.

Zoologists are fatalists. This world is as it is now. It will not last.

Rosaleen Love writes about science with a special interest in the history of wrong ideas.

PADDY MacNAMARA

To Muster Flying Fox Country

'Galloping' Paddy MacNamara, born in 1888, stockman, drover and one-time manager of Lissadell Station in the East Kimberleys boasted a famous pioneering heritage. His father, Thomas MacNamara, was the character immortalized by Banjo Paterson as 'Clancy of the Overflow'.

In the north of WA, Paddy continued the hard-living and hard-riding tradition of his family, and it was here that he met members of the Durack family, including my mother, the late Dame Mary Durack. Over the years, from far-flung outposts, he kept up the correspondence with her, his letters full of valuable first-hand information on many bush identities and events which he thought might be of historical interest.

Paddy's memories, painstakingly hand-written, not overly impeded by punctuation and often with no more than a good stab at the spelling, recently came to light while sorting through my mother's voluminous archival collection.

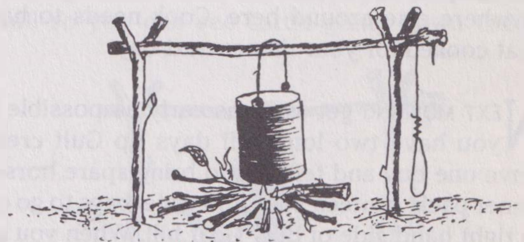
Among his papers the following instructions to his head stockman in the mid 1930s miraculously survive, a minor classic of a sort, detailing a way of life and a vernacular that passed with him and his kind.

Paddy, it will be observed, left nothing to chance.

Patsy Millett

RUN HORSES THROUGH YARD put hobbles on their necks. Let them go again in paddock. Get all packs ready have early lunch about 11am. Get horses up. Saddle all riding horses, soon as finished saddling start packing mules, leave station camp oppasite Mount Chambers on Flying Fox nearly two miles below Alligator Hole.

Next morning four men go up Flying Fox on this side and balance out on other side. Other six go west side out one mile then split two in each party and work up to Bottle Tree plain, where you all come together again. When everyone turns up at this meeting place, start the cattle for Bull Hole, sending three or four with the cattle according to the size of the mob. Two go in and follow up Flying Fox creek. You and the others go up Billy Goat creek but keep out of the creek until oppasite Mt Ambros then go in. Scattered about along the creek here you should get a lot of cattle. Run them out the other side and block them then work around into Bull Hole where you will all meet again. Have dinner here, but if the packs have not come along, muster on to the yard. Tell packs to camp in silver leaf scrub out from yard. After dinner, cut out cows and calves, fat bullocks, fat spayed cows, No 4 and older, any bad sorts of heifers for spayers and about thirty good lively young cattle for coachers[1] for Billy Goat.

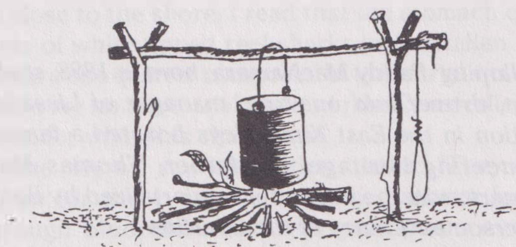


Next morning take all cattle out of yard and cut out fat cows, bullocks and spayers and send them to top paddock. The men who take them in come back that evening. Put your cows and calves in for branding. After you finish branding it should be near lunch time. Take cattle out of yard and cut out coachers for Billy Goat. Someone holds them that evening. You need about thirty spayed heifers and steers and dry heifers. Young cattle in good, strong condition.

Next morning tell packs to go Corner hole for dinner. All hands go with coachers across on to Billy

Goat creek about one mile above Mt Ambros. Cross creek with coachers, take them out on top of ridge about half a mile from creek. All hands go out and look for cattle. Tighten your girth and your own belt as you are on the edge of the wild cattle. You split up into two parties to be not less than four in a party. Do not go up, go out. Do not throw cleanskins[2], earmark and let go. Everything thrown must be put into coachers and left there. After getting back to coachers half go back across Billy Goat creek and up to Goanna hole where you all meet again. Some of you keep just outside of coachers, keep them in sight until you get to Goanna hole. What do not go with cattle go up Barlows creek and this creek runs in at Goanna hole. Go up this creek until you come to a water-hole oppasite Corner hole. Generally get cattle here. If cannot stop them, run them to Corner hole. Coachers should be there now. Corner hole is only about one mile strait in towards point of hill, here only take dinner pack off, have dinner. After dinner start for Billy Goat. Six of you ride ahead of coachers and keep look out for cattle tracks going into creek. As soon as you see fresh tracks go in and find cattle which will be feeding about in the creek. Run them out and move on again until you see more tracks going in. When you get over a rocky cliff you will be on a clear flat. Go in again. You are only one mile from yard now. Packs can now go on. Tell them to camp up on sand flat near Billy Goat hill as you cannot hold your horses anywhere else around here. Cook needs to have meat cooked for your dinner next day.

NEXT MORNING get away as early as possible as you have two long tuff days up Gulf creek. Leave one boy and tell him to bring spare horses. Dinner pack, canteen pack and waterbags to go out on right hand side of Billy Goat hill. When you get about two miles you might strike some cleanskins. You will have to throw them and bump them into the coachers. Move on again all hands going with the coachers. When they settle down start on. When you come to a big sandy creek that is Gulf creek. Cross it onto a flat then go down creek leaving coachers above where you cross. Go down about a mile then cut east and around back to coachers. Move on again all hands going with coachers. Keep out of creek. Go up. Now go in and back a little cross and sneak along the other side where you can see the bottom of the creek. As soon as these cattle see you they will try and get up the creek through the long grass which is very thick. You go at them and force them out. If you can get them out of the long grass and thick bohemia they will run into the coachers. When this mob settle down move on again on the same side over a ridge. Cross a small creek over another ridge. Now turn in and cross a steep creek with long grass and Pandanus. When you get out on top you will be in open country. Now

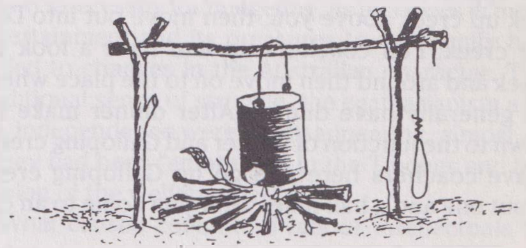


go up to Wrestling dinner camp where the white cleanskin cow nearly horned 'Harriet' and where we wrestled the full eared bullock. The boys know the place. Peter is your main boy. When you get to this place send back to tell fellow with horses which will be following the cattle and stopping every time the cattle stop. Tell them to pull off canteens and bags and leave saddles on mules. In the meantime you and your runners have a look up the creek you have crossed which is over about three quarters of a mile on your right. Go up one mile only then around back where we got the big bullock. It is only about one mile over to the clay-pan hole but do not go there. If you go there you would only mess up tomorrows muster. If you get no cattle go back, have lunch. Start for home everyone going along with the cattle. Do not leave and go looking for cattle when coachers are travelling. If you think there are cattle about pull coachers up either on a ridge or on a clear piece of ground and do not go more than two miles from them when looking for cattle. Also do not split up as it takes not less than five to run ten head of cattle to coachers, two on each side and one on the tail. The boy on the tail must not force the tail too much. Once you get them running towards the coachers keep well out from them. One must be up oppasite the lead but well away from the cattle until your coachers come in sight. Then all hands close in and force them into the coachers as they will break back in ones as soon as they see

them. Make your cattle move along as quick as possible without running them, but take them easy over the stones especially crossing stony gulleys and you have about four miles of stone and gulleys to cross going home. If cattle will not travel put the horses in the lead and someone in the lead of the horses. Do not let wild cattle get too long a string-on. Block the lead until the tail comes up otherwise you will have a smash. Just the same, do not check the lead too much.

Next morning out the way you came in. On way home five ride in the lead and when you get to where you came across Gulf creek the day before you keep on the left hand side. You cross a big creek that runs out to your left keep on going making for the clay-pan hole. When you get within half a mile of clay-pan stop your coachers on a red clear piece of ground. You and your runners go in and cross Gulf creek down below clay-pan hole, which is at the junction of two creeks and under a hill on the far side. You are likely to strike bullocks standing in the hole and also in the junction of the two creeks. Beyond the hole is two miles ruff country and a big tea-tree scrub. If cattle in this junction get their heads turned that way Christ himself could not turn them so approach this junction from the far side and soon as cattle move go strait at them and carry them off their feet until they hit the coachers. If no cattle, have a bit of a look round. Do not delay too much as you have more likely places to look at. Anything over a mile above this hole is out of reach. When you get back to the coachers go strait out and tell Peter to take you to where we wrestled the big barren cleanskin cow. This dinner camp is on a creek near a big bottle tree. Have a look close around here while others are boiling billy. After dinner go out on ridges nor'-east and work around back into creek where you left coachers in a radius of two miles. As soon as you get back to coachers start for home. Not so much stone this evening but plenty of thick scrub and long grass. And you are likely to strike little mobs of cattle. When you cross Kangaroo creek bear a bit to the right and you should miss the heads of a lot of nasty stony gulleys. After you get round the gulleys come back a bit to the left, which will bring you alongside Billy Goat hill.

NEXT MORNING you go up Billy Goat creek, now your cattle will be getting pretty sore, but you have a short day and soft ground. You should be home about four and may have to kill. Your last killer was the day you got to Flying Fox yard and you will not have time to kill tomorrow. This day you go up to Billy Goat creek pull coachers up on Big Bottle. Go over to Kangaroo spring and come up-stream. If no cattle back to coachers, cross Billy Goat creek where there is a high hill on the other side. Go around this hill and you will find a small clearing close to the hill. Leave coachers here. Just outside of where you leave coachers there is a small creek. Up this creek two miles and out on the other side you are sure to get cattle. You could go out twice from this spot. Now you move on going down and a little out. Go on about a mile over a bit of a ridge. Have dinner near a hill fairly open country. After dinner all go with coachers working around towards home. You will hit a small creek follow it down very scrubby may be mickys[3] here. Next morning cook and horse tailers go to Flying Fox yard. Leave someone bring your spare horses and dinner canteens as usual. All hands go with coachers out into Barlows creek where the hills stop. Go round the hill into creek and put coachers near creek on hill side. Go over hill and keep outside of it all the way until you come to Barlows spring. Generally a mob there and they are bad cattle and will do their best to get out over the hill towards Billy Goat. One man starts them and follows the tail without forcing them. One is enough on the right hand side, the rest of you keep on top of hill so you can see cattle going down creek.



Every now and then these cattle will try and get out over the hill but you push them back. Once they get out on top you can say goodbye to them you will never get them to coachers as they will split in ones once they get on top. If these cattle are not at spring they may be down the creek, and across from where you have the coachers is a good place for cattle on the right hand side of creek going down. There is a bottle tree there growing out

of the sandstone. After you take your coachers across and have a look move on down to Sandstone hole, which is about one and a half miles from where you pulled the coachers up first on the left hand side going down. There is a big wattle scrub and there should be cattle in it. When you get to Sandstone hole have dinner. After dinner go out over the sandstone, travelling towards hot water spring. Pull up when you get over the sandstone on a flat about one and a half miles out. Have a look round here then strait for Flying Fox yard. All hands going with coachers, one can ride along on each side but must keep coachers in sight so if anyone sees cattle he can trot back and tell you. Swing your coachers towards them, you and your runners work around them. You should be back at yard about sundown.

Next morning brand everything and send them to top paddock. Cut out the coachers you took from here. You and the boys should know most of them. If they are not too burred up you can use them for Flying Fox. Otherwise you will have to trust to stopping the first mob you get, they are not too bad up that way now. You muster up Flying Fox from hot water spring out. Boys know where we stop for dinner. After dinner all hands go with coachers cross Soda creek go up on top of Snappy Gum ridge. Pull up and have a look around here, then strait for home down past Black Knob. About this knob you may get cattle.

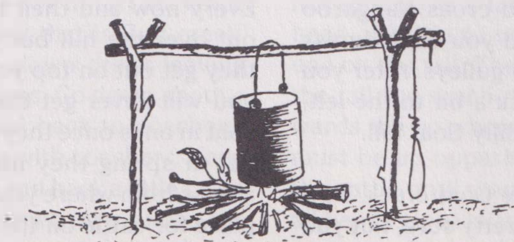
Next morning all go with cattle up Flying Fox on the oppasite side. Go up about three miles, have a look up creek above you, then move out into Dinner creek. Pull coachers up and have a look up creek and around then move on to the place where we generally have dinner. After dinner make on down to the junction of Dinner and Galloping creek. Leave coachers here and go up Galloping creek about one and a half miles after you come to an old fence. Back to coachers and move on going for home down the creek keeping out a little along the far side of the creek.

Next morning need not take coachers or dinner you should be back by lunch and leave someone home tailing. Rest of you split into two parties and meet at rock hole in creek where fence crosses. One party go up Galloping creek on left hand side through old fence around by long hole in small creek back down creek, meet others at rock hole one mile below long hole. Then for home. The other party musters around the end of Mt Evelyn up into the head of Fat Bullock creek near bullock paddock. Do not box those cattle with the ones you are holding as if you cannot clean the lot you may have too many for the yard. After dinner clean cattle you mustered today. Cut out cows calves bullocks and any wild steers as well as bad sorts for spayers and fat spayed cows and let the others go. If you have time clean the others same way. Take cattle out of yard. As you should have bullocks and cows they do not want nocking about. Cut out bullocks spayed cows and heifers for spayers. Hold bullocks, brand. Take cattle out of yard, and you will get some more spayers, heifers you have just branded and bad wild sorts of cows with calves. Hold the bullocks this evening.

Next morning you muster to McKenna spring. Now for the love of mike do not take any fats off this camp only your calves. The cattle you bring from Flying Fox to top paddock after dinner must be put in water before let go. Either brand at McKenna or bring to station. Let camp go. Flying Fox muster is finished.

ENDNOTES

1. Beasts used to handling, used to decoy wild cattle.
2. Unbranded cattle.
3. Wild, young bulls.



SEAN SCALMER

Imagining Class

Intellectuals in the 1950s and Insights into the Present

THE RETREAT OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, which has been apparent for decades, has important implications for political theory and cultural production. Today the imagination of class is in obvious decline. Explanations have been sought and class analysis has been subjected to fundamental critique. Working class consciousness, unity and political centrality have been questioned by contemporary intellectuals. Class-based discourse has been devalued or transplanted.

Much of this critique has been expressed in the language of post-modernism. While it seems deliciously new, this critique is merely a reflection of the current state of political demobilization. In the 1950s, similar claims were made throughout the Western world. In the United States, Daniel Bell proclaimed *The End of Ideology*. In Britain, the affluent worker thesis was introduced. In Australia, conservative electoral victories fuelled strident claims of labour movement irrelevance and smug homilies about 'the Australian way of life'.

It is a matter of subsequent history that the Australia of the late sixties and seventies hosted vibrant struggles, quests for social change and activism. It also contained a rediscovery of poverty. The affluent worker thesis was decisively refuted in a series of important scholarly works.[1] The 1950s did not end class divisions or class conflict; nor did it ultimately dull the clash of opposing ideologies.

And yet, even if the image of the quiescent, affluent worker proved incorrect, it cannot simply be reduced to conservative propaganda. Many committed leftists also seemed to share the view that class had become an anachronism. In 1957 noted labour historian Brian Fitzpatrick issued a questionnaire which sought to explain the demobilization of labour. In it, he argued:

> Working class family incomes, and incomes of unmarried workers, have in 'real' terms risen so much that for some years now there has been no vital difference between the economic position of large working class sections and that of many professional clerical sections once markedly better off.[2]

Such pronouncements were echoed elsewhere in the labour movement. E.M. Higgins sought to explain the decline of the Workers' Educational Association, and a reduced focus on tutorials in economics, politics and history, as a result of "higher living standards" and "a changing class structure".[3] V.G. Childe returned from Britain to argue that "the working classes as a whole have got what they want."[4] Perhaps most notably, Ian Turner's celebrated article 'The Life of the Legend' argued that consumer capitalism's necessity for budgeting, its increases in mass entertainment and its pressures to conformity had all led to changes in the Australian character. The traditional sense of struggle, the egalitarianism and the independence were all disappearing, almost as if they had been "smothered in the T-bones and television of the welfare state".[5]

What caused committed labour intellectuals to misinterpret what was happening in the 1950s – to see class as a relic of the past and not as a relationship of the present?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PRODUCTION of art and culture by intellectuals were sharply limited in the early 1950s. The hopes for a policy of post war reconstruction which would foster the arts had been rebuffed. The Australian publishing industry was in bad shape. In 1946 1228 books were published in Australia; in 1949, 666; by 1953 only 516

books were published. The life of the independent writer was almost unattainable. In 1953 Elmer Rice estimated that between one third and one half of the 8000 members of the Authors' League were "in the salaried categories".[6] This situation was mirrored in the fine arts. Frank Hinder commented that "the importance of the artist to the State seems to be nil – unless one includes those engaged in the preparation of publicity and advertising".[7] Indeed, things had declined so seriously from the glory days of the 1940s that Australia did not possess an art journal of any kind during the decade of the fifties.

The Cold War contributed to a hostile environment. In 1950 Frank Hardy was arrested for criminal libel for his book *Power Without Glory*. In February 1952 Prime Minister Menzies authorized the investigation by Security of "all names put forward" for Commonwealth Literary Fellowships[8]. In August of the same year, Grouper Labor MP Standish Keon attacked the Literary Fund for promoting the welfare of communist writers. The attack and its publicity were to have an enormous impact upon subsequent public funding of art. No grants were made in the following year [illegible]ommunists or fellow-travellers. The ABC seemed so intimidated by the McCarthyite atmosphere that it considered only 'safe' broadcasts as politically tenable. Many writers did not apply for fellowships, "fearing involvement in some indiscriminate Parliamentary attack".[9]

The Australian intelligentsia became less cohesive. Cold War tensions prevented writers from giving each other support. There were complaints that too few of Australia's 'leading writers' came to the defence of communists. There were even dramatic scenes of conflict – like at the Moomba Book Fair in 1955 where red-baiting writer Frederick Howard's address was disrupted by communist artist Noel Counihan. Where there had been cohesion and common purpose, there was separation and opposition. In the early 1950s Australia was serviced by no fewer than six purely literary and three politico-literary journals – most of them short-lived, and all of them expressing a scattering of energies and a variety of approaches.

However, this decline of opportunities, resources and unity among intellectuals did not paralyse left-wing writers. In the mid-1940s groups of realist writers had formed discussion and support groups. They developed a healthy sense of community and common purpose lacking amongst the intelligentsia as a whole. This unity was buoyed by the success of *Power Without Glory*, collectively printed, bound and distributed by a community of Melbourne volunteers.

In the early 1950s left-wing writers also gained Communist Party institutional support. The CPA's policy was for the development of a broad popular front campaign around the movement for peace and opposition to American imperialism. Realist writers could present their efforts as weapons in the battle for national independence and rightfully claim the support of the party's hierarchy.

At the 1952 youth carnival for peace and friendship, plans for a left-wing book society were put forward. They were formed outside the confines of the party, but involved consultation with party leaders, and drew upon CPA networks and resources. The nascent Australasian Book Society (ABS) was validated via reference to the popular front struggle for peace and national independence. One attempt to drum up party support suggested that:

> 'In defence of our national independence' and 'the development of our literary tradition' are more than just phrases. These related tasks are vital and fundamental to the present struggle for Peace and a new and better Australia.
>
> The ABS has begun to play an important part in these struggles. It is a collective effort. You can help.[10]

Communist Party networks and support allowed the ABS to gain three thousand members by its first birthday. Its immediate future was secured and realist writers could nourish sustainable hopes of reaching a broad public.

Opportunities expanded further when, in 1954, the journal *Overland* was launched to replace the old mimeographed *Realist Writer*. This move was supported by the Party and *Overland* was sold through communist-influenced trade unions. It soon claimed the largest subscription of any of the 'little magazines' of the 1950s.

However, this did not result in the widespread dissemination of a socialist realist literature which gloried in the imminent triumph of the working class and abounded with typical characters. While this approach was to retain much respect, and was prescribed as the official party position on literary

matters, it was increasingly discarded by practising realist writers. The urge to communicate with a mass audience, the popular front articulations of the peace movement, and the history of Australian working class literature caused large numbers of realist writers to adopt a more nationalistic, less socialist approach. In January 1954, an editorial in *Realist Writer* signalled the change, with its assertion that contemporary writers still lagged far behind the achievements of Lawson and Furphy. The article went on to criticize contemporary exponents of realism for seeking "to impose on the workers the words, actions, thoughts that they *think* the workers and the people should be expressing; not what they really are".[11] This was apparently a 'sectarian' technique, and a sure means of preventing both the acceptance of communist writing and the emergence of communist workers. Such a critique marked a clear evolution away from the socialist element of realist writing. It was to be taken a step further with the establishment of *Overland*.

The ABC seemed so intimidated by the McCarthyite atmosphere that it considered only 'safe' broadcasts as politically tenable.

What made *Overland* notable was its self-conscious adoption (and promotion) of the 'Australian tradition' of writing practised by Lawson and Furphy in the 1890s. It took up the credo of Tom Collins as its own guide – 'Temper, Democratic; Bias, Australian', and it dedicated itself to the "traditional dream of a better Australia". The journal reproduced the vision of the 'Australian character' produced by Lawson and company – a white working class, anti-authoritarian male; a larrikin with egalitarian beliefs, and so on. This was a vision of the Australian best captured by Editorial Board member and historian Ian Turner:

> contempt for the pretension of the would-be local aristocrats and the authorities who support them, the conviction that every Australian is as good as his neighbour, the tradition of the struggle against oppression, the ideas which inspired the diggers of Eureka to stand up one hundred years ago at Ballarat.[12]

The imagining of the Australian character and the Australian past as radical was so great that even timid patrician bard Banjo Paterson was claimed as a revolutionary forebear. The aim was to construct an image of the Australian which fitted the CPA's hopes for the peace movement, and the *Overland* writers used all of their energies to manufacture that image, and to find it in Australian history.

This was a genuine period of cultural ferment. The ABS and *Overland* were surrounded by a whole range of festivals and activities. There were ABS discussion groups on Australian literature, film and history. There were 'bush tunes' and ballads performed at events like the 1955 Festival of People's Art in Queensland. One typical ABS meeting, to promote a new novel by Judah Waten, involved both prose readings, dances and the performance of Australian bush ballads. The left not only developed and claimed the national literary tradition, it seemed in the early fifties to be the only group that cared about Australian writing at all. Communists dominated Australian cultural organizations because of their commitment and energy, and they drew others towards them through their achievements and resources.

The result was a flood of literature concerned with Australia's past – less socialist realist than nationalist and romantic. Anthologies like *The Australian* and *Freedom On the Wallaby* were published, and these joined with *Overland* in propagating the image of the Lawsonite worker. By the later 1950s this image had become so dominant that historians like Russell Ward and Vance Palmer devoted books to its historical basis in the nineteenth century. The 'Australian Legend' was firmly established in the mainstream of national literature.

In many ways, this was clearly a considerable achievement. Socialist realist writers had resisted the repression of the Cold War, developed powerful institutions, connected with growing audiences, and dominated Australian letters. Politically, the image of the Lawsonite worker as the national type was an important counter-hegemonic achievement, and a valuable complement to communist activity in the peace movement. However, this strategy also represented undeniable costs.

THE DELIBERATE FOCUS on 'the tradition' shifted the perspective away from the problems of contemporary life in Australia. Few of the works of the

1950s focused upon the present. Cold War Australia was not the 1890s and the attention upon the past and its more rural themes could often become an escape from reality. Until Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* in 1959 there was a deafening silence about the life of modern factory workers, and even this was a romantic work – scornful of the suburbs as materialistic and utopian in its hopes for change. If realist writers had set themselves the challenge of depicting the world around them, of illuminating its injustice and struggle, then they had failed. Themes of class were so muted as to be almost undetectable, and the output of the period was later to be comfortably absorbed into the education system and the TV mini-series. The identification of the typical Australian with the Lawsonite rural worker represented, in a sense, the repudiation of the modern, urban working class as the source of 'true' and unique radical values. Such an identification could also be appropriated by conservatives, and thereby used to entrench the long-standing myth that Australia was a 'workers' paradise'.

Whatever the political costs and benefits of this strategy, its prospects were to be shaped by emergent trends within the world Communist movement itself. The combined impact of the invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's secret speech were to have a devastating impact upon the health of the CPA. Its hierarchy denied events in Hungary, while attempting to suppress and then sidestep the significance of the CPSU's 20th Congress. Those who opposed the leadership were expelled, while others were 'invited' to leave the Party or departed voluntarily. Over one quarter of the already small membership left the Party. Intellectuals in particular were targeted, and the period saw Turner, Murray-Smith and *Overland* all leave the CPA.

In the wake of such events, many intellectuals shook off old ties and restrictions, developing not so much into conservatives as radicals and liberals who stood apart from political institutions. After the discipline and control of the Communist movement, many cherished their new-found autonomy. As John Docker has noted:

> it wasn't just political, it was also a desire for freedom to move, to express themselves fully, as intellectuals with other intellectuals in an intellectual realm of non-Party journals and exchange.[13]

This group of intellectuals increasingly saw themselves as intellectuals, and not as revolutionaries. They acted as part of the intelligentsia rather than as worker-writers.

It was in the context of this disaffection with the CPA and intellectual closeness, that this group of left-writers looked again at hopes for socialism and at the working class in the latter half of the 1950s. They were keen to understand their own personal and political disappointments and to communicate with non-communist intellectuals. They were no longer beholden to the CPA's aim of developing the campaign for peace. They were finally free of the Party's unrealistic dogmas concerning the inevitable growth and triumph of the working class, and no longer so hopeful about the prospects of an advance towards socialism. When they looked at the working class they no longer saw the image of the Lawsonite worker – the egalitarian larrikin that they themselves had imagined into existence. But neither did they admit that such a worker was a construction, a myth that existed as a result of self-conscious intent. They became increasingly nostalgic about the existence of that worker in Lawson's Golden Age of the 1890s, but they also asserted that such a worker no longer existed.

Until Dorothy Hewett's* Bobbin Up *in 1959 there was a deafening silence about the life of modern factory workers . . .

The working class was declared overly affluent, possessive and apolitical by left-wing writers who were echoing the claims of conservative politicians and intellectuals. It was an explicit campaigning motif of the Liberals in the mid 1950s that prosperity had made the Labor Party the 'reactionaries' of the period. Successive conservative victories gave this argument weight, so that it also became a theme in newspapers like *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The idea was repackaged in other forms for academic audiences. W.A. Townsley asserted that rising equality had caused the labour movement to lose its driving force. J.D. Pringle claimed that Labor now had no policies, because all of its original objectives had been achieved.[14] Such assertions were now almost uncontradicted – with only a small pool of

communists anxious to refute them from an assailed and unrealistic position – and they passed into popular memory as political clichés – truisms that misinformed political and cultural debate until they were shaken by a newly active, mobilized working class in the late 1960s and 1970s.

However, this is not a reason to blame ex-Communist intellectuals of the 1950s. They left behind them a great record of struggle and achievement, with the continuance of *Overland*, the emergence of sustained historical studies into Australian labour and the cultural climate that contributed to Whitlam's later success. These intellectuals grappled with difficult political choices in a world much changed from that of the Depression years.

INSIGHT INTO THE TRAJECTORY of left intellectuals through the 1950s illuminates the fact that any claims about changing working class consciousness made by intellectuals need to be regarded with suspicion. In the 1950s such claims were dictated as much by the changing positions, difficulties and interests of intellectuals as they were by any intensive analysis. These were not disinterested claims by objective scholars, but passionate, mournful laments by politically engaged thinkers and activists. They expressed the loss of hope, institutional support and confidence which characterized the ex-communist left. Throughout the 1950s, the image of the working class produced by these writers had been structured by their political aims and their institutional location. The repudiation of the contemporary working class at the close of the decade merely continued this same pattern.

The discovery of changing working class consciousness by Australian intellectuals needs to be placed alongside similar 'discoveries' by intellectuals in other periods, such as those of the Frankfurt School in the 1940s, or by postmodernists today. These discoveries tend to occur when heroic struggles seem to have been lost, when radical movements are *demobilized* (rather than anachronistic) and when left intellectuals are faced with disappointed hopes. They occur when the audience of the intellectual, often secured through institutional patronage, abruptly disappears.

Although intellectuals often misrecognize the cyclical nature of political protest, and are thereby able to deny the relevance of class, such denials themselves form a part of this cycle and contribute to such demobilization. In our own moment of defeat and difficulty, perhaps it would be more useful to highlight inequality and to rebuild radical unity than it would be to proclaim a new post-class age in politics and society.

ENDNOTES

1. For example: J.H. Westergaard, 'Sociology: the myth of Classlessness' in R. Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science*, Fontana, 1972; T. Bottomore, 'Socialism and the Working Class' in L. Kolakowski and S. Hampshire (eds), *The Socialist Idea: a reappraisal*, Quartet Books, 1977.
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SEMAPHORE

Semaphore
   you are so full of bad taste –
you've half convinced me
you're good taste

but i love you Semaphore

you have a main street
that wanders down to the sea
like a good old fashioned
country town
   maybe you are a country town
Semaphore
   lost on the outskirts
of a city

but Semaphore
   don't be embarrassed –
you are the only suburb in this
city where people can still
shop in their pyjamas without
being gigged

Semaphore
   you are so unpretentious –
so up-front honest
   that at times you delight me

Semaphore
   you are all larrikins
& character
   if you're not a manic depressive
or a schizophrenic
   if you're not a liberal
a labor a pinko or a greenie
   if you're not a separatist
feminist lesbian
   a lipstick lesbian
or a builders' labourer
   if you're not a Rolls Royce driver
or a Kingswood owner
   if you're not a Catholic
an Anglican a Pentecostal or an
agnostic
   if you're not a renter nor an
owner
   if you're not a yuppie
a trendoid
a straight
a gay
a trannie
a drunk
an addict
or a dead-beat
   if you don't have a ring
on your finger –
or through your nose
your eyebrow
your nipple
or your foreskin
   if you don't dig hip hop
be bop blues acid jazz funk
rockabilly rap techno jungle
ska reggae pop house
or classical
   chances are –
Semaphore
   is not yet ready for you

Semaphore
   you are so laid back i'm sure
there are days when everyone is so
relaxed
   that no-one in the suburb
wakes up

Semaphore
   you confuse me each summer
by inviting me in for a swim
   but then you make me walk a mile
just to get my thighs wet
   you're a tease Semaphore

but you tease others too

you let your jetty shrink
each winter
   & by summer –
when half of South Australia
have stubbed a toe on a boardwalk
   no one wants to say they own it

you tease & you shame

you've teased so many of your
old age pensioners
by putting pokie machines
on Semaphore Road

but you have shamed youself too
Semaphore

you have denied so many of your
invalid pensioners
a sporting chance at a whiz bang
centre
    or is walking down Semaphore Road
with your hand out considered to be
cultural tourism?
    maybe Semaphore –
you need to direct that question
to the Liberal government

but why do these invalid pensioners
ask for anything Semaphore?

maybe fish patties & mashed potatoes
    stale cakes & stale bread
cold showers & no soap
    cold rooms in winter
& hot boxes in summer
365 days a year are boring –
(nothing too liberal about that lot)

Semaphore
    i came to you in the 60s when
your pubs were full of wharfies
& your road was frantic

now the wharves are used for little
more than fishing
    your front bars are as empty
as your churches
    & your road is frantic
for other reasons

i saunter now & enjoy & savour you
Semaphore
    i've got time to stop on your
otherwise bland footpath & talk to
Bobby & listen to his repetitive
chatter
    i've got time to stop outside of
'Larrikins' & dance with Dorothy
while she sings
"Tiptoe Through the Tulips"
    i've got time to stop outside
'Flour Power Bakery' & say
"good morning gentleman" to Wally
    & hear him reply
"good morning sir & good morning
to you too young lady" to my
four year old
    & i've got time for Gerald –
posted once again outside the 'Federal'
& smacking his lips while waiting
waiting waiting for enough to buy
another can
    & sure enough as if on cue –
as we draw near he'll call out to my
daughter
    "that's a lovely hat you are wearing
today my dear   you're a very good girl
aren't you"
    & i've got time to stop & let
Bob Lumley kiss me on the cheek
if he needs to
    that is   if he hasn't got
Tom the greengrocer already –
& that's about the end of the option
plan for Bob
& i've got time to look up & see
the flag flying from the mast of
the RSL club
    & be challenged to consider
what other freedoms
we are still fighting for
    & i've got time too –
to look up at the archangel watching
over Semaphore Road from the Esplanade
    & i contemplate the comfort
she might give to some
with her outstretched wings
    & i've had time strolling down
Semaphore Road toward the Esplanade
    to recognise that the Chinese Maple
trees that sit in pairs
all along the median strip
    are weaker by the time they hit
the coast
    by the time they hit the edge –
by the time they have
no other place to go.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

UNSTEADY EDDY

Although Eddy has been
out of Ireland
a quarter of a century
his voice is
terrorist green
his language
invariably blue
& his politics
positively red

& he is read –
well read
in fact far too
well read
to dismiss easily

but it's only words
that come easy
nothing goes easy
not for Eddy
not for his mother
not for his father
they live together
on the edge of an ocean
far from the bombs
of Belfast
but it's here that
the rattle of a butane can
can be a trigger for a
human explosion
can be a signal that
Eddy is at it again
doing his tin-soldier
walk & reciting poetry
on the deaf ears of a suburb
but it is a signal too
that for Eddy
sometimes
somedays
life is a gas.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

Me and Eddy *by Jane Marr of Semaphore*

END OF SEASON

Twelve weeks and forty-odd performances,
Four thousand miles,
Our adaptation of the Odyssey
Is laid to rest at last.

As we unload for the very last time
Somebody's radio carols and stutters
From someone's room in someone's house
On the other side of the street,
As though there were another world so near.

Our journeyings are over with their labours,
The weight imprinted on our aching arms
Of the goddess's silver dissolve,
The scaffolding, the flats, the trapdoor
For the cobra and the lion and the tree.
Our burdens are laid down.

Oh yes I remember the highs and the lows,
The nights when we feasted,
The nights when we froze . . .
The Magic cards neatly laid out on the dressing-
    room floor,
And the mid-morning Motorway breakfasts,
And the night the black ice
Might have put paid forever
To all our pretences.

Winter's a word we never use.

Oh yes I remember
The boy in the school in North Oxford
With his vacant brown eyes
And somebody's bright orange textbook
On top of his head.

Our smiling farewells cut us off from each other.
Another world beckons . . .
Another season and another show.

They have picked up their coats and their
    scarves,
And put on their coats and their scarves and
    gone home,
Those people who came to see us perform,
Even the North Oxford lad with the bright orange
    book.
He must have a bright orange North Oxford
    home to go home to,
Maybe.

Happy the man, as the French poet said,
"Who has made a fine voyage",
Escaped the black ice,
And gained his Ithaca.

Don't ask him about winter and the rough times.
Winter's not a word he'll use.

Happy the hero who returns,
The monsters vanquished and the dangers past,
To a world that is from a world that seems.

Happy the traveller who learns
When the lights go down on the goddesses at
    last
To trust the bright mortality of dreams

DENNIS DOUGLAS

حديقتان في القاهرة

فلذة الكبد في حديقة الأزبكية يحتضر،
نيران الجنود البريطانيين كانت
ضد الصلاة، ضد البهجة.
الأشجار الباسقة تذوب وميضاً.
لكنه لا يرى سوى الظلام -
سوى الظلام.

The title and the last stanza of Anne Fairbairn's poem rendered in Arabic.

Its dedicatee, Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian poet who won the Nobel prize for Literature was recently stabbed a number of times by a right-wing fundamentalist.

TWO GARDENS IN CAIRO
for Naguib Mahfouz

Egypt 1915

Each night she wakes on the stroke of twelve.
An oil lamp set high on the wall
in a white-washed niche, is projecting light
– a pale circle on the ceiling,
hemmed in by darkness.
Can she hear
whispering jinns in the empty rooms?
When her husband's walking stick
tap-taps from the street his arrival home
from wine-soaked hours philandering,
she holds the lamp to light his way
up the stairs. While drunk, he twists
her ears and shouts, "I'm your husband
the one who commands." If asked her opinion,
she replies, "My opinion's yours, sir."

Each day as the sun is slipping away,
she climbs the steps to her roof-garden.
In webbed shadows of hyacinth beans
and jasmine, she trims and waters her herbs,
glancing from time to time across
Cairo's roofs to the crescents and lamps
on Qala'un and Barquq's minarets.
Below, the twisting, restless street
echoes with the constant clatter
of donkey carts, cries of vendors,
beggars' pleas, haggling shoppers,
the cursed Australians' raucous chatter.

Soon these soldiers will fold their tents
and fade from Giza like a mirage.
Many will die on the Dardanelles;
later, those who survive will ride,
as only Australian bushmen ride,
across the desert to claim Damascus
for the Arabs. But peace brings merely
shattered pledges and loss of trust.

Egypt April 7 – 1919

From her garden, beside her son,
she watches a demonstration grow.
Supporters of the revolution
are gathering around Bayt al-Qadi,
Souk al-Sagha and al-Nahhasin.
As the crowd swells and surges,
people are shouting, "Sa'd, Sa'd,
Sa'd is free . . . Allahu Akbar!"
Her son turns to question her,
"Do you love Sa'd Pasha, our leader?"
"I love him if you do, my son," she says.
"That doesn't mean anything," he replies.

He leaves her in her fragrant garden.
"I'm joining my fellow freedom-fighters
in Ramses square, against my father's
wishes; I must follow my conscience,
the world's so full of blood and grief.
Don't worry, mother, today the British
freed our leader and sanctioned our rally.
This is indeed a day of peace."

From balconies high on minarets,
the muezzins are loudly reciting
prayers of gratitude.
Some chant,
"Oh Husayn, a burden has lifted!"
The vast parade is thrusting forward
to assemble at Ezbekiya Gardens.

While hawks are wheeling in golden light
above the city, this woman smiles,
"From today my thoughts are mine,
my son's rebuke has set me free."

Staccato bursts, distant yet clear,
cut across her reverie.
"Guns?" she murmurs, "It cannot be."

In Ezbekiya Gardens, British
soldiers are firing at the crowd
– against the prayers, against the joy.
Her son lies dying beside his friends.
The towering trees are shimmering;
he sees darkness
– only darkness.

ANNE FAIRBAIRN

McKENZIE WARK

The Space of Invasion

BATTLEFIELD ROUND TRIPS BY AUTOMOBILE!

The Basel News is organizing this round trip in order to afford every Swiss, for the price of 117 francs, the opportunity of visiting the battlefield – and in such a way that the participants are spared all the formalities and inconveniences of travelling.

THIS NEWSPAPER AD so horrified the Viennese columnist Karl Kraus when it appeared in 1921 that he momentarily ran out of his usual inky wit. "What is that panorama of horror and dread revealed by a day at Verdun, what is the most horrible scene of the bloody delirium into which the nations let themselves be rushed for no reason at all, when compared to the sight of this advertisement? Isn't here the mission of the press – to lead first mankind and then the survivors to the battlefields – accomplished here in exemplary fashion?"

Having lived through the unprecedented barbarism of the 1914–18 war, Kraus is here in an unrelenting mood, whereas we veterans of the Falklands war, the Gulf war, Somalia, Bosnia and Haiti are a little more blasé while we aim and fire our remote controls. We are now dwelling in the space Kraus saw on the horizon of a newspaper ad: "You receive the unforgettable impression of a world in which there is not a square centimetre of soil that has not been torn up by grenades and advertisements." In those days this was a criticism; nowadays a mere statement of fact.

These days there is hardly a major battlefield in the world the tourism industry has not opened up to a second invasion. The section on Somalia of the Australian-based Lonely Planet company's guidebook to Africa says: "It's hard to visit this country without the feeling of being a 'refugee tourist'. You should also seriously consider the risks involved in visiting a country at war." Risks not only to life and limb but also to the tangible assets of the terrain of tourism itself: "As a result of the civil war, which is still raging, much of the city is in ruins and many of the sights, hotels and restaurants mentioned may not exist any more."

War, like tourism, is what Paul Virilio calls a "logistics of perception." Both are industrial practices that render terrain – in principle any terrain – into an abstracted field of vision and measurement. The difficulties and differences of the land are first surveyed and mapped. The abstracted version of the existing terrain that results from the survey, the map, then becomes the basis of the plan. The plan reverses the process. The abstractions charted on paper are then transcribed back onto the land. Difficulties and differences disappear under the smooth, even vectors of roads, bridges, drains, telegraph lines. From difference to abstraction, from survey to plan; then from plan to abstraction realized in the concrete – or literally in concrete. Thus are places that resist movement turned into spaces congenial to movement. The general staff, the planning authority, the army engineer, the property developer – all partake of the same industrial transformation of the places of resistance into the space of invasion.

It's no accident that where one arm of this industry goes, the other quickly follows. Usually tourism follows the military. The whole idea of an Asia-Pacific region of air routes and chain hotels would never have happened had not the Pacific war created the perception, and then the reality, of an Asia-Pacific theatre of operation. Cities like Sydney, Bangkok, Seoul and Tokyo, when not actually in the war zone, first experienced mass tourism at the hands of marauding American servicemen on R and

R in the various wars the American empire has seen fit to prosecute against the Japanese, the North Koreans and the Vietnamese people.

Paul Virilio was onto something back in the fifties when he started photographing the enormous pillboxes of the Normandy coast for his first book, *Bunker Archaeology*, now available in English. Virilio realized that the ability to traverse space was outstripping the resistances places could put up to it. The bunkers, for all their concrete monumentality, had not held back the seven thousand boats and eleven thousand aircraft the allies sent to invade it. "To see is to shoot," he says. The technologies of perceiving at a distance and attacking from a distance have in the modern period steadily gained the upper hand. The bunkers are like the bones of dinosaurs, poking out of the earth as a reminder of an evolutionary strategy in the human will to power that failed.

America – still the central node in the networks of global vectors of all kinds.

The Normandy bunkers are of course a tourist destination now. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the D-day landing, the Normandy Regional Arts Fund sponsored a project by American architects Diller & Scofidio that resulted in a rather marvellous book called *Back to the Front: Tourisms of War*. No doubt the commissioning was not without a trace of irony. The American invasion of France did not stop with D-day, so why should it stop with tourists and corporate carpetbaggers? Why not theorist-tourists, architect-tourists? This is the one thing that is not said in this elegant, ironic assemblage of images, projects and texts. Theory and design, art and culture also follow in the footsteps of war. Those of us not subjected to American imperial designs nevertheless do our bit by watching it on TV. As if that were not enough, we then have the spectacle of the learned journals and the galleries filling up with Americans critique-ing American media about American gunboat politics. America – still the central node in the networks of global vectors of all kinds.

The vectors of perception and of war go hand in hand. Karl Kraus was writing about the first war in which explosives were so powerful that they rendered maps obsolete. A hill that had been in a certain location for millennia might, after an evening's bombardment, have turned into a gully. It was also the first war in which artillery had a range well out of eyesight. Gunners were obliged to shoot at map references rather than at things they could see. It was also the first motorized war. Troops could change position very rapidly, so aerial photography had constantly to update intelligence.

The great American art photographer Alfred Steiglitz cut his teeth organizing aerial photography into an industrial process. Photography and war are closely linked. The famous Arriflex 16mm cameras were designed for use by German propaganda teams covering the front. Russian knock-offs of this great design were still being used by the North Vietnamese in their war against the Americans forty years later. Robert Capa's famous war photos were made possible by the Leica 35mm still camera – a mechanized, portable tool for a mechanized, mobile war.

STARTING IN 1914, and accelerating ever since, we have not only the combination of vectors of military movement and perception, but also the integration of the space of the home 'front' with the space of the 'front line'. The same abstracted, mechanized space of movement that meant the victory of the vectors of attack over the resistances of space also draws the hinterlands into the conflict. Vectors of transport ship fresh supplies of troops, munitions and food in one direction, and carry back battered bodies and pristine images.

That 'philosopher of war', Clauswitz, wrote that the only thing that stops a battle from proceeding as quickly as possible to total annihilation is *friction*. By friction he meant partly the differences, diversities and adversities of terrain – the rivers, gullies, ridges that obstruct the flows of force and counterforce. But he also meant the communication equivalent of all that – the noise and confusion, the breakdowns in the flow of report and command. Because of this problem of communication friction, the military has been closely involved in communications. Indeed every army is not only a body of men and material, it is also a system of communication meant to overcome not only the frictions of 'bad' terrain but the noise of communication. The telegraph, radio telephone, cellular phone, satellite

telecommunications – you name it, the military had a hand in it. Why is it that today's portable video cameras weigh so little and work in such low light? Because their core technology, the charge coupled device, was designed for satellite surveillance cameras meant to detect the flare trails of Russian ballistic missile launches.

The military always has the best communication vectors, but now this stuff ends up on the market and in the hands of a rival form of information-power, the media. In *Back to the Front,* Tom Keenan recounts with precision the way the military and the media colluded and competed during the Somali policing action. What would Karl Kraus have made of invasions and bombardments that don't take place until the film crews are in place and the satellite up-links established?

One of the aims of a military organization in action is to secure strategic space. That means monitoring and managing everything that moves through it. Being a strategic space, it is of interest to the media, who want to sell images and stories about it. Being a strategic space, it has been sealed off by the military from any vectors of movement other than their own. As I wrote in *Virtual Geography,* this meant that during the Gulf war the media were forced to negotiate with the military for the passage of their images through military controlled vectors. This is an old practice. During the 1939-45 war the US Army Airforce allowed film to be carried home on its planes, but only from the correspondents it accredited.

In his essay 'Live From . . .' Keenan gives a nuanced account of the military struggle to manage the media flow. The problem was that the military created the story that they were there for a

What would Karl Kraus have made of invasions and bombardments that don't take place until the film crews are in place and the satellite up-links established?

UN-sanctioned humanitarian mission, but then promptly went on a gung-ho policing action against one of the faction leaders. It is in the nature of military organization to be able to shift its own perceptions, objectives and forces quickly. But the media manages narratives about force and place according to quite different practices. Both the military and the media were caught out by the turns of this event, which did not go as scripted. How do you explain to the folks back home that while this was supposed to be a peaceful mission to help the starving Somalis, these ingrates are now taking American hostages, shooting at American soldiers, rioting and demonstrating against Americans and even – lord forbid – taking a few pot shots at journalists? The military tries to learn from past mistakes how better to manage and resource forces involved in ever more complex events in ever more vast 'theatres' of perception and operation. But that increasing scale and complexity goes hand in hand with ever tighter feedback loops to the home front and to public opinion, and so it has struggled to keep up with managing that as well.

FAR FROM DAMPENING our desire to travel, the media pictures of the space of war create new tourist destinations. The space opened up by military logistics brings with it a flow of war correspondents and camera crews. Soon the way is well worn, and the natives take American Express. Diller & Scofidio juxtapose photographs of a soldier's kit with that of the tourist. Both are prosthetic repertoires meant to keep the body going into spaces opened, more or less, to a flow of bodies. War and tourism turn all places, indeed space itself, from a space of discrete places to a space of interconnected flows.

Heidegger wrote a curious little essay in the thirties on 'The Age of the World Picture'. In it he argued that modern image making enables us to frame an image of the world and bring it back home to ourselves. This means that the world appears *as* picture, as if it was made *for* us. He was highly critical of this because of the way it instrumentalized the world, making it appear as if it were ours, as if our human point of view on all things was somehow natural and inevitable. There's a prescient suggestion in this essay that what results is something like a military campaign to subdue and occupy the world as it is pictured. If we imagine it as ours because the pictures frame it for us as ours, why not go and take it?

The other mindset that results, of course, is tourism. And as George Van den Abbeele points out in his essay for *Back to the Front*, appropriately called 'Armoured Sites', it is no accident that the site from

which the general once raised his field glasses to his face becomes the site at which tourists raise cameras to theirs. Even the most thoroughly abstracted space of invasion has those sites from which it most readily appears that the land exists for us, where it appears now quite naturally to us to compose itself as a picture. People have actually to be warned, as in that Lonely Planet guidebook entry on Somalia that I borrowed from Keenan, that the world does not exist for us simply because it appears pictured as if it were on TV documentary and in travel brochures.

Like the military, tourism doesn't stop at mapping a terrain in order to manage the process of occupying it. Tourism transforms that landscape to bring it into line with the frictionless space pictured in the brochures. Darling Harbour, which is near where I live in Sydney, is a nice example. In the middle of what used to be a dense and complex landscape, there is now a huge four-lane highway that is hardly ever used. It runs around the back, as it were, of the entertainment centre, the exhibition hall, the convention centre and the shopping hall, and it has huge parking zones especially designed for its principal users – tourist coaches. In the middle of this urban landscape is a nice smooth vector to get the shock troops in and out of the economics-free-fire zone where it's every credit-worthy visitor for her or himself.

Australia must be one of the only countries in the world that has no tourism industry based on battlefields. Two aerial bombing runs (on Broome and Darwin) and two midget submarine attacks on the east coast don't quite cut it next to Pearl Harbour. The only battle ever waged here is a buried one, the struggle of resistance waged by the Aboriginal people against the white invasion. This is what makes a book like *Back to the Front* instructive, because in it all the connections threading the globe together, fitfully, unevenly but relentlessly, are there. Pacific wars have dragged Australia into the space of flows, but we tend to forget. The finger wharf between Garden Point and the Domain, which is now supposed to be preserved and turned into yet another hotel-cum-shopping tourist trap, was where a lot of Australian troops disembarked and many refugees from Europe first arrived. Flows of munitions, flows of people, flows of images, flows of money – all are connected, although often in ways that are less than obvious.

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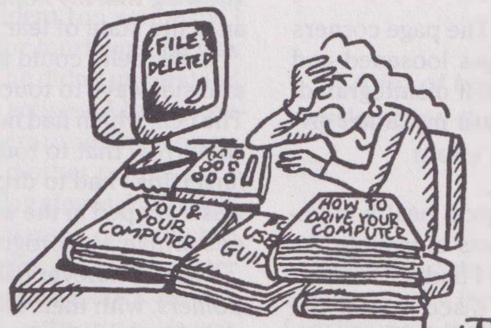


Writer's Block *Bev Aisbett*

IAN C. SMITH

Increasing My Wordpower

WHEN I WAS A BOY growing up near London my father bought me a book from a news vendor's stall. The book was about boxing, and consisted mainly of the records of boxers from all over the world – their opponents, contest dates, venues, and results. Page after page of lists.

The monotony of the book was relieved by its centre pages; eight glossy black and white photographs of the world champions. I remember those photographs more clearly than I remember most things from that year. The heavyweight champion was Joe Louis, the grandson of an Alabama slave. Joe was said to be able to catch flies in mid-air, so quick were his hands. The flyweight champion was Rinty Monaghan, an Irishman who offered his fans extra entertainment by grabbing the ringside microphone and singing sentimental songs after his fights. The middleweight champion was Marcel Cerdan, a handsome French-Algerian with hairs spreading all the way across his chest. Many years later I was to read more of Marcel – as the lover of Edith Piaf. He was killed in a plane crash, flying to defend his title against New York's Jake La Motta who would one day be played by Robert DeNiro in the film, *Raging Bull*.

The cover of that book fell off. The page corners curled, and then the outside pages loosened and fell away. I knew that book so well it disintegrated. It was the only book I can remember my father giving me.

I AM SCARRED, and my psychological health is unreliable. Memory creates pockets of trouble.

Before my late education after I had left a life of petty crime behind, before my discovery of the sanctuary of stories saw me moving away from an ocean of ignorance, I was threatened in a prison yard near Melbourne. This led to a fight, using boxing gloves, inside a ring of barracking young offenders. Warders 'supervised' these bouts which resulted from any challenges in the yard – regular lunchtime entertainment for them – but there were no rounds, no stopping to rest, just last-boy-standing wins. My antagonist had recently been locked up in H for 'Hell' Division after escaping and then giving himself up. He had grown bigger and stronger than me, smashing all those bluestone screenings, blistering his hands, developing scar tissue.

If any 'boxer' quit in front of his peers he might then have to endure an even more miserable life than he had already. I managed to outlast the former escapee only because I was desperate that my life shouldn't nosedive any further. There were no glossy black and white photographs of the winners, just a kind of respect born of false ideals.

A young prisoner serving a long stretch for robbing a security van was also a winner that day. He won five packets of tobacco after backing me at the outsider's odds I deserved. He gave me one packet and I asked him why he had risked anything on me. He told me he had been impressed by my ready acceptance of the former escapee's challenge, not knowing that my nonchalance had been acted from an acute state of fear.

In my cell I could face the door and stretch one arm sideways to touch the wall with my fingertips. The cell, which had no plumbing, just a bucket, was so narrow that to touch the opposite wall with my fingertips I had to drop my elbow so my other arm was v-shaped in the way I had seen a Balinese dancer's arm in a photograph.

I read whatever old magazines I could scrounge. *Colliers*, with their colour advertisements for food, and *Reader's Digest*. I learned that It Pays To Increase Your Wordpower, so I tested myself. Of the multiple-choice answers I often picked the antipole

to the word's correct meaning. I knew my wordpower needed increasing, yet I seemed to have more words than most poor sods in that noxious ghetto.

I can still picture the faces of youth gone sour. Harrison, nineteen, and Watson, seventeen, were in for murder. They had bashed a newsagent harder than they had intended with a steel bar when they robbed his corner shop in what is now a trendy inner suburb of Melbourne where artists gather, but was then a huddle of mean streets where desensitized people lived. Harrison was dull and docile. He looked bewildered, as if wondering how he had managed to do this to himself, his life. Watson seemed the tougher of the two, swaggering about the yard by day, bullying, his piggy eyes alert for trouble. I was surprised when the word went around that he sobbed in his cell at night.

Another boy, Billy, fourteen, was doing Governor's Pleasure for murder.

Yes, fourteen, and locked up in a prison for adults!

He had used a shotgun to blow the head off an older boy who had been teasing and bullying him at school. Billy seemed to be without remorse. Now he was again the sport of older boys. He was placed in isolation after an incident that later had us all questioned separately. The last I heard he had been transferred to the psychiatric division.

While everybody had crowded around the open toilets in the corner of the yard to shield them from the warders' view, Billy masturbated a huge oaf called Tom who had a shaven head and wore thick-lensed glasses with one lens darkened. Tom's mouth hung open and his lips were rubbery and wet even when he wasn't being masturbated. Billy worked away at big Tom's erection, giggling and appearing not to take the incident too seriously. I think he was immature even for fourteen – he was tiny and looked younger – and he didn't understand the full consequences of some actions. A lot of boys in prison haven't fully understood the consequences of actions – theirs and other people's.

Big Tom often wore the boxing gloves. He looked even more hideous with his glasses off, punches bouncing from his bovine features. Many years later I read his name in a Melbourne newspaper. He was still racking up convictions for petty crime. He was described as being an unemployed habitual criminal. His convictions ranged over a period of time equal to two-thirds of his life.

I preferred the fifteen hours during which we were locked up to the nine daily hours of survival. It was easier to be alone, to browse, to dream and make plans, to remember some exquisite pleasures, to laugh at Tony Hancock playing the eternal loser on the prison radio station – run by another murderer – than avoiding danger in the yard.

I once peered through a crack into a toolshed and saw a prisoner with his back to the wall, a pitchfork held at his throat. I believed, for several moments, that he was going to be killed. At the time I realized with a jolt of fear that if I witnessed a killing I might also be killed.

I READ, KEPT AWAY FROM TOOLSHEDS, read some more, survived, increased my wordpower.

The years flipped by faster after I was released, especially in a dingy building crowded with other curious people, in Portugal Street, London, where I spent hours straining my eyes and my imagination searching through nineteenth-century census records. Page after page of lists. I hoped to glean some understanding of my wasted early years by searching for my family's background. I achieved only limited success despite my obsession.

Around the corner from the building where the census records are kept is The Old Curiosity Shop. I have a poor quality print of the shop, a gift from an English cousin who once shared his home brew and his exciting plans for the future with me. We had also laughed in despair over the narrowness and meanness of some families. This cousin has since died of cancer in middle-age. The colours are wrong in the print, nothing like the colours in a snapshot I have of the modern tourist shop which is in a quiet spot, away from the usual tourist track.

A lot of boys in prison haven't fully understood the consequences of actions – theirs and other people's.

When I had struggled to gain some semblance of an education – feeling too old on campus although I realize now that I was still young, with my long sleeves buttoned, concealing my tattoos, always fearful of exposing my inadequacy and thereby proving that I didn't belong – I read Dickens among

many other authors of the past. I thought I might find clues about the rest of my life. Later, when I walked the streets of London looking for atmosphere and inventing the truth, trying to write about what I felt, I came across Bleeding Heart Yard. This was where Little Dorrit and her family must have lived! I had previously thought the place was fictional – it does sound made-up – but at that moment when I stared at the name the boundary of fiction and reality fell away. I believed the fiction. That was all that mattered.

I had left the census room earlier when the close confinement had threatened to overcome me, and the names, addresses, and occupations of Victorian London were repeating in my mind. I headed back by a zigzag route, dodging taxis and buses, towards the Thames. In The Strand a large cardboard koala watched the traffic from Queensland House. Nearing Fleet Street I thought of Dr Johnson walking in the very place that I walked. The koala looked baffled.

I turned into the lane leading to St Bride's, the church shaped like a wedding cake. My ancestors married there in 1815, when Napoleon and Wellington might have been the topic of conversation. Fleet Street journalists held their annual service at St Bride's. In the empty church I sat in a rear pew and listened to the city's muffled hum, imagined the wedding bells.

From there I walked to the river where I gazed at the moored craft, and on the other side, Lambeth and Southwark. Creating my own *mise-en-scène*, I imagined the lightermen, and their horses' breath on the fog-shrouded banks as they heaved the barges, and beyond, the Marshalsea Prison. More ancestors, and in a faint mist! The River Fleet seemed to have disappeared. I know it started in Hampstead Heath and flowed past the Fleet Prison, right through the city. I intended buying a map to discover exactly where the smaller river emptied into the Thames. I never did buy it. But then, maps can't tell us the whole story.

I read somewhere that the Thames froze in the seventeenth century. There were Punch and Judy shows on the ice. Vendors sold roast potatoes. An ancestor of mine sold potatoes, according to his record of marriage. The wind coming off the river had numbed me by the time Big Ben interrupted my thoughts of Londinium and Romans. In a story, the shadows would have been lengthening when Big Ben tolled.

A SCENE FROM THE FILM *Distant Voices, Still Lives* returns to me. The awful father shows affection to a pony. As far as I can remember this is the only indication that the father can show affection. The actor who played the father had prominent cheekbones and gaunt cheeks. His eyes – or the expression in his eyes – seemed to vary only between angry and remote throughout his scenes. My father looked like the actor who played the father in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*. They could have been brothers. The father in that film, who can express tenderness to a pony, but not to his son, is a haunting figure.

THE ROTOR WAS OUR FAVOURITE attraction at Luna Park, by the sea in St Kilda. We laughed to see each other pinned to the wall, held there by our spinning speed as the floor dropped away. We might have wished to keep spinning, out over the bay in a dizzy whirl, and perhaps hurtle clear across the world. We were advertised as 'Human Flies'. The crutches of our pants tugged up into our bum cracks as some of us slid down lower than others, and the faces of those watching from the gallery above orbited like blurred moons.

Cup Day holiday, my first Cup Day in Australia, and we listened to the race broadcast outside The Giggle Palace. I had a pound from my newspaper delivery money, enough to pay for train, tram, a disgusting amount of disgusting food, and all the rides I wanted. There were three of us, mates from school, and we had planned that day. I had been listening to every detail of their stories about Australiana, and I was catching up on sampling those details for myself. Luna Park was, I had heard on the radio, 'Just for Fun!'

My parents were going for another drive in their new car. I'm not sure what they gained from these excursions. My mother complained about Australia with bitterness even though my father said our emigration had been to provide advantages. I suppose they might have been satisfying their curiosity about their new country, too, but any trip with them made me uncomfortable. I think they saw Australians as being hostile, always ready to make them suffer for their Englishness, much as the land had punished those early explorers for their Europeanness. My parents countered this opposition with their own hostility. I liked Australia and its don't-give-a-damn roguishness. It seemed to me

a country where people could take risks. I had left my English accent behind. I hated those drives in that car, my mother's fear of all things different, unconventional. And my father's closed-off self.

My mates had a story for each attraction. The Jack and Jill was a steep, spiralling slide. Somebody had been killed when he had tipped over the edge at the first bend and fallen to the concrete. This story reminded me of the one about the diver who had miscalculated from the tower at the Brunswick Baths. His guts were splattered, I had been told. I had yet to visit the Brunswick Baths but I had been assured that the tower was so high it would test the nerve of the bravest diver. People had stood up on The Big Dipper and had their heads cut off, and others actually fucked in The River Caves. I was absorbing my new culture at a rapid rate with no way of knowing that one day in my future I would stroll along The Esplanade on my return from a long overseas sojourn wondering what had happened to the Palais de Danse and the St Moritz ice skating rink. I also wondered why the happiness of my young days when I had spun on The Rotor had been so dizzyingly brief.

I remember another carnival. It might have been at Epsom Downs, the gipsy carnival held at the time of the English Derby. The smells were of crushed grass and fairy floss and damp cloth. A horseracing game was played by a row of punters releasing handles which flicked ping-pong balls along a sloping board into holes with varied points values, like a game of bagatelle. Each score moved the players' electronic horses across a track the width of the tent, above and behind the spruikers. The ping-pong balls were returned to the players by a chute, and the players flicked them again, aiming towards the holes worth the most points. When the first horse reached the finish a bell rang, lights flashed, and the winning player was invited to select from a display of gaudy prizes.

I watched a laughing sailor play and lose, then walk off, still laughing, with his arm around a woman, his hand squeezing her bottom. I grabbed his handle and pleaded to be allowed to play. I gripped the warm handle. My father, muttering about a waste of money, paid for my go. I had wanted that sailor to win and I thought I had worked out why he had lost. I concentrated, keeping my head down and never looking up to see if I was surging clear of the pack. And I concentrated on accuracy.

When my horse's nose triggered the flashing lights, and that bell proclaimed my victory, those I had played against looked around for the winner. They seemed as surprised as my parents. I asked my mother to choose the prize, something for her. She chose a fruit bowl on a stand. She probably still has it, that memento from my childhood.

TO A DIFFERENT PLACE, but a place in which I detected similarities to that mean ghetto, those gimcrack carnivals.

Kennedy was flooded so it took two hours clearing Customs and Immigration at Newark. Then an inspector boarded our bus and argued with the driver, not allowing him to leave for Grand Central. Midnight, and hot, hot, hot. It appeared that our driver had been selling bus tickets and pocketing the money. Everybody has to have an angle. The crotchety passengers offered the inspector ironic advice, and eventually we made it into Manhattan which was as busy at one a.m. on Sunday as Melbourne ever gets.

At the YMCA the white desk clerk insisted that the black man in front of me should produce ID before checking in. I could tell that the black man, who, despite the way his slow hands patted his pockets, might have been the great, great grandson of an Alabama slave, was never going to find what he pretended to have mislaid. The desk clerk looked and sounded bored. I was exhausted. But I had caught a glimpse of the Chrysler Building lit up against *that* night sky. And I looked forward to meeting Augusta.

She is my mother's sister. Unlike my mother and the rest of their family, she is a rebel. She had joined the WRAF in peacetime and discovered the liberation of living overseas. Avoiding marriage when she was demobilized, she ended up in New York working in great demand as an English nanny. That way she could afford to live in Manhattan at a women's hostel when she wasn't living-in with a family. She was also around children without needing to have her own.

I had only recently discovered that Augusta lived in New York. I had written, telling her of my intended visit, and when I arrived I left a message to let her know where I was staying.

When I woke the next morning, groggy and drained, her message had been pushed under my door. She was meeting me in the lobby. I hadn't seen

her since I was a boy in England so I wondered if I would recognize her.

Coming inside from soaking rain, she looked small and vulnerable, wearing a belted raincoat and furling her wet umbrella. I knew her immediately. This was how my mother had looked sixteen years before, when she had been Augusta's age.

The great city was finally hushed. The rain enhanced this quietness. We found a cafe and Augusta talked and talked while the rain washed and cooled the streets. She talked as though she had been waiting for a friend to arrive, waiting alone for a long time. She was frank. She admitted feeling bitter about her family's disapproval, the meanness, the constant resentful envy. I felt that Augusta and I were allies. She also admitted to loneliness now that she was older, but said her decision to avoid marrying and having her own children had been worthwhile. She had had her loves, her adventures. *Je ne regrette rien.*

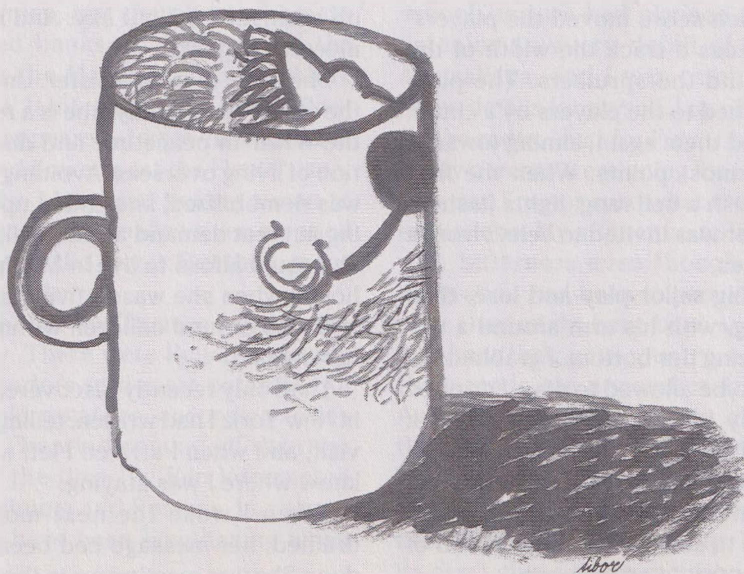
We talked about how loneliness might sometimes result when nonconformists try to break away from their families' control and then find that they can never really break clear, perhaps don't want to. Freedom and loneliness, we thought, could be faces of the same coin. We talked about the way some of us are judged by our families. She said she was proud of me, and that she didn't think my scars or my past sins were so bad. I remembered *Travels With My Aunt.* Could I have been born to the wrong sister? Nah. That's only a story. I remembered how both of my parents hated Augusta.

When I caught up with our relatives in England they sounded as if they had been shamed and, somehow, victimized by Augusta's life. They seemed to believe that only depraved souls could even consider living in New York. When I told them about myself I edited the story heavily.

Augusta was worried about re-entering America whenever she left because she didn't have a green card. I never did find out how she always managed to get back, but she is a resourceful woman, my Aunt Augusta.

When I left New York to see more of the United States with my backpack she saw me off at Grand Central. She blinked away tears, and pressed money into my pocket. I've never seen her since that day but sometimes a postcard arrives with a brief message in her exaggerated scrawl.

Her last postcard was of *King Kong* clinging to the Empire State Building. I can't tell if it is Fay Wray or Jessica Lange under his hairy arm. Outdated war planes attack him, their bullets ripping chunks out of him. I could weep for him in this besieged position but I won't. *KK* says in a balloon caption: "I just love this town!" His defiant grin appeals to me. Aunt Augusta has written on the back: "Don't forget to duck, kid!"



Jiri Tibor

JENNIFER MAIDEN

The Blood Judge

An Excerpt from the Manuscript in its Stanzaic form

The hero George has temporarily given up work as a Probation Officer and is in Central America as a professional Observer for a Human Rights organization. Here, he has had an altercation with a Case Officer at the airport and is returning a shrunken head, given him by a superstitious client, to the Museum of Costa Rica.

All I had in my day-pack
was a sausage sandwich, Clare's letter and
the shrunken head, wrapped in newspaper.
An old charge of mine had smuggled
the shrunken head into Australia after
buying it as a memento in South America. He'd
become convinced that it was bringing
him bad luck – something
certainly was – and, knowing that I was going
back to Costa Rica,
had given it to me
to return to nearer its home. My
original intention had been
to tell him I'd returned it to South America, and then
merely to take it out and
bury it in the bush. But it had
an expression of dignified dismay which
made me reluctant to abandon
it to scavengers, if there were some
alternative. I also vaguely remembered reading
that certain Amazon tribes had a taboo
against burial as such. The head
must have made me more nervous than I admitted to
myself, because I nicknamed it
'Atahualpa' after
the kidnapped King of the Incas, and would
sometimes pat the top of the tin trunk
reassuringly after I'd shut it, or as I
walked past. I had stored the head in a large

round Players cigarette tin in newspaper
in the trunk, not a suitcase, so that
it would stay dry and not sweat. The head
must have belonged to a pigmy. It didn't
smell, except of leather, and
was pear-sized and almost weightless.
It wasn't that they specialized in shrunken
heads at the National Museum
of Costa Rica, but one of the younger
curators luckily had a special interest
in the Amazon and was willing to take Atahualpa
off my hands and return him to South America
on her next field trip. My arm had regained
enough sensation to ache in spasmic
contractions, and I had difficulty extracting
Atahualpa, Clare's letter and my sandwich
from between my shoulderblades. That done, however,
I found the sympathetic curator and
she gave me a bemused glance, some
paracetamol and a glass of water (I said
I had slipped on the airport floor), then carefully
packed Atahualpa away for his last journey.

I hummed 'Going Home' and strolled through the Museum. It
was my favourite museum. Teresa and I
used to meet there. It had airy halls and solid,
shining specimens of Pre-Columban art. I've always
had a taste for Pre-Columban sculpture. It
does justice to the strength
of the human body and face, whether
in anger, rapture
or childbirth's squat pain.
Here, of course, the Pre-Columban was
juxtaposed with some macabre, realistic
Sixteenth Century crucifixions. These were so devotedly
detailed that I wasn't the first observer
to whom they automatically
suggested Sado-Masochism. I remembered
the old quote from Nye Bevan: "You can't have the crown
of thorns and the thirty
pieces of silver." I decided
that the first half of my life had been dedicated
to earning both of them without too much
discrimination, and that now perhaps
I really wanted neither.

I studied the crucifixions for a while
with a half smile   furrowed brow   and
tightening groin and understood again
that Clare had been right, and that I almost missed
conducting my own little trials and interviews. Sometimes
when I was tired and read or wrote reports
about torture and interrogation, I was exasperated because
they weren't as efficient as I had been at Probation.
They seemed to be putting so much   unnecessary
energy into it. Mind you, I have some simmering
energy myself, and a quantity
of appropriate rage.   These three-dimensional Passions
reminded me of the irritation
I had felt towards Philip Antonelli, who had been
my Supervisor at Probation.   Recently, he had at last
left the Department so that he could indulge
his Late Call to the Priesthood. But before that I had often
accused him of miring
his professional ethics in an abstract trough
of sin and salvation. Not that this
worried him too much: he respected
my protestant soul.   Indeed,
he had telephoned me that he was leaving his job,
and suggested that I apply
for it. This had apparently been
seconded by my former Colleague Elinor. I hadn't
made up my mind about their offer, but financially I was running
down my savings – living more from my Probation
Superannuation and less from my Prisoners of Conscience
pay and expenses. Sheridan's wedding
had been amazingly expensive – I'd made sure I paid
much more towards it than her North Shore   grandparents
did – and I usually sent her most of the rent
from the Mt Druitt house her mother
and I had owned. She and Damien had
a life-defining mortgage on a handsome house in Lane Cove.

Looking lengthily at the silent,
howling mouth of one of the crucifixions,
I wondered if Clare herself was genuinely
sadistic. She had smothered her stepsisters   simply
and without ritual, but she had literally,
decoratively carved her dead
stepbrother for five minutes with stars and flowers
like a stick of wood. This had never, however,

horrified me as much as the actual
finality of the murder as such. Her embroidery
of him seemed to me to have a quality
of naivety, as if a much younger child's need
to decorate things for approval – or some furious parody
of it had reasserted itself, despairingly.
Knowing Clare I couldn't see
it as sadistic. She was probably
capable of sadism, but not in such a theatrical
style. At that stage, anyway, the boy
was already quite dead – like my wife when she
was mutilated – and in both cases I found
grim comfort in that thought. I sat
down on a bench and re-read some of Clare's letter. Part
of the furniture she and Sheridan had bought
was a sideboard for the Ashfield house. Clare said:
"It's big and black and Spanish –
as if it had been burned –
and I almost didn't get it because I remembered that
you'd told me that
even though you recognized how necessary luxuries
and possessions were to people's ability to speak
to each other and to themselves, you couldn't
help thinking often lately
of that quote about all those Jewish women
in Europe before World War Two who stayed
too long and died for their sideboards . . .
but then I thought that really I don't
have much choice. People feel safer if I
am practical and understandable and settled
in one place and anchored by
desirable middle-class objects, and running
my own small business" – she managed a Mt Druitt
agency which placed temporary
secretaries in the Western Suburbs – "and if I am generally
very quiet – although not too happy,
always a little discontented, uneasy
and unenviable – but, anyhow,
inarguably tamed . . ." I started
to write back that I could never imagine
her being inarguably tamed by a sideboard, but suddenly
I wanted to say that astringently
to her face. I left the seductive crucifixions, returned
to the honest, consummately emotional Indian
artefacts, and heard myself
hum 'Going Home' again.

SUSAN HOSKING

Empty Nest

with acknowledgement to Christopher Isherwood

IT HADN'T BEEN MUCH OF A YEAR REALLY. At the pharmacy customers still complained. Robert still snored. She wasn't sleeping well. Her son had left home to study in Perth. At least he corresponded regularly whenever he needed money. Sometimes he even rang up when he needed money urgently (reverse charge). Her daughter was rarely home, and when she was she rarely spoke, and, if she did, Mavie didn't know who she was talking about.

Mavie continued to shop once a week for food, as she always had. By the end of each week, with only Robert to feed, the fridge had become an embarrassment of mouldering fruit and vegetables and cheeses. Every Friday she threw out wizened mushrooms, slimy capsicums, browning peaches or spotted apples, depending of course on the season. The dog accepted the green cheeses without complaint. Once he painstakingly buried the over-ripe camembert beneath the ornamental Mulberry which wept all the way to the ground.

As she lay in bed night after night listening to the gristle in her neck crunching, noting the irregularity of her heartbeats, trying to remember the names of girls she started school with, Mavie began to wonder whether she'd read the right books. She was a great believer in books. Her bookcase was packed with literature on raising healthy children, intelligent children, optimistic children, creative children, assertive daughters, sensitive sons, children without eating disorders, children of the universe, ecologically sound and politically correct children.

One night, when sleep finally came in the early hours of the morning, Mavie dreamed she had a baby and she woke up crying. She didn't know whether she was crying with relief or disappointment. She mentioned this to her doctor who decided that what she needed was Hormone Replacement Therapy. She looked under Women's Issues in her regular bookshop and bought a few relevant titles. She put her Trisequens Fortes in the bathroom cupboard alongside the Trifemes which had mysteriously appeared at the beginning of the year. Sometimes Mavie still cried at night. But one morning, out of the blue, her daughter directed a spontaneous communication at her which was very different from the usual begrudged reciprocating grunt. Mavie was as surely shocked as if she had undergone electro-convulsive treatment.

"By the way, Maeve", said the daughter, and she did say Maeve and subsequently wrote her mother's name that way when occasionally necessary, on the occasional form, "By the way, I'm bringing Simon home tonight. Can you cook something." This wasn't a question.

Simon? Mavie sprang into action. She rang old Watchau at the pharmacy and pleaded sickness. She resurrected the cobweb broom and poked it into the dark corners where walls and ceiling met. She vacuumed the sofa and polished the glass over the Matisse print. She picked the toothpaste spots (is that what they were?) from the bathroom mirror, wiping it clean with Windex and newspaper. She removed the cats' sandtray from the laundry, wondering at the number of dehydrated turds that lurked beneath the surface of the attapulgite. She took the hall-rug outside to the permapine trellis and belted the dust out until the trellis threatened to fall over. She tipped out the dead fern by the front door and replaced it with – well, there wasn't anything. She'd buy something. She swirled through the house swiping at surfaces with an ancient pair of silk and lace underpants. How useless they'd been. Didn't even soak up the drips. She swept the floor, washed the floor, dried the floor with her feet wrapped in layers of t-shirt. At 11.23 a.m. she sat down to think about tea. Tea for Simon. A meal for a boy. A family meal with daughter and boy.

Who the hell was Simon? What the hell was Simon? A photographer? A student? One of those

ferals? A drug freak? A drug dealer? But Mavie had read enough books on mood therapy to know that she was beginning to predict outcomes in ways that would only make her depressed. She paused to complete an exercise in internal dialogue, arguing herself out of irrational thinking, visualizing herself climbing out of a deep hole and striding across a mountain ridge with her head in a cloud of butterflies. Just to be sure that she was in control she visualized her daughter's friend as an ape with his knuckles dragging in the gravel, looked him straight in his brown button eyes and said "Welcome Simon". She was a blade of grass. She could bend with the wind, unlike the mighty oak that might look so strong but could crack in a storm. "Welcome Simon. Do sit down and join us. Bananas?"

MAVIE HAD TWO FULL SHELVES of recipe books. It was always a problem. How to please. What to give them to eat. How to do the right thing. The appropriate family meal. The dinner party. The casual barbecue. Meals for friends. Meals for special friends. Thankyou meals. Meals of obligation. Good wife and mother meals. Working woman meals. Meals for people on diets who shouldn't be on diets and meals for people who should be on diets but weren't. Mavie inserted her relaxation cassette into her daughter's walkman and plugged her ears. In half an hour she had the solution. No, no, not *the* solution Mavie, but *a* solution. "There are no absolutes" she said out loud, bending in the wind like a wheatstalk.

A solution to the problem was of course, of course, to ask Robert to wheel out the Weber. Men always gathered around a Weber. Robert and Simon could begin to bond in the most natural of fashions. There would be no embarrassment. And there would be a division of labour in the preparation of the meal that would ensure that she did not project herself as a houseslave. She would prepare the most exquisitely simple salads, giving the impression that they had been tossed together with casual creativity by someone with a discerning but unostentatious palate. She would shop at the organic market with all the other discerning and ecologically caring palates. She'd have to get a move on.

When Mavie was ready to leave the house she had filled the back of an envelope with a list of what she needed for the evening. It had occurred to her that Simon might be a vegetarian – some of those ferals were. The problem was, if he was a vegetarian, would he be one of those vegetarians who ate fish or one who didn't eat fish or dairy products? Some of those vegans were very particular. Maybe she should borrow the Weber from across the road. They were nice people. They wouldn't mind. Maybe she should ask the Across-the-roads as well?

Within forty minutes Mavie had arranged to borrow a second Weber and Mrs Across-the-road had declined Mavie's kind invitation to join them for dinner. She'd stuff a pumpkin for one Weber, and in the second she'd ask Robert to cook a little leg of lamb and a small Snapper. She'd have to go to the fish market. Maybe she should borrow another Weber so that meat juice from the lamb didn't run into the fish. Some of those non-vegan vegetarians were fussy. But she didn't know anyone else with a Weber. Too bad. She'd separate the fish from the meat with foil.

In the supermarket (not the Bi-Lo near the pharmacy but the Big Mart with the gourmet bar and built-in bakery and piped music) Mavie wandered in a dream. She bought a cob of warm wholemeal bread encrusted with sunflower seeds and she selected two French sticks – one glazed with honey and the other dusty with flour. She bought black and white peppercorns and mixed beans, coffee beans, cracked wheat, garlic cloves, onions, tinned tomatoes, curry powder and fresh ginger. She wondered whether she should buy her garlic and onions and fresh ginger from the organic market, but she'd written up her list so that all the vegetables to be cooked – except the pumpkin – were on her supermarket list. There was no point in confusing herself. She bought parmesan cheese and Swiss cheese and a wedge of King Island Brie. She bought water crackers and rice crackers. She hand picked twelve smooth scrubbed potatoes from the potato bin. She bought virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar. She chose a shapely leg of lamb. She bought butter, with a question mark and without a tick. And pine nuts. And salt crystals. And whole nutmegs. And a nutmeg grater. She worked down her list, crossing off what she had bought, adding walnuts, table raisins, pistachio nuts, icecream – just in case. And she bought that new potplant, and another for the bathroom, and a cake of scentless moisturising soap, and a fourpack of recycled biodegradable unbleached toilet paper coloured with natural dyes from beetroot. She hummed through the checkout,

handing over her credit card without so much as a glance at the total on the screen or on the streamer of docket.

The fish market was a tease. Too many pearly fish in frozen schools: Snapper, Rainbow Trout, Atlantic Salmon (too big), Whiting, Tommy Ruff (too small). She had Snapper on her list but settled for two plump Rainbow Trout: somehow their eyes seemed less accusing. She'd cook a sauce with almonds and grapes, sherry, fresh herbs and lemon juice. She'd tempt a vegetarian. She'd tempt a carnivore.

No EFTPOS in the organic market. There were two uncut Queensland Blues to choose from and neither was perfect. One had a nice stalk but there were a few warty blemishes on the skin. The other was blemish free, but it had no stalk and was slightly lop-sided. The stalk was important. She foresaw herself lifting the cooked pumpkin lid to reveal the multicoloured filling – red of peppers, green of herbs, pale gold of cracked wheat, purple skins of beans. *Applause, applause.* She carried the stalked pumpkin to the counter and left it there while, conscious of time, she scrabbled through boxes of oak leaf lettuce, radiccio, rocket, vine ripened tomatoes, spring onions, garlic chives, bunches of borage, mushrooms, baskets of bean shoots, filling a cardboard carton with edible vegetation. When she had paid her bill, which in itself predisposed her to panic (you have to pay to be healthy), an uncontrolled thought flashed through her consciousness that Simon might be a junk food fanatic. She couldn't afford that thought now, so she visualized it occupying a soap bubble, took a deep breath, pricked the bubble and let the thought dissipate into the endlessness of outer space. As she left the market (which really, she thought, was a shop after all), a gaunt young man in plastic sandals held the door open for her.

When Mavie arrived home it was 3.33 p.m. She unpacked her groceries and greens. She put the lettuce and radiccio and rocket into the washing-up bowl to soak. She patted the baby leg of lamb with paper towelling and stabbed it all over with a sharp knife, stuffing the wounds with garlic cloves and rosemary spikes. The rituals of preparation absorbed her completely. Mavie was outside time. Pepper rained like soot, salt like dandruff. Almonds swelled in boiling water and when Mavie pinched them they shot out of their brown jackets and into butter sputtering in the frypan. Lemon juice and sherry hissed round the golden almonds, more pepper, more salt, green flakes of chopped herbs, glistening grapes, put the sauce aside. Pat the trout dry, put the trout aside. Still raining soot and dandruff.

The pumpkin was tricky. There was that story about the woman who had disembowelled herself trying to cut through a Queensland Blue. But Mavie was completely in control. She sliced off a perfect lid, scooping the seeds and soft pulp out of the pumpkin's belly. Diced red peppers, crumbed wholemeal bread, mixed beans, cracked wheat (should she have soaked it first?), chopped odourless onions, garlic, tomatoes, tomato juice, fresh ginger, curry powder combined in a sticky paste which clung to her fingers as she transferred it to the empty corrugated gut. Three hours to cook a pumpkin!! Mavie re-entered the time zone. She needed Robert home immediately to light the first Weber. It would be 8.30 before they ate, but that was about right. When their daughter did come home she rarely appeared before eight. Sometimes she went to the gym. (What if Simon was a body builder? Maybe she should break a dozen eggs for an egg-white omelette? What did they do with the yolks?)

Robert responded to the crackling urgency in Mavie's voice down the telephone and left work earlier than usual, telling his off-sider that he had some crisis management to attend to and rolling his eyes ever so slightly. Stepping into the hall he almost fell upon his wife who was down on her hands and knees, buffing the slate with a lambswool pad attached to his electric drill. With her finger still on the drill trigger Mavie pointed her husband outside again and he knew what he had to do.

Inside, fumes of hospital-strength bleach emanated from the bathroom. A shower curtain fluttered through the house, fluttered on the clothesline, fluttered back into the bathroom. In the fridge a crystal bowl sparkled with trifle layered with fresh peaches and raspberries: the stench of sherry was overpowering. Outside odours of kerosene and coal were replaced with those of roasting pumpkin and later lamb. Robert left briefly to consult the local drive-through attendant on appropriate beers for young men. (What if Simon was fifty? What if, god forbid, he didn't drink?) Robert came back with a selection that would have made his son's eyes goggle. Clinking in another carton was an assortment of rather good $15-plus-a-bottle wines – chardonnay from the Barossa, cabernet sauvignon from

the Southern Vales, Tasmanian pinot noir – Robert's favourites.

Mavie was exhausted. It was 7.43 p.m. She took her relaxation tape out of her daughter's walkman and inserted it into the portable cassette player. She'd play side B, with the music and subliminal messages, while she had a shower and dressed. What to wear? What to wear? Not too much fuss. Keep calm, keep comfortable. The soft leather shoes – no heels. The loose black pants and the linen shirt that crumpled within ten minutes of wearing. Would she look as if she'd stepped off a page from a Country Road catalogue? Don't be silly, not with her shape. Was there a trick to this linen? Did they spray something on it? Were you supposed not to sit down? Ever?

There was one more salad to prepare. The leafy green one with the marigold petals and borage flowers. After their soaking and just the right amount of drying the assorted lettuce leaves had crisped up nicely in the fridge in a plastic bag. Mavie tossed them in her biggest ceramic bowl with paper-thin slivers of button mushrooms, cut straws of spring onion, crumbled Tasmanian fetta, a handful of Kalamata olives (the Greek ones, not the local ones), halved cherry tomatoes, a few grapes, delicate alfalfa sprouts. She sprinkled the mix with yellow petals and tiny spider-blue flowers, and there was a final rain of cracked black pepper. With one eye closed she stood back to contemplate the effect. Not quite a work of art. It needed something. It didn't make a statement. Off centre in her magnificently brimming bowl she made a nest of the remaining alfalfa sprouts. She had three spring onions left. She peeled away the dull outer layers of skin to reveal the startlingly white slightly weepy tissue of pristine onion stalk ascending into feathers of green. She stuck the trio of stalks, off centre, angled towards the edge of the bowl, into the bed of sprouts. That was it. A nest in a nest in a nest. A bird of paradise salad. A work of art fit for a king. She anointed it with virgin olive oil and vinegar. She sat down to wait.

THE TROUBLE WITH SIMON was that he was so, well, so . . . ordinary. It had been a shock the night they'd met. He had trailed in behind her daughter looking particularly . . . well, particularly young. He didn't have dreadlocks, nor a pony tail. His head wasn't shaved. His chin was downy like peach fuzz. There was no earring, no eyebrow ring. There were no visible tattoos. The slashes in his jeans had been effected with scissors, she could tell. He wasn't a drug dealer, she could tell. If he was a user, he clearly wasn't a freak. He certainly wasn't a bodybuilder. He might be a student, she had thought at first glance, and as it happened, he was. Well at least he later said he sort of was. She should have been relieved. But the evening fell flat as a cowpat.

Simon seemed to get on with Robert. That first night they grunted at each other, standing around the Weber. Simon drank beer from a bottle. At least he drank. He was curious about the two Webers. When the meal was served he declined the pumpkin. He also declined the trout because he didn't like bones, he said. He asked if Mavie had made any gravy. She never made gravy. She thought she saw the corner of Robert's mouth twitch; for years she'd denied him gravy. Simon praised Robert's roast potatoes. He dismissed the salads, although he did enquire what that tangled stuff was frothing about on her *piéce de resistance*. He didn't actually say *piéce de resistance* but that's what he meant. At Robert's insistence he tried the cabernet sauvignon but he clearly preferred beer and not in a glass. He accepted the trifle with a great deal of icecream, ate all the icecream, tasted the trifle and made no further comment. He didn't drink coffee.

"He's nice, isn't he?" her daughter had whispered confidentially as Simon disappeared into her bedroom, not to be seen again until the following morning. Mavie was grateful for the confidence, but unsure about the sentiments. Didn't her daughter work sometimes in one of the nice coffee shops on North Terrace? Wouldn't she be meeting interesting people all the time? From the Art Gallery? From the Festival Theatre? Quiet tweedy people from the Museum? Articulate people with wire-framed glasses from the University? Politicians in suits? Mavie had seen a program on television recently (Valentine's Day, that's right) that considered love as chemical reaction. Had her daughter and Simon sniffed each other out, like a pair of dogs? Were their hormones surging in some kind of complementary pattern which mysteriously drew and bound them together? Certainly, something was happening in the bedroom. Was her son doing this to some other mother's daughter?

After a week or so, like Robinson Crusoe, Mavie considered her situation. On the debit side of her ledger, it had to be said, Simon was boring. On the

credit side: he was no more boring than Robert. (Was this on the credit side?) Her daughter was spending more time at home. This was good. But she was rarely at home without Simon. This was not bad, but it wasn't so good either. Simon was not a serial murderer, as far as she could tell. This was very good. He admitted to being a sort of student. This was sort of good, depending on what 'sort of' meant. Simon was not a vegan. This was convenient. He was easy to satisfy. This was sometimes good, but it left Mavie with no culinary challenge. Her accounting seemed to suggest that she was in credit. But Mavie was not content.

After a month or two it was evident that Simon and Mavie's daughter were an item. What's more, they had established predictable visiting patterns determined by their own convenience. Simon's parents had a pool. When it was hot, Mavie learned not to expect them. But they usually appeared on Sundays, when Robert cooked his customary chicken or leg of lamb or lump of beef, on the Weber, of course. They also appeared most Friday fortnights, when Robert was paid and stocked up on beer. They could generally be depended on to turn up for dinner parties or barbies – sometimes with friends of their own. When the weather began to cool Simon's mother bought Simon a double bed, and days, a week, more days passed and Mavie's daughter appeared only when she needed something from the bottom of her wardrobe, one of Mavie's recipe books, a photograph from the family album (what did she want that for?), a signed cheque.

Then, mysteriously, they were back. It seemed that Simon's mother was cranky, that her politics were all wrong, that she had some bee in her bonnet about washing dishes, that she was threatening to charge rent. Mavie cooked pizzas and Simon said they were better than his mother's. Mavie bought her daughter a double bed and a lambswool underlay. They stayed for a week. Simon's parents bought a Weber. That Sunday Mavie and Robert ate alone.

They came and they went. Things took a turn for the worse when Simon's mother's pizzas improved. She'd learnt how to stretch the dough by tossing it in the air. *What a show!* Nor could Mavie match something called sticky pudding that Simon's mother made and Mavie refused on principle to compete with the homemade cassata which consisted almost entirely of pure cream. One long weekend Simon's father sold the two old Dodges he'd always meant to restore and began to convert the shed into a habitable cabin. "A granny flat?" enquired Mavie. Simon didn't have any grannies.

Robert's shed was sacrosanct, but Mavie had always thought that the space above the carport, adjacent to the shed, had potential. A room up there would make a cosy retreat with a rather nice view of the neighbour's treetops. A spiral staircase leading up to a little wooden balcony would look very attractive: she could wind wisteria up the balustrade. She sighed and rang a draftsman who had to be good given the fee he quoted.

Mavie's daughter moved into the converted shed at Simon's place. Mavie didn't see much of her daughter for quite some time. The carpenters were taking forever. The carport had to be completely rebuilt in order to support the weight of the new room. Robert was grumpy. He'd joined a golf club. He didn't even like golf. After he'd signed the papers for the home equity loan he didn't seem interested in the opening skylight she'd chosen, nor the solid cedar door with leadlight inserts, nor the built-in cupboards and bookcase. Mavie was beginning to hyperventilate again. The builder was pushy. His carpenters were needed elsewhere. She had to deal with the builder alone. She stocked up on paper bags and bought a book on conflict resolution. She worked on her personal affirmations. She projected herself into the future, visualizing evenings when the young ones would come down from their eyrie to watch television with her and eat hot buttered scones and drink soup round the fire.

Finally, finally the room was finished. Mavie booked an evening with Simon and her daughter. It was a Monday, and they warned Mavie that they'd have to leave early because the footy season had started and Simon liked to watch the match in bed. Simon's parents had bought them a portable television set.

Mavie was so excited on Monday morning that work was impossible. She rang in sick, again. Watcheau was annoyed. She didn't care. She booked herself an hour in the float tank at the local gym where she undertook progressive relaxation exercises that she had learned off by heart. She couldn't cook. She bought a Greek platter, already prepared. Marinated octopus. Fetta. Dolmades. Tzadziki. She bought baklava. She waited.

It was dark when they arrived. Simon was rasping a song: he seemed to be thanking footy for the best years of his life. Mavie's daughter collected a couple of beers from the fridge and slumped down

on the sofa with Simon. Robert emerged from the study where he said he had been working on a report for the office. Mavie knew he had been playing that golf computer game because she'd heard the recorded voice: "Oh no! You've hit a tree." She didn't care. She took a deep breath, walked purposefully over to the television and turned it off. It was years since three pairs of eyes had regarded her with such intensity. She'd have to speak immediately, before the protests started. They were starting already.

"What the . . . ?"

"I'm sorry," she began, "but I have something to give you. It won't take a minute." She picked up a sealed envelope from the mantlepiece and delivered it directly into the hands of her daughter, who turned it upside down, turned it over, and tore it open. A key clattered to the floor. Mavie folded her hands across her chest and simply glowed. Robert went to the fridge for a beer and didn't return.

"What is it?"

"Well," said Mavie, disregarding Robert's absence, "your father and I feel that you and Simon would probably like a little more privacy, a little more space. So we want you to have the flat above the carport." Mavie's daughter stared at her. Simon hummed.

"It's very nicely furnished, although of course there's room for you to put your own things in it. Built-ins, I mean. There are built-ins. There's a lovely bookcase and benches and a cupboard. And there's a lovely view. You've been up on the roof, you know the lovely view. And I've planted wisteria. And we'd love to have you."

"Does it have a bathroom?"

"Well, no, it doesn't have a bathroom, the plumbing is very expensive, especially upstairs, maybe in a year or two, but of course you can use our bathroom, we can make up a roster, and I can cook for you or if you want to you can use our kitchen and of course you can have a kettle and a microwave and there's a Dimplex and it's very cosy and the view is just lovely why don't you come and have a look although it's dark of course but you can get a bit of an idea . . . "

The vision was fading. *Turn up the lights. More power more power.*

"Gee thanks Maeve," said Mavie's daughter. "It's a nice thought. But Simon's dad has this mate who is a plumber. We're sort of set up in the shed, and like soon we'll be self-contained and Simon's mum and dad said we don't have to pay rent until Simon gets a job and that'll be years. You could rent your flat out to an overseas student or an old person who needs looking after."

"They'd have to be fit, but, to get up the stairs," said Simon.

Computerized sympathy emanated briefly from the study. "Oh no! You've hit a tree." Mavie brought out the Greek platter. Simon left with her daughter at 8.15 p.m. precisely.

The next morning Mavie set off for work. Perhaps, she was thinking, as the car drove itself, perhaps if she gave the house to her daughter and Simon then she and Robert could live above the carport. Would Robert agree to that? What would her son say? As she waited, thinking, at the only set of traffic lights between her home and the pharmacy, a low-flying bird shat suddenly, alarmingly on her windscreen. Mavie stared ahead, unblinking, as the windscreen-wiper hypnotically smeared and cleared the white-grey film. As she stared, unseeing, lines she had once learned for an otherwise forgettable school break-up concert began to emerge from somewhere deep in her memory.

The common . . .
The common cormorant or shag
Lays eggs inside a paper bag
The reason . . .
The reason you will see no doubt
Is to keep the lightning out.
But what these unobservant birds
Have never noticed is that herds . . . herds . . .
Of wandering bears may come with buns
And steal the bags to hold the crumbs.

Mavie chortled involuntarily. She surprised herself. Her snickering grew into laughter, swelling and swelling until there was no stemming it. The car began to tremble.

"Crumbs," she hooted, wiping tears from her eyes. "Crumbs . . . Crumbs." She stretched and sang that final word on a high note as she drove. She whooped and carolled it, tossing it into the slipstream. She warbled as she blew with the wind right past the pharmacy, heading out of town. The car exploded onto the freeway and she was exploding in it. She was going. She was driving east. She was flying north. She was going somewhere. She'd never felt more relaxed.

SILENT PARTNERS

These are the shadows
which fall across our own shadows
deepened, dappled, crossed
looming legless on the wooden fence
arching over the cracked footpath
tracking us home
the silent partners of our silent partners.
Shadow play against a wall constructed of lies.
These are the shadows
lying within the shadow
which has doubled up behind us
in the late afternoon
as we step off the train
onto the grey asphalt of a platform
crossed by shadows steelier than rails
long with legs like ladders
torsos at the next station
heads down the track
in the black recesses of a coming night.
These are the shadows
deep and shallow, solid and spattered
slatted by a picket fence
dense along the concrete side of the bunker
    underpass
broken in wavelets on the lustrous grass
stretched across the waiting park
and there ensnared
by the dark entanglement of shades
cast by her silent partners, trees.

OLGA PAVLINOVA

THEOREMS AND METAPHORS

With all said and done,
theorems are tautologies.
Unobvious and wonderful perhaps,
but merely jewelled
elaborations of the known and trite.
Such, alas, are time and light
that theorems cease to stand alone
and sink in the swamps of trite and known.

Theorems enlarge,
but metaphors connect.
Analogy is not tautology
but deepens meaning multiply.
Better enrich the web of words
than find a property of surds
(though time tarnishes metaphors too,
so poets must restock the zoo).

JOHN PHILIP

INSTEAD OF LOVE

there is the heart
afloat in its bowl

of liquid slivers.
Instead of hope there are

balconies and flagstones
and suddenly remembered

whispers. Instead of grief
there are scraps of fabric

trapped in the branches
of driftwood. Instead

of sleep there is
a wet animal shivering

in its cave, unaware
that the hunters are never

coming. Instead of flight
there is ice in the river,

instead of heat a lake
whose shore we are forever

kept from. Instead of
sparrows there are

the empty trees and instead
of clouds, the vestibule.

IAN McBRYDE

GOLDEN SUMMER

after the painting 'Golden Summer, Eaglemont' by Arthur Streeton 1889

An eagle above the golden foil
of fields carries the moment on its back
as the sheep will the harvest of full
promise. Land buoyed on the earlier luck
of some Elysian dream: a much much
younger sense of how and where we were.
Moment caught in an effusive brush
of yellow ochre with little to fare
in showing clouds or shadows. All of that
was yet to come. There is no quarrel
here or need to point to other seasons. Yet
there is a longing, understood and real
to go back and claim that last gold year.
A summer we lost to war, drought and fear.

JEFF GUESS

ART FROM BLANK

for Paul

He washes his brushes in holy water
prays for a visit from a great master
anything to soothe the sting of white
from this cruel canvas sea.

A lighthouse beckons him
to leave the safe harbour of sketches
and wrestle his storm of colored thought
lashes of cold blue lust
salt spray of purple passion
frothy greens splash the tip
of his mind's tongue.

He tacks from side to side
his eye at the wheel
until at last he grasps a brush
holds it like a mast and moves
toward the uncharted shore.
With angst and a reckless dash
he slaps the first point
on his chromatic map.

JUDE AQUILINA

THE KENNEDYS

(a found poem)

The old man would push
Joe junior, Joe would
push Jack, Jack
would push Bobby.
Bobby would push Teddy.
And Teddy would
fall on his arse.

PETER O'MARA

IN SILENCE

There is a slip of time
when constant air currents cease,
and the slight stir of curtain
belling before the glass hangs mute.

There is the little instant –
like the shiver of a shaft let fly –
when the indistinct silvering
in a fading mirror rouses, shifts,
and then resumes its place.

There is the formal moment
when the resonance of the rose
dropping its quiet petals
from a bowl of Canton blue,
signals their last repose
on the polished table top.

And there is the slow movement,
the inward swing upon hushed hinges,
when the smooth arc of light
increasing across the floor
cues an entrance at an opening door.

Attention is arrested, noting
something ended, something else begun –
some motion in silence becoming inert,
some stillness beginning to run.

MARTHA RICHARDSON

GREGORY O'BRIEN

Outside the Interior

Two Australian Artists – Ken Bolton and Noel McKenna

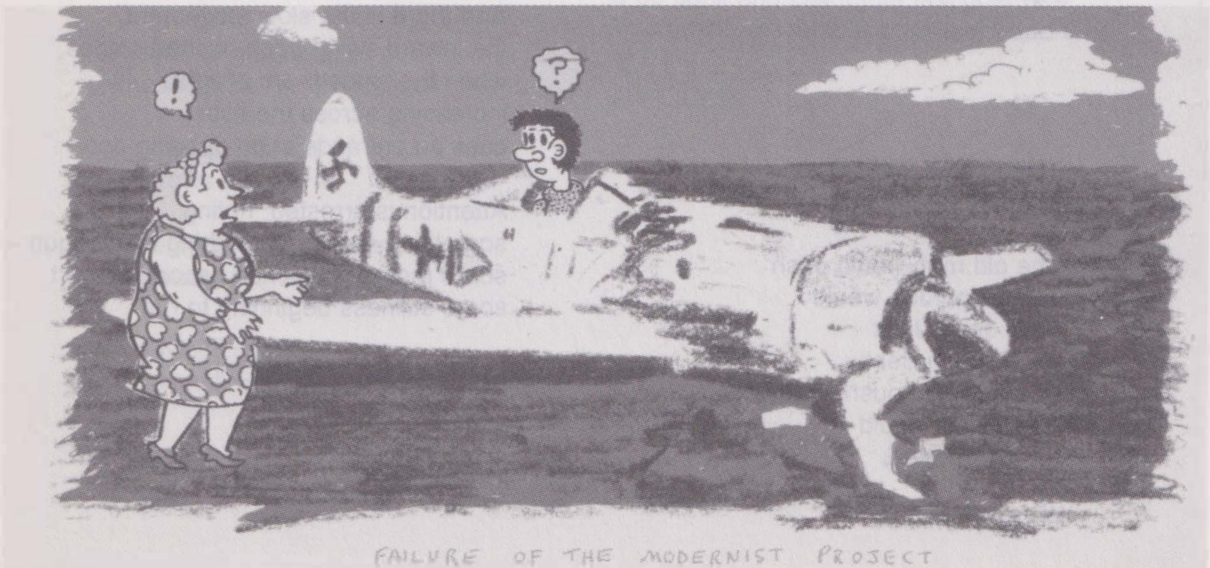
I have an image of my brother, Brendan, and me sailing along in our little ship, crossing the calm, disinterested ocean. (In fact it is March 1982 and we are sharing a bedsitter in Challis Ave, Potts Point, Sydney.) To counter our boredom and to speed our vessel we decide to unload some belongings. The first thing to go overboard is the continent of Australia.

"Sink or swim!" our voices echo from the grumbling matronly clouds. But the continent neither sinks nor swims, it rows off of its own accord, keeping pace with the spinning world.

My brother and I watch the Big Red Desert paddling across its blue ocean, one rowlock located at Adelaide, the other at Sydney (ensuring the vessel will chart an indirect course wherever it is going). At one oar is the Sydney painter Noel McKenna, at the other the Adelaide poet and publisher Ken Bolton.[1]

THERE'S NOTHING MORE POPULAR than art except, perhaps, the absence of art. On 23 August 1911, the theft of the Mona Lisa from the Louvre was announced. *Le Temps* had reported the disappearance in a tiny paragraph the previous evening. While the thief, Vincenzo Perugia, was admiring the painting in his down-at-heel bedsitter on the other side of town, crowds were queuing outside the Louvre to see the blank wall space where the Mona Lisa once hung, and gallery staff and police were combing the forty-nine acres of floorspace for any trace.

Perugia later admitted falling in love with the Mona Lisa: "I fell a victim to her smile and feasted my eyes on my treasure every evening, discovering each time new beauty and perversity in her . . ."[2] During the two years the painting was missing, the poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire



Noel McKenna, no date

was accused on a number of occasions and, at one point, even arrested in relation to the theft. (Apparently some French persons still believe Apollinaire was involved in the crime, despite his being cleared of any involvement whatsoever.)

It probably says something about the nature of poetry that the poet is accused, from time to time, of making off with Art. The iconoclastic Adelaide poet and art critic Ken Bolton has certainly followed in the French poet's footsteps and been accused of such misdemeanours during the two decades of his career as writer, and editor of such radical journals as *Magic Sam* (1978–1982) and *Otis Rush* (1987–).[3] Bolton's poetry is concerned with what is left on the gallery wall once the painting has been stolen. But as well as dismantling artistic/poetic conventions, his poems knowingly and often surreptitiously inhabit those conventions.

As both writer and occasional visual artist, Bolton has also made it his business to examine and, for the most part, undermine the various national complacencies or banal enthusiasms that masquerade as popular or national culture. On the subject of nationalism, Ken Bolton cheerfully and incessantly disavows the grand and the inflated, the heroic and the hieratic. Australia, for Bolton, is an image on a teatowel, the logo on a tin of Fosters or a trademark on an Esky. It can also be the interior of a rental flat, a desk with ashtray, coffee cup, an old radiogram and a heap of LP records.

While the writing teems with references to Literature and Art, the effect of this is never to elevate the poetry or strike airs. In fact, it works the other way, hauling cultural icons and figures/items of esteem down into the world of everyday objects, of things. Bolton's poetry is never baroque, it is a poetry of deflation rather than elevation.

It is also a poetry of the hurried look – a torrent of trivia, misunderstandings, occasional insights, ambling about the home, killing time ("Unemployed at last!" cries the poet). The poet is saying that just as Life itself is composed of the throwaway, the ephemeral, it follows that Life's best mate, Poetry, should be made of similar matter.

Bolton uses collage techniques – a kind of multitracking – in his poetry, but the tone is always monitored, is flattened or (as Barthes would say) "cooled". "It is like / an Alpine ad / or something by Matisse", as Bolton puts it. The poems are sites of indecision as well as deliberation and, every once in a while, action. The characters communicate incessantly; they annoy one another; they interrupt, intrude, disgrace themselves, laugh a lot. They drink, they fall asleep, they indulge their Funny Ideas:

So I
should drop all this stuff about Romantic Love
tho of course
you know I was joking

: chuck-chuck-chuckling thru the
Night

surrounded by my culture

(as Annie Bickford used to say, when the neighbours said
Turn it down! "But it's our culture!"

& she was right.

'poem (where I live)'

There are no lyrical flights – or if there are then Bolton ensures the reader is aware of the cranky machinery, the cogs and propellers of Tradition, at work inside them. He wants the reader to know how the poem is constructed, to be able to see through it. The process is one of demystification as well as deflation. The poet is confined to the world his feet walk on – the furthest he gets from it is a speeding plane or car or bicycle:

. . . me in the wire basket
of your bicycle   you pedal me to the picnic   smiling

not at me   but at the clouds   little white Magrittes
against the quiet, loud blue   so I can see your chin.
you're
pedalling

'a e i o u (twice)'

As well as inhabiting untidy flats, noisy bars, nightspots and the baskets of bicycles, the poet finds himself hanging around the Western Canon. And from his precarious niche perched out on a limb or tip of that tradition, he adopts the lofty, exalted tones of High Art to address such contemporary versions of the Grecian Urn as the sardine tin or, in the following instance, the polystyrene cup:

little styrofoam cup
I really like you:
in my mind's idea.
That sort of
round, inflated look
astronauts have

in that pearly light they have
inevitably to get photographed in, cup,
a look
you take almost with you,
wherever you go, the look of
a thing to which illusions don't stick: the Idea
of the future as a rosy thing . . .

'Timeless Moment (little cup sestina)' –
'a true account of talking to a styrofoam cup, one night, outside the university architecture department'

Philosophical asides – and Bolton's poems are full of Big Themes – enter the poem by the same route as the most trivial thoughts, depending on what books are lying around the flat, what order suggests itself out of the general randomness. The poems drift, the focus of image and language moving from item to item, from room to room, as if in a state of day-dream. In the well-maintained anarchy of the poem's setting, the reader is accordingly given the pleasure of moving around freely, without the author willing any particular response at any particular time.

In its insistence that poetry operate close to unmediated experience, bereft of its privileges and aloofness, his project harks back to Frank O'Hara and Blaise Cendrars – although the tone of Bolton's poems could just as easily be sourced to the lyric sheets of Jerry Lee Lewis albums, the scripts of late-night B-movies and the speech bubbles of cartoon characters.

RATHER THAN BEING SINGULAR or exemplary, the experiences of the poet, as far as Bolton is concerned, are part of a democratic, communal flux. The ears and voice of the poem are tuned to everyday conversation, the throw-away phrase, the mumbled rejoinder. A television in the next room can divert the poem; so can passers-by, complete strangers, or the unannounced arrival of friend or pet. The poems chart a naturalistic movement through time as well as space. Like a journal, they inhabit the present tense, itemizing experiences as they happen, not picking them up in hindsight.

The poem is not allowed to fulfil itself, to settle into its own pristine, fully formed surface – it has to keep moving; it has to *operate*. Bracketed thoughts, memories and asides flicker in and out of the poem, asserting its very ordinariness. Romanticism and idealism might enter the poem as ideas but never as working principles. The writing refuses to be a sideshow or to divorce itself from the circumstances of its making. The flat left untidied in one poem is still untidy at the beginning of the next one. And, at about this point – with Bolton's demotion and asset stripping of the Western Tradition also in mind – a curious strain of Marxism can be seen wafting through the atmosphere like steam from a caffe latte.[4]

up in the sky! in the best bookstores! in the best
homes! is that australian poetry? it that about
cows? yes & no!

is rhyme associated with reason? can you read
an australian poem & not see cows?
has metaphor died yet? has myth? look now.

'The way things aren't'
(from promotional material for Sea Cruise Books, produced by Absolutely Furious Productions)

Some critics have considered, quite rightly, aspects of Bolton's radical program an insult to 'the way things are' within the Literary Establishment (which, I suspect Bolton would assert, is a far cry from 'the way things are' for most people). A constant scourge of the puffed up and the phoney, there is a combative, even abusive, strain to Bolton's poetry which, surprisingly, is the most traditional element of his whole endeavour. It puts him in line with Chaucer, Dunbar and Dante and the bards of old who, according to critic Hugh Kenner, were "retained to do two main things, praise the king's friends, curse the king's enemies, and if they knew their business their curses were efficacious; there are tales of rats rhymed to death. When the bard Senchan Torpest spoke quatrains against rodents who'd eaten his dinner, ten of them dropped dead from the rafters of the house."

If the amount of annoyance Bolton's poems have caused is any indication then he is a very effective poet indeed. Early in his career he managed to ali-

enate many of the power-brokers of Australian Literature, who weren't exactly in a hurry to let such a disruptive voice in:

> . . . they have given poetry a bad name
> by making us all seem 'too sensitive'
> but you are changing all that . . .
> it is like in that John Forbes poem
> where it says
> CHUCK PIES!
> – I would
> like to do it here
> (it is 'the stooge effect')
> great faces, from history,
> are lining up to be hit by pies Attila the Hun, Hitler;
> Churchill,
> that bastard that ran the corner store.
> Les Murray.
> & Fatty Fin (whom Stefan says
> he was always reminded of,
> when he read Australian poetry).
>
> *'Christ's Entry into Brussels'*
> *or 'Ode to the Three Stooges'*

Bolton's poetry is a deliberate – although not unaffectionate – hijacking of Australian Literature. Like Vincenzo Perugia disappearing through a side-door of the Louvre with the Mona Lisa, removed from its frame, under one arm, it can be read as a statement of love as well as disrespect. Even if, at times – as in his notorious 'Poets Drinking' drawings (published in *Magic Sam* #4) – he seems intent on flogging Oz Lit off to the lowest bidder. (Remember that in a similarly contradictory manoeuvre, Perugia unsuccessfully tried to hock his beloved Mona Lisa to a London antique dealer.)

Rather than have his artistic project impaired by an absence of grants and prizes from the Literature Board or by the absence of a sympathetic critical and publishing climate, Bolton has, since the late 1970s, turned such opposition around, transforming it into the very subject matter of his poetry, something which has become useful and, perhaps even, essential to him.

THE FACT THAT, UNTIL RECENTLY, Bolton's poetry came dressed combatively in hand-drawn covers, accentuating the cartoonish and the irreverent, further underlined his status as interloper and saboteur. His most radical journal to date, *Magic Sam*, set out to undermine ideas of permanence, format, formality and hegemony. Gestetnered and mischievously 'hand-done', it incorporated screenprinted materials as well as a smattering of hand-drawn images and text in coloured pencil and crayon, with the end result that each individual copy of the magazine was unique. When Penguin published Bolton's *Selected Poems* in 1992 it looked a very odd bird indeed compared to his productions of the previous fifteen years. At last, and ironically, Bolton was being published in the very form his previous productions seemed intent on undermining.[5]

Author of a vast oeuvre of cartoons, Bolton adopts a number of pseudonyms including A.F. Drawings, Raoul du Plicit, Fran Daddo, Howard Climbing and Wulfe Hubermann. As well as affronting Literary History, Bolton, in these cartoons, gives Art History one in the eye (his drawings often parody visual art icons, from Bocklin's 'The Island of the Dead' to de Chirico's 'The Song of Love'). Like his poetry, his drawings refuse to be an homogenous surface – to be 'well-rendered' or 'well-turned'.

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE DRAWINGS by Ken Bolton is of a dog running with a stick in its mouth. Just as a *New York Times* reporter once rhapsodized over Meredith Monk's music: "Monumental in its minimalism!" So it undoubtedly is with Bolton's drawing.

At one time, or so I'm told, Bolton was flatting in somewhat cramped conditions and had to sleep on a top bunk with his face only two feet away from the ceiling, to which he affixed the original drawing of the running dog – directly in front of his sleeping and waking face. And I think that is a useful metaphor for Bolton's poetry: a bringing to consciousness, a call to various sorts of attention, and also a losing of consciousness – a fabulous, disorientating, irrational, intoxicating ballpark of ideas. A presence and an absence spanning the distance between the dog on the ceiling and the Mona Lisa.

The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is the mark of existence. (Simone Weil)

No one creates . . . the artist assembles memories. (Jack B. Yeats)

McKenna enjoys a high profile at this year's Australian art Oscars, having taken the Sulman trophy and been nominated for the Dobell Drawing Prize. He's also represented in the. . .Wynne exhibition. (Felicity Fenner, Sydney Morning Herald, March 25, 1994)

NOEL MCKENNA AND I were both working in the kitchen of The Basement, a jazz nightclub in Sydney, around the middle of 1982. The club was in Reiby Place, across the lane from the painter Brett Whiteley's studio. Noel was washing dishes in the evenings and painting during the day in his studio off Taylor Square. Most of his paintings from this time were of race-horses (his other obsession, besides painting, being horses). I think Noel was interested in my brother Brendan and me because we were New Zealanders and so many good race-horses came from New Zealand. Later that year I bought a painting from him, entitled 'New Zealand Filly', which I gave to my brother for his twenty-third birthday.

Noel McKenna, Jumping Pet, *1993*

Noel had already arrived at a mature style, particularly in his small canvases, watercolours and etchings.[6] The mood and accomplishment of the pictures were remarkably sustained. In their understated way they were imbued with a sense of mortality, an awareness of loss and the fragility of emotions. I came to the conclusion that these images embodied a sense of a lost childhood which had somehow been replaced by the racetrack.

McKenna continues to investigate states of vulnerability and anxiety – whether his paintings are of a lone jockey at a deserted racetrack or a leaping dog (his many depictions of domestic pets and circus animals are remarkable for their implied human presence and indirect engagement with the human condition). The predominant mood of the pictures has always been of foreboding and isolation, although this is frequently transcended by a suggestion of warmth and compassion. But warmth, for McKenna, is a temporary or provisional thing – the cold is never far off.

Noel McKenna's influences include Fred Williams (his early etchings of figures, in particular) and Sidney Nolan, whose figure and horse in landscape compositions from the 1940s his work deliberately echoes. In the early 1980s, he was enthusiastic about painters such as Balthus and Morandi, whose work he had studied in books, although his studio, which he shared with a large, shifting population of artists, contained far more magazines than books. I recall a lot of racing journals – Noel's day in the studio was punctuated by the occasional trip to the TAB. My brother Brendan was also a minor gambler so we spent a few afternoons together at Randwick Racecourse. Usually losing, as I recall.

McKenna's art is concerned with narrative and event, with the experience or observation frozen in time. Inadvertently, the painted image imposes a time-frame – his running horses, for instance, are captured at about a thousandth of a second, whereas a picture of a person sleeping could have a 'shutter speed' of, say, half an hour. These are important concerns for the painter as they define the psychological nature – the stability and the instability – of the image.

Just as, at a racetrack, the horses compete to cover distance, so McKenna's pictures stop and start time; they measure trajectories of objects or beings moving through and/or suspended in space. Like the French painter Pierre Tal-Coat, McKenna

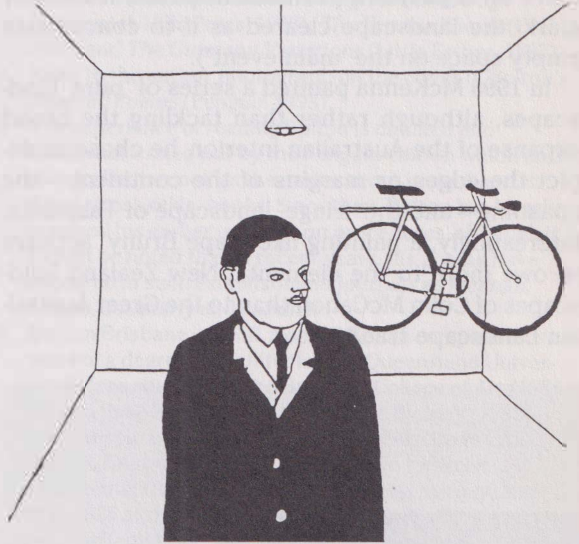
has always been "haunted by space and time", although he deals with the problem in a more allegorical, anecdotal way than the French abstractionist. Never completely knowable, McKenna's pictures are enigmas. Rather than statements, they are whisperings – meaning is insinuated, not inscribed.

BY THE END OF 1982, Noel had left The Basement and did time as a bookie's assistant at Randwick Racecourse. Scraps of language – a kind of 'ticketing' perhaps – had already entered the images by this time and during the next few years he started producing (appropriately, perhaps, for an ex-bookmaker's assistant) book-works. Since the mid-1980s, McKenna has produced small editions of illustrated books, some to accompany exhibitions, others incorporating poetry by writers as diverse as David Malouf and Elizabeth Smither.[7]

I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PUT my finger on a peculiarly Australian *strangeness* – a species, I suspect, of surrealism – spanning the distance between the Ern Malley hoax and contemporary Australian culture. I was recently watching a State of Origin rugby league match (broadcast live on New Zealand television) in which the commentators referred to one of the more solidly built players by his nick-name, 'The Brick With Eyes'. Somehow the name, intoned with a sense of awe rather than irony, didn't seem all that surprising or out of place, given the extremes to which the national psyche is constantly being stretched.

David Malouf's poem 'Bicycle' (published in an edition illustrated by McKenna in 1993) peddles down similarly unstable psychological territory, Noel McKenna's accompanying drawings placing it within arm's length of Magritte or Max Ernst (with a backward glance towards Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd). These pictures, like the rest of McKenna's work, monitor an ambiguous distance between the image and the emotion engaged by it. They are neither sentimental nor funny. If they were they would end up in the vicinity of Leunig – instead McKenna is closer to Edward Hopper or De Chirico (two artists central to him). The images are constantly defining the extent of things, their fragile boundaries. In this, their project parallels that of Melbourne writer Gerald Murnane whose novels *Tamarisk Row* and *The Plains* are full of carefully placed objects and characters within similarly amplified and diminished spaces. Both novelist and artist project major anxieties onto the minutiae of life, focusing on the obsessive autonomy or privacy of the individual.

The isolation inherent in McKenna's images is not usually imposed upon the characters but seems, rather, to emanate from within them. The work is a



Noel McKenna, from Bicycle: A Poem by David Malouf, *1993*

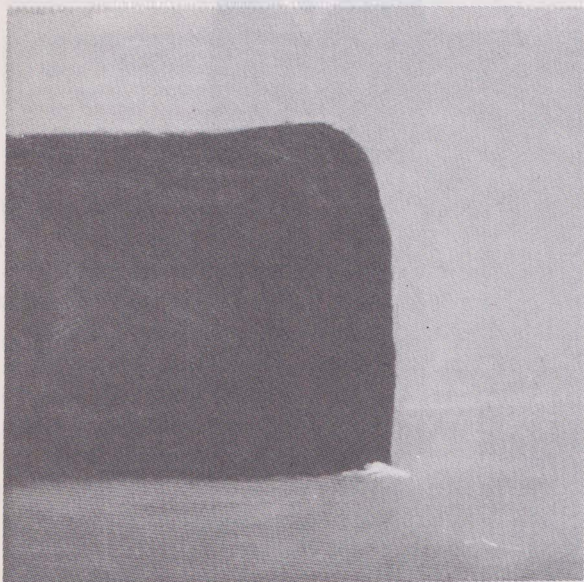
conscious reworking of the Man Alone myth (certainly a prevalent ethos in New Zealand) – McKenna's anti-heroes are jockeys, lone men rowing dinghies, a figure high up a tree – although in recent years, the lone figure has been joined by a family (reflecting McKenna's changing domestic situation) and a very tentative sense of family and community has begun to permeate the work.

His iconography has expanded to incorporate imagery from popular culture as diverse as Babar the Elephant and the merchandising of Australian artist/entrepreneur Ken Done. McKenna seems to have found in Ken Done a metaphor for the commercialization and gimmickry of mainstream Australia. "Your Own Home" proclaims a billboard advertising Done Place, a surreal housing development; "No Interest", the hoarding continues, ironically. In another painting a family group move woodenly past, as though imprisoned in their mindlessly cheerful attire. (As well as reflecting an eerie light on society in general, McKenna's paintings

delve into the various kinds of unease the domestic situation – the nuclear family – gives rise to.)

McKenna's characters often find themselves caught up in non-human 'societies' – gatherings of trees, household furniture, toys. Such non-human elements are given as much formal and narrative significance as the human figures themselves. All the elements within the artist's compositions are there for a purpose (his backdrops are invariably stark, the landscape cleared as if to concentrate empty space on the 'main event').

In 1995 McKenna painted a series of 'pure' landscapes, although rather than tackling the broad expanse of the Australian interior, he chose to depict the edges or margins of the continent – the coastline – and the 'fringe' landscape of Tasmania. Interestingly, a painting like 'Cape Bruny' appears to owe more to the elemental New Zealand landscapes of Colin McCahon than to the Great Australian Landscape tradition.



Noel McKenna, Cape Bruny, *1994*

WHILE, ON ONE LEVEL, the reality of McKenna's work is stripped of myths, it is also strangely reconfigured as myth. Like William Carlos Williams, he keeps returning to the familiar, to that which is experienced – but only because it can never really be familiar; there is always more to be experienced.

McKenna creates a world of dark, childish imagining, a world balanced between desolation and teeming life – as if his subjective world is about to collapse under the pressure of the objective world, and the other way around.

A tonal painter rather than a colourist, McKenna achieves a metaphysical stillness, a silence, within his work. It is as if all sound has been drained from a landscape or interior. Even the television is rendered voiceless. This is a place where nothing can be said, where communication is impossible – an ambiguous state between quietness and deafness.

MCKENNA'S LINE DRAWINGS chart the discovery of forms and images. In his 1989 book, *A–Z Alphabet*, the line is tenuous, uncertain, and therein lies its quirky power. It is as if he has never drawn, for instance, a ship before – he is 'discovering' the form much the same way a child discovers a new word. The drawings in that book, and in McKenna's work generally, enact primitive dramas in which the meanings of words and objects are merged into a kind of visual murmuring. They call to mind Samuel Beckett whose stark psychological ground was traversed by similarly elusive, wafting vapours of meaning, 'a murmuring', as the Irishman might have called it, 'something gone wrong with the silence'.

PLAYING OFF THE IMMEDIATE against the remote, Noel McKenna and Ken Bolton are both aware, and yet deeply suspicious, of the Australian reality, investigating in their disparate ways the simple fact of living on the edge of a huge, unalterable space – an otherness infringing upon, or at least qualifying, that which is present.

McKenna's precarious peopling of this alien and alienating space again calls to mind Murnane's *The Plains*. McKenna's Australia is a stark landscape interrupted by people – it can never settle into the scenic or sentimental. Bolton, on the other hand, chooses to look to the interior of his flat instead of The Interior. His Australia is what happens within walls, in flats or pubs or art galleries. The landscape, for him, is like the sky – elsewhere and out of reach.

Setting quietly about unsettling monolithic traditions and fixed attitudes, they are for the dismantling of established positions (and the power exerted from there) and for the taking up of a panoply of subjective positions. They reflect a kind of relativism defined by Northrop Frye as a realization that "the centre of reality is wherever one hap-

pens to be, and its circumference is whatever one's imagination can make sense of."

Bolton and McKenna work on the outskirts, the periphery; Bolton scrawling his subversive commentaries around the edges of Australian literature, McKenna excavating his – for the most part – small-scale, intimist world. They work at the frontiers, the boundaries that call into question the whole notion of the interior, the establishment, the centre. If, within the Australian scene, their productions are often considered a kind of marginalia, I would suggest that therein lies their capacity to de-centre, to put a curious spin on the Great Immoveable South Land. Accordingly, it seems almost appropriate to be writing of them from the Wellington suburb of Hataitai, right out here on the outskirts of Australasia, on the exterior of the exterior.

ENDNOTES

1. I first started reading Ken Bolton's poetry while living in Sydney in the early 1980s. Some years later I wrote a verse novella entitled *Malachi* which was influenced by Bolton, and his occasional collaborator John Jenkins, in some fairly obvious ways. Like their joint publication *The Ferrara Poems* (EAF, 1989), it was a jaunty travel narrative, rolling along on heroic couplets. In a note at the back of my book, I acknowledged Bolton and Jenkins as 'strugglers in the outback' (a variation on Ezra Pound's description of Basil Bunting and Louis Zukofsky as 'strugglers in the desert'). My book was originally photocopied in an edition of twenty-two copies, one of which crossed the Tasman and came under the eye of Bolton who subsequently reprinted it in his journal *Otis Rush* and as a separate publication under his Little Esther imprint in 1993.
2. Quoted in *The Connoisseur Crimes – Great Art Thefts of the Century* (Drive Publications, London, 1981).
3. Born in Sydney in 1949, Bolton has lived in Adelaide since 1982, where he runs a bookstore at the Experimental Art Foundation. Books by Ken Bolton include: *Blonde and French* (Island Press, 1977); *Talking to You* (Rigmarole, 1983); *Blazing Shoes* (Open Dammit, 1984); *Two Poems* (Experimental Art Foundation, 1990); *Sestina to the Centre of the Brain* (Little Esther, 1991); *Selected Poems* (Penguin, 1992). Bolton has also collaborated with John Jenkins on the following: *Airborne Dogs* (Brunswick Hills Press, 1988); *The Ferrara Poems* (EAF, 1989) and *The Gutmann Variations* (Little Esther, 1993).
4. Refer to the author photograph on the cover of Bolton's *Selected Poems* (Penguin 1993).
5. The experience of reading Bolton is dimmed and somewhat ironed out by the Penguin edition which isn't as 'excellent – cool' as the earlier more immediate, at times ramshackle, books. Since then, Bolton has largely resumed his earlier publication procedures, although it should be noted that in recent years, his poems have appeared in such establishment journals as *Meanjin*, *Scripsi*, *Southerly* and *Landfall*.
6. Born in Brisbane in 1956, Noel McKenna completed two years of a degree in architecture at Queensland University before studying at the Brisbane College of Art (1976-78) and the Alexander Mackie College, Sydney (1981). His first solo exhibition was at the Kelvin Grove CAE Gallery, Brisbane, in 1978. Through the 1980s he exhibited at the Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney, and from 1985 at the Niagara Gallery, Melbourne.
7. Noel McKenna's productions include: *Animaux*, poems by Elizabeth Smither (Modern House, 1988); *A–Z* (Garry Anderson Gallery, 1989); *Drawings* (Garry Anderson Gallery, 1991); *Dog* (published by the artist, 1991); *Pictures and Prints* (Niagara Galleries, 1992); *Great Lake*, poem by Gregory O'Brien (published by the artist, 1992); *Bicycle*, poem by David Malouf (Thinking Fisherman Publications, 1992); *How We Met*, poems by Jenny Bornholdt (Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995).

FACES AT NIGHT

it is late
at night &, for
the hell of it,
I make a tape
make
cups of tea
& the poets – the
poets I 'love'
(tonight they are
"okay by me")
where I sit my
image faces me
reflected in the dark
of the windows opposite
pleasantly blocked –
almost entirely – by
the window frame
so I don't have to watch
my face shift, endlessly,
to look alright, to
get bored with etc –
something, tho,
that I may do later!
when you go to write a poem
it is almost as if you must choose
which sort of poet
you are going to be.
For me
it is like that –
sometimes – for others, more
authentic than I,
it may not be –
they have something to be going on with
a vision to reveal
continuously –
knowledge to dispense
not me
"He's got a nerve"
a phrase always spoken
in my mind by a woman
an American 1947
to 1958 Eve Arden
is my pick
"something to be going on with"
is said
in simple-minded triumph
by an idiot who taught me
science, after delivering
something primitive – a
slap across the head, 15
minutes more work, say,
after the bell has gone
&, with those words,
he shoots out the door
Not my head
One of the brighter ones,
I was bright enough
to develop the earliest animosity to him
amongst the students. Baum-
gartner – all is forgiven!
What else?
Now John
he sits powerfully
at his desk
large shoulders hunched
his mighty brain is
finishing off
a line of powerful reasoning
& logic is defied – 'stands' defied
in fact – or his shoulders
(powerful) are relaxed he
pens the opening lines
that roll easily, no complication
clouds (yet) their path
to mere description, tautology
(tho it will) they have already
a smirk about them these lines
tho the face ('visage', 'dial')
that reflects this powerful brain
reflects it oddly the expression is one
of puzzle, slight
consternation . . . but that is
John.
My face
is reflected
but I can't see it
Pam's
I can see
tho I see it
from above & it is in
profile, bent, having just paused
but bent now & writing quickly
two lines, three! & she straightens
She is in her tiny study
at the bottom of the house
& I would appear
to have come down stairs
to see her
& am floating
– to see her from this angle –

above the door
near the transom!
is that what they are called
the glass window, or panel,
above the door (again I am
in a movie – black & white –
that is how I 'see' the transom
Who is on the other side
of that door, Ray Milland
– the *Lost Weekend*? –
or gangsters, unpacking one of those
large brown paper bags
with lunch in it: they
are 'holed up' after a job
"the hardest part is the waiting"
etc "I ordered pickles!"
What was Pam writing about?
She's finished now. She
sits back, fiddles
with a cassette-tape cover,
shakes it
to see if it is empty,
but doesn't look to see
what tape it is, she is
thinking. If it is a good poem
I hope she sends it in the mail
Then I can read it.
The
face of Cath when she writes
I see it in profile
as she sits at her desk
& as if I have just entered the room
but am not, this time, floating –
my head is about head high! –
or I see it as she sits in bed
writing & see it full-on, tipped
tho, a little, toward the plane
of the paper she is writing on
her face looks alert & intelligent
tho calm – I guess apprehension
is ruled out – & things are
getting done
Now I see the face
of Steve Kelen, large, dark, & brooding
& suddenly Satanic
now I see
mine!
Because I have looked up, briefly,
to wonder has the record stopped that
I am taping, I resemble
someone taking dictation
the speaker has paused –
writing hand stilled, head at
attention. I am
wearing a jacket an old suit jacket
of grey so I look like a clerk
mid century
doing stock-take
in a small town country store
I look slightly careworn, except
there is almost no detail –
but if Edward Hopper were to paint it
those are the details it would be given,
my dial
tho *"His painting days
are over, son"* I hear the voice of
. . . Forrest Tucker (he of the
Noble Visage & the career high
of season after season
of *F Troop* – not
real big
in my consciousness, tho
I liked it, another happy dystopia
like *Gilligan's Island* or . . . what else?
Hogan's Heroes –
for the Authoritarian
Personality
(thankyou,
Frankfurt School!)
I place my visage, carefully,
back behind the frame
& continue to write

tho what to say?

I wonder
if they have all written tonight?
Steve, Cath, Pam, John?
the long face of Robert Gray,
Anna Couani – whose mother
thought I resembled a horse –
the small earnest face of Jamie Grant
(I've never seen it) the guy who wrote
Ross's Poems, I wonder what kind of face
is Ross Bleckner's –
Laurie's,
looking Buddha-like yet careful.

KEN BOLTON

miscellany

A Note From the Chair

SINCE STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH'S death in 1988, the editors of *Overland* have been the late Barrett Reid (1988–1993) and John McLaren (1993–1997), constantly assisted by a dozen or twenty volunteers. This is John McLaren's last issue; Shirley McLaren is also retiring as treasurer. We warmly thank them both for carrying on so devotedly.

Ian Syson has been appointed editor. Ian has a PhD from the University of Queensland in Australian literature, teaches at the Victoria University of Technology, and in recent years has contributed articles and reviews to several journals. We believe he has much to offer.

The Literature Board (now Literature Fund) of the Australia Council reduced our grants for 1995 and 1996 from $30,000 to $26,000, then $20,000. Strong rumour had it that our grant might be abolished. If that had happened it would have been very difficult to carry on the journal. We consequently launched a limited private appeal to donors which was successful enough to stabilize our position for one or two years. To our great delight the Literature Fund has so approved of our current performance as to raise its grant to $25,000 for 1997 and 1998. Moreover, Arts Victoria has slightly increased its annual grant. Thus our short-term future is assured. Yet we still operate on a shoestring and can afford to pay (apart from the contributors) only one part-time executive assistant (and not the editor). Yet there are advantages in remaining almost entirely a voluntary co-operative.

We continue to be buoyed up by subscribers and other correspondents – and some reviewers – who reassure us about our quality and purpose . . .

Geoff Serle

Still Got a Hard-Earned Thirst

SUMMER IS A TIME FOR SPORT, reading and reading about sport and then more sport. But about half-way through *Carlton and United Breweries Best Australian Sports Writing and Photography 1996* (William Heinemann Australia, $19.95) I thought I just couldn't take any more – not another story about Aussie Rules, not another dose of hagiography about a cricketing or footballing hero/thug. I wanted to yell out, just like dad did at the television when the footy was on, "bloody umpires!" – how could they pick this sporting monoculture as representing the best Australian sports writing? Are they blind? What about the Olympics, or Michael Doohan's motorcycling, or Karrie Webb's rapid rise to champion status, or the corporate machinations of Super League, to name only a few recent episodes worth writing about. Then I got to the photography section, and things improved a little, as sports outside the holy Oz trinity/trifecta of football, cricket, and racing were strikingly rendered. Yet by the end of the book, I still had a hard-earned thirst for something more than what this version of the dominant Australian sport culture could offer.

The anthology is a collection of the shortlisted entries (mainly newspaper and magazine feature articles) in the inaugural Carlton and United Breweries sports writing and photography awards, and this origin goes some way to explaining the lack of diversity in the book's contents. The newspaper sports pages are still dominated by the blokes' holy trifecta, so it is not surprising that over half the stories shortlisted cover football (specifically Australian Rules), cricket, or horse racing, with barely a woman contributor or athlete present, and minority sports also battling to get a jersey. The biographical details of the contributors point towards

another factor in keeping the hegemony going: sports journalists (who are overwhelmingly male) appear to write about sports they play and love, thus the pages remain the same. And I don't wish to sound cynical, but might there be some significance in the fact that the sports that are dominant in the anthology share the same sponsor as the writing and photography competition?

As the judges note, Australia lacks a tradition of sports writing, therefore this competition and anthology are steps in the right direction, for there are some great stories and photography which capture the magic, and physical and emotional extremes that characterize sport. Caroline Overington's 'Seventeen Hours in Bass Strait', a chronicle of Tammy Van Wisse's swim, is exemplary in its description of this gruelling feat, while Ian Cockerill's insightful profile of AFL coach, Michael Malthouse, cuts through the hype and platitudes surrounding professional sporting 'personalities'. Stephanie Holt's memoir of being a child St Kilda fan is whimsical and quite original, as she recounts how gender affects sporting involvement and passions. And Spiros Zavros's 'Fragile Talent on Display – And Gone' uses sport as a dignified metaphor for life, in a moving tribute to both David Campese and a dead friend.

Although the above pieces show the potential of sports writing, what all too often emerges in the book is a genre marked by bathos, sentimentality, an uncritical speaking position, nostalgia, and stereotypical masculine obsessions. These characteristics are hinted at in the judges' criterion for good sports writing: it is "a free trip to somewhere else . . . We want passion and all the other emotions you'll find on the sporting field. Don't worry about giving us a bit of brain food. Just hit us in the guts with a sharp punch." Thus the writing verges on being a cathartic outlet for macho dreamings of simpler times, fierce loyalties, physical courage and brutality, and Aussie battler-heroes.

Les Carlyon's eulogy for Ted Whitten appears a role model for a number of the stories: the working class larrikin/lout made good, a natural athlete turned folk hero, whose career is read to mark the changes in Australian society: "This was before multiculturalism, feminism and other gentler values". Carlyon's mixture of controlled sentimentality, anecdote, humour, and class comment is effective in representing sport as maker of Australian culture, but also marked by Australian history. Yet his piece also contains a ghost haunting many of the other stories: a masculinist national mythology under attack by the forces of big business and, I suspect, Carlyon's abovementioned "gentler values". This two-faced spectre helps explain the dominance in the collection of traditionally white Australian men's sports, sentimental boyhood recollections, occasional references to the impact of sponsorship and business on once 'tribal' rituals, heroic individuals triumphant rather than more general accounts of sporting codes, and an unselfconscious blokiness that John Singleton has made a fortune out of commodifying.

It seems there is an underlying nervousness about the changes in sport and Australian society, that the anthology generally does not wish to directly confront (how can it given the book's title?). Much of the writing prefers instead to function as a last bulwark against those ghosts it sometimes conflates and would prefer not to name (for it is far easier to blame feminism than capitalism for changes to the rules). Two stories, however, explore some of the harder issues of sport and politics: Colin Tatz and Patrick Smith's analyses of racism in Australian sport, which go some way to correcting apolitical mythologies of a level playing field.

The photography section also expands the range of sports represented and focus taken, and it is a pity that not more photographs could be included. This section captures the grace, power, and spectacle that sports can offer both spectator and participant. There are spectacular shots of rock-climbers, serene photos of swimmers, a great one of a women's surfboat crew about to be capsized, and the photo of the under-six soccer teams reminds us that sport isn't only about elite individuals making lots of money for physical suffering.

To raise and explore the harder questions surrounding contemporary sport and its implications with capitalism does not mean removing passion or love for sport (for example, Graham Watson's cycling photography and writing, or Joyce Carol Oates's *On Boxing*). Rather, such a task means a different angle of vision, with a matching language that might do justice to representing sport in its current "best of times, and worst of times" mode. Such a vision and language might well renovate the genre of sports writing itself, and take more of us to "somewhere else".

Margaret Henderson

Newsfront

A FEW WEEKS AGO the Australian Film Commission (AFC) released its annual survey of feature film and independent television drama production. The survey reveals that in 1995/96 thirty feature films with a total production value of $221 million were produced in Australia. The total financial commitment was the highest for eight years, and represented a twofold increase on the previous year. Such figures are however slightly misleading. Although twenty-five of the thirty features are classed by the AFC as Australian, their total budgets ($89 million, an average of $3.56 million) represents only 40% of investment. The five features classed as foreign had a total production value of $132 million, or an average of $26.4 million. The Australian government, principally through the Film Finance Corporation (FFC), was the main source of finance for fifteen of the twenty-five Australian features. Overall, 42% of total finance came from government sources, with 40% from overseas and 18% from private and commercial sources. As a footnote, the Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry, chaired by David Gonski, was due to report at the time of writing. In December last year the FFC announced that it would not approve any further investments until the outcome of the Review is known. In other words, this year could be very bleak for the Australian film industry

JUST FOR A CHANGE Fitzroy will be the centre of the (film) world on Sunday March 30. On that date, from dusk onwards at the corner of Brunswick and Johnson Streets, you can watch a cornucopia of short comedy films, entries all in the Provincial Comedy Festival. The Festival is an adjunct of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival which runs from March 27 to April 20. As if this weren't enough, the Film Festival is completely free.

IF YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED to make a movie but have been afraid you'd have to sell your soul to Christopher Skase to do it, you might be interested in a recent AFC publication. *Low Means Low* is the collected papers from a seminar fest on low budget feature-making held in mid-1995. Those offering their ten cents worth on the topic of making a film on the sniff of an oily rag include Rolf De Heer (director of *Bad Boy Bubby*), Sally Hibbin who has produced several of Ken Loach's films including *Riff Raff*, and American entertainment lawyer Karen Robson who gives an insight into the no budget/low budget scene in America. The book is available from AFC Publications, GPO Box 3984, Sydney 2001, for the almost affordable price of $24.95. Also of interest, the AFC has just released the fourth edition of *Get the Picture*, an irregular survey of film, television, video and new media data. Heaven for statistics nerds like me. A snip at $29.95 from AFC Publications, same address as above.

Ben Goldsmith

Sydneyside

GORE VIDAL'S BOOMING PRESENCE at the Sydney Writers' Festival brought lovers of his diverse output to the Town Hall. It also brought lovers of Whitlam. The politically progressive new middle class, long thought extinct, flocked to hear the charismatic Vidal. It was a strange evening. The evil of the corporations was denounced, the rhetoric of 'the people' was heard, and the virtues of socialism were preached. When Vidal suggested that the best thing Australians could do was restore Whitlam to Parliament, the Hall exploded in applause. The dose of nineteenth-century populism left the audience feeling warm, and laughter echoed out of the Hall, as hundreds headed off in their company cars for comfortable suburbs. What Bob Carr, budget-cutting Premier, critic of socialism, and friend to Vidal, thought of the speech has not been noted. It is unlikely that he felt too threatened.

THE SYDNEY SUBURB OF NEWTOWN is decidely hip at the moment, in literary terms. At last count, there were eight bookstores (four new and four second hand) along a two kilometre stretch of King Street. There are readings and events at Goulds, Better Read than Dead, and at the Sandringham Hotel. Now Newtown has its own literary mythology. Recent books by Linda Jaivin and Beth Spencer have been set in Newtown. In *Rock'n'Roll Babes From Outer Space*, Jaivin shows us Newtown – home to crusties, punks, rockers, ravers and piercing artists. The acid-dropping, tattoo-wearing characters constitute the bulk of the suburb, and 'The Last Nuclear Family in Newtown' tiptoes along warily. This image of Newtown brings shoppers and sub-

urbanites anxious for titillation. The daring among them have been buying and renovating houses for a number of years. The myth of Newtown's bohemian status is driving property prices up and bringing more nuclear families in. This is a familiar process, evident before in the gentrification of Greenwich Village and Soho in New York, and in Balmain and Paddington closer to home. It also demonstrates an evolution in the role of the writer: not writer in the service of nation, community or social class, but writer in the service of real estate agent. Perhaps real estate companies such as L.J. Hooker and Richardson and Wrench should be encouraged to move into publishing. They're certainly gaining benefits from local writing at the moment.

Sean Scalmer

Children in a Truly Civil Society

EVA COX IN HER 1996 ABC Boyer Lectures, described her ideas about a 'Truly Civil Society'. In her third lecture she stated: "We should create a culture of child rearing which expects children to be aware of the needs of others, to be co-operative and to be able to work in groups." This statement describes the child rearing practices needed to carry out the ideals expressed in the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* which was endorsed by the League of Nations in 1924 and re-affirmed by the United Nations in 1948. The fifth point of this Declaration stated: "The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of humanity."

The *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* has been updated several times with the result that since 1950 the ideals in point five have gradually been changed out of all recognition. For example the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child stated:

> A child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society and be brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and *in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.* (our emphasis)

Fine words, but emphasis has shifted from "the service to humanity" to preparing the child "to live an individual life". There are two reasons for concern:

1. "An individual life in society" could mean self interest and self advancement, for example in getting a living. The concept is entirely consistent with an acquisitive capitalist-style, market-oriented morality which today we equate with economic rationalism.

2. To "be brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity" could be entirely a passive matter on the part of the child with no consciousness to do anything about it, except to develop a lofty sentiment; reminiscent of the way governments have treated Aborigines, with fine words and dubious actions.

Thus, the current Charter on the *Rights of the Child* reflects the dominating, and growing, trend of modern society to emphasize individualism.

In 1978, Eva Cox wrote an article called 'Beware the Call of Nature' in which she stated:

> The cumulative experiences of the last two centuries have produced children who are adapted to an acquisitive, individualistic society. The last decades since the Second World War have produced young adults who are, perhaps, even too selfish and self-indulgent for capitalism . . . Many have grown up into highly privatized individuals who are family centred and have little concern for the world about them.[1]

Added to these concerns is that in the 1990s individualism and privatization, social isolation and passivity could be escalated through the way modern technology is being used to present information. In an article on the 'Information Super-highway' Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell have warned:

> The information conceptualized is overwhelmingly in terms of narrow, economic imperatives, rather than broader social needs which are not seen to attract markets or provide substantial return on investment.[2]

Of course creating conditions for social responsibility (whether for children or adults) must be balanced by appreciating the uniqueness of individuals. Eva Cox recognized this, stating:

This form of child rearing (a child rearing which expects children to be aware of others, to be co-operative and to work in groups) does not mean that children lose their ability to think and act as autonomous individuals.

But the development of autonomous individuality depends on children being given opportunities for developing self esteem (an awareness of their own worth). This is only possible through relating to others and depends on children feeling that they have their own individual contribution to make. Individual autonomy is developed through group appreciation of altruism.

The most significant *others* that a child relates to are its parents but as Eva Cox stated there is a tendency for modern society to develop privatized individuality and family centredness. In addition, as Margaret Mead has pointed out: "We now expect a tiny family unit to achieve what no other society has ever expected of the family. In effect we call upon the family to achieve alone what the whole clan used to do." However, although the family plays a central role in child rearing, its members are not the only adults in a child's life. It is timely to heed the words of Thomas Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*:

> What does it matter when you come to think of it whether the child is yours by blood or not. All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time and are entitled to our general care.

Thus child rearing is a responsibility for the whole of society. Inevitably one of the spin-offs when adults accept this social responsibility is that the children's lives are enriched through being in constant association with people who have a vision of better human relationships between generations and who are involved in realizing it. And there is a spin-off in the opposite direction . . . adults' lives are enriched when children *devote their talents to the service of humanity*.

In the early 1940s the campaign for preschool education was inspired by Dr John Dale's slogan *Put Magic in the Lives of Children*. Those involved in social movements put magic in their own lives.

Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of the Save the Children Fund and international pioneer on behalf of children, who formulated the 1923 Children's Charter on which the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child was based, often said that "the last clause of the Charter was the most important". To honour her, it is re-quoted as our last word:

> The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents are devoted to the service of humanity.

ENDNOTES

1. Eva Cox, *Beware the Call of Nature*, 1978 Women and Labour Conference.
2. Goggin and Newell, *Media Information Australia*, November 1994.

Reference material is available in the Crow Collection, Victoria University of Technology, Footscray Campus.

Julie Anna & Ruth Crow

'Getting Grown Up' at Wattie Creek

THE FIRST TIME I CAUGHT A PLANE anywhere I flew to Wattie Creek. The plane was a Piper 6: *GWB, gulf, whisky, bravo*. There were six of us, and an architect's model of houses designed for the Gurindji at Wattie Creek. The houses had been designed by a Melbourne architect, Stan Barker. He was also the pilot. On board as well was a journalist from *The Age*, two builder's labourers from Sydney who were on strike, Frank Hardy and me. It was August 1970.

It was not a straightforward trip. On the first day we flew from Moorabbin airport to Broken Hill where we stayed the night. Frank Hardy played the pokies. I helped him. I left Melbourne with $60 in my wallet; I left Broken Hill with $75. The next day we headed for Leigh Creek, but a dust storm forced us to go on from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs where we camped on the edge of the tarmac. We were all so tired we slept on when a USAF Starlifter landed at 4 a.m. Next morning we went to Wave Hill. Nothing in my life has been straightforward since.

Going to Wattie Creek seemed like a good idea when, six weeks earlier at a National Aborigines Day meeting in Sydney, I heard Faith Bandler, Joe McGinniss and Frank Hardy talk about the Gurindji and their 'sit down' at Wattie Creek. I thought: I could go there during the August school holidays. So I went home and told my family. We started to

raise my airfare. In those days of networking in support of 'peace for Vietnam' it was easy to gather support – financial and moral. I thought, as a teacher, I might have something to 'give' the strikers living at Wattie Creek. Later, I discovered that, in the view of many white Territorians, I was yet another 'shit-stirring, southern do-gooder'. So much for high moral tone and political activism.

Wattie Creek (Daguragu) eventually became more than a place on Wave Hill Station, more than a spot on a map. Wattie Creek brought realism into my life, and changed both the way I saw the world and how I judged life/people/values. This is something that seems to happen to almost everyone given a chance to sit down with Aboriginal people in their own country. And from the moment we arrived that day in 1970, Aboriginal people were very much in charge of what was happening to us – but I did not understand the full significance of that for a very long time.

Now when I think of Wattie Creek the images that come are of the children, the women, the country, and the men. The people mediated the country, 'put us into the law' so that we could learn how to relate to them and through them to the country. Over the next four years I spent thirteen months at Wattie Creek, and people from the community lived with me and my family in Sydney for a total of six months.

A man and a baby started my education within an hour of our noisy arrival at Wave Hill Settlement airstrip fifteen kilometres from Wattie Creek. My parents' generation would have innocently referred to the man, a *Jimija*, as 'one of nature's gentlemen'. He came towards me as I leaned back against a desert oak outside the Wave Hill Settlement School trying to make sense of the movement of people. I was also trying to keep cool – and out of the way. He was carrying a baby, his son. He came up and asked if I wanted to hold the baby. It would not have made sense to say 'No', but I made no sense of the offer. I took the child. He probably cried because I remember that Aboriginal babies at Wattie Creek usually cried when a white person came too close. The man and I probably chatted, because this man is a great conversationalist and yarn spinner. I do not remember. Because my ears were not tuned, and my mind not ready, I probably did not understand very much of what the man said. I had *that* problem for quite a while and I do remember that my next teacher utterly confused me.

Later the same day, after we travellers had gone on the back of the Wattie Creek Bedford truck to our guest quarters at Wattie Creek (a round bough-shade), my second teacher, a woman, a *Nanagu*, came. My travel companions kept abandoning me while they rushed around – on men's business. The woman could see I was hot, tired and needing help. I could not understand anything the woman *said*, but she helped me understand that she would take me to the waterhole where I could bathe. I think a cup of tea and damper might also have featured in the offer of hospitality. So the first day passed.

The children of Wattie Creek amazed me. A large group of them had just returned from a school organized excursion to compete in the annual Darwin Eisteddfod. They had sung '*Kumbaya*', 'Pick a bale of cotton', and 'The Gendarme's Duet'! At the Eisteddfod they had also learnt the Welsh national anthem in English. Each day for nearly a fortnight they came in the dusk and stood around as we cooked our evening meal over the fire. Little children sang with their school-aged siblings. They sang. Once the singing became too much for one little girl. She said: Ah, fuck d' *Kumbaya*! Their singing stayed with me for weeks after I had returned to Sydney.

When I went back to Sydney, to my family, I made them help plan a second trip to Wattie Creek by motor vehicle at what was absolutely the worst time of year, December. We did not know that until after we set out. What spurred me on, kept me going towards Wattie Creek when we should probably have stopped, or even turned back, was the powerful memory of the land, and those children, and of a corroboree (*Wonga* – 'play-about' singing and dancing) put on for us one night during the second week of my first visit. For three years I kept going back to Wattie Creek – sometimes alone and sometimes with my children. It took a long time for me to see behind the broad images of the first visit. Eventually I realized that right from that first time there were incidents which were part of a pattern, the design being made by the Aboriginal community as they put us outsiders 'in the law', as they 'grew us up'. I believe all of us (supporters of the Gurindji, and their 'action') were offered this opportunity, although we were sometimes obtuse and did not recognize the offer.

One thing I learnt was not to ask questions, and that, according to the Aboriginal people I lived

(camped) with, I thought 'too much in my brains'. I learnt that if I did ask questions the answer might not come for years. Once, the man whose child I had held on my first visit came to visit me in Katherine – years after I had ceased visiting Wattie Creek, but at a time when I was still in contact with the community. He and I drank tea and ate fruitcake at my home and he told me he could now answer questions I had asked long before. Later we went to a pub for a beer, and he offered to walk me home again because there were too many rough people (I think he meant white stockmen and ringers) in Katherine. It was a painful irony at the time, which perhaps he understood, that it was by being with an Aboriginal man I had actually exposed myself to the rough people.

In the end, neither the questions nor the answers were as important as learning to wait, to listen, to observe and to accept 'being grown up'. Mostly, however, it was my granny, a *Nawula*, who taught me: "You call 'im granny/brother/uncle etc, that bin because . . ." Thus I would learn something more about how people fitted together, how subtle variations occur in the rules, how to respond appropriately, who to avoid, where obligation lay.

Obligations were various, ranging from the performance of simple domestic tasks which contributed to the running of the camp, such as cooking dinner, and more arduous physical ones such as fetching wood or water. Sometimes when women were called on to participate in ceremonies my granny would urge me to join as well. On the whole, obligation was reciprocal and the subtleties of who gave what and when were imparted by members of my 'family' as occasions arose. Because my chief teacher over the years was my granny, I had special obligations to her. She demanded I look after her, one way being by giving her bottles of black hair dye – there was a pharmacy in Sydney whose staff got used eventually to my periodic purchase of a dozen bottles of the stuff. Once, when almost the whole of the Wattie Creek community had travelled to the west to attend a week-long race meeting on Nicholson station, my granny took me and my 'sister' to visit another granny who had come from somewhere in Western Australia. I was quite unprepared for this occasion, so did not anticipate the elaborate bestowal of gifts – on both my sister and myself. We were each given the same items: household goods (sheets, towels), clothing (a dress and a scarf), a dozen cans of beer, and $25 in cash.

After I had recovered from the surprise of being thus acknowledged, I saw that this was further evidence that the Wattie Creek people were very serious about the business of 'growing people up'. Their actions, I realized, had a lot to do with the vision of the man who was a leader of the strike. He said to us that it was time for white Australians to learn to come to the Aboriginal way. His idea had, it seems, been first communicated to his clan, and the other Aboriginal people who had followed him on the 'track' from Wave Hill Station to Wattie Creek. Everybody had obviously agreed, for if they had not then *we* would not have been told. The decision to follow the idea also meant that people who had good cause to be bitter about *gadiya*, i.e. white people, were constrained to cooperate in this great cultural event – the teaching, the 'growing up' of settler Australians. Sometimes, in the evening, as one approached a family seated around their hearth, the low buzz of conversation would ease off and a voice could be heard saying: "Stop now, *gadiya* coming . . ." Then it was clear how separate Aboriginal and settler Australians actually were. But in the daytime teaching would recommence and would continue until it was time for us to leave and go home 'down south'.

And each time I returned to Wattie Creek, indeed when any traveller turned up, the learning started again at the first question: Where you bin come from? After a time it was clear you needed to answer by stating where you had started, which places you had passed through, where you had 'sat down', who you had seen and spoken to on the way. I learned to say I had started in Sydney, I had flown to Darwin where I had sat down for two nights , that I had seen Gurindji supporters in Darwin, had seen community members in Darwin, had seen settlement staff on the plane to Wave Hill, and so on. And I learned to elongate syllables in my words to indicate passage of time . . . sometimes the old man said: I knew you were coming. This made me very careful, and very aware of journeying, which is why, I guess, 'in my brains' I keep going back to my first plane trip.

Lyn Riddett

PRODUCT TESTING OF GREAT THEORIES #19 by Lofo

»Only the Unfinished is Perfect«

(MARQUIS DE ARNSDORF)

Alas & Alac... it is finished...

UNFINISHED

FINISHED

UNFINISHED

FINISHED

This is going to be great...
This is going to be perfect...
Wait till it's finishede..

A FINISHED CROSSWORD PUZZLE (no white spaces left!)

THERE IS NO END TO PERFECTION, JUST AS THERE IS NO PERFECTION TO ENDINGS.

books

Sex is a Nazi

MERV LILLEY

Les Murray: *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (Duffy & Snellgrove, $16.95).

AN *OVERLAND* EDITOR SAID TO ME, "Would you review Les Murray's book of poems? I think you should because of your rural background!" Hardly enough by itself, but if you add some training as a social realist, it could be coming nearer to some sort of qualification as an additive; because Murray is rural in the same time frame still in existence when he was learning to swear and I was riding stockhorses or making buckjumpers into stockhorses for stockmen a decade or so before Les Murray went to university, with Bob Ellis and perhaps Don Anderson. I mention these two names for different reasons. One, a story from Ellis, and a review from Anderson who apparently understands Murray symbolism where I don't, due to that educative difference in myself and Murray etc.

An early understanding of rural life between Murray and myself is that we both learned to pull cows tits at an early age, something that would get a dairyman disqualified from that industry today.

The story comes from Ellis sitting up on the stockyard rails at Cecil's (note Ogilvie's poem 'The Stockyard Liar').

This is what Ellis says he saw and heard:

> Cecil puts his head around the back of the cow he is milking and says: "Would you mind stripping those cows before letting them out Leslie?" And Les replies in a flash, "I am stripping them Dad, it's just that I'm a very fast milker!" And Dad replies, "A likely story Leslie!"

Which goes to show that Les and I know about the same things on that level. We may diverge philosophically. We are looking at the hard facts of living in this country, and we are looking at them poetically.

Les' complaint that people only want to discuss him and his poems politically, seems to me to be a reasonable response to reviewers who wouldn't know what it means to be asked to discuss a poem, let alone a book of poems – it is a fair thing to ask reviewers, critics to talk about poems and poetry and not skip around the task with 'political correctness', the thing Les Murray says has been dished up to him over the last thirty years.

Murray is a very serious caustic poet, grappling with fundamentals of life and liberty, calling a spade a beautiful Nazi when he's talking about the message we have handed on to the school children. Sex is a Nazi. Les is writing out his own experiences.

Jennifer Compton in *HEAT* says 'The Sand Coast Sonnets' have no place in the book for her. I find 'The Sand Dingoes' about the most powerful poem in the book, or anything I've seen anywhere else on this subject of Dreamtime creation. I quote:

> Long before bridges, the old me who are hills now
> were woken by the mopoke owl . . .
>
> . . . The old men started whistling
> and big sandy dingoes ran down from the blue plateau
> far south, beyond the Wattagan. They streamed out
> past Barrenjoey
> and swam all up the new coast. They yarded that wild
> ocean
> to be lakes and swamps for the people's fishing, they
> lay down
> around the old men on a cold night and still sleep
> there,
> being new country in their pelts of tea-tree and palm,

there east of Left Hand, and Mixing Bowl, up east of
Brisbane.
Those blue south mountains were halved in height,
and the sisters
took their sea-digging sticks, and camped with the
Cross in the sky.

WELL, THERE YOU GO. To me that's pure and powerful. I would like to whistle up those yellow dogs, the way Murray has done. Poetry is many things. It depends on how you have been made, how much of it gets through to you, whether you appreciate a particular poem or poet. I can shovel in a dam, clean out a cowyard, see the ibis growing out of the fallen tree in the dam, I can also see reactionary politics growing out of the rural sector, and its victims going down the drain like crayfish and water-rats disputing their remains. I have also said the last hello a couple of times, with a couple or three more to come. The possible fate of the young to live in turn – and by poetry. I have done it and a poem or two by Les Murray has helped me over the years. I owe him for the horse that could fly. I thought it was my horse, even horses. He gave me the poetic explanation of my love of horsework. I knew was somewhere in there but hadn't surfaced. I have said enough. You could perhaps do worse than have a Les Murray book of poems by your bedside. My limited experience tells me that it can take one hell of a long time to ponder out the full meaning and nuances of one poem. And now's a good time to start.

Merv Lilley is a poet and songwriter who has written the radio play Green River Run, *a collection of knockabout stories and poems,* Git Away Back, *and* Gatton Man.

Cover Girl

PAM BROWN

Dorothy Hewett: *Dorothy Hewett: Collected Poems* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $19.95).

ON THE COVER OF Dorothy Hewett's *Collected Poems* is a postcard painting of a robust golden-haired, bronzed Aussie girl in a golden dress clutching a bunch of West Australian wildflowers – blue lechenaultia, red and green kangaroo paws and some ultimately national golden wattle. She shades her blue eyes from the sunny air as she gazes into the distance, into a sublime and promising somewhere-up-ahead. Who is this adventurous girl? Is she to grow up to become 'Rapunzel in Suburbia' or 'Alice in Wormland'?

This is a big book; fifty-five years and four hundred pages of poetic production. It begins with a series of adolescent poems recovered from a school magazine, an autograph book, a student newspaper and so on. These early poems are typical of poetry written by the young – they lurch and fumble through various modes like pubescent teenagers trying new things; sometimes rhyming, sometimes free. Alliteration is always one of every inchoate poet's first techniques and also Dorothy Hewett's "the faded frumped-up form/ of a mistress teaching French". But these poems do reveal a kind of deeper, complicated sexual yearning probably not experienced by the fresh, forward-looking youngster, the purely romantic and asexual golden cover girl. They function to fasten the collection to its autobiography.

Dorothy Hewett is, supremely and ineluctably, an autobiographer, and she holds a firm belief in the role autobiography has for a female writer's development. She said, in 1992: "For the woman writer it is essential to work from the centre of the self to begin to know who you are and what your function is in the world besides being a wife or a mother or a lover or whatever. Not that those functions aren't important, but there are others."[1] She is a romantic poet whose touchstone has always been self-expression, often contextualized by topical events and by nature, and whose life's quest has been for heterosexual satisfaction and equality. These poems chronicle her life from the student to the young mother singing to her baby in 'Sweet Song for Katie' to the old woman lamenting the loss of her womb in 'The Last Peninsula'.

THE BOOK BEGINS, FOR ME, twenty pages in, with the clearly modernist poem imagined as a painting by the pioneer abstractionist Franz Marc:

Women, like red horses,
You see the shadow of them
Waiting for trams.
Men wince at

The line of their heels,
The squeal
Of their brake nerves
In traffic jams.
They are not the women who marry,
Women like red horses.

Just about everything in this collection is sexualized.

She breaks from autobiography to take up socialist heroism, as a member of the Communist Party of Australia, writing folksongs like 'The Ballad of Norman Brown': "There was a man called Norman Brown/ The murderin' bosses shot him down /" which is nowhere near as successful as the more famous 'Where I Grew To Be A Man' (known by its later title 'Weevils In The Flour'): "For dole bread is bitter bread,/ Black bread and sour,/ There's grief in the taste of it,/ There's weevils in the flour./" She returns to autobiography, recounting her second trip to the USSR in 'The Hidden Journey', a long poem written in a mid-sixties song-style which echoes Bob Dylan's witness-song 'Masters of War': ". . . in the year of Stalin, I came to Russia/ And saw flowers growing out of the blinkers on my eyes, /Saw the statues in the squares with their heads blown off . . . Saw the wedding cake skyscrapers toppling like ice-cream cones . . . Saw a dumb cracked girl in Stalino who would not speak . . . Saw a blind man standing on a village corner . . . Saw a ragged child who ran begging by the train in winter,/ While the commissars pulled their pale fur coats to their ears./"

Perhaps Dorothy Hewett's fairytale fables, in which she invents personae for herself, are her best known poems. The book *Rapunzel in Suburbia* originally included 'The Uninvited Guest' with its horrendously vitriolic first stanza describing her ex-husband's new wife. The poem caused Hewett to be sued for libel and brought her a notoriety she doesn't regret. (Attested in the same 1992 interview.) The poem isn't in this book – it's banned in Western Australia.

In Sydney in the seventies Dorothy Hewett would appear at events as Rapunzel the Darlinghurst bohemian, her long hair flowing onto her full-length blue velvet dress. She was often accompanied by her close friend and publisher, the poet Robert Adamson. 'Alice in Wormland' revisits the author's life from her beginnings in Western Australia, follows on until the 1980s, and the entire piece can be interpreted as a reversal of the fall from Eden where the animus, the male, ruins everything. However, later sequences suggest that Adamson is the inspiration for "Nim", the male muse, and it becomes, more literally, an allusive tribute to their heady poetic friendship. She describes incidents around a poetry reading in Tasmania:

Nim raged
with a groupie
Alice betrayed him
with the last Tasmanian poet
her nipples bitten
her feet pricked
by the bonsai wattle
she thought about a threesome
he said he'd rather watch
with the wardrobe doors
half-open
Devils mated
extinct tigers howled
in Burnie's sulphurous air
the poet buggered her
his wife in a flannel dressing-gown
waited for a kiss
Nim's wife dressed up
in cowboy boots
& stetson hat
kissed Alice
full on the mouth
they were all
as thick as thieves.

It's wild stuff *and* it's sustained.

In the midst of life
We are in Perth

Harry Hooton [2]

WHILE THE POEMS, notes, appendices and index are closely edited by Bill Grono, there's a problem with parts of his Introduction. It might be my eastern attitude (I've lived most of my adult life in the Wormland known otherwise as Sydney and I have never visited Western Australia) but to say that Dorothy Hewett is a victim of "neglect" seems far-fetched. Dorothy Hewett hardly needs rescuing from a potential consignment to oblivion. I'd say she has enjoyed, in the context of Australian po-

etry, a well-supported career. She has received prizes, publicity, reviews, many grants, she has given interviews on radio and television as well as in print, she has made many public readings, has had residencies here and overseas, has been widely published and anthologized and has been the subject of a documentary film. "Neglect"? I don't think so.

Bill Grono also says it's unfortunate for Dorothy Hewett's readers that she has been published by "transient publishing houses in small print runs". Only recently did larger publishing houses start to tack poetry titles, like afterthoughts to the novel boom, on to their lists, and in the usual small print runs. And even more recently most have again ceased publishing poetry. In Australia, independent press publications of poetry are the norm. Is it somehow different in the west?

In the last section 'Recent Poems (1994–1995)' the work is resolute, reminiscing, wry and the writing takes a fresh direction in the almost-postmodern poem 'What I Do Now' – quoting Frank O'Hara – "I always wanted my life/to have some kind of meaning" – and continuing:

I lie in bed reading
the 541 letters of Elizabeth Bishop
my daughter brought me from New York wading
waist deep through snow
I get up at 6pm & shower
through the lonely window
the winter garden's
stripped of leaves
at night with the fire burning
sideways in the wind
I watch the news on SBS
a foreign film subtitled
or a doco   at midnight
stooped with cold I stagger
back to bed   the wind howls
ripping my poems to shreds
the paper lantern whirls
I listen to the semis
changing gear to tackle the 40 bends
in the tapestry chair
the cat snores loudly
will I live to a great old age?
there are lots of old mad women
in these mountains
shut up in their houses dying.

And talking about the girl on the cover – "I said 'Fuck them, if they take it at face value, too bloody bad.'"[3] It's just Dorothy Hewett sending herself up.

ENDNOTES

1. Jenny Digby, 'Coming to Terms With the Ghosts', *A Woman's Voice* (UQP, 1996).
2. Harry Hooton, *Poet of the 21st Century* (A & R, 1990).
3. 'Dorothy Hewett in Conversation . . . ' October '96, *Westerly*, Spring 1996.

Pam Brown, a Sydney writer, has published eleven books of poetry and prose including This World.This Place *(UQP, 1994) and* Little Droppings *(Never-Never Books, 1994).*

Generation Vexed

ALLISON CRAVEN

Virginia Trioli: *Generation f; Sex, Power & The Young Feminist* (Minerva, $14.95).
Kathy Bail (ed.): *DIY Feminism* (Allen & Unwin $19.95).

IN YESTERYEAR, THE CHALLENGE of feminism was whether to adopt radical, liberal, socialist (or other) politics. The DIY era keeps it simple: choose between young and old feminism, an easy choice, being one that nature makes for you. Young feminists are "twentysomething" (DIY-speak) while the 'old' feminists interviewed by Virginia Trioli seem to be in their forties and fifties. Why not simply opt for 'living' or 'dead' feminists, and reserve a category for 'extinct feminists'? Given these age limits, DIY grrrls might be dinosaurs by the time they're thirty, so what will they have to say to old feminists then?

> The proffered speaking position would allow me to speak in the displacement of what needs to be bluntly said . . . as feminists . . . we embody the position of watchdog . . . we need to use our imaginations, strike a pose for other positions and instil feminisms with attitude." (Elspeth Probyn *Sexing the Self* [1993])

Probyn's call for theoretical attitude may be unfamiliar to Kathy Bail. But in introducing *DIY Feminism* as "a book about attitude", Bail echoes the call, while differentiating hers from 'other' feminist books where the "texts seem daunting" and "essays . . . are not sassy and illuminating". Arising in the differing fields of scholarly and 'pop' feminism, both seek a change in the feminist mind.

Commercial feminist reading markets have been awakened in recent years by some young Americans (Wolf, Roiphe, Denfeld) narrating a (young) tale of feminist anti-feminism. *DIY Feminism* and *Generation f* are local fallout from this as much as from the Ormond College sexual harassment case and its companion best-seller, Helen Garner's *the first stone*. Owing to the quantity of press it has received, feminism has acquired a dubious but discernible 'social status', in spite of its disreputable qualities of radicalism and man-hating. So the advent of a bunch of DIYs urging the oldies to 'get with it' seems to be more of a case of catch-up in mainstream markets.

If, as Probyn says, feminists are watchdogs, then journalists are sniffer dogs, trailing scents. The scent of feminism today is everywhere because, as Trioli says, feminists are "everywhere", and entrenched in the professions. (Trioli dispels newspaper myths of roving radicals.) She says: "There is no young feminist any more. There is no one movement . . . Feminism now incorporates so wide a spectrum of thinking and action that some older feminists clearly cannot get a grip on it". Bail also explains that "most of the contributors to [her] book have not been involved in organized women's groups". Broadly the themes of both books concern the difference between the young and old, the applied and ideological, the collective and DIY. Some old scholars might read these dilemmas as a simplistic series of binary oppositions. But what would they know?

Trioli models "contemporary feminists", as "ambitious and . . . sophisticated . . . in their twenties and thirties" who have "profited from two decades of feminist scholarship, academia, and public profile". Older women are those "above them" towards whom young women resent having to "act like handmaidens".

While these comments imply academic feminism is past its use-by date, Trioli smoothly appropriates some language of discourse theory, and seems mindful of the scholarly vogue for 'the body'. *Generation f* is a knowing little book: Trioli says the generation debate is "good copy" and the events of 1995 left "publishers scouting around for the next big feminist stone". (No wonder there's a pile of them pictured on the cover of *Generation f*.) Trioli also knows that, in debates about women, "both feminism and sexism sell well".

DIY FEMINISM IS MORE POUTING than knowing. The blurb says: "Recently characterized in the media by an older generation of feminists as an often puritanical, narrow-minded generation, this collection shows that young women are in-yer-face, rhubarb . . ." Yet I thought Denfeld, Roiphe and Wolf thought it was the old, radical feminists (Dworkin, Mackinnon) who were puritanical rape fear-mongers. Either Australian/American young–old rivalries flow in opposite currents, or it's a case of making the material fit the advertising. Anyway, given that Anne Summers and Helen Garner seem to be the 'oldies' to whom these books answer back, while these books are about 'young' feminists, they appear to be addressed to an older audience (especially those hoary old things stuck in universities, moaning about men).

Trioli takes up Garner's book, paying (snide?) tribute to its remarkable success – "a triumph even before it was released". Deftly dismantling the argument, she says Garner was wrongly concerned about sex rather than sexism. Interspersing anecdotes with research/reportage, *Generation f* resembles *the first stone* but takes a kind of journalist's revenge on Garner's positioning of herself as a kind of journalist. Trioli depicts herself as a working journalist, "doorstopping", and telling "a story not yet told", repeatedly finessing Garner. While she argues that Garner broke the trade golden rule – never write a story about yourself – Trioli's tale has plenty.

Generation f is also the daughter's revenge. Taking up Garner's mother–daughter paradigm of feminism, Trioli transforms it into an analysis of "epochal disappointment" in feminism. The "threatened mother" becomes the figure of the old feminist, slightly sad and sorry, drooping sexually as the young women blossom into political presence. So who's complaining about old fashioned feminism now?

Concluding with reflections on the "sobering" developments in the wider society (Victorian State government, New Right etc.), the closing pages revisit the Ormond debate. Having argued throughout

against Garnerite opposition to the use of laws for feminist ends, there is a sobering and disappointing abdication of conviction when Trioli asks, hypothetically, would *she* have told the girls to go to the cops if they'd been *her* friends? Probably not, it seems.

Trioli's book joins Garner's as part of the Ormond oeuvre, escalating the issues and swelling the tame legends of Melbourne University. As a tale of erotic intrigue, Ormond is about as electrifying as the sound of a fridge motor. *DIY Feminism* wisely doesn't dwell too much on this murky, dreary tale. Kath Kenny's essay on Ormond in *DIY Feminism* is sharp and smart, including a concise analysis of cultural sexism and contemporary feminism that is second to none.

A DIY GRRRL IS FUNKY and cosmopolitan, old style radicalism having been incorporated into lifestyle advocacy. But the disclaimers about anti-collectivism are undercut by the collective voice in which the grrrls speak: reminiscent, anecdotal, pseudo-worldly, vaguely anti-men. For Lisbeth Gorr and Sheryn George, home, school years, girls' schools, boys, and first work experiences, comprise the field of reflection, distanced nostalgically. Younger than the *Generation f* feminist, the subject of *DIY Feminism* is a child/adolescent. Musicians, grrly computer nerds, on-line fems, artists and cartoon polemicists rap about feminism in this collective scrapbook.

But by Chapter three, 'Working the System', maturity sets in and in-yer-face politics recedes. Meredith Osborne speaks of "commitment" to feminism and a constitutional bill of rights for women. It is no longer the lone-ranger scare-fun of the DIY feminist. In 'We Are Family', lyrical reflections on the girlhoods of Fotini Epanomitis and Rebecca Cox (Eva's grrrl) contain fors and againsts which balance in favour of feminism, but not without some astute reservations.

The essays of this book rehash for a new audience the time-honoured tenets of radical feminism, citing mainly Wolf, Denfeld and Faludi as their theoretical referents – all names familiar to a newspaper-reading audience. While several essayists ply the myths of their difference from (old) man-hating feminists, the DIY linguistic style expresses an explicit but friendly disgust at men and maleness. Overall the politics is softer: childcare seems to be more important than abortion. Nevertheless, the awareness that the central issue for feminism is not gender but power is one that scholars (and Trioli) should heed.

Ashley Hay's intriguing essay, 'The Memory Palace' ends *DIY Feminism,* teasing out meanings of false memory syndrome for feminism, arguing that memory is the feminist challenge of the future. Well, yes: if Naomi Wolf is your earliest memory of feminism, then it's no wonder you'd be worried about the dangers of short-term memory loss . . .

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Present Tense, Past Tense

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

David Curzon, Philip Hammial, Coral Hull & Stephen Oliver: *The Wild Life* (Penguin, $19.95).
Max Harris: *The Angry Penguin* (NLA, $24.95).
Carolyn Gerrish: *Learning to Breathe Under Water* (Island Press, $12.95).
Gwen Harwood: *The Present Tense* (AIS ETT Imprint, $16.95).

FORTY YEARS AGO Penguin's idea of Australian poetry was an historical anthology. Over the next thirty years they added specialized Australian anthologies. Now they publish more Australian poetry than it's possible to review adequately.

The Wild Life includes collections by David Curzon, Philip Hammial, Coral Hull and Stephen Oliver. It would be useful to analyse how Curzon's self-restraint is so self-revealing, to lament how Hammial's reliance on the subconscious reduces his potential audience and to admire how Oliver's playfulness can turn serious and satirical. Given other poets and publishers, however, it's impossible to review more than Hull's superb second collection, 'William's Mongrels'.

She's a working class poet who retains fierce loyalties and affections while exposing sexism, racism, crime, sloth, gambling, alcoholism, domestic violence and cruelty to animals. Not that she has sold out to middle class values. The beauty, charity, social security and phoney enlightenment industries are beneath her contempt.

She's a narrative poet in the broadest sense. Smetimes her stories themselves are central. At other times, the narrative becomes the moving vehicle. Some poems travel to new and attractive places, but the hypnotic energy of many is generated by her being part of (yet wanting to leave) western Sydney and western New South Wales. If she loathes Brewarrina, she 'monsters' Liverpool. Here and elsewhere she turns narrative into satire. She can handle dramatic monologue too. And there's more.

Much more than raw narrative talent. 'Reason for my Parents' Divorce' gives no reason. 'White Mouse' just juxtaposes her first tampon with her mother trying to smash to death a cancerous mouse. In 'The Monster Burns' she kills the monster she believes she has found in her childhood self. 'Dog' ends as psychological fantasy. 'Praying Mantis' and 'Carla Comes Home' are psychologically complex fable-allegories. 'Study of Blood' could be interpreted in many ways.

She doesn't shed many tears for the human race, but fish, birds, insects, reptiles and animals are her one pure love:

> none of us asked to be here
> – the dog didn't ask to be here/ but (in loyalty)
> tolerates its position/ i (born human) am crying
> now/ & cannot die noiselessly or defeated, like
> william & the black dog . . .
> william – wet & cold from crying
> – hard & old from bitterness & dying & dog
>
> 'William's Mongrels'

As for nature red in tooth and claw, she copes with 'King Browns, Taipans & Crocodiles' by telling tall stories. She's not a comic poet but she can be funny.

HARRIS' SELECTED POEMS, *The Angry Penguin*, aren't Harris the magazine editor, newspaper columnist, television host or self-made millionaire bookseller. They aren't even Harris the *angry* penguin – despite the apt title taken from the best of his surrealist poems 'Mithridatum of Despair'. James McAuley and Harold Stewart did a disservice to Australian cultural diversity by duping Harris with the 'Ern Malley' poems. Little lasting harm, however, was done to Australian poetry.

The 'Ern Malley' poems have worn well. The hoax didn't destroy Harris' creativity. He wrote much poor quality work, some mediocre work and a few very good pieces in most of his poetic genres for most of his writing life. The dreadful obscurity of his surrealism in the 1940s was replaced by clear, but equally dreadful, poems about Australian explorers and pioneers in the 1960s. Plod, plod. Trudge, trudge. His best poems (written in the 1970s and early 1980s) were the opposite of his early work. These poems were non-visual, non-referential, colloquial statements where he was totally in command of rhythm in satires, social comment, playful pieces, dramatic monologues and elegy, as with Adele Koh's death:

> She died bitter,
> I believe, which is better. And wiser.

His view of marriage and family life was as wholesome as any in Australian literature, his wife and daughter in some of his best and most loving work. Even so, 'At the Circus' found him ready to see women trapeze artists fall to the sawdust while an imaginary brother ogled their bodies. Again he was only too well aware that his 'New York Fantasy' could have been called 'Lolita Fantasy'. Fascinating. The declamatory poet, who liked the sound of his own voice, didn't always like 'himself'.

LEARNING TO BREATHE UNDER WATER is Gerrish's second collection. In 'Cousins' she says she no longer believes in "being and nothingness". Not endorsing Sartre is one thing; not believing in being or nothingness is quite another. Does she believe in anything? The answer: a crescent of the blue sky that's both materially and immaterially neutral, although possibly hopeful. To reach this stance, she explores and rejects religious, philosophical, mystical and psychic offerings, exposing their tendency to delude and rip off the vulnerable. For example, 'Through the Usual Channel' is a brutal satire on a nicotine-addicted psychic whose fraudulence is ridiculed by the poet playfully hallucinating Atlantis.

Her layered texture keeps surprising with words, images and directions – both direct and indirect. The collection divides into relationships, institutions, unemployment, 'The Family Way' (an ironic non-pregnant subheading) and sceptical enquiry. In the institutional section she's an observer. In most other poems she explores relationships which are characterized by juxtaposition of the arts, description, travel, gender roles, quotations, statements, dia-

logue, the spiritually authentic and inauthentic, the human comedy and comedy itself. Even so, the participants are most disrupted by themselves. If she's hard on others, she's equally hard on herself. To blame or not to blame is mainly up to the reader.

HARWOOD, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S best poets, died a few months after the publication of *The Present Tense*. Her death occasioned sadness in all readers who followed Australian poetry over the past forty years. Unfortunately, it also occasioned reviewers to look for her last look at the universe. It's understandable, but does her a disservice. It would be hard to find a more sceptical 'guru'. Moreover, her poems in her own voice – elegy and meditative address – aren't the quality work of her last years.

The best way of coping with her occasional lapses is to reiterate how far removed sentimentality was from most of her work. The subjects, themes and techniques that made her work quirky, funny, teasing, challenging or outrageous are included here in scientific and philosophical quotations, languages in the broadest sense, other species, other (invented) characters, satire and parody.

While the twentieth century hasn't made her poems about other species into her most famous, the next century might place greater emphasis on them – the faster they vanish. Among poems about monkeys and elephants, 'Out of Hell' depicts Pollock's *Lucifer* being shown to her during (imaginary) brain surgery. After the operation the surgeon observes "cognitive dissonance" while she thinks she's a bat. A very Gwen Harwood poem.

Graham Rowlands is an Adelaide poet and editor.

Ditto Man and Peta Pan

THUY ON

Beth Spencer: *How to Conceive of a Girl* (Vintage, $16.95).

HOW TO CONCEIVE OF A GIRL is a montage novel that rejects the straightforward linear narrative. Within the book there are choppy bits, fragments of stories within stories, a pastiche of prose, poetry, fairy tales, quotations and veiled social criticism. Feeble-hearted readers fed on a strict diet of linear progression and inter-connecting thought may blanch at Spencer's disembodied kaleidoscopic fragments. In a lesser writer, the whole structure may indeed seem a dissonant mess; a clumsy agglomeration of bits and pieces or an exercise in aping postmodernist flux. But Spencer writes with great verve and manages to weave together the threads of a colourful tapestry.

Spencer herself has said: "My stuff is really knotted together and it gets its points across metaphorically and through images and with jokes." The title, *How to Conceive of a Girl,* comes from an essay by French feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray. The book has a definite feminist agenda, but Spencer is too astute a writer to pander to pushy didacticism. She gets her point across by using humour and whimsy. Western patriarchal philosophy has long relegated the female as the 'Other'; the opposite of and incomplete without, the male. In these stories and novellas, Spencer undermines and ridicules such a concept.

Viewed through Spencer's uniquely tinted glasses, gender politics are explored: 'Fatal Attraction in Newtown', for instance, critiques the way women are portrayed as either virgin or whore. The movie, starring Glenn Close, was a blockbuster; its success largely dependent on the spectacle of Close's character (Alex) spiralling into a psychotic madness when spurned by a married man. Unlike the sweet-stay-at-home wife, Alex is damningly represented as the unreasonable, the irrational, the hysterical female so beloved of nineteenth-century literature. There are two sides to every coin, says Spencer and Alex is "the dark one, the swept under the carpet side." Disturbed by the misogynistic treatment of women in the movie, she champions a "refuge for the unreasonable. Ophelia. Madame Bovary. Rochester's mad wife from *Jane Eyre*: the discarded ones, the drowned women, the self-mutilators."

Meanwhile, 'Space' deals variously with all aspects of personal space. Whether it be the difficulty of a long distance relationship, the territorial boundaries of being a teenager, or the trials of a mother trying to cope with an 'empty nest'. Spencer is always conscious of the startling metaphor, the bon mot, the snappy one-liner. She defines adolescence, for example, as "like walking into a room

in which someone has switched off all the lights". A lover is christened 'Ditto Man' because of his habit of never volunteering, but only echoing compliments; a passive parent is scathingly called 'Wallpaper father' and a short piece about having an abortion is evocatively titled 'Born Again'. Even Germaine Greer's famous witticism is tinkered with. In the mid to late seventies, says Spencer, "a woman needed a baby like a fish needed a bicycle helmet." Spencer clearly has a lot of fun subverting traditional notions. In 'The Faeries at Anakie Park', for instance, J.M. Barrie's classic character is changed to Peta Pan. "The child who never grew up" is a charge often levelled at Spencer, because at age twenty-five, she was still unmarried and childless. "No penis, no child, what does that make me?" she asks. And then answers her own rhetorical question. "I have nothing to govern and nothing governs me."

How to Conceive of a Girl is an empowering, witty and incisive comment on the seventies and eighties sexual-cultural scene, written with the confidence of a woman of the nineties. Beth Spencer won the 1993 *Age* Short Story award and the inaugural Dinny O'Hearn Fellowship. She has been widely published in various journals. Judging by this book, let's hope she conceives of more writing projects.

Thuy On is a Melbourne reviewer.

Australian Popular Culture

RUTH BARCAN

Richard Waterhouse: *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure; A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788* (Longman, $29.95).

A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN popular culture that doesn't include Fiske, Hodge and Turner's *Myths of Oz* in its bibliography? I'm not complaining, mind you, just pointing out what Richard Waterhouse's recent book *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure* does and doesn't claim to be about. The introduction calls it "the first comprehensive and overall history of Australian popular culture", arguing in a footnote that John Docker's *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* is primarily about the emergence of postmodernism. The introduction is at pains to point out what the book is not. First, it is not cultural studies (hence the omission of Fiske *et al*, or any number of names whom cultural studies readers might have expected to see). It is also not a study of Australian identity or nationalism. Its focus is urban rather than rural Australia; it does not deal with Aboriginal culture, and it spends more on the first 180 years of white history than on the last twenty. Waterhouse is matter of fact about these qualifications. His primary themes are that Australian popular culture "was and is complex and diverse", and was formed in relation to both British and US popular culture.

One of the strengths of the book is its broad-ranging and historical definition of popular culture. The book begins with the leisure activities and entertainments inherited from pre-industrial culture ("culture made by the people themselves"), and ends by quoting Lawrence Levine's definition of contemporary popular culture: "culture that is widely accessible and widely accessed; widely disseminated, and widely viewed or heard or read". In this definition, then, popular culture is by no means equated with mass culture. The term ends up meaning a whole range of leisure activities carried out by people across the social spectrum: dancing, fishing, gambling, drinking, boating, theatre, circus, horse racing, bathing and so on. There's quite a lot of discussion of popular theatre and horse racing, Waterhouse having previously written a book on each of these subjects.

With any broad study, one can easily start to list omissions; in the case of this study, some will find that there is less on gender, race and age than they might have expected. I don't see the review of any one particular book as an appropriate place to replay what can become pretty generic debates about 'generalized' history and 'partisan' history – for different books can legitimately set out to do different things. But, within Waterhouse's own parameters it could still be said that there are always interesting and very popular practices that don't get written about much. Lawn bowls, for example, is an extremely popular practice (that happens also to have a lot to do with age); or netball is another very popular practice (that happens also to have a lot to do with gender).

Waterhouse's broad-ranging definition of popular culture allows him to avoid the sterile, rigid or vacuous divide between 'high' and 'low' cultures, focusing instead on popular entertainments in the sense of those that attracted large audiences. Thus it is that he can include discussions of opera, Shakespeare and symphony orchestras. The book doesn't assume that popular culture is always produced out of resistance to a dominant order and is somehow always already 'subversive'. Rather, it looks also at how so-called 'high culture' too has had to struggle in the Australian context. Orchestras, the opera and so on have had to fight to survive financially. Waterhouse looks at the changing composition of audiences for high culture. Before the First World War, audiences at concerts were primarily women, "some of them socialites, many of them music-lovers", as he says wryly. After the Second World War, audiences for such entertainments changed; they were made up increasingly of European refugees and immigrants of both sexes. What Waterhouse shows is that the idea of the superiority of high culture took firm hold, to the point where even Marxist manifestos sometimes incorporated calls for national opera houses and theatres. Waterhouse deals frequently with class, but takes no simple populist line. If the book were interested in theorizing transgression (which it isn't), I imagine it would be more in line with Fredric Jameson's argument for the "dialectical interdependency" of 'high' art with mass culture. Jameson contends that even the most 'degraded' type of mass culture always contains remains implicitly, and no matter how faintly, negative and critical of the social order from which, as a product and a commodity, it springs. But Waterhouse is not interested in questions of value, except as they were understood historically. And he is positioning himself neither as the champion of some underdog culture nor as a custodian of 'value'. His focus is far more on the full range of leisure activities than on the cultures produced directly out of the rise of mass production, consumerism and the technologies of mass reproduction. Debates about value or resistance don't seem to interest Waterhouse much. As he says in the introduction: ". . . the approaches used, the questions asked, by those who analyse contemporary culture using the discipline of cultural studies are so different from the ones with which I am concerned that I found their contributions of only limited usefulness for the purposes of this study". This frank admission provides a disciplinary cue for potential readers, who can judge the book according to their own theoretical preoccupations.

As a reader trained in cultural studies, I found that the study grounded and enriched the kinds of theoretical debates about popular culture that have become pretty familiar in that discipline. It seems to me that cultural studies has produced some of the most nuanced approaches to popular culture available, but at the other end of the spectrum it has made a space for the proliferation of mediocrity. Waterhouse's type of close historical study helped remind me that general arguments about resistance, reading formations, audience, spectatorship and so on need to be in constant dialogue with approaches that focus on the specificities of particular contexts – where the instance functions neither as mere exemplum of a theory nor as a simple case-in-itself. His arguments about the increasing separation of social classes in colonial Australia, the eventual decline of "ideologies of deference", the ways in which time and space became segmented along class lines, and so on provided for this reader a historical base for thinking about the 'transgression' debates in pop culture theory in terms of the specificities of their colonial Australian context. Waterhouse traces the influence of the leisure practices of pre-industrial England and the tensions brought by industrialization on the colonial Australian context, and the gradual influence of US popular culture (though he qualifies the usual argument that the interwar period saw the Americanization of Australian popular culture). Throughout, he makes it clear that "the working classes did not have a monopoly on the culture of transgression".

The strengths of the book are its broad definition of popular culture, its range of Australian examples (it draws examples from across Australia and not just Sydney or Melbourne), its stress on the historical conditions of possibility of popular culture (such as class structures and the organization of time and space), and its clearly footnoted original sources, especially colonial newspapers.

The book is full of interesting snippets. To pick just a few that give a sense of the flavour of the book, I particularly liked descriptions of the tea-drinking contests for old ladies in eighteenth-century Eng-

land; the unruly theatre-goers setting off fireworks inside Melbourne's Pavilion in the 1840s; occasional bouts of fruit-throwing at opera performances at Sydney's Royal Victoria; the padlocks placed on swings in Adelaide to protect the Sabbath; or the spectator who rode a horse into second place at Randwick in 1860 after its rider fell off.

My guess is that responses to this book will depend on where one is placed in relation to the (inter)discipline of cultural studies and contemporary debates about history and 'partisanship'. My own sense is that while this book doesn't have the theoretical sophistication of the best of cultural studies, it has the conceptual depth, the scholarship and the historical base missing from the worst of cultural studies. Which made it an interesting, impressive and useful book.

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Another Form of Voyeurism

PAUL CARTER

Simon Ryan: *The Cartographic Eye* (CUP, $29.95).

THE AUTHOR OF *The Cartographic Eye* subscribes to what might be called the Pauline School of historiography. Blinded on the empiricist road to Damascus, he has seen the post-structuralist light, and is determined to usher in the time of postcolonial last things. Essential to his eschatology is the belief that the world (for which read Australia's colonial explorers and the imperial culture, its ideologies and technologies) until now has dwelt all-un-self-aware in a psychological, moral and epistemological darkness.

The difficulty is plain: having seen through the evil, having brought us to our intellectual senses, how to explain the general failure to embrace his revelation? It might be that much of what he announces has been already heard on the lips of earlier prophets, whom he rather disingenuously declines to acknowledge or pretends to surpass. Or, more seriously, it might be because, in his attempt to characterize the ideological character of seeing, the sense in which the visualist discourses privileged in western culture (here most notably, maps, engravings, narratives and their tropes) expressed and promoted imperial interests, he fails to explore the constructedness of the cartographic eye – a phrase that in the end remains a rhetorical vanishing point.

Ryan perpetuates an Australia-as-special-case tradition of writing that inadequately recognizes the dialectical nature of Australia's historical construction: taken for granted (notwithstanding one of his chapter headings) is the givenness of the map – as if in some way medieval mappae mundi and the Ordnance Survey could be collapsed into one species of 'gaze'. Again, in his telescopic history of ideas it seems not to occur to him that 'England' (not least through the Ordnance Survey, but more importantly in consequence of an economic and social revolution conveniently focused in the Enclosure Acts) was itself in reformation, not least as refracted through its expanding empire.

Equally, in his treatment of his Australian texts Ryan is too bent on prosecuting his case in the court of postcolonial correctness ever to consider the context of the quotations he assembles; he may pay lip service to the value of oral tradition (although his view of it is perhaps sentimental), but he remains himself resolutely a writer indifferent to the context of utterance. Like the exploration ethnography, which he blithely dismisses as "rarely patient enough, or sufficiently linguistically skilled, to inquire about tribal boundaries" (no doubt the explorers beat their wives as well), Ryan is piously impatient with any evidence of human weakness: the Foucauldian system within which his historical puppets lift their telescopes and spur on their horses, inevitably fantasizing bluffs as peninsular forts or Quixotic castles, is absolute, and the possibility that there were many historical experiences and a system that, instead of being linear, contained within it a capacity for self-reflexivity, feedback and chaotic transformation escapes him.

PERHAPS THIS EXPLAINS why his history of ideas seems only tangentially connected with historical process or human experience: not because he offers a radical reappraisal of historical narrative. Quite the reverse: history, like geography, remains

for him an absolute category. And to say that these discourses are "constructed" is to say nothing. Whoever thought otherwise? The humbler task is to understand the mode of their weaving, the textures produced and the patterns reproduced; and a Tale of the Tub genealogy of books cannot do it. Keen as he is to have us unmask and see through the "narcissism" of white imperialism, Ryan's self-confident moralizing, his Aesopian reduction of explorer narratives to an anthology of anecdotes reflective of white, male myopia (if not worse), leaves quaintly unexamined his own position. Having discovered, with the zeal of a Second Adam, that the geographical explorers' image of the land was a cultural projection, it behoves him to ground his own historical and geographical fantasies – which, as he amply shows, pervade every aspect of the way we tell ourselves to ourselves.

The Cartographic Eye contains agreeably incisive, well-referenced discussions of the emergence of exploration as a special branch of nineteenth century geography, of the symbiosis between picturesque evaluation of landscape and the idea of individual land ownership and territorial usurpation. Its brief history of maps is spoiled by a rather uncritical identification of the cartographic imagination with a *tabula rasa* conception of space (in reality the *tabula rasa* of Locke is not a blank space, but a slate wiped clean – an altogether more interesting metaphor of imperialism). Ryan' s discussion of the myriad ways the Australian colonizers stereotyped indigenous peoples is patchy, and like other parts of his book undervalues, if not ignoring, the influence of local experiences in reformulating imported paradigms.

The Cartographic Eye seems to have been produced in a time-loop: it preserves ten years after the event the robustly pioneering rhetoric of cultural studies in its first flush of power. Its strongest but by now scarcely novel point is to direct us again to the discursive nature of power and its relations. But this insistence on the ideological collusion of discourses is also the book's weakness – as it is of much work appearing under the aegis of cultural studies.

Once again the result of his theoretical gaze is to flatten out the cultural terrain, to reduce it to order. The myth informing this kind of reduction is the same that motivated the very explorers Ryan is so keen to unmask: that the past is another country we must put behind us; that the future lies elsewhere. It is this ultimately self-serving notion of knowledge that makes *The Cartographic Eye* academic; untempered by charity, his tireless, almost mechanical, anatomy of the ideological character of colonial seeing becomes another form of voyeurism.

Paul Carter's latest book is The Lie of the Land.

Simon Ryan Responds

IN PAUL CARTER'S REVIEW of my book I appear as both St Paul tossed off his donkey and as the Second Adam (also known as Jesus Christ). At last I can go around telling people what a great bloke I was.

The fact that I work at the Australian Catholic University may have encouraged Carter to imagine the book as the work of a stern inquisitor, placing explorers on a postcolonial rack, until, bones breaking, they confess their sins. And that is exactly what I do. But of course the 'explorers' that I discuss are only real historical figures in some senses. They are also effects of the texts, and it is the texts that *The Cartographic Eye* works upon, and the 'sins'that it teases out are not moral failings but discourses that enable a process of colonization which is destructive as well as productive. So to opine that *The Cartographic Eye* is based on a world view which posits colonial culture and people as "un-self-aware in a psychological, moral and epistemological darkness" is to me quite odd; the book rejects the use of journals to reflect on explorers' psychological states and warns against easy moral judgements. Nor does it posit a nineteenth century that is unreflective; rather, it is careful to point out that attitudes towards Aborigines and the land were keenly contested and that explorers had a wide variety of views. I make a point of quoting the explorer and Surveyor-General Sir Thomas Mitchell's belief that "the only kindness we could do for them [Aborigines], would be to let them and their wide range of territory alone; to act otherwise and profess good will is but hypocrisy". Here and in a number of other places the book shows that the texts of exploration demonstrate an ability to reflect on and subvert the practices of exploration they champion elsewhere. This is not the relentless hunting down of evil of which I am accused.

One of the more spurious of Carter's critiques is his charge that the book takes little account of the "context of utterance" and gives as an example ex-

ploration ethnography, which he suggests I blithely dismiss as inept. In fact of the two hundred-odd pages of the book sixty-seven are devoted to the ethnographic observations of the explorers, suggesting a detailed analysis. Nor does *The Cartographic Eye* see the journals of explorers as linear expressions of dull reductionism; the chaos of human experience is there, particularly in the interaction of explorer with indigene, but it is tempered, as the book argues, by an incredibly strong and flexible system of preconceptions that work to reign in chaos.

Carter argues that exploration contained a capacity of self-reflexivity. But what sort of reflexivity are we talking about? I don't attempt to speculate on the mind of the explorer or even so much on the practice of exploration. What the book is concerned with is the textual representations of these. And the construction and reconstruction of the 'explorer' figure is exhaustively dealt with as is the generic complexity journals possess in having the explorer as both actor and narrator.

WHERE I THINK CARTER most seriously errs is his argument that works like *The Cartographic Eye* want us to reject the past as "another country we must put behind us". I want us to recognize that it is the country we live in. That other Pauline School of historiography is based on a series of stereotypes circulating much the same way they did in the nineteenth century. Instead of indulging in cannibalism and devilish rituals Aborigines as constructed in fish and chip shop discussions now have free cab fares and low-interest loans. If the content of the tropes have mutated, their ability to articulate, multiply and finally generate knowledge is undiminished. The book shows the harmful effects of images and discourses old and new in what might be seen as a naive or judgemental way. But I prefer that kind of political involvement, living and working as I do uncomfortably close to a Pauline school I find repugnant.

The Road to Botany Bay may have ushered in a poststructural way of looking at exploration journals. Perhaps Carter is one of the prophets I am accused of ignoring – a John the Baptist crying unheard in the desert. I find his work conveys a sense of world weariness with theory (the kind of oh, are you still dabbling with Foucault, superciliousness one meets with at parties). He has risen above all that; ensconced in empyrean heights, engaged in phenomenological inquiries expressed in a rhetoric of protean excess designed to give followers of logic the slip, Carter need no longer concern himself with the political world and questions of race and land. He has washed his hands of the matter.

Baby or Bath Water?

LEE CATALDI

Mari Rhydwen: *Writing on the Backs of the Blacks; Voice, Literacy and Community in Kriol Fieldwork* (UQP, $22.95).

IF WE ABANDON SCIENTIFIC METHOD, with its limitations, its constraints, its European history (if not origin), we also lose its power as an instrument of thought, a power which has not only enabled us to substitute the washing machine for the rock, but also to predict, among other things, imminent and disastrous ends for our present economic and environmental practices. This power derives from the construction of systematic, repeatable representations of phenomena that enable not only the original researcher but also later investigators to perceive similarities and differences, and from these perceptions deduce further useful hypotheses about cause and effect.

Abandoning science, we also abandon a recognizable subject for investigation. It is difficult to know what this book is about. It is not, despite its title, about Kriol literacy as exploitation. It is not a contribution to linguistics: it remarks upon but does not investigate problems of phonology in creole languages (a very interesting subject given that these languages are so fluid and so new); it comments upon but does not investigate the effect of literacy upon language change. It is not a contribution to education, since most of the linguistic discussion in the book is only of indirect relevance to teachers.

It is not a contribution to socio-linguistics. Although the relationship between the development and use of creole languages and the process of disrupted peoples repositioning themselves in a new demography is the most interesting topic this book

deals with, substantial, accurate data (which can be subject to further analysis) is missing.

What remains is more like a travelogue, an account of the various times the researcher worked with creole and Kriol speakers and the different places in which she did this. Speculation unsupported by documentation is common. For example, she claims "it is quite probable that ancestral languages were spoken in some camps." This may be acceptable in a travel book, but if this is a study of the use of Kriol in relation to other languages, either these languages (which?) were spoken (by whom?) or they were not. Moreover, in chapter nine there are passages based upon the researcher's impressions but which are essentially 'made up', invented, again legitimate in a travel book, whose purpose is to entertain, but not here.

In this brave new world of non-science a slippage takes place; from the use of hearsay, reportage, even gossip (free from unsightly and restrictive documentation, of boring accoutrements like who? where? when?), to the actual invention of material by the 'researcher' now free of the need to research, and finally, to literature.

But literature, whether written, oral or Kriol, has its own rules, and those who forsake the groves of academe for the marketplace of art must compete there too. Fiction without economy, without form, without surprise, without skill and practice, without art, is crappy fiction, just as research without substance and accuracy is crappy research.

Nevertheless, this book contains many shrewd observations, which if they had been given systematic treatment, could have led to something interesting and useful. The perception that the decision to speak or not to speak Kriol in a particular situation is made on the basis of community ("one of us"), and the book's conclusion, outlining the social importance of this function in relation to extreme social change and disruption, could have been the basis for an investigation of how Aboriginal peoples are presently constructing language and Aboriginality. This would have given valuable insights (for both European and Aboriginal people) into strategies being developed to deal with extremes of social change, something we may all need very soon.

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From a Forgotten World

NGUYEN NGOC TUAN

Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart (translated with an introduction): *The Light of the Capital; Three Modern Vietnamese Classics* (OUP, $19.95).

TRANSLATED FROM THE VIETNAMESE by Greg Lockhart and Monique Lockhart, this book consists of the first English versions of three different stories: 'I Pulled a Rickshaw', the first work of documentary reportage in Vietnam, written by Tam Lang (1900–86) in 1932; 'Household Servants', which is perhaps the best reportage in the pre-1945 period, written by Vu Trong Phung (1912–39) in 1936; and 'Day of Childhood', the first fully fledged modern autobiographical novel of Vietnam, written by Nguyen Hong (1918–82) in 1938 and published in 1940.

From the above description, we can see that the book focuses solely on the period of the 1930s which occupies a special and unique place in modern Vietnamese literature, gaining the largest readership, and attracting the most comment from critics and historians. However, unlike other publications (which have concentrated on the most striking phenomena of the period such as the New Poetry Movement, the Self-Reliance Group, the polemic of art for art's sake versus art for human life's sake, and the appearance and development of realism in novels and short stories), this book focuses solely on two rarely-mentioned genres: reportage and autobiography. In Greg Lockhart's view, these two genres are mostly identical. He argues that autobiography can be classified "as a 'memoir' or as 'reminiscences' (hoi ky) and there is no reason why it cannot be assimilated into this book as a 'self-reportage' (phong su ve minh)".

The Lockharts, however, don't seem to be interested in literary genres themselves. Seemingly, their leading preoccupation is history. Based on these three documentary narratives, they aim to introduce the whole literary scene of the period; and through this, aim to represent the cultural, social and political background on which the literature was shaped. This intention is quite clearly manifested in the title of the book: *The Light of the Capital.* It is also manifested in the epigraph where Greg

Lockhart quotes Kwame Anthony Appiah: "Genres have histories, which is to say, times and places", as well as in the introduction of forty-nine pages which is nearly a quarter of the length of the book, and most especially, in the preface:

> Today, Hanoi is developing rapidly. Yet it has developed rapidly before, and so contains the interplay of past and present, which has shaped this book.
>
> The original idea was to try to recapture something of what had been lost in the 'time warp' to which Hanoi's foreign visitors have until very recently referred. The intention was to search back beyond the epoch of war and revolution for texts to translate what might convey an authentic, inside sense of what life was like for ordinary people in the era that first made the city 'modern'.

In pursuing this aim, the Lockharts' choice is no doubt the best one. Among several genres, they have chosen the most typical: documentary reportage which, as several Vietnamese writers have pointed out, has great historical, social and literary significance. Historically, social realism in Vietnam first emerged in reportage. And because social realism aims to record everyday-life, it is generally believed that people can easily understand social reality through works of reportage. Finally, in respect to Vietnamese literature, the emergence of reportage has been closely linked with the new western-directed development of journalism; a new type of writer who earned a living from the pen; a new type of reader who lived in the city or town and read for the need of self-awareness or just for entertainment; and a new way of writing based on reality rather than imagination, aimed at recording life as it is rather than illustrating the universal truths or providing moral advice.

In the genre of reportage, the Lockharts have chosen to translate the best works of the period: all three stories have great significance in modern Vietnamese literature. Unfortunately, those which have great significance are not necessarily great literary works. The first story, Tam Lang's 'I Pulled a Rickshaw' was a mere experiment. Also, 'Household Servants' and 'Days of Childhood' are certainly not the best works written by Vu Trong Phung and Nguyen Hong. Interestingly, the case of Vu Trong Phung is quite special: in spite of being regarded as 'the king of reportage', he is at his best when writing fiction. It was mainly from his novels, particularly *So do* (A Fortunate Life), which has been widely hailed as one of the finest productions, or even the finest, of Vietnamese narrative prose in this century, that Vu Trong Phung established his reputation, achieving the status of literary hero in Vietnam.

The Lockharts understand the limit of reportage. They are once hesitant: "It would have been possible to translate some novels or extracts of many". However, they still focus solely on reportage to open the direct access to history and social issues which is deeply studied in Greg Lockhart's introduction.

This introduction is an excellent essay on modern Vietnamese literature. Lockhart finds fresh approaches to the often discussed issue of the course of modernization as seen through literature. For example, he pays attention to the impact of urbanization on literature which has often been ignored by Vietnamese scholars. While most Vietnamese scholars have sought manifestations of the 'I' as an individual self merely in poetry and novels, Lockhart seeks it in reportage where he discovers that "the rise of the active 'I' is structurally related to the theme of opium addiction itself", and is also "associated with the rise of 'the people' and their 'nation', as well as 'class'". About the relationship between reportage and fiction, he argues that "the realist fiction of the 1930s functions like social reportage that drops the 'I' and is written as a 'blow-up' in an active third person mode". More interestingly for me, he raises the issue "why it is that the Hanoi, rather than the Saigon, press produced most of the major reportage" and also hints at the connection between the investigative method of reportage and the 1930s detective novel.

While the translation of three selected stories revive "a forgotten world that formed in the first four decades of this century",the thoughtful introduction reveals much about the process of the modernization of Vietnamese literature, especially the appearance of social realism as a movement in Vietnamese context.

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And What Books *Do* You Read?

CATH ELLIS

Irmtraud Petersson & Martin Duwell (eds): *'And What Books Do You Read?'; New Studies in Australian Literature* (UQP, $22.95).
Carole Ferrier (ed.): *As Good as a Yarn With You* (CUP, $29.95).
Deirdre Moore: *Survivors of BEAUTY; Memoirs of Dora and Bert Birtles* (Book Collectors' Society of Australia, $22).
Rose Lucas and Lyn McCredden: *Bridgings; Readings in Australian Women's Poetry* (OUP, $29.95).

THERE CAN BE, I THINK, no greater honour in the world of academe than a Festschrift and Laurie Hergenhan is a deserving dedicatee of 'What books do you read?' To also be a valuable contribution to the field of inquiry such a collection requires a focused editorial purpose. These essays, while representing the research interests of the respective contributors, combine to provide a telling indication of the breadth and depth of Hergenhan's interest in and contribution to Australian Literature. Scanning through the notes on contributors confirms the extent of Hergenhan's influence. Each of the essayists has worked with Hergenhan at some stage, in some capacity and each shares some part of his interests. Many, as one would expect, are connected to the University of Queensland and particularly with the Australian Studies Centre which Hergenhan founded. As a result, each of the essays has been selected to speak to Laurie and his work. The essays also establish a dialogue amongst themselves.

Beginning with Marcus Clarke and moving through Australian drama, Australian literary history, poetry, Patrick White, Peter Carey, communist writers, Australian literary institutions and ending in Michael Wilding's 'fictional' investigation of small press publishing, the scope of these writings and their tendency to cross-reference each other is the true testament to Hergenhan's contribution to Australian letters.

Encompassing the central figures of mainstream Australian literary critical commentary and historiography, this collection of essays and essayists provides a valuable resource as well as a fitting tribute to his work. Of special interest is Carole Ferrier's 'dialogue' between Jean Devanny and Katharine Susannah Prichard. This contribution draws from the same extensive primary research that produced *As Good as a Yarn With You* in 1992. The network of support established by six Australian women writers (Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark) through their correspondence provides a unique insight into the challenges faced by women writers in the thirties, forties and fifties.

SURVIVORS OF BEAUTY: a memoir of the lives of Dora and Bert Birtles is compiled by their niece Deirdre Moore. In her postscript, Moore writes that her "practical method of attacking Birtlesiana" in separate memoirs will be "criticized for being a subjective account". Indeed, the separate accounts of the lives of Dora and Bert Birtles provide more than adequate factual detail of their lives, on many occasions repeating information and accounts, but leaves the reader craving more objective discussion, especially relating to their political activism and convictions.

The Birtles' achieved notoriety early in their lives with their involvement in the *Hermes* scandal of 1923, which arose after a poem composed by Bert entitled 'Beauty' was published in the student newspaper *Hermes*. The erotic nature of the poem was deemed unacceptable by the Proctorial Board, the University's disciplinary body, and Bert was expelled. Dora, to whom the poem was dedicated and who herself published a poem on a similar theme within the same edition of the student newspaper, was also disciplined but was able to recommence her undergraduate study after a two-year suspension. They were married in 1923, in the midst of the scandal, and went on to live a long and eventful life together. Included in the volume are nineteen of Dora's unpublished poems, a fascinating unpublished article by Dora on Christopher Brennan, a chronology of their lives, an annotated bibliography of the Birtles' work, a list of correspondence between the Birtles' and Moore, a list of references and an exhaustive index. The book is valuable for the poetry alone which includes some real gems.

IT IS THE POETRY INCLUDED in *Bridgings: Readings in Australian Women's Poetry* which makes it such a rewarding reading experience. Rose Lucas and Lyn McCredden have collaborated in the selection

of poetry from the work of seven of Australia's best-known and loved twentieth century women poets and critical essays on each of the them. The diversity of the poetry and the poets, Judith Wright, Gwen Harwood, Dorothy Hewett (whose name is misspelled on the back cover), J.S. Harry, Dorothy Porter, Ania Walwicz and Gig Ryan, renders this collection especially valuable. The introductory discussion is prefaced by quotations from Joan Kirkby, Vera Newsom, Dorothy Porter, Chris Mansell and Hélène Cixous which gives some indication of the hybridity which emerges throughout the volume. Indeed, Lucas and McCredden admit:

> *Bridgings* is . . . a hybrid. We have set out to consider the practice of reading and analysing poetry, of focusing upon the ways in which a poetic text, as it appears on the page or as it is read aloud or performed, functions in dynamic interaction with the ways in which it is received and interpreted.

The wordy and sometimes elusive nature of the introductory remarks and critical essays leaves me wondering about the book's intended audience. The fact that a glossary of critical terms such as 'abjection' and *jouissance* is included in the volume indicates that it aims at a wide reading audience. The essays do provide challenging and thoughtful commentary on the generous selection from each of the poets' work and the concentration on the process and practice of 'reading' is particularly refreshing.

Cath Ellis is a post-graduate student at the University of New England. Her doctoral thesis on the novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard is currently nearing completion.

The View from Abroad

JEFFREY POACHER

Paul Kane: *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity* (CUP, $29.95).

PAUL KANE'S STUDY of Australian poetry is the sort of work that makes one wonder why we cannot always read ourselves as others read us. Kane writes as something of an outsider – he is an Ivy League academic very much in the Harold Bloom mould – and, not surprisingly, his book brings with it a particularly American critical sensibility. But he also writes with an obvious enthusiasm for his subject, an enthusiasm which is all the more seductive for being that of someone whose viewpoint is a foreign one.

Kane's objective is to examine Australian poetry through the "dual lenses" of his title, romanticism and negativity. His starting point owes something to Andrew Taylor's *Reading Australian Poetry* (1987). Kane agrees with Taylor's contention that Australia did not experience romanticism as a cultural movement in the nineteenth century, a circumstance which Kane ascribes to a lack of strong poets – or even one strong poet – in the period up to at least 1835. Here Kane diverges from Taylor and other critics like Judith Wright who explain this absence of romanticism in terms of the early colonists' alienation from Nature (with all the discourses of sublimity suggested by that word's capitalization). In Kane's argument, the finger should be directly pointed at the failure of early poets like Harpur and Kendall to domesticate the European romantic 'genius' into a *genius loci.*

The second and more complicated aspect of Kane's study concerns what he calls negativity. In the absence of a native romanticism, Australian poets were forced to come to terms with a gap or negativity in their poetic heritage. As a result, our poetry has been preoccupied with romantic forms and tropes, even if only as part of a process of denial lasting more than a century. Kane makes a Derridean move here that is either sophistication or sophistry, depending on one's point of view: romanticism did come to Australia after all, though belatedly and as something already past, and it came in the guise of an absence which became an inescapable presence.

From this notion of negativity, Kane argues that each significant Australian poet has had to grapple with an uncertainty about our cultural origins, and thus has worked to inscribe romanticism as a central feature of his or her work. Nine of the book's eleven chapters comprise readings of poets who might be regarded as in some sense canonical. Kane groups them in terms of whether their romanticism is overt (Harpur, Kendall, Brennan and Harwood) or repressed (Slessor, Wright, Murray and, more controversially, Hope). The odd man out (well, the

odd something out) is Ern Malley, whom Kane reads as a "romantic-symbolist-modernist poet *par excellence*, a figure of pure negativity – unsullied by actual existence".

Kane's argument is limited by its own terms in a number of ways. One sort of limitation is suggested by this description of Ern Malley as a "romantic-symbolist-modernist". At times Kane conflates quite different poetic influences and practices, wrapping them up in a bundle he calls romanticism. He is right to point out that Ern Malley's was not the only hand that signed the paper which became modernism's death warrant in Australia; there were, as he acknowledges, other forces at work besides the japery of Stewart and McAuley. But his model of negativity does not really account for the very slight influence that modernists like Eliot or even Auden exercized over this country's poets. Does the negative strain in Australian poetry extend to a repression of modernism as well as romanticism? In the same vein, Kane's Christopher Brennan appears as a "late romantic symbolist"; one wonders what the "late" signifies here when the thrust of Kane's argument is that romanticism is an *enduring* preoccupation of which Brennan's symbolist mode is presumably just one sub-species.

This sort of critical typology suggests that Kane's argument derives much from the particular version of dialectical romanticism theorized by Harold Bloom. Kane adopts the occasional gnostic phrase from Bloom's model of poetic influence (such as *kenosis*, the emptying out of the self, which is used to describe the negation of identity in Slessor's work), as well as making various comparisons with Bloomian heroes like Emerson and Stevens. This approach, in spite of (or perhaps because of) its American accent, is a stimulating one. For instance, Kane is able to see remarkable similarities between Harwood's surrender of self in poems like 'Bone Scan' and the work of the American poet, A.R. Ammons; he also draws some interesting parallels between Kendall and Emerson.

In summary, this book has much to recommend it. Kane's style is both lucid and lively, and he succeeds in sustaining his argument throughout (though he does concede that romanticism might not be so important to Australian poetry after 1968). It is a shame that space could not be found for a chapter on Francis Webb because Kane's brief discussion of him in the conclusion is tantalizing. There are a few minor errors, mostly in the end-papers, and a few occasions where a reference might have been useful (such as the claim on page 233 that John Ashbery nominates Ern Malley as one of his favourite poets). But these are very isolated examples and hardly detract from a work of careful scholarship attractively packaged by Cambridge University Press.

On balance, Kane's book is the best study of Australian poetry available in a single volume (even though it does not purport to cover the field and, perhaps a little disingenuously, disavows any intention of institutionalizing a canon). It brings a powerful critical apparatus to bear on our literary culture without ever becoming dogmatic. No doubt the true measure of the book's influence will be the number of other studies it provokes in years to come. In that regard, one might even speculate as to whether it signals a growing critical interest in Australian poetry in the American academy. Generally speaking, Australian poetry has made less impact in the United States than fiction by the likes of White, Stead and Carey (and less impact than poetry by other non-Americans like Seamus Heaney). Paul Kane's book may go some way towards redressing this imbalance.

Jeffrey Poacher writes from the University of Queensland.

Unimaginative Reading

LUDMILLA FORSYTH

Philip Neilsen: *Imagined Lives: A Study of David Malouf* (UQP, $24.95).

THE 'NEW, REVISED EDITION' of *Imagined Lives* remains a solid and uncontentious reading of Malouf. Philip Neilsen has used safe theoreticians (Levi-Strauss, Barthes) as the basis for his examination of Malouf's fiction. According to Neilsen (and Malouf), 'mythologies' are central to this writer's work. Imbued in this mythological aspect of Malouf's fiction, is a spirituality which links landscape, people and their sense of themselves – their 'Australian-ness'. There is in this fictive world a sense of a writer striving for wholeness, for completion. This is Neilsen's burden.

What we discover in Neilsen is a well mannered interpreter who eschews disturbing the imaginative axis of Malouf's world view. Even when he has the opportunity to make it wobble, Neilsen refrains. He tentatively acknowledges that the romantic aesthetic which resolves many binary oppositions set up in Malouf's novels, is often an imaginative conflation which offers an escape from difficult moral dilemmas. Within Malouf's imaginary life, 'Nature' becomes a nebulous criterion by which complications of political, economic and social 'nature' are diffused or mythologized out of existence. As Neilsen acknowledges:

> First, there is Malouf's conflation of individual 'nature' with nature, contradicting all in the novel *(Child's Play)* that has convincingly presented the self as, in an important sense, a cultural construct. Secondly, the narrator poses himself the crucial problem of whether it is possible for him 'to act' unnaturally, as he has been attempting, or whether this is rendered impossible by his ultimate membership of the 'natural order', represented both by nature, and the author's 'life', which is in harmony with nature.

Well, there you have it.

NEILSEN ALSO ADDRESSES one of the other central preoccupations of the romantics and of Malouf – the power of the imagination to create new ways of seeing and of being. I acknowledge Malouf's lyrical facility and his capacity to seduce with appropriate metaphor and thus provide a feeling of cosy comfort. I would have had, however, Neilsen confront more fully Malouf's romanticism which places so much confidence in poetics as a means of transcending daily bashings, racial hatred and terrorist carving up of bodies and states.

In a new chapter, 'Remembering Babylon', Neilsen repeats his thesis that Malouf continues to engage with Australian mythologies. Again Neilsen continues his polite discourse. Although he proposes that Malouf sets out to challenge some of these myths, Neilsen cannot sustain this argument and concludes, as he has done in the preceding chapters, that Malouf "cannot avoid reinscribing them to some extent". In *Remembering Babylon,* it is the "colonial ways of interpreting the world".

A number of times Neilsen makes forays into feminist reading of some texts and decides that from this perspective there would be "serious political problems" in Malouf's characterization of women, as for example, in *Harland's Half Acre.* These tend to be stereotyped and "There is a tendency, already noted in *Child's Play,* to make the conventional association between women and natural forces and to view them as mysterious." This analysis is not pursued and the criticism appears to be excused under a camaraderie of understanding that "male writers over the last few years have become self-conscious about stepping too easily into the female point of view". (Malouf to interviewer.)

Given the safe ground of myth criticism and Neilsen's chronological reading, which relies on reiteration of the principal propositions of his thesis, the work becomes predictable, unchallenging and decidedly dull.

Ludmilla Forsyth lectures in literature at Deakin University.

Intensified Moments

JOE HILL

Tim Richards: *Letters to Francesca* (Allen & Unwin, $14.95).

Susan Hancock: *Sailing through the Amber* (Black Pepper, $14.95).

Natalie Scott: *Eating Out* (National Library of Australia, $14.95).

THE MELBOURNE SUBURB OF HAMPTON is politely middle class, modestly attractive and quite forgettable. However in Tim Richard's stories, ordinary Hampton is just a front for the strange and supernatural. Recently renovated houses, sensible sedans and manicured families conceal improbable imaginings and absurd anxieties. Unremarkable geography becomes the hallmark of amusing and extraordinary narratives.

Richards' streets of Hampton buzz with the tense silence of the secret, the forbidden and the bizarre. He shows us other worlds and strange truths behind the closed doors of suburban lives. Sometimes they are dark – cast in shadow by incest or rape,

but more often fascinating, funny and highly improbable. Socially uncoordinated, obsessive compulsive, and sexually inadequate protagonists create fantasy through their paranoia; a pet lion, a suburban dictator, impossibly ancient monuments, Marlon Brando . . .

Letters to Francesca reads as something of a personal chronicle of suburban 'X-Files'. Character and setting are both gritty and surreal and there is usually the hint of a reality-subverting conspiracy lurking in the shadows, if not singing and dancing in full light. A story entitled 'Days Without Violence' describes a constructed reality and compares it with the 'real' world, outside, as it were. A mother so alienates and isolates her two sons from society that her absurd eccentricities become the only truths in their lives, and the fences of their garden and the walls of their house come to mark the outer limits of their world. Past the front gate, over the fence, through the window, 'The Truth Is Out There'.

In search of perspectives on truth, Richards' narrators occasionally try to step outside themselves a little, and intellectualize about authorship and the role of the reader. Such excursions are the only places where Richards loses his balance. A snappy rhetorical wit and solid narrative skill are compromised. However, balance is only ever lost momentarily, and even then Richards, very readable first collection remains as interesting as ever.

WHILE HAMPTON'S STREETS are punctuated by silences of strangeness in *Letters to Francesca*, the spaces of Susan Hancock's stories in *Sailing through the Amber* are filled with the sombre quiet of waiting and knowing. She describes air and light as if they were water and her silences flow like liquids into lives weighed down by failing relationships, displaced childhoods and mid-life crises. Sadness, loss and emotional rebirth are recurring themes. Hancock's stories are compellingly human: she takes us close to the warmth and drama of family life, close to the lovers and children around whom her stories swim. Although dense with emotive concerns, her prose remains open and considered throughout. In 'Rubaiyat', sisters Louise and Lyddie share the task of sorting and discarding their dead father's belongings. We connect with them, not because they tell us about the intensity of their feelings, but because we can observe it, in the understated details of their actions and the corners of their everyday worlds. In this way Hancock's narratives focus on the internal workings of characters' lives without needing to overstate or explain the mechanics.

There is easy movement into abstractions; from concrete details of households and holidays into shimmering translucent metaphor. The simple acts of cleaning a window or repairing a vase frame the traumas and joys of rebuilding and rediscovering complicated lives. Travelling is also important, as both a metaphor for framing emotional change and a narrative device for intensifying and concentrating action. In 'Behind the Glass', a car trip through wet New Zealand hills plays out the drama of a broken marriage and the difficult consequence for a mother and her son. Travelling, or simply arriving, or leaving, is also a way of touching family roots and cultural heritage. Hancock is a New Zealander by birth, and it is when she returns to New Zealand in her stories that she is most engaging. Here we read through her finely tuned empathy for a history and a landscape, and it is here too that the gentle rhythm and keen visual and emotive sensitivities of *Sailing through the Amber* are at their most potent.

Like Hancock's, Natalie Scott's stories capture intensified moments. Her device is eating. In *Eating Out* , narratives do not so much travel as sit down. Every story describes a meal. Lunches and dinners mark turning points and draw tensions and anxieties into climax. Often, little happens at the table itself, but at some point, the eating and conversation in her stories always manage to expose the raw nerves of a situation. Scott's dramatic skills are impressive. She handles sentimentally loaded themes and issues with a light touch and a selective eye. A gay son confronting his parents; a run-in with a much resented ex-husband; and the mourning of a dead parent number a few of the narratives that at first glance may seem in danger of succumbing to cliched story-telling and hackneyed psychology, but which Scott unravels with striking freshness and energy.

As well as being about the people at the meal, her stories are about the food. At the end of each she gives us recipes for the dishes consumed in the text. In other contemporary writing, particularly short fiction by women, recipes seem to serve as a way of addressing issues of gender, or of signifying or rejecting domesticity. Scott's do neither. Sometimes they create a sense of immediacy, however mostly it is unclear what exactly they are intended

to achieve. But they do not detract from Scott's strengths. If nothing else they add textural colour and interest to prose that is spare but already rich with an incisive feeling for character and vivid sense of occasion.

Eating Out is Scott's third book of adult fiction, following on from two novels: *Wherever we step the land is mined*, and *The Glasshouse*, both of which attracted considerable critical acclaim.

Joe Hill studies at the University of Melbourne and is alive as you and me.

Troubled Optimism

ROBIN GROVE

Mark Verstandig: *I Rest My Case* (Saga Press & MUP, $16.95).

Abraham Biderman: *The World of My Past* (AHB Publications & Random House, $17.95).

YOU WAKE UP ONE MORNING, and find you are no longer human. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, written at the mid-point of the First World War, frighteningly foreshadows the fate of European Jewry during the Second.

Imprisoned, beaten, starved, Gregor Samsa is stripped of possessions, reviled, and left to die. "Human beings can't live with such a creature", says his sister, sounding like the righteous townsfolk of Abraham Biderman's book, who change overnight from friendly neighbours into accomplices to atrocity. Whose was the more monstrous metamorphosis: that of Gregor, or of his fellow citizens, who, discovering him to be a hateful insect, punish accordingly?

Kafka's parable and these two autobiographies, though all very different, share one preoccupation at least: human beings, they see, are fearsomely law-abiding. So, once Authority says 'Kill', killing is dutifully done; once anti-Semitism moves from the margin to the centre of allowable expression, Jews are not just murdered, as they had been for centuries in Eastern Europe, but hunted down and exterminated with maximum industrial efficiency, as a matter of loyalty and pride.

Such law-abidingness carried Biderman from the sealed ghetto of Lodz to Auschwitz, then to Althammer, Dora, and finally Bergen-Belsen, in an unimaginable sequence of abominations. Yet not so far off, in Mielec, the rule of law (for a few years, anyway) actually helped Mark Verstandig to survive. A conspiracy by the entire legal profession, defying what were seen as illegal Nazi bans, enabled him to continue practising as a lawyer despite the German occupation. But then, none of them was in a ghetto already closed and under the searchlight of Nazi decrees. When the disease of Nazism had finally become the norm, "people with ordinary human sympathy" began to seem like aberrations, till by the mid-forties Poland was "nothing more than a vast Jewish graveyard", from which Verstandig and his wife emerged only by being buried alive in hideouts for more than a year.

BOTH AUTOBIOGRAPHIES RECORD the destruction of a world – in Verstandig's account, the jostlingly over-organized community of the shtetl, with its daily page of Gemore, its cycle of festivals and their foods. By glimpses, we see a proud, unsustainable, precious way of life, still believing in human decency till marched to its death in the Aktion of 1942. Biderman's story, by contrast, begins with the occupation of Lodz; within a month, the synagogues went up in flames, and the end of Polish Jewry had begun. Yet through this dark chronicle, glimmers of the lost world persist – family occasions, customs, people – remembered, despite the nightmare. The book gathers its talismans together, to commemorate with terrible clarity both the humanity and the horror of all it has seen. Even on the way to the gas chambers, shrunken women seem like "lamps with a last few drops of kerosene, struggling with their last flickers of light".

To Biderman, Christianity, by blaming the Jews for the Crucifixion, had prepared the way. His book is a fierce indictment of both Church and Germanness, a reliving of agonies, and a memorializing of those whose sufferings ended earlier than his. Verstandig lived through a different war, and offers no centralizing theorum as to its cause. "It would be a travesty", he writes, "to blame the entire German people for our calamity." People acted in different ways, and for many motives. Not everyone was "satisfied with the knowledge that Jews were being slaughtered", and the controlled judgement, localized in that calmly shocking "satisfied", is characteristic of *I Rest My Case*.

From its first sentence on, Verstandig attends to history, showing that 'I' is not first in the formation of events, nor is it ever alone.

> In November 1918, when the Polish Republic was declared, I was six years old. I remember my parents were very busy taking down pictures of the Austrian royal family. My father told the Jewish maid to pack the pictures carefully and store them in the attic because they might still come in handy.

Like father, like son: what might still come in handy must be cannily kept. And thanks to such foresight, and to his own audacity and quick wits, fortune protected him. But how small this circle of luck was. Of his own family, almost none survived; of his wife's, fewer still; of Polish Jewry as a local civilization, nothing. It was not just that Hitler had murdered millions; without benefit of Nazis, the pogroms and random killings continued for years. Soon, of the three and a half million Jews in Poland before the War, only a few thousands remained. But did anti-Semitism lessen, or did it enter instead a new, more purely (i.e. viciously) theoretical phase: anti-Semitism minus Jews?

The last chapters of Verstandig's book, and the final pages of Biderman's, tell of the departure from Poland and the arrival in Australia, a world away. They allow at best only a troubled optimism. The death camps closed, but Britain continued to prevent Holocaust survivors from reaching Palestine. In 1947, its navy shot at and killed refugees crammed into the Exodus, forcing it to return to Europe. In 1967, and again in 1974, the Polish government took away the jobs of all Jews currently employed, and left them without income. In the eighties, President Reagan could lay a wreath at a cemetery in Bittenburg and claim that "the SS were the victims of the Nazis" just as surely as the Jews they slaughtered. In such ways, the Reich continued to poison the world it planned to rule for a thousand years. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church strove to build a nunnery at Auschwitz, the largest Jewish graveyard in history. And in Australia, 1995, the crudely vindictive fantasies of Demidenko's *Hand That Signed the Paper* were honoured three times over, while neither of the present books, outstanding though they are, could find a commercial publisher. History, it seems, was not a tale to be told.[1] But Biderman and Verstandig offer a chance to listen again.

ENDNOTE

1. Second editions of both books are being produced by trade publishers. (Ed.)

Robin Grove is a member of the Department of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Neither Saint nor Flagellant

DENNIS NICHOLSON

Kathielyn Job, Martin R. Johnson, Angela Rockel, Craig Sherborne: *Outskirts; The Australian Poetry Series* (Penguin, $18.95).

I DON'T LIKE KATHIELYN JOB'S collection, *Now, the Melaleuca*, for the simple, personal reason that her work is largely predicated on the conviction that all-men-are-bastards, and being neither a saint nor a flagellant, I am insulted. Worse, the potential affinity I have with her in her support for Koories is compromised by my – probably unjustified – suspicion that her explanation for the wrongs done to them would require no more than the addition of 'white' to the all-men-are-bastards rule.

Martin R. Johnson, whose collection is titled *After the Axe-Men*, is to be congratulated for finding a poetic voice at all:

> Through the heat and sweat, the swirling
> pine bark stinging my eyes, the throb
> and snarl of my chainsaw, I heard
> the fugitive, plaintive cry.
>
> 'A Woodcutter By Trade'

In my experience the type of work he describes amounts to an insidious combination of exertion, danger and boredom, which precludes any non-job related thought, except inevitably and at your peril, a low-grade daydreaming. Gender, sexuality, violence and beasthood always appear in tandem with one or more – and sometimes all – of the others; in 'Spiders' he crushes, in 'The Lizard' he captures, in 'Deer' he has a hunting fantasy, in 'Roo' he reaches for a club, in 'Vixen' the animal is "a woman" and a "temptress" who is "seducing us".

Johnson also gives us nostalgia – the collection's title is reverent not mordant – and the hackneyed, if not untrue, working man's refrain about the callousness of bosses. His poems provide a depressingly apposite dialectical partner for Kathielyn Job's. The following is especially creepy if you read the 'thinking' as being his.

> She really freaked out the afternoon
> I took her to the forest
> to show off how I worked
> with my chainsaw – thinking
> I was going to murder her.
>
> 'The Woodcutter's Love Poem'

BY NOW A SEQUENTIAL READER is in bad shape, but relief is at hand in Angela Rockel's collection *Fire Changes Everything*. How different her reaction to rain after fire –

> At last rain came, sweet
> even through wet-ash stink,
> clearing away. I find things
> cooled to life-warmth;
> cups, a plate, my bread bowl,
> glazed inside alive to touch
> as a new-laid egg.
>
> 'Change'

– compared with Martin R. Johnson's:

> freezing rain lords it over
> this blackened landscape
> of dead trees as I leave
> the comfort of my car
>
> 'Cutting Black'

Rockel's poems exemplify strength without hardness, resolve without bigotry; she delights in the exchange between her inner and outer worlds, and achieves the transcendent voice unavailable to the two preceding poets, who cannot escape an adversarial relationship between the halves of the human dichotomy. Rockel can observe on the one hand, "Life speaks us: words have wings/ and cannot be recalled", and on the other, "I crouch on the charged hill/ call on fire/ to loose its tongues in rain;/ take my part/ in mortal conversation." And she finds confluences of inner and outer which are satisfying despite their impermanence:

> Slowly I take up the ways of peace,
> losing myself in the arc of the hoe
> readying earth,
> feeling a new season shoot and branch
> along my spine with the chant,
> till when night comes again
> my skull is a cup of light, a seedhead
> nodding among its companions.
>
> 'Bread'

THE LAST COLLECTION in this volume, *Bullion*, is by Craig Sherborne, a significant poet who, fittingly, will soon publish a volume on his own. As Angela Rockel sometimes reminds me of Gwen Harwood, Sherborne reminds of the late Philip Hodgins. Sherborne too grounds his poems in actuality, but he is willing to fly sooner and further from it. The legitimate striking image is a wonderful thing, and a frequent occurrence in Sherborne's poems; in the chillingly excellent poem 'Over Here!' – about a drowned, delinquent boy – for example, there is the poignant, desolate simile 'a bedside weapon':

> The mouth was open like yelling No,
> And stiff in his boy-fist was thin bamboo,
> A last grasp at balance, raised beside
> His greasy head like a bedside weapon, accusing all help,
> And nothing in the world seemed as big as he.

Readers must sometimes be prepared to work (the reason poetry is less popular than television) for the rewards poetry as good as Sherborne's offers.

> But you must wait some mornings – perhaps
> You have brought your sherry.
> You must watch the traffic be like a train,
> And a bridge clapping flags of the latest festival.
> Time going slowly, till – there! – it happens:
> Buildings are fitting their keys to the water
> With the sun – or many suns you'd think – pushing
> At their shoulders. And you see
> What you have waited to be shown –
> Gold bullion stones, just below the surface,
> Flecking out across the harbour swell,
> Showing you how they bend so easy
> Because they are gold and not very strong.
>
> 'Bullion'

Dennis Nicholson is a Melbourne poet.

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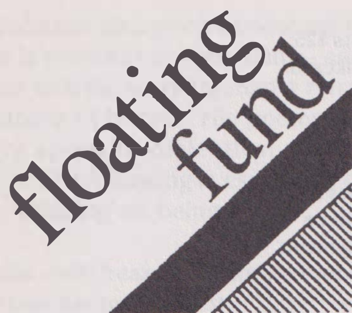

John McLaren writes:

As Geoff Serle writes elsewhere in this issue, *Overland* has been doubly fortunate this year, as we received most generous support for a special appeal he organised and we obtained increases in our grants from the Literature Fund and the Australia Council. Although these do not restore our funding to the level of four years ago, they do assure our future for a couple of years at least – a state of uncertainty we have lived with for forty-three years. The end of this uncertainty is no more likely than the demise of the journal. What remains unchanging is the generous loyalty of our subscribers; without this we would not have lasted so long. We offer our sincere thanks to the following:

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Uncle Jim even said there were commos at the Collingwood Football Club. "Thank God," he added, "Tuddy's a Catholic." But I heard Gus say Tuddy was God.   *Tom Heenan*

'Galloping' Paddy MacNamara, one-time manager of Lissadell Station in the East Kimberleys boasted a famous pioneering heritage. His father, Thomas MacNamara, was the character immortalized by Banjo Paterson as 'Clancy of the Overflow'.   *Patsy Millett*

In our own moment of defeat and difficulty, perhaps it would be more useful to highlight inequality and to rebuild radical unity than it would be to proclaim a new post-class age in politics and society.   *Sean Scalmer*

I settle in a large sandy hole previously excavated by a turtle. Above me the pale green furry leaves of an argusia bush provide some shade. The south-east trade wind blows softly from the Coral Sea.   *Rosaleen Love*

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