

overland

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NEVER MIND THE BALLADS HERE'S

Your ABC

Kurt Iveson on Hip Hop

Australian Women Composers

Never Far from the Manning Cloud

What's Wrong with the Ballad Anthologies

European Association
for Studies on Australia

4th biennial Conference

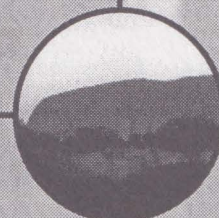
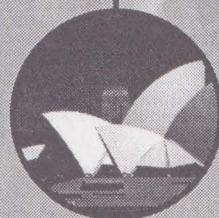
"Maintaining the National:
Policies, Fictions and Discourses
in Contemporary Australian Culture"

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overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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never mind the ballads

WHAT, YOU MIGHT HAVE ASKED, is a modified 1970s punk slogan doing on the cover of *Overland*? When the Sex Pistols used the phrase, 'Never mind the bollocks', they were taking a cynical swipe at what had gone before in the pop music industry. Nothing could be further from my intentions towards what has gone before at *Overland*.

From this issue I take over the role of editor from John McLaren. The editors who went before me (Stephen Murray-Smith, Barrett Reid and John) and the Australian literary institution they created and developed deserve deep respect. While necessarily differing from each of them in terms of my own political, cultural and literary interests, I am true to their broad left focus and aspire to their independence of spirit.

Yet the editorship of an Australian literary magazine in the late 1990s also holds challenges specific to the age. All of the little magazines currently operate under the assumption that government funding will soon be a thing of the past; and many magazines confront the hard reality of a dwindling subscriber base. We are faced with the dilemma of how magazines once so sure of their purpose are to operate in a world which seems to be forgetting the special value and texture of print and the wonderful, liberating stories it can hold. We are faced with the dilemma of a shrinking public sphere in which the stories of the left can be circulated effectively. We are also faced with the political dilemma of the rising tide of economic rationalism and the racism and intolerance it seems to be promoting.

There are a number of responses available to us. *Overland* will, over the coming years, canvass as many as possible in order to fulfil its historical charter of presenting a broad left response to politics and culture. One such response is anger: the anger of youth at the ongoing suppression of its voices and art; the anger of trade unionists, who see the structures they struggled to build being destroyed; the anger of women whose public activities have been denigrated or obscured.

Hence the invocation of the Sex Pistols. Not that the writers in this issue are *necessarily* angry. Kurt Iveson writes of Australian uses of hip hop, an American cultural form, and warns us not to dismiss it as cultural imperialism. Rather, we should examine the agency involved in such uses. Maree Macmillan looks at the long but hidden history of Australian women composers. Lynette Finch reveals the cynicism and hypocrisy involved in the media's posthumous harassment of Manning Clark, while Phillip Deery might well have nailed (one of our own) Ian Milner for espionage once and for all. Dean Kiley takes a comical look at Kennett's Victoria and Moira Burke writes elegantly about growing up in Hamer's.

In truth, *Overland* has never really minded the ballads. The ballad tradition is an important one for any organization whose temper is democratic and bias is Australian. In this issue Keith McKenry examines what is wrong with contemporary ballad anthologies and receives a reply from one of their editors, Philip Butters. Denis Kevans shows that the tradition is still alive in his own bush ballads; we include one written in 1994. Merv Lilley suggests just how important the ballads have been to Australians.

Finally, a word about design. New editors, as a rule, set about making design changes to announce their arrival and to indicate a new direction or emphasis. I am no different; we have made some adjustments to the layout; used a new, contemporary typeface (Thesis); and made greater use of photographs. We have also changed the masthead. Lest readers think that we are merely following the contemporary fashion for all things grunge, the 'new' masthead was designed by Vane Lindesay thirty-six years ago and first appeared on issue #19. Aside from making a point about the cyclical nature of design trends, it demonstrates my own attitude towards editorship. As often as not solutions to problems at *Overland* will be found in the history of the magazine. It might hearten some readers to know that history will often be the first place I look for answers to contemporary editorial and cultural questions.

Ian Syson

Lynette Finch

A Dark and Stormy Night

Manning Clark and the (re)telling of tales

“IT WAS LATE AUTUMN IN 1970 in the early evening . . . It was still light”, began Les Murray, in *The Courier-Mail*, August 24, last year. The award-winning poet was recalling the evening when he happened upon the late Professor Manning Clark wearing an “impressive decoration” that he realized was the Order of Lenin. Under the headline “The Unmasking of Manning”, the broadsheet devoted eight pages to the story. “Professor Manning Clark was awarded the Soviet Union’s highest honour, the Order of Lenin” the opening sentence revealed, and the ‘proof’ looked like this: two people, one deceased, one very much alive (Murray) saw Clark wearing a decoration with Lenin’s profile on it. They both, independently, identified it as the Order of Lenin and, according to Murray, Clark insisted that it was “not the stuff students wear. It’s a real gong.” The first witness told a friend. Years later, after the eyewitness was dead, his friend told one of the two journalists credited with the ‘exposé’. That journalist contacted Murray, who confirmed that he had seen the decoration being worn by the professor, so the journalist rang the widow, who said it might have been an Order of Lenin, but she didn’t think so. In the absence of evidence, the story had to take a fairly devious form – What *could* the ‘Australian icon’ have done to have been awarded it? The absence of evidence was even claimed as evidence in itself – the award was secretly presented because the Soviet Union did not want to compromise Clark; therefore, he must have been very important to them.

The Courier-Mail had intended to make this point: Clark’s intellectual role in crafting national identity made his alleged complicity as historical ‘hack’ for the Soviet Union, a betrayal of a monumental scale. Their allegation is that he chose to tell stories about our past, which helped to create a world-view amongst

his readers (Australians) that made us likely to be sympathetic to the Soviet Union’s political agenda. The Manning Clark phenomenon was never controversy-free. Throughout his career Clark’s work was criticized for factual inaccuracy and sloppy scholarship and, two years after his death, his own editor, Peter Ryan, boosted *Quadrant* magazine’s sales with a passionate denunciation of the professor’s work, which he dismissed as “goeey subjective pap”.¹ Neither were the *Courier’s* journalists the first to accuse the historian of overt political bias.² All that was new in their story was the unproven allegation that Clark had received official commendation from the Soviet Union in return for his alleged role as a “conscious agent of influence”.

August 24, 1996 was not a good day for Australian journalism, and it did little to advance editor, Chris Mitchell’s efforts to resurrect the *Courier’s* reputation as a serious broadsheet. When in March this year, *The Weekend Australian* ran a half-page feature on the same issue, allowing Peter Kelly simply to repeat the allegations, with no further evidence, Australia’s print media was, quite simply, sullied.³ The *Courier’s* story ran for several days without an apology or any recanting, yet revealed nothing new about Manning Clark. It did, however, provide a popular forum for discussion about the relationship between representations of the past and the cultural and political climate of the present. There was an implicit, but undeveloped, assertion in the article that the way Australians understand our nation’s past crucially affects our understanding of our place in the present, or, as the journalists so succinctly put it: Manning Clark “shaped the way Australians think about themselves and their country”. Clark, they alleged, had manipulated his power and deviated from the role of the his-

torian which is to construct a representation of the past which is 'truthful' and which is not influenced by contemporary political or cultural requirements.

For all his public profile and extraordinarily prolific output, Manning Clark was not a historian's historian. James Walter, Professor in Australian Studies at Griffith University, when asked by *The Courier-Mail* to comment on Clark, stated that Manning Clark was the media's historian – "why did people buy his books? It wasn't because professors of history said they were good. He was very much a media construct".⁴ Clark's work is not often used in university history courses and, when it is, his selected documents, or Michael Cathcart's abridged edition of the six-volume *History of Australia*, are chosen.⁵ Mostly, Clark's writings were driven by his own agenda, he remained outside contemporary debates and trends in historiography, telling his stories with his own brand of religious and political commitment openly and self-consciously steering the narrative. Clark's stories were strident and dynamic, which is probably what made his writing style so accessible. School courses in Australian history have relied upon his books for two decades, and in fact, he is often credited as the reason that Australian history finally entered the school curriculum, because, as one of his former students at Melbourne University, Geoffrey Serle wrote in *Overland* in 1992, "no-one else, remotely, roused such interest in Australian history".⁶ In his column in the *Courier*, Christopher Bantick endorsed Stuart Macintyre's tribute that Clark "reached a wide audience, we write all too often for ourselves."⁷

MANNING CLARK STOOD at an interesting intersection of duelling intellectual histories – that of the university intellectual and of the popular journalistic historical narrator. This is not a nation whose citizenry readily embrace intellectuals as cultural heroes – in fact the very word rankles, seemingly reeking of self-importance and an elitist ability to understand what others can't. For the record, I like the word – and I'm using it in this context: those who interpret the everyday, along with the extraordinary, and write about or teach ways in which to interpret it and respond to it. Australians have culturally – and historically – specific reasons for this rejection of intellectuals, but we also share with the rest of the western world, a deeply felt puzzlement about why we

should listen to, and be influenced by, historians (or other university-based thinkers) when we have journalists and media-based commentators to interpret events and tell us our stories. In the universities, the same question is asked – although the fact that academics have overwhelmingly explained the dichotomy as mirroring the difference between high and popular culture makes it easy to see why most of the population want to read what journalists write and fewer want to read what we academics write.

As *The Courier's* allegations that Clark had abused his position as respected historian lost momentum, Manning Clark seemed to become a metaphor, representing an entire section of the discipline. In the magazine section of the newspaper and in stories which followed during the week, the *Courier* went on to accuse many (if not most) university historians of being guilty of either complicity, cowardice, or something worse:

That he injected his own leftist interpretation of history into every column was palpably obvious, yet curiously this was allowed to go virtually unchallenged by his fellow historians. That he took gross liberties with what actually happened in the past not only was allowed to pass unpunished but, astonishingly, was actually lauded.⁸

Whilst we were not all being accused of presenting a past that made Australians sympathetic to the Soviet Union – times have changed, after all – we were being accused of supporting present views which added up to a modern equivalent of the Evil Empire – our histories present a past that Australians should be ashamed of. We tell historical stories which encourage Australians to be too apologetic about our ancestors' behaviour (especially towards the indigenous population), not proud enough of their pioneering progress, and too inclined to criticize the British government and Crown. We dwell on the negative and the shameful, in order to support contemporary political lobby groups – feminists, Aboriginal activists, and gay and lesbian activists were, I think, the unnamed beneficiaries of our historical manipulation.

In the face of such widespread abuse of historical methodology, the paper alleged, it was "small wonder the current Coalition Government has made it a priority to reclaim the historical battlefield."⁹ The

most articulate of the complainants was Prime Minister John Howard whose Sir Thomas Playford Memorial Address in Adelaide was quoted, condemning what he termed "one of the most insidious developments in Australian political life over the past decade or so – the attempt to rewrite Australian history in the service of a partisan political cause. I say this process . . . was an insidious one because it was an abuse of the true purpose of history."¹⁰

While Howard's view of the true purpose of history was not included in the article, his supposition that there is one true purpose reveals the epistemological tradition from which he was working. There is still a strong historiographical tradition working both within and outside of universities, which the Prime Minister's words indicate an adherence to. This empirical – its critics say empiricist – historiography assumes that the historian acts as a mirror, reflecting a true and accurate account of reality. Its adherents tend to debate the quality of the mirror, disputing the range of realities produced, without challenging the idea that the mirror is a possibility.

This tradition holds reality to be an immutable truth which exists and which is not dependent upon culture, history, or interpretation, but forms a bedrock beneath the surface of social practice. Meaning, in this tradition, is not historically or culturally determined. This historiography is imbued with a faith that the present has emerged in a logical driving process from the past; accordingly, reading backwards from the present is a reasonable and logical thing to do. It sees the task of history as the chronicling of the processes through which the present was delivered out of the past. Early this century, an Italian historian, Benedetto Croce argued that the past can only be known through the present and therefore what historians do is not record or capture the past, but *construct* it. Using the present as a point of departure, Croce argued historians organize material about the past, evaluating its worth, and deciding what meaning, or significance to attribute to it. All history, according to Croce, is therefore contemporary history, a construction of the present, not a representation of the past.¹¹

French philosopher Michel Foucault has been the other most significant intellectual force this century in promoting the view that historians construct tales of the present. His approach, which he called a genea-

logical approach, abandons any concern with the truth or falsity of particular theories, attitudes, knowledges, and practices, and concentrates instead on uncovering the conditions of their emergence. His 'history of the present' turns historiographical methodology on its head, using the past to cast a spotlight on the obvious, the taken-for-granted way knowledge is organized within the present. He called upon historians to ask questions about the conditions which allowed the possibility of a subject, how it came to have meaning, and how some sets of questions and statements which describe the subject are accepted, but not others.¹²

This is the type of philosophical approach to the writing of history which has irked the Prime Minister, who alleges that the last decade has witnessed an alarming trend in which historians "read history backwards imposing on the past a pattern designed to serve contemporary political needs". While it has never been alleged that Manning Clark was influenced by either Foucault or Croce, he did share with them the view that the aim of a historian is to explain how we got to where we are now.

IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND that the basic aim of all those who tell tales of the past (including journalists) is to explain the present, we can see that it is impossible to avoid being influenced by the political and cultural environment of the 'now'. That influence is what makes history relevant. When historians construct historical narratives, our aim is to explain how we (and 'we' is very much a selected subject) got to where we are now. Historians do not hold up a mirror to the past and reflect it back 'truthfully' – we select; the historical accident of document survival selects; while fashion and intellectual agreement selects the range of permissible and useable sources. Each historian is a storyteller, with their own reason for being interested in that particular historical continuity (or discontinuity) and every publisher is making individual, primarily economic, selections about what stories they are prepared to publish. The call for objectivity embodied in the Prime Minister's quotation, attempts to impose upon the historian, publisher and public and private archivist, an objectivity, and an inclusivity which is simply not possible.

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer seems to understand this. In explaining why he refused to

present a set of Clark's *History* to Washington's Georgetown University, Downer explained simply: "History is a very, very powerful weapon".¹³ The power lies, in fact, in the processes which select how the past is represented and in the dissemination of that representation. The most emphatic example of its power can be found in the present political impact of the High Court ruling on native title. The very fact that native title was investigated by the highest court in the land arose from a particular representation of the process of land accumulation by non-indigenous Australians.

Throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the historical narratives which explained the process through which land that had belonged to indigenous people, now belonged to pastoralists or town dwellers, as one of peaceful expansion, where the active frontier of pastoral need filled the vacuum of the vast Australian wilderness. R.M. Hartwell's chapter in Gordon Greenwood's *Australia: A Social and Political History* (1955) is just one of countless examples: "The settlers", Hartwell informed his readers, "came to an empty land". Later in the chapter he qualified the statement: "As a process of colonization, the settlement was relatively uncomplicated: the continent was empty, for the unfortunate aborigines offered no serious economic or cultural opposition".¹⁴ In *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1982), Henry Reynolds found a land full of people, and instead of the heroic explorers finding their way through a wilderness, Reynolds wrote of ungracious guests who were "dependent on the expertise of their black guides; they followed Aboriginal paths, drank at their wells; slept in their gunyahs and were often passed on from clan to clan by people who constantly monitored their progress through a landscape the Europeans chose to call a wilderness". Reynolds argues that historical representations that adhere to either the empty land thesis or the attendant theme that Aborigines failed to defend their land from the pastoral expansion, have ongoing moral implications for the present: "If we are unable to incorporate the black experience into our national heritage we will stand ex-

posed as a people still emotionally chained to our nineteenth century British origins, ever the transported Europeans".¹⁵

In challenging a particular representation of the past, Reynolds was objecting to its implications for the present. Like Clark, Reynolds employs a writing style which has given him access to the popular market (via Penguin Books) and he has been an important force in overturning the 'empty land' thesis and in challenging the view that land take-over is somehow natural. In the 1980s his quest moved away from considering the moral impact of earlier historical narrative to a detailed study of the *legaleffect* of particu-

lar ways of representing historical process. *The Law of the Land* (1987) creates a narrative in which the legality of pastoral exclusion of indigenous people is challenged.¹⁶ The subsequent 'Mabo' High Court ruling has a direct relationship to that challenge. Informed by historical research the High Court ruled in 1992 that British settlement had not extinguished native title. This is a clear case where the way historians represent the past impacts directly upon the present,

for it is meaningless to wonder how an 'empty land' was appropriated.

Most of the allegations levelled at Manning Clark, in *The Courier-Mail* (with the exclusion of the Order of Lenin detail) were that he abused the power that historians have to change the present. Such a criticism has a dual role – the first is to establish that the historian has arrived at a conclusion that the critics do not agree with (just as historians of race conflict, such as Henry Reynolds, do not agree with the conclusion that Australia was 'empty'). The second, and more important point is that they are unhappy with the *effect* that conclusion has upon contemporary culture and politics. In short, critics do not want to stop history serving contemporary political needs – they want it to serve *their* contemporary political needs. And there is nothing wrong with that. A wealth of different historical narratives, telling conflicting stories about the same historical moment, arriving at conflicting conclusions, singling out differing heroes or villains, provides the reader with

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choice; when just one way of telling the story is permitted we call it, quite rightly, censorship.

The present attacks upon Manning Clark are not based upon his 'crime' of political bias, but rather on how successful he has been in telling his story, in promoting his cause – and it is beyond the scope of this article to speculate on just what was his cause. Christopher Bantick expressed this well in his Monday column in the *Courier* after the story broke:

Manning Clark . . . expressed his role in the following terms: "A story about the past, if well told, could take readers up to the high mountains from where they would see, as it were, all the kingdoms of the world, be aware of the field of the possible in human affairs, and might even catch a glimpse of the direction of the great river of life". To the frustration of his detractors, many readers have found this to be so.¹⁷

Clearly, the continuing interest in Manning Clark, six years after his death shows how successful he was in making an impact on public perceptions of Australia's past. He would never have achieved that success without the help of the very media which is now creating this 'controversy'. It was the media, during the 1970s and 1980s, which allowed Clark to step out of the constriction which the label 'university intellectual' might have imposed upon him. Through their widely read pages newspaper editors allowed the professor with a lively writing style and a passion for epic historical narratives, to tell his stories to a wide audience. Embracing Clark as media historian was a statement that that was a moment when the historian had something to say to the people, and that the political climate, especially during the 1980s when it was dominated by Labor, could accommodate the overtly political nature of his stories. Times change and so do governments. The rewriting of Manning serves a different political climate. In recreating the media construct that is Manning Clark, *The Courier-Mail* is guilty of the very charge it levels against the professor and the profession.

ENDNOTES

1. Peter Ryan: 'Manning Clark', *Quadrant*, 1993, vol. 37, no. 9, pp. 9–22. Peter Craven covers the subsequent debate which followed, focusing upon newspaper articles, and letters to editors, mostly those published in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, in Peter Craven: 'The Ryan Affair', in Carl Bridge (ed.): *Manning Clark; Essays on His Place in History*, MUP, Carlton, 1994. Ryan also responded, in Peter Ryan: 'A Reply to My Critics', *Quadrant*, 1993, no. 10, pp. 11–14.
2. Probably the most damaging to Clark's reputation was the meticulously researched review by M.H. Ellis, on the first volume of the *Histories*. It originally appeared in the *Bulletin*, 22 September, 1962, pp. 36–7; an abridged version is M.H. Ellis: 'History Without Facts' *ibid*, pp. 70–77.
3. Peter Kelly: 'Manning, Marx and the medals', *The Weekend Australian*, March 1–2, 1997, p. 26.
4. *The Courier-Mail*, Monday August 26, 1996, p. 2.
5. Manning Clark: *Manning Clark's History of Australia*, abridged by Michael Cathcart, MUP, Carlton, 1993. Alan Atkinson believes his works were overlooked because they were "too big and too expensive to be a prescribed text for purchase by undergraduates". Alan Atkinson: 'A Great Historian?' in *Manning Clark*, pp. 122–135.
6. Geoffrey Serle: 'Some Stirrers and Shakers of the 1950s and 1960s', *Overland* 128, 1992, p. 20.
7. Christopher Bantick: 'A matter of history', *The Courier-Mail*, 27 August 1996, p. 15.
8. Wayne Smith: 'By Order of Lenin', *The Courier-Mail Weekend*, 24 August 1996, p. 1. Russell Cowie's column on Tuesday 27 provided some balance on this claim, noting that in his later years, Manning Clark was "mercilessly criticized by many of his academic colleagues". p. 15
9. Smith, *ibid*.
10. *ibid*.
11. Benedetto Croce: *History; Its Theory and Practice*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, Russell & Russell, London, 1960.
12. An excellent article on Foucault's 'History of the Present' is Phil Bevis, Michele Cohen & Gavin Kendall: 'Archaeologizing genealogy; Michel Foucault and the economy of austerity', *Economy and Society*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1989, pp. 323–343.
13. Smith: 'By Order of Lenin', *The Courier-Mail Weekend*, 4 August 1996, p. 1.
14. R.M. Hartwell: 'The Pastoral Ascendancy 1820–50' in Gordon Greenwood (ed.): *Australia; A Social and Political History*, A&R, 1977 edition, p. 71, p. 92 res.
15. Henry Reynolds: *The Other Side of the Frontier; Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, Penguin, 1982, p. 200.
16. Henry Reynolds: *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1992, 2nd edition.
17. Christopher Bantick: 'A matter of history', *The Courier-Mail*, 27 August 1996.

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port arthur revisited

uneasy
is it now?
van diemen's land
we called this place
carnarvon
we ran to a summer ferry
people hid their convict ancestry
back then
it was whispered about of course
she got transported for life
for killing her husband
as it turned out

remitted after a few years
so she couldn't have been
all bad
cocktail parties with plastic balls & chains
was a bit much I thought
badly exposed ghosts
small house of an irish gentleman
perched over an abyss
short rations one less
found myself staring
at a child's whip for a hobby-horse
behind a glass case
& then this massacre
betty tells me, helplessly
'he was my veggie boy'

will his solemn case
make him look brutal
like these faces
& their harsh epigrams
'convicted for bestiality'
they say he points his finger
at nurses & goes 'bang'
thinks it's a great joke
'he used to shoot out
my rabbits for me'

if writing's prophecy
walk carefully here
if you spend as much time keeping promises
as you do in justifying breaking them
insisting on being believed ...
'he was a bit simple
except about money'

& then there was his father
bound by baling wire in his dam
they called that suicide
'his father used to drive him everywhere
with his veggies'
& that woman with all that money
yes - she left it to his dad
so he had to go too
'he seemed a nice boy
they teased him I reckon'

that was lottery money
she inherited shares in a lottery
bad money
there was six thousand left in his dad's shed
I wonder if his father could've ...
'his father seemed a decent sort of chap
liked to keep busy
wouldn't have a cup of tea'

he went to disneyland without any luggage
he had more guns than you could
poke a stick at
he chased that wounded bus driver
onto his bus
& finished him off
& that little girl
her mother put her behind a tree
'he never did have much to say for himself'

Eric Beach

Phillip Deery

Cold War Victim or Rhodes Scholar Spy?

Revisiting the Case of Ian Milner

AMONGST THOSE PEOPLE on the left who lived through the Cold War years and managed to survive with scraps of idealism intact, some will be saddened by the following account. It concerns the long-standing and controversial allegations of espionage against Ian Francis Milner. A Rhodes scholar at Oxford in the 1930s, Milner was – like so many idealists of that generation – fired by the social injustices of capitalist economies and inspired by the republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. During the Second World War, Milner resigned his lectureship at the University of Melbourne and, encouraged by Paul Hasluck and supported by Professor Max Crawford, was appointed to a senior position (Special Investigation Officer in the Post-Hostilities Planning Division) in the then External Affairs Department. In January 1947, he was elevated to the Political Office in the Security Council Secretariat of the United Nations in New York. Thereafter, he was posted to Korea and in 1950 he joined the staff of Charles University, Czechoslovakia. The low point in his public life was in 1954, when Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov testified to the Royal Commission on Espionage (RCE) that Ian Milner, codenamed 'BUR', was a Soviet spy.

In the Autumn 1994 issue of *Overland*, the historian Frank Cain mounted a detailed defence of Milner against his accusers and detractors.¹ Cain argued that had Milner accepted his wife's advice and travelled from Prague to defend himself before the Petrov Royal Commission, "the large Milner spy-industry would never have emerged". The accusations against Milner were based on "extremely scanty information" and represented, Cain concluded, "a very un-Australian attempt to justify the political witch-hunts that marked much of the Menzies years".

This spirited support for Milner echoed an earlier article by Greg Pemberton which accepted Milner's

denial of guilt: "When I had dinner in Prague with Ian Milner a few weeks ago he vehemently maintained, as he had in all our previous talks, his complete innocence".² Both Cain and Pemberton affirm Milner's version of events first outlined in a written statement he forwarded to the Australian government in early 1956: that he settled in Czechoslovakia due to his wife's need for specialist medical treatment; that he was pro-Labor but not a member of the Communist Party; that he did not pass secret documents to a Sydney communist Walter Clayton; and that, in essence, the charges against him were "entirely untrue, defamatory and very shocking".

However, recent archival documentation from Washington and Prague points clearly to a different conclusion. Indeed, it provides that elusive 'smoking gun' that writers such as Robert Manne, Richard Hall and David McKnight previously lacked when they accepted the conclusions of the 1954 RCE that implicated Milner in espionage activity.³

First, the Venona documents. This material, released on 4 October 1996 by the National Security Agency, comprises intercepted and decrypted intelligence cables sent by the Canberra KGB Residency to Moscow between 1943 and 1948. (Kim Philby, stationed in Washington as the MI6 liaison officer in 1949, learnt of the 'Venona Operation' and informed the Soviets who immediately changed their codes.) Because the Venona traffic was in cipher – and the Soviets obviously did not intend ciphered cables to be decoded – it is a rational assumption that it was not misinformation. The evidence must therefore be regarded as authentic. It most certainly is damning.

Although Vladimir Petrov did not link Milner to 'Klod' or 'Claude' (the KGB codename for Clayton, accused by the RCE of regularly supplying sensitive information to the Soviets), Venona does. In a cable

dated 29 September 1945, specific reference is made to Milner informing 'Klod' of "many interesting things".⁴ On 6 November 1945, as acting head of the newly established Defence Post-Hostilities Committee within the External Affairs Department, Milner requested, and subsequently received, two top secret reports, classified as 'strictly limited', from the British Chiefs of Staff Post-Hostilities Planning Staff. One concerned the 'Security of India and the Indian Ocean', the other 'Security in the Western Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic', which, as Manne rather euphemistically commented, "would have been of more than passing interest to Soviet military planners".⁵ These are the documents directly referred to and described in the Venona cable of 19 March 1946.

The operation of handing over the documents was organized by 'Klod' in Canberra, where he recently arrived by car (one of the cars he uses to carry out his illegal work; the latter does not belong to the Fraternal [i.e. Communist Party]). The documents were handed over to us for thirty-five minutes. During this time we photographed them and returned them to 'Klod'.⁶

Because of their importance, it was thought "necessary to transmit immediately to Moscow", but because of their size and the consequent problem of "copious telegraphic correspondence", instructions were requested "urgently" from Moscow Centre. The reply was quick and to the point: send the material "as soon as possible". The full text of both documents was duly telegraphed in two multi-part messages between 22 and 28 March and 29 March and 3 April 1946.⁷

The second set of archival disclosures, from Prague, throws new light on why Milner went to Prague, for whom he worked, what work he did and what he was initially paid.⁸ They starkly contradict the *Overland* article in which Frank Cain challenges the portrayal of Milner as the spy who jumped the wall to escape retribution for leaking documents. Cain continues:

The contributions Ian made to the study of English literature in Czechoslovakia over the forty years he remained with Charles University give lie to any suggestion that he was provided with a safe haven for services rendered to Moscow ... He was

definitely not the superannuated spy of [Richard] Hall's construct.⁹

In late 1996, sections of the Czech secret police reports on Agent 9006, A. Jansky, were released by the District Office of the Ministry of the Interior. Jansky was the codename of "Jan [sic] Frank Milner, non-legal member of the Australian Communist Party". That the extant records are fragmentary is underlined by the report of a decision, executed on 22 February 1985, to destroy 149 of the 164 pages of the Milner file, stamped 'STRICTLY SECRET!'. Thus, like most security files opened to the public, it is tauntingly incomplete. However, the report dated 29 November 1960, corroborates the evidence of the Petrovs and the conclusions of the RCE regarding Milner.¹⁰

During his activity on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [sic] in Australia between 1944 and 1947 Jan Milner transferred to us through third persons valuable materials on political questions ... On 6 March 1949 J. Milner was won for cooperation ... After we have won his cooperation, Milner spent quite some time officially representing the UN in Korea, Palestine and other countries. He kept sending us reports concerning the activities of individual smaller sections of UN or about some leading officials of the UN. On the basis of the services he provided us with ... we are supporting him financially since his arrival to the CSR [Czechoslovakia] by 25,000 Czech Crowns monthly.¹¹

In Cain's account, Milner's relocation to Czechoslovakia was quite innocent: his wife's arthritic fingers required treatment, a medical expert on arthritis was recommended, and to Prague they flew. "The treatment succeeded and Ian was given leave from the UN to remain in Prague while it continued." The Ministry of the Interior file on Milner puts it quite differently: "he came to Czechoslovakia *on our order*".¹² It continues:

In 1950 we received information about a possible repression against Milner [from] our agent in the American counter espionage agency. Therefore a decision was made to relocate Milner into one of the people's democracies. In connection with it, under the pretext of his wife's medical treatment and his leave of absence, Milner left for Czechoslo-

vakia where he is now working as a lecturer at Prague University.¹³

According to Frank Cain, when Milner “became more immersed” in university teaching, he “resigned from the UN to remain permanently in Prague”.¹⁴ However, according to the Ministry of the Interior file: “In 1951, on our recommendation, Milner requested the secretariat of the UN to be released from his contract.”¹⁵ Cain also appears to accept the denial of Milner’s first wife that her husband was neither a member of the Communist Party – “Margot says he was not” – nor involved with the secret police. On the other hand, in 1966, Milner’s “controller”, First Lieutenant Korinek, deemed it “important” that Margot, now in London, “knew something about his activities for our agency and knew that he was in contact with organs of the Ministry of the Interior”.¹⁶ It is unclear from the file why this knowledge was “important” – it may mean it was a source of serious concern – but it is clear that Margot Milner was as disingenuous with Cain as Milner was with Pemberton.

What, then, were his activities after 1950 – the year Milner’s accusers have typically, as Cain points out, “ended their story”? Cain describes an extremely hard-working academic, heavily involved in teaching, translating and writing: in short, an ‘active’ and ‘significant’ scholar until his death in June 1991. But Milner was also ‘active’ in other spheres during this period of high Cold War tension:

On 11 May 1954 he was taken over for further control to the Third Department of the Ministry of the Interior. He was directed to work among university professors and scientific workers, especially for their foreign contacts . . . During his stay in the CSR [Czechoslovakia], our collaborator was used for reporting on universities’ personnel who had contacts with the USA and Great Britain . . . He was targeted mainly for contacts with the staff of institutions of higher learning who visit England and the USA and who lived in these countries during the war.¹⁷

Some readers will find it especially disturbing that Milner’s ‘other life’, his involvement in the security apparatus of the Czech State, was not only highly regarded but also willingly undertaken:

Until 1960, his collaboration was valued positively; he submitted a great number of informations on individuals . . . The collaborator fulfills his imposed tasks very well. He submits reports on people from the circle of university staffs and on his contacts abroad . . . The collaborator Jansky during his cooperation was valued as willing, with his own initiative and exact in fulfilling the assigned tasks. During his collaboration with inimical objects at universities, he submitted 110 reports.¹⁸

During the 1960s, it appears that Milner scaled down his collaboration. After he was assigned to make contact with a British Embassy official in January 1964, it was agreed that “we would meet once more and then interrupt our cooperation for three months, till June 1964”. This diminution of activity was due to Milner’s “nervous exhaustion” about which he complained on 9 January 1964. Nevertheless, “in case of some pressing needs, it is possible to turn to him”.¹⁹ In 1968, the year of the Prague Spring, his controller, Second Lieutenant Josef Benes, reported that because Milner “does not have the chance to engage in further interesting contacts”, his personal file should be deposited with the archives of the Ministry of the Interior.²⁰ There, the remnants of this file remain.

IT HAS BEEN THE MAIN intention of this article to contest the historical judgement that Ian Milner was “framed as a spy” because conservatives in Australia in the early 1950s were determined “to uncover a Soviet spy at any cost”, with the result that Milner became “one of Australia’s early Cold War victims”.²¹ Archival documents have disclosed that not only did Milner pass classified information to the Russians in the 1940s, he also cooperated actively with one of the most hard-line Stalinist regimes throughout the 1950s. It should perhaps be recalled that after the Soviet-backed *coup d’état* in February 1948, the Czechoslovak Communist Party emerged as the most Stalinist party in East Central Europe with its “combination of repressiveness, rigidity, xenophobia, and ferocity of internal ‘anti-Titoist’ purges”.²² These bloody internal purges, which lasted from 1949 to 1954 and which culminated in the notorious Slansky trial, transformed and polluted the political atmosphere of Czechoslovakia.²³ This was the climate in which Milner’s career-in-exile was formed.

The rationale for his activities in Australia in the mid-1940s sprang, most likely, from a naive but widely held idealism: by sharing information with the Soviet Union, an erstwhile ally, the wartime experience of Great Power cooperation could be perpetuated and the noble cause of world peace enhanced. It was not a case of spying in the conventional sense, of betraying one's country, if, indeed, "Milner had 'another country', the cause of international communism, which knew no boundaries".²⁴ But the rationale for his activities in Prague is more problematic. To act as a paid informant, to furnish more than one hundred intelligence reports and become, in effect, an apparatchik in another country's security services, requires commitment of a different order. It requires the confusion of means and ends. At the least, it requires an acceptance of Donald Maclean's justification for espionage: "It's like being a lavatory attendant; it stinks, but someone has to do it".²⁵

Yet there was an important difference between Milner and Maclean. When Maclean defected to Russia in 1951, his duplicity was revealed. When Milner decamped in Czechoslovakia, he continued, like Alger Hiss and Julius Rosenberg, to proclaim his innocence. He has his defenders and they must now confront the new archival evidence. Historians study the past not for comfort but for truths: disclosures about the past usually provide pain more than solace. This article confirms that axiom. It seeks to unpick the truth about Ian Milner, but finds little that is uplifting. For espionage has very corrosive effects, especially on idealism.

ENDNOTES

1. See Frank Cain, 'The Making of a Cold War Victim', *Overland*, No.134, pp. 60-66.
2. Gregory Pemberton, 'Spy mystery that will not die', *Canberra Times*, 19 June 1991, p. 21.
3. See Robert Manne: *The Petrov Affair; Politics and Espionage* (Sydney, 1987, pp. 181-8); Richard Hall: *The*

Rhodes Scholar Spy (Sydney, 1991); David McKnight: *Australia's Spies and Their Secrets* (Sydney, 1994, pp. 72-5).

4. Cable Nos. 361-2, Canberra to Moscow, 29 September 1945, Ref. No. 3/NBF/T77. These documents were made available on the Internet; see <http://www.nsa.gov:8080/docs/venona/docs/>
5. Manne, op. cit., p. 180; see also Hall, op. cit., p. 124.
6. Cable No. 123, Canberra to Moscow, 19 March 1946, Ref. No. 3/NBF/T2253.
7. Ibid. The question of *how* such material was regarded at a policy-making level in Moscow remains, of course, unanswered but is of considerable importance in an overall assessment of Venona's historical significance.
8. I am indebted to the Czech academic P. Hruby, who accessed and translated the documents. Dr Hruby graduated from Charles University, Prague and is the author of *Fools and Heroes: The Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia* (Oxford, 1980), based on his doctoral thesis.
9. Frank Cain, op. cit., pp. 64-5.
10. See, especially, paragraph 526, *Report of the Royal Commission on Espionage*, Sydney, 1955.
11. Personal File, Jan Frank Milner, Archival No. 621743, Report, 29 November 1960, archives of the Ministry of the Interior, Prague, Czechoslovakia.
12. Emphasis added.
13. Personal File, Jan Frank Milner, op. cit.
14. Frank Cain, op. cit., p. 63.
15. Personal File, op. cit. Emphasis added.
16. Ibid., Report, 9 September 1966.
17. Ibid., Reports, 9 September 1966, 18 March 1968.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., Report, 3 March 1964.
20. Ibid., Report, 18 March 1968.
21. Frank Cain, op. cit., p. 60.
22. Joseph Rothschild: *Return to Diversity; A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II* (Oxford, 1993, p. 97).
23. For a chilling account of this period, see Jiri Pelikan: *The Czechoslovakian Political Trials, 1950-1954; The Suppressed Report of the Dubcek Government's Commission of Enquiry* (Stanford, 1971).
24. Richard Hall, op. cit., p. 207.
25. Cited in *ibid.*

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Between the Lines

The tram trundles
through the dusk;
its rumble rebounds
through the carriage
making up for
the void of silence
from the passengers.

There's a young woman
with lines on her face;
a premature etching.
An older lady
with eyes mesmerised
by the passing terraces.
A man whose knuckles
are white;
his grasp of the hand-grip
more than matches
the rocking of the vehicle.

In this capsule
of alienation,
I become
a displaced breadwinner,
the weight of the recession
glued to my forehead.
I worry about a mortgage
I don't have,
the education of
my non-existent children.

Darkness descends
on this waiting room on wheels.

Phil Ilton

The New Age

The time comes when you have to start again;
inventing Western Civ is a bed of nails,
The great surrealists turned out to be
inventors of a tin, toy, painted train
which choofs around its figure-eightish tracks
yet again, once every generation.

Heigh-ho!

Now it's the comfy ackers who've taken on
the engine-driving of an avant-garde,

pretending, in their salaries and jeans,
to be the saltimbanques who circle round
the edge of a volcano

(boop-a doop!)

vertiginously, Their superannuation
cushions the cutting-edge; it's pretty tough
to be a PoMo shithead jacking off.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

On Aggression

Possibility
remains unclad

but the past
has a fox fur coat

We are dressed
in brief decisions

as we run
toward the terrible wire

under unrolling
stormclouds of unreality

genetically
all screwed up

but slightly free.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

You could do that

Moira Burke

YOU COULD BE A PAINTER. A famous painter you'd like that you like painting and art you're good at it. You used to get oil-painting kits for Christmas and your birthday when you were little and putting colours together lets your mind go and you don't have to think about anything you're just there in the colours in the lines in the shadows that you make. Or a photographer. That's what you could be. You really liked doing photography as an elective that time you'd never done anything like that before working in a small dark place and it was fantastic when the picture came up out of nowhere on the paper. It'd be good to be a photographer seeing how things look seeing things in black and white. Sewing. You could do that. Sewing's all right you could sew in a factory like your mum all those rows of industrial sewing machines and overlockers high high ceilings electrical cords going everywhere and upwards and all that noise you'd have to shout even if you were standing close you wouldn't like the noise that much but you could sew you suppose, you could do piece-work at home like she does sometimes. But you really like art you'd like to do drawings and paintings as well maybe you could be a graphic designer. You got a B for building graphics even though you waggged a few classes but not that many because Mr Weaver's pretty tough you can't get away with much but graphics is o.k. You have to use a ruler all the time which gives you the shits because you like to be able

to move with a pencil but the drawings do look good when they're finished and everything is neat and in place. You could be a fashion designer now that'd be good. You can sew you like dressing up you like putting clothes together you like the way things can look good together and the way you feel dressed up and you always look at the fashion pages first thing after looking at your stars. You're Sagittarius. That means you're friendly and outgoing and you like horses. There's horses in the paddock that you have to cross when you take the short-cut to K-mart you always try to cross really quickly in case they stampede you but without running in case that scares them and starts them off. Helen works in K-mart and you walk up there sometimes on a Friday night to pick her up but not that often Con usually meets her. You like Con he's great he always talks to you and sometimes even asks you to come out with them and Helen doesn't mind. You really like your sister Helen she really sticks up for you. She and Con make lots of money from K-mart. Con doesn't work there he just goes up there and gets lots of records and goes through Helen's cash register pretending he doesn't know her and before he pays he pretends he's forgotten something so he goes back and gets something little like a Mars Bar and Helen gives him the records that he hasn't paid for then he takes them to school and sells them to the other kids. You could work at K-mart too it'd be good you'll go up there in a couple of months

and put your name on the list it'd be great to have your own money you stopped doing cataloguing you're too old for that now but K-mart's not a career that's just a part-time job you'd like to have a career. Your mum's got one your dad hasn't. He used to. He was a prison officer and he used to drive Armaguard trucks as well. When he first came to Australia he worked on a farm outside Warrnambool he was seventeen. Then he worked around the shearing sheds in NSW and his good mate was Mr Boots who's Dutch and they were called the wogs even though they both spoke English. Mr Boots lives in the next street now. Mrs Boots and your mum met and made friends when you were in primary school and they had the novelty stall a couple of years running. Mrs Boots used to come around and stay all night talking and smoking and drinking cups of tea and they would make raffia dolls and two-faced dolls and aprons and string bags and peg dolls and the kitchen would be full of material all over the place and kapok stuffing and raffia and smoke and laughing and they'd be up until way after you went to bed talking making things with the sewing machines going. In the morning sewn-on doll's faces would be looking at you hanging up high and the kitchen table would be against the wall and stacks of purple and orange hessian bags and calico aprons would be in neat piles everywhere and you'd have to be careful eating your Rice Bubbles not to splash milk on anything. Your other big sister Rosie is going to be a chef she's really good at Home Economics and sometimes on the weekends she makes these special breakfasts eggs Benedict or blueberry muffins. Sometimes she makes this special dinner *Arroz con Pollo* that she got the recipe for out of the *Supercook* series that your mum has been collecting for her one part every week from the newsagents.

Arroz con Pollo means chicken with saffron rice and peas in Spanish and you wish Rosie would always make it you're sick of minced meat or corned beef you never eat dinner now. You don't like cooking you don't like Home Eco. that much either. You can get away with anything in that class and you and Linda and Lisa usually end up having fights with the flour and stuff and one day you made your teacher cry even though you were only mucking around and she went up to the office and got Ericson and you all got in trouble. You don't know what you're going to do for your career but you have to make up your mind because you have to fill in the form. You're in the library it's careers day today. You tell the librarian that you want to be a painter and she says that's not a very good choice. You go and wait in line to talk to Miss Tobin who's your art teacher you have to wait for ages. When you get there you tell her that you want to be a painter but you can't find it on the list. She looks at you in a soft kind of way like she always does that's why you like her and you know that you can really talk to her. She says no it's not on the list are you sure that's what you want to do? and you say I don't know. She says it's not very practical and you go oh. She asks you if there's anything else you like doing and you go maths. She says anything else? You don't know what to say you can feel yourself going all red and you just look at the form you have to fill in. Umm, I liked electives you say. What did you do in electives you hear her ask. I had Miss McLean we did photography you tell her and she says that being a photographer is a good job it might be hard to get into but it's a good job and if you think you'd like that why don't you put that down? so you do and for your second choice you put down dress-maker.

Moira Burke is a Melbourne writer and performer. 'You could do that' is an excerpt from her novel, 'Losing It'.

i the writer

The poet the writer the person that others saw as a poet a writer a person that earned their living by writing had an idea an idea to be a student again a student of writing and so he wrote a proposal a thought an idea on paper and presented the idea to a professor and a panel of academics for approval for acceptance acceptance being of course a reason for the writer becoming a writer in the first place to seek acceptance to belong to this country this landscape this society this place this place where the writer the i the poet was born but was never made to feel a part of or never felt that he because a he he was he was born a he and a he he was undeniably and undoubtedly because there was never any doubt ever in his mind of his he-ness just the proportions of his he-ness or at least the attention drawn to the proportions of the thing that linked him to all other hes his he-ness his penis was small his mother said to the doctor well not his penis his father would not approve of her saying penis or pregnant in front of children his glands his glands doctor they look well underdeveloped for his age doctor but doctor said they'd be o.k. and they were but he always thought they looked small a smallish he-ness never ever never no wishing for a her-ness just release from the harness of gender and classness this he-ness this writer this poet this i never felt part of this this so-called classlessness this blacklessness this genderlessness this loch-nessless bunyip land of milk and honey and cream brick houses on a quarter acre of land this land the i the writer the poet re-wrote to include himself in because he is a he he is a he who is a writer who sees things from a he point of view he who redefined the environment the atmosphere the landscape in which he could exist as a he and as a blackless he a blackless classless cuntless he he re-wrote re-interpreted the text the textures the yet to be expressed textness of this land and was accepted was accepted as a he that fitted into the he-scape he created the he-scape the he-text accepted him as a he in context he contextualized his blacklessness classlessness cuntlessness existence his text was accepted as a measure of acceptance acceptance of his status his context as a writer a poet a text generator a text experimenter in the context of this vast classlessness this sunburnt blacklessness this suck-my-cock cuntlessness was accepted to study writing to study again to create to reflect to comment on the text created as a writer as a problem solver as a traveler as a scholar as a student of creative writing new writing writing that engages that enrages that breaks conventions that challenges beliefs and defies definitions and traditions the i the writer the poet was accepted and by being accepted rejected the he he had been for that

he the he he had been was a has been that he seemed like a stranger to him
the writer the poet the i that wrote himself into the landscape into being
into being accepted and was accepted as a student and as a student began
to re-define the he he had been the he he called i the i that he wrote the i he
thought i was because the i that writes is not the i that is written about for
the i written about is never the i that writes but the i i thinks i is or the i i
wants to be never he never i never the i that i is for in the context the he-text
i writes within this lessness context this first world context this one world
one globe context this well fed warm bed context this post berlin wall context
this reconstructed marxist context this new world order context this solar
powered environmentally friendly nuclear free context this post n.a.s.a. moon
walk space probe intergalactic context this gloriously infinitesimal infinite
infinity in the context of this infinity there is no absolute truth no absolute
truth except that the i the i that writes the i that proposes proposals of study
the i that is writing that i is finite that i has a beginning and an end known
as birth and death and between birth and death there is life and having a
beginning and an end and a life that i must have a middle and a mid-life and
that mid-life is also a part of the context the mid-life he finds himself in or
tries to find him self in for i has a self as well as a he and a context a place a
landscape and a blacklessness and a classlessness and a cuntlessness and a
self that is neither he nor she nor it a self that doesn't want his cock sucked
when he is depressed a self that is happy in being and a self that enjoys self
makes problems for self and a self that enjoys solving those problems for
self enjoys being by itself creating for itself a self comfortable with the
infinity of the self a self masquerading as a he a mid-life he manifesting as
the i i the poet i the writer i the he the mid-life he the she-less he the she-
less he he chose to be not for another she but to re-acquaint his self with he
with i i the writer the poet to create a new context in which to exist to
construct a new reality so that i could only place himself in the context of
things to come not things that have passed the self is comfortable in the
present can not be found in the past or the future i writes for the future
creating a context for the self to be comfortable with when the future
becomes present and he can be blamed for the past so the poet the writer
the i began to write the dissertation the writing that would make a significant
contribution to the genre the genre of writing called poetry and he called
that writing cyberpoetry.

komninos

komninos can be found at <http://student.uq.edu.au/~s271502>

For You

The moon spreads its light
Over where her breath sounds,
Between this bed, the still night
And the country of her dreams.

And it seems that all creation
(Like a mother to her breasts)
Has drawn the night around,
Forever offering this warmth between.

But I am moved by another
More distant ground, into which
These scenes will soon dissipate
And rearrange, and like our love
No longer appear or be exchanged.
And where this sheet spreads
Luminous over our limbs entwined,
A garden may grow, a yard

Echo with a child's delight,
Or tree in some distant generation
Sway beneath a vault of moonlight.
Still, how perfect this moment . . .

How serene – its fragile, pale face,
Merging like a snowflake touching snow,
As I close my eyes to follow sleep
And a tear drops between.

Eugene Donnini

A Dog Called Yesterday

The man with three heads,
three brains, ears and eyes
is walking his three dogs
past the three factories
beside the three raging rivers.

He has three choices. Stop.
Set the dogs free. Or keep
them chained forever to the leash.
The dogs are called Today,
Yesterday and Tomorrow.

Today rests on the grass and sleeps.
Tomorrow chases invisible birds.
But Yesterday is looking up
at the man with three heads, staring
with those sad eyes of the past.

Yesterday digs a deep hole in the ground
and rips the three headed man's one
heart
out of his chest and buries it. Yesterday
is a strange beast, one minute it barks at
shadows
the next, holds out a paw like a beggar.

Michael Crane

When I Am Dead

for Stephen J. Williams

When I am dead bring a scented flower, one yellow
Jonquil or freesia, a sprig of daphne, a gardenia.

In winter's chill, field violets will remind me of a
friend
Whose 'flowers for the dead' provoked an inner
mind.

Sting removed, when old bones won't lock,
I shall explore my far-reaching beloved blue.

Remember me and my desire to learn a little more
From one whose boundlessness conceived it all.

When light has swallowed black I will touch you
With eternity, the scent of one small flower.

Joyce Lee

Maree Macmillan

Women Find A Voice In Music

FROM COLONIAL TIMES, women have been integral to the fabric of Australian western musical culture. In the early days of European settlement, by reproducing the music of the drawing room, women played an important part in recreating a sense of the 'old civilization' in a distant and alien place. Some were prolific composers of 'parlour' music and even of large-scale works. However, women's contribution is only just starting to be acknowledged in mainstream musicological circles.

The musical establishment's attitude to the parlour song epitomizes the view which has derogated women's composition over the centuries. Derek Scott characterizes it as follows:

The modern musicologist's scorn for bourgeois domestic song arises from its failure to meet the criteria of the Western 'art music' tradition, in which an assumption is made that art progresses under its own laws independently of the material basis of the society within which it is produced. The movement of art is therefore interpreted as a succession of styles, each led and perfected by creative geniuses.¹

Traditionally, musicology has consisted largely of a chronological history of the lives and times of 'Great Composers' (always white, European and male of course), together with formalistic analyses of their 'Masterpieces'. There is little acknowledgement of music's role as a powerfully expressive personal and social force, which not only reflects but shapes history and culture.

One might posit a German canon beginning with J.S. Bach as the musical equivalent of F.R. Leavis's Great Tradition in literature. Standard music texts still bear titles such as *Man and his Music*, *The Music of Man*,

Masters of Italian Opera, *Masters of the Second Viennese School*. References to women's contribution to music are few; no evidence of even an awareness of the existence of feminist concerns is apparent.

For at least fifteen years feminism has informed the study of the visual arts, literature and history; yet until recently, as American feminist musicologist Susan McClary notes, it seemed likely that musicology would slip unheedingly from pre- to post-feminism without having to even examine its practices.²

It is arguable that traditional musicology, more than other discourses, is still dominated by patriarchal and dualistic notions of masculinity and femininity which date back at least to ancient Greece. Some of the most pervasive of the so-called masculine/feminine dichotomies are: order/chaos; reason/intuition; culture/nature; and mind/body.

In classical Greece itself, dual approaches to music were valued: the Platonic tradition recognized music's power over the body and the passions, while the Pythagoreans characterized musical pitch intervals numerically as frequency ratios. It is unfortunate that today's musicology has evolved largely from the latter approach, which encourages the view that music is just music, a self-contained system operating according to laws derived from the acoustic properties of sound. From this perspective it is difficult to see how issues of gender could even arise. This situation is in the process of changing.

MAJOR RECENT DEVELOPMENTS have taken two forms: the restitution to history of forgotten women composers and the examination of the discourse of musicology itself.

Research undertaken during the 1980s in the wake of second-wave feminism unearthed many previously unknown outstanding women musicians. The



Mona McBurney

Courtesy, the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

reclamation of exceptional women composers and performers is important and inspirational. However, this approach can serve to reinforce the nineteenth-century Romantic construction of artist as 'genius'.

Moreover, it does little towards establishing the place of women as a whole; it merely uncovers women who were sufficiently 'notable' in male terms to have survived in a male-defined and male-recorded history. Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn are probably the most well known female composer/performers because of their respective relationships to more famous men. The development of an increasingly sophisticated feminist theoretical perspective is beginning to situate these women in a wider historical and social context.

On the Australian scene, Thérèse Radic, Kay Dreyfus and others have done much to raise awareness of the contribution of women composers and musicians and the contexts in which they worked. As Radic points out, during the first hundred years of white settlement even male composers were a rarity:

On the few occasions when [that rare bird, an Australian composer] was spotted, its colonial status embarrassed listeners. Worse, since British music was then considered vastly inferior to the German or even the Italian models, the unfortunate Australian composer was left in a crippling double cringe. In that environment a woman composer was as puzzling and as miraculous as a heat mirage in the desert.³

Despite the odds, the thriving musical culture of Marvellous Melbourne produced two significant women composers, both of whom wrote large-scale works. Mona McBurney's opera *The Dalmatians*, first produced in 1910, won second place in a Ricordi competition for English opera. Florence Donaldson Ewart wrote five operas, but apart from a concert version of one of them, never heard her work performed. In all, she wrote over sixty works in a variety of genres, establishing her reputation as a composer in 1907 with 'Ode to Australia', her prize-winning entry in the Exhibition of Women's Works.⁴

In the 1880s, with the appointment of George Marshall-Hall as the first professor of music at the University of Melbourne, female students were admitted alongside males to receive instruction in the craft of composition. Among them was Margaret Sutherland, belatedly acknowledged to be one of the most important Australian composers of the first half of this century. Her work is now accepted into the repertoire, if not the canon.

In the 1920s, Sutherland travelled to Europe to study – as did many of her contemporaries – only to find that on returning to her homeland her music was too avant garde to be understood by the general concert-going public. She nevertheless continued to be a major force in the promotion of contemporary music in Melbourne. Her work received recognition in the ABC Composer Competition in 1934: she earned awards in six of the fourteen sections, including the special state award.

Despite the quality of her work, for most of her life Sutherland was in the true sense of the term an amateur composer: she was not paid for her work until her seventies, when she received her first commission. At this time, she was granted an honorary doctorate and finally an OBE. Sutherland was also a social activist. It is to her that Victorians owe the present site of their Arts Centre: when government attempted to sell the land, she led a vigorous and successful campaign to prevent this.

A surprising number of women achieved recognition during this era. These include May Brahe, Esther Rofe, Phyllis Batchelor, Moneta Eagles, Meta Overman, Theodora Sutherland, Dulcie Holland, Miriam Hyde, Mirrie Hill, Linda Phillips (OBE) and Peggy Glanville-Hicks. Some have died, but others are still writing and even performing. Some worked in radio or film, with ballet, or contributed compositions and teaching materials for the Australian Music Examinations Board. Each of these women merits an individual article, but only a few can be mentioned here.

Many of us in our younger days studied piano pieces by Hyde and Hill and completed theory papers by Holland. Some readers will remember Linda Phillips as music critic for the Melbourne *Sun News Pictorial*, a position she occupied from 1949 to 1976. She was also an adjudicator of the Sun Aria solo vocal competition for twenty-eight years until 1977. In addition, Phillips was a pianist, poet and composer of chamber music, particularly of art songs.

Peggy Glanville-Hicks earned a formidable reputation overseas as a composer of opera, but received little recognition in her lifetime in her country of origin. Like Phillips, Hicks was a music critic, writing acerbic reviews for the extremely influential *New York Herald Tribune* during the 1940s and fifties. During her residence in the United States, she also organized landmark concerts of contemporary music, as Sutherland did in Melbourne.

In the late 1950s, Hicks moved to Greece, where her opera *Nausicaa* was premiered at the 1961 Athens festival. Having spent most of her life as an expatriate, in 1975 she returned to Sydney to work at the Australian Music Centre. Hicks' work has only recently been given serious acknowledgement in Australia and has attracted greater attention since her death.

May Brahe was an extraordinarily prolific composer of the much maligned parlour song, as docu-



mented by Kay Dreyfus. Challenging the societal view of woman as amateur and home-maker, Brahe wrote at least 547 songs, and published 290 of them, mostly under her own name.⁵

Brahe's album *Song Pictures* created record sales in 1919 and her song, 'I Passed By Your Window', sold more than one million copies. Her best known song, 'Bless This House', sold over two million copies. Brahe raised four children on the income from her songs; her estate still generates thousands of dollars a year in royalties and mechanical rights.

Esther Rofe's first love was writing for ballet. She received commissions for large-scale pieces from the Borovansky Dance Company and the Ballet Guild of Victoria. For many years Rofe supported her own composing activities by arranging and technical work for the ABC, and later by conducting, arranging and composing for the thirty-two-piece orchestra of the



Margaret Sutherland
Courtesy, the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

music department of Colgate Palmolive in Sydney. Most of her work has been performed, but little has been published.

Moneta Eagles was a composer of film music with the Department of the Interior Film Unit in New South Wales from 1951 to 1964, working as Music Director from 1957. She composed music for more than twenty documentary films. In addition to her film output, Eagles wrote sixty instrumental, vocal and choral pieces during this time, winning prizes for piano and chamber works in the composer competitions of 1954 and 1956. Only about one fifth of this work has been published. After a fifteen-year withdrawal from public life, Eagles returned to composition in 1987, writing sacred music for the organ.

WHILE HISTORIANS WERE reinstating these older women, the next generations of composers were making their mark; they continue to do so, and with increasing vigour. Some of the better known women of the middle generations are: Helen Gifford, Ann Boyd, Moya Henderson, Ann Carr-Boyd, Judith Clingin, Ros Bandt; expatriates Alison Bauld, Jennifer Fowler and Barbara Woof; and overseas born women who mostly reside in Australia such as Mary Mageau, Betty Beath, Gillian Whitehead and Becky Llewellyn.

These women have done much to lay the ground-

work for the present generation of younger composers. Between them, they span a huge variety of styles, genres and media; in the 1970s in particular, Helen Gifford had a special interest in the theatre and was regularly commissioned by the Melbourne Theatre Company, later becoming composer-in-residence for the Australian Opera; Ros Bandt is a performer of early music and a sound artist, working with sound installations and the natural environment; Moya Henderson explores peculiarly Australian themes and Aboriginal spirituality; many of these composers incorporate influences from Asia.

The work of many of these women was featured in Australia's first national *Composing Women's Festival* in 1991, which included not only Australian music, but also music by western women from the twelfth century to the present day. Several of the senior composers already mentioned were able to hear for the first time compositions which they had written many years earlier. It was a very moving and inspiring event.

Nineteen ninety-one marked an upsurge of activity in the field of women and music, both in Australia and internationally. In Australia, as well as the first *Composing Women's Festival*, events included: a performance by the Faye Dumont Singers entitled '1100 Years of Women's Choral Music'; a concert of work by women at the *New Music Festival* at the University of Melbourne; a forum on women composers; and a retrospective celebration of the life and music of Peggy Glanville-Hicks.

On the world scene, there were three international conferences on music and gender and the publication of American musicologist Susan McClary's groundbreaking book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*. McClary, in arguing that music itself is a gendered discourse, brought a whole new dimension to the field of musicology. Her work continues to be hotly debated.

McClary, by proposing a provisional methodology for a feminist approach, renders the standard musical canon far more vital as an object of study than it was in the 'Great Composers' and 'Masterpieces' phase. In recognizing that the subject position of any listener is always a situated one, she opens up the traditional repertoire to other ways of listening and introduces the possibility of including in the hallowed halls of Academe music with non-patriarchal agendas.

WOMEN COMPOSERS in the 1990s adopt a broad spectrum of views with regard to the status of their work and their place as composing women. Some attempt to make their gender identities a non-issue because of lingering essentialist assumptions. They insist that they write Music, as opposed to 'women's music', which they see as belonging to a ghetto.

Others believe that, because women have different bodies and thereby experience the world differently – both by virtue of different physicality and by roles and behaviours culturally assigned to them accordingly – they have available to them different 'ways of knowing' which can be expressed in their music.

It seemed significant that in the *Composers Perform* session of the 1991 festival, all the women taking part showed a remarkable similarity of philosophy, as was apparent in the program notes; all saw their music as an active spiritual force for good in the world.

Ros Bandt described her piece as:

... an attempt to open out whatever spiritual energy does still exist ... so that cultural differences can be overcome and personal and musical communication enriched.

Sarah Hopkins described herself as follows:

As a composer-performer, my desire is to create music which resonates with the space and energy of the Australian landscape as well as the inner landscape of the human psyche. I want my music to move and inspire people and reconnect them with the heart of life.

Vineta Lagzdina wrote:

On being a woman composer I believe that the most vital input in today's world is in the hands, hearts and souls of women. In 1974 Anaïs Nin answered to the question of why she writes: "I believe one writes because one has to create a world in which one can live". Similarly I compose and perform.

It is possible, therefore, that women may, either consciously or unconsciously, write music different from that written by men.

More recent pieces display what might be regarded as peculiarly feminine concerns. Andree Greenwell's music theatre piece, *Sweet Death*, explores a woman's relationship with food and her attempt to eat herself to death by stuffing herself with sweets. The internationally acclaimed music theatre piece, *Recital*, depicting the complex persona of an ageing operatic diva, is also very much a gendered subject, relying for its power on the solo performance by soprano/actor Helen Noonan.⁶

Sydney composer Moya Henderson's recent opera about the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain, written in collaboration with Melbourne poet, Judith Rodriguez, is likely to have insights derived from female experience which will probably be different from say, Richard Meale's *Voss*, with a libretto by David Malouf based on Patrick White's novel.

Things are continuing to move. The second *Australian Composing Women's Festival* in Melbourne in



May Brahe
Courtesy, the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

1994 encompassed a much larger number of composers, performers, genres and cultures than did the first festival three years earlier. The participating composers are far too numerous to mention individually. Some of those who have established reputations are Sarah Hopkins, Liza Lim and Mary Finsterer, as well as Andree Greenwell.

This festival also featured a group interview conducted by Margaret Throsby from the ABC. In this landmark session, VIP women composers and performers, whose ages ranged from seventy to ninety-three, shared reminiscences of some of their vast experience in the music world.

Another mark of the 1994 festival was its increased theoretical sophistication, partly as a legacy of McClary's work. It incorporated a conference component, with papers on history, theory and women's relationship to technology.

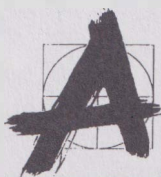
In 1996, the academy at least partially embraced some of these feminist concerns: the *National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia* invited Susan McClary as one of the keynote speakers and included several papers with feminist perspectives.

In Sydney later this year, the third *Composing Women's Festival* promises to be even more diverse than previous festivals. At the second festival, Radic suggested that the door for women composers was ajar now, but not open. It will be exciting to see how much further the door can be pushed and what might come into view on the other side.

ENDNOTES

1. Derek Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlours* (Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1989).
2. Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota & Oxford, 1991).
3. Therese Radic, 'Composing Women: Setting the Record Straight' *Composing Women's Festival* concert program, 1994.
4. Faye Patton, 'Florence Donaldson Ewart: A Critique of a Compositional Method' *Repercussions: Australian Composing Women's Festival and Conference, 1994* National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 57-61.
5. Kay Dreyfus, 'A Woman Composer's Place is in the parlour: May Brahe, Songwriter', *Repercussions*, *Ibid.* pp. 62-5.
6. *Recital*, devised in collaboration with composer-performer David Chesworth.

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Keith McKenry

Looking Beyond the Bowyangs

A Critique of Australian Ballad Anthologies

NEWCOMERS TO THE FIELD of Australian verse could be forgiven for concluding a plague of balladists beset the continent in the late 1800s creating a popular fever lasting several decades. They also might conclude the plague then subsided rapidly to a point where – by the end of the First World War, say – the ballad as a contemporary literary form virtually became extinct. Upon further investigation they would find however that the ballad tradition has remained very much alive, and that quality *new* ballads continue to appear, adapted to the circumstances of modern-day Australia. It's instructive therefore to examine the treatment of Australia's balladists at the hands of anthologists and the literary establishment.

In 1955 Douglas Stewart and Nancy Keesing published *Australian Bush Ballads*,¹ a collection which rightly is regarded as a pioneering work. Their extensive notebooks in Sydney's Mitchell Library bear testimony to their diligence and the scope of their endeavours. Unfortunately however, despite its status now as a standard text the book is unsatisfactory as a showpiece either for Australian balladry or for Australian bush verse.

As Stewart states in the book's Preface, the editors' purpose was "to preserve and present in a single volume the Australian bush ballad of the [eighteen] nineties . . . Since the selection was to be of the bush, all ballads of the streets, of larrikins or of the sea were automatically excluded." Then, displaying a rigour of definition not shared by later anthologists he continued: "[F]orms which were not ballads had to be excluded. Chief among these were lyric poetry, narrative poetry, and comic verse . . . With all that is inappropriate thus trimmed away, there remains for this volume the Australian bush ballad: the ebullition of the nineties, robust, humorous, earthy, and heroic."

While Stewart and Keesing made no *automatic* exclusion of recent ballads, and indeed did include at least one ballad first published as recently as 1950, their notebooks reveal they made a conscious decision to exclude from the collection references to twentieth century technology. They also excluded even mildly bawdy or 'rude' verse (the splendid 'Pidling Pete' being rejected), or any verse of a topical or political nature. Occupational verse other than of the bush similarly was considered not to qualify. Thus they presented a collection stripped of dimension, a collection they rightly made no claim was representative of the wider landscape of Australian balladry.

The narrow conceptual scope of *Australian Bush Ballads* has not been widely appreciated, and the book has played a key role in shaping a misconception, not only among the general community but also among many in the literary establishment that balladry in Australia has focused narrowly on bush themes, and that little balladry of consequence has been produced in Australia since the early 1900s.

Until recently the only other major collection in the field was *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*,² edited by Russell Ward. Although first published in 1964, nine years after *Australian Bush Ballads*, Ward's collection also had its origins in the cold war years of the early 1950s, when Ward, Keesing, Stewart, and others such as folklorist Edgar Waters and folklore collector John Meredith were living in Sydney, discovering and sharing enthusiastically a wealth of material from what Ward was to characterize indelibly as *The Australian Legend*.³

The Legend glorifies a minor subset of Australia's population, the laconic white male rural dweller. As the decades pass, that stereotype becomes increasingly anachronistic, the typical Australian becoming

less laconic, less Anglo, less rural, less working class, and (as it happens) less male. In truth, however, the stereotype has long been myth, urban dwellers having outnumbered their rural counterparts since even before the turn of the century, and Anglo backgrounds becoming ever less dominant as waves of immigration first from continental Europe and now from Asia and elsewhere forever recast the Australian cultural landscape.

The Legend persists largely because many Australians will it to do so or, perhaps, lack the imagination and energy necessary to undermine it effectively. Fair enough, that's the way with legends, but the practice of giving it succour through historically warped literary anthologies, especially in the fields of folklore and balladry, also has played a pivotal role.

Of the two ballad anthologies, Ward's was the more diverse, admitting for example 'town' ballads, and including a section on ballads written by notable contemporary poets. Nonetheless it too focused heavily on the bush, especially the bush of times past, eschewed bawdy, 'rude', topical or sea ballads, and made little attempt to give representation to ballads inspired by mid-twentieth century Australia. Ward also exercised a heavy but silent editorial hand, excising for example sixteen consecutive verses from Victor Daley's magnificent 'A Ballad of Eureka'⁴ (Small wonder then that the shell of a piece he presented failed to make any impression on the Australian consciousness.)

Ward's collection has now been replaced by a new (1993) edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*,⁵ edited by Philip Butterss and Elizabeth Webby. This new edition owes so little to its predecessor it ought properly to be regarded as a distinct work. It is also by far the most disappointing of the three major ballad collections, focusing disproportionately on eighteenth and early nineteenth century verse.

Butterss and Webby each brought to their task as editors a detailed knowledge of aspects of the Australian poetry and ballad tradition. Butterss had worked extensively on broadside ballads referring to Australia, and had also done valuable research into Banjo Paterson's sources for his 1905 collection of *Old Bush Songs*,⁶ publishing in his 1991 paper *Songs of the Bush*⁷ a collection of song texts published in the 1890s in the periodical *The Queenslander*, and drawn on heavily (without acknowledgement) by Paterson.

Webby, for her part, had concentrated on Australian poetry published in newspapers and elsewhere before 1850, and was the compiler of *Early Australian Poetry*, an annotated bibliography.⁸

Given their specialist backgrounds, it was to be expected their new collection of Australian ballads would be fully sourced and much stronger than its predecessors in the area of broadsides and early newspaper verse. These indeed are its great strengths, but so strong is the focus on these areas, and on the work of a few early poets, that the collection is badly skewed and so devoid of balance.

Butterss and Webby's heading 'Later Ballads and Popular Verse' for a section commencing with Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon, may have been intended to drive home the point that the Australian ballad was not born in the 1860s, but by casting such writers as 'later' balladists in the Australian context they overstate their case to the point of absurdity.

Astoundingly, Butterss and Webby omit entirely many of the key poets from the classic period of the bush ballad (c.1880–1920), including Brady, Goodge, Will Lawson, Morant, Quinn and Spencer, and restrict others such as Boake, Daley, Gibson, Gordon, Hartigan ('John O'Brien') and Ogilvie to a single entry, while finding space for no fewer than thirteen goldfield songs (not even ballads, some of them) of the 1850s by Charles Thatcher and ten poems (again not always ballads) by the convict poet Francis McNamara. While in this way they provide a degree of equity between eras the price they pay is the loss of artistic and critical balance. Further, the absence of Goodge and Spencer – masters of the comic/humorous ballad – and the restriction of the outstanding C.J. Dennis to only two items, renders the collection somewhat leaden.

Butterss and Webby assert their collection "has more of an interest in the historical construction of gender and race than earlier collections, and is also a product of the contemporary focus on such matters as diversity, difference and dialogue". In a recent paper, Butterss has expanded on this theme, comparing his and Webby's approach to that of Ward, and commenting:

Perhaps the most significant difference between the beliefs underlying the selection of ballads in the two editions concerns the 'ethos of the ballads' and the notion of Australian identity. Ward's views

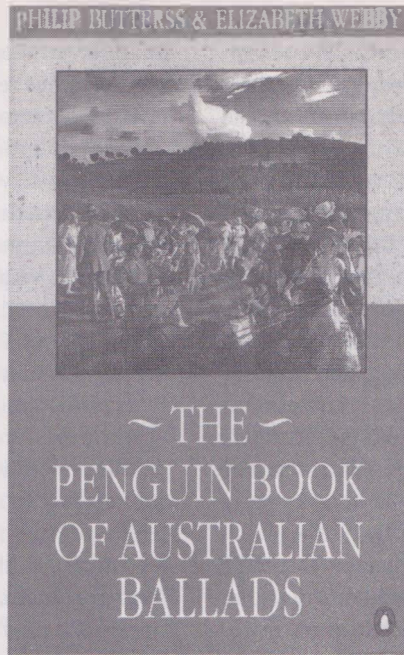
resulted in a ballad collection that emphasized a masculine, anti-authoritarian and communal ethos ...

In the 1980s and 1990s a different set of views have held sway, and our selection of material naturally enough is shaped by those views. There has been a strong shift away from 'essentializing' – attempting to define the essence of a nation, a people, or a period – and we did not try to do so. Rather than suggesting that there is or was a particular type of Australian identity, or a particular mood or flavour to a particular period, or that Australian ballads embody a particular ethos, we believe that such things are always a matter of contestation between different forces, and we attempted to draw attention to some of the competing forces which can be seen in the ballads. Central to the contemporary opposition to essentialism is a concern with difference, and our collection tries to give particular attention to racial and sexual difference.⁹

Despite these views, and Butterss and Webby's achievement in unearthing much significant new material, especially material from the early 1800s, the thinness of their collection's post-1860s coverage and its paucity of topical/political, comic, bawdy, urban, coastal or seafaring ballads and its omission of war ballads renders it arguably as dimensionless and unrepresentative as its predecessors.

One particular area for regret is that Butterss and Webby have failed to take up the opportunity to bring Ward's collection up-to-date. Rather, they have done the opposite, so taking the focus back to the early 1800s they seemingly have excluded all balladists born since 1878, over 117 years ago! As a result they have disenfranchised all but a very few of the balladists writing in the twentieth century, and all those whose work first appeared after 1906.

Had the collection been labelled not *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* but rather given a less in-



clusive title such as 'The Penguin Book of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Australian Popular Verse', then any complaint would largely be one of balance and of taste¹⁰. In the circumstances however, the all-encompassing title is not only misleading but dangerous, all the more so because the book appears as one of the *Penguin* ballad series, and by this fact acquires heightened status as a reference, one which an uninformed reader might assume is representative of Australian balladry in the broad.

IN THEIR INTRODUCTION, Butterss and Webby state that rather than include more recent ballads and verse they have chosen to deal in more depth than Ward "with material up to the early 1920s". (Seemingly however that greater depth applies solely to the period before 1870, with the waters becoming rapidly more shallow as the years progress.) They assert this is not an arbitrary point of conclusion, and note that "by then the considerable interest in the so-called 'literary bush ballad' had dwindled". They quote a 1910 statement by Bertram Stevens (then editor of the *Sydney Bulletin's* Red Page) that "the force of the horse and swagman school is spent" and a 1915 Red Page review which referred to bush ballads as quaint, and belonging to an age long past in Australian literature. They might, in fairness, also have noted Australia was at that time about to embrace with wild enthusiasm a new ballad genre, that of C.J. Dennis' *Sentimental Bloke*, Doreen, and Ginger Mick. In any event, the editorial views of the early 1900s provide no basis for the exclusion from a contemporary anthology of material written after these views were expressed.

Butterss and Webby draw a curious distinction between "later poets and the balladists", as if poets writing ballads are not balladists irrespective of their era, and their work not needing consideration for inclusion in an edition of Australian ballads aspiring for completeness. Thus, at a stroke, they disenfranchise one of Australia's greatest balladists – John Manifold

– as well as Edward Harrington, Louis Clark, Graham Jenkin, Duke Tritton, Dorothy Hewett, Rob Charlton and a host of other important contributors to the canon of Australian ballads.

The broadside ballads and goldrush songs of Thatcher accepted as valid inclusions in most ballad anthologies have a modern corollary in the songs and ballads of contemporary songwriters. Even if we were to confine any selection to songs in traditional ballad form (a standard not applied to Thatcher), then we necessarily would open up to inclusion a splendid and extensive body of contemporary material.

Butterss and Webby display an incomplete understanding of what they have excluded. While one key exclusion has been “the considerable body of song and verse composed as part of the folk revival which began in the early 1950s”, they omit any reference to the far more long-standing integration of the ballad form into the milieu of Australian country music.

Whatever their rationale for excluding post-1920s material, that they have done so both denies a reader opportunity to trace fully the evolution of the ballad in Australia and denies recognition to the host of ballads, and balladists, appearing during this century. It also perpetuates the myth that Australian ballads are solely a phenomenon of earlier times and not part of contemporary Australian artistic self-expression.

For all these reasons, the generic title of Butterss and Webby’s collection is an embarrassment, so much so that the book should be re-issued with a revised introduction under a more appropriate title.¹¹

TWO COLLECTIONS WHICH do fly a flag for contemporary times are Bill Scott’s 1984 *Penguin Book of Australian Humorous Verse*,¹² and Rocky Marshall’s 1985 *Down the Track: Modern Humorous Australian Bush Ballads and Popular Performance Poetry*.¹³ While naturally these collections are concerned only with humorous verse, and are themselves now somewhat dated, they do find a place for notable living (or recently deceased) balladists.

Any complaint about the failure to give proper recognition to contemporary balladists should not be visited solely upon editors of ballad anthologies. An inspection of the considerable body of broad-based Australian poetry anthologies gives the impression that with few exceptions the editors have not considered the bush verse and balladry of modern times

and rejected it on grounds of quality, but rather that they have not regarded highly the ballad per se and have not been aware of the material available.

The standards of contemporary balladry are exacting, and those which don’t pass muster are quickly cast aside. But the best of the contemporary creations, like Rob Bath and Andrew Bleby’s ‘McArthur’s Fart’, Charlee Marshall’s ‘Inside Story’, Claude Morris’ ‘A Grave Situation’, Rob Charlton’s ‘Bloody Shielas’, Don Henderson’s ‘A Practical Smoker’, and Colin Wilson’s ‘Cross-Eyed Bull’ stand comparison with the best of the classic humorous bush ballads of earlier eras. To deny the existence of these works, and others of their ilk and generation, in any Australian ballad anthology aspiring to representativeness, is absurd.

The problem may be in part that, Stewart and Keesing apart, the anthologists have not been clear in what they have been striving for, and have used the term ‘ballad’ as nothing more than a convenient short-hand description. Ward, for example, stated in the introduction to the first *Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, that in:

the title of this book the accent should be placed on *Australian* rather than *ballads*. The verses have been chosen primarily to give the flavour of whatever is distinctive, or characteristic or ‘typical’ of the historical experience of Australians, and so of Australian attitudes to life.

Then, in commenting on his use of the term ‘ballad’, he states:

At one time or another it has been used to cover an astonishingly wide range of verse, but in its narrower sense most people now use it to mean narrative folk-verse, or narrative literary verse written in the style of folk ballads. In this sense most, though by no means all, of the poems in this book are ballads: but to help build up a picture of the traditional Australian self-image, I have not hesitated to include much non-narrative verse of a particular sort. Indeed, a more accurately descriptive title might have been the *Penguin Book of Australian Popular Verse*, were it not for the last section which includes some first-rate, but not particularly ‘popular’ contemporary Australian poems. These have been chosen to suggest the

extent to which traditional Australian values, reflected for so long in popular verse, have influenced the inner content, if not the outer style, of our literature and life today.

In preparing their replacement edition Butters and Webby chose to exclude contemporary poems, but – possibly to demonstrate affinity with the Ward collection, or a claim to inherit its mantle – did not take up Ward's suggestion re a more appropriate title. In their introduction, they address thus the question of definition:

While it is clear that there is a loosely related body of Australian ballad, song and verse, it seems impossible to arrive at a term which precisely covers everything, although editors and authors have tried a wide range of appellations such as 'traditional songs', 'bush ballads', 'old bush songs', and 'colonial ballads'. Not all the material included in this collection is 'traditional' in the sense that it was passed down in a tradition, oral or otherwise; it does not all relate to the bush; it is not all 'ballad' in the sense of being narrative; nor, of course, is it all songs. Even the term 'Australian' is only accurate in a limited sense ...

This being the case, what are we to make of the term 'Australian' in this context? Certainly, ballads referring to or set in Australia seem by universal acclamation to qualify if they are broadside ballads, even where there is no evidence they have travelled to this country. (Indeed, Buttress and Webby go so far as to include one transportation ballad from Ireland unknown in Australia where the hero is transported to Bermuda!) Seemingly however this acceptance does not extend to later topical ballads with Australian references written overseas and published in such magazines as the London *Punch*. Seemingly, too, parlour ballads, such as were written in the late nineteenth century by the likes of George Robert Sims seem never to qualify, even where they are set in Australia and (as is the case with some of Sims' pieces) are known to have been recited and published here.

And if broadside ballads written overseas but referring to Australia are regarded as 'Australian' then what about ballads written by Australians but not identifiably Australian in content or even – shock,

horror – concerned with other countries or foreign cultures? Are we so narrow in our thinking as not to accept such pieces as Australian? We have – after all – no problem in embracing other Australian-written verse and prose addressing the world beyond the Eighty Mile Beach. No-one has suggested, for example, that the likes of Christopher Brennan, Hugh McCrae, A.D. Hope or Les Murray should be represented in anthologies of Australian verse only by those of their writings which reek of bowyangs or the harbour bridge, and we do not disown as non-Australian the novels of Thomas Keneally set in Europe, North America, Africa and the Antarctic, so why should an anthology of Australian ballads be so constrained?

THE ANSWER MAY BE that Australian anthologists have been interested in the ballad less as literature than as history, and in compiling their collections have focused on the concept of an emerging sense of Australian identity and sense of place. Small wonder then that their anthologies not only fail to acknowledge Australia's position in a wider world but also give scant recognition to the fact that the concerns of Australian balladists have not been solely inward-looking and chauvinistic. Small wonder, too, that these days the ballads often are identified with that part of Australian writing which lacks both world vision and a modicum of sophistication.

One criterion for selection for a broad-based Australian ballad anthology is that the material belongs to a continuity, one that respects not only form – in the form of narrative rhyming verse – but also process, in that it belongs to a cultural continuum, one that has evolved largely (but not solely) from the broadside and folk verse traditions of Europe and the British Isles. This would steer us in the direction not only of modern literary ballads but also of the rough-hewn bush ballad and rhyming verse of modern times, and of the sung narrative, in whatever musical genre. Thus, for example, the continuity of process would be drawn out, and we would have a wider insight into the significance and evolution of the ballad form. To dismiss arbitrarily the modern ballad from consideration for inclusion in an anthology of Australian ballads is equally as ludicrous as would be a decision to date the Australian ballad from 1870, and the appearance, say, of Gordon's 'Sick Stockrider'.

The problem is, the body of material to be considered under such a criterion is immense, diverse and dissembled, and the task of the anthologist easily could be overwhelming. Small wonder then that to date anthologists have backed off, preferring to sift again through the much-tilled soil of the past rather than to break new ground.

For all these reasons, we still await a first balanced anthology of Australian ballads and/or popular verse, one that recognizes properly, for example, the existence of the Twentieth Century.

ENDNOTES

1. D. Stewart and N. Keesing (eds), *Australian Bush Ballads*, A & R, Sydney 1955, and subsequent editions.
2. R. Ward (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, Penguin, 1964.
3. R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, OUP, 1958.
4. The full text of this neglected ballad appears in Marjory Pizer and Muir Holburn's excellent collection of Daley's topical and political verse, *Crevice Roe*, Edwards & Shaw, 1947, and also in several subsequent folklore collections.
5. P. Butterss and E. Webby (eds), *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, Penguin, 1993.
6. A.B. Paterson (ed.), *Old Bush Songs*, A & R 1905, and subsequent editions.
7. P. Butterss (ed.), *Songs from the Bush: The First Collection of Australian Folk Song*, Australian Folklore Occasional Paper No. 19, Rams Skull Press, Kuranda, 1991.
8. Elizabeth Webby, *Early Australian Poetry: An Annotated Bibliography of Original Poems Published in Australian Newspapers, Magazines & Almanacks Before 1850*, Hale & Iremonger, 1982.
9. Philip Butterss, 'From Defiance to Difference: The Changing Shape of the Australian Ballad Collection', in *Australian Folklore* No. 10. July 1995, pp. 45-9.
10. This is not the first time an extravagantly generic title has been given to a conceptually limited publication in the area of Australian folklore. Witness, for example, *The Complete Book of Australian Folklore*, *Australian Folklore: A Dictionary of Lore, Legends and Popular Allusions* and *The Big Treasury of Australian Folklore*, compilations which focus - sometimes exclusively - on non-urban, masculine, Anglo-Australian songs, poems, yarns and history. It was not until the publication in 1987 of the Report of the Commonwealth Committee of Inquiry into Folklife in Australia, entitled *Folklife. Our Living Heritage (AGPS)*, and subsequently Graham Seal's *The Hidden Culture: Folklore in Australian Society (OUP, 1989)*, and in 1993 *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* that the breadth of the concept of folklore, and hence its inclusion of craft, ceremony, belief, children's lore, modern occupational lore and indeed the entire spectrum of traditional culture, for all communities, was reflected in an Australian publication.
11. There is a precedent for such an action. In 1958 Penguin published under the title *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* an anthology edited by John Thompson, Kenneth Slessor and R. G. Howarth. The trouble was, this anthol-

ogy was concerned solely with poetry written in the Twentieth Century! On that occasion Penguin saw the error of its ways, and in 1961 re-issued the book with the addition of one poem in a 'revised' edition, under the more appropriate title, *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Verse*. Since Penguin acted then to recognize explicitly the Twentieth Century, hopefully it will act now to recognize explicitly its absence.

12. Bill Scott (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Australian Humorous Verse*, Penguin, 1984.
13. Rocky Marshall (ed.), *Down the Track: Modern Humorous Australian Bush Ballads and Popular Performance Poetry*, Warratta Enterprises, Oaklands Park, 1985.

Keith McKenry has written and performed extensively on the subject of Australian folklore and balladry.

Philip Butterss responds

IT IS GOOD TO HAVE THE opportunity to comment on Keith McKenry's criticisms of the 1993 edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*. The main point in McKenry's article - that there is an enormous quantity of Australian ballads and related verse not included in any of the ballad anthologies - is, of course, correct. In an ideal world where publishers were happy to print vast, multi-volume works, it might be possible to produce a collection with the diversity and depth that McKenry dreams about. Indeed, by the end of his article he is close to conceding that such an anthology is impossible. In the real world any volume of Australian ballads that a publisher would actually publish is open to criticism for its omissions. Russel Ward anticipated such a response to his edition, beginning the introduction somewhat defensively:

Every critic ... will think of favourite verses which have been omitted, and will accordingly damn the editor for not having had the taste to compile the best possible collection - the one, of course, which the critic would have compiled himself.

McKenry points to many ballads I agree it would have been good to include, but only a handful in our edi-

tion that he would exclude – and it would be easy to argue against the latter. His article also contains many minor misrepresentations which it would be unproductive to address, but it is worth making a couple of points about the shape of our collection.

Although McKenry claims that the new edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* “owes so little to its predecessor it ought properly to be regarded as a distinct work”, we were, in fact, deliberately using Russel Ward’s earlier (and very good) edition as a model. For the most part Elizabeth Webby and I used roughly the same categories as Ward (with some minor modifications), but we were able to include some important material that has been discovered since his edition, and to alter some of his emphases. Our first big decision was what to do with Ward’s final section, titled ‘Contemporary Poetry’, which was a thin selection of some more ‘literary’ pieces from the forties and fifties.

In our initial discussions we asked Penguin about the possibility of a two-volume collection which would have given us space to expand in many directions, including post-1920, but this was felt to be impossible for a variety of commercial reasons. As our introduction states: “we decided it would be impossible to bring the collection up to the present day without it becoming either massively long or far too superficial”. We felt – correctly, in my view – that it was better to go for some depth in the period of the Australian ballad’s growth and heyday, than to produce a hopelessly shallow collection.

Ward’s *Penguin Australian Ballads* opened with a handful of British broadsides about Australia. We were able to expand this section to include some fine examples of important ballad types omitted from the earlier edition, such as ballads about transportation from Ireland, ballads about women convicts, and ballads critical of transportation. When Ward published his edition in 1964, only a handful of pieces by the excellent convict poet Francis MacNamara were known, and Ward included three of these. As McKenry points out we published ten, and very happily, too. (In suggesting that this was an inappropriate weighting McKenry omits the fact that four of the additions had only four lines each.) MacNamara’s work should be much more widely known than it is, and thoroughly deserves a place in a collection of Australian ballads.

A DEPARTURE FROM THE model provided by Ward’s edition was the inclusion of a section of early newspaper verse, containing, among other things, verse by women and some interesting and sympathetic ballads about Aborigines. Newspapers were, of course, far and away the greatest disseminators of poetry in the nineteenth century, and are the repository of a vast and important body of verse which also needs to be seen as part of the ballad tradition. We included only a minute fragment, and again one which should be there.

Ward printed six of the many hundreds of extant goldfields songs, presenting a version of goldfields life which supports the argument of *The Australian Legend* – jolly, anti-authoritarian, and communal. We expanded the section to show that the racism of the fields also found its way into the songs, and again to give more space to women’s experience, by including songs such as the delightful and feminist ‘The Colonial Widow’. We collapsed two of Ward’s categories into one section of ‘Old Bush Songs’, and included roughly similar material, although we were able to correct what seemed to us the extraordinary absence of a traditional Ned Kelly ballad in the earlier edition.

We also merged Ward’s ‘Early Literary Balladists’, ‘Literary Bush Ballads’, and ‘Town Ballads’ into one section which we called ‘Later Ballads and Popular Verse’. We covered these same areas, including close to as many ballads as Ward did (and many of the same ones), but certainly the emphasis differed in some significant ways. McKenry was appalled at the absence of Brady, Goodge, Will Lawson, Morant, Quinn and Spencer from our collection. One could as easily have been appalled at the absence of Elise Espinasse, Dora Wilcox, Ethel Mills, Louisa Lawson, Marie Pitt and Mary Gilmore from Ward’s edition. With a limited amount of space it’s a question of who you leave out, and it’s the women who are usually left out – the only woman balladist McKenry mentions in his entire article is Dorothy Hewett.

As well as ballads by these women, we selected a healthy crop from old favourites such as Adam Lindsay Gordon, J. Brunton Stephens, G.H. Gibson (‘Ironbark’), Mary Hannay Foott, Henry Lawson, A.B. Paterson, Barcroft Boake, Will Ogilvie, George Essex Evans, Victor Daley, ‘Dryblower’ (E.G. Murphy), C.J. Dennis, and ‘John O’Brien’ (Patrick Joseph Hartigan). And we included a number of other items that are not

usually found in ballad anthologies. For example, we were able to give a sense of the conflict about the bush ballad, even at its heyday, with items such as Alfred Chandler's ballad about the man who was going to throttle Billy if he sang 'The Wild Colonial Boy' yet again, or R.H. Croll's summary of Australian literature at the end of the nineteenth century:

Whalers, damper, swag and nosebag, Johnny-cakes and billy-tea,
Murrumburrah, Meremendicoowoke,
Yoularbudgeree,
Cattle-duffers, bold bushrangers, diggers,
drovers, bush race-courses,
And on all the other pages horses, horses, horses,
horses.

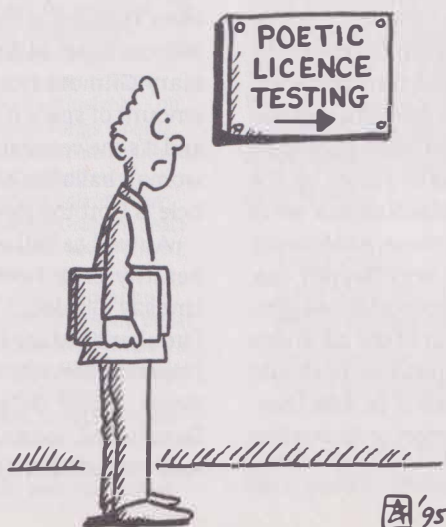
As our introduction states, the *Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* "is inevitably shaped by our own critical concerns". How could it be anything else? McKenry's article makes much of this point, but perhaps he could be less shy about his own particular interests, and the way they shape his view of the ballad canon. In his biographical note McKenry indicates his heavy involvement in the folk revival, and notes that he "has written and performed extensively on the subject of Australian folklore and balladry". Surprisingly he omits to say that he is also a composer of Australian ballads, his publications including *McKenry's Curse and Other Verse* (Fanged Wombat,

1993). With his considerable participation in the revival, it's not surprising that he places a particularly heavy emphasis on the vitality of the ballad tradition in the late twentieth century.

Certainly, given more space we would have included a body of material from later than the 1920s. But it's difficult to know how best to deal with that period. First there's the question of quality. It's difficult to make claims for the excellence of very much of the verse produced by the imitators of the ballad's heyday, as anyone who has judged a bush ballad competition would know. But if one was really serious about bringing the ballads up to the end of the twentieth century, the largest gap in all the collections would be commercial popular music – with its own particular definition of 'ballad', and also with a considerable quantity of narrative pieces that could arguably fit alongside the rest of the ballads. It might not be an area that has interested folkies, but the ideal collection would represent it in considerable detail – which brings us back to the problem of space.

Unfortunately, to do justice to Australian ballads in their full diversity, and in appropriate depth, would require a CD-rom or a substantial internet archive. It may be that the electronic publishing of the future offers a way to produce the ideal collection – one not open to the kind of criticisms that Ward rightly anticipated.

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Bev Aisbett

☆ 95

Merv Lilley

Belonging to the Squattocracy

John Meredith (ed.): *Breaker's Mate; Will Ogilvie in Australia* (Kangaroo Press, \$24.95).

I'VE READ THE BOOK, I've pored over it reader-wise, and now I'll pour over it. It's meant to be a book about Ogilvie the writer, a history of a great (?) poet. I get the impression that he didn't have a big enough story to stand on his own and another character has to have the ascendancy while Ogilvie is occasionally his offsider as a workmate in the breaking-in yards, the pubs, but no incidents take place to show they were equals there, and they drift apart, leaving Ogilvie to write a poem on his death in the Boer war, the punch line of the poem refers to a coward's grave! Not exactly what a soldier would like for an epitaph. Still, mateship has "many a twist and turn, it wanders and doubles back", as Banjo writes about Benjamin Bandicoot, and Meredith knows from a long life in research.

I knew from conversation with him a few years ago that he'd written a number of books of the folklore variety, then I saw the *Herald* front page about Meredith and Ogilvie, and *The Breaker*. That's what drew me in. I knew a fair bit about Ogilvie, poetry-wise, and the Breaker for that matter, but I didn't know they'd been together. I didn't know Ogilvie's personal history either, other than he'd been in Australia twelve years. I didn't know that he belonged to the Squattocracy class, that his way was paved with jobs from the boys, running this and running that, he had the elitist garb to wear into the best homes, the trust of the squatters. I immediately became more critical of the poetry of Will Ogilvie. The blinds fell from the eyes of one who once called his daughter a pet name, Willo Lilley, and made up a little folk song to sing for her, which was mostly repetition of the name, with a line between: "everybody called out Willo Lilley" . . . that was the entire baby song as far as I recall. Thus it can be seen that my class stand has been brought into play by Meredith's disclosures. But

Meredith's class stand apparently has in no way been affected by his own historical look at Ogilvie, whom he sees as the Australian bushies' favourite poet in song and verse. I never found any of these bushies in my wanderings, but I heard one try to recite "The Outlaw of Glenidol" at a bush dance where I come from, in the days when someone got up and sang or recited; but he got stuck early on, tried a couple of times, then retired. This determined me to find out where the poem came from, to learn and recite it. That took a time to find, but it was eventually done.

There was one other occasion when as a fourteen-year-old I had ventured into the canefields area to learn what it was like to grow and cut cane. I sauntered into a local dance hall there to stare in wonderment at dancers in their best finery. I had heard that you got tea and cakes there too at interval. They didn't give me any. It was depression, they could see that a ragged youth of very tender age wasn't worth it. (I sometimes think I've never lost that quality.) The dancers stood around in a babble of talk enjoying the cakes and tea, when suddenly in a lull a male voice yelled out: "and the fire-queen crossed the swamp!"

There was a short silence then a gale of mostly men's laughter, and another story was born which I'm putting on paper to symbolize an Australian attitude to sentimentality, heroics, seriousness, art, life itself; the joke of it.

To bear out my point I will add this story from yet another dance in another bush place. Some local virtuoso was singing 'Memories' in the tea and cakes break. He got to the part which sings tragically "you left me alone" but this was shattered by a stockman putting his head through the window imitating the singer with his own version of the next line "on my arse bone", in high falsetto. The story almost finished

there, except for the teller's own face-pulling imitative screeching laughter. I got the impression that it could have been him who put his face through the window. The thing that was very Australian about him, other than those qualities I have mentioned earlier, was his desperation for constant humour. It had to be found, it was worth remembering, it made life, lovemaking possible . . . He sat on the lawn of mornings, making love witticisms to his wife, a much older woman than himself, so that he had to work very hard. She had a constant headache, and could only smile and laugh painfully all the time, whilst I milked his half-share-dairy-farm cows for a quid a week with her grown son. He got fifteen shillings so he milked slower than me.

That was a sick joke when I think back on it, but it seemed like a well-off job in the thirties.

Ogilvie would never have had to do that, he belonged to the uppercrust. But this didn't stop me from using his verse for recitals up to a few years ago, say a decade or thereabouts. I found nostalgic identification in some of his poems, as well as imagination. I don't see the ones in this book that worked best on stage for me. I sometimes quote pieces from 'The Lady of The Lake' by Sir Walter Scott. I reckon that's where Ogilvie was coming from. Australian subject, nineteenth century, treated in a Scottish poetics. It was the nineteenth century, and if any Australian language was emerging, it hadn't made its way poetically through Ogilvie. As for his prose, well, it was Victorian. To compare his stories to Lawson's short stories is a sad mistake. His Boer War poems: jingoistic. Although he was supposed to be the Breaker's mate his poem to him after Morant was shot did no credit to himself or the Breaker. The reference to cowardice is non-understandable to me, not the point. Craziness for galloping across country to cut off a Minister of religion in a trap and shoot him, acting on his own orders, because he suspected the Minister was a Boer spy and was on his way to give information about Australian troops' whereabouts, was the main source of the matter. From sources I have read but cannot quote, the Breaker may have been involved in revenge killing sprees, atrocities, against captured Boers because he knew of Boers having cut off an Australian officer's knackers whilst still alive. Politically a soldier running his own revenge hatred campaign may well be in line to be shot to pacify other

parties in a tense diplomatic time, and thus Breaker Harry Morant got his, saying "shoot straight you bastards", a farewell statement of love for his fellow soldiers; a brave man indeed, or a man insensitive to personal destruction. Perhaps a madman by this time.

Ogilvie, though a follower of the Breaker and a war-mongering poet, did not follow the Breaker (his mate) to the war, but said his last farewells to Australia:

from one must leave the rowel and the rein
before the Blue Canoblas weave
their snow white hoods again

to go back to a comfortable propertied writer's life, weaving more lyrical poems about Australia.

I would have liked to see a few of Morant's poems and those of their friends, to see if they were coming any closer to having a sense of an emerging Australian lingo than Ogilvie achieved.

WITH RESPECT TO ANOTHER matter in *Breaker's Mate*, said to be startling in the back page blurb and taken for granted. Meredith's claim that Morant may have been the Gatton killer because he had disappeared from Ogilvie's and friend's den during that time, having gone Queensland way . . . is a big assumption to make. Meredith says that the poet Merv Lilley makes the amazing claim "without any reason at all" or words to that effect that his father was the Gatton killer.

I feel that I should apologize for having spoiled John's killer punch for his book that the Breaker was the killer of the Murphys. However I must defend myself about having 'no reason at all' for my claim that my father was the Gatton killer. As a sacred rule in our writing house, one does not reply to this kind of comment. I have decided to make an exception for John, an old friend. In John's case he has been loose, in error about how I have formulated my claims. He needs to read me very carefully. He will find out that my reasons for making my claim come from family history over a longer period. That is the forty years that he has been getting his book together, and then some. My research goes back to my birth in 1919 growing up under a schizophrenic killer, always on the verge of cracking; of suffering terrible terror as a child; later listening to his odd fragments about his movements in his young life, coupled with stories from my

mother about him, and finally his own secret claim to her about his whereabouts on the night of the murders; my recognition of him from exact description of him and his peculiarities as Clarke's man, age, height, colouring, etc. So much so that very few people to date since the publication of *Gatton Man* have doubted me. It's not a subject that I get unqualified satisfaction from. I have been ostracized from family as Frank Hardy was after *Power Without Glory*, in his case by Catholic Church decree; Thomas Wolfe wrote *Look Homeward Angel*, and received the treatment from family and everyone else who thought they, their district or country were in the line of fire; Edgar Lee Masters, the writer of *Spoon River Anthology*, received the treatment of outrage from Spoon River for those very excellent poems about residents who were all sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill . . . I imagine the list of writers would be a very long one of those who had received the treatment for being writers. It may be that I get satisfaction from being someone who has written well enough to join the ranks. I think I have. I think I wrote about a countryside of barbarous cruelty then which still exists now; and that might be an achievement. I think I didn't write an aimless story for no reason at all. Sorry to have cut across you, John. We more or less started out to become writers at the same time, didn't we? Early in the fifties? I used to stay with you when I blew in from the sea, remember? I was Breaker Morant and Will Ogilvie, all in one. But not Bill Lilley, who once offside for the Breaker. He was with the Breaker when breaking in just over the Queensland–New South Wales border, in his own story handed down. Thomas Day was breaking in as Thomas Wilson on Blue Nobby station, just over the Queensland–New South Wales bor-

der, the Queensland police were informed. The police said bring him in. He was gone when they got there. That is police information given to the Gibney brothers, who wrote *The Gatton Mystery*, but didn't include that piece of information in the book. I am sorry to say that the elder of those brothers, once a judge on the circuit, has passed away since I talked to them. I was lucky to have talked to them both. It filled in the pieces, even as my information has done for the public in general, and I believe, the police.

This is the first time I've written anything about it since the publication of *Gatton Man* two years ago, time enough to overcome the emotional trauma of having gone through it, to have written it down and face the public on publication. Having been dealt a hand in history I have played it with card sense, and won. I who have had the words, actions of the Breaker on horse-handling passed down to me by one of his offsideers. I've put them together in the bigger scheme of things where they belong. I kid you not. I'm no lily-white. There's still a dangerous man in here, passed down from earlier times. Believe me. A man who was bred as part of colonial Australia. A member of the rural working class with one of the best left hands in the country, I look back at with the gift of writing.

Merv Lilley at seventy-seven rising seventy-eight, reasonably sound of teeth, still a good horse . . . poet, songwriter, freelance journalist, radio drama and story-writer and reporter of the truth as he sees it, is presently writing a novel 'The Channels' and a children's book about buffalo and a Chinese Princess. He can be found in the Blue Mountains if you can see through the trees.

Hey, Banjo, Have You Heard, Mate?

WHEN A SURVIVING KILEY, Mr John R. (Jack) Kiley of 'Garah', Wallendbean, heard about the sale of Kiley's Run to make a pinus radiata plantation, he said: "I just cannot believe that any man who has any regard for the land, its history, and the people who protected it for so long, could allow it to be turned over for such a purpose. I cannot reach far enough into the realms of profanity to describe my disgust. It amounts to nothing short of desecration. I am appalled." Jack Kiley, ninety-three, died soon after.

In January 1994, I wrote the following poem. I was then on the Friends of Kiley's Run Committee. I recited the poem on Ian MacNamara's 'Australia All Over', and many people wrote letters to me, via the ABC, in support of Kiley's Run, including relatives of Banjo Paterson.

Milton Taylor, of Portland New South Wales, won the 1996 Australian Champion Reciter's Award, at Winton, Queensland, for reciting this poem:

Hey, Banjo, have you heard, mate, what has happened to the run,
Where you rode with old Pat Kiley, 'neath the hot Monaro sun?
Where you stirred your pipe and choked it,
Thumbed a wad of weed and stoked it,
Lit the flames that lit the pictures, in the minds of everyone?

Fresh from 'chambers', Banjo, shyly, you would yarn with old Pat Kiley,
As he talked of 'the old fulla', and his plans for Kiley's Run,
'The old fulla'? Bill, a Kiley, from old Ireland, tough and wily,
Ticket-of-leave man, sent from Sydney, with a dray and axe and gun.

And Banjo, you'll remember, each blooming, sweet September,
How you bid the streets of Sydney, an eager, fond farewell,
And where honey-suckle chalices clustered sweet on Kiley's trellises,
You woke up, murm'ring poetry, to the sound of the kitchen bell.

See you push through lushest grasses, as the cloud's flotilla passes,
See you listen to the stories of the Snowy River men,
Troy, Dunne and MacNamara, Cummins, Guy, and Mick O'Mara,
Yarned and threw away their memories, till your rhyming kicked again.

There, where the embers beckoned, old riders yarned and reckoned
'The Man from Snowy River', was a fella called Fitzroy,
Or was he another Kiley, or that Irish bloke, Jack Riley,
And throw in another candidate, the stockman Jackie Troy.

There, for the Australian nation, you wrote 'A Mountain Station',
While savage critics slammed you as 'a versifying cub',
'On Kiley's Run', you wrote it, no need now for me to quote it,
And one of your favourite poems - 'The Geebung Polo Club'.

It was there you met old Clancy, yes, his name was Thomas Francie
MacNamara, the trees were silent witnesses of everything was said,
And your eager mind it relished, all the yarns, with wine embellished,
And 'The Man from Snowy River' started galloping through your head.

With the cut-out for the shearing, all the sulkies would be steering
To the big dance there at Kiley's, all around the polished hall,
And the ball, it was a boomer, for the hospital in Cooma -
And Kiley trailed the native flowers all around the rough-hewn wall.

There were Geebung-style schottisches, a tub or two of Resches,
The cut-out balls at Kiley's would give 'em all a thrill,
With the waltz 'n' the mazurka, the odd 'bog-eye' gone berserk 'n'
Barn dances, and set lancers, and a brolga-like quadrille.

Kiley showed you all his ledgers, braid was fraying on the edges,
Where he wrote, in looping long hand, all the records of the run,

Those ledgers, bound and leathered, with the shoulders, worn and weathered,
He kept in careful cupboards, they weren't shown to everyone.

And, to you, he demonstrated, the concept he'd created,
Cause you saw the ditto commas running down the columns blue,
Where he paid, in equal wages, all his workers, at all stages,
Whether black or white or brindle, whether male or female, too.

Yes, there on Kiley's Station, it was a united nation,
With no discrimination, and the words I say are true,
Hard to think if there'll be ever, now or then, and maybe never,
Such another mountain station, or another Kiley, too.

Kiley spoke the wild Wiradjuri, and the dialects of Jackadgerie,
He talked to elder Kooris – took him to a secret part
Where the gentle dawn came beaming on the places of their dreaming –
And Kiley kept their sacred secrets, always safe, inside his heart.

Well, Banjo, do you know, mate, what has happened to the show, mate,
To the run the Kileys planted in the hills of sun and snow?
To that place called Adjungbilly? you must think I am silly,
It was sold for radiata, just a few short years ago.

Sold it? Yeah, for radiata, you know that green stigmata,
That porcupines the mountains, and sucks the country dry,
That bogs the creeks, and fills in all the little streams with quills 'n'
Dams of little, steely needles – and I think I'm gonna cry.

Banjo's eyes turned to me, wary, was I dolt, or dromedary,
To gouge an old man's feelings, who was out of touch with all,
But he took my hand to test it, and he pressed it, and he blessed it,
and he believed me, yes, believed me, and I saw his teardrops fall.

Where his muse used to waken's to whispering pines forsaken,
Where he hung his reins and bridle, there is nothing there at all,
And we found the ledgers tasselled, and by snails' feet, razzle-dazzled,
In a heap of rotting rubbish just beside a broken wall.

So Banjo, we'll walk grieving, for the things that time is thieving,
But we'll take a banshee with us, and I'll hug her silken waist,
So her wild song never ceases, on the last of the snow leases,
For the sleet of dispossession is a bitter sleet to taste.

Kiley's Run? Or Adjungbilly? I must be 'Uncle Willie',
Banjo's shrine of shrines? To snatch it, and plant the pine thereon?
A place we should have cherished, what in us now has perished?
But inside your heart, Banjo, mate, and mine, the flame goes burning on.

Denis Kevans

Balladababble

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Kurt Iveson

Partying, Politics and Getting Paid

hip hop and national identity in Australia

NOWADAYS, YOU DON'T HAVE to look very hard to find alternative music. Walk in to any commercial music store like Brashs or HMV and you will know the alternative music because it's labelled 'alternative'. The commodification of music has penetrated beyond 'pop' music into other musical styles that were not so intimately connected with the market even five years ago.

Despite this context, some musicians are still providing a progressive social commentary on Australian society. In fact, we can find an example of this kind of music in the last place many people would expect to look – rap music and hip hop culture. Although there is some continuity with radical music of the past Australian hip hop is helping to establish new terms for producing radical music in contemporary Australia.

BUSH BALLADS AND THE ARTISTS who wrote and performed them continue to provide an example of radical music often celebrated by the left. There are a number of features of bush ballads that lend them to being considered as a form of radical nationalism.

The lyrical project of many bush ballads was to help construct a new Australian national identity, one in which the traditions and culture developed by the Australian working class were celebrated and embraced rather than repressed and denied. This was important at a time when the Australian ruling class and Australia's identity were still bound closely to mother England. Bush balladeers formed links with the organized labour movement in the first half of this century, and their songs were tied up with both working class struggle and working class fun. Performances were promoted in the working class public sphere through word of mouth and other labour movement media.

The second half of the century has seen the decline of this kind of music *and* politics. The growing mass market in music associated with the rise of youth and consumer culture has bumped-off bush ballads in favour of other musical forms. In any case, the labour movement institutions and the working class public sphere that supported bush ballads have been in decline since the Second World War. There have been significant changes in the nature of Australia's class structure, including increasing cultural diversity resulting from post-war immigration.

The left's reaction to the emergence of youth culture in the 1950s was largely one of dismay; historically it has been suspicious of the new musical forms associated with youth cultures. Radicals have often treated Australian youth culture as the unhappy consequence of American-style consumerism. The organized labour movement often joined in on attacks against the Bodgie and Widgie 'cults' of the 1950s. When these attacks began to blame working class parents for letting their children run riot, the left sought some distance, recognizing the classed nature of both youth cultures and their opponents. But they still blamed American cultural imperialism for undermining parental influence rather than defending the behaviour.

For a brief moment in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a kind of reconnection of radical politics and music. But this period seemed only to confirm the left's suspicions that any radical potential in youth culture and music is fundamentally compromised by links with market consumerism. Youth rebellion appeared simply to be sold to young people as a commodity. The protest music of the sixties was quickly repackaged and marketed as 'the protest music of the sixties'.

But this kind of approach short-changes youth cul-

ture. Youth cultures have consistently made space for critique and rebellion by exploiting contradictions inherent in market capitalism. We should not dismiss the politics of music and youth culture by simply establishing its links to consumerism, or by tracing its origins to places outside Australia. Harking back for a music that maintains some kind of magical purity from the forces of global consumerism ignores the lessons that youth culture has for us.

Australian hip hop provides one example of the potential for youth culture to exploit contradictions in market relations to radical cultural and political effect. Without the mass consumer market in music, there would be no rap in Australia. When Brethren, a



rap act from Sydney, open their CD *Big Brother* with the dedication track 'It all points back to the old', they are not referring to Australian bush ballads, or folk singers of the 1960s. The 'old' is 'old school' rap music, and the track is a name check of some important figures in rap history which emphasizes their continuing legacy. Most of these names are American.

In one important respect there is continuity between bush ballads and rap. Australian hip hop is, like the ballads, engaged in challenging dominant visions of our national identity and building an alternative agenda. This alternative vision is a more genuine form of Australian multiculturalism. But here is where the similarities end. In particular, the commodification of music and changes to Australia's class structure which heralded the decline of bush ballads are closely connected with the development of Australian hip hop.

HIP HOP IS MORE THAN JUST RAP MUSIC, it is a culture which revolves around rap, graffiti, break-dancing and DJing. These cultural tools were developed primarily by African and Hispanic Americans in socially and economically oppressed areas of New York in the late 1970s. They are a means to both make life liveable in highly segregated American cities, and

challenge the structures which enforce this segregation. Three aspects of hip hop are fundamental to this project.

Firstly, hip hop provides a vehicle of political and self expression. Rap music's focus on lyrics, rather than melody or chord structure, allows a complex message to be delivered in a short time. Hip hop also assists oppressed people to establish a presence in segregated and heavily policed cities through graffiti and sonic invasion of space, using bass heavy rap music broadcast from boom boxes or car stereos.

Secondly, hip hop culture provides the basics for a good party, in a context where expensive musical equipment is not available to the communities in question. Hip hop DJing takes old records and 'mixes' them up simultaneously on two or more turntables to turn them into something new, a feat which takes a lot of skill. Rapping emerged as a way of livening this up even more, with rappers or MCs rhyiming percussively over the beats created by the DJ.

Finally, 'getting paid' has always been a part of hip hop culture, with rapping, breakdancing, DJing, and even graffiti providing a means for economically disadvantaged people to make some money. This does not necessarily compromise the politics of hip hop. Getting paid is an inherent part of the culture – not surprising given the poverty of the communities in which hip hop originated.

Of course, a happy balance between politics, partying and getting paid is not always achieved. Some argue that there is a tendency in much present-day hip hop to sacrifice other elements of the culture if they get in the way of getting paid. Hip hop activists like New York writer Greg Tate have lamented the way in which the involvement of major record labels has formularized rap music to some extent, eroding innovation and political activism. It seems that too much emphasis on getting paid can upset the balance. But this process is not all-encompassing. For every 'sucker MC' out there rapping about gun-slinging and calling women bitches, there's another tearing apart American racism and sexism in three minutes over some dope beats.

THE ROOTS OF HIP HOP lie in conditions in New York, but the life experiences of many young people in Australia have led them to find the tools of hip hop culture useful in their own cultural production. The

support of hip hop by major multinational record labels does not solely account for hip hop's appeal to Australian young people. For one thing, hip hop culture was in Australia long before the multinational record companies realized that they had a new market to exploit. So what are the material conditions that led to hip hop's appeal in Australia?

To answer this, we must examine the process of Australian youth cultural production. Youth cultures are developed by young people as a means to both *cope with* and *react to* their life experiences. Of course, this process is influenced by the media and the market, both of which promote youth cultures to young people for profit-driven purposes. But along with the media and the market, young people have to contend with their family, with other young people, with being grouped together in educational institutions by the state, with having limited means to secure an income, with their use of public space being heavily regulated.

Music has been an important resource for youth cultural production for some time now. Australia has always produced its own musical heroes, from Johnny O'Keefe to Cold Chisel, Midnight Oil and most recently groups like silverchair. These acts have sustained various youth cultures in Australia over the years. We are often proud of the achievements of 'Oz Rock' in taking on the dominance of American and British music. But most successful Australian bands have one thing in common that makes them pretty irrelevant to increasing numbers of young people in Australia – they're all very white.

The cultural and racial diversity of the Australian population has continued to increase throughout the post-war period. Australian racism ensures that ethnic and indigenous young people experience a range of disadvantages beyond their youth. They are disadvantaged in terms of education and employment; they are disproportionately victimized by the police in their day-to-day lives; and their communities are often locationally disadvantaged. 'Home-grown' (read white) Australian music is simply not a relevant tool for cultural production by ethnic (and indigenous) young people, because it does not address these experiences.

However, ethnic young people seeking out tools for cultural production do not necessarily find them in the cultures of their parents either. For their par-

ents, maintaining these cultures may help to maintain links with their lives before they came to Australia. But many ethnic young people may have spent more of their lives in Australia than elsewhere. Traditional cultures from other countries are not necessarily easy to live within in Australia.

Young people in this position have been forced to seek out the materials to develop a culture that is relevant to their cross-cultural experiences. In hip hop, they found a culture which has the means to fight back against the experience of racism, by addressing the segregation and victimization experienced by people of colour. Rap talks about racism, and other elements of the culture like graffiti and hip hop style provide the means to make space in segregated Australian cities for cultural production. The appeal of hip hop to ethnic and indigenous young people in Australia lies significantly in its valuing of that which isn't white in a white racist society. We can see the roots of hip hop culture's appeal to Australian young people reflected in the rap music produced by Australian groups.

RAP MUSIC PRODUCED BY Australian artists explicitly seeks to establish and celebrate the cultural connections that are experienced by people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. In the rhymes of some Australian rap artists, we can see an attempt to both engage in a meaningful cultural dialogue, and to expose the shortcomings of some brands of Australian 'multiculturalism'. For MetaBass 'n' Breath, this project is summed up in the chorus to their song 'Dialogue':

This is the Dialogue, a co-op of culture
Not an entree for an ethnic vulture.

MetaBass are not simply interested in pointing out difference, but also in establishing the connections and common ground between cultures and people. They emphasize that these connections require the acceptance of diversity on more than a surface level. In 'I Am', they expand on this point by reflecting on Australians' ability to embrace exotic foods while remaining suspicious of the foreign cultures they come from:

A mass fast might be nice
But I sure like your bowls of rice

Faces of wonder at shops from the people that
they plunder

While the white bread looks for the delicious,
exotic tasty sauce

Packed and prepared

Ready made and bought

Not commonly shared

The specific issues involved in the cross-cultural experiences of ethnic-Australian young people are also the subject of Australian hip hop. Sleek the Elite's rhymes are directly addressed at promoting political and cultural awareness for Lebanese young people in Australia:

Your culture, given from Allah

Remember your history 'cause it helps you work
harder

Helps you respect more your mother and your
father

Your parents or grandparents came from another
land

You might be Australian now, but it's not your
motherland.

He promotes to Lebanese young people the value of maintaining and knowing their culture, in order to understand their family's place in Australia. But he does so in the context of hip hop rather than traditional musical forms. Sleek's latest tunes also attack the activities of multinationals like Shell and McDonald's for their exploitative practices in other parts of the world. Brethren, in their song 'Pasa la Cuchara', tell the story of one family's migration from Pinochet's Chile to Whitlam's Australia – in Spanish.

The actual form of rap makes this kind of multi-cultural lyrical project possible, in a way that other less flexible musical forms cannot. The beat forming the backdrop for rap can be constructed in an infinite number of ways. Other musical forms are often sampled, from jazz and funk to more traditional music. Appropriately for the lyrics, MetaBass's 'Dialogue' makes use of traditional instruments from Australia, Asia and South America to provide the beats. DJ Soup mixes in traditional Arabic music with hip hop beats to provide the backdrop for Sleek's rhymes. Brethren's use of Spanish instead of English

is another example of the kind of flexibility that can be achieved.

One of the strengths of hip hop is its simultaneously global and local nature. The music made by the acts discussed above *sounds* Australian at the same time as being representative of a global style. Australian accents and slang are one important part of this local sound. As one of the rappers from MetaBass says in 'I Am':

So what if you say I sound like a white guy
That's what I am . . .

In '2 The Streets', Brethren provide us with a name-check of suburbs in their neighbourhood in the inner west of Sydney, via a sample of the unmistakable voice of the State Rail platform announcer. Once again, hip hop's collage approach to musical construction makes this kind of reference to local places possible.

The lyrical project of these rappers is reflected in their relationship to their audience. The flexibility of hip hop creates the potential for interplay between audience and performer. 'Freestyling' is an important part of the art form – that is, simply creating rhymes on the spot. Most hip hop performances include freestyling by members of the audience. Local hip hop groups are part of a community of people who support the culture, many of whom are active in the scene in other ways. Hip hop events are as much about establishing that community as they are about the particular performer. Members of MetaBass and others were even recently involved in the production of a play called 'The Bridge', which celebrated all aspects of hip hop in Australia.

This community is supported by its own media. Publicity about events is often spread by word of mouth, and local hip hop by no means avoids using 'the media' point blank – it just utilizes different parts of 'the media'. Outlets such as the street press and community radio serve to promote many events. Fliers are produced and distributed at other events, often produced with the assistance of graffiti artists.

Of course, this community is not an organized political movement. Other artists such as the bush balladeers of the past had more direct links to organized political movements. While rap music allows for more focus on lyrics than other musical forms, the message or politics of the lyrics do not over-ride musical concerns. For this reason, focusing solely on the

lyrics might give a false impression of the politics of hip hop. The beats and music are much more than vehicles for lyrics, but are just as important as a means to 'rock the house'. If a rapper has no flow, the message of their lyrics will be inconsequential, because no-one will be listening. This seems in direct contrast to some sad old music I continue to hear performed at labour movement events such as the mass rally in Canberra last year. Entertainment seems to be chosen more for its political lyrical content than for its potential to rock the crowd, and the musician comes across more like another of the speakers.

But the kind of progressive self-expression and cultural dialogue that the local hip hop community promotes has resulted in some interesting connections



between the hip hop community and activist youth organizations. In Sydney in 1995, a number of these groups banded together to organize a project called Hip Hopera. Two large-scale events involving a range of performers were held, and established local hip hop groups acted as mentors and headline performers for the young people engaged in the project. MetaBass 'n' Breath were one group to emerge from this process, and they continue to perform at youth centres. Graffiti artists have also been involved in youth campaigns. For example, Mistery, one of the rappers from Brethren, conducts graffiti programs at youth centres in the inner west of Sydney. For the artists, this kind of community involvement is about more than politics, it is also about promoting other aspects of hip hop culture, such as youth empowerment, self-expression and cultural exchange.

These kinds of hip hop projects are often indirectly sponsored by the state. Various government agencies provide small-scale funding for projects that support youth arts and culture, usually with the instrumentalist end of reducing youth crime, improving youth self-esteem and health, or some such happy outcome. These funds are occasionally used to organize events

like Hip Hopera, or to provide avenues for developing graffiti (a.k.a. 'aerosol art') skills. However, the kind of young people involved in state-funded projects like Hip Hopera are simultaneously berated as gangsters in other political settings. When Bob Carr chose to make an issue out of the fictitious youth crime wave in the last NSW election, his infamous depiction of gangs as "youths with their baseball caps back to front" singled out hip hop culture as a threat. He could have chosen "gangs of youths with bleach-blond hair and a good tan", after all, he does live near the beach. The racism inherent in these kinds of actions only serves to reinforce the very racism which makes hip hop relevant to many young people in Australia.

The relationship between local hip hop acts and the music industry is also complex. The mainstream music industry is not a free market but rather is dominated by a small number of multinational record labels. These record labels have seen fit to invest in American hip hop acts because they are hugely profitable. And if they can sell these acts in Australia, why bother investing in local talent? The Australian music market simply isn't big enough to provide the same returns on an investment as the huge US market. This has had an impact on the market for Australian hip hop. For many hip hop fans, the measure of authenticity is whether or not the rapper is black and American.

Indeed, the market has now become heavily involved in making hip hop culture available in Australia. Even though you still don't really hear that much hip hop on Australian radio, you'll see plenty of it on *Video Hits* and other music video programs, and there will be a well-labelled 'rap and dance' section in your local record shop. What's more, you can buy your 'streetwear' at Grace Bros. There is agency in this kind of consumption. The market for commercial hip hop in Australia is still predominantly ethnic, and the consumption of hip hop rather than other styles reflects the same material factors that were outlined earlier in this article.

However, Australian hip hop groups distinguish themselves from commercial hip hop of this variety. The market saturation by American product undermines the ability of hip hop to achieve its simultaneous global and local status. The local hip hop acts are part of a more 'underground' hip hop community where the measure of authenticity is more sophisticated and linked to local conditions.

While the underground wages a battle against commercial hip hop, it certainly does not exist in complete isolation from any market relations. There is simply an emphasis on maintaining the balance between politics, partying and getting paid. In some ways, underground hip hop relies on the success of mainstream dance music and hip hop to survive. The profits that nightclubs make playing the major label dance music on Friday and Saturday night are able to sustain smaller events featuring local music during the week that might be less profitable. As Miguel D'Souza, a Sydney street-press hip hop columnist once observed, "the bigger the overground, the bigger the underground". And he should know – D'Souza's underground hip hop column is printed in the street paper *3D World*, which largely survives on the advertising revenue provided by mainstream clubs, clothing labels, alcohol brands and the like.

And further, there is occasionally some solidarity among touring and local hip hop performers. Some big acts like US group Spearhead insist, usually against the wishes of their record companies, that their support artists are local hip hop groups. This gives the local acts valuable exposure with hip hop fans who may only have been exposed to American product through the mass media. In another example of this kind of solidarity, the Fugees, whose album *The Score* has enjoyed mainstream commercial success in Australia, recently took time out of their Australian tour schedule to perform a benefit for Koori radio at a hall in Eveleigh Street, Redfern.

In the absence of mainstream music industry support, a range of local community radio stations, record shops and independent record labels provide outlets for local hip hop performers. The underground does not pursue profits at the expense of other elements of hip hop culture, but it is still a market nonetheless.

A PROGRESSIVE MULTICULTURAL lyrical project is made possible and reinforced by hip hop as a musical and cultural form. The way that this is achieved provides us with some lessons for the production of radical music in Australia.

Any contemporary radical musical form not only has to negotiate with the life and political experi-

ences of its audience; it is inevitably drawn into certain relationships with various parts of the state and the music industry, particularly as the commodification of cultural forms continues apace. In the case of hip hop, this is not without its problems. Many hip hop fans may never have heard of MetaBass or Sleek the Elite, due to the lack of mainstream record industry support for local hip hop product. But I think that in hip hop we have one model for how a contemporary radical music might exploit the contradictions inherent in this commodification, surviving at once because of and outside of the music industry. And far from representing the loss of Australian national identity in the face of global capitalism, Australian hip hop artists are engaged in the project of attempting to build a multicultural national identity in place of a racist monocultural model that is now regaining strength in Australian national politics.

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First Things First

We see a man
at the traffic lights
waiting to cross over
to the court
to pass sentence.

We see a woman
in a queue
waiting to buy a pen,
stopping to refill her car
and pay the gas bill
before she sits down
to add another chapter
to next year's Booker Prize.

We jostle for parking spots
and shopping trolleys.
Try to catch a flight.
Miss a step and trip.

We pay
parking fines
doctor's fees
water rates.
Wash dishes
before going to the Opera.
Notice the milk's run out
before rescuing a child.

We board the train
that will derail.
Take a photo
that will outlast us.

We meet for coffee to discuss
company takeovers
divorce proceedings
stock market swings
but first –
we tell the cheerful waitress

(who survived a car crash
whose husband got fired
whose sister won a jackpot)

who's having caffe latte
and who cappuccino
and whether it's full cream or
skinny milk we want

and yes, we'll order
the sandwiches later.

Eva Collins

Ark Paired

they drive in shifts
now across states
thirty years sticking
to the same routes
has weakened
her eyes stiffened
his neck oh so
slowly roads unstitch
before them each new town
frays about the edges
like a last chance

ark paired these two
how often have they
bled over the same
blind spots their different
colours his mole skin
burrowing her
feathered breast

Jane Williams

Apocrypha For My Father

in memory G. V. Tolhurst 1932–1988

You slept through foul weather
as I covered one hundred kilometres
to slip quietly through your door.
Awake, you were kind to your wife
and played a grin for me;
with your lisp largely gone,
your duelling scars spoke of how
you had lost some of your tongue.
It was the size of you that jarred,
hazy little things called secondaries
made light of your recovery.
Your offer to resume the bench
had been declined, at fifty five
you were hardly retired, you were dying;
did you dream high summers in Mildura,
the Sunraysia district spitting, shining, searing,
and you businesslike in the Burns room
chairing the Dried Fruits Board,
happy for me to run in with cricket scores?
One of those nights there was a bump,
we ran from the kitchen to where you fell,
unhurt beyond the embarrassment,
too weak to walk half way to the toilet;
when I was small your petulance boomed
when, "Not even allowed to crap in peace!"
I never heard you called by your name,
before I was born it faded into the 'G'
of your signature. The story of your name
was that your parents could not agree
beyond neither of them liking 'John',
so your father said I will reach behind
and whatever verse my hand selects
we will name him after the poet;
this was agreed and produced *The Beggar's
Opera*.
That rampant 'G' still floats around on
documents

and in the name of the Queen your signature
might still keep some in prison.
You spoke little of your childhood,
that story gave me a glimpse of how
those strange volumes of yellow poems,
some with your mother's name in blue,
Tara Vair Caroline Vandeleur,
were housed before in another house
from which you emerged to shoot rabbits.
I have them here, Herrick by my Hejinian,
your Auden, your mother's Yeats;
"The fascination of What's Difficult"
was what you owned up to,
a dog-eared explanation of yours
for how you were able to sleep.
Over those days I hung around
to help her who helped you,
calm and responsible
I coped as badly as anyone;
did you break out black tie
to again court your beautiful doctor,
nervous, handsome, possibly pissed?
Your young son sleeps in,
where now a granddaughter is changed,
as your wife of thirty years
stretches from watching over you
and goes to fetch the newspaper.
Your dream returns from a weekend of golf,
'Lucille' your Lancia losing her electricals
and your flatmates driving blind into a river;
in the descent from the dicky-seat
your foot went into the cocktail cabinet,
"Would be a pity to let the poor bastard
drown!"
Your wife has scanned the headlines
and locked the security door behind her;
your name has passed from the law lists
and you have entered the death notices.

Hugh Tolhurst

Burning Wood

The bones from the fire
are not of calcium
but iron-strong, years long
in the grainline, hammered
as uprights to boundary
a farm,
 this farm, scant
of trees, wooded with posts,
fencing, curls of rusted
barb-wire
 now with electric
wires we keep the cattle
fenced, wire proves stronger
than wood, except in a blackout.
 We gather the flaking
fence posts
 feed them into fire
pick out the hinges the long
hand-forged nails
 from the ashes.

Lorraine Marwood

Harvest

The smell of the hay unravelled
from the huge harvest roll
 puts me back into that dream:

First Form accompanying my father
to the all Boys' Tech,
my father's first teaching appointment,
to the annual school fair
and I bought the Georgian history book
and in the sketch of rural
harvest, centuries-old English landscape,
I am standing there
smelling the hay,
enjoying the harvest fellowship.
We are all at the same task
and the ripe gold
covers the sky thickly,
and I am not shy
or stumbling from the boys' glances
I have found the landscape
I was plucked from.

Lorraine Marwood

Summer School: Recess

A cold front is moving in:
cicadas communicate in stutters in the garden.
In one moment the sun shines into the classroom,
and the next wind gusts rattle windows ill-fitted to their frames.
A daylight moon, cut, is suspended in the sky,
from somewhere the whine of a saw.

This summer school is empty of children
and this room vacated by adults who,
remembering learning and rehearsing recess protocol,
find rats in the walls of memory
as unpredictable as this intermittent wind.

The season seems confused,
but the cicadas know that it's summer.

Barbara Brandt

Les Harrop

Chronicle of a Clerk for the Coming Republic

First

This brilliant day
in the year of existence 755 (by new-model
reckoning),
the Nob of Creppe eluded confinement
to take up the title of Good King Catalyst,
third of the name.

He gnawed the morning away on a bacon.

The old king's friends turned up about nightfall,
four to a ditch, their hose bespattered,
the mark of their troubles erased from their
foreheads.

None of us bothered to follow the hearses.

The new bright lad! whose thoughts were all
"Yes!"
– whose blood and blue training had brought
him to this,
his *forze* quicksilver in specular glass!

Scriveners all, we stroked our pates and licked
our lips and scratched at our tablets,
tugging the stipends. Remembered our grammar.
We drew our apprehensions about us, and slept
as happy as hounds at a trencher

while all the while it crept on, the rustle
– that hearing the rustle of things from the wall.

This realm was the northernmost fief in the way
of the simpleton god: blank and so teachable. A
hundred

odd years it had rained every day:
ravenous oaves picked meat from the gallows;
ladies were stabbed by hatters in laneways; inquisitors
hammered. The entire polity tolled like a bell.

God – that regrettable saccharine-god –
was hid in a cloud and minding his counsel
much as a has-been. He sat in his hideous fortress of
cloud
to try and suppose what it was to be hated.

The rustling passage: that was the movement
of Natural people, a sea of heads in the sea of grasses
over the wall – the clink of tackle on vintage carts,
of yaks and waddyumacallits: barbies.

(We all sat still.) A mortal people
dragging their houses, carrying pots and axes and
water

– they were the westward-flying chaff of the desolate
Khan,
the desolate horse-folk, looking for sleek lands;
after the countries of livers in stone
the lands where the book-people fable to live.

Ours, as I say, was the northernmost point
of a long-decayed conquest. God still a squeaky
joist to the state, that sanctioned power and kidded the
powerless.

A mess of dwarfdoms and giant disputes, looked after
by monks!

For a thousand years our cabbage-grey tonsures
reared in the gloom, as sheer as our tremulous
bog-mossy voices ...

Espied us, of course – the massive
delusion of despots espied us. And there, in due
course, we curled up
submissive: nibbled by rain where we sank on
our hams
by our endlessly-chortling
watering downspouts.

To gaze on all this from the cyan South Seas, you
will

see's of no interest ... where we have our own
cæsars
robbing us blind in a dreamtime landscape.

But a scribe must be scratching,
must warble regardless along some dimension
on – whom? On a Harold?

Where do they crawl from, all the bald
nobles?

– This violent son of a violent father: under-nob,
general,
at dice with his brothers (between these brothers
is held
every earldom) who relish a gamble.

Id be content to stick to the highlights.

This chief man Harold is shipwrecked, saved,
made captive, let go
on the solemn assurance (his oath upon relics)
that he'll further
his captor's claim to the business.

He had no intention.

History's learned to laugh at a loser.

And –
as it happened – this Harold had not been told of
the strength
of those same relics, whose
bones they were and where they'd come from. So
the case was altered.

Tenured clerks still argue
this question – fax upon fax, the bright and rapid
E-mail to E-mail.)

But back on the horribly pitching tale, his
atheling's boarded
a Welshman's widow, fertilized her in his breaks
from manoeuvres
his children's mother, the Something Swan-neck,
maintaining the while
a dignified silence, 'such that men marvel'.

– He parts from his brothers and
murders them therefore. *Malleus* to those too
much like himself; top man in the realm!

(Now here the elegiac enters.) When he came at
last, as they do,
to examine the place of his quittance, nothing
could alter.

– Time; there is never enough
time to alter. Senka Hill's a hand-me-down place,
where a Harold might well
be sighted, unsighted; and at that unseated.

An active man on a windy day
in an action between two homesick levies. He
took a bad turn
and slipped on oblivion

(the scriptors can try out that old
new term now,
can try out 'Conquest'. *Oh, they sigh, oh! Oh, for a
conquest
among all the scribbled defeats of our pages).*

The non-king Harold
was dug in the shore with a stone at his neck and
not much furore.
He'd reigned nine months, and always unhandily.

Second

We went on inventing; what we in the trades call
'physical culture' (horse-trades, that is – trading in
sentence). A latin sail for the trapping of airlets.

The yoke
for oxen – *Upgrade your beast to thirty
horsepower*. Stirrups
for brutes to sit on their nags and
skewer a serf at seven feet height from
(very enjoyable. No tipping backwards).

And thence the golden chapter of knighthood:
amours, *weylaway!*

The tale readjusts itself on these rumours. And all
the while
the great sea throbs, and Isolde thwarts
her awful lord of her playful body (her playful
lord of her

lawful body) by tossing it headlong onto the
breakers.

Another tough woman. She's not above handling
a red-hot rod

in trial of her chastity – which we in
the tale well know is exploded.

Wherever you look
obsessiveness talking, the battle-*tales* talking.

Bubbles
emerge from every swart head in the myriad
lingoes,
and every one ferrety.

Down in the green
and the green-and-gold brush, the animals
blorting – with words
for their levers.

We're brindled creatures that call us
humans (and think
we're the best of them): lying like snakes in our
cups of ratsbane,
after whatever and bugger the cost.

But we founder; where are we?

A scrivener cried: "Now why
do we yield with our own good sense to that
staleness, antiquity?"

"It's surely not books: it's more like the one great
book of the world
that lends authority.

It can't but smack
of perverseness of pride
to brag that our nation and genius are
'barbarous'.

"A person is always a creature of worth,
some good in the function that's nearest her
humour.

"We're nature's children; our minds can build.
We're not that far from the freeway of sense."

And that was the way (you'd fancy it might be)
the age
got the thought to be fertile in thinking. It's fast,
when it happens. In fatal places
more used to the burly address of the wind
– in the actual flying hiss of the snow dying hard
into firs
on a perilous headland – a few bare neurons
fronted the sky.

In the gloom that ennobles, by a wick
left burning late on a bench, some indecisive and
moribund
clerk was hunched to a parchment.

Sat tensed for the thought he could swear would
emerge from it.

And so it was, really. Once it seemed certain the
tale had been saved,
the monasteries emptied. Scribe and sovereign
set down together

to make profit, practice. Wherever a decent
throne-room fell empty, Creppe's great-
grandcreppen
could proffer their claims

and the clerk-secretariat manage their papers.

– Files, clerks, monarchs
grew fatter and wiser, more stately together.
They matched dream possies
in little-known lands to vacant relations,

who fanned from the rear in an odorous tail of
rubicund uncles
and whiskered vice-regals: the antique stock of
old Nob Sarcophagus
bleeding the innocent face of the earth,

breaking the locals to civilized law, which is what
one is born to. These agents of blood, with all
their starch and their
faut-dastard, could unstrap around cash. They
loosed
their corsets and champagne-corks, the heirs to a

long and martial tradition.

And scribes were not idle;
we sent our masters'
shaking and perfectly barbarous heads
hob-nobbing with filmstars, an' yachtin' an'
joggin' an' openin'
gymkhanas – and altogether combined with
poise their surfeit of tosh
with their surfeit of honour. The perfectest
twosome. We'd come a long way
from Creppe's confinement, through happy
returns on the teetotum, time.

Palimpsest

Graffiti lines the thighs of famous statues:
'Toilet training is a capitalist repression';
'Life is Fragile, Handle with Prayer';
'Two Basic Truths: 1) God is; 2) You're Not Him.'
Graffiti on graffiti: '*She* is not amused.'
This too is the tourist's imprimatur.
No locals have defaced this space.
No lands are left to conquer so we make the world a palimpsest
– elide, erase, efface –
inscribing our silenced wisdom on the grateful dead.

I am forced to remember my station as I cross the world. The beggars' eyes
tell you what you take for granted.
They could die before you, as they often do, and you would still feel hungry –
still have need.

In Amsterdam a gilder would have bought the girl.
Her hungry mouth was pressed on mine before I saw her there.
"Fuck me, it's my birthday," she said, her drug-starved hands
shaking and blue.
I used to think I would die for such carved beauty.
But when it's offered, cut and shaved like shattered crystal,
you can only bleed to it.
I bought her food, left, and felt noble for several years –
I couldn't see the stain my smugness made.

Gerry Turcotte

Aunty Felicity's Little Book of Handy Hints

Chapter 22 – Surviving West Brunswick

for Karen Lindner

Dean Kiley

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

Privatization has solved efficiency, enterprise agreements have fixed productivity, multimedia has re-ignited business, Transurban has a capital works mandate, the Casino has become the stock exchange, hospitals become real estate and glossy government PR brochures arrive in the postbox.

SPRAY-RINSED SKY, spun dry from dusk to night in the space of a Melbourne hour. Puddles, wind-serated. Snails detonate underfoot (blown lightbulbs – used condoms).

You look cold. Come on, keep up with me. Squared shoulderpads, set jaw, hands in pockets, stride out, pivot from the hip, regular, unstoppable, measure out the concrete path in sternly even rhythms from the crackdown of your heels. The trick is: disconnect your eyes, turn your face off. That way the locals leave you alone.

Trucks bully past on Moreland Road. Up ahead on the footpath a bundle of black and grey, swaddled, lumpy, hobbles to the brick fence and leans against it, waiting for her breath to catch up. Parboiled fingers tug at the scarf's knot. Tidal wash of exhaustion has left behind promontories of bone, clotted wrinkles. Late shift at the Burlon factory, long walk from East Brunswick, two hours ago she clocked out but not plaster-saint silence, not bambino wheedling, not shamemake pleading, not crossfire threats, nothing would bring Salvatore home from the TAB then that Abruzzo Club back home, home for dinner comehome *and again AGAIN this happens why he and that girl so much he drink* – muttering in cracked cicada voice – *aaai that boy my boy he –*

She looks right at me with ox-heart wog eyes and I stop and lean over and say

in order to improve across-government delivery of services to Victoria's culturally diverse community language services and programs will be significantly upgraded.

She seems comforted.

KEEP UP! Ahhhh, now here's your typical Brunswick West home. Subsidised scab-brown brick, strangled curtains, knick-knacks neat and sad on the windowsill. An elderly Gemini with a flat tyre flops exhausted on the grass, its front bumper-bar pried loose in a rubbery idiot grin. Man in oil-slobbered overalls takes rubbish out, woman chin on fist at kitchen table, small boy and girl watch from behind the screen door. Suburban cliché colour-by-numbers. She's beat up no more than necessary. They have vicious loud re-run arguments. The kids know where to go, how to cry without noise, and when it's OK to come out again. Child support means she only has to deliver junkmail Tuesday and weekends. Takes Sally with her cos it's safer. Tim walks into tablecorners and doorknobs. Deaf neighbours. Blind GP. Mother-in-law who babysits at short notice and is tongue-bitten dumb, thinking *Maybe if he gets that*

promotion *Maybe if she can find a real job*
Maybe when Tim gets a bit older Maybe –

He glances up from the bin, whistles round the corner of a smirk, looks at me like steak. I turn and say

Everyone in Victoria should share the same opportunities to get ahead and feel secure. The focus is on providing Victorians with the fundamental social fabric and support which allow them to get on with their lives and make the most of their opportunities. We will foster and build on the notion of social responsibility and traditional values which are the foundation of our society in Victoria.

Ah, the corner-store. Shall we? The girl props herself on the counter, pelvis out, hunched over in the shape of a question mark, shut up in a fierce boredom. Too much makeup, overfills her tight toxic-green shirt, unspirals a plasticky curl – not like THAT you're not, Sarah, not for the shop & why do you put that stuff in your beautiful hair eh? She wants to quit uni but they won't let her. Such nice Anglo friends and first-in-the-family and all the books and fees and all that HECS they saved for, not yet Sarah, don't give up, it'll kill your father it will he gets so angry & you're doing well, only another year, not long, & –

The elderly man comes in with a handful of change (pension day tomorrow), one-by-one takes bread and milk and paper and cigarettes to her and asks the price, adding up slowly out loud. Oh. Oh dear. Um. Disgusting habit anyway. He does card-tricks with his embarrassment, turns it into charm for this hard shiny girl younger than his grand-daughter. She clenches her pout, sniffs, sighs, stares at him with something that would be contempt if she weren't so bored, if this didn't happen over and over. He crumples in on himself, knows we've seen everything.

As he leaves I take him by the shoulder and shout (just in case)

More than \$90 million is to be spent on the redevelopment of extended care centres for the elderly, and from next year the Government will reinstate free travel for pensioners during senior citizens' week.

Just a few more blocks. Stop whining and keep up.

The houses along here are sprawling, gabled, with feral gardens and gaffer-taped stained-glass feature windows, wracked with nostalgia for twenty, thirty years ago, their lost futures of naice middleclass conubial bliss. Arum lillies seem –

Oh look, it's the Dancing Man. One of several neighbourhood nutcases. Not normally out this late though.

He's burble-singing to himself, standing (rocking back-&-forth back-&-forth) near the bus-stop, clutching a battered briefcase which fell open once, spilling a toilet roll, a gladwrapped sandwich and a deodorant stick. He's waiting for the bus that won't come to take him to the job he doesn't have just like everyone else. Whatever's wrong with him it means he can't stand still. Literally. So all the good clean office workers stand waiting in separate silences and up he stumbles to take his spot near the pillar. His head bobs, his shoulders roll, left arm swinging the briefcase, right pumping up and down silent-movie jerky, as if halting a friend about to pass unseeingly by, his whole manic Mr Squiggle body rocking one foot to the other. And all the time, behind the thick glasses, that watery apologetic stare. The white-shirts and navy-skirts move grudgingly aside, smile skittish tolerance at each other.

Last time he tried to get on it was that tattooed bus-driver, who said *Fuck OFF* almost under his breath, pushed him off the step, stood watching a middle-aged madman throw a curled-up yelping tantrum. But at the moment he's being goodboy quiet, rocking, waiting.

SILLYBILLY: BUSES STOP at 7.30 p.m. even on weekdays and it's Sunday so there aren't any. I want to tell him, kindly, and from a distance

For the first time a comprehensive plan for people with mental illness has been developed. Crisis assessment and treatment teams and mobile support services have been expanded, and access to treatment has been improved significantly.

But I don't. I just say

Public transport services – tram, train and bus – are being extended and upgraded, and are continually improving their operational reliability.

Let's cut through Everett Street and the park. It's pretty late but it should be OK. There's a hangnail moon out, laying down a thin romantic film over the unkempt oval.

Damn. I knew it was too good to be true. Outside the dilapidated clubhouse there's a scrum of big Italian boys with stubbies and cigarettes and marble-statue lips,
(and is that – could that be –
what IS that acrid smell?)

preening themselves for a few girls at that perfect age, unguessably between fifteen and thirty. Boys, but tough and compact as pocketknives. They'll stink of aftershave and arrogance.

No, I'm not afraid, just nervous, and wary. The pulse in my temple nips at my skin like a flea-circus. Sometimes you have to walk quickly, unnoticeably past them in their other sacred site, round the reconditioned Alfa outside that pizza place, the one with the TV and the big window covered over with Brunswick *Supreme* Pizza Any 2 larg. They tell your retreating back what they'd like to do to you. Well, not this time fellas. I march right up to the nearest boy-man and take no notice of his sarcastic good looks and don't follow the greasy pelt of hair scurrying down his chest, and I rip the joint from his fingers and stomp on it and tell him

Faced with the continuing harm caused by drugs – particularly to young people – the Victorian Government has taken a leadership role in tackling an issue that has troubled communities worldwide for many decades. A network of drug and alcohol free entertainment venues will open for young people in Melbourne and regional centres from early 1997

and can you believe it the thug made as if to hit me! I flinch. You're useless. Why didn't you –

Oh. I run to catch up with you, furious Italian ricocheting behind me.

I give you a defiant grin and recite for reassurance

Victoria remains by far the safest State in Australia. Sentences have been toughened up, considerably adding to sentences for violent crimes. The police force is being given extra operating capacity to give police a higher profile in local neighbourhoods, and a Safe Cities and Shires program is being developed.

Not far to go now. See how the amenities have suddenly started improving? Comforting white-gold buzz of streetlights, fewer sinkholes in the footpath, plugged-up potholes on the road . . . we've nearly reached civilization and – just ignore him, he'll go away.

There, I told you. Melville Road. Home territory.

Little empty shops run by empty little ex-families, almost-about-anytime-now to break even. Small business, pacemakers for the heart of Melbourne's prosperity. Two hairdressers on the same block, locked in rivalry old and obscure as Cyprus: faded posters in the window of Frank Sinatra's stunt-double, brilliantine on the shelves, air thickened with disinfectant, cologne and ordinary despair. Shoe-shop, stacked with meticulous serried ranks of elegant items no-one can afford. Cheap Smokes store, always full of underage Greek girls growing up too fast, busy swatting off Lebanese boys from the Don Bosco Youth Centre with migraines in their groins: if the old woman's there they buy salt'n'vinegar chips, if her son's there they buy Peter Jackson Extra Mild. Dust-furred shopfronts with big Disney-coloured real estate posters promising, for seven months now, AMAZING NEW ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITIES.

Hmmmm, I say to myself, but

Victoria today has a dynamic, growing economy. The State is well positioned to sustain a healthy growth rate because we're becoming increasingly competitive. A smart, competitive economy such as ours and the State's more stable finances are the foundations of a more secure environment for Victorian families.

Sitting folded against the late-nite supermarket entrance is a straggly-bearded man, possibly Aborigi-

nal, it's so hard to tell round here, in a mismatched grubby tracksuit, beanie pulled down over his eyebrows. Tweezered between his feet is a cardboard sign asking for money for food. He stares fixedly at the letter P in PLEASE, willing me to stop, to feel bad, to give. I grab him by both arms, haul him to his feet and shout

We have won the envy of the rest of Australia and international admiration for the way, as a community in partnership, we have tackled the fundamental tasks of establishing a framework for growth and creating opportunity!

Ppphhhhffewwwwww.

Sorry about that.

Dean Kiley is Melbourne writer who teaches at the Unvirsiy of Melbourne. This story was a runner-up in the 'Not the Premier's Literary Awards' held during Melbourne's 1996 Fringe Festival.

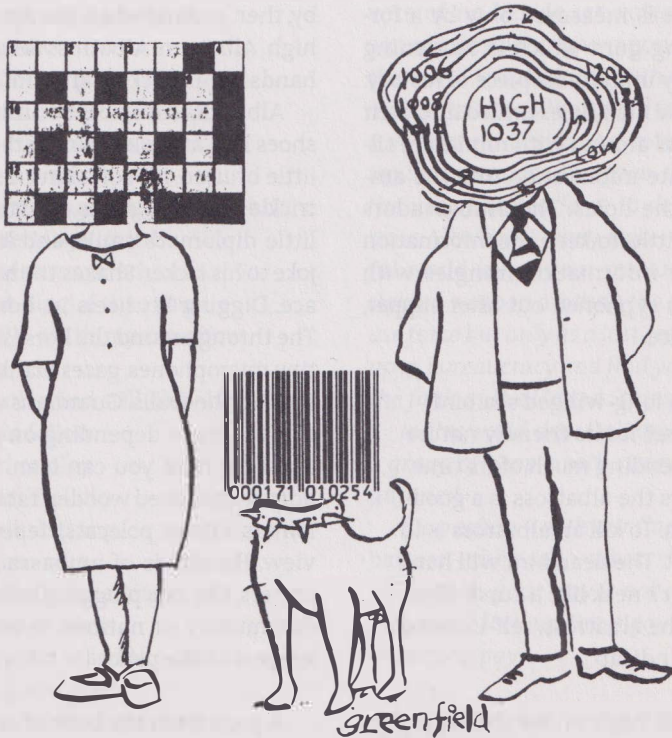
Sometimes I get a little carried away.

Had enough? Me too.

You can catch a tram safely out of here straight into the city from just over there. No, trust me, I'm sure there're no fare increases planned. No, not even when the new automatic ticketing comes on line, which should be sometime next - um - month.

Anyway, off you go. Yesyes yourAuntyFelicity loves you too.

Take care of yourself, and remember what I told you about your kids' share portfolios.



Albatross Albatross Dali

Lisa Greenaway

THE UNITED NATIONS IS like a Salvador Dali painting. *Surreal* enough to start a world-wide movement. *Elusive* enough to incite media speculation. And *expensive* enough to be housed in an American collection.

The United Nations is a dream where worlds collide, forming tables with no corners and citing philosophy in cautious terminology, and in the round room, somehow, politics gives way to surrealism . . .

AS AMBASSADORS STRAIN to hear through their earpieces, and translators sweat a little behind the glass partitions, the ambassadors' watches melt away from their fingers. Time is measured only by a forgotten piece of chewing gum which is hardening under the table. The only immutable piece of history.

The ambassadors have little holes drilled into their temples. Attendants pass around with miniature silver spades and distribute information into the ambassadors' heads, via the holes. The ambassadors must tilt their heads a little, to keep the information from spilling. The new information mingles with their discontents and is syphoned out after supper, as a vote of no confidence.

The albatross is a long-winged sea bird known, like the petrel, for its friendly nature and its stamina, spending much of its time out to sea. To sailors the albatross is a good omen, a bird of truth. To kill an albatross is to invite bad sentiment. The dead bird will hang around the murderer's neck like a curse. Thus, the sporting term: the albatross, self-induced handicap.

Albatross Albatross Dali, high in the shining silver tower, which keels in the hot New York wind like a

ship at sea, is swinging with the sea changes and machinations of the United Nations. Albatross Albatross Dali, in this building of melting determinations, is digging his heels in with the smooth demeanour of a well trimmed, well cultivated diplomat. Albatross Albatross Dali is waxing lyrically facts and figures, carving up ancient bureaucracy with a bureaucrat's scissors.

Albatross Albatross Dali is a singular spectre of politics.

Denounced as a demagogue, a rabble rouser of the third world, then *celebrated* as a quiet and steadfast figurehead. *Blamed* when the white tanks stood idly by, then *praised* when the Americans' bill was not so high. Albatross Albatross Security General places his hands in his pockets and smiles behind history . . .

Albatross Albatross Security General. Steel-capped shoes kick at his legs under the table. His ankles are a little bruised, his soft skin cracks a little, a little blood trickles into his socks. Albatross Albatross smiles a little diplomat's smile, and leans over to whisper a joke to his kicker. Shakes the hand, hides a small grimace. Digging his heels in, hovering over the throng. The throng around the horseshoe table whispers into tiny microphones, gazes blankly at the abstract paintings on the walls. Guardians of a peaceful world – or war-makers – depending on your political leanings, and how hard you can lean. Hundreds of ambassadors at an arched wooden table – demagogues or diplomats, rats or polecats, depending on your point of view. Hundreds of ambassadors listening to interpreters, like rats plugging holes in a sinking ship. The community of nations, international law-makers, keepers of the peace (or a kind of peace).

A page from the book of ancient Roman policy,
A leaf from the medieval round table broad

sword philosophy,
To here, a footnote at the end of the twentieth
century,
A wealth of American piggy bank hypocrisy.

Crowded around this table is a certain representation of the world, all seated on a mountain of history. A history of meetings on mountains and in buildings, in bunkers and in temples. A history of wars, plagues, committees and forums, promises, reparations and commitments. A history of treaties, priorities, politics and bureaucracies, property and votes. A history of vetoes, ministers, generals and presidents with too much on their minds and not enough in their hands. A history of history, no less.

... At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.
It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!
A good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!
In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.
"God save thee, ancient mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus! –
Why look'st thou so?" – With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross.
... And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!
And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
... Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

... Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as it could be;
... Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.
... Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
from 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner')

ALBATROSS ALBATROSS WALKS unsteadily through the troops. He has some trouble finding his land legs away from the UN building. His balance is slightly askew, and he keels towards the silent white tanks a little. He reaches out for the support of a passing refugee, but the little woman's hand comes right off in his. Albatross Albatross loses his balance, and the Americans take the opportunity to lean in a trifle harder, one hand in their pocket, the other poised just below the belt. They study him a little closer – Albatross Albatross Dali, whose moustache is slipping.

Albatross Albatross – they say – when they cast a vote of no beside 135 votes of yes on a resolution against developing weapons of mass destruction, *if the world is out of step with us it is their problem not ours*. Albatross Albatross – they say – when they cast a vote of no beside 154 votes of yes on a resolution against weapons in space, *the UN charter allows us the use of armed force to defend our interests*. Albatross Albatross – they sigh – *the guardian of a peaceful world is not your resolutions but an armed and sighted weapon orbiting the earth. We are prepared to use force but only as a last resort, and if you get caught up in bureaucracy and find your hands are tied, it's not the fault of the United States, it's the way of the race!*

In this world, dear Dali, any community is really only a group of people with strong security with their flag unfurled.

(Correction – *with our flag unfurled.*) Albatross Albatross – they say – when they veto the vote for his re-election, *your way is not our way, and if you won't play, we'll lock up the piggy bank and the world will make you pay.*

ALBATROSS ALBATROSS, to the people with the money you need it's a simple matter of pulling a bad

tooth – and they hold this to be self-evident, that a community of nations is quite irrelevant when it fails to perceive their truth. Albatross Albatross Dali, the silver-tongued bureaucrat, almost but not quite the adjutant, did not quite adapt to the design. A congress in distress called for a new line. A policy of economy. They pay for the UN after all, and in their eyes he was in their employ. Not altogether surprising. Just a bit of fiscal dentistry.

You see, with all collections of art and facts, once you buy something expensive and beautiful and hang it in your gallery, the pleasure of it so soon becomes secondary to the pressing matter of security. And then consider – if you were elevated from a poor country and given a Third World leader's greatest promotion, to the Security General of the UN – if you were given the greatest of ceremony and charged with the responsibility for the people of Kuwait, Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Jerusalem, and millions of wretched humanity, with the world watching you intently, demanding expediency and a superhuman display of diplomacy, and all of this under a bubble of tight security, would you sign your name with confidence?

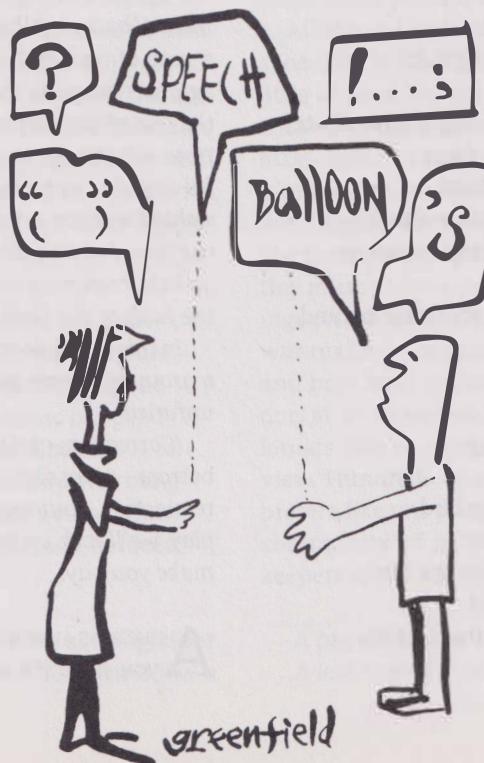
For Albatross Albatross Dali . . . and his successor . . . swaying on the top floor of the Western World community, charged with the passions of an African nation, speaking with words of calm and compassion, with just a *hint* of puppetry – it's a matter of finely tuned diplomacy. Never a stammer, and a whole world bank's worth of stamina.

And now, for Albatross Albatross Dali, it's a long swim home.

. . . and then he remembered a story that Christopher Robin had told him, about a man on a desert island, who wrote a message in a bottle and sent it out to sea, and Piglet thought, if he wrote a message in a bottle, perhaps someone would come and rescue him . . .

(A.A. Milne, from *Winnie The Pooh*)

Lisa Greenaway presents a weekly spoken word show on 3RRRFM, called 'SubText'. She has published fiction and articles in a number of magazines.



Andrew Funston

The ABC and Citizenship

THE ABC, pretty much free from sticky corporate and party-political associations, is threatened once again, despite public support for its survival. Australian governments don't like prickly national broadcasters, but the latest cuts are particularly savage and the Mansfield report, while welcome to some, underestimates the complexity of the problems posed by the cuts. Notwithstanding some deeper legitimacy problems, the ABC must be protected because it informs citizens and helps to constitute a public sphere where we can chatter away, building our future.

It's Melbourne Grand Prix Sunday and according to Victorian Premier Kennett, Prime Minister Howard and the commercial media 'treachery' is in the air. Metropolitan transport workers are out on a forty-eight-hour strike, forcing race fans to arrive on foot. Our national reputation is suffering on global TV. And yet Channel Nine's *Sunday* program – held up as a shining example of quality current affairs on a commercial network – has given the union movement the chance to speak. In a sympathetic interview with Laurie Oakes, ACTU President Jenny George reminds us of the State government's role in protracted and stalled negotiations, and about transport workers' concerns over losing benefits and superannuation entitlements as the transport system is corporatized. George suggests that the government may have manufactured the crisis for longer term privatization goals. Those who are relaxed about the death-by-starvation of the ABC might point to *Sunday* as an example of the sophistication and inclusiveness of our commercial networks (a few nights earlier we watched the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras on Channel Ten). Those who support a well-funded ABC might not be surprised that *Sunday* on Grand Prix Sunday was cut short for resumption of Channel

Nine's live telecast from the Albert Park race track. The commercial media in Australia and in other countries are too stitched up with other corporate interests, so often connected to conservative political parties, to allow the non-commercial media to disappear. *Sunday* could afford its generous interview with Jenny George, given the network's overwhelming endorsement of the Grand Prix.

IN THE 1996 ELECTION campaign the Coalition promised to maintain existing funding levels for the ABC. That promise was in tune with public support, registered in a July 1996 AGB McNair Poll (*The Age* 3/7/96) showing that an overwhelming majority of Australians believed ABC funding should be maintained. That strong level of support exists despite the fact that ABC TV wins only around 15 per cent of the national ratings and rarely has a TV program in the national top ten (ABC radio rates a bit better, with over 20 per cent of listeners in Melbourne, to give one capital city example). The poll probably indicates that many of us use the ABC selectively rather than habitually, or even if we don't tune in we still regard the ABC as playing a worthwhile role in the life of the nation. In spite of the support – and some vigorous campaigns by the national broadcaster's friends – the ABC grant from Parliament was cut by around \$11 million for 1996–1997 and is to be slashed by \$55 million from 1997–1998 to around \$500 million per year. The same poll showed a majority opposed any introduction of commercial advertising on the ABC. Without other substantial revenue streams, these huge cuts necessitate axing programs and shedding up to one in six staff at the ABC, or nine hundred jobs over the next few years. That was the harsh reality according to the ABC's managing director Brian Johns at the Senate estimates committee in September 1996.

The December 1996 announcement of a new and flatter management structure (also removing the organizational separation of radio and TV) and the axing of sixty management positions was both a reaction to the budget and a carefully timed indication to the knife-wielding government that the ABC, under its new chairman Donald Macdonald, was doing its best to trim fat. These management moves were also a sop to the unions; the pain of down-sizing would be shared! Of course the ABC board and management were also anticipating the outcome of Bob Mansfield's *Review of the Role and Functions of the ABC*. The one-man review, which attracted close to twelve thousand submissions, was without public hearings or discussion papers, although many key submissions were made public by their authors and discussed in the press. Mansfield's report, pre-empted by the budget cuts, was made public by Communications Minister, Senator Richard Alston on the 24th January, 1997. His recommendations, extensively reported in the quality press and by the ABC itself, centred on closing down international TV and radio broadcasting, scaling down in-house production except for news and current affairs (enabling property sales which could source funding for more extensive digitization) and re-writing the ABC's legislative charter; to give more emphasis to domestic broadcasting, news and current affairs, children's TV, and regional Australia. Mansfield recommended against sponsorship and advertising, and against further substantial budget cuts. He recommended that the ABC remain a *comprehensive* domestic broadcaster. These two particular recommendations surprised and relieved many, given that the savagery of the budget cuts forced Mansfield's hand to a considerable extent. And there was a worrying precedent. In recent years SBS has been forced by miserly funding to take ads, and some commentators believe that the arguments for a *refined* or *complimentary* ABC role, and some commercialization, had been well rehearsed by Labor's 1988 *Review of National Broadcasters*.

It's worth remembering, there have been other crises. Ken Inglis draws on his deep knowledge of the ABC's history to mention several others: including Menzies' 1940 12 per cent slash to the ABC's radio-licence revenue; the 1947–1948 Chifley government move to appoint two public servants to the (then) Commission and give the new Australian Broadcast-

ing Control Board power to determine political broadcasts; Menzies' 1963 pressure on the ABC (he called up scripts of *Four Corners*) over its item on the RSL; PMG Alan Hulme's 1970 threat of legislated standards for the ABC over *This Day Tonight* and Hulme's concerns about supposed lack of impartiality; cuts in 1976 of 10 per cent by the Fraser government, "harbouring much hostility to the public broadcaster for its performance from 1972 to 1975".¹

ANOTHER CRISIS, the 1988 *Review of National Broadcasters*, is worth revisiting here. In that case the charter/non-charter proposal was fought fiercely by the 'Just Eight Cents a Day' campaign; then shelved when Senator Gareth Evans moved from Communications to Foreign Affairs, and subsequent ministers slid down the muddy pay-TV path, endorsing diversity and 'technology neutrality' while desperately seeking to appease the media barons. One wonders what possessed the ABC to beg to play in this high-risk industry, other than some deep pessimism about long term funding, and some self-defeating idea that the ABC belongs in niche services. We might also add here those very grubby political interventions in 1991 during the Gulf War where the ABC buckled to the Labor Government's funding threats over its initial refusal to provide shortwave services for Australia's military personnel in the region. The ABC was also attacked by the government over its expert analysis of the Gulf War being too pro-Arab and insufficiently sympathetic to Israel's predicament. Some regard the provision in the Broadcasting Services Act (1992) for the ABC's forced participation in the industry-wide complaints mechanism as a legacy of these times. Labor – historically supportive of the ABC due to its fear of conservative media proprietors – effectively eroded ABC funding in a decade of ballooning production costs and rising audience expectations. The ABC, under managing director David Hill, was not rewarded for increasing audience size and hours of award-winning drama production and children's TV. Basically, governments in Australia do not particularly like the national broadcasters because they occasionally bite the hand that feeds them. Mansfield could not see evidence of ABC party-political bias, despite the widely reported comments by Prime Minister John Howard about the supposedly limited range and 'political correctness' of the ABC's pro-

grams, and the implication that conservative views are not sufficiently canvassed.

Since Mansfield's report the most controversial issue has turned out to be the proposed closure of the ABC's international shortwave service, Radio Australia (a reminder to the technological determinists that the newest technological areas are not always the most contested). The editorials in *The Weekend Australian* and *The Age* of 25 January 1997 anticipated the complex foreign affairs dimensions to this issue, perhaps in ways that Mansfield did not. Radio Australia, operating for fifty-seven years, attracts an audience of over twenty million, and broadcasts news and current affairs in eight languages other than English. The BBC World Service, Voice of America and others have expressed interest in picking up the frequency space if Radio Australia closes down, surely correcting the idea that shortwave is dead. At the time of writing this article the political crisis in PNG over use of mercenaries to kill the BRA and re-open copper mines on Bougainville, and ongoing anxiety about regional perceptions that Australia remains a white-supremacist nation, have heightened public debate about the need for the ABC to maintain its shortwave presence in the region. Leaked letters to Senator Alston's department from Alexander Downer's department suggest that the Foreign Minister is increasingly sympathetic to Radio Australia's survival although his department is reluctant to take over the service for reasons of cost and perceived political influence. If the ABC does not cut Radio Australia, saving around \$13–20 million, and if the government pursues the full budget cuts, then where else might the savings be found?

Notwithstanding all these political interventions, the ABC's current miseries result from other deeper-seated problems as well. As lamented by Michael Tracey, Monroe Price, Robyn Williams and others, national broadcasters around the democratic world are suffering from the perception that their paternalistic value-setting and educative roles – so valued after the Second World War – are inappropriate in these

(post)modern times where difference and pluralism are celebrated and the nation, the public and the citizen are contested notions. As Gay Hawkins points out, in 'The ABC and the Mystic Writing Pad' the very "logistics and economics of a national broadcasting service place difficult constraints on how difference can be recognized and serviced" and notes "a deep contradiction within the current practices of the ABC between an audience imagined as heterogeneous

and a schedule that grows more and more homogenized by the day".² Hawkins acknowledges that this is less the case with the radio schedule. The shift to channel abundance – with frequency scarcity no longer an issue – also means that most interests can, in theory at least, be served by media markets (unless, of course, you are locked into diminishing free-to-air services by poverty). Add to this the prevailing economic rationalism which champions smaller government expenditure on public services, together with the spirited

deregulation of telecommunications (increasingly converging with broadcasting and narrowcasting) and the longer term outlook for national broadcasters looks grim indeed.

In his recently translated book about law and democracy, Jurgen Habermas reminds us that democracy needs active citizens. "In our complex, pluralistic societies, the legitimacy of political decision-making processes depends on a robust civil society and a vibrant public sphere." Habermas continues his thesis that our civil rights have been won – and will be won – by more than class struggle. Informal public communication matters and "decision-making bodies must remain porous to the influx of issues, value orientations, contributions, and programs originating from a political public debate unsubverted by power".³

This all has relevance for the future of the ABC. I mentioned Gay Hawkins's qualification that the ABC radio schedules are less homogenized than television. I'd say that a casual glance at a weekly TV and radio guide would indicate that across Radio National, the regional stations, Triple J and ABC Classic FM there is

Mansfield could not see evidence of ABC party-political bias, despite the widely reported comments by Prime Minister John Howard about the supposedly limited range and 'political correctness' of the ABC...

enormous variation, and that the schedule for Radio National alone indicates a spectacular array of programs giving serious consideration to all manner of social issues; with *relatively* high levels of journalistic integrity and expertise. And for all the glossiness of ABC TV news and current affairs, I'd still want to argue that the levels of reporting and analysis are *relatively* high. The relativity issue is crucial here when we consider that the commercial media have a few current affairs programs, but basically it's *just entertainment* and it's there on the screen to deliver mass audiences to the big corporations and their products and services. The media has to be much more than this – at least until the great age of electronic community and participatory democracy really arrives. The media, today in Australia, are the main way most of us get to know what our politicians, business people, public servants, scientists and others in positions of power and influence are up to, and up against. This idea is not new. Nor the arguments about the media's role in (conservative) consensus formation or the media's capacity to under-represent some and over-represent others. Of course we work, as active audiences, to discount and subvert these attempts by the mass media to jolly us along. But the media matter, and governments and corporations wouldn't spend so much time and money manipulating them if that wasn't the case. Yet somehow Australia's parliamentarians, in their treatment of the ABC in the last decade, feign or suffer vagueness or indifference about all this when they put the independence of the national broadcasters at risk.

Perhaps our parliamentarians and major parties are not too concerned with the quality of public communication. Informed communities give parliamentarians a hard time, and they also poke their noses into the excesses of the market place, the failures of the public service and – looking skywards – official corruption. The ABC doesn't need huge audiences to help inform citizens. Most teachers I know hang off the ABC (and read a daily broadsheet) and they take what they know into classrooms and lecture theatres across the country. Then the students take ideas out into the streets and back into the homes. The parliamentarians who attack the ABC know about this

slightly hidden path of influence. Margaret Thatcher loved to goad and vilify the 'chattering classes' and she had particular scorn for the BBC. I suspect that attacks on the ABC over the last decade stem from a similar concern about all this chatter circulating in a public sphere which hasn't yet been sold off and closed down.

Quickie reviews and glossy reports, with under-resourced and behind-doors consultations make the real complexities – such as those raised by Gay Hawkins – invisible. Of course Senate committees get to chew over issues, but the public needs to have its chance to debate the issues in well resourced forums. Mansfield's apparent underestimation of Radio Australia's importance and support is a good example of why we need more than a solitary businessman and a party-disciplined parliamentary committee to do our thinking for us. As the outsourcing debate warms up, the Mansfield report will probably come to seem quite banal on that front as well. And where did Mansfield deal *in any detail* with Australia's dreadful concentration of media ownership (which could get worse if Packer's PBL gets Fairfax Holdings Limited)? Surely this has relevance to the ABC's future.

Of course, policy paucity doesn't just happen to the ABC; its thwarted foray into pay-TV and its sinking Asian TV service are very much 'own goals'. Speaking of which, the ABC's broadcast of Super League – effectively ABC promotion for Foxtel pay-TV, already underwritten by the profligate Telstra cable roll-out – is another case in point. The devil is in the detail and unless you actually take into account things like the effect on Australian Rugby League fans of their code's demise, or the effect of Super League on the historic patterns of regionality in Australian sport, then policy is an empty vessel. The truth is, that within the 'chatter' lies the detail and also lies the beating heart of citizenship.

ENDNOTES

1. *Media International Australia* No. 83, February 1997.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Jürgen Habermas: *Between Facts and Norms* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996.

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Wendy Lowenstein

‘We must keep telling ...’

MICHELE TURNER WROTE ONLY two books, but her achievement was great, and her untimely death a great loss to Australian letters. Her first book, *Stuck: Unemployed people talk to Michele Turner* (Penguin, Melbourne, 1983), was a best-seller. Her second and last work, *Telling East Timor: Personal testimonies 1942–1992* (NSW University Press, Sydney, 1992) is a classic, a superb human document, an awesome, heart-rending and courageous oral history which puts her among the great humanitarian writers.

The ABC Radio National Social History series, ‘East Timor: A Debt to Repay’, based on some of Turner’s material, won the 1991 Human Rights award for radio documentary. She died in 1994, aged forty-three and the following year was posthumously awarded a Human Rights award for services to the Timorese people and to the unemployed. But *Telling East Timor* has been a modest success rather than the best-seller it deserves to be. Published by a small university press it has been little promoted and is already in danger of being overlooked.

I first met Turner in the late seventies. She sought me out after I’d been a speaker at a public meeting. She was young, nervous, almost humble, but very persistent. She had spent months interviewing for a book about unemployment. Would I read her manuscript, advise her?

In a rush of passionate words she told me about her work in the Commonwealth Employment Service, about how middle-aged men would come in to register for work. ‘I’d say, ‘The first thing is to register for unemployment benefits.’ He’d say, ‘No! I’m not going on the dole, I’m going to get another job. I want to work!’ I’d say, ‘Look, it might take time, you’ve paid taxes all your life. It’s your right!’ But that man would go on till he’d lost everything, used up all his resources – telephone cut off, nothing in the bank. And he’d

come in, he’d cringe, he’d actually apologize! ‘I’m very sorry but I’ll have to apply for the dole after all.’ He had no money left. And he’d have to wait another six weeks!’ Passion is infectious and I was hooked. Our friendship lasted until her death.

Stuck came from the frustration of her work in the CES. In 1974 she’d joined the public service as part of the new graduate recruitment program. ‘Just until I found out really what I really wanted to do.’ In the 1970s the existence of unemployment was largely ignored and unknown, the dole bludger myth alive and well. She spent a year working with the then Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS), with unemployed school leavers and was sensitive to their feelings.

People get a lot more from work than just money. They get an appraisal of their abilities, measure themselves against others. When I was supervising a youth employment section, kids would come back, tell you how they were going at work. You’d notice an amazing difference. These scrawny kids, under-confident, yet with inflated ideas of their ability. They’d got a job in a factory or supermarket, been given a bit of authority, left in charge of the store. They’d grown up overnight, been told they’d done a good job. And the change in those kids – it was something that you never would have known when you’d first seen them.

Sensitive to the feelings of the young, she was also very practical. Unemployed people’s problems were little known. She would make them better known – write a book! Taking a year’s leave she bought an old clapped-out Morris truck. Members of a CYSS group helped rebuild it as a space for talking to people in. She suspended a microphone from the ceiling, added

folding chairs, biscuits, an 'airpot' of coffee. She spent four months talking to people as they left CES offices. "Did you have many knock-backs?" "No, I'm little, I'm nervous, I'm no threat. I never had a real knockback. The parking fines were the main problem!" Her first book off her hands, she rested a while, had children.

BUT SHE WAS INTERESTED IN East Timor because her grandfather, an Australian commando kept alive by Timorese during the Second World War, was one of seven hundred Australian soldiers who would have been prisoners of war, have gone to Changi, died. Timor was a Portuguese colony, Portugal a neutral country. "Australia invaded, compromised it." Despite devastated villages, and food shortages, the Timorese helped, supported Australian soldiers. Many lost their own lives as a result. In these small rural communities the soldiers became friends. "I eat with you, you come into my house, you are my friend, therefore I will die for you." On being evacuated from Timor, many felt they'd abandoned those who had preserved them, allowed them to wage a guerrilla war against Japanese occupation for a year, with the loss of only forty men.

In 1975 the *National Times* had published two instalments of the 'Timor Papers'. Mostly from CIA sources, they showed the cynicism of actions against East Timor. Turner decided to interview some Timorese in Australia, perhaps write an article. "I had to do something. I owed it to the Timorese."

She spoke with Australian wartime veterans and with Timorese in Australia, doubting herself, unsure whether she had the right to ask people to relive horror, even those who were very willing to bear witness. She suffered from the constant emotional adjustment needed for getting her own children to sleep, before returning to her office to edit transcripts of horror. "Opening wounds is not nice work . . . It is as if you reach inside a person and pull out the living heart, trying to ignore the pain, getting the details right, examining it before stuffing it back."

"I'd seen reports of Timorese babies' heads smashed against rocks, three hundred people killed – the Clouda massacres. I'm stupid, an optimist, no way would I have embarked on such an appalling project had I realized." Interviews in five languages, often involving two or more interpreters, she struggled to get details right, cross-examining through interpreters. "Informants would say, 'We are Catholics, we do

not tell lies.' It was highly traumatic!"

In a project of this nature and based on oral sources, the writer assumes an extraordinary responsibility. Is the tape recorder a tool in writing more democratic history, or just another intrusion into personal privacy? Can someone be injured, die perhaps, because of you?

An extremely candid person, Turner was very much aware of the dangers.

It was a massive, appalling responsibility! I believe that we live in a democracy, that we have an obligation. But I take all precautions too. It wasn't just having to learn those techniques to protect the work. It was a direct human matter, sharp-edged stuff. If someone's name gets known, maybe thirty members of their family will get rounded up, beaten shitless, tortured – the malaria a man has because he's so ill-nourished, means he'll die. That happened to one family, but not because of any action of mine. Then there's the subtle stuff – your family doesn't get jobs, doesn't get electricity connected, doesn't get permits to get out. I couldn't be naive, I had to protect, protect, protect. I still wake up at night: What if someone's being tortured to death in East Timor because of me?

The article turned into a book, the work went on for ten years. It might take three years before an informant could talk, would want to talk. "They'd tell you about everybody else. You'd press them to tell you about themselves. They'd tell you, 'Yes, of course I was beaten and tortured. But have you heard about so and so? They're much worse.'"

In order to get first-hand stories, she relied on friends in the community. They would learn that one of their relatives had been taken for torture.

All of this was full on – there was no half way. The interpreters were very bossy – they'd say, "This woman is doing an important thing for our country. You sit down and talk to her. Switch the machine on!" They had great respect for learning. I had written a book, therefore I was a scholar. And they think because you can read and write and are an Australian you will have some say . . . that you can visit other important people and help them – like in a small community.

Not long before we last talked, my own book about what's happening to work in Australia had been rejected by a leading publisher, because 'No-one will read depressing stuff like that!' So I asked, "How did publishers react?"

Oh, whoever heard of East Timor? It's over and done with! No-one will want to read it. Too depressing! And when it's finished – they say, "We should have published it", carry on with all this guff – the triumph of the human spirit!

As in so many contemporary oral histories, the material kept coming. "The book was never finished, the massacre was in ninety-one, and the book came out in ninety-two. The bloody chronology changed every day. It was still being written when they dragged it out of my hands!"

Eventually, she started to get people to re-enact their experience. This approach was fruitful, producing responses like that of Fatima Guzmáo:

We were sitting in a cave, we were sick. We had not eaten for many days . . . Our baby had diarrhoea. Jose knew our son was dying . . . I thought he was just very tired and sick and wanting to sleep. I did not know that it was what we call 'agonia', that time between life and dying . . . Slowly I understand he is dead. His arms are locked tight around my neck. It was hard to separate us. Don't cry Michele, there was nothing we could do, no way to revive him. It is like a water pot dropped on the ground. It is gone. You cannot have that water again. But it is hard. Three times it happens to me, three babies die and this one was the hardest because I knew him so well for eight months . . . People tell me to forget, but I cannot forget my children, my friends. We must keep telling so people know the truth.

Guzmáo's group was captured by Battalion 700 of the Green Berets:

Late in the night they take us for the first interview. Slowly those captured with us had been taken and some disappear. We never see them again, and we know it will be our turn and we expect to die. They ask us who wants to be the first

to die. And I say "Kill me first." I want Jose to see me die. He knows then that after he is dead, they cannot use me as their prostitute, pass me from hand to hand. I will be dead and what they do with my body then I don't care, but Jose, before he closes his eyes I want him to see that I am dead.

I recorded Michele Turner several times – very frustrating, because she would lean over, press the pause button and go off to find corroborative evidence, a particular article, letter. At our last session, I said through clenched teeth, "Will you bloody well sit still!" She was concerned, "You're tired. I'll get you a cup of coffee!" She finally pressed the button once too often. Engrossed, I forgot to switch the damned thing on again and the rest of the interview was lost.

Telling East Timor is an amazing book because, despite the dimensions of human suffering portrayed, it inspires; infuses with reality the cliché about the 'triumph of the human spirit'. It makes me proud to be a member of the human race. It is not only magnificently done, one must be amazed that it has been done at all. I am sure that the trauma of writing this book helped bring the author to her premature death. The let-down experienced by such committed and passionate people after years of dedicated and agonized labour, the appalling conviction that it may have been all in vain, that so little has changed despite your efforts, must be devastating. Michele Turner was not only the greatest oral history writer I have yet read, she was the best person I have ever known.

Wendy Lowenstein is the author of best-selling oral histories of Australian working life, including Weevils in the Flour.

**WEEVILS AT WORK:
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO WORK
IN AUSTRALIA – AN ORAL RECORD**

Wendy Lowenstein's latest book will be published by Sydney's Catalyst Press in July this year. Advance orders (post-free) can be obtained from Catalyst Press, PO Box 33, Hawksburn 3142.

Out to Sea

Neil Boyack

THERE WASN'T THAT MUCH that was keeping them together. They were just shy of their fifth anniversary; which was one thing keeping them together. Sad songs were keeping them together and it was easier to stay together than to break up. If they were seeing secret lovers they would have split for sure, it would have been a case of one body to another, bed to bed, no waiting period, no break in cover. Easy. But they were still together, just doing what they did, going on, hoping that things would freshen themselves up. Butch was the one who wanted to call someone, just lift the phone and ask someone when things would get better, like call the Lifeline or the bloke next door and just ask: do you know when things are going to get better? So Butch drove down to the beach on the Thursday evening and booked himself into a cabin, to get a day to himself before the rest of them came down for the weekend.

Friday. Butch is on the beach fishing, when he sees another fisherman. It's a sunny day, a slight off-shore wind brings in the sea-spray, makes the clouds hurry, makes it cool enough for a jumper. Butch watches the fisherman pull in a Whiting, and after a couple of minutes he reels his line in and goes to have a look. By the time he gets there, the fisherman is gutting the fish, washing it in a yellow bucket. Butch stands over him and says it's a beauty.

Sure is, he says without looking up. Butch asks him what he's using, then he looks up; sand-worms he says, surprised. He watches the man use the knife on the fish, he is quick.

Do you mind if I have a go here? he asks.

No problem, the man says. Butch looks out to the waves, and times his run, getting as far as he can

without getting too wet and he casts in just beyond the break. He is using a standard surf rig, bluebait and a ganged number two hook on an eight kilo line, no roll sinker. The man baits his hook beside Butch and casts into the break. They stand next to each other, shake hands, his name is Mario. They talk small talk in the quiet between waves, like, what brings you here? what do you do for a living? what fish are running at the moment? Mario tells Butch that there were seals everywhere last week, so there were no fish. Butch asks Mario where he's staying and Mario turns from the surf and points to his house. He invites Butch back to the house. Yells the invitation as a wave washes into their shins, puts them off balance. Mario has gumboots on, Butch has runners. Butch is thinking he'd rather go eat the Whiting with Mario, than go back to the empty cabin at the moment.

And they eat the Whiting over slow, low volume hip hop. Mario tells Butch that he lives in the city for a few months at a time, then comes down here for a couple of months, comes down here whenever he feels like it. He tells Butch he likes the clubs and pubs in the city, but loves the solitude and the fishing here, and if he had to choose he would be here at the beach. Butch is listening, standing at the window looking at the ocean. Mario tells Butch he inherited the beach house from his mother, who died here the day it was finished. He points to a picture of his mother hanging on a wall, she is a toothless woman in black, squinting into the sun, holding a handbag. A gold crucifix hangs over the picture frame. Mario says he made his money concreting, decided to sell up and retire last year when he turned thirty, he says he got his muscles from concreting. He rolls a fat number

over the meal plates on the coffee table. Some want the Ferrari and the Mansion but I couldn't give a shit about that, he says. Butch turns from the window nodding his head.

Butch tells Mario that his fiance and a couple of friends are coming down to the beach for the weekend. Mario raises his eyebrows and Butch says he came down earlier to have a little time to himself. Good thinking, Mario says, you can't beat it down here. Butch looks back out of the bay windows into Bass Straight. It's getting dark and the crooked streetlights in front of the house are flickering to life, the light in the telephone box out front comes on, he sees that the lights in Apollo Bay are on, just around the coast to his right. He follows the lights of a car on the road that runs along the coastline, he follows them all the way into town. He thinks of all the fish mingling in the water here, thinks that maybe tomorrow he'll go for some Whiting.

By 2 a.m., Butch is truly stoned, standing back at the window looking at boat lights slowly rolling in the black sea, the moon shining soft through the thin cloud onto the shifting water. The music finishes and they are just listening to the surf rising and falling. The dope makes the surf louder, makes it sound like the waves are breaking backwards. There is nothing in between the sound of waves breaking. He likes to be bent like this, he hasn't been this stoned in a long time. He looks out to the right, around the coast to Apollo Bay where he can see a string of streetlights start and stop, he thinks that no-one would be awake there at 2 a.m. on a Saturday. Then he sees the reflection of Mario in the window, slumped on the couch, slowly feeling his dick through his jeans. Butch is very stoned, things are going slow, this has taken him by surprise, he doesn't understand. The floating lights of fishing boats out to sea in front of the house catch his attention, he watches the yellow lights of the boats, not knowing what to think. He imagines things men would like from men, things men would like to do to other men, he has seen men with men in magazines. He cannot hold a picture of anything, he can see things for a second but they go. He wonders if he is attractive to men, he never thought of it like that.

His cough telegraphs his slow turn to Mario, who is leaning forward now, over the coffee table rolling another joint. Butch thinks about getting back to the cabin, but what the fuck, there's no-one there, and he would have to walk in the dark with his fishing gear, it's not worth the effort, he thinks. Mario concentrates on what he's doing; he looks at Butch as he licks the paper and rolls the thing shut. Butch goes to put another cd in the player and Mario pats his pockets for a light. He decides to flick the radio on, he hears Nick Cave. This makes him think of his fiance Kate, think of the way her lips sit, think of her when she's crying, think of her love for animals, all these things are going through his head. He thinks about the problems they've been having, he'd love to be with her now, to have her here. He thinks about last week when he nearly left her, when she was talking to her ex-boyfriend Andre at the casino. She hadn't seen Andre for years. Andre was a star footballer, he played a handful of games in the AFL reserves, he got her into Nick Cave, he limps and uses a walking stick now because of the car accident. Mario takes Butch away from all that when he puts a joint to his lips, Butch goes to take it but it's already there in his face, he takes a hard drag, listens to the stuff burn. He tastes Mario's salty fingertips, listens to the waves, and then he can't suck any more back. He pulls away gently and holds it all in, closes his eyes. Hears his heart get louder, slower, and then opens his eyes and lets it all out towards the roof. He is so stoned that he sways slightly, from the balls to the heels of his feet. And Mario stands there for no reason, just keeps dragging on the joint, stands there with his hand on his hip, like he's going to say something philosophical, but he doesn't. Butch goes to the couch, he is wasted.

IT'S SATURDAY MORNING and they're all together driving along the Great Ocean Road, on their way into town. Frank and Lisa are in the back. Kate is in front, she asks Butch if they name a wind by the direction it's going or from which direction it springs. He says from which direction it comes from, because that is what he has assumed. He considered it a stupid question but he confuses himself as he thinks about it. He

sees Mario's house on the right as he drives, the bay windows flash with the reflection of the sun, Butch thinks of Mario. Lisa says from the back seat, look at the boat, and they all look out of the left windows of the car at the boat laying nets. Orange markers in blue water. When the road winds closer to the surf the sea spray gives the effect of light rain, Butch turns the wipers on now and then.

They get into Apollo Bay and all the shops have their front doors shut, like they're closed. When they're in the Bakery Frank says to the short woman behind the counter, nice day, and she says you've got to be joking, that wind kills us every time, comes off the water straight in the front door, and they buy bread and rolls and leave. The sun is in and out. They walk to the mini-mart too because they need to buy soup and milk and coffee and when they pass the hotel, they decide that they will eat dinner there later. She asks Butch if he brought the Nick Cave tape down because she couldn't find it at home, he says that he didn't bring it down. By then they are entering the mini-mart, it is Saturday morning but there are only a few people around. The mini-mart does not have trolleys but red handled wire baskets, there is a lady with dark lipstick and a floral apron, name like Bev, waiting at the checkout as they enter.

At the checkout they wait for their groceries to be totalled. Kate touches Butch's back-side like a lover. Frank and Lisa have walked through the checkout and are waiting near the door of the mini-mart, they leave Butch and Kate to pay and look across the street outside to the pine trees bending in the wind, the empty playground in front of the surf. There is a closed mini-golf course under the pine trees there. And it's when they're all walking back to the car Butch sees the sports store, he thinks of the piked Whiting hooks, even if he doesn't use them this afternoon he'll use them sometime so he gives the car keys to Kate and says, he'll meet them all back at the car. Butch surprises the man behind the counter when he walks into the sports store. It was as if the man didn't work there, like the shop was his lounge room, like he was just behind the counter reading his paper, minding

his own business. The man is balding, green eyes, clean shaven, pink cheeks. There are Polaroid photographs of people holding fish sticky-taped to the glass counter, like the shop was responsible for the catches. There are small kids with small Bream, a curly haired lady with a Salmon in a backyard with a green tin fence. He says good luck with a smile, and hands Butch the bag of hooks. Butch walks out of the store wondering if Mario will be fishing this afternoon.

It begins to hail as he opens the driver's side door of the car, he puts the plastic bag of hooks into the console and sees a Nick Cave tape. He asks Kate where she found it, she says she bought it from the music store which was situated in the back of the newsagents. Said it was on special for five dollars. What is it with you? Butch asks. She looks at him. That bastard can't even sing, he says.

He starts the car instead of saying anything more, puts it in reverse, looks over his shoulder and backs out onto the main street. Frank and Lisa look over their shoulders for oncoming cars, the hail has eased to rain. Lisa says, there's no-one around like it's going to lift the mood in the car and Kate thinks of what Andre said last week at the casino, how he said that he missed her and that he would love to be with her again. He said that he loved her. And she can still see herself with Andre, easily, anywhere, like on the street to her left or going shopping or screwing. That's one thing about Andre, he never did mind going shopping with her. She always finds herself thinking back to Andre when things are rugged with Butch, she thinks of his football, his epilepsy, the walking stick. She remembers three orgasms in five minutes with Andre. And looking back on it, they split over nothing in particular; he was bored three months in, and said so and that was that. She thinks of what Butch would do to stay with her, what he would do to get her back for leaving him. She sees a close up of Butch's chipped front teeth, sees him hurting. He's a crier, a beggar, vindictive. She keeps looking at the windscreen, the squeaking wipers, the rain. They're out of town, on the thin ocean road now and she knows that HE, will never leave her.

Neil Boyack's fiction 'Jack the Dancer' was recently published in Pub Fiction (Allen & Unwin).

miscellany

Brisbane Line

Margaret Henderson (with thanks to Robyn Sheahan)

QUEENSLAND HAS produced a number of distinguished writers, such as: Thea Astley, Janette Turner Hospital and David Malouf. Yet in the past couple of years there appears to be something of a reinvigorated literary culture, with successes in the Vogel awards, notoriety in the literary hoax stakes, and a sense that you no longer have to leave for Sydney to make it as a writer. An important part of this literary activity is the Queensland Writers' Centre, based in Brisbane.

The Queensland Writers' Centre has been operating since 1991 after much lobbying, and is the third writers' centre established in Australia. The aim of the Centre is to support writers and writing in Queensland, and its fifteen hundred individual members and one hundred affiliated groups in a statewide network are evidence of the Centre's success in fostering a diverse literary culture. Three writers' services are offered: first, a professional development service for writers, comprising a variety of courses and classes on professional and creative writing issues; second, an employment service; and third, an information service. Writer

promotion is another activity for the Centre, which also organizes the Brisbane Writers' Week and regional festivals, so that Queensland writers are given wider exposure. The Centre acts as an advocate for writers' interests in industry and government bodies and forums, and has strategic alliances with other arts groups.

The Writers' Centre has five staff, and funding is from both state and federal governments, with the majority coming from Arts Queensland. The Centre also applies for funding that is program-specific, for example, from the Brisbane City Council for a 'Writers in the Library' project, and is looking to reduce its reliance on government funding by increased sponsorship and some income-generating activities. Because of a three-year funding agreement, the changes in state and federal governments haven't had any adverse effects so far.

The Writers' Centre is having a change of leadership as Robyn Sheahan is leaving after being executive director since the Centre's inception. A number of plans are already under way for this year, a priority being the further development of the employment service for writers. The Centre is trying to target the corporate and government sector to create work opportunities for writers. Another

priority is the continuation of a 'Master Class' program, where four writers work under the guidance of established authors to get their work to a publishable stage. One area that needs further development is that of indigenous writing, which Robyn Sheahan sees as having an exciting future. The David Unaipon Award has an important role in fostering Aboriginal and Islander writing, as does the Indigenous Touring Program. Currently, Herb Wharton is touring western Queensland giving talks and readings in schools and to communities, and later this year he will be writer in residence at Doomadgee.

So what types of writing are developing in Queensland? There are interesting parallels between the state of Queensland's literary and rock music cultures, in that both have suffered in the past from a regional isolation from industry centres in Sydney and Melbourne, hence a corresponding drain of talent, and both are now perceived as undergoing something of a renaissance. And a question related to Queensland's isolation, perceived parochialism, and recent political history, remains: is there a distinctive Brisbane sound, and Queensland form of writing? Sheahan argues that Queensland's isolation from mainstream publishing may have contributed to

a different type of writing developing, as signified in the discourses on climate and landscape, but a major change appears to be one of attitude. Some writers are moving away, although many more are now staying here, happy to write both from and about Queensland and Brisbane, without parochialism. The new crop of young writers have a self-assurance, and a professional attitude concerning their work. They do not see writing as a hobby, but something they try to earn a living from, whether by giving seminars, or writing for the corporate sector. The isolation and alienation experienced by writers is being overcome by an evolving literary community in Brisbane and regionally. Brisbane Writers' Week in 1996 also saw a number of publishers excited by the local talent on display, which is reflected in the number of Queensland authors on national publishing house lists.

The new writers work in all forms of literature, for example, children's literature, genre fiction, and literary novels, with developments in multimedia as a future area of expansion. Experimental approaches occur mainly in short prose, poetry, and drama. Social issues, for example Andrew McGahan's *Praise*, are represented through individual perceptions, that is, in the relationships between people and how these relationships reflect society. Another issue that recurs is a questioning of the purpose and aim of writing and the novel form.

This cultural confidence and vibrancy can be in part attributed to the achievements of the Queensland Writers' Centre over the last six years in providing resources and a focus, thus countering an attitude that writing is something that

happens elsewhere (namely, Sydney or Melbourne), and that Queensland isn't much of a topic. I look forward to more writing which fictionalizes our past and present of conservative and repressive government and frontier-land capitalism.

Heroes and Villains

Ben Goldsmith

IN 1898 AN ENGLISH anthropologist named Alfred Cort Haddon travelled to the Torres Strait with two wax-cylinder phonographs and a 35mm Newman and Guardia movie outfit to document the life and customs of the indigenous peoples of the islands. The footage Haddon and his camera operator Anthony Wilkin shot is of immense historical significance for two reasons. First, the four minutes of film that survive represent the first known ethnographic footage to be shot in the field anywhere in the world. Much more significantly, the film would become crucial evidence in a court case almost a hundred years later which has changed (and will continue to affect) the ways in which Australians view their history as the twentieth century draws to a close. The footage shot on Haddon's expeditions substantiated the claims of a group of Murray Islanders to their ongoing spiritual and cultural connections to their ancestral lands.

The story of the Murray Islanders' fight for their land was told in a documentary film made by writer-director Trevor Graham and producer Sharon Connelly in 1989–90 called *Land Bilong Islanders*. Seven years down the track, Graham and Connelly have made another film which deserves to be as historically

significant and enduring as that shaky footage shot in 1898. *Mabo: Life of an Island Man* is an intimate and deeply personal account of the life of one of the key figures in the struggle for land rights in Australia, Koiki 'Eddie' Mabo. Made with the full support and cooperation of the Mabo family, the film moves beyond the obvious subject of land rights to situate Koiki as one of this country's most important and effective political activists who was involved in a wide range of causes throughout his life. Koiki's place as a figurehead in the broader and continuing fight against racism and discrimination is reiterated by footage from the filmmakers' last major shoot with the family. This footage documents the unveiling and subsequent desecration of Koiki's tombstone in Townsville (where the Mabo family lived for many years), the family's immediate response to the vicious attack, and the final burial ceremony on Murray Island itself. The film was made through Film Australia's National Interest Program which supports projects that investigate issues of national concern or which document or interpret the lives and activities of Australian peoples. On both counts, the life of Koiki 'Eddie' Mabo is a fitting subject for study. Over the years the program has enabled the making of a large number of films by or about Australia's indigenous peoples such as *88.9 Radio Redfern* (1988), *Kakadu Man* (1989), *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?* (1992), and *Yirrkala* (1995), which have done much to promote understanding and conciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The producers of *Mabo*, Tantamount Productions, are also in the process of developing a CD-Rom which will



Eddie Mabo returns home to Murray Island
Courtesy, Film Australia

incorporate both *Mabo* and *Land Bilong Islanders* together with a wealth of archival material about the landmark land rights case.

Mabo is scheduled to screen on the first weekend of the Sydney Film Festival (probably on Saturday 7 June), and may also be screened at the Melbourne Film Festival in July–August. The ABC has also expressed interest in the project, although no broadcasting date has been set as yet.

MEANWHILE the shake-up in public arts agencies is not confined to the major national organizations like the ABC. In Queensland, the Coalition government has been busily ‘restructuring’ the State’s arts commitments along economic rationalist lines. Basically this means that a swag of agencies are being transformed from statutory authorities to Government Owned Enterprises, or GOEs, with the intention that they will become self-sufficient at some point in the future. In March Joan Sheldon, Liberal Party leader, Deputy Premier, Treasurer, and Minister for the Arts announced a revamp of Arts

administration which has seen Arts Queensland ‘streamlined’ and renamed the Arts Office (with not a little blood spilt in the process), and which will lead to the merging of Film Queensland and the Pacific Film and Television Commission. Such moves are justified by the simultaneously vacuous yet highly politically charged Coalition mantra of ‘art for arts sake’ (a clear nod to the federal Coalition’s pre-election policy document ‘For Art’s Sake – A Fair Go’), while the Minister’s office would like us to believe that the upheaval is designed “to focus [the Arts Office’s] activities on frontline service provision”. Although government arts patronage in Queensland has never been entirely at arm’s length, these changes will, it seems to many, only further serve to bolster the influence of the Minister and the Treasury Under Secretary, Dr Doug McTaggart, over the forms of culture Queenslanders may see, hear or experience. Arts for Arts Sake quite clearly will not mean Arts for Everyone.

ON A LESS CONTENTIOUS note we are rapidly approaching

festival season. The 44th Sydney Film Festival runs from 6–20 June, the 46th Melbourne Film Festival is scheduled for July 24–August 10, while the Brisbane International Film Festival will screen from 1–11 August.

Contact details: SIFF – Paul Byrnes 02 9660 3844; MIFF – Sandra Sdraulig 03 9417 2011; BIFF – Anne Demy-Geroe 07 3220 0333. And if short films are your bag, the Exposure International Film Festival for films of up to thirty minutes made within the last twelve months will screen in Brisbane from 3-6 July. Contact Carmel Rooney on 07 3252 3394 for details.

Les Murray at Wannsee

Nicole Moore writes from her temporary home in Berlin

LES IS GARRULOUS and polite at once. The microphone on too early, he jokes with his translator, “they’d think I was a genius”, and she says, at once, “you are a genius” and pats his arm. He laughs with pleasure and the introductions begin. We are in a villa overlooking the lake, opposite the train station, half an hour’s train ride from central western Berlin. I keep my carefully black-clad leg crossed at a careful angle, my stomach growls formidably and the double readings start, one German, one English, Les and the translator in turn. ‘An Ordinary Rainbow’, the bean poem, religion is poetry, his father’s death, ‘Sprawl’, a mother poem, the gum forest, his autistic son. The beans twist and ululate in front of us, never-ending bounty of the rabbiter God. The home-style market garden, managed useful reasonable

proficiency made Christian. By 'Sprawl' I am finding the stuff more than belligerent: his irony is really bitter provocation. Sprawl is the self-serving largesse of land-owning bullshit-touting cockies who don't believe in the possibility of their own malignance. Sprawl is going the extra hundred kilometres to show that loser weirdo hitchhiker that no-one drives down this road after a certain time on a weekday and if you want a ride you want something else. Sprawl is the repudiation of earnestness, viciously anti-urban/change/youth/difference/femininity; sprawl repudiates earnest anger against it by denying the intent of its own.

Berlin is one huge construction site right now. At Potsdamer Platz a new city centre is being constructed, between the old centres of west and east, but still in old western Berlin. The biggest multinationals queue to have their buildings up first, and tourists like me queue inside a viewing box to see it in virtual reality. The Reichstag is being rebuilt for the move from Bonn and the Brandenburg gate is covered in apologies for the construction going on around it. Berlin is intensely and earnestly momentous in these years between the Wende and its re-emergence as a new Welt Stadt, the cultural and symbolic capital of the new Europe. The easy victories of capital are everywhere building themselves monuments. Les offers lightning in the bush as alternative, for this he has ignored these passions of his time.

The Australian bush is always not-here, and the literalization of this at Wannsee reinforces the insistence of Hodge and Mishra that this not-here is also not-now. Les and his translator read us an innocent

landscape, balmy with eucalypts, offered against Goethe's managed natural, or the German Green Party's environment. This is a not-here, not-now that would be indifferent to political history or the contingency of an imperial, racist relationship to productive land. But Les is not indifferent. The assertive cultural privilege inscribed in Sprawl declares itself as majority cultural truth in Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. Les has left his last collections at home. His eucalypts assume an authority here that strikes me as a cheater's authority – Les owns his eucalypts, but ownership is the really unstable question that no-one will ask here. Australian nature is only natural from here and Les writes his bush as its history. Goethe was buried in a sealed metal coffin.

Still, my flatmates, from Leipzig, don't know that gum trees aren't deciduous and the translation of Linda Jaivin's *Eat Me* is in the shops. The Literarisches Colloquium villa looks over greening trees and the misty lake; the glassy water is still a dark black colour even this far into Spring. The group of listeners lean their wine glasses together away from the view. The readings finish and no-one has a question for Les. I find I don't want to have to have something to say. We go out into the cold.

Face to Face with Rowie the Witch

Harry Garlick

ROWIE THE WITCH? Her name was Rosaleen Norton, a painter and a figure on the disreputable edge of Sydney's (then minute) bohemia in

the late 1940s and early 1950s. (In fact, from this distance in time, it seems that Rowie Norton and Joan Murray, that poor benighted single-mother tram conductress who was hounded by the Sunday papers on supposed moral grounds, were the main subjects of the Sunday paper beat-ups in those days. The way she was persecuted also deserves to be recorded as another moral aberration in our social history, along with Frank Browne's jailing for contempt of Parliament, but perhaps another time. For now: Rowie.)

Rowie's appearance made her a distinctive presence, especially on those rare occasions when she appeared in public in daylight hours. Her figure would possibly be described today as anorexic; certainly she was a slight figure, but her usual mode of dress was in voluminous dark clothing, frequently black. Her dark hair was often teased out into some tousled arrangement that suggested volume, and her make-up was striking (so much so that the French word *maquillage*, which to me implies something much more deliberately made, composed) seems a more appropriate description. It reminded me of the stage make-up used in that old film, *The Red Shoes*, except that with Ms Norton's *maquillage*, the total effect seemed directed towards darkness, not the brightness of normal stage make-up. In strait-laced old Sydney of the post-war 1940s, however, her appearance certainly guaranteed her unimpeded progress through city streets on those rare occasions when she walked out in daylight.

Indeed, 'walked out' is a phrase chosen for its complete inappositeness, for with her voluminous blackness, and with her

reputation, one half expected her to fly. Rosaleen, or Rowie, as she was called by those of us who affected knowledgeable about such things, was reputed to be a witch. And not just any old witch, either, but from the beat-ups of the Sydney Sunday papers, particularly *The Truth* of Ezra Norton and *The Sunday Telegraph* of Frank Packer, she became typecast in everyone's mind as The Witch of King's Cross. According to some of these reports, her public persona of witchness was simply the tip of an unbelievably evil iceberg. She was reputed to be the dominant force of a coven that possibly contained a few of the city's leading citizens (after all, hadn't she corrupted that nice lad Gavin Greenlees into being her paramour, when he came from a solid, respectable family?). It was suggested that she even presided over black masses, at which unspeakable sexual practices took place. Because they were unspeakable, of course, the journalists who peddled such a line were absolved from explaining what these practices were.

Now it is at this point that I have to apologize for a defective memory. I wanted to tell you about how Rowie decorated the walls of a King's Cross coffee lounge with diabolical murals, human figures in dark colours and devil-like faces, complete with, in some cases, horns and dragon wings (no sexual parts, though; the walls would have been torn down by the moral enforcers of the time, the coffee-shop closed, and another victory claimed for moral uprightness – through the Sunday papers, naturally). My memory tells me that these decorations were in the Arabian coffee lounge in Macleay Street, though other sources

claim the Kashmir as the location. Both were, I think, in the same location, and I believe the name 'Arabian' preceded 'Kashmir' as the name of the place when Rowie's decorations were in vogue. That is my explanation of this apparent contradiction, until and unless someone corrects me. (Allan Seymour, where are you?)

Although I saw her a number of times, even in the daytime once or twice, when her presence attracted a small crowd, who viewed her from a distance that marked out not so much respect as fear, I only encountered her the one time at close quarters. I was, at that time, some fifteen years old, working as a telegram boy at the Sydney GPO. Having some seniority in the job by this time, I was working the graveyard shift, from 11 p.m. until 6 a.m. Even though we delivered few telegrams in those hours (except for one bastard of a supervisor who used to delight in sending us out to the furthest corners of Sydney, especially when it was raining heavily), we certainly did our share to keep the wheels of the post turning non-stop. One of our tasks was to get food for all the graveyard shift-workers in the entire GPO; we'd write the orders down, then take as many express bags as we could manage on our bicycles, and ride up to Castlereagh Street, to the Packer Consolidated Press building, and there, to the canteen. We would fill our bags with food and drink for everyone, and if we washed up for Dani, the woman who ran the canteen, she would give us our purchases at a mean discount. The profit on those orders, plus our inability to spend our pay because we were sleeping during most days, made the graveyard shift an

attractive proposition for savers – or for dedicated jazz record collectors like me. Natural attrition and the restrictions on social life meant that no-one kept that shift for much more than a year.

At the time of my encounter with Rowie, however, that was my shift, and here a further slight digression is necessary for those who know Wynyard Station only from recent times. In those years, the twin concourses, which led from George Street down to the train entries, and thence up to the tram terminus, were full of shops. Many of these were smart and classy shops, including a high-class bakery that ran through from one concourse to the other.

At the end of my shift one morning I was sitting in a tram reading my paper, waiting for the conveyance to depart Wynyard and take me home. I recall it was a new tram, as we referred to that model, one which had a central corridor, with padded seats at either end, and wooden seats only in the middle, abutting the four central doors. I was sitting in one of these, my back comfortably braced against a corner; I was the only occupant until a series of fluttering and swishing sounds made me look up from my reading. I hastily looked down again, but the print swam when I realized that sitting diagonally opposite was Rowie the witch! She was in her usual black, and was accompanied by her poet-companion Gavin Greenlees. He complemented her outfit in his usual way by wearing sandals with socks – a mode of dress I have since come to associate only with English tourists – and the usual nondescript corduroys of the self-proclaiming bohemian. Once they were settled, he produced cigarettes,

lit one for her, one for himself with both in his mouth together (I just naturally assumed he'd learned that sophisticated trick from a recent Bob Hope movie; *I'd* seen it), and she began talking.

She was not talking loudly for effect; heavens above, if I may employ such an expression in this context, a telegram boy in a rumpled uniform was not worth the effort of striving for any effect; rather, it was just what seemed to be her normal dictatorial tones to the milksop Greenlees, and appeared to consist of "I said to X and then she said, ... and then he said ..." to which Greenlees hummed and grunted assent frequently. Even on such a brief acquaintance, studying them furtively while pretending to turn the pages of my newspaper, there was obviously no doubting who was the dominant partner in that relationship. My affectedly casual surveillance then presented me with an odd fact. Each of them was clutching two pristine fresh bottles of milk, a circumstance that struck me as rather odd, appearing to be so out of character. I didn't know that witches drank milk; I still don't, in fact, but in my stereotyped thinking then, I believe I half expected the milk suddenly to turn blood red.

This strain of superstitious speculation was cut short by the entrance of another character in the little drama that was being enacted in front of me. A figure in white appeared on the running board of the tram: white shirt, trousers, white beret on head, even white smears of what I later concluded was flour on face and neck. It occurred to me afterwards that what I had witnessed was a classic encounter between good and evil in which the combatants had even been colour-

coded to enable onlookers to avoid any errors in identification.

No such fanciful notion entered my head at the time. I gave up all pretence of reading, and watched – I suppose round-eyed – as the figure in white reached out, grabbed all four bottles of milk from the disreputable-looking duo, and boomed out righteously, "I'll take those, thank you. And I know they're ours, because we counted them this morning." Was the booming for my benefit? I can't be sure – not then, not now.

They offered neither resistance nor demur to the intrusion of the knight-errantly baker. When he had left, however, Ms Norton began fuming about the small-minded pettiness of the bourgeoisie. I was amazed to hear such views issue from her mouth, because these were sentiments that I had heard expressed before this only in lounge-room derisiveness about communists. What I also found surprising – again, because it contradicted my stereotyped notions of how a witch should act (memories of the Wicked Witch of the West who pursued Dorothy to Oz were still fresh in my mind, remember, as was that very superior witch from other movies, Gale Sondergaard) – was that Rowie kept on and on about being bested by the baker. Plainly that was how she saw the whole incident. So all the way from Wynyard to Milson's Point, where they alighted, she kept up a non-stop barrage of 'pettinesses' and 'bourgeois' and the like. Not like a witch at all; she didn't screech one curse; but certainly she sounded just like someone who is still smarting with recent humiliation. So, part of the education of young Harry was to discover that perhaps even witches

could be quite human; and that, perhaps – as a fifteen-year-old in a homogeneous society my suspicions weren't easily aroused but I did suspect for a minute there (oh so fleetingly, of course) – the Sunday papers could sometimes be wrong. But my sense of reality quickly reasserted itself: that was absurd. They couldn't, could they?

Blue Poles and Whitlamism

Lindsay Barrett

"BAREFOOT DRUNKS painted our million-dollar masterpiece", said the front page of Sydney's *Daily Mirror* in October 1973. This was the reaction of Australia's tabloids to the rumour that Jackson Pollock and his friend Tony Smith had been drinking when they started work on *Blue poles*. Purchased a few months earlier by the Whitlam government for the record price of \$1.3 million, the arrival in Australia of the abstract expressionist painting created an aesthetic crisis rivalled in intensity only by Dobell's *Portrait of Joshua Smith*.

For many Australians the purchase of *Blue poles* appeared as yet another act of flamboyance by the most flamboyant government the nation had known, a government headed of course by the most florid, grand gesturing Prime Minister ever to inhabit The Lodge. Indeed, the American painting appeared to equate well with both Whitlam and his government, matching nothing so much in both style and substance as the dress sense of the high profile Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby.

In parliament the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Doug Anthony, said that he "could not comprehend

how the painting was made, or the merits of it". Whitlam replied that if "the selection of paintings was based on the comprehension of the Honourable Member, our galleries would be bare and archaic indeed." As always, Gough knew best. Later in the year he had a copy of *Blue poles* reproduced on his Prime Ministerial Christmas Card. This typically audacious Whitlamesque act did nothing less than apply Pollock's radical signature to the image and identity of his own government.

Furore erupted over *Blue poles* not just because it was American and expensive. Previous big-budget expenditure in Australia had always been on tangible objects, had always been on monuments or public buildings, whether controversial constructions like the Sydney Opera House or heroic engineering projects like the Snowy Mountains Scheme. When Australians looked at their public monuments and works of art they saw elements of both their national identity and history. Upon first looking into the abstraction of Pollock's *Blue poles* however, there seemed to be no message. It wasn't just foreign, it was abstract: as a national icon it made no 'sense', signifying only itself and, as a consequence, simply the boldness and excess of the government.

But this was the seventies, and as James Mollison, Director of the National Gallery, the bureaucrat who'd actually bought the painting put it, "Art annoys the public. Great art annoys the public even more." Of course Whitlam had authorized the purchase, and Whitlam was unique in Australian politics up to that point in that he took art and culture seriously, as seriously as any other aspect of national life. *Blue poles* was part of Whitlamism's proof that

it was a cosmopolitan movement in charge of a cosmopolitan government in what was now a cosmopolitan nation. Whitlam, like Jackson Pollock, was a quintessential modernist. Pollock had said that modern art was the expression of the contemporary aims of the age in which he lived, and for Whitlam politics, in an age when it was time for change, amounted to much the same thing. For Whitlam the freedom to demand that Australia be taken seriously and the freedom to buy a serious work of art were not unrelated. They were, in 1973, a clear expression of national self-worth.

Whitlam, like Pollock, crashed rather than crashed through. But *Blue poles* has survived, increasing in value many times over, as Whitlam always said it would. The controversy has lasted too, and any visit to the National Gallery will still find the general public arguing and reminiscing over the price and worth of the work. Indeed *Blue poles* has persisted even as all the other scandals which dogged Whitlam's three years in power have faded from view, even Jim Cairns' infamous relationship with Juni Morosi. Perhaps this isn't surprising. After all, Australians can handle sex, it's art we can't cope with.

The Essentials

Christos Tsiolkas

A NEW PLAY OPENED in Melbourne in May. *The Essentials* exposes the bleak side to Kennett's Victoria. Based on the experiences of ambulance drivers under privatization, the play was initially to have run at the Gasworks Theatre in Albert Park. Port Phillip Council, which runs the

theatre, got cold feet over the politics of the play and pulled the plug at the last minute, arguing fears of legal action. Legal advice argued this was not the case, but the Council refused to alter their decision. Fortunately, Trades Hall stepped in and offered their space for the group.

In the changing dynamics of Australian culture censorship no longer gets enacted under the guise of safeguarding morality. Reliant on government funding, theatres like the Gasworks end up self-censoring their productions. Perfectly rationalist.

The Gasworks' decision not to honour their commitment to the play sets a dangerous precedent. If theatre groups are going to run scared of work that challenges or criticises established institutions, then theatre will lose its opportunity to become relevant or exciting to a contemporary audience.

Floating Fund

Ian Syson writes:

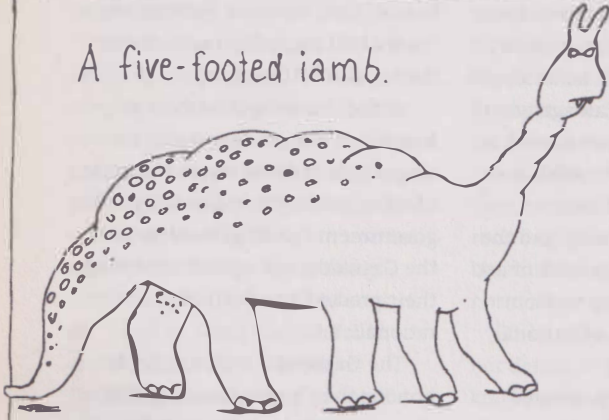
DESPITE WHATEVER OPTIMISM and enthusiasm with which the editorial staff produces *Overland*, the magazine is sunk without the support from its subscribers. We gratefully thank the following for their donations:

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Poetry versus Dinosaurs by Lofu

"Can't you see the poetry in dinosaurs?" he asked. Whereupon she replied: "Maybe. But can't you see the dinosaurs in poetry?"

A five-footed iamb.



A strophic dactyl searching for its rhyme me



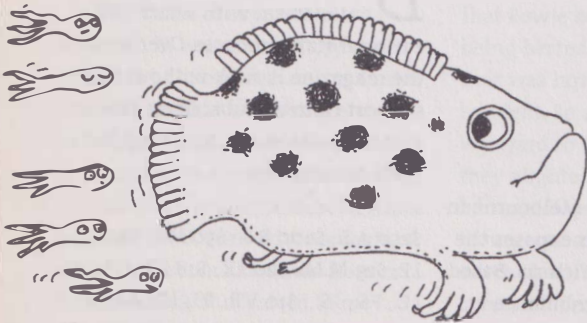
A molossus surrounded by free syllables.



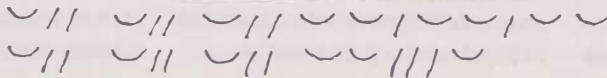
A tribrach sitting on its arsis.



A metric ictus followed by epitrites.



A polyrhythmic antibacchius about to split a trochee.



books

A Just and Worthy Tribute

Geoffrey Serle

Laurie Hergenhan: *No Casual Traveller; Hartley Grattan and Australia* (UQP, \$34.95).

MANY YEARS AGO I wrote somewhere that Hartley Grattan (1902–80) was by far Australia's most important foreign observer. Laurie Hergenhan confirms that assertion. Over fifty years Grattan was to Australia what de Tocqueville and Bryce were to the US, and relatively much more important. In the twentieth century at least, no Britisher considered Australia worthy of long-term study and involvement. An American potentially had much more useful to say, for Grattan was aware of the American need to finally abandon cultural subservience to Europe, just as Australia had to grow out of its servility to the 'Old Country'. Historians of Australian culture are usually unaware of the American parallel.

Grattan was of Canadian and part-French origin. His father, a baker, moved to New England where Hartley grew up and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from a minor university; Veblen, Dewy and Beard were among his intellectual influences. A radical dissenter, by his mid-twenties he had broken into the higher journalism, counting Mencken, Edmund Wilson and Lewis Mumford among his friends. He was re-evaluating early American writers and preparing a revisionist book on America's participation in the First World War.

Serendipitously, in 1927 he tagged along with his first wife, a talented singer and actress, on a tour of Australia. Filling in time, he began to collect books about the country and was staggered at how few

there were of any worth – but he soon picked up a copy of *Such is Life* of which he eventually published an American edition. In 1929 he produced a booklet, *Australian Literature*, which remains a landmark in Australian literary criticism. Yet Grattan was a 'general writer' on politics, economics and literature in that order. His primary interest in literature was its relationship to society and to a national ethos. He was beginning to be fascinated with the notion of Australia as a democratic experiment and, because of his anti-British prejudice, its inevitable drive towards independence. He saw a mission to make Australians interested in themselves.

So he became an 'Australia watcher', and began taking every opportunity to write about it in the American press, and developed by correspondence crucial guiding friendships with Nettie Palmer and Miles Franklin. He hankered to return and write a 'big book'. This came about when he was given a Carnegie Corporation grant which enabled a twenty-month visit from December 1936 to September 1938. He broadcast on the ABC, lectured to the Institute of Political Science and WEA, at universities and elsewhere whenever he could, travelling all over the country, talking to all and sundry. Despairing of such a hide-bound and stuffy country, he was often rude and tactless but his basic honesty and patient friendliness saw him through. He got to know well leading politicians, public servants and thinkers of the time – 'Doc' Evatt, Macmahon Ball, Lloyd Ross, Colin Clark, Brian Fitzpatrick, 'Nugget' Coombs, J.G. Crawford, Copland, and Casey and others on the right. At a critical moment in the free library movement's campaign, he provided a dashing and effective pamphlet.

By now a key man in top-level American–Australian relations as war in the Pacific threatened, Grattan was sent by a foundation in 1940 to investigate for

ten weeks the situation in Australia and New Zealand. His report was widely distributed but not published.

Introducing Australia appeared in January 1942; it was a fortunate moment given the events of the day and became a bestseller in the US. It was the first serious overall study since Hancock's *Australia* (1930) and the last for many years to come – what sort of a country was it which could be so backward in self-examination? A few hundred copies tardily reached our shores. Angus & Robertson delayed a small Australian edition until late 1944, and reproduced Grattan's updated edition of 1946 only in 1949. But he had succeeded in his dual intention of introducing Australia both to Americans and Australians.

Grattan's most significant Australian work was done by the end of the war. Bringing up a family, his finances were precarious; his most important income came from regular work for *Harper's Magazine*. He kept writing about Australia, notably in histories of the South-West Pacific, and visited again in 1960 for four happy months with old friends. In 1964 he sold his library and papers to the University of Texas, Austin, and, rather discontentedly, lived there as a professor. Three brief Australian trips followed in the 1970s.

He enjoyed his special relationship with us and our comparatively innocent, unpretentious ways. He was moved when people like Stephen Murray-Smith and I told him how much we owed to *Introducing Australia*. He reviewed our books in a kindly avuncular way, did not patronize us and was always good for a yarn. Mind you, he could be rather cranky. Perhaps the important biographical fact is that he felt his Australian achievement, of which he was immensely proud, did much to modify his feeling that overall he had not made the most of his talents. At his wish, his ashes were scattered over Sydney Harbour.

Hergenhan has written the story of Grattan's life and work and has done it well. He preserves the balance between the American and Australian work, while tilting a little towards Australia where Grattan's fame is more likely to endure. The book would possibly have benefited from pruning. Perhaps Hergenhan rather overlooks what I recall as Grattan's delight in the 1960s and seventies of Australia's growth out of colonialism and the remarkable development of the arts and scholarship. But overall the book is a just and worthy tribute.

This is an opportunity for *Overland* to thank Hergenhan for his contributions to the study of Aus-

tralian literature, notably in his editorship for thirty-four years of *Australian Literary Studies*; and to note the coincidence that Murray-Smith and Clem Christensen, the other two long-serving editors, also stuck to the task for thirty-four to thirty-five years.

Geoffrey Serle's biography, Robin Boyd; a *Life won The Age Non-fiction Book of the Year in 1996*.

Taking Off The Blinkers

Sean Scalmer

J. Walter: *Tunnel Vision; the failure of political imagination* (Allen & Unwin, \$19.95).

THE RULES FOR PARTICIPATION in public debate over the past two decades could be reduced to one simple directive – be an economist (or pretend that you are one). Banana republics have been foretold, belts have been tightened and retightened. Budgets have been cut, services privatized, jobs lost and discussion stifled. The bacon has been brought home, and then it has disappeared, and the cycle of cuts has begun again. All of this has been presented as an economic, technical necessity.

It is in this context that James Walter has written a book of opposition to the creed of economic rationalism – a book angry, personal and analytical by turns. *Tunnel Vision* is not simply a book of economic alternatives to the unfettered market. Although Walter argues in favour of a mixed economy, his focus is primarily on the sphere of politics. His principal argument is that the dominance of economic rationalism has produced a 'tunnel vision' which has destroyed the conditions of political debate. It has not been possible to discuss alternatives. His intention is therefore to rebuild the conditions of that debate, and to revive the political imagination.

This is an intention with which many will sympathize. Walter's analysis of the political effects of economic rationalism, his passion and his concern to connect with a public rather than academic readership all deserve praise. *Tunnel Vision* is a sharp, ambitious book that disputes the popular understanding of recent history, that places those events in an analytical framework, and that argues for a democratic

future of ameliorative liberalism. However, it was precisely when I felt myself most in sympathy with Walter's aims that I felt his assumptions most questionable and his arguments most ragged.

To begin with, what is this thing called 'politics' that *Tunnel Vision* seeks to revive? Politics is "an activity through which an aggregate of many members, with diverse ends, deals with the problem of self government". Politics is a matter of mediation, conciliation, compromise and discussion – the activity that strives for the balance: a politics without power. Only glancing attention is paid to institutions like the press and political parties. There are common interests and agreements, but little reference to divergent interests and to struggle. There are ideas and leaders, but no classes. Walter's vision of politics is not simply a matter of abstract theory, but one which has important implications for his understanding of the triumph of economic rationalism. Walter explains its triumph without exploring the decline of the left, the retreat of trade unions, the marginalization of socialism and the modernization of the Labor Party. The struggles at community level against the effects of economic rationalism led by activists and social movement organizations are not of interest. These are outside of the politics he seeks to understand and regenerate.

Equally, when Walter sets himself the task of reviving politics, his comparative neglect of power makes his explanations doubtful and his projections unlikely. When he argues that "we've lost sight of the conditions of debate", he doesn't mean a free, pluralist press, and nor does he mean democratic, responsive political parties that adhere to their platforms, or governments that do not privilege elites. For Walter, the conditions of political debate "will be a series of judgements about its meaning for me, an audience with shared interests (and which will listen), and processes through which changes can be made." The conditions of political debate apparently can be restored without institutional renovation, but merely with talk and ideas. His practical conclusion is that "we need to recapture ways of thinking about citizen, society and nation to restore the conditions for political debate."

This narrow privileging of ideas leads Walter to make a series of intellectual and political jumps. Firstly, his interest in rethinking citizenship leads him to support ways of invoking principles of community, from there to support for "the national idea" as a force for mobilizing community, and finally to republican-

ism as a "mobilising cause to bring things together". The aim of reawakening the political imagination has been reduced to support for a specific, narrow campaign. The possibility that the 'rethinking' that this debate involves may be constrained by power, and may highlight divergent rather than common interests, is not adequately faced.

The way the republican movement has clearly been controlled by elites is not fully digested. The possibility that after thought may come a struggle for self-government is not considered.

Rather than acknowledging the difficulties that the struggle for a revived politics may face, Walter instead seems to revert to wishful thinking. Early in the book, he constructs a model of "three cycles of public culture" in post-war Australia. The first cycle existed from the 1940s until 1975, and emerged out of the post-war consensus; the second cycle existed from 1975 until 1993, and was the cycle in which economic rationalism dominated. Apparently, we are now in a third cycle, when a new politics of ideas is emergent. The evidence of this new cycle's existence seems sketchy. After all, recent critiques of economic rationalism have not been taken up, as Walter himself admits. However, the putative existence of this 'third cycle' allows Walter to argue that John Howard is in an electoral quandary, and that an exit will only be possible through "a recovery of the philosophy of ameliorative liberalism".

I understand why Walter wants the republican movement to be successful, why interests and citizenship are important, and why he supports a mixed economy. I support his quest for a revived politics and his opposition to economic rationalism. I am thankful that his attack on tunnel vision has been published, and I hope that others will follow. However, I do not share his faith in the absolute centrality of ideas or his proposed path to a revived political imagination. Indeed, Walter's own ideas about the possibilities for change often seem to constitute a passionate, committed, tunnel vision of their own.

Sean Scalmer, a Sydney labour historian, is an Overland correspondent.

JAMES
WALTER

TUNNEL *The future of political imagination* VISION

Transference, Sex and Rage

Jennifer Maiden

Francesca Rendle-Short: *Imago* (Spinifex, \$16.95).

Judith Fox: *Bracelet Honeymyrtle* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

Glenda Adams: *The Tempest of Clemenza* (A&R, \$24.95).

Helen Barnes: *The Weather Girl* (Penguin, \$14.95).

Ben Winch: *My Boyfriend's Father* (Wakefield Press, \$16.95).

THERE IS AN AUTHORIAL LACK of self-confidence in plot structure which can take the outward form of strong moralizing and attitudinizing in the novel, particularly against characters with whom the author may have transference problems. To varying extents, I suspect all these very beautiful works of this frailty. My admiration for them is therefore mixed with unease.

My unease is also due to their deliberate misappropriation of traditional erotic modes to self-consciously 'unusual' circumstances. In *Imago*, the narrator's erotic object is her fleshy female next-door-neighbour; in *Bracelet Honeymyrtle*, the narrator's religious-bigot-mother; in *The Tempest of Clemenza*, the narrator's idealized dying daughter; in *The Weather Girl*, the young female central character's pop-singer-one-night-stand; and – yes, indeed – in Ben Winch's second novel, the female narrator's boyfriend's father. Much of the energy of each work, therefore, is concentrated on explaining carefully and credibly how these fixations came about, and perhaps too little in focusing on the internal logic and psychology of their outcomes. Characters outside the immediate radius of the detailed passion tend also – perhaps consequentially – to be confined to weaklings and wicked wickermen.

In all this indignant armload, the novel which alarmed me most was the almost infinitely elegant and equally almost infinitely derivative *The Tempest of Clemenza*. The plot device of the thirteen-year-old Clemenza's dying urge for literary diversion (not for nothing is her local bookshop called The Haunted Mansion) permits a plot structure full of more manuscripts within manuscripts and coincidences within coincidences than the early Doris Lessing, and the firelit deathbed (deathfloor, rather) section in which Clemenza expires as bloodlessly and discreetly as a

tactful moggy has a hybrid sense of Dickens, James and Poe emphasized by the rural American setting. The word 'Gothic' is used too.

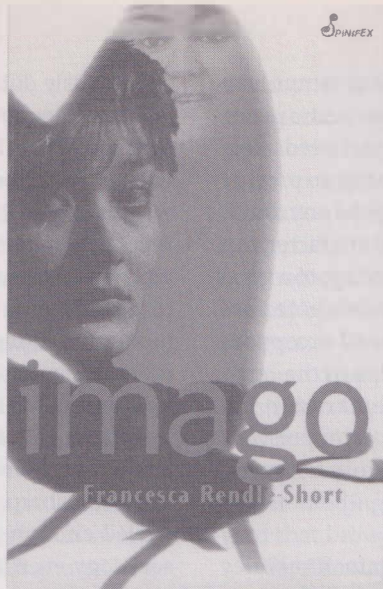
There is nothing of the denials, desperations, medical researches and gambles, pleading clutches and sheer worn-out irritations of such a sufferer or parent in reality. Most of the plot's accusation is focused against the narrator's husband, a vain, inconsistent Joycean academic, and against the psychopath who kidnaps and trusses her and the then toddling Clemenza (fortunately, a prodigy in untying knots) and is almost immediately killed by his own drink-driving. My first and still troubling impression was that a traditional male/female deathbed fantasy had been transposed into a parent/child setting with the author also aware that this produced a subtly vampiric as well as tragic effect. Particularly in contrast to the robust adolescent girl narrative which forms the bulk of the 'manuscript' plot. That the author of the latter turns out to be the original narrator's unsuspected half-sister (a stranger who comes vainly to their American door looking for her manuscript, which has been included accidentally in a box of books bought for the unhealthily erudite Clemenza), will illustrate why the reader's critical faculty needs to be distracted by a certain amount of authorial moral outrage. The other distraction is the writing style, which – as usual in Adams – is balanced, clear and brilliantly involving, throughout what is virtually a defiant steeplechase of literary devices like those manic coincidences and babushka-layered manuscripts. I'm deeply uncertain, however, whether the stylization and emotional exploitation are those of depicted grief (which does have valid elements of both) or of some more dangerous avoidances.

DANGEROUS AVOIDANCES in the characters were what Ben Winch's first novel *Liadhan* was about. So much so that I suspected the work itself of them when I reviewed it a while ago in another publication. I also described it (and this new novel's PR often quotes me) as "a crisp, taut, lovely thing". And indeed, so is this second novel, but this one has much more nerve, verve and sexual directness. When I reviewed his first novel, the other publication's editor perhaps wisely deleted my comment that *Liadhan* "masturbated with only one hand", a reference to its hero observing a woman do this and fleeing. My point was that women

tend to masturbate with both hands, and that the book was perhaps likewise half-committed (accepting the auto-erotic nature of all novels as axiomatic). But that particular editor felt that the book did not masturbate at all, maybe seeing the concept as pejorative. There is no doubt, however, that by using the female first person and therefore transcending most autobiographical inhibitions, Winch has now achieved a much fuller and sharper sexual style. There is one particular sparely lyrical scene in which the drug-affected heroine perceives an attractive male sub-character:

I wandered, staring at the flatness on all sides of me. The dots were there again, shimmering, reminding me that all was illusion. I looked at Russell – flat, shimmering, threatening to break apart, to be scattered across the blue, lamp-lit street. I stopped. A short way ahead, Russell stopped and turned. He waited. I walked toward him, touched my hands to his waist and kissed him, my tongue stiff and frantic in his shocked open mouth.

The plot centres on the narrator's developing realization that her amiable, experienced and initially prosperous prospective father-in-law is actually a wife-beating, child-corrupting, suicidal drunk who has made her boyfriend the emotionally crippled wreck he seems destined to remain. Interestingly, the main arrestable crime the almost-father-in-law commits seems to be spying on women masturbating. Guilt at this specific form of voyeurism seems to have a special function in Winch's work. In general, however, there is a great deal of plot build-up about the narrator's attraction to the hero's father, and the revelation of his possible sins seems not quite as structurally effective as it might be. As after the build-up to horror in Adam's novel, the revelation of evil may not be quite shocking enough to carry the climax by itself. Again, however, the moral vigour and stylistic skill distract from this remarkably.



RENDELE-SHORT'S *IMAGO* often has a lyricism which seems to transcend diction directly into sense-data: "They could hear the ocean thump against the beach all night, the waves weightless in the dark." Her descriptions of food, flesh, clothing, seascapes and landscapes have such a solid, sumptuous female precision that I feared throughout that the plot and characterization must have some difficulty in equalling them. Apart from some standard anger against the novel's two main male characters (one of whom is impotent and the other a rapist) and

suggestions of a Jamesian collusion in the narrator's rape by her beloved neighbour's husband, however, the perfunctory plot is buttressed less by indignation than by an elaborate and convincingly developed simile between the growth of an imago (final stage of metamorphosis; idealization of childhood loved one) and the growth of the narrator from the pupa of her once-plump neighbour – or her earlier, thinly mothered self. The transferences of female imagery to the landscape (a tremendously difficult device to use newly) are among the best I've read. The fluctuations and magnitudes of individual interpersonal electricity are also conveyed with great respect and art.

JUDITH FOX'S *BRACELET HONEYMYRTLE* has a buttress of emancipatory rage:

I couldn't wait for Mum to change. I bailed her up in the hallway ... For a moment I was that twenty-year-old girl, shovelling rage into sewn-up pockets on a glassed-in, green-tinged verandah. Yet as fast as I stuffed the stitches unravelled. I was that twenty-year-old girl and my sixty-one-year-old self, and it was no longer a question of backing down. My anger was uncontainable. "You have ruined my life. You have never wanted anything good for me ..."

The narrator is in her eighties, remembering her first real confrontation of her domineering mother twenty years earlier. By the time of the novel, the narrator

has become a more tolerant, wiser character with an endearing relish for sensuous detail, domestic pleasure and dry humour. Once again, the plot needs help and the fine style and righteous catharsis do provide it. For the duration of reading, we suspend any doubt that our pamphlet-proffering central character can mellow into Miss Marple through marriage to a good preacher and the taming of a strongly delineated but conventional old tyrant. There are several exceptionally well-rendered female relationships in the book, including the last one between the narrator, her careerist great-niece and the silky, sulky, compulsively bouncy baby daughter the narrator minds for her daily:

She comes and sits on the bed again. Kimberley reaches for her and Deborah pulls her daughter onto her lap. "Do I like Peter? Do I know who he is? We haven't had a conversation for so long, a real one, like this, not one of those 'will you pay the insurance or will I?' ones that I don't know that I know him." Kimberley, bored and restless, arches her spine and throws her body into the air. There is a sharp crack as her head hits Deborah's chin and then she's crying fit to bust, howling inconsolably. I see that Deborah's fighting back tears whilst she comforts Kimberley. Either it hurt like billyo or she's distressed by what she's been saying. Maybe both.

The novel's final death or near-death experience has a conceptual feeling of one of Patrick White's monotheistic death scenes about it and again the diction and involving central characterization have to rescue some predictability of plot.

DESPITE THE GLOSSILY POUTING blonde staring the reader down on the front cover, Helen Barnes' *The Weather Girl* is not about someone who kills to be on television but a pregnant adolescent religious maniac called Rose who also has much girlish normality, waif-like commonsense and an author who can involve the reader energetically in the fate of composite or stereotyped characters as if they had Shakespearean complexity and significance. Once again, any plot deficiencies are hidden by a moral stress on the pernicious and exploitative effects of the old on the young, but there is a fresh twist to this at the conclusion. A clearer Rose (spectacularly unsuccessful at murdering her silly singer seducer), her new baby and

a previously dubious drug-blown antique hippie are last seen heading north. The soulless businessman hero dies of nostalgia on a surfboard and his buxom wife is thus liberated to a state where her loss of weight and of Rose's previously-coveted baby mean very little to her. There is also a beautiful, awful girl who eats up and spits out lovers, finally brisking off to join Community Aid Abroad, and a legless and manipulative young man who is discarded by her after befriending Rose in the country. The author's opinions on this well-shuffled pack of paper people pop in and out endearingly like a hostess's head from the kitchen, and some of her observations are deliciously salty and sharp. The religious and cultural aetiology is well enough perceived for the book to transcend sociology, even if (as in the *Winch* novel) – the sixties and seventies are seen peculiarly to be obsessed with smoking dope rather than with their real horror – Vietnam. Probably the superficial effects of the dope are easier to observe than are the profound effects of McNamara's War.

STRONG COMPLEX PLOT in a novel is a form of social positioning. Lack or over-simplification of plot seems to me basically conservative, like that old Tory comment, 'I don't like politics'.

One feature of the displaced erotic fascinations in these books is that in none of them can there be a complete sexual consummation or mutual orgasm with the real object of desire. Helen Barnes' pop singer does call around contritely after the attempted murder and the birth of his hippie baby ("called Sunshine, Moonlight, Rainbow, any old thing") but his timing is out and Rose is gone. In the other books, physical sex is part of a subsidiary relationship (although the Judith Fox novel presents the narrator's brief late marriage as idyllic) and the main personae conclude each story in independent celibacy.

It might be that this is sound marketing – readers could be more numerous in that sexual category – but it seems a pity that these enormous talents for sensual, social, psychological and emotional description aren't being used to explore human life when it is based on and grows from the continuing truths and conflicts of consummation. And maybe that might jump-start and structure those plots.

Jennifer Maiden, a NSW writer and freelance tutor, is a regular Overland contributor.

Some Local Dantes

Judith Armstrong

Rodney Hall: *The Island in the Mind* (Macmillan, \$39.95).

Robert Drewe: *The Drowner* (Macmillan, \$29.95).

David Malouf: *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (Chatto & Windus, \$29.95).

Christopher Koch: *Highways to a War* (Minerva, \$16.95).

Peter Goldsworthy: *Keep It Simple, Stupid* (Flamingo, \$14.95).

Janette Turner Hospital: *Oyster* (Knopf, \$35).

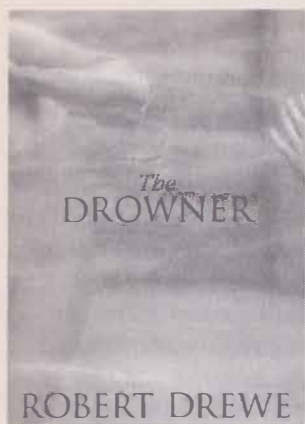
ORIGINS ARE ESSENTIALLY UNFATHOMABLE; the search cannot satisfy the thirst to unravel our sources – cosmic, terrestrial, national, or genetic. The first three of this selective clutch of recent Australian novels (*Island*, *Drowner* and *Conversations*) claw away at the shrouds that obscure the early history of our continent – myths of origin in the making, yet grounded in the factual realities turned up by extensive research. The second three (*War*, *Kiss and Oyster*) are more interested in where we have fetched up: they examine aspects of our immediate past (the Vietnam war), our suburban present (an Italian football club in Adelaide), and a dreadful apocalyptic future set in the dead heart of what was once conjectured as The Land of the Holy Spirit. The trajectory from the seventeenth century dreams and rumours of that Terra Incognita, through the hardships of the pioneering days of the 1800s and the national and local wars of the second half of this century, to the vision of destruction by fire as the year 2000 approaches, is downhill all the way. Or would be, if some of the stories told did not reach the peaks of high art.

Rodney Hall's *The Island in the Mind* is something of a prodigy – or part thereof, if its projected sequels come to fruition. Already a trilogy in itself, it presents a complex mythology: the European obsession with the Unknown Land, which works on both dreamy imaginations and greedy pockets. *Within* this narrative its power can only be expressed by another art-form – opera – though the actual performance becomes a political football kicked around by international rivals for the lucrative colonization of new worlds. The Unknown Land becomes, paradoxically, slightly more real in the cryptic second section of the trilogy, when the mind of a young Venetian girl is invaded by the Dreamtime of a captive Aborigine, himself seen as an

exotic prize to be wrangled over by jealous nations. The third section, a picaresque adventure with slender linkages to the first two stories, allows an English adventurer to sight the terra incognita in a symphonic resolution of the earlier themes. This recondite, rich, powerfully imagined exploration of perceptions of 'Australia' before it was explored orchestrates a huge variety of voices, yet acknowledges the limitations of language (Isabella and Yuramiru communicate through dreams). It is much to be admired, and eminently worthy of one of our famous literary prizes; it may be too rich to be read on the Met, but will surely become a source-book for those of us who want new understandings of the golden dreams and dreams of gold that brought us into being.

The Drowner narrows the focus, exploring how progeny of the motherland contributed to the fertilization of the hot dry land. The water that emigrant Will Dance helps bring in a gushing pipeline to the thirsty goldfields of Western Australia is not required by the Aborigines, but is essential to the settlers – just as the former are sustained by their own myths, while the whites must cope as best they can in a vast and unfamiliar terrain. Here they conquer the aridity, both spiritual and physical, through the metaphor and reality of the creation of a water supply. Like water, though, the metaphor itself runs away, into the moistness and dryness of sexual difference. His delight in the elusive Angelica keeps Will (who tends towards rigidity) running after her, as water ineluctably leaps and creeps; and in their ultimate re-uniting they are engulfed, as they met, in the element that has shown its potential for both destruction and creation. This highly crafted product of a symbolic descendant of the English drowner embodies art's profound reshaping of raw experience, while recording one example of civilization's slow and fumbling search for streams of living water. In this it is an optimistic tale; disillusion has not yet set in.

David Malouf focuses on a comparable period of our history, but considers immigrants who for various reasons left a country already oppressed by English overlords. Despite their very different circumstances the three Irishmen – one an honest trooper, one a romantic outlaw, and the last an ex-convict accused of murder – have all come to Australia in order to get away from something – an unrequited love, the obligations of nobility, grinding poverty. The new, harsh land deals cruelly with the most deserving, kindly with the duti-



ful, and enigmatically with the highborn who places himself outside the law. The conversations take place only between the trooper and the alleged murderer, but hinge vitally around their individual connetions with the almost legendary Fergus, who back in Ireland had carelessly captured the affections of the woman

that Trooper Adair loves, and as a bushranger inspired blind loyalty in the gang of desperadoes which included convict Carney.

Again the mystery is probed: How do we come to be here? What have we left behind? What do we do with the legacy of the past? Malouf makes us see into the minds and feel with the hearts of each of his characters, and take to ourselves the imponderables that are played out in one of the all-too-frequent scenarios of our early history – the *injustice* dealt by the rough and ready laws of the new land, based insensitively on the procedures of the old. *Conversations* is a sad culmination of the dreams in Rodney Hall's *Mind*, and the final triumphs of *The Drowner*.

FORWARD ANOTHER 120-odd years to the New Land's involvement in a war we were led into by politicians seeking to appease our American allies. In the opening chapters there are tenuous links with Malouf's book, for *Highways* is set in the ex-convict colony of Tasmania, now home of the tow-haired Mike Langford, whose boyish charm ensures for some time a young man's charmed life. Having elected to go to Vietnam, Mike is always different, even special. He identifies not with the US army, but with the ill-equipped South Vietnamese; he shoots only film, not people, and hangs out with the buddies' circle of correspondents and photographers all living out boyhood fantasies, either through the adrenalin rush of war or in the eddying dreams of opium.

Throw in a belligerently patriotic, scornfully beautiful Asian woman who gives Mike the cutesiest presents in the midst of their torrid affair, and the highly romantic, 'boys' own' adventure story wins a prestigious literary prize. The award was earned by the quality writing, the mature presentation of immature characters, and the global significance of the

war the Americans couldn't win spilling over into a hideous civil conflagration. The ending, though, is predictable: the question of whether Mike Langford, missing for some time, is dead or alive can never, must never, be answered; he is no ordinary mortal, much less a battle statistic. He is the Peter Pan hero of a new myth, designed partly to catch the Vietnam war in one particular lens, but even more to proclaim that heroes are alive and well in the imagination of at least one contemporary Australian writer.

UNFORTUNATELY, THOUGH, the sun must set even on their day. Peter Goldsworthy's soccer star, Mack, has virtually come to the end of his run, but will not recognize that he is losing his touch with the black and white ball. The special status accorded him through the patronage of the Rossi family, founders and financiers of the Club, wanes along with his ability to kick goals; Mack blames his injured knee for the loss of form, his wife for the deterioration in their marriage, and the boredom of the staff-room for his urge to leave off school-teaching and take up a milk-round instead.

The small change of suburban life is deftly observed – his mother's nursing home, the quiz nights Lisa makes him go to, the porn-and-prawn nights at the Club, the flavour of Italian baci. Mack fends off middle age with an endless stream of lame jokes, but finally has to face the fact that he is a has-been; his wife's miscarriage terminates her only pregnancy, which turns out to have been produced by another man. Mack is impotent in every sense of the word, but at the end of the day, and of the book, he is "a little older and a little wiser". Is this where all great dreams end, in an infertile marriage bed in an Italian Display Home that has to be given up because of its owner's poor performance?

Peter Goldsworthy is a medico as well as a writer, and knows how to dissect a no-longer healthy body; perhaps he knows too well, for he has been successful in several literary genres, and here the result is a little facile. One wishes the knife might have slipped a few times.

But even if it had, the damage would be as nothing compared to the death and destruction of Janette Turner Hospital's *Oyster*. It is an appalling leap from the suburban dream gone sour to this nightmare of apocalyptic proportions. We have indeed arrived at a myth of endings, an Armageddon, as one of the last

chapters is called. But while the Australian serpent bites its own tail, and the island in the mind is epitomized by searing heat, devastating drought, a brooding mistral called Old Fuckatoo, intense isolation, xenophobic communities, and the lust for opal, there are strange reverberations with other communities in the United States, where evilly charismatic cult leaders mesmerize their followers, and lead them ultimately to their death. Strangers arrive in Outer Maroo to search for lost children, but discover that it was always already too late long before. The opal reef was blown up a year earlier, but the fact has been kept secret by the people of Outer Maroo, by characters with unconvincing names such as Mercy Given, and Miss Rover (“Miss Rover, come over”, chants Mercy, regularly and desperately). Some huge and menacing portent lurks, yet meaning dissolves as you think about it, and turns back into a horror-story sustained mainly by brilliant writing.

Australia, the final reality of the island in the mind, would seem in fact to have ended up as an outer circle of hell, at least to judge by these six novels. Yet in the case of Hall, Drewe, Malouf and Hospital, it can make a claim to some local Dantes.

Judith Armstrong's latest book, The Christesen Romance (MUP), was published late last year.

From Nervous to Nihilistic Nineties

Toni Johnson Woods

Nick Earls: *Zigzag Street* (Anchor, \$16.95).

Neil Boyack and Simon Colvey: *See Through* (UQP, \$16.95).

THE BUGGERS WHO STOLE my car are no doubt enjoying their spoils – some Christmas pressies, a collection of videos (the library will NEVER forgive me) and the two books under review – if the delinquents can read! Amazing how intolerant one becomes of crime when one is the victim. So, after Christmas replacing the copies was number one priority. *See Through* was easy to find; *Zigzag Street* involved quite a search (car-less); according to bookshop sales assistants, people thought Nick Earls' book made an ideal Christmas present. I can only concur. While I

might have been more in the world-sucks frame of mind of *See Through*, I found *Zigzag Street* engaging. Who can resist a loser? *Zigzag Street* engages from the outset – few people can resist a loser in love. Richard Derrington is a corporate lawyer without a girlfriend. He just can't seem to get over being 'trashed' so he spends his life pretending to renovate his Red Hill almost-Federation house, playing tennis (against someone who “almost never loses singles, by off-setting a visibly low level of ability with a very low error rate”) and playing Sammy the Snake at work. Luckily no-one at work notices his lack of productivity – because the deal he is working on falls through. His weekends are so uneventful that on Monday morning he reflects: “I can't believe I begin my week by disappointing someone with my weekend”. The book is peopled with comfortable twenty-somethings whose smugness usually irritates me immensely, you know, people with mobile phones and annoyingly wealthy parents, people to grind your teeth at. Rick's social embarrassments are squirmingly acute and often hilarious. Sometimes the book borders on self-indulgence but Earls' elegant text shaves by – the protagonist's bathetic life disarms the reader. You wanna hate Rick but just can't – his cock-ups are too glorious.

Rick desperately seeks a new partner; he is no soloist. Accompanying him on his love quest is a band of self-reflexive friends who proffer advice and theories on life, love and matters of longitude. Even if we don't believe their witty conversations, they are nonetheless amusing for that. The other characters are equally beguiling. For example, there is Rick's neighbour Kevin Butt, slide guitarist extraordinaire; Rick's boss, Barry the never-was, who regales everyone with his tales of what might have been, his “peripheries of glory” and Greg the flea-infested cat who has Rick's doctor wondering about suicide ideation.

The book is filled with delightful incidents and insights into contemporary Brisbane life. It is easy to see why it would be popular with local book readers as it recreates Brisbane. Much as Rosie Scott celebrated the sensual tropics and McGahan praised the underbelly, Earls gives us trendy Brissy (yes Virginia, there is such an animal) and an amusing side it is. Earls' story is not mere fluff though. Allusions to Elizabethan drama and times (Shakespeare, Kyd and aphrodisiacs) underscore Richard Derrington's (or is it Derington, a decidedly courtly appellation) olde worldliness. While striving to come to grips with life

in the nervous nineties, he unmasques himself as a romantic, a hopeless romantic.

IF NICK EARLS' HERO IS QUIXOTIC then Neil Boyack's and Simon Colvey's anti-heroes are chthonic Byrons. Between the black covers and menacing eyes lie a collection of short, sharp, shocks from not-so-marvellous Melbourne – another addition to the twenty-something genre of drugs, sex and unemployment. This book lacks the polish of Berridge and the literariness of Ettler but is still compelling. Like craning to see a car accident, I couldn't help but reread with horrified fascination the utter awfulness of stories like 'Raffle' or the bleak despair of 'Redgrass'. It may not be your type of literature but you can't deny the power of its voice.

Colvey's men spend hours trying to satisfy their 'taste' while yearning after hollow-eyed, slim, stoned objects of desire, or almost desire. Frustrated lovers from the Dante/Beatrice school; they love from afar but their downward spirals keep them just out of love's reach. These wasted women are never attained, and when/if they finally manage to get together, the sterile refrain "just sleep... nothing else" discloses that this love never even finds a physical solace. On the other hand, Boyack's couples manage sex and find a kind of love: "a fuck is love, a category of love". This love is no more satisfying; indeed it is all the more torturous for they do not find solace in "it never was" but rather drag each other through an unrelenting life. Here is love between exceedingly grimy sheets.

Both writers invoke a rhetoric of despair in their rendering of life. Life sucks everywhere, even the rural suburbs of 'Redgrass' are hellish. This is powerful writing, the cut and thrust of their confrontational prose is unnerving; the harrowing events no less so. One shrinks from the tales of men waiting their turn for paid sex, raped suburban men, men at bucks' parties masturbating while watching a stripper fellate others. And fat women with *Praise*-like peeling legs who have to find pleasure in casual encounters, women whose zealot fathers rape them, women who try to escape the inner-city torment only to find suburban boredom. Not a book for the fainthearted. Or the depressed. But then who said literature should be comfortable? I wonder which book the joyriders preferred?

Toni Johnson Woods is a Queensland reviewer.

Aspiring to 'Irishness'

Rebecca Pelan

Lizz Murphy (ed.): *Wee Girls: Women Writing From An Irish Perspective* (Spinifex Press, \$19.95).

I WAS IN CANADA THE FIRST TIME I heard that there are only two types of people in this world: those who are Irish and those who want to be. The person who told me this did so as a proud member of the first category, despite being born and having spent his entire life in Vancouver. As an Irish-born immigrant in Australia, I've often been confronted here with examples of the same thing – a kind of cultural schizophrenia which most often manifests itself in second, third or fourth generation Australians claiming – usually passionately – that they are Irish and proud of it. I remember standing at the back of a Brisbane 'Irish' pub some years ago on St Patrick's Day watching people drinking green beer and singing 'Whisky in the Jar' with all the passion (and talent) of an English football crowd and – with a cynicism afforded by my Belfast background – musing on whether the whole 'Irish' phenomenon is really nothing more than the fact that if the Irish diaspora (now estimated at seventy million) contributed nothing else to their adopted countries, they brought the refined skill of how to have a damn good piss-up – ably assisted, of course, by that other significant export, Guinness.

Whatever its origins, this phenomenon of aspiring to 'Irishness' is implicitly at the centre of Lizz Murphy's book, *Wee Girls: Women Writing from an Irish Perspective*, which began as a link between Ireland and Australia and grew to include England, Canada, America and New Zealand. The collection contains samples of the work of twenty-two writers – thirteen Irish born (many of whom now live elsewhere), four from New South Wales, one from Queensland, two from New Zealand and two from the United States. A few of the writers would be well-known to readers of Irish fiction and poetry – Maeve Binchy, Medbh McGuckian and Eavan Boland. Others, such as Rita Ann Higgins (Galway poet), Ailbhe Smyth (academic/writer/activist) and Linda Anderson (novelist) are less known outside Ireland and Britain, while many of the Australian and New Zealand writers are not generally associated with the field of Irish

or Irish/Australian writing at all. As a result, some of the writers' connections with Ireland are pervasive and others are quite tenuous.

Initially, my impression of the book was that of a fairly superficial cross-cultural exercise in a search for commonality. A closer reading changed my mind to some extent due to the impressive quality of the material. But I still have problems with a number of aspects, including Murphy's apparent attempt to capture some essentialist notion of what it means to be Irish, encapsulated in the sub-title 'an *Irish Perspective*', implying that such a homogenized view of the world is possible. This is a problem given the amount of contemporary Irish women's writing which has been, and continues to be, directly concerned with challenging entrenched images of women in Irish society: images crucial to the creation of a cohesive post-independence Irish national identity and which have proved very damaging to women, not to mention difficult to shift. The irony of such a diverse and fragmented collection such as *Wee Girls* is that in attempting to show the array of contemporary Irish women's identities, it actually overshoots the mark and runs the risk of becoming representative of nothing more than the impossibility of representativeness.

The other problem I had with the collection is that it tries to do too much with so little. Murphy's claim that the collection became not just a small taste of contemporary Irish women's writing, "but an attempt to define just what 'Irishness' is; what it means to be Irish" – is not only a tall order for any body of writing, but one that is certainly never achieved in *Wee Girls*.

She is by no means alone, of course. Her attempt is in keeping with a number of books on Irish women writers to be widely published and distributed outside Ireland in recent years. In particular, DeSalvo, et al., *Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories by Irish Women Writers* (Virago, 1990) and Casey's *Stories by Contemporary Irish Women* (Syracuse UP, 1990).

DeSalvo's book, especially, promised much more than any collection could ever hope to deliver by claiming to include stories and portraits of:

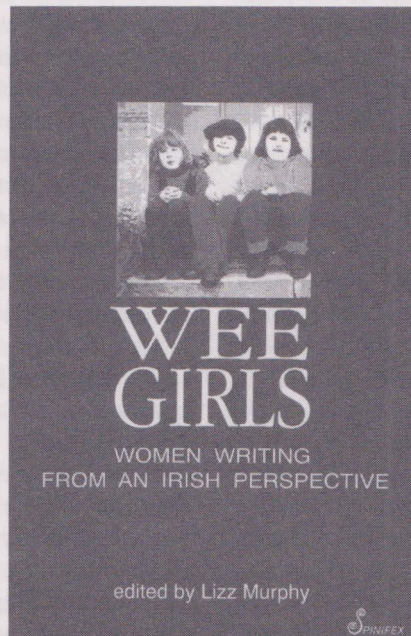
urban women and rural women, women from the Republic of Ireland and women from the North, Catholic women and Protestant women, portraits of women who loved men and women who loved women, visions of elder women thinking back through their lives and portraits of young girls, adolescent women, mothers, widows, and women living alone.

While *Wee Girls* is much less ambitious, it does include writers who are Irish born and non-Irish born; from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; Catholic and Protestant; urban and rural; as well as examples of autobiography, poetry, fiction and non-fiction – all brought together as some kind of sampling of women's writing from a perspective which is never defined and which, arguably, could never be defined. A collection such as this, which ostensibly celebrates diversity, can actually work to obscure important differences by papering over the cracks. By homogenizing the writers both as 'women' and as 'Irish' – thus implying that the writers and their work share something essential to an understanding of

both categories – such groupings risk the depoliticization of what is an immensely political body of writing by women in Ireland today.

Having said all that, however, the paucity of publishing on the subject means that a collection such as *Wee Girls* is a welcome addition to the field of contemporary Irish women's writing even if it does raise more questions than it answers. There are some very fine examples of women's writing included in the collection and some interesting glimpses into the lives of women in Ireland and elsewhere.

Rebecca Pelan lectures at the University of Queensland.



Sharing the Presents

Joanne Scott

Greg Dening: *Performances* (MUP, \$29.95).

Tom Griffiths: *Hunters and Collectors; the Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (CUP, \$34.95).

David Day: *Claiming a Continent; A History of Australia* (A&R, \$19.95).

Marjorie Theobald: *Knowing Women; Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (CUP, \$34.95).

GREG DENING DECLARES THAT "We history-makers must know ourselves". Four recent publications by Australian historians present an opportunity to 'know' some of the preoccupations of academic 'history-makers' in the 1990s. The books encompass a variety of theoretical and thematic concerns; they range from a collection of loosely-related essays to a general narrative history. Indeed, their inclusion in a single review risks the imposition of an inappropriate unity. Yet there are points of convergence as well as divergence. Individually and in combination, the four studies encourage reflection on that multi-faceted phenomenon, history-making.

Performances is an anthology of Dening's writings from the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the chapters have been published previously and all of them may be read as independent pieces. Their disparate subjects include Captain Cook's death in Hawaii, a battle during the War of 1812, films about the Mutiny on the Bounty, and the wartime experiences of students from Xavier College, a school which Dening himself attended. This eclectic selection attains some coherence from their author's theoretical interests: "history as a form of consciousness is their constant concern". Recurring themes include the relationships between the past and present and between the individual 'performer' and the history which he or she constructs.

The chapters are gathered into three sections – 'Making a Present out of the Past', 'Presenting the Past' and 'Returning to the Past its own History' – and are framed by an autobiographical prelude and a similarly personal 'postlude', in which Dening reflects upon aspects of his intellectual and spiritual journeys. For most readers, I suspect, the decision to endorse or dismiss the sentiments of the introduction and con-

clusion will be determined by their previous encounters with Dening's work.

The author's "ambition for readers of these performances... is that at some moment the reader will say to her- or himself, 'That is just what I was about to say!'" For me, the most valuable statement in *Performances* is Dening's reminder of the tension between lived experience and the hindsight of historians: "We disempower the people of the past when we rob them of their present moments. We dehumanize them, make them our puppets. We owe them more, it seems to me. We have to write history in the human condition and share their presents".

In *Hunters and Collectors*, Tom Griffiths evokes and interprets some of those 'present moments' of Australia past. This study draws some of its inspiration from Greg Dening's work and begins with Dening's statement that "Human beings are history-makers". The book addresses that concept by analyzing "the historical imagination of antiquarians, collectors, archaeologists, naturalists, journalists, urban progressives, historians and heritage managers" across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This fascinating study presents a variety of topics including the activities and obsessions of collectors of artefacts, the strategies by which European Australians 'possessed' the land, the roles of the early historical societies and contemporary conflicts over the preservation of history versus natural history. These interconnected issues are also linked by the author's continuing exploration of "two historical tensions", the first between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, the second between amateurs and professionals. Perhaps Griffiths' greatest achievement with this study is its "thematic resonance". Echoing the concerns of the collectors and others who are the subjects of this work, he draws on a "promiscuous" variety of sources to present the reader with an interwoven collection of themes and individuals.

Through both his empirical research into the antiquarians and his adoption of some of their methods, Griffiths rescues these individuals from the condescension of history – or more accurately from the condescension of professional historians who have tended to identify their lineage only with the versions of history which are practised in universities. In retrieving this other past and thereby providing an historical context and analytic framework for the current enthusiasms of public history and conservation,

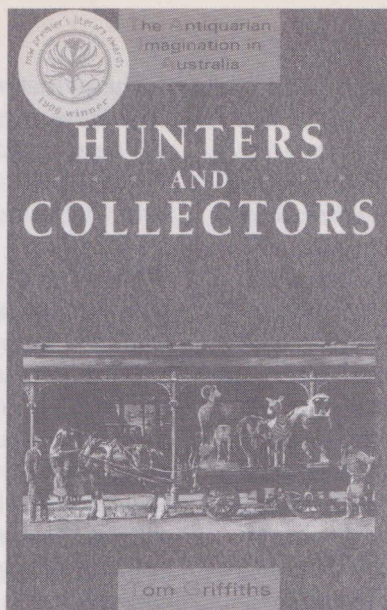
Griffiths enables the reader to reflect critically on contemporary history-making, its motivations and its implications.

David Day's *Claiming a Continent* shares some of Griffiths' interests through its exploration of how Australians have related to the land and its examination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. This narrative history of Australia takes as its central theme the "process of asserting claims of legal, effective and moral proprietorship" over the country by European Australians. It is the first general history of Australia to adopt race as its central feature.

Day expounds his central thesis with admirable clarity, an account which is easy to read, despite its almost five hundred pages. He acknowledges historians' adoption of "different routes by which to explore Australian history" but argues that "more than anything... the history of modern Australia has been the ongoing story of the struggle by European Australians to claim the continent of Australia as their own". It is this emphasis which distinguishes Day's study from other general histories and establishes its 'newness'.

Yet the author's adherence to this single theme as the driving force of his study simultaneously invests his work with a curiously old-fashioned air. In contrast to the other books under review and despite some engagement with historiographical debates, *Claiming a Continent* seems relatively untouched by recent theoretical developments. As well, the reader is left to ponder what Day has had to leave out of his history, which elements of Australian history cannot be accommodated within the author's interpretive framework. Most obviously, and in direct contrast to another general history, *Creating a Nation* (1994), *Claiming a Continent* accords little significance to gender relations.

Day's analysis of the intertwined issues of race and land within the traditional format of a general narrative history highlights the extent to which Australian race relations have become integral to the mainstream of Australian historiography. Yet the use of such a format, particularly in combination with a single theme, contributes to the book's limitations.



In *Knowing Women*, Marjorie Theobald is alert to the problems of producing a general history, reminding us that "the generalist historian runs the risk of pleasing no-one". Theobald's solution in her account of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia is to offer in-depth explorations of a series of specific themes. They include the ladies' schools tradition, women's entry to universities, white girls' primary and secondary schooling, female teachers and the state, and the experiences of outcast girls.

The result is a provocative and lively study. It combines meticulous research into "the rich ethnographic detail of women's lives" with a critical engagement with theory and historiography. Theobald's nuanced analysis recognizes the diversity of women's lives and is sensitive to their racial, class and religious dimensions. Of particular value is her willingness to confront issues which have posed challenges for feminist historians, notably "the intriguing question: why did the nineteenth-century state insist that girls go to school?" As well, Theobald offers new readings of processes which have become accepted catchphrases in the history of women and education. In her chapter on female teachers in Victoria, she reconceptualizes "the feminization of teaching" as the "bureaucratization of women's teaching labour".

Theobald's epilogue acknowledges the frustrations and fascinations of historical research and situates the author within a landscape of other women's lives. *Knowing Women* echoes Denning's concerns about the relations between our presents and our pasts and how history-makers perform their roles. Theobald embraces both the limits and the possibilities of the historian's endeavours with her final comment: "I make no spurious claims of sisterhood between the women whose lives I have appropriated, nor do I assume that they would wish to know themselves as I have depicted them. The knowing woman is truculent, enigmatic and elusive".

Joanne Scott teaches Australian Studies at Sunshine Coast University College.

Set-Up by Vasilakakos

Michael Hanrahan

John Vasilakakos: *The Set-Up* (Black Pepper, translated from Greek by Mary Mylonas, \$15.95).

Leonie Stevens: *Big Man's Barbie; ten days that shook my booty* (Random House, \$17.95).

READING THE FIRST FEW PAGES of *The Set-Up* gave me that sinking feeling usually saved for a Monday morning. With his story of the migrant experience in Australia, Vasilakakos has taken an interesting idea and beaten it to a slow and painful death.

Lakis lives in Sydney in 1978. He has become caught up in the Social Security Greek Prosecutions Scandal, which involves people fraudulently obtaining sickness and invalid pensions. It is suspected that Lakis, who is Greek-born, is exaggerating his various ailments in order to receive one of these pensions. Sent to investigate is "the Other", a man who tries to win the confidence of Lakis in an effort to expose him. He makes his first appearance at Lakis' doctor's surgery, and later appears in Lakis' hospital room. "The Other" wants to find answers to such questions as what is the secret meaning of Lakis' exceptionally long surname? What is the significance of his underlinings in an article about Cheryl Ladd's breasts? Who is condemned by the misprint in that article? Vasilakakos has hidden any points of interest beneath his character's idle ponderances. Lakis spends many paragraphs wondering about his feet and toenails, and giving such insights as "this woman's either pulling my leg or telling the truth".

To add to his flat characters, Vasilakakos has a tiresome style of writing. The story seems to have been run over with a steam roller. It is nice and smooth throughout. Nothing to get excited about, no tension, no drama. Rather strange for a book that purports to be a "hand-grenade" thriller. There is really nothing going on at all, the lifeless feeling accentuated by the unchanging sentence lengths and long paragraphs. Originally written in Greek, there is no way this level of monotony could be the result of translation. Vasilakakos also seems to have an obsession with rambling, trivial dialogue. He doesn't always identify which character is speaking, making the conversations even more difficult to follow.

The potential exists for an intriguing tale, but Vasilakakos began in a rut and refused to move out of it for 173 pages. *The Set-Up* is supposedly "like Peter Corris re-imagined by Dostoyevsky or Kafka". Unfortunately it was then written by Vasilakakos.

TO GET SOME IDEAS on how to write a story that moves, Vasilakakos should have taken a look at *Big Man's Barbie*, by Leonie Stevens. *Big Man's Barbie* (subtitled *ten days that shook my booty*) is as fast as *The Set-Up* is slow. It is an outburst of strange characters and bizarre situations in a slightly surreal world. Siren Boyd is called upon by her uncle, underworld boss Big George, to organize a barbecue that will end all barbecues. Siren's orders: do what you like, just make it big. Initially she is not too keen to get involved, but as soon as she hears the three magic words – "There's money involved" – she decides she can put aside her personal distaste for her uncle and help him out. Siren's first recruit for the barbie is a female Elvis impersonator named Ngaire. Later additions include a couple of Maori wrestlers, lesbian kick-boxers and a man to slaughter the day's main course for the guests' entertainment.

Siren's life races wonderfully out of control as she is pulled in different directions by all who can get a hold of her. It doesn't take long for everything to go horribly wrong. The Maori wrestlers want to use her for target practice, she sleeps with her ex-boyfriend and punches Ngaire in the face. And that is just the beginning. Siren soon wishes she could go back to her old life of drugs, sex and music (although, despite current events, she still manages to squeeze in plenty of all three).

Stevens writes with an uncomplicated style that doesn't waste time with anything not absolutely essential. Her characters are remarkably vivid and the story exceptionally tight. Siren has had more happen to her in these ten days than I have in the past ten years. Written in the first person from Siren's perspective, we are drawn in to every aspect of her gloomy life, from her first sexual experience to her mixed up family. Stevens' dry sense of humour is woven through the book. The story doesn't take itself at all seriously, which is why it can wander off down slightly ridiculous paths and yet still seem like everything is normal.

Big Man's Barbie is pure entertainment, and it makes no pretence of being anything else. Stevens'

style is different without being contrived, easy to read without being lightweight. For a high energy fix, you couldn't do much better than *Big Man's Barbie*.

Michael Hanrahan is a Melbourne reviewer.

Making Places

Leigh Dale

Monica Matthee: *Neither the Colour nor the Gender* (Matthee Publishing, \$29.95).

Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall (eds): *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (Routledge, \$32.95).

NEITHER THE COLOUR NOR THE GENDER is Monica Matthee's account of her transition from downtrodden Afrikaner daughter to highly successful independent businesswoman, now living in Perth. Her self-published autobiography has in common with *The Hand That Signed the Paper* a curious combination of sentimental family narrative and utter brutality, all conveyed in expressionless prose by a repellingly self-important yet pitiable narrator. As in *The Hand That Signed the Paper*, the broader cultural and political setting – a national history shot through with cruelty – is oddly diminished by being presented as scenery on the stage of family frolics. For example, after noting the slaughter of the 'Battle' of Blood River, so called because when Zulus were slaughtered by Boers, the river ran red with their blood, the narrator eulogizes the wonderful community warmth that characterizes the Afrikaner festival which commemorates this event: "There would be *Volkspeler* (folk dancing), recitals and singing and lots of eating, some of the specialities being pancakes, *Boerewors* (sausages) and *Boerebeskuit* (rusks). Oh, what wonderful fun until the day of the 16th when it all became so solemn". The book documents family violence and racial and gender prejudice, but its documentation is never reflexive, so deep are the prejudices and so blind is the faith in myths of community and tradition.

Turning from Matthee to the collection of essays indicates just how wide the gap between 'common sense' discourses about family and community and critical discourses that seek to analyze them can be. *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in*

South Africa and Australia advertises itself as a "landmark", "the first to investigate nineteenth and twentieth-century South[ern] Africa and Australia as distinctive imperial and post-colonial spaces in geographical, historical and literary terms". The book does do this, but only when taken as a whole, because only three of the fifteen essays are comparative. The Introduction is forced to survey papers on a wide range of topics, but being fearless in its historical and cultural generalizations, is able to provide ample quotable quotes for those entirely unfamiliar with the history or culture of the two nations. The first essay, Paul Carter's 'Grounding Post-Colonialism', unfortunately does not really concern itself with either place under discussion, and fails to resist the seduction of its own assortment of metaphors.

The three comparative essays deal with literature, oral poetry, and historical geography. Liz Gunner compares Australian Aboriginal and Black South African oral poetry, but the comparison runs aground on the fact that the "aesthetic of naming" that is identified as being a common feature in the two forms, is actually, in the South African case, a naming that is a gesture of conquest. In searching for similarity rather than difference between two different kinds of indigenous societies, the argument is forced to all but ignore the racialized history of relationships to the land in both South Africa and Australia. Terence Ranger provides a reading of Uluru and the Matopos mountains in Zimbabwe, although a vocabulary studded with Americanisms – ranchers, herders and cowboys – sits uneasily on the Australian social landscape. Ranger interrogates past work (including his own) that represents indigenous cultures as static captives of tradition, but in arguing against a rigid dichotomy of tradition and modernity, clearly prefers the work of controversial South Australian anthropologist Philip Clarke to that of any indigenous commentator on history and culture, in either Australia or Zimbabwe.

Gillian Whitlock's essay provides the only genuinely comparative study in the volume, an essay that is further enhanced by its lucid survey and critique of the intellectual tools of comparison and post-colonialism that might or might not be brought from other colonized/colonizing cultures to South Africa. The essay is one of few to do more than gesture to cultural and historical specificity, taking account of the particularities of class and gender that inflect co-

lonial cultures and their figuration of racial difference. Other papers are by those clearly working within national borders, at times making comparisons that are too general to be useful, or crossing disciplinary boundaries without doing sufficient homework: Sue Rowley's 'Imagination, Madness and Nation in Australian Bush Mythology' should have been a valuable engagement with the work of Christopher Lee on Henry Lawson, but seems oblivious to Lee's work.

Some of the remaining essays, particularly those early in the book, tend to follow the now slightly-tedious anti-colonial pattern: gesture to atrocity, after which all is resistance and contradiction, found even and perhaps especially among those who seem to have led lives remarkable for their displays of certitude. Exceptions are David Bunn's interesting essay on the politics of agricultural and recreational space – we are promised more in a forthcoming book, *Land Acts: Modernity, Representation and the Making of South African Space* – and Tony Birch's analysis of the hysteria and paranoia generated in the non-Aboriginal community in Victoria by a proposal to restore Koori names to sites in the Grampians. Birch makes the important point that what is at issue in Australian culture and politics in the mid-nineties is not so much history, as historiography, noting that, "It is when names are restored to recognize earlier histories and cultures that the threat to [white] ownership occurs". There are also three interesting essays on South African literature, by Dorothy Driver, who analyzes the representation of African women in the decidedly 'seminal' *Drum* magazine, Sarah Nuttall, who offers readings of recent novels by Elleke Boehmer and Damon Galgut, and Rob Nixon, who in looking at the work of Bessie Head includes a wonderful description of her *Serowe* as "a eulogy to Serowe's past that doubles as an orphan's act of affiliation".

Text, Theory, Space is a beautifully packaged book, and the striking cover compensates for the standard of presentation inside: grammatical errors, deleted words, 'global' changes that produce multiple typographical errors, and sloppy bibliography. These gripes aside, the book will be of interest to specialists in South African and/or Australian literature, but has less to offer a more general audience.

Leigh Dale teaches Australian literature and Australian studies at the University of Queensland.

One Dead Poet and Five Alive

Michael Dugan

Jordie Albiston: *Botany Bay Document* (Black Pepper, \$14.95).

Chao: *Fate of a Grasshopper* and *Paper Boat* (Edith Cowan University Press, \$16.05 each).

Jennifer Harrison: *Cabramatta/Cudmirrah* (Black Pepper, \$14.95).

Fidelia S. T. Hill: *Poems and Recollections of the Past* (Barr Smith Press, \$25).

Geoffrey Lehmann: *Collected Poems* (Heinemann, \$24.95).

Geoff Page: *The Secret* (Heinemann, \$15.95).

THE POEMS IN JORDIE ALBISTON'S second collection examine the lives of women during the first fifty years of British settlement in New South Wales. The poems draw on a range of documentary and pictorial sources, including letters by convicts and other women, the *Sydney Gazette*, journals, paintings and drawings. The result is a refreshingly objective series of poems that take a variety of forms that reflect their original sources.

Often Albiston quotes directly from some of her source material, using italics to show where this has been done. It is an effective technique. For example, the first stanzas of 'Elizabeth Walsh Gets a Grant of Land':

1. *Petition to Governor Macquarie*

I want to tell you I have made up
my mind *to settle a farm in this*
Country I have gained some land
at Richmond Hill I purchased with

personal bills but require more
for my Cattle and Stock and
despite my gender and lack of
wedlock petition just the same

2. *Reply*

I cannot comply with your
request it being contrary
to Regulations to give
Grants of land to Ladies

TO PUBLISH TWO COLLECTIONS of poetry in Australia in the same year is unusual, however Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has issued two collections by Chinese poet and scholar Chao who spent time there last year as a writer in residence.

The poems in *Paper Boat* are in the main short, imagistic and evocative. The title poem is typical of these acutely observed poems:

a white dove
turning afloat
on a blurred bluish water

night falls
a heavy fish net has dropped
onto the ground –
hills darken besieging

a small paper boat
turning afloat
like a blanched fish
on blue blurred water

The poems in *Fate of a Grasshopper* tend to be longer, more complex and also draw more on Chao's Australian experience. Both collections reflect strongly the poet's Chinese cultural and poetic background. However they also demonstrate the confident and skilful use of English language that comes from what must have been many years of study and reading of poems in English.

JENNIFER HARRISON IS A PSYCHIATRIST whose first collection of poems, *Michelangelo's prisoners*, (1995), won the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Anne Elder Award for a first collection and was commended in the National Book Council's Banjo Awards.

'Cabramatta' is a longish poem in which Jennifer Harrison recalls memories of her childhood and teenage years in Sydney while noting the changes that have occurred as "i drive into liverpool past the pizza hut/that was my father's motor-bike shop". Roads, cars, motorbikes, suburbanization, rivalries between kids from different parts of town are commented on and considered retrospectively in this poetic memoir.

The section of the book titled 'Cudmirrah' consists of a series of poems in which Harrison explores her childhood memories of summers spent on the south

coast of New South Wales. The poems are more formal in arrangement than the freewheeling 'Cabramatta' but are no less evocative and thoughtful.

There may be an historical or bibliophilic reason for issuing a beautifully presented facsimile of the first book by a woman to be published in Australia but, in spite of Philip Butters's argument to the contrary in his introduction, there seems little reason on poetic grounds. Stanzas such as:

In other days a tower 'tis said
Far hence upreared its stately head
And proud Saint Oswald ruined now
Peer'd o'er yon lofty mountain's brow . . .

leave little doubt as to where Fidelia Hill's poetic reputation should be relegated.

GOFFREY LEHMANN HAS PUBLISHED all those poems he wishes to preserve in his *Collected Poems*. Many of them have been revised, some extensively, since their original publication. The result is a formidable body of work that largely reflects Lehmann's family concerns and his interest in classical history and other historical events and people.

The Secret is Geoff Page's eleventh collection of poems. Page is eclectic in both subject and form but the reader usually finds his subjects are of interest and his forms are always subject to the controlling discipline of his skilled craftsmanship.

The poems in this collection include several that ponder the inter-relationship between family of different generations and a number that draw on Page's upbringing on a cattle station. However, Page wanders far from home with word play in tanka form, epigrams and even a witty sideswipe at Alexander Downer. This is a rich and enjoyable collection of finely formed poems.

Michael Dugan is a Melbourne writer.



Of the Kinder Variety

Kel Semmens

Marion Diamond: *Ben Boyd of Boydtown* (MUP, \$39.95).

Joan Clarke: *All On One Good Dancing Leg* (Hale & Iremonger, \$19.95).

Ann Moyal: *Breakfast with Beaverbrook* (Hale & Iremonger, \$34.95).

Penelope Nelson: *Penny Dreadful* (Random House, \$16.95).

BIOGRAPHY: FACT OR FABRICATION? Necessary enlightenment, or needlessly hurtful disclosure? After the recent sensation-seeking biographies of Housman, Auden and Larkin, these two biographies and three autobiographies were approached warily, but proved to be of the kinder variety.

Marion Diamond's *Ben Boyd of Boydtown* is a cracking good yarn. Who thought all Australian crooks were despicable con-men wearing business suits in respectable office addresses, or woe-begone oppressed convicts in prison? Here is the vividly told, carefully documented account of a swaggering, swashbuckling crook in Australia, to be matched with any overseas. The romantic relics of Boydtown on the shore of Twofold Bay will be even more interesting on a next visit.

From grand arrival by yacht in 1842, through visionary though failing business ventures, through a short but notable parliamentary career, to a mysterious death in Guadalcanal, here was a tycoon to put those of our own day in the shade. This is a story well worth the telling, and very well told.

Joan Clarke's *All On One Good Dancing Leg* is a gem. Simple and unaffected, this is much more than the story of a young woman growing up with a physi-

cal handicap. In plain unsensational prose, Joan Clarke tells what it was like to grow up in an 'ordinary' Sydney suburb before the war, and the feeling of the war years themselves for a civilian. More evocatively than anyone I can think of, she depicts those days of seemingly unsophisticated social life, and the importance of the 'wireless'.

She tells of the difficulties of young womanhood with a paralysed leg, but does so with no mawkish self-pity, and she sets an example of the kindness referred to earlier. Where her memories of early romantic encounters might embarrass or disparage someone who can't respond, she carefully preserves their anonymity. I admire her too, for her emphasis, not on the bad leg, but the good one.

Breakfast with Beaverbrook by Ann Moyal lives up to its title, but was disappointing to this reader at least. From an historian who had been involved for so long with the collection of biographical material about notable Australians, and with recording the achievements of Australian scientists, there was more about the lifestyle of the very rich and the fairly famous than I needed, and less about the history of ideas than I'd have liked. Two things badly needed were an index and a good proofreader.

Penelope Nelson's *Penny Dreadful* is cheerful small beer. Reminiscences about rich and privileged youth in Sydney in the fifties and sixties should appeal to readers of society notes and gossip columns, and to the people involved. Sheltered school-days followed by the common liberating experience of university life, they are of the 'how mad and bad and sad it was – but then how it was sweet' genre. They probably will interest social historians one day, but perhaps not enough time has yet passed.

Kel Semmens is a Victorian physician and writer.

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"Sewing. You could do that. Sewing's all right you could sew in a factory like your mum all those rows of industrial sewing machines and overlockers high high ceilings electrical cords going everywhere and upwards and all that noise you'd have to shout even if you were standing close you wouldn't like the noise that much but you could sew you suppose, you could do piece-work at home like she does sometimes." Moira Burke

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