overland

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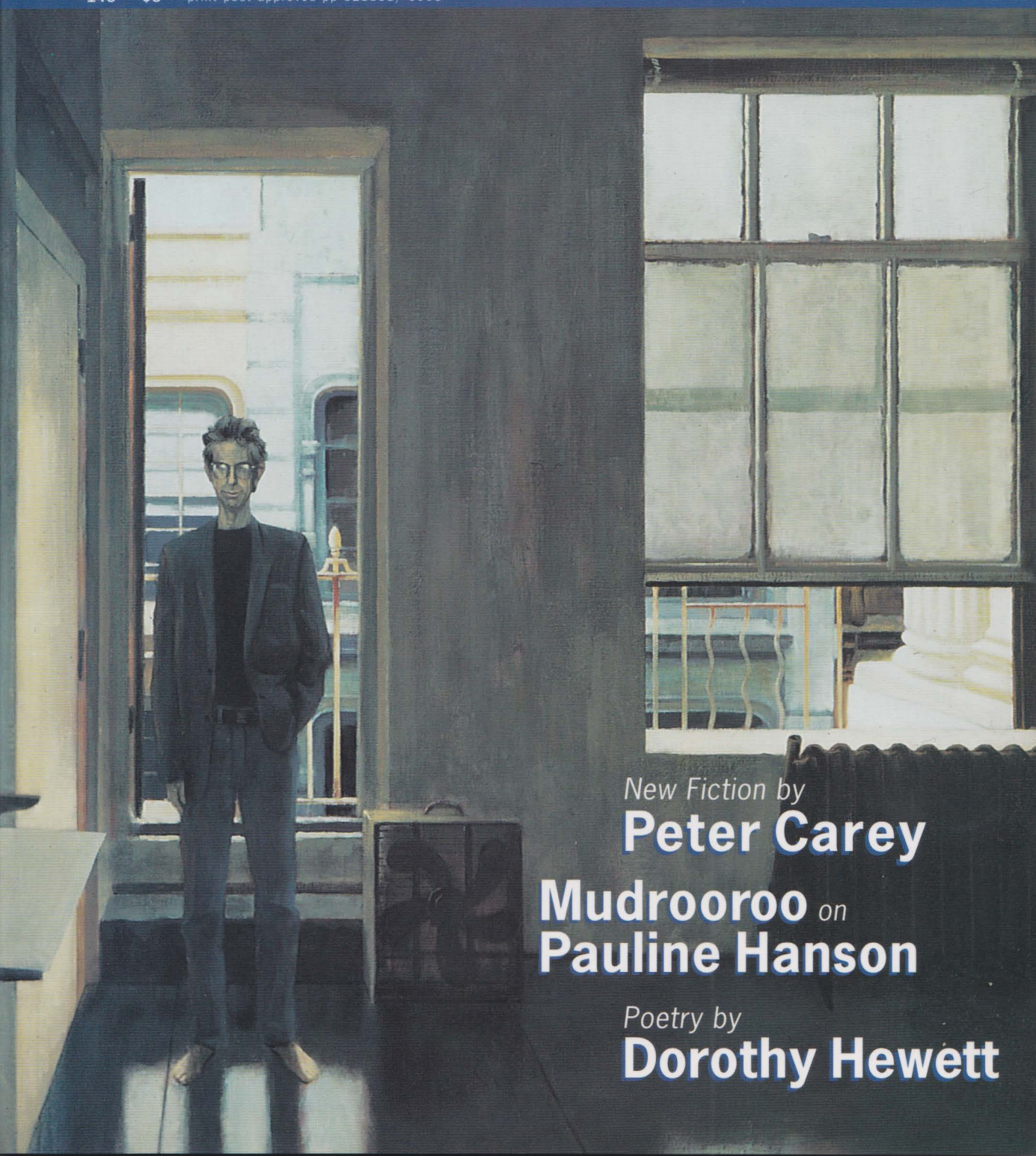

New Fiction by
Peter Carey

Mudrooroo *on*
Pauline Hanson

Poetry by
Dorothy Hewett

1997 FOOT NOTING 1997

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The judging panel shall consist of three judges appointed by the Somerset Celebration of Literature. The judges' decision will be final with no correspondence being entered into. All poems will be judged anonymously. The winner will be announced at the opening of the Somerset Celebration of Literature, 11th March 1998. The winner will be offered the opportunity to be part of the 1998 Somerset Celebration of Literature to be held from the 12th – 15th March 1998.

For further details and entry form contact
The Somerset Celebration of Literature Ph (07) 5530 3777 Fax (07) 5525 2676

contents

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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editorial

communication & sympathy

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO, almost to the month, *overland* published Peter Carey's 'Crabs', a dystopian story set in an Australian drive-in cinema. Like much of his early work it constructed a near future of individual alienation and social rupture – a literary vision perhaps even more relevant today. We celebrate this anniversary with a focus on Carey and his work. Rick Amor's cover portrait, which was shortlisted for the Archibald Prize this year, provides a graphic introduction to the literary work inside.

We include a chapter excised by Carey from his latest work, *Jack Maggs*. The chapter offers a taste of this exuberant and excessive novel and hints at alternative plots canvassed by the author during its creation. Brian Kiernan reviews *Jack Maggs*; Ben Goldsmith looks at *Dead-End Drive-In*, a 1986 feature film based on 'Crabs'; while Phil McCluskey reviews Graham Huggan's recent critical work on Carey.

FOR MANY AUSTRALIANS, 1972 also meant the beginning of a cycle of positive change and small victories for the left. Unfortunately many of these gains were bureaucratized in such a way that they are and have been easy to unravel. Free education is just one example; freedom from censorship might soon be another (see the note on *Rabelais* in the miscellany section). Against this, 1972 also marked the beginning of the apparent decline of the labour movement as an effective agent of change. We have seen, in these twenty-five years, a growing disjunction between left-wing intellectuals and the working class. The emergence of Pauline Hanson is an indirect result of this breakdown in communication and sympathy. Mudrooroo makes the appealing and optimistic argument that most working class Australians don't like Hanson even if they agree with her (class sympathies preclude liking anyone with the Liberal taint). Mudrooroo suggests that while they won't vote for her or her party now, One Nation (or something like it) could emerge as a real force if it obtained a working class edge. His is an appeal for the left to get its house in order and get back in touch with its roots in the class politics the right is presently exploiting.

Ian Syson

Mudrooroo

The Perils of Pauline

Consensus and Dissent in Australian Politics

INALA IS A BRISBANE SUBURB without a train station and with an intermittent bus service. It is a mix of public and private housing and a staunch Labor Party stronghold with approximately 75 per cent of the vote. It has been taken for granted by the Labor Party since its founding as a dumping ground for lower working class and welfare recipients. Over the years it developed from a mix of Murris and whites, who to some extent intermarried and intermingled to form a community, into a multicultural suburb with an influx of Vietnamese people which shifted its population demographics.

The presence of an Asian community with a strong culture in all respects: language, food and even film, has created a race division between them and the older inhabitants (Murri and white) based on a seen difference. Unlike others who were mainly European or a mix of Aboriginal and European lower working class, these newcomers are a visible and economic presence with shops and even a Buddhist temple. There has been a flight of small businesses from the suburb and the vacant premises have been taken over by Vietnamese.

Mixing does occur at the school level, both amongst children and adults who perform volunteer services such as manning the tuckshop. But owing to cultural and economic differences this contact has led to a degree of racial animosity, so much so that it might be expected that Inala would be a fertile recruiting ground for Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party, whose views on Asian immigration and non-white cultures have become widespread through the media. These views are also propagated through the One Nation Internet site which when I visited it had recorded over twenty thousand hits.

The Internet site is not important to Inalans. According to *Australian Personal Computer* (May, 1997), quoting from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, out of 6.6 million homes using voice, computer and digital technologies, 66.4 per cent used a telephone only. Inalan homes would come under this figure with few families having access to computers and the Internet. Most Inalans rely on the media, newspapers and television for their news, and any views about Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party would be taken from them. Although she and her party's opinions are well known from these sources, there has not been a shift, as yet, to the new party even though many of the older population feel betrayed by the Labor Party, which is no longer seen to serve their interests. Still this dissatisfaction remains inchoate. Class identification is such that there is an attitude of 'Better Dead than Liberal', though the disenchantment with the Labor Party has led in some cases to a withdrawal from the voting system with an informal vote being cast, often defaced with disparaging remarks.

Into this suburb with racial tensions (expressed by such jokes as: *How do you know a Vietnamese has broken into your home? Your homework's been done and your cat's gone.* Or, *What do you call an Aborigine in a suit? A defendant.*) a Murri family from the old Aboriginal mission of Cherbourg was placed by the Housing Commission in a street populated by older residents of the suburb, the majority of whom own their own houses. This was the proverbial family from hell. If there ever was an example of a dysfunctional family which expressed all the racial stereotyping as used against Aboriginal people, this was it. At all hours of the day and night music playing loudly; the screeching of taxis and general and consistent drunken behaviour which manifested itself in profane language and endless fights. There was an intervention by welfare authorities and some Aborigines from a prison aid group who sought to modify the behaviour. The Aborigines from the group were called in by local residents who had lived beside or

with Murri people for many years of their lives. These had found that there was no specific Aboriginal organization that had the authority and necessary skills to help and eventually it was left to mainstream authorities to try to alleviate the antisocial behaviour. After a few weeks four police cars and the dog squad evicted them, not before a family member took refuge in the ceiling through which he fell with a resounding crash at the feet of the police.

Usually, when such episodes are reported they are seen as racist issues with the racism coming from the majority community. In this 'family from hell' episode there certainly was plenty of racism involved but from the family in question rather than from the residents, who from previous experience thought that when the pension money ran out things would settle down. But the money never seemed to run out: the taxis kept on coming and the crime rate increased, to support a lifestyle which the majority of people in the suburb could ill afford. A woman had her handbag snatched in broad daylight and an old woman next door to the family was constantly threatened. She was forced to barricade herself in her house where she came under siege with abuse and bricks being hurled. Supposedly, at first the police had said that as the family was Aboriginal there was nothing they could do and this supposition joined the general belief that Aborigines were indeed getting special treatment.

There is a coldness in her manner and delivery of words which though in the nasalized speech patterns of Queenslanders does not project that wry Queensland sense of humour which often passes over those from other states

After they were evicted and the house was repaired, a Vietnamese family moved in. They introduced themselves and said they had moved into the street because it was quiet. They also described the state of the house and how there were syringes, bottles and rubbish everywhere, though it had been cleaned. Now the street has resumed its peaceful character and the old woman, who under the stress of the situation sold her house, though well under market value, had moved out. According to the *Courier Mail* (7 June 1997), the average price of a dwelling in Inala was $65,550 but she received $45,000. Inala has a reputation of being an unsafe suburb with a high crime rate and it has the second lowest property valuation in the Brisbane area. It is said that bank loans are hard to get to buy property in Inala owing to its reputation and that this allows the Vietnamese, who are said to have their own financial sources, to buy up the suburb as businesses and houses come onto the market.

Inala with its racial tensions and disenchantment with its old political party is a fertile area for media stereotyping of minorities. One such stereotyping of Vietnamese is that they are drug dealers. Stories abound of Vietnamese counting out thick wads of money and buying everything with cash. Vietnamese children come to school with twenty-dollar notes, and it has been decided that this apparent abundance comes from nowhere else but the drug trade. Added to this stereotype is that of being clever or cunning, though cleverness and the ability to make money legally do not seem to go together. It is a source of resentment that they will eventually come to dominate Australia by their cleverness (and isn't it a fact that most of Queensland is owned by Japanese anyway?) and so we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. These statements by old Inalans are similar to those issued by Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party.

THE MEDIA IMAGE of Australian Aborigines is essentially that of the victim. The highest rates of incarceration, the worst health problems, etc. etc. – all put down to historic conditions such as being separated from families and culture at an early age and thus doomed to a lumpen proletarianism of the spirit which must be removed by special treatment. Rarely is there any deconstruction of the elements both historic and genetic which go to make up the Aboriginal *other* and there is a reductionism which postulates that all Aborigines suffered such historic conditions and all Aborigines need alleviation from them.

In Inala, where conditions for whites and Aborigines are economically similar, there is not this simplistic split between white and Murri, or oppressor and oppressed. In fact, when the Stolen Children report came out, any number of white families could point to similar circumstances which affected their own

families. The community acknowledges that there are both white and Aboriginal no-hopers and the family from hell could have been white. Those Aborigines who have shifted from the victim syndrome and hold down jobs are seen as examples: 'if so and so can make it, then others can too'. To a great extent circumstances are reduced to the individual worth of 'the battler'. Getting ahead is a matter of individual perseverance, which in places like Inala does not extend far beyond obtaining low-paid employment. Beyond this, the individual passes out of his or her class and this is seen as a loss to one's community. This individualism enters Pauline Hanson territory by claiming that Aborigines (for all the benefits they receive, more than your average Inalan) do not make the most of these advantages. There is a belief that all Australians should be treated as equals. This even extends to deaths in custody with claims made by those who have been inside that those who can't hack it end up committing suicide. In fact, this assertion goes so far as to give examples of those who can handle gaol and it is nothing much for those hard men. Again the emphasis is on the individual and individual values, though underlying it is a felt solidarity with one's class and suburb.

There is a working class ethic of individualism and solidarity with one's class and political party as long as these are seen to being doing the right thing. But when it comes to the Vietnamese this breaks down. The attitudes resemble the media portrayal of a monolithic community, with values different from ours. 'Ours' in this case including Aborigines. In fact, this prejudice might be put down as a class bias, with Asians being seen as middle-class, collecting property and opening shops.

One of the things which is dismissed is the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, despite media attention and having within its membership at least one old Inalan. (It must be pointed out that media attention is usually from the ABC and SBS public television channels and these, except for fishing and gardening programs, are not watched by the average Inalan.) This Council has been established for a number of years and during that time has not grown in relevance for many Queenslanders, especially in places like Inala where whites and Aborigines have been forced to live side by side for any number of years and where some accommodation has been achieved. Reconciliation has no existence except on the media and the recent Reconciliation Convention with Aborigines and whites shaking hands meant nothing, not even as a symbol. Derisory remarks were made such as it was the first time that many of those whites at the convention had touched an Aborigine. The release of the Stolen Children Report accompanied by a slather of white apologies was ill received in Inala where people declared that perhaps the British Government owed them an apology for sending their ancestors to Australia without their consent. The prevailing attitude is best summed up by Lawrie Kavanagh, a columnist in the *Courier Mail* who made a joke of the whole process. It is difficult to pick out a succinct quotation from his column, but perhaps the conclusion might do:

> But, back to my original request. Is there a superior being out there who can hand down a tablet of stone on which is written the ultimate apology with instructions on who is to make it and who is to accept?
>
> Without such guidance all of us, black and white, will continue to stumble around like a mob of headless chooks. (31 May, 1997)

PAULINE HANSON HAS through the media become the public face of dissent in Australia. This new girl on the block emerging from the Liberal party (as did Don Chipp with his famous slogan of 'keeping the bastards honest') lacks class identity with Inalans. The question might be asked if she had emerged from the Labor Party would she be accepted. This is difficult to answer, as left dissenters have always had a problem with media coverage and are quickly dispatched to oblivion. The left in Australia as a viable alternative has been left behind and there is little likelihood that there could be a left Pauline Hanson. Any Labor challenge would have to be in the Graham Campbell mode. Pauline Hanson has penetrated Inala even to the extent of there being talk of forming a party to battle her influence; but even if such a party eventuated, it would have similar concerns to hers. With such similarity of attitudes, why is she so unpopular in Inala?

One answer might be that she is not seen as belonging to the working class, that she is a member of the middle classes, a shop owner and OK for credit, but not for a vote. The image she cultivates is different from that of the average female Inalan. There is a

certain uptightness and lack of self-parody in her public appearances. She always appears to be dressed in her Sunday best, carefully made up as if for church and is as serious as a churchgoer. She emits few jokes, if any, and it has been a long time since Inalans dressed in their Sunday best, or went to church for that matter. Pauline Hanson's image is of the lower middle class and not of the working class. If she dressed casually in jeans and shirt, or even in a dress from K-Mart, this might make her more acceptable. There is a coldness in her manner and delivery of words which though in the nasalized speech patterns of Queenslanders does not project that wry Queensland sense of humour which often passes over those from other states.

But then my assumptions might be questioned in turn. Perhaps her image is not so off-putting and she gives a serious dissenting voice to a politics with grass-roots support, saying (as she declares) what the people want to hear and that this will garner her votes in Inala and elsewhere.

The media are monopolistic to an extreme and this leads to a consensus in which what is deemed good for them, for capitalism, is good for the country

This is certainly the image of her gained from the media, where she is the darling girl whose doings are reported in great detail. The *Courier Mail* (31 May 1997) even gave a projection showing that her One Nation Party would gather 9.9 per cent of the votes at the 1998 federal election and might hold the balance of power in the senate. This would be at the expense of the Coalition and not the Labor Party which, in a poll conducted among Oxley voters by the *Sunday Mail* (15 June 1997), emerged as a possible winner if it fielded a strong candidate.

INALANS COME FROM A LABOR TRADITION which emphasizes positive policies and although they hold to a great extent Hanson's negative views do not believe that Asians take jobs which should be rightly theirs. As for land rights, the Wik debate and so on, the Inalans are city people and do not see land rights affecting them as much as Asians buying up the suburb. Asians are seen as a threat and Aborigines as not.

Still, it is difficult to separate Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party and its two negative policies from the attitudes of Inalans. Perhaps when and if One Nation develops a program of policies covering the whole political spectrum and fields strong candidates in constituencies like Inala, there might occur a considerable leakage of votes from the Labor Party. The One Nation Party may firm into a party in its own right and have a future beyond Pauline Hanson. This might be one of her perils: if with the right candidates and positive programs it does succeed in areas such as Inala, the very success might challenge her limited leadership, especially if there is a shift from essentially negative policies to those championing the underdog, such as job creation and preservation.

The public face of the One Nation Party is that of Pauline Hanson constructed as the Woman from the Fish and Chip Shop in Ipswich. A slightly loony face of dissent rather than one of seeking consensus in the Australian mode of doing politics. Dissent has always withered in Australia. The Democratic Labor Party (after it served its purpose of keeping a leftist Labor Party out of office for a number of terms) eventually dissolved – though it did have a voting block in the Roman Catholic Church and some trade unions. The Greens face a similar fate. They are constructed as a one-policy party of the loony left seeking conservation of natural resources too often at the expense of maintaining jobs. The only group which succeeded in forming a party with a continuing life came from the Liberal Party. The Democrats have since the departure of their founder managed to stabilize as a minority party with approximately 8 per cent of the national vote, which translates into three senate seats. The One Nation Party is said to have equalled, or surpassed this, though as the party has not yet been tried at the polls, it is somewhat premature to project such figures. Recently it was headlined in *The Weekend Australian* (31 May–1 June 1997) that Pauline Hanson has changed her attitudes towards Asians and Aborigines, thus giving rise to the possibility that she is shifting to the middle ground and might contest the next election as a central-right party along with the majority parties with only the Greens and the Democrats to the left of them. What is symptomatic of this position is that there is no real ideological contest among political parties, especially from the left. Thus Inalans will simply have no place to turn and the opposition will remain inchoate with

a continued defacing of votes with the message: 'A plague on all your houses'.

THE MEDIA ARE MONOPOLISTIC to an extreme and this leads to a consensus in which what is deemed good for them, for capitalism, is good for the country. This in practice means a stable government apparatus with the passing of power from major party to major party with little or no change in general direction. Any ideology is placed behind pragmatism. Ad hoc policies tinker at the social and economic problems of Australia; with populist legislation such as gun control being passed without demur.

The Liberal Party under Hewson fought an election on a consistent and thoroughly worked out political program which would have led to far-reaching changes in Australia. One of these was the replacing of the various sales taxes with a Goods and Services Tax, which many other countries have. This projected change in taxation was used to defeat the Hewson Liberal Party and Australia was left to flounder for three years under the lame duck Keating Labor Government which was eventually replaced by the equally lame duck Howard Liberal Government with its populist approach which appears to suit no-one. In this climate, Pauline Hanson was elected with what was seen to be an appeal to the covert and overt racism in her electorate of Oxley.

The media have stressed the racist nature of Pauline Hanson's utterances. She is portrayed as the naive provincial from Queensland who needs to be educated into mainstream Australian politics, which are formulated south of the border, with which Queenslanders have always had a problem and which led to a past premier attempting to become the Prime Minister. He was seen as both a joke and a threat from 'Australia's deep north'. Pauline Hanson is the media's new Joh Bjelke-Petersen. The derisory tag of 'peanut farmer' has now become the equally derisory 'fish and chip shop woman' and she is insulted with such epithets as the 'Moron from Oxley'. As Bjelke-Petersen was someone whom it was permissible to hate and lampoon so has Hanson achieved this dubious status, the object of demonstrators who in their moral righteousness have shifted from street dissent to an alliance with mainstream Australian politics. Pauline Hanson has now become the image of the dissent simmering under the face of consensus, but a dissent that is too far right for the media and for those who demonstrate against her. Mainstream Australia as constructed by the media and the voices of official dissent as constructed by demonstrators have reached a consensus in her case. It may be a matter of contention how much she has become influenced by rightist forces who are using her, but this is one of the perils of Pauline – as is her using Aborigines and Asians to shift dissent away from all that is not right with Australia. All that is not right with Australia resides in suburbs such as Inala whose people feel that the majority political parties do not speak for them, that there has been a failure of representative democracy. Many still think that Pauline Hanson does not speak for them, that Asian immigration and Aborigines are not as important as the media and Pauline Hanson have made them out to be. They would subscribe to her slogan that all Australians should be treated equally, but on the lines of 'from each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her need'.

ENDNOTES

Information used in this paper has come from the newspapers especially from *The Weekend Australian*, Saturday 31 May – 1 June 1997 and *Courier Mail*, Saturday 31 May and 7 June 1997 and *The Sunday Mail*, 15 June 1997. For a discussion of the power of the media in Western Australia and the agitation against juvenile offenders, see Mickler, S. (1992) 'Gambling on the First Race: a comment on racism and talkback radio – 6PR, the TAB and the WA Government' Perth, commissioned by the Louis St. John Johnson Memorial Trust Fund. For a succinct analysis of political consensus (hegemony) see Crowley, T. (1987) 'Language and hegemony: principles, morals and pronunciation' *Textual Practice*, 1(3). For number of Australian homes using computer and digital technologies, see *Australian Personal Computer*, 17–18 May 1997. For information from Pauline Hanson and One Nation Party see internet site http://www.gwb.com.au and for views on and about Pauline Hanson on the internet see Pauline Hanson on Yahoo Search Engine.

Mudrooroo is a prolific writer of poetry and prose. His latest book is The Literature of Indigenous Australia *(Hyland House, 1997).*

Another Home Holiday

Coming home the steam train
its cracked leather seats sticky with sweat
chugs all day through the harvested paddocks
the black clumps of sheoaks huddled for shade

laughing through the little bush towns in the dark
with a big blonde college boy I will never see again
wanting to kiss and maul me and make me ashamed

and then the arrival at first light the bins
trickling wheat the siding beginning to shimmer
a sign at the railway crossing
LOOK OUT FOR THE ENGINE
the iron gate on the boundary
always stiff in my fingers
the groove of the lock
fits into the palm like a memory
till it clicks open
with a little puff of wind to stir up the dust

across the creek bed
a crow with a ringed eye
stares from the dead York gum
on the horizon the small hill
rises up like a signature out of the crop
in the place where we used to chase lizards

tonight when the gas mantles are lit
the dogs will run round the house barking hysterically
the big bellied women
will serve boiled meat and steamy potatoes
and far away on the other side of the world
the bombs will begin to fall on big cities.

Dorothy Hewett

Lyn Riddett

The Slow Bus to Casuarina

I WALKED TO THE BUS STOP avoiding squashed and rotting mangoes dropped by fruit bats. It is that time of year, the mango season, the 'build up', when people justify irritability, even rudeness, by reference to heavy hot and humid days. The sun stews me through the glass panels in the back of the bus shelter. Chewing gum melts on the footpath. The wet will surely come.

Across the street there is a cleared and vacant block of land – the builder went bust. Some vines, and a tree or two, have escaped the scraper. In the middle of the block is a tall tree, ten metres high, with a wide canopy of brilliant orange flowers. It is a flame tree. During the dry it was bare and looked as if it might die. A Norwegian backpacker I met at the bus stop moved in under the tree for a few days during the dry. He camped on the side away from the street. I could not quite see what advantage a leafless flame tree could possibly have, but he seemed to enjoy leaning back against the trunk. In the night he would have the clear sky to look at. The tree was perhaps for him a reference point, near a takeaway food shop, not far from the showers and toilets at the Myilly Point campus of the Northern Territory University, and suburban life on three sides, the bus stop at the fourth.

Sitting waiting for the No. 4 to go up town I looked at the tree. A woman, a regular bus traveller like myself, came up. Had we missed the bus? No, the one to Casuarina going the other way had just left. Ah well, ours would be along in a minute. Out of the blue the woman said: "University must be finished for the year." I looked at her, how could she know that? She said: "The students told me that when that tree flowers then lectures are over for the year. They must be happy now because the tree is flowering."

Bare, or in flower, the flame tree has meaning. Sitting at the bus stop gave me two of those meanings. There is a lot to be said for bus travel in Darwin even when the bus most often used, the No. 4, is known as the 'slow bus to Casuarina'. I am a daytime traveller; rarely have I caught the bus at night. I do not know if there is a night-time subculture on the No. 4, but given my experiences during the day, it is quite likely there is.

When the 8 a.m. No. 4 bus arrives at stop No. 48 on Dick Ward Drive eighteen Indonesian midwives get on. "*Selamat pagi*" says the driver. "Good morning" say the midwives. They pay their fare. "*Terima kasih*" says the driver. "Thank you" say the midwives. The driver has practised his Indonesian; the midwives, their English. Everyone, including the passengers who have been waiting for this, is happy.

The midwives come from six *propinsi* (provinces) in Indonesia and they came to Darwin to spend thirteen weeks at the Northern Territory University to be trained as trainers. Observing the different styles in their dress, and the fact that some can be identified thereby as Muslim, while others clearly are not, it is possible to get some idea of the diversity of peoples in Indonesia.

One day one of them sat next to me, and after we had exchanged greetings establishing the requisite basis for dialogue (How are you? Where were you born? Are you married? How many children do you have? Where are you going?), the midwife told me the legend of the creation of her home town, Bandung in Java.

Even if the No. 4 is the slow bus to Casuarina, a lot can happen in thirty-five minutes. Sometimes life-shaping incidents occur, like the story of Bandung. You can also watch Aboriginal passengers converse in sign language, using fingers, hands, lips to ask and answer questions not unlike the ones the midwives ask. You notice that Aboriginal people watch without actually looking, they are attentive to their environment and respond immediately. This kind of

conversation requires responsive attention between people otherwise one could miss out on the beginning of the conversation. It can be successfully conducted over a distance. The participants do not need to be sitting together. Social distance can be respected through this means of conversing. A man of fifty or so can, for instance, sit opposite a much older woman, facing her across the aisle from one of the longways seats, face her, and keep his head tilted down in respect, acknowledging her status, and still be attentive to her questions signed to him across the space between them. A parent can 'tell' his child something about where they are going, or about a fellow passenger, meaningful phrases contained in the blunted point of an index finger, a shift of eyes, a raised eyebrow, creased forehead, a flick of the hand. A good gossip between two friends can also be had, and no harm done.

The distance travelled by the No. 4, in either direction, is not great, perhaps twenty kilometres from Darwin city terminus to Casuarina terminus. It is slow because of the way it travels the distance, winding through narrow, leafy suburban streets diverting twice each day, once in the morning, once in the afternoon, to take in a school bus stop. The diversion is obviously not always expected and passengers will call out at the driver that he's going the wrong way. An Irish woman once confided in me that "these drivers have a will of their own". And indeed one driver in particular *does*. He seems to not like some bus stops, and will cruise right past them even as passengers, wishing to alight, remonstrate with him.

Slowness is also sometimes brought about by the tricky combination of a long articulated bus and a roundabout at the intersection of two narrow suburban streets. Some drivers aim the bus at mid point, change down gears, stop, start, and then negotiate the arc. Sitting in the rear section of the bus on those occasions is like what it must be in the back half of a pantomime elephant. It can be a cause of feeling quite dissociated.

Other drivers approach the manoeuvre in a more cavalier fashion, and the bus sways and sometimes clips the kerb as it careers through the roundabout. At times like this the narrow high-set seat in the Japanese-constructed bus can be a launching pad into the aisle. A firm grip on the seat in front is recommended. Some of the Japanese buses have instructions in Japanese language on the glass panels on the folding exit and entry doors. I have not yet asked, but I imagine the message politely bars entry, or exit, on the door acting as the opposite. The space created by them when they open is small and very restricted. It would not do to attempt an exit through an entry, no space for two people to pass. On the other hand, on buses which have wider doors an occasional driver will resolutely refuse to open more than one door, causing passengers to race the length of the bus to get out. Presumably those drivers have wills of their own too.

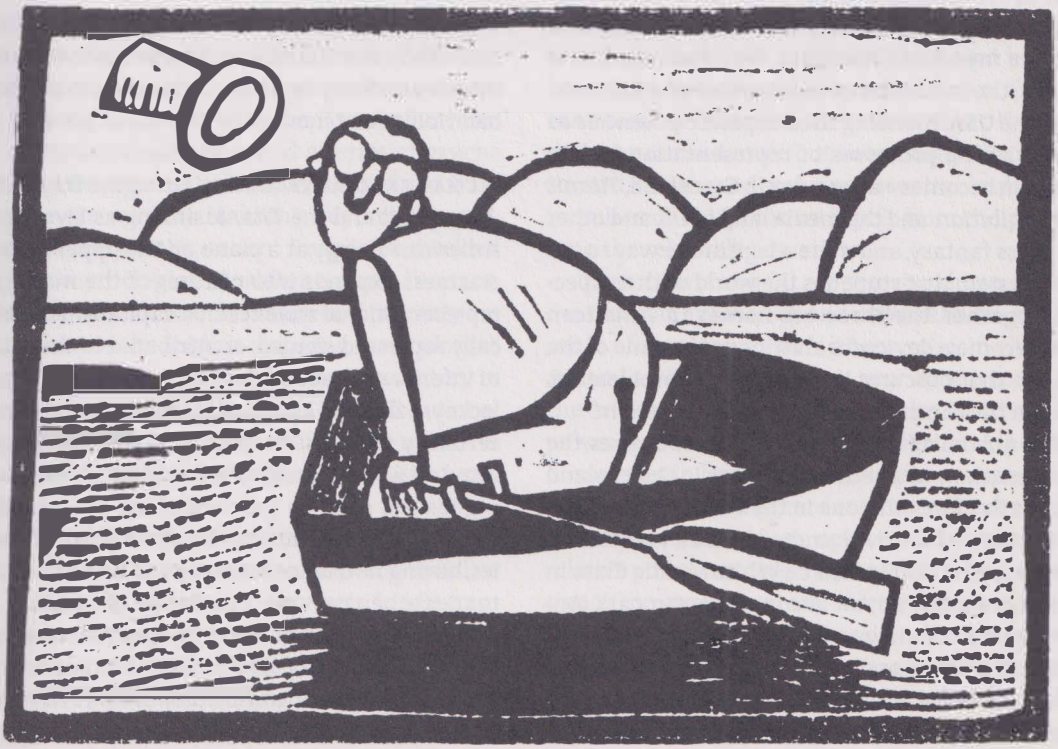
There is just the smallest element of competition between some drivers and their passengers. Destinations must be defined accurately for these drivers, or an elaborate exchange will occur during which the driver sorts out the exact spot the passenger is headed for. Conversations between passengers and the drivers, of course, do not happen 'whilst the bus is in motion', so they must take place at the bus stop. These dialogues play a minor role in the slowness of the No. 4. Likewise other exchanges about the correct fare and whether the passenger's pension card is up-to-date can cause delays, but no-one minds when the driver waits until a mother and her children are comfortably seated, or an older person has reached a safe position. No-one really minds waiting, either, for the passengers sprinting down the street to the bus stop. Anyone who runs in the tropical heat of Darwin deserves praise and serious consideration.

The heat can seriously affect the behaviour of passengers especially during the 'build-up'. At this time it is a good idea to avoid the 3.15 p.m. No. 4 from Casuarina into the city. During school term it is a peak-hour bus for school students, and the one which does the diversion. This is what happens. The bus, a long articulated one, pulls up at the stop and one glance is enough to tell you. Each seat for two is occupied by one person, and a school bag, or a shopping bag. Sighs of exasperation emit from ensconced passengers asked to make room for new ones. It is so hot, and one side of the bus will be in full sun for most of the journey. No-one willingly shares their space. Understandable, but not convenient, if you happen to be getting on an already nearly full bus. No sensible person wants to be close to another in this heat, and at the end of a school day students are tired, surly perhaps? Better to wait for the 4 p.m. bus.

Energy flows are very noticeable in the tropics; ebbs and flows are something it is wise to learn how to control, better to moderate activity and conserve energy. There are, however, little buzz spots where energy surges. There is a spot like that on the No. 4 bus route. It is near the place where the diversion occurs, and just after the house with the sign 'Builder *Rumah*' (house builder) where there is a house with a large frangipani tree in its garden. In the frangipani tree, on one of its top branches, there is a white cockatoo glove puppet. At that same spot one day the driver said, in a very formal way as he slowed the bus a little: "Ladies and Gentlemen, please get your tickets ready for the Inspector". The bus glided into the stop, and a woman in dark green drill shirt and trousers, a woman with a very tanned face and a no-nonsense haircut, embarked. Standing at the head of the aisle she addressed us: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the Inspector, please get your tickets ready to show me" and then proceeded up the aisle saying to each of us in a most friendly way: "Thanks mate!"

It is a pity really that the Indonesian midwives did not witness such a splendidly egalitarian display of authority. I think they would have enjoyed the incident. They have gone now, back to Indonesia to instruct trainee midwives, but they have bequeathed the No. 4 bus a legacy. Once the 8 a.m. No. 4 was a short bus (seating capacity: sixty-nine); it was never big enough for the peak hour crowd. Eighteen extra passengers getting on at one stop stretched its capacity to the point where the bus could not cope. Now we travel in comfort in a long articulated bus (seating capacity: one hundred and fourteen). As my retired, former Latvian, friend and sometime travelling companion has pointed out, we have the midwives to thank for that. That leads me to wonder if I have ever had a beneficial effect on buses in Indonesia. I think not.

Lyn Riddett writes from Darwin before heading 'back south'.



Jiri Tibor

Janine Little Nyoongah

'Unsinkable' Big Things

Spectacle, Race and Class through Elvis, *Titanic*, O.J. and Sumo

THANKS TO CULTURAL IMPERIALISM and television, Elvis Presley, the *Titanic* and O.J. Simpson are as famous in Australia as they are in America. Yet they would appear to offer little of interest to an Australia wrestling with its own problems of identity. They are, however, of enduring interest for me – identifying as White Trash[1], and having been accepted as such by my community.

As 'mainstream Australia' contemplates the ethereal intersecting of Sumo and Pauline Hanson – an intersection only possible because big fat men brawling in the dirt complement our culture so well – the trio of Elvis, *Titanic* and O.J. assumes a dimension outside the superficial. They are the characters who dominate my tour of Memphis, Tennessee and, as it happens, the industries of amusement and information in the USA. Blending their separate potencies as symbols of the processes of representation in late capitalism becomes – after a day in Graceland, *Titanic – The Exhibition*, and the media land of O.J. and other Gods – less fantasy, and more a legitimate way to critique a system that stupefies the world with its spectacle. Together, the three big names in American desire become a device for shifting aside some of the spectacle that obscures the Sumo-sized problematic of *race* in the centres of advanced consumerism.

Since Australia is certainly one of these centres, the local formations of *race* await me back in Queensland as I meet its close relations in the USA. There are the Elvis fans who drive five hundred miles a year to visit Graceland, who said I could be White Middle Class in America because I do not live in a caravan park. Another identity crisis. I was still finding my White Trash roots, in the Rhineland of Germany, the East End of London, and 'the Bronx of Brisbane' where I was raised. That did not matter, the Elvis fans said. I was not apparently black, Mexican or on welfare. I did not need an identity. When I wrecked my last bit of street cred by saying I was at university, they hugged me and laughed – sort of the same way my auntie did, when she asked what I did for a living.

Then there is the Cherokee man in a native craft shop, who talks for an hour about land rights and indigenous mythology, but this is foremostly a place of white myths. To be dubbed White Middle Class here is to be handed a legacy of power and privilege in a place where denial shapes historical and ongoing experiences of racial oppression and exclusion just as it does in Australia, but on a more complex level. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Memphis: city of Bibles, death and money.

In Memphis – complete with gleaming ersatz Pyramid – Elvis, the *Titanic* and O.J. assume their symbolic interdependency beyond a common association with bad Hollywood movies.

IT HAPPENS CRAZILY, AT FIRST. I imagine O.J. in an Elvis jumpsuit and the *Titanic* sinking as Elvis sings *An American Trilogy* at a piano on the upper deck. Then craziness expands into pictures of the material and representational violence that capitalism has historically repressed, denied, or attributed to the madness of inferior sex, race or class. Like 1950s American disc jockeys I think of Elvis as a black man and share their certainty that his celebrity and adoration is predicated on whiteness. Maybe that is why I see him singing his last song on the deck of the doomed *Titanic*, while its hull is filled with hundreds of shackled bodies, having no chance of escape and no historical voice to speak their own place in the age of a sinking, class-ridden Empire. All of these images have precedence in the narratives of late modern culture in what is called *the West*.[2] Unconsciously or not, I have merely altered their politics by opening and closing my eyes always to something of no actual substance, but of profound historical consequence – *race*.

While its insubstantiality in terms of identity and difference have enabled the theoretical discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism to function, the profound historical interlinking of *race* with class is now bringing postcolonialism, in particular, to a critical impasse.[3] Like the initial impulses of postcolonial counter-discourse, the urges to throttle big symbols of cultural spectacle and imperialist ambition with their own historical ambivalence, still have the thrill of political subversion. It's a thrill that is gone from a theoretical centre that has neglected class analysis, burying its political and historical import under claims for the artifice of 'the real'. Insubstantiality, however, does not ward off contradiction any more, and artifice was always meant to refer to the generation of insubstantial, usually ideological, resolutions.

The world that is dominated by advanced consumer capitalism is replete with this contradiction of insubstantiality and the willingness to pay, fight or kill for it. It is not surprising, therefore, that American cultural constructions of *race* are bound up in complicated ways with the iconography of tragedy and lost heroes. Neither is it difficult to contextualize Elvis, the *Titanic* and O.J. within a shared cultural space that includes Australian heroic mythology and its troubled colonial history. The Sumo and Hanson dimensions of culturalism and race relations are, after all, playing in concert with the Port Arthur massacre, the Stolen Generation, and a series of gauche official responses to matters of social grief and tragedy. These are matters reaching beyond the geopolitical borders of 'the nation'. Images of shackled bodies, the mythologies of whiteness and their imperialist associations with servitude and property are replicated across the English-speaking, 'postcolonial' world. They seem so incoherent and contradictory in the fragmented spaces of the media-framed, national attention span, but work like a chain when read over the intersecting stages of world capitalist history and ideology.

Stuck inside a singular 'nation', with the intensifying bourgeois liberal pressures to own a racial or ethnic identity of worth, one only gets to see fragments. If existing substantially only through the prism of class, those of relative powerlessness and poverty take TV as determining the dimensions of their world. White Trash identified, I am lucky, therefore, to be out of country, and, at least superficially, out of my class. I walk through Memphis retaining a fascination held since childhood about the *Titanic*, why 'they called her unsinkable' and how a big piece of ice proved them wrong. The cultural milieu from where I watched *Raise The Titanic* and *King Creole* and listened to the lady next door singing along with Johnny O'Keefe's *She's So Tough*, is still far away from a wealthy world destroying itself – but not so far away from the caravan park. Serving its ideological purpose, TV, like cultural imperialism, shifts the powerless into its world of insubstantiality and one-dimensional representation where objects are humanized, and humans are commodified symbols-made-spectacle and profit.

It is because *Titanic – The Exhibition* functions equally well on the superficial level of consumer culture, and the level of historical ambivalence underlying it, that its inanimate objectivity is made as impossible as that of the Elvis fan, or the O.J. trial jury. When the *Titanic* is humanized, its fifteen hundred dead, mostly third-class migrant passengers, are dehumanized. They are commodities with the rest of late capitalism's rag bag of cheap tricks and contradictions. *She* is lonely, lying there, alone, being ravaged by time, tide and advertising cliche. *They* are lost, and exist nowhere else but in the bits of exhibited wreckage that have outlasted flesh and bone and have, consequently, turned more human. People as commodities relinquish their humanity to the objects they acquire and covet, but a seemingly illogical pitch toward social grief remains essential in displacing impulses of obligation and guilt from the powerful, onto the relatively powerless.

Titanic, Elvis and O.J. are disaster shows, celebrity deaths that symbolize and capitalize on grief, the sense of something having been collectively lost. As Australian cultural practices now appear to indicate, the trick performed so well in the institutions of power is that of intensifying the general incapacity of societies in late capitalism to put a name to what they have lost, and to care any more about anything not acquired through an open wallet. In positions of relative powerlessness they, and I, buy $12 tickets instead. The gaze for which we pay can be about broken crockery, rusting steel and buckled suitcases, or about death, tragedy and the fragmented violence of representation. In the belly of the beast where I am called White Middle Class, the lure of the insubstantial is strong, especially since I know I will soon be across town in Graceland, gazing at Elvis's grave.

Loss is exchanged impassively here and there between commodities watched and commodities watching. Accordingly, divisions of class and race that so often animate the metanarratives of disaster and death appear as insubstantial as the world represented on TV. American consumer culture has achieved what Benedict Anderson, indeed Marx, claimed impossible.[4] The reduction of human beings to commodities is the obvious achievement, but underneath this is death and the complicated way that death is appropriated, valorized and consumed. Bringing death under the cohesive arm of capitalism (Anderson 1983) is a feat highly noticeable in places like Memphis – or maybe California's cryonic body-freezing warehouse – and on some of its twenty or so late-night TV shows.

On TV, death may be complicated by religion, but it accrues even more value in the process. I recall lunging for a motel telephone, fingers poised to dial 1800-*rapture*, ready to discover which seven famous people will be locked out of heaven (Elvis? Pauline? O.J.?), when the evangelical hostess Rexella van Impe's big blonde hair disappeared behind a flashing yellow, $24.95. Having spent all my money on *Titanic – The Exhibition*, a set of commemorative Elvis fridge magnets, and one of the many books on O.J.'s trial, I was raw with unsated consumer desire, waiting for the coming of 'the rapture', when all will be revealed – but not, sadly, at that low price.

Deprived of the van Impe secrets of rapture, I turn to one of the specials on the Jonestown Massacre that appear frequently across the celluloid nation. It is curious that no-one has mentioned Heaven's Gate (except Rexella, but she meant the heaven's gate of Bible fame) or the twenty-nine who suicided in the belief of a better world and the spaceship that would take them there. The silence about Heaven's Gate seems incongruous in a place where TV loves death. I suspect it is because I am in a country where at least the Bible has always delegitimated any alternative worldview – a delegitimation that historically involved some combination of gun, fire or poison, but rarely choice. If suicide is a sin, Jim Jones is an anathema – but not so in this spectacular world of contradictions. Passing the poison Kool Aid, Jones told his disciples that he was God. There are, apparently, enough Americans hedging their bets for the media to bring out Jonestown again at times of social grief, like Heaven's Gate, the Oklahoma bombing or the Branch Davidian siege at Waco. God sells, and there is nothing false about the *profits* made by representing death.

In its most spectacular representation, death is underscored by the tensions of race and class that have pervaded societies organized for the capitalist mode of production since Columbus anchored whiteness in the New World. Toni Morrison's introduction to a book on the O.J. phenomenon, 'The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing'[5] threads these postures of race into motifs that can be observed functioning identically in a Melville or Faulkner novel, and a hastily compiled TV dramatization of the murders of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman. As Morrison states:

> Illogic, contradiction, deception are understood to be fundamental characteristics of blacks and in judging them there need be no ground or reason for a contrary or more complicated view. For centuries the debate in human versus animal discourse has rested on blacks, thus relegating to them the essence of contradiction ... When the scholarly vocabulary of race is itself primitive the belief-language of popular culture is equally retarded. What might be illogical for a white is easily possible for a black who has never been required to make, assumed to make, or described as making 'sense'.

'mainstream Australia' contemplates the ethereal intersecting of Sumo and Pauline Hanson ... because big fat men brawling in the dirt complement our culture so well.

While White Middle America can be generally complicit in the quasi-religious cult of Elvis – to the extent that many believe his grave is empty – and in the commercialization of what is actually a deep sea cemetery, their repudiation of O.J. Simpson's heroism for an enduring certainty – his *race* – shows how murder is unsubstantiated by the 'senseless' crime of blackness. Morrison, in dubbing O.J. a 'Dead Man Golfing', suggests that he might as well have died when stripped of the sports hero/film star identity that, at least superficially, legitimated his non-whiteness.

The popular predetermination of guilt being as irrational and contradictory as the iconography of Elvis, the *Titanic* and (unblack) O.J., is a notion overwhelmed by historically conventional representations of *race* encapsulated, as Morrison notes, in the Faulkner character's comment that "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour". While Elvis's living legend status makes his death insubstantial (especially since he only *sang* black), O.J.'s *race* and its violent historical representation in white myth, make him a non-human, an insubstantial life. "To the spectacle", says Morrison, "he is a disembodied voice, a phantom, a social cadaver and a minor irritant in the official gaze, which cracks occasionally to expose him golfing."[6] As dread entertainment, O.J. shares courses, in the transatlantic spaces of cultural hegemony, with the fat men of Sumo.

Representing, as with O.J., a *race* that has at least in postwar history been despised by Middle Australia (almost as much as blacks), the Japanese Sumo are a spectacle that legitimates local, stereotypical images of barbarity and over-consumption. They are images that have animated Pauline Hanson's incoherent and contradictory warnings of an 'Asian invasion', though anyone who can eat five kilos of squid in one sitting without exploding would stir more rational fears in a former seafood proprietor. As with the disgraced O.J. in the superficial and gargantuan dimensions of TV world, the gargantuan appetite and appearance of Sumo switch from the threatening to the disdained without the apparent consistency afforded even the symbols of White Trash consumer culture.

What resolves Pauline's Sumo problem, however, is fat: for the consuming Eurocentric, the ultimate symbol of social unacceptability. Gross obesity shifts these specific representations of the Japanese as a *race* into inanimate objectifications of Japanese people as spectacularly crass and unhealthy. Like all such resolutions out of the artifice of bourgeois ideology, it disappears unless the denial of the material circumstances of Japan's economic success, and influence on the capitalist world is maintained. There is, by comparison, no need to deny the actuality of O.J.'s accomplishments or his blackness in order to commodify him as an escapee of not only his own personal history, but also that of his *race*. Not shackled and sinking into the depths of silence assigned to the dehumanized and powerless, O.J. is instead, and by virtue of class privilege, "a dead man arrogantly alive". Alive and black, O.J. symbolizes how conditional that class privilege is on the way that social grief is accounted for, and directed. Systemic and historically contested aspects of capitalism's imperialist impulse, this grief, and the guilt and obligation it inspires, are displaced through the spectacle of race and class onto those who are relatively powerless. Elvis and the *Titanic* are (re)animated, unsinkable. O.J. plays dead and senseless in his own darkness, while Sumo squashes Port Arthur and the Stolen Generation into the trashy realms of white myth.

ENDNOTES

1. See *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (eds), Routledge, New York, 1997.
2. The argument that postcolonial theory, in particular, still imagines a *West* that no longer exists with the modes of production being spread across the world, is made fully in my doctoral thesis.
3. See Alan Lawson, Helen Tiffin, et al's introduction to *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: General, Theoretical and Comparative 1970–1993*, G.K. Hall – Simon & Schuster – Macmillan, New York, 1997.
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983; Karl Marx, *Capital. Vol. 1*, which also includes a lengthy analysis of the operation of commodification in the capitalist mode of production.
5. Toni Morrison and Claudia Brodsky Lacour (eds), *Birth of a Nation 'hood: Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case*, Pantheon, New York, 1997.
6. A delegitimation intensified by the emergence of golfing professional, Tiger Woods, as the new national, black (but innocent) sports hero and celebrity.

Janine Little Nyoongah is a Queensland writer.

fiction

An Abandoned Chapter

Peter Carey

AT EXACTLY THE HOUR at which Lizzie and Tobias began their adulterous embrace, Mr Buckle learned (in circumstances too intimate to here relate) the exact address of the Molly Club where Henry Phipps was living. The satisfaction produced by this information lasted him all through the night and was with him before he opened his eyes, before he was sensible of what had caused his sense of well-being.

As one wakes in the morning after a mighty storm has shaken the house and finds the air still and clean, the grass scattered with plum blossom and the bees finally come back to their old haunt under the eaves, so Mr Buckle met the morning of May the fourth.

He lay abed a good while longer than his custom, happily anticipating the departure of Jack Maggs.

By lunch time he could have the horrid nails withdrawn from the windows. This afternoon he would have carpenters to repair the damaged sills and sashes. This evening he would take a turn in the garden and smell the pear blossom. Tomorrow everything would be as it always had been.

It was not until he had heard the church bells strike nine that he finally rose from bed and began the business of his toilet. Had it not been nailed shut, he would have opened the window, but he still was able to look down into his garden while he ran his razor up and down the strop with vigour. Soon it was sharp enough to fell a single black hair on his broad wrist, and when this test had been performed, he lathered and shaved, whistling as he stretched his skin to meet the blade.

Next he dressed his hair with the more expensive of his three pomades, and spent more than a moment arranging the curl on his brow. He was in a mood to wear the gold and silver waistcoat and the teal blue trousers, and indeed took these items out and laid them carefully on his bed. Then he recalled his butler, presently lying in a Funeral Parlour on Bow Street.

He reluctantly put the teal trousers back inside his wardrobe, and dressed himself in mourning.

When he finally descended to the ground floor he found a sense of order everywhere restored. He did not yet see its agent, that little moon-faced creature with her black leg-of-mutton sleeves and heel-heavy shoes. But his shop-keeper's eyes observed that the floors were already swept. When he stepped through the dining room door and smelt the polish in the air no spring scent could have pushed his spirits higher. His place was set at table, and *The Times* neatly ironed and ready for his perusal.

As he sat himself at the table Mr Buckle could hear the blackbird singing in the garden and see the swift shadows of house martins darting to and fro. He rang the bell and lo who should answer it but he whose quest was about to end.

Jack Maggs stood before the master glowering, encased again in all his formal livery, with an old ill-fitting wig placed comically atop his head.

"I can't play along with this," said he. "I can't endure the bleeding duchess."

Mr Buckle might have delivered his Good News then. But he had suffered enough from this rascal and so toyed with him a little.

"Mrs Halfstairs insisted on the wig, Jack?"

"You think it funny, Sir?" the ruffian threatened, but then the doorbell rang and the Australian, not without a curse, turned to answer it. Mr Buckle smiled and opened *The Times* to the Parliamentary debate

and was thus posed when he entered unannounced.

"Mr Buckle," cried Tobias Nicks.

The writer sat himself down without apology and placed a nasty-looking brown paper bag on the white table cloth.

"You go fix yourself," he called to the footman who was skulking in the doorway. "I'll straighten this with Buckle."

Maggs withdrew, and Mr Buckle looked warily at his famous visitor. His eyes were red rimmed, his mouth thin. He was seated forward on his chair as if he planned to only stay a moment.

"I'm taking him to Gloucester," he said, "to put him in touch with the thief-taker."

Mr Buckle opened his mouth.

"No," said the writer. "That's all there is to it. It's what we promised him from the set-out, and now it must be done."

Mr Buckle was accustomed to offence and gave no indication of his anger. "Would you take a kipper with me, Mr Nicks?" He smiled.

Tobias shook his head impatiently.

"Perhaps some kidneys? I'm not sure if we have kidneys. But my house-keeper and cook are all recovered from their . . ."

"I have provisions for the journey." Tobias picked up the nasty paper bag and put it on his lap. "Apples, walnuts."

"That you do not need."

"It's seventeen hours to Gloucester, Mr Buckle." The young man consulted a battered silver watch. "The coach is leaving St Martin Le Grand in half an hour."

Mr Buckle now enjoyed his little pause. "You will not go to Gloucester," he said.

"What mean you, Sir?"

"You will not need to," said Percy Buckle. "On account of, I know where Henry Phipps is laying low."

Tobias Nicks' brows descended hard upon his eyes. "*No.*"

"'deed I do, Sir." Mr Buckle patted down the fringe of his moustache. "'deed I do. Jack Maggs will find his man ten minutes from this house."

The author of *Captain Jemmocks* slumped down in his chair.

"But this is *good* news, Sir," said Mr Buckle who was now becoming agitated himself. "You know the danger I've been living with, but now I can tell you, tell him too – Mr Henry Phipps is presently residing in a club in Covent Garden. How's that for fish, eh, Mr Nicks. How's that for fish, Sir?"

"It is very bad news," said Tobias Nicks, standing and picking up his paper bag. "And I did not hear it."

"It is accurate, Sir, I swear to you."

"I'm sorry Mr Buckle, but *I don't know where Henry Phipps is.* Do you understand me? No, no. Listen to me. *Nor do you.* One day I will explain it to you. When my book is written, when your name is there for all to see in its dedication. *To my dear friend Percival Buckle Esquire without whose generous support this novel could not be written.* We'll change it if you don't like it."

"It is in Floral Street . . ."

"He must not know. I am more desperate than you'll ever know."

He seemed, at that minute, a very weak and uncertain young man. "Then let me help you," said Percy Buckle, "whatever the trouble is. Perhaps it is in my power to help you."

Percy Buckle saw his offer weighed. Or rather, he had the sense that he himself was weighed. "Mr Nicks, it would be an honour . . ."

As he spoke they heard the heavy rapid tread of a heavy man running down the stairs, and then, a moment later Jack Maggs came into their midst. He was dressed once more as he had been on arrival, that is in black trousers and black jacket with a flaming red waistcoat. At his side he carried a small gunny sack, and in his right hand, a stout stick.

"I'm set," he said.

"Let me help," said Percy Buckle.

But the writer had already taken his place beside the convict. The robust figure of the latter, his fierce fiery optimism, only served to make Tobias appear the more sickly.

"Then let us go," he said.

Percy Buckle did not judge it politic to contradict him.

fiction

Duple Vista #25 Stops Here

Carolyn Logan

THE DARK ROAD STRETCHED away to right and left, a line drawn with a ruler over a flat grey land, swallowed up at the horizon by the grey sky. No trees, no buildings marred the geometrically flat landscape. There was not a shrub nor a blade of grass. His boots scraped on the gravel as he turned to inspect the bus stop. It was a tall, four-sided post. Orange. The only spot of colour. 'Duple Vista #25 Stops Here' painted on one side in white.

He must be early. No need for panic. All he had to do was wait patiently for Duple Vista #25. It stopped here.

He checked the change in his pockets. Enough, he thought, although the coins were strange to him. But there were lots of them and their weight sat satisfactorily in the palm of his hand. The bus would arrive, he would climb in, dump an assortment of the coins in the hand of the driver, wave away the change, find himself a seat and he would be out of here. Duple Vista #25 would take him out of this barren grey place. Take him home.

He jiggled the change in his pocket and wished he could remember where home was. Never mind. He was sure he would recognize it when he got there.

The tune he was whistling through his teeth died suddenly as he looked off to his right. A tiny speck sat on the horizon. He leaned forward and narrowed his eyes as the speck grew larger. Was it the bus? Yes. He heaved a sigh of relief. He saw that the bottom half was a bright yellow up to windscreen level and then a pure, sparkling white. Across the top of the windscreen green dots moved and formed letters. Words. A number.

Duple Vista #25.

The bus drew closer and he realized that it was moving almost silently over the road, the only sound the soft, continuous crunch of the rubber tyres on the grey gravel. Was it an electric bus? he wondered, and then as the vehicle showed no sign of slowing, panic filled his chest. It had to stop!

He thrust his left arm stiffly into the air and waved it back and forth but the glinting windscreen, the flickering green letters continued to bear inexorably down upon him. Frantically, he waved the other arm, semaphoring madly. What was the matter with the driver? Still the bus crunched along at its steady pace. He stepped out onto the road. "Stop! Stop!" he yelled, surprised at how thin and reedy his usually robust voice sounded in this grey atmosphere. "Please stop," he shouted again, preparing to leap out of the way.

Suddenly, the bus stopped. He could hardly believe it. A moment ago, it had been moving purposefully along the grey road and then it stood absolutely still, its bonnet almost touching his chest and directly in line with the orange post. His heart beat rapidly as he hurried around under the shining windscreen and dashed up the three yellow steps.

The driver stared straight ahead, hands resting purposefully on the black steering wheel, ignoring his handful of change.

"Don't you want –"

Suddenly, the bus was moving again, rushing along the road directly above the faint white line. He put out a hand to steady himself but he needn't have bothered. The movement of the bus over the road did not disturb his balance at all. It was as if the bus re-

mained still and the landscape started up and moved along past the bus.

He pocketed his change and looked around. At first he thought the bus was empty, its rows of bright yellow plastic seats jiggling silently in the grey light that fell through the windows. But then, away at the back, in the middle of the long seat that stretched across the rear of the bus, he spied a figure.

Good. Someone else rides the Duple Vista #25, he thought, and made his way down the aisle.

"Do you mind?" he pointed to the space beside the man and not waiting for an answer, sank gratefully onto the seat. At last. On his way.

Out of the corner of his eye he checked out his fellow passenger. The man looked to be in his early seventies. Long yellowish white hair swept back from a high forehead and curled at the nape of his neck. Bushy white eyebrows and an impressive nose. A dirty white moustache.

"Nice day." His voice still sounded flat and weak.

"Is it?" The old man turned and nailed him with a penetrating blue glare.

Quickly he checked the smoothly moving landscape outside the window. "It's not raining."

"Doesn't make it a *nice* day."

Obviously, pleasantries were lost on the blue glare. "Where does this bus go?"

"Don't you know?" The old man turned and stared straight ahead. He wore an old army greatcoat, every seam of which was lined with rows and rows of glittering safety pins, one beside the other, marching up from the dirty hem to the rusty collar. The old man's arms were bare to the shoulder, the armholes of the coat frayed and ravelling.

"Lose your sleeves?" he asked.

"Like to have my arms out in the sun." The knotted arms were deeply tanned a golden bronze that glowed against the rough khaki.

Perhaps the sun did shine in this grey place. "Do you live here?"

"Walked to #24. Boarded there."

Were there more orange posts dotted beside the road, guiding the Duple Vista bus along its route? Would they come to a Duple Vista #26 and find someone waiting there? He sighed. He didn't want the bus to pick up more passengers. He wanted it to trundle over a rise or go around a corner, pass through the barrier that cut this place off from home.

He wished he could remember what home looked like.

"Where do you get off?" he asked the old man.

"What do you mean, asking me where I get off?" was the thunderous reply. "I stay on as long as I like, I am a fully paid up person, I can stay here forever. Here," and reaching into a cardboard carton on the seat beside him, he drew out a small bread roll. "Hungry?"

The bread was pitted with grey bits of gravel. "Thanks anyway."

"What's your name?" the old man asked, biting off a corner of the roll.

"Have you got anything else to eat? Besides bread?" He needed time to think. What *was* his name? His name was like home. Gone.

The greatcoat gave off an aroma of wood fire and ancient sweat as the man dug around in the crumpled newspapers that filled his box. "Nope. Nothing else. My name is Salvander," he announced and thrust out a hand.

"Baran," he replied and they clasped hands momentarily. Baran? Was that his name? Well, it would do for now. When he got home, he would ask . . . he couldn't think who he would ask. Never mind. For now, I am Baran, he told himself and turned once again to the old man. "What's Duple Vista?" he asked.

Salvander roared. "You don't know!"

"Know what?"

"It was hell in the trenches." Salvander seemed to have only two voice modulations: roar and conversational. He had switched to conversation mode now and Baran felt safer. The old man's roar made him shake.

"Is there a Duple Vista #26?"

"Freezing in the winter of twenty-five. Getting warmer now."

Suddenly Baran remembered. "Twenty-five. Today

I am twenty-five."

"Twenty-five what?"

"Years old. And I . . ." but Baran's words were lost in the tremendous roar that filled the bus. He was thrown sprawling on his hands and knees into the aisle.

"Never! Out!" shouted the old man and what felt like a large round-toed boot connected with Baran's backside and he was propelled up the aisle, tumbling in a heap beside the driver, who reached down and without taking his eyes from the road, pushed Baran out the door.

"Hey!" Baran yelled, scrambling to his feet to chase the bus which rapidly grew smaller and smaller as it ran away from him. "Come back!" A tiny white puff of exhaust popped out of the back of the bus and the yellow and white vehicle vanished.

"What the hell," Baran muttered in astonishment, staring at the point on the horizon where the bus had disappeared. He swore again as he staggered off the road and bumped into the orange post.

Unbelievable. He was right back where he had started. Duple Vista #25. He put his face up close to the post and stared hard. Yes. Duple Vista #25.

A wave of despair washed over him and Baran dropped his head into his hands. His thumbs brushed his ears and gasping, he ran an unbelieving finger around the rim of his left ear. It was lined with safety pins, cool and smooth to the touch. Same on the right. From each ear lobe dangled a long chain of safety pins. He touched his nose. His nostrils were ringed with pins as well. From the left there swung a huge safety pin which tapped him on the chin. Frantically he slapped at his body and everywhere he touched, there was another row of pins. "No! No! No!" he moaned, jiggling from one foot to the other and the pins jingled and jangled, tinkling out an atonal tune to accompany his panic.

"All aboard for Duple Vista #25!" announced a piping voice and Baran whirled around to find the bus standing beside him, bonnet in line with the orange post.

He scrambled up the steps. "What did you do that for!" he shouted at the driver, who continued to face straight ahead as the landscape moved past the windows. Baran leaned down to shout in his ear. "Listen, you –"

"And what will the birdies do then?" It was the piping voice. She was sitting halfway down the bus on the right-hand side. "They'll fly to the barn, just to keep themselves –"

He threw himself into the seat beside her. "Where's the old man?"

"– warm and tuck their heads –"

She was about eight years old, with long yellow plaits and a blue and white checked gingham dress. Her eyes were round and blue; her mouth a red hole in a flat face; her voice, at this close range, piercing. "– under their wings." She swivelled her head around to face him. "The poor things!"

Her voice almost blasted him off the seat but he hung on, his safety pins tinkling and clinking a descant to his fear and panic. "Where is the –"

"See the birdie," she shrieked, lifting her hands to reveal a basket in her lap. Inside the basket was an egg.

"It's an egg. Look, what's with this Duple Vista –"

"Birdie!" the little girl screamed and grabbing a chain of pins, pulled his head down to the basket. The egg had a tiny crack in it. The crack widened into a hole, in the middle of which there was a sharp yellow beak. "See the Birdie!" howled the little girl and the beak emerged, scattering the fragments of shell, revealing a bird with a bright green eye.

"What an ugly chick!" Baran shouted at the little girl.

"You poor thing," she screamed back and jerked harder on the chain.

"Answer the question!" snarled the bird and heaving itself up in the basket, began to grow.

"What question?" The green eye filled his field of vision.

"You'll kill us all. Poor things. Answer!" howled the little girl, tugging on the chain.

"Hey! Let go!" Baran tried to wrest the chain from the little girl's hand but she gripped it even more

tightly, cackling with laughter as the bird grew and grew, filling the basket, filling the space between the seats, blocking the aisle, crushing up against the windows on the other side, growing and growing. Baran's ear smarted from the tug of the pins, the bird's feathers filled his eyes and his mouth, rustled in his ears and pricked between his fingers.

"Let me go!" Baran shouted, at last yanking the chain out of the little girl's fist but he could not fight his way past the bird because it filled the whole bus, blocking out everything and now the sides of the bus began to groan and cry out and with a last cackle from the little girl, the bus exploded in a welter of feathers and pins and Baran was once again lying at the foot of the orange post.

"Duple Vista #25 Stops Here," it announced.

Baran groaned and hand over hand, pulled himself upright on the post. He turned to the road, expecting to see the wreckage of the bus, the remains of the driver and the bird and the little girl.

Nothing. Then out of the grey sky a feather drifted and settled on the white line. OUT OF HERE! He had to get out of here!

Walk. Forget the bus. Forget Duple Vista numbers twenty-five and six and seven and the soldier and the girl. Forget the sadistic driver. He had had enough. Baran would walk out of here. He brushed his hand over his head as he strode out onto the road and what he felt there, stopped him in his tracks. Feathers. Frantically, he ran both hands over his head, his shoulders, down his body. The chains of pins still followed every seam of his jacket, his jeans, still dangled in a fringe from the edge of his sleeves, from the bottom of his jacket, from his belt, from his bottom lip.

But where there were no pins, there were feathers. All over his head and God only knew where on his body. He could not bear to look but his fingers found them. Little tufts pushing out of his ears. Tiny feathery ones on his eyebrows. Eyelashes. Peeking from under his fingernails. Thrusting up out of the tops of his boots and from between the stitching that held sole to leather.

"I'm outa here," Baran announced and began to march down the road, heading toward the horizon, his feathered boots following the faded white line.

"Duple Vista Twenty-five, Duple Vista Twenty-five," he chanted in time with his steps. "Duple Vista –"

He broke into a trot. "Duple Vista Twenty-five! Duple Vista Twenty-five!" he shouted as the trot shifted gears to a run. "Duple Duple Duple," he panted as he ran even faster. "Duple! Duple!" he howled and now he could hear it coming up behind him, its tiny black tyres hushing over the road. "Duple! Duple! Duple!" he screamed, trying to run faster but the feathers were slowing him down, dragging against the surface of the road. The chains and fringes of safety pins clanked like iron bars, weighing him down. "Duple! Duple! Duple!" he shrieked, stretching out his arms, reaching for home and an end to the feathers and pins but there was only a blank grey sky and the swish of the black tyres behind him.

Suddenly he could stand it no longer. He stumbled to a halt, turned and threw his arm up in a stiff salute. "Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!"

Duple Vista #25 was on top of him, huge and square, the green lights flickering, the windscreen blank and luminous. "Stops here!" he bellowed, pins tinkling and feathers rustling as he shook his fists at the bus. "Damn you! Duple Vista number twenty-five stops! STOPS HERE!"

The windscreen flashed and cleared and he could see the driver, staring at him out over the black steering wheel. The driver was wearing Baran's face; through the glass he stared into his own eyes, recognized his own lips and nose. He saw his face twist, its mouth opening in a silent howl as the driver guided the bus straight over him.

It hurt more than anything had ever hurt.

Hurt bad.

"Out of here," Baran sighed.

Duple Vista #25 stopped.

Carolyn Logan is from Western Australia. She has written several novels for children and young adults, short fiction, poetry, radio plays and a stage play. She recently completed a long novel.

The Late Winter Ambulance

VI – The Magnetic Poetry Kit

In Waikiki,
a magnetic poetry kit,
only nineteen, ninety nine and
hundreds of short simple words
to place on the door of the
refrigerator
so
that, in the
morning, I could tell you again
of seals
at play
in surf and
the waves that
make it
across the wide
rock platform.

It would all be
simple,
direct,
like
sand and spade,
sunglasses and
ripe mangoes.

Nothing about a fear of
timeless tropic seas,
the constant still clouds above island
volcanoes –
'the unimaginable sadness of the Pacific'.

Just pictures of play,
endless perfect days
on the shoreline,
yellow and white and
blue.

Something to remember as you
rock on
down the light-flash arterials
of a grey Melbourne, in
four day shifts of
sirens, lights and glass on
blood-wet asphalt.

Car versus pole, car versus train,
head-ons, T-bones, hips, fights,
'all that shit',
extrications, air bags, jaws,
masks and big injections.

Sometimes
the thump of life,
perhaps once,
perhaps twice,
perhaps as transient as
that seal's passage
across the rock
platform.

Ken Taylor

Wagtails

but for their size
they're the Rottweilers
of the bird world
these off-the-leash
off-their-tree
wagtails
these black-white
concoctions of spite
miniature magpies
feathered Furies
these snip-beaked
black-faced
in-your-face
chitterers
xenophobes of suburbia.
Anyone
in *their* yard
is a foreigner.

John Malone

Titleless Poems of Wet Weather

i

Sleep was a memory
of a dream
happening through me,
and I was
purveyor of all . . .

Now as I wake
I am merely a dream
of what I could
have been
before sleeping.

ii

There is a recipe
for living
that requires rote learning
like maths tables
or alphabets.

Sometimes
I mix the recipe
with prescriptions
which require
considerable manipulation.

Dyslexically
I dream of other recipes
which no-one
has tried
and no god has swallowed.

iii

You want more passion
from me.
Oh, dear, I have none!
I am just
the poet of domesticity
embroiled in the magnificence
of trivia!
Leave me to my
toothbrushes and tweezers
these too need songs
and poems –
the secret is out

nothing is worth passion
but everything
is worthy of interest.

iv

When part of me
has not come home
with the rest of me

when I lose purpose
and sink into someone
else's system

When there is no point
in being serious
and no fun in outrageousness

Then I send out
flares in the night
lit with the flame of ennui

and allow my history
to tap me on the shoulder
and whisper "mortality" . . .

v

There is no sense
in trying to remember
your smile –
it has been etched
into much more
than that grey enclave
in my ponderous head
which remembers.
If I look at my foot
with enough love,
I will see you . . .

Geoff Prince

To Denise Levertov

Your words fill me
and overflow.
Follow me,

you say,
down the hallways,
and alleyways

of this mind,
yours and mine,
turning over in sleep,

looking out of doorways
together, through
the eyes of windows,

seeing
the world
as it is –
but also
as it is
not.

Not forgetting the fields
of unleavened childhood
slowly rising

in the hot tall grass
of coming to know
before having experienced

the metal and steel
of the world's
daily shattering

but also daring
to refuse
the world as it is –

not forgetting
to dream
into fullness

the small daily
discipline
of wonder.

Learning to thrust
clear-sighted
anger

through the blind
eyes of windows
shutting out

the truth
of tables turning over
in temples

and auditoriums
and the back benches
of rhetoric.

Learning to make
fire again
beneath the moss

of stones
turning over in prayer
the flint of faith

that strikes
a steel-lit
sorrow path

down through
the ages, the many
Port Arthurs across

the world
above whose skies
shooting stars

may be seen
at any time
turning red.

Attempting
to comprehend
why angels' wings

are daily wrenched
from the spines
of babies

still being born
beneath the ashes,
you show me how

not to forget
the almost forgotten
coal.

Shari Kocher

Michael Denholm

A Constant Struggle

The funding of little magazines in Australia

In 1995 *MEANJIN* published an article by Bev Roberts on Literature Board funding of literary magazines. She characterized the situation regarding the state funding of literary magazines in an extremely negative way. It was, in a metaphor that she took from Tom Shapcott's history of the Literature Board, "a climate of sickness and death", the case for funding magazines having been constructed around "the concept of providing palliative care for the chronically ill".[1] Roberts' rhetoric stated these views as a fact, yet there was no evidence in her article that she had read any of the historical or critical studies of literary magazines in Australia, from John Tregenza's pioneering study of little magazines in Australia to Bruce Bennett's *Crosscurrents*, or my own two-volume history of small press publishing in Australia.[2] Instead she repeated the metaphor that Shapcott had noted in his history of the Literature Board, that at the Board's 6th meeting, on 8 May 1973, it had been asked "whether ossified magazines should be allowed to die gracefully or should be kept alive by injections of State serum . . ."[3] The so-called obvious solution that emerged over two decades later in a different form, with the Australia Council's funding of *The Australian's Review of Books*, was the appointment of a four-member Magazine Committee with terms of reference that included "the setting up or selecting one or 'two grand monthlies' which would publish poetry and short stories and serialise new novels" and "what was termed concocting a scheme of euthanasia for magazines which had lost their liveliness".[4] Thus a proposed solution to this so-called problem of lack of liveliness was centralization, what one could call the Vladimir Lenin model of state funding, to put your eggs in one basket rather than having diversity and plurality.

Roberts continued the metaphor of illness in her article, describing the magazines as "a ward full of sickly ones"[5] without stating which magazines she thought had been sickly and for what reasons. Thus, rather than celebrating the fact that Australia had so many literary magazines, many of which have survived in a hostile, philistine environment, she simply gave credence to those voices who complained that the magazines were deficient. Similarly, in recent newspaper coverage of literary funding in Australia, the media has given credence to strident voices like the former editor of *Island*, Cassandra Pybus, who had lost the editorship of the magazine in controversial circumstances, and who was jaundiced about the funding of literary magazines. Pybus told a forum at the Sydney Writers' Festival that "to substantially subsidize ... an indulgent activity" as she described it, as editing *Island*, "is squandering scant resources".[6] Yet she went to great lengths to gain sympathy when she was forced to resign and was very upset even though her editorship was, in her opinion, "an indulgent activity". She then accepted a well-paid position at La Trobe University to edit *Australian Humanities Review* on the electronic network. Pybus acted in this way even though on 15 September 1989, with Barrett Reid, she had written a letter to the then Chair of the Literature Board, Rosemary Wighton, expressing concern about the declining level of support provided by the Literature Board to magazines. Specific areas that were detailed as requiring increased funding included equipment, contributors' fees, market development and editors' salaries. Not once in the debate about literary funding, did the newspapers contact people who had a deep historical understanding of the role of literary magazines based on extensive research rather than on prejudice or off-the-cuff, destructive comments. Thus the media, as is often their way, sensationalized the debate and did little to create an informed, rational debate.

In her policy, Roberts adopted the language of monetarism. "In the new and gritty policy climate of *Creative Nation*", she stated, "there is no place for ex-

emptions or special pleading. No place for a program that lacks a clear and achievable statement of purpose, does not adhere to objectivity or consistency in funding assessment and relies principally on qualitative analyses."[7] Yet her article, following on from her evaluation of the Board's Magazine Program, showed how flawed and limited her research had been, based on Tom Shapcott's history, some Literature Board files, and a small number of interviews and correspondence with magazine editors and writers. She wrote that in five years "in her evaluation", $1.5 million was allocated through the Magazines Program, a "mere", as she rightly described it, "seven per cent of the Board's total grants for the period". Roberts thought that $1.5 million was "a pretty staggering figure".[8] The fact that it was staggering for her shows the limited extent of her understanding. Funding for literature emerges from the hard-earned labour of taxpayers. Taxpayers, in a democracy, have a right for the state to fund activities deemed worthy of funding, such as literary magazines, which are often produced in what could be termed exploitative conditions, emerging from small, crowded offices run by editors who work long, often unpaid hours in rudimentary conditions (that would only be tolerated in the arts and other industries where people are exploited for their labour). It is a sad indication of how magazines are taken for granted in this so-called culture, where people often seem to believe that publications can come out of thin air.

A figure that Roberts should ponder is the support given to Murdoch-owned publications by governments. Murdoch, in his desire for more power and profits, moved to the United States to become an American citizen, renouncing, in 1985, his Australian citizenship to secure television licences in the United States. According to the *Guardian* newspaper, Murdoch's News Corporation pays less than 7 per cent tax, whereas most large Australian corporations pay between 20 and 40 per cent.[9]

Roberts was critical of magazines that had static or declining figures and average readerships of fewer than two thousand. In doing so, she showed her ignorance of the role of the 'little magazine', which, by its nature, is never going to be concerned with a large circulation. Such magazines exist to publish innovative, unusual, or challenging, dissenting views, to bring on the new. Her article included a scathing reference to *Australian Literary Studies*, a magazine that has a well-established reputation overseas, stating, "the old arguments will be presented by their editors and their supporters, some of whom may well be the same highly respected literary figures who argued for ALS some twenty years ago".[10] Many of these figures, such as Douglas Stewart, R. D. Fitzgerald and James McAuley, are now dead.

The Fund's decision to cut *Meanjin*'s funding by $16,000 of its annual budget of $110,000, with its grant 44 per cent less than its $36,000 grant in the two previous years,[11] in the same year that the Australia Council found $176,000 to fund *The Australian's Review of Books*, resulted in considerable protest from the Australian literary community. This treatment was inflicted on a magazine which has been published for fifty-five years, and that many would consider Australia's major literary magazine.

The distinguished historian Bernard Smith rightly described this cut as "savage". *Meanjin* "is the finest cultural magazine we have. Its standards have been consistently high, and higher than any other, I think, for the last fifty years". It has "been very important for the moral consciousness of Australia".[12]

The cuts will mean that *Meanjin* will have to cut salaries, decrease payment to contributors, and decrease its print run.[13] To compound *Meanjin*'s problem the cut in funding occurred at the same time that its funding from the Victorian government was halved to $10,000.[14]

Despite the savagery of the treatment inflicted on *Meanjin*, the Board's decision had its defenders. Thus Cassandra Pybus, while stating that *Meanjin* "is an important part of our literary heritage", claimed that it and *Southerly* had "been generously subsidised for five decades", a statement that is factually wrong, as any reading of *Meanjin*'s history would demonstrate.[15] *Meanjin*, in fact, has had a constant struggle to continue in a philistine environment. Pybus's comments could be described as a betrayal of the tradition of little magazines despite the fact that she was offered the editorship of *Island* at a time when it was in its healthiest-ever financial position. Pybus did nothing to dispel the myth or fiction, the "perception", as she described it, that "these literary elders", as she described *Meanjin* and *Southerly*, "have grown dull and overly academic, no longer reflecting the vitality of contemporary literary culture and that their historical claim on the public purse may no longer be justified".[16] In the end she sided with the cost cutters, the economic rationalists, when she concluded:

> The escalating production costs of providing a raft of magazines, all much of a muchness and none with more than two thousand readers, makes no sense. Courage in funding decisions is what's needed; even though the weight of history is against it.[17]

As with Roberts, Pybus gave no evidence for her claim. Why Pybus sided against the weight of history is a question that needs to be asked. Despite the claims of those whom the media love to publish, there is a wide variety of material that is published in the literary magazines that is essential for a vibrant literary scene.

What is of concern about literary funding in Australia is that there is too great an anxiety to be relevant. Thus the decision of the Australia Council to, in effect, set up its own magazine, in funding to such an extent a Murdoch-owned publication, shows a failure of nerve, an anxiety to demonstrate that its policies are working. Such an intervention happened even though such literary figures as Helen Daniel and Peter Craven were trying, at around that time, to create a magazine similiar to what the *Australian* set up but one that would have been independent of the press barons. What was distressing about the Australia Council's decision was that no writers appointed to serve the Fund or staff of the Literature Fund chose to resign in response to the Council's decision even though it overrode the autonomy of the Fund. Their failure to act has thus weakened its power.

With Australia Council funding going to *The Australian's Review of Books* rather than to other magazines which publish poetry and fiction, most writers of these genres are disadvantaged. Since space in this publication is devoted to reviews of works of established writers by other established writers many of whom have agents to act on their behalf, new writers will be unlikely to be taken up. In comparison, the small press and the little magazine are, by their nature, a breeding ground for talent. The move by managers of the Australia Council, such as its former chairperson Hilary McPhee, to give money to *The Australian* for *The Australian's Review of Books*, is a symptom of the shift of wealth in Australia to the privileged, with the emergence of a significant underclass, as Australia increasingly goes down the American path and becomes a more brutal, uncaring society. With such a publication, the well established Australian writers, or those currently in fashion, will receive more money and attention, while those writing against the current climate of opinion or not yet established will have to survive, if they can, on smaller amounts of money.

The Murdoch literary publication is unlikely to tell us much more than we already know. Three of the contributors to its April 1997 issue are journalists for *The Australian*, Paul Kelly, Frank Devine and Luke Slattery. As Patrick White once said, the journalist and the school teacher rule the literary roost in Australia. For the 'new', for the voices that will tell us the truths that need to be told, we will need to look elsewhere. For the best in literature often comes from the margins, those authentic figures like D.H. Lawrence, who wrote with great passion and confronted respectable society with realities that it often does not want to be told.

ENDNOTES

1. Bev Roberts, 'Magazines and Metaphors', *Meanjin*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 1995, p. 187.
2. See John Tregenza, *Australian Little Magazines 1923-1954: Their Role in Forming and Reflecting Literary Trends*, Bruce Bennett (ed.), *Crosscurrents, Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, and the author's *Small Press Publishing in Australia, the early 1970s* and *Small Press Publishing in Australia, Vol. 2, the late 1970s to the mid to late 1980s*.
3. Tom Shapcott, *The Literature Board, A Brief History*, UQP, St Lucia, 1988, p. 232.
4. Ibid.
5. Roberts, 'Magazines and Metaphors', loc. cit.
6. Fiona Capp, 'The Writing on the Wall', *Meanjin*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 1955, p. 184.
7. Roberts, 'Magazines and Metaphors', op. cit., page 189.
8. Ibid.
9. Humphrey McQueen, 'The Murdoch Press', *Australian Book Review*, No.184, September 1996, p.24.
10. Roberts, 'Magazines and Metaphors', op. cit., p. 190.
11. Susan Wyndham, 'Funding switch hits *Meanjin*', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22/11/1996, p.17.
12. Gia Metherall, '*Meanjin* staggers as literature fund slashes its annual grant', *The Canberra Times*, 4/12/1996, p. 11.
13. Sally Fisher, 'Budget cut stuns literary magazine', *The Herald Sun*, 22/11/1996, p.80.
14. Wyndham, 'Funding switch hits *Meanjin*', loc. cit.
15. See Judith Armstrong, *The Christesen Romance*, MUP, Melbourne, 1996 and Lynne Strahan, *Just City and the Mirrors: Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front 1940–1965*, OUP, Melbourne, 1984.
16. Cassandra Pybus, 'Hoary chestnut of literary grants', *The Age*, 30/11/1996.
17. Ibid.

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The Six Tongues

Please ignore
the six tongues
squirming inside
the wicker basket.
Yes, dragons,
I'm afraid, though
I meant to bring
you wild roses.

The beasts waited
in ambush for me,
below the cliff,
beside the sea.
I suppose you
want to know
how I killed them,
ripping the tongues

from their throats.
How the blood
was flowing down
turning the oceans
red like a rose.
Tonight as you
sleep in your bed
dreaming of another

and I am far away
chasing dragons,
I want to tell you
to ignore the idle
gossip from those
squirming tongues.
If you should plant
them in the ground
they may grow again:

The headless stems
of six newly picked roses.

Michael Crane

Satisfaction

Aunt Gwen propelled me through Walton's
by a coat sleeve. Like a bolt of material,
we rolled through the aisles.
Her face shone like silk.

Empty with promise, the string bag dangled
like a charm between us.
Her plump hand coveting
a purse stuffed with coupons.

Bliss caught my breath as we free-fell
in a lift without a ticket, delivering us
to Toyland next to the office
that paid *you* for coupons

with notes much brighter than Mum peeled
from her purse always with a sigh.
She never smiled
when she looked in store-windows.

I wished out loud she'd shop for satisfaction.
Mum measured the clothes,
their cost, against me, and sniffed:
"She's bought you," she said.

Colleen Cridland

On the Death of a Husband

After all the years
of our rehearsing a life together,
something important it seems
has been left out.
Lost seasons in the sun
becomes a stage of opposites
with now this milder kind
of vaudeville creeping in.
Like an actor folding up
boxes, backdrops and costumes.
I am still in our home alive,
your death in every spoon
and jar and book I pack away.
Other than that you are not here
to argue as you might have once
over what to keep or cast aside:
your soft censure over some small thing
that I've discarded
reminding me of where you bought it,
date and place and day and why.
No – your sharpness is gone
and I lose the focus of your face.
Slow and painful
dragging myself into each cupboard,
drawer and shelf to bury you again.
There will be other interments
but none so long or funereal as this;
so ritualized, where nothing
can be hurried or glossed over.
This morning
I cleared the spice cupboard out
keeping little back –
so many use-by dates were gone
like your huge workman hands
such quick and clumsy wings amongst
curry paste, lime leaves and coriander,
stirring up the wok
for some new Thai recipe.
This afternoon will be your letters
photographs and other personal effects
I have put off till now,
having given so much away
the rota and routine of all our hours;
impedimenta of cellar and of shed
touched now by other fingers.
And I will sit in a seat you made
that I shall keep
and read again those words
that once promised me everything
and anything but this:
The dullness of these rooms
and sprawl of garden
where I now like some forgotten player
dance through the dust and cobwebs
of what can never
be properly cleaned away.
Although in years to come
when I am gone and far away from here,
I know that you'll be turning up
again and again
in red caesia flowers
purple wisteria and Iceberg roses –
to always an appreciative audience.

Jeff Guess

This poem won first prize in the 1997 Kyneton Literature Festival.

Sue Goss

First they must read

A conversation with John Hanrahan, July 1994

DURING THE SIXTIES JOHN HANRAHAN was a Roman Catholic priest teaching in Canberra. In 1968, along with three other priests, he challenged the Roman Catholic church on the issue of contraception. Disillusioned, he left the priesthood and came to study in Melbourne. After completing his MA in Literature, he became a tutor at Melbourne University, going on to RMIT where he rose to Head of the Literature Department.

As John's health began to decline he resigned. Now began his most important output in terms of the Australian literary scene. During the eighties, he was a major book reviewer for *The Australian*, *The Age* and the *Australian Book Review*. His brilliant and incisive reviews earned him great respect – and he also became a bit of a 'maverick' with his confrontational articles and provocative column in *ABR*. For a time, John was Deputy Editor and Acting Editor of *Australian Book Review* and had his own creative work published – a novel entitled *O Excellent Virgin*, some poetry and many short stories, in *The Age*, *Tabloid* magazine and *overland*. He was invited to be writer-in-residence at Holmesglen College and gave many lectures in literature and professional writing at Deakin University.

John Hanrahan was deeply concerned that the literary scene in Australia should not become complacent and inward-looking. His strong political awareness and social conscience enabled him to place books sensitively and accurately for review, and his own judgement as a reviewer was highly prized by such people as Tom Shapcott at the National Book Council.

For those of us who knew him he was also the kindest, most compassionate person alive. He died in February this year.

WHAT DO YOU SEE as the difference between literary fiction, popular fiction and the avant garde or postmodernist writers?

I'm at present reading Jeffrey Archer for a review for *The Age*: Archer presumably falls into the middle category, popular fiction. His writing cheapens the human experience. By that I mean he is fascinated to the point of drooling over wealth: but also he treats the reader as though they have very little imagination and not much intelligence. So he condescends . . . thinks for them and imagines for them. This is a collection of short stories and he is into trick endings which you can see coming a mile away, after the first one.

The distinction is in fact very blurred between literary fiction and popular fiction. People like Dickens can overlap. Look at the people who lined up on New York docks to find out the fate of Little Nell in the Old Curiosity Shop! Yet he was such an erudite writer.

In Australia, two people immediately leap to my mind who could fit into both categories – Ruth Park and Thomas Kenneally. Maybe also some novels by Jon Cleary. So there is not always a hard and fast distinction, but some authors are fairly easy . . . Patrick White for example is not read by many people and would fall quite neatly into the category of literary fiction.

He never had to write for a living, so he could write what he liked. When Patrick White was pretending to be a poor farmer, in the sixties, among his many donations to charity was fifty thousand dollars a year to The Smith Family. Patrick White's family owned most of Northern NSW. He was an incredibly wealthy man in his own right, in his parents' right, in his grandparents' right.

The interesting person is Kenneally. His early novels, particularly novels like *Jimmy Blacksmith*, are highly literary and had an influence on Patrick White. His most recent novels move more into the 'airport' type of novel. He's written several under a pseudonym and for my mind I can't tell

the difference between those and the novels he's written under his own name of recent years.

Graeme Greene was a writer who tried to make the distinction himself. He used to have his novels listed under two headings – 'novels' and 'entertainments'. An interesting case is *Brighton Rock*, which he published as an entertainment, popular fiction. But the critics liked it so much that he eventually changed its category. If you look through the collected editions of Greene over the years, at a certain point it moved from being listed as an 'entertainment' (along with *Gun for Hire* and *The Third Man*) to his 'novels' list. He suddenly decided that people were taking it as seriously as his more 'novel'- type novels.

The 'postmodernist' novel is quite distinct, separate. It is very self-conscious, very inward-looking. One of its preoccupations is in fact with the art of writing and the future of the novel. Now I suspect postmodernist novels sell very little. There are exceptions, naturally, depending on your definition. Look at *The Bone People*, a fabulous book.

I don't see a great future for the postmodernist novel. Perhaps it's already passe. In the last two months I've reviewed novels like Alan Gould's *Closeups* and *Drift* – these are not postmodernist. Something like *Landlines* is in between.

This sort of writing is a very precious, 'in' thing. Several people in Australia have written like this, the most distinguished being Gerald Murnane, much loved by *Scripsi*. I quite enjoy Gerald's writing but it has limited appeal. It tries to deny that straight storytelling is of great interest to everybody. It really is no further advanced than people like Joyce, Virginia Woolf and various American writers of the twenties and thirties. It will die of its own cleverness, whereas popular and literary fiction will constantly intermingle.

How do you approach the task of reviewing?

Three things. One is a sub-text. Every review is first of all a letter to the writer. When I write a review I like to think that if I'm at some literary gathering and we're standing around the last dregs of the wine-cask and I suddenly come face to face with an author that I've reviewed, that I'll be quite comfortable about saying what I said in that review.

I will have several things in mind – not only the quality of the work, but also the author's feelings. Reviews can hurt.

Secondly, reviewers must try to place themselves in the situation of the reader. I give them a feel of the book, say what it's about without giving too much away in which case you don't need to read it.

I've just reviewed a story by Steven Carroll, subtitled 'a story of betrayal'. It was very hard writing that review, talking about betrayal, without giving away what the betrayal really was, because it only concerns two people. You must not tell them!

The third thing is that you say, well this is my value judgement on the book. I dislike reviews that use terms like 'one finds ... the reader finds ...' Reviewers who are afraid to use the personal pronoun 'I' are copping out. What you are saying is this: 'I felt ... I thought ... my response was ...' Along with a feel of atmosphere and tone, we must be prepared to offer a value judgement even if it's 'I don't quite know ...'

It's perfectly legitimate to say, 'I feel ambivalent about this. On the one hand ... on the other ... This book has some elements that I dislike ... sexist, racist, ageist whatever. But on the other hand I did find certain people in the book really warmed my heart, moved me.'

Reviews ought to be a personal statement, not some grandiose thing. In the last decade, the august magazines like *The Times Literary Supplement* have started to identify reviewers. It was all 'The TLS says ...' which is just not true – they are all individual opinions!

One of my few small contributions to literature in Australia has been to persuade Penguin (which is obviously one of the most important publishers) to stop quoting reviews as simply '*The Age*' and begin saying 'Fred Smith, *The Age*'. That is quite an important step. It means reviewers can stand up and be counted. It leaves the onus on us.

Unfortunately it also allows for the reviewer to be misquoted. There are the famous three dots. You realize after a while that they can take anything you've said and use it to advantage. 'While I think this book is totally awful, it does have a few moments which are quite startling and stunning.' So they take it and say, '... Quite startling and stunning', Fred Smith, *The Age*. But at least it acknowledges that reviewers must be seen to be responsible.

Can you help having preconceived ideas about the writers you review, in the sense of difference between the way you treat known and unknown writers?

No. You can't. Of course you have views.

But unknown authors yes. I have been writing about books for thirty years and never asked for a particular book. I enjoy reviewing first-time authors and only refuse certain books on the grounds that I know the person too well, I've seen the manuscript, whatever.

Known authors are different. I reviewed and really enjoyed Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*, a true novel. Then I reviewed his novel *Tax Inspector*, which I thought was a dismal failure. It's hard going against the current saying 'we all love Peter Carey'; I do too, but this novel is no good. I haven't read *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. But obviously from reading reviews he has reverted back to the fantasy of the short story collections like *Fat Man in History* or *Bliss* or even *Illywhacker*, whereas *Tax Inspector* was a very realistic novel. Interesting, considering we were talking about postmodernism earlier!

It does make a difference when an author comes to you known, with a big reputation. I have just reviewed a novel by Helen Barnes. I have no idea who she is but it's a wonderful novel. Presumably she is a young writer. It's a first novel certainly. You come to that totally cold.

Whereas when I read a Peter Carey, I do subsume into my reading all the previous novels. And not only that, to be honest, I also subsume all that other people have said. You can't help it. I try and make a rule never to read reviews of novels that I am also reviewing. But occasionally it happens, that I am reviewing something which has been out for a couple of months, for a quarterly magazine. So I go to this review carrying the weight of other people's opinions.

About getting published. Is it actually a closed shop? How difficult is it to break into?

Extremely difficult. It's almost a closed shop. To be honest, who you know matters. A couple of riders to that . . . one is there are a number of magazines, and I have written for them, who prefer not to pay their writers. So if you're prepared to be published but not paid, there is a chance. I can understand that. And I've even encouraged a couple of people to write for such mags.

Okay, being published is an ego trip. Having your name in print is an ego trip! But being published gets your name around. In this world of TV and video and other media, there still is a respect for, a belief in the value of the printed word. It certainly doesn't harm writers to have been published in a non-payment situation.

But I go back to Samuel Johnson's statement: "Anybody, sir, who publishes without being paid is a blockhead". There's a lot of truth in that. Writers are often exploited, and ought to demand to be paid. But for anybody trying to get into this closed shop, if it's a choice between demanding to be paid, and being published, I would encourage people to be published.

Where does a new writer look for a market?

First, they must read. They must know what's out there. Marketing managers talk about 'niche markets', one of our buzz words. People must look around magazines, newspapers: where is the sort of stuff they're interested in writing and reading being published? Then go for it.

But everybody has to accept that in terms of magazines, newspapers and periodicals probably 90 per cent of the stuff published is commissioned. That leaves 10 per cent that is sent in 'cold'. So look around, find out your niche market and send it.

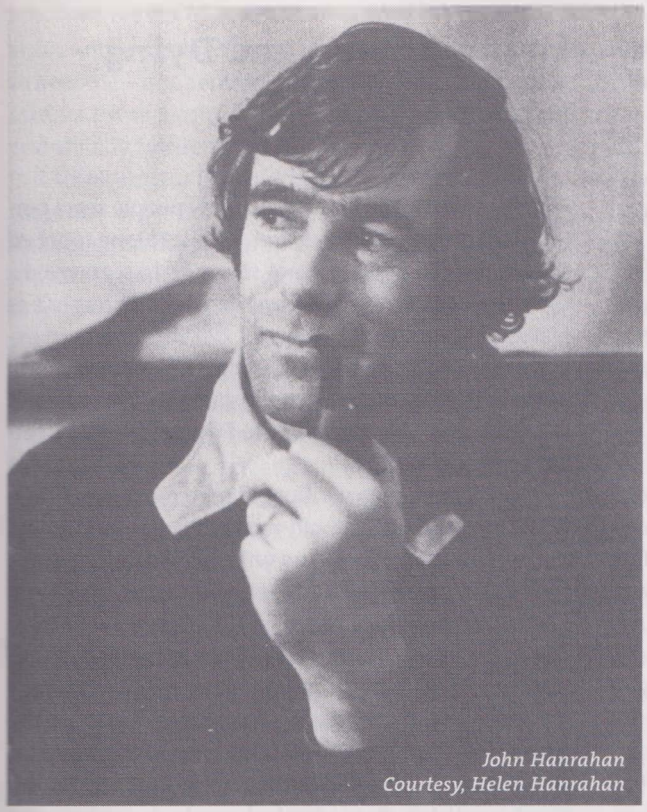
You also have to find out who's who. You need to know, although it may seem a bit depressing. Go to workshops, writers' groups, literary festivals and make something of it. Get phone numbers, make contacts, have a coffee with people. Find out who's who – introduce yourself.

You can't start at the top. Very few magazines or journals accept unsolicited work. [Ed.note: 90 per cent of the fiction and poetry published by *overland* is unsolicited.] You can always try, though it is discouraging when the envelope comes back in the post with your own handwriting on it, and obviously it's a returned manuscript.

Writers have to read first!

Find out who publishes what! *overland* will publish things that *Quadrant* will never publish. *overland* is an old-fashioned left-wing magazine whereas something like *Quadrant* is our contemporary right-wing magazine. You know – it's no good sending something to *Quadrant* that says 'come the revolution'. It's no good sending something to *overland* which says, 'let's hope for a Liberal victory next year'. You have to work out your niche market.

There are different ways of getting started. Go to book readings, writers' weeks. Approach people and



John Hanrahan
Courtesy, Helen Hanrahan

ask, Would you be prepared to look at my stuff? Most people say no, but some people will say yes. This could become a big break. But it is sad that writing is a business and who you know matters.

Do TAFE courses adequately prepare students for the real world of making a living through writing?

The writing courses that I'm familiar with are at RMIT where I have lectured at times; Holmesglen where I was for two months writer-in-residence; and the Deakin course where I've lectured many times.

The answer is probably 'not quite'. These courses prepare people very well for such realities as meeting deadlines, being edited, getting the right tone to the right audience.

But I suspect that most courses don't prepare people enough for the realities of the sheer slog involved. I was talking to a friend yesterday, both laughing about one of Australia's most famous lit mags, *overland*. When you review ten books for them the editor says to you, well of course, you'll be paid extra for this.

So you go and read ten books, write two thousand words on these, which is about two weeks work, and then you find out that when the editor says you'll be paid more, he means that he is going to pay you a hundred dollars for two weeks' work rather than eighty dollars for one week's work.

Writing courses tend to look at the Morris Wests, the Colleen McCulloughs, the Thomas Kenneallys of this world, who make more than any of us could dream of, maybe two to three hundred thousand dollars a year. Whereas your average writer is going to be very hard put to make thirty or forty thousand. Sometimes courses work on the theory that they're teaching students to get to the top, but very few people actually get there.

Student publications can be a good stepping stone: I've been involved in magazines from Holmesglen and Frankston.

There is the encouragement of seeing your name in print. People may disparagingly talk about this as an ego trip. And we all need somebody to roll up our confidence occasionally.

But – maybe somebody will notice! Somebody somewhere will say hey, this is interesting. I have a copy of the *Picador Second Book of New Writing*, and the very first story is by somebody I suggested to the editor because of something he had written in the Deakin mag.

Is poetry a special case?

Most certainly. My feeling is that people who write poetry have not read enough poetry. Sometimes people who write poetry are re-inventing the wheel.

I read a lot of manuscripts for the National Book Council. I'm sometimes staggered that the people who are writing this stuff are simply unread. What they think is new, original, varied, different, was done thirty or forty years ago. Everybody should be well-read.

I have a manuscript today to read for the NBC assessment service and a note from the director says, "I hope that this does not worry your patience too much. I suspect that the writer has never heard of *Finnegans Wake*." So I approach it with some dread.

I am aware constantly of reading the sort of poems that Eliot wrote and discarded fifty years ago and people think this is "new fresh original strange" to quote some words of Hopkins. But if they had read some Hopkins, some Eliot, some Pound, or even later people like Lowell, Sexton, Clough – they'd have gone

on. As it is, they're doing what Clough and Sexton and Lowell did better thirty, forty years ago. Poetry is particularly prone to this non-reading disease.

Helen Eliot, a writer and critic, recently said that knowing what happens to a book after it is published has prevented her doing anything about her own novel for four years. Do you have that same experience?

No. I think it's a cop-out. I agree that the publisher that I've had, didn't do much for my work of fiction.

But do any publishers?

Oh yes they do. Bob Hawke's memoirs probably sold all the copies they were ever going to sell just on prepublicity hype. I suspect that book was going to fall dead in the water. He can complain about Paul Keating, he can complain about what the Labor Party did to him, but he can't complain about his publisher's hard-sell. That was probably the only thing going for that book. I've heard the publication run numbers about seventy thousand in Australia. That's huge for this market but I suspect it will never be able to sell anything like that and current sales confirm that.

The first print run for most first Australian novels is three thousand copies. Most publishers wouldn't go beyond that, unless there was a good reason. If Andrew Peacock writes a novel they might go a bit higher! For the ordinary run of the mill books it's three thousand and if they sell half of that they would be quite pleased. I know it sounds a bit depressing but two and a half thousand sales for a first novel is doing quite well.

Can a society have too many authors?

Absolutely not. The more voices we have, the better. I really believe that however discordant, dissident, however small the audience, we should all be in there, writing.

Sue Goss is an education journalist with The Age. *She teaches writing and journalism at Box Hill TAFE, and is currently editing her third anthology of writings by people with disabilities. John Hanrahan and Sue Goss met through a common interest in epilepsy and worked together on several related projects.*

Living, Loving and Dying

John Hanrahan

DEATH IS OUR LAST TABOO. Few people see a person die. Few have ever seen, let alone touched a dead body and not many go to a graveside. Children are kept away from death, as though it is something unnatural, not to be part of their own experience. Shakespeare and Donne often used death as an image of orgasm and orgasm as an image of dying. I like that, particularly in Donne's song, 'Sweetest Love I Do Not Go'.

"Young men may die, but old men must" (16th Century proverb). But the old must die, die quietly and decently, without fuss. And without fucking, because that is an animal activity, is a reminder of death. Sexual relationships between the elderly are seen as improper, as threatening, as indecent. They challenge the sexual relations of the younger generation, which are often unsatisfactory. We have forgotten to see the beauty of ageing; we deny the elderly their aspirations, dreams (not about the past but about the future); we think their physical needs are to eat, piss and shit, never to fuck; we feel they need the peace of Valium, not of sex; the warmth of an electric blanket, not of physical closeness. We want them to go away, to die quietly so that we can forget the futility of our own lives and the inevitability of our own dying.

Thirty years ago I was a celibate priest, still – if one discounts masturbation – a virgin. Masturbating ever more frequently, going to confession ever more frequently. I was even sent to a psychiatrist to find out what was wrong with me. I thought I was not just a solitary sinner, but the only solitary sinner. In 1968, I came in conflict with the Catholic bishops, because I publicly wrote that Catholics should disobey the Pope and make their own decisions about contraception. The conflict increased and I ceased to practice as a priest in 1970 after being banned in three dioceses.

I know I was not cut out to be celibate and would have become a miserably fallen priest had I stayed on. So I left the priesthood, a disgrace to my order, to my family, driven by unfulfilled sexual longings. I remained a virgin for some time, not from choice; partly because I carried a baggage of guilts and fears about sexuality and the body; more practically because I was gauche, inept, and totally insecure in my relation-

ships with women. When I met the woman who was to become – and remain – my wife, clumsy and ignorant as I was, I found that sexuality was liberating, ecstatically fulfilling. It still is.

I think sensuality and tactility are of central importance to one's health. I wholly support women's fight against the presumptuous, arrogant, unwanted physical attentions of men. However, we must fight to give the touch, the kiss, the hug of affection, support, friendship, their proper place in human relationships. Men in particular must learn to hug each other, even off the football field. We are too frightened of our bodies and our emotions. Within families especially, we must learn close, non-encroaching physical contact. Fathers have a lot to learn, and warm physical contact with children, especially as they grow older, must be a high priority. It's very important.

We live in a 'now' society. Instant gratification is all the go. The media concentrate on the young, or when they get daring, on those who are 'thirty something.' Our literature is too inward looking, too self-preoccupied. The novel, as written particularly by men, is too self-conscious, too trendy, too preoccupied with form. There is too little celebration of years passed, fulfilled and unfulfilled. Dylan Thomas urged a raging "against the dying of the light". 'Raging' has taken on a new meaning but it should still be the prerogative of the elderly. Middle age, especially in the nineties, the neurasthenic, neo-puritan nineties, has become the desperate fight for conventionality.

The aged deserve more respect, not because they are wiser (they are often not) but because they are people. We need to give them more independence, physical and emotional; and more support, at home, or in smaller places with nursing care. We need to listen to them. Again, primarily because they are people, but also because they are our history, they have much to remember for us. We shy away from the elderly, because they remind us of dying, ours not theirs. Dying should become as much a focus in our social and political awareness as is birthing. People ageing should be encouraged to make more choices, to break the conventions, which are considered the privilege of the young. In pretending to make the aged more comfortable, we are trying to comfort ourselves. We want the aged to live quiet and restricted lives, like battery hens. Social reform is about making the cages more comfortable, but real reform consists of throwing away the cages, of allowing ageing to be free and different, in ways that we all dream of, but never risk pursuing.

Conformity is such a social demand that we come to demand it of ourselves. It is safer. So we label the aged as 'eccentric' or 'senile', when often we are viewing our younger selves, before we had learnt how to be middle-aged (usually when we are about twenty-five), before we had become busy enough to pretend that we ourselves are not growing old and already dying. Reading Yeats, particularly his two 'Byzantium' poems, we are reminded that dying is an unforgettable and inescapable experience, and worth living for.

This was written for a book (as yet unpublished) of interviews with people about ageing and identity; edited by Denise Higgins and Sylvia Wharton.

Stew

in memory of John (Black Jack) Hanrahan

My heart is in it
sizzling for the hungry.
They will find it
and devour it.
We eat each other,
relish egos
tear at tender
and religious vanities.
The sun shakes out
its yellow pepper.
I add onions
tomato and green paprika,
and you dear John.
We don't taste bad
old friend.
Oh great day,
already my
black and white
dream tigers,
my slow grey cats
of memory
are leaping into colour,
leaving the dull reviews,
the newspapers
for dead.

Mal Morgan

David Martin 1915–1997

Some fragments recalled

Vane Lindesay

MOST THINGS THAT SHOULD be said about David Martin have been said – that he was born Ludwig Detsinyi in Hungary in 1915, that he was one of the last few left to have participated in the Spanish Civil War, that he settled in Melbourne with Richenda in 1949, wrote over forty books of verse and prose, was a full-time writer and was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to literature. David died and was buried in his adopted town Beechworth during July 1997.

We at *overland* would like to boast that we discovered David. In truth, David discovered us, to become a most valued supporter, contributor, and our friend for just forty-two years. David wrote long analytical letters critical and constructive after every issue of *overland* from the first issue for Spring 1954, encouraging its founder and editor Stephen Murray-Smith. His last comments were written in 1996.

During his early years in Melbourne David made some sort of a living as a copywriter for the advertising agency O'Brien Publicity at their old Temple Court address in Collins Street. At the time I had just been discharged after serving five of the war years in the army and was building up a practice as a graphic designer. David gave me a tremendous start by commissioning me to illustrate in full colour his story of the history and processing of table salt – the whole in rhyming verse. He had conceived a character 'Walt the Salt' to tell the story in verse – my task was to delineate Walt and the other characters in the story situations: this I did to David's approval and that too of the O'Brien executives.

This colourful booklet, a challenging exercise for both of us, was distributed to school children around the Commonwealth, designed to assist their school work.

David's sally into children's story-telling probably prompted him to do more of the same. For he again called me to prepare a set of drawings which were to illustrate a pilot presentation, the first of a proposed series of stories for children. This, 'The Adventures of Dinkum the Kangaroo' was labelled 'Junior Brumby Number One'. David had a ten-page dummy printed with two-colour illustrations running through the text bound in a four-colour cover. I cannot find this title on any list of David's books – we should presume publishers of the day were not interested. *Overland* never had such a devoted and committed supporter as David Martin. In his younger days he was a regular team member, despite very poor eyesight, batting for *overland* at the traditional cricket matches against *Meanjin*. I have a fond memory of the match when David was next man in to bat and partner me. David had fastened his right pad securely but had rather hastily buckled his male protector in position. He faced the bowler and smacked the ball for two runs. Halfway down the pitch something that looked like a strangely shaped rat or small dog or some creature was snapping at his ankle. As he ran his protector had become loose, trailed down his trouser leg and the elastic expanded and retracted with every pace, looking for all the world as if he were being chased by a frenzied, savage creature. David enjoyed the risible situation and told often of the occasion he stooped to pick up two pine cones – and they flew away.

We all have our treasured memories of David. He gave his mates some wonderful yesterdays.

George Turner 1916–1997

Judith Raphael Buckrich

PERHAPS THE MOST difficult thing for any biographer is to write the obituary of her subject. Next year I would have known George Turner for twenty years. During the last five I have been getting to know him as his biographer.

George Turner was a moral thinking man. He had a sense of right and wrong and yet he was always questioning it. It almost always came undone, just as all people's fragile morality is kept in place as much by its unravelling as by the occasions when we manage to stay 'on the path'.

His life was often hard and just as often easy and his most difficult moments were ones he would laugh about afterwards. He travelled a very long way from where he started so that by the end of his life he had transformed himself many times. In his last letter to me he wrote that "the only value in regret is the lesson learned; the rest is self-pity for having been what we once were."

Turner was born in Melbourne but spent the first six years of his life among the poppet heads of the gold mines of Kalgoorlie where his father was a mines' accountant. He had little company beside his parents, a small dog and the occasional visitor.

From there his family fell on hard times and he and his mother moved back to Melbourne where he began to live a solitary life full of reading and peopled by his imagination. His primary school years were spent mostly at the St Paul's Cathedral Choir School where he was an unangelic choir boy. By the time he attended University High School he was in the habit of writing regularly and had several gems published in the school magazine.

After a short spurt as a copy boy at *The Herald*, he braved the great depression as a waiter and later a singing waiter. Here he began to drink in such quantities that it nearly killed him before he gave it up forty years later.

As soon as the Second World War began he joined the army and spent six years with 25th battalion in Europe, North Africa and the New Guinea highlands.

After a few years in back in Melbourne he became the Employment Officer in Wangaratta and then went to work at Bruck Mills. In Wangaratta he met Frank Kellaway who persuaded him to take long enough off his drinking career to start taking writing seriously.

His war novel *Young Man of Talent* finally appeared in 1959 and was followed by *A Stranger and Afraid*, *The Cupboard Under the Stairs*, *A Waste of Shame*, *The Lame Dog Man*, *Transit of Cassidy*, *Beloved Son*, *Vaneglory*, *Yesterday's Men*, *In the Heart or in the Head*, *The Sea and Summer*, *Brainchild*, *The Destiny Makers* and *Genetic Soldier* which was published in 1994. A stroke had slowed him down but he was working on something new in the last weeks before his death.

For *Cupboard Under the Stairs* he received the Miles Franklin Prize and *The Sea and Summer* was honoured by the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and the Arthur C. Clarke Prize.

His contribution was much more than these books and many short stories. During the nineteen sixties, after he was befriended by John Bangsund and Bruce Gillespie, he became one of the best known and most feared critics and reviewers of science fiction. He read many hopeful writers' manuscripts and provided good advice, support and encouragement.

The singing continued as well, and people who knew him before I did said that he was often likely to burst into song and be entertaining for hours on end, and he was always happy to discuss books, music and science fiction with anyone any time.

As I got to know him, I found that there was great suffering and great joy. But I also saw in him the discipline necessary to write and to keep writing even when it seemed that what he wanted to say was sometimes not sought after.

I will miss his humour, his generosity, his intelligence and kindness. But because he has been so great an influence, these things will continue and in his work he will be with us always.

fiction

He Get Too Quickly

Gary McCartney

MAYBE IT WAS THE HASH I had smoked back in Cairo, but when I woke from heavy dreams the train was in freefall. Plunging like a dagger towards the heart of upper Egypt, home of the dark-skinned people, necropolis of the Pharaohs. The Nile a black glass curtain to one side, reflecting the crescent moon, blurred through palm trees and power poles. The Sahara blue, undulating on the other. A vast, infernal ocean.

I was barely in contact with the train. My shirt hung damply at my back, backside numb against the slatted seat. Zero gravity situation. Heart pounding in time with the engine.

The train was nearing terminal velocity as it approached Luxor. Starkly lit villages flashed by, disappearing upwards towards the horizon. I held a wet bandanna over my face against the eyeball-peeling heat and dust blasting through the glassless windows.

And then the cramps reappeared, twisting and torturing my intestines, cold sheen of sweat on my face. I rolled my head upwards. Backpack straps swinging on luggage rack, crates of limes and chickens, cheap cardboard suitcases all in motion. Boy asleep on one rack, arm swinging limply, head nodding. I pushed myself to my feet and climbed the aisle towards the stinking cubicle at the rear of the carriage, pulling myself up between the seat backs past jolting, rocking people. The chubby matron and the skinny brown children with whom I had shared my water supply. Who had offered me chicken and rice on sheets of newspaper. The crew-cut and acned soldiers in faded green fatigues, pulverized cigarette ends under their boots. The leathery old man in the filthy *gellabia* who had jabbered at me for half an hour in Arabic, his mouth a red-rimmed hole with one long, ivory tooth a sentinel at the entrance. Who was now nodding onto his chest, a string of saliva over his grey stubbled chin.

I held my breath and closed the flimsy door. Pain and necessity overcame disgust as I squatted over the faeces-encrusted hole and voided explosively over the strobing railway ties below. I exhaled, my head spinning, and balanced with difficulty on the balls of my feet, bracing myself with fingertips against one grimy wall, using my other hand to keep my shorts safe at knee level.

The brakes went on. My outstretched arm was against the wrong wall. Inertia struck. My shoulder his the opposite wall at the same time as my swinging camera. The door swung open and banged shut repeatedly. I stood up too quickly and everything started to turn black. I fell forward and grabbed wildly for the window ledge. Fingers and chin on ledge, trouser-bound feet still planted on the ridged footplates of the toilet. Body rigid at forty-five degrees, genitals and camera in synchronized motion. The train jerked and screeched to a halt and gave one final heave backwards. The toilet door slammed shut again and I could hear passengers scrambling about the carriage, already forming a frantic scrum against the people on the platform fighting to get on. I grabbed a lung full of blast furnace heat and dust and opened my eyes.

On the platform, a dusky youth in a striped *gellabia* and improbably clumpy shoes grinned white teeth and gave me a Cleopatra cigarette. "My name is Jamal. Welcome to Luxor. You need hotel?"

I followed him through dusty streets harshly illuminated by bare bulbs in shop doorways. People walked in the relative cool of the evening. Veiled women with dark, secret eyes, young men in cotton pants and sports shirts. Old men lingered in cafes, contemplative over glasses of tea and *narghile*. Smells

of spices and animals and stagnant water shared the air with the tinny wail of cheap radios.

"My family has very nice hotel. Very comfortable."

"You have a fridge?"

"Fridge, yes. Very big. Very cold."

"Full of nice cold beers?"

"No beer."

We reached Television Street, a narrow, rutted alley of half-finished buildings. Some had got as far as the fourth floor before the money had run out and the fourth floor had become the roof, with stairs leading up to the clear sky. The raw concrete was still hot from the searing sun, bare reinforcement bars crookedly protruding like broken strings of instruments.

"Come. This way."

Kicking my sandals off at the top of the concrete steps, cool terrazzo floor on tortured soles.

"Drink tea?"

"Sure. My own room, right?" I'd had it with dormitories.

"Yes. You come. I show you."

Through the kitchen, Jamal pointing out the large antique refrigerator and pausing to put a dented saucepan of water on the stove. Lighting the gas with a loud 'woof'.

My room had two small single beds and two sets of bunks.

"You choose any bed. Sleep anywhere. No-one else here."

"And the bathroom?"

I got the tour. At least is was clean. With a western toilet bowl.

"You American?" he asked.

"English."

"There is American staying in our hotel. Come."

He led me to the American's room as if he were going to show me an illicitly stashed mummy in the linen closet.

"Here," he said proudly as he swung open the door without knocking.

The room was a small one and smelled of deodorant and ripe socks. A pair of which adhered to the generous feet of the American, who waved languidly from his bed. He had been reading a paperback held at an awkward angle above his head, and had one hairy leg loosely crossed over the other knee. I could see his balls up the leg of his shorts. He extended his hand and we exchanged names. He was putting himself through law school, travelling to give himself some insight into international law. I was being government subsidized through architecture school.

"Don't let him charge you more than four a night", he whispered.

There was no-one else in Jamal's cousin's restaurant. I sat outside and ate kofte kebab and rice and rich, nutty hummus and slapped at mosquitoes. The soft breeze from the Nile was enough to sway the slender palms and sweet, heavy dates started to fall around me, each hitting the baked earth with a sugary thud. I leaned back and stretched and breathed in the warm, heady air.

I WAS IN BED, trying to write a letter to Susan, images of Cairo scratching their way across the sweat-stained airmail pad. The pyramids rising pure and mountainous above the trashy outgrowths of the city. Night in the youth hostel, grey, stark and penal, tossing on the iron bunk in the stifling basement dormitory. The Norwegian below me begging for insect repellent, almost in tears with the torment, blood-black mosquito smears on the white sheets. In the museum, the small, serene face of the boy king preserved in gold forever. His empty tomb now trodden by thousands of Nikes and Reeboks . . .

What I could never describe to her was how much I missed her.

"Who you writing to?"

It was Jamal.

I was naked under a single sheet, still damp from my shower. Thinking about Susan had given me an erection and I turned over, embarrassed.

"My girlfriend."

"She did not come with you? Why?"

"Aren't you sleeping on the roof tonight?"

"No. Too cold. More comfortable here."

He pulled off his *gellabia* and slipped into the second single bed. He leaned up on one elbow.

"You smoke hash?"

At least there was some consolation. This better be good stuff, I thought. He reached into his discarded garment and fished out a pungent nugget of black hashish. As he broke open a cigarette with a long thumbnail

and proceeded to methodically roll a joint, I tried to work out what it was that he wanted from me.

"Is your girlfriend pretty? You have photograph to show me?"

"No," I lied. It was next to my money. And besides, I didn't want Susan becoming some Arab kid's masturbatory fantasy.

"What she look like?"

I lied again.

"Oh, tall, blond, big blue eyes ..."

"She make good fuck?"

He passed me the glowing joint. I inhaled deeply, the sweet harshness tearing at my dry throat. Visions of Susan flitted through my mind like winged insects. Her slim fingers fluttering over my skin.

I exhaled, opened my eyes again and smiled.

"Yes."

"I have English girlfriend last summer. Very good."

He made a fist with his thumb between the index and middle fingers.

"Very good," he grinned.

We finished the joint. I lay on my back, watching the broken fan not going round. Creatures of negative mass bounced around the ceiling. Pain was starting to gnaw at my lower intestine again like the rats on the river bank gnawing the mooring ropes of the *faluccas*.

Jamal spoke again.

"You know," he confided, "there is difference between man from Upper Egypt and man from Lower Egypt."

"No," I replied, uninterested. "I didn't know that."

All the mass in my body had drifted to my head and as a result the bed was starting to tip imperceptibly backwards. I was on the edge of sleep but someone had a tight hold on my innards and kept pulling me back.

"Yes," he continued. "There is difference."

"Uh-huh."

"You know, man from Lower Egypt, when he make fuck, he lasts long time, you understand?"

I could hear the springs creak as he mimed the motions.

"But man from Upper Egypt, he get too quickly. He is different, has special *penniz*."

"Oh."

"Yes. I think it is the heat."

"I'll buy that."

I was still wondering what exactly he was trying to sell me when another cramp gripped me like a tyre fitter's hand and I leaped out of bed and ran naked to the toilet.

The American and I were walking reverently through the immense hypostyle hall of the Temple of Thebes. Viscous heat filled the spaces between the fat, closely spaced columns and pressed down on our heads. I squinted up at the toiling sun. Where there had once been a roof to echo the sounds of the procession of the slave-borne god-kings. Filtered light in solid beams through high clerestory windows, whorls of smoke and dust. Heavy aromas of incense and perfumed oils. Brown-skinned Nubian slaves fanning the pale, aquiline faces of the Nobles, sounds of flutes and stringed instruments. A multitude of vivid colour now bleached and faded over millennia.

"He's after your English ass," said the American.

"He's just a kid," I said. "Showing off. It doesn't mean anything. Look, see how the colour has stayed on the underside of that lintel where it's been in shadow. That's over four thousand years old. No-one has figured out yet how they mixed their colours to last so long."

"I'm telling you, man, he's got the hots for you. It's a way of life in these Arab countries. That's some pretty bizarre shit he was going over last night. And you're just leading him on, running around with your *penniz* wagging about for all to see."

"I didn't have time to grab anything. It's no big deal."

"I think you should talk to Saeed about it."

Jamal's older brother ran the hotel in the summer.

Responsible young man with western clothes and university English. The American approved of him. Jamal, he said, was just a waster. Like all the other sleepy Arabs dozing away the blistering afternoons in shop doorways and concrete drainage pipes, or playing backgammon over sweet mint tea in murky cafes. Who lived on top of an archaeological treasure trove and treated it like fucking furniture.

I WOKE UP EARLY from fitful bouts of dream-drenched sleep interrupted by sudden and frequent dysenteric sprints to the toilet. The first alarm call was

the spiralling wail of the muezzin at four o'clock. Then, as the dawn approached, the hoarse crow of a rooster heralded the surreal cacophony of howls, brays and bleating noises which tailed off raggedly in deference to the entrance of Ra, God of the Sun.

I tried, as usual, to steal some precious moments of sleep but it was already too hot and the Germans who had shared the room with me that night were up and organizing.

Instead I pulled on my shorts and swung my legs out of bed, checking my money belt and scratching reflexively at some fresh mosquito bites. I wandered out to the fridge, opening the door and stretching my hands out to its comforting coolness.

Breakfast was served by a yawning Jamal who had spent the night on the roof with his brothers. The congealing plate of purplish fava beans made my insides growl.

"I have a bad stomach," I said. "I can't eat beans."

Jamal disappeared and returned with a bottle of 7-UP.

"You drink," he instructed. "Very good for stomach."

I had heard of some interesting tombs in the Valley of the Nobles. The American was not interested.

"I'm beat," he said. "I'm going to hang out here for the day, maybe catch up on some postcards. You go play Howard Carver if you want."

"Carter."

"Whatever."

"Don't play with your *penniz* too much."

"I won't."

IT WAS CRAZY TO TRAVEL in Egypt in August. When the Hiltons and Sheratons lay empty, lizards scuttling across their dry fountains. The guardians and Tourist Police asleep in the shade of the ancient stones, apathetic in the sandbagging heat. While the Saharan wind blew dust and desolation across the vast temple complexes. I would sit alone there, ears singing with the silence, absorbing the monstrous beauty.

It was crazy to be pedalling a wobbly rented bicycle through the shimmering furnace of the Nile Valley, carrying a backpack filled with bottled water, camera equipment, sketchbooks, archaeological guides and toilet paper. But that's what I was doing. Susan had told me I was testing myself. My capacity for independence. I wasn't going to admit that to her.

I stopped and opened the litre of Evian I had frozen solid in Jamal's fridge. Tipping the now tepid water into my parched mouth and over the top of my baked head. I studied the map and squinted around the ramshackle collection of hovels and outhouses. An impermanent collage of baked earth blocks, palm fronds and sheet metal. The sprawled-out dogs and the lines of desiccated washing were the only signs of habitation.

I was in the Valley of the Nobles.

The guardian swung open the heavy steel door, lit a hurricane lamp and handed it to me. He wasn't going down those steps. I started down into the black void, clutching the worn rope which served as a handrail. The steps were narrow and smooth from generations of intruders. I removed my sandals and stepped sideways, bowing my head, scraping vertebrae on the hewn rock. The weight of countless layers of civilization bearing down on me.

The walls and ceiling of the chamber were covered in vines. Sinuous tendrils snaking across the ceiling and cascading down the walls. Bunches of voluptuous purple grapes dripping sensuously from the rock on which they were painted. Like the sweat that was now condensing on my skin in the cool humidity. Running in rivulets down my forehead, stinging my eyes. Streaming down my dusty legs, bare feet making sticky footprints on the packed dirt floor. As if my host was anointing me with his three-thousand-year vintage.

"DID HE SAY he wanted to fuck you?"

Saeed was being polite but stern. Serious allegations had been made. Jamal was sulking at the kitchen table. The American stood against the sink, picking at a bunch of wet, pea-sized grapes. They all looked in my direction when I came in. I looked at the American. He shrugged.

"No," I said. "He didn't."

"See – " said Jamal, "I was telling him difference between man from Upper Egypt and man from Lower Egypt – " He pointed at me.

" – Why you tell my brother these lies?"

"I didn't tell him anything," I said. "Who told you this, Saeed?" I shot another look at the culprit, who was spitting seeds into the sink.

"You should tell this guy, Saeed," said the American, "not to talk like this to your guests. Egyptians are very fine people. He gives the wrong impression. He makes your family look bad. People misinterpret . . ."

Jamal and Saeed had a heated exchange in Arabic. Jamal shamefully turned his head away.

"Look," I said to Saeed, "He's young. He didn't mean any harm. I was not offended."

I extended a hand to Jamal. "No hard feelings?"

Jamal took my hand under instruction from Saeed. Avoiding my eye. He turned away and disappeared up the stairs.

Saeed offered his apologies. I said it was nothing. I was dog tired and my bowels were in turmoil. I adjourned to the bathroom.

I ran into the American at dinner but sat at a different table from his in the small, brightly lit restaurant. Doing my best to ignore him as I scooped up rice and lentils and drank cool water from an aluminium beaker.

He was joking around with some locals, teenage boys eager to improve their English and hang out with an American. He was drawing a diagram to show them the parts of the body, labelling them with arrows one by one. Arms. Legs. Finishing up inevitably with grotesque caricatures of the nether regions. Dick. Balls. Ass. Laughing and smoking cigarettes, the boys' teeth white and irregular. Until the American said seriously, "These are not good words. You should not learn them."

And he crumpled up the drawing and shoved it in his pocket. As he got up he looked over as if to speak to me, then awkwardly turned away and left. I watched his ridiculous high-tops disappear up the crowded street.

I PULLED UP MY SHORTS, shivering. It was getting worse. I would have to see a doctor. I had not slept. God knows what time it was. The final spasms still ran through me and my head was throbbing. I flushed and left the bathroom, heading for the dark kitchen for cool water and ice on my forehead.

He was there when I turned around from the fridge. I froze with shock. Jamal stood tall in front of me. He was naked apart from a pair of faded blue shorts, his dark torso sculpted in the light from the refrigerator. We stood still, facing each other. His eyes never leaving mine, burning right through me. The rest of his face a mask. The only sound was the running water from the refilling toilet tank. He turned around and walked away, his back straight and proud.

Even before the northbound train ground to a halt at Luxor station, frenzied travellers were flinging themselves in through the windows, bags and suitcases held before them. I was suddenly swept up in the rush of the crowd on the platform, weakly fighting to stay upright and keep possession of my pack. My sandalled feet mashed by heavy shoes and army boots. Rancid breath filling my nostrils, harsh chin stubble scraping my own fluffy growth. Flecks of spit on my face. An eternity of sweaty pushing and swaying before everyone that was going to had either wedged themselves into a carriage or onto the roof. I found myself squashed into the end of a compartment, near the toilet cubicle. Which was comforting. The train lurched forward and I lost my balance into the crowd, people behind me starting to force me to the floor. I panicked, all elbows and knees, until equilibrium was regained. I couldn't breathe. My face became numb. Lights dancing, flickering, head spinning, down, down . . . One last ounce of resource. I mimed vomiting and thrashed my way towards the open window. The crowd parted like I was Moses and I stuck my head out into the rushing desert air. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and passed me two blister packed tablets. I washed them down with lukewarm water from my canteen.

I tried to sleep standing up, wedged into a corner of the bouncing carriage. It was late afternoon, and I could see the broad expanse of the Nile, sunlight dancing and sparkling on its jewelled waters. The *faluccas*, sails as white as egrets, slicing through the current. Men and women at work in the green, fertile flood plain, tending strips of maize and beans. Lazy water buffalo wallowing in irrigation ditches.

I was thinking of Susan, how it would feel to see her and touch her again. To feel her breath on my sunburned skin. But every time I closed my eyes all I could see was Jamal's face. His eyes as black as Nubia, as deep as the tombs of the Pharaohs.

Sandalwood

Our father brings the last stick of sandalwood
and lays it reverently on the playroom fire
the sandalwood cutters moved through this country
systematically cutting it out a generation ago.

The heavy scent fills the room and the flame dances
yellow and blue and green on the fluted clock
till our eyes glaze over our father's dark face
bending to tend the fire his gift to us
this emblem out of a past we cannot share

and in a moment everything changes the playroom
burns through the night like Aladdin's cave
it skims through the doors floats high
clearing the creek-bed where the owls
sit humbly and the horses sleep
with lowered heads in the starlit paddocks.

Dorothy Hewett

Thank you Milosz

thank god for words
to divide the world

to break up the plain synergy
of thing on thing

thank god for the naming
separating off of us

from ancestor
tree from stable

staple from yarn
yearning from given

riven from beloved
thank god for words like

love so we know what we –
large and clumsy – are

deft at and thank words
for god so we can tell

ourselves apart

Chris Mansell

Abermain war memorial

Those dead from the favoured wars
lay scratched in the base
of an obelisk next to a playground.
The toilets there are locked after dark
and on weekends. Kids shoot up in the park.
No-one comes to remember their sons,
boys dead from the popular wars.

Driving towards Kurri you'll see
the bridge for the coal trains
to your right. It says "Vietnam
for Vietnamese" and something else
too worn or too well scrubbed to read. This
how they remember my friend's father.
His sacrifice wasn't for them.

The bridge has carried the trains
seventy years, eighty: I don't know.
Its bricks are a weathered hard red.
Other stories are scraped there,
in initials. My father's first love,
for example. Those bricks are
like Spartans, like the woman

we saw that August, washing herself
on the ground with the tap. We sat
in the car eating chips, watching as if
she were a flock-lost bird.
Dad wouldn't let us throw her the scraps:
he said leave her her pride. Next time
we were there the tap had no handles.

The tough kids from school ride trailbikes
in the bush just through there.
I was out there once, the cicadas louder
than the bikes. The kids didn't talk.
Diffo dropped his XR, sat by a tree,
face in his hands. Next week
was Anzac Day and they found him

O.D.'d in the dunnies. "Poofter,"
his mates said, "had it cummin."
They wrote his name in the bridge.
In days they were back at the circuit,
pissing around, pissed on long necks
nicked from their dads. They're all
Spartans here. It's not just the bricks.

Greg McLaren

Log

December 16. The sky face down
on the deck trying to rain
like a man trying to cry,
that heaving sound
then quiet again.
We are becalmed.
Someone tells travellers' tales:
Vortex Forest, Suicide Forest.
These are the names of real places.
The sound takes up colour
as it moves across the water,
arrives in green fir,
an island just over there,
just over there.
Our hands are oars.
There are holes in our hands.
What is the use of this flailing?

Stillness again.
The poet we carry as a mascot
is trying to make weather from words.
While the seamen hoot:
Hey Tsunami, waiting for you
we boil our leather soles
and drink the soup.

Below deck, the engineer
leans delirious on the dead engine
thinking of other great failures.

Radio out. Charged silence.
Blue light crawls amongst the rigging.
There have been worse days than this.
Sometimes, holding the two ends
of a broken sentence
so close, so close
you close your eyes
and wait for the leaping flash.

Julie Hunt

Dad

under the car
in the shed
at the races,
a small man
with short square hands
he wanted to be a brain surgeon.

Where to start?
Dad and Love
Dad and Death
Dad chasing Mum
around the motel room
on their wedding night
and not in fun.
Mum doing the washing,
me airing the dirty laundry.

The first wife
was beautiful. She had red hair.
She was very bright, very fast,
a slut, a bitch. She was nineteen.
Dad went away, fixing trucks for William Angliss,
driving gas masks to the wharf,
got jack of it, enlisted.
When he came back she was gone.

There were kids, out searching.
They found all sorts of things:
God and the army,
poetry, money.

They met up at Christmas,
talking of Dad,
how he got out from under,
wiped the grease off his hands,
spent ten years bored to death
in the car yard on the corner
of Cimetere and Charles Street, Launceston,
how he should have stuck with the movies
when the talkies came in.
Threepence a head
in the back of the Oddfellows Hall at Deloraine,
kept someone on to play when the sound cut out.

How he's ordered the box, prepaid,
his only regret you can't get those pressed
cardboard ones
they have on the mainland.
Plastic rose and a ute.
No cards, flowers or condolences.

More pressed ham? Go on, it's Christmas.

There are other branches to the family.
Uncle Dan was a rat
which got Frank into Duntroon.
Auntie Mol dressed him up for the interview
which was a dinner.
It's all class and manners there.
He got in. They reckon he's ASIO now.

Gee it's cold for December
Dad's locked the fire into the wall.
The house is an icebox
but it's cheaper.

I don't want to be too negative.
Dad stores his love for me
under the lowboy
in a tin held up by a magnet
and in the desk behind the false partition.
The top rolls back like an eyelid.
It's neat in there.
He says you can't be too careful.

When Dad meets Death
he's sober. Winding back the speedo
he says she'll go for years.
Death, cunning as a meat axe, plays dumb
kicking the tyres.
Dad says it's human nature,
everyone takes you down;
it was better before,
people had standards then.
Death yawns.
Dad gets shifty, says
come clean, are you really him
I want to meet the butcher
not the maggot on the block.
Death says you've got to come down
Dad says that's my final offer
anything less and I'd be giving it away.

Julie Hunt

fiction

Home

David Roderick Smith

IT HAS BEEN OUR COMMON terrestrial belief that those from Above would land in a nation with a substantial media industry, that they would want us to record and promulgate their business. Our films tell us that those from out there would be Diplomats from beyond and in trepidation and excitement we would be allowed to draw them to the forefront of our self-concerned movements. But it is not so, they have watched our media long and hard and over and over. They no longer have an interest in all that. They now want to see what they have not studied. Therefore if you want to see them, if you want to see their new form and content, you must go a long way away.

IN KARACHI, WINTER, the season of death was so fully upon us and the cold so far into our bones that a mallet and chisel could not gouge it out. In the matter of a few days, winter had lurched in there weeping and spitting like a drink-sodden Anzac mourning his lost holiday. The unnatural humbug climate was the plague of all of us there. Myself, I pulled my scarf a notch tighter and walked in the sleet muttering some words from 'The Boxer' by Simon and Garfunkel through clenched teeth. I enjoyed the warmth of spirit by flicking a gold English pound coin into the cup of the blinded street corner beggar but noted with concern (for at the time it did concern me) the black eyes and the brute Urdu of the loitering scoundrels who resolved there and then to take the coins and for good measure to lead the beggar by the arm into heavy traffic.

I had met and had with me two of the French: a Monsieur Ogier and Mademoiselle Chantal. They spoke little Anglais. I knew some of their tongue and more of the common store of words let loose in Europe by the Iron Fist of Ancient Rome. I would say these words to them in a French accent so we could communicate so we were together.

I had told them I had to see somebody so we waited in the marketplace near piles of green spice, incense makers, and a man in a dress beating copper with a hammer. An ocean of flies gently undulated on a side of lamb hanging off a hook. False teeth lay for sale on a trestle table with the flies pawing them too. Among moth-eaten Betamax videos for sale or hire was a series of comedies featuring a trolley person with no legs clattering away doing high jinx on a modified skateboard. I curled my lips pending a laugh but a blast of a car horn shattered my incipient comic relief and I turned around to look knowing it would be Rashid, a long, long way from his old Home.

Rashid's taxi was as old as the Plague, battered and pockmarked like the Moon and the engine sounded like someone being keelhauled. Rashid's visage offered no greater inducement to get in the taxi.

He spat out, "Do you want a lift?" in Urdu and English as though they were the words of a vendetta. He put his hand over his moustache and mouth to stifle his impatience for us to answer. When I, at last, with recognition assented, he kicked the door open and shouted "Get in!" three times, once for each of us and then a fourth time to start a new round as M. Ogier was a little slow. I stated an address chosen only because it was on the other side of town. He slammed the column shift down like a judge's gavel and we started off.

"Ze light is red," said M. Ogier.

"I couldn't give a coffin of spit!" shouted Rashid.

Karachi blurred past under the flashing wheels of Rashid, and animate parts of it were forced to sprint to avoid a dread conjunction with Rashid's car. He made me wind down my window so he could scream at a donkey he so nearly hit. He turned residential street corners at 90 km/h. He overtook on the inside with a wheel on the footpath plunging into a tea stall. I saw a hooded schoolgirl leap out of his way to safety on a median strip but he U-turned to encircle her like a shark with teeth sharp with the foulest Urdu invective. He stared me full in the face and shouted about the route he was going to take. I noticed his teeth were all falling sideways like neglected tombstones in a swamp. He stared back at the road and hurtled through a yellow light and a good deal of the personal space of a pedestrian.

I tried to talk to him about weightier matters, tried to tell him that I knew. He didn't care; all he talked about was where we were going and how he was going to get us there. As he bounced down a residential alleyway short cut, washing was dragged away by his functionless radio aerial and kitchen waste thrown from a window splashed on his windscreen to be washed away by the one working wiper. We spun around the dogleg at the end of the alleyway, braked and went into four-wheel lockup. The car stopped just short of the old men who had placed a table and seats for backgammon outside their houses where a motor vehicle had never driven. Rashid pressed his angry fist unceasingly on the horn and the old men did their best to clear the way. As each man looked at us in turn, I noticed they had both fear and a big cataract in their eyes. With the last man needing only one step to get out of the way, Rashid hurtled on.

"Minutes off the trip!" he shouted, drowned out by tyre squeals.

I watched him intently. His eyes darted back and forth like a metronome, looking for a gap in the traffic. He expelled more air than he took in. While he waited for minutes to enter an enormous highway, his stumpy black fingers clasped and reclasped around the steering wheel looking like ten blood-stained black puddings vomiting over the side of a Bay of Bismillah ferry. When vendors came to our window, he screamed out their wares to us. One was selling brown sugar, a drug. Rashid screamed at me "Do you want brown sugar?"

"No," I replied.

"Do you want brown sugar?" he screamed at Monsieur Ogier.

"Just say no," I muttered to him in French.

"N-Non," he stammered.

Rashid was not impressed. Again he screamed his brown sugar mantra at Chantal. She sat mute and frightened.

"She speaks no English," I told him.

"You ask her in French," he screamed back.

"Voulez-vous de sucre brune?" I inquired politely.

Chantal did not respond. I looked away pondering the stupidity of my question. Then suddenly Chantal let out a series of screams at blood-in-the-eardrums pitch, as if all the knights of Agincourt ran their gauntlets down a blackboard. I spun around to silence her and saw the cause that had tipped her. Thrust right up her Avignon nose were three withered stumps of the amputee children demanding ingress to her wallet. The girl who was last to get her stump out of the window was thrown into the other two as Rashid sped off.

Karachi is not so big that it cannot be traversed in under an hour, particularly propelled by the force flowing through Rashid and his car. The white line firmly under the middle letter of his number plate, Rashid sped up a third freeway lane of his own creation, forcing others to adapt according to Darwin. When at last he saw that we were close to the address I had indicated, a look almost of panic crossed the face that had shown only passive intensity during routine overtaking on the crest of a hill. When he reluctantly stopped, forced to acknowledge that we had in fact made our destination, he seemed momentarily deflated. Then with his eyes darting back and forth in time with the doll on the unused rear vision mirror

(which perpetually shook its head at each new manoeuvre) he saw another possible fare.

"Get out!" he screamed. "Get out! Get out!"

I threw the money in as an afterthought, as he careered off to his fare, the back door still open from the ponderous exit of the broken-willed Monsieur Ogier.

The fare was picked up and taken away. I heard the sound of wailing which may or may not have been from a mosque.

If you are always moving, then you are always going somewhere. If you are always going somewhere, then maybe, while you are going there, you are not lost.

FURTHER AWAY, in Sarawak, in a land incidentally and aptly meaning 'Head hunter', I could see the bamboo house she was in from where I stood between the palms. As I pushed through the mud, little scuttling things of all species ran against my legs and left a furry kiss or sting on my calf.

I stopped in the tangled periphery of the 'yard' of the house before me, so as to try to see her first before I approached. I couldn't see her.

The second-storey balcony was covered by bamboo slats to keep the sun off the people using and being used in the rooms. It kept her from my eyes.

Three of the slats hung loosely down, broken from outside by rain or kicked from inside by pain. I thought I could see a leg in a silk pyjama, but I could not be sure. I knew she was in there.

The buzz in my ear made me feel nervous. It hit my ears as a black wave out of the spongy giving-up trees and no matter how loud, the sound of my own humming could not stop it. I wondered if she could hear it, if she ever listened. Between her and the trees I stood in was a composted yard from which nothing of value would ever grow.

Somehow two stubborn ancestors of the trees beside me were pig-headed enough to stay wedged in the ground supporting the tumbling house upright like the sorely put-upon arms of a miserable wife leading her husband home again dead drunk for the almost last time.

Outside that house, I could not see that any of the green wood steps leading to the front door could support my weight. I could not see that they could support the weight of those within who had much heavier things weighing them down than I did. But these green wood steps were not used much, they mostly just led in.

Round the back, an old rusty lock gave way easily for me.

The foul cultures in the kitchen that battled for supremacy over the mouldy pots were too far engaged in their filthy germ warfare to infect me. The inner ugliness of the food pieces that draped the floor was testified to by the rat that sat, unafraid at all of me, choosing to chew bamboo with rusty nails in it instead of a bowl of rice and pigs' body pieces smashed on the ground beside it.

I bared my teeth and made the 'TSSSSSS' sound. It didn't move.

I stepped slowly right upon it, increasing the pressure gradually. I removed my boot many times to give it the option to flee. It just stayed there feeding until the escalating pressure of my boot crushed its brain and organs out onto that awful floor. It did not even care to struggle.

My reverie in the kitchen was replaced by the vibrations in my ear from the reverse wind blowing in the room beyond, the only other inhabited room. The wind blew strong. I knew what the wind was and that it was blowing over her and through her.

I entered the room and smelt the warm wind. The many eyes there looked at me but with no curiosity. The long thin old man near me raised his eyebrows but he looked away again at the end of the stick that was his main concern. It glowed at the end, then dimmed, and he grimaced at the beast entering his lungs and making itself so comfortable. Another Chinese boy, he was only a boy, reached around on the floor for his spilt matches, more concerned to find them in his fumbling way than to look at me.

She was there in the silk pyjamas I had seen on her leg through the spongy trees. Her now Chinese eyes recognized me and they recognized my recognition.

In Sarawak, they call smoking that heroin 'Chasing the Dragon'. With another long drag of the heroin stick, she chased the Dragon all the way inside her. When the Dragon knocks, it is friendly. When the Dragon enters, it is sleepy. When the Dragon awakes, it is hungry and wants more Dragon company.

I could lay poppy flowers from here to Home for her to swim along but she would not quite make it. She will always be hungry. She will always be lost.

THE SPARSE GRASS AND WEEDS around the village were still dark with a black burnt scar leading from Marko's hut to the forest where the villagers had finally caught and beaten to death the fire Marko made. Begrudgingly, and only through Marko's liberal application of the convincing facsimile of currency which was made so far away, did the villagers rebuild Marko's hut and even then it looked little more than one of those spontaneous shanty towns that a cyclone makes by picking up the wooden buildings and smashing them on the ones of concrete. Marko had never been popular on Isle Djerba, and was less so now. In their Tunisian-scented Arabic, they called him 'Outsider', and worse. Marko was an Outsider and more outside than they could suspect.

I had no trouble finding him and no trouble recognizing him, despite his being clad in the Djallabah, a Merlin costume which keeps the sun from burning the skin by its thick woollen folds. Marko was standing by himself on the beach looking out over the Mediterranean for something. I had no Djallabah, only British clothes and the British skin I had been allotted. I greeted him and identified myself but I was burning in the sun as much as the village did when Marko tilted the candle in his hut that night. I could not stay beside him out there under the radiation from the fire in Space. Marko was more intent on staring out over the Mediterranean than continuing our dialogue, so I left him to go wet for myself a towel and then to rub the towel's wetness into my face and neck.

The rivulets of water running down my face went through the basin of my eye alternately blurring and then splitting into double the image of Marko. I imagined I was one of the cataract men of Karachi and wondered at how their ten diseased eyes must have split me into twenty image-men. I wondered at the army of blurry beasts and buildings they had made out of the Karachi-scape, non-existent except in their yellowed lenses.

A cataract is a waterfall. I had never seen a waterfall, so I wondered if the watery cataract was so named because it reminded an Ancient of the hideous blinding flow which eventually covers and dims the eye forever.

Although I knew someone was right now talking at me, I refused to focus on their words or budge until I had finished my thinking. When ready, I turned to the speaker, a teenage Tunisian girl talking to me in that French language. She told me what I had heard several times previously from the villagers there: the story of Marko's fire. Whether it was the different climate or something which made a profounder distinction from his normal life out there, Marko had not been able to get to sleep on Isle Djerba. In all the months there, his time spent asleep was composed of a few hours dozing on the beach under the burning sun and some nights now and then when he would drop unconscious in his stricken hut. Then he would sleep for two days.

On one of these sleeping nights he tilted his candle and only awakened when he was dragged down the burning stairs by a whole village of firefighters. I had heard this tale before from the others, as well as of nights he spent pacing up and down the beach looking at the sky and singing his Home songs in his Home language.

What I had not heard was Marko's war beneath the waves each day, slicing, killing and maiming a swathe of African fish who could never know that their destiny was to die engaged in Alien-fish combat ten feet beneath the waves by a snorkelled Avenger wielding a kitchen knife and a kitchen fork as weapons.

"Are you brothers?" asked the Tunisian girl before she walked off.

"In some ways," I replied.

It was in an offer to cook one of these scarred and

blinded beasts Marko had dragged from the seas that I first connected with him. The sun looked like it had caught on fire and sunk as it disappeared into the water and the flames of the lesser fire we had made leapt up to burn our hands as we pulled huge strips of flesh from the roasting fish and put them into our mouths. Marko had little to say about Isle Djerba, little to say about anything much at all really. We ate all the meat off that long fish and then Marko broke its very hot skeleton over his knee.

Marko had spent a long time on the Canary Islands and had liked it there. He had liked the stories of the blond-haired Caucasian troglodytes living there who had fought the Spaniards to a brain-stunned standstill for one hundred years with clubs against gunpowder. While the rest of Europe was entering the Age of Reason, the Canarians huddled in caves together and howled at the moon. The Spanish planted their flag and claimed all the islands in the name of God and Spain. Marko described in detail the hypercivilized Spanish trying to load and unload their muskets while the brutes clubbed each to a pulp. He spent a lot of time amongst the sites of these old battles, traceable for him, though unfortunately given no name by the Spanish who would rather forget sad defeat.

But Marko had to leave the Canaries, he had heard such horrible, horrible things there. Marko began shouting as he told me the stories that made him want to leave. Marko badly needed sleep and I noticed he would repeat verbatim the same stories he had told me an hour earlier. In the middle of a story, he would stop for three to four minutes and then continue half way through a different story. Three times I heard the two stories that made him know he had to leave the Canary Islands.

One was told to him by a young German, one of the Northerners who refuse to do one year military training and in return take the longer period of compulsory civil service. Marko shouted and half raised himself above his fire as he told of the job the German who liked peace had to do: "He had to wash corpses in the hospital!" shouted Marko. "He had to wash corpses in the hospital!"

Before they were given over to the disposal of their relatives, the corpses in the hospital had to be washed and it was the job of the young dissenting German to wash the corpses in the hospital. "I'll show you," shouted Marko and he got up to shamble off to the charred remains of his hut.

I followed slower but more directly as the tired Marko weaved a little in his steps. At his stilted hut, Marko dragged himself by his hands up on to the raised balcony. He dragged me up by my arms, there having been no replacement made of the charred stairs by the villagers and certainly not by Marko.

We entered the charred charcoal-smelling blackness of his hut with its buckled boards and half-hinged doors and windows. In the moonlight it seemed like he had few possessions; in the light of the candle he lit, it seemed like he had none.

From under his pillow he pulled out the photos he wished to show me. He thrust the candle directly at them, close enough to burn. In the halo of light I saw both the photos and the other being in the room: a coiled black snake at the foot of the bed, about two centimetres from Marko's feet. I recoiled in horror and gasped.

The snake raised itself upwards, hovering expectantly, wondering what response it would give to all this commotion. Marko stared at the snake passively and then went back to describing the contents of the photos. Marko had never seen a snake before.

The snake had seen a human before and was satisfied with the impassivity it was shown. It resumed its placid coil.

One by one the photos slammed into my hand and I was meant to see why Marko left the Canary Islands. A group of porcine German youths grinned at me from the Kodachrome. They were in a hospital room but they were drinking and, in some shots, partaking of some gas through a face mask. In each shot, and there were ten, the gentlemen would push up into a sitting position a sad Teutonic corpse. The living would have their arms around it in attitudes of mock camaraderie, along with other bodily attitudes affected as though the corpse were a feeling sentient thing. The lads had big smiles on their faces and

sometimes their fingers would pull up a smile on the face of the cadaver. In one photo, the corpse was made to waltz with the living. The corpse had been an old woman and its mouth lolled open with the tongue partly out against the shoulder of its dance partner. The living dancer looked frightened.

In each shot, the hair of the corpse was done up in an outrageous rock star style. In the last shot, the corpse had a frown pulled down by fingers, eyes stuck open with matchsticks, and on its lap, a plate with some preserved organ on it. The hair was done exactly as Marko had done his hair.

About an hour later, I left Marko to his room, to his photographs and to his snake. Marko had finally fallen asleep so I chose not to disturb him. Stepping onto the beach, I lit a cigarette and part of my sleeve in the fire we had left burning before. It burnt brighter and harder than when we had tended it.

Smoking, I looked up at the clouds that hid Marko's Home as well as the radiation from it that could warm his soul. I thought of why he did his hair that way and I heard him again in my mind, as I had heard him from his mouth tell me the tale of the Lost Belgian of the Canary Islands.

In the Canary Islands, Marko sought out and found the Belgian living amongst the modern day Canarians, now mostly Spanish blood and mostly crawled out from the caves. The Belgian knew he was Belgian only by his undeniable accent. He knew nothing else of himself. He lived with villagers and with the stabbing headaches which shot like an electrical storm across his damaged brain. Coconuts topple from Canarian trees all the time, and a particular one fell onto the head of the Belgian, smashing the memory of all his life irretrievably away. In only bathers, he had no connection to the world which had been contained in his lost memory. If he left his identification somewhere in a hotel while he went swimming, the hotel people had decided to sell it and not tell it. He lived with the villagers of the Canaries, farming for a living, not caring to tug the strands of who he may have been because he could never be that person again.

"That man is truly lost," said Marko to me, looking slowly to his feet and then even slower to the sky.

I left the next morning without going to Marko's hut. The man who rowed me to my boat told me he had heard that Marko had last night toppled his candle again and this time the villagers did not help to put out the fire. They said Marko had caught on fire but had put himself out in the sea. They said he had not returned to the village nor to any of the villages to the north and south. The villagers said that Marko was lost.

I told the man to row faster.

ON A MUCH LARGER ISLAND, much farther south, I had managed to locate the one called Eric. He was working. I heard he may have been happy.

As a postmaster in Prahran in Australia, he was servitor to civic need. Letters and parcels would arrive in his little piece of the pyschosphere and then be sent on by Eric. The tyranny and the seduction of routine had erased lines from his eyes and repetition killed the questions in him before they left his throat. His thin hands worked ceaselessly into the night, where they would do the mail sorting of ten men, from 9 a.m. right through to the dawn when the beams from Out There stopped coming through the night sky and bouncing onto the roof of the post office. Entombed and enwombed inside the post office, he did not go home, just sorted and sorted by four-digit postcodes. Occasionally, for mirth, he would open a package and look inside.

One day, the day I arrived, he must have seen something in a parcel he did not wish to see. Maybe the unceasing malignant city noise outside bent his mind, but for whatever reason I myself was one of several who lent our arms to dragging kindly Eric off the child star he had pinned in Toorak Road. Coming around the corner onto this disturbing scene, my ears too heard and recognized his incessant cries of "You cannot judge Me! I have looked into the eyes of the slobberer! I am not one of you!"

His strangely angering cries turned my vision to red also and I leant full force to the quelling of kindly Eric in league with the fists of many other street Samaritans. His cries ceased under our ministrations as did those of the child star who I promised a pointy

reckoning to if he breathed but a word of all this.

An undercurrent of vengeance transfused the street Samaritans in the aftermath and the debate turned to what form of summary justice must now be dispensed to Eric. Under cover of their factionalizing, I managed to spirit Eric away under the assurance that he would get his. This was not true for I wanted to help Eric. I had rented a house nearby for just that purpose.

Eric spoke quickly and disjointedly as I led him down to my street. He spoke of 'Getting out of the Cold' as though this phrase had a significance above its normal meaning. He asked me what I knew, and why things were like this. I ignored his questions while I thought about what I was to do. I sat him down in my lounge room and bade him to make a nice fire while I washed away some blood which was staining my skin.

The hot water burnt and the cold water bit so I left as before the wounds I'd picked up in that unfortunate scuffle. I returned to see Eric's fire but there was no fire and no Eric. At the end of the hallway I heard a slamming and a bolting.

It is now five weeks since I've seen Eric in the body of the house and even then it was just a glimpse of him sprinting down the hallway at about 5 a.m.

The family who saw fit to rent me their house while they travelled had placed what they valued in the master bedroom. They then locked it from the outside and allowed me the rest of the house. The bedroom is now locked from the inside and I don't feel the rest of the house is much mine.

I thought the sameness of scenery in the bedroom might bore Eric, but he seems happy enough. He sure laughs a hell of a lot. I hear a rising cackle and singing as I drop his meals off of an evening. The laughter stops at my approach.

My soothing coaxing words can get him to open the door eventually but only ever for a second. His pale arm darts out to snatch the plate, then quickly slams the door. Ten minutes later, the plate will roll out. Sometimes food scraps will follow but never bones. He laughs after eating.

Eric's appetite is hearty, sure, but the food I give him (when I remember) is not nearly enough to account for the several rolls of fat hanging from his formerly thin arm. I speculate he must have another food source in there.

As for drink, I remembered I had not given him anything liquid in the last four meals. I hurried back and shouted over the song he was crooning that I had milk and lemonade. I offered all these libations in the best feeling of fellowship yet it just made Eric cry and cry for a long time, my well-intended offer.

Some liquid (was it tears?) splashed onto the fire he keeps incessantly burning in his room. I ponder this fire. I know he has dragged up the vegetation outside the window to feed it but surely that was not enough to keep a blaze of that magnitude going for five weeks and to supply the lumber to board up those same windows.

I ask him about this fire because I am genuinely interested. My questions enrage him, and he shouts "Fire? Fire? I'll give you fire!"

Someone who can never go Home is not lost. They are found.

David Smith writes from Melbourne.

Pam Brown

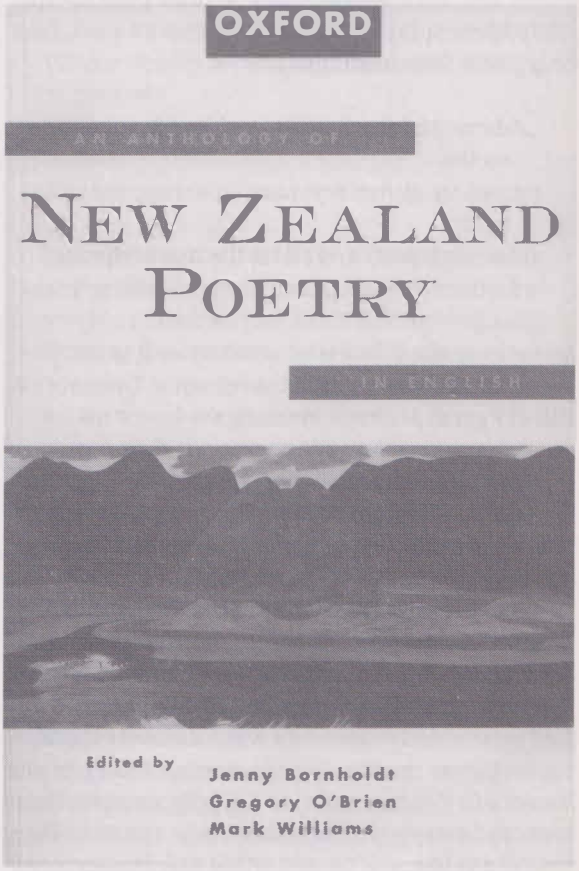
Looking Across

Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams (eds): *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (OUP, $39.95).

THERE IS A CLUSTER of literary complications that can only be called 'anthology syndrome'. Anthologies' criteria are influenced not only by the personal tastes of editors but also by the exigencies of current dominant ideologies (for instance, 'multiculturalism', 'postmodernism', 'postcolonialism'). Exigencies which may elevate or reduce but which basically, aestheticize history. National or regional anthologies are used by readers, students and teachers who inevitably draw conclusions about *the* poetry of whichever country or place at whatever time. And that's their unavoidable function for me as well. The process of anthologizing *has* changed over the last decade or so, moving in a direction away from ingrained motives of canon-building, reputation-making and immortalizing.

This collection is edited by two poets under forty – Jenny Bornholdt and Gregory O'Brien – and a forty-five-year-old academic, Mark Williams. In New Zealand a few years ago an outbreak of anthology syndrome meant that several authors declined to be included in C. K. Stead's *The Faber Book of Contemporary South Pacific Stories*.[1] In 1994 Mark Williams gave a general background to that situation:

> . . . (the) whole effort of decolonization embraced by Pakeha intellectuals around the middle of the century . . . aimed to overcome the settler nostalgia for a home elsewhere, and establish a distinctive national culture, attentive to and respectful of local realities . . . Postcolonialism refers to the counter movement this effort gave rise to among all those who felt excluded by its masculine, Pakeha and paternal concentrations. The plethora of separatist anthologies of writing by Maori and women in the late eighties testifies (to that) . . .[2]



In 1983 'Piggy' Muldoon's reign concluded and New Zealand lurched into revisionism. A new anti-nuclear Prime Minister stood up to America and France, Maori land rights were addressed – leading to a freshened biculturalism – and Keri Hulme won the Booker Prize. But older cultural nationalists like C. K. Stead remained unchanged which contributed to the problems of his Pacific anthology.

Although published by Oxford University Press ($39.95) this book tries to avoid the mainstream strictures the word 'Oxford' connotes by calling itself *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*. In New Zealand many Maori words are commonly used. Maori is a single language, with dialects. The names of native flora and fauna are in Maori. Words like 'Pakeha' are in common usage. In Australia to use the word 'gubba' would be impossible – there are many different Aboriginal languages and there would follow a predictable, self-conscious outcry against 'political correctness'. This collection is dotted with Maori words and, without a glossary, in some poems, especially Apirana Taylor and Hone Tuwhare's work, I can only guess the meanings.

> . . . show the long-hairs how to knock out a tune
> on the
> souped-up guitar, my mere quivering, my taiaha
> held
> at the high port. And I'll fix the ripe kotiro too
> with their mini-piupiu-ed bums twinkling: yeah! [3]

Sometimes the effect is incantatory and to decipher seems unnecessary – as in the refrain in Tuwhare's 'A Fall of Rain at Mitimiti: Hokianga':

> *E moe, e te whaea: wahine rangimarie . . .*
> *Anei nga roimata o Rangipapa. . . .*
> And to a dark song lulling: *e te whaea*, sleep.

I've not visited New Zealand but I have read a number of New Zealand poets.[4] I can only look across from an Australian context and, like a tourist, I must compare. *The Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1996) was edited by an elderly expatriate who has lived in London for well over thirty years. *Australian Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (1991) is a clearly unrepresentative collection. It includes only four women poets born after the Second World War, thereby completely ignoring the irrefutable and dynamic impact of feminism on Australian poetry. Not that the selection of male poets is generous or unbiased – a reader's impression could easily be that Australia is a place where select coteries of male aesthetes huddle together to sketch, banter, muse and mythologize. *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (1991) offers a much wider survey even though its scope was limited by publishing economics. However, the problematic for all three collections remains, typically, in their exclusions.[5] I don't know who's not included in the NZ book but I can imagine that there are NZ poets so far unknown to me, in whose work I would be interested, who will remain unrevealed as they're unpublished in this anthology. Who is excluded, the selection of work and amount of space given to each poet are common grievances, part of the syndrome.

This NZ anthology encountered complaints concerning the method of and sometimes perfunctory selection of previously anthologized poems (rather than newer work) resulting in what one of the poets describes as "repackaging Official Verse Culture – NZ style". There was additional contention over inequitable payments being made to the chosen poets. However, these editors' version does involve a certain degree of reclamation. An example is their devoting a generous ten pages to Mary Ursula Bethell over sixty years after she was overlooked by the definitive 1930 anthology *Kowhai Gold*.[6]

The Australian anthologies adhere, unquestioningly, to a linear notion of history as progressive whereas the NZ anthology travels backwards from 'today' to settlement. The editors, in the introduction, write:

> By moving backwards in time we sought to reflect the energies, the tremors, that recent poets send back into the past. While the anthology contains a narrative, it is not one of the triumphant evolution of consciousness from colonial dependence towards postcolonial national maturity, but rather the story of struggle and interaction between different versions of where we are and how we perceive ourselves.

Even though I'm concordant with the editors' method, in order to attempt to fathom the historical poetic context I decided, conventionally, to start at the beginning of this century with an early politician, William Pember Reeves' 'A Colonist In His Garden'. The colonist receives a letter persuading him to return to England:

> Old friend, ere darkness falls, turn back
> To England, life and art.
>
> Write not that you content can be,
> Pent by that drear and shipless sea

Round lonely islands rolled:
Isles nigh as empty as their deep,
Where men but talk of gold and sheep
And think of sheep and gold . . .

The colonist replies that he can't return. It's not that he's content in NZ but because England itself has changed –

For is my England there ? Ah, no.
Gone is my England, long ago . . .

To move on to discover how or whether poets following on into the century "content can be", most of Mary Ursula Bethell's poems in 1929 use the garden as the base from which she gazes. She relates the presence of a more dramatic landscape just beyond the fence of the cultivator:

When I am very earnestly digging
I lift my head sometimes, and look at the mountains,

. . . how freely the wild grasses flower there,
How grandly the storm-shaped trees are massed in their gorges
And the rain-worn rocks strewn in magnificent heaps . . .

It is only a little while since this hillside
Lay untrammelled likewise,
Unceasingly swept by transmarine winds . . .

In Sydney, an expatriate New Zealander told me that to read NZ poetry always evokes for her the memory and sense of the physicality of New Zealand's very beautiful and particular landscape. My disadvantage of not having been there means that my experience of this poetry is limited to my imagination. The editors say:

Since the sixties, environmental issues have been synonymous with depictions of landscape . . . transforming the lyrical, pastoral tradition into something strident and politically engaged.

In 'Fishing the Olearia Tree' Keri Hulme writes:

The lagoon is on the maps. The others build nests and rear
their chicks from bluish-green eggs, all the while elegant themselves
in dorsal aigrettes, nuptial plumage. They are not
many: the survivor chicks are also few.

We dreamed we won the land . . .
now we wake, and know
the land won us a long long time
an age ago

And Cilla McQueen laments a damaged landscape in 'The Mess We Made at Port Chalmers':

Tongue-stump of headland bandaged with concrete,
Obliterated beaches stacked with chopsticks.

All of this takes place in shallow time.

In deep time, the trees have already recovered the hills
and the machines rust, immobile, flaking away.
Healing, the land has shifted in its sleep.

All we would see if we were here
is seed-pods moving on the water.

My first response to NZ poets is that they are like 'us' – or more like us than other English language poets living in western democracies. But, to continue my probably reductive comparisons, they seem to be influenced by an old-fashioned Englishness whereas we are more engaged by North American poetics. However, the editors say "both Keri Hulme and Robert Sullivan acknowledge a Celtic inheritance, and find this sits more comfortably with a Maori heritage than the 'British' model."

The thirties was a period of strong poetic production and, according to the editors, "a period dominated by the desire to bring into being a national consciousness". A group of poets associated with Caxton Press continued those aspirations into the forties. They wanted to overcome "the colonial sense of distance, isolation and inferiority by establishing a distinctive local literary tradition." Allen Curnow was the leading poet and anthologer, editing the major collections of NZ poetry in 1945, 1950 and again in 1960. In 1942 he wrote a poem commemorating the 300th anniver-

sary of Abel Tasman's discovery of New Zealand. It begins heroically:

> . . . you launched the whole
> On a fine morning, the best time of year,
> Skies widening and the oceanic furies
> Subdued by summer illumination; time
> To go and to be gazed at going
> On a fine morning, in the Name of God
> Into the nameless waters of the world.

then courses a problematic and ultimately instructive journey and ends reflectively:

> . . . Who reaches
> A future down for us from the high shelf
> Of spiritual daring? Not those speeches
> Pinning on the Past like a decoration
> For merit that congratulates itself,
>
> O not the self-important celebration
> Or most painstaking history, can release
> The current of a discoverer's elation
> And silence the voices saying,
> 'Here is the world's end where wonders cease.'

Although the quest for national literary identity seems like a modernist project, the editors found imperfect fits in relation to modernism and until the sixties it's not strongly evident. An exception, 'Utopia', a long excerpt from A.R.D. Fairburn's poem 'Dominion' written in 1938, is very like T.S. Eliot's modernist poems:

> Backblock camps for the outcast, the superfluous,
> reading back-date magazines, rolling cheap
> cigarettes,
> not mated . . .

In the fifties and sixties a movement counter to the nationalist past emerged in Wellington. It was centred around James K. Baxter – a kind of communal, hippie-philosopher immersed in self-expression and mateship. This Wellington circle gradually made the space to allow for the future new poetries – from the seventies until the present.

The introduction talks about innovation in NZ poetry as being concurrent with postcolonialism yet there's not much that is formally innovative or abstract apart from Michele Leggott's inventive arrangement of poems into discs and even then, the text is straightforward:

> wavejumping
> down the coast a
> eight months a year call up step
> the weather office every morning into
> second-guess the winds at the cape heaven
> at Kina Rd deliberate
> the swell more coffee a look around the windows
> west sou'west getting up now more avocado on toast
> good thing that long season on Hass
> why settle for less the best avo the best coast
> another balanced judgement the best driver in the world
> from those who should know (best) load up Bluey and go
> nose into the slipstream that may or may not be worth it
> he learned in the summer of cold southerlies we all remember
> he was out fierce concentration it was strange
> in the waves pulling in the new as the old weather
> when she died stripped heart and sail from him then
> late on a windy afternoon in January she just stopped
> one of those days around the bed breathing
> he said to us back there in the house on the hill
> I'm going after scares vigils the descent
> to blow glass hyaline and its stations
> oh WAVE, DURABLE FIRE she'd gone
> yes A SEA AZURE A CLEAR SKY
> and went off to measure up
> the workshop

THIS BOOK'S GREAT STRENGTH is that over half the poets represented are from the decades after the nationalist surge. New Zealand contemporary poetry is as unpredictably varied as anywhere else. The range in this anthology should stimulate further interest in individual poets' work. My list merely hints.

Gregory O'Brien's formal two, three, five-line stanzas display an immense writing discipline and yet are, mostly, fantastical, painterly and narrative. 'Carnival' is a commemorative poem documenting the spectacle of Wellington's sesquicentenary in 1990:

> Morning, ballerinas retire into clown suits
> moved to music, a grey-nose shark is lowered
> by a crane just over your head as you paint
> puddles on the asphalt. Earthquake Survival
> Day at the carnival, among truckloads of
>
> golden sand – once a beach near Gisborne.
> Rain on the pavement yesterday, the freshly
> painted stars running oceanwards past the
> well-intentioned lighthouses, a singing police
> dog.
> Voices installed in walls – bear, rat, laughter
>
> a tape of birds so the parrots don't need
> to sing . . .

Wystan Curnow is a witty and exemplary minimalist in an extract from 'Cancer Daybook':

Now that
I
have it
(death)
in my
sentence
I'm the
more
composed.

David Eggleton presents a breathless, dense monologue that is totally different from but as performative as Alan Brunton's more concrete and mildly irreverent piece:

IT IS RAINING
(il pleut pleut pleut)
! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !
at Fayette St and Green
! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !
(mon dieu –
il pleut some more)(!)
in Baltimore . . .

Bernadette Hall is subtly abstract in 'Anorexia':

in a monochrome of beige sheep & paddocks
you try to say your unclear thing
you curl up like a wild rabbit

living out now in the open
you are the original food.

And Bill Manhire dispels any earnestness with his especially light touch in 'Milky Way Bar':

I live at the edge of the universe,
like everybody else. Sometimes I think
congratulations are in order:
I look out at the stars
and my eye merely blinks a little,
my voice settles for a sigh.

But my whole pleasure is the inconspicuous;
I love the unimportant thing.
I go down to the Twilight Arcade
and watch the Martian invaders,
already appalled by our language,
pointing at what they want.

Readers expect or presume a general map, an organized set of cultural-historical clues, and although often there are beneficial documentary aspects, anthology syndrome produces symptoms of reverence in readers, and scepticism and an occasional sense of conspiracy in poets. Perhaps the American poet David Antin's oft-quoted quip that anthologies are to poets as zoos are to animals is pertinent.

Unless the anthology is thematic (and in Australia there's a surfeit of thematic prose anthologies) most anthologists strive for a representative eclecticism that their task renders unattainable by its inherent, or latent, hegemonic cast. In fact, to attempt a definitive selection seems futile with so many impediments lurking in the process – complex juxtapositions of poems, chronological restriction, the amount of page space meted out and so on. All of this has a neutralizing effect, and despite the best intentions, notions of 'quality' or aesthetic requirements become the determinant – the poetry is subdued by the context. The anthologist seems compelled to tidy up and so usually revises whatever the 'live' version of poetry might be or have been to suit current tastes, ideologies and so on. As the Sydney academic and columnist, Don Anderson has pointed out Dorothea Mackellar's famous and incessantly quoted poem 'My Country':

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of drought and flooding rains.

. . . does not appear in any of the four randomly consulted anthologies of Australian poetry, from the 1958 *Penguin Book of Australian Verse* to the present day.[7] However, it *is* included in Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn's 1986 *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* which reveals a happy absence of embarrassment in those editors' own revisionist style.

So, although it sounds a little glib and probably crotchety, I think that I could do no better than to read New Zealand magazines like *Landfall, Sport, JAAM,* and so on, to uncover, at least, a sense of spontaneous contemporary poetics and, possibly, some of the trends of cultural flux.

There are productive tensions in magazines which reflect diversity in a way anthologies do not. Continually shifting editorial ideas, issue after issue, provide less formulaic samples. Although carefully considered by editors and designers, a magazine's apparently extemporary edge permits fractiousness, experimentation – poetry which can't always be tidied. Some magazines also practise a dismissive use of poems as space-fillers. If economics allow, a magazine's ongoingness furnishes a continuing forum for a miscellany of writings and critical anxieties that intersect in unpredictable ways. More like a hybrid collage than an authentic representation, a magazine, these days, suits the economy of attention of the contemporary cultural moment. Magazines publish the latest poems and often publish newer and younger as-yet-unanthologized poets. Some of these poets may never be included in anthologies. Some may not be intent on a 'poetic career' or a niche in a canon. Some may give up writing poetry. Looking back through a range of magazines there are unanthologized and no-longer-practising poets who represented the trends and ideas of the times better than some of their contemporaneous poets who, by luck, by fluke, by charm, or by simple persistence hung in there long enough to be anthologized. As Laurie Duggan says in 'Well You Needn't':

> maybe it's enough to grow old
> refusing to go away . . .

ENDNOTES

1. Vincent O'Sullivan and Hone Tuwhare declined participation. Then Keri Hulme, Witi Ihimaera and Albert Wendt withdrew their work
2. Mark Williams in *Meanjin* 53, No. 4, 1994.
3. Hone Tuwhare, 'To a Maori Figure Cast in Bronze Outside the Chief Post Office, Auckland'.
4. Prior to this anthology I had read only Michele Leggott (well known for her work on Louis Zukofsky), Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien, Dinah Hawken, Bill Manhire, Elizabeth Smither, Janet Charman, Robert Sullivan, Keri Hulme, Janet Frame, Katherine Mansfield, Albert Wendt and James Baxter. And I had heard of Sam Hunt, Ian Wedde, Lauris Edmond, Allen Curnow and C.K. Stead.
5. The glaring omission of TTO and Dipti Saravanamuttu from all anthologies is an example.
6. Quentin Pope (ed.): *Kowhai Gold*, Dent, London, 1930. 'Kowhai' is a native plant.
7. Behind The Lines, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June 1997.

Pam Brown has been included in and excluded from various anthologies. She would like to thank New Zealand poets Tom Beard and Wystan Curnow for some local information and to an expatriate, Su Hanfling, for her help with Maori language. Her twelfth book of poetry is 50–50 *(Little Esther books).*

Ron Shapiro

Anti-Semitism and Literature

While the subject of anti-Semitism has received much critical attention over the years, the subject of anti-Semitism in literature has received far less. There have been a few noteworthy books on anti-Semitism in American and British literatures and a few more on the treatment of the Jew in literary history, but there has been scant consideration of more 'literary' issues. The recent Demidenko–Darville affair created a good deal of heat and light and several books without tackling fundamental questions concerning the ethics of free expression in a literary work.

Robert Manne's *The Culture of Forgetting* is probably the most useful book in the wash-up from the public brawl over *The Hand that Signed the Paper*.[1] I admire Manne's commitment to the ethical issues of the Holocaust as well as his characteristic lucidity of exposition. Nevertheless, I am a little dissatisfied with the larger conceptualization of literature evident in his study. It is not Manne's assessment or estimation of the Demidenko novel itself that gives me trouble; time and again I find myself agreeing with his judgement. In the Andrew Reimer–Robert Manne debate over *The Hand*, I come down firmly on Robert Manne's side against "provincial liberal naivety".[2] What I have difficulty with in *The Culture of Forgetting* goes beyond the estimation of the value of *The Hand* and has a bearing on a larger and more general question of authorial responsibility in literature.

This is a matter which goes back to first principles and asks, what is literature? and then, by what kind of criteria is literature to be judged? I am bemused by the fact that the New Theory has taken off at such a rate over the last decade or so and yet when it came to the crunch, as it did in reaction to books like *The Hand* and Helen Garner's *the first stone*, we witnessed a sudden dearth of answers to the kind of questions about literature that really matter to a people and to a society. Contemporary academic theory was revealed as hopelessly inadequate when it came to the important issues that affect people's lives, rather than theorists' careers. The reason for this is pinpointed by Manne: the issues of morality, ethics and responsibility have gone out of fashion.

The Demidenko and Garner debates have proved that literature matters to a lot of people and that it has an outward referential function and affect as well as an aesthetic/linguistic inward orientation. While post-Saussurean strategies of reading have sometimes wished the messy world of moral conflict and ambiguity didn't exist (indeed that it is even possible to disprove empirical evidence on aprioristic linguistic grounds)[3] it seems for the majority of non-academics that the world where human decisions govern behaviour remains. And this is where morals and ethics come into play. The New Theory in its more pragmatic or utilitarian manifestations like post-colonialism and feminism does attempt to reject the more outrageous kinds of postmodernist relativism and amorality. However, this approach employs political rather than ethical assumptions when discussing topics like gender relations or the relation between Self and Other. This reduction of ethics into politics stems from New Theory's suspicion that ethical discussion is universalist and tainted by its past colonial associations. Accordingly, ethical discussion disallows the non-western subaltern any significant speaking voice. While I see great virtue in encouraging alternative (particularly non-western) voices to be heard, I don't think that a parade of our own altruism and self-congratulatory tolerance should allow us to abandon ethical thinking. One has only to scan the daily newspapers to be aware of the degree to which ethical considerations don't count in political decision-making, and the degree to which questions of justice are generally subsumed by considerations

of advantage – which I take to be a dubious way of surmounting the objection of metropolitan values masquerading as universalism. That such precepts of justice might have to involve us marking out our own 'metropolitan' position should not be enough to put us off moral and ethical decision-making altogether.

The crucial concern in the present discussion involves the nature of literature itself, a debate started between Plato and Aristotle and never concluded. Does literature tell lies, as it is now popular to affirm? Does literature need to burden itself with moral and ethical doubts? Doesn't the writer/artist have a dispensation from the normal rules and responsibilities by which other people live their lives in the interests of the special cultivation of the human imagination?

The recent Demidenko–Darville affair created a good deal of heat and light and several books without tackling fundamental questions concerning the ethics of free expression in a literary work.

In *The Culture of Forgetting*, Manne is chiefly concerned with Helen Demidenko-Darville's historical inaccuracies, but also with the ambiguous position of the authorial voice in *The Hand*, "an altogether ambiguous and unresolved relationship between the imagined first-person voice of a mass murderer and the authorial voice of its creator."[4] He recounts that David Marr told him "he was in fact not particularly concerned about whether or not Helen Demidenko was herself anti-Semitic. Only the text interested him."[5] This was a common cry at the time of the public debate, that literature must be judged on the basis of the text alone and nothing else – even though one might wonder had the novel been the work of some known Nazi sympathizer (preferably middle-aged, fat and bald rather than young, blond and female), whether *The Hand* would have received the same kind of broad critical approval from those judging panels. Manne demonstrates the depth and extensiveness of anti-Semitism in the novel so as to inform Marr, Jill Kitson, and many others, of what they did not seem to know: the demonstrable racial virulence which lies behind what might seem like relatively innocuous representations of a classic Jewish stereotype. *The Culture of Forgetting* is an eloquent reminder of the need for historical awareness and education in Australia, something in which Australians have been deficient. Even more importantly, it is a plea for moral and ethical awareness.

On the question of fiction's accurate representation of history, Manne makes some interesting points. Historical verisimilitude, he argues, depends on the case in question:

> Our answer depends, necessarily, on a number of concrete considerations. In general our concern with the historical accuracy of a novel set in a remote period will not be the same as with a novel set in contemporary times. A certain kind of historical criticism of a book about ancient Rome or Elizabethan England would rightly be regarded as pedantic and pettifogging. Our concern about the accuracy of a period novel will not be the same as our concern for the truthfulness to history of a novel which offers historical interpretation or explanation... Even our aesthetic tolerance for something as simple as a novel's factual inaccuracies will be influenced by how seriously we regard the historical matter it fictionalizes, and by whether we experience its inaccuracies as expressions of artistry – of irony, let us say, or play – or of a straightforward ignorance.
>
> If, in short, we ask whether in general the novel is responsible to historical truth no answer seems possible. But if we ask the same question of a particular novel the answer may be completely obvious.[6]

This is an important admission that Manne's interest is specifically with *The Hand* and not with literature or aestheticism generally. He argues that for the writer ethical responsibility is paramount. As Drusilla Modjeska puts it: "It is the special responsibility of the creative writer, as opposed to the bureaucrat or legislator, 'to stand back from the fray for a moment' precisely to see life more steadily and whole."[7] Manne argues that each work must be judged on its own merits, and that it is impossible to formulate blanket rules in these matters. He is concerned with the effect of a work rather than its internal patterning. Whereas Manne's discussion tends to avoid the literary aesthetic, it is precisely this topic that is reinstated at this point in his discussion; in the above excerpt literature's aesthetic dimension is recognized as being able to cut across and distort accurate historical

representation. I applaud the conclusion that morality is important in literature but also that there are a large number of variables which must be taken into consideration. Yet I am disconcerted at the mysterious appearance and disappearance in Manne's writing of an aesthetic dimension, acknowledged on some occasions but more often subsumed by the moral imperative; here and yet not here like the troublesome Cheshire cat.

Anthony Julius harbours no such doubts. In his *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*[8] he concludes not only that Eliot's poetry is anti-Semitic, but that anti-Semitism actually empowers Eliot's work. While deploring anti-Semitism, he finds that art and anti-Semitism are not mutually exclusive; it is possible to write good poetry and be anti-Semitic. The aesthetic and the moral can exist separately, or else they can come together in mutual reinforcement – not only, as Manne argues, to debase a piece of writing but also, in Eliot's case, to heighten its literary and poetic cogency. "Poetry can move readers to hate . . . To hold that art can only promote the good was once received wisdom, but now it simply looks like sentimentality. Eliot played a part in the discrediting of this view, which does not survive a reading of his anti-Semitic poems."[9] As Julius argues, Eliot was uncertain about the effectiveness of his own work; he quotes Eliot: "A writer . . . may be in his effect either beneficial or pernicious. I am not sure that I have not had some pernicious influence myself."[10] On the other hand, Eliot will more usually strike an 'aesthetic' stance which elevates 'the work alone', regardless of its effects: "The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed."[11] And Julius quotes Martin Jay: "What would be libellous or offensive in everyday life . . . is granted a special dispensation [if it is to be regarded as art]".[12] Like Manne, Julius is not calling for censorship or suppression of anti-Semitic literature but for awareness: "I censure," he writes, "I do not wish to censor."[13]

Julius' discussion of academic attitudes towards anti-Semitism in T.S. Eliot's poetry is timely. He points out that this anti-Semitism was regarded by Eliot's followers (and most of the western academy) as a personal foible which didn't detract from the poems. Julius argues that anti-Semitism was not just a personal prejudice, a contingency of personality, but a component of culture, something which given our contemporary understanding of racial and gender issues we should now be able to see more clearly. Julius paints a picture of the culture of anti-Semitism in which Eliot's ideological dictatorship passed virtually unchallenged in the academies and reading public. Eliot's work stood supreme at the centre of literary studies for several decades; it created few doubts about its social mission and its high moral seriousness. "Eliot's anti-Semitic poems remained an identifiable part of his work. Those who esteemed him did so in the full knowledge of their existence."[14]

T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form concerns itself with close readings of Eliot's anti-Semitic poems and prose. It argues that Eliot's Jews are sometimes directly or commonly anti-Semitic, sometimes more 'poetically' anti-Semitic in the sense that in a few measured phrases Eliot is able to concoct or revitalize a tissue of anti-Semitic mythologies. Eliot's poetic genius works hand-in-hand with his anti-Semitism. At other times Eliot employs what Julius calls an "aesthetics of ugliness" which has always been an accepted aspect of modernism – manifest in the dramatic, visual and musical arts as much as in literature. And what can be uglier, and hence more appropriate, than racism? Not just the common list of clichés such as inferiority, laziness, childishness, etc., which white supremacists have traditionally attached to the dark-skinned races; but in the case of the Jews a far more extreme association with everything felt to be most disgusting and repellent, for instance with excrement, rats and sewers: "The 'dirt' is the Jew, and 'dirty Jew' is the figure of speech that haunts Eliot's anti-Semitic poems."[15] Eliot's Jews like Bleistein are punished with a comfortable and righteous sense of "pleasurable horror" that is strikingly reminiscent of Demidenko's novel:

> Bleistein is punished for Rachel's offence. Crabs tear at his eyelids in retribution for Rachel's own tearing with murderous paws, one Jew paying the penalty for another's crime. There is an element of kitsch in this, an element of pleasurable horror, converting the disgusting into the harmlessly scary, modifying recoil into mere frisson – the domestication of the appalling. Of course, there is also the virtuosity of the exercise: a demonstration of the poet's innovating range, as, for example, for Leavis, for whom Eliot's poetry eschews the notion of 'the intrinsically poetical'.[16]

The "pleasurable horror" belongs to the realm of the irrational which Eliot regarded, in *After Strange Gods* (1934), as more significant than those thoughts which can be more readily articulated: "The assumptions that are only felt are more important than those that can be formulated".[17]

This irrational element in Eliot's thinking is also the driving force in favour of orthodoxy, and very explicitly against liberalism or free-thinking, in a period when the ideologies of Fascism and Marxism were in the ascendency. Eliot's strong advocacy of a sort of culture that is homogenous and monolithic must appear to us hopelessly conservative and outmoded in the 1990s. Because non-observant or free-thinking Jews epitomized for Eliot the kind of liberalism or free-thinking he so despised, this sort of Jew he regarded as even worse, if possible, than the observant or traditional Jew:

> The population should be homogenous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is *unity of religious background*; and reasons of *race* and *religion* combine to make any large number of free-thinking *Jews* undesirable.[18]

This is threadbare stuff. However, I find myself wondering whether, more than anything else, it was not the insufferable self-righteousness and pig-headedness of the period which inevitably, half a century later, was to lead to the emergence of libertarian critical ideologies which, ironically, tend also to possess their own kind of blinkered and often over-rigid and intolerant insistence, their own holier-than-thou brand of self-righteousness.

The reason why Eliot's anti-Semitism could be regarded by his readers as relatively unimportant rests, Julius claims, on a set of widely shared but scarcely examined suppositions regarding the value of poetry. Why this is relevant in the present context is that it helps throw light on many of the (otherwise inexplicable) public responses to Demidenko's novel. First, Julius explains, all 'artistic' effort had come to be associated in the modern western critical tradition with "certain notions of the artist's benevolence, wisdom and insight ... The artist is God, and the work is his or her world."[19] – the poem is not just artifact but is also sacrosanct. Second, "there is the conviction that art has an ethical dimension ... the belief that the poet is a superior human being because, by the fruits of his creativity, he enhances freely the quality of human life. The writing of poetry is thus an act of supererogatory goodness for which the poet should be honoured",[20] meaning that the poet's ethics cannot, or should not, be called into question. Third, "there is that tradition of English cultural criticism which argued for the redemptive qualities of poetry as a substitute for religion,"[21] which is perhaps why Demindenko's novel could be hailed by at least one critic as 'redemptive'. Fourth, "Poetry is revelatory, giving us access to essences otherwise hidden",[22] which is again interrelated with the redemptive function. For all of these, and similarly adduced reasons, the traditional attitude towards literature has been that the written work cannot be wrong, or that even if it can be shown to be wrong in some respects its divine or quasi-divine aura is always sufficient to override other considerations. These are suppositions, Julius argues, which require urgent re-examination.

This reduction of ethics into politics stems from New Theory's suspicion that ethical discussion is universalist and tainted by its past colonial associations.

Yet Julius might be thought to be making too much of Eliot's anti-Semitism. Louis Menand, in his lengthy critique of *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* in *The New York Review of Books*,[23] argues that anti-Semitism was "a relatively minor aspect" since "Eliot didn't give much attention to [it] and in most of the poetry and almost all of the literary criticism it fades into insignificance". It was precisely Eliot's lack of interest in the matter, according to Menand, that resulted in Eliot's "intellectually half-baked" and "morally negligent" views regarding the Jews. I find Menand's review of Julius's book strangely condescending. While Menand is forced in the main to agree with Julius, he nevertheless prefers to go off in his own directions, sketching in some of the finer details of Eliot's intellectual history. The other kind of history – about the way anti-Semitism and the notion of the Jew as Anti-Christ became "an integral part of European and Western culture"[24] (a view recently reiterated by Abraham Biderman in his wonderful but

appalling memoir, *The World of My Past*[25]) – seems to be something in which Menand has little interest. On the other hand, for Eliot, Jews represented more than just Jewishness:

> Eliot's genteel, snobbish anti-Semitism was consistent enough with his Catholic antimodernist outlook, his distaste for free-thinking secularism, commercialism and the rootlessness of modern civilization. It would be shared by many cultural critics and artists in twentieth-century England, ambivalent about progress, modernity, mass politics, urban values and the legacy of uninhibited Victorian capitalism.[26]

Of particular interest in the argument of *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* is the fact that many of Eliot's poems about Jews pose the same 'technical' question as does *The Hand*: do anti-Semitic comments ascribed to one or other character in a literary work inculpate the author? Julius is intending to reply to Christopher Hicks who, in *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice*, argued that Eliot's poems were *about* anti-Semitism rather than themselves anti-Semitic. Julius replies that it is precisely because of this ambiguity, precisely because of Eliot's deliberate obfuscation on this matter, that the poems lend themselves to anti-Semitic readings. 'Gerontian', "which articulates a loathing of Jews, has as its subject a man who loathes Jews. It is an anti-Semitic dramatization of an anti-Semite. It is an example of what it represents ... It is an effect which takes for granted a certain version of Jewish history."[27] With Eliot it is not possible to invoke postmodernism as a pretext, though an 'aesthetics of ugliness' species of modernism might equally serve, since this is one respect in which modernism and postmodernism might be seen to correspond.

T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form sets out to resist the argument that anti-Semitism negates poetry, which might be extended to mean literature. Julius argues against a certain mystique of purity which has conventionally surrounded poetry, predicated on some notion that poetry contains irrefutable truths, and that poetry is so intrinsically 'good' that "it cannot articulate the wicked, false doctrine of anti-Semitism."[28] In place of the kind of self-referentiality ascribed to poetry which affirmeth nothing, he argues that poetry can indeed be propositional:

> Literary works may specifically be written to dramatize and empower a set of beliefs ... Poems can affirm; in consequence they can lie ... Anti-Semitism, which is mired in ugliness and loathing, does not make poetry impossible. Indeed, not only can it provide the material for a poem, it can be a poet's inspiration. It can be a muse.[29]

Julius would agree with Manne's view that anti-Semitism is insufficiently recognized in literature for what it is; but he would disagree with the notion that anti-Semitism automatically cancels out literary value which, he argues, is not wholly to be found in a work's content or message. Literature is characterized, apart from what it specifically affirms or denies, by dimensions of 'affectiveness' which constitute its larger esthetic form. Nevertheless, both writers would probably agree that to speak (as a number of writers, judging panels and critics did in the case of *The Hand*) of 'the work itself' as the final arbiter is well nigh meaningless since the 'affectiveness' of literature is something more complex and wide-ranging.

I AM BEMUSED by the way literary slogans and fashions catch on. I'm thinking as much of the past as about our highly theorized present. Something as fatuous as John Ruskin's notion that only a good person can produce a good work of art cannot withstand any kind of serious scrutiny. Commonsense would suggest this is mere sententiousness, and indeed any number of important contrary assertions (even apart from the French or English Decadence) spring to mind: for instance, Shirley Hazzard's treatment of the morally flawed Paul Ivory in *The Transit of Venus*, her eminently successful playwright whose art is really a form of artifice and a misleading personal disguise. More pertinent to the topic of anti-Semitism are the Singer brothers, Isaac Bashevis, and more particularly his older brother Israel Joshua, whose fictional Jews are so often the loathesome individuals one would expect from the pens of committed anti-Semites. In their work we are forced to confront the realization that it is not only anti-Semites who can produce fictional representations of grotesque grasping, rapacious and uncivil Jews. Or rather, that the whole notion of anti-Semitism in literature is hedged around with greater complexity than is generally recognized.

What does this further complexity consist of? Several of these things I have already mentioned: aesthetic mode, which will affect the way in which a text is read; the question of authorial culpability in a text, which permits certain propositions put into the mouths of fictional characters to go unchallenged. But there are further difficult considerations. In the case of the Singer brothers, for instance, can one say that a critique of Jews by Jews is different from a critique of Jews by non-Jews? And a further question: is anti-Semitism as big a crime in the work of a 'major' writer as a 'minor' writer? Is Israel Joshua Singer's thoroughly unpleasant character, Max Ashkenazi, a man who out-Scrooges Scrooge, any more acceptable because of Singer's profound grasp of the historical and social forces shaping and driving individuals like Max Ashkenazi at that particular moment in Polish Jewish history?[30]

While there can be no blanket answers or ultimate proofs to all of these questions, it is possible to arrive at some broad working principles. Literature may be philo-Semitic or anti-Semitic and yet be either good or bad literature; in fact the very same reasons that might make a work anti-Semitic are those which might make the work philo-Semitic. The question is, how are we to judge it? I think the only real problem arises in any over-enthusiastic attempt at a succinct summary of a work of literature or of art, the sort of thing which can and does happen when books are awarded prizes. It seems to me wrong-headed to imagine that any work of art or literature can be adequately encompassed and summarized in a single phrase or sentence, which is more or less what happened in the case of *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. To assume as much is to underestimate literary complexity.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Manne, *The Culture of Forgetting: Helen Demidenko and the Holocaust*, Text Publishing Company, 1996.
2. Manne, p. 190.
3. See Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
4. Manne, pp. 12–3.
5. Manne, p. 34.
6. Manne, pp. 139–40.
7. In David Carter, 'The Range of Goods we Live by', *Quadrant*, July–August, 1996, p. 35.
8. Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, CUP, 1995.
9. Julius, p. 39.
10. Julius, p. 39.
11. Julius, p. 55.
12. Julius, p. 40.
13. Julius, p. 40.
14. Julius, p. 8.
15. Julius, p. 134.
16. Julius, p. 135.
17. Quoted by Julius, p. 151.
18. Quoted by Julius, p. 159.
19. Julius, p. 115.
20. Julius, pp. 115–16.
21. Julius, p. 116.
22. Julius, p. 116.
23. Louis Menand, 'Eliot and the Jews', *The New York Review of Books*.
24. Robert S. Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*, Thames Mandarin, 1991, p.xix.
25. Abraham H. Biderman, *The World of My Past*, Random, 1995.
26. Wistrich, p. 107.
27. Julius, pp. 73–4.
28. Julius, p. 76.
29. Julius, pp. 76–7.
30. In Israel Joshua Singer, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, Penguin, 1980 (1937).

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Nathan Hollier

Theorists, Romantics and the Australian Cultural Malaise

What do nazis, fascists, communists, cultists and calvinists have to do with feminists, multiculturalists and university humanities departments? If nothing else, they have all been identified in recent times as symptomatic of the kind of "cultural malaise" in which Australia now finds itself.[1] The diagnosis is taken from the infamous speech in acceptance of the 1996 Miles Franklin award by Christopher Koch; though it may fairly be said to express a more widely held conviction within the literary and broader community, that the politics of multiculturalism, of endless political correctness, constitute a radical and fundamental threat to Australian culture and society. The theorization and politicization of the humanities is identified as facilitating this 'divisive' process. 'Defences' of literature in this context divide their criticism fairly evenly between the absurdly pedantic impositions of political correctness and the absurdly far-fetched questioning of 'common sense', of established truth, both normative and empirical.

One rhetorical mode of defending the autonomy of literature is that it goes against an essential spirit, or mystery of art and the artist to analyse them in a scientistic way. Deconstruction and poststructuralism, those bodies of theory which sound most at home in a laboratory, are commonly juxtaposed against a transcendent aesthetic principle linking the great works of art. The function of theory here is described not so much as a conscious radicalism, but as a disease, or cancer invading the unconscious of the unwary and the weak-minded. Like Paddy McGuinness' "official Aborigines", the teachers of theory become those who would misuse both their purported subject of interest and the trust of their constituents, for reasons of cynical self-advancement. It is often asserted or implied further that those who read or apply the jargon of theory are interested in constraining literature's guiding principle of beauty within some abstract scientistic or sociological model. This is patently untrue, even oxymoronic. As has been stated ad nauseam within the public sphere, the very names of these theories imply an opposition to intellectual closure, or delimitation.[2] There is no reason why the shift in critical attention from the author to the text need alter the inherent value of a literary work at all. The challenge is rather to the critic, to take cognisance of the intellectual contingencies informing his or her reading and speaking position. Somewhat ironically then, this characterization of theory as a form of thought-control, an intellectual disease from which one can never recover once smitten, is often couched directly in the terms of authoritarian repression. Though he stops short of advocating a burning of theory books (to fight hyperbole with hyperbole), Koch implores young writers, "never listen to a deconstructionist. Don't listen, in fact, to any critic or pedagogue".[3] The essence of literature, it is asserted, lies in the original genius of the artist, and as such simply cannot be approached in this theoretical way.

A second rhetorical mode of defending literature's autonomy, and one which may be seen as somewhat puzzling given the criticism of theory as overly scientistic, is the reassertion of the autonomy of scientific, empirical knowledge. David Williamson in particular has pushed the view in the public sphere that knowledge and free will must be either innate or an illusion forced upon us by some monolithic, oppressive regime.[4] This zero-sum binary is not drawn within theory but nevertheless, those elements of it which analyse empirical forms of knowledge in terms of their broader social, intellectual, cultural or historical context are lambasted as denying the rational and free basis not only of post-enlightenment, western science, but of the liberal-humanist culture and social structure it supposedly underpins. For William-

son, somewhat confusedly it must be said, the social and empirical structures of liberal humanism are inextricable, and are thus equally threatened by the "poststructuralist gurus who hold the reins of power in most of our proliferating communications and cultural studies courses".[5] This mode of criticizing theory operates specifically in the context of defending the innate nature of literary originality, value, and the literary canon of 'dead white males', against the tendency of theory to 'relativize' knowledge.

On the basis of these two rhetorical modes of defending literature against theory, two observations can be made. Firstly, this defence is less concerned with protecting literature against scientism, or empirical science against theory, than with perpetuating an understanding of these two intellectual spheres, or cultures, as C.P. Snow famously termed them, as distinct and opposed wholes. The central criticism here is of the tendency of theory to draw these two spheres together, to consider each in the context of the other, to demonstrate, or seek to demonstrate their interdependence, the interdependence of normative and empirical truth, of nature, science and culture. Secondly, and related to the above point, it is not so much what theory *says* which is offensive, since the shift in critical attention from the author to the text does not involve a denial of individual artistic agency at all, but rather this shift itself. What is objected to is the change in preoccupation of the critic, from demonstrating an appreciation of the writer's connection with, or creation of, the profound truths of our culture, to the use of literature as an 'educational tool', a site of engagement with broader social structures of work and power.[6] What is being protected here then, is not literature *per se* but the status of the artist within criticism, as the ultimate cause and end-point of literary meaning, as the beholder of some sacred, original genius to which the critic and the reader must always genuflect if he or she is to have an inkling of this 'mystery'.[7]

The ideal of the artistic genius as one who expresses the essential and timeless truths of our common human imagination, begins of course with Romanticism.[8] To an extent, as many works of literary history mention, our present historical condition of modernity or postmodernity continues to be defined by, or against, the cultural context of Romanticism.[9] It is debatable whether this ideal of the artist functions as a cause or an effect of Romanticism, or of modernity. In any case, as Michael Ackland points out, Romanticism in one sense only exists as "an arbitrarily constructed category intended to order, and to privilege, certain literary-historical gestures during a given period".[10] Those who would leap to protect the intellectual autonomy of the artist would elide the fact that this ideal is at least as much a product of our particular, western cultural and social forms, as it is of the spontaneous arrival, in the late eighteenth century, of imaginative genius. This is to say too, that the aura surrounding the artist, and to which literary figures often appeal in criticizing the politicizing function of theory, is as much an effect of reading practice as of writing.

In an interview in *Meanjin* (Autumn 1997), Peter Craven posits a "naive", "bibliophile" childhood at the centre of his intellectual development, effectively downplaying any cultural factors informing his speaking position.[11] He argues later that "the current relativism" of university literature departments "can be quite inimical to writing".[12] Some people have a natural affinity with literature, a "literary instinct", whereas others would use literature to relativize, to tear down the beauty of the great artists. Clearly, it is not only writing which interests Craven, but reading, and a model of reading is proposed here in which it is somehow an offence against the writer to question the cultural processes through which we derive literary value. Of course there is nothing wrong with this belief that artists are born and not made. What one should be wary of doing however, in my opinion at least, is drawing on this popularly held aura surrounding the artist, as a means of criticizing the theoretical study of literature at university, and the critical perspective of the humanities generally. If that which qualifies a person to speak on literature is an appropriate level of appreciation, a love for the literary greats which brings one's own sensibility close to theirs, why go to university to study literature at all? This is a point I take Craven to be making in this interview, albeit implicitly, both in terms of his own decision to write outside the academy, and in relation to the theorization of university literary studies.

If the critical study of literature involves the (mis)use of literature for political purposes, what is also implied by this accusation is that the uncritical acceptance of the innate nature of canonized works and figures necessarily involves the use of literature for the protection of power. Within most criticisms

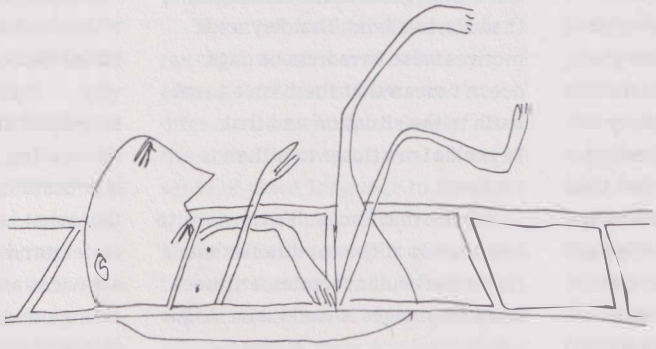
of 'revisionist' readings however, there is rarely an acknowledgment that in order to obtain power by displacing a particular reading, then regardless of whatever 'reason' it contains, that reading *must also* be an expression of power. By the same logic, to criticize the humanities for adopting a critical perspective in relation to established normative and empirical readings is to advocate, or at least to legitimize, a model of the university, and of knowledge, in which applied research takes precedence over pure research, in which the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is subservient to the provision of that knowledge deemed necessary for the perpetuation of existing social structures. As John Frow argues in his inaugural lecture delivered to the University of Queensland, "This call for the humanities to return to the affirmative teaching of a supposed consensual culture, a set of common truths and universal values, in fact summons them to an essentially decorative role, a support role in the business of national economic reconstruction: their concern is to be with the things of the spirit while the real world goes on elsewhere".[13]

There is indeed a crisis confronting Australian culture. On the one hand, the country is being run by scarily conservative moral majority types in Canberra, whilst on the other hand, globalizing capital threatens to commodify away, to relativize our cultural landscape. It is within this dispensation, as opposed to the imagined dispensation of minority-group and humanities-department 'thought police', that the Australian 'cultural malaise' exists.

ENDNOTES

1. Christopher Koch, 'Beware bullies who sap the beauty from young writing', an edited version of Koch's speech in acceptance of the Miles Franklin Award, 12 June 1996, printed in *The Age*, 14 June 1996, p.17.
2. See for example, Meaghan Morris, 'The truth is out there . . .', *Australian Book Review 181* June 1996, pp. 17–19; or 'the great Theory debate', carried out in *The Australian Higher Education Supplement* between May and June 1993.
3. Koch, p.17.
4. See for example, David Williamson, 'Universal Moral Soldier' *Bulletin*, 2 April 1996, pp. 72–3.
5. Ibid., p.72.
6. See for example, Peter Craven's objection to Simon During's criticism of Patrick White's antipathy to the use of art and literature as an "educational resource", in 'The kingdom of correct usage is elsewhere' *Australian Book Review 179* April 1996, p.41.
7. Craven's criticism of During is again representative: "The mystery by which White (in this respect like Christina Stead) sometimes had to write badly in order to write well is one into which During has never been initiated", p.37.
8. See for example, Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: romantic theory and the critical tradition*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1953.
9. See for example, Paul Kane, *Australian Poetry: romanticism and negativity*, CUP, Melbourne, 1996.
10. Michael Ackland, 'Why Read Australian Poetry?', *Southerly 57:1*, Autumn 1997, p.184.
11. 'A Critical Vocation: An interview with Peter Craven', conducted by Rebecca Lucas and Ralph Humphries, *Meanjin vol. 56., no. 1*, 1997, pp. 170-180.
12. Ibid., p.178.
13. John Frow, *The Social Production of Knowledge and the Discipline of English*, UQP, St Lucia, 1990, p.6.

Nathan Hollier, a Masters student at Monash, is researching Australian Poetry.



Jiri Tibor

miscellany

David Williamson replies to Lynette Finch (#147):

I RECENTLY TUSSLED in a satirical way with the implications of post-structuralist thought in a play called *Dead White Males*, which had a very successful theatrical life but was not fondly thought of by the sort of academics to whom the name 'Foucault' has similar resonance as the name 'Allah' does to devout Moslems. As you can imagine I read your article 'A Dark and Stormy Night' in *overland 147* with some interest. I found the article well written and cogent, but would like to take issue in a non-strident way with some of the tenets of the holy writ of poststructuralism (of the Foucault variety) evident in your article.

It's a very neat conceit to claim that there is no 'immutable truth' on which 'reality' is based, and that 'reality' is in effect 'constructed' (I think constructed has become the most used word in intellectual discourse) out of culture, history or interpretation. It's a very arresting and sexy theory. The belief that this leads to, that all history is basically an act of storytelling about the past to suit the particular present day power interests of the person or group who have invented the story, I think is only a partial truth, and one that does disservice to your profession and many within it. For instance you use as an example the 'narratives' constructed by Henry Reynolds and R.M. Hartwell. Hartwell's 'story' included a description of the white settlement of Australia which said the white settlers came to an 'empty land'. Henry Reynolds however found a land full of people who had a long established and sophisticated system of land tenure. It's entirely correct to say that Hartwell's 'story', helped justify white appropriation of the land and that Reynolds' 'story' helped redress this appropriation in the historic Mabo decision. To imply however that Reynolds has merely created a 'narrative' which is useful in a contemporary power play between whites and aboriginals is surely fallacious. Reynolds' version is simply nearer the real and objective truth than Hartwell's because he did what historians are supposed to do and investigated more thoroughly than Hartwell did. That Reynolds' motives were to redress wrongs doesn't mean that there isn't a real truth to the situation and that Reynolds isn't closer to it than Hartwell.

I think that Foucault's warning, to look closely at the conditions that create particular theories, attitudes and knowledges is well taken. As his intellectual precursor Nietzsche warned us, the "will to power" in the human species makes it very hard for us to be objective. We all try to bend the truth in our favour or our group's favour, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a truth. Sometimes, because of our emotional and ideological biases it's just very hard to discover it. If the academy moves to a position that everything is relative then surely it is shortchanging the very real advances towards truth and justice that historians like Reynolds make.

Yours in a spirit of friendly discourse (I say this because I heard a couple of poststructuralist academics literally frothing at the mouth after *Dead White Males* on Radio National, because I had dared to satirize the orthodoxy that tries to tell us there is no orthodoxy).

Lynette Finch replies:

WHILE I AGREE with you about the foolish slavish devotion to Foucault that some scholars have, I don't think I use his work in that way . . . In fact it is his predecessor Benedotto Croce, who I find really stimulating. What I find compelling is Foucault's fundamental message that what is important to understand is the conditions which allow certain readings of events to emerge and gain popularity, and I'm totally convinced of Croce's insistence that histories are created to serve the present.

I take your point that post-structuralism does a disservice to

historians – we are acutely aware that the obvious question we create is 'what is the difference between historical narratives and fiction' and we have no answer. This leaves us in politically dangerous territory when, for example, neo-nazis claim the holocaust never happened. On the other hand, without an external judge, like God for instance, how can you claim that Reynolds is closer to the truth than Hartwell was? 'Empty' or 'full' is a value judgement and while Hartwell clearly did not do as much research as Reynolds to arrive at his conclusions, I'm not sure it would have made any difference to his work, as he found what he expected to find. The point you and I probably most clearly disagree on, is that I'm convinced that the same can be said of Henry Reynolds.

Snug and Discomforted

Reflections on the Canberra Wordfest 1997

Libby Robin

CASSANDRA PYBUS has a special place in the world called Snug. It weaves itself into the warp and weft of her writing, making her a fundamentally southern-Tasmanian writer, whose sense of place provides a canvas on which other ideas are later inscribed.

At the recent Canberra Wordfest, major highlights were two sessions where writers talked to writers. Pybus was in conversation with John Ralston Saul, a Canadian who writes for 'discomfort'. His aim is to provide language for those of us who feel disempowered by 'corporatism'. Saul's work is about speaking truth to power. He locates his abstract aims in a landscape of traditional intellectual history, peopled by such figures as Socrates and Voltaire. His mission is to discomfort the certain voice of the professional gatekeepers in all walks of life who use language to control power rather than to reveal truth.

Robert Dessaix in his conversation with Marion Halligan the next day gave a wonderful example of the sort of corporate culture decried by Saul. Dessaix reported the question of a scholarly expert who asked him what gave him the right to use Dante in his writing when he did not even know Italian? But anyone who has read *Night Letters* can see that Dessaix uses Dante to work through the very difficult, universal subject of death. His is not an exegesis of Dante. It merely borrows from Dante to structure his own metaphysical idea, to 'anchor' the idea, as he described the process.

Dessaix spoke with admiration of Halligan's ability to write about concrete objects, to breathe life into domestic detail with a deft, sometimes black humour. He described her writing as "fleshly", whilst his own was metaphysical, and difficult to locate in space.

These two conversations made me think about recent debates in education. What is it we want to offer our own children? Surely, 'all of the above'. We want them to have a sense of place, language to speak truth to power, an ability to think about difficult concepts, and yet also to locate themselves 'in the flesh' with a strong sense of humour about life.

Such abstract ideals must be approached indirectly. As soon as one snatches at them, they disintegrate. The stories of these writers, offered in conversation, suggest the value of myths, parables and history in making paths to ideas.

What are the myths that inform good writing today? The mythical imagery of Egyptology was invoked by several of the Wordfest writers, including Carmel Bird and Alison Croggon. They drew on images laid down in childhood: pyramids in the desert symbolizing death, place and history. Egyptology is rich with delicious words: Tutenkhamen, Nefertiti, Osiris. It is also a place in the distant past preserved through objects found in tombs, where history and myth work together to illumine death. Are our children learning myths about Egypt – or other tales of death and immortality?

This question was floating in my mind as I enjoyed the panel of writers talking about the marvellous co-operative project, the book *Daughters and Fathers*, launched at the Wordfest. Carmel Bird described herself as the 'mother' rather than the editor of this collection. Of necessity, it fell to the men to talk of the next generation, and it was Kevin Brophy's story of his children in the bath that offered insight into the myths of childhood in 1997. The younger child claimed to be "a million and fifty years old" and the older, accepting that as absolutely reasonable said, "That's quite a lot for a four-year-old". This generation's myths and sense of history are framed in terms of dinosaurs. One of my own children had established a time-line at a similar age, "First there were dinosaurs, then there was Ned Kelly and now there's now".

Dinosaurs are like Egypt: lots of lovely long words – as well as the 'saurus' set, there are herbivores,

carnivores and omnivores. Dinosaurs offer us an even more distant past, revealed through the objects of (geological) tombs. Science has entered the myth-making stakes, displacing history. Death is not mere death, but extinction.

This is one of the ways that this generation will be different from mine. But I am concerned that if the myths change too sharply, there will be no metaphorical shared language between generations. Classical history once functioned in this way – bridging generations, offering 'anchors', ways to talk about difficult ideas. It still functions as a common voice in at least one very multicultural inner London school, where my Australian son (aged seven) and his friends from Pakistan and Somalia played 'Greeks and Romans' every lunchtime. Their games were a reflection of the English primary school curriculum, 'old-fashioned' to current Australian wisdom, but clearly exceptionally successful in inculcating creative myths that transcended enormous cultural and language barriers.

I am not happy that my children, now in Canberra, study SOSE, not a real source of creative myths, like all the disciplines it replaces: history, geography and science, but an ugly acronym for Studies Of Society and Environment. SOSE is situated firmly in the realistic and experiential present. Topics include 'families' (year 2) and 'the sea shore' (year 5). Stories are few and moral rectitudes clear.

SOSE has no tools for dealing with difficult concepts indirectly. The notion that there are lots of different ways of constructing a family is handled bluntly, in terms of the present Australian population, where the same theme treated historically and internationally offers at least as much exposition of the subject, and other dimensions as well. Myths, stories, poetry, history offer parallels, not absolutes or right answers, ways to explore creatively, language to express the unmentionable. Yet they do not seem to be priorities in the Australian curriculum.

Children's unconscious wit is underestimated. As we know from our pre-schoolers, you don't have to be a palaeontologist to know about dinosaurs. But once they are through the dinosaur phase, realism rules. Children must work always from their own experience (however pleasurable or painful that is), and be concrete. They must even find mathematics 'in daily life', rather than play with the arcane and magic language of maths for the sheer fun of it.

The Canberra Wordfest offered me a chance to get back to basics, to find ways to approach life 'asymptotically', in parallel, reaching for infinity. We all need the language for discomfort, because in Snug the chilly winds of the Antarctic are never far away.

In My Own Shadow – Fragments

Nicolai Sherman

To my daughter Asya, when she grows up.

I WAS BORN ON 9 June 1946 in Leningrad[1] in unusual circumstances. Officially my parents were divorced although living under the one roof. Father did not wish to acknowledge paternity. Two years later mother compelled him to formally register his paternity. I was never able to discover what had transpired between them. My sister, Inna later told me that when my father was asked how he managed to live with my mother, he replied in characteristic humour, "If you play with fire . . ."

I consciously remember myself from the age of two.

My first memory of father: green cloth of a card table, warm light of a desk lamp, hairy hands.

My first memory of the apartment on Tverskaya Street[2]: white-tiled stove and white blocks with black letters of the alphabet. At the age of four, I learnt to read using these blocks.

My first memories of Siverskaya[3] were connected with a road. Father had a car, a Moskvich 401 and a driver, Kostya. During this period, country roads had not yet been asphalted and after a heavy downpour, the roads became impassable causing the car to get bogged in the mud. I can recall mother and Kostya pushing the car out of the mud.

One New Year's Eve at the beginning of the 1960s, I ran into Kostya at Malcevsky Market. He was selling Christmas trees and when I introduced myself, he barely recognized me. This was our last encounter.

My first sense of fear was on returning by train from Siverskaya. After alighting from the train, mother and I went over to the poorly lit taxi stand near the Warsaw railway station. There were no taxis in sight apart from private cars whose drivers were offering to drive at a charge. Mother hired one of these cars, a black Emka, whose driver, as we later learnt, was quite intoxicated. When taking his seat

behind the wheel, the driver said to my mother, "Madam, do not be afraid, just tell me the colour of the traffic lights." All the way home from the railway station, I never took my eyes off the lights.

The first visitors to our home whom I can recall were my mother's close friend Ida and her distant relative, Leo Satyr, a third navigator on the battle cruiser *Red Crimea*. I remember Leo's snow-white navy tunic and his ceremonial dagger.

Leo disappeared in Stalin's last purges . . .

One day when I was in the fourth grade, my friend and classmate, Oleg Ivanov came to me during midday recess and whispered in my ear:

– Take *Rodnaya Rech*[4] and meet me at the toilets.

At the toilet Oleg asked me to tear out from the textbook the colour picture-portrait of 'The Great Leader and Teacher of All Times and Nations' Comrade I.V. Stalin. "Tear it to pieces and flush it down the toilet."

Oleg's father worked as an instructor for the District Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and had just returned from the twentieth Party Congress where Nikita Khrushchev made his famous speech denouncing the cult of Stalin's personality. Pictures and sculptures of the 'leader and teacher' one by one disappeared from walls and corners. Discipline in the schools also disappeared almost immediately.

One of my major passions was television. We did not have a TV set so I would go over to our neighbour, Nina Mihailovna Pavlova, who lived at No. 5 Tverskaya Street.

Nina Mihailovna Pavlova was a Professor of Botany, a writer of children's books and daughter of the father of Soviet metallurgy, Pavlov.

She was obese and for this reason never married nor had any children. During the war, Nina Mihailovna adopted a girl from an orphanage, Marina. Marina was in the same class as my sister.

They lived in a cosy three-bedroom flat together with their housemaid Katya, a black cat called 'Blot' and a terrier with the name 'Gera'. Nina Mihailovna owned a large library, including a complete encyclopedia: 'Brockgauz and Efron'. She also had a TV set with a large screen.

Taking advantage of our good relationship, I spent entire evenings at their home watching TV. Mother realized that this could not continue and had no choice but to purchase a TV set, a KVN-49. Thus, I had an opportunity to watch TV at home. I watched everything – movies, tele-dramas, agricultural programs. This certainly affected my studies at school.

When my marks dropped below the acceptable level, mother as punishment hid the indoor antenna so that I could not watch TV; but I found a simple solution to this problem. I substituted the antenna with an ordinary nail. The television worked perfectly and mother never knew of my ruse.

Shortly before finishing seventh grade, I took part in a TV quiz show – 'Who Will Answer?' I correctly answered all the questions and together with another Leningrad student, Natasha Nosacheva, I was invited to the TV Studio. For the first time in my life I was plunged into the world of TV cameras, microphones, lights and people who, as it seemed to me at the time, were magicians. We were introduced to the director of the program, Aleksei Aleksandrovich Resser – a man of encyclopedic knowledge and extraordinary memory.

People of different professions worked in the scenery workshop – stage-hands, furniture dressers, costume dressers, armourers, carpenters, painters. One was Dima Veisblad, a furniture dresser, who was a drunkard and a womanizer, quite a Fagan. He had a phenomenal memory and liked to play a game of words where each of the players would make up the largest number of words beginning with a certain letter. Nobody could triumph over Dima. He was always the winner with the best score.

Dima was very well read, especially in recollections and memoirs. It seems that he had once been a university student. He was responsible for storing furniture and choosing furniture for upcoming productions.

The major part of his time Dima spent in the storage room sitting in a superb replica armchair from the period of Louis XIV.

One day, being very drunk, he brought into the storage room a prostitute whom he picked up at a nearby liquor store. It was a mystery how he managed to bring her into a very well guarded TV studio but vigilant women – costume dressers, whom Dima ridiculed – saw them and reported him to the Head of the Set Department, Raisa Ilinichna Izakson, known by the nickname 'Mother Raia'. Acting on this information, and followed by a curious retinue, she went to Dima's room and cautiously knocked at the door.

– Dima, I beg you to open the door immediately!

No answer. After she knocked again Dima answered in a drunken stupor.

– Who is there?

– It's me, Raisa Ilinichna.

– Raisa Ilinichna, I cannot open the door for you.

– Why is that Dima?

– I am not dressed.

– Then get dressed, Dima.

– It does not matter, I cannot open the door.

– Why is that?

– I am not alone.

Costume dressers who heard this exchange giggled from behind the back of Mother Raia.

– Dima, if you do not open the door immediately I will give the order to break the door down.

Dima, like all of us, knew very well that what Raisa Ilinicha said, she meant. The door slowly opened and Dima in a blue football shirt worn over long black shorts and in socks full of holes appeared before our eyes.

Raisa Ilinichna quickly closed the door and after telling everyone to disperse she resolutely moved inside.

At that time I was a passionate admirer of the Dutch film-maker Joris Ivens. His film *La Seine a recontre Paris* had been shown in Leningrad cinemas and it left a great impression on me. In a biography of Ivens published in the USSR, I saw frames from one of his first films, *De Brug* (The Bridge). The frames reminded me of the construction of the huge Ochta bridge across the Neva river near Smolny[5] and to a certain extent inspired me to make a film about this bridge.

After editing and sound mix were completed, I showed the film to the artistic council of the film studio. They obviously hoped to see a 'standard production' and to my regret did not understand or accept my film as it was.

Several very encouraging comments were made by leading cinematographers of the studio, including Arkadi Klimov and Boris Lebedev, who gave me their blessings for my future professional camera work. Unfortunately both of these extraordinary directors of photography died at short intervals in 1970 and I could not show them a later film which I considered to be one of the most interesting of my earlier works –*Rembrandt: Etchings*.

Many famous cinematographers refused to shoot this film, including Konstantin Pogodin, Honoured Art Worker of the RSFSR,[6] who was considered the top master in the filming of art works. Pogodin said that some of the etchings were too small to perform proper camera movements, or tracks, or panoramas etc.

I suggested a technique of making slides from the etchings and using a method of front projection (projecting slides onto a special large screen), to shoot images directly from the screen, making panoramic and other dynamic camera movements.

To make the slides we invited an exceptional master of photography, Konstantin Nicolaevich Vidik, who for many years had worked as a photographer at the Hermitage Museum. When television began in Leningrad, Konstantin Nicolaevich became one of the first TV cameramen at the Leningrad TV Studio. Those several weeks working together, discussing the work, studying the originals from the Hermitage collection, remain in my memory forever.

After conducting experiments with front projection, we went on location to Lithuania looking for landscapes with windmills, similar to Holland. Shooting this film was the beginning of my creative work as a cinematographer. I was only twenty-two years of age and the youngest cinematographer at the studio.

ENDNOTES

1. This city underwent several name changes from St Petersburg to Petrograd to Leningrad and in the early 1990s back to St Petersburg.
2. An elegant street in St Petersburg.
3. A village some 74 kilometres south of St Petersburg where our summer house was located.
4. A Russian literature textbook.
5. Smolny Institute. Before the Russian Revolution of 1917, Smolny had been a school for young ladies of noble birth.
6. Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics.

Brisbane Line

Margaret Henderson

The Brisbane Gay and Lesbian Pride Festival began in June, and a number of literary events were part of the huge range of political and cultural activities of the month-long festival. 'Sensible Shoes: Kicking Back in the Funky Pride Literary Lounge' was an evening of readings from local writers, and special guest, Gillian Mears. The venue was the Queensland Writers' Centre and there was an enthusiastic capacity crowd. Mears gave a great reading of her bittersweet short story, 'Our Position on the Map,' about a lesbian trying to get pregnant (quite ironic considering the Queensland government's recent moral hysteria

concerning lesbians and the IVF program), and local writers, Paul Cadzow, Shane Rowlands, and Chris Gasteen also entertained the crowd with readings from their work. Any closet writers in the audience were invited to read their work.

Another literary event of the Pride Festival is the 'Pride Young Writers' workshop, a six-week-long series of workshops for writers under twenty-six, convened by Chris Gasteen, with funds provided through the Gay and Lesbian Welfare Association and the Queensland Department of Family Services and Youth. The workshop's participants will be given guidance by Chris in the various components of writing, and other tutors will be working on issues of homophobia, coming out, self-esteem, and social identity. The finished works will be published by the Queensland Writers' Centre later in the year and would make an ideal anti-homophobic resource for schools. This is a terrific opportunity for young gay and lesbian writers to be given assistance and guidance in a supportive environment, and hopefully some of the participants will be putting on their sensible shoes and reading in next year's Pride literary lounge. The Queensland Writers' Centre and Red Books should be congratulated on their support for Brisbane's gay and lesbian literary community.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY of Australian Literature (ASAL) Literary Studies series was launched in Brisbane in June as part of the 'Everyday Wonders' popular culture conference (convened by the History Department and the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland). Brisbane was an apt location as the first two books in the series are by Brisbane-based academics, Leigh Dale from the University of Queensland, and David Carter from Griffith University, and are a promising beginning for ASAL's foray into publishing.

The series attempts to counter the contraction in the publication of academic literary studies by the major publishers (with the exception of Cambridge University Press and the University of Queensland Press), and began as an idea by Susan Lever in 1993. An editorial committee was formed to set up a publishing mechanism using funds from ASAL so that properly refereed, and substantial scholarly works could be published. The series will publish works of literary sociology, criticism, and theory, specifically aimed at an academic audience, and any proceeds will be used to publish further texts in the series.

ASAL aims to publish one or two more works next year, and to overcome the expensive process of distribution for such a niche market, ASAL relies on professional networks, and mailouts to libraries and English departments. Leigh Dale's *The English Men: Professing Literature in Australian Universities* and David Carter's *A Career in Writing: Judah Waten and the Cultural Politics of a Literary Career,* exemplify the broad focus and direction of the series, as they are works not only of literary studies, but also of cultural historiography and politics. They each cost $25 (or $20 for ASAL members) and are available from:

ASAL Literary Studies Series
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
U S Q
Toowoomba QLD 4350.

Sydneyside

Sean Scalmer

THE SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL has been restructured. It will no longer be held in January, amidst the summer heat and face-painting of the Festival of Sydney. From next year it will instead be held every May. A new board has also been created to organize the Writers' Festival, with journalist Geraldine Doogue as chair.

Many will welcome the changes. Certainly, the Writers' Festival will no longer be overshadowed by simultaneous State-sponsored events, and will be judged more fairly on its own literary terms. However, the decision to relocate the Festival may not be wholly disinterested and supportive. The *Sydney Morning Herald* greeted the change as offering the Festival "the potential to become an outstanding regional attraction", and criticized the tendency to "show too much reverence towards slight fiction". It seems possible that the new Festival may be shepherded in a still more populist and bland direction. A 'blockbuster' that returns the investment of the State with expanded cultural tourism may be in the offing. Sydneysiders look forward to next May with a mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation.

ROSS FITZGERALD'S biography of Fred Paterson, *The Peoples' Champion*, was recently launched at the Trades Hall Inn by Jack Mundey. The event provided a valuable corrective to those who understand the story of Australian Communism as a Russophile, espionage-laden narrative. Those in attendance heard about the life of a Communist who

was concerned with his locality – a moral, committed man who spurned ideological dogmatism and sectarianism. His political struggles were not shaped by the manoeuvrings of the Soviet State, but by the problems of the working class in his community.

The launch itself was a reminder that Paterson was not alone. The Trades Hall Inn was full to capacity with scores of past Communist Party members. This was not a gathering of musty academics, but a reminder of the Party's ability to hold the loyalty of a significant strata of working-class people. Their idealism had not been totally compromised by the Cold War, and their contribution to Australian politics and culture should not be overlooked. Jack Mundey spoke about the possibilities of a revived socialism that embraced genuine internationalism and respect for the environment, and was received by the old comrades with warmth.

Dead-end Drive-in

Ben Goldsmith

In an article in a recent issue of *Cinema Papers* Christos Tsiolkas observes that inter-generational conflict has become "a standard narrative within Australian films which utilize multi-ethnic characters". Moreover, much of this conflict in the films to which Tsiolkas refers revolves around the relationship between a father and his progeny: examples include *The Heartbreak Kid* (1993), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Metal Skin* (1994) and *Shine* (1996). The situation in Australian films which utilize mono-ethnic or predominantly Anglo characters is often very different. Barbara Creed noted in *Metro* a couple of years back that mainstream Australian cinema from the 1970s was characterized by the Oedipal quest of its primary male characters – beginning with *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972); the father is often physically or spiritually absent, and the dominant male–male relationship is intra-generational, between mates. The inter-generational conflict that Tsiolkas notes is in part supplanted as a narrative engine by the competitiveness and inevitable tragedy of mateship. Examples here are numerous though the theme is most evident in the cinema of the 1970s and 1980s and can be traced from *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) to *Gallipoli* (1981) and all the way to *Idiot Box* (1997). Frequently the absence of a father figure in the cinema of mates forces the displacement of inter-generational conflict on to institutional or institutionalized surrogates, which may go some way to explaining the preponderance of narratives dealing with (literal or figurative) incarceration and struggles within or against restrictive regulatory systems. One problem with cinema of this kind however is that the depiction of such struggle may lend itself to a reliance on stereotypical characterizations and scenarios which do not deal with the realities of a plural, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in any but the most superficial ways and which automatically equate 'difference' with 'threat'.

Brian Trenchard-Smith's uneven but visually splendid third feature, *Dead-End Drive-In* (1986), follows this disturbing pattern to a certain extent. Based on Peter Carey's story 'Crabs', it was the second adaptation of Carey's work for the screen after Ray Lawrence's *Bliss* (1985). (*Oscar and Lucinda*, directed by Gillian Armstrong, is, finally, scheduled for release later this year.) 'Crabs' is at heart a disturbing meditation on inexplicable incarceration and the regulation of social movement both geographically and generationally, and it may in some ways be seen to anticipate themes in the work of cybersociety's theorist *du jour*, Paul Virilio. The film expands these themes, adds a pasticcio of generic conventions and stereotypes and raises a variety of issues intended to act as a commentary on racism and class conflict in Australia. These elements never quite gel, and the issue of racial intolerance is hopelessly inadequately resolved.

The movie opens with a series of pre-credit titles detailing a cataclysmic sequence of events which form the background for this dystopian vision of the (then) near future: the 'Rocks Riot' in Sydney on Australia Day 1988 leaves fifty-one dead; a nuclear accident at Mururoa Atoll in December 1988 poisons Pacific fishing grounds, creating food shortages; 103,000 die in 'The Great White Massacre' in Capetown, 1 April 1989; another Wall Street Crash in June 1990 plunges the capitalist system into chaos and presages the collapse of social order. In an attempt to control rampant unemployment and hyper inflation the government invokes emergency powers. So far so good: the film has made explicit what is only inferred in Carey's story, and set the scene for a classic urban futurist nightmare. Unfortunately then the main credit sequence begins, and apart from some dazzling camera work which makes full use of the stark but

beautiful Australian light, and an impressive car chase and final stunt, it's pretty much downhill from there on in. 'Crabs' (played by Ned Manning and so named because he once claimed to have crabs to impress his mates) is trying to build himself up in order to get a job as a tow-truck driver like his brother Frank and give up his job delivering Big Bob's Pies in an old clapped out Mini van. We know this because the credit sequence shows him jogging through mean, litter-strewn streets dressed like a refugee from an aerobics video for aspiring New Romantics. He is harassed by the Karboys, a street gang who vie with predatory tow-truck drivers for prime pickings from car crashes. To impress his girlfriend, Carmen (Natalie McCurry), Crabs 'borrows' Frank's pride and joy, a 1956 Chevy, to take her to the drive-in, little suspecting that the old ozoner has become a detention camp for the young. Later, as they test the comforts afforded by the expansive interior of the Chevy, two of the car's wheels are stolen. Scrambling half-naked from the car Crabs sees the wheels being loaded into a police paddy wagon. His complaints to the sinister manager of the drive-in, Thompson (played by the excellent Peter Whitford), bring only an issue of blankets and meal tickets, and his demands for a taxi or a phone are met with a world weary sigh. "You just don't get it, do you?" Thompson tells Crabs: "There are no cabs, no buses, no transport. Just the 'S' road. And you can't walk on an 'S' road, it's illegal. Three months mandatory detention. No excuses. So you're stuck here until the government decides what to do with you."

While Carmen quickly resigns herself to their confinement, Crabs refuses even to try and fit in with their fellow assorted misfits and outcasts, dreaming only of escape. He patrols the drive-in searching for the spare parts necessary to fix the car, and is finally rewarded when a consignment of wrecks appears one day. The new load of cars is followed by cattle-trucks carrying a group of Asian detainees who are clearly intended to inhabit the cars. Their arrival triggers the most disturbing scenes in the film. With a new-found solidarity, the previous inhabitants band together against what they see as an Asian invasion. A White Australia Committee is formed to 'do something' about the 'problem'. Crabs takes advantage of the distraction to steal a tow truck and attempt to escape. He is chased around the lot by the police and eventually crashes the truck. In the confusion he manages to steal a police van, drive up the conveniently lowered ramp of a car-carrying truck and leap the wall to freedom. The film ends with Crabs smiling wistfully at his good fortune.

This ending is a significant departure from the short story in which Crabs decides "to become a motor vehicle in good health". He imagines his escape, but out on the highway he drives for hours without seeing anything or anybody. Finally he turns a corner and sees lights in the distance. "He turns off the highway and finds himself separated from the lights by a high wire fence. Inside he sees people moving around, laughing, talking. Some are dancing. He drives around the perimeter of the wire, driving over rough unmade roads, through paddocks until, at last, he comes to a large gate. The gate is locked and reinforced with heavy duty steel. Above the gate is a faded sign with peeling paint. It says, 'Star Drive-in Theatre. Please turn off your lights.' " Carey's ending is then much bleaker than that offered by the film; Crabs is incarcerated mentally as well as physically, and is ultimately left with no choice but to resign himself to his fate. In offering an alternative to this scenario the film creates multiple problems for itself. The clumsy racial plotline, which could have been a telling commentary on the fate of an underclass that allows itself to be divided and gains spurious solidarity only through the exclusion of others in the same position, is like too many other elements simply left unresolved.

Ultimately the film is quite a let-down. Its storyline and subject matter appear to promise much: a captive population, a sinister government plot, corrupt police, car chases, crashes and stunning stuntwork (though we should expect no less from a director who made a prize-winning television documentary *The Stuntmen* in 1973, and followed it with two films, *The Man from Hong Kong* (1975) and *Deathcheaters* (1976), which contain some of the best stunt- and camerawork yet seen in the Australian cinema). But the acting is on the whole woeful, with Wilbur Wilde the most embarrassing. Apart from the opening and closing scenes the pacing is far too pedestrian, and the superficial representation of a faceless Asian mob – a la *Romper Stomper* (1992) – is extremely discomfiting when viewed through post-Demidenko, mid-Hanson 1990s eyes.

Trenchard Smith's recent work in America is not as widely known as some of his less-talented contemporaries. A founding editor of *Movie Magazine*, he is rapidly

carving a niche for himself in the critically ignored but hugely popular schlock horror market – known for state-of-the-art make-up and special effects. He recently completed *Leprechaun 4: In Space*, his sixth Hollywood feature and his second of the *Leprechaun* series.

Rabelais vs Thought Police

Rabelais Defence Committee

THE FEDERAL COURT RECENTLY refused an appeal by the 1995 editors of the La Trobe University student newspaper *Rabelais* against the banning of an edition containing an article entitled 'The Art of Shoplifting'. In supporting the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) censorship of the article – and hence the entire publication – on the basis that it "instructed in matters of crime", the presiding Federal Court judge, Ron Merkel, re-affirmed a reading of Australian censorship law requiring that extremely broad categories of text be banned.

The article itself was unremarkable for a student newspaper. Indeed, more-or-less the same article, in various forms, had been previously published several times. Articles of this type are political performances attempting to force people to consider their own relation to the law by confronting the reader with the *concept of instruction in crime*. In order that the pedagogical function be carried out, it is necessary that such instruction have the *appearance* of being genuine, regardless of whether the instructions are in fact useful. Despite the prevalence of such performances, the fact that they belong to a dissident genre of literary production means that they are frequently not recognized for what they are, at least by those who fulfil roles as voices of moral outrage. Usually those responsible for such political performances don't bother to contest mis-characterizations of their work, since outraging the establishment or its spokespeople is frequently part of the intentions of the creators. Censoring authorities, it seems, have no time for such subtleties, and can only read such an argument as a desperate alibi. *In reality, the law should require no excuse for political dissent.*

In supporting the ban, Merkel has made it clear that he believes any advocacy of illegal action or any discussion of how to undertake an illegal action must be suppressed. Thus the advocacy of anything from civil disobedience through to social revolution has been criminalized. Any person putting out a leaflet urging workers to undertake a picket or secondary boycott or discussing abortion – both technically illegal in some circumstances – could find themselves in the same situation as the former editors of *Rabelais*: banned, arrested, interrogated, finger-printed and photographed by police, and charged with serious criminal offences with penalties totalling up to six years gaol and a $72,000 fine each.

The OFLC originally banned the July 1995 edition of *Rabelais* in September 1995, at the request of the Retail Traders Association. The OFLC did not inform the editors or publishers of *Rabelais* either prior to or subsequent to this decision that the publication was even under consideration by the censorship authorities, and the editors only discovered that they had been censored several months later, when they received a police prosecution brief for charges of having distributed, deposited and published an objectionable publication – one legal definition of which is simply a publication which has been banned by the OFLC.

The political motivations of the Retail Traders Association in requesting that the publication be banned are obvious. Equally, it is easy to think of other organizations – employers' bodies, right-to-life groups, whoever – who might now attempt to make use of these draconian laws by requesting that material be banned on identical grounds. Bit by bit the government and police will be intervening to narrow the boundaries of acceptable public discourse.

The editors have launched a new appeal to the Full Bench of the Federal Court, in an effort to protect the already limited ability of people to publish dissenting views. Your action and support will be crucial in determining the outcome. For more information call (03) 9660 4769.

Floating Fund

Ian Syson writes:

The generosity of *overland* readers and subscribers is undiminished. Many thanks go to the following contributions:

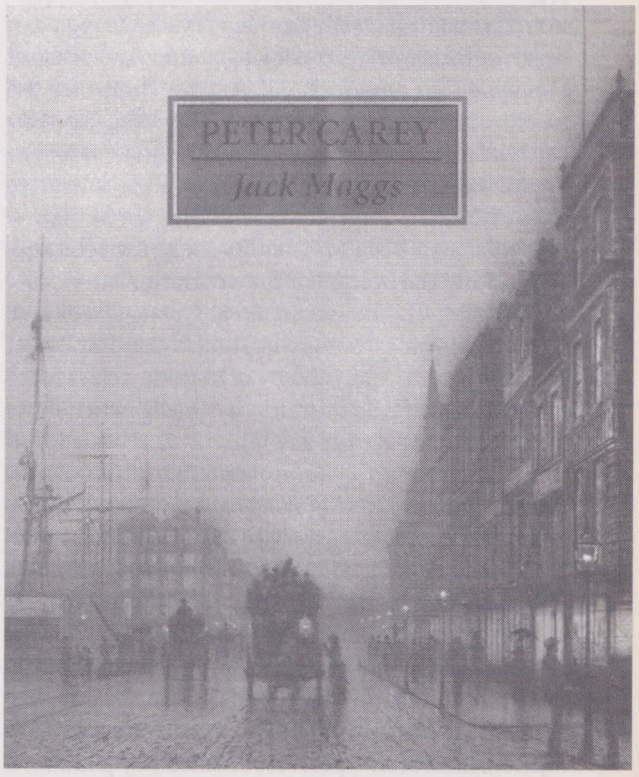
$5000 Anon; $120 A.M.H.; $100 J.N.; $68 R.M., Z.N.; $30 J.M.D., K.S.; $29 M.M.; $28 T.T., F.S.; $25 E.A.W.; $20 B.F.; $18 M.H., E.R., J.H.; $10 R.O.; $8 B.&M.B., M.J.&B.M.L., P.S., D.R., D.S.&J.F.A., A.J.D.McG., W.K., G.L.; $7 C.A.McF; $5 L.M.&R.E.G; $3 C.W.&A.H., R.W., H.N: Totalling $5695.

books

Return of the Repressed

Brian Kiernan

Peter Carey: *Jack Maggs* (UQP, $35)



LONG BEFORE *Jack Maggs* appeared, newspapers had reported that Peter Carey's next novel would be about Magwitch, the convict who in Dickens' *Great Expectations* is transported to New South Wales, and becomes the unsuspected benefactor of Pip, the narrator. Following the success of Carey's play with nineteenth century English authors, Dickens among them, in his Booker Prize-winning *Oscar and Lucinda*, this subject promised rich possibilities for further postmodern literary play and postcolonial critique.

While *Jack Maggs* amply fulfils such expectations, its eponymous protagonist is never explicitly associated with Dickens' Abel Magwitch; there are just numerous parallels that readers can perceive, or not. Thus, without reference to *Great Expectations*, *Jack Maggs* can be consumed as a pacey, playful, intricately-plotted period thriller filled with suspense and surprises, and Carey's familiar (and here appropriately Dickensian) comic caricatures and grotesqueries. At this level, it is as engaging and satisfying as an Elmore Leonard thriller – which is intended as the highest praise for Carey's narrative skills, praise which one rarely feels like bestowing on other Australian novelists who appropriate 'low' genres for more pretentiously literary purposes.

However, at the same time an implicit 'writing back' to *Great Expectations*, *Jack Maggs* offers readers familiar with Dickens' text – itself a powerful indictment of mid-Victorian England – opportunities for postcolonial reappraisal. And beyond the single, 'originary' text of *Great Expectations*, lies the wider network of texts, especially biographies, that 'Charles Dickens' connotes. I shall now have to engage in some unavoidably brutal summary to establish this point.

An expiree who has prospered in Sydney, Jack Maggs risks all by leaving his house at Snails Bay (where later Lucinda, like Carey himself, also lived) to return to London. There he expects to be reunited with Henry Phipps, who, when a small boy, had shown Maggs kindness on the eve of his transportation, and whom Maggs subsequently 'adopted' as his son. The figure who returns illegally – none too surreptitiously in a red waistcoat – is not Dickens' character but Carey's fresh creation: one who has yet to learn that his expectations lie not in Great Queen Street, London, but in Wingham, NSW; not as an Englishman but as a member of the new 'race' he despises, the Australians.

Maggs has set Phipps up in a house in Great Queen Street, but finds that his protegé has fled in anticipation of his embarrassing arrival. Through confusion,

Maggs is taken on as a footman in the house next door, which has been inherited by a former grocer and pedlar of fried fish, Percy Buckle, now quite unexpectedly elevated (no great expectations here) to the rank of gentleman, and able to devote every day to his passion for reading. From Buckle's house, Maggs can sneak into his own next door, to compose an account of his life that he hopes will prepare Phipps for the meeting that will reunite them. This account is in reverse, or mirror-writing, and invisible ink – with the implications that Carey is reversing the narrative roles of Dickens' Pip and Magwitch, and making visible what had been omitted in *Great Expectations*, particularly the horrors of transportation.

The adjoining houses in Great Queen Street and, soon after, Tobias Oates's in Lamb's Conduit Street provide the sets for a comedy of Victorian class manners, upstairs and downstairs – a comedy which shifts into a different, darker key when it is revealed that the new footman is an escapee from New South Wales. That revelation is owed to young Tobias Oates, *Morning Chronicle* journalist with two popular novels already to his credit, a lover of theatricals, and a dabbler in Mesmerism who has a morbid fascination with the Criminal Mind.

Oates learns Maggs' secret by mesmerizing him to relieve the paralysing pain of his *tic douloureux*. He convinces Maggs that he is possessed by a phantom, only to become possessed himself by plans for a new novel, *The Death of Maggs*. Oates also has a secret – he has impregnated his young sister-in-law. The novelist and his subject (who, unknown to Oates, is writing his own story for Phipps) are then drawn into a criminal collaboration which leads to the sister-in-law's death.

The purpose of this partial plot summary is to suggest that just as Maggs is not Magwitch, but invites comparisons with him, so Oates, who is not Dickens, also invites comparison with the actual boy-wonder, who, in 1837, the year Maggs arrives back in London, had published *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People* and *Pickwick Papers* in volume form, and had begun *Oliver Twist*. With the possibility of a quick sketch always in mind, Tobias Oates keeps his eyes open for suitable aspects of every-day life and every-day people; and the reminiscences Maggs records for Phipps (and for us), of being a foundling brought up as a thief by Ma Britten (Mother Britain?), are somewhat reminiscent of *Oliver Twist*. Also in 1837, Dickens' beloved sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, died. And Dickens, lover of amateur theatricals, was even reputed to have relieved a tic by hypnotism . . . The more the reader knows about the historical Dickens, the more Carey's fictional novelist Tobias Oates will seem to have in common with him.

Well, writing about writing, writing that is rewriting, and writing that blurs distinctions between the fictional and the historical are all attributes of what is identified as postmodern fiction. (Though not only of postmodern fiction; and, in this connection, *Jack Maggs* also contains an allusion to *Tristram Shandy*.) Such self-reflexive games in other hands can become wearisomely over-familiar – when was the last time you read a new Australian novel that was not postmodern? – and Peter Pierce ('Things Are Cast Adrift: Brian Castro's Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies*, 17) probably spoke for many readers when he advised one such author that he would do better to write novels rather than to continue to write about them.

But this is not advice that those same readers would want to offer Carey. Although he clearly delights in period pastiche, in the opportunity to flourish the appropriate archaism, especially slang, he keeps a tight rein on it. The narrative proceeds, through his characteristic succession of brief, resonant episodes (here ninety-one in all), by way of short, active sentences, and sharp dialogue exchanges, rather than any luxuriance in nostalgic 'fine writing'. And while the sentences and episodes are often freshly metaphoric in themselves – another characteristic – the more significant metaphors are (like the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda*) embedded prismatically in the total narrative.

In the terms of Frederic Jameson's familiar distinction between historiographic 'pastiche', which merely picnics amidst the cultural ruins, and 'parody', which engages critically with past conventions, literary and social, *Jack Maggs* is clearly, and seriously, parodic, a postcolonial rewriting of its now mythic original. But it is as well (shades of Patrick White, whose parodic *Voss* Carey ironizes towards the end of Oscar and Lucinda) a 'high' parody in Thomas Mann's sense of an ambivalent engagement with a lost tradition – ambivalent because, while it concedes that one cannot write unironically in such a way today, the engagement also conveys a wistfulness for what has been lost.

For, perverse as it may seem from my summary account of Oates, Carey here has much in common with Dickens. In its (ostensibly 'unsentimental') concern with the foundlings and outcasts of a class-ridden, hypocritical old sow of a nation that eats her farrow, this is a very Dickensian novel. The structural metaphors referred to above are those of aborted, abandoned or exploited children and their delinquent parents, which give *Maggs* a more profoundly Dickensian aspect than its delightful comic caricatures, sketches of London's every-day life and people, and barbed evocations of Olde England.

Both A.J. Hassall and Graham Huggan in their recent, stimulating books on Carey give attention to Carey's moral concerns. While, admirably, they may have risked seeming out of fashion by introducing such outmoded considerations, they should feel vindicated by this most recent novel. *Jack Maggs*, beneath the writing about writing and its parodic playfulness, is very much a *novel* about the need for attachment to others and to place, about the need to belong to family, society and nation. I cannot reveal the ending – which means I have to avoid the romance and leave out mention of the morally most significant character, the allegorically-named Mercy. Yet, perhaps I could hint that it is a mirror-image, a contemporary Australian rewriting, of the ending to *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, that quintessential Anglo-Australian colonial romance, in which, having made their fortunes in Australia, the protagonists return to Olde England.

Brian Kiernan is in the English Department, University of Sydney. Currency Press published an updated edition of his David Williamson: A Writer's Career *late last year.*

Fiction for the Ages

Phil McCluskey

Graham Huggan: *Peter Carey* (OUP, $19.95).

A TESTAMENT TO PETER CAREY'S continued international popularity, this thin volume in the Oxford Australian Writers series, written by Harvard academic Graham Huggan, is the third book-length study of Carey to appear since his first collection of short stories, *The Fat Man in History*, was published in 1974. Carey's popularity as a writer has always seemed to issue from his capacity for producing fictions which can be understood and enjoyed on a number of different levels. Their compellingly enigmatic qualities can always be read within particular frames of reference – Australia's history as a colonized and colonizing culture, or metaphors for acts of reading, writing and telling stories – but they can never be exhausted by them. The 'truth' of Carey's fictions always seem to lie just one interpretive level deeper; a premise which is itself played upon in Carey's early short story 'Peeling', in which the narrator's attempts to uncover the enigma of a woman who collects dolls and paints them white results in a literal peeling away of her bodily layers until nothing remains except a small white doll. All that is affirmed by the narrator's attempt to address the enigma is the efficacy of the enigma itself.

The problem of how to approach a writer whose fiction continually frustrates attempts at interpretive 'mastery' is a daunting one. In response, Huggan has chosen to address Carey's work collectively, at a thematic level, drawing together the common elements of his short-story collections and novels from *The Fat Man in History* up to and including *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994). As he deftly illustrates, there is considerable thematic continuity running through the range of Carey's writing. He identifies three major themes which are common to all of Carey's books: an exploration of the relation between the supernatural and the everyday; concern with personal and social transformation; and attempts at an uncovering of the hidden world of dreams and secrets. Acting as a buttress for this 'integrated approach' is the concept of the New Age, which Huggan uses as both a beginning and an end point for his study, arguing that much of Carey's fiction is concerned with debunking and satirizing its myths, especially the cult of 'personal transformation'.

While the New Age does represent a potentially useful angle from which to approach Carey's fiction, it is also a dangerous one. The looseness of the term makes it highly adaptable; it doesn't take long for the 'New Age' to become all-encompassing, open to such contrary distinctions – from the commune at Bog Onion Road in *Bliss* to the self-help tapes that Benny Catchprice listens to in *The Tax Inspector* – that it re-

ally fails to mean anything at all. Huggan acknowledges the disparate views on New Ageism: "At best, the New Age provides a roof for mystics and eccentrics; at worst, a shelter for egotists and dangerous fanatics", but resists employing the term with a specificity which would make it truly useful as an analytic point of departure. Instead it becomes a catch-all that puts transcendental meditation and naturopathy next to the *Buns of Steel* exercise video in the sale bin marked 'Dodgy': "The advertising industry feeds the New Age cult of self-improvement: it urges its clients to buy their way to success, happiness, salvation." Huggan's depiction of the New Age sounds a lot like plain old capitalism to me. But his initial discussion of it, moving primarily between *Bliss* and *The Tax Inspector*, does illustrate one of Carey's other abiding concerns: the way in which the machinery of capitalism takes up 'marketable elements' of anti or non-capitalist subcultures and repackages them for mass consumption. This concept is prevalent in *Illywhacker* and is the main trope of Carey's story 'American Dreams', in which the inhabitants of a small town are forced to emulate their appearance as it is captured in a scaled-down model 'small town' that becomes a popular attraction for American tourists.

Despite bracketing his study of Carey's writing with this loose conception of the New Age (and using it as an occasional touchstone throughout), Huggan explores the fictive territory that Carey creates with five thematic approaches, forming a lucid and insightful analysis of the author's writing. Of these five chapters, the first four are the most successful at mapping elements of Carey's eclectic fictions. 'Dreams and Secrets' looks at Carey's penchant for the fantastic; 'The Magical Power of Signs' is an astute analysis of Carey's often ambiguous portrayal of commodity culture; 'The Rage for Structure' focuses on the metafictional qualities of his writing; while 'Invented Pasts and Futures' delves into Carey's often apocalyptic (and mock-apocalyptic) visions. Monstrosity, on the other hand, in Huggan's final chapter 'Monsters' rapidly proves itself to be an ungainly position from which to approach Carey's work. The examples that Huggan uses here, primarily from the short stories and *The Tax Inspector*, seem tenuous and slightly forced; he employs a deliberately open-ended definition of monstrosity that includes moral monstrosity and various forms of hybridity, but ends up asserting at one point in the chapter that "'Monstrosity' is clearly too wide a net" to catch the diverse creatures that inhabit Carey's fictions.

Huggan's 'integrated approach' to Carey's fiction has merit; as he argues, it avoids the "artificial chronology of the conventional monograph", and it plainly displays the thematic continuities of Carey's fiction. Having had this continuity revealed, however, I found myself wanting a greater sense of how Carey's movements as a writer through various forms, themes and styles has shifted over the years. Huggan's approach only provides tantalizing glimpses of how Carey has recalibrated earlier concerns, principally between his early stories and the more recent, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. (This is especially true of Carey's overriding interest in biological and surrogate father/son relationships, which runs through the majority of his fictional and autobiographical work, and crops up enough separate times in Huggan's analysis to warrant its own chapter.) But Huggan has purposely avoided constructing the kind of totalizing narrative which Carey himself routinely constructs for his characters only to subsequently undermine, and his integrated approach ultimately pays a structural homage to Carey's overdetermined fictive landscapes.

Phil McCluskey is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

Which Side Are You On?

Ian Syson

Mark Davis: *Gangland; cultural elites and the new generationalism* (Allen & Unwin, $16.95).

GANGLAND IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT book I've read for a long time. Written with the kind of delicacy you might see in a street brawl, it tells the story of a gang in control of Australian cultural production – one not formed by the interests of class, race, sex or sexuality but by the forces of a generation, the baby-boomers. The members' names are easy to reel off because they're in the mainstream papers and on the broadcast media week after week after week, after week: Manne, Craven, Garner, Hughes, McQueen, Brett, Williamson, Slattery, Adams,

Faust, Murray, McGuinness, et bloody al. Very little space is occupied by or opened up for younger voices. This would be all very well if the "New Establishment" presented a true diversity of opinion; but for Davis, even apparently embittered ideological foes ultimately line up on the same side:

> When Robert Manne faces off with Humphrey McQueen over Manning Clark, or Phillip Adams does battle with Stuart Littlemore or Ray Martin, or any combination of the above, I suspect that they see themselves as occupying great and opposing positions. They'd be surprised, I think, by how alike they all look to outsiders.

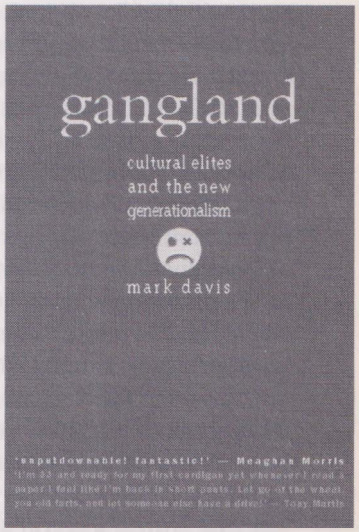
Paradoxically, the truth of *Gangland*'s argument could prevent its becoming a seminal work of Australian cultural criticism. As it stands Davis' "quarry", the Australian cultural Mafia, the "boomer-whingers", will do one of two things: ignore it or slam it. I suspect they will attempt the former and resort to the latter. The book is just too important to be ignored.

Compared with most of the prominent Australian cultural critics, Davis is young. Compared with those producing the fanzines, most PhD students and those who write for youth culture magazines like *Voiceworks*, he is a bit of an old fart. In his late-30s (an in-betweener like myself) Davis sits between the warring baby boomers and gen-Xers, his sympathy clearly with the latter. But it is not a sympathy borne of identity or immediate self-interest. The book is, rather, a variously angry, passionate, drippingly-sarcastic, brilliantly-written barracking for the cultural underdog.

Davis' argument is not, however, simply a repetition of some tired model of generational conflict. He does not invoke Lear to explain Garner and Ormond. The conflict is located precisely in postwar Australian history. Those coming in for criticism were often, as Davis recognizes, progressive cultural activists who benefited from the post-Whitlam institutionalisation of mildly-radical culture. The trouble is they don't want to let go. And it's not that hard to imagine Phillip Adams, with Johann Sebastian's backing, still chatting away to Gladys for many years to come:

> ... something has happened. Individually and collectively, many of the figures who led Australian culture out of the wilderness in the 1970s seem to have lurched into a sort of Endgameism, a high modernist cosmopolitanism gone wrong.

The baby-boomers have forgotten the lessons they learned in their own ascendancy: not only do new arguments have to be made to suit the age, new techniques, forms and (dare I say it) theories have to be negotiated. Young people should not be censored just because they don't agree that print is superior to screen, Shakespeare is superior to *The Simpsons* and that Foucault, Bataille and Baudrillard are incomprehensible.



If Davis' tone is combative, his intellectual method is just as vigorous. Never unfair, bullying or disingenuous, Davis fights front-on. Nearly all his evidence is well-researched public information and he reels off screeds of it when the occasion demands. I found two of these frontal attacks to be particularly important. Peter Craven (the ex-editor of *Scripsi*) is placed in relation to some amazingly tight and tangled webs of influence, especially in the review pages of several newspapers and magazines. For example, Davis shows how Craven and the ex-*Scripsi* crowd were particularly close at hand during the kerfuffles over each of the two Helens. Given this I was a little disappointed that Davis made no attempt to extend this discussion to Craven's appointment as the review editor of *The Republican*, a decision which baffled a number of people and lost the newspaper a lot of left-wing credibility before the first issue was even printed.

It is Robert Manne, however, who comes in for perhaps the most searching criticism. Davis argues that having:

> initially attempted to read Hansonism as a sign that the cultural elites are out of touch, Robert Manne has since conceded that many members of the "conservative intelligentsia" would find "their own ideas – on the new class, political correctness,

Mabo, multiculturalism, Asian migration, the High Court – absorbed, simplified, systematised and radicalised" in Hanson's rhetoric. It was telling that Manne spoke of this 'intelligentsia' in the third person, without directly implicating himself. It was as if those who had propagated the disease now wanted to offer the cure, while taking up media space in both instances.

Manne, as editor of *Quadrant*, bears a great deal of responsibility for the Australian importation and development of the right-wing catch-cry of political correctness. It remains to be seen whether future generations want from Manne (an agent of influence of American right-wing fundamentalism) the kind of admission of complicity that he presently demands from anybody who falls within five degrees of separation from Stalin's gulags.

The general truth of Davis' generational argument is, I think, beyond doubt. Just have a look at the next *Australian Review of Books*. Yet I would have liked to have seen some examples of cross-generational solidarity which would have forced Davis to modify (though not reject) his model. I'm thinking particularly of feminist magazines like *Hecate* and *Australian Women's Book Review* which have always made space for writers across generations. Davis might well argue that these are exceptions which prove his rule; they are hardly high-profile mainstream forums. Moreover, this kind of refinement might well have stymied his polemic. Nevertheless, I was left at the end of the book wanting to hear the good news about how non-generational cultures will develop and the examples from which we could take heart.

The final chapter of *Gangland*, 'Theory, Death and Me' is the most optimistic in the book. The tone lifts and it reads like an introduction to something else. Davis asserts the technical competence, power and intelligence of youth throughout: "Younger people have never been more serious about issues, despite their cynicism about mainstream politics and the fodder served up on mainstream news and current-affairs programmes and in the newspapers." He asks us, implicitly, to trust younger people and let them take responsibility for their own and ultimately 'our' cultural and intellectual lives, without giving the kind of solid textual and empirical evidence on which this intergenerational trust can be based – after all he has spent the whole book explaining to under-30s that the baby-boomers are a selfish lot. If this is starting to sound like I'm asking Davis to write a *different* book, that's not quite right: I'm asking him to write *another*, one which reveals, describes and analyses the cultural forms masked by the mainstream media he rightly condemns.

As for *this* book, *Gangland*: buy it, read it, fight back if you have to. But whatever you do don't ignore it.

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Xenophobia? Please Explain

Shirley Tucker

Lachlan Strahan: *Australia's China; Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (CUP, $39.95).

Sang Ye and Linda Jaivin (ed.): *The Year the Dragon Came* (UQP, $18.95).

Diana Giese: *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons; Conversations with Chinese Australians* (UQP, $39.95),

Yuriko Nagata: *Unwanted Aliens; Japanese Internment in Australia* (UQP, $24.95).

When we discuss 'relationships' between Asia and Australia, our vocabulary struggles over terms such as 'rapprochement', 'engagement with' and 'enmeshment'. Sometimes, we are encouraged by journalists and politicians to 'embrace' in a friendly hug. However, our understanding of the nature of past and present relations between Asia and Australia remains remarkably unclear. Recent books such as Stephen Fitzgerald's *Is Australia an Asian Nation?* also signal a collective unease that our understanding of Australian identity is the product of a capricious and faulty memory.

The four texts discussed here are related by a range of depictions of Asianness and Australianness, revealing aspects of Australian history that may be back to haunt us. Lachlan Strahan's *Australia's China* provides a strong argument that Australian images of China have historically helped define Australian national identity:

> Australian national identity gained definition and coherence in juxtaposition to China. Australianness was revealed through the articulation of opinion concerning Chinese, and the question 'What is China?' also partly answered the question 'What is Australia?'

He examines the Australian presence in China from the 1930s to the 1990s. Beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, Strahan details Australian responses to China through the writings of journalists, members of the CPA, clergy, intellectuals, trade unionists, business people, and diplomats, who travelled to China and 'back'. Tracing a continuous narrative of active Australian interest in China, Chinese politics and exotica, he also argues that "white Australians have developed a multifaceted, highly textured and sometimes contradictory body of stereotypes concerning Chinese." While this is not surprising, some of the stereotypes are. During the Second World War for example, China was portrayed as 'the saviour of Australia' for its 'gallantry' in combating Japan and the assistance given by Chinese citizens to Australian POWs in Indonesia and Singapore. As much about Australia as it is about China, Strahan's work provides plenty of detailed first-hand accounts of the Australians who were responsible for creating diverse images of China and the Chinese. The meticulous detail, together with the fast pace of his narrative that covers six decades of a complex and, on the whole, positive dialogue between China and Australia, is compelling reading.

Despite its obvious scholarly and narrative strengths, Strahan plays down the role of racism in historical Australian images of China. He consistently asserts that stereotyped images of Asia "derive from a diffuse sense of unease rather than any embedded racism". One could now argue however, with his assessment that "despite the persistence of some ambivalent, ignorant or prejudiced attitudes, racist groups have not moved from the periphery into the mainstream of Australian society". Perhaps many images of Australianness and Australian identity have relied on the idea that the Chinese should stay in China.

Sang Ye's "spicy, prickly book", *The Year the Dragon Came* also addresses stereotypes of Chinese and Australian identity. This collection of sixteen interviews of recent Chinese immigrants in Australia was selected by Sang Ye from more than one hundred oral histories because they were "the most interesting stories". And they are very interesting. These diverse stories share a common perspective; the foreigners observing the foreign – Australia. Although they are 'interviews', there are few clues to suggest what questions were asked. Instead, each story appears as a disconnected, free-floating narrative about recent experiences in China and observations of Australia(ns). Some observations may cause alarm for readers still lolling in the afterglow of Australia's post Tiananmen 'humanitarian' gesture to Chinese students. As a Masters degree student candidly states, "I don't have any 'Australian dream'. This place isn't good enough for my dreams". Like many of the other interviewees, he tells of the physical and emotional struggle faced by those that leave home. Even other Chinese in Australia seem changed and unfamiliar to him:

> When I left China, I had no illusions about Australia being a wonderful place or anything. Paradise was already chock-a-block, no room for late-comers, I knew that. But I never imagined the world of mortals was full up as well. I really felt like saying, "Fuck you, China! Fuck you, Australia!"

If *The Year the Dragon Came* raises parochial Australian anxiety levels, Diana Giese's *Astronauts, Lost Souls & Dragons* provides a soothing rejoinder to Sang Ye's prickles. 'Astronauts' refers to the increasingly common phenomenon where Chinese professionals, such as doctors, commute between jobs in Hong Kong and families in Australia. Based on interviews recorded by Giese for the National Library of Australia, this book focuses on Chinese Australians who have been here for many generations, as well as 'successful newcomers'. Giese explains the selection process by stating that "all these people are the survivors, the winners, the ones whose families have made good in Australia over several generations, or who have reached the head of some immigration queue". Celebratory in style, the book is beautifully produced with many photographs and a large format. The text is broken into seven sections, with headings such as 'Pioneers', 'Industry', 'Identities', and parts of interviews are spread throughout these sections thus making it difficult to trace the voice of any particular

interviewee. Occasionally, a quoted section of an interview is repeated in other sections, suggesting perhaps, that the text is meant to be read by turning to particular topics of interest rather than cover to cover. Although Giese says that this structure enables "an unfolding relationship" with the "characters", I found it mildly frustrating. I also felt irritated by the continual emphasis on fairly narrow definitions of 'achievement' and 'achievers' but the book is a valuable tribute to many otherwise invisible lives in Australian history.

Another version of Australia's hidden history concerns early Japanese migration which was relatively small in number and invisible – until the Second World War. Yuriko Nagata's *Unwanted Aliens* recounts the swift internment of 1,141 Japanese Australians twenty-four hours after Pearl Harbour. A further 3,160 Japanese from other Pacific locations were also incarcerated in Australian camps during the war. While the text is densely packed with testimony and government records, the style is matter-of-fact, offering an uncritical view of the period. This is unfortunate given the important questions that the process of internment foregrounds about judgements based on ethnicity. Australian-born citizens and British subjects for example, were interned for their Japanese ancestry. In fact anyone 'perceived' as Japanese was automatically arrested and these arrests could be made by 'other' Australians. Repatriation at the end of the war meant that elderly Australian Japanese who had lived in Australia for over fifty years were sent to Japan. Aboriginal descendants of Japanese pearl divers were also incarcerated with 'other Japanese'. The serious social implications of this kind of war-time ethnic cleansing is missing in current debates about ethnic origins, Asia and, Australianness.

These books expose the myth that relationships between Asian nations and Australia are primarily economic conundrums for political and business interests to negotiate. Strong cultural links over the last two hundred years to the elsewhere of Asia and Europe are part of who 'we' are and who we think 'they' might be.

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This is Not a Love Story

Allison Craven

John Polya & Robert Solomon: *Dreyfus in Australia* (Fast Books, $29.95).

I BECAME VAGUELY ACQUAINTED with the Sydney Sparkes Orr story when researching a MA dissertation on sexual harassment. I was prompted to dip into W.H.C. Eddy's long-winded account (*Orr*, Jacaranda, 1961), but sensed that, at the time, the story had little to say about contemporary feminist or bureaucratic concerns about sexual harassment, in spite of Cassandra Pybus' attempts to rustle the story into relevance with the publication of *Gross Moral Turpitude* (Heinemann, 1993). Here the authors of the self-published *Dreyfus in Australia* and I broadly concur.

Equally, however, it seems futile for the authors to pursue the theme of heroic affiliation of Orr with Dreyfus, in spite of the similarities between the stories. As a story of sex scandal, Orr's is rather typical of the way unremarkable men are transformed into foolish and unworldly warriors in struggles over love and ethics. While Solomon and Polya do not imply as derogatory a view of Orr as Pybus does, they nevertheless do not resurrect an heroic Orr any more than they illuminate the windy parables extracted from his experience. Rather than a soldierly figure, Orr, with his many foibles, is characterized as a pixie-like speaker of "magic . . . Celtic words".

But Solomon and Polya's allusions to Dreyfus are based less on the figure of Orr himself, than on their belief that the story of Dreyfus symbolizes a "conspiracy" which "led to the conviction of an innocent man". Applied to Orr, this is at least questionable, while interpretations of Dreyfus differ. Pierre Bordieu says that what is "represented by 'J'accuse' and the battles of the Dreyfus Affair" is "the radical assertion of the writer's freedom".

Dreyfus in Australia, according to the author's note (signed only by R.J. Solomon, as Polya, like several players in the Orr drama, has gone before) was penned partly in response to Pybus' alleged "misrepresentation of events". This is not the sole motive, as the authors claim – in their radical freedom – to be "against university misconduct" and to expose the "disinclination of institutions to admit their mistakes." In the last chapter, other supposedly comparable examples

(of intellectual suppression, university recalcitrance, etc.) are cited (including Ormond College), effectively framing the book with evidence of these noble concerns.

The struggle over whose version of events is more factually authentic will no doubt continue. Nevertheless, the ruminously whimsical Solomon and Polya claim to have written "a moral tale, directed to the general rather than the academic reader". In its reflective moments, the book has the quality of a reminiscence elaborated with some rather musty poetic sentiments. When, for instance, the authors describe how "universities are like carpets: they may be bad for health and hard to keep clean but not having them strikes one from the social register", the memory of the 1950s is invoked in ways that remind the reader that the Orr case happened a long time ago.

And few females enter the narrative. The first (before Suzanne Kemp) is a guileless teacher's wife, the subject of an inner moral tale, who fails a social test by incompetently baking a cake, "scold[ing]" her husband for her own mistake with a wifely, "darn you". For those who feel comfortable with homespun wisdom of this kind, and who have followed the Orr story for some time, this book might be an intriguing read. Some allegations of skulduggery and intrigue are so serious that readers are forewarned "to close the book and turn to fairy tales".

The noble aims come unstuck, as the tale is narrated with a rather ungripping classical angst (including various appeals to 'dear' and 'gentle' readers). The recollection of Orr's and Kemp's alleged assignations are somewhat prurient (a map of the Hobart Derwent area is included with a key indicating sites of 'intercourse' and 'no intercourse'); there are weird 'n' wonderful biblical allusions (especially concerning Susanna and the Elders); dour reminders about the lowly, inhospitable lives of academics of the day; and a strange atmosphere is concocted around figures who survived European nazism and communism and which pervades the storytelling. And storytelling it mostly is, documented sources being fairly few overall. (Suzanne Kemp's diaries are strategically cited but do not appear to be acknowledged in the chapter notes, nor receive a specific index entry.)

The opening chapter contains a lengthy exposition of the origins of the University of Tasmania which figures Tasmania itself as the poor love object of the university-builders. 'Academic Foundations' begins, with (rather racist) unflattery: "Australia was the last continent to be colonized by Europeans, excepting uninhabitable Antarctica" owing to its "remoteness from the developed world". The extreme of this outpost is the subject of the story, lying "offshore" . . . Tasmania . . . "insular". Tasmania, a lonely girl in need of (an) education. Crudely stereotyped, Tasmania, as "a small academic and political entity", is submitted by the authors for examination in this story of the Orr case because such societies "are a microcosm of larger societies".

Stories of the microcosmic relations between small places and large places would seem to be colonialist furphies by now. Narratively, this subjecting of lonely, 'insular' Tasmania to scrutiny as 'microcosm' benefits the story of Orr and his contemporaries by sealing it and making it a 'special case', knowable only to those who were there and within it. It is charity, then, for such lowly subjects to be worthy of comparison to the Dreyfusards of France.

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Queer Gothic

Damien Barlow

Kirsty Machon: *Immortality* (Blackwattle, $14.95).

Since the mid-1990s an adventurous – and at times deliciously disruptive – queer poetics has made its way into print. Among this new body of queer Australian fiction is Fiona McGregor's *Suck My Toes* (1994), Dean Kiley's *and that's final* (1995) and Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* (1995). If we were to look across the Tasman at New Zealand fiction, we could add Annamarie Jagose's *In Translation* (1994) and Peter Wells' *The Duration of a Kiss* (1994). To varying degrees, all of these texts self-consciously position themselves as queer by mobilizing oppositional narrative strategies and subject positions, which in turn, contest hegemonic understandings and 'truth-claims'. Kirsty Machon's book of twelves stories, *Immortality*, is the latest significant addition to this impressive and expanding queer canon.

From the intriguing cover photo of a blurred drag queen, a queer tone is set; a questioning and subverting of those permeable boundaries between homo/hetero, male/female, masculine/feminine. For example, in 'State of Shock', the narrator's sex and sexuality remain unannounced until the last lines, allowing for numerous queer possibilities and cross-identifications to develop along the way. Machon's stories are also deeply imbued with death, violence, lust and a dangerous fascination with the darker, murkier, facets of queer lives. Her prose exudes a gothic ambience, that has the ability to chill the blood in one scene, then bring it to an erotic boil in the next. Machon's characters are queer characters, defined against the 'normal', yet concurrently living within the dominant society. We have lesbians, poofs, straight women and men, bisexuals, brother fucking brother, transvestites, and necrophiliac dyke love when Jackie Traval discovers a murdered weather girl in 'Butterflies, Baby'.

In one of Machon's more violent, yet beautiful stories, 'Stranglehold', she examines race, sexuality and gender through her Filipina-Australian protagonist, Lucy. Despite being married to an abusive white Australian man, Lucy discovers love and lust when she meets Sadkia and begins a passionate clandestine affair:

> She forced her tongue in, savouring the taste of expensive lipstick. She ran her hands down the seams of Sadkia's leather jacket, her black trousers, the naked skin above her heart.

Just as Lucy begins to explore more fully her sexuality, she is sadistically raped and brutalized by her husband, who as a final punishment – and in a macabre twist on the coming-out genre – leaves her hogtied literally in the closet. Machon's Lucy elides racist and heterosexualized cliches, she is instead endowed with agency and subjectivity which previous representations of Filipina women in Australia – such as the infamous Cynthia in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* – have failed to achieve.

In 'Eight Legs of The Devil', Machon focuses on the consequences of one of this country's more violent (and often excused) pastimes, poofter bashing. The story begins with the murder of a transvestite, viciously killed by Hamish in a moment of "homosexual-panic". Machon powerfully places Hamish's homo-panic within the wider context of the current NSW Woods Royal Commission into Police Corruption, and more specifically, the way the Royal Commission has triggered and contributed to the current barrage of homophobic discourses concerning paedophilia. However, Machon cleverly decentres this narrative – without losing any of her anti-homophobic sentiment – by exploring the ways the murder affects Hamish's sister Shelley and the family of the dead transvestite, to deliver a dramatic and satisfying climax.

Machon's stories of dangerous desires and murderous loves cannot simply be read within homo/hetero or male/female binaries. Her stories encourage a queer reading position, where identities are fractured and ambiguous and dominant understandings of sexuality, sex, gender, race and class are destabilized and challenged.

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Ballads, Bards and Bollocks

Craig Williams

David Foster: *The Glade Within the Grove* (Vintage, $17.95) and *The Ballad of Erinungarah* (Vintage, $16.95).

D'ARCY D'OLIVERES, POSTMAN, rickety, terminally ill narrator in *The Glade*, begins the story in a preamble – a device used to begin both texts – where he tells us how he was mysteriously inspired by the discovery of a "lost" ballad in an old mailbag towards the end of his working life. D'Oliveres informs us that his text, which follows the preamble in *The Glade*, is

> a gloss, a supplement to *The Ballad of Erinungarah*. A view from the Mind, to be read in conjunction with the view from the poet's Heart, to effect a stereopsis. The Gospel according to the scholiast.

Though this explanation teeters on the edge of credibility, a consequence of Foster's satire which works

by anchoring D'Arcy's words in an archaistic sensibility, it presents a pretty simple corporeal equation as a key to reading the two texts together. I'm not so naive as to think that cover blurbs and publicity paraphernalia are definitive assessments of literary merit. But I was startled to see the publicity material released with the books misunderstanding D'Arcy (the blurb reads: "D'Arcy explains that the *Glade* is the view from the Mind, the *Ballad* the view from the Head"). As Morrissey, lead singer and lyricist with The Smiths once wrote in the song 'Still Ill', "Does the Body rule the Mind or does the Mind rule the Body, I dunno". Clearly, a lot of care goes into marketing books these days.

Foster has come up with what I found a dense, difficult, sometimes boring, occasionally obnoxious, "double work". The texts function in very complex ways to present a set of stylistically different, but thematically and historically related narratives. In my mind the narrative dimension of the double work – the story that establishes a clear relationship between the texts – wasn't as interesting as the interplay between formal and generic elements set up through separate publication of the texts; the novel is a magisterial, postmodernist treatise, the poem something that resonates with elements of literary and popular ballad, a development in Australian pastoral and a mythological fragment.

Brief, dogmatic explanations, such as the quotation above, are a consistent feature of Foster's novel. As much as D'Arcy's point suggests a dualistic framework for reading the relationship between the texts, his exegesis also works as an intellectual and emotional challenge to readers: it sounds as though we're being *told* in no uncertain terms to take both texts, and thus D'Arcy's word as well, *seriously*. This task is often difficult.

D'Arcy is a classic literary type, an intrusive narrator and a relative of figures such as Herbert Badgery in Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* (among many others), and also a traditional literary pessimist, with a bleak, neo-Darwinian view of the world, full of lament for the ravages of secular democracy. Another rant, later in the novel, engaging with the "human ambivalence towards sex" and the association of sex with dirt, argues that it arises from the demiurge's design of the human body. The male urethra has been made to serve a dual function, and the arsehole has been put "an inch from the cunt in a creature the size of a large barramundi". This is a discourse of the pedantic amateur scholar (among other things), and routinely signals D'Arcy's frequently hilarious, sometimes rambling digressions.

So why, at this point in history, should we readers force ourselves to bother with D'Arcy's old-fashioned style of speculation? Because "everything has gone terribly wrong for this civilisation". This is why D'Arcy decides to launch into his dense, laboured dramatization which vaguely reconstructs the story of a doomed commune, founded sometime in the late sixties in far Far East Gippsland. It was this attempt at autarky that spawned one Timothy Papadimitriou (otherwise known as 'Orion the Poet'), the fictional author of the sacred ballad that has "imparted meaning" to D'Arcy's life. The five-act narrative systematically blends dense detailed description, with dialogue, paratextual inserts, and various narratorial digressions, discussions and archaisms, to produce disarming satirical discourse that is often so vague and hysterical that it simultaneously functions as a kind of late twentieth century mode of literary mysticism. D'Arcy at times reminded me of Jack Hibberd's mad narrators, but Foster is much more sparing in his use of colloquialisms. For instance, the phrase "died in the arse" is used twice in the novel to describe a country town that's basically 'stuffed'.

It is likely that Foster has pulled off an impressive feat in convincing Vintage Books that a companion volume of verse – some kind of ballad, written by a fictional character in a novel, at that – is commercially viable, let alone half-interesting enough aesthetically to be worthy of separate publication. What is most interesting for my money is the way Foster's ballad sits in a strikingly obscure way in relation to the set of traditions and styles constitutive of Australian ballads. Henry Lawson's 'bush' ballads, for example, are routinely interpreted as poems that narrate *popular* stories. *The Ballad of Erinungarah*, on the other hand, presents a defiantly quixotic story, only haphazardly illuminated by D'Oliveres' discourse in the novel. Structurally, the ballad is organized into numbered, short stanzas. The formal features of the verse, combined with the obviousness of the title, the rustic descriptions of nature, and D'Arcy D'Oliveres' commentary, effectively mark the text as a species of ballad in terms of content and style. But it introduces some strange resonances in relation to other poetic traditions and styles used by Australian writers. D'Oliveres, for instance, in a bizarrely deft nod to the

Jindyworobaks, regards the poem as a "White Dreaming, cognate with the Aboriginal landscape, but defiantly pastoral, the way the hippies were". And, occasionally, the verse is amusing; in stanza 57 'Orion' describes the way "An ef one hundred's glittering arse/Illuminates in a brake light flash".

The cover design and artwork encourage us to engage with the question of Foster's hybrid style and subject matter as they are produced intertextually, and help to create the sense of a vague and mysterious/mystical relationship between the texts. The books feature reproductions of photographs by Olive Cotton, dated 1937. 'Orchestration in Light' appears on the front cover, top half, of *The Glade*; 'The Sunlit Tree' occupies the same spot on the front of *The Ballad*. The space below each piece is a bright, but flat whiteness, over which text appears: the author's name in bold black lettering on both covers; alongside are some excerpts from reviews on *The Glade*, and an excerpt from the narrator's preamble on *The Ballad*. Each photograph suggests a different perspective. 'Orchestration in Light' presents a tinted view down into a gorge somewhere, framed by what look like eucalypts, with a few tufty clumps of grass in the foreground that give the impression of someone peering over a ledge into the valley. The perspective suggested by the photograph plays around with ideas of omnipotence: a gap between some trees provides a breathtaking glimpse of a gorge, but the gorge is hazy and the detail murky. Which, for me, both sums up, and effectively constitutes Foster's style. The view up into 'The Sunlit Tree', Cotton's photograph on the cover of the ballad, registers something like a 'tone' of seriousness that's quite appropriate to a literary, lyrical ballad. The image presents an impression of looking up into a strange blend of tinted lightness and space produced in the interplay between the branches and sparse foliage of a tree, and the flat background tone of sky.

These are two strange books, and it's fitting that readers are lucky enough to be given the chance of deriving some solace from the crisp black and white photograph of the author on the back cover, wearing white overalls, leaning in a relaxed but seemingly potent pose against a fence, with his fingers looking vaguely soiled. Is this man the John Shaw Neilson of contemporary Australian poetry? If the book starts to chafe your brain, you can always close it, turn it over and meet the frozen gaze of the author on the back cover. Then, to the satisfying realist contours of the face, you can lavish him with praise, call him a tosser, ignore him or try something even more inane and work towards offering a subtle critique of his miserable ideas about "blood identity" revealed in the opinion article he wrote recently for *The Sydney Morning Herald* ('Race Debate is Skin Deep', 26 June 1997). Perhaps I'm being a bit harsh here. Kerryn Goldsworthy has pointed out that Foster may work in mysterious ways, considering his assertion that "the most effective way to satirise something is to become the thing you're satirising". Bollocks?

Craig Williams hails from Newcastle.

Migrants, Rock 'n' Roll, and Unhappy Childhoods

Con Castan

Venero Armano: *Strange Rain* (Vintage, $16.95).
Olga Lorenzo: *The Rooms in My Mother's House* (Penguin, $16.95).

THE MOST OBVIOUS LINK between these two novels is the authors' names. Clearly both of them are 'ethnic' or 'non-Anglo/Celts' and therefore, it is assumed, contribute to the multicultural field of Australian literature. Olga Lorenzo was born in Havana, Cuba, and came to Australia via the United States. Venero Armano was born in Brisbane; however, he is the son of Sicilian immigrants.

It turns out in this case that the most significant biographical element is place of birth. For Olga Lorenzo's subject is memories in Australia of growing up as a refugee child in Florida and of her family's life before that in Cuba; subject matter that would be classified as 'ethnic'. Venero Armano's subject is the life of two Australian rock 'n' roll musicians who are fleeing from a failed past. Here the classification is youth sub-culture. Both novels, though in different ways, support the argument one hears that there is a new diversity in Australian fiction of the eighties and nineties.

One other difference is that *The Rooms in My Mother's House* is powerfully female while *Strange Rain* is equally powerfully male. *The Rooms in My*

Mother's House is Ana's story and while her father Pedro and her brother Carlos play important roles, it remains Ana's story as well as Consuelo's and Delores'. The only major female characters in *Strange Rain* are Catherine and Annie and they are more projections of male desires than independent and realized characters.

The Rooms in My Mother's House is a major contribution to the genre of the immigrant's story. It is beautifully written in a prose that has the intensity and sense of rightness of poetry. It is skilfully narrated, almost totally devoid of dialogue, yet giving expression to several voices. It achieves full poetic status in the italicized 'intrusions' into the narrative of the Spirits of Cuba (they are not so named – nor given any name at all – that is what I am calling them), sections which are not only intensely lyrical but which show acute insights. The one which opens the novel, for example, evokes the life of those who are living on memories of the past, many immigrants being one sub-set of this group:

> There were always more people living with them, than they ever encountered, just as there were rooms in the house that they dared not enter. They did not allow themselves to know to what extent their past was there. But still we crowded their lives. We forced them into a smaller space. We curtailed the possible. We were there, neither appeased nor unappeased, neither watchful nor neglectful . . .

An important part of the novel is the Cuban Spanish which is the language of her world without being Ana's own language. I was most impressed by the skill with which Olga Lorenzo works pieces of it into the text so that the reader who does not know the language can understand it without the intrusive device of direct translation. Here is one example of the techniques the author has developed:

> Consuelo was soaking in the bath . . . and called, Anita, stop that. Anita come here *por favor*. Consuelo was the only one who ever said please.

Strange Rain did not excite me as much until its climax, which is very attention holding indeed. This might be because the book draws heavily on Australian and New Zealand popular music with which I am unfamiliar. Apparently "the book's title, the chapter headings, the name of the Thornhill nightclub and the songs performed there, are all references to songs – songs significant to Joe Santo's emotions as he related the events of this book to the author". It is quite likely that the book would have a stronger impact on readers who carried these within them than it did on me.

I opened this review by mentioning the most obvious connection between the two novels. A deeper one is that both depict worlds that are violent and worlds of unhappy childhood. In *The Rooms in My Mother's House* the unhappiness is in part caused by the family being refugees; but this is not the whole story. The violence goes back to the Cuban countryside and its poverty, to the characters of Pedro and Dolores, even to an element of violence in Ana's mother Consuelo, although she contributes to it mostly in the children's experiences by being unwilling or unable to shield them from the violence of the others.

Violence is omnipresent in *Strange Rain*. Its principal location, however, is in the Rosewall family, the violence of their father towards Catherine and her half-brother Isaac. This is the world that Joe and Cliff unwittingly travel to in fleeing from their own violent past, which in Joe's case includes a stretch in Pentridge for manslaughter as a result of driving under the influence of alcohol and ambition – wanting to do too many gigs.

Con Castan is best known for his studies of Greek-Australian literature. He is currently at work on a novel and is a republican activist.

A Sort of Breathing Space

Michael George Smith

Richard King: *Kindling Does For Firewood* (Allen & Unwin, $14.95).

IT'S FUNNY HOW STYLE can affect your response to something. A few years ago, I reviewed Andrew McGahan's first novel, *Praise*, for *overland* 128, and while I found it a compelling read, as I admitted in the review, I didn't like the book, its characters or the

world they inhabited. Four years on and I'm reading another winning novel launched by *The Australian*/Vogel literary prize, again published by Allen & Unwin, again basically a relationship tale about two young loosely Generation X people whose lives are dominated by sex and drugs (and once again not the once-obligatory third element – rock 'n' roll), essentially living nowhere lives and inevitably falling out of the relationship – and I loved every page.

The difference is the style in which the story is presented as much as the characters being depicted. Richard King's novel may well be sex and drugs but it doesn't fit the 'grunge' or dirty realist formula (if it ever existed beyond a neat marketing exercise). Where McGahan's characters lived the tawdriest of lives, or the hero of Rosie Scott's novel, *Movie Dreams*, a similarly drug-fucked existence, King's lovers are witty, insightful, intelligent and actually *care* about each other, and the sex and drugs – or more particularly the sex, in *Kindling Does for Firewood* – is an essential barometer to the shifting psychology of the two lovers, William and Margaret, and points the way for a third part within this relationship, Margaret's younger sister, Jane, very much the Lolita of the piece.

Where McGahan was following in the footsteps of Bukowski, King makes it plain he's tipping his hat to J.M. Barrie, the creator of *Peter Pan*, though Mr Barrie would surely blush at the way the inspiration has been interpreted by King. William works part-time in a bookshop – he's the Peter Pan character – and lives in a house with half a dozen certified drug-ingesting dole bludgers, very much the Lost Boys, all of them determined never to grow up. Enter Margaret, the Wendy of the piece, who inevitably moves in with William and thereby the boys, a move she describes as "an awfully big adventure", after she has had an argument with her parents, shouted a few profanities (King informed me that his friends enjoy a game involving finding a page *without* any profanities!) and storming off to her bedroom. "Then William appears at my window and whisks me out and into the night."

William finds the fact that he suddenly seems capable of flying not liberating but deeply disconcerting: "In fact I can foresee circumstances in which having the gift of flight may be inopportune or at least slightly embarrassing." And that's the real beauty of the book. For all the explicit sex and expletives, the book is also profoundly funny, delivering lines like the above as asides or digressions, playing with words, peppering the text with puns and anagrams, stopping the narrative to make the reader complicit in the interpretation of events or descriptions by one or other of the protagonists, offering alternative possible narratives and generally having a lot of fun along the way. And when King wants to, he can write with a real sense of poetic perception: "We said farewell to the surety of friendship and would now slowly and with uncertain paces map and chart the ravines and cliffs and treacherous landscapes of some kind of love."

There are actually two narratives going on in this book. There is the William and Margaret plot, with the story propelled by each in turn, and there is the story of Great Aunt Peggy, which bares no necessary relationship to the other story whatsoever, yet somehow seems to fit nonetheless. Peggy's story goes back to the early years of this century and is told in a much more sedate, though still slightly fantastic style. Peggy's is born the eldest daughter to a "wordless man" in Tasmania, described as Neverland, populated originally by "a mass of surplus and sundry convicts ('They are the children who fall out of perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way')" – Mr Barrie again! Perhaps King could have culled this tale from the body of *Kindling Does for Firewood* and developed it as a book in its own right – *Kindling* certainly wouldn't suffer for its absence – but its presence makes for a sort of breathing space, breaking up the three sections of the main story, and the reader is certainly free to decide if Great Aunt Peggy's story is part of the family lore of William or Margaret.

King also leaves the options open as to whether William/Peter Pan eventually opts to grow up or not. Margaret/Wendy certainly opts for it, but there's also Jane/Lolita/Tinkerbell to consider. *Kindling Makes for Firewood* certainly cheered me up after pounding through the deeply disturbing and sadly all too realistic *Know Life*, by Daniella Petkovic and Maria Kokokiris (Pan, $11.95), very much in the grunge/dirty realist mould. King deserved his prize.

Michael George Smith is the Associate Editor of The Drum Media, *a Sydney-based youth arts and entertainment weekly newspaper, too old to be a Gen-Xer and yet missed out on being a Baby Boomer as well, thereby, perhaps, being something of a Lost Boy himself.*

Lost Places Mean More Than You Think

Mary-Ellen Ryan

Peter Read: *Returning to Nothing; the meaning of lost places* (CUP, $29.95).

'How do you feel?'

This is of course the cliched question now so abused by sections of the media fixated by victims and reliant upon a heartfelt response of between ten and fifteen seconds duration that we cannot help but be embarrassed by it.

But by asking this same question in all seriousness and giving careful consideration to the responses, author Peter Read in *Returning to Nothing: the meaning of lost places*, instead invests people with a dignity currently denied them according to the central thesis of his book.

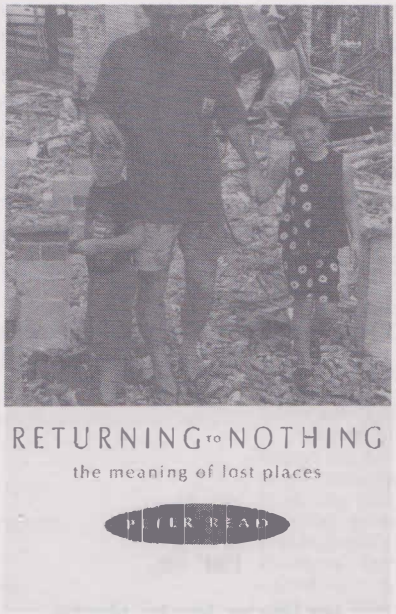
For Read, those traumatized by a loss of place are truly "the bereaved".

> Grief for dead places seems much more analogous to grief for dead people than professional carers have allowed. Cultural studies, the dominant mode of analysis of contemporary society for the past two decades, has shown little interest in the personal and the individual. We need a second Elizabeth Kübler-Ross to advance place-bereavement as a continuing theme of contemporary distress.

Loss of place is sometimes brought about through a planned and voluntary process of transition, but often not. While Read considers the emotional impact of a loss of place from a variety of points of view, his primary concern emerges as an anxiety that not enough consideration goes into the effects of "place deprivation", particularly when it is imposed upon communities by unaccountable bureaucracies representing private industry, planning authorities or government agencies.

Current impact assessment criteria such as dust, noise, vibration and environmental damage are not sufficient when there is not equal consideration given to the effects of loss of home, community and countryside. "Loved sites are worth preserving because of the intense pain which their destruction may cause to the inhabitants of these places," says Read.

Loss by the individual may ultimately prove an irreplaceable loss to the wider, Australian society. The destruction of part of a Sydney bushland suburb is a phenomenon of "creeping international sameness", he says. We should act to preserve places like Darwin, Beecroft, Cribb Island and Adaminaby, all cases in point explored in the book, because "they may be the creative nuclei of future cultures".



With the exception of a chapter on the loss of Lake Pedder, Read consciously eschews a theoretical approach, preferring instead to rely on the power of "raw and intimate memories" of the more than eighty people he interviewed.

If this book demonstrates the complexity and depth of feelings for lost places in Australia, its mission will be accomplished.

The book's Australian context is fundamental to its strength. Without ever naming it, *Return to Nothing* tackles the issue of national identity through an examination of the personal circumstances of individuals and the ways in which they identify with particular Australian places.

Read retells the painful 'lost place' experiences of women and men, farmers, urban dwellers, migrants and refugees. For some it is as complex as the loss of a homeland. For others, it is as simple as moving house.

The incredible diversity among interview subjects could, at one level, suggest fragmentation – that Australian society is made up of too many different 'bits'. Instead what happens is that the experiences of one life

unexpectedly resonate in the experiences of another.

Andrew Reimer's sense of alienation from others who did not share his survival experiences in wartime Budapest echo the Gray family's experience when sightseers tour past their bushfire-ravaged home at Macedon in 1983. Fragmentation then, gives way to a sense of common humanity. We all feel the same pain at a loss of place, yet we are isolated from each other by the singularity of life experiences.

Where experience is not shared, it is layered on the landscape, thus recollections of the experiences of Aboriginal people are prominent. Margaret Johnson, having 'lost' Windermere Station, belatedly acknowledges the loss to the Wiradjuri people on whose land the station was established. Bruce Clayton-Brown had blanked out his past until he joined an association of Aboriginal people removed from their families.

> Bruce signed himself in to a mental hospital and found himself disbelieved by the psychiatrist to whom the experiences of exiled Aborigines were much more foreign than the concentration camps and ghettoes of the Second World War.

Clayton-Brown's experience links him to Vietnamese refugee Do Thi Anh.

Our sense of history and identity has reached the point where one 'place' can serve as a spiritual centre for a number of culturally distinct groups. After fifty-seven years, Granville Crawford knew the country of the Snowy Mountains high plains intimately.

> Yet his deep attachment to this land was shared by others. The Ngunnawal Aboriginal people, bushwalkers and environmentalists knew and loved the same valleys and ranges. Now this land is not only emotionally loved but emotionally contested.

Returning to Nothing's intellectual and emotional appeal lies in the power of individual accounts in which the subject's own voice often comes through Read's account by the use of italics.

The book could have benefited from more thoughtful editing, there is some needless repetition and the index is not comprehensive, but neither diminishes the power of the message to rethink what we take with us into the future.

Mary-Ellen Ryan is the Queensland Correspondent for Campus Review *newspaper and a PhD student enrolled at Victoria University of Technology. Her thesis is 'The Recovery of Self in Australian Women's Writing'.*

He: Her.

Her: He.

He: Her he. Her he. Her he.

Her: He her. He her. He her.

He: Her! Her! Her!

Her: He! He! He!

He/Her: Hee hee hee hee.

He: He her. He her.

Her: Her he. Her he.

He: Her.

Her: He.

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In Inala, where conditions for whites and Aborigines are economically similar, there is not this simplistic split between white and Murri, or oppressor and oppressed. In fact, when the Stolen Children report came out, any number of white families could point to similar circumstances which affected their own families . . .

Mudrooroo

At exactly the hour at which Lizzie and Tobias began their adulterous embrace, Mr Buckle learned (in circumstances too intimate to here relate) the exact address of the Molly Club where Henry Phipps was living. The satisfaction produced by this information lasted him all through the night and was with him before he opened his eyes, before he was sensible of what had caused his sense of well-being . . .

Peter Carey

As 'mainstream Australia' contemplates the ethereal intersecting of Sumo and Pauline Hanson – an intersection only possible because big fat men brawling in the dirt complement our culture so well – the trio of Elvis, Titanic *and O.J. assumes a dimension outside the superficial . . .*

Janine Little Nyoongah

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