overland

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CAPITALISM BREEDS WAR

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little johnny howard

kylie valentine on bad girls and politics

gays & lesbians and the left

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overland
Temper democratic, bias Australian

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editorial

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MARK DAVIS' *GANGLAND* has set the angry cat among the relaxed and comfortable pigeons of Australian literary culture. For all its faults (which a pamphlet like *Gangland* is bound to have) the book, like none before it, has driven a number of 'leading' critics into farcical self-parody. According to Davis, X, Y and Z, tend to dominate the review columns and literary pages; voila, X,Y and Z end up reviewing his book, however reluctantly. Davis' metaphors of organized gangsterism and gang violence turn out to be apposite ones. We give two views of the book's impact (from 'GenX' perspectives) in the miscellany section of this issue.

If, as Davis suggests, Australian culture is dominated by gangs, then what kind of gang is *Overland*? In the 1970s, Ian Turner said *Overland*'s job was to promote a broad left culture whose role was, in part, to engage in polemics with the right. Is that our role today? In these times of economic rationalism, the politics of racial division and the consequent destruction of community-based and working class cultures and institutions, our political role is probably more urgent and demanding than it was at the height of the Cold War.

Turner felt that *Overland*'s gang consisted of democrats, radicals, socialists and Marxists. He also believed *Overland* should always include younger voices. In the early 1970s he argued:

> If those of us who have been lucky enough to survive the crisis of ideology over the past twenty years are to have any part of [the encouragement of younger thinkers], we will have to accept the starting-points of the new generations, and not demand that they begin from ours.

That no substantial link has been made between Davis and Turner's arguments (either by Davis or the older left in general) since Turner's death, is profoundly important.

One of the absences in *Gangland* is social class, something of which Davis is not unaware. He will be writing for *Overland* in the near future on the rhetoric of class in contemporary Australia. We present in this issue a series of pieces which focus on class, politics and culture as a way of making a constructive criticism of and development from Davis' timely intervention in Australian cultural politics.

Ian Syson

Jenny Lee

Honest John: A Memoir

OVER THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS or so Australian politics has lost something of its dreary, business-as-usual aura, and with it has gone much of the authority of our dreary, business-as-usual prime minister. The coalition parties seem to be in the process of being taught a lesson that the US Republican Party has already learnt, to its considerable electoral cost: wedge politics is a two-edged weapon.

Wedge politics deploys the postmodern paraphernalia of niche marketing in the service of the time-tried objective of divide and rule. Its basic formula is simple. Step 1: identify aggrieved, biddable elements of the opposition's support base – preferably people without a lot of formal education who are feeling insecure. Step 2: use sophisticated opinion-gathering techniques to identify the most likely short-range targets for their resentment – preferably other people who are even worse off than themselves. Step 3: tailor your rhetoric to convince your subjects that they are the 'real' America, Australia or whatever, and that their legitimate aspirations to reap the rewards of a lifetime's hard work are being frustrated by the demands of mollycoddled minorities and welfare recipients. At root, wedge politics is profoundly anti-democratic. Its essential aim is to construct a majority opinion in opposition to the rights of underprivileged minorities.

In the USA under Reagan and Bush, these techniques were used extensively by the right wing of the Republican Party to draw white, working-class (especially male) voters away from the Democrats and into the polling booths by convincing them that they had been neglected in favour of 'vocal minorities' (especially blacks, gays and middle-class feminists). The Australian Liberal Party machine drew on these techniques in its 1996 election campaign.

There's not much new in this. Conservative political parties in both countries have been doing much the same thing less scientifically for many decades. After all, the Liberal Party was first brought to power federally in 1949 by a similar rhetorical move, after Bob Menzies' talk of the 'forgotten people' had catalyzed the frustrations of many war-weary men and women who felt their interests had been overlooked in Labor's grand scheme of postwar reconstruction.

John Howard obviously believed he had won a comparable constituency in 1996 with his deliberate targeting of 'battlers' who, several years into a much-trumpeted economic recovery, were still doing it hard. The stakes were high in 1996, as in 1949. Both elections came at the end of a long period of disorganization and ineffectiveness in the conservative ranks. Like Menzies, Howard was a leader who had failed once and persevered to be given a second chance.

The analogies were not lost on Howard, and the tenor of his statements after the election suggested that he believed the change in the political culture he had accomplished would be as enduring as that achieved by Menzies. The analogy, though, may prove as facile as the white-bread version of Australian history on which it is based. As Humphrey McQueen has said, "Knowledge of the past can be a lock as well as a key. Military commanders are not the only ones who fight the last battle they were in."[1]

The current political environment has little in common with the conditions under which Menzies came into office. Buoyed up by the postwar boom, a backlog of personal savings and a reservoir of pent-up consumer demand, Menzies could score easy points by taking the lid off consumption, particularly by abolishing petrol rationing. When his support faltered, he could always bring it back to life by kicking the communist can – an enterprise supported by Australia's Cold War allies, who were willing to turn a blind eye to the occasional breach of civil rights in a just cause.

The coalition today, by contrast, faces a far more volatile, fragmented electorate and an economic situation that is unlikely to offer the government many free kicks. It also faces a radically different international climate. With the dissolution of the bipolar Cold War order, Australia is no longer a strategically significant bulwark against anything in particular, and cannot look to a great and powerful ally to give it unquestioning support in the name of 'defending the Free World'. Economically, it is a very small fish in a pool dominated by several international trading blocs, none of which seems especially keen to let it through the gate. In reading 1949 into 1996, Howard appears to have jumped the gun; certainly, if there has been a change in the political culture, it isn't in the 'relaxed and comfortable' direction he predicted.

THE RISK OF WEDGE POLITICS, as the US Republican Party boffins discovered during their own 1996 election campaign, is that the appeal to prejudice tends to unleash emotions that are outside the usual domain of politics, and the existing structures can be hard put to contain them. In the US case the strategy boomeranged when the anti-abortion lobby – a 'vocal minority' if ever there was one – became so fired up that it tried to press-gang the entire Republican Party to its cause. In Australia the burgeoning race 'debate' has a similar potential to fracture the coalition of support on which the Liberals' 1996 victory was based.

Ironically, it's a moot point whether the Liberals needed to use wedge tactics in 1996 at all. Howard could almost certainly have won by offering the electorate a few bribes, smiling into the camera and not being Paul Keating. After all, John Hewson had almost won in 1993 by offering the electorate an elaborately specified dose of bad medicine, looking down his nose at the camera and not being Paul Keating. In 1996, however, the party machine was leaving nothing to chance. It had found out about wedge politics from the US (this, remember, was before the Republicans' 1996 debacle) and its polling revealed that there was a vast reservoir of ill-informed resentment out there to exploit, especially on Aboriginal issues.

At the same time, the party was keen to attract the votes of the various 'new constituencies' that had helped to keep Labor in office. Well aware that Howard was likely to be dogged by reminders of his earlier statements against immigration, multiculturalism and native title, the Liberal machine set out to renovate his image. It made a serious – and successful – pitch to win votes among immigrant communities by emphasizing its faith in multiculturalism and denying any intention of cutting the existing immigration program.[2] The machine also capitalized on Keating's neglect of the green lobby with the promise of big new initiatives in conservation, having pre-emptively squared off the forestry industry by persuading them to 'trust us' and shut up until after the election (an act of faith for which they have been amply rewarded).[3] Even on Aboriginal affairs, where the coalition had blatantly used wedge tactics during the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, the official policy statement bent over backwards to avoid any taint of racism. While it foreshadowed moves to review ATSIC's funding, it affirmed a commitment to the reconciliation process, promised to uphold the Racial Discrimination Act and announced that the coalition was "determined to wipe out the remnants of discrimination against Indigenous people".[4]

In health and industrial relations too there were reassuring noises: Medicare would be retained, and workers would not be disadvantaged by the new industrial relations regime. There were to be none of the hard-line economic rationalist diatribes that had given the party a slash-and-burn image in 1993. The aim now, as one member of the campaign committee told journalist Pamela Williams, was "not to offend people".[5] The strategists knew they could safely leave that to Paul Keating.

This inclusive, reassuring air was only part of the game plan, though. There was a harsher edge to the Liberals' appeal to the 'battlers' – a carefully chosen colloquial term aimed squarely at fostering the politics of resentment in sections of Labor's traditional support base. As Marilyn Lake has pointed out, at one stroke the "reinvention of workers as battlers" allowed Howard to address employees and the self-employed in the same breath, broke the nexus between the activity of labour and the Labor Party, and catalyzed the deep sense of economic insecurity that was abroad among blue-collar workers and small businesspeople who felt that Paul Keating's grand schemes had nothing to offer them except more work for less pay.[6]

At the same time the term carried a thinly veiled appeal to prejudice: the coalition was interested in helping the 'battlers', not the 'bludgers'. This was fer-

tile territory, well tilled by Labor's social policies. In the interests of keeping taxes low and projecting an image of responsible economic management, Labor had subjected family allowances, Austudy and a range of other benefits to stringent means tests. As a result, single-income families earning somewhat less than the average wage were – and still are – losing up to 80 cents in the dollar at the margin as a result of the combined effect of income tax and the loss of means-tested benefits.[7] Many resented having to pay taxes to finance welfare beneficiaries who seemed to be not much worse off than themselves. By targeting the welfare system so closely at a time when real wages were under pressure and the effective cost of having a family was at an all-time historical high, Labor had opened the door to a backlash from those who had just missed out. In retrospect it is extraordinary that the coalition parties took so long to wake up to the electoral opportunities this offered – but then social policy isn't exactly their strong suit, as their behaviour in government has amply demonstrated.

The rhetoric about 'battlers' meshed perfectly with the coalition's emphasis on 'the family' – another theme it had in common with the US right. This was the part of the platform that was closest to Howard's heart; and, when he said 'the family', he meant the idealized old-style nuclear family, where Mum stayed at home, Dad brought in the bacon, and they all lived happily ever after. Very early in the campaign preparations, Howard's insistence that the party must offer a major set of benefits specifically to single-income families brought him into conflict with Peter Costello, who wanted an across-the-board family tax concession based on the number of children. Although Costello's proposal would have been more equitable and would have cast a wider net, Howard won the day. The Liberal leader was never happier than when he was expatiating on the virtues of the family as a bulwark against social disorder, playing on the nostalgia and sense of loss felt by his newly discovered 'battler' constituency. By the time the campaign was in full swing, this was the only element of the platform that embodied Honest John's 'old' policies; all the rest – his anti-immigration stance, his opposition to the Native Title Act, his criticism of Medicare – had been given a brand-new gloss by the campaign committee's spin doctors.[8]

The doubleness of the Liberals' campaign rhetoric extended to the party's slogan, 'For All of Us'. As several commentators have noted, the slogan could be read in two quite contradictory ways. Noel Pearson described it as "dog whistling": behind its apparently inclusive message, a trained ear could hear the menacing subtext, 'Not for Them'.[9] According to Pamela Williams, it was this ambiguous quality that attracted Howard to the slogan in the first place.[10] Still more sinister was Howard's constant use of the phrase 'mainstream Australians' as a code for the old white Australia. This was a straight power grab, with a racial subtext that could barely be missed. It placed white Australians at the centre, in the 'mainstream', and consigned non-whites to the margins, along with other 'powerful vested interest groups'(!) such as feminists and environmentalists.

IN EFFECT, the coalition was trying to ride two horses at once. The hope was that its conciliatory official position would attract urban voters, immigrants and educated small-l liberals, while its covert ventilation of race issues would appeal to the visceral resentment of rural voters and Labor's white working-class rump, and the whole unlikely alliance would be held together by the fact that so many people had had Paul Keating up to the back teeth.

At various stages during the campaign the party machine was hard put to maintain its double act. Several of the coalition's long-standing mavericks hit the headlines when they made racist comments, only to retract them under pressure from campaign HQ. But the most serious crisis arose when a brand new maverick refused to toe the line: Pauline Hanson, who had been preselected for the apparently unwinnable seat of Oxley.

In view of the fuss that has subsequently surrounded Hanson, it's worth pointing out that she wouldn't have had a hope of winning the seat without the Liberals' help. The Liberal Party had a pretty good idea of her opinions when they preselected her. She had already been a local councillor, and had made no bones about her views on race. In January 1996 a member of the local Liberal branch had written to John Howard to warn him that Hanson was making statements that were out of court; he received no answer.[11] By the time the party hierarchy realized that it had to dissociate itself from Hanson or lose votes in the south, it was too late to field a new candidate.

The way things panned out in Oxley epitomized the two-faced quality of the Liberals' strategy. At the

national level they could portray themselves as taking a firm stand against Hanson's racist statements, while at the local level they could let the race issue rip, turning a blind eye when local Liberals handed out how-to-vote cards for 'Pauline Hanson, Independent'.[12] After all, no-one in the south would even realize that they'd done it until after the votes had been cast. The southern media duly reported Hanson's 'shock victory' in terms that fed the notion that she represented a significant new political force.

But it was Howard's behaviour after the election that really prepared a place for Hanson on the national stage. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Howard comprehensively misinterpreted the import of his victory; in this, he has more in common with Paul Keating than he would like to admit. Just as Keating erroneously attributed his survival in 1993 to the 'true believers', in 1996 Howard seems to have decided that it was the divisive subtext of the campaign, not its reassuring surface, that had won him the election. So, once in power, he cut loose with a series of Us *vs* Them roundhouse punches. He got stuck into 'political correctness', the 'Aboriginal industry' and 'dole bludgers'; he railed against the 'black armband' version of Australian history and curled his lip at multiculturalism. It seemed that, as far as the leader of the Liberal party was concerned, the inclusive strand of the coalition's rhetoric was mere baggage that could be jettisoned as soon as it had served its purpose.

Then Hanson made her maiden speech, using Howard's own vocabulary – 'battlers', 'mainstream Australians' – to bid for the support base he thought he had made his own. At this point, Howard was hoist by his own petard. He had left himself no room to attack Hanson's blatantly racist, xenophobic views, even if he had wanted to; in the cock-eyed logic of wedge politics, criticism is tantamount to censorship. Besides, having done more than most to let this particular genie out of the bottle, he would risk charges of inconsistency if he tried to stuff it back in with unseemly haste. So, to the horror of liberals across the nation, Howard implicitly sanctioned Hanson's carryings-on by suggesting that they were symptomatic of the greater freedom of speech that prevailed under his government, merely issuing a wimpish caution that free speech should be exercised responsibly.

For Howard, the middle-class urbanite steeped in institutional party politics, the vehemence of the race 'debate' seemed to come as a surprise, almost as if he were flummoxed by the passions he had helped to set loose. It provoked even greater alarm among several prominent critics of 'political correctness'. So, for example, Robert Manne, who had energetically publicized the anti-'PC' cause since the early 1990s, both as a newspaper columnist and as editor of *Quadrant*, was obviously appalled to discover the same rhetoric in a "simplified, systematized and radicalized" form in *Pauline Hanson: The Truth*.[13] He immediately sounded a clarion call for conservative intellectuals to reconsider their stance – a summons that might have been more convincing if General Manne had been less keen to lead them into battle against 'PC' in the first place.

YET THE EXTENT of the white backlash against Asian immigration and Aboriginal rights comes as no surprise to anyone who has even a cursory acquaintance with rural Australia. For erstwhile country kids like myself, Hanson's rhetoric is all too familiar. Every time we go 'home' we encounter the same dilemma: bite your tongue or be accused of starting an argument at the dinner table. What *do* you do when an older relative or family friend tosses an outrageously racist remark into the conversation, blithely assuming that it will be taken at face value by the company at large, simply because all those present are white? When do you bite your tongue? When do you bite back? Often you simply find an excuse to absent yourself – something that becomes easier as time goes on, and much more permanent.

The paranoia about cultural difference merges into a media-fed moral panic about the cities. How to explain to a well-meaning female relative that it's possible to walk the streets of Melbourne without encountering a mugger on every corner – let alone that my daughters are far safer in the city than I was at the same age in Tamworth, where any lone female was considered fair game?

For all the improvements in transport and communications, the gulf between the city and the country – especially the inland – seems to be growing wider. In terms of cultural composition the contrast is stark. Immigrants have always tended to cluster in the capital cities, and immigrants from outside Britain, Ireland and New Zealand are especially concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne. At the 1996 census these two cities accounted for almost exactly two-

thirds of the 'overseas-born (other)', as the Bureau of Statistics so delightfully terms them. For Anglo immigrants and the Australian-born, the proportions were reversed.[14] What this means on the ground is that in each of these cities the overseas-born non-Anglo population is almost a quarter of the total and rising, whereas elsewhere the proportion is just over 7 per cent and falling – and far lower again in most of the purely rural areas.

Although the government has made noises about inducing immigrants to go to the countryside, this is pure wishful thinking. Not only are immigrants' personal support networks based in the cities, but jobs and services are as well. Economic inequality in Australia is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, but one of the deepest cleavages is along the rural–urban divide. On any measure you like to name, there is a growing disparity between the capital cities (or most of them) and the rest of Australia (or most of it). At the 1996 census, incomes per head were above the national average in all the capital cities except Adelaide and Hobart, and below the average in all the rest except a few remote mining towns, parts of rural Western Australia and the tourist belt along the north Queensland coast. Some of the gap is bridged by lower housing costs, it's true, but low rents and land values are indicative of deeper problems.

There is a distinct drift of people in their economically active years away from the purely rural areas into the towns, and from the country towns to the capital cities. The census housing figures present a stark picture here. In the five largest capital cities the vacancy rate for private dwellings fell marginally between 1991 and 1996, from 7.3 per cent to 7.2 per cent, while in the rest of the country it rose from 12.1 per cent to 12.7 per cent. The rural population is also ageing fast. In quite a few parts of the countryside the median age of the population is already pushing forty, as against the low to mid thirties in all the capital cities. There are areas of western New South Wales and South Australia where the median age rose by four years in the five-year interval between the 1991 and 1996 censuses, and increases of three years were not unusual. In the cities, by contrast, the increase was between one and two years.

There has always been a drift of young people from the countryside to the cities in search of jobs and education, but these days fewer seem to be returning. The problem isn't just the droughts and the fall in international commodity prices, nor even the intractable environmental problems emerging in so many of the irrigation areas and broadacre farming districts. It's also to do with the increasingly opportunistic quality of both public and private investment, especially in the services sector.

Is it possible that [Howard and Hanson] share a faith in the superiority of their own culture so horizonless, so inextricably part of their being, that they cannot see beyond it?

There are qualitative as well as quantitative losses when cost-conscious banks 'rationalize' their country branches out of existence, or equally cost-conscious governments close schools, hospitals and offices in the country areas, or Australia Post contracts out its over-the-counter operations to the local general store (or, in one case I've seen, to a butcher's shop!). It's not just that jobs are lost, nor even that the kinds of jobs that are lost are among the few that have traditionally offered relatively secure career paths to people in the country towns and/or provided a conduit for country kids to go 'home' after completing their tertiary education. It's also that the loss of services makes the rural areas decidedly less pleasant places to live in.

The laissez-faire economists' faith that the market will provide doesn't work especially well in the cities, but in the country areas it breaks down entirely. There is simply not the concentration of people to make private provision profitable, and the external effects of 'rationalization' can be devastating. To close a bank branch or a school may make an institution's bottom line look better, but often it merely does so by deflecting costs onto the local community, reducing their standard of living and quality of life. There is absolutely no assessment of the social costs of forcing schoolchildren to spend several hours a day on a bus, for example, or of making their parents travel similar distances to go to the bank or get to hospital. It doesn't take many decisions of this kind to tip the balance against a small country town and set up a vicious circle of departure and decline.

There are emotional costs as well. When younger people leave, the older generation is left high and dry. These days, given the difficulty of finding jobs and the huge difference between rural and urban land values, their chances of following their children to the cities are vanishingly small. I suspect that the emotional force of Hanson's appeal to older people in the rural areas and the depressed provincial towns is partly bound up with a sense of personal bereavement: their children have left, and they're not coming back. This is a hard thing to come to terms with at the best of times, especially if you don't understand why it's happening. It's the kind of experience that sets people casting around for scapegoats and swallowing any nostrum that is offered to them; and Hanson offers them the full swag. Her policy statements, like her maiden speech, are a pastiche of old White Australia-style racism, 1950s-style trade protectionism, anti-'PC' rhetoric and tabloid hysteria about urban drugs and crime, all overlain by a ferocious anti-intellectualism.

Robert Manne . . . sounded a clarion call for conservative intellectuals to reconsider their stance – a summons that might have been more convincing if General Manne had been less keen to lead them into battle against 'PC' in the first place.

In fact, as One Nation attempts to reposition itself and shed its racist tag, it seems to be increasingly targeting intellectuals as Public Enemy Number One. The One Nation site on the World Wide Web is extensively referenced to authoritative sources such as the *IPA Review*, the *Adelaide Review* and various right-wing commentaries in the *Australian* and the *Adelaide Advertiser*, all swept along in a flood of semi-literate drivel about the misdeeds of an imaginary intellectual 'new class'. Its central theme is that economic rationalism and political correctness are part of a single ideology espoused by a conspiratorial intellectual elite who believe that "mainstream Australia has no right to Australia, that it has no right to resist mass immigration, Assassination at internationalization" [sic; I assume they meant 'Asianization and internationalization'; the Freudian slip is marvellous].[15]

In a sane political universe this kind of garbage would merely be laughable. In the present climate it is anything but. This is not just because, as the media have been telling us *ad nauseam*, Howard lacks the political courage to take a firm stand against One Nation. It's far worse than that. On an uncomfortably wide range of issues – immigration, multiculturalism, native title and Australian 'identity', just for starters – Howard's position has a lot in common with Hanson's, and the policies he has adopted seem clearly designed to pander to the anti-immigration, anti-Aboriginal lobby. In May 1997 Howard was still trailing his coat to Hanson's supporters, vehemently denying that they were racist; only a few days earlier, on Alan Jones' talkback program, he had boasted: "Remember that I'm the Prime Minister who took money out of the ATSIC budget . . . any suggestion that we have perpetuated the Aboriginal industry is wrong".[16]

It is symptomatic of the similarities in their views that both Howard and Hanson have denied responsibility for starting the 'race debate' and angrily rebutted any suggestion that their own views might be racist, instead blaming their opponents for fostering division. The alarming thing is that these protestations seem genuine, even though they fly in the face of the evidence; it was Howard and Hanson, after all, and certainly not indigenous leaders, who introduced the divisive language of 'guilt' into the debates over the Wik decision and the stolen children inquiry. Is it possible that these two share a faith in the superiority of their own culture so horizonless, so inextricably part of their being, that they cannot see beyond it?

Meanwhile, back at what it doubtless sees as the 'business end' of government, the coalition has done nothing to remedy the grievances that it exploited so effectively during the election campaign. The government lost no time in slashing public expenditure and embarking on a series of radically regressive policy shifts in key areas such as education and employment – an approach that risks sending the labour market into a flat spin, especially in the most vulnerable rural areas, and compounding the advantage of those who can afford to 'go private'. Far from alleviating the burden on families, the government has forced them to shoulder more of the load by tightening unemployment benefit eligibility conditions, denying independent Austudy to people under

twenty-five and increasing tertiary education costs – all at a time when 41 per cent of Australian children are living below the poverty line![17]

Stripped of the all-too-familiar claims that good times are just around the corner, the government's social policy can best be summarized as a consistent, relentless attempt to give the already privileged a head start at the expense of the rest. It is odd that the media have failed to draw the obvious inference: this is not the behaviour of a government that genuinely believes it is looking at the prospect of a sustained period of economic prosperity. It is the behaviour of an elite that is trying to manoeuvre itself (and its children) into a safe spot before the deluge. Among those in the know it seems the call has gone out: 'Last into the bunker locks the door behind them.' And you can bet that when it shuts Howard's battlers will be on the outer.

October 1997

ENDNOTES

1. Humphrey McQueen, *Suspect History* (Wakefield, 1997), p. 6.
2. See Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, 'An Opportunity to Change the Culture', in Phillip Adams (ed.), *The Retreat from Tolerance* (ABC Books, 1997), pp. 66–9.
3. Pamela Williams, *The Victory* (Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 154.
4. The policy statement is at http://www.liberal.org.au/ARCHIVES/ABORIGINAL. It's interesting to note that all the 1996 policy statements seem to have been consigned to the archive shortly after the election, and there's no sign that anyone has been working on them since. I'd suggest you download them for reference before the party hacks realize that they've left them lying around.
5. Williams, p. 98.
6. *The Age*, 29 October 1996.
7. See Michelle Gunn, 'Downward Envy', *Weekend Australian*, 2–3 November 1996.
8. Williams, pp. 91–2, 150–1, 252.
9. Quoted by Glenn Milne, *Australian*, 4 November 1996.
10. Williams, p. 156.
11. *The Age*, 15 May 1997.
12. Marcia Langton, 'Pauline as the thin end of the wedge', in Phillip Adams (ed.), *The Retreat from Tolerance* (ABC Books), 1997, p. 88.
13. Robert Manne in *Weekend Australian*, 26–27 April 1997.
14. Calculated from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing. Selected Social and Housing Characteristics*, ABS catalogue no. 2015.0, July 1997.
15. 'Hansonism: We are all Australians', at http://www.gwb.com.au/onenation/truth/conclus.html as at 25 August 1997; they might have found a proof-reader in the interim.
16. *The Age*, 7 May 1997; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May 1997.
17. *The Age*, 26 June 1997.

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Urban Landscape
by Wes Placek

Work, Obey, Fight

privatise! efficiency!
budgets black and tight
competition, rubbish-jobs
work, obey, fight

dry self-feeding words
dust to gag the mouth
in the internetted desert
to the thirsty south

an eagre of dust,
eager for ashes
charges the golden-saucered horizon
unstoppable history,
created every moment
in the *obiter dicta* of hack economists

'change is the only certainty'
you can't step twice in it,
its banal dynamic of cruelty
to them lustful and inevitable

once, a giggling boy too old for my class
pressed the head of a grasshopper
onto the hot coil of a telegraph sender

Do you want to shit, good boy?
Or Emlyn on the roof in a wild Welsh winter:
'come down from there, Emlyn, your dill will freeze'.
Stories which call up the last, Welsh century
making me feel old
at four

(though never tales
of the murderous *derwyddon*, the Druids,
who divined earliest
the immortality of the soul,
and whose faithful went into battle naked;
or of the rampages and wanderings
of a people for 4000 years
which filled a continent
and overspilled into Asia
and later the whole world;
or that
Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief.)

Woe unto them
that call evil good,
and good evil
uttered the Prophet with *hwyl*
in another small country
long ago

our bards
cried out down the centuries
for the expulsion of the invader:
for the return of the Island of the Mighty,
and of Bendigeidfran, for all I know

How Merlin sleeps upon Ynys Enlli
Till Arthur returns to life

the Old Story
of rage at dispossession
uttered by a people
sprung from invaders themselves

my mother did know
of the heavy wooden WELSH NOT sign
they once hung round the necks
of the children of Rhiannon
when they dared to speak the ancient
language.

In today's Wales, like everywhere else,
bloodless, though not kosher, accountants
decide in ignorance
who lives or dies;
the holiday homes
belong to the Saxon;
on display for our enlightenment

the child of socialists and Christians,
at that moment i knew
despite all spirit-sapping slogans
that evil had flesh and blood
that every river can be diverted.

Robert Verdon

Sheila Byard

Plantation

When from the long distant past nothing subsists after the people are dead, after these things are broken or scattered, still alone, more fragile but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear in the almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

Janina Green

PLANTATION IS THE TITLE given by photographer Janina Green to an exhibition held at Smyrnios Gallery in Melbourne from 17 June–18 July 1997. Her works are large black-and-white photographs soaked with photographic dyes, highly sexualized vistas of pine plantations. Green, born in Essen, Germany, grew up in the small Gippsland town of Yallourn North. Her extensive exhibition record since 1986 has led to her representation in the collections of the Australian National Gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of South Australia and many regional galleries. The *pinus radiata* plantations of Australian Pulp were an essential part of her childhood. One 'forest' stood on the other side of the fence of her primary school playground.

In the fifties the Latrobe Valley with its booming coal-based economy was heavily immigrant. One town, Newborough, was described as the least 'Australian' town in Australia in the 1954 census. For the new settlers like Green's parents the tracts of radiata pine planted by the Australian Paper Manufacturers Limited from 1950 did something to mitigate the strangeness of the bush and the harshness of the mining landscape. One newcomer, in a piece entitled 'From the Agony of War and Slavery to Freedom and Peace in Australia' wrote of her nostalgia for her native countryside: "Who does not love those enormous forests ... those warm fragrant evenings, and the singing of nightingales?" (Zubrzycki [1964] *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*). Janina Green, herself displaced from Europe and reared in Victoria's Ruhr, has returned to these local pine forests to examine their problematic power.

The pines are seductive, drawing us into the plantation to consider its height and depth, to points

where there is nothing but plantation foliage as far as the eye can see, save the twiggy growth at the base of the trees, the ground between rows of trees and the sky beyond the tree tops. There is a security about this closure; the planter has carefully arranged the seedlings so that the mature trees, row upon row, inhibit undergrowth and have optimum access to sun and rain.

Politically correct antipodeans should prefer the scragginess of native old growth forests to these ordered rows of 'European' imports. That *pinus radiata* was first introduced to Victoria in 1859 from California does not detract from our belief in its European origin. By contrast to the bush this is a controlled landscape. These plantation spaces are exotic and yet familiar, the trees redolent of domestic ritual, from Christmases past to cleansing processes. The resinous flavour of the place draws us in to sights and smells of other worlds recalling Proust's words about the ability of the smell and taste of things to rise in the memory – "the vast structure of recollection" – long after the things themselves are gone.

Janina Green

Each part of this ordered place, each found landscape, offers a forest experience which is both standardized and curiously private. Certainly we are aware that there are those who tend the plantation; we see the access roads and fire breaks. Yet this landscape, for the duration of this encounter, is unpeopled and thus offers enclosure, the potential of privacy, by contrast with the bare land which was before, or will come after the plantation.

Some of the pleasures from these cloistered spaces comes from the way the eye delights in the meeting of trees and sky, cleft between the sheer volume of luxuriant growth. This is not a pleasure easily taken, since the images are constructed as though seen through a blurred lens, or as if framed behind dirty glass. This lends an impatient edge to our attempts to read the landscape. Are we trespassers then, liable to discovery? There is a further sense of unease derived in part from the absence of diversity. This ecosystem precludes any native undergrowth, any animal life. Yet the industrial world is insistent. We glimpse the paper-pulp plant beyond the trees. There is a lost Sputnik too, or is it a piece of waste left by a passing worker?

However mysterious, the plantation has its boundaries and its lifespan. The brutal vistas of adjacent clear-felling and the hard lines of access tracks remind the viewer that this luxuriant growth has a purpose which can only be accomplished by cropping. The industrial construction of landscape – the utilitarianism of all this growth – is most clearly displayed in the long sequence of images which treats the intersection of several blocks of planting within the forest: this 180-degree vista sardonically echoes the triumphalism of the nineteenth-century panorama. The solidity of the trees stands against our knowledge of their certain fate. This immanent sense of loss speaks to our understanding of the effect which the loss of dead and dying places has upon us.

Peter Read, in his recent *Returning to Nothing*, looks at migration away from dying homes, streets, neighbourhoods, suburbs, towns, cities and countries and the return journeys to the empty spaces where once they were. In *Plantation* we come to a growing place where once we or our progenitors were. That these trees grow in the Latrobe Valley of Victoria's Gippsland, in a region which has undergone massive de-industrialization during their lifespan, adds poign-

ancy to the tale of transitory exploitation of which they speak. While it can be said that our Eurocentric culture means that we attach to the pine forest many layers of meaning, for Green herself these images have an additional complexity of meaning, referring both to her European roots and to her youth as part of the introduced richness of human landscape, which characterized the Latrobe Valley in its heyday.

The plantation remains while much of the built form of the nearby Valley has been dismantled – like the company town, the administrative core and much of the works – or allowed to wither away like the remaining settlements where morale is poor and jobs are few. Where once there were lively townships there

is dereliction. A society which prided itself on the important role it played in the state's and nation's progress sees now that it is as expendable as plantation pine. Thus the sombre mood evoked by *Plantation* recalls the funerary images of the continental tradition, giving another dimension to the links which can be drawn between these works and those of an earlier age. Recent retrospectives have enabled us to think again about the ways in which earlier photographers have viewed the national landscape. This *Plantation* series reminds us of the work of the excursionists, both in its dependence on a large-format camera and in the judicious application of photographic dyes. Although these scenes are far from the picturesque of Carre and Lindt there is something in them which resonates with the Victorian impulse to present important pieces of landscape.

Of course *Plantation* is not about the popular; here is no simple celebration of the glories of the Eridunda plateau or tourist driven calendar shots. The ambivalence of our contemporary attachment to the natural world precludes any such lyricism. Empathy with the terrain, and technical mastery of the photographic process, are tempered by anxiety about the seductive power of growth. Our attention is firmly focused on the ambiguities represented by these scenes. This is shown mostly clearly in the bleary emulsion washes – a sort of slurry of colour – which runs across the photographic images. The effectiveness of the dye is not least in its evoking of the unpleasantness of the process used to convert the *pinus radiata* to paper pulp. Here another odour is made tangible. As Zubrzycki said, "noxious effluent which is released several times a day from APM's works at Maryvale can be smelt as far west as Trafalgar, and on a wet autumn day, or a hot day, is all pervasive". Once again from the "vast structure of recollection" the smell and feel of this place comes out to meet us.

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Sheila Byard finished her secondary schooling within sight of these pines and within smell of the pulp plant.

Janina Green is represented by Smyrnios Gallery, Prahran, Australia.

Robert Hodder

And Who Thought Up The Plover's Call?

You can hunt and fish and dream,
With your forest wilds behind you
And the wealth of lake and stream . . .

Henry Lawson 'To A Fellow-Bard Camping Out'

IN A LANDSCAPE AS SERENE and brittle as a Cezanne canvas where shadows leave impressions in the dust, a man hunts hares while over the horizon Martin Bryant shoots tourists.

At sunset the hunter piles carcasses on the floor of a shearing shed and cleans the kill. Last light pours in from cracks in the convict-hewn stone walls to wash a bruised hue over a pelt tacked up generations ago. It is the pelt of a thylacine, a Tasmanian 'tiger'. That marsupial wolf now extinct.[1] Perhaps.

SO MUCH FOR SYMBOLISM. Some people perceive a connection, even cause and effect, between this man and the Port Arthur massacre. They make no mere claim. They fire an allegation. The charge is aggravated petit fascism; that is, redneckism. The penalty is seizure of arms.

Context is wonderful.

In 1789 the killing of hares was the first revolutionary act of French peasants. Hunting had been a privilege jealously monopolized by the landed nobility. Reclaiming the right to hunt was a self-conscious attack of the masses on property. When the estates of the Prince de Conti and the Count of Oisy and even some royal preserves were overrun, the nobles responded by disarming whole parishes.[2] It provoked an open season on the nobility itself, with no bag limit.

Hunting seasons in France and throughout Europe still echo that historic clamour. (The Italians are so protective of their rights as to continue to claim even tiny fauna, including sparrows, as fair game.) It is a synthesis, however now symbolic, of economics (food gathering), sport and political praxis.

The appropriation of firearms, including sporting guns, by revolutionary militia established democracy against the landscape of an armed citizenry. It brought to bear Thomas Hobbes' paradox of politics: each is equal only in so much as each has equal capacity to kill each other. Maoists found power came from the barrels of their many guns. The American West hollered, still hollers, God made all men and Samuel Colt made them equal.[3] In the gravelly tone of Jack Palance and the title of that enigmatic movie, *Welcome To Blood City!* We sneer, Welcome to Waco.

From the American War of Independence, the Thermidor of the French Revolution, Stalinism and even as far back as Oliver Cromwell's suppression of the Levellers and Diggers, we see the maintainers of democratic ideologies, both liberal and socialist, struggling with the tendency of the state to monopolize the means of violence. But we have wandered from our fellow, who fishes in the morning, hunts in the afternoon, reads and criticizes in the evening as he sees fit. If the state allows. Of course the metaphor, minus the state, belongs to Karl Marx. It is his vision of communism.[4]

That liberal-anarchist, Ernest Hemingway, took the ideal literally and made it real. While big-game hunting on the Serengeti Plains in Africa, he declared it "Pursuit As Happiness".[5] He later reflected on this for *Esquire*:

> When you have loved three things all your life, from the earliest you can remember: to fish, to shoot and, later, to read; and when, all your life, the necessity to write has been your master, you

> learn to remember and, when you think back you remember more fishing and shooting and reading than anything else and that is a pleasure.[6]

Just the provocation for Batista's police who raided Hemingway's Cuban estate for guns, rifle-butting his loyal retriever to death.

George Orwell considered blood sports to be the opposite of war. "Is it any use talking about it," he asks, "the sort of fairy light that fish and fishing tackle have in a kid's eyes? Some kids feel the same about guns and shooting . . . It's not a thing you can explain or rationalize, it's merely magic."[7] But a price of modernity – post-modernity, if you prefer – is to rationalize; we have to explain ourselves, like naughty little boys.

> *The magic in this thing, hunting, is it is a primal act; it is the discovery of pleasure in what was a necessity. When labour becomes play then it is sport in the truest sense; necessity resolves into freedom. The hunter wipes his hands and as he caresses the fur of his prey he touches the ancient cave art of bison and woolly mammoths and giant diprotodont because the heart of the hunter and the heart of the hunted beat little differently now as yesteryear.*[8]

To paraphrase Sven Berlin from his meditations on hunting with line and hook, the hunter touches a ritual as primordial as catching coelacanth.[9] Our hunter then turns to the thylacine. Running fingers through the stiff short hair of an animal shot in fear or for bounty or both, he realizes the difference between hunting and shootism.

Fred Engels chased foxes. Leon Trotsky fished. Probably hunted. Fidel Castro has given up the big cigar, but not duck shooting. Yet the boldest proclamation of guns for sport again comes from Hemingway in a piece of blank verse accented in Papa toughtalk:

> I think they all were made to shoot because if they were not why did they give them that whirr of wings that moves you so suddenly more than any love of country? Why did they make them all so good to eat and why did they make the ones with silent flight like woodcock, snipe, and lesser bustard, better eating even than the rest? Why does the curlew have that voice, and who thought up the plover's call, which takes the place of noise of wings, to give us that catharsis wing shooting has given men since they stopped flying hawks and took to fowling pieces? I think that they were made to shoot and some of us were made to shoot them and if that is not so well, never say we did not tell you that we liked it.[10]

Liking it, liking guns and hunting, liking violence as sport, is the thorn in the paws of the hole-and-corner reformer, the bourgeois 'socialist', chained by neurosis to Anglo utilitarianism. America's trout bum, John Gierach, ponders squeamish sentimentality:

> You love the things you shoot; you kill and eat the things you love and feel proud to have game on the table without entirely forgetting the remorse you felt when you dropped it. Then you tie flies with some of what's left over which you use to catch fish, which you also claim to love. A few of those you kill, most you release. This sport, take it from me, is a lofty and philosophical pursuit. Still, for some people there are too many nuances there. They'd feel a lot more comfortable if you killed birds because you hated them.[11]

Hate. The sigh of the gaoler. The opiate of the urban middle classes. And sorbet for their dinner-party politics. But when is hate happy?

Admit we know happiness is a warm gun. Then for hate with a jack-o'-lantern grin, track down Raoul Duke, Master of Weaponry. He is an expert on bombs, gas, fire, knives, demolition, ballistics, blades, motors, animals, "anything capable of causing damage to man, beast or structure. This is my *profession*, my bag, my trade, my thing . . . my evil specialty."[12] He gets his "rocks off" from ads in gun magazines, yet moans "even a nigger" could see we have not learned much about weapons, and rails against police who use "Fag tools! Breathalyzers, 'paralyzers', gas masks, sirens, funny little car radios with voice scramblers so the scum can't listen in . . . but no ATTACK WEAPONS!!!" Replacing tear gas with nerve gas is recommended because otherwise "the scum will be back in your face like wild rats." He unzips the beat cop's wet dream: "the 'Nutcracker Flail', a combination club and pincers about three feet long that can cripple almost anybody." Raoul loves his .44 magnum because, "In this critical hour we don't need love, we need WEAPONS – the newest and best and most efficient weapons

we can get our hands on. This is a time of extreme *peril*. The rising tide is almost on us . . . "

Some would recognize the fear and loathing as the satire of Hunter S. Thompson (another shooter liberal-anarchist). The point is, since 1970 when he wrote this parody of fascism, its howl is louder, even in gun-fearing Australia.

One Nation: Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer. Who will slap leather with Pauline at the next schützenfest?

Of last century's shooting festivals, the near genocide of the Tasmanian Aborigines was not so much the murderous reflex of intolerance but a direct function of capitalism. In the 1830s the decision was taken to clear the midlands for sheep for wool for the British mills. The land had to be swept of trees, animals and people, just as in the Highland Clearances of Scotland. Amidst sacred sites renamed in the lexicon of a New Jerusalem, like Bagdad (sic) and Jericho and the river Jordan, the lower ranks of the British aristocracy moved into Georgian mansions in their new island state, Tasmania. Lebensraum was not a Nazi invention.

To clear the land and build the mansions, stone barns and shearing sheds, as well as the public infrastructure like roads and bridges, there was a ready supply of slave labour. Convict would only be a euphemism if not for the fact other master classes, such as in the cotton belt of southern USA, at least had to pay for their slaves. In Tasmania the state loaned out human flesh like library books.

Convict history is integral to the economic and social relations of Tasmania *today*. Penal settlements were the British empire's final solution. Like Auschwitz or Belsen, they are a hell now empty. At least they should be.

In Richard Flanagan's vertigo of imagination, *Death Of A River Guide*, the narrator spurns the "ignorance" which sees Tasmania as a "grotesque Gothic horrorland".[13] Much worse than Flanagan expected, the horror became cliché. Even the fact Joseph Conrad's last ship, the *Otago*, lies scuttled in the Derwent River seems to conjure up a heart of darkness.

Bryant's rampage was loaded with symbolism. His first intention was to shoot tourists on the Isle of the Dead. It seems too poignant and dreadful for an allegedly infantile mind. As a gaol, Port Arthur was so brutal that a sanatorium was built for the guards to recover their humanity. The sanatorium is now a 'condemned' wing of St John's Hospital, New Town – Bryant's home suburb. Solid import drips from the ether.

The daguerreotypes of Port Arthur prisoners could be mug-shots of death masks. Because religion dissuaded suicide with the threat of a hell worse than could be contemplated, that is worse than gaol, the most endearing promise a man made to an inmate was to "murder" him; the punishment of the gallows ensured the contract worked for both. You too can inhale the stinking breath of death in Port Arthur.

The hunter puts away his knife and rolls the hares into a hessian game bag. He thinks it is simple, so Cartesian: he hunts, therefore he is. It is the dream from prehistory. He envisages a feast for family and comrades of saddle of hare served with a sauce thickened with blood drained from the beasts' lungs. Ancient societies believed an animal conceded its life only to the morally fit. The ensuing feast would be dedicated to nature, to the gods, such as the hunters Nimrod and Bahram. Now the hunter salutes the kill with the finest wine he can afford. The respect is in all the effort and the celebration of what can never be taken for granted.

Thylacine teeth gnash at the clearances of neo-liberalism. This is the age of the Fu generation, the Fuck-u generation. Anyone will vote for public safety so long as the high price is paid by someone else. There is more than irony in sports shooting having to defend itself from declining into a rare and endangered species. There is tragedy. Where is that communism now? What is a nice lefty like this hunter doing in a pigeonhole with proto-fascists newly emerged from their cupboards, the stencilled death's heads drying on their glossy wings?

In forcing the states to call up semi-automatic smoothbores and rimfires, the Prime Minister cynically smudged the line between sporting guns and combat weapons, between hunters and shootists; sport is vilified as war. Gun owners, be they loony left, anal-retentive centre or redneck right, are being punished for Bryant and something someone else might do. That we are not on the cusp of another round of enclosures seems only a hope; to wit, the anti-Wik. Again we have to grovel to the landed classes and the crown for written permission to hunt. Maybe the hidden agenda is a joke?

Gun nuts of the world unite.
You have only your stereotype to lose.

And the hunter tries to smile when stopped one year onwards in country Victoria for an alleged driver's license check which reveals itself as a prolonged bullying over guns, even if absolutely legal, by police who caw about him like a murder of crows at a fresh road-kill.

AS HE SITS DOWN days later to remember the three things he has loved all his life, and feels the necessity to write this, this very piece in front of you, the strange workings of stream of consciousness – or is it anger? – bring to mind the vengeful verse of Ezekial 25:17 ruminated upon in *Pulp Fiction* by Jules the black gangster as he finally disavows violence. The hunter sees the joke, all the jokes, and sighs, "But I'm tryin'. I'm tryin' real hard."[14]

ENDNOTES

1. The shed and the pelt still exist on a farm near the Tasman Peninsula, the location of Port Arthur. Both sporting and commercial shooters use the shed.
2. Rude, George, *The French Revolution*, Orion Books, London, 1994.
3. Samuel Colt manufactured the West's omnipresent 'Peacemaker', a .45 calibre six-shooter, which Hollywood re-manufactured into a genre motif.
4. "... communist society ... makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to fish in the morning, hunt in the afternoon ... read and criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind ... " Marx, Karl, *CAPITAL I*, Moscow Publishers, USSR, 1954.
5. Hemingway, Ernest, *Green Hills Of Africa*, Scribner Books Inc., New York, 1934.
6. Hemingway, Ernest, 'Remembering Shooting-Flying: A Key West Letter', *Esquire*, February 1935; see *Hemingway By-Line*, edited by William White, Grafton Books, Britain, 1989.
7. Orwell, George, 'Coming Up For Air', see *The Complete Novels of George Orwell*, Penguin Books Ltd, England, 1951.
8. "... in the heart of that ruthlessness which makes the true hunter there is love, a deep love for the quarry, therefore an understanding of the tragedy of its death and of the miracle of its life, shown so profoundly in the Salmon Shelter carving at Val d'Enfer in the Dordogne, done twenty thousand years ago. The heart of man and the heart of (the hunted) beat little differently then as now." Berlin, Sven, 'From Jonah's Dream, A Meditation On Fishing (1964)', see *The Magic Wheel*, edited by David Profumo & Graham Swift, Pan Books Ltd, London, 1985.
9. "Fishing therefore is not only a matter of meditation, of peaceful moments in which the reflected images are as real as those above the water, through which fish move and thought is seen upon the fin, turning, nuzzling the mud, searching with its golden eye for a pearl. It is also a dream of prehistory. We touch fingertips with the coelacanth, who may well have emerged from the sea to negotiate with the problems on land." Berlin, Sven, 'From Jonah's Dream, A Meditation On Fishing (1964)', op cit. Also, bullfighting is the dramatization par excellence of hunting ritual.
10. Hemingway, Ernest, 'Remembering Shooting-Flying: A Key West Letter', op cit.
11. Gierach, John, *Sex, Death and Flyfishing*; see 'Flyfishing's National Bird', *Salmon & Trout*, Sep-Oct 1994, Harmsworth Magazines Ltd, London.
12. Thompson, Hunter S., 'The Police Chief', *The Great Shark Hunt*, Warner Books, Inc., New York, 1979.
13. Flanagan, Richard, *Death Of A River Guide*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, 1994.
14. Tarantino, Quentin, *Pulp Fiction*, Faber and Faber Ltd, Great Britain, 1994.

Robert Hodder is a Melbourne writer who has worked as a chef, teacher and barman.

fiction

A Shot of Winter in Templestowe

Alfred Marks

"NO, BUT I TELL YOU, WOLFRIT, it's good to see you, hey." Expertly double-clutching. "I can't believe it's that long since we passed through Sydney. We were so bloody jet-lagged, man, and we hardly had time to talk. A bloody nightmare, hey. Poor little Jonathon, he was just a baby, beside himself."

"I'm looking forward to seeing him," I reply, watching a convoy of larger, more powerful vehicles receding from the frame of the passenger window.

"So you've got your own photo exhibition in Toorak. Very highbrow, old pal. I remember you farting round with that box brownie."

"We've both done a lot of farting around since those days," I say.

"That's no lie. You see this here, this is Templestowe now. This Melbin sprawls all over the show. So it's not so beautiful as Sydney, but beautiful doesn't pay the rent. Jo'burg wasn't so beautiful either."

Really driving the small car, not just playing with it, this tall man. A trowel nose squashed on a hatchet face, beady, opal eyes given to larrikin flashes. An old wild-guy becalmed in domesticity.

"That house with the cement-render and that one across the road, *ons se mense*, our people. Brick's all right for public shithouses man, but you must finish your house off. Did I tell you the South Africans are the new boat people – soon as they hit town, they buy a boat."

Swerves into a parking space among many vacant early morning ones. No-one much about, a line of shops, brittle in the biting air. Bracing – a temperature remembered.

"I can live with this cold."

"Ja, a bit like the highveldt, hey, but damp. The locals whinge about it like buggery. Just get a paper and some deli stuff for Annette. This Greek here is the owner. Smart, sells biltong, would you believe, good too." Handbrake, gear, keys, almost a single movement, up and out the door as he speaks. Greeting the European type as he sweeps by, "Hello my friend, how are you?"

"Aah, Gerult, always in a hurry."

Automatically ducks under the door-frame, the old lock forward; tall, energetic, African-broad, strides inside. Gesturing to the Greek girl behind the counter, to her mother, making them smile. Then lost in the shop.

I take a bead with my ancient, trusty, Pentax and pan over the parking lot, calculating composition, alert for signs of interest. Nothing more inspiring than a garbage bin disgorging gambling stubble onto tar-encrusted stones.

The Greek on the pavement exhales steam, enfolds the warmth in his leather jacket, shuffles in black, patent shoes. The low sun wan on the home invasion headlines. A film bordering on ice in the khaki suburb unblued by eucalypts. This Melbin town all around to be discovered.

Purposefully out of the deli, his free hand a pistol, cocked thumb, he points at the Greek. "I'd shoot the bastards stone dead if they burst into my house, eh Nickos?" The Greek agrees.

The door forges open and the newspaper slaps the seat and on top of it is a stick of biltong in Glad Wrap. "For you. Can you get this in Sydney? Don't polish it off before breakfast." You can get mebos and tinned guavas and blatjang and other home products but it took some looking.

Quickly reversing then picking up speed. "Hard bastard that Nick, never pays on time. But we still

supply him. The rep's a bit mealy-mouthed, you know. But I phone the deli direct and create shit. Then he pays up. You must have moxie man, otherwise these bastards push you around. But he's all right, Nick, he knows the score.

"But what do you think of these bastards breaking in, tying you up, man. If it's going to be like that we might as well go back. Everyone says how dangerous it is over there, but it's getting as bad here. I've still got my gun. Ja, they're quick to point at us, but did you ever see so much corruption. They do nothing, man, and it will swamp this whole society.

"But talk of guns, hey. You know I was working for old Simon and doing a bit of overtime, and you know that end of Jo'burg, especially after dark and Annette was worried so she says, 'Take your gun with you, I've got mine.' All right, it's not such a bad idea.

"O.K., I come out of work one evening and the sun's this big, fucking tomato behind the mine dumps. And I case the street; second nature, man, like never walking through hoardings round a new building where they've got you captured. Anyway, there's three hanging round the corner and two half way up the block on the same side. O.K., so I do the wise thing and I cross over the street. Straight away the three cross over, then the other two cross. I get the vibes, man, and the hand goes into the jacket and there's the criss-cross grip on my palm. Then I walk along with this erection in my pocket so they must know I have something. Next thing the three take off round the corner where the parking station is and the other two find the far side of the road much more interesting.

"O.K., so I turn the corner and I think I see one go into the parking station. Maybe I do, maybe I don't, but I am ready. So I arrive and look in, and all I see is this band of red sky at the end of the concrete and just the shapes of the cars. Dark, man, and no lights because it's not night yet, but it's not bloody day either. Not a soul around.

"Right, so what must I do. I must go get my car. In I go, hand in the jacket again. I'm arriving at the car when I hear this scraping behind it. Out comes the gun like Billy the Kid, and I duck behind this Jag, O.K., I'm trained on the sound and if anything shows I am going to blow it away. I hear this slapping, Wolfrit, like the bloke's got a loose sole on his shoe and he keeps going up the side of the car to the front and then down to the back. And I'm following him with the gun, hey, slowly up and down, up and down. Then the noise stops. Look, I tell you, I'm gripping the gun so hard it's welded to my hand. Five minutes, half-an-hour, I don't know, but I'm a thousand per cent attention. I know every detail of that leaping jaguar figure, and I am thinking: this is me; I can't afford to die now, Annette is pregnant and my old boy is crook. Then he starts moving again, hey. Same thing, slowly up and down – up and down. So I take off my shoe. Now I'm going to flush him out. Just like in the movies man. I'm going to throw the shoe on a car near him and when he comes up to shoot it, I'm going to pot him. I tell you I'm so bung, I'm packing it, as our kids say, shoe in one hand, gun in the other, ready. Then this big scraping sound and even before I can shoot I see it's just a bit of newspaper blowing in the wind. The sound is instant recognition, man. I just lean over that Jag's bonnet laughing at myself, talking to myself, feeling so bloody stupid man. Lucky nobody saw, hey. I just get into the car still bloody talking to myself and drive off."

Turnings and accelerations bring changing perspectives of Templestowe.

"Well," I say, "that's the difference, that's why we're here. We don't have gun battles with scraps of newspaper."

Expert double-clutching brings a paved driveway, neat gardens, an ample, cement-rendered double-story.

"This is very nice."

Engine, handbrake, keys, all yielding to that one swift movement. "Annette and the boys are looking forward to seeing you." Leaning forward and gripping the wheel. "Look, there's no denying, we've done well here, and it's a beautiful country. You know me, Wolfrit, a buck is a buck and people have to live somewhere and you need cars and petrol to get from A to B. I'm not artsy like you and I'm not sentimental. But sometimes, man, I just see the old kraals and their cooking smoke and the sugarloaf mountains and it hurts like stink, man. – What do you think, Wolfrit? I think we made the right decision?"

"I think that's the decision we made, but the way things have unfolded, it just might turn out."

"Ja, then something typical happens and it's back to square one."

"That was then, my friend. Now is now."

"Of course, of course. We get on with it, that's why most of us have done so well here."

Swift movement out of the car, hatchback bursting open, snaps your bag up, slams the door. Resolutely down the smart drive at a clip. Stumbling after him, adjusting your hand luggage.

Front door flying open to reveal Annette. "Hello, Wolfy, Jonathon is standing here behind to show how much taller he is than me. And this is little Andrew," cuddling his shyness, his fazed smile that passes for our greeting. "Ja," tousling his hair, "this one is a real little Ozzie, born and bred, hey."

"What's that big spaghetti around your neck, Andrew?"

"It's a scarf."

"And that cosy with the pompom on your head. Are you making tea under there? Is that the club you support?"

"Support?"

"Uncle Wolfy's asking who you barrack for, Andrew."

"Carlton rules."

"Hawks rule. They thrashed Carlton."

"What position do you blokes play?"

"Rover."

"Full forward."

"No lock forwards?"

"They know nothing from lock forward."

"Rugby's for rah-rahs."

"For haw-haw's."

"Do you follow Aussie Rules, Wolfy? I quite like it."

"Don't know the first thing about it, mate, but it looks spectacular, very athletic."

"Funny word that, barrack. Where did they get it from?"

"Who knows, probably the convicts."

"Those bitser umpires, transmogrified from every sport. They've got pizzazz."

Jonathon vaults upstairs.

"Not now Jonathon, breakfast is ready."

"No, now."

"He's also a keen photographer, Wolfy. He's been sweating on you. I said you'd help him take some real pictures, not just snapshots."

The lad vaults downstairs clutching a polaroid more ancient than my Pentax. Do they still make the film?

"Where are you going to take it, Jonathon? Inside, here?"

"No, outside."

"What do you think, Wolfy?"

"The light's better outside. It's his shot."

"All right, come on then."

"Where?"

"The side drive, the front."

"Don't trip over that scarf thing and strangle yourself, Andrew."

Self-conscious amateur subject again. How long since this reversal. And how vulnerable as subject, how easily forgotten from the confidence of one's hardware.

"You stand in front, Andrew. Altogether now, sex, cheese."

"Ag, c'mon, Jonathon, don't take all day."

"Wait a bit dad."

"You're standing too far; come nearer, man. What do you think, Wolfy?"

"Let him take his own shot." He'll learn more from a bad picture than a good one.

Camera held at a point of frozen anticipation instead of being fired off at unsuspecting subjects to capture the liquid of life in still frame. If he has an interest, I'll show him. At last the importuning flash and it's over. We break ranks to be absorbed in the chemistry of development.

The depiction peeled back. Torsos only of adults, one with the demonic, glowing eyes of a vampire; a pompom, segments of scarf snaking about. The rest is background.

"Hell's teeth! Jonathon, you got the Munsters here, man. You photographed the people next door."

"Look at my eyes, Dracula."

"Frankenstein, how did he flatten my head like that."

"Nice shot of the garden, Jonathon."

"Where am I, mum?"

"That is you darling. That pompom there, see, and the scarf."

"But where am I?"

"There, that is you," she says pointing out of frame.

"You missed me Jonathon."

"Never mind, Johnny, we'll take some pictures together."

They re-study the photograph looking for their essences, the false portrait that is and is not themselves.

Beyond bamboozled, celluloid adults, a section of a cement-rendered house, a bush that is a boronia. On once spare, open, possibly marshy land, in a transitional climate neither antarctic pain nor tropical fug, tiled roofs zigzag away to a sky of sleet.

"Great shot of Templestowe, Jonathon."

"Never mind, Johnny, Uncle Wolfy will hang on to the masterpiece and show you what's wrong later.

"Come on, come on, let's have breakfast. It's wonderful to see you. Ag, you can't count that lousy airplane food as breakfast; have something substantial." I am in for a humungus breakfast.

On the breakfast cloth, between the cornflakes box and the homemade marmalade, the masterpiece lies face up. The parents periodically lift it, chortle at bamboozled adults, inspect the vague images through its back, lay it down, pick it up again. They habitually search it for smoking kraals, cutting highveldt air, sugarloaf mountains, gunfights in parking lots; half a fractured, unlikely life spent among their own.

"You look sad, Wolfy," her finger tapping the celluloid.

"Just the camera angle."

I tackle my humungus breakfast, basking in the big, welcoming, do-anything-for-you smiles of our people, fighting down the hurt like stink.

View of Harbour from Churchyard

In the churchyard
leaves have fallen
unconfessed

Overhead pelicans pass
in a straight line
across a curved sky

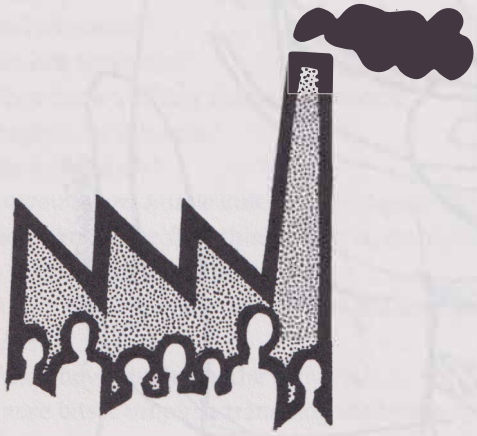
From behind clouds
the moon has excavated
itself

A few stars twitch
pylons are fixed
on each other

The pier street lights
weep their halos
the jetty can not swim

Over the harbour
rain is falling
the oil tankers
are not baptised

Jules Leigh Koch



Vane Lindesay

Broken Hill

Outside the town
only the sun
poses for its photo

Thin clouds cover
white like a veil
of a Filipino bride

In the supermarket
the old miners follow
their wives

Mining the shelves

Their memories have
dusted over
or gather like coins
in the pokie machines

Evening
and the wind
lengthens its stockwhip

Along the highway
diamonds of light reflect
from the cattle trucks

Pro Hart paints
his bathroom cupboard

All the stars
are out
like trade unionists

Jules Leigh Koch

Video Messages

Before the Election
and his diagnosis,
my late father had skimmed
the channels, recorded

video messages:

Marchers, in their river
of tiny skulls, flooded
the gorge between blank-faced buildings . . .

Heads. Talking.

A children's beauty contest,
those like his daughters . . .

Politicians, commentators,
too many, the expectation
that 'a campaign of terror'
could gag History . . .

Tongues, babbling.

We fast-forward:

Until a lake, soundless,
a waters' edge . . .

There's no voice.

Wading up onto the bank, an impala
dragging a thick crocodile
whose teeth are grapnels
tearing her rump . . .

She manages to shake loose . . .

She's in shock, wobbling . . .

Collapses . . .

Where's the voice?

From the mirror
a hippo surfaces, walks to her,
with the gentle lower jaw
tries to raise her head . . .

No.

John Mateer

The Man/The Work

Giacometti,
an open-hearted man,
according to Brassaï,
said of Brancusi:
"He was a great sculptor
but he was also
the most insensitive
and ill-natured man
in the world . . ."

Still
in subtly-lit
spaces
we hold
our breath

waiting

for the bronze
and marble birds

to soar

for Madame Podgorny's
eyelashes
to flutter open
after sleep

for these pure
shapes
unforgiving
of fingerprints,
to breathe . . .

And when
they do not

in our hearts

we are not
disappointed.

Frances Rouse

Dying Light

In every home there is
the darkness
Behind the fly wire
the TV screen
the saladas
and the super eights
there is what is
there is what has been
the Polaroid snatches the light
of a microsecond
and the shot peels
over the Vulcan flame.

Michelle Ryan

Ritual

The confusion of epideictic with epigamic display insures that their rituals will overlap: while one is galloping madly over fields one is walking solemnly behind a hearse, a case in point, obviously, of sexual pluralism although the eunuchism involved is dependent upon a presumed viewer who may or may not be present. Dead or alive. In any case, a pulse so feeble that no sartorial changes are rung as the procession slows to a crawl. Rags on sticks.

Philip Hammial

Footprints

Proud mother
Holds her baby,
Stamping defiant
Footprints
In the water of a pool,
Setting his mark
On his new world.

Michael George Smith

Tomorrow like glass

She watches herself grow
softer round the edges
spread across more mirror
The surface of crystals
backed against passing light
by its hard sheet of poison
reflects her life's slow
loosening The glass
mists slowly into the room
each droplet charged entirely
with clear light and time
One day it will copy her
broadening
everywhere like God which is
to say not
in particular here

Aileen Kelly

Wendy Lowenstein

Acquiring Class

FOUND WANTING In 1932, the deepest year of depression, I start school. In 1935, when I am eight years old, I am staying with my grandmother in Bendigo. She is out when the doorbell rings. A swagman asks me for a billy of tea, a sandwich. I say, "I'm not allowed to cut the bread or light the gas." When Grandma comes home she is shocked, runs into the street, looking for this man, says, "No-one has ever been turned away hungry from our door. The swagmen know us." I know I've been found wanting.

Ancestors In 1854, my mother's English grandfather, a printer, came to the Bendigo goldfield, and prospered. My father's family came to Melbourne in 1841, selected land, built 'Gowrie Park', an impressive bluestone farmhouse. They prospered too, but the next generation was wiped out in the 1890s depression. Class is never discussed in our home, but my father, one of eleven, grew up in dire poverty. Twelve years old, he left school for a job as a messenger boy. His father and older brothers were at the WA goldfields. Hoping to earn money to send home, they suffered serious illness and permanent injury. There was no dole, there were six younger kids, Dad's five bob a week was vital. In the freezing Broadmeadows winter frosts, he milked the cow before work. Dad eventually studied accountancy at night, married above him, is terrified of falling back, of losing a hard-won middle-class respectability. His fear overshadows our lives too.

Manners maketh the man If I do something uncouth, lick a knife, drop an H or say, "I never did nothing", there is a lecture on Dad's hopes for us, on his struggle for education. Nothing to do with licking your knife, I think. But it's about class. A blue-collar worker may drop an H, use double negatives, lick the knife, but not us.

How dare you speak to me like that! My mother has the confidence of the middle class. Faced with impertinence she says haughtily, "How dare you speak to me like that!" In the 1960s I am teaching, the principal berates me unjustly. I look her in the eye, hear myself say, "How dare you speak to me like that?" I've just stated my class position in regard to the boss. My mother, no feminist, has created a feminist in me, a trade union activist too, and when funds allow, a self publisher. Because most publishers, I will come to realize, are employers, with the same contempt for unorganized workers as any other boss.

The Missionaries Our extended family has Quakers, missionaries, Fabian socialists on one side; Presbyterian ministers, Home Missionaries, precentors and choir masters on the other. Our nuclear family abandons religion, retains a social conscience. And we follow world politics: the Japanese invasion of China, Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia, Nazism, and the persecution of the Jews, the Spanish Civil War. But we aren't involved in the peace movement, don't know any Jews, Africans, Chinese, Aborigines or even Catholics.

We must be free or die My city-dwelling father, a devoted boss's man and romantic Australian nationalist, is enamoured of Paterson, Lawson, shearers and drovers, legendary outback heroes. For my sixteenth birthday, there is a handsome copy of Henry Lawson's poetry. Dad inscribes it, "We must be free or die who speak the tongue that Lawson spoke".

In 1937, my brother John went overseas to a boy scout jamboree. Our maternal grandfather paid his fares. Our English cousin, a communist student, took him around Britain on his motorbike, showed him the slums and the poverty, the horrors of Glasgow's Gorbals, convinced him that war was imminent. In

Australia Europe seems far away, and war remote. The depression has lifted, 'official' unemployment fallen to 10 per cent. But the backlog of poverty is immense. Many people still live in bag and tin humpies. Thousands of houses are uninhabitable, damp, unhealthy and rat-infested, lacking adequate toilets, ventilation. An explosion in 20 shaft, State Coal Mine, Wonthaggi, Victoria kills thirteen men due to management negligence, and there is a stay-down strike at the Sunbeam Colliery in nearby Korumburra. Aborigines are thought to be a dying race, and Professor Wood Jones says, "It is generally said that when the white man came to Australia he found the aborigines a dying and degenerate race. There is no truth in it. We started to make them die." South Australia which has experienced the highest depression unemployment, now insists that BHP build a blast furnace, provide jobs in that state instead of treating their iron ore only in Newcastle.

Hope dies with Munich In September, 1938 hope that great powers would halt Hitler, died with the Munich Agreement. The Australian government supported appeasement too. War was now inevitable, but in the following month the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted R.G. Menzies, Attorney General, as saying, "If you and I were Germans sitting beside our own fires in Berlin we would not be critical of the leadership that had produced such results." Only the communists are calling for sanctions against the Axis powers. The Labor Party, isolationist, forbids its members to appear on the peace platform. Early in 1939 Germany and the USSR sign a non-aggression pact. In Britain our communist cousin leaves the party. He is to become a Labour Party economic boffin, a father of the welfare state, eventually a labour lord. The political passion he set in train in our family will flourish for many years, change our lives.

Till the day I die My boy scout brother comes home politicized, joins Melbourne New Theatre. My sister joins too. I hear International Brigader Lloyd Edmonds talk about the Spanish Civil War. I hear about the Port Kembla wharfies too, dole queue patriots who refused to load BHP's pig iron for Japan. I am roped in for theatre working bees. All Australian theatre is determinedly escapist. In 1936 when Sydney New Theatre presented Clifford Odets' anti-Nazi play *Till the Day I Die* it had been banned – it might offend a friendly power, Nazi Germany. In 1938 New Theatre creates another sensation with Irwin Shaw's anti-war play, *Bury the Dead.*

There's going to be a war In 1939 the September school holidays. My mother, always dramatic, announces, "There's going to be a war, and the boys will have to go, and they'll both be killed. So we'll go to Sydney and have a holiday first!" In brilliant Sydney spring sunshine, we tramp over the Sydney Harbour Bridge, around Wentworth House, ride ferries, explore South Head, the Gap and the Zoo, go to the Blue Mountains. My brothers are not killed in the war. But it was a great holiday.

Minds blown here New Theatre blows my six-teen-year-old mind. I discover theatre, art, radical writing and politics, along with adult tolerance and comradeliness, Jewish people and Jewish humour, trade unions, real Greek food and Chinese cafes. School becomes less relevant and, despite having won a scholarship, I fail matriculation. I'm not worried. There is a war on, and a labour shortage. My life is good. Like Pete Seeger, a later trailblazer, I have stopped studying and am getting educated. There's a war-time shortage of men, so I even get a job as a journalist on *Radio Times*, today *The Age Green Guide*.

What's in class? New Theatre and the working-class movement, to which the theatre belongs, teaches me to think about class. A daughter of timber mill workers reflects: "Class is about money and education." In New Theatre the accusation, "You're so PB!" is heard. PB means 'petty-bourgeois', and it's an insult. I meet working people, men and women who teach me how to think, to understand what happens in the world outside Camberwell and school. They are more interesting, experienced than the 'educated' middle class. I meet a Jewish boy too, a refugee and encounter classical music and bushwalking. I find an inspiring, new and awesome religion. I don't want to help workers, I want to *be* a worker, and change the world. Middle-class benevolence to the poor, sandwiches, billies of tea are in the past. Australian workers have suffered a dreadful depression, a rate of unemployment second only to that of Germany. Working people are fighting the war for democracy. They must win the peace too, fashion a society where there is no war, no-one is poor, hungry or homeless. A would-be boyfriend talks of being brought up on the wrong side of

the tracks. "What", I ask, "could be better than growing up working class?" He says, "Only a middle-class type could ask such a silly question!"

When men are liberated women will be liberated too I am eighteen. The party sets up its own printery, needs a proof-reader. What could be better than to work for the party? My journalistic career is postponed. I am praised for my work. I am paid two pounds a week, am happy. Enter the union organizer. "What's *she* doing marking the proofs?" (printing union indentures refer to the tradesman as *he*) "There's a war on, we can't get men", says the boss. "Well", says the union bloke, "she can stay until you get a man, but she gets full adult male rates." A proof-reader's rate is around nine pounds a week. So they sack me, employ an inexperienced man on full pay! I complain to a party elder, "But the party believes in equal pay for women!" "Feminism", she says, "is divisive. When men are liberated, women will be liberated too."

To the factories In 1950 the party issues the call, "To the factories." I'm studying for a diploma of journalism at Melbourne, walk out in high dudgeon when the English professor, a Scotsman, introducing a lecture in Australian literature, says, "I don't know anything about Australian writing." For a part-timer the University Labor Club culture is hard to gate-crash. I am not one of them. After these toffee-nosed university comrades, I look forward to the factory. My friend Miriam and I work in a battery factory. Filthy job, no overalls. Carbon blackens skin, oil drips onto paper spread over our knees. Rubber gloves are provided, they are too small, my hands are painfully cramped and the machine never stops. I have no energy left, flee the joint when the whistle blows. Miriam who grew up in working-class Carlton, fares much better, makes friends. I am not one of these workers either. By this time I've married – my third Jewish boyfriend, my life-time friend and lover. There is only one way out of the factory with honour. I get pregnant!

We don't mean Werner! We flee the outer suburbs, move into a working-class street in inner Melbourne. Anti-semitic remarks are commonplace. I look them in the eye, "My husband's a Jew." They say, "But I don't mean Werner. He's all right!" They meant he isn't a boss, he's a worker like them, but addicted to taking up petitions against the atomic bomb, lobbying politicians, and fighting for a local high school. He is a shop steward too. But we're still different, because we have a house full of books, and no television, don't patronize the pub.

Realist Writers I have three children, one a baby, I mean to be a writer, go to the Realist Writers, take a short story based on my sister's experience with a demented admirer. It has black humour and sex. Judah Waten tears me to shreds. "How can you laugh at a poor mentally ill worker?" The sex is all wrong too. I am devastated. Another woman reads a detective story, not well received. Afterwards she says, "I thought your story was very funny, but my husband's demented too!" I don't go back to the group. I never write fiction again. I never forgive Judah nor he me.

The Wild Colonial Boy (No Wild Girls) In England and America, there is a folk song revival triggered by the left. Ian Turner and I start the Folklore Society of Victoria. It is radical to assert that Australia has a folk culture of its own. I start the journal *Australian Tradition*, edit it for many years. It is much admired by overseas folk notables, ignored in Australia. In the folk movement we are part of the left movement without interference from the party, can write without being 'off the line'. I don't notice that our folk songs celebrate men's lives, ignore women.

Darkness falls In 1956 we read of Stalin's history of murder, bloodshed, torture and terror. Party leaders admit these 'mistakes' to meetings of cadres, but tell the rank and file, "It's all bourgeois lies!" But Soviet troops march into Hungary. We are shattered. Many friends vote with their feet, or call for change and are expelled. But how can we give up our vision of a great new world? "The Soviet people will put things right," we predict. "The Australian party will be different." But reform is a futile task. About 1960, we drop out too, are abused as being middle-class deserters, but are more active politically than ever. Communists, the fire and the flame of many a community centre, school or kindergarten committee, while thinking to overthrow capitalism, have helped give it a human face.

I want to work In the 1960s there is no child care. I want to work. I have three children. "You could be a teacher," says my friend. "Good holidays." "What if I'm no good?" "Well you'd better be a school librarian."

Next day I enrol in study. For the next nine years I teach part-time, do my degree, acquire library and teaching diplomas. I am not alone. Many workers are getting educated. Werner and the kids wash dishes, cook meals and do the shopping while I study, are all part of my adventure. With other ex-party members and one Labor man, we fight for a local high school, lobby local politicians, distribute endless leaflets. We oppose state school fees, refuse to pay, join the Free Education Movement. Are amazed that old guard party members, without children or close interest in education, stack meetings, take over and destroy the group in the interests of ideological purity.

Teachers are workers too? I at last become an activist, the union rep. The post-war baby bulge hits secondary schools, Victoria has the highest percentage of non-English-speaking migrants, overflowing classrooms, a desperate teacher shortage. We demand federal aid for education, strike for it, not asking anything for ourselves. Our martinet principal tells prefects they must take classes. I'd taught these kids Australian history, they studied the trade unions. Their fathers are workers. A deputation of prefects reaches me. "We want to support the teachers. Have we got the right to refuse to take classes?" I temporize, "Well, why not stay home?" "We don't want to stay home, we want to do what's right!" The buck has reached me. I'm an untrained temporary teacher, highly vulnerable. But the buck has to stop somewhere. I say, "No-one really has any rights except what they can win. Do your best!" They don't win, but they try and I'm proud of them. After the strike, the union meeting: "Aren't we going to blacklist the ones who scabbed?" A horrified response. "We're teachers Wendy, not wharfies!"

A year off work My mother leaves some money, Werner's long service leave is due, our elder son matriculates. We will blow the lot, take the kids round Australia for a year, meet the 'real Australians'. It's the pay-off for all those dishes! We set out to realize the outback dream, work here and there, meet old friends, make new ones, record folklore and tales of working life. We are just in time. The locals aren't yet in full retreat from the tourist flood.

Enter Studs Terkel Ian Turner says, "You'll like this book." It is *Hard Times* by Studs Terkel. When I put it down, I know what I'm going to do with the rest of my life. To hell with a safe job and superannuation! I will write about working life. I start with the depression too. I have a title, 'Weevils in the Flour' from Dorothy Hewett's great poem. Over six years I travel to as many states as I can, talk to working people about the thirties, produce a massive, messy manuscript. No-one will publish it.

"It's a document book," they say, "unreadable!" I go back to teaching. The school has a majority of migrant kids. My friend Morag Loh and I want teaching material for migrants. I take British migrant interviews from *Weevils*, (no-one will ever publish it anyway) and we interview non-Anglo migrants. *The Immigrants* is a best-seller. "What else have you written?" asks the publisher. "An oral history, about the depression?" "I'll publish it. Go and get it now!" I do, and she does! Another best-seller.

Workers will read books! I'm going to write about wharfies. "But who will read books about waterside workers?" asks my publisher. "Waterside workers!", I reply. "Workers don't read books!" he insists. Waterside Workers Union officials agree. I enlist Tom Hills, a waterfront hero, renowned for his vendetta against the waterfront scabs of the 1928 strike. Tom knows what side he's on. To me he is what a worker and a communist should be. With Tom I am welcome on the waterfront, without him I would get nowhere. I write the book, he has made it possible. He declines a share of royalties, so I put his name on the cover, and he is delighted. We raise the money, self-publish a handsome book, and wharfies buy multiple copies. We print a second edition, prove that workers *will* read books relevant to their lives. Tom, Werner and I take a holiday on the proceeds.

Robe River, red rocks Writing is hard lonely labour. For some years I don't write at all. But in north Western Australia I record iron ore workers, mining the ancient red rocks of the Pilbara. The company will accommodate me, fly me around, the union supply an organizer and a four-wheel drive. None of this happens. The vehicle breaks down on the first day, and we catch the bus north. The Peko Wallsend lockout has taken place, unions have been crushed, activists driven out. When I visit a home, police often drop in too, enquire about a gun licence. He's told, "I haven't got a gun!" But the copper then hangs around until I

leave. I'm endangering workers, who stand to lose not only job but home.

An organizer goes to a workplace, award in hand, asks for the key to the union notice board, is refused. "But the award stipulates a noticeboard for the union." "Yeah," says the company man, "but it doesn't say you can have the key!" The company had previously sacked workers in defiance of the Industrial Commission, failed to reinstate them when ordered. Unions asked the Labor State Government to withdraw the company's licence to mine. The government took no action. A shop steward, in tears, tells me that if his members heard that senior trade union leaders who'd sold them out had been killed in a car accident, "we'd have a party that lasted for a week!" Ten years later in 1997 I can use some of these interviews in *Weevils at Work* without endangering people. But by now there is no union at Robe River, workers are on individual contracts and strikes are illegal.

Not the Miscellaneous Workers' Union My husband is vice-president of the Missos. I write a film script for *Weevils in the Flour*. The film is not made. I start a (working-class) detective book. A publisher rings. "Will you do a book of interviews with unemployed people?" He offers a substantial advance. The money is good and I agree. He sends a contract no self-respecting author should sign. I amend it, make it compatible with Society of Authors standards. He rings, he has never been so hurt! I say, "It's an ambit claim!" "This isn't the Miscellaneous Workers Union", he sneers, adding some personal abuse. How dare he talk to me like that? How dare this wealthy man sneer at unions! But I've been hooked. I decide to write a book not just about unemployment, but about what's happening to workers in and out of work. I ring publishers. "No-one will want to read about unemployment", they say. The Left Book Club however will publish it, give me a good contract. "It will take a year to write", I promise. It takes nearly five!

***Weevils at Work*: What's happening to work in Australia?** This book reveals the naked exercise of class power against workers. In it an historian observes that we don't get Marx's educated working class, because when educated, workers become middle class. It seems to me, after talking to two hundred workers in and out of the workplace, that this is changing. True, white-collar workers are more easily deceived, tend to believe in and support the boss, until the day they get the sack. But today, in Australia and elsewhere, educated white-collar workers are being put on production lines. Instead of exercising their professional skills, they are losing their autonomy, forced to run from job to job, shuffling paper about instead of being able to use their range of professional skills. Capitalism is demonstrating its power, extracting maximum profits.

People can't stand the strain Sooner or later such systems break down. People can't stand the strain any longer. I believe that struggle will bring white-collar conventionally educated workers together with workers on the shop floor who are educated in struggle, as well as in their own callings (there is no such thing as an unskilled worker), creating a working class which will pool knowledge and experience, forge alliances with groups like environmentalists, women's groups, ethnic groups, civil liberties groups, and together reinvent unionism as a moral movement in action, not a corporate lookalike.

I've stopped wondering what class I belong to, because at the end of nearly ten years of talking with, and listening to people who are being screwed in and out of work, plus the work on the depression and the wharfies, I find myself accepted by workers. One guy takes my book to work, sells twenty copies to workmates.

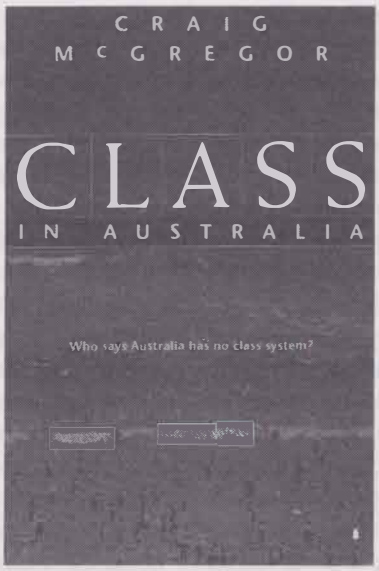
I decide no-one's going to call me middle class any more. I belong to the working class, I'm a working-class writer. I decided to be a worker when I was sixteen and I've served an apprenticeship, and completed my articles. "Writers is the worst paid workers in the world!", Tom Hills, my wharfie friend used to say and he was right, both about writers being workers and about the money too. Tom knew a worker when he met one. With him on my side, and workers buying my books on the job, no-one can deny my right to be working class.

Class is not just about income, it's not just about education either, or where you live, or what your parents did. It's about what you believe, where your loyalties are, who you identify with. Above all, it's about where you line up when the chips are down, what you fight for, and who you stand beside. That's where the buck stops.

Wendy Lowenstein is Australia's leading oral historian.

Class in Australia – a symposium

Frank Stilwell



Craig McGregor: Class in Australia *(Penguin, $24.95)*

Craig McGregor is to be praised for his willingness to tackle an issue of such importance. Class is fundamental in shaping the distribution of income, wealth and life chances: it is integral to education, industrial relations and the patterns of national economic growth and decline. It is a pervasive feature of Australian society just as much as in other nations where there is a stronger consciousness of class according to differences of modes of speech, dress and parentage. Yet it is a concept with which many people feel very uncomfortable, perhaps partly because of its association with Marxism, both as a mode of analysis and a political program. No doubt the discomfort also arises because the emphasis on class appears divisive: it reminds us of social barriers and thereby challenges cherished beliefs about equality of opportunity and meritocracy. 'Fair go, mate' is a sentiment that conflates description (of what is) and prescription (of what should be).

Analyzing the issue of class in Australian society is particularly timely because structural economic changes are currently generating major inequalities, while the dominant political discourse emphasizes the 'battlers' of middle Australia. The language of classlessness sits uneasily with the experience of social polarization.

Ambiguities in the interpretation and application of the concept of class are much in my mind after recently attending a conference on 'Reconfigurations of Class and Gender' which was convened by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Academic sociologists came to Canberra from around the nation and from overseas to discuss the nature of class, its relationship to other social distinctions such as gender and race, and its contemporary manifestations. I recall no explicit reference to McGregor's book in the formal sessions – presumably it was deemed too populist in tone to be considered by such an academic gathering – but there were overlapping concerns aplenty. The changing dimensions of economic inequality, social mobility, power relations, political expressions (including voting patterns), all these are the key concerns in contemporary class analysis. Yet there seems to be no agreement on how to sort the issues out, beyond simple descriptions of social structure and behaviour.

Does class exist? It is a truism to say 'well, it depends what you mean by class'. According to McGregor, "factors such as income, education, occupation and parentage are in fact components of class . . . it is a complex of these inputs which crystallizes your class position and it is your class position which profoundly affects your life-chances and expectations". This composite interpretation is worth unpicking. For simplicity one may identify five views about inequality and class along a spectrum of possibilities:

1. Socio-economic inequalities are pervasive.
2. Impediments to socio-economic mobility are substantial.
3. Society comprises groups of people whose opportunities are systematically shaped and constrained by their economic position.
4. Class exists as a power

relationship which derives from ownership and control of economic resources.

5. The relationship between capitalist class and working class shapes capitalist development and contains the seeds of radical transformation of the socio-economic system.

Few would deny the first proposition. Indeed, it is a statistical fact, easily demonstrated by reference to official data on the distribution of income. The Australian evidence clearly shows widening income disparities over the last two decades, albeit ameliorated by the effect of redistribution through the social wage. But the existence of economic inequality – even of growing inequality – is not proof of the existence of class. It is quite reasonable to posit that, even in a society with a markedly inegalitarian distribution of income and wealth, there is no problem of class division as long as all have opportunity to compete for the top slots. Evidence of social mobility – rags to riches and riches to rags – would be the proof that such equality of opportunity exists. Conversely, evidence of the impediments to social mobility (such as the inter-generational 'stickiness' in education levels, occupation or income) provides grounds for believing that life-chances are systematically biased according to social origin. If an 'unwise choice of parents' consigns people to lives of economic and social disadvantage, then the liberal ideal of equality of opportunity goes out the window together with the socialist ideal of equality of outcome. Class inequality then starts to emerge as a pervasive feature.

Such reasoning leads directly to the third view in the preceding list. If the inequalities and barriers to mobility operate as systemic phenomena, rather than just as individual problems, then there is evidently sense in describing the society as class-structured. The focus on the power of these classes – to reproduce themselves and to establish and extend relationships of dominance and exploitation – becomes the next point of issue. Seeing class as a power relationship deriving from the ownership and control of economic resources brings such concerns into focus. From there it is only a short step to the Marxian view of a fundamentally non-symmetrical power relationship between capital and labour which is embedded in the capitalist mode of production. The dynamics and dialectics of that capital-labour relationship, on this view, are the key to understanding the political economy of capitalist development and the possibilities of radical transformation to a classless society.

This five-step analysis provides a taxonomy for judging what use is made of 'class' as an analytical concept. McGregor's book embraces the first three. There is insistence on the existence of inequality, notwithstanding pervasive ideologies about social egalitarianism in Australia. McGregor quotes the evidence from researchers such as Raskall, Saunders and Gregory to make the point. There is similar emphasis on the impediments to mobility. His chapter on the ruling class explores the mechanisms of collective class reproduction and ends by saying, "class is not just a matter of snobbery, which is merely stupid; it is a matter of 'the right to rule'. And who has it."

How these objective class inequalities flow through into consciousness of class position is a particular focus of McGregor's book. Much is made of the self-identification of the majority of Australians as 'middle class'. This blurring of objective and subjective class positions is by no means uniquely Australian. Indeed, the major challenge of contemporary class analysis (exemplified by the international comparative project of sociologist Erik Wright on which the Canberra conference focused) is to unpick this issue of the 'middle class'. One of the chapters in McGregor's book worries away at this problem, dealing with white-collar workers, education, accent, lifestyle and suburbia. Bit by bit, a rich understanding of Australian society is constructed from the fragments. What is strangely underdeveloped is the association between urban locality, housing values and social position. Given the strong association of status and residential locality in Australia one might have expected rather more attention to this issue.

More generally, what is lacking from McGregor's work is a systematic analysis of class power and the way in which class operates to shape capitalist development in Australia. There is passing reference to the power of bosses over workers and the ways in which property underpins class inequality. However, for the most part the emphasis is on social description rather than political economy. It is often very insightful social description. As a journalist, McGregor has an admirable facility for blending personal observations with selective data and vivid illustrations. His thumbnail sketches of individuals like John Howard, Kim Beasley and Dame Leonie Kramer provide fascinating insights into the lived experience of

class and the attitudes of key players in Australian public life. However, it is the lack of a systematic analytical framework for sifting through the observations, anecdotes and piecemeal evidence that left this reader a little frustrated.

It is to be hoped that Craig McGregor's book will be the trigger for a revival of concern with class analysis. What is now needed is a more systematic study of how contemporary social, economic and political changes are generating new patterns of advantage and disadvantage. Economic rationalism, globalization, structural changes in the workplace, attempts to cut back the welfare state and the assault on the role of the public sector are creating new winners and losers. Going beyond McGregor's description of existing social cleavages, we need to know more about the distributional effects of these dynamic transformations. Class analysis has never been more necessary.

Lynette Finch

"THIS IS A BOOK ON CLASS in Australia which, as I wrote it, developed into a general commentary on Australia as well", explains Craig McGregor in his preface. It is written with a light touch, employing a chatty style designed to put analysis of class back on the street, to have corner conversation and pubchat include recognition of the impact of structured divisions within Australian society. But this opening sentence flags a confusion which undermines the author's intentions. The idea that 'Australia' (he means Australian society) somehow got drawn into the discussion and that the story of the impact of class divisions could be disembodied from the society it divides, flaws the entire project. As well, the author offers no definition of class or of society and the assertion that everyone thinks Australia is a classless society is unproved.

From cover to cover Craig McGregor's *Class in Australia* is a strangely anachronistic text which positions the reader as Rip Van Winkle and sets out to "dispel once and for all the myth that Australia is a classless society" by investigating the rhetorical question, 'Who says Australia has no class system?'. Unfortunately, McGregor does not devote any space to answering his own question, although the first chapter explains that Australians are uncomfortable talking about class. "Blander terms" such as 'status' or 'prestige' appeal more, he explains.

The Howard Liberal government is very comfortable with being identified with upper-middle-class and wealthy Australians and with 'big business'. McGregor provides compelling evidence of this, and I don't think it would surprise anyone. But someone writing a book dispelling a myth of egalitarianism ought to be a bit troubled by this. It really ought to lead them to ask themselves "*Who* says Australia has no class system?" McGregor does not seem to see the problem, and he continues on, providing clear evidence that politicians, journalists, and academics are in agreement that class exists and affects our daily lives. Presenting statistics on voting patterns, drawn from Erik Wright and John Goldthore's research, McGregor concludes: "the results confirm what the party strategists already know: class helps determine how people vote". He has provided many other statistics which show that class affects just about every other aspect of life in modern Australia.

Without a doubt there *was* once a myth that Australia was a classless society. I'd suggest it emerged in the post-war years, when one of the most cunning political figures of modern history, Robert Menzies, created a new political party and won many elections by convincing war-weary Australians that they were all middle class. The obvious implication of everyone being in the same class, is that there was no class. Menzies's notion of egalitarian Australia lived a long healthy life despite being nonsensical rhetoric. For most of the voting public it was probably just a shorthand way of saying, 'let's not discuss politics', rather than a statement which people actually believed, but it greatly disadvantaged the politically inept Labor Party, which seemed to find it difficult to illustrate that class was a thriving vital determinant of opportunity and wealth accumulation in the country.

From the early 1970s, sociologists set about proving that the myth of an egalitarian society in Australia was a pile of phooey. Throughout the 1970s the leading sociology journal, the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* published living breathing number-crunching articles which showed that class – in the Marxist sense of people united through economic and political self-interest – completely dominated employment options, political preference, educational opportunities, and health and wealth. The journal, and the leading theorists of Australian sociology, such as Ron Wild and John Western, kept up their relent-

less harrying of Menzies' favourite myth until everyone else grew bored, and either turned right away from sociology towards cultural studies, or began to investigate the implications of structuralism and then post-structuralism.

And now, *Class in Australia* dives straight into the 1970s debate as though it were still raging (if rage it ever did). There is no history of the origin of the myth, no analysis of why it was effective and long-lived and served the Liberal Party so well. Perhaps John Howard's self-conscious persona as the new Robert Menzies (not to be confused with Paul Keating's self-image as the new Jack Lang) has inspired McGregor to revisit the theme. Actually the text is so puzzlingly dated that I do wonder how long the manuscript has been sitting around. Perhaps the return of a Liberal government has seen its renaissance, upgraded with vignettes of contemporary Australian life and cameos of contemporary Australian public figures?

The only material which is clearly drawn from 1990s discussion is a section on the underclass. "Australian society has begun to show some of the features of American society which so appal visitors to cities like New York and Los Angeles", says McGregor in explaining why an American concept has recently been employed in Australia. He uses the term 'under-class' to mean the politically alienated, the long-term unemployed – "a permanently and chronically disadvantaged group of people who seem to be outside the traditional class structure and are 'under' even the working class".

Gunnar Myrdal first used the term in his 1962 book *Challenge to Affluence*. His focus was economic – pointing out that unless economic reform designed to create employment was undertaken, the 'reserve pool of labour' would be so large it would be socially untenable. In 1982 Ken Auletta shifted this economic argument to one of social pathology – the underclass were psychologically different from other members of the poor, they were angry, socially alienated, and potentially dangerous. Subsequent discussion of their socially dysfunctional behaviour showed that Myrdal's argument had been so subverted (shifting the emphasis from the economic structure to the abnormal individuals) that by the early 1990s, American sociologists began to urge total abandonment of the term. For example, Herbert Gans[1] argued that the term is dangerous for it implies a homogeneous hopeless and unhelpable people. This paper was extremely influential in the United States, was much discussed by sociologists and led Julius Wilson (*The Truly Disadvantaged*) to drop the term in favour of 'the ghetto poor'.

McGregor's underclass are socially dysfunctional – "discarded by society . . . [they] in turn, discard that society (and its values) and wreak a violent revenge upon it". He warns that harsh economic reforms, high levels of unemployment, and threats to terminate social security after a fixed period of time, will see that revenge unleashed. Problems with use of the term aside, linking social upheaval to socially uncaring fiscal policy is the strongest contribution this book has to make to contemporary debate. It is timely and it states a truth that too many rationalists forget – people have to eat and if they don't get money to eat, they will steal. Historians can add, they also starve to death – as they did in huge numbers following the 1834 reform of the *Poor Law* in England.

McGregor, a journalist, writes well. His prose is engaging and his ability to explain statistics without sending readers to sleep is admirable. This is a well intentioned book which calls upon Australians to resist the brutality of economic rationalism and to 'do something about class'. I'm speculating that the return of a government enchanted with harsh economic reform and under-impressed with human kindness has inspired McGregor to take up his crusading pen (or word processor). And maybe it will provide a context for some of the startlingly honest assertions of John Howard's Liberals, such as ex-education minister Amanda Vanstone's outburst: "People who go to state schools are more likely to be unemployed". But the confused theory, the lack of clarity about key terms (like class) and the overwhelming sense of *deja vu* severely undermines the effectiveness of the project.

ENDNOTE

1. Herbert J. Gans, 'Deconstructing the Underclass. The term's dangers as a planning concept', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 56, 1990.

Rick Kuhn

MANY, EVEN MOST, PEOPLE probably agree that Australia and the world aren't in brilliant shape. The problems include widespread poverty and ill-health in the context of vast inequalities of income and wealth; economies beyond anyone's control, giving rise to roller-coaster cycles of mass unemployment

alternating with interludes of booming profits (but continuing high rates of joblessness), together with longer hours, a faster pace of labour and less satisfactory work. Then there are wars, vicious racism and continued oppression of women.

The issue isn't really getting people to recognize that these problems exist. Even conservatives, economic rationalists, neo-liberals and those who place their faith, with Howard-like simplicity, in 1950s family values know about these things. The problem is to mobilize people to change the way the world works rather than accepting or reinforcing it.

Emotion is one of the keys to mobilization[1]: Making people feel angry, resentful of or discontented with the established order; encouraging them to identify with the exploited and oppressed; promoting a sense of solidarity against those who benefit from the status quo and confidence to challenge them.

The emotional impact of *Class in Australia*, which has attracted widespread attention and, I hope, large sales, contributes to political mobilization. It makes class, largely denied in the mass media and mainstream politics, into a concrete feature of our experiences. There are cameos that capture the characteristics and sometimes ambiguities of individuals in terms of their class backgrounds and experiences: the smug elitism of Leonie Kramer, to the manner born; Jimmy Barnes' larrikin working-class anger; John Howard, who has never stretched his perspective beyond the attitudes of a small businessman's son. McGregor's tale of his own experiences of class is another vehicle for engaging readers' hostility to social inequality. His clear and direct language make both his argument and sentiments accessible.

McGregor skilfully builds sympathy for a series of political propositions: ours is a profoundly unequal society; the inequality is systematic; our personal experiences and features, political, cultural, social and linguistic, are structured by our place in Australia's class society; and all this is objectionable.

Emotional mobilization, no matter how well it succeeds, is not enough to involve people in effective strategies for social change. We are all feeling beings and this has to be taken into account in a strategy for social change. But strategies also have to engage our capacity for systematic critical thought. Of course *Class in Australia* does have an analysis and gives signs of a political strategy. Unfortunately, the analysis is inconsistent and the strategy is rudimentary and weak. Together they fall into a long tradition of populist class analysis in Australia.[2]

McGregor makes it very clear that Australia is an unequal and class-divided society. But his discussion of the nature of the classes in Australia is thoroughly confused. He argues that a series of factors are important in defining class. These are income, wealth, power, education, occupation, parentage and culture. No problem here. "Occupation – which can be seen as a shorthand for defining one's relationship to the means of production – is the primary determinant of class." This is music to Marxist ears. The problem is that this approach is not pursued throughout the book. The primary criticism here is one of inconsistency rather than deviation from a Marxist norm.

McGregor pays particular attention to class identity. This is a question of importance not only in understanding how Australia's class structure works, but also if one is concerned with mobilizing people to change it. But if different factors are involved in constituting class and class behaviour, then it is necessary to relate them to each other in a consistent way.

This needs to start with a process of abstraction, eliminating, for the time being, less important factors and focusing on the most fundamental ones.[3] The analysis can then become progressively more concrete by introducing complicating factors in order to outline the empirical appearance and experience of class. In his *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx's discussion of 'classes in themselves' and 'classes for themselves' sketched such an approach to class analysis.

For Marxists the most important factor is location in the relations of production, given that ownership or control of means of production is the most important source of power in capitalist societies. Then, in order to understand the specific ways groups act in the class structure, historical, political and cultural factors are considered or, in the case of individual behaviour and perceptions, personal background, education, political experience and lifestyle.

McGregor's formulation (at least McGregor on page 47 of his book) seems to embrace this approach. But elsewhere he abandons it. He also uses 'occupation' not as shorthand for 'relationship to the means of production' but as an excuse to reject people's position in the relations of production as a significant factor in determining their class. The rationale? The working class cannot be defined as those who sell their 'labour' because this "flies in the face of the tangible 'con-

sciousness' of the vast majority of people". 'Consciousness' has become the prime criterion for class membership. But only for the middle class, because McGregor only makes this populist appeal to the validity of *middle-class* self-perceptions. Where the concept of 'false consciousness' is rejected, as far as the middle class is concerned, workers can be mistaken about the class they belong to.

When it comes to the nature of Australian society as a whole, moreover, McGregor explains "heavy resistance to talking and writing about Australia in class terms" as a consequence of "hegemonic consciousness". So a widespread view about Australian society can be mistaken (wrong, 'false'). But McGregor won't accept that this hegemony can distort people's views about their own class location.

In *Class in Australia*, he defines the working class as manual workers, apart from "affluent tradespeople", irrespective of their consciousness. The middle class is people in white-collar jobs because of their self-identification, irrespective of the nature of their 'relationship to the means of production'. The upper class is owners, employing groups. Sometimes some self-employed, senior managers and professionals are members of the upper class, sometimes of the middle class. In discussing where such people belong McGregor undertakes no serious discussion of their 'relationship to the means of production'. So unserious is he about his own definitions that, at one point he allocates "proprietors of medium sized businesses and landholdings" to the middle class.

It is no wonder that McGregor discovers fractions inside this hypertrophic middle class. On the one hand we have proprietors of medium sized businesses and senior managers (even top corporate executives, so long, presumably, as they own no shares), on the other hand bank tellers and shop assistants. Yet if we look at their relationship to the means of production, the *class* differences are obvious. Senior managers exercise as much, or even more, control over corporate means of production and the lives of workers as big 'owners', entrepreneurs or landholders.

McGregor seems to generalize mistakenly from his own white-collar experience, as a journalist, to lower level white-collar work in general. The degree of supervision, level of control over the labour process and autonomy experienced by many white-collar workers in the financial, retailing, hospitality industries as well as the public service does not differ from that in manufacturing or construction. And the incomes, wealth and lifestyles of such white-collar workers are as diverse as those of blue-collar workers. Looked at this way a large majority of Australians are working class.[4]

What is more, white-collar *workers* have increasingly become involved in the kinds of organizations about which McGregor makes a series of insightful observations and which he identifies with the working class: trade unions. He just doesn't notice the phenomenon of white-collar unionism, let alone white-collar union militancy, amongst bank tellers, public servants and shop assistants.

This is not to deny that a middle class exists. Its existence can be demonstrated in terms precisely of its distinctive relationships to the means of production or, better, its position in the relations of production. Small businesspeople (including professionals), who own means of production (or have possession of them by virtue of bank loans) but rely primarily on their own labour and that of their families, fall into this category. So do those who are the local representatives of capital in the workplace: supervisors and lower level managers. And other professionals, employed in public and private sector bureaucracies, who exercise considerable autonomy in their work and are subject to limited supervision are part of this still heterogenous, but much smaller middle class.[5]

McGregor pays a great deal of attention to the issue of class identity. And this is entirely warranted, especially if you are concerned not only with how class works but also with mobilizing people to overcome it. But the influence of education, culture, lifestyle and conservative hegemony/false consciousness on individual and collective class identities is clearest when they are understood in the context of positions in the relations of production, the substrate of class.

McGREGOR'S ANALYSIS is populist in a second sense. He indicates that action is necessary to change the social structure and identifying a huge middle class which makes up a majority of society establishes a framework for a rudimentary populist politics. Conventional forms of class struggle are therefore marginalized. Trade unions are important, but primarily to the small, declining working class. McGregor subjects the Accord to an insightful critique, indicating how it undermined militancy, but there is

no suggestion of a possible alternative working-class politics.

The strategy for change indicated by hints in *Class in Australia* is old fashioned social democracy in the leftish mode that acknowledges some role for extraparliamentary campaigns. So McGregor looks to the potential of government as "the prime countervailing force to private exploitation", while noting that "burgeoning subcultures" together with institutions like "Workers Education Associations and Friendly Societies . . . the trade unions, trades and labour councils, and the Labor Party itself" embody "a cooperative ethic". This ethic is exemplified by the final cameo of Marg Barry, a dedicated community activist, militant and Labor Party member.

The Labor Party, argues McGregor, is shortsighted in assuming that "Australia is innately conservative". Here he is correct; the ALP does pander to the effects of conservative hegemony. McGregor goes on to maintain that "class is probably inevitable" and the mass of Australians "are clearly not prepared to support revolution", but that we can look to "reducing the effects of class". We can subject this latter view to the same critique McGregor applies to the Labor Party – here he is himself pandering to middle-class prejudice. If "counter-hegemonic movements" can challenge "the idea that *the way it is* is *the way it should be*" and open the way to social reform, why can't such movements, and particularly a more militant labour movement, *also* fight for the revolutionary elimination of classes? Such a perspective is at least as realistic as his goal of eliminating "the destructive effects generated by class" within a society where classes still exist.

McGregor imagines a world in which bosses will exist but power will be redistributed "from corporate heads to the people". He thinks this can be achieved through education and the transfer of wealth and income. But the logic of capital accumulation (whose relationship with class is entirely absent from the book) and the power it gives the 'upper class' (which McGregor outlines) stood in the way of this strategy even when it was the formal goal of social democratic parties. Today there is an additional obstacle: the absence of a party with such goals.

Under these circumstances it is no more implausible to advocate revolutionary change alongside the struggle for reforms. Social and community struggles can catalyze both reforms and a desire for more radical change. There is, however, a far more potent factor which McGregor's analysis can't encompass. He acknowledges the existence of "the day-to-day reality of union rank and file activity, the shop floor agitation". But, focusing on a shrinking blue-collar working class, he cannot appreciate the potential power of working-class self-organization amongst white-collar workers together with manual workers. In the public service and at the Australian National University, in a union of academic and general staff, I have experienced the solidarity, organization and dedication characteristic of many blue-collar unions. They have been accompanied by the prospects for similar victories and defeats. The struggles they have made possible contain the same seeds (however small) of a class consciousness, of awareness of common interests and a common goal in a classless society. The emotional impact of books like *Class in Australia* can help those seeds germinate, but their growth also requires much clearer analyses of class structure, power and struggle in Australia.

ENDNOTES

1. Jack Barbalet, 'A macro sociology of emotion: class resentment', *Sociological Theory,* Fall 1992.
2. Rick Kuhn, 'Class analysis and the left in Australian history' in Rick Kuhn and Tom O'Lincoln (eds), *Class and class conflict in Australia,* Longman, 1996.
3. For a discussion of this approach as used by Marx in *Capital* see Henryk Grossmann, *The law of accumulation and breakdown of the capitalist system: being also a theory of crises,* Pluto Press, 1992; 'Die Änderung des ursprunglichen Aufbauplans des Marxschen "Kapital" und ihre Ursachen (The Change to the Original Plan of Marx's *Capital* and its Causes), in (Grünbergs) *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* 14, 1929.
4. Diane Fieldes, 'The working class' in Kuhn and O'Lincoln *Class and class conflict in Australia,* op. cit.
5. See Rick Kuhn and Tom O'Lincoln 'Introduction', ibid.

Morag Fraser

SEPTEMBER 1997 was a month to concentrate your mind on class. But not just because the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) effectively said 'go hang' to the Coalition Government when it used its international muscle to secure an industry victory, forcing the aptly named and US-owned International Purveyors into a backdown over use of non-union stevedoring labour on the wharves in Cairns.

The threatened strike flew all the flags of an old-fashioned class warfare. There was the supply

vessel, the *Java Sea*, bound for the Freeport mine in Irian Jaya. An anxious global company having kittens about the financial costs of delay. An ambitious Federal Minister flexing his new industrial legislation and vowing he would not 'resile'. The International Transport Workers Federation got in on the act and the US Longshoremen's Union loomed. Money spoke, International Purveyors caved in and the MUA declared victory.

But this was just a first shot across the bows. The real fight between powerful Australian unions with international connections and a government committed to radical industrial restructuring is yet to come, and only a mug punter would pick a winner at this stage. The rest of Australia is not even sure who it thinks is favourite. Or why.

What is clear is that the battle will be fought without the assurance about tribal, social-class or political allegiances that once would have bolstered both sides. Would a cutter in a Surry Hills clothing factory in 1997 support a wharfie who earns three times her wage? Which way would One Nation supporters lean in a variety of industrial disputes? In a much more fragmented Australia, self-interest has often supplanted class allegiance, and union membership – the MUA is the exception not the rule – has eroded to such an extent that 'Solidarity Forever' sounds about as funky as 'Two Little Girls in Blue'.

We can list the causes of change: globalization; technology, the mass entry of women into the workforce et cetera, but most people don't get much further than the list. Analysis turns prematurely into blame: things are different, some are broken and we don't know how to fix them, so it must be somebody's fault. The mobility of international capital and the elasticity and interpretation of social grouping in Australia has generated a socio-economic class pattern so riddling that many citizens, even commentators and analysts, give up on class debate entirely. Or simplify it out of usefulness.

But the root questions are there to be asked still and anyone interested in what remains of a class debate in Australia, what remains of a debate about equality, about egalitarianism, has an obligation to go on asking them. In Cairns, who was firing the shots, and on whose behalf? What structures underpin both sides? What strategies work? What is happening in a society like ours where the gap between rich and poor is increasing, where the phrase 'social justice' induces snorts of derision from columnists in the financial press, where the phrase 'information poor' has a basis in reality?

In some Australian schools the library has a few computer terminals with Internet access if you are lucky. In others – not many – every child has a laptop, all the classrooms are online and there are teachers available who are equipped to encourage not just computer literacy but the critical/analytical skills that might make Australia a nation of program generators, critics and creators, not just electronic consumers. That is if there were enough skilled teachers to go around. Or if equality was a serious consideration.

Equality is a very serious consideration for Craig McGregor, and hence his recent analysis of the structures that promote and inhibit it in *Class in Australia*. I have had my arguments with the consistency of McGregor's analysis elsewhere, but I am in no doubt about the value of his unabashed insistence that class in Australia still matters, still determines people's lives and futures. Little wonder he quotes and endorses Raymond Williams' insistence on the continued analytical usefulness of the notion of 'economic class':

> In its social sense, most people only talk about class when they are anxious, and often want to get rid of the feeling that there are these kinds of distinction between people. I think this desire should be respected, for it is an exceptionally valuable piece of social growth and maturity. But the point has been reached where the growing feeling that class is out of date and doesn't matter is being used to ratify a social system which . . . is still essentially based on economic classes.

Closer to home, Judith Brett, in a fine broad-ranging essay, 'The Politics of Grievance', in *The Australian Review of Books* (May 1997) echoes Williams' conviction that class analysis remains relevant and pertinent at this juncture in Australian politics:

> . . . in providing a program of political action, class-based politics opens up the space for hope. This is a very important space in keeping democratic politics from degenerating into populist whingeing and worse. By contrast, the remedies offered by the lower middle-class ideology, which finds its grievance in the moral shortcomings of others, is the punishment of the imagined offenders and denial of their imagined, ill-gotten benefits. It is one saving grace of Australian political culture that this punishment is not generally taken in hand by the populace itself, but is rather

seen, along with the basic provision of services, as the government's job.

But how long that 'space for hope' will remain open and negotiable in a period of what can only be called a retreat from the high ideal of civic government and government provision is a vital, and open question.

Craig McGregor responds:

At last, some serious reviews of *Class in Australia*! It's a relief. Actually some of the newspaper reviews were serious, but quite a few seemed to deliberately misunderstand the project. Like Lynette Finch (in this symposium), who seems to think a serious discussion of class in the nineties is 'dated'. I don't think an analysis of class and its destructive effects is ever dated, and certainly not because it was argued about in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* back in the seventies. For the record, I don't anywhere in the book say that "everyone thinks Australia is a classless society"; and I *do* canvas several definitions and approaches to class, as well as writing a chapter on the determinants of class. As for failing to offer any definition of 'society' – well, I've written several books on Australian society. Maybe Lynette Finch hasn't read them. Pity.

I enjoyed Morag Fraser's essay, and she is right to identify the book's focus on inequality. I also agree with virtually everything Frank Stilwell writes, except I would disagree with his assertion that the book lacks a systematic analysis of class power. There is an entire section on *Power* as one of the key determinants of class (chapter 2), and the entire chapter on 'Class and Culture' is keyed to a Gramscian analysis of ruling class (power bloc) hegemony and modes of resistance. The chapter on 'Upper Class' defines the class as basically "a class of owners . . . who dominate Australian society through the concentration of economic power which is typical of any capitalist society and through the exercise of hegemonic cultural/social power" and most of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of how that power is exercised. It concludes: "at the core of the upper class, therefore, is power". The portraits of people like Kerr, Barwick, Fraser, Leonie Kramer and John Howard reinforce this theme. So, in a reverse way, do the profiles of Jimmy Barnes, Marg Barry, Bobbi Sykes and others. I can understand that Frank Stilwell may have liked a more academic analysis of power, based perhaps on the insights of political economy, but I was more concerned to demonstrate how class power shapes, controls and sometimes destroys people's lives.

Rick Kuhn's review is so carefully and generously argued my instinct is to give assent to most of it. But I should make it clear that I didn't set out to offer a political strategy; that's up to the Labor Party and others: I thought it was enough to write a one-hundred-thousand-word analysis of class. I don't agree that the analysis is inconsistent or that there is anything wrong with it being populist. The question of who, precisely, belongs to the middle class is a vexed and complex one; there is argument even among Marxists about this; I have tended to accept a broad vernacular description, partly because it corresponds to what people think (and how they identify themselves) in everyday life. I'm well aware of the increasing militancy of white-collar unions, but that doesn't necessarily change the class positioning or self-identification of those on either side of what Professor John Western calls "the blue-collar/white-collar divide". D. Lockwood, in his classic study of this concludes: "The completeness of the separation of these two groups [office worker/manual worker] is perhaps the most outstanding feature of industrial organization." I have stressed 'relationship to the means of production' as the primary determinant of class, as Rick Kuhn recognizes, but I personally think other factors (e.g. family background, wealth) can be involved.

As for the potential power of working-class self-organization – I don't wish to underestimate that, though the times do not generate optimism. As I argue in the book itself, what we have to do about class is "first, recognize that class exists and that Australia is a class society. Second, recognize the damage done by class to the lives of virtually all people. Third, work to lessen and change its impact." Writing a book like *Class in Australia* is my contribution to that process. As Frank Stilwell says, "class analysis has never been more necessary". Dead right.

- ***Frank Stilwell** is an associate professor in Economics at the University of Sydney.*
- ***Lynette Finch** is an historian and Senior Lecturer in Australian Studies at Sunshine Coast University College.*
- ***Rick Kuhn** is a political activist from Canberra.*
- ***Morag Fraser** is editor of* Eureka Street.
- ***Craig McGregor** is a writer, journalist and associate professor of visual communication at UTS.*

Paddy Garrity

Dockyard Daze

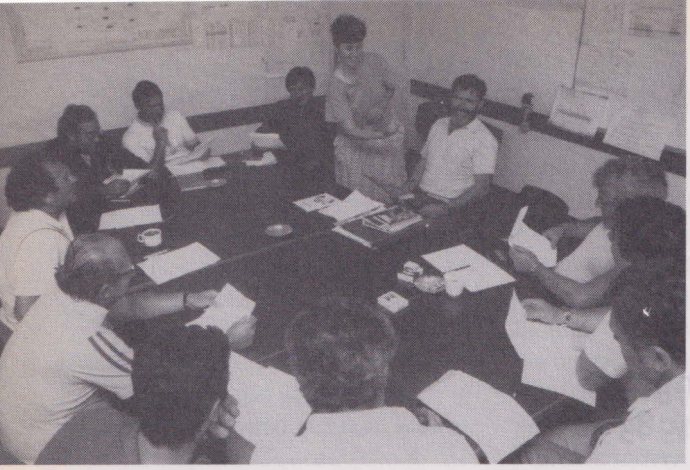
An Experiment With Art In Working Life in Williamstown Naval Dockyard 1983–85

What was the Williamstown Dockyard like? It was first described to me as the classic recipe for disaster. A government-owned shipyard building and refitting warships. Senior managers were right-wing, conservative, incompetent civilians, who couldn't tell the front end from the blunt end of a boat and sharing power with them were even more right-wing, conservative, incompetent naval officers, who couldn't tell a reef knot from a granny knot. To make sure everything really fouled up, every department in the dockyard was incompetent at all levels of management. Now add six hundred white-collar workers, whose priority appeared to be making sure there was an oversupply of supersoft, pink toilet paper for senior management, while at the same time, skilfully managing to organize a shortage of steel for ship production. Mix in 125 foremen, who with an odd exception were not very bright and whose main priority was being anti-union. Include thirty-six Naval Military Police, who were there to add a bit of Navy spit and polish and act as security. The next ingredients are fourteen hundred blue-collar workers from over twenty unions, represented by a shop committee that had been caught in an industrial relations time warp in 1905. Don't forget to add a large dash of trade elitism by the skilled tradesmen and mix in a few demarcation fights between unions over which workers should do which jobs. Now pour into all sections of the yard a fair amount of sexism and racism and a large amount of alcohol. Simmer for a while until the hate ferments between management, foremen and white- and blue-collar workers. Stir a bit to make sure with each refit or shipbuilding project there are massive time delays and cost overruns. Stir again to make sure the organization loses millions of dollars each year. Pour in some more alcohol and bring to the boil. Then watch everybody blame everybody else. And *voila,* you have Williamstown Naval Dockyard in 1981.

It was into this environment that friends (?) organized me a job as a ships rigger while I was waiting for a ship to go back to sea (I had just spent four years ashore working with an Unemployed Workers Union.) To be fair to my friends, they did warn me not to get involved in this workplace. However, because of my past active role in trade unions, I attended the shop committee meetings as an observer and finished up a shop steward for the Ships Painters and Dockers Union.

How did a Dockyard Art and Working Life Project get started in such a disaster area? One factor was a new personnel manager called John Smith, brought in from the private sector of industry to try and straighten out the many industrial relations problems of this public sector organization. Another factor was the election of a Labor Government and the appointment of Brian Howe as the Minister for Defence. (More about this later.) The third factor I suppose was myself. I'd been strongly influenced in the early seventies by two communist union officials, Max Ogden from the Metalworkers, and George Seelaf, from the Meatworkers. These two comrades had convinced me that unions had to play a greater role than just fighting for wages and conditions. Unions, they argued, should be involved in the quality of life for workers and their families in the fields of art, education and culture. Because of these philosophies, over the years I became involved in a wide variety of union and community arts activities.

Shortly after he came to the Dockyard, John Smith and I attended the same arts exhibition opening in the city. We nodded to each other but did not speak at the exhibition. A few days later we held a casual conversation that started with art but soon turned to



Migrant English Classes, Williamstown Dockyard 1985

dockyard problems. I pointed out in the thirty acres of concrete, steel and buildings that made up the dockyard, there was only one ten-square-metre area of grass. (You could not sit in this area as it was fenced off.) The only recreation facility for the two thousand workers was one dartboard in a lunchroom. We talked about some recent experiments on the different behavioural patterns of rats packed in cages and those who had decent food and space to live in. Both of us agreed that alcohol was a major problem in all sections of the yard. Up to six hundred workers went to the pubs outside the dockyard gates at lunchtime. White-collar workers drank in the saloon bars and blue-collar workers in the public bars. While workers faced the sack if they brought grog into the yard, senior management drank at a Naval Officers Club inside the dockyard.

John Smith and I also recognized the dockyard was losing millions of dollars every year and time was rapidly running out. Dockyard management promised the government to introduce reforms that would turn around this deficit, but each year the situation got worse. No government, Labor or Liberal, was going to allow this to continue. The only way to stop the dockyard being shut, or privatized, was for workers and management to work together to save it. And that was the problem.

Originally I thought John Smith was the typical right-wing, reactionary, senior dockyard manager and was quite surprised when he agreed that if management honestly wanted to improve industrial relations in the dockyard, it first had to gain trust by improving human relations and communications between all sections of the workforce. John was a quiet, subtle man, but very effective. At the time I thought I was teaching this new manager how to suck eggs. Later I found out why John Smith always smiled when I was espousing my radical ideas.

A few days after our original conversation (in May 1983), John Smith chaired a combined union/management meeting on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). OHS was a serious issue in the dockyard, but this committee never agreed on any issue. Management did not want anything that would cost money or could be seen as a union victory. Union delegates (at this stage) were unskilled in the complexities of OHS. Some shop stewards actually saw OHS as something that could be used as a bargaining tool in the industrial arena! Others had a policy of no compromise with the bosses, and winner takes all. (There might have been some sense in this union position had they ever won, but up to this time they never did!) John convinced this committee about the need for an education program about OHS in the dockyard and then got them to agree to the painting of a mural on the issue. I don't think anyone on this committee understood that art could be used as a propaganda or publicity weapon, or the possible flow-on effects.

After the OHS meeting John Smith asked me if I would take charge of the project because of my interest and contacts in the art world. I asked the Shop Committee if this was OK and they agreed.

Nothing like this had happened in the dockyard before and while ordinary white- and blue-collar workers thought the mural would be good for the yard and supported the proposal, senior management disapproved but did nothing. Middle management and foremen both thought they should have been in charge and said it was a mistake to allow me to run the project as I was one of 'them'. (A blue-collar worker and worse, a 'Painter and Docker'.)

I started by contacting Ric McCracken, Director of the Footscray Community Art Centre. Ric was as excited as myself at the long-term possibilities of this project.

Through Ric some money was quickly raised from the Australia Council and we employed muralists, Ann Morris and Toni Chaffey, to work with both blue- and white-collar dockyard workers on the research, design and creation of a 40 x 20 foot mural in the Nelson Pier Lunch Room.

We called a meeting in the yard for anybody interested in being involved in the mural and over thirty people from blue- and white-collar areas turned up. There were no foremen or management representatives (except John Smith). Everyone was enthusiastic, with people promising in-kind support from their

work areas such as the use of drafting tables to design the concept, equipment to screen the design on the wall, scaffolding, paint, brushes, etc.

The first mural meeting decided that the theme should be on OHS issues relevant to all sections of the dockyard. They agreed the background design should be of a seagull's view of the dockyard and the issues raised in each of the twenty-seven different workplaces could be framed with something symbolic from that workplace, for instance joined paper clips were used to frame problems in an office area, a rope surrounded the rigging lofts, or a wooden frame around the carpenters' shop.

It was not only the completed mural that publicized OHS issues. The process involved workers from all sections of the yard with assistance from the artists, researching the OHS issues in their own areas, coming up with a design, then painting the mural. Many workers came to me during this first mural and on later projects to say they had been working for years in their areas and never been aware that work practices or chemicals they used daily were dangerous.

One of the worst OHS issues in the dockyard was ignorance about asbestos which was widely used in the navy ships. After the Art in Working Life was used to promote OHS issues, negotiations took place early in 1984 with management on an asbestos-handling code for the dockyard. Shortly after an agreement was reached on this issue a document fell off the back of a truck. This document, signed in 1979 by the then dockyard General Manager, was an agreement between the Australian Federal Government and the Williamstown Dockyard to implement the British Navy code for handling asbestos. The British Navy Code was superior to the code just negotiated in 1984. No-one on the shop committee had ever heard of, or seen this document before.

During the design stage a handful of workers, and the artists, became the mural steering committee. When painting began some workers were given a couple of hours off from their normal duties to paint. Most painted at smokos or lunchtime and a few stayed back after work.

An after-work mural launch was held once it was completed, for workers and their families. Over four hundred people turned up including quite a few senior and middle-level managers and foremen.

Photographs of this mural appeared in twenty-seven publications over the next six months. A great

Painting OHS mural in boilermaker shop canteen, 1983

deal of good publicity was also generated about the dockyard on this issue. In the past the yard had only had bad press about strikes, time delays and massive cost overruns.

As the mural was progressing, interest grew in the concept of using other art forms in the workplace to publicize the issues of health and safety. The joint Health and Safety Committee actually suggested a training video, a dockyard publication, posters and more murals.

With the obvious interest from the workers and the suggestions from the joint OHS committee in mind a meeting was arranged with Management, Ric McCracken, the ACTU Arts Officer, union officials and shop stewards from blue- and white-collar sections of the yard on the possibilities for a future arts program. This meeting drew up a proposal to go to the newly elected Minister for Defence, Brian Howe, the Australia Council, unions, dockyard management and the shop committee for further discussion.

At this point I might digress slightly and point out that just prior to the Federal Election in 1983, management invited all dockyard workers to hear the then Liberal Minister for Defence unveil a plaque and declare open a new building. This politician declared the building open and then made a blatant election speech.

We asked for an opportunity to have a federal ALP member speak in reply inside the yard. The Dockyard General Manager refused. So one lunchtime in the week before the election, we organized a truck outside the gate as a platform and invited Ralph Willis to address the workers. Ralph turned up with Brian Howe and they spoke to over five hundred workers.

Three days after the unexpected 1983 ALP election victory, I arranged for Brian Howe, the new Minister for Defence, to come in and talk to the shop committee. It was a delight to see the faces on the Naval Police as they jumped to attention and saluted the car

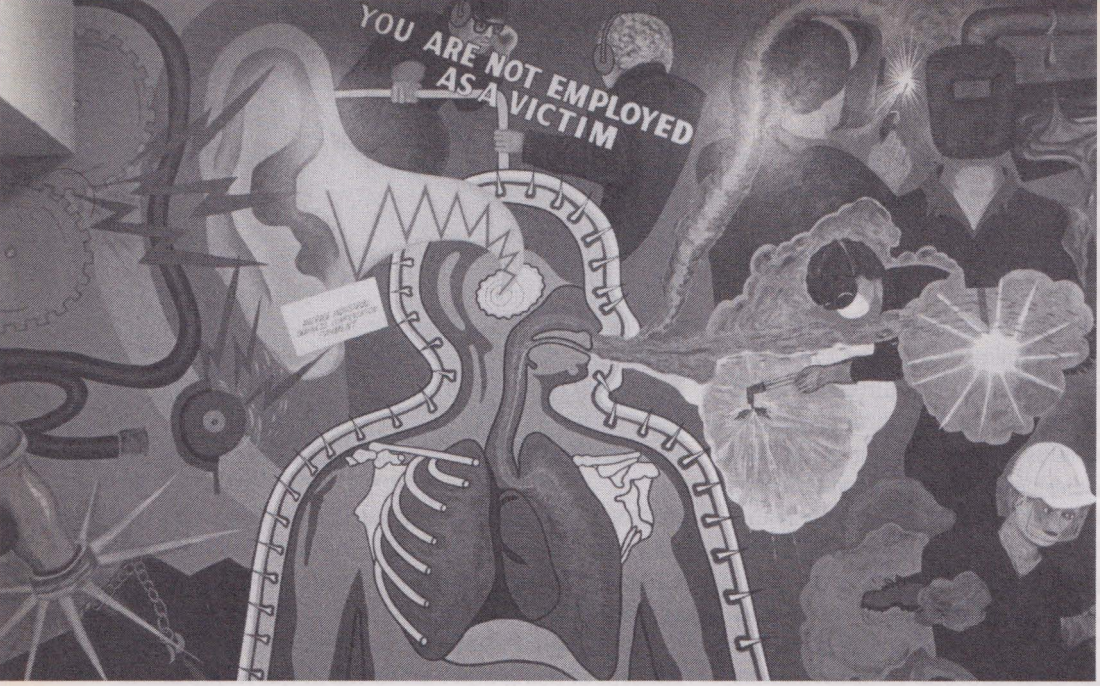


Photo: Toni Chaffey
Boilermaker Shop
Canteen Mural, 1983

carrying the new Minister for Defence on this unexpected visit. Then a Painter and Docker in dirty overalls (who had been waiting by the gate) came up, ignored them and got into the back seat of the Minster's car saying "Good day Comrade" loud enough for the Naval Police to hear and then give the driver directions to the shop committee rooms!

After a two-hour meeting with the shop committee, I went back to the gate in Brian Howe's car and smiled at the Naval Police as I got out of the car and said goodbye to their 'Comrade' Minister.

As the Minister's car drove out the gate a very flustered looking General Manager ran up and asked me if it was true that the Minister for Defence was in the yard. When I informed him that he had just left, the GM asked did I not think it would have been courteous for the Minister to have called on him. I reminded the GM it was only a week ago that he personally had rejected a bid to have Brian Howe and Ralph Willis in the yard. Then I told him: "Things are going to change around here Comrade." And so they did.

Back to the main story: The proposal for an Arts, Educational and Recreation program that was sent to the new Minister for Defence, the Australia Council, unions, dockyard management and the shop committee was approved. The project soon required more workers and first Tony Hicks and then Paul Blanchard came to work part time then full time with me. An Arts Committee was granted an hour a month in work time to hold meetings. Ric McCracken continued as a valuable adviser and resource.

WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

Occupational health and safety became a real issue in the dockyard.

We produced seventeen copies of *The Dockyard Worker* – a forty-page A4 publication which had a big spread on OHS and a Management Page and Shop Committee Page. There was a Trading Post and many articles written by blue- and white-collar workers. There were a couple of very fine cartoonists in the dockyard who contributed several pieces of work to every issue.

We produced another three murals researched, designed and painted by yard workers with the aid of artists like Megan Evans.

We produced three posters on dockyard OHS and then set up a poster production service for management, shop committee, etc. (Which produced over sixty internal dockyard posters).

We organized Liz Sadler to direct a play about OHS involving blue- and white-collar workers.

With help from Gillian Harrison, Music Officer from the Footscray Art Centre, we held seventeen lunchtime concerts with outside bands or performers.

Gillian also helped organize the Williamstown Dockyard Band, which was given a space to practice and $15,000 for instruments by the Department of Defence. Over twenty workers practiced music every lunchtime. This band later gave concerts in the dockyard and at other government establishments.

We organized leadlight classes after work, took groups of workers to shows and arts exhibitions, had

an Arts Committee dinner dance, organized dockyard involvement in Williamstown Summer Festival.

We organized two art exhibitions with twenty blue- and white-collar workers submitting works.

We organized recreation and fitness assessments. For volley ball we painted six courts, and organized clinics and competitions. Table tennis tables were supplied in lunchrooms, clinics and competitions were organized. We supplied dartboards in all lunchrooms and organized inter-department competitions.

Aerobics classes were held at lunchtime twice a week. Lunchtime runs were organized for joggers. We started an early morning swimming club at the Altona pool (including classes for beginners). On rostered days off there were golf competitions.

We held a series of meetings with the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Foundation about setting up a system in the dockyard for people with problems. Nothing official came of this but an informal service assisted at least six workers with problems.

Through the Workplace Basic Literacy Program (we were involved as a pilot project when they first started) we ran basic and advanced Migrant English classes plus literacy and numeracy courses for people with needs, writing courses for the specific needs of the dockyard and comprehensive reading courses. We organized beginners' courses for computers and we had an after-hours creative writing course run by Alan Wearne.

On a sad note, after only six months in the dockyard John Smith was diagnosed with cancer and given two months to live. I went to his funeral and during the oration found out for the first time (as he always dodged the issue of his personal politics) that even though he was at the top level in employer industrial relations, he was a lifelong supporter of the ALP and came from a left-wing background. I then understood the knowing smiles he gave me when I was trying to disguise my radical proposals.

How did I know that Art in Working Life worked in Williamstown Dockyard? Over the two years I was involved in the project there were constant comments from all sorts of workers about the dockyard being a better place to work. Many workers said they now actually liked coming to work in the dockyard. I would see blue- and white-collar workers talk and joke with each other in the workplace. At one of the workers' art exhibitions, held in the dockyard, two white-collar workers said they did not think blue-collar workers, "could paint so good". Two band members came and thanked me on behalf of their wives, because they now practiced music instead of going to the pub every lunchtime and had stopped drinking altogether. In the early days the foremen ordered one foreman not to join the band. After eighteen months of the arts project foremen became more friendly to me. One day I was stopped by two foremen who told me they liked what I was doing because the workers did not hate them as much as they used to.

In 1985 over 750 out of the two thousand workers were involved in some form of dockyard arts, education or recreation programs.

There were still a few senior and middle managers whose noses were out of joint because the workers and not themselves had control over these projects. On the other side of the fence, some shop stewards criticized the arts projects saying this was not what unions were about. They said they wanted to go back to the good old days when they had stand-up, slug-out fights with management and if the dockyard lost millions of dollars each year, it was not their problem. These shop stewards would not, or could not, recognize that time was rapidly running out and the dockyard was either going to shut down or be privatized. Unfortunately, change is a long slow process and despite the many good results gained by using art to change a culture, it was too late; time did run out.

In 1985 the yard had a financial loss of $29 million and the Labor Government, facing the usual budget deficit, decided to cut its losses by first retrenching a large percentage of the workforce and secondly calling for tenders to buy the dockyard. I had only intended to stay in the Williamstown Dockyard for a couple of months until I could get back to sea, but despite being warned, had become involved and stayed four years. Before the retrenchments started I decided it was time for me to go and find other windmills to tilt at.

A firm called Transfield bought the dockyard. One of the first things they did was to paint out the murals.

Paddy Garrity has just been awarded the ALP's 40-year medal, but received far more kudos and praise for being a number on the secret police files.

fiction

Tawny Moon

Judy Crozier

LAURA HAS HAIR LIKE white fairy-floss, bones like a bird's, talks to strangers with her head on one side and her feet just a little pigeon-toed. She grasps my skirt in a crowd. The hand that I hold along footpaths is impossibly delicate, astonishingly competent. Ruthlessly small. She looks at me with dark eyes and her chin raised.

I am still surprised at her difference to me. I can remember a feeling of mild disconnection when she was born: utterly white, tiny tufts of silver on her head, the focus of her eyes strengthening day by day.

I sent photographs to my mother; pictures of another child born in a strange outpost of the world. At that time, it was the hills of Malaya, where we travelled in armoured cars and wore pistols on our hips.

MOTHER IS WHITE-HEADED herself now. Somewhere in the recesses of her louring Victorian sideboard is a long, dark plait of hair from her youth. She never fails to write *wishing you all the best in your new sphere* for every fresh appointment in every surprising part of the world. She has never much commented on the rugged terrains, the tribal and political rivalries, sporadic banditry, heat and rains that have made up much of our life. It is all folded away, I suppose, with the doilies and the lace-edged hankies in a drawer smelling of naphthalene.

My father, the delicate vicar whose pointed humility masked a simple obstinacy, was appalled and very nearly outspoken when his youngest daughter sailed away. Lured into a war-torn Asia by the long-boned arrogance of a godless adventurer. He died long ago, never entirely reconciled. Robert has forgiven neither his opposition nor his opinion.

Mother fetches the bottle left by the milkman on the front step, shaking the yellow cream back into the milk. She lights a flame under the kettle and steps slowly up the concrete path, past the suburban neatness of lawn and shrub, to fetch the mail from one of the little boxes set in the low brick wall. Back to click her tongue at the budgie, and to reply to us in a sloping hand with the faintest of old-lady tremors. Her face is pleated around a slight half-smile. A wisp of hair floats away from the bun at the nape of her neck.

LAURA PLAYS ALONE in her room, soundless in the hum of the airconditioner as we snooze over our books and tea in the after-lunch siesta. She reads. The pages turn, marking a steady journey through shelf after shelf of the English language library. Volumes now dispensed with are stacked untidily on her bedside table, occasionally toppled to the floor. And she spends hours stretched on the cool tiles, surrounded by paper, drawing princesses with very long hair, and women with the graciousness of princesses. Occasionally she draws a male, the prince I suppose, who looks androgynous and unhappily awkward in armour.

She might do this while I sit, also with paper and pencil, bolstered by the pillows of my bed and pondering meals to be discussed with the cook, or an invitation list for some socially obligatory dinner party. I might be writing a letter to my mother, my sons, a friend, which I do because one remains connected, and because the events, sometimes, need to be chronicled.

I wrote short stories, years ago.

In the neighbouring bed, there is a faint scrape as a page is turned. Robert reads science fiction, or a detective novel, whose language is taciturn and manly

and whose heroes invariably go it alone. He stirs his tea; the spoon tinkles against the glass.

Laura may be making constructions of her furniture and her bedclothes. For this, she borrows straw from the garage and sits happily all the hushed siesta, a prisoner on bread and water in her cell of knotted sheets and chair-backs.

The embassy car arrives; Robert returns to work.

MANY TIMES, THE HOUSE is empty of the child while she visits the servants. If I stand on the front porch I can hear her voice, high-pitched and endlessly questioning. The answers are comfortable; there is the sound of a saucepan being scraped. Laura often begs, she tells me, for the burnt edges of rice which would otherwise be soaked and scattered for birds. Someone might sing something intricately Asian. She has occasionally brought back stories from the spreading network of which our servants are a part, snippets overheard about her father, his work, opinions of his opinions. What the ambassador said to the second secretary over consomme, perhaps. I have passed these on to Robert; he has found them useful. He has no forgiveness for fools and he has no tact. There are always fools and consequently there are always poisonous whisperings. From the edges of the labyrinth, Laura brings back fragments of praise instead.

Sometimes I see her through the window, pottering in the garden, dropping stones into the well, calling into it to catch an echo. She chatters to that gormless dog the gardener brought us. To guard the house, we were told, though we had our doubts about the rotund puppy periodically knocked off his feet by his own enthusiasm. Once, not so long after that, he found the front gate ajar and adventured, briefly, in the traffic. Struck painfully across the haunches, he has had no more foreign adventures. He is faithful to the point of neuroticism. There is a scar across his rump and his tail whisks hysterically.

She wanders off to explore and the dog patters after her. The garden is rich and heavy as a layered cake, harbouring life in little scamperings behind the huge, enclosing hedge. The cat blinks narrow-eyed, neat on a patch of path as girl and dog poke into green darknesses, their backs to the beating sun. Laura wears nothing beyond baggy cotton underpants and a pair of thongs.

Once, she brought me a lizard's tail. I explained it would have been dropped to escape attack, and told her to wash her hands.

Other times, she sits on the edge of my bed in her pyjamas, smelling of soap, with her hair drying slowly into a cloud. She watches me at my dressing table. The shutters are closed; the airconditioning creates a slight chill. The twin beds are crisp, neatly turned down for the night. She is intent as I dab scent, silk rustling. She rattles on about her day and her questions. I answer carefully, steadily drawing in an eyebrow. I stab at my earlobe with the stalk of an earring, to find the hole. She is absolutely certain of my knowledge. There is a short pause as I stretch my mouth for the lipstick. The talk is about everything a child can think of or an adult might want to teach: current events; people liked and disliked; favourite tales about my father; the rights of women.

Alone in my room sometimes, she might borrow my shoes and giggle as she teeters. I might find her with a scarf around her head because she yearns for that heavy fall of hair that Asian women have, the hair that all her princesses have.

MY SONS WERE HERE for some weeks on their Christmas break from boarding school. A school of old brick and ivy, paving stones and well-mown expanses. Possibly too High-Church to have pleased my father in his austerity, but of some satisfaction to Robert. The school was recommended to us when we lived on remote hillsides without schools. The younger pleaded and railed with a tearful passion in his first year. Serious boys, they now write regular and rather formal letters, uncomplaining and responsible. Very neatly, they hope that the weather is fine and the enemy has been routed. I reply as regularly. That is important.

I confess there was a time when I was wretched: young and anxious, miserably pregnant in an Indian desert. Children were so much at odds with Robert's career. Then the baby wouldn't eat, as if he knew. Tiny and mewling, with his father away all the sweating day. That was the eldest.

My mother takes the boys for most of their holidays to her small, quiet flat with the lavender tucked into the corners of overstuffed armchairs.

For their sister the boys glow fantastically, like distant knights.

Annually, they fly to us: inches taller, side by side, subtle alterations to the set of their faces, naked around the edges of their freshly cropped hair. Their ears are pink. The elder works hard and wins prizes. The younger declares his excitement more. His stammer is fading.

There are several years between each of my children. At first, my eldest made the trip by himself. A grave little fellow in grey flannel shorts and blazer, sitting by himself for the days of the journey, watching the blur of propellers over a backdrop of endless ocean, his hand held from terminal to terminal by various air hostesses. Once he arrived ahead of time and made the enlightened guess that he would find his father in the bar of the largest hotel, whisky at hand, expounding and joking to the bartender, to women with long necks and emphatic cleavages, and to other assembled expatriates. A boy with a large decision. In the background the echoing of loudspeakers announcing departures and arrivals, and in the foreground the bustle and din of the alien city. He hailed a taxi and told the driver where he thought he wanted to go. Very solemnly, he tugged at his father's sleeve. *Hello, old chap*, Robert said. This was years ago, in Rangoon, before the dusty, winding hours of the trip with his father to the hills where we lived and worked. To stay for the few weeks with the family, before the trip back to Rangoon, the air-hostesses and the endless racketing hours in the air. Back to the pock of cricket and the clacking applause of young chaps in white, to the solemnity of quires, quadrangles and chapel. To the rows of little boys writing letters in the evenings.

My boys fill the spaces of this house. My younger son lectures his little sister on various subjects and she listens devoutly. He eats enormously. She advises him to wear shoes outside, as he may pick up worms. She holds his hand. He made a picture frame for one of her princesses. She cooked biscuits, inedible because she mistook the salt for sugar. She saw through her brother's discretion and was desolate. He made her an entire deck of tiny playing cards. We all go to the *Cercle Sportif* to swim in the pool overhung with great, cicada-loud trees. Languid French women too old for bikinis bask on fold-out chairs.

We drive a little way out of the city; the boys munch on sugar cane and develop freckles.

The war is distant enough for us to travel by train to the sea. It is classic: the crescent of sand and the fringe of turbulent palms, and the waves thrashing into froth. Fishermen in straw hats spread nets to dry. Sunsets are instant, and suddenly there is a night filled with noise. Insects find their pitch and lizards answer, mesmeric and oddly loud. We sleep surrounded by clouds of mosquito netting, listening to the hush of the sea. The boys have sunburn. Skerricks of skin puff from their shoulders. Hair is stiff with salt and everything is sandy.

AND THEN THEY are gone.

There is space and silence, but for the hum of the airconditioning. Robert turns another page of Rex Stout. A tiny gecko waggles up the wall on its suckered toes.

NOWADAYS LAURA crosses me more often, standing there clenched and shrill. So absolute. It can turn into farce, a simple clash of wills which is an effort to win. Such as the time I chased her, hairbrush held high for corporal punishment, through her bedroom door, out the other into the bathroom, through the bathroom door into the passage, through her bedroom door . . . to collapse on her bed, finally, weeping frustration. There was a pause, then she came to sit with me and her hand, small, light as a passing thought, patronized my shoulder. I had no answer to that.

We have enrolled her at what we are assured is the best local school, a French convent of pink-faced nuns with tropical-white habits and a studious obstinacy. They speak a rapid French and are smug at my struggling response. There was no room on the form for religious affiliations other than Buddhist or Roman Catholic. I insist to the nuns on our Anglicanism, but Laura has found a crucifix and it stands now, brooding, on the table next to her bed. I advise her to take care not to offend the servants, who are Buddhist, and

that Catholics always feel they have a mission to convert. She begged money for a small plastic rosary. Her princesses now wear crosses at their necks. She has joined the choir and goes to chapel on Thursdays. There are bible stories on Tuesdays. She brings home catechism, though I write notes to the nuns. They smile benignly and supplant the catechism with improving texts with no overt reference to Catholicism.

In the mornings, the fluff of her hair pulled tightly into a ponytail, she leaves with her father in the chauffeured car. At school, the thronging children of the better-heeled wear blue and white and chirrup like birds in an aviary. The school is vast. Classrooms are open-sided to catch the breeze. Heavy tarpaulins are rolled up tightly, ready for monsoonal rains later in the year. Beneath the shirring of cicadas there is always the chanting of times tables. Little Vietnamese girls recite tales of French heroes. Rows of Vietnamese children dip nibs into inkwells to practice French calligraphy. A brisk nun, the beads of her rosary swinging, might crunch across the white gravel towards the heavy tropical gloom of a stand of trees.

At recess, hundreds of girls scatter in pairs and groups across the gravel. There are stones enough, I imagine, for dozens of games of jacks. Skipping ropes whip the pebbles and across the schoolyard the singsong verse is the same, the one that she has brought back to me:

Salade, salade, je suis malade
En Paradis, je suis geurie . . .

The rope gathers pace with the invocation of months of the year and days of the week:

Janvier, Fevrier, Mars, Avril . . .

Beyond the chanting and the white gravel, the massive, mossy walls topped with broken glass, the iron gates and their blistering green paint, there is the growling and barging of traffic. It is a great surge, every day, an unsmiling concentration on survival and business, filled with dust, the grumble of trucks, the parping of tiny taxis and the bell-ringing of cyclos. Little horses with plumes on their bowed heads tick-tick along the road. They haul carts creaking with people and baskets, chickens and children. The air is exhaust-blue. And dirt-red: puffs of earth from all those unmarked, unpaved side streets.

School finishes at midday. She stands with the others. The starched nuns, faces hot and damp, scold children and greet parents or servants. The chauffeur brings the air-conditioned car and she climbs in to sit in the back seat, feet dangling short of the floor. She chatters, I suppose, as he competes for space in the lurching traffic. They urge their way down colonial boulevards edged with looming trees. Stressed or straining faces might glance at the pale child, small and intensely foreign behind her cool window. There is the occasional distant crump of war. A striving population presses around the car. The child sits in her pocket of air.

YESTERDAY, THE BELL at our gate rang, bleating in bursts. It broke the peaceful whisper of frying in the kitchen. Chi Ba ran, and found Laura still leaping at the bell and breathless from leaping at the catch of the gate. She said the taxi should be paid, and reminded us she had no money. She had stood, she told us, as the school crowd thinned, until she knew she was deserted, hot and squinting into the dust. I cannot imagine what the nuns were thinking. She had stepped to the road and shrilled with her hand in the air for a taxi, been precise with the address, sat in the back seat with her hands jammed between her knees. Stared at her toes as hundreds of faces peered at the lone white girl on the cracked vinyl of the little rusted car. Had had to stretch and leap at the bell, satchel bouncing, as the disinterested driver looked on.

She told me this, small and cross, knees a little grubby. She held the satchel by one strap; one of her sandals had come unfastened. She scowled. It folded the skin between the wisps of her eyebrows. Twirls of hair like threads had escaped from the ponytail. I heard myself keening, face to her face: "please, please, please" and "never, never, never". She patted my shoulder and put her thin arms around my neck.

We looked out at the moon, that night after dinner. It was a tawny orange, distended, enormous with the smoke of the swollen city.

The Four Horses of Constantinople

from *The Pilgrimage of Alfredo the Dog*

One afternoon
Alfredo climbed to the top of Basilica San Marco
to see the four horses of Constantinople
(who were hiding out
from immigration officials
at the time)

Alfredo entered solemnly
and placed the cheese crackers and the six-pack of beer
he had brought with him onto the floor

He had also brought them a bundle of
racetrack magazines
which the horses used
to inspire within themselves and others
brutal acts of equine liberation
and to perve on the many pictures of athletic young
fillies which they contained

Alfredo was contemplating his life while staring out
across the piazza
its flagstones golden in the early morning sunlight
when the room shook with the horses' laughter
(Arif had just told a dirty joke about
a horse hung like an Italian)

Suddenly
Alfredo felt a hoof gently rest on his shoulder
and without movement or force
turn him around

Alfredo faced Omar,
the wisest and gentlest
of the four horses
to whom Alfredo spoke his first words that day:
"These nights," he said, "I have had dreams
which consist not of
images
but words and phrases
which for all I try
I still cannot understand; phrases such as
'an open hand on a falling page',
'July began on a Monday' and
'Nick the Chicken';
and
I fear this, Omar.
I fear
the non-existence of
meaning"

Omar smiled gently at his friend:
"There are many ways
to see, Alfredo. There is the way
of the squirrel who
sees only the nut
and of the bird who sees only the earth.
And then there is
the cocker spaniel
who sees all of Heaven and
Earth and the Oceans and the
Stars; yet he does not
know the beauty of that which lies within
himself
because most
cocker spaniels are pretty
stupid that way
(well, at least the three I met
in Thessalonica)

The wheel of life
turns, Alfredo,
until there is nothing
left of
what has remained."

Alfredo embraced his friend
and Omar gave Alfredo
a coat he stole
in a café
the day before

Alfredo tried it on
and
as he felt its fit and ran his hands over the
fur-lined collar
he immediately felt a strange sense of
belonging and of resolution
although he didn't like the buttons.

Cesare Piotti

Queer Theory

Rudi hurled the shot glass into the fire place.
Jack swore the difference didn't matter.

Virginia didn't know which way to jump.
Paul was at first amused, then disturbed,
by their behaviour.

Samantha closed the French windows so that
Boniface, Gerald & Poppy wouldn't hear the adults
cursing each other, fluently.

(Though later, data disguised as 'kiddie porn'
exposed the tease – or *mise en abime* –
undermining her manoeuvre.)

What's become of those large, stylised instruments
made of wood & used for serving salad?

"Are we all just bits of reconstructed bliss?"
wailed Anthea.
the newly appointed Lifestyle Professor.

Then, by way of reply, the camera slowly tracks back
revealing the whole panorama – it's merely Hugh

& his class at the Leisure Centre,
practising the informal manners of the rich.

& not even Liam's
worst shaggy dog joke can equal
the futility of that scratched itch.

John Forbes

Properties of the Sun

Difficult to recognize, homeward resemblances,
the route so well known, windswept,
fluting. Miles high, tangled insight,
a credentialled Icarus, if rueful, moonless.
The land is scarred, worn by fretfulness,
always gouging, quarrying. Baldness opens
in a park; something has been torn along
those burnt tracks. Loops of cypress
snake like a caravan, the dam is red
and virginal. Now the land craves
condolences of green, a fluidic sun.

Peter Rose

From 'Remember the Sounds of Footsteps'

Andrea Sherwood

ALBA STARED AT THE WALL IN FRONT OF HER,
reading the therapeutic messages that had been taped
on every blank surface over the years by young
too-enthusiastic social-workers.
There' s only ten fucking commandments for you lot
(the hospital was sponsored by a christian church)
how come we get fucking hundreds?
You want us to memorise this stuff?
Recite it back to you
or what?
Cathy hated the nurses' snide observations,
the sense of security that only the incurious,
or the *not*-quite-so-intelligent
can possess.
"Drugs are for people who can't handle reality",
or "take one day at a time" followed by the question
"what if more than one day happens at once?"
Or, an old favourite of Alba's: "Dead Bored? Why not just be Dead?
How? It's easy with heroin – just like having your head sawn off
but slower. 45 million dead junkies can't be wrong!
Smack yourself out forever.
Available from a rich well-fed murderer now!"
Alba laughed at Cathy, "You stinking rich well-fed murderer!"
and Cathy grinned at their wilful ignorance;
the desperate need for people to understand the world
in opposition, black and white, them and *us*.
Most of the dealers other junkies got to, were other junkies.
People who actually gained from heroin
were well up the 'protected species' line, untouchable.
Alba pointed out another, handwritten one to Cathy.
"Remember? Cath? Reality is for people who can't handle drugs!"
Alba skipped her fingers along the arms of the chair,
bouncing Frieda on her knees until she and Frieda's tummy
gurgled with delight.
Alba knew that Cathy was thinking about Jen
but at the moment she needed to be happy, to believe.

Belief was a common necessity, though offering only
a tenuous security.
There were more compartments in 'belief'
than the word admitted to.
One was a container for torment, another induced madness,
yet another, at a simple meticulous gesture, or word,
dressed up as message, would consummate murder.
Cathy and Jen had been close, they had shared something *apart*
from their mad abusive energy
that kicked people off guard.
Alba didn't want her memory brought to life,
ghosts took up so much time. Alba was startled by her thought
but quickly, smoothly, translated it to metaphor.
She sighed, breathing in deep then releasing her breath slowly.
Frieda, bored, slid off her mother's knee and, collecting Paul,
raced up the corridor chanting "can't catch me can't catch me!"
Alba stood up, warning Frieda to be quiet before one of the nurses
did catch them.
Nothing appeared to have changed.
The nurses' station was still locked up behind glass
and metal barriers, the public phone sat still in the corner,
grubbier, its cord twisted into a loose hanging knot.
To the right of the nurses' room was the dining hall.
Alba remembered when she had been an in-patient,
how awful it had been, Frieda miles away with her grandmother
while she withdrew cold turkey, hoping to speed it up
and get out of there.
Everyone said she'd have no chance in one week,
giving up *heroin* (some in-patients were proud of their scars)
took weeks of hard suffering, suicidal thoughts, self-obsessed anguish,
then there were the months of remorse, horror at who you were,
what you'd become: utterly intolerable, deformed by secret shame.
The rest of your life was, in a way, the toughest:
never to be forgiven for committing the most horrible of sins –
the taking of the first bite of the forbidden apple,
the expulsion from the world.
There was some self-congratulation,
but the persecution of eternal temptation was a killer.
Once expelled, very few (if any, rehabilitation centres
also need belief) survived.
At the end of her one week Alba weighed 39 kilos
and, if it were not for Frieda,
death would have been a very real, very comfortable, option.
Alba remembered the other people who'd been trapped there,
because of a judge's orders, threats from welfare

(some had already lost children and had forgotten life).
No-one was there of their own free will, it was the choice
when the word was no longer yours
or you had never owned it.
Inside, Alba rarely heard the word.
There were so many rules you were cornered,
and sooner or later they got you.
There was an emergency button
that all staff wore around their necks like jewels
of power, stuff more expensive than heroin
and far more lethal.
The therapists annoyed Alba,
their need to *want* you as victim
so they can be 'other', the 'powerful'.
They needed you to define themselves.
'You' were utterly powerless in their hands,
and that's where they needed you to be.
Without you, they'd be the victim.
Therapists only used the language of opposites:
stay, no heroin, strong / go, lots of heroin, weak, bad (user, thief, liar) /
good (non-user, ex-thief, honest) / and so on.
Alba and Cathy hated this perversion of words, the indifference
with which those in authority used it to control the in-patient.
Power destroyed and malformed said Cathy;
so did the lack of it.

Cathy could hear Jen talking to her
but she couldn't listen.
Since she'd been busted she'd been so tired
so tired she could see only one thing at a time.
She'd talk to herself, trying to work things out,
plan each day so she wouldn't lose all sight, all her focus.
Cathy knew she'd lost something, and she knew it was precious.
She remembered the times her mother cried,
and she felt that the world wouldn't stay,
that something essential to its continuing, was threatened.
But there was no-one to talk to.
Alba was still too full of fear.

The hospital gave Cathy the creeps.
Insubstantial with decay and the foibles of its keepers
it reminded Cathy of time done in England,
the shabby namelessness.
Like her dream, everything was brittle,
shivering and splitting into black dust and stone

when she tried to pick it up.
Then there was Paul.
Cathy had to keep him separate from herself,
though sometimes it bruised, discoloured her.
Hadn't she tried to prove her love?
Risking her *life*, her freedom?
Mitch was capable of murder.
Cathy had felt murder in her own hands,
before she came here, to Australia.
She could feel murder in some people's touch,
anyone was capable.
That had frightened her so much
she'd tried to feel nothing and nearly succeeded.
She believed in action, in *doing*,
deliberately diverting your attention
from the unbearable.
Cathy remembered the time she'd smashed glass, in the alley
behind the flat, looking for the sharpest splinters
to re-open her already hacked wrists.
It wasn't suicidal, quite the opposite;
it gave her a pain she could see, understand, and mend.
Nothing could mend the pain in your mind.
Alba was different. Alba was all thought. And fear.
But now Cathy didn't have the energy for action,
though she needed it, she had to get away
before the case was heard.
Paul didn't want to go.
Cathy knew he'd rather stay with Alba,
that he didn't trust her.
He didn't trust his mother.
That hurt.
If she could just say she loved him,
if he would only believe her.
She couldn't do more than that.
If she did, she'd break away into a million pieces
and never be able to find herself.

"I can't guarantee that you'll both get on
at the same time." The social worker was serious;
her bottom lip was loose and trailed after her top lip,
unable to keep up. Paul was fascinated, staring openly,
admiringly.
Cathy and Alba nodded.
"That's fine, how long do you think we'll have to wait?"
Alba was impatient, and more than irritated by the emergency device

the woman wore close to her heart.
"A week at the most. First you'll have to see the doctor,
Doctor Legety, and he'll give you a narcan test
so we can establish the dose that best suits you."
The social worker smiled at Paul who didn't smile back.
She was obviously new.
"So you'll call us, then we go to the doctors,
then we come back here?
Will the dose be ready?"
Alba wanted order, and she wanted to get on a program
as soon as possible.
"Everything will be ready." The woman was too confident.
Cathy hated her slick non-emotion smile.
"I'm leaving the country soon, so you'll put me on a low dose,
and reduce quickly, so I haven't got a methadone habit when I leave?"
Every junkie knew that cold-turkey from methadone was a horror.
The answer was prompt, from the book.
"The program is designed to suit individual needs."
The woman sat there, in her trendy Carlton–
Fitzroy dress, and Alba felt an intense antagonism toward her.
Frieda had already yanked open the door
and Paul clung to her, not wanting to let her
out of his sight for a moment.
Cathy watched him, noticing his pale small fists
as his arms swung tight and out of rhythm by his side.
As Cathy closed the door behind her
she was hit with the hospital smell
of antiseptic and death and she gasped,
holding her hand to her chest as though her heart
was blocked by bonds and was pounding,
unable to free itself.
Frieda turned to look behind her
and she saw her mother and Cathy,
bent double, tying up a loose shoe-lace.

Cathy couldn't sleep that night.
A part of her was missing, she knew it,
could acknowledge it.
The image of her mother was gaining in detail,
layer by layer, day by day,
her mouth that rarely seemed to open, her brown soft skin
and dark, blind-looking eyes.
There was a child there too, in the semi-lit background,
though its features were indefinite, unmarked.
It could have been either Paul or herself.

kylie valentine

Bad Girls, Worse Politics

Catharine Lumby: *Bad Girls; the media, sex and feminism in the '90s* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95)

THE LATEST IN A DEPRESSINGLY homogeneous series of populist feminist publications, Catharine Lumby's *Bad Girls* seems at first glance to offer few surprises. The book's deliberately if not desperately provocative title is backed up by its presentation. An endorsement by noted feminist Robert Hughes is superimposed on the front cover's photograph of a (naturally) headless (naturally) white woman wearing a sheer, cropped top and unbuttoned denim shorts. The effect of this juxtaposition alone is, I suspect, enough to give many readers pause. Along with 1996's *DIY Feminism*, by Kathy Bail, and a number of American texts by Naomi Wolf, Kate Roiphe and Rene Denfield popular here, *Bad Girls* would seem to be at first glance a paean to a feminism constituted by convulsive selfishness, privilege and individualism: a feminism more or less unrecognizable as a politics of anything at all.

Bad Girls is distinguished from these earlier texts in a number of ways. Lumby distances herself explicitly (and laudably) from the move towards periodizing Australian feminism into an earlier, ideologically rigid generation and the current enlightened one. She argues that "the popular feminist critique of the media has itself become a dominant view. It has become self-satisfied and lazy". *Bad Girls* does not attempt to describe a new feminism, or repaint in savvy colours (in order to refute) the ideological prison house of the old one. Lumby restricts much of her argument to a topical, recognizably left-libertarian critique of censorship. The argument that the political uses of censorship are unlikely to favour feminism, regardless of any short-term tactical advantage a call for censorship may appear sometimes to have, is one with which many feminists would agree. Lumby is not trying to encapsulate 'new' feminism in its entirety. It should be noted also that, along with a case against censorship, she makes a salient argument for a synthesis of academic and non-academic feminism, for feminisms that negotiate the much-discussed but still recognizable bifurcation between theoretical elegance and feminist activism. (That Meaghan Morris made the same call some time ago, using the same suggested strategy of Foucault, is not necessarily relevant here.)

Bad Girls presents itself quite baldly as an ideological justification for the importance of cultural studies:

> Rather than futilely wishing that popular culture would disappear, those who are concerned it will harm children would be much better off taking media and cultural studies seriously and promoting their inclusion in primary, secondary and tertiary curricula.

Life would be much simpler if all such justifications were presented with similar clarity. The clarion call for feminist scholarship to embrace cultural and media studies seems less than relevant, however, given the extent to which feminism has done just that in recent years. Cultural and media studies have a tradition that is not less than noble when the field is drawn widely enough to include (say) Bakhtin, Adorno, Williams, Jameson, hooks, Hall and Angela Davis. Opponents of any one version of cultural studies part company from its advocates precisely when this field is drawn so narrowly as to include the strategies of advertising companies and not much else.

It is this narrowness of vision that is most disturbing in Lumby's text as far as her explicit political project is concerned. Two examples will have to do here, both advertising billboards. The first case was (is) an ad for lingerie depicting an image of the old woman-being-sawn-in-half magic trick; the second

an ad for shampoo showing two "sexy young women" with short skirts pulled up (by them) to reveal their underwear. Lumby takes to task the removal of the second following complaints, but, more surprisingly, takes to task also two women who spray painted the first with a message of protest and, in a version of her chapter printed in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, appears almost sorry that when taken to court the women weren't punished. Her point "is not that the feminists who spray painted the billboard read the image 'wrongly', but that" the incident:

> contains a cautionary tale for anyone who wants to impute magical powers of persuasion to ads. Contemporary advertisers tend to give consumers more credit than that. Aware they're dealing with an image-literate public, advertisers increasingly trade in images which acknowledge their status as images.

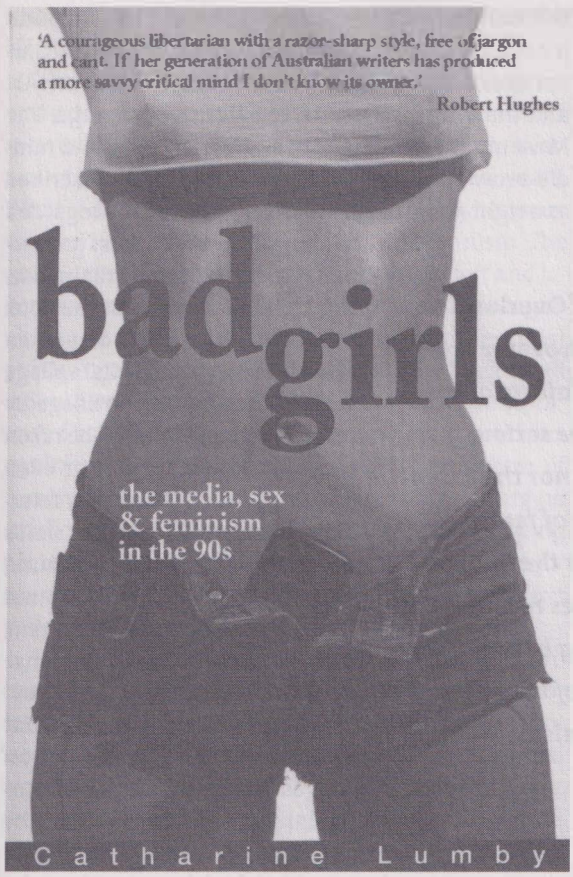
A number of angles would seem to be salient here. The first is that spraying paint on advertising would seem also to acknowledge that the images are images (surely the painters knew that it wasn't a real woman being sawn in half). The second is the fact that the women who sprayed the paint didn't go to jail must be seen as a real victory for most versions of feminism. The third is that defacing a billboard is exactly an example of reading an image in informed and diverse ways, exactly what advertising agencies seem to want and cultural studies as a pedagogical model certainly encourages.

Finally, reactions against images of women such as those on the billboards are not devoid of political content. The "muscular, partly clad bodies" on the shampoo billboard were actually thin to the point of malnourishment, a fact of interest in feminist interventions into the impact of body image and eating disorders in young women. The proliferation, not to say saturation, of images of sexualized women relates to debates around sexual assault. Both of these interventions and concerns may be specious, both may be eminently reasonable. The fact that they can be collapsed into accusations of wowserism and prudishness would be testament to the power of advertisers against political activism, were these accusations not being presented in a book supporting feminism.

Lumby's broad political project, however, is not as problematic as the vision of feminism that her text shares with *DIY Feminism* and other mainstream 'feminist' publications. Each presents its own arguments and has its own projects, but all contribute to a narrow and hegemonic public arena to which the majority of attention to feminism is directed. Given that Lumby mentions Habermas in the first two pages of *Bad Girls*, it is ironic that her own place in the (re)production of a feminist public sphere in Australia is erased from it. Feminism for her in Australia is (to schematize – but not much) played out in two adversarial although not always connecting arenas.

The first is a bureaucratic technocracy, whose main practitioners are the Office of the Status of Women and Jocelynne Scutt. The other is an enlightened but wholly theoretical academy. The latter plays little role in the argument, aside from being endorsed in the imagined "stand-off between the traditional left and contemporary cultural theory": "ideologically diverse" academic feminists "are still simply dismissed as apolitical or simply idiotic by feminists in the legislative, juridical and policy making arena" even though these same post-structuralists "have a lot to offer feminists working with, and on behalf of, the state". That this is the concluding argument of the text perhaps points to nothing so much as its manifest lack of originality, to say nothing of its unexplained and inexplicable eliding of the "traditional left" and "feminists working with, and on behalf of, the state".

This bizarre slippage is not restricted to the conclusion of the text, but is peppered throughout it. Discussing American feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, Lumby argues that the impact on "politicians, bureaucrats, and equity-focussed feminists" in Australia "cannot be underestimated", but what is "disturbing is the support the Far Right is now getting in its family values agenda from the centre and the left". Leaving aside the doubtfulness of these claims – Dworkin and MacKinnon have had arguable impact in Australia; the response to their campaigns and claims was equivocal in America, let alone here – Lumby's examples of the centre and left are telling: Paul Keating, Richard Neville, Senator Margaret Reynolds. That the left, and feminism, are placed in such a rarefied context would be grounds enough for regarding *Bad Girls* with something less than serious attention were it the only text of its type, and were it not getting the kind of attention and endorsements it is. Were this text the only one of its



type, it would be an interesting example of the debasing of politics for commercial publication. Were it the only one of its type, its isolation would perhaps explain the reception and attention given to such flimsy argument and conceptual confusion. The fact that Lumby's is only one of a number produced over the last two years represents something else: that the feminist public arena is being transformed into a post-politics field. Linda Jaivin, one of the most hyped of the players in this arena, put this most succinctly in a near-ecstatic 'review' of *DIY Feminism*: "If feminism began as an ideology, today it's an attitude."[1]

In this new field, purported explications of debates and contestation within feminism are instead enactments of it. Not only is the 'debate' carried out by only one side of it, but their opponents are imaginary in two senses. Firstly, their arguments are presented as an image – spectacular and precisely two-dimensional, to be presented as a surface without depth, for surveying rather than interrogating or analyzing. Secondly, these opponents are imaginary in the sense of being opposed to real: they don't exist. Not only is it egregious and insulting to equate the left – any left – with the "legislative, juridical and policy making arena" (as opposed to individuals who may work within these arenas at certain moments) but it is equally unjustifiable to restrict the feminist left to policy makers and bureaucrats. There is nowhere near parity between nominal feminists calling for censorship in any form and nominal feminists objecting to censorship and other actions of the state. The examples of "pro-censorship" feminists presented by all of the texts is testament to this.

It is manifestly untrue that "over the past twenty five years, feminists have made an enormous effort to bring women together under the banner of the women's movement and to find a common language for women to discuss their oppression." Feminism was one of the first theoretical networks to acknowledge the impossibility of a single banner under which difference could be accommodated, and debates around the relevance and uses of feminism to, say, Aboriginal women, have been conducted since the 1970s. Yet the criticism levelled against feminism by Lumby, Jaivin and others has been a process of setting up false oppositions, and claiming imagined and untenable positions as enemies. After doing so, it is relatively easy to call to the desires and buying habits of real women, to make attacks on elitism and humourlessness, and to argue that feminism can be recognized as a web-site, or a t-shirt, or a porn movie.

I have nothing against web-sites or T-shirts, nor do I want the state to somehow stop porn movies being made, but to conceive of political movements as fashion statements or the productions of individuals is to transform them into something other than political movements. This is not to say that the feminism presented here is not political. In both intent and effect the feminism presented by Lumby is anything but devoid of politics. What are lacking, however, are the attributes of a political movement: goals, strategies, struggle and membership. The question of feminism's relationship with other political struggles and movements can simply not be raised, let alone discussed, in such a context. The issues that have been important and troubling in forging connections between feminism and other political movements – the relationships between class, race and gender; the

importance of "private sphere" concerns; the means by which alliances can be formed and the limits to these alliances – are lost.

The placement of feminism in an arena of the opinions, actions and beliefs of isolated individuals not only comments on the relationship between feminism and the left; it actually works to produce this connection, or more accurately the lack of it. Feminism as produced by Lumby, Jaivin and others, where supposed feminists are "not particularly interested in the theory, neither are they especially keen on either activism or organization"[2] is unrecognizable as an arena with anything to share with the left. It is unrecognizable as a political movement at all. This is a state of affairs that is not only a disturbing development in the history of Australian feminism, but is also a situation that has been largely ignored by the left. The question as to why this is so, and the traditional connections between feminism and other political movements in Australia is a complicated one. In recent times, however, the relationship in Australia between feminism and the left, and the connection or otherwise between them, can be examined through the filter of publishing: feminist, left and mainstream.

The response of* Overland *to the Garner controversy does not indicate a failure of the journal to take seriously feminist politics, nor the extent of its coverage of feminist publishing over the last ten years. What it does reveal is the lack of grounding between the world of letters of the left and of feminism.

The originating point of the connection between these three fields was the publication in 1995 of Helen Garner's *the first stone*. The first of the Australian feminist blockbusters, both marketing and reception of the text appeared at least to have learnt salutary lessons from the American experience, where books like *The Morning After*, *The New Victorians* and *Fire With Fire* all gained huge sales and great mainstream media attention in the strategic use of 'controversy'. Questions of peripheral importance to feminism were situated as the most important, or feminist strategies and problems were distorted to that of individual decision making. Garner, a novelist previously connected with feminist activism and theorizing in genuine but limited ways, was by no means as conceptually bankrupt or cynical in both writing and then discussing – or 'defending', as the media put it some eighty thousand times – her book, but the brouhaha around it certainly lost her publishers, Picador, no money. Garner spoke both at the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Sydney Institute, to extensive coverage. The Museum is emblematic of significant sales and middle-brow attention, the Institute is usually described as a right-wing think tank. Neither could be regarded as being a site of feminist production or tradition in any real sense. Nor could the subject of the book – the action by a couple of women at a university residential college against a professor who allegedly sexually harassed them – be taken seriously as exhausting or even covering particularly closely feminist concerns. (Virginia Trioli's *Generation f*, published around the same time and with around the same hype as *DIY Feminism*, is an explicit and angry response to *the first stone*, although it covers a little more ground.) That mainstream media attention suggested otherwise is not particularly startling. However, the lack of connection between feminist and labour movement production that had been evident for some time was brought out particularly in the wake of this attention.

Rather than reading the Garner controversy as the media event that it was, many sites of left politics sympathetic to feminism felt compelled to continue the imagined debate between Garner and 'establishment' feminism by taking sides in it. Scholarly feminist journals paid less attention to the text than a number of left journals. The response of *Overland* was emblematic of this reception. On the one hand, the journal gained critical distance from the furore with the publication of Delys Bird's thoughtful article on the textual-political field in which *the first stone* was embedded. On the other hand, *Overland* still felt the need to take sides, commenting that "a great deal of the criticism of Helen Garner's *the first stone* comes perilously close to the kind of Stalinism that bedevilled socialist realism years ago" and "Garner can at least be acclaimed for refusing to conform".[3] The difference between this and something like "feminism began as an ideology, today it's an attitude" or "femi-

nist critique ... has itself become a dominant view" is less than apparent.

The response of *Overland* to the Garner controversy does not indicate a failure of the journal to take seriously feminist politics, nor the extent of its coverage of feminist publishing over the last ten years. What it does reveal is the lack of grounding between the world of letters of the left and of feminism. The marginalization of feminist concerns from left and labour movement publishing is mirrored in the marginalizing of traditional 'left' concerns from feminist publications. That both fields have suffered as a result is doubtless. That both movements are now being portrayed as either anachronistic or distorted beyond recognition cannot be coincidental. The feminism of Lumby and others as a post-politics arena bears no small resemblance to the 'class is dead' rhetoric being pasted onto the left. It is no doubt true also that feminism is no more and no less imperfect and complicit in its disappointments and failures than the left.

Feminism is not and should not be immune from criticism from within or without. It has failed at moments to be alive to important interventions from labour movement politics, as well as from Aboriginal women, gays and lesbians, women of colour, migrant women, women with disabilities, working-class women. It has failed in some of its aspirations and misrecognized others. The tendencies of feminism to preach are, as Lumby points out, elitist and unproductive; the tendencies of feminism to self-flagellate over past misdemeanours are boring. The alternative must not be, however, a celebratory recasting of the arena of struggle into one where victory is always inevitable; where simply consuming culture transforms the world. There have been important and powerful developments, recognitions and alliances around class, race and gender that have benefited both feminism and the left. It is not certain what the connection between emancipatory political movements should be. What is certain is that the imperative to connect political movements with each other remains. Feminism will not be redeemed through abandoning the struggle against class, race and gender oppression; nor will it be redeemed by deciding that oppression is no longer of interest, or no longer exists.

ENDNOTES

1. Linda Jaivin, 'From DIY to Gen X', *Australian Book Review* 187, December/January 1997.
2. op.cit.
3. John McLaren, 'Slippage', *Overland* 140, Spring 1995.

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Russell Forster

The Bad Seed from the Bad Seed Bed

A cultural perspective on the work of Nick Cave

THERE IS A DARKNESS in the Australian psyche that rarely reaches daylight, a darkness we can't afford to ignore if we are to know ourselves better than we do. The hype and hysteria of the rock world – a multi-billion-dollar industry designed to exploit the natural rebelliousness of young people – often means that when a genuine artist does come along, the arts establishment fails to provide any serious critical commentary. Instead the popular media cast sneering, envious asides about drugs, sex and fame in order to provoke vicarious pleasure. The specialist presses, from what I gather, are not much better. I wonder how many times Nick Cave has been asked by journalists about his drug habits rather than his creative directions and intentions. Shouldn't we be looking at ways to appraise the works of rock artists who have honed their expressive skills over most of their adult lives? Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, as an expressive phenomenon, is a conscious attempt to drive creative energy beyond the bounds of mainstream value systems and allow full artistic licence. There is no doubt that part of the appeal of this is undergraduate nose thumbing, an attack on conventional morality. But there's a good deal more too. Cave is broadening our emotional horizon, not just playing with badness for image sake, but reminding us that we are not the innocents we've been led to believe.

Paul Kelly, Stephen Cummings or Steve Kilbey notwithstanding, there is no more satisfying rock songwriter working from an Australian context than Nick Cave. This assertion may provoke discomfort, particularly because Cave is so thoroughly lacking in political correctness, also because there seems little in his work to identify as Australian. Cave has an international reputation as an artist of the first water which is as secure as can be expected in the over-mediated nature of the rock industry. Cave can be spoken of in the same terms as Cohen, Dylan, Reed and Young as an artist of the chthonian tradition. What separates and distinguishes artists of this nature is the extent to which they appear to struggle with the idea of self in relation to culture and its history. There is an aspect of the heroic journey involved in their struggle, and the expressions they produce can become the watersheds we come to recognize ourselves by. There is a seemingly sacrificial element in their work which provides us with the feeling that no material compensation for their struggle is going to be adequate and, that once the journey has begun there is no turning back. Once engaged in the process of self-discovery and the chronicling of attendant experience, there is almost no truth ugly enough to be denied. As Yeats said, those into creativity must "choose between perfection of the life, or perfection of the art".

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why Australians don't sing in their own accents more often? Ostensibly the answer is simple: it sounds stupid. (Accent, like rhythm and song structure, is an integral element of form.) Be this as it may, the aesthetic decisions behind the choice to sing in an American accent derive from the traditions associated with the rock song as being rooted in the Rhythm & Blues complex which has swept the western world since the Second World War. This doesn't mean that other patterns do not emerge to characterize the expression. Cave's passion for the grotesque itself amounts to an aesthetic which can be located in other Australian artists ranging from Albert Tucker to Barry Humphries. Behind the grotesque there may lie some latent fury, a fury in response to denial. Stuck between two worlds, the New Worlder has experiences which can't be legitimated at home or recognized abroad, until the validity of such experience is somehow vetted. (How many

Australian artists have had to 'make it overseas' before recognition is provided here?) Fury develops out of frustration on two levels. First there is the lack of precedent in the home culture, which is often stifling in its banality. Secondly there is the frustration associated with finding adequate reception elsewhere. Here precedent as the problem gives way to identity and the struggle to maintain it as the generator of artistic expression. One solution is to investigate the forms, the clichés if you like, of received expressions and adapt them. Genre then becomes fruitful ground and a relatively safe way of venting fury.

Stephen Cummings once said that the pop song is like a detective story. He was referring to the trashy aspects of popular culture that celebrate their trashiness when left to their own. Traditionally, the world of the detective novel contains a hard-boiled dude with just enough sentiment under his pachyderm to redeem any negative actions he takes to make a crust; to satisfy his lust; to ameliorate a series of desires that are as much his lot as his fated position to do right. These days the situation for the *noir-gallant* is more precarious than ever. A credible modern dick needs you to know that there is hardly any morality left at all. The world is a matrix of competing desires; full of men of action competing mercilessly for the right to tell their story. So it is with Cave men. The male in the Cave narrative is defined by a good deal of *The Other*. Femaleness in the Cave domain is threatening (and erotic) on a variety of levels. If Camille Paglia is right and men can only fully engage women in an artistic medium, then the extent to which men know themselves is through discourse with women. The measure to which men don't understand the feminine is then equal to the degree in which they fail themselves. In this respect men must see woman as the saviour, or else perish morally. This is why, Paglia argues, tragedy is primarily a male paradigm. Forever severed from original creativity, the male in western culture has sought "action as a route of escape from nature".

The Irish as the early predominant songsters in this colony used traditional forms to bewail the horrors of transportation. In a community desperate to establish itself one can imagine the reception such complaints would create in governing classes. Quick to be labelled and proscribed as subversive, it is little wonder that few indigenous forms could take graft and mutate. There is the odd exception: 'Waltzing Matilda', written during the nationalist period of the nineties, for instance. The dramatic nature of the lyric with the apotheosis of the thief, the sundowner and the revolutionary socialist makes it an admirable song, but it's not much to hang your hat on. (Unless you want to include 'The Road to Gundagai' and 'Aeroplane Jelly', both of which were initially written as advertising jingles.) 'Waltzing Matilda' itself underwent editorializing for the sake of the advertising business with the addition of the word *jolly* in the first line. (The ad I think was for Billy Tea.) It is in this lack of homegrown reception that we can understand Cave's work which, even today, is better known in Europe than it is in Australia.

It's like* Dimboola *on acid, but this isn't the Australian quality I want to investigate. What is interesting about the general corpus of Cave's work is the way crime becomes central to almost every narrative he creates.

While America managed to repress its slave guilt and swept itself into the euphoria of New World fever, Australia kept its lid tightly on. Overburdened with the notion of Empire as both prison and moral custodian, we never had the war of independence we needed in order to sing confidently. In the US, songs abounded and heroes populated them with purpose and morality. Their melodies are utilitarian, capable of glee and melancholy. Didactic a lot of them may be and their musical roots apparent, but there is no doubt that America took *the song* and ran with it.

Post Second World War influences on the Australian song were predominantly American; beginning with the Swing era and moving on to the Sixties with the reflected British invasion, which took its brief from the Rhythm & Blues that America could not assimilate until it found white stars to perform it. The subsequent popular explosion was mere echolalia, yet opened (in the Australian context) potential discourse which was not exploited in any meaningful way, unless you see attempts like Dave Warner's 'Suburban Boy', as something more than a joke. Warner was

brave in adopting natural speech patterns for use in the song, but our ears were so inured to the American model that our accent sounded odd, if not grotesque.

I want now to look at a song by Cave in this context. In 'John Finn's Wife' from the CD *Henry's Dream*, Cave employs a dramatic character, a device he often uses. The narrator is unnamed. There is little *lyrical* about it: if anything Cave is more of a dramatic poet than a lyricist.[1] The narrative creates a panoply of images to support its unfolding. Some import a metaphysical element, and remark on a sort of Bosch-like hellscape:

> Dancers writhed and squirmed and then,
> Came apart and then writhed again
> Like squirming flies on a pin
> In the heat and in the din . . .

while others are loyal to the crime genre: "guns did flare and guns did bawl", providing a grotesque spin to the song as a whole. The plot starts when a disaffected resident of a small town comes upon a wedding. He enters the celebration with malice, lusting after the bride and preparing to take her from the groom, Mad John Finn, whom he must first dispose of. The woman is mysterious and imposing. She has legs like scissors and butcher's knives. In these respects she is the oedipal woman. The dangerous object of desire, threatening castration but irresistible. The unnamed character is successful in his venture: he kills the groom and gains the wife, but it is a pyrrhic victory. The coda is musically full of remorse for the tragedy that has been enacted, as the words tell us that flies buzz around the body of John Finn and his new wife throws all the flowers down on the ground, making her now inaccessible. Complicit she may have been, but she is the first to baulk at the consequences of the crime. John Finn being mad, there seemed to be a moral cause behind his murder, but the whole thing backfires. A remarkable tension between the exotic, and the cramped, mean-mindedness of small-town culture is musically evoked by the production values of Mick Harvey, whose input into Cave's songs should never be underestimated. The body of the song is initially propelled by a pulsating acoustic guitar and builds, magnificently employing a minor-key string arrangement, thumping floor toms and surface-shattering cymbal crashes.

THERE IS SOMETHING of the deep American South in Cave's words. His novel, *And the Ass saw the Angel*, revels in this idiom. (It is a dense read, but can be great fun when you lay on the Southern accent.) The attraction to the South for Cave may well be the rich humus of evil associated with its dark past. Stereotype representations of the South have it as a culture steeped in residual Old Testament guilt and jealousies, and Cave is keen to use language which describes life as a sort of punishment for an unspecified sin. This is more apparent in other songs (from *The Good Son* on), but even a line like "the night bore down upon us all" is a reference to such antagonism. Does the intensity and passion that the South affords Cave supply any comment on Australia as a far more mysterious and repressed culture than readily accepted? The decimation of indigenous peoples, the brutality and savagery of penal settlement all point to an evil past, but there is too little vernacular awareness for it to be much use to an artist of Cave's ilk. (A song like 'Moreton Bay' goes some way in expressing the horror and evil of penal excess, but it's astonishing that there are not more like it.) When the male narrator of 'John Finn's Wife' drawls that he has left the hall to engage the groom in a fight, he has reservations: he only has brass knuckles and a bolo knife. This is quickly followed by a sneering glimpse at wicked victory because he also has, ". . . John Finn's wife *is all*", suggesting that she is the ultimate weapon. But it's not only mastery of the idiom that impresses; it's also Cave's relentless and tightly woven imagery that fully exploits the potential for evil intrigue and amplifies the tragedy of the coda.

It's like *Dimboola* on acid, but this isn't the Australian quality I want to investigate. What is interesting about the general corpus of Cave's work is the way crime becomes central to almost every narrative he creates. It is glib to rely too heavily on received notions of cultural heritage, but the temptation is strong to see Cave as negotiating the moral questions of crime in relation to the romantic ideal of the individual in a New World context. Australia as a prison state can't allow the imprisoned to sing of their crimes. Whereas America is the land of the free. To sing, freedom is critical. One of the consequences of importing the trappings of genre into song is the free rein it affords the creator. Subsequently, Cave has exploded the idea of the song to incorporate features of

the crime genre of literature into a musical context, and gone beyond Kurt Weil and Bertolt Brecht, because while Brecht was pushing a political barrow, Cave is for escape: the determination of the artist. This escape requires the confronting of personal demons and a rigorous appraisal of the forces of imprisonment. In order, these become the mother, the father, the family, the society, the culture, the country. This is the notion of the artist as anguished emissary. In this instance it means a descent into proscribed regions and a return with experience and new knowledge to be shaped into digestible form.

It follows from this prescription that the artist must necessarily be shocking to the mainstream sensibility. The problem with Cave's work is the question as to what extent shock value is enforced from the outset as a kind of cosmetic designed to seduce, or whether there is an authenticity to it. This is, of course, complicated by the reception of rock music as a kind of cartoon art, but with Cave's vision focused deeply within, his excursions become increasingly legitimate; more universal with each album. His recent CD, *Murder Ballads*, is a relentless tour de force, an imaginative excursion into the mind of the killer and the victim. Current debates about the question of violence in cultural expressions, and whether they lead or lag society, rarely take into account the question of identity. As the world we inhabit is increasingly mediated, difference, which is a function of identity, is increasingly threatened. A Big Mac in Shanghai is the same as a Big Mac in Yarraville; a walk through a mall in Toronto is the same as a walk through a mall in suburban Melbourne. Our growing predilection for violence in cinema, literature and pop music may well be a response to the suffocation such sameness creates. Apart from this though, is the peculiar relationship Australia has with crime. Up until 1864 some seven hundred thousand *criminals* created the seed bed of Australia as a modern society.

Have you ever wondered why Australians don't sing in their own accents more often? Ostensibly the answer is simple: it sounds stupid.

You don't hear a great deal of talk about The Cringe these days, but whatever such discussion was supposed to relate to, it is clear that in terms of the popular song it meant that no reasonably natural expression in the Australian context was possible. The problem of subject matter, that is the textual stuff that we can see ourselves in, was not being recognized. Whereas Americans seemed to swallow nationalist sympathies wholesale, creating the groundswell for a popular song industry, the practice never took off in Australia. But with artists like Cave glaring directly at the Medusa-head of self, we may learn that the song can work in, and from, an Australian context; that it doesn't have to be about football, or 'Ayers Rock'; it can and should be about us in all our complexity, our fear and guilt and desire.

ENDNOTE

1. Cave recently released a new album, *The Boatman Calls*, which is predominantly lyrical in nature. He was also nominated for an ARIA award for his song, 'Into My Arms'.

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Graham Willett

Minorities Can Win

The Gay Movement, the Left and the Transformation of Australian Society

AUSTRALIAN LESBIANS AND GAY MEN have experienced an extraordinary transformation in their lives in the past quarter century. From being a group that was simultaneously marginalized to the point of invisibility *and* vilified and demonized, homosexuals have moved into the mainstream of social and political life by means of a series of significant political and cultural reforms. These have included legal reforms such as the decriminalization of male homosexual behaviour, lesbian and gay custody rights and anti-discrimination laws; wide public acceptance, manifested in the broad support for gay rights in general and tolerance of gay visibility in Mardi Gras and similar festivals; and the creation of a thriving subculture centred on commercial venues, a regular press, political organizations and lobby groups. We even have our own market niche. Most important of all, perhaps, lesbians and gay men now have a powerful sense of our own worth and entitlements. Gay pride is without doubt the most surprising achievement of them all.

None of this is what we expected – certainly not if by 'we' we mean 'the left'. As Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner have noted in their recent article on Australian intellectuals and the new social movements, a quarter of a century ago the welfare state, unionization and the right to strike seemed secure; short of socialism, Aboriginal land rights, homosexual law reform and legal workplace discrimination were the hard issues. The left has not been alone in being taken by surprise. Even the early gay activists did not expect to achieve what they did. Daughters of Bilitis, the first openly gay political organization in Australia wrote in 1970: "It would be idealistic to think that we, in our lifetime, will see a great change in public attitudes to Lesbianism". The Campaign Against Moral Persecution, the next-formed, and longest-lasting group, expressed similar caution in the same year, suggesting that it might be twenty years before gays were marching in Australia's streets. (It's a pity no-one thought to write this on a banner to carry in the 1990 Mardi Gras, when a hundred thousand people lined Sydney's streets to watch the parade.)

Because it was so unexpected, this is a transformation which the left took a long time to acknowledge and which it has still done very little to try to explain. This is a pity, because while gays have gone from strength to strength through the eighties and nineties, the left itself has gone from strength to weakness. There must be lessons in there somewhere. Part of the left's problem was that for a very long time, it could not believe what was happening before its eyes. Well into the 1980s, the far left, in particular, was expecting a backlash against the liberalization of the previous decade and was inclined to interpret every anti-gay utterance and event in those terms. This, in turn, owed much to an analysis of gay oppression which located it deep within the structures of society: within the family, its sex/gender roles and within capitalism's drive to accumulate and its tendency towards crisis. Where there was capitalism, the argument went, there will be oppression. Any gains by the social movements must be either marginal or fragile, or both. In the 1980s, then, the left's fear was *for* the gains of the gay movement, not *of* them.

It wasn't always thus. In the 1950s, when the left was at the peak of its influence, homosexuality was simply not on its agenda. Nor, indeed, anybody else's. Unlike the US, where McCarthyism had been directed as much at the homosexual threat as at the communists, in Australia the response to homosexuality was to silence and repress. Censorship by the state of books and films and plays with homosexual themes (few though they were) and indifference on the part of most of the legal, medical and religious authorities characterized the period. Only the police were

active, rounding up literally hundreds of men every year – entrapping, questioning, arresting, bashing and threatening and blackmailing – in an effort to eradicate what the NSW Police Commissioner more than once called "Australia's greatest menace".

The left was not well positioned to respond to this, even if it had known it was going on. Homosexuality was not something about which it was able to talk during this decade. Part of the problem was that there was nothing by way of a left tradition to direct attention to the issue. The fact that none of the major thinkers of the socialist movement ever had anything to say in public about homosexuality added to the lack of interest. Not Marx or Engels, not Luxemburg, Lenin or Trotsky – not even Alexandra Kollantai, for all her writings about love and sex under capitalism and socialism – ever once mentioned same-sex love. It is true that in Germany both the social democrats and the communists had supported the homosexual rights movement in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s (and in the case of the former group had initiated efforts to decriminalize sodomy as early as 1905). It is true, too, that the Bolsheviks had decriminalized male homosexuality in Russia, as the French had done during their revolution in 1791. But the rise of Hitler (who destroyed the movement in its German heartland with surprising speed and ruthlessness) and of Stalinism (with its renewed emphasis upon the nuclear family as the basic cell of society and its recriminalization of male homosexuality) wiped the issue from the left's agenda for over a generation. To the extent that most leftists in the 1950s thought about the issue at all, they probably accepted either the Stalinist view that it was a bourgeois degeneracy or, alternatively, the prevailing bourgeois medico-legal understanding of it as a psychiatric disorder. Some, of course, held to both; the ideas are not radically incompatible.

Unlike the US, where McCarthyism had been directed as much at the homosexual threat as at the communists, in Australia the response to homosexuality was to silence and repress.

Nowhere is this left homophobia better captured than in the utterances of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), the Maoist party, which was a powerful force on the Australian left for a decade after the mid-1960s. The party was viscerally hostile to homosexuality, describing it in terms of sexual depravity, ruling class filth, appalling muck (though it did hold out the prospect of 'treatment, care and proper respect' – under socialism – for those who suffered this abnormality). Among the party's leading members, Albert Langer, while conceding the right of homosexuals to defend themselves from attack, dismissed gay lib as "decadent and camp" and Barry York demanded conjugal rights for prisoners as a means of preventing prisons becoming "breeding grounds" for homosexuality. The gay movement and its demands were actively opposed by Maoists on the grounds that they were a US imperialist plot to sap the moral fibre of revolutionary youth by propagating sexual depravity and degeneracy. As late as 1975, the party campaigned against endorsement of the national student union's pro-homosexual motions and engaged in verbal and perhaps physical harassment of the union's gay president.

By the 1970s, when it was peddling this line, the CPA(M-L) was seriously out of touch with the rest of the left. The organizations which had emerged out of or were moving towards the Trotskyist and anarchist traditions had greeted the new movement with enthusiasm. Even formerly Stalinist organizations such as the mainstream CPA, adapted themselves to the new thinking between about 1971 and 1973. In 1971, Mavis Robertson, a member of the National Executive, managed to discuss women's liberation, class, sexuality and the family without so much as mentioning lesbianism. Two years later, homosexuality casually appeared among the causes to which the party was committed. This shift by the party leadership was a response to a number of factors: a push from the party's own rank and file – represented, for instance, in the Young Communist League program which as early as 1971 was in support of gay rights; the presence of Denis Freney, himself gay and a supporter of gay lib, on the staff of the party paper; the influence of organized gays within the party in the form of a CPA Gay Collective (especially around the time of the 1973 Congress); and to the party's adaptation to the new radical milieu in which it found itself. It had not been smooth sailing – traditional homophobia found its voice through the

letters columns of *Tribune* and (apparently) in a document circulated in 1973 by prominent party member John Sendy which, according to his critics was "a call to the most prejudiced elements within the Party to oppose gay liberation and to take a conservative, sneering stance". But the change did take place.

But it was not the old left which had originally developed this new outlook. Rather, it had originated within a broader new liberalism which emerged in Australian political life in the late 1950s. This liberalism spoke for a new middle class that was, in the words of Donald Horne, gripped by "doubt, anger and disgust" at the "racist, anglocentric-imperialist, puritan, sexist, politically genteel-acquiescent, capitalist, bureaucratic and developmentalist" society that it saw around it. This class – or at least its intellectuals – was enraged by the way in which these values were buttressed by powerful social forces: "in official symbolism and rhetoric, in elite-forming institutions, in most of the mass media and in the way things were done in most of the bureaucracies". Frozen out of the mainstream media, the intellectuals established their own forums. In quick succession came *Overland* (1954), *Quadrant* (1956), the *Australian Book Review* (1958) and *Nation* (1958). Here, the new liberalism developed a world view which rejected the stultifying consensus of Menzies and Calwell, rejecting White Australia and restricted immigration, paternalism and racism in Aboriginal affairs, censorship, capital punishment, urban ugliness, the ban on abortion, the death penalty – and, among this host of issues, anti-homosexual laws and attitudes. The new liberal press provided an outlet for the discussion of homosexuality that had not hitherto existed except in the scandal-mongering pages of the *Truth*. In these magazines books were reviewed, police harassment exposed and homosexuals allowed to speak.

Nowhere is this left homophobia better captured than in the utterances of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), the Maoist party, which was a powerful force on the Australian left for a decade after the mid-1960s.

THE VALUES OF THE NEW LIBERALS found a ready audience – among university students (whose own press expanded further the space in which homosexuality could be spoken about – and in which homosexuals could speak), medical writers, religious leaders, legal academics and practitioners. When Rupert Murdoch established *The Australian* in 1964, its liberalism allowed, for the first time in the mainstream press, a serious reporting on issues such as homosexuality. As the rest of the press started to compete for *The Australian's* audience, serious treatment of homosexuality started to appear in papers such as *The Age*, the *Canberra Times*, *The Bulletin*. The final victory of this new liberalism came with Whitlam's remaking of the ALP, a remaking which included the adoption of the new liberal program on a range of social questions. The 1969 ALP Federal Conference adopted progressive policies on a whole raft of social issues including civil liberties, censorship, the voting age, marriage and divorce, corporal and capital punishment, consumer protection, freedom of expression for public servants, legal aid, punishment and rehabilitation of criminals and anti-discrimination legislation in relation to "colour, race, sex, religion or politics". If homosexuality was not explicitly mentioned, it was nonetheless able to ride into the mainstream on the coat-tails of this shift, and it came as no great surprise that senior party figures such as Bill Hayden (beginning as early as 1967) and even Whitlam himself (in 1970) expressed support for decriminalization of homosexual acts. As the Liberal Party struggled to catch the wave that Whitlam was riding, reformers such as Don Chipp and Tom Hughes also raised the prospect of homosexual law reform.

If liberalism, however, in the process of establishing its hegemony in Australian political life, had brought homosexuality onto the political agenda, it was the radicalization of the late 1960s and early 1970s that gave homosexuals the desire and means to go further. The political climate at the time is important here. Forming themselves into a movement (and the very idea of a movement is itself a product of the times), in which lesbians and gay men spoke for themselves, activists drew upon counter-cultural ideas such as 'the personal is political', in order to argue that changing one's self and one's life is an integral part of the process of changing the world. The movement drew, too, upon radical notions that were

in circulation at the time; ideas of self-organization and self-activity, of militancy and direct action, of a common struggle by all the oppressed and exploited against a common enemy: The System. The argument that homosexual oppression was not simply a matter of legal discrimination and ignorant prejudice, but rather an integral part of an oppressive and alienating society, positioned gay politics firmly within the left, at a time when this was the dominant force for change in society.

But the diversity of ideas which constituted the left and the way in which these were reflected within the movement, had certain political consequences. In the first place, it produced a movement with very wide appeal. It was possible for politically aware people of all political stripes (other than moral conservatives) to find a point of contact with the movement and to find a way, given the presence of any sort of good will at all, to support the demands of lesbians and gay men. If counter-culturalists were offended by the revolutionary rhetoric of the left-wing elements of the movement, they could nonetheless identify with the gay communal households and the talk of changing day-to-day relationships. If liberals were appalled by episodes such as the heckling and abuse of a prominent medical scientist at an academic conference, they could read with greater approval the journal distributed at that same event which put the arguments about the medicalization of homosexuality in a calm and rational manner. Revolutionaries could, if they wanted to, simply focus on the former and overlook the latter.

This ideological diversity also produced a wide range of targets and activities. The liberal law reformers had a limited goal (decriminalization) which only members of parliament could actually carry through. It therefore had a limited audience – primarily politicians and opinion makers. This, in turn, limited the repertoire of activities upon which they could draw to lobbying, public meetings, publishing – activities that would not unduly alienate politicians, editors, church leaders and the like. The gay movement's goals were very much broader. Even law reform was given a much wider interpretation than the liberals would have countenanced. In 1972 Lex Watson addressed a meeting in Adelaide at which he set out a law reform agenda which included the abolition of all laws regarding sexual behaviour, the eradication of all economic and social discrimination against gay couples, legislation banning discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, sex, race, religion, creed, marital status (recognizing the commonality of struggles) and demanded a public education campaign, starting in the schools, to confront and eradicate anti-gay attitudes.

And this was just the minimum program. The gay movement, or sections of it, was also for the overthrow of sex roles, the gender system, sexism, the family and for the remaking of the entire social order. All of which produced an extraordinary range of targets: politicians and opinion makers, to be sure, but also professionals and experts, other activists, other oppressed and exploited groups in society, ordinary people in the streets and, of course, all lesbians and gay men themselves. This, in turn, generated a vast range of activities: lobbying, public speaking – both mainstream, such as Lions Clubs and other community groups, and provocative, as in its 1973 blitz on schools – demonstrations and pickets, direct action and zaps, street theatre, boycotts, publishing, consciousness raising and counselling, election campaigns and so on. And on a day when there was nothing planned, the mere presentation of self – the wearing of radical drag into the streets and classrooms, holding hands in public – could become a political action.

THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT, then, was not just the product of a political period but one that was particularly well-suited to a range of challenges. It was a means to develop, adapt, rework and to argue for ideas, analyses, strategies. It was a means to organize activists and their supporters, offering each of them, whatever their politics, temperament or skills, a suitable niche. It was a means to intervene with and against a variety of targets. It is this ability to adapt, its ability to be on the scene in a number of places simultaneously, to seize a variety of often incompatible opportunities and to run with them which explains the importance of the social movement in the process of historical transformation during and since the 1970s.

If, in the 1980s and 1990s, the goal of *liberation* – the radical and counter-cultural ambitions which had motivated the early years of the movement – fell by the wayside, this was hardly a process unique to the gay movement. But neither was the enduring emphasis upon the political movement as the best means by which to advance social change. This is especially

clear when considering the threat posed by AIDS; a threat which was both medical and political. In the early 1980s, lesbian and gay activists established AIDS action committees which went on to provide the focus for government liaison, policy development, community empowerment and – at their fringes – radical action. The history of ACTUP in Australia has received too little attention (Michael Connor's important piece is an exception here) and the seeping of Queer out of the academy (with the establishment of Radical Queer in Perth and Queer Action in Melbourne) is too recent, and its importance too uncertain, to have elicited much comment. But both the radical groups and the mainstream AIDS Councils reflect the capacity of gay activists to recognize threats and opportunities and to rally to meet them by whatever means seem possible and necessary.

And yet, while all this was going on, the left seemed blind to what was happening. Believing that the gains of the 1960s and 1970s were fragile, its engagement with the movements since then has tended to focus upon the imminent (indeed, ever-present) threat of the backlash and upon the tactics necessary to fight it off. This has been a mistake. It is not the gains of the social movements that have been eroded in the 1980s, but the left itself. For this reason, the attention paid by the left to the movements – and the gay movement is merely one of these, of course – ought to be more in terms of what it can learn, than in what it can teach, though it does still have achievements and analyses of its own to defend and argue for. The primary importance of the movements lies in their capacity to adapt to their environments (and this is both a good and a bad thing), to meet new challenges and to confront them and to find ways forward in difficult times.

One of the great achievements of the past thirty years has been the remaking of Australian society into one where liberal values (and even many of those once dismissed as impossibly radical) hold sway. We live in a society where tens of thousands of people will take to the streets to protest against racism, to oppose war, to defend trade unions, to celebrate lifestyles. Perhaps Pauline Hanson has demonstrated that these are minority views. But if so, then the experience of the gay movement – a movement of and by (though never for) a minority; a movement of a minority which has transformed the society of which it is a part – this experience becomes all that more important. Minorities, apparently, can win.

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Andrew Moore

Super League and 'The Decline of Working Class Culture'

In the early 1980s Dr Bradon Ellem, a comrade who teaches industrial relations at the University of Sydney, hailed a taxi in the inner city of Sydney. The football season was just beginning. Unsurprisingly the taxidriver began to talk about the affairs of rugby league. The gossip at the time concerned that redoubtable ball of muscle and aggression, Tom Raudonikis. Near the end of his long harum scarum career 'Tom Terrific' had just moved from Wests to play a few, rather spiteful as it happened, seasons with Newtown.

Things were changing in the world of rugby league but to a certain extent these were still the 'olden days' when players tended to remain loyal to their clubs. Though few would have dared to accuse Raudonikis of being a class traitor, his defection from his fibro mates at Lidcombe still seemed a little odd. Tom himself was clearly uncomfortable because he laboured the point that he was glad he was still in a working-class club and a working-class area, both slightly dubious contentions.

Dr Ellem's taxidriver, however, knew precisely why Tom had left his Swanee River at Wests. Newtown's financial benefactor John Singleton, the right-wing advertising millionaire, had lured Raudonikis. What had he done? 'Singo' had paid Tom's gambling debts. It was as simple as that; indeed the taxidriver was perplexed by encountering a passenger who was so ignorant. He assumed that everyone in Sydney knew about Singo's largesse to the tough half-back. Why didn't Bradon? Where had he been? Mars?

Such taxi talk provides a window into rugby league's cultural milieu and reveals how information is disseminated around the working-class urban 'bush telegraph', networks of pubs, clubs and workplaces which exist in the contested territory of 'communities'. For while Tom Raudonikis' fondness for horse racing and having a punt was (and is) common knowledge, the story about his gambling-induced penury was never widely disseminated in the media. Yet in every pub and club where rugby league was discussed people (no doubt, more precisely, men) knew, or thought they knew, that this was gospel. Presumably they regarded this as such an obvious and old story that no 'rugby league person' would bother to mention the topic again.

Dr Ellem's taxidriver as a fount of knowledge stands in stark contrast to the Telstra cables in which Rupert Murdoch would have us all invest to get our news about the "earthy game of rugby league", as one Super League acolyte and recent Labor prime minister, Paul Keating, has styled it.

This article explores the imminent demise of taxidrivers talking about Tom Terrific and his kind and tangentially the related Sydney phenomenon, apparently common enough at the height of the Super League war in 1995, of taxidrivers refusing to drive News Limited journalists to their workplace. To what extent did rugby league court its own demise? Is Roy Masters, that great master of hyperbole and populist class analysis correct when he argues in *Meanjin* that Super League represented the "decline of working class culture"?

It's not simply a matter, as Roy and H.G. would say, of thinking of 'the kiddies', but unless you like touch football and dubious results, it's hard to work up any enthusiasm for Rupert Murdoch's alleged Super League (or more correctly, as of January 1997, the alleged Super League of Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer and Brian Johns).

Indeed the so-called 'Pearl Harbour raid' and its aftermath became a metaphor for many of the things that are wrong with Australian society. Most obviously at a time when cross media and media foreign ownership regulations are facing review, Super

League was the logical culmination of allowing a media proprietor of Rupert Murdoch's wealth, power and acquisitiveness to trample on democracy. It was just like 1975, except that rather than a government this time the target was a social democratic sporting organization, the not-for-profit Australian Rugby League. As with Kerr's coup, the News Limited newspapers were breathtaking in their capacity to spread propaganda and misinformation about Super League's 'vision'. *The Australian* may have calmed down a little; the *Telegraph* significantly less so, especially its leading league journalist whom Stuart Littlemore aptly describes as "Murdoch's chief toady". The worst part of it is that because of the barrage of lies in the *Telegraph*, Sydney's traditionally working-class newspaper, inevitably many people now believe that there was something genuinely wrong with the ARL – and with what they had before Mass Murdoch.

The Super League conflict also illustrated the rapprochement between the ruling right-wing elite of the Australian Labor Party and the big end of town, reflected in this case by the pro-Murdoch line adopted by the Keating government. Neville Wran began the rot when he accommodated Packer and World Series Cricket in 1976, but this was even more craven, especially given the extent to which in New South Wales and Queensland rugby league was the opera of the proletariat, formed in 1908 in the shadow of the inner-city ALP branches.

Super League also serves as a reminder of the force of Queensland populist nationalism and its manipulation. For it was the Brisbane sporting entrepreneur, Paul 'Porky' Morgan and his fellow New Right colleagues in the Brisbane Broncos club who inspired the schism. On the one hand they invoked the nostrums of economic rationalism, citing the stupidity of an organization – the ARL – that was not consumed by the profit motive. On the other hand the Bronco separatists exploited, a la Bjelke Petersen, an aggrieved Queensland siege mentality staving off the southern socialist centralists, the Sydney-dominated ARL.

In every sense Super League had precious little to do with sport. Rather it was a battle about opposing views of the world. The former electrician and Super League executive John Ribot revealed a clear understanding of the rudiments of political science when he suggested that the dispute was "a bit like politics" and described himself as taking a right-wing position, as opposed to the left occupied by the ARL. Porky Morgan amplified his New Right philosophy the day after the Super League competition had been legitimated on appeal. Speaking on the ABC radio sports show 'Grandstand', Porky rejoiced that socialism and communism had been found wanting; only capitalism, pure and unfettered, could help the unemployed, the homeless and the needy. Morgan is not silly enough to argue that sport and politics are unrelated.

Finally, despite the best efforts of that great, wise and noble judge, Mr Justice Burchett, ultimately the Super League legal proceedings showed the extent to which the law (not just contract law which Burchett defended, but the law as a regulatory mechanism seeking to secure the common good and community wellbeing) means nothing if you have lots of money and can use the Trade Practices Act to show a 'restraint of trade'. It is no surprise that the Trade Practices Act was used by the New Right to win so many industrial struggles, Mudginberri and so on, in the 1980s. To the contemporary moguls of big business it is as effective as the Transport Workers Act of 1928 as a way of keeping the workers in their place, as well as corporatizing and attacking working-class culture.

In short the 1995 'Pearl Harbour raid' was heady stuff, but perhaps it was the culmination of processes already in train? It may be that rugby league was vulnerable to corporate takeover, not just because it had become spectacularly successful in commercial terms, which it certainly was, but also because it had lost sight of the links between community, class and culture that had been its mainstay. Here we need to know something of where rugby league came from, and how its roots became lost.

UNLESS YOU BELIEVE that the bash and crash momentum of rugby league mirrored the rhythms of work in the factories of industrial capitalism, there was no intrinsic reason why rugby league would become the game of the masses in New South Wales and Queensland, leaving the elite ensconced in the private school networks that played rugby union. Unlike Wales or New Zealand, league became attached to working-class culture. The situation in eastern Australia mirrored the north–south divide of England. In this respect sport mirrored 'Englishness' for league there is connected with 'northern identity', an argument which, except for the Yorkshire accent, is a dead ringer for Russel Ward's Australian Legend.

Certainly there were significant industrial relations issues which underpinned the split of 1907–8, among other things the 'broken time' payments it facilitated. The coming of rugby league also mirrored the growing maturity of the Australian working-class movement in the 1900s, the sense of a proletariat fashioning a city and a nation state in its own image, no doubt with a little bit of help from the likes of Mr Justice Higgins and the Harvester Judgement about living wages. There was, as George Parsons writes, "a conjuncture of historical forces which reached its critical mass in 1907" and lead to the breakaway from rugby union.

Local variables also helped. As the Peter Bowling strike waged in the Newcastle coalfields, the fact that many coalmine owners were connected to rugby union encouraged their employees to play and support rugby league. In Sydney the rugby league football clubs reflected the labour market of a port city and the demography of the nearby suburbs where blue-collar workers lived. Institutions of local communities – particularly pubs – were pivotal for the propagation of rugby league.

Local identity was a major aspect of rugby league and its connections with the urban history of Sydney. Rugby union had floundered because of the distinct lack of local or regional identity, which seems undeveloped in Sydney until the 1900s and meant that the rugby union competition did not embrace a district competition until 1900. Eight years later, for working-class males donning the first-grade guernsey of a district rugby league club became a matter of intense pride. Urban historians have not had much to say about suburban parochialism in Sydney, but there is some evidence that by the 1920s the mental universe encompassing localism had intensified.

It may be an exaggeration to talk, as does Associate Professor Ian Heads, the official historian of the NSW Rugby League , of an "unbroken chain" between rugby league, the Australian Labor Party and the labour movement. Yet it remains true that the links between the game and Labor have been under-recognized by labour historians. Variegated and contradictory, rugby league contained and expressed a bedrock of ideas about solidarity, collectivism and a social democratic milieu. The game was surprisingly egalitarian. At the outset, for instance, players were responsible for such crucial matters as team selection. Gate money was split equally between players of the three grades. In common with other working-class pursuits – as Lucy Taksa argues about outdoor political meetings during the 1917 strike – rugby league became an informal expression of "upholding a separate working-class identity", reinforcing a "sense of common interests". It may be a bit steep to say rugby league was in Gramscian terms "a means of defining and winning space within the social structure", but there is certainly an element of that. And perhaps because it was a game of the respectable working classes and involved entrepreneurial types like J.J. Giltinan, the social structure of Sydney certainly accommodated rugby league. Leeds is the only other major city in the world where rugby league had its headquarters in the same venue as the Establishment's game – cricket. Certainly seen in world terms Sydney's love affair with Northern Rules rugby is eccentric, though no less so than Melbourne's attachment to Australian Rules.

NOEL ('NED') KELLY, Wests' old-style enforcer of the 1960s, is a curious symbol of modernity. Yet when the Queenslander arrived in Sydney at the start of the 1961 season, Wests' patron was licensee of the Narrabeen Hotel, smack bang in the middle of Manly-Warringah's home turf, territory Tom Raudonikis' coach would later characterize as belonging to the enemy 'silvertails'. Kelly and his family grew to love the beaches of the Northern Peninsula, and never moved, permitted to do so by the end of the residential qualifications in 1959.

Few lamented the end of the requirement that if you played for a club you had to live in its often minutely defined (by the League) territory. The rule had long been rorted. On paper at least the domiciles of club secretaries periodically bulged with stray footballers. As well the rule was intrusive and administered in an authoritarian fashion.

With the advantage of hindsight, however, it is clear that ending the local residential qualification was crucial in breaking down the relationship between a community and its football club. Indeed much of league's attraction was its parochialism and tribalism. In turn the football clubs helped confer a sense of place on their adopted districts.

For me the North Sydney district was a grand place because it was identified with a major, if fundamentally flawed rugby league team. My suburb, solid red-brick Northbridge was a comfortable place, made all the more so by the sight of the gnarled visage of the

long-time Bears' hooker, 'Roscoe' Warner plying his trade at Sprowsters Quality Meats in Sailors Bay Road, or various members of that famous North Sydney rugby league dynasty, the Blinkhorns, providing my father with paint and nails at their hardware store a few shops away. When in 1973 Phil Giersch, a North Sydney Boys High contemporary briefly became the tabloids' headline 'Giersch experiment' and joined the North Sydney backline alongside the great George Ambrum, we Northbridge boys knew that we could claim a major brush with fame. As apprentice members of the drinking classes one early visit to the local bloodhouse, the Strata at Cremorne, was made memorable by the sight of Jim Mills, the incorrigibly violent Englishman and Norths prop, at work as a bouncer. Never one to skimp on aggression, a large group of people was attempting to restrain Big Jim from throwing a patron off a second floor balcony. Any footie fan of a few years standing can relate similar stories. Rupert Murdoch wants the young to miss out on these cultural experiences for there is no space for the local in the global.

It's not simply a matter, as Roy and H.G. would say, of thinking of 'the kiddies', but unless you like touch football and dubious results, it's hard to work up any enthusiasm for Rupert Murdoch's alleged Super League . . .

The communities from which the foundation rugby league clubs emerged have themselves been disrupted. In 1968 the completion of the Warringah Expressway cut a swathe through working-class North Sydney, completing a process the approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge had begun in 1923. By the 1970s the process of gentrification in the inner city and the relocation of factories to the west and south-west changed the focus of rugby league. The neighbourhood networks of the older inner-city suburbs were destroyed, the municipal basis of Labor politics was eroded, while, as Connell and Irving argue, "the sense of class distinctiveness was lost". This partly explains why one relatively newly established and now allegedly Super League club, Penrith, has long struggled to build a local following, though there were good Labor families like the Andersons (Peter was a police minister) who made the transition from the inner city to the west and changed football allegiances.

Patterns of commuting changed the relationship between the clubs and their supporters. Residence, in isolation, no longer dictated club affiliation. In 1979 the president of the North Sydney Supporters Club lived in Greenacre, in Sydney's west, by then the natural habitat of the Parramatta Eels.

Finally the working man's game had indeed supped with the devil of commercialism, perhaps because it always had. The first guernsey signing rights – Easts with City Ford – took place in 1976, a deal reputedly worth fifty thousand dollars over three seasons. As early as 1962 rugby league was linked to a harmful drug – tobacco – when the pre-season competition was styled the Craven A cup. The Winfield Cup started twenty years later, a fateful liaison between a cigarette company and rugby league which nearly led to the expulsion of one club – the North Sydney Bears – from the competition because of the militant anti-smoking stand taken by its then president, David Hill. More than anything else television rights gradually changed the landscape of rugby league into a multi-million-dollar operation.

Those in charge of the game made decisions like the accountants they were becoming. On the day the Newtown club was finally expelled from the competition, Australians were expected to stand and cheer for Alan Bond's victory in the America's Cup yacht race. The competition expanded to embrace new clubs outside Sydney, disrupting the prospect of ordinary people being able to see their team play each weekend. Television affected the scheduling of matches. The importance placed upon State of Origin football disrupted the fortnightly rhythm of home-and-away club football. Periods of up to three weeks could take place mid season before fans could attend a home game. The older working-class fans of North Sydney cite the loss of a fortnightly ritual as a basis for long-term disaffection. Hitherto they had followed a weekend (Saturday) routine of enjoying a few beers at lunch, placing a bet on the races at the pub (later the TAB), then walking down past the terrace homes of Crows Nest to the Oval. In my own case even the 1983 innovation of FootyTAB killed off an attraction of rugby league – the SP who would visit the Crows Nest garage in which I worked on Thursday nights. His purpose was to take bets on the margins of the weekend games. A sur-

reptitious character with a highly oiled pompadour, he would arrive like clockwork at 5 p.m. I don't grieve for him because I surmise he ended up getting a 'proper job' as a bureaucrat at DEETYA.

IN SOME WAYS THE HIATUS caused between the 'olden days' and Super League was not all that abrupt. The rot had been setting in for some time. On the other hand while rugby league had long been shaped by commercial imperatives, especially from the 1970s and certainly since 1983, it had not been dominated, swamped by commercialism, as undoubtedly it now is, especially the scab League abomination. To say that this caused the demise of working-class culture would be too strong, because cultural practices can be very resilient, but decline is probably right. Why the Super League war hurt and hurts so much, was expressed best at an anti-Super League rally in 1995 by Paddy Crumlin of the Maritime Union. Crumlin argued that rugby league is "about the development of community life for working men and women. For a large section of our union it (rugby league) is the basis of our leisure".

Indeed it remains unclear whether Murdoch's money will finally beat the community life. One aggrieved British fan quoted in volume two of *When Push Comes to Shove* argues that: "Despite all the publicity, despite the TV exposure, and despite the big money, the question of the future of Rugby League is a question of culture and not just a question of exposure and finance". Mike Donaldson is right when he argues that cultural 'globalization' is not "determined in its effects; the cultures impacted upon are not without resilience and creativity".

These are the brave thoughts we all need to cling to in order to believe that a small gnat – the ARL – can slay the demon News Limited and its accomplices. For there are many reasons for depression, not the least being the prospect that ongoing financial deals in the corporate world over pay television will force the ARL into a 'compromise' that is really a capitulation. And then there is the problem of how we 'rugby league people' relate to the Super Leaguers if a reconciled 20-team competition is organized for 1988, as presently (28 October 1997) seems likely. I have in mind an image of Dr Evatt naming the Groupers at the 1955 Hobart conference of the ALP. Clambering onto a table he yells to Eddie Ward, "Take down their names! Take down their names!" I'm not sure if the same blind fury drives my list of Super Leaguers but there are many who should not be welcomed back into society. It should not be forgotten, for instance, that like Dame Nellie Melba in 1917, Christine Anu and the former Maoist John Schumann, sang for the scabs.

For myself I shall continue to go to North Sydney Oval because I love a club and its flaws, its characters, its oval, and the fact that they are my tribe. I won't go when and if Norths are amalgamated with Manly, as sometimes seems likely, or so the Murdoch press alleges. Nor can I face the prospect of relocating to the Central Coast, a disastrous Super League style 'business plan' the Bears' officials dreamed up without help from Rupert Murdoch. But I gather there are some excellent A-grade fixtures at local ovals. Crows Nest versus McMahons Point at Tunks Park, an idyllic setting by Middle Harbour with two hundred spectators seems like an attractive option. And I sometimes see great games of rugby league in the Newcastle competition. Lakes United versus South Newcastle may not attract too many pay television subscriptions. True, such games can be brutal and lack finesse. At least, however, they are 'real' rugby league.

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Andrew Moore teaches Australian history at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur where Tom Raudonikis once told him: "Youse are local". He recently published The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League *(Macmillan). He is not the Andrew Moore who calls rugby league games on a Sydney commercial radio station.*

miscellany

Two responses to Mark Davis' *Gangland*:

1) Nathan Hollier

The most useful and exciting thing about Mark Davis' *Gangland* is that it links our own 'culture of complaint' to the ease with which governments in this country have introduced narrowly economic and socially regressive policy agendas. That is, it finds a synergy between that tendency to see new cultural and social formations as products of the intellectually and morally bankrupt, and government desires to withdraw all forms of social investment. Davis identifies the literary figures and cultural commentators occupying the central positions of speech within the culture industry, and argues that they are linked together by their demographic or cultural status as 'baby-boomers': "Some were born at the height of the baby-boom, especially the 1940s, just as some were born after it, but it is their assumption of privilege, not their date of birth, that will be held against them here". He takes his subjects to task for their direct participation in this more widely functioning political ideology (Manne, Craven, Murray, Williamson, Garner), and for a general lack of self-reflexivity. This is perhaps most tellingly analyzed in relation to the short-sighted, sometimes simplistic and often defensive attacks on 'theory'. Because for all the criticism heaped on theoretical 'jargon', much of its political import lies in a simple assertion that a position may be true in one sense, but not in another.

Davis' research effort is phenomenal. It effectively reveals, within the elites he examines, a fundamental shift in attitude ("Having grown up in the seventies myself, I remember many of these figures as, if not radical, then somewhere to the left"), and one not confined to one or two of its sub-groups. Throughout *Gangland*, rhetorical 'attacks on youth' almost always equate, at a policy level, with attacks on those principles of progressive social planning and investment characteristic of the Whitlam era: "One reason for many of the above problems is a widespread reluctance to pay higher taxes, which has been exploited by the political parties". It is to be expected that this reluctance to invest in progressive social outcomes will have amongst its most visible effects, a vilification of youth and youth cultures.

2) Benjamin Ross

The notion that the political economy of cultural production is separable from the social relations of really-existing capitalism is absurd. The key to the defence of this notion lies in making critics appear as philistines (or else Stalinists). In Australia, those who do not assent to the self-image of liberalism can additionally be accused of suffering from a 'cultural cringe'. In the case of Mark Davis' *Gangland*, this is already being done. For these reasons alone, and despite significant flaws, *Gangland* can teach the children quite a lot, both as an analysis and as a provocation (and hence as a symptom). Its pedagogy works best when supplemented by the efforts of those provoked – most notably Peter Craven in this October's *Australian Book Review*.

What Craven gave us was a pretty good expression of this desired self-image. Davis' sin is clear: he undermines the claim to openness and liberalism essential to these cultural institutions. By discussing some of the circuits of exchange constituting Australian cultural production, Davis is guilty of bad taste, hanging dirty laundry in publishing.

He must have expected hostility and the profession of good faith on the part of those mired in these economies, and this Craven provides. Craven takes the validity of the 'public sphere' for granted. As with Habermas – whose search for the

speech situation undistorted by relations of domination is always unsuccessful but who always seems to find the present 'public sphere' of liberal democracy *close enough* – those under attack have a need to defend the notion that there is *something* diverse, responsive, representative and democratic about Australian cultural politics. The secret is not any generational network or individual sin, but rather the fact that cultural production is a political economy, with all the hierarchy, exclusion and power-politics which go with it. As with many markets, it declares that decisions to participate are individual choices, and when challenged (and despite 'multiculturalism' and 'political correctness' and 'postmodernism') tends to fall back on the idea that outcomes are or can be more-or-less based on politically-neutral merit – the search for truth or for quality can help ideologically reconcile liberalism with exclusion. As with all markets, free or otherwise, those who benefit tend to see the solution to any problems as simply more of the same. Craven's review of *Gangland* embodies all of these cliches in one form or another.

Davis is certainly impressionistic and sometimes shallow in his use of evidence – witness the vague use made of the *Rabelais* censorship case which has unfortunately been a chunk of my life for the last two years. His generational theories are certainly too simple, and his understanding of the contemporary political context appears to be only marginally better than that of many of those he assaults. None of this, however, can take away the power of this text to irritate. I, for one, am grateful.

Chris Woodland writes:

READERS OF MERV LILLEY'S 'review' of John Meredith's *Breaker's Mate* (*Overland* 147) were presented with some fascinating and controversial reading. Like me they would have been confused that the piece was offered as a review when it was obviously an autobiography.

However limited the writer's references to Ogilvie were, there are a couple of points I would like to comment on. Lilley's reference to cowardice is taken out of context as the relevant verse shows:

> They laid him low in a coward's grave,
> Somewhere out on the grey Karoo,
> (Yet I know one mate would have thought him brave,
> And a woman who thought him true!)

Unlike Lilley I have found Ogilvie and his poems very popular. In the north-west of NSW, around Bourke and Wanaaring, and up over the border, I found the memory of both Ogilvie and Morant quite strong and the poetry of the former relatively well known.

When reasonably lubricated Max Barton of the Paroo channel country would recite 'The Riding of the Rebel', though substituting 'Numbardi', the name of his station, for that of 'Glenidol'. Retired drover Jim Kiley put at least one Ogilvie ballad to music over half a long lifetime ago. Tony McLaughlan of Sydney performed 'From the Gulf' over thirty years ago and many other Ogilvie ballads are well known in song. 'How the Fire Queen Crossed the Swamp' has been a party-piece for Chris McGinty, Monaro horse-breaker and general bush worker, for many years now.

A Labo(u)r Childhood

George Parsons

WHEN BOTH MY PARENTS were out I used to drag a chair from the dining room and stand on it to reach the top of their wardrobe. Here was the fascination of the fearful – the picture of my grandmother's grave; there was also a breast pump, some erotic playing cards my father had bought in Egypt, his Masonic case, some love letters and a small box containing war medals, rising sun badges, his army pay book and a bundle of tickets mixed with union badges and membership tickets of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).

The picture of the grave terrified me; the breast pump conjured up vivid, if totally misleading images; but the rest of the forbidden treasure was reassuring. Dad had fought in what we called the anti-fascist war, and now he was involved in the battle to win the peace for the working class. The Labor Party – we knew – was petty bourgeois but it was the best hope for change. My father's soul was, however, with the CPA, with Stalin, Lenin and the first socialist nation, represented in our house by Soviet publications featuring tractors, fields of waving wheat, heroines of socialism, ballet dancers and musicians. This was the future but we needed to proceed by way of the popular front until the crisis came – as it would! – and the people woke up and overthrew the capitalist system. It would be slow; progress – Mum taught us – might seem unlikely, but it was inevitable. Dad had a favourite word – rationality. We were rational, they were not. We were on the side of

history, they were on their way to the scrap heap.

It was all very convincing to a child born in 1942, living in a working-class Sydney suburb dominated by the Left. Even at school there was no need to hide one's political views. Most of the teachers voted Labor – many were Dad's mates in the branch – and the only boys who were ridiculed were the sons of the small businessmen, the 'two bob capitalists', the 'would-bes-if-they-could-be'. My mate, the taxi-driver's son, relayed his father's belief that Liberal voters were mean as shit, that they didn't drink and that they didn't know how to root. The bus conductor, next door, told Dad over the fence that Menzies was 'on' with the rich women; the Libs had no morals. They were, in the words of my Uncle Sidney (gassed at Ypres in 1917 and left for dead – Grandma had the telegram), alley cats. Uncle Eric, who was later to marry Tilly Devine, agreed; no moral sense.

Everything seemed so simple in 1949. Of course there were problems. Bloody groupers were everywhere. My left-wing father was somehow also a Mason, drawing criticism from mother about "little boys writing their names in blood", who justified his anti-Catholicism on political grounds. Many of his colleagues were Catholics but they were the enlightened ones who told of the evils of the convents, the tunnels used by lecherous priests to get sex-mad nuns, and the fleecing of the poor in the name of superstition. Mum said we were atheists; sometimes Dad talked about a 'Supreme Being' and mother glared, but the moment passed quickly and peace was soon restored. It dawned on me fairly early that my mother was the strong one. She didn't need any outside help.

Dad had a nice line in revolutionary puritanism, but it didn't extend to beer. Every weekday afternoon and all of Saturday he resided in Jack McGrath's pub with my uncles and his mates. "Everyone likes Tassie," said my aunt. "He doesn't have an enemy in the world. You're lucky Et." My mother smiled grimly. "Why do you piss it up against the wall when the kids need things?" we'd hear her say late at night. The old man would smile, try to pat her on the bottom or pull her into his lap. He never answered the question, especially when my sister rephrased it in even more direct terms. Like Henry Lawson, who he read and revered as a socialist realist writer – the first story I heard read was 'The Union Buries Its Dead' – beer made him feel the way he would have liked to have felt without it. One night as he sat on the porch singing 'Charmaine' my mother calmed my sister, not bought off by lollies, with the words, "Well, love, remember he's never hit you or me ever!" "The man who hits a woman", said my father, "is a coward." Some nights he had the marks to show he sometimes tried to intervene in what Mum called 'domestics'. "Bloody silly idea, mate," said Uncle George. "Neither party will thank you."

Dad and Mum were optimists. The disastrous election of 1949 didn't destroy their confidence. "Only the political, son," said Dad sagely, "it's the social you have to worry about." My father believed that history was on our side. His imagery was that of a zig-zag railway; although upward movement was slow it was inexorable. Capitalism was doomed; even when he died, aged eighty, he was still confident, still patient, still convinced that communism was inevitable. In his last year he rejoiced in Bertolt Brecht's great poem which my friend Eric Hobsbawm found him and which prophesied socialist victory even though he would not be here to see it.

Politics mattered but the 'social' mattered more. Leaders would come and go – my father was critical of the hero-worship of leaders on the Left, although he cried for Ben Chifley – but the 'people' would always be there. Fascists would reappear regularly but they would be defeated. Workers would show 'false consciousness' and be seduced away from the revolution but eventually they too would see the light. The bourgeoisie could be re-educated – mother didn't agree; she believed it would be a matter of bayonets in the end – and the people could rule democratically rather than dictatorially. (Years later when I explained this to the late Edward Thompson he told me it was remarkably advanced communism for the time. I thought, aged seven, that every working man felt like this.)

Four decades ago it seemed all so clear, simple and rational. It was a good way to grow up, believing in the socialist revolution, in community, in 'fraternity' (Uncle Eric thought this the missing element in socialism) and in mateship (which included women!). Dad called Mum 'mate', he called his sisters 'mate' – indeed he called everyone 'mate'. He would, I think, have been delighted to hear his granddaughters, all tough feminists, use the term as a badge of honour. At his funeral we sang 'The Red Flag' and 'The Internationale'. At least one of us still believes the words.

Shelter

Ian C. Smith

I DISLIKE THE AGONY style of pop music, sanctimony on talkback radio, deserted dogs that howl all day, car alarms, dawn-breaking whipper-snippers, and many other intrusive noises, so I prefer not to live near neighbours, and we have lived here in the grounds of this psychiatric hospital for the past two years. Now that we are finally leaving I feel an uneasy nostalgia for the place even though I am glad to be going. I will never again walk past the man who sits on a lovers' seat outside his ward, sits in his pyjamas waving his grubby teddy bear, calling out to me by making guttural sounds as if he has had an operation on his throat. His erect penis is large and pale. I imagine him as only ever experiencing the caress of his own hand.

Whenever I have walked – and I have walked obsessively – in these grounds, I felt hemmed in by opposition and resentment which hung about the hospital like a miasma. The groundsmen, motorized gardeners, stare at me from a distance but look away if they draw near me. When I arrived here I naively thought they were patients who were allowed to work. Their expressions seemed to be sullen. I have needed to speak several times with these and other men who work here and I found them to be perversely stupid, exchanging knowing looks and appearing to withhold information, then prodding each other to speak first, to be the spokesman. Common sense, good manners, and reason seemed to be wasted on their antagonism.

Back to those walks. I have often been looking after my two youngest children during these walks which were mainly for the entertainment of little boys bursting with *elan vital* who can't be contained inside all day, so you might think those men would have found a couple of angelic-looking terrors appealing, but this doesn't seem to have been the case. I can only remember my boys receiving a friendly wave on about three occasions.

Perhaps the fact of a man taking care of his children is what bothers these men? Perhaps they know my wife works for the same general employer as they do, only in a management position, and this is what they resent? Perhaps they know I am a writer and they sneer at this vanity? Perhaps there was an incident involving me or my wife, such as the time when we asked the maintenance men not to spray poison in our backyard, that had been overlooked by us but has become enlarged in the collective psyche of these men who spend their days in the grounds of a psychiatric hospital? Perhaps we inherited a tradition of opposition to outsiders, to intruders, when we moved into the house? My wife's theory is that the workers simply resent the fact that they have to go out to work and I don't. Then again, my existence could be so sheltered from what is sometimes called 'the real world' that their resentment exists only in my over-developed imagination?

Most of the patients who wander the grounds avoid other people, with a few regular exceptions. Those who speak to me are mostly polite and friendly, and I have never been, or even felt, threatened by any of them. The wards, built in 1930s brick and asbestos spare-no-expense style, some now closed because of the asbestos, look impressive at first, and combined with the many European trees, create an English village appearance, but I have grown to dislike what I now see as their grim facades. Sometimes I hear eldritch screams and tantrums, sometimes I see a bundle of bedclothes outside, lying below a window, but often it is quiet here. I feel I have come to know every building, every turn in the roads, and even nearly every tree with their little collections of beer bottles and cans around their trunks, in these grounds. Part of the hospital has been turned into a golf course so the most familiar sound is the drone of mowers.

The poet, Francis Webb, lived here as a patient for part of his unhappy life. I have listened and looked – with utter failure – for his ghost, and can only conclude that he must, like me, have been miserable here. His shattered life might be representative of many other shattered lives here, and this might be the reason for what appears to be an absence of happiness, the aura of melancholia which surrounds us all despite the English postcard effect. Even my boys sense that something is wrong.

Let's face it, my time spent here has not been a success, although the principal reason for this, I suspect, has been boredom. My wife has done well. We came here because it was a great career opportunity for her, and she has made the most of it. I think it is ironic that on some occasions when I have been walking alone, professional people like her (you can tell them apart easily, they dress and carry themselves differently) have avoided eye contact with me because – and I am certain of this – they

believe I am a patient. I know I dress sloppily. With my wife's help, I cut my own hair. And I am content, and amused, if this guise means that I am left alone and ignored.

From an old armchair on the front porch of our institutional house I see the nursing staff driving in and out at each change of shift. Some drive as if they are perpetually running late, or are angry, or both. They drive at speeds up to three times the hospital limit, and have even crashed into each other in the grounds. These people also dislike making eye contact with me but they look when I let them think I don't know they are watching me. Like the gardeners and the maintenance men, they also look disgruntled and mean. Some of the women staff members are driven by men I presume are their partners. These men look like the sort of men I would not like left alone with my children. Sometimes they drive fiercely across the golf course during the early shift changeover, instead of driving around the road, spinning their wheels and gouging black stripes on the fairways.

My willingness to fly away from here could be connected to my past. I have always felt exhilarated when shaking off a feeling of impediment and confinement by leaving behind certain people of narrow outlook. The feeling of received resentment and then, harassment, debilitates my spirit when I have sometimes lived or worked with people of limited or undeveloped intelligence and fulfilment.

I know nostalgia is a form of sentimentality, and sentimentality blurs reality, yet I think the reason I feel nostalgic to be leaving even though I count down the days to what I joke about as The Great Escape, is simply that, like all those other people here, nurses, gardeners, maintenance men, doctors, garbage men, managers, and patients, this is where I have spent part of my life, and life is so precious to each of us. I read somewhere recently (it might have been in a poem) of a man who, whenever leaving any place he has lived, stops to solemnly thank the house for providing shelter during that phase of his life. This at first struck me as being odd, but now I think I understand it.

Darwin Tongue and Groove

Marian Devitt

OF THE FIVE EVENTS of 'Tongue and Groove' – the literature events on the 1997 Festival of Darwin program – it was the 'Mother Tongues' event that we hoped would demonstrate the positive effect of cultural diversity in Darwin and offer an opportunity to our audience to appreciate the languages and oral traditions that inform the work of Northern Territory writers.

Bilha Smith, an Israeli storyteller, born and raised on a kibbutz, seemed the perfect choice to open the event. Bilha, comfortable with performance and the storytelling medium, told the story of the Tower of Babel – a tale of the potential for language to create division and antagonism.

A visiting Anne Fairbairn then read her transcreations of 'A Secret Sky' by the poet Wadih Sa'adeh. Anne's reading was further enhanced by the presence of a Darwin scientist, Hassan Bajhau, who translated the poetry into Arabic. It seemed, in this environment, a natural and appropriate progression from Bilha's Hebrew context, to the spare and delicate poetry of the Arabic world and a great privilege to have such an esteemed poet in our presence and the opportunity to hear the poetry in the original Arabic.

Ragini, an Indian choral group bonded together in this new country by a love of music and songs, performed next. The presence of Ragini, a dozen strong in full traditional dress, accompanied by organ and tabla, was an uplifting delight. Their songs provided the perfect transition into the reading by Prithvindra Chakravarti, a Bengali poet and linguist due to publish a volume of his poetry in Calcutta in 1998. Like Bilha and many others in Darwin, Prithvindra has worked in Papua New Guinea and read a long poem inspired by that neighbouring country. His wife Joy, a dignified elder of the Ragini, read poetry by Tagore in the language and was so overcome that she wept as she struggled to finish the recitation. This spontaneous reaction brought home to the audience the power of the Mother Tongue, embodying all that has been left behind and cannot be expressed in English. Prithvindra was followed by an Indian flautist, Mrigen Verma and the tabla player, Ram, from Ragini.

Karyn Sassella, the project co-ordinator of these events, then took to the stage and read poetry in English, Italian and Gumatj – an East Arnhem Land language she began to learn while living in Yirrkala. Much of Karyn's poetry explores the experience of a European living and working with Aboriginal people.

THE SECOND HALF of the program provided the opportunity for less experienced writers, poets and performers to contribute to this

balmy morning and it was good to see that some visiting backpackers were able to hear poetry and song in their own languages.

To further enrich the cultural mix, Mona El-Ayoubi, a teacher at the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at NT University, made an appearance on behalf of the Aboriginal students. The students have been writing books for children which are then translated into Aboriginal languages, French and Italian. Mona read both French and Italian versions and then surprised us all by singing, in Arabic, a traditional haunting chant.

DeeDee Pringle, an Aboriginal woman originally from Broome, was next and admitted to the audience that she was terrified. A round of encouraging applause, a chair to help alleviate the shaking knees and a repositioned microphone all encouraged her to begin the story 'Going to the White House'. The 'White House' is an Aboriginal reference to the Casino that looms like a nuclear bunker within sightlines of our venue that morning. The story was full of irony and humour and DeeDee had the audience captivated as she revealed strange and hilarious rituals performed to induce good luck.

Peter Siriotis, a Greek poet, read briefly in Greek before bursting into Greek song which sounded not dissimilar to Mona's haunting chant. And finally, Jacquie Williams, an Englishwoman who has been in Darwin for twenty-eight years, read her story 'Muckin' Out Pigs' in full Lancashire brogue. The story has echoes of cold comfort farms and strange sightings in the woodshed and seemed somehow fitting as a final piece – a reference back to England, the Mother Country of the Anglo–Celts.

This description of 'Mother Tongues' gives readers some insight into the literary scene of one small part of the Northern Territory. The tiresome stereotypes of rednecks and crocodile stories were nowhere in evidence and the morning was so pleasant that we pledged to repeat the experience. Next time, we hope to take advantage of the full moon and the tranquil outdoor garden setting of the Myilly Point Coffee Garden to listen once again to the sounds of many languages in a spirit of appreciation and celebration.

Tasmania News

Tim Thorne

October in Tasmania was a time of literary festivals, with the Tasmanian Poetry and Dance Festival in Launceston from 2–5 October, then the Tasmanian Spring Writing Festival from 21–25 October.

The Poetry and Dance Festival has grown out of the Tasmanian Poetry Festival, which started back in 1985, and which introduced the concept of the Poetry Cup, a performance contest in which each poet has a time limit of one minute to elicit the loudest audience response to an original poem.

Over the years the Launceston Poetry Cup has been won by some very famous names (e.g. Gwen Harwood in 1991) and by some who have made no other mark in the annals of Ozlit. Among the latter group are husband and wife, Liu Yongbing (1988) and Yu Yuanfang (1996). Liu's win was all the more meritorious in that his poem was delivered in Mandarin, a language not understood by anyone in the audience. Such is the power of the music of poetry!

This year the festival featured readings by the poets, Ivy Alvarez, Pam Brown, Sheila Burchill, Adrian Caesar, Peter Hay, Brian Henry, Kristin Henry, Mark O'Flynn, Edwina Powell, Ania Walwicz and Lauren Williams. There were also performances of contemporary dance and music.

In a warm-up for the Cup, the inaugural Sim's Cafe Bar Poetry Handicap was held on 2 September and won by Bryan Ervin.

Less than three weeks after the Festival, the state played host to the six British writers in Australia on an exchange trip organized through the Australia Council and the British Council. In Tasmania, the six, Diran Adebayo, Simon Armitage, Kate Clanchy, Louise Doughty, Alison Kennedy and Glenn Patterson, were joined by a number of Australian writers for the Tasmanian Spring Writing Festival, which took place at various venues, including such relatively isolated towns as Strahan and Stanley.

The University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Writers Centre have been the organizational forces behind this festival, and the Centre, which was established earlier this year after some six years of lobbying, is already providing welcome support to writers and to those who are endeavouring to keep literature as an important element in the cultural development of Tasmanian communities.

It is currently hosting a community residency for Kristin Henry, and conducted a conference on community writing in Hobart in late September. It was instrumental in facilitating a forum in June at

which a number of the state's writers raised issues with Arts Tasmania, the State Government's funding body.

These issues included the make-up and role of Arts Tasmania's literature panel, the small share of the funding allocation which goes to literature compared to other art forms, and the question of assistance to Tasmanian literary publishing. The publishing issue will be further addressed at a meeting in November, and it is hoped that, as an outcome of this, Tasmania will end up with a state-based literary publishing house something along the lines of the Fremantle Arts Centre Press in Western Australia.

Another initiative of the Writers Centre has been the Write Sport Competition, sponsored by Australian Air Express. With $1000 prizes in both open and under-18 categories, the competition is for writing by a Tasmanian resident in any genre which alludes in some way to sport.

Brisbane Line

Margaret Henderson

WHY IS IT THAT ALL the cultural events in Brisbane seem to happen at the same time? First, we had the poetry festival at South Brisbane Sailing Club, followed by the Brisbane International Film Festival, then the Stage X Youth Arts Festival (27 August–7 September), and the final knockout was the Brisbane Writers' Festival (4–7 September). So for a few weeks in the second half of the year, you can almost forget about the saturation of everyday life by the various football codes and their increasingly long and overexposed seasons, as long as you don't watch television (free to air or cable) or open a newspaper. Although I don't see why cultural athletes aren't also in danger of fatigue and mental groin strains from an over-intense season. By the last session of the Writers' Festival, I could almost understand Julian O'Neill's behaviour.

The second Brisbane Writers' Festival was on an even grander scale, and was more diverse and popular, than last year's festival. In just over four days, every possible literary taste was catered for, with over seventy different panels, readings, launches, awards, performances, and breakfasts running from morning to night, in a variety of venues, and again, the vast majority of events were free and filled to capacity. The line-up of writers was huge (over one hundred), including fiction and non-fiction writers, children's writers, screenwriters, the well-established and the recently published. This opportunity for new and Brisbane writers to reach a wider audience is probably one of the most important benefits of the festival.

The big 'stars' this year were Peter Carey, Bryce Courtenay, and Alberto Manguel, ably supported by overseas, interstate and local writers, such as Sue Woolfe, Roberta Sykes, Peter Goldsworthy, Jean Bedford, Lily Brett, Stephanie Dowrick, John Marsden, and Peter Corris. Panel topics ranged from polemical writing, censorship and the erotic, magazine publishing, the role of public intellectuals, and new indigenous writing, to literary hoaxes, literary agents, teen and children's literature, and cookery writing.

Since I was carrying a few end of season injuries, I could only cover two events at the festival, nevertheless, these two events symbolized the best of times and the worst of times for writers' festivals. 'All Frocked Up' was the 'young' women writers' session and was unashamedly feminist in its politics. Kaz Cooke, Virginia Trioli, Sheryn George, Melissa Lucashenko and Emma Tom were the guests, and Mary Rose MacColl was the mistress of ceremonies. And by a spooky act of synchronicity, this session was on the night of a certain Princess's funeral. We arrived early, and there was already a huge queue at the door (surely a sign that feminist writing is alive and well, rather than that Elton John was going to be on the telly). The capacity crowd was not to be disappointed.

The writers' readings were varied, entertaining and confronting: Kaz Cooke's was a savagely funny attack on the dangers of women and provocative dressing, Virginia Trioli's was a feminist analysis of Mike Tyson, Emma Tom argued the need for a new type of feminist superheroine, Sheryn George read her piece from *DIY Feminism*, and Melissa Lucashenko read an excerpt from her recently published novel, *Steam Pigs*, about a Murri woman's struggle against domestic violence. The questions from the audience gave the panel a chance to further entertain us and savage the social order, as they ranged from opinions on Pru Goward, sexual harassment, breaking into journalism and the literary domain, and the Royal Family – who cares? I left feeling that perhaps words could do more than flog products, while Melissa Lucashenko's comment put into perspective our tendency to fetishize writing and writers (a fetish Festivals rely upon, but also unravel).

Lucashenko was asked how difficult it was to write a novel, and she replied that it was not much of a struggle compared to surviving domestic violence.

The next night, however, was such a different experience; in effect another part of the outside world popping in to disturb the literary domain, hence redefining the chattering classes. These readings at Jameson's Bar were the final event of the Writers' Festival, and looked to be a great line-up: Sue Woolfe, Peter Wells (gay novelist and filmmaker of *Desperate Remedies* fame), Geoff Goodfellow, Stephen Dando-Collins (scriptwriter), and Korean poet and academic, So-eup Kim. The problem here was the venue, being a very nice bar located across the road from a couple of inner-city yuppie towers. The locals who descend from their heavens to spend a lot of money on classy drinks in their own clubby space weren't all that receptive to people who don't wear designer jeans, yachtie shoes, or who aren't desperately trying to get a better class of fuck on a Sunday night in inner-city Brisbane. So the writers battled on in their own polite way to an appreciative section of the audience. Sue Woolfe read a gentle evocation of mothers and female mathematicians from *Leaning Towards Infinity*, Peter Wells read an explicit coming out narrative, and So-eup Kim translated her delicate poetry, while another part of the room carried on noisily and business as usual. I hoped in vain that the jackhammer approach of Geoff Goodfellow would be the match of the Melrose Place set, but alas, Geoff didn't seem to pick the irony of his location, in a classy and classed space, across the road from the recently-closed Wharfies club, and the triumphant parapets of Admiralty Towers. This time the words came out second best, muffled by the *nouveau riche*, whose comfort and privilege remained unconfronted.

The Brisbane Writers' Festival committee can't be faulted in putting together a very well-organized, accessible, and incredibly diverse literary festival, giving writers a forum to connect with a broader public, and giving readers a chance to demystify literature and writing. Commendably, the organizers are also open to public criticism and input to ensure the continuing success of the festival, which to its credit, is still the Brisbane Writers' Festival and not the OptusVision, or the Coca-Cola, or the Smirnoff Writers' Festival available only on pay-per-view.

Queensland Poetry Festival

Duncan Richardson

With poetry disappearing fast from the Brisbane Writers' Week program, the inaugural Queensland Poetry Festival was organized over two days and an evening in August (1–3). Despite the occasional reader being blinded by reflected rippling light, the riverside venue at the South Brisbane Sailing Club proved successful.

Poets came from all over the state, helping to break down the barriers of distance and putting faces to names seen in journals. Among these, Gina Mercer, Brendan Murphy and Ted Neilson were particularly impressive. The program featured one interstate guest, Anthony Lawrence, who ran a workshop in nearby Orleigh Park, as well as reading and taking part in a panel.

Festival maestro, Brett Dionysius has had considerable experience with such events, having run a fringe festival for three years. Supported by Rob Morris and Francis Boyle, Brett obtained major funding from the Queensland Arts Office and in-kind support from the Queensland Arts Council and University of Queensland Press.

Readings and panel discussions allowed a large range of voices to be heard and attendances were good at most sessions. One of the highlights was an at times heated discussion of the 'state of the art' with Clare Hoey from the Arts Office and Sue Abbey from UQP. While other talks aroused less ire, they were all directly related to the practice of poetry. Generally, it was a waffle-free zone. Some anger was also expressed in an 'Angry Penguins' reading featuring four poets who once believed Penguin was going to publish their work.

Unburdened by Penguins in any mood, the book table was kept busy, not least during the launch on the Saturday night, of books by Ross Clark, John Knight and Pym Schaare.

Coincidentally, the program for the 1997 Brisbane Writers' Week (BWW) appeared on the Saturday of the Poetry Festival. Looking closely, the need for the festival became all too apparent. Poetry was reduced to three sessions in the BWW (down from eight in 1992), a point noted by Ivor Indyk at the Writers' Week launch of *HEAT*, so he made a point of including some in the launch. One of the few BWW poetry sessions was programmed at the same time as a 'Feedback Forum', when some aggro might have been expected. Some dare call it conspiracy.

The Poetry Festival in 1998 promises to be even better. Let's hope it's not used as an excuse for wiping poetry totally from the BWW program next year.

The 1997 Australian Film Festival

Ben Goldsmith

There is in Bill Bennett's *Kiss or Kill* a moment which encapsulates something of the essence of Australian cinema. Aboriginal tracker Possum Harry (John Clarke) has led two sun-ripened cops on the trail of two small-time hustlers with a developing appetite for murder, to an old nuclear test site west of Ceduna. The gates are padlocked. A sign informs us what Detective Hummer (Chris Haywood) already knows: the site is federal territory, outside their jurisdiction. His colleague Crean (Andrew S. Gilbert) has other ideas. With well-practised ease, he assumes the classic macho cut-through-the-bullshit pose: feet shoulder-width apart, he crouches slightly on his haunches, both hands clasping the revolver with which he prepares to eradicate this obstacle. Hummer, who all the while has been standing with his back to his colleague and the camera, grips the fence and stares out to the wide, dusty horizon. Almost without turning around he says dismissively, "Get a grip . . . wake up to yourself!" Crean lowers his gun, his bravura (and our expectations) undercut by his partner's unwillingness to play that particular movie game.

Bennett is, in the tradition of the visionary filmmaker, unorthodox. His desire to push the boundaries of convention, to challenge his audience's expectations is in part a manifestation of his own unwillingness to play the safe, expected game. He encourages his cast to add a degree of improvisation which, reinforced by the edgy and unsettling use of jump cuts and the omission of certain frames, creates an edge of immediacy and spontaneity. This is a risky process, but an exhilarating one when all the elements work. When it works, as it does in *Kiss*, the film appeals to that greatest of all spectator pleasures: the realization that, although the narrative, staging and surroundings may appear familiar, they are surrounded by the ever-present possibility of tragic or horrific or humorous disruption.

The chase/road movie is the perfect genre for this kind of cinema, as the narrative seems always to be at a crossroads, its logic demanding a multitude of possibilities for the protagonists: to plunge on into the heat haze, following the bitumen trail, or to drive off the predetermined path down a barely trodden track. And since the road movie bundles up the romance of the track with the promise of movement through time and space and the paradox of enforced intimacy and confinement in a metal box hurtling across huge distances, it is the quintessential genre for the journey towards self-knowledge which has for so long preoccupied Australian cinema.

Given the iconic status of the car in Australian culture, it comes as no surprise that four of the fourteen films shown at this year's Australian Film Festival were road/chase movies, with motorized transport and its consequences a feature of several others. (It is no coincidence that the producers of *The Castle* chose the profession of tow-truck driver for their hero.) Indeed, the roads this year (particularly the highway across the Nullarbor) are so full of carloads of eccentrics and fugitives and drug dealers and aspiring musicians that it would be no surprise to see *Kiss*'s Frances O'Connor and Matt Day, fleeing Adelaide chased by two cops, an Aboriginal tracker and a former star footballer with a penchant for paedophilia, collide with *True Love and Chaos*'s Miranda Otto, Noah Taylor, Hugo Weaving and Naveen Andrews who themselves are being trailed by Ben Mendehlsohn's overbalanced psychopath. Or for Miranda and Matt to bump into themselves coming the other way on their journey to Nashville in *Doing Time for Patsy Cline*, or to overtake Russell Crowe and Youki Kudoh on the run from a shaven-headed, vengeful, Japanese, black-leather-clad motorcyclist husband and an Afghani family keen to practise their torturing skills in *Heaven's Burning*.

Kiss was my fourteenth Australian movie in fifteen days. Double-figure attendance at Australian screenings is a respectable *annual* tally given the difficulties faced by local product in gaining wide release, so the annual Australian Film Festival (the opportunity for Australian Film Institute members to vote for best film at the AFI awards) is a feast for the cinephile. The final film in the Brisbane section of the festival, *Kiss* was the pick of a mixed bag.

Hayes Gordon's recent criticisms of the standards of Australian theatre actors do not, on the evidence of these features, readily apply to film. The Australian cinema

is basking at the moment in the light cast by such brilliant talents as Richard Roxburgh, Matt Day, Ben Mendehlsohn, Jeremy Sims, Miranda Otto and the empyreal Frances O'Connor; but there were plenty of toe-curling performances too. Fortunately most of these were confined to two appalling films, *The Inner Sanctuary* (yuppie wanker accountant [pick the redundant term] relearns morality, humanity and humility when sent to audit a run-down inner-city Catholic mission) and *Under the Lighthouse Dancing* (unconvincingly disguised elongated ad for Westpac, Rottnest Island and mobile phones). All this movie proves is that Jack Thompson can express more emotion in one tiny, heartstopping quiver of the bag under his left eye than his colleagues could manage in several lifetimes.

I tried very hard to like *The Well*, but in the end spent more time trying to stay awake. And on second viewing I found *The Castle* even more problematic than previously; it would be a tragedy if this technically deficient, conceited and contemptuous film is considered the pick of this year's crop. What *The Castle* does have going for it is a solid script (unlike several other features in the festival), and a strong and sympathetic father figure which is unusual in modern Australian cinema. Most of the other films seem to sympathize with Hanif in *True Love and Chaos*, who observes: "Families suffocate you . . . they screw you up".

Heaven's Burning, a Japanese–Australian co-production, is for three quarters of its length a tense and involving thriller. But something odd happens in the run to the line, as if everybody decided they'd gone on too long and it was time to go home. A series of coincidences and fortuitous meetings presage an unintentionally hilarious climax. Sadly the censored scene (a supposedly anti-Japanese speech by Ray Barrett about fate and karma and the inequity of the postwar wash-up) was not the one I had hoped would explain this desperate lunge towards the credits.

Love in Ambush was a brave, if flawed, attempt to depict aspects of Australian involvement in Asia (set in Cambodia in the period immediately before the rise of the Khmer Rouge). It is marred by an unimaginative script and some wooden acting. Far too little of the film was taken up with introducing and developing Cambodian characters who tended to be one-dimensional stereotypes. Far too much time was devoted to Gary Sweet whose appeal as a television actor does not readily translate to the big screen.

Monica Pellizzari's *Fistful of Flies* was reminiscent of early Jane Campion, and was, along with *Kiss* and *Idiot Box*, a film of vision and promise, with a marvellous central performance by Tasma Walton. *Blackrock*, based on the Leigh Leigh murder case and evolving from Nick Enright's play *Property of the Clan*, was moving and, unlike many 'teen films', not at all condescending to its target audience. The funeral scene is one that will stay with me for some time. The gentle *Road to Nhill* was a neat change of pace, about a small event (a minor car crash) and its effects on a small country community. The only good thing about the pretentious, bourgeois marriage fantasy *Thank God He Met Lizzie* was another supreme performance by Frances O'Connor.

Sydneyside

Sean Scalmer

SPRINGTIME IN SYDNEY has brought with it a burst of public literary activity. Leading Sydney bookstores Gleebooks, Ariel and Berkelouw have hosted a vigorous program of readings. Book promotion, sponsorship and event-holding have demonstrated the importance of bookstores to an active literary culture. This has, unfortunately, also entrenched two of the primary limitations of that culture – its geographical and class biases. Each of these bookstores is, unsurprisingly, huddled closely to its primary customer base in the gentrified inner suburbs of Paddington and Glebe, patronized by consumers from the professional classes. No large, active, comparable bookstore exists in Sydney's west, where the majority of the population live. This is, of course, not the fault of the proprietors of Gleebooks or Ariel. It is, however, a depressing reflection on the 'public' that makes up the active literary public of Sydney.

SLIGHTLY FURTHER WEST is the NSW Writers' Centre in Rozelle, which recently hosted the 5th Spring Writing Festival. 'Lust, Lies and Literature' was held on the 13th and 14th of September, and included an impressive variety of performances and forums. The Festival held a delicate balance between the interests of amateur writers anxious for advice on writing and publishing and others concerned with the output and readings of distinguished professional writers. It was a successfully struck balance, with only slight tensions apparent. Some writers may have tired of the

umpteenth questioner asking 'how did you first get published', and a consequent lack of engagement with their work or performances. This was successfully negotiated for the most part, and those attending witnessed an array of sessions which included crime writing, indigenous writing, history, court reporting, bush poetry, playwriting, screenwriting, and a poetry sprint competition. There was also a thorough and sometimes amusing level of sponsorship garnered for the Festival. A series of erotic readings was sponsored by Yvonne Allen & Associates – "Australia's leading introduction services since 1976", and a session on 'Writing in the Internet Age' was sponsored by *The Sydney City Hub* – a free newspaper.

Also beginning in mid-September was the 'Festival of the Dreaming' – an indigenous arts festival sponsored by the Sydney Olympics body, SOCOG. The Festival included a wide range of theatre, literary readings and art around Sydney. Highlights included 'Wimmin's Business' – a collection of seven solo performances; a season of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' performed by an all-indigenous cast, and a production of 'Waiting for Godot' translated into Bundjalung. There is an exciting Summertime to look forward to, even with the relocation of the Sydney Writers' Festival.

Weevils in the flour

THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION of Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour: An oral record of the 1930s Depression in Australia* will be published by Scribe in February 1998.

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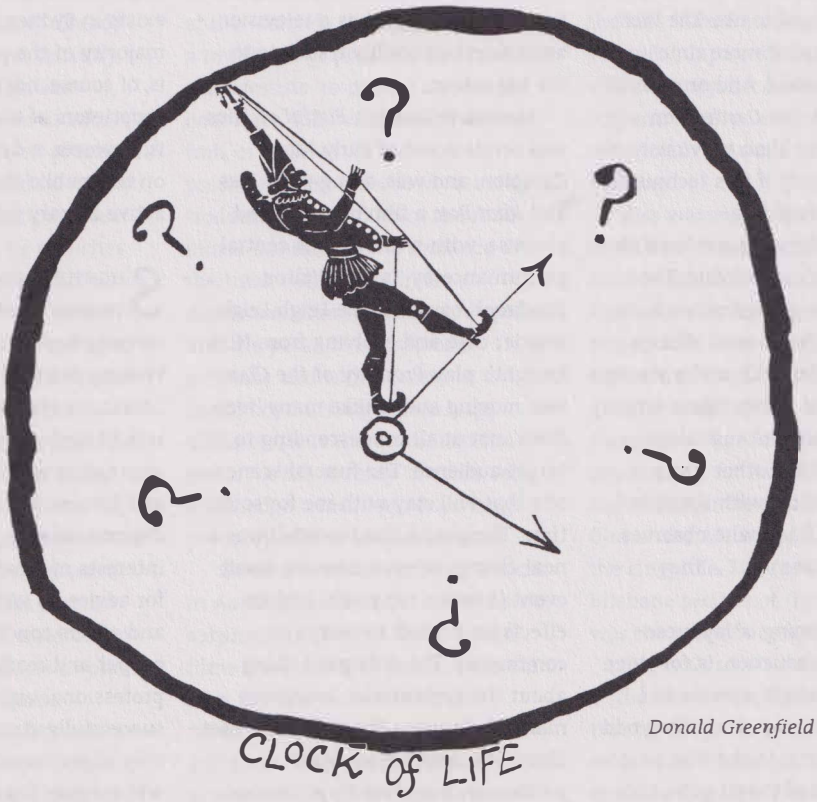

Donald Greenfield

books

Transforming Bernard Smith

Lindsay Barrett

Peter Beilharz: *Imagining the Antipodes; Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith* (CUP, $39.95).

I'M ALWAYS SUSPICIOUS whenever I come across Andrew Reimer in praise of this or that, and so it was with a few reservations that I opened Peter Beilharz's new book on Bernard Smith: unfortunately I'd just read Reimer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* writing of how while he generally dislikes contemporary sociology, Beilharz's books are for him an exception. As it happens my fears were confirmed: I didn't particularly enjoy *Imagining the Antipodes*. It's not that it's a bad book, assuming of course that (with the possible exception of *The Hand that Signed the Paper*) such hypothetical objects actually exist. No, it's not a bad book, it's a reasonable book, but it is in no way deserving of the high-volume perfunctory platitudes it has so far received and nor, in a fadless society, would it have been responsible for re(kick)starting interest in the work of Bernard Smith.

If you're in search of hype then the blurb on the back is of course the best place to look, and *Imagining the Antipodes* doesn't disappoint. It tells us that Smith is Australia's "greatest living thinker", and that Beilharz has the privilege of introducing Smith's life's work to an international public. I make this point not to trivialize however, but to highlight this cult of repackaging which for me is the key issue in relation to this book. Really, are we so shallow that we actually need to be told of the importance of someone who was for many crucial years Professor of Fine Arts at Sydney University, wrote three key texts on Australian art and culture and produced *The Antipodean Manifesto*? Not to mention the fact that this person is still working and still speaking in a well-known but low-key mode utterly antithetical to all forms of hysterical claims to intellectual championship.

Given Bernard Smith's obsession with the role of myth in Eurocentric cultures, it's interesting that the project of this book is then grounded firmly in the myth of his invisibility. Beilharz tells us that this is a book for "those who have never read Smith, those in sociology or politics, philosophy or cultural studies to whom the name may mean nothing on first contact". But has the work of Bernard Smith really been so well hidden within Australian intellectual life, and if so, how can the publicity machine so easily nominate him as our greatest intellectual? Not that Beilharz claims that Smith has never been read by anyone. Rather, he argues that he has primarily only ever been read by art historians because his work, which is really social theory, was so far ahead of its time that we (those of us who are not art historians presumably) can only understand it now.

But another way of looking at the reception of Smith's work over the past few decades would be to posit that it's not that Smith was only ever read *by* art historians, it's that he was only ever read *as* an art historian. Perhaps then the wider process that *Imagining the Antipodes* is tapping into is the increasing legitimation and expansion of Australian cultural studies. Two decades ago Smith was read, with varying degrees of enthusiasm generally related to the problematics and complexities of his work, as Australia's pre-eminent art theorist. Now, when it seems we need the rather narrow, elitist focus of art history far less than we need the pluralist possibilities of cultural theory, we can re-read Smith as a cultural or, in Beilharz's Marx-conscious version, social theorist.

This is not to argue that the *oeuvre* which emerges from Beilharz's earnest and scholarly examination is in any way a collection of free-floating propositions open to perpetual re-interpretation. Quite the contrary in fact, and Beilharz constantly reminds us of the dominance of Marx in all of the work in question, nestling into one of the by now well-established genres of post-communism: namely that Marxism would have been really, really great if all those bad pseudo-Marxists hadn't buggered it up. Yet for me the stridency of much of Beilharz's rereading of Smith, which recreates its subject as something of a misunderstood or just plain neglected genius, detracts from an otherwise interesting project. If Bernard Smith is to be reinvented as a seminal figure in Australian social or cultural studies then we need to focus as much on our desire for him to fulfil this role as on his qualifications for it. I'd argue that, as Beilharz shows, his work is equal to this request, however the wider questions still need to be addressed.

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Processes of the Imagination

Bernard Smith

Gary Catalano: *Building a Picture; Interviews with Australian Artists* (MacGraw-Hill, $36.95).

THIS ATTRACTIVE LITTLE BOOK should find a place in the reading lists of schools and colleges wherever contemporary Australian art is taught. It has been assembled from interviews originally published in local art magazines, such as *Art Monthly*, *Art and Australia*, *Voices* and *Imprint*. Lucidly written, and commendably free from jargon, it reinforces my belief that artspeak, though still virulent among 'postmodern' critics, is a virus to which most practising artists are immune.

In a useful introduction Catalano traces the main currents in Australian art since *The Field* exhibition, held in the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968: conceptual, post-object, photo-realism, the protest and environmental art of the 1970s. He notes the way that the dominant interest in landscape of the 1950s and 1960s has given way to a more pluralist approach as our culture has become more multicultural.

The originality of the book lies in the way Catalano has conducted his interviews: to evoke from the artists the way in which their works come into existence, not so much in a technical sense (though this is not neglected), as through the complex and half-secret processes of the imagination; the threshold of creativity before the hand is put to work. A distinguished poet himself, Catalano is obviously deeply interested in how the imagination transforms itself into concrete artefacts – even when the embodiment is as coy and reluctant as in some forms of conceptual art.

This emphasis upon the threshold of creativity is announced in the first section of the book entitled How Images Appear. Here the author interviews Robin Wallace-Crabbe and Rosalind Piggott. Wallace-Crabbe finds it helpful to sit down for four or five hours four or five evenings a week and just let his eyes track around the room, sometimes against low-level music. Piggott, acknowledging the heritage of surrealism, speaks of the importance of glass and water for 'seeing through'. "I think that's got something to do with time for me: it allows us to stand in the present and look to the past and future simultaneously."

Other sections of the book are called: Flirting with Narrative; The View from the Suburbs; Minimalism and Beyond; The Attractions of Ephemera; Inspecting Nature; Reaffirming Traditions; and Other Media. The net is thus cast wide, the author doing his best to present, engagingly and sympathetically, a wide variety of approaches to the making of comparatively recent art.

THE MOST ENLIGHTENING interviews for me were those conducted with Murray Walker and John Wolseley. Walker speaks so easily and naturally about his interest and delight in finding the odd things that interest him. "To be an artist you need to be a child, to have the child alive and well within you." John Wolseley is always impressive, in his art, his thought and his passion for the natural environment. His throw-away comments can be both acerbic and illuminating:

> You go to a dinner party in England and people won't talk about anything serious at all. It is really

> frowned upon. You are an immense success if you come out with these curious witty things all the time ... In Australia people feel they can talk about serious things.

John must go to different kinds of dinner parties in Australia than the very few I do.

Robert Hunter, perhaps our most consistent latter-day mystic in painting, is also fascinating. He follows that old-fashioned 'formalesque' tradition laid down by Malevich and his more secular followers, such as Carl Andre and Sol Le Witt. For Hunter the mystery lies in knowing when to stop. There are "mechanisms by which you do a painting, but its becoming finished is a mystical sort of thing". How does a painting end? It seems to take over and end itself. And his paintings, though absolutely flat, tend to turn for him into sculpture as he looks at them. But he does not claim, as an earlier generation of abstract artists might, that they penetrate the fourth dimension.

One of the most persistent themes in the book might be called 'landscape as historical memory'. Whereas our traditional landscape, even to the time of Drysdale and Nolan, is concerned primarily with imagery. Perhaps it has something to do with the overacting effect of the conservation movement; the need to see the built environment as an evocation of the past, the natural environment as a precious but fragile present.

Catalano states in his introduction that "it is difficult for an Australian artist of any background to remain unmoved by Aboriginal art". It is to be regretted therefore that he was not able to include any artists of Aboriginal descent among his interviewees. But I guess that was due more to contingency than intent.

Bernard Smith is a well-known art historian.

Lessons on Biting the Tongue in Your Cheek

Nicole Moore

Michael Wilding: *Somewhere New; New and Selected Stories* (CQUP & McBride's Books, $14.95).
Michael Wilding: *Studies in Classic Australian Fiction.* (Sydney Studies in Society and Culture & Shoestring Press, $25).

MICHAEL WILDING'S contribution to Australian literature and its study has been long exploited, and these two volumes together represent a long chronology, the fiction alone stretching from 1972 to encompass three new stories first published here. The essays collected in the volume of studies are from specialist and hard to obtain sources, published between the mid 1980s and early 1990s, and offer a singular, important and too often neglected mode of analysis that should assume a stronger place in Australian literary criticism after this release. The Marxist politics of these readings of Marcus Clarke, Lawson, Lane, Furphy, Jack Lindsay, Stead, and White constitute a sustained intervention in Australian literary analysis, made visible as such by this collection. Wilding is doing the groundwork here for Marxist readings of texts that are now canonical. A certain defensiveness of tone reveals that Wilding has had to insist on the left politics and contexts of these texts and of his analysis, even as the academy could insist on their diminution so as to fashion a canon more comfortable within the orthodoxies of literary elitism. A history of support for alternative publishing, both as a writer and critic, is continued here in his choice of publishers for these volumes. It is not that Wilding remains a marginalized member of the academy, however, holding a personal chair at the University of Sydney, and indeed, many of the short stories in this selection of fiction are now readable as insider gags from within a Sydney literary and institutional scene.

It is perhaps because of this that I wanted more from the collection of essays. I would have liked some contextualization of each one, a little writerly framing, in the style of other recent collections of chronologies of essays, such as Susan Sheridan's *Faultlines*. This sort of framing could reinsert the sometimes turbulent institutional history that underlies and constructs these essays, and further reinforce their import as interventions. It doesn't seem to act in Wilding's favour to maintain such a rigid distinction between criticism and other forms of writing – indeed more than a couple of his pieces from the fiction collection work as formulated critical argument engaging with other texts, especially one long meditation on Stead, writing and history. These pieces often intervene directly in the context of the critical pieces, deconstructing and ironizing the personal sites of their production, and yet the simultaneous publish-

ing of these two volumes would let us believe they have little to say to each other.

Perhaps Wilding doesn't want to produce himself as simultaneously both writer and critic. Nevertheless, the character of Wilding, the writer, the academic, the libertarian, etc. is the shifting and self-conscious point at which the volumes cross over, and self-consciousness, in historical collections like these, can only atone for so much. I mean, he and his mates pondering the attributes and fuckability of each other's girlfriends, or whether they've written more stories or drunk more whisky – I'm sorry but is this interesting to some people? It's true that the selection of fiction is weighted strongly in favour of Wilding's later writing, somewhat more thoughtful and more self-critical, and it's perhaps also revealing that the one change in their chronology is a decision to place the 1978 story 'The Phallic Forest' earlier in the order, the effect of which is an apparently ongoing self-consciousness about the politics of masculine sexuality. Reading Moorhouse and Wilding as the abiding geist of the new liberated writing of the seventies makes a strange history, however – I'm forced to ask what happened to the women writers of the seventies, why aren't collections of their work returning to the shelves, so we can read Vicki Viidikas-style satires of this stuff? How can Wilding continue to get away with being his own and only feminist critic?

Wilding's ability to get away with it (the cover of *Somewhere New* cites the *New York Times Book Review* – "He's so good you're willing to forgive him anything") seems to me just a bit too dependent on the adequacy of irony. On irony in Lawson, Wilding says: "Of course there is irony, but irony does not cancel the signification, only reinstate it". I haven't asked myself how fair this is, to read a writer through his own literary criticism, but it is edifying in this case, especially comparing the two essays on Stead with his ficto-critical account of their writing relationship. On sex and politics in Stead, Wilding says, "in part, sexuality becomes a displacement of social issues". What is this displacement? Is sex not a social issue? If not, what is all that sex doing in his stories and novels? This is more than another example of male Marxists under-reading women's writing (although quite a galling one in Stead's case, one of whose achievements as a writer has been a de-authorizing of some narratives of the natural which allow sex to be written apart from social conditions). Wilding seems able, even in his somewhat gratifying attention to the prominence of gendered narratives of sex in these writers' thematics, to under-read the import of a Marxist theorization of sex. Even as he declares for "the inseparability of the women's issue [singular of course] from the socialist organization of society", Wilding is able to read that almost entirely feminine definition of socialism in *The Workingman's Paradise*, Nellie's kiss for an anonymous sleeping prostitute, within a brutal separation of love relationships (women) and labour (men). Moreover, this distinction is furthered as that between a hero's human qualities and his socialist ones. The role of women as ironic critique for Wilding's own antics in his fiction is similarly angled within this distinction – work is writing, and women don't write or work, and yet writing is the writer's excuse for his claim on our attention, his claim to authority. This is not just writing about writing, but writing about writing about writing, sometimes leavened with a sleight of hand introduction of sexual and labour inequality, but the figure of the writing secretary strikes me in the context of Wilding's essays as an abominable fetishization of that moment when the most serious questions of his critical politics are in play.

The fictional piece on Stead marks an apparent turn in Wilding's politics and writing practice, and reflecting obliquely on his own previous approach to Stead he writes: "He was caught up with the 'new' and had yet to see the reactionary consequences of that aesthetic of the new – the focus on form, on manner, the agenda of exclusions". The chronology of the fiction steps out a significant change in tone, a disillusionment and retreat from postmodern disengagement towards a post-postmodern regret, arriving at some semblance of a return to something he has already signalled in his essays as a politics of the literal, of content and analysis. This could seem a retreat from the problems of irony as a politics. But some of the fiction's factors don't change at all: the peripheral but abiding presence of women as silent witnesses, the persistent preoccupation with the identity of the male artist. Finishing the collection with a new story simply titled 'Libertarianism' underwrites the irony of the collection's title, *Somewhere New*, completing a swing between a desire and search for alternatives (both places and politics), and an obsessive, ironic, self-generating nostalgia. Wilding uses a tension between irony and obsession, or paranoia, as a tension

between modes of writing and political practice, and the motif of drug-induced political paranoia, the endless and destructive fear of provocateurs and informers, is an amusing critique of the postmodern suspension of the possibility of truth telling. He writes it as a comment on powerlessness, on the effect of the displacement of authority: "It makes it very hard to go on".

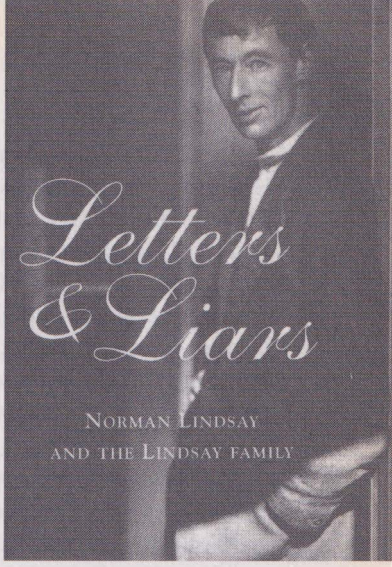
Despite this sense of (suspended) development, however, some older pieces, from the essay collection particularly, have not aged well – images of an empty wide brown land in the fiction are no longer naive, and the sustained reliance on deviance as an aesthetic category to be denounced as degenerate in his reading of White is a feature of socialist critique that doesn't need repetition. Nevertheless, some of the opportunities left begging by the groundwork of these essays are still to be taken up.

Nicole Moore faced life after a PhD dissertation by joining the Love Parade in Berlin.

Sniffing at Personal History

Michael Wilding

Joanna Mendelssohn: *Letters & Liars; Norman Lindsay and the Lindsay Family* (A&R, $19.95).



The Lindsays were an extraordinary family of artists. Their creativity ranged across the visual arts and literature. They are a major part of any history of Australian cultural production, not only in their individual achievements but also in the myths they gave rise to. The myths, of course, were assiduously perpetuated by the individual members of the family. The number of memoirs, autobiographies and personal statements they produced is considerable, and all helped establish and preserve their reputation. They also wielded considerable power in the politics of culture. Daryl was director of the National Gallery of Victoria. Norman's influence, through his associates and followers like Douglas Stewart, Kenneth Slessor and Brian Penton, reached into the *Bulletin,* the Sydney *Telegraph* and Angus and Robertson. The myths and the work, without question, appealed widely to the national imagination. What its final significance is will continue to be debated, though Joanna Mendelssohn's *Letters & Liars* is not a book that offers any useful contribution to that debate. Indeed, it offers no useful contribution to anything. Neither cultural production nor cultural politics is its concern: instead it focuses on family rivalries, on the quarrels between the various family members, and on sexual scuttlebutt.

Rose Lindsay, Norman's second wife and model for much of his work, sold a substantial collection of letters, by Norman, his sister Mary, his brother Robert and other members of the family, to the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales. They were sold under the condition that they should not be available to the public until the year 2003. Joanna Mendelssohn found this restriction irksome. " 'It's no good,' I sobbed to Peter, Lionel Lindsay's son. 'I'll never get them.' "

But she did get them. Rose Lindsay's wishes and the conditions under which the letters were sold to the Mitchell Library, were disregarded. This vulgar, tawdry book is the product of Joanna Mendelssohn's persistence. It is a monumental warning to anyone contemplating giving or selling private materials to a library on conditions of restricted access, not to do so. Perhaps in that regard it is a useful warning; perhaps it will persuade librarians in future to honour the agreements they or their predecessors made.

Letters & Liars is not a work of scholarship. It offers no new appreciation of the creative achievement of the Lindsays. Indeed it offers little comment on their creative work at all. The agreement the Mitchell Library made with Rose Lindsay was broken in order to make public this trivial, salacious, would-be sensational inquiry into who had sex with whom when, and which family member wrote ill of another, and whether another member was retarded. And if Joanna Mendelssohn cannot definitely establish who had sex with whom, she blithely puts in the speculations and suspicions, secure in the knowledge that the individuals are dead and can never reply.

This is all on the grounds of supplementing John Hetherington's authorized biography of Norman, and the memoirs of Daryl and Lionel. A new, serious biographical study of the Lindsays, incorporating what small amount of new information there was in the embargoed letters, and placing it in perspective and balance, would be useful. This is not such a book. It is an ill-organized, unstructured mass of peripheral material. Its author happily declares:

> My problem now is how to tell this story. A simple narrative won't work – there are too many inconsistencies, too many liars. I suppose I could play it like a computer game, or perhaps it could be told like one of those children's adventure books where the reader can follow half a dozen interlocking narratives, with different endings, flipping madly back and forth through the book. There is no single common thread to this story, except the family itself with all its contradictions and its emotions. Much that is important in this account of the lies and the cover-ups in the Lindsay family has been lost to common knowledge.

We are in that tedious territory of the biographer as hero, and biographer as incompetent hero, at that. The biographer who discusses her methodology or lack of it, who foregrounds herself in her breathless researches: "Was this why she hadn't taken the job? I looked up Montague Grover in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography.*" To be told that the biographer looks up a basic reference work is surely the nadir of confessional biography. Most of the time, however, such contextualizing researches are absent, preferable though they are to the biographer's personal reactions:

> "I feel as though I've been walking through a sewer," I said to Helen Glad, Norman's granddaughter. We were talking about her family and the letters Robert had written when old Jane Lindsay was dying. "I can see why Rose kept them, though. There'd be no way she could let Mary get away with that nonsense of the benign Robert."

There are two problems here. Firstly, these are amongst the letters to which Rose Lindsay had restricted public access. Joanna Mendelssohn manages to break the embargo, and then moralizes about walking in a sewer. If it was a sewer, she has only herself to blame for entering it, and releasing it on the world.

The second problem is her inability to read. The letters from Robert Lindsay she quotes are written in a camp, histrionic, transparently exaggerated style. They remind me of Patrick White's conversation on the few occasions I met him, malicious, even vicious, but consciously and comically so, designed for an audience: a performance. Every serious historian or critic knows the difficulties in using letters as evidence. They have major components of, on the one hand, expressiveness, of letting off steam, of exorcising painful events, and on the other of catering for and adjusting to the world view and expectations of the recipient. But these factors are not recognized in this naive account.

And naive it is. Although the biographer is intrusively present, she is apparently devoid of any self-awareness. She writes, "I asked Helen how she and her family had coped with those pedantic old men, the collectors Chaplin and Wingrove, who came around sniffing at their personal history."

Ian Hicks, former literary editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald,* suggested the title of Mendelssohn's book. *Sniffing at Personal History* would have been a better one.

Michael Wilding's most recent books are Somewhere New: New & Selected Stories *(Central Queensland University Press, $14.95) and* Studies in Classic Australian Fiction *(Sydney Studies, PO Box 575 Leichhardt 2040, $25).*

Murphy the Furphy

Lucy Sussex

Moira Watson: *The Spy Who Loved Children; The enigma of Herbert Dyce Murphy* (MUP, $17.95).

THIS BOOK TELLS OF Herbert Dyce Murphy, a gifted amateur storyteller in the Boy's Own mode. One of his intriguing anecdotes – that he spied for the British Empire, disguised as a girl – was repeated to another, more talented storyteller, Patrick White, and sparked *The Twyborn Affair.* When the source for White's glamorous cross-dressing

Eddie/Eadith was revealed in David Marr's biography, Moira Watson, a writer who as a child had listened reverently to Murphy's tales, determined to set the record straight. Her Murphy, despite his fondness for children and claims of ex-transvestism, was a Boy's Own hero, a stranger to sleaze.

With that premise, Watson began what ultimately became a losing battle, for not only can she not entirely progress beyond her child's eye view of Murphy, but her subject also proves slippery and ultimately elusive. The result is an odd and irritating book. To begin with, the title is clever, but problematic, given that it merges Ian Fleming and Christina Stead, a very strange couple indeed. To allude to *The Man Who Loved Children* implies that Murphy was a real-life Sam Pollit, not a paedophile (the charge that Watson is most determined to refute) but psychologically abusive to children. Such would appear not to be the case, for though Murphy hosted summer camps for the offspring of his friends, the result was sunny memories, not traumas.

In addition the other reference of the title, to macho James Bond, seems to be a furphy. Watson does not mention the Chevalier d'Eon, an eighteenth century French aristocrat popularly remembered as a gorgeous boy spy in frocks. This myth, to which d'Eon contributed, for he was a spy and transvestite, though not concurrently, is suspiciously close to Murphy's story; it may well have inspired him. Watson can find no evidence that Murphy spied, let alone in drag, and indeed military historians (as quoted in *The Australian*, 3–4 May 1997) find the idea risible. Marr opines it was a fabulation justifying Murphy's transvestism.

Furthermore this book contains no proof that Murphy was ever a cross-dresser. He said he was, but Watson provides minimal supporting evidence. Many of Murphy's records have disappeared, leaving only pathetic and doubtful scraps, like a photograph of a Turkish girl with Murphy's annotation that she was wearing his dress. The one photo reproduced of Murphy in drag shows a rear view only, and could be of anyone . . . Moreover, Murphy's story that he modelled in drag for E. Phillips Fox's 'The Arbour', is, like much else in his life, unprovable: an art historian I consulted used the word 'bullshit'. Nonetheless Watson tries hard, if unsuccessfully, to make a case for it.

When in doubt, she believes Murphy and quotes him, as if the voice from the grave, preserved on Stephen Murray-Smith's interview tapes, is authoritative. The more Watson admits her subject's stories are unverifiable, additional sources missing, the more her research skills seem wanting. The alternative is that Murphy was a compulsive liar, his story being perhaps closer to another Herbert, Mr Badgery of *Illywhacker*, than the Eddie of *The Twyborn Affair*.

An example is when Watson quotes Murphy re Oscar Wilde, who visited his English school, Tonbridge, staying with a housemaster and his wife, a writer of "trashy novels, the sort that servants read".

The anecdote begs the research questions: did Wilde really visit this boys' school? when? who was the master's wife? is Murphy's dismissal of her novels correct? There is no indication that Watson has considered these minutiae, but then this is a book without an index, whose list of sources comprises exactly two pages.

Watson states she cannot prove that Murphy was related to the Empress Eugenie; the sceptical reader wonders if the pair were even acquainted. Watson's discussion of Murphy's alleged Norwegian foster daughters is similarly nebulous, although Heather Rossiter, a rival biographer of Murphy, claims to have located their descendants. Indeed Rossiter's work – she also claims to have new material on the one verifiable area of Murphy's life, the Mawson polar expedition – would seem to have some claim to scholarship.

The same cannot be said of *The Spy Who Loved Children*. The book is a sentimental memoir, at best in its evocation of the idyllic seaside holidays Watson spent at Murphy's Mornington Peninsula home, which she now owns. It reads like *Swallows and Amazons*, a depiction of a world lost forever.

Great figures garner many biographies; lesser men, like Murphy, are lucky to have a monograph on their lives. Given the economics of modern publishing, one book on Herbert Murphy, despite its shortcomings, may seem more than enough. Rossiter's book, where the research bug would seem to have bitten deep, sending the author to Norway and the Antarctic, is still seeking a publisher. Because it was pre-empted by *The Spy Who Loved Children*, it may never find one – and that would be a pity.

Lucy Sussex is the author of The Scarlet Rider *(Forge, 1996), a novel about the madness and method of biography.*

To Stand Alone

Verity Burgmann

Ross Fitzgerald: *The People's Champion; Fred Paterson, Australia's Only Communist Member of Parliament* (UQP, $26.95).

To be a professed communist in Australia in the late 1940s demanded an unusual degree of faith, dedication, courage and resilience; to be the sole Communist member of parliament required even more. As the Cold War began to manifest itself internationally from the end of the Second World War, the McCarthyite forces within Australia seized the opportunity to make life personally difficult for Communists and to call into serious question the integrity of those who espoused the Communist cause. The meaning of Communist Party affiliation was therefore unavoidably shaped by forces antagonistic to its principles. Emblematic of this process was the serious physical assault upon Paterson by members of the Queensland Police Force on St Patrick's Day 1948 and the government's subsequent refusal even to investigate the matter.

Ross Fitzgerald's welcome biography of Australia's only, and presumably last, Communist member of parliament explores what it meant to be an Australian Communist and the implications of this unusual commitment for the life of Fred Paterson, whose life even apart from his peculiar position in parliament was extraordinary. The son of a poor, alcoholic pig-farmer, he so excelled as a student at the University of Queensland that he became the state's 1918 Rhodes Scholar, qualified later as a lawyer and was admitted to the Queensland Bar in 1931, despite clear attempts to prevent him, as a well-known and inspiring orator for the Communist Party, being able to practise as a barrister. Those who stood in his way must have sensed intuitively his future record in defending successfully the impoverished and insurgent.

Although Fred Paterson was initially elected to the Queensland state parliament as the Communist Party member for Bowen on 15 April 1944, at the late wartime high-point of the Communist Party's size, influence and relative acceptability, much of his time in parliament was spent in the increasingly chilly atmosphere of the Cold War period. By 1949 the Menzies-led Liberal Party, which hoped to outlaw the Communist Party, had been elected to federal government. By 1950 Paterson's state seat had been carefully redistributed out of existence by the ruling Labor Party who hated and feared Paterson, the strong communist centres of its mining towns split into two; at the same time, the Communist Party Dissolution Bill already introduced into federal parliament suggested to electors there was no point electing a Communist to represent them in parliament, since such a member would soon not be permitted to take their seat. In this situation, exacerbated further by a widespread anti-Communist hysteria, Paterson's popular vote (under the first-past-the-post system then in operation) of 44.4 per cent in 1944 and 39.3 per cent in the more heavily contested election of May 1947, was reduced to 12.7 per cent in April 1950.

What sort of personality could withstand these slights and calumnies? Paterson, like many other leading Communists in Australia, and like most Communist MPs in Britain, was of Protestant background and disposition. Whilst the Queensland AWU and the Labor Party were disproportionately composed of Catholics, who enjoyed the opportunities for

mutual self-advancement available through membership of the Labor Catholic tribe, the Communist Party of Australia was different. Its atheism was of a peculiarly Protestant variety and the opportunities it offered for pelf and place more or less negligible. Protestantism's emphasis on the importance of individual interpretation and conscience, a stress that may lead inexorably to atheistic conclusions, had certainly prompted Paterson's own loss of faith in the course of his Theology studies at Oxford: "The more I studied the Bible, the more doubts I had." The same emphasis produced the ascetic personality type that could endure the isolation and discomfort of serving as a Communist MP in a Cold War environment, an experience that demanded a commitment to principles, whatever the adverse consequences for the individual. At the same time, his encounters within the Church of England in his formative years, his exposure to the clerical type that possessed a strong social conscience, ensured that his initial Christianity was of the socialist variety. That he was receptive towards this brand of religion was ensured by the poverty of his family and his experiences in the AIF in the latter part of the First World War, which cured him of all conservative inclinations and patriotic delusions and "made him aware that it was acceptable under certain conditions to rebel".

Why, then, did he not content himself with becoming a radical vicar, as had been his original intent? His answer was that of a Protestant atheist: "As an ardent Christian I was motivated mainly by the extremely selfish vision of the reward of eternal bliss in heaven. As an ardent communist I have been motivated by a much higher and more noble vision: the vision of a world where . . . where all work for the good of all . . ." Although Fitzgerald's biography of this remarkable man does not dwell upon the significance of his denominational, as opposed to his religious, background, its import is nonetheless apparent. Fitzgerald summarizes the way in which Paterson came to occupy a unique position in Australian history: "In the modesty of his personal life, in his serious commitment to his electorate, and by his passionate enunciation of a philosophy at odds with prevailing political norms." There he stood; he could do no other.

Verity Burgmann is Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Melbourne.

True Fever

Julie Hunt

Lin Van Hek: *The Ballad of Siddy Church* (Spinifex Press, $16.95).
Emma Lew: *The Wild Reply* (Black Pepper, $15.95).

THE BALLAD OF SIDDY CHURCH is both folktale and family history. Populated with characters that are as fabulous as they are familiar, the book traces bloodlines and storylines through three generations of women made marvellous in the telling. The title is perfect. *The Ballad of Siddy Church* is a song, a performance. Verses are called up as they are needed. Incidents, episodes appear as if by popular demand. It is hard to imagine the story told chronologically:

> Each day had its moments that reached back to other days in the past and stretched forward to days not yet lived.

Listening to *The Ballad of Siddy Church* is like listening to a long intricate conversation, a conversation of aunties. It is being present at their card game in the sleepout "way down on earth" where:

> By slow degrees omens showed up the frailty of the game. They talked about "mortally ill", "contracted cancer", and the war. The cards kept turning . . . They guessed at hands and trebled their bets. They could not yet see the whole plot, but they continued to unlock riddles and beat about the bush . . . From hand to hand passed the lustre of small hopes. Years evaporated. Allegiances were rigorous, the manipulations terrifying. The naked light bulb hung by its roots. Hands mottled with age shuffled the deck. No one was permitted to sleep.

The main character, Eadie Wilt, has been dealt a difficult hand. She moves between safety and danger, between the love and protection of the aunts and her grandmother, Siddy, and the more precarious relationship with her mother:

> She (Siddy) understood the functions of conserving, patching and mending. She could not tell me

why my mother sometimes picked me up by my hair.

There is an assurance to Lin Van Hek's writing, a sense that she is 'writing from home', owning her territory and as such has allowed herself the freedom to play. The result is abundance – endless tales and the feeling that 'there are more where those came from'. The stories are tough, tender, and eloquent. There is a sense of generosity about the book, a largeness of character, event and of spirit that made me as audience want to applaud:

> Eadie still remembered what Siddy told her, against the garden wall where they bared their knees and closed their eyes to the sun. "The God-holy truth," said her grandmother Siddy, "is that you are going to have one great and marvelous life."

THE POEMS OF EMMA LEW in *The Wild Reply* are from a very different world, a world in which the idea of gaining a sense of place and meaning through continuity would be absurd. The cover painting depicts a macabre little girl leaving what could be a carnival scene or a ruined theatre. Stark figures play with a giant mask in the background. Someone is attempting a balancing trick. All is ominous and shadowy. The departing figure, a sort of 'wise child', glances behind her with a knowing look. Who is this character? An orphan at the end of history. Someone who lives "heirless/ on playthings, collectables". *The Wild Reply* is exciting. It is a defiant answer to a question that makes no sense. Emma Lew is not concerned with conventional meanings. She does not ease the reader into a poem as if into some understandable reality. The arrival is abrupt, jagged. There is a sense of urgency:

> I need to know
> the truth about
> the elevator crash.
> I can't wait or
> the pain will go
> back into its house.
> Listen, I am
> the doctor of this
> theatre.
>
> 'Cheap Silhouette'

"This theatre" is charged territory. The terrain is unpredictable. Emma Lew uses whatever comes to hand – surreal image, bland statement, sudden declaration, Hitler, Goebbels, "an archway of zucchinis". The lack of caution is exhilarating:

> There is so little to hide behind
>
> We are always hounding ourselves
> Why shouldn't we laugh, even if there is nothing?
>
> 'The Way out of Hungary'

There is a wry intelligence at work here. We are warned to be attentive: "hoax callers are jamming the emergency lines . . ."; "we are beautiful as long as we are masked,/and treachery is an affectionate game . . ."; "The agony is only put on . . ."

It is easier to describe the work in terms of what it does rather than what it is. Abrupt changes of style and tone disorientate the reader. There is a hit-and-miss quality to the writing, a sort of stab-in-the-dark abandonment that dislocates and allows for sudden and surprising possibilities which is what I look for in poetry – to be startled into a new place.

Reading *The Wild Reply* is to be in the line of random fire. Sometimes it misses but there is no mistaking when the words meet their mark. You receive them like advice:

> collect your mail,
> keep your strange name,
> feed your true fever.

Julie Hunt is a Melbourne poet and book designer.

The Last Word is Fervour

Thomas Shapcott

John Leonard: *100 Elegies For Modernity* (Hale & Iremonger, $16.95).

THERE IS SOMETHING intrinsically appetizing, though challenging, about a book-length sequence of poems. It is like a four-course meal at midday: no half-measures, and you have to be prepared to go the whole hog.

John Leonard's *100 Elegies For Modernity* is a unified banquet, no fat here and not much sauce (though sometimes there is a flavour of sauciness). It is a series of meditations and speculations on economics as well as on the plural in 'us'. It is written with a distancing, almost public tone, apparently as passionless as white china in some nouveau cuisine repast – though this is a device carefully structured to whet the appetite for the moments of confession or personal revelation when they do appear.

The first course might be illustrated by poem 'XX', with its carefully managed 'public' rhetoric, leading to the final 'economic' twist:

> It seems strange that to keep
> things as they are here
> it is necessary to make sure
> that things are as they never
> were elsewhere;
>
> That, so prosperity and good
> order can be maintained,
> elsewhere order must be
> turned on its head, poverty
> newly coined.
>
> In truth our order is none,
> our prosperity borrowed,
> and what we have visited
> on ourselves, we now inflict
> with interest.

This use of pun is something John Leonard delights in, and it helps deflect an otherwise slightly sermonizing tone:

> To be made common currency,
> passed from hand to clutching hand,
> tendered legally and accepted,
> is to be noted, not recognised.
>
> 'XXX'

Sometimes – we are onto Mains now – there are pepperings of more poetically standard tang, even the occasional image, or Classical allusion:

> Midas' touch turned all
> to gold: golden furniture,
> golden food and a twenty-two-
> carat daughter.
>
> 'XLIII'

But, by mid-point the author has relaxed sufficiently to let the tasty meat of longer lines and a full-bodied cadence be served up to us (inspired, characteristically, by the key word 'crisis'):

> The word 'crisis' has a smile in it –
> not a triumphant one, for although resolutions
> have been passed, and the Marines are already
> standing at street-corners, things could
> still go wrong, further crises entailing
> the symbolic use of force might yet
> ensue, before we can report that things
> are back to normal, order restored,
> our efforts vindicated.
> Later there can be
> unsmiling news, people dead or dying,
> long-standing wars, famine and unrest.
> These are no crises, although we would
> be happy to send advisers, help train
> the army, dispatch a fleet of planes
>
> 'LIII'

But it is at a point exactly two-thirds through the sequence that John Leonard, really, buttonholes the reader directly. From this point on, we will be prepared for sweets and savories, served up by the Chef himself. The coffee, though, will be sharp and bitter.

> You may notice that these poems
> are not normal ones; if I had
> wanted to write such I should

have made sure to introduce myself
subtly, to hint at good reasons why
my random observations were not
simply random – but united by
a creative mind.

There would have been much anger,
but arguments only to be grasped
by a lyric understanding, a sign
of the poet's absent consciousness,
and the reader's lively sympathy.
Another such sign would have been
a nice loose form, no sarcasm
in tight stanzas.

'LXVI'

Of course we get the sarcasm in tight stanzas almost immediately. This is the entire poem 'LXXI':

In a culture of statistics
every person counts.

And, thankfully, Leonard still cannot resist playing with words. This is a banquet with words, they are the poet's capital:

In theory the flip-side
demands an obverse –
but what sort of argument,
to begin only tail-wise?
And 'obverse'? scarcely
the bold, expected answer,
more the reverse of the reverse –
no comfort in obversity.

'LXXIV'

As the sequence approaches its end the 'I' becomes both more relaxed, and more clearly committed to a concept of living that is as far removed from the 'expertise' (as John Ralston Saul would define it) of modern economic power bases as possible. A world, in fact, that proclaims the fervour of necessary ambiguity:

Real growth, though,
of the sort that you
and I might recognise,
not for itself,
its own worst excuse,
but as a by-product
of living aimlessly,
with an intensity
of goallessness akin
to fervour.

'C'

Thomas Shapcott is a poet and novelist and is currently Professor of Creative Writing at Adelaide University.

Postmodern Toryism

John Leonard

Damien Broderick: *Theory and Its Discontents* (Deakin University Press, $29.95).

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK is misleading, for what we do not get in this book is a sustained critique of the assemblage of writings and putative methodologies that have gone for the past two decades or so under the name of 'theory', nor do we get a comprehensive account of the critiques of theory that have been offered. Instead Broderick's purpose here is to take from theory a few tools for his own use, and then, in the context of a much wider frame of reference than that usually deployed by theoreticians, to develop his own methodology and theoretical framework for the analysis of culture and cultural productions.

Until this purpose is grasped the introductory part of the book reads a little puzzlingly and doesn't begin to warm up until Broderick starts to construct his own theory. This begins with Jakobson's six-fold schema of communication (addresser, context, message, contact, code, addressee). It continues with an impressive array of scholarship, and reference to a great swathe of academic writing in areas such as psychology, linguistics, logic, dialectics, historical climatology (sic), and many more.

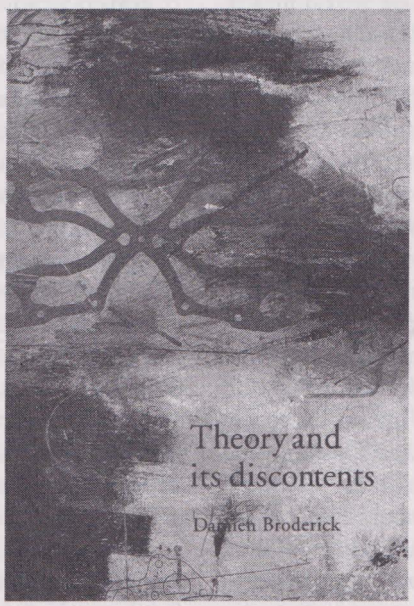
What all this leads to is the superimposition of much of this scholarship, including sun-spot cycles, on to the Jakobson model of communication, to come up with a model of a six-fold set of cultural domains through which culture passes in a cyclic fashion once

every three hundred years, though it is never made clear whether it is only western culture that conforms to this schema, or some sort of overarching notion of world-culture. The formulation that Broderick suggests at this point runs in part:

> 1800–1824–1849: 'I'/anticlerical/Romanticism ([Michaelangelo], Byron)
> 1850–1874–1899: 'IT'/scientific empiricism/ empire ([Shakespeare])
> 1900–1924–1949: Text/unstable absolutism ([Thirty Years' War], WWs I & II)
> 1950–1974–1999: Code/oligarchical representative democracies
> {2000–2024–2049: Phatic/postmodern and postindustrial fragmentation}

(the names in square brackets are representative figures and events from the analogous phase in the previous revolution of this three-hundred-year cycle).

Broderick's postmodern Toryism (the same things just keep on coming round again and again) is a refreshing change from the prevailing Whiggism of the academy, pretheoretical and theoretical. For what I find interesting about 'theory' and those who practise it is that it seems to leave them and their practice completely unaltered. Theory came, and may have gone, but the ruling assumptions of western liberal humanism, its economic and social framework, are completely unshaken, and may even be reinforced – it is sad how unsurprising it is to hear from the mouths of former theoreticians turned educational consultants that globalization, professionalization and 'training' are going to provide unimaginable prosperity for everyone in the next century. Projects like Broderick's are valuable insofar as they import into the studies of the humanities considerations from a very much wider range of scholarship than the narrow field usually canvassed, and therefore provide better tools for a more sober assessment of our prospects.



However, I, as I suspect most readers of Broderick's book would, have serious problems with his theory as such. It seems all too determined and deterministic to have much value as a theoretical framework, and I also suspect that Broderick understands this, and so titles his last chapter 'A Speculative Envoi'. But this is another misleading title. Despite it, and despite the gestures in the direction of 'hypertext' and a postmodern fragmented and multi-stranded argument, the whole work leads up to this ending, and there is no alternative, no other set of hyperlinks, provided.

I AM FULLY PERSUADED that it is a worthwhile task of scholarship to combine such data as long-term climate variation with the assumed universals of human communication. My principal concern with Broderick's model, however, is that it is, in all its detail, in danger of obscuring the fact that our culture has been going through one very long cycle, which began about 1800, and can be defined by the war waged constantly since then against the environment, and against non-European peoples and their lifeways, in the name of economic growth and development. Broderick's formulations, however, obscure this long cycle by having 'business as usual' carry on from 1700 to the present (and possibly for the three hundred years before that) when in fact business as usual did not carry on smoothly over the divide from pre-modern to modern, but a whole new way of thinking about the world, the self and 'business' began at this time, around 1800, and has persisted with remarkably little change since then. Moreover it is doubtful how far into the next three-hundred-year cycle things can carry on as they are, and here, at any rate, Broderick's cycles fail him with the prospect of 'global war? 2025' at the far right-hand edge of the page, at the beginning of Bill Clinton's 'bright new century', the very start of the next three-hundred-year cycle.

John Leonard is a freelance writer living in Canberra.

An Alien Career

Paul Adams

David Carter: *A Career in Writing; Judah Waten and the Cultural Politics of a Literary Career* (Association for the Study of Australian Literature, $25).

IF JUDAH WATEN HAD ARRIVED in Western Australia from Odessa in the 1960s what 'positions' could he have occupied? Might they have differed from those a Jewish writer could occupy after the first waves of Jewish migration which followed the world wars? Would Waten have seen himself as a 'migrant writer' or an 'Australian' writer? Could Waten have written avant-garde writing after 1940? Do writers need certain histories to begin certain kinds of 'careers'?

Carter's book is as much about the process of writing biography as it is about Waten. He would prefer his book to be read as an essay in cultural history and is opposed to the traditional biographical narrative which examines history through the unified ego of the great writer. Carter intends his story of Waten to be a narrative about how Australian cultural institutions and the way radical movements chose to discard or promote certain aspects of Waten's writing in different historical circumstances.

Carter's chapter on proletarianism and modernism is particularly rewarding in this way. He shows us the interconnections between the avant-garde and left-wing ideas in the twenties and thirties and how modernism, prolecult and 'new realism' jostled for space in the left avant-garde *Stream* and *New Masses*. Like the internationalism which was generated from the Spanish Civil War, left modernism was a global movement which tried to forge new slogans and politics in a period of chaos and upswing of revolutionary ideas.

Australian cities were also undergoing changes. Migrant communities were bringing a new cosmopolitanism and intellectualism to the inner-cities of Melbourne and Sydney. Waten, despite his immersion in Australian culture, did not forget his migrant background. Carter finds evidence of Jewish story-telling in the spare realism and narrative 'talk' of *Alien Son*. Waten wanted a Jewish literature which was also part of Australian literature. His writing was complicated, containing both assimilationist ideas and strategies for cultural resistance at a time when concepts of multiculturalism and 'ethnic' writing were not available 'positions' for Australian writers.

Waten wrote his first novel *Hunger* and was co-editor of the avant-garde *Strife* during the 1930s. *Hunger* could be broken up into fragments, read and interpreted without it being necessary to grasp it as a whole: "Everything went into it – the unemployed, stowing away and jumping trains, gaols, burglars, religion and Communism." Waten traveled to Paris and London to get his manuscript published but instead became co-editor of the British *The Unemployed Worker* and joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The Australian Party would not be quite so hospitable, disparagingly referring to Waten's "petty bourgeois irresponsibilities". Eventually he was expelled for a time. He traveled around Australia with Communist artist Noel Counihan and temporarily gave up a promising career as a left modernist writer.

Waten would, however, experience a mid-life change in direction in 1940. He began to write again, recasting himself within the terms of the new party cultural objectives of writing historical and national fiction as a realist writer. Between 1950 and 1961 Waten wrote *Alien Son*, *The Unbending*, *Shares in Murder*, and *Time of Conflict* and would become a leading figure within the Melbourne Realist Writers Group. But Waten would not completely lose the trace or memory of his avant-garde past. He thought of *Alien Son* as "an autobiography without an architecture", a self not so much in command of history as in its stream. As Carter shows, a domestic, attenuated and incidental form of memoir writing became the hallmark of his realism.

Socialist realist writing is experiencing something of a critical rebirth due at least in part to David Carter and the poststructuralist readings of Frank Hardy by John Frow and Peter Williams which have made difficult simple distinctions between modernism and realism. These readings have paid particular attention to the hybridity of socialist realist writing and its function as rewriting and intertextuality. The pitched battles fought between the left and the liberal conservatives in the universities and literary magazines in the forties and fifties were after all not so much about genre distinctions as politics.

Carter sees his own project as a study of the notion of a career through the institutions and dis-

courses, the structures and techniques of meaning-making in a given society at a given time. For Carter the relationship between the contingent forms of Waten's textuality and the socially differentiated publics are important as registers of Waten's changing literary style. His sense of history is stronger than Frow's or Williams', for whom historical meaning is always internal to discourse.

But unlike Frow's work on Hardy which is concerned with how the canon works as a literary system, Carter tells us little about the reception of Waten's writing in literary histories and institutional journals, where the most active notions of the canon were developed against radical writing and socialist realism.

The Communist Party, which was arguably Waten's most significant influence, barely rates a serious mention. Waten's debates with *Overland* and his troubled relationship to the party are at best footnotes to his literary writing.

Carter shows us how the literariness of *Odessa to Odessa* rescued Waten from his pro-Soviet position but we find out little about the Waten who was a key cultural and political spokesperson of the party's Soviet faction or who moved the motion to expel Frank Hardy from the party for writing *The Heirs of Stalin*.

Waten's disputes with the party and his role in front organizations such as the Australasian Book Society are noted in passing but only as background information. It is a pity that the sensitivity which Carter shows for nuance and contradiction in Waten's writing is not shown in equal measure for the other historical texts and material that he examines.

At times Carter's focus on textual matters borders on dry formalism. This is particularly so in the chapter on *Time of Conflict*. Carter shows us how the book approximates the narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman* and spends a great deal of time demonstrating how the plot can be broken down into narrative elements such as subject (man), object (classless society), sender (history), receiver (mankind), opponent (bourgeois class) and helper (working class).

This is an interesting observation in itself, but one which surely has wider interpretive meaning than just as narrative form. What meaning, for example, might Waten's *Bildungsroman* have as a rhetorical strategy, as agit prop, as cultural history or as a trope of the liberal humanism of the front politics which the party was trying to build in the sixties?

A Career in Writing is a literary history of Waten's texts rather than a cultural history of Waten's career in institutions and discourses. Yet if Carter does not achieve a cultural history, *A Career in Writing* is nonetheless a good literary study of Waten's works and an important addition to the small corpus of intellectual writing which has been written about socialist realist writers.

Paul Adams teaches and writes on working-class writing.

Caverns Beyond Narrative

Carmel Macdonald-Grahame

Gail Jones: *Fetish Lives* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $16.95).

THESE STORIES ARE ABOUT the very stuff of stories. They fascinate, spell-bind, catch us in their own analogic compulsion. They are, as the cover exclaims, the work of a superlative storyteller. *Fetish Lives* is Gail Jones's second collection. It makes me think of Coleridge's dream of music in 'Kubla Khan', its "deep delight", and the desire of the waker to recapture it. The musicality is pervasive and there is a clear attachment to a sublime aesthetic *a la* the Romantics – perhaps that's why – but Gail Jones is no mere damsel with a linguistic dulcimer.

This is an author with a spec(tac)ular imagination. She enters into the recesses of narratives, spots detail there, lights it up, inhabits imaginatively the lived moments towards which such detail directs her attention. Such moments from history as hollow out behind her scrutiny are rendered so plausibly as to be somehow revived upon the page. Legend is fleshed out. Virginia Woolf's fingers must have held Freud's gift of the narcissus, must have discarded it, by which time the petals must certainly have been spoiled. Her head must, yes, have rested on a pillow. Proust is hardly more vulnerable labouring breath for difficult breath than he is in a dependence upon curling tongs for the fineness of his moustache. Mata Hari's blowing of a kiss almost seductively towards her executioners is anchored to their banal and likely ministrations to their own bodies before killing her. The heads upon which Marie Tussaud must have looked

long and hard do represent a dreadful and textured physicality; the abject necessity which must have accompanied her craft. By entering into such moments the humanity of legendary figures undergoes a kind of resuscitation. The stories attend to the body, its fragility, the certainties of its living presence (the body: now); the word is made flesh and the flesh is made word in a lovely reciprocity.

The emotional range is unsettling.

The writing can be wise and compassionate, especially in relation to love. Abused Eleanor Marx is an example: "This is such a common form of suffering; to be awake, late at night, in an alienated partnership. It is like reading a book oneself has long ago written." Grieving Marie Curie keeps the clothes her husband died in. Great generosity and tenderness for fathers surfaces in the exquisite lunar poetics of 'The Man in the Moon'.

It can be ironic and the ironies have a dangerous edge, as in the introduction to one of Mata Hari's executioners in 'The Veil':

> On the morning of October 15, 1917, a middle-aged man probably named Claude – he was paunchy, balding, somewhat phlegmatic in manner – breakfasted as usual on dried bread dipped in coffee, stretched, pissed, adjusted his collar in the hall mirror, then rode his bicycle all the way to the rifle range at Vincennes. There he stood in a straight line with eleven other men, and shot one of twelve well-aimed bullets into the body before him.

The Paris over which the French Revolution is about to break is *declasse* as well as "a city of dreadful night, dreamt up by some Sadean. It was an incendiary device timed by History for 1789". The logistical problems which must have attached to the Terror are placed in the context of grim municipal realities: "In the Fauborg St Antoine a channel had to be cut from where the guillotine stood, to convey the human bloodstream to a common drain."

The language is luscious but not self-indulgent, scrupulously directed as it is towards its project of incarnation. This is cerebral writing too, often ferociously so, and gorgeously, unabashedly intellectual:

> The surface of this story is like the surface of the Grand Canal, which, dreamily fractured, is of course unrepresentable. But inasmuch as there are rooms conjoined with faces, and buildings, which look fictitious, floating substantially over bodies, and the ubiquity of tricks, visual illusions and wavering strange doubles, then it seems permissible to enter its ultra-modernist aesthetic and seek out, fluid as time and fluid as memory, the once breathing presence of Marcel Proust.

Only one do I wish away. 'Heartbreak Hotel' registers a derisiveness which is a depleted version of the expansive, bountiful spirit of the rest.

This is also a performance by a virtuoso reader/listener. As illuminations of the distance between signifiers such as Proust, Tussaud, Marie Curie, Mata Hari and the people from whom they have come adrift with time, the stories are as fascinated as they are fascinating. They suggest "the gift for listening" which, for Walter Benjamin, "is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled" and by means of which the storyteller (as opposed to the novelist) reaches back into the past in ways which "let the wick of [her] life be consumed by the gentle flame of [the] story" (*Illuminations*, 1973).

I'll stop this effusion. These stories do that to you – they draw you into caverns beyond narrative and language and they influence with their pleasure in both. As writing, as reading, *Fetish Lives* is fabulous literature in the best senses of each of those words. Honeydew.

Carmel Macdonald-Grahame is a PhD student at Edith Cowan University.

A Devoted Life

Ninette Dutton

Julie Lewis: *Mary Martin, A Double Life* (UQP, $29.95).

MANY PEOPLE ALIVE TODAY remember vividly the Second World War and the years preceding it, though to an ever greater number that time is already a misty and puzzling era. This gives a particular edge to an account of Mary Martin's unusual life which spanned this fascinating period.

Hers was a comfortable background, basically Unitarian, where several of her women forebears had

literary abilities. One grandmother was a staunch stick-waving communist. Such a background encouraged the young woman's wide thinking, but set this in a framework which she might ignore if she wished. She chose to carve an unusual path for her life and found fulfilment in doing so. Julie Lewis endeavours to portray her motivating forces.

Mary was born in 1915 when the watershed of the First World War began the avalanche which changed the world between then and 1945. She became fascinated with Indian life as a schoolgirl through a discussion group at the scholarly Girton College in Adelaide.

An unusually mature poem she wrote at the time shows that, while appreciating the possibilities of the magical world of the mind, she had a realistic streak and no time for sentimentality.

Her upbringing ended in a moderately successful university career. When she was nearly thirty she decided that bookselling was her calling and in 1945 opened her famous bookshop. It was a lively time for writers, artists and scientists. Mary's shop became the focus for thinkers of all sorts, particularly young ones.

She was a quiet woman with deep dark eyes which radiated excitement at any interesting comment. She had a retiring warmth which sometimes hid a basic wit and she could be both firm and tart.

Her friendship with Max Harris, the bold young poet, began at the university. Their contemporaries still remember their histrionic daily entrance into the refectory at lunchtime.

Later Mary had the brilliant idea of inviting Max to join her in running the bookshop. This partnership made the bookshop the phenomenon it became and eventually Max's wife Von was much involved.

It was Max who, realizing Mary's ever growing passion for Indian culture, insisted that she go there. Her fervour had carried her away when she saw the Hindu dancer Ananda Shivaram perform in Adelaide.

Mary travelled in the simplest possible way which sometimes puzzled the Indians. Despite difficulties this did manage to win people over and Mary was deeply touched at the eventual warmth of their acceptance. It was a complicated journey which Julie Lewis recounts in such detail that the dutiful reader sometimes endures the distance rather wearily.

In 1961, after further visits, Mary returned to live in India, planning to earn her living as a bookseller. The second part of the book is given to this very different half of her life, her loves and enthusiasms.

She eventually settled in the Nilgiri Hills and made a home at Kotagiri. Her close friend and mentor was Dr Narasimhan, who ran a clinic at Kotagiri and smaller hospitals in the surrounding countryside. This entailed exhausting trips for his helper Mary and she taxed every aspect of her strength, while continuing to run the bookselling business.

Illness overtook her and she died after an operation at the Vellore Hospital, mourned by hundreds of people who had known her work.

Something about Mary caught public interest in Australia, though many found it difficult to understand why she chose the life she did. Speculation continues to this day and I have heard numerous astonishing suggestions and explanations. A biography was called for and Julie Lewis has attempted to find her way into Mary's caste of mind and spiritual attitudes, uneasily at times.

FASHION NOWADAYS FINDS it difficult to disassociate any form of love from sexual overtones and this has led to surmise about Mary's sex life. Whatever it may have been Mary herself disclosed little about it. She did what she did, urged on by love of an unusual kind. Conjecture takes us no further towards the truth.

Julie Lewis' own speculations sometimes come between the reader and the woman whose portrait she is trying to limn. Mary's own versions of certain episodes are lively and revealing. There are still those whose memories could make the whole picture clear. Mary has become history while still alive in the minds of those who knew her.

I would find the book easier to read if Julie Lewis had referred either to Mary Martin or simply Martin if she felt this correct. The use of both names sometimes made me wonder if I were reading about two people.

I thought it distasteful that the blurb on the back cover refers to Max Harris' "fall from grace" over the Ern Malley affair. Grace with whom I wonder? He may have been misled in this complex affair and drawn jeering derision on himself, but notable people supported him. I recently re-read the poems with the same excitement and admiration as I felt on the day they came out, though not always with understanding. It takes unusual minds to form the kind of friendship Mary and Max enjoyed. It changed their lives and had an extraordinary influence on Australian writing.

Ninette Dutton is an artist and writer.

On Thin Ice

Antoinette Bauer

Nikki Gemmell: *Shiver* (Vintage, $16.95).

FIFTY DAYS SPENT VOYAGING to Antarctica gave Triple J reporter Nikki Gemmell the idea to write a novel. Given the recent popular appeal of other 'ends of the earth' books such as *Miss Smila's Feeling For Snow*, E. Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*, and Tim Bowden's *Antarctica and Back in Sixty Days*, it no doubt was a good idea. I approached Gemmell's novel about contemporary Antarctic journeying as someone very much drawn to these frozen settings. No doubt it was mainly the mythology surrounding Antarctica that fuelled my interest – as it has Gemmell's, and most who have ventured there in fact or fiction – helped along by highly appealing packaging on the book's cover which draws on aspects of those myths. However, my interest waned as *Shiver* proved to be a fairly conventional love story, albeit on ice.

Final frontier myths, myths of extremes, of emptiness and excess, of 'cruel beauty', abound in writings about this endworld place:

> The land of mythical tragedies. The place of ship's hulls being crushed by ice, of long treks into darkness and death, of soles falling from feet and being strapped back on, of teeth freezing and splitting, fingers dying, toenails coming away, mates disappearing through holes in the ice, mates walking away into blizzards ... of men lying down to die and placing their hand across the chest of their already dead, dear mate.

Rather than examining or questioning such myths, Gemmell's book pretty much buys into them. What *Shiver* does serve to highlight – keeping in mind that women expeditioners weren't allowed to 'winter' there until the 1970s – is the gendering of Antarctica. Despite the fact that Gemmell's Antarctica has been well and truly infiltrated by women and even features a female Station Leader, Antarctica remains in many ways a boyzone: beginning with the 'bloke-sized' government supplied gear with which the main female character is outfitted in Tasmania, including "men's thermal long johns with a slice at the front for the penis", and ranging to the ubiquitous *Footy Show*-style drag parties, "cross dressing's big in Antarctica".

Gemmell's protagonist, Fin, is a hip but vulnerable radio journalist eking out a sleep and work existence. She's apparently very good at (but in fear of becoming) her job, as news of an accident in which a mother and five kids are killed fails to make an emotional impact, but is instantly appraised instead for its newsworthiness – "Good story – kids are good, they use kids". The early part of the novel shows promise with detective-novel-like descriptions of life in 'The Cross', its in-your-face seediness, and the ironically named apartment building in which Fin resides – 'The Hopes'. And as you might expect in a book set in Antarctica, descriptions of landscape and weather abound. But here and elsewhere the writing is uneven, with flashes of brilliance interspersed with groan-inducing clangers. The plot-line is all too predictable, the characters lacking in depth, overshadowed by the Antarctic landscape. The writing is at its best when it verges on reportage; and there are enough of the fascinating details of life in Antarctica to make *Shiver* an interesting read.

What were for me some of the more interesting threads of the story, with great plot potential, were under-exploited. In particular, the issue of the impact of humans on Antarctica, specifically, in this case, of scientific experiments on crabeater seals, is underscored in one compelling scene then is simply dropped.

In the end then, the great idea for an Antarctic novel remains just that – an idea.

Antoinette Bauer teaches English and History in Ipswich.

To What Ends?

Tim Bowers

Brian Kiernan: *David Williamson; A Writer's Career* (Currency Press, $29.95).

FROM HIS MIDDLE-CLASS background in the suburb of Bentleigh in Melbourne, to his house overlooking Sydney Harbour, and more recently to Noosa, David Williamson has become the most successful playwright in Australia. The commercial suc-

cess of his plays and screenplays both here and overseas has more recently been supported by a measure of academic respectability which seemed to elude him in the early part of his career. His popular and critical success, and his mixture of left-wing idealism and reactionary conservatism, have given Williamson a high media profile for over a quarter of a century.

While the first edition of Brian Kiernan's *David Williamson: A Writer's Career* (1990) was well received by most critics, some found that the scholarly accumulation of detail failed to provide a vital appreciation of the relationship between the playwright and his work. The purpose of the book seemed obscure; insufficient scrutiny for a critical biography, yet too 'academic' to suit a wider readership.

In the preface to this substantially revised edition, Kiernan announces his purpose clearly: "By focusing on Williamson's career – rather than on either the 'real' man behind the work (which journalists hope to reveal) or on the plays 'in themselves' (which critics attempt to assess) – I hope to have interrelated that large part of his life as a writer, the inner or imaginative life that is spent alone at his desk, and his conspicuous public presence over the last quarter of a century."

Kiernan's decision not to provide a detailed critical discussion of Williamson's work and his reluctance to engage in the more imaginative and speculative aspects of biography leave a number of interesting issues sidelined from the main game: in what does Williamson's genius lie, and how has he endured?; on what levels do the plays work?; how has Williamson's work changed during his career?; which of Williamson's plays will survive, and which will not?; what do the plays tell us of the man, and vice versa? And there are other questions to be asked: are Williamson's plays simply mirrors of 'ordinary' life or are they complex examinations of the nexus between agency and determinism, and between the individual and the society; are the plays anything more than mouthpieces for Williamson's moral didacticism based upon simplistic dichotomies and stereotypes (as his detractors argue)? Most of these questions are hinted at in Kiernan's biography, but the author seems too polite to dirty himself in what makes the unseemly business of biography often so attractive to readers and writers alike.

Kiernan's biography is at its most interesting when he situates Williamson within a history of Australian theatre and the contemporary culture. The personalities and politics of La Mama Company in Melbourne and the Nimrod Company in Sydney make for particularly interesting reading. The text is thorough and for the most part lively. This edition is more carefully edited, tighter and more polished, and with an improved index. The plethora of information rarely hinders the pace and energy of the text.

However, Kiernan's willingness to go in to bat for his subject seems at odds with the author's 'factual' agenda. The matey tone makes it difficult for the reader to afford Kiernan's evaluative comments much credibility. Time and again, the biographer politely looks away when Williamson's actions and motivations seem questionable, and yet how quickly he defends Williamson from reviewers, "that scurf on the scalp of writers".

As a career profile and an introductory history to contemporary Australian theatre, *David Williamson: A Writer's Career* makes interesting reading. What Kiernan has done, he has done well; but to what ends?

Tim Bowers is a postgraduate at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

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Dungeons and Drag-ons

by Lofo

The king was well pleased, paid the writer 100 Thalers and had the book printed. The still imprisoned artisans, whose work still dragged on, were all given a copy and urged to read it.

'For I believe', said the king, 'that art and literature are the world's true inspirations.'

In his country, the book is still required reading.

Wedge politics deploys the postmodern paraphernalia of niche marketing in the service of the time-tried objective of divide and rule. Its basic formula is simple. Step 1: identify aggrieved, biddable elements of the opposition's support base – preferably people without a lot of formal education who are feeling insecure. Step 2: use sophisticated opinion-gathering techniques to identify the most likely short-range targets for their resentment – preferably other people who are even worse off than themselves. Step 3: tailor your rhetoric to convince your subjects that they are the 'real' America, Australia or whatever, and that their legitimate aspirations to reap the rewards of a lifetime's hard work are being frustrated by the demands of mollycoddled minorities and welfare recipients . . .
Jenny Lee

I have nothing against web-sites or T-shirts, nor do I want the state to somehow stop porn movies being made, but to conceive of political movements as fashion statements or the productions of individuals is to transform them into something other than political movements . . .
kylie valentine

These are the brave thoughts we all need to cling to in order to believe that a small gnat – the ARL – can slay the demon News Limited and its accomplices . . .
Andrew Moore

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