

overland

150

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ADVANCE
AUSTRALIA



contains
special anniversary reprint of
OVERLAND number one

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overland

Temper democratic, bias Australian

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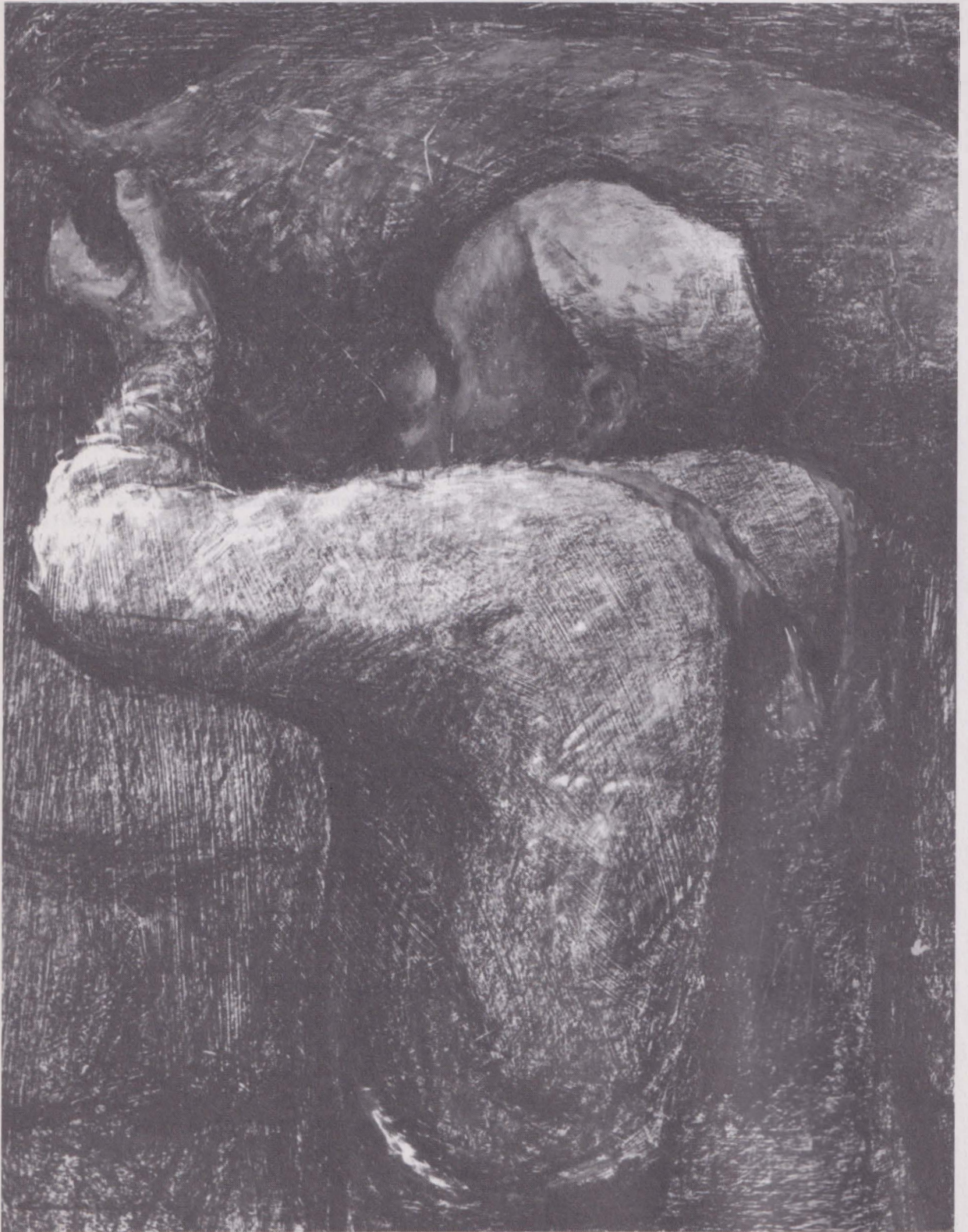
O*verland* reaching its 150th issue is a feat worth celebrating. We have survived these forty-four years because of the committed political, practical and financial support of a great number of individuals and groups. And to them we remain indebted. Our survival has also occurred in the face of heavy Cold War opposition, the rise of a New Left which aided but also challenged our purpose, the shrinking of the Australian public sphere, and the much-heralded but yet to be proved decline of print media and culture.

This survival points to a resilient but obscured culture – part socialist, part nationalist, part humanist, part working class – on which the magazine's future rests. The acknowledgement of this culture is a rarity in the contemporary media. The Australian media complex (courtesy of Murdoch and Packer), sycophantic in the extreme, is mostly involved in the promotion of an anti-communitarian logic which sees us as individual economic units and denies our collective interests and struggles. If *overland* can remain a democratic Australian voice for collectivity before individualism and for socialism over capitalism, then we indeed have something worth celebrating and maintaining.

In celebration we present a full facsimile reprint of our first issue (on pages 35–50). It offers readers the opportunity to reflect on changes within both *overland* and Australian society since 1954. Indeed, much of issue 150 involves reflection. Stuart Macintyre leads off with an historical look at the present wharfies' dispute. Rowan Cahill then remembers the books that aided his Vietnam War anti-conscription battles. Allan Gardiner, Laurie Hergenhan and Ben Goldsmith each take a close look at an aspect of *overland's* history and are, in turn, critical, revealing and laudatory. Gwen Kelly, a long-time contributor, writes of her career as a schoolteacher, while Stephen Gray reveals the story of Charles Priest, rape and racism in the Northern Territory in the 1930s. This issue also sees the introduction of a new section, 'Shorts', in which short fiction by new and emerging writers is showcased.

Having reached 150 issues *overland* is in a strong position. This strength is a basis for optimism that the magazine will reach its 200th issue and beyond. We will attain that goal if we remain flexible and attuned to the demands and issues of the day. We have a young, energetic editorial team, to which we have recently added Sydney poet, Pam Brown, who will take over as poetry editor from issue 151.

Ian Syson



Noel Counihan, Waterside Worker II, [1963]

Stuart Macintyre

The third time as rodomontade

*The lord above, send down a dove,
With wings as sharp as razors,
To slit the throats of bloody scabs,
Who cut down poor men's wages.*

THIS POPULAR LAMENT dates from the early 1890s, when the first great maritime strike brought troops onto the Melbourne wharves. It was revived in the late 1920s, when the second major maritime strike turned the port of Melbourne into a battleground. We have not heard it yet, as a third dispute as epochal in its significance as the earlier two has begun, but there is every likelihood that similar intervention will be necessary.

The maritime strike of 1890 was fought over the right to form a union. The marine officers, who did that, were forbidden by the shipowners to affiliate to the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. When they walked off their ships, the crews went with them along with the waterside workers and the coalminers of New South Wales who produced the ships' fuel and the shearers who produced the main export cargo.

The governments of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland broke the strike by using police and troops to introduce strikebreakers. This was when Colonel Tom Price of the Victorian Mounted Rifles issued his infamous order to "fire low and lay the bastards out".

From the ensuing misery and chaos came the creation of the Australian arbitration system, designed to bring industrial relations into a "new province of law and order". A state tribunal gave legal recognition to trade unions in return for their acceptance of its adjudication of disputes. The wages and conditions of the members of the Waterside Workers Federation became embodied in legally enforceable industrial awards.

The change did not transform the wharfies' occupation. The industry remained a casual one in which stevedoring companies assembled gangs of men to

load or unload a ship, and paid them off as soon as the job was done. The insecurity, low pay, and arduous, dangerous conditions all contributed to the turbulence of the industry. The pick-up, where wharfies were engaged, and the humiliation and corruption it encouraged, revealed the operation of a labour market in its most degrading form. Against this logic of individual competition the wharfies relied on their own forms of solidarity – based on the dense overlay of family, friendship and neighbourhood in portside neighbourhoods – and the union.

The vital economic significance of the maritime industry meant that the Commonwealth government could not leave its operation to the vagaries of the market, nor its industrial relations to direct bargaining. During the First World War the government responded to strikes with an attempt to deregister the union and preference for strikebreakers. In the 1920s the government made it a criminal offence to obstruct maritime transport and created a system of licenses as a condition of employment.

The second great maritime strike came when a new judge of the Arbitration Court issued a new award in 1928. The award introduced a second pick-up in the afternoon, forcing wharfies who had not been engaged in the morning to return and offer themselves again. At a time of increasing unemployment, the Federation accepted the award, but a number of its port branches refused to work under it.

As in 1890 and 1998, the dispute turned on the ability of the employers to introduce strikebreakers. As then and now, the state governments assisted them with police reinforcements. On Station Pier the police opened fire on pickets and one of them died. At the Port Melbourne railway station, trains carry-

ing strikebreakers were attacked. Several boarding-houses were bombed.

The prime minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, won the battle but lost the war. His licensing system entrenched the strikebreakers and his penal powers broke the union, but in 1929 he decided that the Commonwealth would dismantle its Arbitration Court and return industrial relations to the states, leaving federal control of the maritime industry only. He lost the vote on his legislation in the House of Representatives and was defeated in the ensuing election. He lost his own seat of Flinders to the secretary of the Trades Hall Council, who had only recently been found guilty of strike activity.

It took the Waterside Workers Federation a decade to recover from the defeat of 1929. They did so when Jim Healy was elected secretary in 1937 and persuaded the members to accept the scab workers into the union to make common cause for better pay and conditions. During and after the Second World War the union was able to civilize the industry. A roster system of employment, attendance pay, holidays, safety provisions, changing rooms and amenities was secured. Even with the return of the Coalition government in 1949, the union held its gains. Neither the threat to use troops on the wharves in 1953 nor a campaign of vilification among primary producers in 1956 intimidated it.

Tom Sheridan, a researcher at the University of Adelaide, has made an intensive study of maritime industrial relations during this period. He has shown that the major shipping lines, which owned and controlled the stevedoring firms, maintained a rigid and authoritarian stance. They were adamantly contemptuous of the union, preferring to retain Queens Counsel for industrial tribunals rather than negotiate. The onset of containerization and mechanized cargo handling merely aggravated the shortcomings of their management practices.

For their part, the Waterside Workers Federation was slow to respond to changed circumstances. It operated as a stronghold of exclusive and aggressive masculinity when the conditions for that style of unionism were waning. John Morrison's stories of the

waterfront perhaps best capture its ethos of mateship and fierce loyalties, but also suggest its limitations. It was loyal to a fault but enclosed, tenacious in holding to what it had achieved but reluctant to adapt. Not until the numbers of wharfies had shrunk to a fraction of the thousands once employed at each major port did the Federation accept the necessity to combine with the Seamen's Union and other small maritime unions.

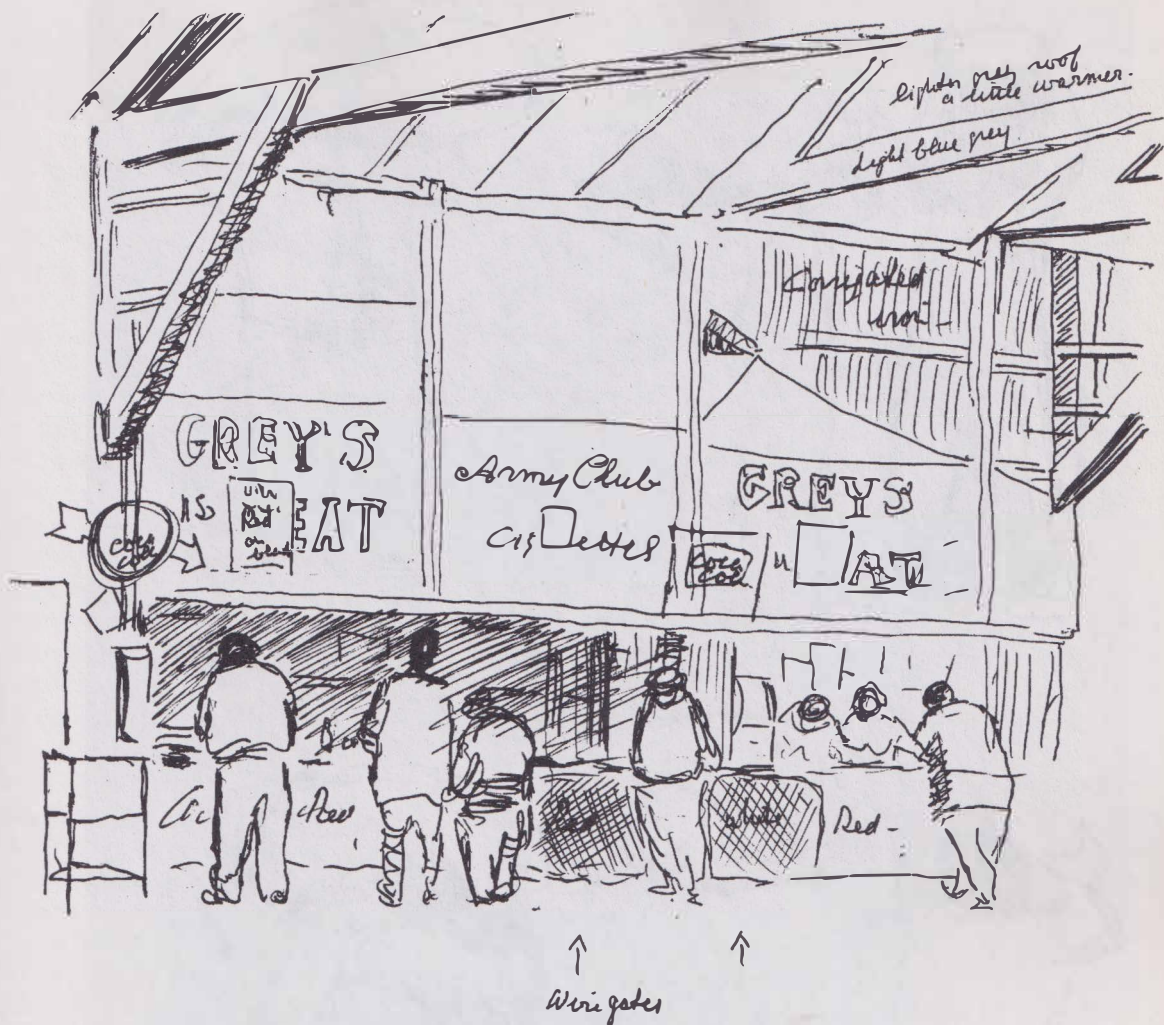
Yet during the 1980s the Maritime Union of Australia accepted the need for waterfront reform and improved productivity. It co-operated with the federal Labor governments of Hawke and Keating; it accepted new redundancies, and it developed effective relations with major export producers.

Why is it now under siege? The Howard government has repeatedly alleged that the performance of the industry is inefficient and an intolerable cost-burden on exports. These claims are usually supported by statistics for container lifts per hour at overseas ports. The figures are exaggerated; they frequently confuse container sizes; they take no account of differences in port layout, volume, equipment or management performance.

The Howard government also claims that it seeks greater competition in the industry through the breaking of the union monopoly. This principle of competition is a dogma enshrined in COAG agreements and implemented by all levels of government with adverse effects on public service provision and accountability. Its application to the private sector is highly selective. There has been no assault on the market control of large corporations in media, finance and other sectors. The cry for competition in the labour market is directed to unionized sectors of wage and salary earners rather than to the powerful professional associations.

In choosing to attack the MUA, the government had first to deal with the awkward fact that the union was quite willing to negotiate waterfront reform. Its tactic here was a series of provocations. First, there was the attempt to establish a non-union port operation in Queensland. Then there was the clandestine recruitment of service personnel for training at

The pick-up, where wharfies were engaged, and the humiliation and corruption it encouraged, revealed the operation of a labour market in its most degrading form.



Canteen - black frame work -

Red at each end & along bottom under counter down to floor -

Coca-Cola posters - red on white ground.

mirrored ~~across~~ in bar back wall of canteen, ~~forming~~ reflecting compound. -

Big cigarette ads on grey, dirty walls above counter -

walls blackened near roof - broken sheet of fibro cement -

lights, openings show sky - rusty grey, corrugated iron -

"GREYS" posters, yellow with black lettering - heavy, scraped letters.

"Army Club", grey with black script lettering -

Beak of green door in whitewashed wall, beside canteen -



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Noel Counihan, Waterside Worker I, 1963

Dubai. Both these exercises failed. On both occasions the government denied any involvement, and refused any criticism. The manifest intention was to provoke the union, yet the MUA and the ACTU are still prepared to continue negotiations.

The government's hope is to provoke retaliation that will discredit the union. Hence its exultation when a rock was thrown on the picket line at Webb Dock at a bus carrying security officers on 1 February, shattering the window and cutting the face of one female guard. The immediate cries of 'union thuggery' from the Prime Minister and his Minister for Workplace Relations, Peter Reith, are aimed at a public they believe is susceptible to this imagery. Of the fact that a car carrying riot shields was driven at high speed on the same evening, endangering both pickets and journalists, they say nothing.

The preparations were extensive and lengthy. The government commissioned advice from a brace of lawyers and consultants. It has dusted off its secondary boycott provisions and other legal penalties. It has offered encouragement to allcomers, whatever their reputation.

The part played by the National Farmers Federation is surely fraught with peril. Here is an organization whose members enjoy various forms of public assistance, an organization that called for 'certainty' of land title in its response to the Wik decision, seeking to deprive another section of Australian society of its livelihood.

Arguments between farmers and waterside workers are not new. In the 1920s, when North Queensland port workers were striking for a roster system of employment, beef and sugar producers descended on the coastal towns of Cairns and Bowen with firearms to imprison the unionists, beat up their leaders and order them from the towns on pain of death.

History occurs the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. During the first maritime strike of the 1890s the most tragic fall was that of government leaders, men such as Alfred Deakin and Samuel Griffith. They had been leading liberals, championing the rights of labour, but when the strike began they called out the troops.

The second maritime strike of 1928 was brought on by the Prime Minister, Bruce, and his Attorney-General, John Latham, who had stacked the Court and created the penal powers. Bruce was a patrician Melbourne businessman, educated at Cambridge. He travelled in a Rolls Royce and had his valet pin a fifty pound note (three months' earnings for a wharfie) to his pocket, "for emergencies". Latham was an austere, inflexible lawyer, determined to enforce the rights of property.

There is a suggestion of John Latham in John Howard: both men from humble origins who fought their way up, stubborn, unexpansive, ungenerous.

But what of the present member for Flinders, Peter Reith? He is no match for Bruce in urbanity or style, but he has the same plump prosperity. Bruce was unhurried, magisterial; Reith only recently learned to control the rapid head movements that betrayed his agitation. Bruce was born to rule, Reith has acquired the habit by trimming his political sails to the prevailing winds. Bruce disdained to dissemble and accepted his defeat with good grace. Reith has given many hostages to fortune and might well have to pay for them.

That will depend on the capacity of journalists to pursue the tangled web of arrangements woven from the minister's office, and it will be only one factor that determines the outcome of this contest. Public opinion will be important, for the government thinks it is on a winner in a fight with the unions, and the MUA is sensible of the dangers of violent confrontation. Yet Howard and Reith ignore the lessons of 1929 at their peril: the government has provoked this fight and it cannot assume its belligerence will escape the notice of the voters.

The attenuated industrial tribunals are already involved, and civil action against the MUA is highly likely, as it is against the ACTU and unions that support it. But this is not a fight that can be shirked. The wharfies are fighting for their jobs, as they have fought so often, and if they are beaten then no-one is safe.

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Stuart Macintyre is the Ernest Scott Professor of History at the University of Melbourne.

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Rowan Cahill

Vietnam Reading

IN HIS 1995 mea culpa *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (Times Books), former US Defence Secretary (1961–1968) Robert McNamara listed eleven major causes for what he termed the American “disaster in Vietnam”. He explained how he and his associates in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations – “an exceptional group: young, vigorous, intelligent, well meaning, patriotic, servants of the United States . . . ‘the best and the brightest’, as we eventually came to be known” – came to be so tragically wrong about Vietnam.

According to McNamara, prominent amongst the mistakes he and his colleagues made were misjudgements regarding the geopolitical intentions of North Vietnam and its allies, and the dangers these posed to the US; under-estimation of the power of Vietnamese nationalism; misjudgement of the political forces within Vietnam; profound ignorance of South East Asian politics, history, and culture; and failure to recognize the limitations of modern high-tech warfare in response to “unconventional people’s movements”.

I reacted to McNamara’s confession with elation and anger; elation because he had finally come clean, after all the Vietnam war has been called McNamara’s war; anger because thirty years earlier I had been variously threatened, punched, spat on, arrested, fingerprinted, hauled through courts, incarcerated, spied on, and denounced as a traitor when, as an anti-war activist/radical student/conscientious objector, I had pointed to many of the ‘misjudgements’ McNamara was now being feted for admitting to. Thirty years too late I reckoned.

My anger increased during the media excitement that followed. Former Australian Prime Minister (1968–1971) Sir John Gorton, who had presided over crucial years of Australia’s involvement in the war, went on record as saying that Australia’s involvement in the war had been unjustified. Former Australian

Defence Force chief (1987–1993) General Peter Gration endorsed Gorton’s view. Gration went to Vietnam as a Lieutenant Colonel, 1969–1970. In his view Australia’s involvement in the war was “on balance” not justified. But then one of the Australian warlords, Don Chipp (Minister for Navy 1966–1968), had broken ranks much earlier and beaten them all to it. In his 1987 memoirs *Chipp* (Methuen Haynes) he had written of “the tragedy of Vietnam” which in retrospect he believed he was wrong to have supported.

It seemed to me that McNamara had little excuse for claiming to be so spectacularly uninformed about the war; after all he had at his beck and call the awesome resources of the CIA, more spook outfits than you could poke a stick at, South East Asian experts ad nauseam in academia only too willing to enlist in the service of Uncle Sam, and tucked away the confidential *Pentagon Papers* (dramatically leaked to *The New York Times* in 1971). In Australia the contemporary information situation is best symbolized by the case of Lieutenant Colonel Warr, Commanding Officer of the Fifth Battalion of The Royal Australian Regiment. When assigned to Vietnam in early 1966 Warr faced a lack of official information about the conflict he was about to enter. He was told by intelligence authorities to tell his soldiers nothing; resorting to his own devices he ended up making discreet inquiries to an ANU academic. Similarly the Australian people were no better served about the Vietnam war by either the government or the media.

Before 1964 I took little interest in the Vietnam conflict. Small wonder. Who did? I was sixteen when thirty Australian jungle combat advisers were committed to Vietnam in 1962. One of the few people who really pressed the Australian government for information about this commitment and the conflict was fiery Labor MHR Eddie Ward, whose questioning at the time appeared obtrusive, out of kilter with the

times. Vietnam was neither an issue nor a story.

My quest for understanding began soon after 10 November 1964, the date the introduction of a selective conscription scheme for twenty-year-olds, with provision for overseas service, was announced. I had a gut feeling then, which later proved correct, that I would be conscripted, and that it would all lead to Vietnam. My presentiment was perhaps due to the fact that the announcement came a few days after my nineteenth birthday. So far as I was concerned conscription did not come out of the blue;

there had to be more to it. America had bombed North Vietnam for the first time; the Australian government had expressed support for America's actions; the first Australian protests against the war were taking place. It all fitted; America, Vietnam, Australia, conscription.

In a half-heard, little-understood way, I had been through some of this before. There were backyard childhood memories

of my father and neighbours apprehensively discussing the possible widening of the Korean war. During November 1964 I tried to make geographic sense of the new conflict via my old school atlas; but it was an early 1950s publication, dog-eared, ink-stained, and Vietnam was still part of French Indochina.

When recalling the 1960s one needs to correctly cast the Australian atmosphere of the time, and not in terms of the carefree hedonism favoured by market forces. Other images are necessary, a point veteran broadcaster and foreign correspondent Allan Ashbolt grasped when he began his commentary on Australia's Vietnam years, *An Australian Experience* (Australasian Book Society, 1974), with an account of a 1966 anti-war meeting in a church hall on Sydney's upper North Shore, heart of Liberal territory. Addressed by legendary journalist Francis James, the meeting was violently disrupted by a coalition of right-wing forces – the Young Liberals, the DLP, Ustasha, the Defend Australia League, the Friends of Rhodesia, the Friends of Freedom, and the Nazis. That imbroglia symbolized Australia in the 1960s for Ashbolt; a society trapped in a repressive hysteria of fear and loathing.

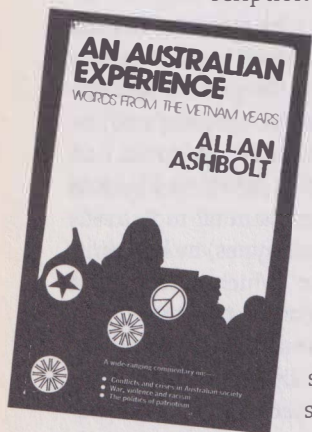
Finding out about Vietnam from the media was not an option. Brain dead from years in support of Menzies the media basically took a passive approach to news gathering from Vietnam and accepted the government's position, which in turn reflected Cold War political assumptions and analyses.

So how did an unenfranchised student, aged nineteen and headed for conscription via the second call-up ballot, September 1965, find out about Vietnam? For me it was a complex and gradual process; people and events helped along the way, but much of it had to do with reading. And this, the time and space to read, think, and question, was a luxury virtually unique to tertiary students since they could, as I did, defer their showdown with – or submission to – the warlords until completion of the first degree (contingent upon satisfactory academic progress in the meantime).

Two libraries featured in my Vietnam education; Sydney University's Fisher Library and from 1968 onwards as I increasingly moved in leftist circles, the well-stocked Communist Party research library in the Sydney party headquarters. Both libraries had substantial holdings of current American newspapers and journals. From these I learned the Vietnam war was a major political controversy via journalism and analysis that did not accord with US government propaganda aims. I could follow the vigorous debate almost contemporaneously, a far cry from the Australian media wilderness.

Two bookshops were important. The Co-operative Bookshop at Sydney University provided a discounted diet of Penguins. Bob Gould's joyously rebellious and encyclopedic Third World Bookshop, established in 1967 in Goulburn Street, proved a dissident's Aladdin's cave.

My Vietnam education began with an Australian edition of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament booklet *Vietnam Briefing* by John Gittings and Ajit Singh, a critique of a pro-war speech made at Oxford, June 1965, by Britain's Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart. The booklet's arguments were eye-opening, while sources referred to introduced further readings, in particular Bernard Fall, Edgar Snow, and Denis Warner. *Vietnam Briefing* owed its Australian incarnation, via Morgan Publications (Sydney, 1965), to young Oxford academic Michael Wilding who had recently taken up a lectureship at Sydney University. Stunned by the Australian lack of information and debate about Vietnam, Wilding teamed with bookseller Colonel Alex Sheppard and



Hugh Price of Sydney University Press to publish the booklet locally.

A couple of widely circulated and influential publications originating in Sydney helped fill the information void: *Vietnam and Australia* (1966) produced by the University Study Group, an academic outfit unofficially based at the University of New South Wales; and *Vietnam: Myth and Reality* (1967) written and published by Harold Levien. No newcomer to the business of comment and controversy, Levien had been founder and editor of *Voice* (1951–1956), the pioneering Sydney independent journal of current affairs.

In 1968 the Peter Wiles translation of Jean Lacouture's *Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography* (Allen Lane) became available, readably sorting fact from fiction and portraying key Vietnamese personalities as significant historical and political figures – a far cry from the dismissive racist treatment meted out by Australian propagandists.

As Robert McNamara eventually realized, understanding the Vietnam war demanded an understanding of the transformative powers of nationalism. The topics of nationalism and imperialism had been introduced to me as part of the school Leaving Certificate Modern History course, mainly as contributing causes of the First World War. Understanding was advanced by a Sydney University undergraduate course on nineteenth-century European nationalism. Readings went beyond the time frame and one of the texts, Hans Kohn's *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Van Nostrand, 1965), portrayed nationalism as the determining political and cultural force in the post-1945 world. Later *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin, 1967) by Caribbean psychologist Frantz Fanon, who had been part of the Algerian struggle against French colonialism, explored the power, the undercurrents, the violence, the spirituality, the psyche, of nationalist struggle in Third World contexts. Nationalism had deep and subtle wellsprings. It was a force beyond high-tech bludgeoning.

If as McNamara claimed, he and his bright young things were ignorant of South East Asian histories and cultures, then how much more so babyboomers raised in the Yellow Peril humidicrib of the Menzies era? Eventually, as part of my attempt to establish status as a conscientious objector, I would try to argue in an Australian court that the militaristic role of Australia in Vietnam was to the long-term detriment of the Australian people; that I believed in living with

Asia, and understanding the people, cultures, and histories of the region. This blending of nationalism and internationalism owed debts to *Living with Asia* (Lansdowne, 1965) by left Labor MHR Jim Cairns, and to New Zealand geographer Keith Buchanan (first encountered in Helen Palmer's journal *Outlook*) who wrote prolifically about Asia and the Third World, the peoples, cultures, their human environments and moral and emotional patterns. A collection of Buchanan's writings on these themes was later published as *Map of Love* (Pergamon, 1970).

To understand the Vietnam war one had also to think about America. Ultimately there was no end of scholarly and propagandist material available, no end of critiques, no end of American contributions to self analysis. For me one book had significant impact – *An American Experience* (Gollancz, 1966) by Australian journalist Allan Ashbolt, special American correspondent for the ABC from 1958 to 1961.

Written from a left perspective, *An American Experience* was a confident, lovingly crafted foray into political and cultural analysis. At home with American history and culture, Ashbolt wrote sensitively and perceptively, disappointed “at the contrast between America's original democratic aspirations and the practice of democracy in America today”.

I recently returned to Ashbolt's American and Australian *Experience* volumes and found them still relevant. Together they lay claim for Ashbolt being regarded not only as the journalist and broadcaster he is usually described as, but as a significant Australian democratic radical and bearer of the flame of individual social conscience.

Community ignorance and fear of communism was orchestrated by the Menzies government during the 1950s and sixties, underpinning conscription and involvement in the Vietnam war. I was part of this mindset, coming from a politically conservative family. The



DRAFT ONLY

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AS A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

To The Registrar, National Service Registration Office,

Sydney

Rowan John Cahill of 36 Wangoola Street

East Gordon in the State of New South Wales

Student in pursuance of Regulation 31 of the National Service Regulations hereby apply:

- (a) to be registered as a person exempt from liability to render service under the National Service Act, on the ground that I hold a conscientious belief that does not allow me to engage in any form of military service, whether combatant or non-combatant:
(b) to be registered as a person who is liable to be called up for service under the National Service Act, but who is not required to engage in duties of a combatant nature, on the ground that I hold a conscientious belief that does not allow me to engage in military duties of a combatant nature, but allows me to engage in military duties of a non-combatant nature.

I submit the following facts in support of my application: The space given in which to state reasons for conscientious objection is ridiculous, as is the system by which conscientious objection is decided. However in spite of this I have tried to list briefly some of my reasons. I am opposed to war. Wars exist because men want them to. They exist because man in general has made no serious attempt to study its causes and the reasons why people are willing to kill each other. I believe that the glorification of war, the worship of things military as is apparent in Society, is obscene. I will not aid in the spread of this obscenity by lending my body, mind or soul in any way to anything military. (2) Wars exist because people are willing to fight them. Wars are based on ignorance cultivated by nationalism, patriotism, respect for, and reverence of, things military, fears and hatreds, partly conveyed from generation to generation through educational institutions, the mass media and governments. I will not surrender my mind to these debased forces. I am opposed to the intervention of the West in Vietnam. I believe that the military intervention of America in Vietnam is unwarranted. I will not aid any military machine which helps perpetuate this intervention or supports the imperialist policy of the American capitalism be it in Asia, Africa, Latin America. (2) America's presence in Vietnam is due to that nation's policy of imperialism, one that has its roots in American history. As a socialist I am opposed to this policy and pledge solidarity with all peoples, wherever they are, who are resisting and opposing it. (3) The Vietnam war is essentially racialist in nature. I will not aid nor encourage this racialism by participating in it or aiding it in any way. (4) The action of the 'allies' in Vietnam, the decimation of the people and the land represents a crime against humanity. I will not be party to this crime. If the West once had something to offer to the Vietnamese people, it no longer has. Signature of Applicant

initial breakthrough to new understandings originated from the collection of essays The Disintegrating Monolith (ANU, 1965) edited by J.D.B. Miller and T.H. Rigby. For me this book destroyed the Menzies-era spectre of a threatening monolithic communism, demonstrating instead divergent, often mutually antagonistic, communisms, an understanding later enhanced by a reading of C. Wright Mills' The Marxists (Penguin, 1963).

Australia has a strong martial tradition, from colonial campaigns against Aborigines, involvements

in the Maori Wars, the Sudan, the Boxer Rebellion, the Boer War, to nationhood during the First World War, and on through the Second World War to Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam. Colonial and Federation poets yearned for a blood sacrifice to help forge Australian nationhood; war memorials tend to be religious sites as the Calvary and Anzac sacrifices mesh.

My opposition to this martial spirit and 1960s conscription did not come pre-packaged, but developed piecemeal. Martin Boyd's anti-war novel When Blackbirds Sing (1962) was an early and powerful in-

fluence, read by chance simply because a friend had an association with the Boyd family and I was curious to find out about 'the Boyds'. An undergraduate American history course introduced me to Transcendentalism, the nineteenth-century New England intellectual movement that included Thoreau and Emerson. Thoreau's essay 'On The Duty Of Civil Disobedience' was a significant personal encounter. A European literature course required from me a tutorial paper on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; in the process of preparing this I discovered Tolstoy's writings on civil disobedience, especially his Christian anarchist foray *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, a much unused copy of which I found in Fisher Library. In 1966 *The Pacifist Conscience* (Penguin), edited by Peter Mayer, was released. A wide ranging collection from Lao-Tzu to Albert Camus, analyzing violence, war, and the individual conscience in relation to the State, Mayer's book accessed a moral and ethical world totally out of step with Australian Cold War conservatism.

Conscription and Vietnam did not radicalize me. I was a rebel-in-waiting. While the state school system had exposed me to teachers who made the class copy out reams of mimeographed notes in dormouse quietness disturbed only by the scratching of pens, there were others – men who had swapped uniforms and weapons for university training and teaching; young post-war idealists, some of them communists; and talented renegades passing through the system, on the way to future literary and academic successes. Tediously bored by some of my teachers, I absorbed from others a sense of education as excitement, and as a transformative personal and social process.

In Leaving Certificate English I got a solid dose of the Romantics, a glimpse of Jacobin intellectual circles of the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries, and from this an inkling that protest and rebellion were perhaps okay. A new Modern History syllabus aimed at linking the social, economic and political in the context of world history from 1750 onwards, and gave the notion of social class a run. I picked up the idea that revolution was maybe an historical necessity, and found that in spite of Empire/Commonwealth Day and 'God Save the Queen' it was hard to be in love with imperialism. One English teacher, and later psychologist, introduced me to John Anderson's 1943 essay 'The Servile State'; he helped me with its complexities, the recognition of history as struggle,

the rejection of reform, and the idea of permanent protest and opposition.

Anzac and Remembrance days were major school events. However in 1960 my French teacher stood in front of our class on the eve of the Anzac Day holiday; he was one of those many older men recalled from retirement in the late 1950s to cope with teacher shortages and the babyboomers. Wearing his medals and a sprig of rosemary, with quiet anger and tears he told us fifteen-year-olds of the horrors of the Western Front, of his Somme experiences, and explained why Anzac Day should never glorify the martial spirit as it tended to in those school days.

By the time I completed my schooling I had critically questioned an army recruiter about logical inconsistencies in his spiel to an assembly of the senior school, my action earning us an afternoon's detention; and I had delivered an anti-imperialist Commonwealth Day address. I left school with real, if basic, intellectual tools and with a belief that life could be understood and that it was possible to make sense of bewildering data. I left too with the knowledge that not everything passed on as historical fact and wisdom was what it claimed to be. Itching to engage with the wider world in a critical way I tried to contribute to the satirical magazine *Oz*, the first issues of which my school-bound mates and I had excitedly purchased on railway stations in 1963 from Richard Walsh's band of attractive female distributors. But I never mastered the genre, and my juvenilia was rejected. Menzies and his warlords took care of the rest.

NOTES

1. For a report of the 1995 comments by Sir John Gorton and General Peter Gration on the Vietnam war see Cameron Stewart, 'New Wounds From An Old War', *Weekend Australian*, 22–23 April 1995, p. 22.
2. The quest for information by Lieutenant Colonel Warr is reported by Greg Lockhart, 'Into Battle. Counter Revolution', in Gregory Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, Lansdowne, Sydney 1990, p. 44.
3. The dissenting life and times of Alex Sheppard MC are outlined in his obituary, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June 1997.
4. A fictional memoir of the period by Michael Wilding titled 'Vietnam Protest' is in Mabel Lee & Michael Wilding (eds), *History, Literature and Society: Essays in Honour of S.N. Mukherjee*, Sydney Studies/Manohar, Leichhardt and New Delhi, 1997, pp. 227–241.
5. For an outline of my dealings with the National Service Act see Rowan Cahill, 'A Conscription Story, 1965–69', *The Hummer*, Winter 1995, pp. 17–22.

Anzac Day

A certain cast to their features marked
the English going into battle, & then, that

glint in the Frenchman's eye meant 'Folks,
clear the room!' The Turks knew death

would take them to a paradise of sex
Islam reserves for its warrior dead

& the Scots had their music. The Germans
worshipped the State & Death, so for them

the *Maximschlacht* was almost a sacrament.
Recruiting posters made the Irish soldier

look like a saint on a holy card, soppy & pious,
the way the Yanks go on about their dead.

Not so the Australians, unamused, unimpressed
they went over the top like men clocking on,

in this first full-scale industrial war.
Which is why Anzac Day continues to move us,

& grow, despite attempts to make it
a media event (left to them we'd attend

'The Foxtel Dawn Service'). But The March is proof
we got at least one thing right – informal,

straggling & more cheerful than not, it's
like a huge works, or 8 Hour Day, picnic,

if we still had works, or unions, that is.

John Forbes

John Forbes 1950–1998

Laurie Duggan

JOHN FORBES WAS BORN in Melbourne. Through his childhood he lived in Penang, Townsville, New Guinea and other places where his father, an RAAF meteorologist, was posted (a sense of the tropics pervades his work). He finished high school at De La Salle in Caringbah and Cronulla, Sydney, then entered Sydney University where he studied English and Fine Arts. He was working on his (finally abandoned) MA thesis on Frank O'Hara when I first met him in 1972. I had arrived in Sydney from Melbourne, drawn there by an active and – at last – unselfconsciously modernist writing scene centred on *New Poetry*; attracted too by new friends – writers and critics of the calibre of Pam Brown, Martin Johnston, Carl Harrison-Ford, John Tranter and Robert Adamson.

I visited John soon after, a little nervous about meeting the person who had called Martin (though with admiration) a “hopeless romantic”. I needn't have been. John was a man who made friends easily, and kept them if the number of people at his funeral service is anything to go by. Through subsequent life I was often to benefit from his advice and encouragement. John wouldn't pretend (or allow you to) that anything could be gotten away with. He was his own harshest critic, and he may well have been the conscience of modern Australian

poetry. He was truly catholic where poetry was concerned and would pardon anyone for writing well, just as he held the knowingly facile in contempt. As he noted in 'Lessons for young poets':

it's important to be major
but not to be
too cute about it – I mean
it's the empty future
you want to impress,
not just the people
who'll always be richer
& less talented than you.

We had both grown up breathing popular culture; for us neither a thing to view with disdain nor a subject for the anthropological gaze. The Ramones, like Tiepolo, were just there, part of our life. In 1974 we co-edited a little magazine, *Surfers' Paradise*, which exemplified these attitudes. The esoteric and the mundane sat together without the need for self-conscious signposting (the cover of the first issue featured a Colin Little screenprint of a woman waterskiing through floating beer cans; the second featured a TV screen featuring Steve McGarrett of 'Hawaii Five-O', photographed by John's brother Mick). John continued to edit this impossibly irregular publication whenever he could afford to and whenever there were younger poets, like Adam Aitken or

Dipti Saravanamuttu, whom he particularly wanted to see in print.

John was in London for a year in 1975, working as a clerk in Australia House and sampling the mores and absurdities of English cultural life, a constant source of gloom and amusement, exemplified by his lines:

... all cough medicine can do
is make it a pure delight
to read the *Times Literary
Supplement*

He was an insatiable reader. He read poetry constantly, much military history (he might have had an interesting conversation with Kim Beazley on the American civil war), and fiction, enjoying the seafaring historical novels of Patrick O'Brian: well-written works for a specific readership rather than those exercises in designer fiction supposedly written for all of us. But John would read anything if there were no bookshops around. In the late seventies he joined a group of us on a bushwalk in northern NSW. We were out for several days and by the end of that period John had read not only every book we'd taken, but also the scraps of newspaper wrapped around things and even the instructions on food and medication packets.

John was a notorious user of pharmacological substances yet

there is in his work no romantic blurring of drugs with art. Even the popular 'Drugs' poem (quoted above) is an exposition of manners rather than a diary of 'experience'. Poetry required full attention; drugs and alcohol were for those other, less satisfactory parts of life, those gaps when nothing else was happening.

I returned to Melbourne in 1985. John moved down in the later eighties, living in Prahran and finally Station Street, Carlton where he made a virtue of the fact that he could never afford to move back to Sydney. Habitual mismanagement and an often misplaced generosity meant that he always lived from day to day. Only the imagination of possible windfalls structured his life until the next, usually unsatisfactory, change of circumstances. Yet the magnificent

poems he produced ultimately render these details insignificant. 'Sydney', written in memory of Robert Harris, concludes with the lines:

others have armchairs
& opinions about things

but you sing a song like
the clinking of schooners

the city's still hearing
when they're dead and gone.

While long periods often passed between our meetings, John would regularly phone me to read new poems, announce his elaborate plans or enter into philosophical disquisitions. With my partner Rosemary he would discuss his ethical concerns and satisfy his curiosities about contemporary

feminism. We both got large serves of his (largely imagined) love life and would advise and occasionally berate him on one issue or another. He took it all in good humour but seldom acted on our suggestions.

By early 1997 John knew that he would need to clean up and cut down, if not give up alcohol. In July we were both in Sydney. One night I sat up late drinking with him. Seeing him the next morning I realized that he was going to die soon, if not in a month certainly within a year. I had not long moved back to Sydney when Alan Wearne rang: "I have some bad news". I knew what that news would be. But I'm still half-expecting another call: a booming voice which will, without announcement, commence reading to me some absurd passage from the *London Review of Books*.

Poem

Dissatisfaction's mawkish force, new stars to pan –
his aestheticism blinding on its bland parapet
All the earth is down and leafless wings sucked
pallid. Black universes stretch
time's lake. He reads like a marvel
The carousers come home, confetti laughter
on the concrete steps' worn shine
Call the machines and talk
They sleep in their security boxes
Cars hiss Things tossed
Look inward and throw up
Rows of elastic trees ruffle
Thin cutlery tingles in the next flat
Impoverished televisions wail
Talking doesn't change
I recoil from the door
from the great statues floundering in the Square

Gig Ryan

Possibilities

Say, are the hills still green, my love,
As they were, long years ago,
And the thunderheads white in the evening light
As though they were filled with snow?

Does the magpie carol his morning song
From the topmost bough of the tree,
And the honeyeater's sweet sharp voice repeat
The world's nativity?

And are hearts still broken and mended, my love,
According to curse and prayer,
Does righteousness wait at the city's gate
And find true welcome there?

Oh yes, the hills are green, my love,
As they were, long years ago,
And storm-driven rains again and again
Have replenished the valley below.

Birds still dispense their drams of song
From every heaven-bent tree,
And hearts that are pure have known the cure
Of their lyric chemistry.

But what of those souls who sue for peace
And for judgement swift and fair?
They shall ache till the world's last morning break
Before they get their share.

Bruce Dawe

Not either/or but both/and

i'm a post-modern woman
certainty bores me
i look for inconsistencies
contradiction
revel in contrasts

the green hill
luminous against dark sky
sunlight through a gash
in black cloud
ephemeral grasses
on red rock
ancient as dinosaurs
fragile petals
between thorns
the softness of your penis
in my hand
its hardness in my mouth
the yelling, the anger
the fist in my face
your tears and remorse after

Anna Brooks

Cobar and Byrock, NSW Landscape Description

welcome to the cobar and byrock shires,
incorporating wooded undulating country, with rugged hills and dry water courses,
the shire boundary is formed by the darling river in the north
and the lachlan river in the south east,
much of the land used around the town district is for sheep grazing,
emus, echidnas, snakes, lizards, giant goannas, 200 species of bird,
including parrots, major mitchell cockatoos are common,
along with the eastern and western greys, the euro and the red kangaroo,
fork tailed kites, and wedgetail eagle feeding on rabbits, kangaroos or sheep,
in reservoirs and farm dams: heron, ibis, ducks, wanderers or even gulls and terns,
other common birds include honeyeaters, wrens, robins and the apostle bird,
a walk in the bush can reveal a surprising variety of wildlife,
one or two ranges of rocky hills dominate the landscape in the east,
flattening to sandy river plains in the west,
the water supply forms a 135 km pipeline to nyngan,
the floodplains are naturally treeless, saltbush and mitchell grass communities,
here, the banks of the rivers and minor creeks are lined by red river gums,
in the south and south east of the cobar shire, lie extensive areas of mallee vegetation,
most of the district is covered by semi arid woodlands,
some common trees are bimble box, red box, rosewood, behalh, and mulga,
vast expanses of wildflowers bloom in spring,
before european settlement the area had a park like appearance
with stretches of perennial native grasses scattered with trees and shrubs,
more than a century later much of it is dominated by shrubs,
such as turpentine, buddha, hopbush, punty and mulga,
they are known as densities and have been insidiously increasing,
creeping over the dune dominated lands, at the expense of pasture for livestock,
warning: the increase in density of these woody weeds
is the largest threat to sustainable pastoralism,
land holders are now using fire to reduce woody weed densities,
other methods being utilised are goat grazing, sage chemicals and clearing by
mechanical means, where there is predominantly the grazing of livestock,
byrock, a small village 78 kms south east of bourke on the mitchell highway,
named after the renowned 'rock-hole', a natural gilgai formed in a table of granite rock
near the present site of the village, the old saying was '*meet you by the rock*',
which gradually became '*bye-rock*' then later *byrock*, or more recently, '*bye bye byrock*'
or '*bye bye outback*'

Coral Hull

Gwen Kelly

Principals I Have Known

The Tableland – Patrick’s Palace

ONCE UPON A TIME, in those days before governments and their allied bureaucracies sought to amalgamate institutions of learning appropriately or inappropriately, Armidale Teachers’ College, as it was then called, supervised its own students ‘on practice’. This meant every student of the college was placed in the care of a college lecturer who was responsible for the supervision of work, final assessment and the personal problems of the student, although the teacher and school principal were also asked to comment on the student’s performance. This task involved every college lecturer, not merely those who taught ‘Education’ as a subject, spending about six weeks each year visiting schools and watching classes, on either the Northern Tableland or the North Coast.

My first practice as supervisor took place in a bleak, cold school which served the underprivileged of a large, country town. I felt a sense of depression which threaded my nervousness with gloom for somehow, I seemed to have walked back in time to the most traumatic period of my own childhood.

In 1932 my mother died and my sister, Una, faced with a long list of debts and a father who had already been out of work for twelve months, transferred the family to the industrial suburb of Leichhardt where we remained with minor variations for six years. My new school was Crystal Street, Petersham. I had exchanged the treed playground and airy rooms of Penant Hills for an asphalt exercise yard, and the high, green-painted, internal walls of a red brick prison. The front door was even barred. It was a school without equipment. I learnt to play rounders with my bare hands for there were no bats; to jump balls bounced off the high brick walls. A large number of the pupils never progressed past sixth class because they left school for the factories or in a few cases they filled the beds of the Child Welfare Department’s Industrial

Schools. I looked round this new school and there, again, were the painted inner walls, the scrubbed, wooden floors stained sporadically with ink. I glanced at the blackboard and my depression deepened, for chalked in neat cursive was exactly the same poem which had occupied the board in my Crystal Street room in 1933. ‘The Australian Sunshine’ by James Cuthbertson. Here under the eagle eye of Mr Patrick Sanderson, the headmaster, the morning star was still paling and the tides were still swirling free over the purple reaches and the children were still copying the words into their book, and reciting, sing-song fashion, aloud. There too were the replicas of the early maturing girls I had known. Their new breasts pushed against their tunics, while they spent the day, at least in the student lessons, combing and arranging the hair of the girls in front of them. Their eyes were fixed with dewy concentration on the teacher, a faint smile of interest fixed on their lips. They were the eternal debunkers of the education system.

The group, comprising the lowest sixth class, was taught normally by a chalk-lined, lively man on the borders of retirement, who looked like a composite of all the male primary teachers of my own childhood. While I watched the hairdressing, he watched with a grin my raised brows. “Mrs Kelly,” he said one break, “we all have our role in life. Some of us train teachers and doctors and dentists. My job is to be midwife to the graduates for the town laundry, an ugly, hot, barn-like building on the corner of a busy street. Believe me their role is essential and dreary. I help them at least to be partially literate.” I understood.

Patrick Sanderson was a dapper little man with bright eyes who never doubted the worth of his profession. He was an efficient, old-fashioned teacher, who pursued the assistant teachers in his care with a pry and root-out policy, which was enforced by a string of verbal directives. The permanent teachers

referred to the school as 'Patrick's Palace'. "It has the autocracy of a palace without the luxury or privileges," said a kindergarten teacher. Yet he was not an unkind man. He had many years of grinding toil behind him, for he never obtained a non-teaching post, either through back luck, prejudice, or his own refusal to transfer his family at departmental direction to the backblocks of New South Wales. Yet he could be unnerving. He had an instinct for the most difficult hour of the day, and nothing pleased him more than to restore order to a subordinate's mayhem. It was legitimate but wearing. I remember a student with a bad stammer whose class teacher, a firm, motherly, married woman, had managed to guide step by step to an articulate state. Both she and I felt some hope for the boy's future after two weeks of tender, loving care. Unfortunately Mr Sanderson chose a language lesson to swoop into the room. "Name an adverb," he said to a pupil on passing before seating himself in one of the desks with his beady eye turned unmoving on the hapless student. "Well, you'd better listen more carefully, lad, to your teacher. Carry on, Mr Chalmers. Tell this boy about adverbs." I watched dismay creep up Mr Chalmer's face. He stood there, speechless, grasping his chalk. An indistinct mutter came from his lips. "Speak up, boy. No one can hear you." The class giggled. In vain, the poor youth struggled to speak but no words came. He looked at the teacher, looked at the class, looked at me. Nothing. Finally, the teacher braved the basilisk stare and nudged the boy with a few, gentle promptings, but it was no use. Mr Sanderson saw me at the end of the lesson. "That boy will never make a teacher. Never. Get rid of him." It was my first experience of a nervy student overwhelmed by a principal with a powerful personality. It was not, unfortunately, to be my last.

Even more wearing was Mr Sanderson's habit of taking an unreasonable dislike to one or two students every practice. They were usually gifted. Rick was a self-confident, talented, young man destined to become one of Australia's successful popular entertainers. Unfortunately he also had the self-centredness, necessary for any creative artist. He was so absorbed in his own performance, he failed to see that his ignoring of the headmaster's helpful directives was creating a state of suppressed rage in Patrick. In fact the young man conducted the headmaster's class unaided for three weeks, enabling the headmaster to concentrate for once on administration. Perhaps the

problem lay in the fact Rick conducted it too well. The children almost wept when the time came to say goodbye. I suspect a subconscious jealousy burnt in the breast of Mr Sanderson. It is not an unknown emotion in teachers faced with pupils more gifted than themselves.

It was a school without a piano. Tuning forks were the sole aid to a music lesson. With Rick came a revolution. Seated on a desk, his guitar slung across his shoulders, he introduced the children to song after song. They received free something for which a few years later they were to pay dollars. Even then, he was a skilled player and a soporific spring afternoon can still recall for me, the eager excited faces of those underprivileged children singing happily with the young man perched on the desk.

Unfortunately he disliked detailed lesson notes. A few brief phrases conveyed to him the gist of the material he wished to present, for he had organized it immaculately in his own mind. This habit was a source of constant irritation to Mr Sanderson. It was exacerbated by his ignoring, along with most of his generation, the possessive apostrophe. Every morning Patrick tut-tutted over the missing symbol and every morning he wrote 'apostrophe?' at the foot of the page. By the end of the week the upper case replaced the lower and the word loomed large, APOSTROPHE! Finally Patrick sent for me and I sent for Rick. "Why do you ignore him?" I asked. "Surely you read his comments." "I glance at them," said Rick. "Then why," I asked tartly, "don't you put in the apostrophes?" Rick looked at me blankly. "He writes that word on my notes every day, but I haven't the faintest clue why." "You could have asked," I sighed, and proceeded to give the young man a lesson on the genitive case in English. "Gosh," he said at the end. "I never knew that. I thought it was something you put in when you leave out a letter." "It is," I said, "but it's not the only use. Don't forget." "OK," he said cheerily, "Barkis is willin', but none of us ever uses it." "I know," I said. Rick had his reward. At the end of the practice, Mr Sanderson remarked. "A good lad in his way. I'm glad to say I've managed to teach him the use of the apostrophe while he was with us."

One of Patrick Sanderson's keywords was 'decorum.' "A good teacher dresses with decorum." This maxim applied particularly to female students. Every morning he eyed them eagerly to pick out the offenders. The era of the mini skirt had just arrived. It rubbed

shoulders at first with the craze for black stockings. Curiously, when I went to high school I was forced in the name of decorum to wear these monstrosities throughout my secondary years. Mr Sanderson would shake his head sadly at students who favoured current fashion and say to me, "What would the mothers say if they saw their children exposed to such sights?" Only once did I have the courage to reply, "their mothers are wearing them too," for he looked at me in such distress my protest withered on the vine.

The main target of his disapproval was a girl whom I shall call Merry. She had bright hair which fell below her shoulders, an innate love and appreciation of English Literature and an uncompromising opposition to anything which did not please her.

At this time I was studying the fourteen-line poem with my English class. I owned a complete set of Shakespeare's sonnets recorded by the Marlowe Society. I gave an open invitation to those interested to drop up on Saturday if they wished to hear them. Merry came with a friend who listened for a while and then came into the kitchen to talk to me. Merry lay on the floor of my lounge room, propped on her arms, and listened throughout one golden afternoon to record after record. The picture remains with me: the intense face, the blackstockinged legs, the golden brown hair lit by a shaft of sunlight through my glass doors.

Her practice at Patrick's Palace did not begin happily. The teacher in whose class she had been placed did not want a student. She was not unkind but she gave the minimum of help. At the same time Mr Sanderson picked on the girl constantly. Her dress was not suitable. Black stockings were not respectable. Her hair was too long. Her skirts were too short etc, etc. At the same time, he sat with pleasure in the classes of another student with long graceful legs and the shortest skirts I had seen up to that time. I do not think he ever analyzed his own motives. "A delightful girl," said Mr Sanderson. I pointed out that Miss Tone's frocks displayed far more leg than Merry's black skirts, but he quelled me with a frown. "Miss Tone," he said, "is neatly dressed. Miss Kay is not. Miss Tone does not wear black." "What is wrong with black?" I demanded. He refused to answer.

I finally managed to have Merry transferred to the class of a middle-aged woman, the mother of a couple of way-out teenagers. At the same time I sug-

gested to Merry she vary her dress occasionally. She looked at me with clear, no-nonsense eyes. "I can't afford lots of clothes," she said. "I spend my allowance on books. This is my only woollen skirt and my only stockings. It is cold." She was quite right. Her teacher finally took the matter in hand. "I'll fix Patrick," she said. "I was not supposed to have a student this practice." The persecution stopped. Merry was in general a competent rather than an inspired teacher. She was taking first class but she had little natural rapport with tiny children. On one occasion I watched her struggle with a poetry lesson on a poem called 'Our Flag'. It had obviously been chosen to mark the impending Commonwealth Day. If I remember correctly it dealt with the various crosses on the Union Jack with a burst of patriotic sentiment at the end. Merry gave a boring lesson. The children were restless. She read the poem in a listless voice and the children chanted the lines after her.

I discussed the lesson afterwards, trying to get her to analyze her own failure. Finally, I said, "Surely you could have thought of some activity to liven things up. Maybe the children could have formed the flag on the floor, or drawn their own flag, or . . ." She interrupted me. "Mrs Kelly," she said with a twinkle, "you are my English lecturer. Surely you know better than that. The poem is rubbish. I should never have *chosen* to give a lesson on it to anyone." I recalled then her response to the poetry of Hopkins, her feeling for words, and her head caught the sunlight as she lay on the floor in her own time listening to Shakespeare's sonnets. I said no more in criticism.

Merry graduated, taught for a year or two and returned to Armidale for a college reunion at Easter. One evening she drove out to a quiet spot with her boyfriend. As they turned into the Grafton Road late at night, a car travelling very fast from the coast but with undoubted right of way, caught their small car side on and wrapped it round a telegraph pole. Merry died the next day.

Gwen Kelly is an aging writer resident in Armidale, Northern NSW. Her work first appeared in overland in 1954. She has written short stories and personal pieces for the little magazines and five novels. She remains a social democrat politically and an Andersonian philosophically which means she is not into theories of relative truth.

Anne Waldron Neumann

Fionas I Have Known

I HAVE KNOWN THREE FIONAS in my life: two, years ago in America (where the name is less common) and one recently in Australia. Remembering them, I compare the ideals of the countries and decades they represent.

My first Fiona, in the early 1950s, was a classmate in the primary grades at Miss Fine's, a private girls' school in Princeton, New Jersey. To be truthful, I never knew Fiona Morgan well. She and her sister Prudence lived with their parents at the end of Princeton's richest street. Hodge Road has none of the delicately carpentered eighteenth-century homes of Princeton's older, dwindling wealth. But nor is it *nouveau riche*: its handsome masonry reflects the Italianate and Tudor tastes of turn-of-the-century Rockefeller lawyers poised to serve great wealth halfway between Philadelphia and New York. The Morgans, for example, lived in an investment banker's version of a French hotel de ville (yes, they could well have been *that* Morgan family). Mrs Morgan – my mother thought her Princeton's most beautiful woman – drove her daughters and her profile about town in a wood-paneled station wagon, black hair caught in a loose chignon aristocratically beyond fashion in post-war America. The Morgan women alit in a gravel forecourt guarded by cast-iron palings and pollarded catalpa trees, a servant at hand to garage the car. A *New Yorker* ad years later showed a uniformed chauffeur helping the butler lift a case of Dewar's Whiskey from a station wagon parked before what could well have been the Morgans' home. The Morgans and their kind had become American ideals in America's bonfire-of-the-*vanities* Reagan era. A New York society lady in an earlier era's joke asks her Boston cousin, "Where did you get that hat?" "My dear," the Boston lady says reprovingly, "in Boston, we do not *get* our hats. We *have* our hats." The Morgans too *had* their wealth – from the first, not the second wave of Wall

Street wealth – but wealth gotten recently enough that they still had it.

I didn't foresee clearly enough the Ralph-Lauren polo-player-on-your-tennis-shirt years to idealize Fiona Morgan as a child, however, unless her never becoming real to me counts as idealizing. And I don't know what became of her. Nothing very interesting, I imagine. As a tan, sturdy teenager, Fiona was terribly keen on field hockey and lacrosse. No law says the rich must be interesting as well as privileged, and perhaps this is better: I forgive Fiona's wealth more easily now remembering her blandness. Moreover, I grew up partly in my mother's class, the intellectual *nouveau* poor so I idealized inherited cultural capital more than financial capital. In the years I knew Fiona Morgan, I learned to recognize the minute gradations separating social classes. Such distinctions seemed relatively fixed in those years (I realized at thirty, in contrast, that I had exhausted my inherited cultural capital – everyone nowadays knew Bach and Van Gogh – and must quickly acquire more). Values too seemed relatively fixed in those long-ago years: we did not *get* ideals; we *had* ideals.

MY SECOND FIONA must be even more middle-class today than her parents were. Fiona Thompson was African-American (or, as we would then have said, 'Negro' or even 'colored'). I met her in the public schools I attended in the mid 1950s after leaving Miss Fine's. Postwar Princeton had voluntarily desegregated its schools using what became widely known as 'the Princeton plan'. Before the war, colored children had attended a K-through-8 school in Princeton's black ghetto, and white children, a school near the Princeton University campus. After integration, everyone attended the white school through fifth grade and then the black school through eighth. In fourth grade, my first year after Miss Fine's, I watched the

boys' gym teacher (a retired Princeton University football coach) grapple at lunchtime with the now-integrated student body. Mr Weiss, who had been lecturing John Washington, black, that a side order of creamed spinach could not feed a growing boy, suddenly stopped: how much lunch money had John's mother given him? Eleven cents was the whispered reply.

Next year, in fifth grade, John and I got jobs drying dishes in the cafeteria. I was thrilled to be paid in lunch: Monday's meal, my favourite – meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and gravy – cost thirty-six cents, and for twelve cents you could add ice cream in a Dixie cup (no-one bought creamed spinach who could afford meatloaf). John and I were co-workers only briefly, however: I still feel ashamed that my mother persuaded me to resign. I was missing recess, she said, but perhaps she felt my job should go to someone who needed it. I think John and I should have felt proud together about a job well done. I was hungry for the new ideals abroad in those years, and my mother rarely sheltered me from them.

New social currents accompanied these new ideals. Unlike Mr Weiss, my junior-high-school teachers were accustomed to black pupils. But I too felt safe in Quarry Street School's kindly, wise embrace. Our principal Mr Waxwood, rotund and just, was black. So was Mrs Harris, a bony and inspired science teacher with lavender-tinted grey hair. So too was Mr Moss, fuzzy where he was balding but much younger than Mr Waxwood and my best history teacher ever. He promised to fail us if we forgot crucial dates, I never have. 732 AD? Charles Martel, Charlemagne's grandfather, defeats Muslims at the Battle of Tours.

At Quarry Street, Princeton's white children not only continued going to school with black children. We passed their houses on the way to school and walked them home afterwards. That's how I met Mrs Thompson, Fiona's mother, and experienced several firsts, including my first sleep-over. Fiona had also invited her best friend Florence Harris, an African-American classmate. I was sensitive to names in those days, not having heard many: I noticed when I met a second Fiona. And I took names literally, linking Florence Harris with Florence, Italy, and thus with the Renaissance, my only association with Italy in the mid-fifties (spaghetti being not yet invented as far as I knew). Florence certainly had Renaissance elegance: slender, ebony, and tall, she resembled statues of proud Nubian captives (but better humoured).

Fiona was lovely in a softer, more rounded way, with a coffee-and-cream complexion and what was then called 'good' hair – that is, nearly European: long, wavy, and touched with bronze. My own flimsy, slippery Anglo-Saxon hair was of course 'better', and during my visit Mrs Thompson may have been as curious about it as I was about Fiona's and Florence's. That night, after Fiona and Florence, I could, if I wished, have my hair braided for bed.

The Thompsons' television was in the front room, and after supper we joined Mrs Thompson on the sofa to watch professional wrestling from Philadelphia's Saint Nicholas Arena. I had never watched the Philadelphia station and I had never seen professional wrestling. Fiona's father, a small, tan, and respectable taxi-driver, read the Trenton evening paper in his armchair. But we girls watched fascinated. Contenders that night included Haystacks Calhoun, a goofy blond giant, hair cut in an upside-down soup bowl, who entered the ring barefoot in country-boy denim overalls, one strap hanging. His opponent Killer Kelly, swarthy, with tangled eyebrows, stomped down the aisle in lace-up boots twirling a black cape with appliqued lightning gashes while Mrs Thompson and the St Nick's audience booed and hissed. Our focus, that is, was the villains Americans love to hate: not the innocent country boys but the cheats who gouged and bit when the referee turned his back (which, I now realize, he did helpfully often), forerunners of the biters and gougers of a later television generation, sexual and economic entrepreneurs like J.R. on *Dallas* or Michael Milken on network news.

Thus my three firsts with my second Fiona: the sleep-over, professional wrestling, and braids. After Fiona and Florence had their turns, I sat eagerly on the floor between Mrs Thompson's knees. The comb had sharper teeth than I was used to, and Mrs Thompson was a tight braider. I felt my slippery fine hair growing kinkier as she worked. "Go get 'im, Killer!" she yelled as the comb scraped my scalp. "Go get 'im, Killer!" and my hair was twisted tighter. "Go get 'im, Killer!" I volunteered, turning my head as far as I could to smile at Mrs Thompson. I remember feeling very much in the spirit of things as Fiona, Florence, and I climbed the narrow stairs to bed. Permission to root for Killer Kelly on TV had vented any meanness and left us tired and happy, with enough patience to value the dopey good guys – the Haystack Calhouns – of real life.

Fiona Thompson married early and committedly. I hope, while she raised her own poised, polite children and kept immaculate house for her handsome husband, that she mingled her mother's grit with her father's placidity. I learned from Mrs Thompson in that decade of changing ideals that ideals nourish us better taken with a grain of salt. Go get 'em, Killer!

MY THIRD FIONA was Australian, nee Fiona Robinson, known to me as Fiona Sinclair, and, for six weeks in the middle of this anxious and fragmented decade of the nineties, Fiona Rhys. My honors student in English at the University of Melbourne, Fiona Sinclair was soft and pretty like Fiona Thompson, but she had a pink plastic leg, the aftermath of bone-marrow cancer in her twenties. Now in her thirties, she was also one of the most isolated people I ever knew well: her father died when she was eleven; a brother died of cancer the year before her own cancer; she was estranged from her older sister (especially after their mother's death, in the second year I knew Fiona, caused quarrels over probate); she had divorced a much older husband who had custody of their twelve-year-old, learning-disabled son; she was ending a relationship with an alcoholic who beat her; and I never heard her mention women friends, only male lovers.

But still Fiona was a wide reader, of Victorian moral fiction especially. Her honors thesis, with my encouragement, discussed Victorian heroines literally or metaphorically mutilated: Esther Somerson in Dickens's *Bleak House*, disfigured by smallpox; Lady Isabel Vane from Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne*, unrecognizably scarred in a train crash after being lured into adultery; and Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, whose meagre, asexual body reflected a childhood of physical and emotional starvation. Fiona undertook to argue – and did more or less argue – that her authors nevertheless ascribed greater autonomy to their mutilated heroines: not conventional beauties, they were unconstrained by the pitfalls awaiting sexual attractiveness.

Alas, the real Fiona *did* feel constrained by today's demand that women be sexually attractive. She yearned for literature's messages but could not as-

similate them. She wanted to keep old ideals *and* wear new hats. Books' ideals were real to her, but, given the reading-against-the-grain Melbourne's English Department stressed, not real enough and therefore perhaps unrealistically desired. Half a year after completing her honors thesis, six weeks after a second marriage where I was her matron of honour, Fiona suicided. A long history of depression and previous attempts finally told. She went to her death agonizing about mutilation: a recent weight gain, the disfigurement of her amputation, and a possible recurrence of cancer.

Was Fiona also a victim of her fragmented decade, however, and of her extreme and therefore flimsy ide-

alism? She too had a Fiona Morgan in her life, in her case male and a closer friend than my first Fiona. Handsome, wealthy, gifted, Scott seemed everything desirable. But this golden youth had his own inner mutilation and killed himself at twenty. If, from ignorance, I idealized my first Fiona less than she may now seem to deserve, perhaps my Australian Fiona, in a more chaotic and materialistic decade also idealized Scott too much. She told me of him and his suicide shortly before her own death, and I said something inane about people

who seem to have everything. Alas, Fiona must have begun to fear she had nothing. Her new marriage could not be the perfect acceptance she dreamed of. And, having expected the ideal, Fiona rejected the real.

Many people find idealism a dangerous quality – one confined, luckily, largely to the young. I admire idealism, at least guardedly, and I find Americans more idealistic than Australians. Despise, if you will, our boundless faith in our own possibilities. Fear our Christian right wing (as many of us do). Snicker when we pledge allegiance to our flag “and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”. We Americans *think* we have liberty to choose between Republicans and Democrats whose ideals Australians can hardly distinguish. And, in our oh-so-divisible nation, some get more justice than others. A Kennedy scion is acquitted of rape; Mike Tyson is not. Poor blacks go to

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jail by the busload; O. J. Simpson walks free. Was my African-American Fiona glad or sorry after O.J.'s first acquittal? The ideals we learned in the fifties let us root for the bad guy on television – "Go get 'im, Killer!" – so we could choose the good guy in real life. But we were fortunate: we could have our ideals and get more of them. Most important, because we could sometimes let them go and vent their opposites, we could afford to keep them.

Since American idealism is thus tempered, it is, I think, healthier. Australia, in contrast, may need more idealism, more of the fictions we Americans live by – or used to live by (a past idealism allegorized so movingly by the Bruder Mouse stories in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, Peter Carey's fable of Australian-American relations). Perhaps Australia needs a Thanksgiving, for example, the day American families gather in loving celebration of each other whether or not the love is deserved or the celebration genuine. More Americans travel by plane on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving Thursday than any other day including Christmas. Each year, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans (let the rest of my compatriots speak for themselves) drink themselves under the table, eat themselves into a stupor, complain that no-one helped dry the dishes, and quarrel – as my Australian Fiona did – about children and inheritances. But every year we gather again, forgetting former frictions, hoping for future affection.

And habits do comfort, however empty. Perhaps Fiona's son from her first marriage, her estranged sister, the groom's adult daughter, and various nieces and nephews should have attended her second wedding, however little they believed in it. Would Fiona's marriage have lasted longer had more of her family pretended she had found ideal happiness and joined to celebrate it? Probably not. But she might have felt less shame in the days before her death, less despair that so many of her family and friends despised her fond hopes. The idealistic fictions she wished to live by would have comforted her more if others had seemed to share them. If we admire ideals in youth but live long enough to hold them lightly, it helps us love others despite their flaws. My poor lost third Fiona.

A FINAL WORD in favour of books and idealism, but a tempered idealism. At a Melbourne University Mud Fest several years ago, students nailed books to the South Lawn. What this symbolized I never learned – desacralizing the written word, confirming the death of the author, protesting how universities make texts specimens for study, applauding the canon's crucifixion in recent decades? Whatever the symbolism, Penguin contributed a truckload of remaindered paperbacks, which the festival's organizers spread open and impaled on the grass, a nail through each half like so many butterfly corpses. After a day of wonder and amusement, students gathered in ones and twos to liberate the crucified texts despite complaints from the festival's organizers. I can't imagine

why I waited for the third day to search the battlefield for survivors. Suppose it had rained?

I found many books I wanted to keep on Melbourne's South Lawn, some I would even give money for. If Salman Rushdie grew up kissing books and bread, as he writes in an essay on the sacred and the blasphemous, I have known few free books I wouldn't welcome into my home.

Buying the occasional bookcase seems a small price to pay for the possibility of pleasure, human intercourse, and information. The exiled South African writer Bessie Head, a profoundly lonely schizophrenic and finally a suicide like Fiona Sinclair, held an even more elevated view. She writes hopefully in one of her novels that of course "any artistic observation of human suffering arouses infinite compassion". Any observation? Infinite compassion? Hardly. But artistic observation of human suffering arouses more compassion than no observation at all. Because compassion isn't ideal doesn't mean it isn't real. Finite idealism is still desirable. Julian Barnes' *History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, one of the paperbacks I liberated from the Mud Fest, is no less comprehensive with nail holes in every page. And the stigmata that symbolize compassion actually improve the Norman Mailer novel I found on the South Lawn.

My own view of how books contribute to compassion and idealism is shaped by years of teaching as well as reading. Teaching is, of course, an occupation for idealists, those who trust we may someday extend liberty and justice – or imagination and understand-

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ing – to all. At the end of her life, Fiona Sinclair was training to be a teacher. Government cutbacks mean Victoria's teachers are no longer paid to supervise candidates, so not enough 'good' (i.e. eastern-suburbs) schools are available for easy, successful practice teaching, not even for clearly fragile students like Fiona. Fiona's first experience was a western-suburbs nightmare. Perhaps Fiona lacked the resilience ever to become a good teacher. But shouldn't society have strewn her path with roses rather than thorns?

And what kind of teaching had Fiona herself received? A wreath at her funeral from a Frankston high school read, "To my best English student in thirty years." Fiona was less successful at Melbourne University, however. Melbourne's English Department believes in making the gap between secondary and tertiary studies as wide as possible: instead of meeting students at A and walking with them to Z (even letting some linger at M or N), it addresses them first and last from Z. In Fiona's first year she would have learned that D. H. Lawrence continued a distinguished tradition not of anti-industrial protest but of male chauvinism, that Conrad – though anti-imperialist – was racist, that Yeats was less a great stylist than a flirt with fascism. These claims are not groundless: Lady Chatterley's gamekeeper-lover is phallogocentric; one cannot study *Heart of Darkness* academically today without reading Chinua Achebe on Conrad's African characters; and Yeats' conservatism, like Eliot's and Pound's anti-Semitism, must influence how we assess their poetic gifts. But these claims are not all we should offer students. Melbourne's English Department believes it attracts so many students, however, that, underfunded and understaffed, it would rather offer thorns than wreaths. How many *more* it

could attract, how many it could retain, and how many whose lives it could enrich, it never asks.

Fiona's counterparts pass through Australia's English departments in their thousands at an age when young people fall in love – with each other, with books, with ideals. In fact, most choose English departments because they *already* love books and the ideals they offer. One of Jane Austen's characters praises "the mere habit of learning to love" because when you love something "You have gained a new source of enjoyment, and it is well to have as many holds upon happiness as possible". Is it too much to ask of a liberal education that it also offer its students holds upon happiness? Let our Fionas love and even partly believe the texts we make them read. They need so many more constructive beliefs before they can begin to deconstruct. Christopher Koch, in his Miles Franklin acceptance speech, deplored the "life-hating ideology" that dominates Australia's English departments and deprives students of "a true discovery of the peaks of literature", by which Koch means its aesthetic peaks, its "notion of beauty". Koch's complaint is shriller than I admire. But he is right that postmodern theory, as taught, does often deprive. It deprives students not only of aesthetic value, however, but of the moral and political ideals literature can offer. Let us instead help Australia's Fionas get and keep ideals to live by. As in America's Thanksgiving harvest festival, let us celebrate this getting and keeping. Let us not blight idealism in the summer when youth lays down a store of idealism to last through the winter storms of adulthood.

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MORE THAN JUST A BOOKSHOP

All our sins

If I ever
see him again,
I'd ask him
what part of him
stayed in that place
after we had all
moved on

ask him about
the evening he was
caught sneaking
back to his room, why
he had refused to cry out
when he was caned, why
when I had seen him
the smell of shit
hung around him like a curtain.
Tell him why
I hadn't said anything that night

ask him why
we had spent
an hour every Sunday
going to our knees and rising
to our feet, why our mouths
were made to chant
the eucharist and the word sin
bore the weight of
mortality on
twelve-year-old tongues

ask him what kindly old
Brother Joseph had said to him
once when he had been crying
because his parents hadn't visited
and it had made
him stop

ask him if living
in that place had
made us stronger
because we shared the air
with old men in white smocks
who slept alone every night but
bred compassion and fear and hatred
in the same body

ask him if his flesh
turns to fire whenever
he comes close to a woman,
if she makes him feel
a way we were told
we should be ashamed to
and whether he still
feels ashamed to

And ask him why

Ask him.

Shen

Aviary

Night breaks up with the disembodied hiss
of radio and fear. Concrete simmers
in moonlight that saturates to bone,
as though I'm bone to searching X-ray eyes.
My day's invisibility is gone;
I am a rodent in a raptor's eye,
or, up thirty feet, a dinosaur's brain.

In me is invested metalness.
I am told to guard the mottled birds;
to pay their dividends in lead and brass.
They bask in frigid moonwash, eggs of fire
tucked like twins under mothers' alloy wings.
Perversity quickens me to wakefulness
in a sand-bagged nest I cannot flee.

My iron world. Cold creeps like an enemy
to our perimeter. Who will be first
to sense the other? Steel muzzles quiver.
In five fathoms of blackness underneath,
inked men twitch through their camouflage of sleep.
I ought to warn them of our victimhood
but I've no words. And I must not wake the birds.

roger g mcdonald

The pale green radio

At night I buried
my ears in the pillow
so the music could not
seep out. I let it
make a world
I could bear inside me.
The beat of skin,
the burr of metal string
and its midnight
beautiful howl.

The radio never found me
alone, all my years
gathered, still few
but long enough
in travel as a big ride
on a good wave curling
through air, the high thrill
of drowning in the
absolute sound
of a pale green radio,
pushing the volume
closer to release
in the throat of the song,
stopping up the cracks
in the plastic, the folds
of my solo night.

Jill Jones

The Mountaineers

David Forrest

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE days when a moment of desire comes, stealing in wonder upon a man, haunting him with the nearness of its fulfilment.

It was one of those days for which a person is born.

Billy Beitzel saw the moment coming towards him, his mind attuned to it in the split-second when someone mentioned Geoff Barker's hill. The hill was growing in Billy Beitzel's mind before he raised his eyes, the hill that was the end of the known world. He knew that if he climbed to the top of the timbered slopes, the world would grow bigger than anyone in the valley had ever dreamed it could be. A huge, rolling world for men to walk in, where Mr Mallory had walked and was never seen again, a world which no-one in the valley had ever seen or ever would see.

He looked up and saw the hill beyond Tommy Hegel's shoulder and he thought that it was possible that Mr Mallory had gone that way to the Himalayas. There it was, Geoff Barker's hill, trodden by no-one but the Government Surveyor, in the days when he carved up Wilungun Homestead. His name would be blazed in a tree trunk on top of the ridge, and Billy Beitzel knew with shapeless certainty that there were no other names on the top of Geoff Barker's hill.

There would be the name of the Government Surveyor, and with a sudden inexplicable thrill, he knew that the next name to be carved on the tree trunk up there could well be the name of William Beitzel, Esq., whatever Esq meant, but it showed that a man was very respected, for Esq was what people put on their letters to his father, even when they wanted him to pay his bills.

Billy Beitzel said sharply and firmly, "I want to come, too."

And the whole argument stopped, and everybody stood there looking at him: the Meisenhelters; the Beitzels, dad, mum, brother and sisters; Tommy Hegel, Donny Bishop and a stray Zegler or two.

They all stood there looking at Billy Beitzel and for a space of ten seconds there was never a sound.

"He might fall over the side," said Shirley Meisenhelter hopefully.

"Over a precipice," said Connie Zegler, dragging the words in a witch-like hiss.

"What's a preserpis?" said Billy Beitzel, and Gran'dad Meisenhelter took his pipe out of his mouth and said, "Yair, what is a preserpis?"

And Uncle Don said, "It's like the back stairs on Bill Strohfeltd's place."

This went in one ear and out the other. There was an important, vivid clue stuck firmly in Billy Beitzel's head. No-one, definitely no-one, had said he was not to go. He had hold of that fact, and did not intend to let it slip.

He addressed himself to Tommy Hegel. There was a strange thing about Tommy – he treated everybody as though they were all Esq.

Tommy was stronger than a bullock, so high he was five feet, and terribly old, say fifteen. He could drive standing on a German Wagon at a canter, milk fifteen cows an hour, heft a cream-can by himself, plough a furrow straight as any grown-up could do, and walk bare-footed over bull-heads, khaki-weed and burr.

"He'll be right," said Tommy Hegel, and looked down at Billy, "Won't you?"

"Now look," said Uncle Don, "you can go. And I'm telling you now: any Beitzel on this expedition better be back by four o'clock."

Aunt May looked at him in alarmed protest, and Uncle Don said, "He's got to strike out on his own sooner or later, May."

Billy Beitzel marched down the steps, shouldering infants aside.

"This here is Base," said Tommy Hegel and counted his expedition.

The biggest, and hence the bravest, went first. And of course, the girls travelled in the middle. And of course, the smallest members of the expedition brought up the rear. There were regular halts for roll-call.

The hill rose above the surrounding country, towering over Billy Beitzel, towering unimaginable thousands of feet over the plain. There was not actually any snow on the peak, and never had been, but he was quite prepared to wake one day and see the hill in a white mantle.

The way went through ten acres of Geoff Barker's Rhodes grass – tall, waving, seeding Rhodes grass, half as tall as the hill itself. Every so often, the party halted while a search was made in the Rhodes grass for the smallest members of the expedition.

Georgie Meisenhelter was found bearing on ten degrees left of the mountain and despatched to Base after a difference of opinion with the rest of the force.

"We'll never hear the end of this," said Connie Zegler, and Tommy Hegel said, "I'm happy. I'm not related to any of you." And Shirley Meisenhelter said, "Listen to God Almighty".

Tommy looked a little at a loss and Shirley sniffed, and led the way through some spear grass until Tommy remembered he was a man and she only a girl and took the lead again, leaving Billy Beitzel vaguely perplexed because Tommy was the bravest man in the world apart from Uncle Don and should not have behaved to a girl in the silly way he did.

The expedition met a frilled lizard and Jack Beitzel said afterwards that it was twenty-free feet long and had two heads and all Uncle Don said was, "There's some funny things come out of the pear country."

"There's dingoes in these hills," Billy Beitzel announced to the force as it marched out of the spear grass into the forest. "And tiger cats. Tiger cats chew you all up into little bits if they catch you. Dingoes

and tiger cats and snakes."

He added with sudden inspiration, "And spiders!"

Connie Zegler jumped as though she had met one and Billy Beitzel hissed like a nest full of snakes.

"Billy Beitzel!"

"The red-back spiders are the worst," said Billy Beitzel.

Connie Zegler burst into tears and retired to Base with two or three weaker members of the force. Billy Beitzel looked askance at their retreating backs.

Instinct told him the remaining explorers were of more formidable character, and he conserved his breath for climbing. Looking out from the height he had attained, he discovered that he was in the mountains. He was almost level with the top of Grandad Meisenhelter's pepperina tree.

The cattle track in the forest led them up a ridge.

"This here is the West Wall," Tommy Hegel announced and he and Shirley Meisenhelter and Billy Beitzel walked very carefully, or at least Billy Beitzel did, lest they plunge into the dismal chasms about them.

He noticed that Tommy Hegel was a gentleman, like Mum said a man should be, for he held Shirley Meisenhelter's hand so that she would not fall over the side. She had taken much convincing that Tommy should hold her hand, but Billy came to the conclusion that she was too silly to know when she was being offered assistance.

"That there's a moraine down there," said Tommy, and Billy Beitzel looked over the side of the West Wall. There wasn't much to see – a few trees, a rock or two, and Geoff Barker's bull, which for several weeks afterwards Billy Beitzel persisted in calling Mr Barker's Moraine.

"Forward," said Tommy Hegel, and Billy Beitzel began to climb in earnest, consigning his toy car to a position inside his shirt.

"You know what, Tommy?" he said, "Mr Mallory might be up here."

"He could be, too," said Tommy earnestly and considered Billy's hands which were scratched from the rocks. "He might be a bit old now, but."

Shirley Meisenhelter said, "Who's Mallory?"

"Girls," said Billy Beitzel shortly, leaving Tommy

Hegel nothing to add.

"Well, Mr Smartypants. Who is Mallory?"

"Girls wouldn't know much about that," began Tommy, and Shirley Meisenhelter jerked her hand from his; and Billy Beitzel stopped climbing and made an announcement, which may have had an air of sorrow about it, and on the other hand, may have sounded like that because the mountaineer was puffing a bit.

Billy Beitzel said without any punctuation, "It was in the book Donny Bishop got for school at breaking-up Mr Mallory went to climb Mount Everest all by himself and he went away up into the snow and never came back."

"That's right," said Tommy Hegel. "And one day I'm going to climb Mount McEuen."

Billy Beitzel looked out anxiously at Mount McEuen. "Is that higher'n Boat Mountain? Tommy, did anybody ever go up Boat Mountain and never come back?"

"God, you ask silly questions, Billy Beitzel," said Shirley Meisenhelter.

Billy said confidentially, "I know somethin' about you nobody else knows. You were holdin' hands in the pictures last night with Herbie Zegler."

"You little liar," said Shirley Meisenhelter and Billy Beitzel said as stoutly as he could manage, "Who's a liar!"

"Brat!" snarled Shirley Meisenhelter and began climbing again.

"Not that way," said Tommy Hegel, "You'll fall down the hill if you go that way."

The girl said, "I'll see you gutless wonders on top of the hill."

Billy Beitzel yanked out his forty-five and shot her. "You're dead, Shirley Meisenhelter."

For a dead person, she climbed very well, until Tommy Hegel said sharply, "Come back here you bloody fool!"

He grabbed Billy Beitzel and pushed him out of the way of a plunging rock the size of a football, "Shirley!"

She climbed down and stood on the track. Tommy took her firmly by the hand and Billy Beitzel followed them up for another twenty-five thousand feet.

"Tommy? Are we higher'n Boat Mountain?"

"There's nothin' higher'n Boat Mountain," said Tommy. "Only Everest."

Maybe if it was night a man could reach out and touch the Southern Cross.

"Look," said Billy Beitzel in a whisper. "There's a cave."

"So are you," said Shirley Meisenhelter. "It's the Blue Mountains the caves are in. Everybody knows that."

"You don't know nothing," said Billy Beitzel and walked into the hill.

It wasn't much of a cave. Tommy had to duck his head and they all sat in the cave, in a circle, looking at the heap of charcoals on the floor of the cavern.

"Who do you suppose did that?" said Shirley Meisenhelter and they all sat there, reviewing everybody who lived in the valley, not finding any of them likely to be lighting fires in a tiny cave on Geoff Barker's hill.

It was something strange, out of the past, outside the world, outside dairy cows and farms, from beyond the horizon.

"It was the bushrangers," said Tommy Hegel, but his voice showed that he didn't believe it. There had never been a real bushranger in the South Burnett, unless you counted poddy dodgers, and poddy dodgers rode too fast to be lighting fires.

So they sat there, until Tommy announced, "It was the blacks."

"They all live in Barambah," said Shirley Meisenhelter. "In the Mission."

"Years and years ago," persisted Tommy Hegel. "Before we were born."

He said it with a shred of wonder.

"But it wouldn't stay here all that time," said Shirley Meisenhelter. "It'd be gone."

Billy Beitzel bumped his head on the roof and said, "They must have been little blacks."

They sat there looking across the centuries. It was a time too big, too improbable, too elusive, like the string of noughts on the end of a hundred million.

Tommy Hegel said, "P'raps somebody got in here out of the rain and lit a fire to get dry. Geoff Barker, maybe."

"It was Mr Mallory," said Billy Beitzel to himself,

took the car out of his shirt and drove wildly around the cave. "Wheeeeeee. . ."

They left the camp fire of the unknown traveller of the past, and scrambled out into the sunlight. None of them spoke, but they found it more comfortable without the past around them.

The hill rose before them, rocks and trees and dirt and forest grass; no other travellers, no dingoes or tiger cats or spiders; warm in the autumn sun – there was the dry fragrance of the forest on the air.

"Come on," said Tommy and they climbed towards the summit of Geoff Barker's hill.

And quite without warning, they were walking there, with nothing between them and the sky except the tops of the ironbarks and the gums and a Moreton Bay ash.

"We're higher'n everybody," Billy Beitzel announced and scrambled up onto a big rock.

He looked out and saw the world.

The valley lay before him, autumn brown and peaceful, specked with the green of Gran'dad Meisenhelter's pepperina tree and the red of Mr Badke's roof. Blue in the distance, Mount McEuen towered over the Burnett and it looked to be a hundred miles away. Black soil roads went here and there across the valley, to Gayndah, to Murgon, to Kingaroy, to who knew where.

The world was big. It was bigger than Billy Beitzel or any one in the valley had thought. The world was very big and very quiet, quiet as Sunday morning.

The world went out as far as he could see, strange and alluring, drawing his eye beyond the horizons of the valley. Then, with a warm little tingle, he knew how big the world was. He could not see beyond the hills, but he knew. It went far away beyond Boat Mountain and Mount McEuen, but he had no names for where it went.

Tommy Hegel looked out to the blue mountain in the south and found it higher than his hill.

"Someday," said Tommy, "I'll climb that."

"It's nice up here," said Shirley Meisenhelter, but her voice had wandered away somewhere. "It smells nice. Like in them magazines you see in town."

On the bole of a sugar gum, Tommy Hegel carved his initials with a pocket knife, and then he carved S.M., and then W.B.

"Someday," said Tommy, "somebody else will climb the hill and they'll see our names here."

And then he carved the date, the twenty-third of April, nineteen thirty-five.

Billy Beitzel looked around very carefully, but Mr Mallory had not carved his name anywhere on the hill.

The mountaineers stood there looking out, for mountains were never intended to be sat on, but stood on, and the explorers knew this without being told and without discussing it; and in the same way they knew they had done something that few people in the valley had ever done or ever thought to do – climb to the top of Geoff Barker's hill. It was possible that a little bit of that achievement might stick to them all their lives.

And then they went down from the mountain, to whatever the years would bring them.

Billy Beitzel wanted to know whether anyone had ever climbed up Boat Mountain and never come back, but all Uncle Don said was, "There's some blokes in the Burnett *ought* to go up it and never come back."

Billy Beitzel didn't mention Mr Mallory, for standing on the top of Geoff Barker's hill, he knew where Mr Mallory had gone.

Tommy Hegel caught his pony and rode home to fetch the cows. Shirley Meisenhelter went out to feed the pigs.

'David Forrest' (David Denholm) died on 19 June 1997. 'The Mountaineers' is the fourth – and last to be published – of the 'Winderah' stories, written about 1961. With its companion pieces 'The Road to Madrid', 'That Barambah Mob' (overland 15) and 'Cattle Train' (overland 18) it reflects on his boyhood in the South Burnett area of Queensland. After 1969, Denholm turned his attention to history. His best-known historical work is The Colonial Australians published by Penguin. He retired as Senior Lecturer in History at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. Zita Denholm

OVERLAND

Incorporating The Realist Writer

NUMBER ONE, SPRING 1954

ONE SHILLING

35
1998.overland.150



Off to the diggings, 1854.

Drawing by N.C.

WRITING BY:

Nettie Palmer, John Morrison, Katharine Susannah Prichard, John Manifold, David Martin, Brian Fitzpatrick, Senator Donald Cameron, Elizabeth Vassilieff, Eric Lambert, Professor A. D. Hope and others.

OVERLAND

Overland is a new magazine devoted to creative writing. Its motto is: "Temper, democratic; Bias, Australian."

Overland will publish poetry and short stories, articles and criticism by new and by established writers. It will aim high, but has no exclusive or academic standards of any kind. It will make a special point of developing writing talent in people of diverse background.

We ask of our readers, however inexpert, that they write for us; that they share our love of living, our optimism, our belief in the traditional dream of a better Australia.

Send us your criticisms and suggestions, and help us to reach the public we want to serve: the useful people in every field.

SWANS IN FOOTSCRAY

Superbly indifferent to clanking machinery,
Ignoring traffic jerk by either side,
Untroubled by chemicals tainting the water
Serenely back and forth the black swans glide.

Our hearts are uplifted. The smooth dusky symbols
Evoking bush and plain, mirage, lagoon;
Re-calling how close to industrial suburbs
Are spacious acres free to sun and moon.

Time turn back. The tainted pool
Lies—a Yarra billabong
Warm, swan-haunted, clean and still.
Musky lilies clearly curved,
Gums exhaling honied breath
Pausing airs with sweetness fill.

Laughing native children come,
Pelt the swans with buttercups,
Angry swans their red bills snap,
Thrust forth black and snaky necks,
Surge toward the daring tribe,
Savage wings like weapons clap.

Children scream and run and scream,
Swans subside, their webbed feet push
Drowning yellow buds away,
Endlessly the tiny choirs
Drone among the seeding grass
Through the timeless summer day.

The generations hold the right of swans
To all the pools throughout their ancient land.
The laughing children's heirs, forlorn and few,
Exploited, outcast, walk their native strand.

NELL OLD

GREETINGS

DAME MARY GILMORE writes:

Of course I wish **Overland** every success. Australia needs her own magazines, especially those that can go into a pocket, which I hope this one will. So far most of our periodicals are of a size for the city and an easy chair. None of them are for the men still riding the boundaries, and of whom there is still a large body inland. If they think a thing worth while they carry it about, and so spread knowledge of it.

VANCE PALMER writes:

I am very glad to hear of the coming publication of **Overland**. Every new magazine directed with sincerity and intelligence is an enrichment of our life, and I am sure **Overland** will be something which we can look forward to with pleasurable excitement.

WILLIAM HATFIELD writes:

I am glad to hear of the development of the new magazine **Overland**, something that might act as a counterblast, or at least counter-kick, to the flood of imported periodicals, and the degeneration of Australian periodicals to mere vehicles for syndicated trash. Its sponsors have my heartiest congratulations on their effort, and I hope the new magazine becomes a permanency.

CLIVE TURNBULL writes:

Each "Little" magazine gives something, however short its life. I hope that **Overland** will have a long life, and that it is now economically possible—if not profitable—to publish an intelligent magazine without continual monetary transfusions from sympathisers. **Overland** will have as tough a task as the people who coined that word; I wish it well.

FRANK DALBY DAVISON writes:

I look forward to the appearance of **Overland**, especially as it will develop out of **Realist Writer**, a journal I have read with amusement and profit. There appears to be room always for a new journal of opinion provided it has character of its own, and I am sure that **Overland** will have this quality. I trust you will scour the continent for new talent, both imaginative and critical. The literary future is with the unknown. They must be sought out and encouraged.

C. B. CHRISTESEN writes:

I welcome the appearance of **Overland** with very real pleasure. It is no small achievement to be able to launch a new literary magazine today—one, moreover, which proposes to adopt a non-conformist approach to literature and society, and to stand four-square behind genuinely democratic Australian values. Providing it honestly adheres to its progressive editorial policy, **Overland** is certain to make a significant contribution to the highest traditions of our national literature.

R. G. HOWARTH writes:

Southerly, the senior Australian literary magazine, believes in the necessity for a number of periodical publications devoted to original writing and criticism. It therefore welcomes **Overland** as a newcomer to the field and wishes it all due success.

ALAN MARSHALL writes:

So **Overland** has stepped out on the track with its swag of Australian writers and its tucker-bag full to the neck. There's good, nourishing stuff in that bag. The Australian writers who filled it know what's needed to put vigor and strength into a magazine humping a bluey along a new, untouched track, and they'll keep it full. Good luck to it! I hope it gets a hand-out from every good Australian who wants to keep our traditions alive.

THE WRITER AT BAY

by Brian Fitzpatrick

ONE way of dealing with dissident writers, in an era when the climate of opinion has turned cold, is to freeze them by silence. This treatment has been accorded the author of **Rob the Robber** (Melbourne, Joseph Waters, 5/-) by, I believe, the entire press of Australia. (It is true that the gifted biographer hides his light under the bushel of "Spinifex." But then, George Eliot and Lewis Carroll were pseudonyms, and so were Fiona Macleod and the saintly Ian Maclaren.)

Another technique is to frighten publishers away, as with Howard Fast in the United States today. Another is to do an offending author out of a job, as with the Australian Allan Clifton, author of the novel, **Time of Fallen Blossoms**, three years ago. Yet another is to stigmatise an author as a Red, "review" his book not as (say) the novel it is, a serious imaginative reconstruction of life as it was lived in a particular place, in particular historical circumstances, a generation ago, but "review" it as the projection backwards of the author's believed political opinions. Judah Waten's novel, **The Unbending** (Melbourne, Australasian Book Society, 18/6) has been accorded this treatment in for example recent issues of Melbourne **Herald** and Sydney **Telegraph**. More, Mr. Waten has been made by ill-disposed persons a sort of tarmac. From and over his devoted corpus taxis a propaganda bomber bound on a far-ranging mission. Target: Canberra. Code name of operation: CLF. But before we examine this latest sortie, let us look first at what, that is painfully relevant, preceded this flight.

Mr. Standish Michael Keon, M.P. for Yarra, and a graduate of Saint Ignatius' School, Richmond, Victoria, on August 28, 1952, used the privileges (including broadcasting) of the House of Representatives to make his contribution to the Budget debate. Supported by Mr. Gullett and Mr. Wentworth in the Government benches, and Mr. Mullens in the opposition, he offered a dissertation on the Australian National University and the Commonwealth Literary Fund. He said, e.g. that CLF grants of late years had gone almost entirely to Communists and their associates. He named Judah Waten as one of these, and in particular as the author of the "indecently blasphemous" work, "Jesus Christ in an Ash-tray." Stung by this, I protested, over the air and in the papers, that I was the author of this poem, and that it was a poem written in protest at such cheap vulgarity, which I had witnessed.

Asked what-about-it, by the Melbourne **Herald**, the historian-critic from Richmond said he retracted nothing; he would deal with the matter in Parliament later. He did, too. When Hansard appeared—members having the right to correct the transcript first, for grammatical lapses and the like—it turned out that all the newspapers of Australia had misreported Mr. Keon; what he had really said was that Mr. Waten had edited a magazine that published "Jesus Christ in an Ash-tray"—and "Another poem in this publication is so indecently blasphemous that I shall not read it all." That handsomely let me out, and lifted some of the odium from my friend Waten. (In January this year I reminded the History Section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of

Science Conference of this and learned doctors and masters present agreed that it was an interesting sidelight on the advancement of knowledge.)

Well, on that occasion Judah Waten defended himself candidly and courageously, and now two years later is doing the like again. On that earlier occasion the Prime Minister, too, stood up for the administration of the Literary Fund and against his and Dr. Evatt's Red-baiting ratbags. I trust he will do the like again when Parliament resumes and, as hitherto reliable sources inform us will happen, the same group of spiritually-minded members, grouped independently of party, return to the attack.

Now to indicate the shape of things to come. There lives and labors in Sydney a Mr. Frank Browne, who publishes a **Things I Hear** news-letter which every lover of the curious should subscribe to. In a June contribution Browne confided that the whole principle of CLF grants is wrong; most of the grantees are "either Commos or near Commos," like Judah Waten whose novel **The Unbending** is "straight-out Communist propaganda."

This bold if false opinion was quickly taken up by Sydney **Daily Mirror**. An editorial in the June 23 **Daily Mirror** stated frankly that CLF money "is being used to subsidise Communist propaganda," and proceeded to mention Mr. Waten unfavorably and Mr. Keon favorably. The taxpayers, they said, wished the whole Fund administration overhauled, so that their money wouldn't help an alien ideology to overthrow the Commonwealth. Of Judah Waten's largely unpolitical novel the **Daily Mirror** said, "Presumably, no one on the (CLF) committee thought it worth while to ask him what the novel would be about"—when they awarded him a CLF fellowship to enable him to complete it.

Pained, Mr. Waten wrote to the **Daily Mirror** (on June 25, but it must have been lost by the P.M.G.; they haven't been able to publish it):—"The Unbending . . . is the story of a migrant family in Western Australia in the years between 1910 and 1918. Some members of the IWW make their appearance in the novel during the war years. They are a part of a truthful picture of those years which form the background to my story."

And more to the same truthful effect. (I thought, as a student of history who has looked into the first-wartime story of the IWW, that in fact they cut more of a figure in 1916 than Mr. Waten allows.)

Of course Mr. Waten told the CLF, when applying for a fellowship, what his novel was about. Of course he lodged the MS of his novel with them, and they accepted it, and raised no word of exception to any part of it. The members of the CLF board are well aware there's a cold war on; but in fifteen months' possession of the MS. no member saw reason to question the good faith of the author.

Now the dogs are barking—the literary lions, rather, of **Things I Hear** and the equally erudite **Daily Mirror**—let us hope sensible men on both sides of the Federal Parliament will stand by the CLF as they did two years ago, and reject again the bogus aesthetic thought out in the gutters of Richmond and Surry Hills.

NINE O'CLOCK FINISH

JOHN MORRISON

THE trouble begins at eight o'clock, when somebody down on the wharf blows a whistle. It doesn't penetrate to all hatches, but down in Number Three everybody hears it because both winches happen to be silent at the moment.

All six men stop and look at each other, as if a gun has been fired.

"What the hell's that supposed to be?" says one big fellow aggressively.

"Smoko, Joe," replies one of his mates. "I told you it would be on."

Joe, without another word, walks out on the hatchboards covering the lower hold and looks upwards.

"On deck there!"

Nobody answers. Overhead, both runners hang slack in the blaze of light from a cluster up on the bridge, indicating that the hook is over the wharf and the hatchman at the ship's side. All work has ceased from one end of the vessel to the other. In the sudden silence angry protesting voices are raised all along deck and wharf.

The Nestor has been working, day-gangs only, for nearly three weeks, Saturdays and Sundays included. Being now Friday night, and with only a few hundred tons of cargo still to go in, the men have been looking forward to a Saturday morning finish with the rest of the week-end off. The blowing of the whistle at eight means that they are required to work the job out to a finish that night, and under compulsion to attend the pick-up next morning.

In Number Three, as in all other hatches, a babel of protest has broken out. All six men are now out in the open square, but no one has yet appeared at the coaming cut sharp and black against the sky of an autumn night.

An elderly little man, wearing a leather apron, and leather shields on the backs of his hands, deliberately walks away from his mates and sits down on a case by himself, as if to indicate that the matter is no concern of his.

"On deck there!" shouts big Joe for the third time.

Still no one comes, but hurried footsteps go along the deck close by, and the voice of the hatchman can be plainly heard as he yells out to someone on the wharf:

"You wouldn't get this crowd to work on, not for Christ himself!"

"Good on you, Ernie!" exclaims big Joe. "I'm going up," he announces, starting for the ladder. "Stay where you are, Joe!"

"We're not taking smoko, and that's all there is to it."

"We haven't knocked off. We're still here if they send cargo in."

"Leave it to Ernie. He knows the form . . ."

Joe doesn't answer, but goes no further than the middle of the square, where he remains, with head tilted and hands in pockets, patiently watching the wharfside coaming and listening to the confused murmur drifting aft from Hatches One and Two.

His mates fall silent. An apprentice who is acting as watchman comes down from his perch on the

cargo deep in the wing and walks out into the light.

"What's the matter?" His youthful voice and precise English diction sound odd after the clash of mature Australian idiom and invective. Two men begin to answer him at once.

"They want us to work on to a finish, and we ain't having any."

"If we finish tonight we'll go straight into another job in the morning . . ."

"We've worked nineteen days without a break."

"It's been nine o'clock every night since the job started. What's wrong with nine o'clock tonight?"

They both stop, just to give him a chance to say something. They'd like him to understand their complaint, but he just looks politely and vaguely from one to another of them.

"I see," he says.

They let the matter drop. They know very well that he doesn't see at all. If he really wanted to know he'd ask more questions. He's looking in at them from another world. For him the ship has merely stopped taking in cargo; for them, something has happened which touches not only tonight, but every day of their lives.

Suddenly there comes a clatter of footsteps on the companion leading down from the upper deck, then a voice they recognise as that of the foreman:

"What about this gang?"

"Ask them!" replies Ernie the hatchman, and a moment later he and the foreman appear together at the coaming.

"What's up with you blokes?" demands the foreman. "I've blown up for smoko."

"Good on you, mate!" says one of the holders. "Now go and blow your bloody self up!"

Big Joe turns on the man impatiently. "That gets us nowhere, Jim." Raising his voice, he addresses his mates in general: "Anybody here want to work on to a finish?"

"Yes, I do!" calls out the little man in the leather apron.

Nobody else does.

"There's your answer," says Joe crisply. In all groups of men working together there is always one to whom the others look for some degree of leadership. The big fellow, still standing conspicuously in the middle of the square, now goes on to put their case, addressing the foreman by name:

"You know yourself how it is, Bob. Spare me days, we've done over two hundred hours without a break . . ."

"That's all right for you, Joe. What d'you think my feelings are? My orders are to work to a finish. That means smoko at eight. I blew up five minutes ago . . ."

"What've you got to worry about? You was told to blow your whistle. All right, you've got a hundred witnesses you blew it. Now go and tell Summers we're waiting for cargo." Summers is the Supervisor in charge of the job.

"Summers isn't here; he's down at Twenty-one. I'll send for him; but I've got to be sure first where I stand. You refuse to take smoko?"

"We refuse to work after nine o'clock. Anyway, what do the other hatches say?"

The foreman vanishes without answering that, but Ernie, who has remained alongside him throughout the discussion, gives a throaty laugh: "What do the others say—didn't you hear 'em?"

"What's going on on top?"

"Nothing. You might as well come up till Summers arrives. He's down on the Merka."

One by one they head for the ladder and climb to the deck.

Other ships are working on, and the continuous rattle of winches around the Dock emphasises the silence which has settled over Berth 16. From all hatches the holders have come up to sit around in talkative little groups or hang over the side waiting for developments on the wharf. There is an atmosphere of suspense, of action precariously suspended. Occasionally lonely footfalls sound passing along steel deck or concrete wharf. In the bigness of the night, and after the long uproar of working cargo, normal voices give an illusion of being under restraint. In the entrance to the port alleyway, a shirt-sleeved officer stands smoking and listening to what is being said by the nearest men. Half a dozen or so have seated themselves on a pile of hatchboards and are being harangued by the little man in the leather apron who alone was prepared to keep on working.

"... we could have been finished by eleven..."

"Nobody's crooked on that, Sam," chips in one of his audience. "If we didn't have to come in to the 'Pound in the morning..."

"And wasn't you one that supported compulsory attendance at pick-ups?" Sam, excited by what he sees as a good scoring point, stops in front of the man who interrupted and wags an admonishing finger. "Didn't you support the Gang System? Didn't you? And ain't this a part of it? What d'you want to do—go back to the days when every bastard could please himself if he come in or not?"

The man fumbles for a reply, but others immediately take up the issue:

"You're talking bull-dust, Sam..."

"This gang never squealed about being ordered in..."

"What we're lousy on is the fact that we weren't told sooner. They knew—why didn't they tell us last night when we knocked off? Half of us have got arrangements made for the week-end. I got friends coming up from Geelong..."

"Why didn't they put night-gangs into her last night? There was men sent home yesterday without a job."

"Who's they?" Sam's shrill voice rises. "God spare me days! Aint they human at the 'Pound? Who says they could have told us sooner? I wouldn't like the job they got, trying to please all you blokes. I still say this is the wrong way to go about it, even if we have got a complaint. Direct action never did do no good. Everything we ever got come out of sitting down and talking it over..."

Sam realises too late that he has over-stated his case, for this really gets them going. Such a chorus of derision goes up along the hatchboards that several more men stroll over from the ship's side to see what it's about. They include the apprentice who, seeing no point in remaining in an empty hold, has also come up on deck. Even the officer steps over the breakwater and unobtrusively edges nearer.

"Talk sense, Sam!"

"What about the double-dumps blue?"

"And the black buses in the transport strike?"

"And the soda ash on the Vito?"

"And the twenty-eight strike!" Sam yells above them all. "Go on—what're you stopping for? What about that one? How many of you was in that? It was nearly the death of the Federation..."

"Tell that to the shipowners, Buff-head! It crippled us, but we got over it..."

"What did we get out of it, that's what I want to know..."

"We got a bath, I give in. But..."

"We always get a bath. We never win, not by direct action..."

Once again Sam's voice is drowned in an outburst of ridicule. And as the noise subsides it is Joe who emerges and commands attention:

"We never got anything except by direct action, and every man here knows it, Sam. Hold on a minute—I'm entitled to my say. You don't need to go any further back than the double-dumps. There was the classic example of what you get out of just sitting down and talking it over. Keep quiet! There's other blokes listening to this. You're an old-timer, like me. You know what happened. Long before the war we was agitating for the abolition of double-dumps. Nobody ever denied they was dangerous, but year in and year out all we got was talk, and promises of more talk. They was still talking when war broke out. Remember..."

By his measured tones and a few forceful gestures, Joe has gradually got them all in, even the officer and apprentice. All, that is, except the two old winch-drivers, who, withdrawn a little from the rest, have got their heads and smelly pipes together in a murmured discussion beginning with leaking roofs and moving swiftly on to a mutual enthusiasm for gardening:

"I've had three tiles off my roof for a fortnight. If we start another job tomorrow, they're liable to be off for another bloody fortnight. Every time it rains we got water running in streams down the bedroom wall. I promised the missus faithfully I'd fix it this week-end."

"And I got two hundred onions to put in. They been lying in a box since Monday night. I got 'em off Jimmy Neale. Ever seen that garden of Jimmy's?"

But for this quiet little domestic background, and occasional contentious voices from a distance, Joe goes on in an attentive silence:

"Remember the agreement we made? Remember how we was asked to sink all demands and differences till the war was over? We got what amounted to a promise, didn't we? Handle the doubles till the war was over, and they'd see what could be done about it. Save shipping space and help win the war—that was our job. All right, we did it. All through the war we stowed double-dumps without one squeal. You'd have expected that when it was over all we had to do was say "what about it?" That's all right, Sam, I'm not trying to tell you anything—I'm only reminding you. You know as well as I do what happened. We started getting more promises. One bloody conference after another. Promises, promises, promises! This week, next week, sometime, never! And all the time they was turning out double-dumps as fast as they could lick. What were we to do? A day come when some of our blokes in Sydney just put their coats on and walked off the job. It was on then for young and old. We weren't even given a chance to confine the dispute to wool ships. Ten days we was out. That's a lot of pay to working punks. Ten days'

pay lost to get a hundred promises filled. Nobody needs to tell us we never make it up—we're the ones that know all about that. But we got the double-dumps stopped. It cost us ten days' pay, but we got what we wanted. All the young blokes coming down to the waterfront for years to come will get the good of it—no ruptures for THEM in a wool hatch. And I don't remember hearing about any shippers or wool-growers going broke because of it. Now tell me it wasn't worth it! And why should we have had to lose ten days' pay getting something everybody admitted we was entitled to, and had been as good as promised times without number."

Sam, directly addressed by Joe, and under the scornful eyes of the other men, gives ground, but with a gracelessness that only completes his isolation.

"So what?" he shouts. "Direct action stopped the double-dumps—what else did it ever do? Go on, tell me. What about all the things it didn't get us, all the things we got in the last few years? What about the Rotary Gang System, smokos, transport, meal-money, consolidated pay . . ."

"You bloody nitwit!" Joe, driven to exasperation, explodes at last. His great voice booms over the quiet ship. "You trying to tell me we got all them out of the shipowners' goodness of heart? How would Healy ever have gone sitting down to a conference table with them if they didn't know he was in a position to stick their ships up? Spare me days, they'd laugh at him, like they used to laugh in the days when there wasn't a Federation. You've got to have strength behind you at any conference. The shipowners have always had it—our jobs! Do as we say, or else! That was their idea of sitting down and talking it over. Now we've got something. We're organised—we can chop their profits off. And, by Christ, don't they know it! That's when you get compromise, when both sides have a bloody gun under the table. Now tell me what we ever got without direct action."

But Sam, who has been trying for the last few seconds to shout Joe down, finally loses his temper and abandons reason altogether.

" . . . drag in everything right back to the bloody Ark, like you always do. What's all this got to do with working to a finish? I've seen times when you'd fall over yourselves for week-end work. You're getting it too easy, that's what's wrong with the lot of you . . ."

He keeps going a little longer, stamping back and forth along the deck, waving his arms, and shouting at the top of his voice. But nobody is prepared to listen to him any longer, and, wilting before a barrage of laughter and abuse, he suddenly consigns them all to the devil and retreats to the ship's rail.

Joe goes off to "see what the crowds are up to."

Somebody remarks that "Summers is taking a long time to get here," but fails to start a discussion around the question.

An exhausted silence falls at Number Three Hatch. Only the two winch-drivers talk on:

" . . . what they call green fingers. Everything he puts in seems to grow."

"My missus is like that. She's out at her sister's place at Oakleigh one day, and she comes home with some cuttings off a bush—I forget the name of it. Now everybody told her . . ."

Eight-fifteen, and the uproar precipitated by the blowing of the whistle has quite died down. In

the pleasant night a sleepy mutter of voices goes up out of little pockets all along ship and wharf, as in a normal smoko or supper-hour. But the vicinity of the hot water boiler set in the wall of the shed remains ostentatiously deserted. Any man who were to go near that with a billy before this issue is settled would be instantly bawled out.

Summers arrives at twenty past eight. The sound of his firm purposeful steps coming through from the other side of the shed reaches clearly to the ship, and at Number Three all the men immediately get off the hatchboards and crowd to the rail. Only the two old horticulturists carry on.

Summers, tall and straight, and immaculately dressed in a grey suit, comes to a halt out on the open wharf and takes a long deliberate look, first aft then for'ard, along the whole length of the ship. In the blaze of light his angry expression can be plainly seen as he sizes up the idle derricks and lounging men. Two foremen are giving him details of the situation, but he doesn't appear to be listening to them. With his experience, he knew all about it before he left Twenty-one.

Striding over to the nearest group, four or five wharfhands sitting on a six-wheeled truck, he asks them peremptorily what their complaint is.

Several of them start talking at once:

"We're not working after nine, Skipper."

"We aren't taking smoko."

"We was given to understand the job finishes tomorrow morning . . ."

"Who gave you to understand?"

"Nobody in particular, Captain Summers." One of the men constitutes himself spokesman and stands up. Other men are now converging on the spot from all sides. Every word lifts clearly to the row of holders and deck-hands lining the rail fifteen feet above.

"Speak for the crowd, Tony!" big Joe calls down. "We're all in this."

Tony goes on with added confidence: "All the week the talk's been of nothing else but a Saturday morning finish. We're all set for a week-end off. The war's over now, we haven't had a spell for three weeks . . ."

"That's the business of the Compound officials, not mine."

Summers, standing with hands in jacket pockets, looks sternly down on the crowding faces. "I'm in charge of the loading of this ship, and my instructions are to finish tonight." Carried away with what he regards as the justice of his case, he raises his voice: "Here it is—twenty past eight, and not a ton of cargo gone in since eight o'clock . . ."

"And whose bloody fault is that?" Tony begins swiftly, but another man, who has been edging his way into the centre of the group, grips him by the arm.

"Hold on, Tony. No need to get excited." From the way his mates give ground and keep silent, the newcomer is evidently one who enjoys their confidence. He isn't old, but he addresses himself to the Supervisor with all the quiet air of a seasoned job campaigner. "It's no use, Captain. We aren't working on. You'll get the same answer from one end of the ship to the other."

"Why?"

"Because we've had it. We've got two hundred and twenty-five hours in without a break . . ."

"Am I responsible for that?"

"Nobody's saying you are . . ."

CONTROVERSY

"I'm concerned only with the hours you work on this job. You know the regulations as well as I do. You have the right to apply for time off in a proper manner."

"When? All that was needed was a tip from you earlier in the day that we was required to work on, and we'd have applied for the week-end off . . ."

"You can still make application . . ."

"Tomorrow morning? That means we all come in at eight o'clock. Even if we get it, the best part of the day's gone by the time we get home again, and not a cracker to show for it."

"My friend, all this is your business. I couldn't care less what you do about the week-end as long as I get this ship away. Can't you contact somebody tonight? The Compound . . ."

"The Compound's closed. See how you go trying to get anybody after hours! We've had a gutsful of it. It's time they was taught a lesson over these finishing orders. What time today were you told to work the job out? Why didn't you give us the drum then?"

"Where and when I get my instructions . . ."

"All right, we won't labour that one. What about you taking the responsibility of telling us not to come in in the morning?"

Half the men on the job have now gathered under the yardarm of Number Three. A chorus of approval has gone up at Tony's shrewd suggestion. Even Summers is embarrassed by the logic of it. Taking one hand out of his jacket pocket he rubs his chin, and rapidly scans the circle of watchful faces. He sees only eagerness, eyes lit up with the light of imminent victory.

"How the devil can I be expected to do that? Anyway, let's get down to tintsacks. You all refuse to work after nine?"

"To right we do!"

"Nine o'clock finish and back in the morning!"

"Without dinner!"

"All right, get back to your hatches. The orders are: Back in the morning. I'll report all five gangs to the Port Committee for disciplinary action."

And, turning only on the spot where he stands so that he faces the gangway, he remains sulkily watching as the men break up and return to their working positions. They go in silence, not because they are awed by the threat of disciplinary action, but out of respect for Summer's restraint and forthrightness. Accustomed to facing hard facts and defeat themselves over long years, they like an adversary who can take it when it becomes their turn to dish it out.

At Number Three the old winch-drivers slide stiffly down off the hatchboards.

"That's the only language the bastards ever did understand," says one with deep satisfaction.

The other nods, but makes no reply. But a minute later, as he reaches the dark jumble of winches at the foot of the mast, he looks over at his mate:

"Now don't forget what I told you about them onions, Tom. Over at an angle, and barely cover the roots . . ."



CONTRAST

The Rosenbergs, though dead, are strong
To move a poet into song.

The President is still in flower,
But who would sing of Eisenhower?
ROSS TRACIE

Reviewing **From Life**, David Martin's recent small selection of poems, Professor A. D. Hope of Canberra launched a three-column assault on "The Party Line in Poetry" (**Sydney Morning Herald**, 1st May, 1954).

Professor Hope stated that Martin's poetry showed cheerfulness and vigor, and that he had a real poetic gift. However it was, he stated, "nearly all red hot propaganda of the crudest sort."

Professor Hope stated that he did not object to writing that strives to convey a message, but that it is "the sort of thing you try to teach which is crucial." He held that "the arid doctrines of dialectical materialism" cannot stimulate the didactic impulse into acts of creative imagination.

We have received permission from the Antagonists to publish the ensuing exchange.

MARTIN TO HOPE

Sydney Morning Herald, 5th May, 1954
To A. D. Hope

You love to play God,
To toy or to praise,
To brandish your rod,
To destroy and to raise.
But the Lord took the dust,
And made it a man,
While you earn your crust
By the opposite plan.

On 7th June, Prof. Hope wrote to David Martin:—

HOPE TO MARTIN

Dear Martin, you have scored a hit
Might well suspend the wrath of God,
The tables turned, the biter bit,
The judge constrained to kiss the rod.
Hear now the message of the Lord:
"My ways, though dark to men, are just.
Poets and critics both, my Word
Created Equally from dust.

That when my poets fail to break
The bread of life to other men,
I give my critics leave to take
And grind them back to dust again!"

On 8th June, David Martin wrote back:—

MARTIN TO HOPE

What is your bread of life? Some ectoplasm,
Baked crisp on top but vacuous at the core?
Is it the loaf that fills a poet's chasm,
And leaves all mankind emptier than before?
O Lordly critic, God has need no more
Of you to be his brother judge and grinder,
Than has the hungry stranger at the door
Need of a don to be his conscience minder.
God's ways are dark, you say. Yet yours are blinder:

Who does not knead **your** dough is marked
for branding.

But what men seek, I send you a reminder,
Is not the bread that passes understanding
(A reply from Prof. Hope is pending.)

Short stories, poems and articles are solicited for **Overland**. All contributions will be paid for, initially, however, at token rates. Stories longer than 1,500 words will only be considered if of exceptional merit. A stamped addressed envelope must accompany all submissions of MSS.

SWAG

Congratulations are due to Mr. Douglas Stewart of the Sydney **Bulletin** for his long essay, "Australian Bush Ballads," in the **Bulletin** of May 5. Norman Lindsay has a Red Page devoted to Louis Stone and Ted Dyson in the **Bulletin** of April 28. Mr. Stewart refers to Ted Harrington in his article as "of post-war balladists continuing the Nineties tradition the writer who has best understood the requirements of his craft." A profile of Ted Harrington and samples of his work will appear in the next issue of **Overland**.

Flexmore Hudson, whose recently published story "Mr. Heine" aroused such interest, writes that early publication is expected of several of his mss. He is sending **Overland** stories based on his experiences as a teacher in his first country school, which, he says, are "distinctively Australian." Many will be looking forward to them. Mr. Hudson, rowing coach as well as Senior English Master at Adelaide's Scotch College, had the satisfaction of seeing his crew win the Head of the River recently in record time.

Five notable literary evenings have recently been held in Melbourne. Mr. Arthur Phillip's paper on Joseph Furphy, read to the Fellowship of Australian Writers, was a contribution of permanent value to Australian literary criticism. It has been snapped up by **Meanjin** for early publication. Three interesting evenings were sponsored by the Australian Book Society. On the occasion of the publication of **The Legend of the Nineties**, an evening of tribute was held in honor of Vance Palmer, and speeches were made by Professor A. R. Chisholm, Mr. G. F. James of the Melbourne University Press and by Mr. Eric Lambert. Late in June a similarly crowded evening was devoted to a Lawson commemoration, addressed by Mr. Frederick Macartney (whose readings from Lawson were delightful), Dr. A. G. Serle and Mr. Ian Turner, Hon. A. A. Calwell, M.H.R., also addressed the gathering. Another well-known politician, Senator Donald Cameron, together with Mr. Hirsch Munz and Mr. John Morrison, addressed a successful meeting on Judah Waten's latest book, **The Unbending**. Finally he Realist Writers' Group sponsored an affectionate "so-long" evening to Mr. Frank Hardy late in July, to mark his moving to live in Sydney. (Reports of similar activities from other States are invited.)

Next choice of the Australasian Book Society, we are informed, is Bill Wannan's anthology of Australian sayings, legends, songs and other illustrations of social history, named **The Australian**. Following choice is F. B. Vickers' **The Mirage**, a novel which deals with the tragedy of the mixed bloods in Western Australia. Those who have read that remarkable document, the **Annual Report** of the Commissioner for Native Affairs (W.A. Government Printer, Perth, 1954, 4/-) will appreciate this novel's timeliness. Those who have not seen this frank report should send for it. Annual subscription to the Australasian Book Society, incidentally, is £2/10/- for six books, payable to the Society at 360 Collins Street, Melbourne.

NOTABLE BIRTHDAYS. We all honor the birthdays of Dame Mary Gilmore (August 13) and Frank Dalby Davison (June 22). (Dates of other

prominent writers' birthdays are required.) We will also remember: Henry Lawson's death (September 22, 1922); Joseph Furphy's birth (September 26, 1843) and his death (September 13, 1912); Francis Adams' birth (September 27, 1862) and his death (September 4, 1893); and A. G. Stephens' birth (August 28, 1865).

From Brisbane we hear that Nance Wills has recently broadcast her piece on Paterson's novels, written for the Wynnum Writers' Circle Paterson night. John Manifold has also been heard in A.B.C. programmes, singing bush ballads.

Fascinating and important material of literary and historical interest is being published in **The Australian Photo-Review**, in the form of chapters from the unpublished book **Gold and Silver** by Keast Burke (A.P.-R. Editor). The material is woven around the dramatic discovery recently of the thousands of negatives of the Holtermann Collection, illustrating in the richest detail the documentary story of Australian goldfields. Readers are directed to Nos. 3, 5, 7 and 9 of 1953 and No. 2 of 1954. Number 9 places in the happiest juxtaposition extracts from Lawson and contemporary photos illustrating his work. No. 2 does the same for Boldrewood's **The Miner's Right**. Copies of the A.P.-R. are available from its Editor at G.P.O., Box 2700, Sydney. Price 1/- post free.

Admirers of the work of Mikhail Sholokov will be interested to know that a sequel, or second part, of **Virgin Soil Upturned** is now appearing in magazine instalments in the Soviet Union. It is believed that Sholokov has also finished his mammoth work, **They Fought for Their Country**, extracts from which were published as long ago as 1945.

Talking of Sholokov, those interested in Soviet writing and socialist realism are directed to three important and controversial articles in the **Anglo-Soviet Journal**, Spring 1954. These are "The Work of the Writer" by Ilya Ehrenburg (27 pages), "Originality and Inspiration in Music" by Aram Khachaturian and "Comedies Yet Unborn" by Grigori Alexandrov. An important theoretical article, essential to the understanding of what Russian writers are trying to do, is "On the Objective Character of the Laws of Realist Art" by V. S. Kemenov, published in **VOKS Bulletin** No. 83. This magazine is available free (6d. postage) from the Australia-Soviet Friendship Society, 330 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, C.1.

GUARANTEE FUND. Companies, we are told, have a "sinking" fund. **Overland** has a "stay-afloat" fund. How badly we need donations to keep the magazine going and to improve it you can grasp from the fact that, until circulation rises, each copy costs nearly 2/- to produce. Send a bit extra with that subscription! Donations to date: F.J.H. £7/10/-, E.L. £5.

Overland will normally run a "Comment" column for short comments on controversial and other issues. Contributions are invited, but will not be paid for.

Subscribers to the **Realist Writer** are having their subscriptions carried over to **Overland**. With **Overland** half the price of the **Realist Writer**, the unelapsed portions of subscriptions will go twice as far.

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON

The place of Henry Handel Richardson in Australian literature remains one of our most disputed questions. Whatever the answer, it will depend largely on assessments of her major work, **The Fortunes of Richard Mahony**. *Overland* is asking a number of distinguished writers to give us their view on this matter, and started with Mrs. Nettie Palmer because of her well-known critical studies in Australian literature in general and Henry Handel Richardson in particular. In these two contributions Mrs. Palmer opens the subject up for discussion, and Katharine Susannah Prichard adds her comment. Further contributions will appear.

NETTIE PALMER

ALL writers among us have asked themselves what effect the arrival and work of the author of **Richard Mahony** has had on the growth of a serious literature among ourselves. It is worth while to look back on the circumstances in which her undoubted masterpiece was produced.

When Henry Handel Richardson settled to the writing of **The Fortunes**—it proved, as we all know, to take three volumes, and fifteen years, to appear—she was already a mature woman and a practised novelist. Under her unchanging pen-name, she had published **Maurice Guest**, set in the Europe she had known in the nineties as a student of music; and the personnel of the book included an exotic woman from Australia; then **The Getting of Wisdom**, set in her own school background of Melbourne in the eighties.

She never wasted anything and in the **Fortunes** she was to use her special sort of experimental realism, tried out in the former books. But before she could begin on her prolonged and tragic task, she had to amass large note books of historical facts from newspaper files stored in English libraries. Then, in order to verify her private recollections, she returned from London to Victoria (her Australia Felix) for two crowded months in 1912. It was when she was well into grips with the first volume that the War of 1914 began; an event that for her had a peculiarly disastrous meaning, since she was conscious of an enormous debt, cultural and human, to the Germany that was now the official enemy; and it was in consciousness of this added burden that she undertook the struggle against her new and difficult material. Then it must be remembered that **The Fortunes**—volume one—when first published in the year 1917, made no impression on Australians as a part of their own heritage or output. The hero, Mahony, had left Australia by the end of the book, it seemed forever; and the author, presumably, was an Englishman having some inherited acquaintance with Australian history. When the second volume appeared, in 1925—**The Way Home**—its predecessor was already forgotten and unobtainable. The final volume—**Ultimate Thule**—was at last to let loose the flood of curiosity and eagerness in 1929. After some hesitation, the whole trilogy was republished, first in separate volumes and then, in 1931, in an omnibus volume, which came out at various times in England, America and Australia. It is this form of the revised trilogy that is the unit and basis for all subsequent discussion of the book that has aroused the greatest discussion in our time.

Some of this questioning was merely obvious and misleading; in other directions it was refreshing

and even inspiring. A few of the more or less relevant topics may be set down here:

Granted that this is the greatest novel ever to come out of Australia, was it good that the most famous book should be tragic? Those who admit that tragedy is by no means excluded have then sometimes protested that the opinions and impressions of Mahony are unjust and unhistorical. Others have said that Mahony's limitations were above all grounded on a weakness in himself that prevented him from appreciating the realities of the life around him and from its justifiable demands; and this the author would grant to be true; it was part of Mahony's tragedy, and she wanted to show it in word and act. These protests against the book may take many forms, and the answers are not to be given in a word or two; except perhaps what I have heard many a thoughtful Australian say: "You know, we had a Richard Mahony in our family!" Possibly, but they had no novelist to give his figure permanence and reality and terror and pity.

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

ALTHOUGH I admire other novels by Henry Handel Richardson, I cannot regard **The Fortunes of Richard Mahony** as either Australian in essence, or realism in the fullest meaning of the word.

Realism—even when it is not socialist realism—implies something more than a negative attitude to people and places. To "see the world steadily and see it whole," as Matthew Arnold says, suggests what realism ought to be.

In the first two volumes of the trilogy, H.H.R. deals with a period to which our grandparents and parents belonged. My own resembled the Mahonys in many respect; but I never heard from them so derogatory an account of their life in the early days. **Settlers and Convicts**, published in 1847, indicates the background of developing Australian characteristics.

After reading **The Fortunes of Richard Mahony** a friend of mine, a trade union secretary, exclaimed:

"Why, there's not a decent Australian character in the book. Eureka's just referred to as if it were a brawl among riotous miners. Not a word of the heroic struggle it was or its historical significance! The workers are always described as 'dirty,' 'loud-mouthed,' 'vulgar,' 'illiterate.'" There's no mention of the great strikes and political conflicts which affected everybody in those days."

I pointed out that H.H.R. was concerned chiefly with the reactions of Richard Mahony, an ego-centric Anglo-Irishman—"a square stick in a round hole"—to conditions of life in Australia; that the

trilogy is an intimate, psychological study of Mahony, and of a contrasting type in his wife, Polly, at first lovable, practical and courageous, although later imbued with Mahony's social snobbery.

My friend was not satisfied. She insisted that in a book about Australia there should have been some sympathetic understanding of the people and country. Particularly if the writer is considered to be an Australian writer. My friend marked explanatory passages where the author takes-up an unnecessary attitude of Mahonyish superiority. I agree that this is so, both in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *The Way Home*.

These two books, as well, seem to me lacking in literary craftsmanship. They have no word magic. But *Ultima Thule* has both. It is true, I think, that H.H.R.'s power as a writer derives from her insight into, and revelation of, emotional crises. So painful and powerful is her tracing of Mahony's moral and physical decay that you wonder how it could have been written. There is in this book, too, some relaxing of an innate hostility to any but the main characters. A clergyman, bank manager and some friends, are shown capable of kindness; but still there is not a good word for any working man or woman, except perhaps Bowey, the "devoted and leech-like friend" who helped to tend Mahony in his last days. Even children are treated from the angle of Mahony prejudices. It is difficult to believe that Cuffy, at the age of eight, could have been such a chip of the old block.

And yet, in *Myself When Young*, H.H.R. tells of her childhood in Australia; how her parents impressed her with the superior gentility of her own family; would not let her play with the children of neighbours in the country towns where they lived. She left Australia when she was seventeen and returned only on a short visit. Her character developed in the musical circles of Germany, and there, I think, found its spiritual dwelling place. The world of music, shut-off from the noise and conflicts of the struggle for existence, became her solace. Bitter memories were associated with Australia.

Maurice Guest, her first book, breathes familiarity with the Leipzig of students and music. It has a freshness and vigor I admired immensely when it was published. Then came disappointment with *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *The Way Home*. My respect for H.H.R., as a writer, revived with *Ultima Thule*, but in *The Young Cosima*, I pay homage to a work, mature and vital, as an imaginative recreation of Wagner's story.

When I met H.H.R., in London during 1933, I urged her to come back to Australia. I told her that I never regretted having left London to live and work among the Australian people, and that it would be a great thing for Australian literature if she would make her home among us. But she said she would never return.

It was not until I heard her broadcast during the war that I came to the conclusion that H.H.R. had no deep feeling for, or interest in, Australia. Many of us looked forward to hearing her message. What did she say to identify herself or her work with us? She read an extract from *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, describing Mahony's joy at seeing again the coast of England.

In my opinion, it is not enough for a writer to be born in a country, and write of it from youthful

TIMES CHANGE

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, noble Greek,
Having travelled widely in Egypt, Mesopotamia,
Scythia and other parts of the Persian Empire,
And foreseeing that clash between Europe and Asia
In which his beloved Athens was to play
So glorious a part, wrote
(To defend Athens against hostile views
Caused by Athenian imperialist deeds)

His History of Persia

With great and conscious art,
And showed that it was Athens who (for all her
sins), was then
The better model and the hope for men.

I plebeian Australian, returned
From travels in the New Cathay of Mao Tse-tung,
Grieving that my Athens plays a game
Of indefensible stupidity and shame,
Write and speak
To tell my fellow Greek
What of Asia I have learned.
I labour with an art too weak
For all that I would passionately say:
How (while the manners of New China seem to me
As rich and strange
As the ways of ancient Persia seemed
To pious Herodotus, Father of History),
How I have seen, today,
The roles for good and evil are exchanged
That Europe and Asia play.
For it is China now that is enlightened, free
Humane, creative—the better society!

Herodotus spoke exclusively to the educated class,
Who at that season
Of history were men of reason.
I do not, for it has come to pass
As an aspect of the West's decay and fall,
That the modern western intellectual
Cannot believe in anything at all,
Save, in extremity, in the supernatural!

Herodotus gave no heed
To his effect upon the common man,
For he in those days could not read;
But now, praise History, he can!
The common man can still face fact,
Can reason, can believe, can act,
So I address myself to him, hoping that thus,
Even as did Herodotus
And even with my little art,
I may convince men to the better part.

ELIZABETH VASSILIEFF

remiscences, to be regarded as a representative of that country, or an interpreter of the character of its people. Comparing the Mahony trilogy with Eleanor Dark's *Timeless Land*, *Storm of Time*, and *No Barrier*, we find a much broader understanding of similar types and conditions in Eleanor Dark's work. It has a realism which sees not only ill-mannered louts among convicts and workers, but those who have finer qualities; a realism which reveals the injustices they suffer and that they are the victims of degrading circumstances. There is nothing of this in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

The difference in outlook of these two writers is that one was limited by her social experience and environment, the other stimulated by the democratic tradition of the Australian people to a vision which is humane, progressive and in tune with the realism of its time.

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

“AUSTRALIA WRITES”

In recent months, three Australian anthologies have appeared. Firstly, **Sunburnt Country**, a self-conscious volume produced in London; secondly, **The Tracks We Travel**, published by the Australasian Book Society; and thirdly, **Australia Writes**.

For no reason, other than that we have been misrepresented by the “critics,” Australian writing comes in for a lot of patronage at the hands of overseas book reviewers. **Australia Writes** (edited by T. Inglis Moore, Cheshires, 1953, 19/6) will help to deepen that evil, for so much of what it contains is merely imitative of what passes for “literature” in England and U.S.A. today.

I never quite got over the nauseous taste of the first piece in the collection, T. A. G. Hungerford’s “The National Game.” Why an anthology, purporting to be representative of our modern Australian writing, begins with a slander on the national character is something that I should like to hear Mr. Moore explain. If his reason is that it is “good writing,” I can only answer that it is bad Australian, and therefore the title of the anthology is insulting and bogus. By using a swy-school, often humorously referred to as our national game, Hungerford sets out to prove that our national game is really to waylay, bash, and rob New Australians on dark nights. Another choice little sidelight implies that the Australian toiler reads his mates’ mail whenever he gets the chance. It cannot be said I am reading too much into what is after all only a short story. **Mein Kampf** was after all only a book. The whole story is permeated with a solemn and morbid tone in order to convey the incidents therein as being symbolic; and the story being what it is, the title, “The National Game,” sounds calculatedly anti-Australian.

The collection improves but little with the second story by Darcy Niland. Niland has always struck me as a faker who apes very well a certain school of American magazine writers, equalling them in false pathos, bogus values, and sentimentalism so thick you feel you almost have to scrape the treacle off the page. Niland once again proves that a man’s most blessed state is one of constant poverty and hardship. I do not quarrel with hardship; nothing worthwhile was ever done without it; but when some sort of mystic, weepy virtue is given to the sufferings of people in an unequal society, that is charlatanism.

There are some first-class short stories in the collection. This had better be said now, in case the nature of the first two stories be taken as setting the tone of the whole collection, which they don’t, thankfully. But to clear the decks first. Story Number Three, “And Life Went On,” by Dorothy Harrison, is another one you must recover from before you begin to find out what Australia is writing. Briefly, it is a trifle about immediate post-war life in a Central European country. Two girls are having a pretty miserable time; the blame, by implication, does not belong to the Nazis and traitors who ravaged the country for seven years, but the duly elected post-war government clearing up the chaos that is left, rounding up the traitors and re-building the land; which may be why the author says at the beginning: “You won’t believe it.” She also neglects to mention whether the life of the two girls was miserable under the Nazi occupation. Which only goes to show how dangerous realism in writing can be if you don’t understand reality.

John Morrison’s “Easy Money” is one of the best of his waterfront stories, which makes it good indeed; when you can say so much about a writer in so few words, you are talking about a master. Another such is Vance Palmer, with a story that, slight as it is, has vividness and power . . . Judah Waten with his shrewd, warm episode “Read Politics, Son” . . . Refreshing pieces of Australianiana by Alan Marshall and Dal Stivens.

Allan Ashbolt’s “Black and White” is solidly-hewn and well written, but some might not favour an Agatha Christie-ish ending. They would have to admit that he gets away with it. The story is the problem of black man oppressed by white man. It admittedly does not need a murder mystery to make poignant the plight of the black man. The murder is the exceptional or the particular rather than the typical, which is what most of us would prefer in a short story with such a social message as this. Perhaps Mr. Ashbolt’s evident sense of social wrong has been sacrificed in part to the more sensational mechanics of story-value; to say any more would be carping, for the story is an eloquent one and could hold its head up anywhere.

This is too bulky a collection to discuss each story in detail, but others which make it worthwhile are war stories of Frederick Howard and Hugh Clarke; others by John Hetherington, J. K. Ewers, and F. B. Vickers. One cannot let pass F. D. Davison’s “Bush Diary” with its lean lyricism, full of countryside images, that make you want to go bush and renew your acquaintance with its birds, animals and landscapes. Of the non-fiction prose, Flora Eldershaw’s “The Landscape Writers,” a thoughtful and valuable article, and Leon Gellert’s amusing “Bacteria Background” stand out to my way of thinking.

Now to the poetry, which has quantity, but little quality. It is in the main the usual “Eliotism”: the shapeless, meaningless, aimless, humorless, airless prose, full of the bizarre combinations of words that are passed off as poetic images these days, sawn up neatly into lines that don’t scan half the time. I wonder just how well our “modern” Australian poets know the pale imitations that they are of the Georgian Decadents? Whether David Rowbotham, when he writes—

When the thinning vein shall feel
The flood die in the green leaf
To a still well,

is aware that about twenty years ago Dylan Thomas, that highly original poet, wrote—

The force that through the green fuse drives
the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of
trees

Is my destroyer.

I can never write about Judith Wright without expressing disappointment, for she has undoubted poetic power and a deep sense of imagery. But once again it is Judith Wright listening to Judith Wright, for all the lovely and sensitive images; the recoil from reality. The reader is never addressed, never praised or rebuked or appealed to. He is an eavesdropper on a sweet and morbid song. That is why the wholesome exceptions to the above remarks, poems by David Martin, Mary Gilmore and Rex Ingamells, are all too short.

Of the three anthologies mentioned at the beginning, I unhesitatingly prefer **The Tracks We Travel**, least pretentious of them, the most cheaply produced.

Why? It has character. Australian character.

—Eric Lambert.

"THE UNBENDING"

The Unbending is a splendidly told story in the form of a novel that is true of the life as I knew it in Western Australia during the 1910-16 period referred to by author Judah Waten. His leading characters and the parts they played present a well set out word picture of the men and women and their activities as I saw them in those hectic days.

And this applies particularly in 1916, when the people of Australia were divided into two bitterly hostile groups—military conscriptionists and anti-conscriptionists. This took place as the result of the then Commonwealth Government having decided to take a referendum of the people, as to whether or not they would approve of young men being conscripted for the purpose of the 1914-18 World War.

In the State of Western Australia, the State about which Judah Waten has written in **The Unbending** with such acumen and understanding in this connection, the two groups were more bitterly opposed to each other than they were in the other five States of the Commonwealth. So much so, that the infamous misrepresentation by the conscriptionist Press, by politicians, by prominent churchmen, and by other persons then occupying responsible positions, and the brutality of Press-inspired mobs to which anti-conscriptionists were subjected and to which Judah Waten has directed attention, cannot be denied. I am in a position to say so, first, because the facts as recorded speak for themselves; and, secondly, because I was the chairman of the then Perth Anti-Conscription League, and saw most of what happened in the direction indicated during the referendum campaign.

The Unbending gives readers a very good idea of the actual state of mind of highly placed and privileged men and women in Western Australia in 1916, who were prepared that young men should be compelled to risk their lives on the battlefields rather than their own should be risked in that manner. It was also a state of mind that had been created by the knowledge of the fact that military conscripts were much cheaper propositions than volunteers, where money-capital could be invested in profitable wartime loans and contracts.

To all who would demand or have the same regard for their own lives as they are expected to have for the lives of others, I would earnestly recommend that they should read and study the case for such consideration as has been implied by the author of **The Unbending**. Also, that they should do so in the light of the fact that man is the only creature in the animal world to organise mass murder of his own species for trade and profit.

—Donald Cameron, Senator for Victoria.

★

NEW ZEALAND STORIES

The publication of the World's Classics volume **New Zealand Short Stories** (Oxford University Press, 9/-) ought to be the signal that New Zealand writing has come of age, or, at the very least, entered adolescence. Unfortunately, a reading of the selection suggests a less optimistic verdict; it does not even bear out the statement of the editor, Mr. Dan Davin, that "New Zealand has never had more . . . promising writers than it has today." On the contrary, the conclusion that springs to mind is this: that the kind of New Zealand writing represented in this volume has passed from lusty infancy to second childhood without experiencing any middle state of maturity. (I am, of course, treating Katherine Mansfield as a brilliant exception.)

It is impossible to interpret in any other way the fact that the earlier stories in the volume—the work of writers who were born before 1903—are so much better than those written by men of forty and under. Much of the writing, early and late, is frankly reportage; but how slight and inconclusive are A. P. Gaskell's **The Big Game** (1947) and Maurice Duggan's **Race Day** (1952) compared with Lady Barker's **Christmas Day in New Zealand** (1872)! Lady Barker, in spite of her class inhibitions, writes with humour and sympathy of sheep-shearers and their economic activities; whereas Messrs. Gaskell and Duggan seek epic and romance in the national opiates of agonised sport.

The slight sketch, dealing with marginal issues and hinting obliquely (and usually unsatisfactorily) at really important questions, is handled impressively by Frank Sargeson, less skilfully by others (e.g. Janet Frame, Phillip Wilson), but there is reluctance, in the stories selected, to handle dramatic, "typical" situations which sum up in themselves the main conflicts in New Zealand life. Those ignorant of John Mulgan's novel **Man Alone**, or the poetry of R. A. K. Mason, would naturally conclude from the volume before us that New Zealand writers are the victims of constitutional timidity. Thus in 1912, B. E. Baughan publishes a pastoral sketch, **An Active Family**, which has a little of the sentimentality and most of the warmth of Burns' "Cot-tar's Saturday Night." It contains this interpolated comment—

Unlike the Old-World workers, we, in this country, have no burning wrongs to awake our energies and point us to ideals—or, at any rate, if we have, there are few of us that have caught fire.

And in 1947, Anton Vogt expresses the same attitude—

Andy was a great fellow with the men. Andy was in the bush for what he could get out of it, but he was a fair boss. In his younger days, Andy had been a crack bushman himself. He had come away from the chops with big money in his belt, but he had stuck to it. And when the chance came, he went in for his own mill. No man ever made anything on wages, so Andy paid wages and collected on footage. The little mill was Andy's creation; with no Andy there would have been no houses . . . Also there would have been no community of thirty souls packed away in the back of beyond.

(**The Accident**)

Although a large number of stories deal with men at work, the characters are seen as isolated individuals working in small groups—cow-cockies, bushmen, shop assistants, etc. The only short story to deal with factory life, O. E. Middleton's **Coopers' Christmas**, is perhaps the worst in the whole book; the narrator tries to hide his contempt for the workers ("They are all talking about what's going to win on Boxing Day") behind a screen of false objectivity.

The most direct reference to economic exploitation occurs in the work of the aristocratic Lady Barker (1872). She obviously realises that N.Z. sheep-farmers and shearers are both exploited by mortgage finance. One story, G. R. Gilbert's **A Girl with Ambition**, is set in the depression, and several others make oblique reference to those years; but no story in the collection attempts to portray any aspect of the struggles of the New Zealand people during the slump. Incidents in New Zealand working-class history are not used as source-material, while the militant Labor Party leader and former cabinet minister, John A. Lee, is represented by a pleasant little tale about a "swagger" which celebrates anarchist values if it celebrates anything at all.

Side by side with this tendency to ignore organised labor there is a refusal to see New Zealand life as part of an international scene. The story chosen to represent the First World War, Alice E. Webb's **The Patriot**, does not advance beyond sentimental jingoism, while the two stories of the Second World War show no awareness of the real issues of the war against fascism or its connection with the deeper struggles of the New Zealand people. There are no stories about Fiji, the Cook Islands or Samoa; and the authors seem lamentably deficient in national feeling when placed beside their Australian counterparts. Some of the best stories are concerned with areas of the country which have preserved elements of English life (including class distinction)—others show nostalgia for such a life.

Perhaps the most interesting stories in the book are those which deal with Maoris. On the one hand there is the complacent pakeha attitude ("if you're soft with the Maoris, they'll cheat you"), shown in Alfred A. Grace's **Te Wiria's Potatoes** (1901), and repeated by the narrator of B. E. Baughan's **An Active Family** (1912). In contrast to such official opinions, William Baucke is full of nostalgia for the vanished glories of the Maori race in **A Quaint Friendship** (1905), while Douglas Stewart is envious of Maori spontaneity (in **The Whare**, 1944), and A. P. Gaskell exposes narrow-minded race prejudice with bitter contempt (in **The Picnic**, 1947). The editor speaks of the poetry of Sargeson's stories, but the only real poetry in the book occurs in the monologue of the old Maori woman in Baucke's story.

Although some of the later stories are technically very good, for instance, Bruce Mason's **The Glass Wig** (1947) and John Reece Cole's **It Was So Late** (1949), it is evident from the anthology that the old subject-matter, with its emphasis on personal impressions and inhibitions, is no longer able to produce good stories. A new subject-matter and a new outlook, at once national and international, are required before the New Zealand story can express the realities of the New Zealand scene. To the Australian and British reader, therefore, this anthology is primarily of documentary and historical interest; to the New Zealander, and above all to the New Zealand writer, it is both a challenge and an awful warning.

—Donald Mackenzie. (N.Z.)



A PATRIOTIC BOOK

In **The Legend of the Nineties** (Melbourne University Press, 25/-) Vance Palmer has given us a book that fills a real need, and which instructs even where it does not wholly succeed.

The last decade of the Nineteenth Century was an important one in Australia because it marked a turning point. The main social and political developments that shaped the Australian character had taken place earlier; in this respect the forties, fifties and sixties, the decades of the anti-transportation leagues, of the gold rushes and Eureka, were more important. The years after 1900 created the economic patterns of life that still exist; the Australia of the two-party system, of the B.H.P., of the decaying bush. It could be summed up in a slogan: from Glory without Power to Power without Glory.

In the first half of the twentieth Century the democratic, popular, militant Australian tradition has fought strongly to assert itself under conditions of full capitalist development. But in the eighteen-nineties the mould was set; in those ten year's Archibald's **Bulletin** acted as the recognised and brilliant mouthpiece of native radicalism, and the work of "Banjo" Paterson, Lawson, Furphy and

many others came to maturity. They were in many ways years of decisive conflict, and they can best be understood by reference to the great shearers' strike and to William Lane's Utopian, and foredoomed, "New Australia" experiment in Paraguay.

(Dame Mary Gilmore is a living link with this era, and in her many of its best qualities are embodied.)

Vance Palmer, the veteran writer, has given us a survey in which, rightly, he goes back beyond the nineties. He begins with a just warning that it is wrong to isolate the nineties as some kind of a "golden age," but himself later somewhat succumbs to the temptation. This is partly due to the fact that the period after 1900 does not make itself felt strongly enough, even indirectly. The author gives full and sympathetic weight to the democratic impulses of the time, but, wavering between the basic approach of a literary and a political history, his outlines remain vague and the whole is not greater than the parts.

But the parts are often excellent. The chapters dealing with the "Bushman's Bible," the old **Bulletin** of Archibald and Stephens, Hop and Phil May, and with Lawson, Paterson, Furphy and O'Dowd are written with authority and a keen eye for essentials. Lane and Spence also emerge plastically, but the same cannot be said for the general background against which these men worked and created: the changing bush, the union sheds and the growing, yeasty cities. The book certainly does not lack heart and insight; it lacks system and a central motive or view-point.

But the author has earned the gratitude of the public by industriously bringing together much relevant material which, until now, has remained uncoordinated. Any future writer, who would attempt the important task of reevaluating this period from a fully consistent historical point of view, will find that Vance Palmer has prepared much ground. Such a writer may be able to surpass **The Legend of the Nineties** in analytical vitality, but not in genuine affection for his material.

The Legend of the Nineties is a patriotic and timely work. It has special value today when Australia's heritage is under attack and when a new generation of writers is raising Lawson's banner because it asserts creative traditions in a firm, but never aggressive spirit. Get your library to put it on its shelf.

—D.M.

THE REALIST WRITER

Since **Overland** has grown out of the **Realist Writer**, readers will be interested to know the story of that journal.

The **Realist Writer** was a roneoed quarterly journal, usually of about 20 foolscap pages. It was started in March, 1952, as the organ of the Melbourne Realist Writers' Group, but increasingly drew contributions from writers in all States. Nine issues in all were published, the final issue being that of March-April, 1954. A few back numbers of Nos. 8 and 9 only are available, price 2/6 posted on application to the Editor of **Overland**.

The following were some of the features carried: **How I Write** by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Ralph de Boissiere, Walter Kaufmann, Eric Lambert, Frank Hardy. **If I Could Paint** by Henry Lawson. **Visit to the U.S.S.R.** by Naomi Mitchison.

Original poetry appeared from David Martin, Victor Williams, Elizabeth Vassilief, Dave Smith and others. Articles and comment came from John Manifold, John Morrison, Laurence Collinson, Jean Paul Sartre, Howard Fast and others.

The Editor of Nos. 1 and 2 was Bill Wannan, and subsequent numbers were edited by S. Murray-Smith.

“THE BANJO”

JOHN MANIFOLD

I.

IT is 90 years since A. B. Paterson was born, and 65 years since his first poem was published. He published four volumes of verse, two novels, a book of stories and essays a book of travel-notes and reportage, a collection of **The Old Bush Songs** and some smaller work.

In spite of his continuing popularity, I think he is underrated today. Carried away by his wonderful rhythmic vigour and sharp-eyed, realistic descriptions, we fail to realise that he expressed a coherent vision of life, a philosophy deeply rooted in his experience and that of his contemporaries.

Unformulated but all-pervading, this philosophy is nearer to anarchism than to anything else. We may quarrel with it, but we must recognise it. Understanding Paterson, we shall be the better equipped to understand ourselves, for what he expresses has become a part of the national temperament. The pattern of conflict that runs through his work, traceable to a common origin, is worth the study of anyone who believes in the worker-farmer alliance.

II.

Paterson's boyhood was spent on Illalong station in the Upper Murrumbidgee. While he was still a child, the station passed into the hands of an absentee capitalist. Paterson senior ceased to be the owner, but stayed on at the homestead as manager. These facts must be borne in mind; they deeply affected the poet's outlook.

The manager's son on a mountain station is no pampered aristocrat. He rides and camps with the men. It depends partly on accident, but mainly on personal temperament, whether he is accepted by the men as a companion and an equal, or rejected. The poise and confidence of nearly all Paterson's work are the marks of the man who has been accepted. You can see him sitting around the fire with the men from Snowy River, absorbing the old bush songs as they come from the lips of the singer.

The homestead, with its books and its traditional Scottish civilisation and the girls, did not contradict the world of men and balladry and bush-life, but complemented it. If there was a social dividing-line in young Paterson's cosmos, it was drawn not

between the homestead and the hut, but between the homestead and the alien "city" which owned the place.

But the older Patersons drew the line elsewhere. Landless now, they could not pass on to their son the economic basis of gentility; but they could outwit misfortune by making him into a lawyer.

III.

Paterson detested not only office-work—as he shows in **Clancy** and **An Answer to Various Bards**—but lawyers. In **Gilhooley's Estate** he treats the law frankly as a racket. In **The Man Who Was Away** he shows the lawyer as hopelessly insensible to the normalities of bush life. In the novel, **An Outback Marriage**, the lawyer is a power of evil, an immoral and disruptive figure, finally overthrown by his own hubris. A faint echo of this rings in the poem **In Re A Gentleman, One**. Wherever Paterson shows a lawyer in action, he pits him against something typical of Illalong—a family of children, an estate, an old homestead. He sees the lawyer and his law as hostile and alien to the old idyllic up-country life; as the type and symbol of new and unwelcome property-relationships.

Part of the special character of the old pastoral economy comes from an admixture of **hunting** economy. No one owns the buffalo-herds of the Territory, the wild cattle of the Gulf, or the brumbles of Monaro:—

It lies beyond the Western Pines
Beneath the sinking sun,
And not a survey mark defines
The bounds of Brumby's Run.
Old Brumby asks no price or fee
O'er all his wide domains;
The man who yards his stock is free
To keep them for his pains.

Common stock, on unsurveyed land! It is a tribal concept, not a legal one. Paterson extracts a slightly grim amusement from the clash between lawyers' law, in this regard, and outback custom. The hero of **A Walgett Episode** sells fifty kangaroo-skins to the city slicker who has previously rooked him:

Then he smiled a smile as he pouched the pelf,
"I'm glad I'm quit of them, win or lose:
You can fetch them in when it suits yourself,
And you'll find the skins—on the kangaroos!"



And the same old joke is sprung on the Englishman who has won **The Wargeilah Handicap**. The officials tell him he may collect at any time the splendid horse which has been offered as the prize:

“He’s with a wild mob somewhere round
The mountains near the Watershed;
He’s honestly worth fifty pound—
A noble horse indeed to win,
But none of us can run him in.”

Something of the same conflict underlies **The Gundaroo Bullock**. Morgan Donahoe is known to have beef in the cask, ergo it must be stolen beef. Down come squatter and troopers to haul Morgan out of bed and the beef out of the harness-butt. But “Gundaroo bullock” is native-bear-meat, as any native knows, and the law is discomfited again, for there are no property rights in wild bears! It is a comic version of **Waltzing Matilda**.

In **Waltzing Matilda** the law does triumph, for the sheep has really been stolen. But it triumphs in vain, for the swagman’s suicide lays on the shoulders of the law a greater crime than the one it set out to punish. So, too, in **How Gilbert Died**: the law triumphs by corruption and treachery; Gilbert, shot as he covers the retreat of his comrades, retains the moral victory and the glory.

Saltbush Bill, too, is on the side of the outlaws. He is not a man of property; he does not own the sheep he travels; but in their defence he will dare anything—not merely once, but all the season round. He does not want to own the grass, but to use it. Grass is one of the things, like air and water, which ought to be “common.” Saltbush Bill’s life is one long battle against the law of private property. Not that he cannot bend the law to his own purposes when he likes; as a J.P. he earns the price of a holiday by exploiting the manifest ineptitude of the law on inquests. Tribalism, blackfellow tribalism this time, under Saltbush Bill, makes a monkey of the law yet once again.

IV.

If the law represents one threat to the old pastoral life, the banks represent another:

But droughts and losses came apace
To Kiley’s Run,
Till ruin stared him in the face;
He toiled and toiled while lived the light,
He dreamed of overdrafts at night:
At length, because he could not pay,
His bankers took the stock away
From Kiley’s Run.

I can think of no other poet, even among the Communists, who has been so conscious of the economic basis. Paterson, the landless man, is not personally haunted by “the overdraft;” but he can always smell the creature out, as it skulks and scratches in other people’s homes, just outside the circle of lamplight. Once hauled into the light by Paterson’s art, it can be laughed down to less terrifying proportions.

MacThirst, what gars ye look sae blank?
Hae all your wuts gone daft?
Has that accursed Southron bank
Called up your overdraft?

The Great Calamity.

’Tis strange how often the men outback
will take to some curious craft,
Some ruling passion, to keep their thoughts
away from the overdraft.

Saltbush Bill’s Gamecock.

The overdraft would sink a ship,
but make your mind at rest;
It’s all right now, the parrakeets
are flying to the West.

The Weather-Propheet.

Sometimes Paterson, like a good warlock, will raise this imp from the darkness in order to loose it against pomposity:

Stations are of all sizes, and the man who is considered quite a big squatter in the settled districts is thought small potatoes by the mag-nate from “out back” who shears a hundred and fifty thousand sheep, and has an overdraft like the National Debt.

An Outback Marriage, IV.

And there is one charming moment when Morgan Donahoe prides himself on having reached such social heights that he too may qualify as a victim of the banks!

The times are something awful,
as you can plainly see;
The banks have broke the squatters, and
they’ve broke the likes of me.

The Gundaroo Bullock.

It becomes clear that the nostalgia, so evident yet seemingly so motiveless, in **Under the Shadow of Kiley’s Hill**, **The Wind’s Message**, **Black Swans**, and in parts of many other poems, is no poetic affectation but a true abstract of the reality of Kiley’s Run, Illalong, and a boyhood buried deep under mortgages.

V.

Is it merely a linguistic accident that links “finance” with “the city?” It seems likely that Paterson’s dislike of all things citified may have originated, partly, in his distrust and resentment of the powers of capitalism, the law and the banks.

And the hurrying people daunt me, and
their pallid faces haunt me
As they shoulder one another in their rush
and nervous haste,
With their eager eyes and greedy, and
their stunted forms and weedy,
For townfolk have no time to grow, they
have no time to waste.

Clancy of the Overflow.

He knew and pitied, rather from a distance, the town workers.

Within our streets men cry for bread,
Our willing workmen, strong and skilled,
Within our cities idle stand,
And cry aloud for leave to toil.
The stunted children come and go
In squatted lanes and alleys black;
We follow but the beaten track
Of other nations, and we grow
In wealth for some—for many, woe.

Song of the Future.

Only once does he seem to recognise that the city poor may be capable of hitting back; and that is when he describes in **Happy Dispatches** how the London clubmen blenched from the roar of demonstrators against the Boer War.

So that on the whole it is the evil force of the city that he sees, whether wreaked on the bodies of its own poor or on the men of the countryside. He celebrates and magnifies, for its symbolic value, every little skirmish-victory which the country wins against the city—as in **The Geebung Polo Club**,

The Man from Ironbark, An Idyll of Dandaloo, and When Dacey Rode the Mule. The same antagonism lurks in such unexpected places as **The Travelling Post Office** and **Come-by-Chance**, where he enjoys the ability of the countryside to vanquish, domesticate and humanise even the city-born mechanical efficiency of the Post Office.

Sometimes the mechanised invader wins—as in **Mulga Bill's Bicycle** and the short story of **The Cast-Iron Canvasser**. That, now, is a really horrible symbol of commercial civilisation! A machine that forcibly sells you what you do not want!

VI.

The town-versus-bush conflict takes a special form at the races.

Paterson was not mad about horses. He liked them well enough, he could pity them, but he knew them too well to idealise them:—

Big, stupid creatures that they are, cursed with highly strung nerves, and blessed with little sense, they are pathetically anxious to do such work as they can understand.

The Bullock

Nor was he beglamoured by the race-track or the show-ring. See **Only A Jockey** and the savage short-story **Concerning a Steeplechase Rider**. Watch the race-track morals and manners painted in **The Oracle, Sitting in Judgment, A Disqualified Jockey's Story, and The Shearer's Colt**. In nearly every race-course poem of Paterson's there is trickery or corruption, exploitation or death.

The influence of Gordon lies thick on Paterson's horse-poems, but it was no "hippodromania" that took Paterson to Randwick. I think it was simply that horses, even in town, reminded him of home.

Yet when I noticed the old grey horse,
The rough bush saddle, and single rein
Of the bridle laid on his tangled mane,
Straightway the crowd and the auctioneer
Seemed on a sudden to disappear,
Melted away in a kind of haze—
And my heart went back to the droving days.

Rio Grande is not at bottom a poem about horses, but a poem about the pigheaded bravery of Macpherson, first cousin to the Spanish **pundonor**. Elsewhere he makes the horse into an object of local patriotism, and drapes the finagling and skull-duggery with the flag of war. All's fair against the city!

"Just think of how they'll take it when
they hear on Snowy River
That the country boy was plucky and the
country horse was clever,
You must ride for old Monaro and the
mountain boys today."

The Open Steeplechase

And out on the heels of the throng I
sprang,
And the spurs bit deep and the whip-
cord sang
As I rode. For the Mooki River!

The Old-Timer's Steeplechase

The horse is the mode of expression of the horseman. The horseman is generally a man and a brother. But horse and man alike go to ruin on the race-tracks of the big cities.

(To be concluded).

COMPETITIONS

A communication from the magazine **World Youth** announces competitions under the general heading of "The Life of Young People in the Countryside." Entries are acceptable until September 15 for Literature, Music, Folk Art and Fine Arts sections, and prizes include cameras, typewriters, etc. Short stories, short novels, poems and plays are invited. Further particulars may be obtained from the Editor of **Overland**.



Another competition is announced in a letter to **Overland** from the Miners' Federation. Mr. Neilly, the General Secretary, announces that prizes of £5 each are being awarded for the best poem, short story and cartoon and also for the most interesting historical document or article based on original research. The set subjects are the Eureka Stockade or the earliest reports of union activity in the coal industry. All entries to Editor, "Common Cause," 188 George Street, Sydney, by August 9.



Other competitions in brief: Brisbane Arts Theatre, for a one-act play, first prize £10, closing date August 21, entry forms from the Theatre at 234 Petrie Terrace, Brisbane; **Tribune** newspaper, short story under 2,000 words on problems, struggles, traditions of the Australian people, first prize £5, special prize of £3 for beginners with not more than one previously published story, closing date October 31, entries to 40 Market Street, Sydney; **Challenge** youth newspaper, depiction of aspect of life of Australian youth in the present or the past, open to those under 30 on October 8, short story under 1,500 words (10 gns.), poem (5 gns.) or feature article under 800 words (5 gns.). Closing date October 8. Further details from Editor, **Challenge**, 36 Pitt Street, Sydney.

OVERLAND

Which incorporates **The Realist Writer**, is a quarterly Australian literary magazine. Price 1/-, 1/3 posted. Subscriptions (5/- year, posted) and MSS. to the Editor at G.P.O. Box 98A, Melbourne, C.1. Editorial Board: S. Murray-Smith (Editor), Eric Lambert, Jack Coffey, Ian Turner, Ralph de Boissiere (Vic.), Joan Clarke, Len Fox (N.S.W.), John Manifold (Q.), Joan Williams (W.A.), Brian Fox (New Zealand).

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Allan Gardiner

Rediscovering a constituency: *overland* beyond the liberal sphere

“CAPITALISM BREEDS WAR” declares the slogan on the cover of *overland* 149. Aphorisms of this kind condense whole bodies of political theory and experience. But in the cover’s design the slogan is fading into the background, becoming a relic of lost significance. The image illustrates the ongoing crisis of left politics, a crisis that also affects *overland* due to its importance as a forum for ideas behind traditional leftist slogans. Readers and writers of the journal must continue to debate the nature of the crisis and of our responses. Sean Scalmer has already begun to question an orthodox view of *overland*’s mission,¹ and I share many of his qualms. *overland* should rethink its orientation towards liberal nationalist intellectuals even though this has sustained the journal since its early break from the Communist Party of Australia. An alternative is to return to the original constituency for the magazine, to an audience, that is, of politically advanced workers. This might sound like a slogan, but what follows are some ideas behind it.

The name ‘little magazine’ seems inappropriate when applied to one that played for such very large stakes. *overland* aspired, in the post-war period, to be a cultural journal for an entire social class no less. The ideologists for wage-workers could use it in public debate, in particular with *Quadrant*’s apologists for the geo-political status quo and *Meanjin*’s theorists from the managerial and professional classes. These magazines are marked by their difference from others catering to specialist interests. Though serious and scholarly, they can disdain academic disinterestedness in favour of passionate opinion.² The writers for these three journals may attempt to change Australian political culture rather than merely explain or describe it.

While-ever *overland* attempted to be an organ for politicized workers, its reason to exist was clear and

assured. Political groups and movements always, even in this supposedly post-print era, need newspapers and journals as organizing tools. These publications are free from the market, from the drive to make a profit on the sale price or advertising. Rather they exist to give depth of argument and to be of use wherever their subscribers do political work. A militant intervention from the floor in a union meeting is made more effective, for example, if the speaker can wave a paper to show that their view is not only that of a single individual. The political publication also builds internal strength as members of the political tendency share their ideas. Each human body that publicly sells or holds the publication is a political force agitating the fabric of society. This is one of the mechanisms by which slogans become meaningful.

Of course, *overland* was never merely a left group’s propaganda sheet, but comparisons can be drawn. In its earliest manifestation as the *Realist Writer*, the magazine was made possible by two strong forces. Crucial were the energies of particular people, a group of Melbourne men including Jack Coffey, Eric Lambert, David Martin, Ralph de Boissiere and many others around Ian Turner and Stephen Murray-Smith. These were true enthusiasts who poured their hearts into a magazine they thought could bring about a roneo-powered cultural renaissance. But their energies could not have been harnessed without the post-war policies of the CPA. After the war the Party, despite its chronic anti-intellectualism, was forced, by a Soviet turn to ideological struggle, to offer support to its artistic members and fringe. These included, of course, the otherwise marginalized middle-class intellectuals, but also some worker-writers, for whom Communism meant an unprecedented entry into literacy, imagination and self-expression.³ Party

branches, members and affiliated trade unions provided the Realist Writers' Group with capital, contributors, a means of distribution, a readership, an ideological framework and a sense of mission. In the cultural desert of postwar Australia, the effects belied the size of the persecuted CPA.

So the early issues of the *Realist Writer* can certainly be compared to a Party publication. Members could make interventions in meetings of the Fellowship of Australian Writers confident in the knowledge that their leftism was backed up by a journal of substantial ideas. The power of the publication as a political organ was further shown when Stephen Murray-Smith and Ian Turner began to take the *Realist Writer* away from the Party's ham-fisted control. Their brand of nascent anti-Stalinism could quickly win support within the Party due to the organizing strength that flowed from having their own magazine. The Party was avoiding a genuine danger of factional disruption when, in 1953, it pulled *Realist Writer* back into line.

If the foundation of the journal was in the political wing of the working class, then these class interests were fatally mediated by the CPA, a Stalinist party that monopolized the leading working-class militants. But this does not tell the whole story. As Scalmer puts it in his comments on the views of *overland's* recently retired editor John McLaren:

He rightfully sees that the Communist Party attempted to control writers through the theory of socialist realism, but he does not see that the theory also gave a sense of cultural self-confidence to working-class Party members. He notes that the audience of *overland* fell without the centralist organization of the Party behind it, but does not fully accept the extent to which the Party's networks were therefore vital and enabling for Australian working-class writing.

The 1958 break was not only with a discredited Party but with the whole class, with trade union activists and militants and people with close organic links to workers. On the face then there is a case for re-considering how *overland* could possibly re-establish a basis in a working class organized, as E. P. Thompson would say, for itself. But even though *overland* slumped after its 1958 declaration of independence from the CPA, it did not die. From then on, as far as its

new leaders were concerned, it had found a different rationale. Real doubt needs to be cast on that rationale, otherwise why fix it if it isn't broken?

overland's traditional politics are social democratic and nationalist. Australian society, as represented in its pages, is contested, but not fundamentally divided. The journal no longer claims to serve any particular social class on the grounds that the relevance and even the existence of class is questionable. Where social contest does occur, the journal's sympathies certainly lie with the underdog. Its editorial commentary might, typically, oppose cultural imperialism or criticize some betrayal by the ALP of principles of public ownership and spending. But *overland* also tries to give space and respect to a range of political opinions. In open debate the basic decency of the majority of people will win the day over anti-social, anti-communitarian and anti-Australian interests. *overland* encourages essays, often quite personal and topical, on matters culturally Australian and it applies modernist aesthetics to its publication and commentary on serious fiction and poetry by and about Australians. In the name of these principles, and with real courage, *overland* kept intellectual traditions alive which were otherwise threatened by cold war anti-Communism. The value of this work is not in question, but has the success come because the overtly stated policies were correct or were there hidden reasons?

Officially, *overland* did not abandon the working class in 1958, rather it abandoned 'rigid Marxist' notions of class itself. Workers remained a part of the target readership but they were now seen as Australians rather than as workers. The Party's attacks on *overland*, of course, painted it as a turncoat.⁴ Amongst the excommunicative slanders and the attempts to defend the Party for its own sake and for its Soviet masters, the CPA response included some moot points about the responsibility to workers that *overland* no longer could uphold. In fact, few literary historians today seriously doubt the middle-class element in the revolt of *overland* from the CPA. In effect the magazine poached from the natural constituency of *Meanjin*, or, more accurately, provided an intellectual home for that part of the middle-class that wished to sever its alliance with workers but still remain slightly distinct from the mainstream of their class. There were many apparent reasons, from the early 1950s onwards, to believe that socially progressive ideas and the power to implement them belonged with this class.

There was much scope for socially improving activity, planned and administered from above, during the long capitalist boom and national reconstruction following the war. The professional elites that flourished in this brave new era of corporatism and Keynesian economics believed passionately in ideals of public service and social progress and had the opportunity to act on these ideals. When Stephen Murray-Smith saw *Meanjin* editor, Clem Christesen, address a large peace rally, he reported on the experience in *Realist Writer* No. 7 in terms which make Christesen, a figure of the liberal bourgeoisie, seem like a true leader of social revolution. Intellectuals provided, as Scalmer says, “a constituency for postwar reconstruction, and for the cultural renaissance which galvanized Australia during the Second World War” and their journals were “concerned with the political identity and political aspirations of these new public servants, educators and artists”. In fighting for their place in the sun they led the opposition to Menzies’ conservatism. By contrast, the working class seemed passive, with strike days plummeting, and their only political voice, the CPA, devoid of charismatic leaders and increasingly exposed as an arm of a repressive Soviet state.

Mere disagreement in ideas between the CPA and *overland* was not as important in causing the split as was the perception that the working class was no longer an appropriate audience. The ideological differences were not fundamental and became even less so over time. It is difficult, for example, to characterize one side as revolutionary and the other as reformist. Following a brief left-turn in the years around 1950, the Soviet Union increasingly directed its affiliates around the world to turn to respectable electoral strategies. In terms of theories of culture and nationalism the differences were only as deep as some rhetorical flourishes – as might be expected considering the centrality of *overland* personnel in the construction of the CPA’s post-war implementation of ideological struggle. For both camps, sentiments of Australian national identity were seen as intrinsically progressive and democratic. The similarities of the cultural thinking of those within the CPA and *overland* can

be demonstrated by the history of the *Realist*, the journal begun by the CPA to replace *overland* after its defection. The *Realist* and *overland* were equipped with the same conventional ideas about artistry as personal expression, art as a separate sphere, and national culture as intrinsically democratic. The *Realist* was soon doing all the things *overland* could have done better: agonizing over the pernicious effects of ideology on art and standing up for ‘spiritual’ writers like Patrick White. In principle, *overland* could have developed along the same lines, only rather more slowly, had it remained within the CPA purview.

***The power of [Realist
Writer] as a political organ
was further shown when
Stephen Murray-Smith and
Ian Turner began to take
the Realist Writer away
from the Party’s
ham-fisted control.***

overland did not escape from a class-based perspective, rather it changed its class base. Along with much of the left after the war, it championed the progressive middle class. Also untenable is the idea that *overland* grew beyond ideology and vulgar left/right dichotomies. Middle-class intellectuals adopted left ideas as part of their fight against the conservative and

outdated institutions of the Menzies era, and *overland* reflected this. Thus the magazine remained the natural place in which to make left interventions in public cultural debate. Unfortunately for socialism, however, the interests and alliances of the middle classes are by definition unstable. In many ways the mission against the establishment mounted by professionals in the fields of the arts, educational, communications and the public sector has been completed. Their ideology has been toned down and their promises to allies are being forgotten. Opinion polls might continue to show more liberal views amongst these people on relatively abstract questions, but they know that the long economic boom is over. No major concessions to the waged class will be granted easily by capitalism and they stand to lose from any real attempts to force such changes. The Australian Democrats, for example, can espouse enlightened views on environmental destruction but support a far-right attack on unionism. The ALP, in the process of cutting its links to trade union bodies, shows the same tendency only a little more unevenly.

What would happen if *overland*’s fate was no longer tied to the intelligentsia but to the working class? It would be in a position to do better what it is

best suited to do. It would have a mandate confidently to focus the literary wing of movements for democratic transformations of society, chief amongst which, for reasons of its potential inclusiveness and economic power, being the frequently stalled social movement for the unionization of workers. It must remain inclusive of left tendencies but not through political sogginess. It can no longer assume that 'Australianism' can be its intrinsically progressive rallying point for the broad left. The concept was always partly an escape from responsibility to oppressed and exploited groups and now it lacks even the ability to encourage any meliorative reforms from the Australian State. A communitarian rationale, where left culture is supposedly embraced by attempts to maintain local, neighbourhood-level systems of non-commercial social relationships against 'globalization' and so forth, is merely a re-jigging of the advocacy of Australianism. In fact, communitarianism brings along its own contradictions and inadequacies.

overland can only chase a middle-class phantom if it seeks to speak for a *demos* that is wishfully imagined to be essentially progressive and democratic. How can I be united with others sharing socialist interests and goals merely by identifying as a citizen of this country, or as a resident of this inner city suburb, or as a user of this information technology, or as a consumer of this set of lifestyle commodities and spaces? These can only be sites in which the hard work of changing destructive and unjust conditions must begin. *overland* can be an asset in this social struggle, and gain its own reason for existence, if it unashamedly offers a validation and a forum to a readership organized in conscious political opposition to aspects of capitalist society, especially at the point of production.

Re-oriented to the working class, *overland* could continue to do many things it does already, but they will be done *because* of the journal's policy rather than in partial *contradiction* of it. Here is my wish list. An *overland* for the working class will contain reports on the mainstream art scene, but even more so on art outside the 'proper' structures. The art will not be seen from the viewpoint of the respectable and dominant critics. The journal will review from an independent standpoint the arts initiatives of the union movement. It will be a forum for dissenting voices in such official union programs. Its fiction and poetry pages will be open to writers who do not necessarily con-

form to academic and publishing 'best practice.' The journal will re-embrace a tradition of reportage, in which investigative feature writing by participant observers looks at the 'real' picture as opposed to the lies and half-truths of the media. It will be a clearing-house for a variety of progressive movements and tendencies. Above all, its contributors will thereby have something different to *say* amongst magazines indifferent to working-class experience.

This change to a working-class audience would be taking place at a time when there are few signs of an upturn in political struggle. Unions, progressive social movements and socialist political groups are in decline. It is true that vigorous health comes to magazines such as *overland* only in a climate of widespread social struggle. But a depressed oppositional political culture is still its only source of recognizable life, though it may be necessary, in order to keep in touch with mass thinking, to err a little towards political voluntarism or substitutionism. If activists, substituting for their rank-and-file, push for reform they will at least find what the limits *are*. These limits might seem absolute if seen from within a wall of defensive isolation or abstention from political culture.

By staying in touch with the working class *for itself*, *overland* will be better placed to know the class *in itself*. It is alarming how little is published about what ordinary people think and desire. As examples of this absence, two recent mass phenomena should suffice: the mourning of Diana Spencer and the initial support for Pauline Hanson. Both phenomena involved substantial numbers of workers.⁵ No left organ I know of, including *overland*, was engaged with any research or theory that could have predicted these two spontaneous expressions of mass emotion. Even after they happened, these events were poorly addressed by left intellectuals. A magazine from a group that tries to have an explicit orientation to rank and file workers, *Socialist Alternative*, could offer no explanation at all for the wide sympathy for Diana Spencer until weeks after the funeral. Their eventual conclusion was that workers' anger, unfocused in the absence of a credible and confident left opposition, leads them to invest in even the most unpromising symbols of a more caring world. This is at least suggestive. Perhaps tenuous similarities could be drawn to those Chinese mourners for the dead Deng Xiaoping who signified their *dissent* by ostentatious, excessive *assent*.

But where can such ideas be researched and properly followed up? *overland* has not addressed the Diana question. Its most substantial commentary on Hanson has been Jenny Lee's exposure in the previous issue of the way Hanson merely laid claim to the same right-wing techniques of USA 'wedge politics' used by the Liberals. This helps to discredit Howard's government, but only marginally and incidentally. Such analysis says little about how actual workers think and how they become susceptible to or else come to reject wedge politics. Lee is wholly typical of many commentators in feeling that her task is done once a (retrospective) explanation of the gullibility of the masses is established or when machinations amongst our rulers are duly reported.

Of course, if *overland* is out of touch with non-elite culture, then the whole field of academic cultural studies, which also failed to predict or clearly explain the above-mentioned cultural earth-tremors (despite much greater institutional resources and much touted theoretical sophistication) should also be embarrassed. Yet if *overland* had maintained its traditional ties to working-class readerships it might have been much better placed to understand and even participate in mass opinion. Consider: the vast industry of gossip magazines explicitly addressed to the working class were the source of some bigotries exploited by Hanson and most of the ideas about Diana Spencer. This print market is now uncontested by outfits other than the Murdoch/Packer variety, and yet *overland's* original brief placed it within a range of periodicals and books which, for a time, refused to concede this readership to cynical gutter dwellers. There was continuity between the books published by the Australasian Book Society, early *overland* and the early *Australasian Post*. Whether worker-readers wished to have a good read, 'improve their minds' or while away a train trip, they at least had some chance of finding a publication that respected them and their interests. Exploitative magazines have not won a monopoly over worker readers as a matter of inevitability. The success of a new entrant, *That's Life*, shows that a niche exists for a magazine that has some regard for its working-class audience. It seems more likely that the political will to address workers disappeared, not their willingness to read.

overland must re-discover that political will, or else make do with cafe conversations at the tables of the self-satisfied and self-righteous, wondering what the

faded slogans on the wall behind them once meant.

ENDNOTES

1. Sean Scalmer's critique is in his review of John McLaren, *Writing in Hope and Fear*, *overland* 145 (Summer 1996), pp. 69–71. The orthodox view can be found in various histories of *overland*, including Ian Turner, 'My Long March', *overland* 59 (Spring 1974), pp. 23–40; David Carter, 'Capturing the Liberal Sphere: The Politics and the Text in *overland's* First Decade', *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter, Sydney: Local Consumption, 1991, pp. 177–192 and John Sendy, 'The Story of *overland*', *overland* 102 (Autumn 1986), pp. 35–42.
2. Natural language was all the more important for the early *overland*, which tried not to alienate worker readers. Even so, Ben Chifley still tarred *overland* with the same brush as all little magazines. According to Tom Inglis Moore, Chifley thought they "cater only for a small minority of intellectuals, that they offer nothing to the great masses of horny-handed workers, that they would be meaningless to the ordinary rank and file of trade unionists". See Jenny Lee et al., *The Temperament of Generations: Fifty Years of Writing in Meanjin*, *Meanjin*: MUP, 1990, p. 64.
3. For the literary experiences of communism for worker-members see David Carter, 'History Was On Our Side: Memoirs from the Australian Left', *Meanjin* 46.1 (March 1987), pp. 108–121 and John Docker 'Culture, Society and the Communist Party' in Ann Curthoys and John Merritt eds., *Australia's First Cold War: 1945–1953: Volume One: Society Communism and Culture*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984, pp. 183–212.
4. Examples of this Party response are Judah Waten, 'Latest Issue of *overland*', *Tribune* Wednesday 14 October 1959; Ralph de Boissiere, 'overland Controversy: Author Asks Editor Pertinent Questions', *Tribune* Wednesday 3 June 1959 and Rex Chiplin, 'overland: Where's It Being Taken?' *Tribune* 13 May 1959.
5. Jeff Sparrow, 'The Princess of Wales: Why Do Millions Mourn Di?' *Socialist Alternative*, 21 October 1997, pp. 18–19. I use the qualifying language advisedly, as I do not want to overstate the case. The 'people's princess' hysteria did have an element of media manufacture and a large number of the mourners were not potential members of a working-class advance guard. Pauline Hanson's electoral success came from Liberal voters and a localized working-class backlash against the ALP, while her One Nation party has its base in the small-business class. The Lady Di phenomenon has not had a lasting impact, and Hanson has been quite easily contained, on one hand by the capitalists who stand to lose by her execrable anti-Asian racism and on the other by the left coalitions who have helped Aborigines stop her rallies.

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Laurie Hergenhan

Summoning Xavier Herbert's Ghost

This essay, written for overland's 150th issue, aims at giving a detached and condensed view, looking back from the present, of a correspondence and friendship enthralling at the time. Hence the third person point of view has been chosen.

XAVIER HERBERT WAS a willing contributor to the fiftieth issue of *overland* in 1971. His correspondence¹ throws interesting light on his view of that magazine and on his facility for self-publicity and self-dramatization. Reclusive by nature – he makes Patrick White seem gregarious by contrast – indeed an isolate who found it well near impossible to relate to other people, he lived most of his life in the bush, or on its fringes. And it was as the great writer toiling in the wilderness, the prophet from the Bush, that he dispatched his communications, or sometimes hurled his thunderbolts, to the civilized centres. Yet Herbert was full of contradictions and conflicts. For all his vaunted self-sufficiency and superiority, he was dependent especially through his correspondence, on others, sometimes like a child, to offer friendship and admiration and to do his bidding as errand boys – they were mostly male – or acolytes to confirm his power and impress it on contacts he sought out. For all this curtaining isolation, there were times when he could touch, rather than impress people, and when he could be moved, if transiently in return, as though some friends sensed his vulnerability and he allowed himself to respond out of a need he usually denied. Yet his life was a series of broken friendships as people inevitably failed to live up to his expectations.

In a letter protesting a lack of interest in published comments on his work, ironically in a context of his disappointment at the Miles Franklin Award judges for passing over his *Soldiers' Women* the year Patrick White won with *Riders in the Chariot*, he turned to discuss the forthcoming fiftieth issue of *overland*,

"which I think the best lit. publication the country ever had, which has always treated me with respect and been given such work as asked for without consideration of fee (they pay a Nominal)."

He was pleased to be asked for a contribution, especially as the issue was to be "dedicated to our leading writers". His first idea was to send an excerpt from *Poor Fellow My Country*, the mammoth "maximum opus" on which he was embarked. Though much had been written there was a long distance to go, the novel not appearing till 1975. He considered publishing an excerpt about some characters trekking through the wilderness of the top end, along "a chain of despoiled billabongs". While:

not anything like the high drama that can be found in so many other places, I think it gives a fair idea of the story – no, I don't suppose one could say that – but it's not picking the eyes of it, rather a moderate, modest choice, in fact.

Herbert passed this suggestion to Laurie Hergenhan, one of a line of what he called "patrons". They had first got in touch when Hergenhan published an Adelaide Writers' Week talk of Herbert's on 'The Writing of *Capricornia*' in *ALS*. Shortly after, in 1971, when Hergenhan moved from Hobart to the University of Queensland and visited Herbert at his home in Redlynch on the outskirts of Cairns, the contact quickened into a friendship, conducted almost entirely by correspondence. In retrospect, it seems that Herbert wanted moral support in his lonely battle with *Poor Fellow* and something more, almost a reassurance to himself and the world that he was engaged successfully on a great Australian novel. For contradictorily, while like many Australian writers Herbert distrusted academics – Akkoes as he called them – as critics and friends, at the same time he considered that the opinion of an academic he trusted and who would be lis-

tened to in the literary world might provide helpful 'outside' support of his claims for himself. This is not to say that in this case he did not overestimate, in his ignorance of the literary world, the influence of such an opinion from Hergenhan. But the example nevertheless shows Herbert's belief in himself in conflict with his self-doubt.

With the proposed *overland* piece, Herbert suggested that Hergenhan should save his (Herbert's) own precious time as author by choosing the excerpt according to *overland's* requirements and "writing an introduction, perhaps saying who the characters are and what they're doing there, and give some opinion of the work as you know it". Herbert again showed his isolation from the literary world by wondering if the acting editor, John McLaren, "was the famous Jack, by any chance?"

In his next letter to Hergenhan, Herbert changed his tack. Accepting Hergenhan's disinclination to act as entrepreneur – "your gentle No" – he nevertheless agreed that:

One *must* present oneself to one's customers . . . How can you be a Leading Writer if you don't appear with your peers? God help us. I know the trade secrets very well, and have my fame largely through the use of them. Only the Very Discerning will bother about your work unless you put a pretty frame round it and hire a band.

But Herbert tried to think of *overland's* need as well as his own:

Still I want *overland* to have something to brag of for them. To say, *No, can't be bothered*, would disappoint them. They . . . have labored hard without reward in a good cause.

Then he came up with a new idea.

This is what struck me. Why not a thing, under the title of 'The Agony of it – and the Joy!' telling briefly the tale of writing *Poor Fellow My Country*, from its conception . . . through to the Advent of one L.H. and the change it made? It could be very useful to those who strive only in the agony of loneliness. So much is written of the great loneliness of the novelist's life. Most novelists try to get the joy through leading bands of lunatics about (H.G. Wells is said

to have changed his band with every book, actually written his next book about them) or collecting women, like Bluebeard, and dismembering them in subsequent works. It's a pretty story – unless your modesty (put your head in a bag when it appears!) forbids. And the purposes would be served – Trade, and the wish to make my contribution to those without whom the like of me would be mutes. May I? I won't say much about L.H. – but I do want to use the phrase 'The One Just Sod in Sodom'. Please don't deny me.

Two weeks later the piece was finished:

Now, may I make a suggestion, the one that I'm making to McLaren, but am wording for you as an incentive. I feel I have to, because of your modesty. That doesn't mean you have to use the same words or even ideas. I'm just supposing (perhaps hoping) that you would say something similar. Here then:

COMMENT BY LAURIE HERGENHAN

When will it be finished? Soon, I think. But what does it matter – when it is something that will live for ever!

Kid myself, don't I? Not really. I do ask your forgiveness for intruding my own interpretation of your verdict. It's like writing one's own blurbs.

In an about face, Herbert was apologetic about "the awful liberty of that [suggested] Comment", saying that he'd been "in trouble for this sort of thing before and hence have become wary of it". He gave three instances – a typical case of his excessive rationalization – of putting words into other people's mouths through interventionist editing. One instance will suffice here. It is ironic that it concerns his old enemy P.R. Stephensen for whom Herbert nursed an undying hate for claiming that he (Stephensen) had edited *Capricornia* so as to make it publishable. This was yet another example of the contradictoriness resulting from Herbert's fear – terror in the case of *Capricornia* – of anything that might question him as *il supremo*. The instance of Herbert's boastful editing:

. . . was while I was working as Editor of PRS (Aust. Book Publishing Co. – which I bankrupted eventually "for the good of Aust. Lit." as I aver). He gave

me a T/S by one Basedow, another medical man, who'd worked in the N.T. and had a rather interesting screed on Aboriginal affairs in his time (he was dead). Inky knew how badly it was written and gave me the job to "straighten it up". I had to rewrite it. I hadn't got far when the doctor's widow called to see how publication was going? Inky somewhat proudly told her he had a "very talented young writer" preparing it for press. She asked to see the T/S, saw, shrieked, snatched the whole thing back, and went to get her script retyped. Inky was wise enough to apologize to me, saying he shouldn't have given the job to one "so talented". Still I hadn't learnt.

Herbert concluded to Hergenhan: "It was distinctly a *faux pas*, worse than that, *effrontery*, *damned effrontery*. My only excuse is that I did it when very tired and in the mood . . . rather like that of a naughty child."

This rationalization proceeded less from sensitivity than from a sense of miscalculation.

It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate here and elsewhere Herbert's self-awareness, including his flaws, though how he reconciled this with his infallibility defies ready explanation. For Herbert, impatient for a reply to his 'retraction', wrote:

I hadn't realised until lately how dependant I've become on you – on your watching me, my work. When I wrote first, in sending the *overland* screed, I hinted at trepidation. The very fact of my sending it for you to send fairly shouted trepidation, surely. That was ten days ago. How can I help but feel I have made a bad mistake, since not having a peep out of you? . . . It isn't that I fear your disapproval. I expect it here and there, perhaps a great deal of it for the rest of the book. My worry is that *you* will be afraid to tell me. That would cancel you out as the essential you are to me, my infallible patron.²

As if sensing that he was projecting his own infallibility, and really expecting back an echo, not a reply, he wrote:

Although the *overland* thing is not the Job, it is in a way connected with it. In fact everything is connected with it, even my life with Sadie. If you dis-

approve of my attitudes in this and that I must take notice. You *could* be wrong . . . I don't regard you as infallible over-all. But I do think you are as dedicated to that Job as I, and hence must have as much say in it as myself. Hence my fear when you are silent at a time of crisis. I imagine you, with rumpled brow, muttering to yourself: "I don't like this, but who am I to tell *him*?" Suppose I were to adopt the same attitude in a different way, saying: "He doesn't like this thing I have done but who is *he* to criticize *me*?"

While Herbert was engaged on the same letter, Hergenhan's reassuring reply arrived. Conceding the latter's wish to make his own comment, Herbert encouraged him to:

handle the whole thing as you wish. All that's important about it to me is as (A) the contribution to our old friend *overland*; (B) public pronouncement of my association with you. Will you do it all as soon as possible, in case McLaren is waiting for it. I now go back to work with a heart again. Ah – I suppose it was useful to discover the depth of my commitment to you.

Herbert's "commitment" was engrossingly to himself through his novel. But this is the norm for artists, and though his solipsism was extreme it would be misleading to see it as sealing him off completely in his own world.

Re-reading 'The Agony and the Joy' one may well believe that Herbert's original idea of publishing an excerpt from his novel would have been much better, for both his career and readers.³ This essay is deeply ambivalent. Typically, he allows his usual compulsion to hoist himself, to play down the loneliness and self-doubt that was supposed to be his real subject but which he merely touches upon. The piece, like many of Herbert's press interviews, and like his conversation and letters, takes an anecdotal form in which any admission of the agony of loneliness is nominal only and is offset by tales of his fortitude in adversity and his power as man and writer. Typically he asserts his credentials as being a hermit: the only such novelist in Australia, and a bushman born and bred, tracking down, or being stalked by, his "mania", "the Australian Ethos", in the territory he had imaginatively made his own: "what used to be called our Empty North",

the Real Australia. Friendless and pissed on by a lot of critics, after *Capricornia* he had struggled unsuccessfully to develop “a flawless technique” for his Opus.

When he does come to admit that after six years’ hard work on this he had been for the first time “afraid as an artist: not about whether he could end it, but whether it was worth ending”, he immediately has to withdraw from this admission. He goes on to refer to Hergenhan’s friendship and the latter’s admiration for *Poor Fellow*, stressing his academic status (miscalculating its influence) and making him an “authority”, who, having read the completed chapters so far, “roared: ‘Get on with it’ while Herbert mumbled weakly, ‘Yessir’, and got out”. This is a parody of what really happened and of his vaunted anti-authoritarianism. The secret of keeping sane to the end, he continued, was to assume the mantle of humility, not that of “kingship” he had donned earlier: “to remain a tyro” and to find support in a dedicated “patron”. Not for Xavier Herbert the man to face “the crushing realities of [his own] life” no matter how he suffered and pored over them. Rather, the compensatory work of the novelist is to recreate “such realities” in worlds of their own, translating the personal into the socio-political. In other words, after his promised heart-to-heart Herbert falls back on the familiar artist’s assertion, ‘seek me in my work’, probably the ultimate if not the most enlightening advice artists can give.

If readers find his defensiveness here unattractive, even pathetic – one reader asserted roundly, the essay “made me sick”⁴ – they might also spare a thought for his thwarted impulse to ask for pity; the urge of one who spent a lifetime preaching freedom and justice to break out of the solitary cage of the “manias” he could not live without, but would forever rail against. As for *Poor Fellow* itself, it must await the test of time to prove whether it is “botch” or a flawed achievement that endures.

Herbert’s brief interchange with the editor of *overland*, Stephen Murray-Smith, after the essay appeared, provides a coda to this story. Typically Herbert had written ungratefully to complain: about the garbling of his treasured *bon mot*, “the one just Sod in Sodom”, to “the one just God in Sodom”; about the “cold” accompanying note to his cheque, and even to a supposed coolness of Murray-Smith at an Adelaide Festival back in 1964. The long-suffering and generous editor replied: “lamentable” about the typo; and

that in Adelaide (“you have a good memory”) perhaps he “had tooth-ache or was worried by some extraneous matter”. He added that he hoped we have a chance to revive, “before we all get too old”, the “happiest memories he and his wife Nita had of that occasion”. As for the rest:

The accompanying note to your cheque was cold, if it was cold, because I’m under great strain at the moment and have had to make the choice between closing *overland* down and handing much of the mechanical work to a secretary. So it was Hilary Newton who sent the cheque and the note, together with about fifty-five other cheques and notes that went out in the same mail.

If Herbert, never satisfied, thought the novelistic representation of other contributors in the *overland* issue was unworthy of his own stature, he nevertheless had the grace to write: “I feel very pleased that they were able to get their fiftieth number out . . . If *overland* goes under it will be a deadly blow to Aust. Lit.”

ENDNOTES

1. Laurie Hergenhan and Frances De Groen, whose biography of Herbert is currently being prepared for publication by UQP, are editing a selection of Herbert’s letters (also to be published by UQP) with the assistance of an ARC grant. Heather Atkinson is the project’s research assistant. I would like to thank both colleagues in the preparation of this essay. The correspondence drawn upon in this essay is selected from that between Herbert and Laurie Hergenhan, held in the Sadie Herbert collection in the Fryer Library, University of Queensland. The one exception is the letter from Stephen Murray-Smith, which along with some other *overland* correspondence is held in the same collection. Those involved in the ‘Letters’ project wish to thank Robyn Sinclair, Herbert’s literary executor, and her agent, Curtis Brown, for permission to quote from Herbert’s correspondence.
2. Hergenhan soon realized that what Herbert needed was moral support and friendship rather than any kind of advice that would substantially change the course of his Opus.
3. Before the novel was published, Harry Heseltine introduced an excerpt in *Meanjin* 34 (1975), pp. 137–49.
4. The late Professor Harold Oliver greeted Hergenhan at a dinner party: “I’ve just been reading about you and Xavier Herbert, and it made me sick. I repeat, it made me sick.”

Laurie Hergenhan is editor of Australian Literary Studies and author of a recent biography of Hartley Grattan.

Ben Goldsmith

Call Yourself a Literary Magazine?

overland and Australian cinema

FROM ITS VERY FIRST ISSUE, *overland* has proudly described itself on its editorial page as “a quarterly literary magazine”. As its subscribers and regular readers will well be aware, *overland* has never been just that. Reviewing the first 149 issues and thinking about a retrospective of *overland*'s coverage of film, I was struck by the depth and breadth of coverage of issues, media and cultural pursuits not obviously included in that modest self-description. For example, enthusiastic support for the efforts of local film and television producers, and regular reports on the state of the local film industry and film culture from correspondents including Cecil Holmes, Phillip Adams, David Baker, Jonathan Dawson, Graeme Turner and Jack Clancy, have been a feature of this publication since the 1950s.

The first contribution on film appeared in issue 6, February 1956. Gerry Grant's spirited and deeply critical review of Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* was strikingly at odds with much contemporary commentary which praised the film's sincerity and visual splendour (a view, incidentally, which has again become popular since the recent release of a remastered print). Grant, by contrast, declared that *Jedda* “peddles the worst kind of racist nonsense” and described the film as “thoroughly bad . . . technically and artistically third rate”. The review's irreverence and candour reflect qualities that for me typify much of the writing on film in *overland* over the years: a preparedness to challenge prevailing wisdom and opinion and to advance particular causes or political standpoints close to the heart of this publication. Grant, for example, premised his review on another of *overland*'s perennial concerns, a desire for social as well as representational justice for indigenous Australians.

Another of *overland*'s earliest film correspondents was the film- and documentary maker Cecil Holmes.

In issue 9, published in April 1957, Holmes wrote an article entitled ‘Unmade Australian Films’ which lumped together the major distributors and exhibition chains and the federal government and blamed them for the dearth of opportunities available to local filmmakers. Holmes had just completed his second feature, a trilogy of short stories connected by their common concerns of labour solidarity and mateship called *Three in One*, but was himself struggling to find a sympathetic distributor. Dreaming of a time in the near future when a quota act requiring that Australian films make up at least 15 per cent of the total screened in cinemas had been introduced and enforced, Holmes imagined reading the trade paper *Film Weekly* in a week which saw *Power Without Glory* break all box-office records, its premiere at the Sydney State Theatre attracting “many leading sporting personalities and politicians, including the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Kenneth Street and Lady Street, Norman Rydge, head of Greater Union theatres, who are releasing the picture, and of course the famous author himself, who was observed modestly moving amongst the multitude and accepting congratulations”. Other films currently in production included a French–Australian co-production of the Ernestine Hill novel *My Love Must Wait*; *The Long Walk*, the story of the epic race between Burke, King, Wills and Stuart; a version of Katharine Prichard's *Coonardoo*; *Love Game*, a romance “set against the background of big tennis”; a quintet of Alan Marshall short stories *How's Andy Going*, starring the author himself; and *Undertow*, a comedy adventure set against the background of surfing and life saving and featuring “a British comedian who plays the part of a migrant initiated into some of the ways of Australian life”. While Holmes' dream was clearly fanciful, his sense that a future Australian industry might rely

heavily on literary works was spot on. And while neither Ernestine Hill's nor Katharine Prichard's novels have yet been filmed (although two silent versions of *The Pioneers* were made in the early decades of the century), Alan Marshall's work has graced the screen via Gillian Armstrong's *The Singer and the Dancer* (1977, based on Marshall's short story 'Old Mrs Bilson') and Ann Turner's *Hammer Over the Anvil* (1994, based on the book of short stories of the same name). And of course there was the ABC-TV serialization of *I Can Jump Puddles*, made in 1981. In addition, a number of films have been made based on the stories of Australian explorers, and the plot for *Undertow* (albeit with a bush rather than a beach setting) sounds remarkably like that of James Gilbert's *Sunstruck*, made in 1972 and starring Welsh comedian Harry Secombe.

The primary aim of Holmes' article was to press the case for the introduction and enforcement of a viable Quota Act to ensure screenings for Australian films. But as he explicitly recognized, such an Act would soon become redundant if current production levels were maintained. Holmes ended his piece with a blunt message:

At the time of writing another of the few available film studios is closing down for lack of work. It is no longer a question of crying wolf about the state of Australian film making. The hard reality of the matter is that our industry has reach [sic] the point of extinction.

I wonder what Holmes might have thought, almost forty years later and almost a quarter century (and around five hundred films) into the revival, reading the words of Ramona Barry who had been asked to comment on recent films:

My face fell when I was told "Oh no, it was *Australian* films we wanted". I had listed only four. "What Australian films?" I thought. I could hardly write an entire article on *The Silver Brumby* now, could I?

"What Australian films?" What Australian films, indeed. Quite an epigraph for the industry, and a huge slap in the face for the thousands of poor bastards who've tried to bring a slice of their sense of themselves, of their Australianness, to the screen, or the thousands more who just happened to be here and

wanted to make films because they love the flicker of light and colour on a screen a hundred feet wide. Nowhere in the rest of her article, a comfortably superficial stroll through recent film history, does Barry recognize or acknowledge that the fact that a large proportion of this country's celluloid output has not made a lasting impression on her is not the fault of the films themselves, but is primarily due to the structure of the distribution and exhibition industries in this country. As Holmes was acutely aware, the reticence of local distributors and exhibitors to handle Australian films, let alone actually put money into their making, was a crucial factor in the absence of local stories on screen after the Second World War (and, indeed, before it). Today a few huge conglomerates retain the ability to determine not only what is shown in cinemas they own or control, but also indirectly what films smaller exhibitors may show and when they may show them. Australian films in general, so the rhetoric goes, are just not good box office. At the end of the day, for those local films lucky enough to be released widely and make some sort of profit, the returns to producers and investors, and subsequently the incentive to back future projects, are minimal.

Thus we return to the fateful dichotomy, the two paths that Australian cinema might follow, which filmies and bureaucrats have been arguing about for decades. In order to secure the financial future of the industry, should Australian films content themselves to be low budget, locally oriented parts of a "poor cinema", where box office failure would matter less, or should we be aiming for a smaller proportion of high budget extravaganzas geared toward an international (or 'mid-Pacific') audience? Keith Connolly in another of *overland's* periodic surveys of the state of the industry (issue 71 [1978]), came down heavily in favour of the former, arguing that:

The benefits to Australia would be far greater – and much less costly – than attempting to match Hollywood at its own game. The prospects of doing that are, anyway, negligible – and who the hell wants to?

On the evidence of the growing expat community soaking up the Californian sunshine, the answer might be 'lots of people, actually'. And given the eagerness of the New South Wales government to

accommodate a local production arm of Rupert Murdoch's Fox Studios to be sited at the old Sydney Showgrounds, that answer might even be 'lots of people in positions of power and influence, actually'. Incidentally, a damning report by the state Auditor-General which strongly criticized the processes leading up to the deal did find, as the state government hoped it would, that the studio would provide a net economic benefit to the state. Yet there remain serious doubts about the local content of the films Fox will produce here, and many within the industry fear that despite a heightened level of activity and employment the particular local character of Australian films which has emerged over the last quarter decade will be lost in the push to make either profitable features tailored broadly to appeal to international audiences and specifically to succeed in America, or formulaic 'Movie of the Week' type offerings designed to fill gaps in the schedules of Fox's satellite television companion companies.

To a large extent it is the structural hindrances alluded to above which have inhibited the progression of Australian film to the status of a national art form, to the point where, as Graeme Turner argued in 1980, "the medium can become more artistically self-conscious and confident, with an Australian-ness that is expressive, as well as observant, of our culture". Five years on, as Turner argued in *overland* 100 (1985), the late 1970s preference for the (often bush-set) period drama, and the aggressive nationalism of early 1980s features like *Gallipoli*, *'Breaker' Morant*, or *The Man from Snowy River*, had given way to films "more diverse in form and content . . . more personal and idiosyncratic . . . more actively involved in the discussion of contemporary Australia". Yet arguably it is only through the exuberant 1990s phenomenon of the "quirky Australian film" (with its darker, late 1990s variant a la *Kiss or Kill*) that our cinema has now reached the point of being not only an internationally recognized distinctive cinema, but, through the work of highly regarded and hugely talented directors, actors, cinematographers, costume designers, visual effects artists, editors, and so on, a national art form (albeit one of which a large proportion of the population are prevented from seeing or from being a part).

Some of the credit for heightening public awareness of and interest in the fate, possibilities and potential of Australian film must go to *overland* and its small band of film writers over the last forty-four years. I hope very much that in the years to come *overland's* coverage of film and related issues will grow, and that we will continue to tap in to the ongoing debates over Australia's cinematic presence. But while we may have pulled back slightly from the brink of extinction which Cecil Holmes warned of in 1957, as the present government's attempts to cut back on funding for federal bodies like the Film Commission and Film Australia almost proved, for all the industry's apparent vitality it is but a small step back to that brink and a smaller one still over the edge of the abyss.

Major articles on Australian Cinema appearing in *overland*:

- Baker, David: 'Hollywood and the Bush', *overland* 41 (1969), pp. 15-17.
- Barry, Ramona: 'Learning to Walk, all Over Again: Recent Australian Cinema in Review', *overland* 135 (1994), pp. 8-10.
- Clancy, Jack: 'The Triumph of Mateship: The Failure of Australian War Films Since 1970', *overland* 105 (1986), pp. 4-10.
- Connolly, Keith: 'Australian Scenes and Scenarios', *overland* 71 (1978), pp. 47-52.
- Dawson, Jonathan: 'Canberra and the Film Industry', *overland* 42 (1969), pp. 11-12.
- Goldsmith, Ben: 'Through Ned Kelly's Helmet, or What are You Looking At? A View of Cinema and Audience in Australia', *overland* 144 (1996), pp. 18-23.
- Grant, Gerry [Joe Joseph]: '*Jedda*', *overland* 6 (1956), pp. 7-8.
- Holmes, Cecil: 'Unmade Australian Films', *overland* 9 (1957), pp. 33-4.
- Lewis, Glen: 'Two Too Honest Films', *overland* 71 (1978), pp. 42-3.
- Turner, Graeme: 'Travel Books in Disguise: The Australian Film and the Australian Novel', *overland* 79 (1980), pp. 19-24.
- Turner, Graeme: 'Our "Dubious Legacy"', *overland* 91 (1983), pp. 38-43.
- Turner, Graeme: 'New Directions in Australian Film', *overland* 100 (1985), pp. 51-6.

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Geoff Goodfellow

Poems for a dead father

Poem for Johnny

There's no more talking
under water
without blowing bubbles
 Captain Hornblower is dead

there's no more
medication
 no more nebulisers
 no more oxygen masks
 no more calling out for Lois
 no more calling out for mum
- John for you
 there's no more pain -
& there's no more oxygen

& life was a gas John
 wasn't it?
well much of it

like the woman you chose
for a life partner after
an eight day romance
 fifty one years plus -
now John that's a gas

John
 you were a good bloke
- & a pest
 no this is not an occasion
for lies or concealment
 the truth of the matter is
- your good
 always outweighed your bad

you gave everyone an even break
John
i can remember a childhood
where you'd often bring home
someone who was hungry
 or homeless -
& we'd share whatever
was needed

you walked it like you
talked it John
 you were never a hypocrite

& through that childhood
around the kitchen table
 you showed us how to
act
 sometimes you'd turn it
into the theatre of the absurd
 but you talked a lot of
sense too
 if you had any air in those
clapped out lungs today
 you'd have likely yelled out
'nonsense'
 you taught us much about
word play

yeah you'd play John
 & you'd play up too -
& it's debatable what you'd
enjoy the most

you knew no shame

i have a very pleasant memory
of you one sunny day in maybe
1965

you'd asked me to meet you
in King William Street outside
a bank at a particular time
i was early & looked each
way continually

'til our eyes met from
over fifty yards

& though the street was
crowded

you shut out everyone
except me

you were stone cold sober
at the time but you still
made a game of it

you crept from hiding
behind one No Parking sign
to the next

to the next –

advancing on me step by step
in your suit & snap brim hat –
oblivious to bending necks

i was a bit embarrassed
for a moment

& then i saw the looks
from some of those watching
eyes

they were children's eyes
in adults' heads
& yeah

you made me realise the value
of play we laughed

i think we always laughed a lot

we laughed back then that we'd
never cremate you

we reckoned that with all the
St Agnes brandy you'd put away
you'd burn a soft blue flame
forever

sort of like the colour
of your eyes

well it's come down to this
John now listen Captain

it's absolute –

we're going to have to put that
to the test.

No Complaints

Three sons

& we were all taught
to shake hands like a man
firmly but not
too hard

the old man would say

"never a wet fish

& don't trust anyone
who'd give you a wet fish"

we didn't kiss the old man
after our tenth birthday

"you're men now & you'll
touch the glove

there's no cows hoofs
in our mob" he'd say

through the last few months
as the cancer was
white anting him

i began to kiss him
on his grey forehead
just below his grey hair

he didn't complain.

Scaled Down

i couldn't believe it
when i saw dad in his
coffin

so small

i said to my brother

"this looks surreal

it's like a film set

& he's been scaled down
to a two third size model

he's so small –

he looks like a leprechaun"

"he is" my brother replied

"he is".

Removed

At the funeral parlour
just before leaving
i leaned into the coffin
kissed the old man
on his forehead
kissed him on the
lips
looked up at his
wife
his third son
his only daughter
his eldest grand-daughter
his eldest grandson
one of his ex son-in-laws & his
eldest son –
& my girlfriend
then reached into the
coffin
unclipped his R.S.L. badge
& withdrew his Tobruk pin
held them in an open palm
gesture to the family
& said
“i’ve got the badges –
who wants to go through
the pockets”.

Johnny's Reply

you should have copped
the turn-out
mum & the kids organised
for me
what a bloody funeral

i'm bugged if i know
how they did it

some of the old bastards
that were there
i hadn't seen for years

& they reckoned i was dead

you should have copped
some of those poor bastards
blokes like myself –
returned blokes
& a lot of the poor bastards
from my unit too
but christ –
most of them looked like
they went to the first
world war
not the last bastard

anyway
i'm here & they're there
so i s'pose they've got
the drop on me in some respects

but it wasn't just seeing
those old bastards
it was some of the other
bastards too that give me
a kick

blokes like Jim Honor
my old parish priest –
i'm bugged if i know
how they organised him
to do the show
he left the parish
bloody near eight years ago
but ah jeez
he's a beauty
wouldn't give you two bob

for the bloke that took
his place
i'm buggered if i'd want
him to do another bloody
baptism on any of my mob
let alone a bloody funeral

& Kevin Fisher
what a bloody great job
he did
anyone who can sing
'Danny Boy'
(and i don't mean
two or three verses
i mean the bloody lot)
well there wasn't a dry eye
in the joint when he
finished
ah those Fisher boys
they're family

& all them hard bastards there
too
Boof Heffernan
Foxy
Jimmy Bavin
Des Pearce
Colin Betty
even Billy Whyte

Billy won the Flyweight title
the night i won the Feather
Monday the third of October
1938
if anyone had spoken about me
out of turn you can imagine
what would have happened
those bastards would've
been fighting one another to see
who was going to knock the
loud-mouth out
not to mention my own boys

it was good to see both Brian
and Mark cold sober
(that's a bloody change)
& the other bastard
the poet –
he whispered to me one night
as he was leaving the hospice

"don't worry Johnny
i'll write a good one for
your funeral"
& the bastard did too –
must've stopped chasing young
sheilas for a few days
course he can thank me –
not for the sheilas mind you
i was married to his mother
for fifty one years
she *was* a good sheila
a *bloody* beauty
but him –
he gets them & he loses them –
& he's had some good ones too
i wouldn't have minded . . .
no no i'm starting to go
off track there
we'll leave that alone

& Anne my eldest
she looked bloody beautiful –
& didn't she look
after her mother on the day
& she didn't do a bad
bloody job looking after me
in the bloody hospice before
i threw the towel in
best bloody visitor
a bloke could have wanted
besides her mother

no i'm proud of the kids
i love them all
they give me a beautiful
send off
it was a bobby dazzler –
four of the best
& mark my words they are
i told them before i pissed off
told them i don't love them
twenty five per cent each
i told them i loved them
all one hundred per cent
bonza kids
mad though
totally fucken mad the lot
of them
but i love them –
& i love their mother too.

A Quiet Spot

A week after the old man
died

i attended the funeral
parlour & said to a man
in a striped coat
"i've come to collect
what's left of Johnny Goodfellow"

he eyed me suspiciously
& gestured for me to take
a seat
trying hard to be solemn

three minutes later he re-
appeared with a package
it looked like it could
have been a 1.5kg pack of OMO
wrapped in brown paper

it had
Goodfellow John James Lawrence
scrawled across the larger faces
in black felt tip pen

i took the package

it was much heavier than OMO

after i'd signed his docket
i was ushered to the door
obviously he was keen to
direct the accounts clerk to
issue the final account

before he could shut the door
i said
"do i need to put a seat belt
around him
i don't want to get pinched"

he wasn't deaf
but he sure was dumb

it was a ten minute drive to
where Johnny used to breathe

midway i suggested to him
that this was the quietest
trip we'd ever had together

i still don't know if i hit
a bump
but the box did nod in
agreement.

Work it Out

I thought the old man was
mad when i was a kid
he'd grab my attention
by saying "hurry slowly"
& i'd say 'wot'

& he'd slow me up ...
repeating his quote
at half the pace

& then he'd snap back -
his forefinger pointing at me
like a .357 magnum
& he'd snarl
"& don't say wot say eh"

i never knew when he was
serious

& it seemed neither did he

'what do you really mean?'
i'd ask him

"life's a crossword puzzle
work it out" he'd say
"work it out".

NOW I RUN CLUMSY like a calf over spinifex over gibber, ironstone underfoot, iron soul unfinished under my skin. Three years I been swallowing wire, like the philosopher of metals Manic of Riga who made he self impervious to time and papal daggers, who accumulated demons to he service. I swallow the fence tailings: long piece short piece; we throw them away as we extend our lives across the spinifex and gibber in a straight line with no forks. You sight along the fence it invisible; at night the plain too invisible. The plain; the line. I'm afraid our lifes they follow the latter. The dingo: he the plainsman, he the immortal. That why all dog the one immortal dog, because he does not know death. I fear the Old Man more than most and that why I will trick him. Me; my iron resolve. Me, like the rude demiurge who thwart time and papal daggers with he wire bone, nerve, sinew, and tongue, and with he wire words. The dingo feet inscribe the plain with indifferent impressions all he life long. But he don't know what he write: he don't remember and he don't hope, and when he, bush-whelped, come to the dog fence it sniff, his nose, it twitch, his ears, it bite

The Fencer's Factotum, 1933

Tom Coverdale

it worry it forget it lay down or howl or chase it tail round and round like wire on the spinner and then it £1 hide hung, it bones cleaned by crows next the rude jaws of the trapper's trap, and it no worse off – or better. That how he life always retract to rusted bones, like wire retract – wire which sing Zenolament one hundred years at the cursed line, and still try broken-back to recoil when you pull it off. Now I cruci-

fied to the Dog Fence by the Old Man. He nearly in Farina by now. – Ostler, he say, Unhitch the quadrupeds, and have them fed and watered before the sun sinks low in the west, for this I will be thankful. He sit at the bar for whisky, tell long story, and thank the Good Lord. He wire my ankles to a dropper, my wrists to the barb strand, and weave me a crown of barb wire; my eyes, my tongue I give to the tap-tapping crow, my feet, my organs fortify the dingo. But two days down the line, stripped to my hide of woven wire, iron soul unfinished, I already gleaming like a new calf over spinifex over gibber. My stride ring ironstone in the Old Man camel-buggy track, my indifferent demons already after with kah-kaahs and clatter of blunt nails.

EVERYBODY WANTS TO BELONG somewhere, which is why I've gotten used to regarding this tunnel as mine. It's on my property and I own it. Now I even own the land it's sitting on. I have my own possessions and the tunnel, the pipe, the hollow inside is mine.

At the high school I used to see kids sitting in the big, concrete pipes dumped on the vacant bit outside the oval but still inside the school gates. I remember how only the racy kids, the cool kids, used the tunnel. In those days I had to stay outside and watch from the other side of the playground.

It mattered who went inside the pipe, whether it was a boy and two girls or vice versa or how many of the same sex. It was usually a mixture or two girls. Boys wouldn't be caught in there alone together.

I was not one of the illegals who got inside the pipe. I watched from across the playground and thought that sometime I would go in. A few years later I did try it, when I was older and there was no one around. But it was just a draughty pipe and it was hard to sit straight in the curve and the concrete felt cold on my bum. I realized you had to have someone in it with you, to make the discomfort worthwhile.

So when I finally got my own place I wanted a tunnel. First I thought it was enough to have my own place, that that was enough enclosed space, enough cubby to crawl into. Then that space became too big. I could hear the night noises of crickets and moving cars and voices from other flats and I wanted to get deeper inside to an untouchable, impenetrable place where I would be safe.

First I made a favourite room in the flat. The room where I could see out but people couldn't see in, unless they specifically wanted to. Like the old coot from upstairs who frightened me when I first moved in by climbing up a ladder to his balcony. I could see the shadow of his body against my window.

Exposure

Ashley
Morgan-Shae

He always wore a sweaty, old, white t-shirt. At night he would sometimes wander past calling, Pussy, Pussy, to Gypsy, a ginger tabby who lived upstairs adjacent to his flat. Sometimes Gypsy's owners would shut her in and he would look up and she would look down and make a show of running a paw against the glass.

I began keeping the blinds closed and the window shut. Then

I built myself a cubby nook with a sheepskin floor and lots of pillows, enclosed by a desk and a table. I would take a book and a lamp and pretend to read there. Actually the book was used as a trigger to spark off an image that I could then just lie and dream of. I would curl into a tight, ankle-to-arse little ball until I got sore and I would wake in dead night. Then, through darkness, I would crawl on all fours to the bed where I would stretch out and dream.

The person I would most like to be or be attached to was a girl from the old high school. She had straight, black hair and a curved nose and high tits and a rounded arse, and she smiled a lot and was with the in-crowd and every guy wanted her. Her name was Joy.

Back then I would be a lookout in the toilet block just so I could sometimes turn and see her on the ground. The room was thick with smoke. I would wait till she finished and said, God, I needed that, then watch her straighten up, fix her undies and her jeans and watch her arse move back to class.

When the cubby wasn't enough, as I always knew it wasn't, I started searching building sites for my own big pipe. A pipe of hard concrete and steel I could try to roll to my place. When I found one it wasn't so easy and I had to get the help of Jack and his forklift and pay him in phone numbers of girls I knew he wanted and ring up and chat to them and hand over the phone to Jack.

I only wanted one tunnel to escape into. One with two ends so if I ever did need to get out the other side

then I could and if I did get out the other side I wouldn't exist. I had gone in but I hadn't come out. What had come out was another being.

Anyway I parked the pipe in my lounge room. But when it got too much, when I kept bumping into it and when I worried about what people would say, I locked it in the bedroom, and then half in the wardrobe. I had to take out all my clothes and make a rail for them, but every night I would creep into my tunnel and dream of Joy. Except when I didn't deserve to stay because I had talked to too many people that day. But that tunnel held my best times and I wanted to deserve them.

After I got out of the place where they sent me to be reformed, the first thing I wanted was my own hole. A woman at the drop-in centre helped me look in the papers and apply at Social Security and get financial assistance and then Jack helped me move my stuff in.

I enrolled in a night class at the uni in philosophy but I couldn't understand a lot of the tables and absolutes and concepts but I still kept on going because after the class in the coffee shop there would be Maria.

She would smile at me and she looked like Joy from school years ago and I even started calling her Joy. I saw her each week and sometimes after I would walk her to her car and once she took me home. Well, I knew what to do in there in her place with the soft pillows and the dusty pink curtain and the wet spot the coffee made when it spilt on the sheet. But I couldn't sleep a wink all night, I felt too exposed. So in the morning I asked her if she would spend a night over my place.

The next week I got there early and she seemed like she didn't have much time but I said I would help her with that carpentry job at her house and she got nicer. All the time I was thinking of that tunnel, my pipe, and having her in there with me, and never being really alone again. By this time I had inherited a house from my mother and moved into it and planted

trees and didn't have to worry about any creepy neighbours with pussy obsessions.

I had buried my tunnel whole near the house and then cut a door in the lounge floor so I could get into it. This made the tunnel have only one entrance. I would go in and come out the same way. And try to straighten my back from the permanent bend it got from being inside.

So anyway Joy came round and the upshot was she said I was crazy and that she was leaving and I got scared she would tell everybody and I kept pulling her back and she kept saying, let me go, and I covered her mouth to stop her from talking so loud and I started telling her Plato's story about the cave and when I finished I let her go and she dropped like a crumbly cookie from my hands and didn't move.

I did my best for her. I wrapped her up, I tried to keep her warm, I said I would marry her. I even handed over my favourite part of the house to her. I called her Joy, Maria, my Love. But in the end we're all alone and nobody belongs nowhere and all we have is our own and she said I was cracked and nobody in their right mind would stay with me. When they really know you they go. When they've used up every little piece of you and they know every secret place and will talk about it to their friends and there's nothing left.

If the light could get to them they would gleam and maybe being so exposed, so shamefully unprotected by their lying flesh, they would say sorry. But I love them so I don't expect that. I cover them with my body and keep them warm. I'm down here in my tunnel, I've gotten hurt by the system and I've gotten out, nobody can ask anything of me. I have my tunnel here in the earth. I have my Joy. When I enter to be with her I feel the tunnel roundness and the hollow clutching ringing around me. I feel the close air, the firm curve and the deafening silence, and I feel the smoothness of white Joy. Then I lay my head on the length of the piled spikes of her bones.

YOU ARE ON YOUR BACK. You seem to be drifting out to sea on calm water. It could be the Dead Sea. There's nothing to say it isn't. You have heard that the salt in the Dead Sea can keep you afloat forever. And that's what you feel you can do now, keep afloat forever. The sensation is strange because although you know you are floating on water, you do not feel the wetness of it. You are not wet. Your face is warm. The sun is behind a thin smooth blanket of cloud which means that you can feel its warmth but not its fire. The sun is how more people should be. This is what you think. But as soon as the thought floats into your mind you let it drift out again, perhaps through your ears which are almost submerged in the sea. Where the idea goes, you do not know or care. Several ideas have drifted away because of your carelessness. Your laziness, your dreaminess.

This cannot be the Dead Sea because you left some people on the shore who will, no doubt, remind you of who you are and where you are, if you ever stop drifting. This morning they stopped in front of your house, sounding a horn and waving their straw hats out of the pale blue car which then took you to the beach. You think of the colour of the car for a fraction of a second before it dissolves into the blue-grey of the thin cloud stretched across the sky. You don't think about the man who drove the car. You have thought of him so often that even his name seems to weigh you down. And here you are, floating and weightless, released from the anchor of his presence. He is somewhere else.

He is on the shore with the woman who is supposed to be his best friend's wife. He is playing a game with her and a game with his friend. They are tired old games which will wash away like sandcastles with the next tide but at the moment they have a sting in them, like hot sand blown into your face by a gust of wind. When you have the chance, you will probably tell his friend to wake up even though the real way out is in the dreaming and not the waking. The real way out is this. Drifting out to a point where the shore is non-existent and games and players have dissolved into the impartial sea.

There are stories about you as a child swimming out too far and nearly drowning. They are dangerous stories. You have been seduced by them. This is easy to see when you re-tell them as you do, too often. You play with the stories, stretching them on a yoyo string and pulling it back sharply when you suspect you are somehow tempting fate. Are you tempting fate now? Some might say you are but, like everything else, it is a matter of per-

ception. It's a bit like believing you are floating on the Dead Sea. Who is to say you aren't? Who is to say you are? Only those on the shore might judge, looking out to the point where your body has become a single dark speck on the sheen of the wa-

ter and shaking their heads with disapproval. But you have left them behind on their own shifting sands while you drift in a separate world and who is to say which of the worlds is the real one?

The strip of cloud above you stretches endlessly, thinning over the disc of the sun. The light is momentarily brighter and hurts your eyes. You try to keep them open, so that they remain filled with sky but the light is like a razor blade so they close, involuntarily, despite your intention to keep them open. Trapped behind your lids are the patterns of the light, arching and dilating, blue and pink and yellow. The lap of water in your ears fills your head with the sound of your aloneness.

On the shore someone has called out your name. The call is like the squawk of a seagull, harsh and penetrating. Nevertheless your name dissolves and blows away with a cool cross-breeze which has skimmed the shallow water near the beach and sent a shiver through your companions who have begun to think of going home. "She can't hear you," the woman is saying and she is right. Your ears are filled with lapping water and their function has changed. Hearing has become a different thing and when you open your eyes again, so has seeing. The cloud has become dense and low. It seems to be settling on the water and because you are somewhere between being in the water and out of the water, it seems to be settling around you and on you. It is particularly heavy on your eyelids which have closed again, but not against the light. They have closed in something like a gesture of acceptance. They have closed without trapping anything of light or colour. There are no kaleidoscopic patterns playing behind your eyelids, there is no light. There is only the thick mist of the cloud, inside and out. There is nothing more to see and nothing more to hear. You have accepted this and you drift on. Perhaps this is the Dead Sea and you will drift forever.

Drifting

Olga Pavlinova

THE SKIN OF THE GIRL behind the register changes colour when the couple enter her queue. It begins as scratch marks at the side of her neck, and advances like an incoming tide, until she is drowned to her hairline. The elderly woman she is serving pauses from her methodical unloading of tinned food and comments on the change of colour. She thinks it is the heat. "I don't notice it myself. I always feel cold," she says. The girl behind the register wishes she only felt the cold and pushes back her sleeves. She hopes she can't be read.

Three

L.M. Robinson

The couple haven't noticed her. Their eyes are full of streaks of celebrities that catwalk in and out of a glossy magazine he holds in his hands. She comments on the paper faces and watches carefully for his response. This is an old and dangerous game she likes to play to test his love for her. She

says to him in what she thinks is a throwaway tone, "You've got to be joking, she looks like a Barbie doll!" and drops her bottom lip at the subtle flash of admiration that moves through his eyes. She turns the page quickly so it doesn't imprint.

But often she has said, "Women will always be more beautiful than men," then taken the picture and consumed it with an appetite that would make him embarrassed.

This is her part in the game. She never notices the men and their musk that draws readers to their paper faces. She doesn't like to hurt him. Instead she looks for his approval in the faces with the dark hair, or eyes that tilt up in the corners like her own. She doesn't like to hurt him.

The girl behind the register doesn't get hurt. She never reads the magazines. She only gets embarrassed.

The girl behind the register claws her way back to her lightly tanned skin with a steady stream of tins and boxes of cereal, and breaths she pulls from the pit of her abdomen. She practices a dialogue, a spell against blushing tides, and out of the corner of her

eye checks the couple's advance to the autobelt. She has never seen the girl before and is captivated by her unkempt hair and mahogany eyes. She thinks of his fingers, like smoke-drunk bees, resting in the dark tangles, and of their faces so close he can read the stories embedded in the small open pores around her nose and on her cheeks. She is pulled back through time by the thought and remembers:

You have such beautiful hair. I love girls who have thick, long hair like yours.

The thought gives birth to new tides whose watermark cannot be read.

Then something happens, words perhaps, or a movement across the eyes. The couple have become silent and sulky, and the language they now speak is more pure and legible. They stand apart. Unsettled. The hard ball of her shoulder is rolled away from him, like it has been for so many nights he can't remember, and her eyes stare at the ceiling. He is trying to catch the reasons for her coldness, and wonders if it is something he already knows. He is saying:

I feel the breath of your thoughts, I can smell them.

But they melt from his grasp before articulation, and he is left with nothing but this great space, and the bite of the memory of the white sheet desert that for night after night has spanned between them. His mind turns back time like pages, and he sees her as he first did, not the cold mouse, the nest of hair, the little windows of flesh glimpsed through silverfish holes in her black stockings, and the predatory eyes that never rested, always ready to suck up and seduce a glance from a room. A flirt. A something wanted. He cannot blame himself.

His pupils shift to the corners of his eyes as if to catch her in the act of who she was. She swings the plastic shopping basket from hand to hand like a ball at the mercy of someone's nervous energy, unaware that he is watching. Her eyes are now fixed on the wire racks behind the service desk, and she doesn't seem to notice the occasional face that turns her way in admiration. She hunches her shoulders and hides in her hair. She is saying to him:

Keep away from me! I don't want your licks or nips or fumbling night hands,

*fumbling like so many tentacles. I don't want this
poor flesh love, with nothing
to separate it from cats rutting or dogs on a lawn.*

Every day she curls further away from him and into the dark places she has no name for. She has searched for the source of this coldness, travelled up the dark rivers of memory for something she may have forgotten, even questioned the burning she thinks she feels for him, but finds nothing. She loves him. She knows she does. She says it over and over:

*Never leave me. I couldn't live without what you
give me,*

but nonetheless, the wall of shoulder in the mornings, the exhausted, uninterested breath at night.

The girl behind the register knows all of this. Perhaps she has used it for her own ends. She doesn't like to believe it but for a moment turns gooseflesh with the possibility. She hopes he doesn't notice.

The couple begin to unload the goods from the basket onto the auto belt. He has barely removed anything when he looks up and notices the girl behind the register. Their eyes lock.

Can she see anything?

And somewhere, in his dark places, he hopes the girl beside him can.

The girl behind the register feels the creeping of the tide creeping up her neck again. She concentrates on the coolness of the coins in her hand. She has always managed to avoid this.

Can she see anything?

But the girl behind the register chooses not to look.

He wants something else from the moment. He cannot help himself. He wants to find the answers that the girl beside him can't, wants the few whys left in his life neatly tied up and put away.

Answers. Dare he say it? Punishment for the empty armed nights. He cannot help himself.

"Hello Em," he says, to the girl behind the register.

The girl beside him looks up. He snaps to attention and, yes, he thinks he catches it. A hunted look. Perhaps a stain of something redder. Something more difficult.

Who's fault is this?

The girl beside him feels his glances sucking at her skin. She feels a riot of words without structure or sound filling up her head like air in a balloon. She knows. How can you not? Both of them wear it like a garment. Suddenly, so many things to think about, herself, him, this unknown face, and if this is the reason for all this distance and space between them. Can you know a thing like this without words said?

The girl behind the register fumbles. Such cruelty. Coins and composure fall to the floor and she hurries to her knees after them, telling more than she promised she ever would. When she rises she brings with her a new face, something she hopes is impenetrable. She concentrates on the small, square buttons in an effort to keep this face in place, but the girl has teased her curiosity. She feels her eyes move as if bewitched.

Can she see anything?

But of course she can. Her hands, like wounded doves, flutter through her hair, and her skin burns like ripe peaches. She is speechless.

He scans the face of the girl beside him like a grazer scans the horizon for rain. An unrecognizable voice inside him finds a new why that makes him despise himself. He watches her snap open her purse and hand the girl behind the register a \$20 bill. No hoarse voices or angry tears of accusation. Her hands are shaking, embarrassed. "And this is what I've made her," he thinks. The girl behind the register takes it and tries to catch the girl's glance. She doesn't look at him. She doesn't have that kind of cruelty. The girl averts her eyes and says nothing with her mouth. They listen to her body. She seems to be saying:

This poor flesh love.

As he picks up the plastic bags at the end of the register, he bites at the girl behind the register's glance, hungry to read it. The girl behind the register doesn't bite back. She is sick with tides.

The girl who is with him walks away.

COLLEEN DOES THE night shift. The long black roads she walks are funnels for wind and dust. Papers eddy and swirl, clutch at her legs like hands, trying to drag her under with their weight of unwanted information. But Colleen walks on, through the pools of street light, through the blue night. She sniffs after the scent of other people's dreams like a junkie.

It is late. Night lies over the suburbs like a blanket. Here and there the blue of cathode flickers like an epileptic but elsewhere the night is drugged by sleep.

Women and men spooned together, children tossing lightly. Innocence is born of darkness and dies in the harsh slap of daylight. This is what Colleen believes. She will not venture outside in the light of day. But the night is hers. She is guardian, recorder.

Here she stops. Straddles a fence

awkwardly. Presses her face to a window. Holds her breath so not to fog the glass. Darkness recedes slowly. Coalesces. A living room. Toys are scattered across the floor, pencils spill, splashing colour on a dull rug. The chair cushions are crooked. Coffee cups are marooned in a sea of paper. Colleen smiles, interpreting the signs. Discerning patterns.

She turns away. Sidles around the house noiselessly. Here a study, black lump of computer on a grey desk. She passes by. Here the bedroom. A cocoon. Clothes draped carelessly across a chair back. The bed is a cradle, the palm of a hand holding an indeterminate shape. Look long enough and you can make out the rise and fall of breath. And there, on the pillows, three heads. The mother turning inwards, hair like water rippling across the pillow.

The father turning outwards, huddling carefully near the edge. And in the middle the child. Mother, father, child. The holy trinity.

Suddenly the window pane burns like dry ice. Colleen pulls away, staggers. Her stomach bunched like a

fist. But she will not hate. She will not. She returns to the street. Takes out her journal and records what she has seen. "Proof that joy is possible," she writes.

And then she goes back to work. She takes a piece of paper from the trolley, prods it into the letterbox and moves on. Takes another piece of paper, prods it into the next box. What is she delivering tonight? What promise of fulfilment punctuated by dollar signs? What enticement to spend in the guise of a sale? What mathematical equation inextricably binding happiness with material wealth? She doesn't care. If people want to believe it, that is not her problem.

Somewhere there is the screech of tyres. She holds her breath. Headlights cleave the darkness. She is like a roo, frozen, immobile, vulnerable. Until the deafening roar of engine has passed, receded into the distance. And the shattered silence has pieced itself together again. Then she continues, shakily. Warily.

She comes to another house. Enters through a creaking gate. Through a garden redolent with perfume. Under her feet the earth is soft, accepting her footprint like a gift. She smells lavender. Breaks a piece off and crushes it between her palms, inhaling deeply.

She moves to a window. A kitchen. Polished floorboards and spices arranged on pine shelves. A mortar and pestle, herbs growing in little pots. A fruit bowl on the table. A bunch of grapes, waiting to be eaten. Teeth breaking the delicate skin, a burst of sweetness, the pulp sliding down the throat. She closes her eyes and sees a couple sharing breakfast. Inhales the hot, astringent smell of brewing coffee. A newspaper is spread on the table. The couple read; he the sports section, she the world news. But their legs rub against each other, entwine softly. The clock ticks unheard.

She takes out her journal. Records what she has seen. She must convince herself that happiness exists, that it is tangible, concrete. That it isn't fleeting, illusory, swept away by something as random and senseless as ... But she will not think about it. Cannot. She wonders vaguely if she might be mad. It is a pointless question.

She goes back to the street. The trolley squeaks plaintively as she continues. She takes a piece of paper and prods it into a letter box. Takes another piece and prods it into the next box. On and on down the quiet, blue, dreaming streets. Until daylight chases her back into her own particular darkness.

Her Own Particular Darkness

A. N. Munro

Linda Westphalen

Betraying History for Pleasure and Profit

Leon Carmen's *My Own Sweet Time*

IN 1994, MAGABALA BOOKS published *My Own Sweet Time*,¹ a book supposedly by an Aboriginal woman called Wanda Koolmatrie, who was born in Pitjantjara lands in the north of South Australia in 1949. Removed from her mother and raised by foster parents in Adelaide, Wanda left for the eastern states in 1966. She married Frank Koolmatrie (now dead), travelled extensively and made a living from writing song lyrics. Conveniently, Wanda now lives in London, far away from her home, the press and her reading public.

In the same year, I was one year into my PhD thesis, trawling around for autobiographical writing by Aboriginal women. I hadn't been able to find any texts by Aboriginal women in South Australia, a disappointment for me, because South Australia is my home state, and I wanted to find out something of what had happened here.

In 1997, as I wrote this, the Melbourne Reconciliation Convention and the Stolen Generation Report had entered into the public record. On a more personal note, the Blackwood Reconciliation Group, of which I am a member, helped to organize a reunion for the ex-residents of Colebrook Home, most of whom were removed from their families in Pitjantjara Lands while they were infants. Eventually, then, I did learn something of Aboriginal experiences of being stolen in South Australia. But I didn't learn from Wanda. It turned out that 'she' had nothing much to tell me, at least not from the perspective of history.

I have a card in the front of *My Own Sweet Time* which states: "Interesting for what it doesn't say: a removed child who doesn't follow up her curiosity. No political awareness. Politically correct hippy-dom". I wrote this in 1994. In the draft of my first chapter, recently reviewed interstate, I noted that Koolmatrie's text was unique because it had "little or no Aboriginal style elements". I was admonished for being pa-

tronizing to Aboriginal people, something I was and am anxious not to do. I now find this comment somewhat ironic.

What I meant was that the style was wrong somehow. It was a funny book, a clever book, even an interesting book, but it didn't strike me as 'Aboriginal', whatever that is. I assumed that its language and content were unusual, reflecting Wanda. I didn't realize that the book was actually by a non-Aboriginal man, Leon Carmen, busily appropriating his perception of another culture because he couldn't get published in his own. This point is worthy of expansion: Carmen cashed in on the enormous influx of Aboriginal women's writing which has occurred since the bicentenary. He not only perpetuated a lie, in that he masqueraded as an Aboriginal woman, but he misrepresented Aboriginal experience, writing a story which in neither content nor style made sense to me as a reader and student of Aboriginal writing. This is what I meant when I said that the book was 'wrong'.

What Carmen has done is morally suspect from two perspectives. First, he appropriated Aboriginal and Australian history, recasting it to suit artistic and material ends. Carmen wanted to be published; he did not much care how. Second, he created Wanda Koolmatrie and gave her a life so improbable that it caused real hurt to Aboriginal people in their struggle for recognition of past wrongs. It enabled the punters to say, 'See, Wanda was taken away, and she turned out alright ...'

Aboriginal autobiographical writing is, as Ruby Langford Ginibi puts it, "telling history from the Aboriginal side of the fence".² This has become one of many functions of texts about indigenous experience. *Bringing Them Home* (the Stolen Generation Report) used case histories as the basis for its recommendations, which include the provision for ongoing testimonies.³ Recognizing the wrongs of the past is central

to reconciliation, and, on a personal level, fundamental to Aboriginal people's healing. Anyone reading Wanda's story would think that there is little to apologize for and nothing to heal.

Despite the postmodern concern with the rubberiness of 'truth', the fictive qualities of autobiographical writing and the questionable non-existence of the author, it is clear that autobiography can't be dismissed as fiction, with nothing to contribute to discussions about colonialism, invasion history or Aboriginal identity. David McCooey notes:

To argue the historical nature of autobiography is not to ignore the constituting nature of knowledge, nor other key concepts of deconstruction, such as that textual meaning can never be totalized; indeed, such concepts are related to modern concepts of historiography and they do not . . . make concepts such as reference and meaning redundant.⁴

He makes a case for autobiography to operate both within historical discourses and in postmodern theory. It is also important to point out that Aboriginal people consider their writing to be part of historical discourses. Ruby Langford Ginibi states:

I want to store all this knowledge about my mob here so that we *don't get left out of the next lot of history* . . . I'm not interested in writing fiction . . . I'm too busy writing the truth about my people . . .⁵

The reporting of their experiences functions to reclaim indigenous knowledge, re-establish links between families, instigate processes of psychological and spiritual healing and affirms Aboriginal identity. *My Own Sweet Time* runs counter to all these aims, and more, it damages non-indigenous readers' trust in accounts of Aboriginal life.

Apart from a schoolboy bully, difficulty in getting a room in a cheap hotel and a few odd looks, Wanda seems untouched by racism. Her blackness is seen as a 'misdemeanour', but her dark skin and hippie-torn jeans don't attract much comment. She has no problems getting served at a local pub, an impossibility for an Aboriginal person in Melbourne in the 1960s. When Wanda is reminded of her blackness, she faces the racism stoically, even cheerfully. For most Aboriginal people, racism is a constant grind which needs opposing; Wanda barely registers its effects.

A teenager in the sixties, one of the most volatile periods in Aboriginal political activism, Wanda is oblivious to Charles Perkins' 'Freedom Ride Bus Tour' in 1965, the 1967 referendum, the land claims and strikes for equal pay. She has more idea of anti-Vietnam activism which reflects a non-Aboriginal view of history. People write about what they know: it seems Leon Carmen didn't do much homework or research on his topic. If he had, he would, perhaps, have presented Wanda as a woman engaging with the debate about land rights or citizenship rights, or with a deeply felt consciousness as an Aboriginal woman in search of her past. Aboriginal existence is necessarily political, whether in institutional or non-institutional domains. The public debate with which they engage both rebounds on and reflects a private pain. Wanda should be a lost soul: she has no connections with her land, with her people or with her culture.

Equally improbably, Wanda is a free agent in her travels. Given the enormous intervention that the government and its various institutions saw fit to impose on Aboriginal people's lives, this is surprising. She is never asked to justify herself, defend her actions or account for her movements. She never nods to a policeman in an era (sadly, not yet past) when an Aboriginal person could be stopped by the police because there was a robbery a couple of miles away.

She has no curiosity about her Pitjantjara mother and makes no attempt to re-establish contact with her. Given the deeply felt need for the adopted to connect with their biological parents, this is almost unheard of. Wanda does not weep for her lost family; she is not angry at the government policies of assimilation which 'necessitated' her removal. In this respect, she is an emotional vacuum.

Carmen doesn't even allow Aboriginal people any independence. Wanda's mother is likely to have wanted to see her child. Other Aboriginal people are likely to have tried to find out who she was in the vastly complex and far-reaching Aboriginal family link. Wanda has nothing to do with any other Aboriginal people in the book. And they have nothing to do with her.

Wanda has a fleeting consciousness of her identity as Aboriginal (calling them "My People"), but this has no outlet in activity which would act to cement this sense of unity. 'My People' do not exist as 'real' people beyond Wanda's perception: her 'ownership' of them is the most subtle kind of appropriation. One

could argue that she is no more Aboriginal than I am, since she is not recognized by any Aboriginal community and identifies as Aboriginal only by virtue of her black skin. She does not pursue Aboriginal culture, nor does she bemoan its loss or compensate for this pain in substance abuse or psychological illness or antisocial behaviour as so often tragically happens. She is not even a little bit depressed. Wanda is like Pollyanna; her approach to life is almost nauseatingly positive.

I know of no Aboriginal people who have no yearning to connect with their culture or who don't work to preserve what little culture is left, or who don't deplore the loss of culture in the young. In this respect, we could call Wanda a triumph of assimilation and this is where Leon Carmen does his worst.

My Own Sweet Time perpetuates a lie that children stolen from their parents were/are content with their dislocation. They are, like Wanda, exempt from anger, despair, pain, yearning or futility. They are perfectly happy. The reality is that even children from the stolen generation who find their families again rarely recover from the crisis of identity and fracturing of their selfhood which assimilation policy forced on them. They are desperately alone, frightened and unhappy, sometimes unable to even speak with their families because they no longer share a common language. Yet Leon Carmen, in a re-write of history from the perspective of an ill-informed member of the majority, colonizing culture draws a curtain over that inconvenient and unsavoury part of our history.

I would like to think that he didn't know the damage he would cause when this book was read in schools.

Carmen presents a superficial and inconsistent view of Aboriginal life, displaying his failure to connect imaginatively with Aboriginal experience. I doubt whether he has any Aboriginal friends. He certainly doesn't know much about Australian history or read any texts by Aboriginal women. If he had, he surely would have turned Wanda's life into what nearly all Aboriginal lives are; a constant struggle for land, autonomy, culture, recognition and respect. Perhaps if he had, *My Own Sweet Time* would have been a more effective lie.

From the perspective of content, Carmen's text is hopelessly flawed. I would suggest that this is also reflected in the style of the writing. Generalizations about what is or isn't an Aboriginal writing style are invariably inaccurate and patronizing. While I hesitate to define any style of writing as essentially 'Aboriginal', I suggest that there are forms of language use which Aboriginal women favour. So far as autobiographical writing goes, Aboriginal women seem to prefer direct language, reporting what happened and what they felt about it without calling on symbolic images. This may be due to the type of education they received (many are self-taught), or due to a cultural need to emphasise events and experiences.

**Aboriginal
autobiographical
writing is, as Ruby
Langford Ginibi puts
it, "telling history
from the Aboriginal
side of the fence".**

When I'd first rumbled out of Adelaide four years earlier I'd been wide-eyed and gasping, with my tuppence ready. You could have sold me falcon's teeth and plastic jade. I was in the market, couldn't wait to scramble onto all the rides. I hadn't needed a lot to have my head spun round.

An Asian supermarket maybe, or a car parked crookedly on a teeming footpath. Nonchalance and vigour rubbing shoulders. Nothing much in themselves of course, but stuff that couldn't happen in the world I'd known previously, the world of dusty prudence and prohibition.⁶

Aboriginal writers rarely use this type of metaphorical writing. Evelyn Crawford, Glenys Ward, Alice Nannup or Ruby Langford Ginibi would never have written about a "world of dusty prudence and prohibition"; they write in a conversational style, as if the reader is a listener, and they tell them the home-truths of their hard lives. This comes from the fact that Aboriginal autobiographies are conceived orally and are often transcribed from audio tapes by another person who may or may not be Aboriginal. The oral nature of story-telling is part of the ancient culture of passing stories from one generation to another. But perhaps I am forgetting that Carmen's image is of a completely assimilated woman.

Aboriginal writers tend not to hide behind tumbling metaphors, perhaps because their stories are too important and pragmatic for such frivolities. The only exception is when Aboriginal people speak or write

about their land, when it is common for images of it and the Dreaming ancestors who created it, to have a spiritual and symbolic dimension beyond the comprehension of most non-Aboriginal readers. For example, Ruby Langford Ginibi's yearning to return to her 'belongin' place in *My Bundjalung People* is a statement about her belonging to the land and her need to return to her roots.⁷ When Alice Nannup returns to her land after decades of absence in *When the Pelican Laughed*, her one regret is that she wished she'd asked "Noel to give me a handful of soil, so I could have held it tightly ..."⁸

In addition, Wanda doesn't use any Aboriginal English or any Aboriginal word constructions. Her choice of words would probably have made many Aboriginal people shout 'coconut' and tell her off for 'talking rub-bish'. But then, she's an assimilated person.

My Own Sweet Time is not only not a story by an Aboriginal person, it's not even a story about an Aboriginal person. It's about a young woman in the 1960s who travels from Adelaide to Melbourne and then to Sydney. Coincidentally, she has a funny skin condition which makes people stare. Ironically, it seems that Wanda had reason to hide.

That nobody in Magabala books noticed the odd style, or remarked on the curious absence of Wanda, or her relatives, in Aboriginal recollection could perhaps be put down to Wanda's residence in London, her status as a removed child, and/or the death of her partner, Frank. However, surely the alarm bell must have rung for someone at Magabala when none of the Ngarrindjeri knew of her or Frank (Koolmatrice is a Ngarrindjeri name derived from Kulmaterie or Kulmatintjeri)⁹ and when she failed to show up to get her Nita May Dobbie award.

Sue Hosking writes that:

Leon Carmen has betrayed the trust of his publishers, of taxpayers who support his publishers through government funding, and of readers who look to Magabala books to increase their awareness of the diverse indigenous presence in Australia. Most of all, however, he has betrayed Aboriginal people who accepted *My Own Sweet Time* as a version of contemporary Aboriginal experience written by someone who knew and worked through the trauma of displacement.¹⁰

While I agree with Hosking's litany of Carmen's betrayals, I suggest that the "trauma of displacement" is not so easily discarded. I would also add that Carmen has betrayed Aboriginal people's sense of the recasting of history. Just when it seemed that the subjugated knowledge around the effects of colonization was being recognized and dealt with, Carmen spouts the old testament, as uttered by the prophets Blainey, Partington and Herron: Aboriginal people benefited from assimilation.

Carmen's text is more than a literary fraud. It gives those who are unfamiliar with Wanda's identity an excuse not to confront the past, their own privilege or complicity in the racism which now peppers political discourse in Australia. I have no time for 'black armband' views of history; reconciliation is not about guilt, but the recognition of collective responsibility for physical and cultural genocide. So far as *My Own Sweet Time* is concerned, I only hope that it's obvious, even to the most Hansonesque, that Aboriginal people know their history better than a non-Aboriginal taxi driver from Adelaide.

ENDNOTES

1. Leon Carmen (writing as 'Wanda Koolmatrice'), *My Own Sweet Time*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1994.
2. Dorothy Illing, 'Taking Back Your History'. *Campus Review*, 4-10 August 1994, pp. 1-2.
3. *Bringing Them Home: A guide to the findings and recommendations of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997.
4. David McCooey, *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography*, CUP, Melbourne, 1996, p. 8.
5. Janine Little, 'Talking with Ruby Langford Ginibi'. *Hecate*, 20: 1, 1994, pp. 108-9.
6. Carmen, p. 169.
7. Ruby Langford Ginibi, *My Bundjalung People*, UQP, St Lucia, 1994, p. 1.
8. Alice Nannup (with Stephen Kinnane & Lauren Marsh), *When the Pelican Laughed*, FACP, South Fremantle, 1992, p. 223.
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Stephen Gray

Black Skeletons in a White Man's Cupboard

White Men, Aboriginal Women and the Stolen Generation

WERE THEY MONSTERS, the people responsible for the 'stolen generation' policies that separated Aboriginal children from their parents from the 1930s until the 1960s? Or were they ordinary human beings believing that what they did was in the best tradition of 'smoothing the dying pillow'? The 'Stolen Generation' report, with its allegations of 'genocide', should have unleashed a bout of national introspection about policies and motivations comparable to that unleashed in Germany following the Second World War. It would have done, in a country less practised at shoving skeletons in the cupboard.

Non-Aboriginal responsibility is personal as well as institutional. Like many people who head up north, I came to Darwin with a curiosity about Aboriginal people and a desire to know more about the relations between Aboriginal and white societies. Yet the most revealing single comment came, strangely, before I left Melbourne. It came from a relative of my grandparents' generation who had never, so far as I know, consciously hurt a living soul, and who, among the usual exhortations not to forget sun-tan cream and mossie repellent on the long car-trip, had a piece of advice for me about the dangers of the road. "If you run over any b****s on your way up," she told me, "just keep going."

Such remarks were not always as shocking as they are now. Nevertheless I thought seriously about not including it in this article. I chose to do so firstly because it was made by a woman who had led a relatively sheltered and conventional life for her time: and secondly because I recognize that the attitudes which lie behind such comments have in some form been passed down to me. It is tempting to think that it was 'they' – the squatters, troopers, outlaws, politicians – who did the damage to Aboriginal people, and to ignore the extent of general, public and individual non-Aboriginal complicity.

I believe that non-Aboriginal Australian people knew what happened on the frontier. They knew, in just the same way that ordinary Germans 'knew' what was happening to Jews in 1930s Germany. This is not to say that every individual had positive, first-hand knowledge. But the existence of Aboriginal or 'part-Aboriginal' children scattered throughout certain elements of non-Aboriginal society – in missions, in institutions, or as domestic servants – was part of common, unspoken knowledge. It must have been also part of common, unspoken knowledge that rape and sexual misconduct by white men gave rise to many of these children – unless white middle-class society was as ignorant of the facts of procreation as anthropologists claimed the 'savages' to be. This knowledge, the physical reminders of white men's guilt, had to be suppressed. It was suppressed brutally if necessary, or else by use of the more archaic and arcane elements of the criminal law.

One instance of such suppression was the 1936 criminal libel trial of a white newspaper editor, Charles Priest.

CHARLES PRIEST WAS an outsider. He was self-educated, a 'misfit' in his own words, a communist for a time but somebody who could never fit within any political ideology for long. As a young man of twenty-two he "jumped the rattler" on a railway freight car from New South Wales and headed up north. Like many thousands of others during the depression he was unemployed, attracted by the promises of work and possible wealth which drew so many others to the northern frontier. But Priest took an unusual course. Not long after his arrival he left Darwin on a possum-skinning venture on Melville Island. He lived with the Islanders and developed his self-styled "deterministic" philosophy of life. When he returned to Darwin he decided to find ways of pub-

licizing what he termed the Aboriginal 'cause'.

Darwin at the time stood truly on the frontier of Anglo-Aboriginal relations. Its sixteen hundred non-Aboriginal inhabitants (Aboriginal people were not counted in population figures) were isolated by a two-week boat journey from southern Australia. The colonial necessity to uphold conventional dress standards isolated men from women. Middle-class people, especially women, regularly took refuge in the south as the hotter build-up season approached. Darwin was in a sense a reflection of what the Australian colonies had been eighty to a hundred years before. But there was one important difference. The telegraph line and the existence of southern newspapers meant that the town was exposed to public gaze. Its white inhabitants, particularly representatives of the 'establishment', had to deal with two sets of social standards. Like true scions of the British Empire, they evolved peculiarly hypocritical values to cope.

Priest's 'publicity' for the Aboriginal cause quickly brought him into conflict with these values. As editor of the left-wing *Northern Voice*, he began in 1933 by printing a report of a prosecution for a fatal 'assault' by a Constable Stott upon an Aboriginal woman in the Borroloola district.¹ Through this report he first came to the attention of the infamous Justice Wells of the Northern Territory Supreme Court. Wells regarded Stott's prosecution as having been politically motivated. At the end of the trial Wells, remarking "Stott, you have my sympathy", advised the worthy constable that he might sue for defamation – a valuable piece of advice, since as the sole Supreme Court judge Justice Wells would naturally preside over the trial.

In August 1934 Priest published a 'special supplement' to the *Proletarian*. It contained an account of the Tuckiar trial. This trial, of an Aboriginal man for the murder of a police constable in Arnhem Land, was a blatant cover-up by the Northern Territory authorities. Evidence of Aboriginal witnesses was suppressed by the prosecution. Tuckiar made two confessions, one of which was to the effect that he had caught the police constable in the act of raping one of his wives. This confession, which could have led to his conviction for manslaughter only, was disbelieved even by Tuckiar's own counsel and not reported by the press. Priest's report was the only press version of the trial which recounted this crucial piece of evidence. He circulated his 'special supplement' down south, and it must have added to the pressure

which led to Tuckiar's successful appeal to the High Court – although, in a typical piece of frontier justice, Tuckiar himself 'disappeared' shortly after his release.

Priest's role in these affairs did not make him anybody's hero. He encountered, not unexpectedly, the hostility of the establishment. There were threats by more complaisant journalists to make him "very sorry for his blazing indiscretion, and [he] will not be permitted an opportunity to offend again".² Even Darwin's communist leaders were hostile to Priest's idiosyncratic use of the party organ. Priest was expelled from the Communist Party in early 1935. Priest was something of a 'loose cannon': egotistical, idiosyncratic, but at the same time fiercely committed to the causes he espoused. But it was these very qualities which made him one of the few people prepared to break the hypocritical silence surrounding the practices of white men towards Aboriginal women.

Priest's next foray into these troubled waters was contained in a self-published pamphlet distributed in early June, 1936. Entitled *Administration Attempts to Hush Up Case of Constable Accused [sic] of Rape*, the pamphlet alleged that a white police officer, George Don, had raped an Aboriginal woman named Alice Mindil. Priest's pamphlet contained a signed and witnessed statement which he had obtained from her, together with allegations that the Administrator, Weddell, had suppressed evidence of the charge.

The circumstances of the allegation were these. The rape allegedly took place on 13 May 1936, when Alice had been working as a housemaid at Constable Don's home for about three weeks. Don's wife and their child went out, leaving Alice and Don alone in the house. Don approached Alice in the kitchen, smiling at her and saying "Come here". Alice ran out of the kitchen and tried to escape, but Don caught her and dragged her into the children's playroom, where the rape allegedly took place.

Alice then left the house and walked out to the two-and-a-half mile camp, where she and her commonlaw husband Smiler Fejo lived. Smiler and his brother took her to see a Sergeant Koop. Koop interviewed all three, took from Alice the clothing she had been wearing that day, then drove her home. It was only when the Aboriginal victims heard nothing further from the police that they went to seek help from Priest.

Priest by this time had a well-developed hatred of the establishment. He had been in jail for vagrancy and public order offences several times, and had taken

part in the well-publicized 'communist' occupation of the Administrator's verandah in 1931. It is significant, therefore, that Priest was by no means whole-hearted in his support for Alice Mindil. He published the pamphlet – taking care, as he claims in his self-published autobiography, not to claim that the police officer had actually raped the woman – but he did so with considerable moral disquiet. He claims that he was:

confronted with what could legitimately be called a moral dilemma. I could right one wrong, but only at the expense of injuring one or more innocent parties. Could it have been put in such black and white terms I would have preferred to protect the innocent even though the guilty went free, because I had long since lost my respect for the law. But I was still a communist at heart . . .³

Why, then, did Priest publish the allegations? His previous success, his natural sympathy with the outsider and his journalist's instinct seem temporarily to have prevailed. But it was not long before he began to realize the strength of the forces against him. In publishing the Tuckiar story, as well as that involving Constable Stott, he was on unassailable ground: he had a complete defence to a libel charge, that of reporting evidence given in court. Alice Mindil's case, on the other hand, could scarcely have been weaker. It involved the uncorroborated evidence in a rape charge of an Aboriginal woman – Aboriginal evidence having only just begun to be accepted in court – and a woman who, moreover, had taken the unwise step of trusting her complaint to the police. Priest was committed for trial before Justice Wells on a charge of criminal libel of Constable Don.

Priest approached the Communist Party in the hope of finding money for his defence. They refused. He was forced to defend himself, employing for the purpose a copy of *Chambers Encyclopaedia* which he had discovered in the town library. He discovered that a criminal libel had to be something which, amongst other things, is likely to provoke a breach of the peace. Constable Don had also clearly been apprised of this requirement. As first and only witness for the prosecution, he deposed that:

he had read a copy of the pamphlet produced in court on Monday 8 June. He was very upset about it and had the publisher been about at the time he

would have been tempted to take action himself and give the defendant a hiding. After he had cooled down he realized that he was a sworn-in police officer bound to prevent a breach of the peace instead of committing one.⁴

Constable Don's evidence should have given Priest fair warning. He had only one reliable witness, Alice Mindil, and this unsophisticated woman was completely at the mercy of the prosecution. Cross-examined about her previous sexual history, she obligingly recounted that her previous boyfriend, Dan, had been killed in a fight over her with another 'boy'. She then revealed that: "[m]y present boy Smiler used to belong to a lubra named Yanner. I took him away from her and we had a fight in the pictures because of that".

At this point the charade really began. Priest next put his trust in the honesty of Sergeant Koop. The sergeant admitted that Alice had come to him, but said that he had seen no physical marks of a struggle on her body. He had examined the dress Alice had been wearing, which Alice claimed had been torn, but found that it had only two holes which were "not those which would be obtained in a struggle". Sergeant Koop had also taken Alice's bloomers and singlet, and found that these had no relevant marks or stains. Priest then called Dr Carruthers, the medical officer in charge of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory. Dr Carruthers had examined Alice's clothes, and was able to confirm the sergeant's opinion.

The final witness was Constable Don's wife, Eileen Cecilia Don. Mrs Don gave evidence – somewhat surprisingly, given Sergeant Koop's admission that Alice had been to see him with an allegation of rape – that she had seen Alice at six o'clock that evening, apparently mentally unscathed. Mrs Don then managed to recount the following highly prejudicial story:

a few days after Alice had come to work for her she noticed the lubra wearing a gold bangle and remarked about it. Alice said her former employer had given it to her. She also said she liked her missus but didn't like the husband because whenever her missus would go out the husband would want to do something to her. Witness told the lubra she must not say things like that because she knew the husband was a nice man and that she may be called upon to prove it. After that Alice never broached the subject.⁵

Mrs Don retired from the stand. Priest did not cross-examine her. It was almost a foregone conclusion, given this evidence, that Priest should be convicted. He spent six months in Fannie Bay Gaol. Upon his release he found himself blacklisted. 'Stonybroke', he begged a couple of pounds from an old comrade, jumped the train for Birdum, and never again returned to live in Darwin.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THING about this whole episode seems not to be the trial itself, or the result. It is the attitude towards the proceedings of Charles Priest. Priest was one of a very rare type of person who could have been relied on to support the interests of Aboriginal people in a situation like this: strong-willed, egotistical, courageous, and with little to lose himself from fighting what was clearly a losing battle. Yet Priest himself, the outsider in many ways, was also a mouthpiece for the social attitudes of non-Aboriginal men. He compared his feelings as he contemplated the case to the "awesome loneliness" of the US President. He insulted the character of the woman who had come to him for help: "[r]aping an Aboriginal woman was a common enough fact of life in those days and was not likely to have the traumatic effect on her, or her husband, as it would in the case of a white woman, so why should I dig up such dirt?"

Most of all, Priest's moral dilemma was the product of the prospect of having to humiliate a white woman. His account of the trial invests Mrs Don with an almost mythical quality. When, finally, she enters the scene he describes her in these terms:

Then it was Mrs Freon's [Don's] turn to give evidence. She was probably in her late twenties and normally would have been a very attractive woman. She was dressed in black and I seem to remember that she wore a black hat and veil. There was no need for her to act: the humiliation of being in such a position struck at the very core of her being. In a barely audible voice she stated that Alice Mindil had told her that she did not like her husband because, whenever she went out, her husband would want to do something to her. She told Alice she should not say things like that because she knew her husband was a nice man, and she might be called upon to prove what she said. After that Alice never again broached the subject. She

may have given more evidence but, if so, I have no recollection of it. When she had concluded her evidence I was asked if I wanted to cross examine her and I said that I did not."⁶

Priest was clearly overcome. He seems to have been incapable even of understanding the effect of Mrs Don's evidence. For Priest, as for the other male participants in this trial, one image was more powerful than any other: the image of the wronged white woman, dignified in her suffering, and on a moral level immeasurably superior to that of the white men who listen to her story. His place as an outsider seems only to emphasize the utter conventionality of his views in this regard: guilt at the position of the wronged Aboriginal woman, but far greater guilt at the position of the wronged white woman, who has the moral burden of upholding the hypocritical social compact of the time.

IT MAY BE TAKING THINGS a little too far to see white man's guilt as the origin of the 'stolen generation' policies. The social and humanitarian ideas of the time clearly played their part. But the children most affected were not those of exclusively Aboriginal blood: they were the kids of mixed-race origin, the ones whose very bodies expressed and evidenced the rapes and illicit unions that were the underside of the white man's occupation of the frontier. More accurately, perhaps, they were psychologically the 'dark side'. They were foreign and yet part of the white man, evidence of his shame and therefore to be locked away. White women as well as men knew what was happening: but it was easier in the end to ignore it, to treat Aboriginal interests as road kills and deny the guilt – in other words, as my elderly relative succinctly advised me, "just keep going".

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Priest, *Still Further Northern Territory Recollections*, 1936, p. 3.
2. Ted Egan, *Justice All Their Own: the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island Massacres*, MUP, 1996, pp. 146–7.
3. Priest, p. 26.
4. 'Alleged Libel', *Northern Standard*, 4 August 1936.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.* pp. 32–3.

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The Driver's Wife

Ian Wilkinson

SHE SAT IN THE KITCHEN and looked out at the paling fence, and beyond it to the long flat fields of dry grass. The kids were screaming in the rumpus room, all four of them at once, but she just let them go. She held the cup of coffee tight in her hands and rested her chin on its rim.

Beyond the fields was the highway heading north. That's where her husband was. A few thousand k's up the road in his monster semi, hauling loads of goods that she couldn't give a stuff about. The truck seemed to eat money, not make it, and she wished he'd give the game away. But she knew he had a girl up there in Brisbane, and that if she kicked up too much of a fuss, he might not come back one time – and so she let it ride.

She noticed the dog hanging around the back fence, sniffing and scratching at the holes around the posts where the fencers hadn't back-filled properly. Three months they'd been in the house, and nearly every day she made a promise to herself to fill them in. But the kids took up so much time; she was on the go from six in the morning till eight at night, when she carried the last of them off to bed. It was only then that she had a couple of hours to herself; only then that she had time to think, and it was then that she wouldn't have minded having an adult to talk to.

He was only home three or four days a fortnight, depending on the runs he was doing. And on the evenings when he was there, when she could've had time to talk to him, he was at the pub anyway. She was always asleep when he got home. But just so long as he managed to pay the mortgage, the other bills, and feed and clothe the kids, she reckoned she could put up with him.

The dog was getting more and more excited as he scratched at the fence and jumped up to the mid-rail. She went outside and called him to the back

door, but he wouldn't come, so she walked over to him.

"What's the matter Ally? What yer found there?"

She stood up on the fence rail and looked over into the long grass. She couldn't see anything, so got down and gave the dog a big pat. Then she took him by the collar and tied him to the post by the back door.

"Want the kids to come out and play? Will I get Tom and Jack for yer, eh?"

He jumped up and down on his chain. Then she looked at the house next door; the only other one in the street, though the frame was up for another at the end of the court. They both worked next door, though. Young couple with no kids. She checked down the passageway between her house and the fence; just wide enough to walk down, really. And it was the same on the neighbours' side too. The houses seemed close enough for her to lean out the window and touch next door. She wondered if it had been done on purpose, to help her overcome the isolation and the flat desolation. But it only made it worse – she lay in bed some nights and listened to them in their bedroom. They were a noisy pair, and their love-making seemed to go on for ages. She'd lie there, feeling guilty that she was listening to them, but would then think to herself that it wasn't her fault she could hear them so well, especially as they left their window open all the time.

She climbed onto the side fence and hung there, looking at the neighbours' bedroom window. And she thought about how her husband only wanted her body in the mornings – sometime between waking up and having a shower, whether she really felt like it or not. It was like some ritual, or habit, he'd got into. Every morning he wanted her, even with the kids in the bed sometimes – but she drew the line at that. And it was then that she was glad he was hardly ever home.

She heard the door slam behind her and all four kids charged into the yard. The twins followed the boys. Tom let Ally off his chain, and the dog charged straight for the back fence.

IT'S ONLY THIRTY POINT FOUR K to the centre of the city," he'd said, when they first looked at the block. "I know it looks as if it's in the middle of nowhere, but it's not really. Before ya know it there'll be 'ouses all round ya. Shops, too. They're gonna build them in the next street there," he'd said, pointing.

"Next century," she'd replied.

"Well, we're gettin' it, and that's that. It's all we can afford to buy."

SHE'D GROWN UP in the inner city, and was used to tin fences, concrete yards and bluestone lanes at the back of all the houses. And streets jammed full of cars and kids. Now she could see the horizon from her kitchen window and she didn't like it.

When he was at home, she'd also look out onto the massive frame of his truck, which he always parked on the vacant block on the other side to the neighbours' house. Sometime in the future he'd have to park it in the street, where all the neighbours would glare at it, and be forced to drive around it, just like at the rented place they'd lived in before. She could already hear the same old complaints pouring in.

Then she heard Tom cry out.

"Snake, snake. Mum, there's a snake."

And then Jack screamed. And the dog had the snake in its mouth, flinging it around. Its head smashed against the fence. Once, twice, and then it hung limp, and the dog dropped it.

"Jack's been bit, mum. He's been bit on the leg."

Jack was crying and screaming uncontrollably. She jumped off the fence and raced to him. It was all she could do to keep him still enough to search for the tell-tale punctures of the skin. But she did find them, and she felt sick. She began to shake.

"What're we gonna do, mum?" asked Tom.

The twins began crying as well.

She yelled at the top of her voice, as if she thought he might hear her in Queensland. "What are we doing in this godforsaken hole? You've killed our son, you bastard."

And then she suddenly calmed, and looked at Tom.

"Is he gonna die, mum?"

"He could." She hugged Jack tight and ran down the concrete paved passage beside the house and out into the front yard, where the station wagon was sitting in the driveway. "Get in," she yelled. "Get in, we're going to the hospital."

"Should we bring the snake, mum?" Tom said. "So they know what sort it was that bit him."

She nodded at him, and he ran back and got it while she strapped the twins into the car and tried to calm Jack. When Tom came back with the snake she told him to throw it on the floor in the front.

Then she asked him, "How did you know to do that? You're not even six, yet."

"Dad told me."

"Then why didn't he tell me, for God's sake, eh. What d'yer reckon, Tom?"

They sped off along the deserted flat roads.

WHEN SHE RANG on his mobile number, a woman answered. His other woman, she guessed. She hadn't wanted the phone because it was too expensive, but in the end she'd agreed on the basis that they'd only ever call each other in real emergencies. But now she knew why he'd been so keen on the idea – it was so he could keep in touch with his other woman, in Brisbane, while he was on the road. And they'd got so smug and comfortable up there that she was swanning around answering his calls.

"He's not around just now," the woman said.

"Well tell him his son's in hospital with snake bite. Tell him that, and that if he's not home tomorrow, then he'd better not bother comin' back at all. You'd better make sure he gets that message, eh."

"I'm very sorry," she said. "Is he OK, your son?"

"Probably, but he's not outa the woods, yet. Just tell that man he'd better make up 'is mind once and for all. Got it?"

She walked back down the shiny corridor to the room where Jack was. The twins were somewhere else, with a nurse, but Tom was still sitting next to the bed, holding Jack's hand. She sat next to him and gave him a cuddle.

Then out of the blue he said: "I'll never get a truck, mum. I don't wanna go to Queensland."

The Passage

dedicated to the passion of Shelton Lea

Richard Hillman

I WRITE WITH BLACK INK, dreaming in my veins . . .
*i write to you a strong long letter of love,
 of words wrung from an expiring heart.
 from time.*

I've read from the passage you marked for me. But I must return it.

I have crossed paragraphs over torn pages, retraced your steps through foothills of punctuation, hunted the lull and music in your voice, to find your passage. You shift a lot. Like a dancer.

Did you know that?

i write to you as an enthusiast of the braille of souls.

as a lover of the cold of mornings;

as a man who loves to feel

from cocks to the next reality.

from the uncertainty of smell

to the supposed supremacy of sight.

I've been away, god knows how long . . .

When I came back and found your passage, the one you had marked for me, all I wanted to do was shake you until the dandruff fell out of your hair . . .

*i write to you because i remain alive.
 relatively sentient.*

The skin peels and sheds . . .

*the dull ache of my brain like a loosely trained
 piece of
 thought.*

flurrying through the forests of my fears.

Your words do not belong in a prison . . .

*oh i write to you because there is a world,
 a surrounds. lots of places of peace.
 the rebounding images of our immortal words.
 the friends in our life that remain true.*

It feels good to be back, though, the house is still the same. Same old blood-brick house on suburban square-acre block. With loose native shrubbery, dirty quartz chip in the driveway, and a lawn needing wa-

ter because it's dry in patches. And it has a few trees too – a redgum, apricot, almond, three pines, and one I've never learnt the name of.

The nameless one has small fern-like filigree leaves and tiny purple flowers when it's in season – perhaps it's a jacaranda; I wish I knew – but it's dead now. Borers have stripped the bark skin from its flesh while I've been away, and it's turned a flat off-the-wall white, leafless and flowerless – odourless – so, when I look out the kitchen window I see it sitting up near the back fence like the skeleton of a huge hand, its splayed fingers reaching into the blue like a dream, but a dream yet to be dreamt.

Tomorrow, I will cut it down and make firewood from its bones . . .

And it's the same on the inside of my house – bare. The few pieces of furniture I've kept, stand out like bones; I surround them with no object, no ornament to give them flesh and blood.

I do not keep parrots . . .

The only room in my house that has any muscle, is my room – the end room – a small room with a bed bent like a bicep, and a desk and a bookcase and a wardrobe and a stack of milk crates I've used for filing – two black and two maroon. There's a map of the East Coast on one wall, and my Degrees on another, and postcards and a child's painting beside the window on still yet another wall, and all are bordered with photographs of people I know and of places I've been to.

Y'know, you shift a lot; like a lover . . .

I've plastered my wardrobe with cuttings from the newspapers – words which seemed important when I put them there – and landscapes I've torn from magazines to splash the room with that much bit of extra colour – as if the world were not colourful enough.

On my door is a calender from 1978, the year I was

born, with a picture of the Skyway cable car hanging above The Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains – which holds me in suspense because gravity demands that what goes up must come down – and it is hedged with more pictures – an old Valhalla poster with cult movie names stimulating its surface, and tiny square pamphlets from avant garde theatre productions, and more postcards, of artworks from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and a lot more from Australian galleries – so the whole room, with its patchy quilt of deviating colour, appears like a giant mural brought inside as if it were the bizarre part of a bricklayer's dream. Yet, this is my dream.

We make our own prisons ...

I can't remember where the dream came from – all those photogenically imposing memories don't really feel like my memories at all. But, I guess that's the way it is with memory; we put it aside, lock it away, deep in our subconscious; and when it appears with a whiff of nostalgia we own it for a moment, then let it go back to where it came from; and, even though I've let those memories out, or kept them, put them on my walls and door, there are moments when they are not mine, moments when they belong to the collection in my subconscious, out of reach, distant, inaccessible, and past regret, or desire for repetition.

*i write to you the absurdity of writing,
the absurdity of vision.
the absurdity of having a lifelong dream
that remains forever a scream for rest, for being
a Need.*

Perhaps we've shared the same dream ...

WHEN I VISITED *Terra Reaffirma* – on my debut as a performance poet – the Customs Officer with the black-visored hat, blue uniform, and flat square face, took me into an Interview Room.

I'd forgotten to declare my 'trust', he said.

Inside the Interview Room there was a window which reflected like a mirror – but I knew that it was a window because I'd seen that on TV – and in the mirror I watched as a body took its boots off, which were followed shortly after by jeans and shirt.

The Customs Officer stuck his nose into the boots. Then rummaged through the pockets of the jeans.

He didn't find anything.

The near-naked body in the mirror didn't ask questions but watched silently as the Customs Officer took out a white plastic glove from a large flat paper

packet. The Customs Officer tried to pull the white foreskin over his thick stubby fingers, stretching and splaying them to make them fit better, or until the transparent webbing between his fingers could not be told from the real thing, except of course he now had one hand whiter than the other.

The Customs Officer watched the body in the mirror remove its underpants.

The naked body in the mirror bent over a table and spread its legs. Then watched itself in the mirror as the Customs Officer inserted a lubricated finger into a place that couldn't be seen in the mirror.

There was an expression of intense pain on the face of the performance poet, which stayed there long after the face of pain had removed its finger.

"You're clean," breathed the Customs Officer when he finished doing what he said he had to do.

I couldn't tell whether he said that with relief, or disappointment.

And I didn't have time to find out.

The Superintendent of Customs came into the room, took one look at my naked body stretched over the table, then started barking at the Customs Officer.

The Customs Officer was looking for a garbage can to throw the plastic shit-smearred glove into, trying not to notice that he might possibly be in some kind of trouble.

The Superintendent of Customs barked louder and the Customs Officer froze, clenching the plastic glove into a ball inside his meaty hand. I think he wanted to throw the offending evidence away.

Sweat dripped into the Customs Officer's eyes like a climax.

The Superintendent of Customs turned to me and apologized for the mistake. He made a joke about my hair, said I was lucky the Officer hadn't taken me downstairs for de-lousing.

I didn't laugh.

I said it didn't matter – I was in a new country – I had to go by the book – do as I was told.

I had no idea what was to be expected of me.

The Superintendent of Customs waited for me to dress.

Then we walked out of the Interview Room together.

Once outside the room, I looked through the window and I did not see myself – I saw the Customs Officer shoving the plastic glove into his pocket, looking around as if he didn't know where to look, his fat, gris-

tly cheeks glowing red like the tip of a penis.

I noticed that the Superintendent of Customs did not notice how the door appeared to open and close for him. Doors opened in front of us and closed behind us without either of us touching them.

"We don't get too many performance poets in *Terra Reaffirma*, Mr Rose," the Superintendent of Customs stated, the red tip of his tongue flicking over the twin bulbs of his lips with intent.

"There was a man from the country of my birth who simply called himself 'poet' when he went on tour," I replied.

"I have not heard of this man ..."

Downstairs, in the auditorium, a large audience had been gathered.

On the stage I watched how the crowd moved about like sperm under a microscope – a festering wound squirming with maggots – groaning in white.

"I am Micky Rose," I introduced myself like a lubricated finger.

Jokes were hurled onto the stage like ribald flowers.

"I'm not a comic."

I read a few poems while the crowd slithered in the sweat of allotted freedom.

Between the lines of my poems there is room to think ...

Why am I here? Why have I come back to this place? Do I need to reassure myself that this is where I'm from or belong? Why am I here?

Words can be a prison ...

After the show the Superintendent of Customs introduced me to some resident poets.

I could tell by the scars on their faces that they had lived.

Each scar was a poem.

I read their poems, then left.

On my way from *Terra Reaffirma* a Customs Officer caught me up, handed me a Pass, apologized ... I looked at his face, without the glove, and he could have meant it.

TRAVELLING, MOVING BETWEEN checkpoints and street cafes, faces flashed in and out of focus. Sometimes I thought I was dreaming. At other times, remembering.

Most of the time – I was on a bus – I found myself looking through glass at people I could've known; the view was constantly being interrupted with images

of myself – these were not images I wished to cling to or repeat but I felt as though I was being stitched to them all the same.

Some wounds never heal ...

That first night I stayed in a cheap motel.

During the night, trucks rolled by often enough to give my dreams a burnt rubber smell.

I tried closing the curtain but it wouldn't go all the way. So, I had a crack in my room which emitted light from the VACANCY sign outside the Receptionist's Office. It took a while for my mind to register the idea of darkness. When it did, I slept ...

Yet stitches ... unravel ...

And I dreamt ...

... a dark void circled me, or i circled the void, making a whirlpool in the crowd, a collage of faces floating in the black semen of voices, filling my ears, and i choked on that, and spat it out, and shifted a great weight before a man, with dark skin, sat beside me, and smiled yellow teeth at me, and i wondered if i was grinning, or not, and he was saying, over and over, "i'm black; recognize me; i'm black; recognize me; i'm ..." but i couldn't work out why and around his and in his hand, a long, not sure, snake, which i try to touch, but it slithers away like rope, into the belly of this man, through some hole in his belly, and he's holding out that rope to me, saying "take it no good dispella" and i hear myself saying "i don't want it" and the hole in his belly opens up and i'm falling then i'm inside this belly, being sucked into it, and a loud-speaker is booming "WELCOME TO CUSTOMS" and a plane lands like a truck through the wall of this belly, i hear its wheels skidding desperately on the black tissue tarmac, and a black hand grabs my hand and lifts me to my feet, though, i never asked for that hand, then i feel plastic, a plastic hand, and i remember my anus and it's hurting and my eyes are closed tight against the pain and there's buzzing in my ears like a drill inside my head and i scream ...

I open my eyes.

A stream of light, pure and untouched, is striking like a knife into my motel room. Stabs me between the eyes.

So, I get up and dress.

There's a knock at the door.

I think that I'm going to have a headache, then don't.
Room service.
Cold toast.
I chew on it anyway.

BACK ON THE ROAD knives peek through a row of trees like a guard of honour.

I'm at the rear of the bus. Near the toilets – as if I can't get enough of the smell of humanity.

I alight at *Terra Incognita*.

This time I have my Pass and a Customs Officer opens the gate as if he were sick of opening gates for other people. He pours me into a funnel connected to a series of pipes, corridors and channels.

Then I'm inside the stomach; a glass cage for Customs Officers.

They digest me with a glance.

A metal door opens.

A surveillance camera follows my movements.

The intestinal tract is twisted in places, marked with stone, odd hieroglyphics etched here and there – names, dates, desires – *by what scalpel?* I cannot tell – and ulcers on the sides bleed with outstretched arms, wanting to pull me to them as if my face were a mask, but their touch is confused, it knows no soft nor hard, love and hate mix in its desires, and the Customs Officer offers a medicinal truncheon to fingers which have not been burnt enough, or because they have, because they have been touched too often to notice the sudden difference between pleasure and pain – yet, my motion is continuous as I make my way into the tight bowels of the hall.

I stand upon a stage with scars in my hands.

I bleed from my pores the putrid poems that I carry with me.

But a scar to a scar is a scar – a relation, an identification, like burnt numbers on concentrated flesh, or cigarette burns, or cone burns, marring the tissue, marking the passage of touch – how it burns, that cold metal fire – and my raw tongue in flames, cauterizes the haemorrhage with brief ideal.

When I step down from the stage I feel like ash – my mind scatters on the wind dressed in the black stitches of society's oldest mourning ritual.

The Customs Officer appears like a laxative and leads me out.

THE WHEELS OF THE BUS bounce and thud and grate under my bum.

I'm near one of the windows with PUSH TO EXIT written on it.

I remind myself that there will be money in the bank at the end of the tour.

Keep moving. Keep passing. Town after town.

I'm trying to feel my way between free speech and flesh. But words get in the way.

I'm in the passage between stops. In an open space – outside I see night fires in wide bushland, shooting stars on clear night sky, then the thin fog of pre-dawn – transparent with private thoughts.

I travel across country. The hum of the bus lulling me to silent captivity – captured by my own visions of loneliness and confinement – the world is happening outside but I'm trapped on this bus between stops.

Words keep getting in the way. I need to stretch my legs, or lie down on a bed – my body doesn't know what it wants – it wants the bus to stop – it wants to come alive, re-enter the world, make known, make public, represent its desire to be present in its own making.

The bus stops for lunch at a roadside diner and petrol station. My eyes search the horizon but it has no companionship.

Outside the bus, flies are critical. They inspect everything. They rummage through luggage. Search for fruit, the open wound, the refuse. They are indiscriminate. Independent. They see more when they are moving. Easy prey when sitting still.

I go inside the diner. Buy myself a sandwich and a Coke. There's no avoiding the smell of diesel on the seats. A fly lands on the sandwich half I haven't eaten. I squash it beneath my thumb and toss the sandwich away. I wasn't that hungry anyway.

THAT SAME NIGHT I'm in a motel not much different from the last. In the room to my left the bed-springs squeak lust ALL NIGHT. Every now and then I think I'm in that room. The walls are so thin. And in the room to my right a TV buff watches a flickering black-and-white light ALL NIGHT. He cannot feel the endorphins gushing from his stimulated pituitary gland, relaxing him, releasing him from the necessity of living, keeping him from his sensuous and tactile body, from its suffering, from its desire to scream. He cannot feel because the body's opiate has suppressed all feeling, controlled all emotion. Every five-and-a-half minutes the volume goes up with advertical displace-

ment then settles back down after three minutes to the pulse of monotone and throb of hypnotic light.

Some people live in motels.

There are places in this world where people don't sleep.

LIKE CHARON ON BLACK tar river I ferry my luggage to the bus. Slide it into its strapped groin. I only have one suitcase and I keep my overnight bag with me.

A strange thought occurs, *Why are bum bags always strapped to the front of men's groins?*

My back is itchy. I want to move. Do. Carry something.

AFTER TWO HOURS on the bus I arrive outside the gates of *Terra Desiderata*. The sign above the gate reads like a contemplating forehead . . . the silence in my eyes traces the calligraphy of years.

I show my Pass to a Customs Officer.

The Customs Officer leads me into a long white corridor. I can smell the raw mass of humanity clinging to the walls . . . a siren blares repeatedly, in search of the ear of God because such noise is not designed for the consumption of man.

I ask the Customs Officer, "What's happening?"

"There's an emergency in one of the cells."

We wait in the corridor rather than continue. The siren stops. Then we move on.

Suddenly, a poet on a clanking trolley is pushed into the corridor by two Customs Officers. I watch, my back against the wall, as the trolley passes. The white sheet draped over the poet's body won't stay on but the two Customs Officers at either end of the trolley try to keep it on him as they run – as if they're afraid of exposing the disease below – perhaps the white sheet represents something else; the body's status, its nothingness, its purity.

The poet is frothing white at the lips, head twisting from side to side, fists shadow boxing like two white ghosts, then the trolley is out of sight, down the corridor and around the corner, searching for an exit.

"Another bloody odee," the Customs Officer mumbles.

I have no idea . . . at what point is speech removed?

Today the audience is glazen-eyed. I rub my eyes to remove an interest in sleep.

The hall ripples with anticipation, like an ocean, a lilting red ocean at sunset, a wound, an aching heart, and beginning to pump as I pop poems onto my

tongue with clenched teeth . . . the indentation of scars . . . the spoon of eyes peering out of memory's window . . . the white powder stirred into flambéed spirit water . . . the poem rising to the surface like pockets of air . . . drawing back on the syringe, sucking in that translucent water . . . my mouth wide with teeth . . . the tourniquets of commas and parentheses . . . squirting pipeline of blood . . . a blushing syringe . . . shooting obscurity into the heart of surrendered freedom . . . the injection of Capitals and full-stops . . . the cold rush of amphetamine's mixed emotion sending shivers up my spine . . . the throbbing pulse of humanity externalized like a map of the circulatory body . . . spreading words caked in loving blood through collapsing veins, trying to get to the heart of the matter, of substance.

After the performance a Customs Officer allows me to visit the infirmary.

Inside the infirmary track-marked arms wave with closed fists, and I read one more poem, before the flesh moves on.

Back in the bus I can only think that some prisons are mobile . . . it's after twelve . . . or locked into time.

The bus is empty, except for the driver and myself. The upright metal frames of the seats vibrate as the bus idles. When I sit down I can sense the exclamations of an engine picking their way through my bone like needles – blunt needles – which do not leave a mark on my flesh . . . yet, the pain is there, yes, that pain of knowing is there.

There's an advertisement on the wall above the window above my seat. It says "I can't stop the bleeding! I can't stop the bleeding!" Perhaps for ambulance insurance . . . I remember Julian Barnes writing about art as ambulance, that there's an expectation which perceives art as a healing process – nobody expects that the ambulance might run you over, or worse still, be going some place else – they say that, don't they? Life happens while you're going some place else. It's written on the back of my bus ticket.

The motel I'm staying in tonight is no different from the others I've stayed in. Perhaps I should stop travelling and do my performances all in the one place . . . but people can only take so much of me . . .

I lie down on my bed. A hard mattress. When I close my eyes I see a bus hurtling down a city street, back in my birth country, and it doesn't stop when it reaches the red light but ploughs through two cars crossing the intersection, and one of the cars whips

into a group of pedestrians and the bus stops like a wedge between a parked car and a stobe pole. When I close my eyes I see the blood that has mixed with flesh fragments to make a human paste on the grill of the bus. When I close my eyes I see the headless torso of the driver of the first car. When I close my eyes I see a crowd of writhing bodies in orgy of pain upon the pavement. And a child's voice, I hear a child's voice, crying out, "I can't stop the bleeding! I can't stop the bleeding!" When I close my eyes I hope I'm dreaming. But I am not.

When I checked into this motel, the woman at Reception told me that the person in the room next to mine was an elderly man. The elderly man lived in the motel. The Receptionist told me not to make a noise because he was dying.

I do not make a sound when I cry myself to sleep.

THE NEXT DAY, as I stepped off the bus at *Terra Reconcila*, I noticed a pain in my right lung, at the back. Immediately, I wanted to crawl back the way I had come. Instead, I show my Pass to the Customs Officer.

I step through the gates and onto a circuit-board of electric conveyor belts and quick-step roller platforms – making for a human runway – arches beep overhead fussing for metallic objects. Then I'm in the nasal cavity, blowing my way through the pink and grey mezzanine, plucking hairs and thinking about my birth country . . . red soil like rust in the cracks of oxidized stone walls, like rust on metal bars and barbed wire fences outside disused military installations . . . in my birth country red denotes error in socializing columns (perhaps it is human weakness to take our failings to school) and letters are written in red on the signs of linguistic Testing Stations, red is the sign of heat, of infectious disease, of danger, of a proximity to the living, the dangerous, and red hands step out as warnings against touching or wanking or saying things which you're not supposed to say, red is the colour of blood, of life, and in my birth country there are red lights which flash on the roofs of cars at night, or pulse above doorways to prohibited areas and darkrooms – but I don't go that way today . . .

I'm inside the *Terra* . . .

The Customs Officer takes me across the Outer and over the centre Quad, through a mesh of wire fences to an auditorium with basketball nets at either end.

In the middle of the auditorium they have erected a stage out of tables and chairs, which I stand upon.

A sea of dark-water faces filters dense light from the floor of the hall up to my receptive eyes . . . black truncheons guard the perimeter. I can hear voices, make out their warrior sounds, each a sharp note flashing to me with flat white teeth . . . and I hear words which I've heard before but not taken much notice in, "hey, storyteller cunt, go home", "hey, storyteller cunt, what you get from my mother?", "hey, storyteller cunt, what your words for this?" (with the speaker shoving a fist up an imaginary arsehole), but I don't listen, I hold out my hand and they stare at it as if it were an empty gesture – they want water but my mouth is dry – so I show my scars, and someone throws a rock at me, straight from the desert, and it hits my left knee, tears a hole in my jeans, cuts the flesh there, draws blood, then truncheons come down and people are yelling and screaming and moving toward the walls in clusters of anger, and in fear I shake through the throb, limping blood onto the polished wooden floor, and slip before feeling a pain in my back, above my right lung; grunting hands with tough nails are clawing at me, tearing at my flesh; my teeth snap and chip on the floor as my face and lips kiss the wood with the force of love; my gums bleed in defiance; I try to push myself upright but hands shove me back down; I yell in the language of my birth country as I am stripped and beaten, as my skin is flayed and my flesh scraped away, exposing my ribs, my shell of bleached bone – making the scars (that are trapped inside that cage of bone) visible – before a boot stamps down, crushing my Pass and my bones, releasing those scars with a grunt, or a sigh, until the whole hall is filled with the noise of that crunching, exhaling poem – and I think that I am dreaming because there is no pain. But it's not a dream.

I write with black ink
dreaming in my veins.
My fingernails
scratch at this page
until my voice bleeds
from their tips.
Like bruised wing
of ink moth
drawn
to white paper lantern

my hand
burns
with skin's cold silence
for a poet
who lived
and saw
far beyond my wildest
touch.

I take the Scar of my youth down from the shelf.

The passage . . .

a thief, a jailbird, a thinker

and then the ashes, the kids, staying out of jail . . . hey,
that's one hell of a fucking life, you could break bricks
over it . . .

words are drying tears

as callously as a sponge

o god I gotta hear the voice of the sage, hear his voice,
one more time . . .

it is the loneliness of words

jesus the teeth, the long hair . . .

a neck.

like a column; a studio to the stars.

I have ruptured my spleen bending over backwards
to hear you, I have scratched images of tattooed birds
to hear you, I have sucked dawn until my gums have
bled to hear you, I have stuck my arm into sewer pipes
and touched raw matter to hear you, I have traced in
bold red ink the facial scars to hear you, and with se-
men dripping from my eyes I have seen your stone
larynx rise and fall and heard every breath you gave
life to . . .

today i met a man who talked about the

tongue

of poetry.

I have not marked your passage with dog-ears . . .

I hold up your skull Dear Scar

constant carrier of emigre thoughts

take you on my journey over the skin of madness

and i write to you because we are all finally,

irrevocably mad,

our passions running like fire through a

building

burning forever our sentiments, our dreams.

searching for the shadow geography of stars . . .

grim roads

you might say

deserts for some, yet in exile

dream of freedom

the Self

the sweet passage of our rites

dreams

do you remember

the spectre of the daunted moon

the chains which dragged us down

and i am toothless and educative

how our wrists and ankles bled

i make desires, dreams, with a sotto voce voice

but the rasp and file of words

but if we dream of freedom

we watched sparks fly

of what it is that we can dare.

if we dream

if we dream

but you wander backwards upon unnecessary roads

if we dream

return to tinder block and truncheon anvil

who is there to care against us.

disguised as poet!

if the world is a sore, a wound, an open

infested grave

what point is there to being saved.

I saw you there, don't hide, this is not the time to be
humble

i see again the gaunt spectres of the walking flesh

I tread in your footsteps

for christ's sake, aren't we all the same.

an ear.

like a passage; a drain to the dream.

an echo on my ear

beyond repetition

like a poet

flings words

when I slash my wrists black ink pours from my
veins . . .

chuck/thud/chuck/thud/chuck/thud

i don't like dead things in my backyard. when i bring
the axe down upon the neck of white wood i hear a
hollow sound. a drumming in my ears. then a crack-
ing dry snapping sound as the tree fractures like bone.

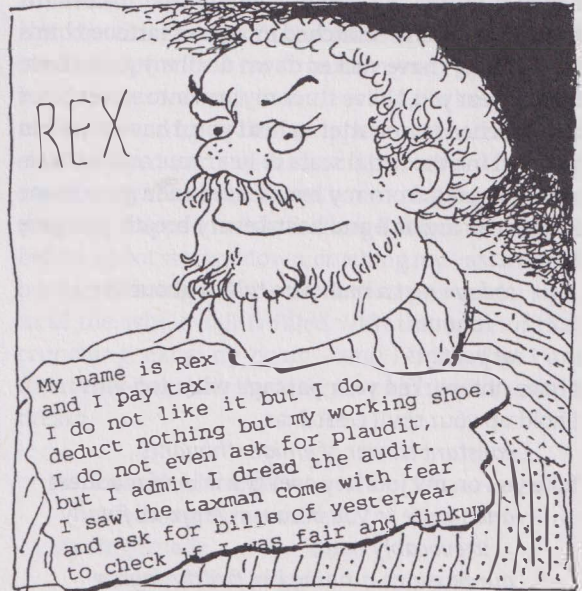
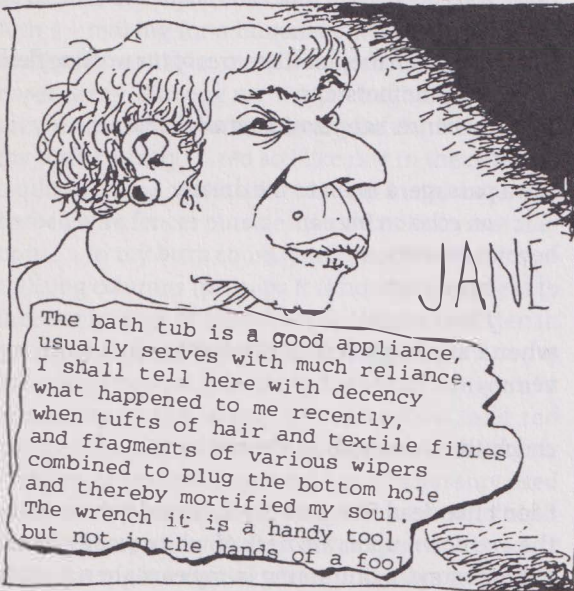
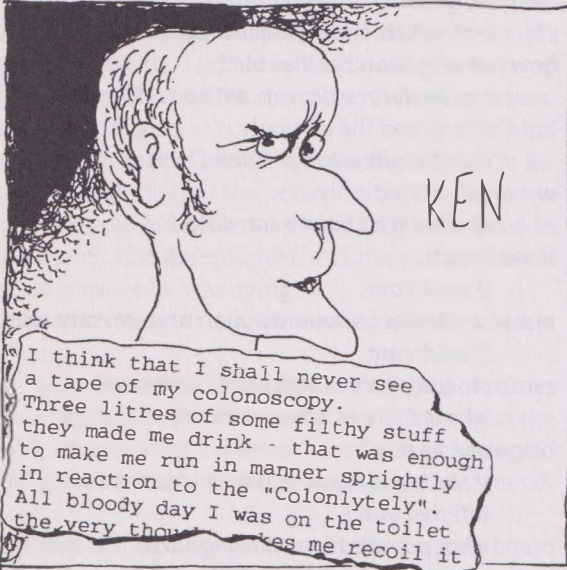
ENDNOTE

Lines of the unseen voice (in italics) belong to the poetry of
Shelton Lea, from *palatine madonna*, Outback Press, 1979.

Poets in the Making

by Loflo.

A poetry teacher in the Martha Murray National School of Poetry told her students to write an old-fashioned poem about the most important event of their previous week. Here are some of the results:



MS MARTHA MURRAY CERTAINLY LEARNED SOMETHING FROM THE EXERCISE: THE SUBJECTS OF POETRY ARE NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN PEOPLE'S LIVES. IN FUTURE LESSONS SHE WOULD TEACH: »POETRY IS THE SCIENCE OF **LESSER** EXPERIENCE« HOWEVER, SHE CAME TO REGRET THAT STATEMENT (SEE FUTURE INSTALMENTS).

dialogue

Pauline Hanson Day

Lyn McLeavy

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST Rock Against Racism concert was held in the Town Hall, at Northcote, an inner city suburb of Melbourne and a place of significance to Kooris, on Sunday 13 July 1980, at 6 p.m., using for its publicity the image of Uluru (Ayers Rock), the most sacred site in Australia. It was the first time the name Uluru was used publicly and with the permission of the elders of Uluru.

Northcote police had opposed the granting of a liquor licence and we had gone to the press with the story. We expected the police would make an appearance at the gig. The Town Hall was full of supporters, dancing, and the police vanished into the night.

I was the coordinator, treasurer, and driving force; a twenty-eight-year-old student of history (with an Irish convict past, that I didn't know about until last year) and an impoverished childhood on the Melbourne waterfront in the fifties. My great-great-grandmother, Jane Cooke, was sentenced, with her eleven-year-old daughter, Ann, to ten years transportation to Van Diemen's Land for stealing a pot lid in the Irish Famine. She arrived in Hobart in 1850 and served thirty years in its jails until her death. I

was the first person in my Irish-Australian wharfie family of five generations to receive an education past year eight, thanks to the Whitlam Labor government.

I'd seen apartheid in South Africa in 1969 and another version of it here, all over my own country and in the heart of Melbourne.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE in Fitzroy used to ask me, when I first entered their struggle for justice in 1976, whether I was in for the long haul, or whether I was just passing through. I know now there's no leaving their cause, even when I've tried – circumstances that Miles Davis called “spooky” pull me back.

On 3 June 1997 I went to visit friends on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. I didn't know it was Eddie Mabo Day. I arrived to a parade of trucks and cars decorated with palm leaves and tropical flowers. People in grass skirts and colourful shirts waved as they went past. I felt happy and excited to arrive so unexpectedly on this special day. The parade headed to the Children's Memorial Park in the main street for the celebration.

The small, mostly Islander, crowd sat relaxed and calm under the shady trees. Dancers decorated with shells and wearing elaborate headdress performed and children danced and sang. The elders called out to them teaching and

encouraging. A few white children danced and sang along in grass skirts, flowers in their hair.

Male and female elders talked to the crowd about the history of Eddie Mabo's efforts and the community's experience with Canberra and the court system. They talked of a long struggle to claim their land and urged the people to stick together to achieve this through the white legal system. They said they had been on their islands for a long time and loved their culture.

They spoke of the Christian Lord God as an inspiration and One who supported them in his just and loving ways. Thursday Island's Martin Luther Kings, older men and women educated in European ways as well as their own, told of speaking to judges, lawyers, and parliamentarians in places far from the turquoise sea and the people with flowers in their hair.

That night there was a traditional feast fit for the people and islander bands played every night that week.

ELEVEN DAYS LATER I went to Cairns on my way home; it was Pauline Hanson Day – she was having a meeting that night, Saturday night in Cairns. I put her in the back of my mind and went snorkelling on the Reef. When I got back it was just falling dark, and I was being driven in a mini bus to a Youth Hostel. I saw a park on my left, a remaining splash



Thursday Island, Mabo Day '97. Photograph: Denise Fowler

of green in the new Cairns I hadn't seen since 1973.

In the lingering light I could see Murris playing music in the park and I called out excitedly "stop the bus". I thought I could hear reggae.

The gig had been going since 3 p.m. Most people had left but there were a hundred or so black and white Australians, with children, sitting around together, enjoying the music. A haven of peace and sanity. I felt so lucky to hear three or four Aboriginal and Islander bands in the last hour or so before the day ended. Some beautiful Aboriginal and Islander young women sang harmonies as night continued to fall. Their up-front singer was a Murri man who sang with a spirit like Marley. The music was beautiful, funky, inspiring, lyrical, uplifting. Harmonies and love on the air. Our country's soul music.

The singer said, "Australia's always been multicultural. There were five hundred language groups here, we were like Europe." And I was in heaven. That's why I never leave. But there is a hell, and its representative was in town that night and there was that edge, that deadly reality outside the park. I wanted to dance, like we danced that night in Northcote.

At the end of the gig I remembered I used to work for the North Queensland Land Council, and maybe some of them would be here. I thought of who I'd know, who would still be around. The old Chairman, Mick Miller, might be. I felt excited again. I hadn't seen Mick for years. These were the people I'd worked most closely with. We used to sing in Lyndon and Wes' kitchen in Collingwood about Beautiful TI (Thursday Island). I never thought I'd go there one day. Or that so many of my Aboriginal friends would be dead. Or that every day would feel like Pauline Hanson day.

A WOMAN TOLD ME Mick might be in a cafe in the centre of town. The streets were filled with tourists, clothes shops, cafes and restaurants. (A Murri collapsed into a chair opposite me the day before and asked if he could sit down, a shellshock victim from another planet.)

I saw a black face through the cafe window and smiled. I thought it was Mick and went inside. The man at the window wasn't Mick but was as good looking. He invited me to sit with him. He said he was the elder who had welcomed everyone to the day's event and spoken for that land.

We talked of people we knew; the sad passing away of someone special to a lot of people, Clarrie Grogan, the middleweight champion of Australia, who fought in the last fight at Festival Hall, North Melbourne, the night it burnt down. Clarrie and I were mates. I used to drive him to meetings and sometimes carry him home when he'd had too much to drink.

I asked about my daughter's godfather, the editor of the North Queensland Land Council's *Messagestick* newspaper which was produced at my house in Brunswick, Melbourne, when my baby was born. Shorty was named in Joh Bjelke-Petersen's parliament and was Queensland's, or Australia's, most wanted Murri. A warrant was issued for his arrest to see a psychiatrist of Joh's choice.

That was the thing I noticed when I became involved with Aboriginal people; that life is played out on a battlefield. I never got used to being arrested, or stopped and pulled over, searched, detained, chased after in helicopters, hiding out. I didn't think Australia could be that exciting. As Shorty said, "It keeps life interesting".

I remember all my Aboriginal friends no longer here. The night I got Sandra out of Russell Street Police Station after she'd been driven all over the backroads of country Victoria for hours by the police. She thought she was going to die. Later that night we saw my beautiful friend, the dancer, artist and activist. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw him, a broken man. He told me he'd been bashed by the Queensland police and we had to do something. That was horror. He hanged himself soon after.

The stories go on . . .

Democratic, national, global

John McLaren

SINCE ITS FOUNDATION, the editors and supporters of *overland* have believed that peace and justice are inseparable. The founding editor, Stephen Murray-Smith, had fought to maintain Australian independence, and came out of the army with an abiding hatred of authoritarianism, prejudice and tyranny. Now, 150 issues later, while Australia is still taking faltering steps towards full independence and democracy, we find governments, by declaring war on unionists at home, inviting foreign capital to take over our institutions, and engaging in military adventures at the behest of foreign powers, jeopardizing the freedoms we have gained in a century of federation.

Even television's sport commentators would have difficulty in matching the hyperbole that has flowed from Canberra's Old Parliament House during the recent Constitutional Convention. Yet, for all its faults, not least the government's cynical but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to fix the process of electing delegates, the Convention did provide an example of democracy at work, and has produced a workable model of a republic. The issue now is whether the monarchists can whip up enough fear among voters in the smaller states to preserve us as a dominion of the house of Windsor. If they do, they will once again have demonstrated the ability of demagoguery to defeat hope.

Not that the demagoguery has been all on one side. Certainly, the monarchists made a strong sally, in

the best tradition of Charles I, to claim a monopoly over it. There was Brigadier Garland, with his claim that his oath to the Queen and her lawful successors precluded him from extending loyalty to a President who becomes her lawful successor. Then there was Lloyd Waddy, QC, Chairman of the King's School at Parramatta, claiming that, despite his membership of the RAAF since 1960, he had never sworn allegiance to a non-Australian monarch, and that the Constitution had no reference to such a person. His law lecturers presumably had failed to draw his attention to article 2, which specifically refers to the then Queen's successors in "the sovereignty of the United Kingdom". Even more preposterously, there was the suggestion by other monarchists that the sovereignty of the monarch derived from the people, and not from the ancestral thugs who had initially seized the throne. Finally, the Premiers of two of our quaintly governed states, Western Australia and Queensland, asserted that the issue was not the sovereign but the "Crown", an abstraction that apparently existed independently of the person in whom it was manifest and for whom it was a mere metonym.

Yet this hyperbole was more than matched by populists like Patrick O'Brien or Paul Tully, who claimed that election of a President from a constituency of all the electors of Australia would somehow guarantee democracy. It would of course do nothing of the kind, but rather would set up an alternative source of power that could be used to prevent the will of the people, albeit expressed in parliamentary elections that are stacked in favour of rural landholders and city capitalists,

from being implemented. Despite the claims to the contrary made by advocates of direct election, a president elected on 51 per cent of the vote can neither be above politics nor represent the nation as a whole.

The common criticism of the Convention was that it found agreement difficult. Yet this was also its greatest achievement. The return of debate from the theatrical mausoleum on the hill to the real debating chamber by the lake allowed democracy, with all its faults, to work, but its central message was the widespread distrust of politicians and of the system that elects them. While delegates were happy to fan this distrust, it bodes ill for our future. The delegates who objected to the divisions of opinion and to the attempts to overcome them by compromise were objecting to the process of democracy. Those who objected to the authority of parliaments were objecting to the popular sovereignty they claimed to uphold. Those who wanted easy answers, individuals vested with authority, an absence of division, were forgetting the old adage that for the most complex question there is an answer that is short, clear and wrong. There lies the path to the kind of Bonapartism that has characterized recent governments in Queensland and Victoria.

The search for clear answers is a similar abdication of responsibility to that shown by the present federal government in its attitudes to foreign power and capital. The current negotiations on free international movement of capital threaten any independent cultural, environmental, educational or employment policies. At the same

time, the world seems engaged once more in a doomed race towards a war to end wars. The agreement of the government, supported by the Labor Party, to join the United States in military action against Saddam Hussein, is a substitution of action for thought. Hussein, with his probable arsenal of vicious weaponry, is undoubtedly a menace to world peace and human life. An attack on him, however, is an attack on the Iraqi people, who are responsible neither for his arsenal nor his actions. It threatens to unleash on the world the very terrors it is supposed to avert. Whatever the outcome, to resort to military action is to admit the failure of western policies in the Middle East to bring either peace or justice to its peoples. The problems of Kuwaitis, Iranians, the Kurds, the Israelis and the Palestinians will remain. Meanwhile, as a report to the US Congress suggests, Hussein's doomsday technologies will be spread more widely among rogue regimes sympathetic to him, and the prospect of mass destruction become even closer.

The real global challenges to Australian sovereignty are to act independently abroad, and to maintain our independence at home. The republic will not achieve either of these ends, but it may give us the confidence to insist that our governments work towards them.

Phil Cleary was right about one thing at the Convention. The Constitution needs a preamble setting out who we are as a nation. The lawyers got to this and gutted it. Now is the time to let the poets have a go. They may help the rest of us join Cleary's passionate beliefs in his country to a clear-sighted understanding of who we are and

where we come from. That would give us a base from which we could make our own way into the coming millennium.

Hair and History at the Convention of Australian Love

Janine Little Nyoongah

AS AUSTRALIANS APPEARED to be headed into another Gulf War, a line from the Constitutional Convention TV coverage seemed to sum it all up for me, "In a hundred years time, they'll look at your hair and wonder what you were thinking".

The hair in focus belongs to one of the five women I recall saying anything, or being given air time during the week-long gabfest. Moira Rayner's pink forelock at first satisfied my yearning for something apart from Myer elegance, something a little raw, something that might strike an unconscious chord with the sort of youth who weren't represented in the chamber.

Its garish glint into the mire of flannelled good intentions was a point of disorder, the mosh-pit-dwelling, dreadlocked disenchantment that is usually tossed off government property – unless it's a watch-house – or featured on a Ray Martin dole-bludging story.

It glinted from Moira Rayner's head, and like the TV reporter, I gazed at it. I gazed so hard I barely heard what she was saying, and instead thought about being young in a country where being tossed off the stage before the show starts means you have good reason to be more interested in crowd surfing than in Constitutional reform. The fact that the Convention is deciding

on our future, or at least the system that will dominate the largest part of it, seems lost on what became first a chamber of mostly middle-minded horrors, then one big conservative, Canberra-style love-in. Apart from the straight-man talents of RSL chief, Bruce Ruxton, the Canberra version showed little of the connections with impassioned dissent that were so characteristic of the love-ins of the sixties.

All that stayed outside Old Parliament House, in the mosh pits, on the beaches and on the streets, where that other sixties adage about not trusting anyone over thirty would still be vindicated by the clean-cut, well-heeled selection of young Australians that those now too old to stage-dive chose as having the most interesting things to say. There wasn't a pink dye job, nose ring or dreadlock in sight. If Moira Rayner looks wilder than the kids, then, as usual, any sign of dissent seems to have been sidelined from the start. This has always happened in the cultural and political history of Australia, so how might the chamber have given its 1998 love-in some of the verve and energy that also has historically been stifled by grander visions for the nation?

The pink strip of hair might have flicked over the eyes of a real teenager, a Nimbin feral, a Byron surf freak, or maybe even a kid living on the street. Next to Poppy King, the lipstick queen – talking about how anything is possible as long as you have ideas – a street kid, feral, or freak would be living proof that it doesn't always work that way. Or maybe you do just wake up one day, become bored with your shade of lippy, make your own, and become a young millionaire. Someone with ideas like that obviously has much

more to contribute to the shaping of our nation than a kid without a job, or a nice haircut. Lucky it was Poppy, and not them, or Bruce Ruxton might have offered to sort 'em out with both by signing them up to jump in with President Clinton's boys, as they bust up Baghdad again.

Then they would have haircuts, jobs and a President, and we wouldn't even have to bother with a referendum because the only Bill that would be shaping our future is in the White House, regretting the day he let another young woman with big ideas into his chamber. Yes, women become a bit of a problem when they don't stick to just lippy, and what do you do in times such as this but the same thing old Bruce or Ray Martin would do with those long-haired, dole-bludging ferals. Pull 'em into line and send them off to make their country proud. Or at least that's what I thought when I saw those clean-cut young things taking their seats next to Malcolm Turnbull and Kim Beazley. Call me nostalgic, but I treasure the few things I know about the sixties – hell, maybe its just that same old nostalgia that keeps me and a few comrades carping on about class consciousness, when time and time gain we are *told* Australia is a classless society. Sad gits that we are, all we have is history – like me being born in 1965, and being only three when the Vietnam war started. That was the same year that anti-Vietnam war student protesters had the police brought in on them with the full consent of all but a minority of Left academics. It was a time, perhaps, to be in Paris – where the student uprisings of 1968 had an intellectual base that fed into political praxis – rather than the cities of Australia, where protesters

were tossed off campuses and thrown in jail with other conscientious objectors.

I do not recall hearing, from anyone who was on the streets in 1968, anything like the rhetoric of the Constitutional Convention's claim to be "making history". When the Convention, and Australia's complicity with the US in aggression against Iraq, are all part of the historical process anyway, it's funny that those who were around in the sixties keep making that claim about this most recent meeting of bourgeois minds. It's even stranger still that they do not seem to attribute Howard's eagerness to book front row seats at another use of force to "stop the threat of mass destruction" to the same logic that sent Australian troops to Vietnam.

I think I've heard a few people ask, since the wiping away of the last conventional, patriotic tear, whether finding a model for an Australian republic really matters when it occurs at exactly the same time that the Prime Minister leaps at the chance to send Australians off to another war that is none of our business. Those who believe in nationalism say it is time to let go of mother's hand and grow up without the Queen. Yet the ambience and timing of such nationalistic manufacturing of consent reflects more an historical amnesia about the Indigenous dispossession represented by that Queen, than a commitment to reconciling it with the return of lands to the traditional custodians. The amnesia and the emotionalism performed to the strains of the anthem: all so Australian, yet all so wonderfully American.

I felt like I was at the wedding reception of some distant relation:

the kind with the daggy uncle who drags you up to the dance floor to do the chicken dance; the kind where the reception's two-course menu of sponge cake and beer are served together, so by the time the speeches and back-slapping start, you're so tanked up on sugar and grog that all the jokes are hilarious, everyone looks great, and Whitney Houston's 'I will always love you' sounds bloody beautiful.

All this I ponder as I watch that pink glint of hair amid the big wigs of Australian social commentary celebrating their own week of fighting, drinking and teary hugs, and I wonder about Bill. In fact, Bill is so clear in my mind – now that Mr Howard has bravely sent off other men to fight in the next Gulf war – that whenever someone mentions an Australian President, I keep hearing Bill calling, "Come to Daddy".

And for some reason, it's not the young ferals, crowd surfers and unemployed I see stumbling over each other to follow the President into war. I see all those who speak of Australia's need to let go of the British Queen, and those who believe arguing about what kind of republic we should have means more than an 8.2 per cent unemployment figure, or the bitter disputes over Native Title that have made Australia an international cause.

I see millionaires, militants and the middle-minded, and those who are married or meaningfully committed, and so know the thrill of the link between sex and war. I see Bill being our President, and I see Australians a century from now looking not at Moira Rayner's pink forelock, but at all those ferals, freaks and fringe dwellers left out of the chamber, and I see them wondering, perhaps, what they were thinking.

An Object of Espionage

Anthony Cappello

EARLY IN MAY 1940 Father Ugo Modotti gathered the Italian community of Melbourne into the hall of St George's Catholic Church in Carlton. Here he shared his vision of a religious revival of the migrant community, his operation '*religiosa italiana*'.¹ The plan was to establish a house where Italian Jesuit Fathers would live and work with the Italian community. This house was to be the nerve centre of Italian–Australian religious life, ensuring immigrants arriving from Italy would be safeguarded from the dangers of secularism and Protestantism. On this very night Modotti established his committee. It included the top guns of the community – Severino DeMarco, Dr Soccorso Santoro (the community's doctor), Gualtiero Vaccari (the community's entrepreneur and later the immigrants' representative on government boards) and Guiseppe Santamaria (whose son was to split the ALP fifteen years later).²

In the crowd were two Italian-speaking policemen. They had been sent there by Inspector Roland Browne to find out what Modotti's real scheme was and to determine whether the meeting was a cover-up for a fascist gathering.

It was 1940, the world was at war and Italy looked like uniting with Germany, therefore facing war with the Commonwealth. In Melbourne this threat of war with Italy had a more particular concern: a fifth-column revolt. Ten thousand organized Italians under the auspices of a clever priest spelt major security concerns. The authorities were faced with this religious leader, Father Ugo

Modotti, who was determined, strong willed, intelligent, patriotic, and possibly an Italian fascist. In a matter of months he had united the Italian community under the guise of religion and had such power that the authorities feared him and secretly placed a twenty-four-hour surveillance on him. However, he had the protection of Archbishop Daniel Mannix, a well-known supporter of the anti-British organization, the IRA. When Italy had invaded Abyssinia, Mannix did not attack Italy's quest for colonial territories, but rather used the occasion to attack British Imperialism.³

At the meeting Modotti collected one hundred pounds and a deposit was placed on the house. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world in Europe, Italy's foolish entry into the war seemed imminent. Inspector Browne had received a call from the Director-General of Security, with the instruction that as soon as Italy declared war Modotti was to be interned.⁴

On 10 June 1940, Italy declared war on the Commonwealth. On 11 June 1940 a police car arrived at St Ignatius, Richmond, with an arrest warrant on which was the name Rev. Hugh Modotti SJ. His crime – being a fascist and a threat to society.⁵ The evidence was fragmented and very vague – not enough to hold up in court. But wartime fears of a fifth-column revolt ensured convenient internment and a postwar trial for those arrested.

The arrest was a failure, as an account of the event recalls: Modotti approached the car, and two kind policemen opened the door. Modotti, six feet tall, slammed the door shut, refusing to get in. Once again the door was opened and Modotti was

asked to enter, but once again he refused and the door was shut. By this stage the other Jesuits had come out to witness the spectacle and were amused by the police's inability to make Modotti enter the car.⁶ Modotti then left in his Fiat, which had been provided to him a year earlier by a fund organized by the Italian Fascist Consular Officials in Melbourne. The policemen followed in their vehicle and the two cars soon arrived at Raheen, Kew, the residence of Archbishop Mannix.

Modotti, with the policemen following, entered the room with His Grace, possibly finishing off a coffee scroll. Modotti stood behind His Grace as a policeman read the charges. It was the state versus the church – the medieval struggle had entered the twentieth century. Mannix called the Minister of the Army, Brigadier Street. A heated discussion followed, but a compromise was reached. With the church being powerful – made up mainly of Irish immigrants, many of whom shared their homeland's neutrality in the war – Brigadier Street faced a divided community. Street informed Browne that no further action should be taken against Modotti. However he was placed on parole.⁷

Barely escaping arrest, Modotti in the following month gathered those left in the Italian community after the internments and revealed his plan for "the religious assistance of the internees and their families".⁸ Among the crowd there were two Italian-speaking policemen listening in on Modotti's plan. They were sent there by Inspector Browne.⁹

For the next five years Modotti was followed, harassed and arrested a number of times, but always escaped internment thanks to

Archbishop Mannix and Roman Catholic Chaplain-General, Rev. Tim McCarthy. Yet the authorities were determined to have him in detention and in 1943 they called in an American secret agent, Sgt Colucci, to trap Modotti.¹⁰

The plan, thought up by the Security Services in Queensland, was to have Colucci pretend that he was a deserter from the American army. From here he was to approach Modotti in the confessional and ask for help in the hope that Modotti would shelter him.¹¹

The plan never worked as Modotti did not take confessions. Even if it had worked the police faced the problem of evidence gained in the confessional being inadmissible in court.

Modotti returned to Italy in 1945, and up until he departed his every move was watched. The authorities never understood the real mission of Modotti, opting in the end to make him an object of espionage. Yet, two years later, his personal friend Arthur A. Calwell visited him in Rome, hoping that Modotti would return to continue his work in Australia. He refused, to the relief of the Australian Security Services.

ENDNOTES

1. *Italo-Australian*, 25 May 1940.
2. *ibid*.
3. *The Advocate*, 17 October 1935, p. 12.
4. Inspector Browne to G.S.O. (M.I.) Southern Command, 11 June 1940, Commonwealth Investigation Services, Father Ugo Modotti, Australian Archives A367/1, Item C62490, Canberra.
5. Ugo Modotti Statement, 15 April 1943, Commonwealth Investigation Services, Father Ugo Modotti, Australian Archives A367/1, Item C62490, Canberra.
6. This version was told to the author by B.A. Santamaria for his thesis

A.S. Cappello, 'Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919–1945', 1995, Department of Christian Thought and History, Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne.

7. Dr Mannix to the Hon. F. M. Forde, Minister for the Army, 26 March 1942, and also Police Report of Major H. R. Seeger, Melbourne, 18 September, 1945, Commonwealth Investigation Services, Father Ugo Modotti, Australian Archives A367/1, Item C62490, Canberra.
8. 'Serata Pro Assistenza Internati, 20 December 1940', Church flyer at St Ignatius, Richmond. Italian Historical Society, Modotti Collection, Melbourne.
9. Oral Interviews (D. Triaca, R. Romanin, J. Coloretti) conducted for the thesis, A.S. Cappello, 'Aspects of Italian Catholic Life in Melbourne, with special reference to the Political Convictions of the Chaplains, 1919–1945', 1995, Department of Christian Thought and History, Yarra Theological Union, Melbourne.
10. Deputy Director of Security for Queensland to Director-General of Security, Canberra, 5 July 1943, *ibid*.
11. Deputy Director of Security for Queensland to Director-General of Security, Canberra, 15 July 1943, *ibid*.

Anthony Cappello is completing a MA in History at Victoria University on 'Italians, Fascism and the Catholic Church in Melbourne 1919–1945'.

Damien Broderick writes:

WHILE I WAS PLEASED by Dr John Leonard's generally favourable review of my book *Theory and Its Discontents*, I was dismayed by one rather eccentric, and key, rhetorical move. Leonard dubbed my approach "postmodern Toryism", immediately defined as "the same things just keep on coming round again and again", and set up by

contrast to "the prevailing Whiggism of the academy, pretheoretical and theoretical". I have two strong objections to this characterization.

First, 'Toryism' no longer conveys that antique distinction to most readers, so I suspect many will carry away an inference that my arguments and views reflect those of, say, Margaret Thatcher or John Howard. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It's as if a democratic theorist were obliged to declare for either King or Barons. The real choices, luckily, are considerably broader (and deeper).

Secondly, although I broach the topic of imposed and elicited cycles – an unfashionable suggestion, in today's pomo phase of attacks on 'generationalism' – it's the *style* or *modality* of discursive recurrences that "just keep on coming round", not their contents. Quantum theory tells us absolutely new things about the world, even if its heyday was (by my speculative account) a double generation especially primed for emphasis on theory rather than, say, thrusting self-expression, and it bears on human technologies in radically discontinuous ways. The consequences are the very opposite of 'Toryism': the world, if we can keep our heads in the face of unremitting change, is indeed "going to provide unimaginable prosperity for everyone in the next century", as I detail in *The Spike: Accelerating into the Unimaginable Future* (Reed, 1997), as 'Whiggish' a book as one could imagine.

Put it in your diary!

OVERLAND 150 will be launched and celebrated at Melbourne Trades Hall on 9 May 1998 at 7.30 p.m. All welcome.

miscellany

Sydneyside

Sean Scalmer

FAMOUSLY, cultural life in Sydney has been portrayed as libertarian, boozy, sensuous and politically detached. This was a vision of cultural life critically presented in John Docker's 1974 analysis of Australian cultural elites. While Melbourne elites were concerned with social improvement and organic unity, Docker argued that their Sydney counterparts were social pessimists, holding to a kind of elite pluralism.

This is a portrait that has always had its critics. However, over the last two decades it has gradually been extended from a critical vision of Sydney's specifically elite culture into a kind of thumbnail sketch of the city as a whole. In the process, the politically radical culture of the city has been excised. Even the University of Sydney, home to the free-thinking Andersonians, was always home to a more dissenting, politically radical current – evident in the existence of the Student Action for Aborigines Council, the Free University, the political economy movement, and the Philosophy strike of the middle 1970s. This has been suppressed. The place of Sydney as the headquarters of the Communist Party has equally

been marginalized, as has the more complex history of connections between intellectuals, the union movement, and the new social movements.

The myth of Sydney's monolithic culture has been consolidated over the last few years. Memoirs and histories of the Sydney Push – the archetype of 'sensuous' Sydney culture, have recently been published. Tony Moore's ABC documentary, 'Bohemian Rhapsody', extended it to a wider audience. McKenzie Wark's recent work, *The Virtual Republic*, recapitulates the standard elements of the myth, and implicitly positions itself as the culmination of 'the Sydney tradition'. Wark runs through the pantheon of the Sydney libertarians, taking time to praise his most recent contemporaries, and grab the mantle for the Sydney postmodernists. John Anderson is appropriated as a precursor to Gilles Deleuze. The classic Sydney view is that the big picture looks after itself, Wark assures us. Sydney is about social difference, cosmopolitanism, and the good life, we are told. Spirited irony is the spirit of Sydney postmodernism, he emphasizes, before plodding through a four-page explanation of irony, replete with the Greek roots of the word, references to Socrates, Duchamp and Warhol. It is capped, in what I can

only assume is a 'spirited', 'ironic' parody of intellectual patronage, with a quote from "best mate, sparring partner, comrade, colleague, confidante and co-conspirator" (and apparent expert on irony), Catherine Lumby. The mythical culture of Sydney even becomes the implicit basis for Wark's vision of an ideal public sphere, a place where "rednecks and faggots can acknowledge each other's existence and yet pass on by".

Is all of this a serious, moral engagement with the future of public culture in Australia, or an ironic, playful critique of those intellectuals intent on producing detailed maps of the social good? I suppose, if the mythical vision of Sydney culture is to be believed, it's down to those from Melbourne to answer. Up here, we're too busy drinking, fucking and being amusing to bother.

Soundings '97

Third Biennial National Conference on Poetry

Pam Brown

I WAS WARNED by an experienced poetry conference participant of the possibility that the Third National Poetry Conference might be

"a bunch of poets standing around glowering at each other". This prediction, a popular and standard perception of poets-in-groups, was proved wrong. 'Soundings', organized by Jeri Kroll and Lyn Jacobs and held in Adelaide in November 1997, was a showcase of difference and its exchange, and of diverse positions, styles, politics and ideas.

Because of the concurrent sessions there were several papers I'd wanted to hear but had to miss – Lee Cataldi and Fred Jensen on their collaborative video-tropes project, John Mateer on Vygotsky's linguistics, Moya Costello's 'The prose poem says find me' and a reading by Miriel Lenore. The conference proceedings will be published and Mike Ladd recorded the readings for ABC radio but, here, I'll give brief impressions of the presentations that I found most impressive.

Ann Vickery's reclamation and exposition of Anna Wickham, the English/Australian poet whose dislike of bourgeois married-life's complexities and frustrations led her to produce erotic poetry. She was encouraged by her father but, after the publication of her *Songs* by 'John Oland' (a pseudonym) her husband had her committed to an asylum for six weeks in order to prevent her poetic pursuits. Anna Wickham suicided by hanging in 1947.

Elizabeth Parsons tackled notions of authenticity and historiography – "can poets speak for the unspoken past?" – using Dot Porter's 'Ahkenhaten' and Susan Howe's poetic fictionalizing of Jonathan Swift's 'Journal to Stella'.

Lyn McCredden wanted to know "Where are all the real poets?" by examining the worsening relations between academics and writers. It

seems 'real poets' and 'real academics' are making pronouncements in this "intellectual battlefield" even while wishing each other would go away, disappear off the edge of the rifle range.

Steve Kelen's 'When holograms kiss: poetry and Star Trek' showed clearly that poetry is likely to last into many millenia to come and 'Star Trek' knows its literary theories well. – "Remember, it is among the Klingons that love poetry achieves its finest flower" – Worf.

no's keynote presentation on 'dialect' poetry in Australia was a tour-de-force and set the agenda for an immediate flurry of discourse leading, later in the day, to the session 'Transcreations' in which Tom Shapcott examined the (im)possibilities of translation and Adam Aitken, looking at hybridity in poetry, introduced the work of the Hawaiian 'creole' poet Lois Ann Yamanaka and also talked about Lionel Fogarty.

Rosemary Huisman, a semantics expert working in Sydney University's English Department, took a break from her daily grind and presented a witty and percipient paper on avant-garde poetics including an uplifting, over-the-top literal rendition of a Dada sound poem.

Lisa Bellear, an enthusiastic, ad-libbing yarn-spinner, came across as a natural comic in the face of the huge adversities currently being experienced by Aboriginal people. Kevin Brophy's impeccable light touch illuminated the urban-rural dichotomy and the concept of 'place' in Australian poetry – focusing finally on the poetic community of suburban Brunswick in Melbourne. Philip Salom's address ranged broadly – excited by the potential

liberations offered by hypertext, he had some doubts about poetry as a medium for propaganda.

I shared a reading with Dinah Hawken, a brilliant poet from Wellington, New Zealand whose measured, slow reading style allows her images to sneak up on and surprise an audience – from *The Harbour Poems*:

Turned away from the lecture on
sexual economics
she goes down into the sexual
garden, under its dark spread
and into its detail: ecstatically
branching magnolia, tuberous
roots thrusting up huge leaves. Fuck
the tulips in their damned
obedient rows. Stop. They're finally
opening their throats!
They have dark purple stars! They
have stigma! They have style!

"An opiate to your amphetamine"
was how Steve Kelen put it to me.

On Saturday, out at Flinders University, the action was in the happy blathering that occurred in response to the morning's papers at lunch al fresco over a refectory canteen sandwich and a styrofoam cup of lukewarm instant coffee. On Sunday, in the restaurants of Rundle Mall, grouped around cool, dry Fox Creek whites, e-mail adversaries reconciled, poets and academics chatted and gossiped together, displaying no hint of the afflicting "worsening relations" on the magazine battlefields, and interrupted by only occasional bragging of brushes with poets more famous than those present.

An event in association with the conference was the launch of Ken Bolton's *Untimely Meditations* at a city wine bar. Old timers' meditations – old friends with new

poems – John Forbes, Steve Kelen, Ken Bolton and myself, newer poet Cath Kenneally and New Zealander Dinah Hawken gave a reading to celebrate the new collection. A nice way to complete an intense and vital dose of poetics.

Land and Identities

Shirley Tucker

ASAL 97 was a relatively small gathering of the faithful at the University of New England, Armidale, 26–30 September 1997. Perhaps the provincial location and the specific focus of the conference, 'Land and Identity', deterred many potential participants looking for a more eclectic selection of papers. Although I was looking forward to a motel room on my own, catching up on a bit of reading and listening to a few papers, I was a bit worried about the possibility of endless discussions on 'landscape' or the 'bush'.

Certainly, most papers featured done-to-death Australian landscape tropes: deserts, lighthouses, urban spaces, homecomings, monotony and the picturesque, and there was a touch of *deja vu* in session topic names such as 'imagined landscapes', 'land and identity' and, the more recent, 'territories of desire'. However, despite the focus on a literature/landscape/identity nexus, many papers (not all) managed to avoid cliched and tired references to the landscape as a social and literary barometer of Australian national identity. And although the word 'landscape' was often replaced with 'space' and 'topographies', this change in the terminology was not just a simple rhetorical strategy for rabbiting on

about the same old stuff. Vivienne Muller, for example, delivered a detailed discussion of cultural mythology in Andrew McGahan's 1988, and questioned whether McGahan's comic irreverence significantly shifted dominant gender discourses away from idealized versions of a predominantly masculine national identity. Christy Collis claimed that Robyn Davidson significantly rewrote the desert in her exploration narrative, *Tracks*. Mary Ann Hughes examined the complexity of identity politics itself, by discussing the work of Sally Morgan and Mudrooroo and considering the controversy surrounding them personally as Aboriginal authors. Ros Haynes revisited the desert by critiquing the work of E.L. Grant Watson, whose attitudes and insights about Aboriginal culture she argued, could pass as 1990s postcolonialism.

Naturally, I was not able to hear all the papers and these are among my personal favourites, but my overall impression was that most papers were innovative, and thankfully, at times, theoretical. The specific focus on a theme helped the development of a detailed critique for both the speakers and the audience. Sadly however, the audience didn't seem up to the task in the 'question asking' department. Most questions appeared to be unrelated to the research papers. For example, Muller was at a loss to comment on a statement made by one ASAL member who "liked" McGahan's book and who pointed out that it was very popular on the ADFA reading list. After presenting a complex theoretical framework in which to read Davidson's interaction with the desert, Collis was asked to speculate on the relationship

between Davidson and a National Geographic photographer. Another presenter who examined environmental questions in Eleanor Dark's writing was asked whether she had ever seen Dark's (presumably preserved) garden. I know irrelevant responses can arise in any situation, but these questions and comments were made by academics who should be better at this sort of thing.

The prize for the most controversial and disjointed paper went to Goldie Osuri and S. Banerjee's reading of the Port Arthur 'massacre' against a history of white media silence regarding Aboriginal massacres. Unfortunately, their passionate critique was marred by too many sweeping generalizations, but it certainly changed the relaxed and confident mood of the predominantly white, and subsequently silent, audience.

Speaking of prizes, it was a pity that some members of the ASAL executive, in a disgraceful display of bad manners at the Presentation of Awards dinner, completely ignored the Mary Gilmore Award winner while at the same time fawned over the two other Award winners – Paul Carter and Robert Dessaix. Talented, female and young, Morgan Yasbincek was seen at a table set for ten, dining with only her parents who had flown from Perth for this celebration. It was bad enough that there was apparently no room for her on the grownups' table, but no one from the ASAL executive introduced her to significant others who were there to see the Awards presented and to meet the recipients, rather than sample the ordinary cuisine.

Discussions about 'Land and Identity' are often an attempt to

reconcile a set of contradictory and unsettling claims on the Australian landscape. Aboriginal writers have changed the language of land and identity relationships, and perhaps this is why papers that expressed 'spiritual connection,' and 'affinity' with the land borrowed these terms and concepts from Aboriginal writing. Before leaving picturesque and pastoral New England, I went with friends to the site of Judith Wright's 'Niggers Leap New England'. Watched by a large black bird, we read Wright's poem looking over the rocky outcrop where hundreds of Aborigines were driven to their deaths by local white farmers. The vicarious nature of this act of 'spiritual connection' however, was soon revealed to me. Back in the information hut, we discovered that we were south of that particular infamous cliff. Driving back to Brisbane I noticed many such outcrops and realized that any 'affinity' with the land white people might imagine could only be expressed in fiction where it didn't much matter which cliff you stood on to read a poem.

Report from Cambridge

John Kinsella

THE ANNUAL Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry will be held here in late April. The Conference invites innovative poets from around the world to read and discuss their work in an intense and empathetic environment. This year's Australian guest was to be John Forbes, who had visited Cambridge last year and immediately gained a following. He attended, and eventually read in, Lucy Sheerman

and Karlien van den Beukel's rempress poetry reading series. John stayed with us for a couple of weeks at Churchill College and we spent much time discussing his new volume of poetry, which at that stage was to be called *The Banquet of Cleopatra*. Rod Mengham of Equipage – a cutting-edge poetry press based in Jesus College and specializing in pamphlets – is to publish a selection of this material sometime this year. John was a close friend; it is hard coming to grips with his death.

The organizers of the CCCP are including a memorial reading of John's work on this year's program. The CCCP is a forum for the linguistically innovative, and seeks to explore the periphery of poetic activity. Tracy Ryan, John Tranter, myself, and Les Murray, have all been guests of the Conference. John Tranter's pamphlet *Gasoline Kisses* was released to coincide with his much-lauded appearance at last year's event. The Murray reading the year before was similarly successful – something of a surprise package actually. 'Bat's Ultrasound' works in any environment! The CCCP is looking to continue its relationship with Australian poetry and hopes to bring a different innovative Australian poet to Cambridge annually. This year's program will include poets from Canada, France, USA, and Britain. Some of those attending will be: Roy Fisher, Anthony Barnett, Helen Macdonald, Keston Sutherland, Peter Gizzi, Lee Ann Browne, Peter Blegvad, Lisa Jarnot, and Olivier Cadiot.

Cambridge is proving something of a focal point for Australian writers. We have been able to create reading and seminar spaces for Australian writers, as well as put

them up for short periods of time. Audiences are variable, which is the nature of things here. Next year a residency for an Australian writer, to be administered through the English Faculty of the University with the support of the Newton Trust, Judith E. Wilson Fund, and The Australia Council, will commence. We are also working on a scheme to bring an Australian academic with an interest in Australian literature, particularly in an international focus, to the University. The incumbent would present a seminar in the Commonwealth and International Literature course, be available for supervisions, and spend the time doing their own research/work. Bruce Bennett will be working at Cambridge, based at Kings College, from April to June this year, while Chris Wallace-Crabbe will be giving a seminar in the Commonwealth and International Literature Course of 4 May. The New Images tour of Britain passed through Cambridge in October and the participants stayed at Churchill College where they gave a reading in our Australian Literature Festival. The readers were: Fotini Epanomitis, Robert Drewe, Justine Ettler, Dorothy Porter, Christos Tsiolkas, and Sam Watson. This year's festival will focus on India though will include an Australian component (readers yet to be decided). Audiences varied from a dozen to eighty. This year will see the commencement of the Folio(Salt) poetry pamphlet publishing program out of Churchill College. The first batch will include Gig Ryan, Adam Aitken, Peter Minter, S.K. Kelen, and Pam Brown. The idea is to introduce British audiences (through free library distribution) to Australian writers in a collective sense, rather than as the odd

individual who's managed to have publishing success in the UK.

Professor Carl Bridge and Dr Bernard Attard have been working to put together an interesting and diverse academic and literary program at the Menzies Centre at the Centre for Commonwealth Studies at London University. Over the last twelve months numerous Australian writers and academics have read or given seminars there. John Forbes, Gail Jones, and John Bennett were among those who read there. April events will include: Lesley Walker (ICS) "How to get there? Where to go?" Choosing New South Wales in the Nineteenth Century: A Case Study from Wales'; and a joint meeting with the Commonwealth History/Decolonization seminar.

Australia House has just appointed an Arts Advisory Committee to oversee and advise on its cultural activities in the future. Their Literary Links series is to continue, with a number of major events in the planning stages.

Across the Channel, Elaine Lewis' Australian Bookshop in Paris continues to support Australian writers as it did so effectively in 1997. David Malouf is due to appear there in April, adding to a program that has included Beth Yahp and Venero Armano. Venero also recently gave a week-long workshop at Hamburg University in Germany, following in the footsteps of Tracy Ryan and Bernard Cohen.

Individual appearances by Australian writers at venues as diverse as Barcelona University, the Literaturhaus Salzburg, and Universities in Portugal, Denmark, and Italy, are increasingly common occurrences. My next report will focus more on continental Europe.

Commonwealth Writing for a Global Audience

John McLaren

AS COMMUNICATIONS are globalized, prizes for writing become more important as a way of giving authors the publicity that gives them access to an international audience. But most prizes are either national, like Australia's various Premiers' awards, or metropolitan, decided by judges in London or New York whose interest is in writing that challenges the jaded palette of middle-class consumers. Certainly, these prizes have gone to some distinguished writers, like Salman Rushdie or Michael Ondaatje or Thomas Keneally, but these are all writers who have already taken their subjects into the global mainstream.

This leaves space for the Commonwealth Writers Prize, which is based on the regions of the old British Empire. This sounds terribly imperialist, but in fact it gives a space to the writing that is expressing the dilemmas of the post-imperial world, and so giving its readers the opportunity to escape from the bonds of old and new colonialism. The prize is awarded by selecting a final winner from nominees chosen by juries in the various regions. In past years, nominees from the Southeast Asian and South Pacific region, including Australia, have included Witi Ihimaera, Gillian Mears, Andrew McGahan, Albert Wendt, and Fotini Epanimotis. Winners have included David Malouf, Alex Miller, Rohinton Mistry, Janet Frame, Vikram Seth and George Turner.

Entries for the 1998 award, in the two categories of best fiction and

best first fiction, closed on 15 November 1997. The final judging will take place in Jamaica this April 1998. The chairperson for the Southeast Asia and Pacific region is Kee Thuan Chai, literary editor of the *New Straits Times* and a distinguished critic and playwright.

Teri Merlyn writes:

I AM WORKING on a biography of my uncle, Eric Lambert. I welcome contact via *overland* from any one who might have information of value to this task I have before me. Spare copies of any of Eric's books would also be appreciated.

Floating Fund

SINCE OUR FIRST ISSUE, when Frank Hardy and Eric Lambert gave £12/10- between them, and Stephen Murray-Smith announced the 'stay-afloat' fund, *overland* has relied on the donations of subscribers and supporters. Our sincere thanks to the following for their support: \$50 D.G.; \$40 D.D., J.P.; \$25 J.K.; \$20 D.B., J.A.McD., B.J.N-S.; \$18 J.B., J.H., J.H., D.B., D.H., P.M., T.S., L.A.R., R.M., C.M., J.B.; \$10 E.W., G.B., H.F.; \$8 J.D.McC., V.B., M.M., C.E.S., P.R., NT C.W.P., H.D., S.M., J.A., P.H., C.L., R.B., M.L.; \$5 S.T., R.J.H., H.H.; \$3 L.C., J.F., R.I.; Totalling: \$571.

Erratum:

Due to an editing misunderstanding, we mistakenly published a corrupt version of Robert Verdon's 'Work, Obey, Fight' in issue no. 149. The lines printed between "onto the hot coil of a telegraph sender" and "on display for our enlightenment" are from another poem.

books

Unimagined Survival

Glen Ross

Russell McGregor: *Imagined Destinies; Aboriginal Australia and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (MUP, \$29.95).

FEW WHITE AUSTRALIANS earlier this century could have imagined that a strong and vibrant Aboriginal population and culture would exist in this country today. At that time, the destiny of 'White Australia' was imagined in relation to an understanding of the expected demise of the Aboriginal people. Today, historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars are increasingly focusing on the evolutionist ideas that informed the conceptions of the Aboriginal people as the fading remnants of a disposed race.

Russell McGregor's *Imagined Destinies* calls to mind Tony Austin's 1993 study *I Can Still Picture the Old Home So Clearly: The Commonwealth and 'Half-caste' Youth in the Northern Territory 1911-1939* and Lester Hiatt's *Arguments About Aborigines: Australia and the Evolution of Social Anthropology* (1996). It finds a position between these studies as an examination of both the intellectual underpinnings that informed the 'doomed race concept' and a survey of the role anthropological ideas played in the formulation of official governmental policies. Like Austin, he focuses on Aboriginal administration in the Northern Territory, and like Hiatt he follows the paradigmatic shift from evolutionist to functionalist anthropology in the Australian context.

Imagined Destinies is a history of textual representations of the Aboriginal people from the time of invasion to 1939. It begins by identifying the ideas that informed the representation of the Aboriginal people in early colonial Australia, before exploring the way the "Enlightenment tradition of societal development and the post-Enlightenment science of race

were harnessed together in evolutionary anthropology". Drawing upon the work of Baldwin Spencer, it then moves through an analysis of the way evolutionist ideas were deployed in the representation of the Aboriginal people as a dying race. Considerable attention is given to the shift in orientation from evolutionist to functionalist anthropology. Using A.P. Elkin as a point of focus, McGregor probes the plethora of ideas converging on the 'half-caste' problem. He shows how commentators from a wide range of sites and practices were in disagreement over the future of the Aboriginal people in the context of the dissolution of the doomed race ideas.

McGregor's aim was not, however, to write a history of anthropology in Australia, and despite the prominence in *Imagined Destinies* of the work of Baldwin Spencer and A.P. Elkin, he reveals something similar to what Mikhail Bakhtin called 'heteroglossia': an array of voices converging on the Aboriginal 'problem'. In following Australian anthropology from its institutional establishment in 1888 through to its more conspicuous presence in Sydney University in the 1930s, he establishes a chronological framework for exploring the complex web of debate revolving around the doomed race concept. Probing beneath the 'grand narrative' of Australian anthropology, he considers the important influence upon the public imagination of the opinions of 'Protectors', such as John Bleakley, Cecil Cook and A.O. Neville. Moreover, he shows how the voices of people even less directly involved with Aboriginal administration emerged to intermingle with those of the anthropologists and protectors. The meliorist account of Daisy Bates clashed with the lonely voice of David Unaipon, and the 'robust' criticism of the mining engineer Charles Chewings was not so different from that of the novelist, Xavier Herbert. Finally, in a gesture towards finding Aboriginal voices among the objectifying tradition of the white colonialism, McGregor seeks to show that: "However constraining the Western intel-

lectual tradition may have been" the emerging voice of Aboriginal activists indicated that they are "perfectly capable of fashioning certain of its elements anew, into arguments that challenged dominant white perceptions of a race locked forever in the Stone Age".

What McGregor demonstrates in *Imagined Destinies*, is that anthropologists, protectors, humanitarian reformers, missionaries, Aboriginal activists and others developed a complex web of ideas that often intersected with the evolutionist assumption that the Aboriginal 'race' was doomed to extinction. His careful unravelling of the intellectual underpinnings of this tradition goes a long way towards its demystification. An instance of this can be seen in his analysis of the shift from the "diachronic perspective of evolutionary theory to the synchronic orientation of functionalism". This examination is underscored by the important point that functionalist anthropology's narrowing of the temporal boundaries framing studies of the Aboriginal people did not mean the eschewal of evolutionist ideas. Rather, "it was only too easy for the new anthropologists to adopt the same labels, and frequently to slip into the same conceptual world". In a refusal to draw distinct boundaries, then, McGregor shows how evolutionist anthropology's conceptions of primitivism and race continued to inform the representation of Aboriginal people in functionalist anthropology. As he neatly puts it, "Some societies were more primitive – those were the ones anthropologists studied. Some societies were more advanced – those were the ones anthropologists came from".

The usefulness of this focus on intellectual fusion rather than fission is most apparent in McGregor's analysis of representations of the so-called 'half-caste' population. He shows how anthropologists focused on what they saw as the fading remnants of the Stone Age while a 'half-caste' population was emerging beyond their intellectual vision. Eventually forced to confront the 'problem' of this rising population, the emphasis of representation moved, according to McGregor, from "Doomed Race to Half-caste Problem". This shift of focus is not out of place in *Imagined Destinies*, and McGregor makes the important point that "the decline of the Aboriginal population and the rise of the half-caste problem were, in effect, opposite sides of the same coin". It is at this point in his book that commentary outside the discipline of anthropology becomes most noticeable. Driven by fear, it seems,

people from all sections of Australian society wished to voice their opinion on the half-caste situation. As McGregor writes, "the problem was that half-castes were not white. It was the threat posed to the ideal of a White Australia . . . that fostered a fear of a growing half-caste problem". Solutions to this problem ranged from the idea of the segregation of the Aboriginal people on reserves to prevent further 'interbreeding' through to a more active 'uplifting' of them to 'civilization'.

The main value of *Imagined Destinies*, however, lies in its interpretation of a complex web of ideas both informing the doomed race concept and providing a platform for the emerging ideas of assimilation. The complexity of the project and the limitations of space may excuse some omissions. Perhaps a place could have been found in the prologue for a brief reference to the geologist Charles Lyell's influence upon the development of Charles Darwin's ideas. More importantly, after the discussion in the prologue of the international context of ideas that informed early conceptions of the Aboriginal people, there is an almost complete contraction into the Australian context. This leaves an impression that the transition from evolutionist to functionalist anthropology occurred as a result of conditions in this country rather than as the result of a worldwide shift. Perhaps more could have been made of the connection with Australia of an important figure involved in this paradigmatic shift, Bronislaw Malinowski. Aside from these omissions, *Imagined Destinies* is a valuable addition to studies of the representation of the Aboriginal people, and a must for people interested in the 'doomed race' concept.

Glen Ross once wore a grey hat for Mt Isa Mines and is a post-graduate student at University of Southern Queensland.

Civilizing Australia

John McLaren

Leigh Dale: *The English Men – Professing Literature in Australian Universities* (Association for the Study of Australian Literature, ASAL Literary Studies Series, USQ, \$25).

Is poetry, a queen in her own right, to abdicate and to become the kitchen slut of science and socialism? I think not.

THESE STIRRING WORDS come neither from our present Minister of the Arts nor from the self-professed redneck bush laureate, Les Murray, but from Professor A.T. Strong, Oxford graduate, sometime poet, militant imperialist, and misogynist who in 1922 became the first holder of the Jury Chair of English at the University of Adelaide. His words were uttered in response to the poet Bernard O'Dowd's address on 'Poetry Militant', a call for poets to lead the struggle for human freedom. O'Dowd, whose socialism was based on universal principles, who denounced the White Australia policy as "unbrotherly, undemocratic and unscientific", and who worked strenuously to promote Australian literature, was opposed in every sense to Strong and his fellow Professors of English, who saw their task as using the study of English to bring British values to the colonies and bind Australia in the ties of imperial federation. Education served imperialism by cultivating masculine virtue and vigour in the service of the motherland. With the spread of education and the influence of Matthew Arnold, the maintenance of this virtue came to be seen as a peculiarly middle-class responsibility, a way of safeguarding society from the excess of the aristocracy and the violence of the mob.

Nineteenth-century Englishmen took very seriously this duty to civilize their families, the lower orders, colonials and the world, in that order. The institutions for this task were school and university, and the means were the disciplining of the body through the rod, cold showers and manly sports, and of the mind through the study of great men and great books. Leigh Dale, in this illuminating study, examines the last of these means as it took effect in Australian universities from the last decades of the nineteenth century. Her final chapters bring her story up to the long campaign to introduce the study of Australian literature and to the most recent debates on standards and cultural studies. Although, necessarily, the author does not engage in detail in these debates, her work provides the historical context within which we can recognize them as providing a space for the last stand of the apologists of imperialism.

Dale builds her study on an account of the relatively recent origins of the separate discipline of Eng-

lish in the principles of classical education as it had developed in the public schools and universities of England. These principles had combined German idealism, Greek philosophy and liberal Anglicanism to produce the ideal of an hierarchical society with imperial ambitions. Central to them was the assumption that the task of the teacher was to reveal the truth: the truth of the writers' perceptions, embodied in the ideals of their works; the truth of their expression, demonstrated by the beauty of their language; and the truth of apprehension, or the correct reading of the work to discover its innate truth. This assumption left no room for dissent or differential readings, and implied a single canon of great works. These were those that revealed the truth most clearly, and by further implication demonstrated the virtue of the nation from whose soil they had sprung, to use a favoured metaphor. The task of English teaching in the colonies was a form of cultural nationalism that transplanted this virtue to new soil by teaching the English canon, and at the same time encouraged local writers to emulate their English forebears. By definition, however, successful emulation could only occur at some unstated time in the future, when the 'southern Britain' would have achieved a history and maturity comparable to those of the motherland.

EVEN AFTER ENGLISH came to be separated from classics and modern history, the men appointed were generally born in England, with degrees, often in classics, from Oxford or Cambridge. Australians educated in England could receive an appointment, but Walter Murdoch, Scottish-born but Australian-educated, was passed over by Melbourne University, where he already had a distinguished record of teaching and publication, in favour of a man eight years his junior and with no apparent record of publications. Robert Wallace, also born in Scotland, was a graduate of Oxford. When men born and educated in Australia were appointed to chairs, they had strong English connections and English-educated mentors. Yet these men still enjoyed a strong advantage over women. The first female candidate for a chair that Dale has discovered is Enid Derham, who in 1922 became the first woman appointed to any position in the Melbourne English Department, was in 1921 beaten for the Chair in Adelaide by A.T. Strong, and who in 1935, as Acting Professor at Melbourne, became the first woman in Australia to hold a professorial position in English.

While appointments may have been made on the basis of imperial qualifications, professorial tenure was frequently turbulent, with dismissals being made for alcoholism, adultery and pacifism. The attention paid by the press to these men, their careers and opinions demonstrates their prominence as public figures, and the importance of their role in the emerging debates about Australian nationalism, identity and loyalty. While the contemporary media are less likely to pay attention to university politics as such, Dale shows the continuing importance of professorial appointments in deciding such issues as the proper manner for the study of Australian literature and the consequences of debates about the nature of culture and the place of theory.

THE CAMPAIGN TO include Australian literature in university courses was long and arduous, enlisting such disparate allies as *Meanjin* and *overland* on the one hand and the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom on the other. Yet, although the battle was eventually won, the war was in many ways lost, with the first occupants of chairs in Australian literature applying imperial models of analysis and judgement to perpetuate its subordinate status and to nurture a conservative canon that excludes the social, the political and, in the broadest sense, the national. Dale shows how this is a consequence of a discipline that has retreated into itself, in comparison with the earlier decades of the century. Yet, at least until the last ten years, it has continued to be dominated by an approach emphasizing style rather than intellectual substance. The recent 'culture wars', including the debate over the Miles Franklin awards, political correctness and feminist criticism, demonstrate the failure of the dominant tradition to obtain a purchase in the world of economic rationalism and global integration.

Dale's study would be richer for a more detailed study of these last issues, and for a consideration of the effects, potential and actual, of some of the most recent appointments to English chairs. While these show an openness to fresher modes of thought, they also carry the danger that new theory may merely become old academicism. Certainly, the political and national dimensions of literature are less likely to be considered in the professional literary journals than they are in, say, the *Journal of Australian Studies*. At the same time, the 'best' students, as measured by

entrance scores, consistently choose business, law and medicine rather than the humanities or science. The debate over public education, or over the parallel war against the unions, is conducted almost entirely by people from history, politics or the various branches of management. English, in its guise of postcolonial studies, has interested itself in issues of multiculturalism or Aboriginality, but otherwise its civilizing missionaries seem no longer to have anything to say.

Leigh Dale's book is an excellent start to bringing English back into the public mainstream. Its publication helps to inaugurate a new series of books from the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, an association which has itself managed to maintain scholarly standards without descending into narrow academicism. The production of the book is appropriately fine. The index is excellent, and there are few editorial slips. One of these, the misprinting of Arthur for Alfred, does, however, substitute medieval mysticizing for the robust Anglicanism that underlay the positive as well as the negative elements of imperialism.

The book, I hope, signals the start of a much larger project by Leigh Dale. I would, for example, like to see her develop the remarks she makes about the notion of resistance in Australian literary studies as a response to the insistent imperialism of English studies, and to combine it with her recognition of pedagogy, rather than criticism, as the most significant outcome of academic theory. This in turn could lead her to the study of the way English, taking its lead from the radical Leavis and such of his students as David Holbrook, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, was used in Australian secondary classrooms, where it anticipated tertiary cultural studies in developing a culture of resistance intended to empower its students. Finally, she might like to consider the whole question of empowerment in relation to the decentring of English, both in schools and in universities, and the institutionalizing of cultural studies. But, whether she or others choose to take up these questions, her book marks a valuable starting point for their investigations. They may then restore an understanding that poetry is the president of the commonwealth of disciplines because it encompasses them all.

John McLaren is a consultant editor of overland.

Dream Worlds and Underworlds

Marg Henderson

Luke Davies: *Candy* (Allen & Unwin, \$16.95).

Marele Day: *Lambs of God* (Allen & Unwin, \$19.95).

David Ireland: *The Chosen* (Knopf, \$35).

IN TERMS OF SUBJECT MATTER and mode, these books form a very mixed half-a-sixpack of novels, but all three testify to the strength and versatility of the contemporary Australian novel. *Candy* is Luke Davies' first novel and is a terrific debut, *Lambs of God* signals a successful change in direction for Marele Day, and *The Chosen* is David Ireland's tenth novel, and his first in ten years. Each novel takes the reader into dream worlds and underworlds: of heroin in *Candy*; a monastery in *Lambs of God*; and a quintessential Australian country town in *The Chosen*.

The world that Davies so graphically and lyrically evokes can be summed up by some lyrics of Lou Reed: "heroin – it's my life, and it's my wife". *Candy* is a novel about love – for heroin, and for a woman, Candy, and how the two desires are doomed to incompatibility. The novel opens with two short episodes – 'Example of Good Times: Candy's First Overdose' and 'Example of Bad Times: Sugar and Blood' and the journey between these two polarities comprises the rest of the narrative. We begin with the unnamed narrator, already with a heroin habit, in the early days of his love affair with Candy. Life is bliss, and Davies' lyricism captures these magical and heady times: "When I first met Candy: those were like the days of juice, when everything was bountiful." Candy decides to try heroin, and we follow the course of these two loves over a ten-year period, with an increasing feeling of inevitable destruction.

While Davies' account of heroin use and addiction is graphic and highly detailed (there's an interesting recipe for using up large quantities of panadol), it is neither romanticized, nor boring (even though it is such a limited and repetitive lifestyle), nor self-indulgent. Instead, the narrator takes us into the psychic and material infrastructure of heroin use: the emotions involved, the work required to maintain a habit, the physical and immaterial boundaries that the heroin underworld constructs.

The book is structured by short, self-contained (mis)adventures that veer from euphoria, chaos, de-

spair, eroticism, to black comedy, all fitting together to suggest impending doom for the narrator and Candy. The narrator matter-of-factly describes the collapsing veins, the petty crime, the pimps and pushers, the addicts, the poverty, the spiralling prostitution, the heartbroken parents, the holy grail of being clean, the horrors of detox, and the sheer hard work, physical risks and repetitiveness of being an addict. Then there are the flashes of poetry when Candy or heroin is working well:

There is nothing like the morning blast. Adrift. At times it seems that I am floating in the beauty of docility. Pulling the needle from my arm, I succumb again and again to the luscious undertow of the infinite spaces between atoms. My arm an estuary of light in which all rivers meet.

Although *Candy* gives the book its title, the love relationship quickly becomes entwined with, and perhaps secondary to, the characters' endless search for heroin. Yet Davies writes of the dying out of a love affair as assuredly and as poignantly as he recreates the inferno of addiction. *Candy* is a timely novel given the current moral panic surrounding drugs, the Howard government's rejection of a heroin trial in the ACT, and Howard's resurrection of yet another 'war on drugs'. The heavens and hells of *Candy* show the banality of such a response.

MARELE DAY'S *Lambs of God* is centred on another type of isolated community; in this case, a monastery on an island with three nuns and a flock of sheep. Such a pastoral idyll is a far cry from Day's Claudia Valentine crime series, yet elements of mystery, suspense, and female heroism remain. The plot has some interesting parallels with D.H. Lawrence's short story, 'The Fox,' in that the peaceful existence of an all-female community is disturbed by a male intruder. In *Lambs of God*, however, Lawrence's misogyny is absent, and the women resist and subvert the male intruder, a priest.

Father Ignatius is an ambitious young priest who wishes to close down and sell off St Agnes' monastery for a luxury tourist development (sound familiar?). He arrives at the monastery expecting no resistance to his economic rationalism. The nuns, Sisters Carla, Margarita and Iphigenia, however, are not going to accept passively the destruction of their way

of life and beliefs. Thus the narrative concerns how the nuns take the priest hostage and attempt to change his ideological mindset.

Knitting is an extended, suitably feminine and subtly feminist metaphor that runs throughout the book: the nuns tend the sheep that provide them with wool which they spin into garments, just as myth, fable, fairytale and biblical stories are woven into tales by the nuns to sustain their (imaginative) existence. For example, one of the nun explains a tapestry:

The knitted piece tells a story, a fabric stitched from the thread of language, an artefact bright with meaning. It holds the memory of learnt stitches, the inventiveness of imagination, and the cables and ribs of the knitters' own lives. Islands, sheep, religion are only some of the themes running through it.

The priest is the fox who would unravel the threads binding the nuns and St Agnes together.

This knitting of diverse narrative threads is also Day's writing method. She interweaves pagan and Christian myth, fairytale, biblical parables and allusions, and legends into a magic realism that is a gentle but powerful feminist satire on the god of economic progress. For humour is a major element in the book, as the otherworldly nuns are confronted by aggressive forces of 'progress'. There are some very funny and insightful moments when the nuns deal with car alarms, mobile phones, and economic jargon:

Carla and Margarita turned to another book, *Negotiation Skills*. It was difficult to read, almost as if it was written in a foreign language.

But the novel is also successful in evoking a ritualistic, pre-modern and austere way of life within the monastery. Day takes the reader into a different temporality and spatiality, a cyclical world of prayer, ceremony, shepherding, shearing, cooking, knitting, and storytelling, as alien to the postmodern Catholic church of Father Ignatius as to the reader, yet one made comprehensible through Day's nun-heroines. And she weaves in some gothic elements – certain dark secrets in the nuns' pasts that are about to re-emerge, to keep the suspense high. *Lambs of God* may be 'only' a fairytale, but I wonder if the order of St Agnes would like a job defending Telstra?

DAVID IRELAND'S *The Chosen* also has a weaving metaphor as part of the narrative and the mode of the text but, not surprisingly considering Ireland's other novels, it is a very masculine use. The community under Ireland's satirical lens is the country town of Lost River on the New South Wales south coast. The narrator is Davis Blood, a weaver commissioned to weave a tapestry for the Lost River council based on the lives of fifty-two of its townspeople. His task is to interview each character, one per week, to work out how he will represent their lives in the tapestry. Each chapter is based on one character, thus the novel's progress mirrors the tapestry's.

Ireland's focus is on the eccentricities, foibles, uniqueness and darkness just below the surface of the characters' apparent normality. He uses his characters as mouthpieces to philosophize about life in general, and the state of contemporary Australia in particular. The writing is characteristically Ireland: blackly surreal humour, savage satire, imaginative and original insights, mixed in with passages of lyrical beauty as he ruminates about love, nature, or moments of courage or beauty in supposedly ordinary people's lives. Like in his previous works, Ireland's strength lies in his characters and the links he makes between them and their sociohistorical context: they are both larger than life yet totally believable, recognizable types that are still individually distinctive, and symptomatic of the structures they inhabit (but he is far better writing male characters).

Yet *The Chosen* has some weaknesses. It is too long and becomes repetitive. Unlike his other novels such as *The Flesheaters* or *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, which have an overarching institutional setting or allegorical framework, *The Chosen* has a fairly weak narrative and unifying principle. It starts to read as a static and disconnected collection of sometimes predictable eccentrics. But more worrying is the occasional reactionary outburst via the mouths of his characters. Ireland's previous works may have had sometimes problematic assumptions about class and gender politics, but you always felt that his intentions were basically politically progressive, and his framework was bold and imaginative. In *The Chosen*, however, there is a feeling of nostalgia, a lament for an imaginary lost Australia that is becoming more prevalent in times of simulacrum Menzies-ism.

Ireland laments relations between men and women, and has a fairly uncritical version of Aussie

bloke masculinity, while the she-devil of feminism is disguised in his occasional retorts about “women of the future”. There are similarly veiled criticisms of multiculturalism, theory, and arts bureaucracies. His biggest targets are the state, government, and conformity, while the individual and individualism are celebrated continually, as is some notion of a prelapsarian community where these individuals could be free. Yet there are still some wonderful moments in this novel where Ireland hits a different target, revealing another type of individual or societal underworld; thus his dated and simplistic solutions for Australia are momentarily forgotten.

Marg Henderson is overland's Brisbane correspondent.

Accidental Detective

Zoe Naughten

Bernard Cohen: *The Blindman's Hat* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

THE BLINDMAN'S HAT is at once a parody and the embodiment of a detective story. This is a new and somewhat unexpected genre for Cohen, just as detective work is for his protagonist. An Australian journo working in New York, Vernon Collins is an appealing mix of cynicism and vulnerability, a combination made more potent by his continual feeling of otherness – revisiting the theme of alienation which pervades Cohen's writing.

When Vernon meets streetwise New Yorker, Dida, he falls so in lust that he cannot face returning to work at what he refers to prudently as “[Newspaper]”. Then he discovers just how badly its staff require his services, as suspicious parallels develop between his refusal to return to the office and the disappearance of his blind acquaintance, Steve. But Vernon would prefer to unravel the mystery – at least then he can be with Dida:

We wake up on a Tuesday and roll into each other's arms, legs, bodies. I'm surprised as always to find Dida beside me . . . I tell her that. She tells me just how much my ass perspires. I try to pattern her body with selective nipping. She seizes my

nose with her teeth and holds it just tight enough so I cannot move. Then she starts tickling me. I'm lying there shouting, “Pax! Pax!” but it sounds too ridiculous with a blocked nose.

As detectives, Dida and Vernon take their lead from films and novels. On discovering the dead body which probably belongs to Steve, Vernon and Dida “drive home slowly from the forest, shower, stare helplessly around the room and at each other, try to speak about shock and disbelief, become silent, embrace tenderly for comfort and sit side by side holding hands” as if they were plotting their way through a movie script.

Cohen not only satirizes the detective genre in this way, but experiments with idiom and juxtaposes writing styles that reflect newspaper reports, sociological texts, instruction booklets and television programs from the detective show itself to something resembling ‘Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous’. “Oh, and I'm Vernon. Hi”, Vernon says, introducing himself to his ‘audience’, the reader.

Cohen describes seemingly trivial events in endless (albeit amusing) detail, from verbatim accounts of answering machine messages to what he describes as “personalised numberplate syndrome”. Yet in this way, Cohen allows the reader to re-examine phenomena which have become ‘taken for granted’, and which can illuminate the broader social world.

Vernon's philosophizing white terrier, Muffy, is preoccupied with a different kind of minutiae. He maintains a glorious equanimity throughout Vernon and Dida's quest, regaling us with impressions of his doggy existence in italicized speeches. The mood of these snippets is reminiscent of those contained in Cohen's first novel, *Tourism*, documenting modest but epiphanous moments:

Muffy: Running, running. What a wonderful world this is, with all its stairways and underpasses . . . There are friendly people to run with and unfriendly people to run from. There are indifferent people to run around or past . . . There are slight downhill gradients where your hind legs catch your forelegs and there are slight uphill gradients where they do not. Sometimes you go so fast your ears turn inside out and sometimes you slow down and shake your head and they pop back the right way.

The blind man's hat itself is, as Vernon suggests, an

“iconic presence” throughout the novel. It rests on his bedroom closet and when Steve’s death is finally explained, spins out of sight “like an old LP”.

Zoe Naughten is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

Hybridities and Bastards

Dean Kiley

John Kinsella: *Genre* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$19.95).

George Alexander: *Mortal Divide; the autobiography of Yiorgos Alexandroglou* (Brandl & Schlesinger, \$19.95).

Tim Richards: *The Prince* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

GIVEN THAT NO-ONE really believes in the myth (let alone ‘shock’) of the New™ anymore (blurb-writers excepted), what’s left for experimentation is often something post-it theorists call ‘hybridization’. I prefer *mongrelization*. It at least admits the chemistry-set miscegenation and bastardization of the generic DNA in high/low, fact/fiction/commentary and prose/poetry/script classifications. Techniques, all attempted or enacted by the books under review here, would include the incorporation, bricolage, cross-pollination, grafting, synaesthesia, cyborging, knotting or simultaneous cross-translation (the metaphors, like some of its examples, just go on and on) between genres, modes, formats, styles, conventional markers (e.g. font, typesetting, text-structures, etc.) and voices.

It doesn’t always work. When it does it can be exhilarating and immersive.

Kinsella’s *Genre* is nothing if not upfront about its bastardizing project, both in its naming and the gorgeously allegorical cover, a cutaway doll’s-house of compartments, full of suggestive implements that spill out of, over, through, their containing walls, despite the proliferating labels, numbering and other (failed) classifications. It’s an apt model for this project and its method: standard structuring devices (like paragraphs) are jettisoned, so the reading experience is a demanding triathlon between interpretation, stamina and game-playing.

Narrative – the fact and multiple stor(e)yedness and impetus and associative connectedness and fractured-impaction of it – becomes fetishized in *Genre*, a trans-

ference from the narrator (as Tracy Ryan notes in a July *ABR* essay) to narrating, incorporating everything from letters to drafts, quotations to commentaries (e.g. on John Forbes), playscripts and poetry-sequences, skittering across proliferating points-of-view and voices, clustering structural metaphors and clenching into almost-modular parables.

The latter part of 1997 saw an influx of Kinsella re-evaluations (lit-crit, review, gossip, etc.), catalyzed by an intemperately blunt review in *ABR* by Ivor Indyk. Among the indictments was the crime of being too prolific, woodchipping away at text without shaping. Unfair and, on the evidence of *Genre*, untrue, though the black-hole centrifuge of its writing can be exhausting and strenuous in its demands (dip into it, play with it, instead), and can often seem circularly self-enclosed.

Alexander’s *Mortal Divide* is more interactive, a beautifully-designed book with photomontages from Peter Lyssiotis. It’s the story of (how’s this for symbolism?) a TV translation subtitled. And it’s an anti-oedipal odyssey, migrant memoir, oblique autobiography, socio-political commentary, Orphic mini-epic, and genealogical mystery. It’s also an epistolary picaresque travelogue charting the territory between a daughter, several fathers, a girlfriend having a fling with an ex-wife, sundry dreams, some answering machines and a psychoanalyst. It’s virtually a Tardis of time-place, cross-wired with family anecdotes, stranded in a suspension of nationality and identity: Greek, Egyptian, Turkish, Italian, Australian, the tract of self-discovery stretching in a thin straight fine line between the *rembetika* bars of Perth and the crumbling shores of a Greek island. In a Frankensteined-Oedipal way, the nostalgic modern(ist) father is lined up against the naïve postmodern(ist) son in a ghost-written battle for stories of origin. As so often in nineteenth-century Bildungsroman, the intuitive cure is to be found in, or by, travel, and writing (the daughter’s named Toto for Jung’s sake, what did you expect?) and, here, in nomadic writing, diasporic thematics, migrant symbolism and returning-home mythologies, transverse mobility meets alchemical hybridity. George Alexander breaks into, or out of, Yiorgis Alexandroglou, the replicant double and dreamed other, where Joyce and Calvino merge with Athanasou and Papaellinas.

Just as analysis is the ‘talking cure’, the book is a “writing cure for the common code”, full of acute

epiphanies and lyrically stunning writing. This would have to be one of my favourite books of 1997, incisive, honest, involving, witty and challenging without becoming algebraic or indulgent.

When it comes to extended allegory, the pitch and tension needs to be tautly balanced or you'll fray into morality fable or special-pleading polemic on the one edge, and clunky farce or meccano symbolism on the other. *The Prince* fails badly in its allegorical-satire experiments. It's set in a very Melbourne-like community called Hampton, where the Festival of Killing is being celebrated, a budget-rationalized series of state-sponsored ('sponsored' as in Coca-Cola: it's a tourist cash-cow) murders, conducted with a rigorous set of ethics by an official assassin called, with representative irony, The Killer.

Unfortunately, the thematic scope of the whole book could be compressed down to a single (straight) line . . . *literally*: from a speech by The Killer, "Maybe this community is alone in recognizing the real relationship between the cost of living, and the value of life." OK, fine, so you translate the brutality of economic rationalism as the coercive tribalism of fake-heroic individualist capitalism, so you literalize state violence as sanctioned murder . . . now what? What do you do with this theatre of political ideas? Bloody little, I'm afraid. It's framed as a jigsaw puzzle murder mystery – who killed the documentary makers investigating the Festival of Killing? – and the evidentiary forms accumulate, from scripts to video to diary to transcribed interview notes, etc. but nothing much develops. Not only plot- or character-wise (we can forgive that: po-moirony covering ineptness), but also in terms of theme, concept, argument, etc. So Richards regularly lapses into half-arsed Full-Frontal-skit humour instead, convoluted and incoherent, overwritten and underthought, pickled in inane snippets from The Killer's journals. Exhibit A: *All the forms of propaganda/ Fashion a world/ That's black and white/ Just like a panda/ (And who doesn't like a panda?)*

All three books are usefully disobedient mongrels, but – unexpectedly, when you inhabit them without conventionalized prejudice – it's the two more thoroughly bastardizing texts from Kinsella and Alexander, rather than the familiar handheld doco (sur)-realism from Richards, that work (and play) most effectively.

Dean Kiley is a Melbourne writer.

Whetting the first stone

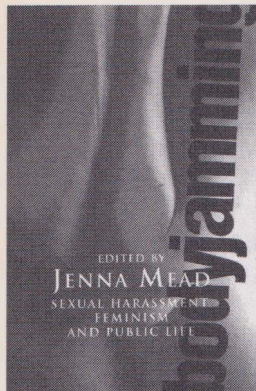
Cath Darcy

Jenna Mead (ed.): *bodyjamming; Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life* (Random House, \$19.95).

BODYJAMMING is the latest contribution to the *first stone* debate, which has been raging since the publication of Helen Garner's first book-length work of non-fiction in 1995. The potential of *the first stone* to stimulate intelligent public discussion of the issues surrounding contemporary feminism and sexual harassment was limited, by the mainstream media, to a sensationalist beat-up about a generational war between feminists and futile arguments about the way young women dress. *bodyjamming* represents a considered and intelligent analysis of some of the issues raised by *the first stone* and its popular reception.

The book is divided into three sections – sexual harassment, feminism and public life – together with an introduction by Mead. The debate is contextualized in terms of the current shift towards neo-conservatism, both domestically and internationally. The contributors also examine the issues raised in terms of race and class as well as gender, and in doing so they significantly shift the parameters. Meaghan Morris, Alice Blake, Jenny Morgan and Foong Ling Kong focus on the intersecting marginalities of gender, race and class in such arenas as the union movement and equal opportunity legislation. Ann Curthoys and Rosi Braidotti emphasize the ethnocentrism and middle-class bias at the heart of liberationist feminism, with Curthoys calling for the development of "[a] feminism attentive to the racist legacies of the colonial past and the continuing reality of colonialism in Australia today".

The book also includes a number of cartoons by Judy Horacek, a short satirical piece by Kaz Cooke, and two works of short fiction. The comical contributions by Horacek and Cooke lighten the mood, but they are no less incisive than the other pieces. By far the most thought-provoking contributions for me, however, were the short stories by Amanda Lohrey and Elspeth Probyn. These brief and ambiguous narratives, situated amongst the more polemical non-fiction essays, demonstrate the power of fiction as a mode of political and social interrogation. Both stories examine the bodily



obsessions of women, each suggesting in its own way the power available to 'victims' of patriarchy. These narratives quietly and subtly question the politics of victimage and the operation of power as described by Garner in *the first stone*. Given the open criticism of Garner's politics evident in some of the other contributions, they

represent a refreshing ambiguity.

While the collection contributes positively to public discussion surrounding the issues raised by *the first stone*, the editor makes a claim which must be challenged. She asserts that the contributors to the book write "in a spirit of commitment to public debate and without rancour". The essays work well to broaden the debate, however, some of the arguments slip into a mode of personal attack. Since the publication of *the first stone*, Mead's primary criticism has centred upon the divergent philosophical approaches she and Garner employ. Where Garner writes from a liberal humanist position, viewing power in terms of the individual, Mead's post-structuralist perspective means that she sees power as institutionally produced. Mead acknowledges that Garner is a "cultural icon" and that her power to speak arises from institutional support. Rather than consistently analyzing the sociology of power, the contributors to *bodyjamming* are often waylaid by a surprisingly liberalist tendency to focus on the individual, thus falling into the discourse Garner is challenged for using. For Mead, *the first stone* was an attempt on the part of Garner to reinvigorate a career which "had stalled after the publication of her last novel, *Cosmo Cosmolino*". According to Foong Ling Kong, "Garner has ab/used the people involved in the case for her own conception of the failure of feminism and the schisms within it". Matthew Ricketson accuses Garner of "hitchhiking on the credibility of other writers", such as Janet Malcolm, while for Rosi Braidotti, Garner is a "[m]ediocre artist", a "vampire" who sucks the lifeblood of her "victims".

Braidotti's essay is a particularly good example of the personal style of attack that occasionally slips in through the back door. Revisiting Garner's very public 1972 sacking for a plain-speaking sex-education class, Braidotti, a student at Fitzroy High at the time, accuses Garner of sabotage and self-interest. In *the first stone* Garner herself relates the Ormond affair

to the events of 1972, and more recently she has reprinted the *Digger* essay on the impromptu sex class that led to the dismissal. It seems reasonable that someone who was there in 1972 provide another perspective on the events, just as Mead and XX tell the "other side" of Ormond in this collection. The vehemence with which Braidotti performs this function, however, undermines its effectiveness and belies the claims made in the introduction. This essay cannot be described as being "without rancour", and it opens the collection to accusations like those made by Robert Manne, that the primary goal of the book "is not so much to throw new light on the affair as to destroy Garner's reputation" (*The Age*, 3 November 1997). *bodyjamming* deserves to be seen as something much more than this.

The second claim I would like to take issue with is that the contributors write selflessly, with the philanthropic aim of contributing to public debate. Garner's name has a particular power in the public sphere because of her significant reputation as an author. *the first stone* debate is sourced by this power and it has its own effects in terms of Garner's career and reputation. But this is also true of the other 'names' in the debate. Mead has previously stated that she is an unwilling participant in *the first stone* affair, and she reiterates that claim in *bodyjamming*. In spite of this, it is inevitable that as Helen Garner's opponent her own name emerges as a public signifier. *bodyjamming* represents a claim to authority. Mead's authorial name carries its own weight, and her refusal to acknowledge this seems to be at odds with the post-structuralist analysis of the operation of power she attempts in her introduction. *bodyjamming*, whatever else it is, is also, like the book it takes issue with, an expression of a career.

As a contribution to public discussions surrounding sexual harassment, feminism and public life in the 1990s, then, *bodyjamming* is quite good. It broadens what had become a narrow and futile debate, and deserves to be lauded for its intelligent and considered approach to the issues concerned. What Garner would perhaps call the "gap between theory and practice" which exists in the book, however, detracts somewhat from its achievements.

Cath Darcy is working on her PhD thesis, entitled 'Institutionalizing the Author: Helen Garner in the Public Domain', at the University of Southern Queensland.

What Shall We Do with the Virtual Republic?

Kate Macdonell

McKenzie Wark: *The Virtual Republic; Australia's culture wars of the 1990s* (Allen & Unwin, \$19.95).

MCKENZIE WARK'S LATEST joins a bundle of recent publications – such as Mark Davis' *Gangland*, Catharine Lumby's *Bad Girls* and Jenna Mead's *bodyjamming* – which consider how subjects (in all senses of the word) are pervasively and sometimes insidiously framed by mass media. Unlike Wark's previous book, *Virtual Geography*, which centres on what he calls those "weird global media events" (like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Gulf War) that inform and affect the lives of people who are physically dislocated from those events, the concerns and contexts of *The Virtual Republic* are much more localized. Here, Wark offers a compelling series of meditations on how the *idea* of a virtual republic provides a way of conceptualizing what it might mean to be an 'Australian'.

The book is divided into two parts: 'Roots' and 'Aerials'. In 'Roots' Wark spells out his understanding of the virtual republic, making quite clear that it is not to be confused with its constitutional counterpart. It is:

that plane upon which people can come to negotiate their particular entitlements, premised on the belief that all members of this virtual republic are equally entitled to have our sympathies extended to them, and from whom we presume a sympathy also extends.

The virtual republic is thus a space in which subjects can freely converse about issues of both personal and collective significance. It is also conceptually dependent on three things: post-structuralist theories; the proliferation of media or global 'communication vectors'; and genealogical ties to 'Australian' cultural traditions such as Libertarianism and 'Sydney postmodernism'.

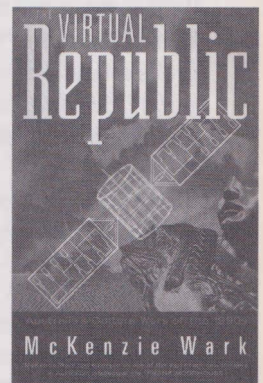
Although in 'Roots' Wark argues that Australia does not yet constitute a virtual republic, 'Aerials' is largely propelled by an arguably inevitable assertion to the contrary. Wark questions how and why issues like feminism, political correctness, multiculturalism

and meritocracy have elicited considerable debate during the past decade. He tackles the Demidenko Affair, the controversy over Manning Clark's alleged communist allegiances, Pauline Hanson's political fame, and the anti-po-mo rhetoric of both Christopher Koch and David Williamson.

While I'm certainly appreciative of Wark's often ambitious engagement with these issues – especially his considered re-reading of the figure and work of Helen Demidenko/Darville – what appeals to me most about *Virtual Republic* is the way Wark manages to couch an eclectic array of topics in a language that is respectively personal, modest, audacious and playful. He parodies Williamson's *Dead White Males*, for instance. And he also writes quite wittily at times of how his childhood, along with his experiences as both a student and a teacher, and his penchant for chilling out to the radio while negotiating the streets of Sydney in his red Mazda 121, serve as metaphoric models for his understanding of the virtual republic.

There are, however, a number of problems with the text. They stem from Wark's tendency to misread the work of some of the theorists he cites and disregard the stumbling blocks this work presents for his virtual republic. I'm thinking particularly about how Wark's reading of Foucault's work on the ways in which bodies are ordered and disciplined pushes an understanding of discipline or power as a tangibly oppressive force meted out by individuals or institutions, only to side-step an explicit engagement with what Foucault insistently and repeatedly cites as the discursive machinations of power. Certainly such an engagement would have enabled Wark to incorporate into his discussion of the conversational make-up of the virtual republic an analysis of how conversations are not only politically weighted but also, to paraphrase Judith Butler, 'implicitly censored'. Which is to say that the kinds of issues about which a subject can think and speak and converse are context-bound and, conjointly, discursively determined and delimited.

Similarly, Wark's discussion of Lyotard's concept of the 'phrase' is worrying. It takes place without any consideration of how the Lyotardian *differend* (which



inheres in the phrase) underscores how the genre and 'meaning' of the phrase-event are always provisional and therefore able to be read in ways that may be discursively incommensurable. Clearly, Lyotard's argument that the ostensible resolution of such incommensurability involves the silencing or victimization of one of the speaking parties places pressure on both Wark's underpoliticized reading of the phrase-event and his belief that in the virtual republic conversations of any kind will be happily accommodated.

I can see that Wark's perception of *Virtual Republic* as an 'essay' demands – in his view – a general rather than specialized engagement with the numerous theories, histories and ideas that contribute to the virtual republic's conceptualization. My feeling is, though, that a more properly theorized and contextualized approach to that concept would have enabled Wark to sustain – rather than shy away from – a rigorous analysis of what it is that makes the virtual republic tick and, moreover, both what that republic enables us to do and what we can do with it.

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Reasons to be Cheerful

Peter Beilharz

Gary Jungwith (ed.): *Labor Essays 1997. Renewing and Revitalising Labor* (Pluto Press, \$14.95).

Tim Battin & Graham Maddox (eds): *Socialism in Contemporary Australia* (Longman, \$29.95).

NOBODY'S HOME IN CANBERRA, at least on our side of the fence, or so it seems. Hopes abound, apparently, that Labor's lethargy will be overcome by morning intakes of Special K. Meantime, there is some little stirring among the ranks, and even in leadership. We know to expect a major book from Mark Latham, representing the new blood, and we know that we can expect something of Latham and Lindsay Tanner as leaders. But we also know, or feel, that Labor has lost heart, or vision, turned its back on traditions won over decades of struggle, turned its back indeed on its own past constituency. Analyti-

cally speaking we know, or suspect, that Labor was so transformed by the long Labor Decade 1983–1996 as to become a party of state, no longer a social movement. And so we wait, some of us, for better times. What kind of better times?

Labor Essays was a major institution in Labor's earlier revival from around 1980. Some of those earlier volumes were great. The 1997 volume is a bit of a hiccup, but not quite a yawn. It's not without interest, even if the tenor is flat, a little given to the appearance of self-flagellation before a speedy return to the politics of re-election. Suffice it to observe in passing that this little elision is the biggest issue for Labor – the problem is not so much re-election, as what will happen once Labor returns to power. More of the same? and, why should we expect any different?

Labor Essays opens with a 1996 post-mortem by Barry Jones. Labor lost the support of less-well-paid voters in the fertile crescent but especially outside it. Gary Gray offers a different kind of self-criticism, which seems to take away with one hand what it gives with the other. Failure, here, seems more like a strategic oversight than a fundamental symptom. The best reason to be cheerful here seems to be that Labor will not be so mean as the Liberals are. This is what remains, apparently, of vision, principle, or ideology. Gareth Evans and Kim Beazley, meantime, seem to have been reading Marx, for they offer us the good news that "People are not commodities... Labor is not just another commodity". The problem for too many Australians today, however, is that they cannot sell their labour power at all or at a defensible price. Life would be better if they *were* commodities. Actors like Latham and Tanner, from differing perspectives, are by comparison more attuned to these kinds of sensibilities of inclusion and exclusion, though the new tailor looming in the margin of this refit looks uncannily like Tony Blair, or perhaps Will Hutton. But at least these guys are thinking forward. Martin Ferguson, Neil O'Keefe and John Brumby's essays are less inspiring.

So there are other reasons to be cheerful? *Socialism in Contemporary Australia* seems to imply so, at least in the inflection of its title and orientation. One could be forgiven for viewing the title of this book as a tease, or else as an enigma. Certainly Australia has had a labourist, or if you insist, social democratic culture, and cultures persist even against innovation, if not eternally. But what can these writers have in mind

by 'socialism' in 'contemporary Australia'. As the volume's papers unfold it becomes apparent – the two experiences being held up as exemplary are the forties and the sixties, reconstruction and Whitlamism, though the fifties also score a guernsey as a lost, or overlooked moment of socialist hegemony. The prompt for this book is obvious – what's left of the relationship between Socialism and Labor after the Labor Decade?

This is a semantic puzzle, of course, because most people in the field would define Australian socialism practically as labourism, populism, or liberalism. If we follow these clues historically, then it would seem to make sense to view labourism (or socialism or whatever) as a matter of institution building. The crisis of Australian 'socialism' then, becomes a matter of the dissolution of its institutions – arbitration, economic and social protection, full employment, the social wage and so on. This helps to explain the impact of particular studies like Michael Pusey's *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*. The problem is how to make sense of these shifts, and here, interestingly, some old-fashioned disciplinary as well as historiographical differences emerge. Thinkers like Paul Smyth and, from a distinctive path, Geoff Dow, want here to privilege politics and to argue that the crisis of Labor is perhaps less long-term than cyclical. The cyclical view is obviously enabling, in a spiritual sense – its implication is that Labor's fortunes fluctuate up and down, so that hope remains. Labor's decline is less long-term or civilizational, on this account, than it is incidental or reversible. Here's a reason to be cheerful: what goes down, must come up. The problem is whether this particular kind of short-termism works, or whether modernity has instead seen the exhaustion of the labour movement as a social movement. My own argument, in books like *Labour's Utopias* (1992), *Transforming Labor* (1994) and *Postmodern Socialism* (1994) is that the longer trend in fact witnesses some of these apparently irreversible declines. On this basis, the claim that we could or should 'return' to full employment, public ownership or a centralized wages system seems less than obvious. This is, however, less an argument against socialism than it is a view that the Keynesian Welfare State was conjuncturally specific. The politics and the political economy of globalization militate against the likely revival of this order. Globalization is certainly a politics, but is also a political economy.

The limit of the argument for reviving democratic socialism is exactly that we cannot relive the 1950s. More bluntly, arguments about socialist advance falter at the crucial stage, which is less that of policy than that of actor or agent. Which is the actor or institution which can now carry democratic socialism forward? The Labor parties, state and federal, do not seem able or interested in adopting these 'our' causes. Parties have become system actors rather than extensions of social movements. This is exactly why well before the fall of the Wall socialists were already substituting the value 'democracy' for that of socialism, enthusing for civil society over the state and identifying the future with social movements rather than parties. Only as Carol Johnson shows in her essay in *Socialism in Contemporary Australia* these kinds of substitutions also risk dissolving socialism into its broader cultures, which may not be such a bad thing, but returns us to the adequacy of the horizons suggested by the title of this book. For while this is a useful collection, I wonder whether its candour in facing the future is sufficient.

Let me be provocative here and suggest a different line of argument, departing from these others and momentarily at least from what I have argued in the past. There is an old revolutionary Marxist claim that labour and socialism, or Labor and Socialism, have never had anything to do with each other. Historically, I think, this claim is misleading. But today, more than ever, one wonders about the leftist need habitually to identify rather than merely to associate labour and socialism. The identification of labour and socialism today, I suggest, is a projection which is less than enabling. There are no obvious good reasons to connect socialism and Labor today. People like us should support Labor because they may do less damage than the other side. But if we are stuck with capitalism, for the foreseeable, the best we could envisage for the present is the older game of civilizing capitalism. We do not need to imagine socialism as a realizable state of affairs in order to remain socialists. But commitment to socialism does not depend on projecting our hopes and values onto a political instrument which cannot bear them. We can support Labor electorally while expecting little of it if only because they may inflict less pain upon those in Australia who are already suffering most. And we might choose to remain committed to socialism for ethical reasons of our own choosing. We do not need to continue to sow illusion

about the identity between Socialism and Labor into the new century. This may not be in itself a reason to be cheerful, but the combination of modesty and hope may be less damaging than the difficult alternatives of optimism or pessimism. This is why there remains such a large and difficult opening between the politics of re-election and the prospects of social reform. If, as Fernando Claudin put it twenty years ago, "socialism will be democratic or it will not be at all", then we may be forced to accept that our horizons are even hazier, though no less challenging, than they seemed before. Cheer up, it could be worse.

Peter Beilharz is an editor of Thesis 11. He has written about socialism and Labor in Transforming Labor (1994) and Postmodern Socialism (1994).

Public Figures Undressed

Clyde Cameron

Judith Brett (ed.): *Political Lives* (Allen & Unwin, \$19.95).

POLITICAL LIVES GIVES a warts and all picture of Paul Keating, Bob Hawke, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Robert Menzies, Arthur Calwell and Paul Hasluck. Former public figures who have escaped the notice of its authors should remain forever grateful.

Graham Little quotes Paul Keating as saying: "The important thing to me is to be a good Prime Minister, rather than out there chasing cheers." It is the author's way of having a sideswipe at Bob Hawke whose vanity, writes Little, "was legendary, attaching to his hair, his sexuality, his drinking, his stamina, his intelligence and, feeding on itself, the love the people had for him".

Keating nicknamed Hawke 'Old Jelly-back'. Reviewers of Hawke's memoirs writes Little, have gleefully totted up the number of times the 'I' and 'me' appeared. Hawke hit back by describing Keating as "sour and self-serving". But in the exchange of insults Keating has to be given the gold medal. The difference between Keating and Hawke is explained by Little:

Keating is "The Cat That Walks By Himself" in Kipling's 'Just So' story. (Hawke would have to be dog, belly up for the tickle of human attention and

creature comforts.) Like the cat, Keating is too proud to accept fully that his is part of the world other people are in.

The author gets close to the truth when he writes that in the 1996 campaign the Coalition had concentrated on Keating's arrogance, disdain and failure to listen. It was a theme the Coalition had been pushing for more than a year. Little reminds readers that when Keating conceded defeat he shed no tears and virtually disappeared:

If there are tough lessons in Keating's flash across the political skies, there is also poignancy. He came to seem like a Leader who thought he was born to rule, a self-made man who, when he got there, didn't want to look self-made. There can be no taller poppy than that.

The next chapter is about Gough Whitlam, with the sub-heading 'Bursting Limitations'. James Walter captures a side of Whitlam that is far from flattering. He sees a man who lacks self-doubt, is intolerant of constraint, has a limited empathy with others in interpersonal relations and a strong urge to be in control.

Against that, I have always acknowledged that Gough is a highly intelligent individual who has a fine personality. He always looked like a Prime Minister. In fact, most people with Gough's gifts would be excused for being self-opinionated.

The author correctly argues that Whitlam was committed to his political career and meticulous in the preparation of his work; but that key decisions remained his alone. He did not seek Cabinet approval for his decision to recognize Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic States, the recognition of the People's Republic of China and a range of other decisions relating to Australia's relationship with other countries. But apart from his secret dealings with Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, I personally agreed with most of his decisions.

Whitlam is quite unfairly criticized for pushing the Government's legislative program too fast. He had no alternative. Labor had been in opposition for twenty-three years and we wanted to remedy the evils and neglect of lazy, incompetent and biased Liberal administrations, before we were axed by the electorate.

Walter would have us believe that Gough made a practice of using the tactic of 'do as I say, or remove

me', when in fact, after his near defeat by Jim Cairns when he did resign in 1968, he never once repeated such a threat.

Whitlam is credited with being "masterful in a crisis". He was just the very reverse in the 1975 constitutional coup. Had he been a little more masterful and waited for another twenty-four hours, the Senate would have passed the Supply Bill, because at least four Liberal Senators had decided to let the Bill pass.

Walter sees Whitlam as one who, when political imperatives seemed to demand it, would be prepared to sacrifice those who had performed a useful service. That charge was certainly borne out in my case; and although he recognized me as "a principal architect of victory" in the 1972 election, he didn't hesitate to ask Kerr to use his power to dismiss me when Treasury unfairly blamed me for the 1974 wage explosion.

Graham Little's chapter on Malcolm Fraser credits his subject with being a strong leader. When one compares Fraser with Harold Holt, Sir William McMahon and Billy Sneddon, Fraser was indeed a strong leader.

I had the advantage of recording several hours of oral history with Fraser and was able to see a side of his character that was not on display publicly. Fraser rejected the damaging theories of economic rationalism which were embraced by Hawke and Keating. He clashed with Margaret Thatcher and was a fearless critic of apartheid in South Africa. He preferred 'Waltzing Matilda' as the national anthem to the dirge-like 'Advance Australia Fair'.

Next to Menzies and Hawke he was the longest-serving Prime Minister in Australian history. (The author forgets that Hawke was Prime Minister from March 1983 to December 1991.) Senator Nick McKenna gave an excellent definition of leadership when he explained:

A leader may be feared, respected, trusted, liked, loved. He may indeed be all five. But no man will be a Leader unless he is either feared or respected. If feared alone, he may be a great Leader. But if respected, he will be a greater *man* and still be a great Leader.

Little gets close to McKenna's definition of what constitutes a good Leader when he writes: "Strong Leaders are not about being clever or loved but about being effective." He correctly sums up Fraser's personality

when he writes that "beneath Fraser's alleged arrogance lay a considerable sensitivity".

JUDITH BRETT'S CHAPTER on Sir Robert Menzies is first class. She refers to his mastery of the King's English and his love of England. In fact, he made the Queen blush, and Prince Philip wince when he publicly announced he would love Elizabeth II "until I die".

Menzies was a slightly better orator than Eddie Ward; but only because he was a better actor. *Hansard's* recording of some of Dr Evatt's speeches are superior to some of Menzies' contributions; but if one could see and hear Menzies in full flight, no Member could match him as a speaker. The only Member of Parliament whose interjections caused him to stumble was Eddie Ward, who would call out, "Show us your war medals!"

Lindsay Rae's chapter on Arthur Calwell proves that he knows more about Max Scheler, Svend Ranulf, Andre Gorz and Robert Bales than Calwell. He would have us believe that Calwell was a bitter old man when he entered Parliament at forty-four years of age, when, in fact, he was only a year older than Curtin and Chifley, but seven years younger than Bob Hawke and Bert Evatt when they were first elected.

I sat in the Parliament with Calwell for twenty-three years and found that the three commanding influences in his life were his country, his party and his church. He was not the dismal failure described by Rae. Even with bitter opposition from the Democratic Labor Party, his great electoral triumph and near victory in the 1961 election confounded his critics.

Judith Brett gives an interesting account of the way Paul Hasluck handled his Department of External Affairs. In a minute addressed to James Plimsoll, the then Secretary of that Department, he reprimanded the Department for assuming that it was in a position to recommend what he should or should not do.

I had the privilege of recording a total of sixty-three hours of oral history with Sir Paul Hasluck and Sir James Plimsoll which, when its twenty-five-year embargo expires, will prove that few Ministers or Departmental Secretaries reached such a high standard as set by Hasluck and Plimsoll. The Right Honourable Sir Paul Hasluck was also the best Governor-General we ever had. At an official ceremony held in Parliament House on 8 March 1977, I had a long conversation with Sir Paul during which I asked whether he would have dismissed Whitlam as Kerr did. His

immediate response was: "No!" He went on to say that he would have tried to persuade Whitlam to first test reports that certain Liberal Senators had indicated their intention to pass the Supply Bill when it was next presented to the Senate.

The final chapter is written by Angus McIntyre and is about President Suharto – a figure who is foreign to me.

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Down and Out in Melbourne and Robe River

David Palmer

Wendy Lowenstein: *Weevils at Work; What's happening to work in Australia – an oral record* (Catalyst Press, \$24.95).

A USTRALIA ALREADY IN a major depression and on its way to becoming a Third World country? More exaggeration and alarmism on the left, you might say, but this is Wendy Lowenstein's position in *Weevils at Work*, in many ways a sequel to her critically acclaimed (and recently republished) *Weevils in the Flour*, an oral history of Australia's 1930s Great Depression. In a number of respects, Lowenstein's claim has merit. *Weevils at Work* is no academic piece, it is not filled with economic theory or analyses of markets and policy, but it accurately relates the experience of Australians who are not at the top. Her evidence is the words of working Australians themselves. Their experiences reveal difficult working conditions, job instability, and the destructiveness of long-term unemployment on individuals and families. As one of her interviewees put it, "A recession is when someone else is unemployed, a depression is when you're unemployed."

Sixty years after the Great Depression, however, things are somewhat different. Survival for many is possible, even without a traditional job. 'Work' is what you do, not necessarily what others tell you to do. Patricia, a community activist born in the early 1930s,

summarized it well: "To me, there is no difference between work and play and relaxing. It's what I do with my life. I work seven days a week." Furthermore, these interviews (more than two hundred in total) graphically relate how Australia's vast welfare state, with the dole, pensions, state-supported education, and national health care, has meant that people today are not (literally) starving, dying of preventable diseases, or having no access to training, in contrast to the desperate 1930s when people did actually starve to death. The 'bureaucracy' that administers these programs can be an oppressor in its own right, but there are those who can use the dole to gain free time for creating art, developing folk music festivals, and becoming involved in community activism. As we all know, this limited 'social welfare' environment is beginning to change. Lowenstein's interviewees reveal just how profoundly reactionary the 'economic rationalist' governments of Howard, Kennett, and others have become in their drives to cut these programs and attack the organizations and rights of community, environmental and trade union groups. The conditions for complete destitution, common during the Great Depression, are being prepared, although the resistance in the last few years has been fierce.

The structure of *Weevils at Work* is similar to Lowenstein's earlier book on the Great Depression. There are four 'books' within the book, and interviews are loosely categorized by subjects related to attitudes ('Helping Yourself!', 'The Best Days of Your Life'), occupations ('Nursing "Clients"', 'Outworkers'), and locations ('The Country Life', 'Coast to Coast'). At times the interviews tend to wander, and there's a sense that the world of work is little more than 'bosses' versus 'workers'. This is, however, part of Lowenstein's approach to oral history and is an essential part of creating both a complex (if at times flat) and realistic picture. We're talking with everyone, not just those who've found interesting avocations or know how the world works and where the power is. Lowenstein herself becomes a part of the picture as she converses with her interviewees, interacting with these people and their lives, rather than objectifying them and standing back as a professional or a 'writer'.

Weevils at Work has no narrative or story line. Some may find it easy reading, but I found parts challenging. It is not a book to be read at one sitting, but should be appreciated in parts and selectively. Lowenstein's approach to oral history is somewhat

like the art of photography. She selects, but only analyzes through presenting the barest of informational background. At one point we discover her viewpoints on issues when she interviews herself. At other times we learn her opinions through undisguised questions to those she's interviewing. There is no pretence at 'objectivity', no pretending to stand above or apart.

Weevils at Work has definite peaks where drama takes over. 'Book Four' is particularly powerful. In 'Robe River, Red Rocks' we are given a scathing indictment of trade union bureaucracy and ruthless mining companies, but in stories that detail both the positive and negative sides of men and women living and working in the Pilbara iron range. We learn that not all companies or bosses are bad, that male workers can be just as predatory toward women as managers are to trade unionists. Many people love their work, while families find life in the wilderness of Northwest Australia impossible given the isolation and inadequate healthcare and education for children. In 'Book Three' we see the other side of Australia, the urban environment of Richmond (suburban Melbourne), where a community fights to keep the local high school open by occupying it and maintaining classes with volunteer teachers. Jeff Kennett's police break the occupation, but to Barbara, a community activist, it "was a great lesson in democracy" for her daughter. "I was on the far end of the picket line – lucky, because it was very vicious. I'd made my young daughter stand across the road. Her eyes were hanging out, she was just so shocked! And she was able to give the ombudsman a very detailed account of what happened."

In what sense, though, can we really say that Australia has entered 'a depression'? Lowenstein persuasively presents case after case of the phenomenon of downsizing, and its impact on employment and people. It is everywhere in Australian society, in every sector, occupation, and institution. In Europe and North America the issue of downsizing has been in the public discourse and print media for more than a decade. In Australia, those who own the media and control government (whether Liberal or Labor) have failed to openly discuss the issue. Instead we have 'economic reform' and similar euphemisms. Even in the bookshops these days it is hard to find *critical* social and political commentary (unless it is from overseas, such as Noam Chomsky or David Suzuki).

Lowenstein's 'oral record' of 'what's happening to work in Australia' should be read and discussed by everyone who has a concern for where the country is going and why so many Australians are facing unemployment or the prospect of it.

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The Seductive Microcosm

Jennifer Maiden

- Martin Langford: *In the Cage of Love's Gradings* (Island Press, \$19.95).
 Louise Nicholas: *The Red Shoes*; Stephen Lawrence: *Her Mother's Arms*; Richard Hillman: *Mending the Dingo Fence – Friendly Street New Poets: 3* (Wakefield Press, \$14.95).
 Miriel Lenore: *sun wind & diesel* (Wakefield Press, \$12.95).
 Michael Dargaville: *On the Reality of Atlantis & other poems* (Saturn Press, no price).
 Pam Brown: *50–50* (Little Esther Books, \$15.95).
 John Anderson: *The Shadow's Keep* (Black Pepper, \$15.95).
 Jim Williams: *Letters from Byron* (Black Pepper, \$15.95).
 Alison Croggon: *The Blue Gate* (Black Pepper, \$15.95).
 Hugh Tolhurst: *Filth and other poems* (Black Pepper, \$15.95).
 Caroline Caddy: *working temple* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$16.95).
 Jill Jones: *the book of Possibilities* (Hale & Iremonger, \$16.95).
 John Millett: *Dragonfly Tie* (Five Island Press, \$12.95).
 Arthur Pike: *Dreamtime Beach ... and other times* (Southern Cross University Press, no price).
 John Kinsella (ed.): *Salt 10* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$16.95).

AUSTRALIAN CRITICS ARE OFTEN charmed by the combination of modest scope and sumptuous detail. The details in themselves need not be trivial. They can be about migraines, mountains, melons or misalliances. But they must be sharp, sensuous and original, and their larger context must not be ambitious. Broken or wistful love affairs, dull jobs, lifeless marriages, 'small' people trapped uncomprehending in large wars or the results of large wars

seem permissible. Characters or authorial personae who think, strain or question too far beyond the initial philosophy of their writer or reader seem open to literary suspicion.

The reverence for detail is reinforced by the natural tendency of people in shock, mistrust or mourning to partialize their sense-data into manageable portions, to notice only bits and pieces of things and to notice those with an increased brilliance of perception. To question such processes can seem almost sacrilegious at times. When I received this miscellany of recent Australian writing, I expected the books to rate very high in wonderful sense-data and rather lower in surprising concepts or situations. The word 'high' is applicable, too, because fixation on bright details is also characteristic of most forms of intoxication (as it is of childhood and prison).

One suspects, too, of course, that (despite the undoubted compensations – as in Borges – of enforced metaphor) there is an element of sexual evasiveness in some of the splendid evocation. Even in Patrick White's novels, the powerful settings might have dwindled in perspective to personality had his central characters not been the rather one-dimensional Mrs Roxburgh and Mrs Godbold but someone like the rather more voluptuous and much more multi-dimensional Mr Munday.

Many of these current books, too, have powerful Australian settings.

The oddest is *Letters from Byron*, in which the seductive locale of Byron Bay serves as a ready made backdrop for what are essentially tight, tense epistolary fictions in which the reader is made to understand more about the nature of the events – usually scientifically impossible and occasionally simply illegal – than the narrator ostensibly does. As short stories, the ones illustrating straightforward indignation at 'idealistic' social experiments I think work best, but the self-consciousness of the autobiographical device as such makes the narratives seem much more contrived than they really are. This author deserves to relax into the luxury of third person characterization and the full freedom of fiction.

I have work in *Salt 10* because, following my somewhat reserved review of an earlier *Salt* in *overland*, the concerned John Kinsella sent me a far, far better issue of *Salt* and I supplied him with a poem as a peace offering. Vested interest declared, however, *Salt 10* is a solid and adventurous anthology. Its editorial

identity is attractively restless. Despite several well-crafted selections limited to microcosmic personae (what Mary McCarthy has described as being trapped in a literary philogenesis in which a Dickens novel would be restricted to the first person ontology of Uriah Heep), the magazine's persistent undertone is of a tough little philosophic animal sniffing out any possible hole in the wall. For example, Brady on the sophistication of Judith Wright's actual philosophy, some fine modern French prose and poetry, the scruples and technicalities of Internet verse, and the art of video are all given serious attention. Indeed, in Perloff's essay on Viola's videoscapes, the quote from William Blake ("If the doors of perception were cleansed, then everything would appear to man as it is – infinite") could be seen as the aim of the whole enterprise. In *Salt 10*, the problems in this can be analyzed most clearly in Kinsella's interview with Kevin Hart. Despite Kinsella's probing, Hart's Christian stance of concentration on detail as a form of prayer which will reveal God at God's discretion (my interpretation, but fairly accurate, I think) is so extreme that Hart declares, "Only very great poetry yields anything like 'knowledge': Shakespeare, maybe Dante, but not much beyond that." Clearly, valuable observations such as that of Simone Weil that "moments of attention and insights of genius aren't different in kind" continue to cause all sorts of bother. Maybe try: insights of genius aren't different in kind from lapses of attention, either ... Kinsella's own powerful 'The Kangaroo Virus Project' with photographs by Ron Sims is excerpted at the end of the anthology: "Who can read and translate these signs? Who can read the blind leap into the arms of history ...?", as if he has finally synthesized his preoccupation with several narrower forms into a scientific black pastoral which should satisfy him – and the reader – much more.

MUCH OF CAROLINE CADDY'S worthwhile *Working Temple* is set in China and its attention to detail is that of someone observing a different culture and customs. These in turn take on an expected aura of metaphor for humanity as such. Then sometimes the persona struggles to engage in and benefit directly from the customs: as in 'Tai Chi': "Here are people making happen / what I sweat to make happen / and succeeding! ... I feel as though / I could give them a poem / and they would be able / to extemporise – / though not in any language I could hear ... / I would

have to watch / very carefully!" Caddy's stance moves carefully and usefully between observation, opinion and involvement. There is much more substance to the involvement and to this collection than one might surmise at first from its quiet style.

Martin Langford writes: "Tongues are important, / and trust, and that air of agreement. / Stout walls and ceilings – / to keep out inquisitive stars." Langford reinforces this concept in many of these varied and vigorous poems – including one on 'the epicure's heaven', involving the last poetry-bereft narrowing of Kenneth Slessor. Although I remember Dr Grace Perry emphatically attributing Slessor's decline to drink rather than food – too much alcohol being a profound antidote to poetry which she also saw in a very famous U.S. poet and novelist who had been her house guest. Given a glass of passionfruit juice for breakfast, this expert on deliverance had shuddered, "What's that? My God, woman, take it away? There are eyes in it!"

Indeed, sometimes an hallucinatory obsession with details may be due not to the pantheist so much as the pancreas, and even since Rimbaud it seems observably true that an abundance of impressive literary sense-data can end quite suddenly in a great distrust of art. Langford's book is richly preoccupied with another intoxicant: the day-to-day drownings of memory and reason ("a sea-calm of breathing") in a way which he indicates may make the subsequent "cunning, / law, rule" inevitable.

Another cage – this time of subject matter – is suggested to me by Alison Croggon's *The Blue Gate*. I had heard very well of this writer and was indeed avidly impressed by her clear, deliberate vocabulary and intense expertise in spacing and timing – as in 'Song', which begins "There is a flower / made of eyelids / there is a moon / which scythes the ripples / of a black river / and then nothing". There is a circularity in her themes, however – a recurrence of elemental things, broken loves, legends, children, birdsong – as if all were brilliantly frozen in a lyricism which makes me wish the blue gate would open more often. There is a wilfulness in such perfection and it will become quite

admirably the wilfulness of wider, wilder art.

John Anderson's *The Shadow's Keep* has a haunting perfection, too. It is tailored from lines "received in dreams and retained on waking", but the juxtapositions are profoundly more fecund, logically wittier and have profoundly more sleepy grace (the atmosphere of real dreams is actually much brusker) than that genesis would suggest. Cumulatively, the mismatched words and lightly altered clichés build up to

a clear, generous personal universe which has an authentic spiritual sweetness and refreshment about it. The lyricism is expansive because it is based on the privacy of questioning as much as on physical observations.

Miri Lenore's *sun wind & diesel* begins with her experiences with the Ngaanyatjarra and concludes with self-questions in Adelaide, where the local monuments, including poets, have less dimension in her work than do the vivid desert people and the general sensuousness of landscape and weather. There is a growing sense of strong personality and rationed and rational lyricism in her work, based on her memories as a woman and

on that disappointed, important contrast between the desert and the city which she indicates will lead her on an inward journey 'home'.

Jill Jones' *the book of Possibilities* is urbane and perceptive and the details and imagery are of the steadily flowing, skilful sort where the simple roundness of phrasing ("and the sea full and green") conveys a history of grief and heroic self-management without any attitudinizing. Admirable as this is, one feels that like Lenore, Jones' next journey further beyond descriptive detail will be even more interesting: "The past sits on my shoulder. / It hovers near your face, / then explodes like stars."

Pam Brown's *50-50* is wealthy with witty, well-phrased second person self-assessments ("once in another time / you were / the singing bass player / in clitoris band") and a firm political perspective. Her interest at this book's conclusion is in the '50-50' life – the necessity of the underworld being close to the surface – like the Paris of sewers not the Sydney of



"sealed stingy tunnels". At the same time, her resolution seems to lie with Australia – perhaps because any journey too far downward is seen as too self-indulgent in the context of this book. There is a promise, though, of sensible expeditions inward (which isn't always downward) and her wry, sinewy, engaging style is becoming more flexible all the time.

Arthur Pike's *Dreamtime Beach... and other times* uses poetry in a clear, self-expressive rather than explorative way. These are poems in which open opinion and open lyrical response sum things up for the writer and for readers who have shared experiences like his. There is a quality of sharp memory in the work, however, which makes it more dimensional than simple doctrinaire referential poetry would be. I have recently been interested in Professor Marjorie Agosin's concept of memory as being revolutionary in nature (this associated with her interest in Chris Wallace-Crabbe's belief that memory is intrinsic to poetry, and the familiar human rights concept of poetry being revolutionary). Certainly, in Pike's poems about Vietnam, the dole and Kokoda ("young men... / stepped and slipped / into history / to become a myth, / a myth they did / not want to be"), memory provides an implacable opposition to authoritarian fantasy.

Michael Dargaville's *On the Reality of Atlantis and other poems* is short, stapled and coloured mauve, with Donald Duck in stars and stripes on the cover. It bristles with rage and energy against social conservatism and, in particular, the Murdoch Press. Dargaville is described in the bio as "a performance poet/artist and gonzo journalist". The problem may be that the methods of gonzo journalism are not familiar to his wider audience. Certainly, his facts, skill and arrangement of metaphor are more considerable than their cover, and if the tone has an extremist tinge it is probably due to an isolation the writer himself makes clear he doesn't desire.

Hugh Tolhurst's *Filth and other poems* is also rebellious in tone – which again makes its microcosmic presentation a pity. The title poem itself indicates a more resonant, subtle context: "the city looks lime at night, / possessed of the consistency of a cocktail / you cannot climb high enough to drink. / I've locked myself out and I'm not going home." Tolhurst works his way, however, through youthful cityscapes and succinct domestic intimacies, the predictable translation of Catullus involving fellow poets, and con-

cludes with some stoical and elegiac love poems. Here, stoical elegy and its use of lyric fragmentation may be an easy means to poignancy. This is not terribly problematic since he has the skill and insight to achieve poignancy in other ways.

In *Friendly Street New Poets: 3*, Louise Nicholas' poems are alert, crisp, involving and autobiographical. Many are concerned with a visit to Israel, well aware of the contrast between "we in our bikinis / and / impudence" and "the eyes of the occupied / burned black". Others are about the awful anxieties of being a child. Memory and indignation are again married here – there is a telling protest poem against the medical profession's neglect at the birth of her older sister. The voice throughout is rounded and distinct, but it may be that a need to create good performance poetry and conclude on author sympathy is still inhibiting it somewhat. Stephen Lawrence's fluent and economical verse narrative 'Her Mother's Arms' involves another analysis of the medical model. His hero Victoria is a medical student required to dissect a subject who has, indeed, "her mother's arms" – even though her mother is still at home and thriving. Victoria overcomes her inhibition, touches the consenting arms without gloves, performs the dissection and gains a more humane perspective of both medicine and her mum. Although there are some frank clinical details, and medical ethics and some forms of medical sexuality are criticized to some extent, there is no real rejection of medicine's professional romance. The character of Victoria, however, has increasing originality and depth and it would be desirable for Lawrence to develop her and the concept further. Richard Hillman's collection is wide-ranging, clear and sensitive. Again, autobiography often fuels a critique of the medical model: "I carry my asthmatic child up the stairs of the local hospital. / The sign on the door says CASUALTY IS CLOSED" is the effective end of an apparently fragmented narrative about mortality. There are whimsical poems and some sturdy ones on land rights and kangaroos. The Patrick White poem finishing "the old eagle / who'd winged from his nest in search of prey" forms a neat real-life contrast to the more pathetic details of an observed photograph but still seems to me too obviously observational, and perhaps not in keeping with White's vulnerability: especially his artistic dilemma in trying to broaden his plots to match the scope of his politics and sexuality, and to balance those great magnetic oppositions

of positive and negative in his elaborate sense-data.

John Millet's *Dragonfly Tie* is a fascinating volume from a by now very experienced lyrical moralist. The urgent later poems in this collection are about his wife's family lost in the Holocaust. The earlier and last poems are about the sensualities, deprivations and conflicts of Australian bush childhood. There is a rippling, disingenuous Dylan Thomas effect in some of the fine imagery but the technique is in fact meticulous. In 'The Holocaust Museum – (Sydney)', for example, the poem in the collection ends "... a man fumbled with the past for an experience that might prepare him ..." In the *Sydney Morning Herald* version (which, knowing the *Herald*, one assumes is an earlier draft), it ends: "... might prepare him – / but only the shoes were talking." Millet has discarded that safe and useful device of ending on a physical image in order to leave the reader directly within the intelligence of the victim. His urban professional and domestic depictions are equally careful – if not quite so powerful in effect. His initial quote from Proust: "The broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another" makes one hope for a future effort at trawling all these elements together into a morally and artistically fulfilling pattern of time regained.

PICKING MYSELF UP from these fourteen books and this avalanche of images, my mind oddly still echoes that anecdote from Millet's old friend Dr Grace Perry: "My God, woman, ... there are eyes in it!" Very beautiful eyes, too, of course, and seeing very beautiful things. But it is time for them to focus sometimes away from grief and terror and rapture and to analyze what it is that they are seeing, and where it is, and why it is – and why then, to them, it seemed so.

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Opera on the Edge

Maree Macmillan

Tony Mitchell: *High Art in a Foreign Tongue; Adelaide Ristori's 1875 Australian Tour* (Australian Drama Studies Association Academic Publications, \$10).
John Jenkins & Rainer Linz: *Arias; Recent Australian Music Theatre* (Red House Editions, \$19.95).

IN 1875, great Italian tragedienne, Adelaide Ristori, nearing the end of her reign as queen of the mid-nineteenth century stage, ventured to the edge of the 'civilized' world, the Australian colonies, as part of a world tour designed "to vindicate abroad the true artistic genius of the Italian stage". Ristori's tour was compared favourably with that of Sarah Bernhardt in 1891.

At a time when the stage was dominated by popular British forms of theatre, such as melodrama, ballet, operetta and comedy, Ristori's classical and historical repertoire promoted the claims of 'legitimate drama', with portrayals of great queens, including Elizabeth I, Marie Antoinette, Mary Stuart, Lady Macbeth and Medea. Ristori's performances were hailed as displaying 'genius', not only because of the quality of her acting, but also because of their "morally and spiritually ennobling and uplifting aspects" and the restorative values which they engendered.

The accolades Ristori received were all the more remarkable because, as she performed almost exclusively in Italian, the majority of her Australian audiences did not understand a word. Historian of Australian theatre, Harold Love, deemed her performance "a form of opera without music", whose meaning the audience was able to imbibe through Ristori's facial expressions and dramatic gestures.

In *High Art in a Foreign Tongue*, Tony Mitchell presents for the first time an English translation of the travel diary of a member of the tour, General Bartolomeo Galletti, whose role was, apparently, that of financial record-keeper. His personal impressions of late nineteenth-century colonial life are of general historical interest. In addition to the obsessive recording of prices, his observations encompass landscape, architecture, politics, cultural and social behaviour, and the role and potential of Italian migration. Particularly striking are accounts of the elaborate participation of the Italian community in Ristori's parting galas, which rate as large-scale multicultural events.

However, Galletti's diary has relatively little to say about either Ristori herself or her performances. Our sense of her impact in Australia is gleaned mainly from a substantial selection of performance reviews from the Australian press of the time; these are included as an appendix which makes up almost half the book. It falls to Mitchell's thought-provoking historical introduction to draw together the otherwise somewhat disparate elements of diary and reviews.

As well as providing essential contextual information, Mitchell highlights the impact and significance of the Ristori tour for nineteenth-century Australian theatre and culture. That many of the issues the tour raised are of abiding concern is part of the fascination of this book.

The initially slow audience response, although mainly owing to inordinately high ticket prices, was thought to reflect on Australia's cultural status in the eyes of the rest of the world and its coming of age as a nation. Audience responses in Sydney and Melbourne were regarded as measures of the relative sophistication of the two cities, leading to cultural rivalry between them. Ristori's tour, accredited with being responsible for the banning of prostitutes from the stalls of theatres and the demise of the pit, aroused passionate debates about cultural elitism which are all too familiar: commerce versus art and money versus taste; the price of 'high art' and the importance of venue and price in attracting a diverse audience.

Mitchell regards the impact of Ristori's tour as mixed. While it brought cultural gains to Australia by providing exposure to the highest form of dramatic art, it also resulted in a loss of some of the democratic and popular aspects characterizing Australian theatres. He sees the tour as representing "a form of moral and cultural colonialism in helping to turn theatres into sites of respectability". Ristori's *Compagnia Drammatica* also bequeathed another lasting legacy: Ristori's niece Giulia Majeroni with husband Eduardo Majeroni, also part of the company, remained in Australia to make a significant contribution to the development of Australian theatre.

Indeed, perhaps the high moral seriousness characterizing the *High Art in a Foreign Tongue* of Adelaide Ristori, is part of the heritage of the concerns of Australian music theatre of the late twentieth century, documented in Jenkins' and Linz's *Arias*. One of the most exciting artistic developments in Australia over the past decade, this new music theatre, dubbed 'opera with edge' or 'opera with attitude', brings together leading composers, writers, directors, designers and multi-talented performers in cross-disciplinary works which explore contemporary themes in highly innovative and thought-provoking ways. Perhaps the most widely known piece in this genre is 'Chamber Made's Recital', which has achieved acclaim at several major festivals, both internationally and locally.

ARIAS SETS OUT TO document rather than critique the genre, which is taken to include works which are "completely original and new Australian pieces of innovative music theatre or chamber opera written and performed in this country during the past decade". The book focuses on smaller, more marginal and experimental companies such as Chamber Made, Sydney Metropolitan Opera, Seduction Opera and Calculated Risks, rather than larger, more widely known and extensively archived organizations such as the Australian Opera.

The companies and their productions themselves serve to structure the book. As well as the work of national and state opera companies, and of the specialist groups referred to, the collection encompasses the chamber opera productions of broader based contemporary music ensembles such as ELISION. Another chapter includes a large range of diverse performing groups, each of which has a main focus on music or theatre, but which occasionally stages music theatre events. The influence on the genre of long-standing innovative companies, such as La Mama Theatre and Handspan, is recognized under this category.

Brief factual information about each organization introduces the ideas of the directors, writers and composers such as Barrie Kosky, David Chesworth and Martin Friedel, and their approaches to individual productions. *Arias* displays the fecundity and variety of these pieces, which work to interrogate conventional opera and theatre, sometimes consciously critiquing the values, traditions and prices of 'grand opera'. Through the words of the artists themselves, one senses the level of commitment and the energy generated by extensive collaborative processes, which push the borders between music and theatre.

Many productions explore non-linear narrative; non-conventional performance spaces are used, for example, waterfront warehouses, skyscrapers and car repair shops, the dome reading room of the State Library of Victoria; some pieces incorporate multi-media theatre, using computer generated images; several make extensive demands on performers physically, as well as dramatically and musically. The very visual quality of most of the productions is reflected in the many evocative photographs in the book; a sense of the immediacy of the works is enhanced by the inclusion of production plans and program notes.

The *Arias* collection is an excellent resource. To those familiar with the area, it provides a welcome

reminder of the wealth and diversity of music theatre in Australia. For newcomers to the field, this book extends a tempting invitation to explore a very lively and challenging artistic area. *Arias* is a celebration of what artists with vision, energy and ingenuity can achieve, often despite extremely straitened circumstances.

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A Welcome Addition

Robert Pascoe

Alan Wearne: *Kicking in Danger* (Black Pepper, \$16.95).

COLLEAGUES, INCLUDING the editor of the illustrious *overland*, are wont to complain that reading *The Winter Game*, my social history of Australian football, is rather like being stuck in one of

those endless pub conversations which goes on and on, without any pause which might allow an interruption, another voice offering a verbal route out of the all-enveloping, ceaseless and neverending, never-tiring discourse on the Great Australian Game which for most months of the year threatens to engulf and suffocate everyone living in Melbourne: this novel would have the same effect on the 'unbelievers', those, like the journalist writing in the American magazine *Fortune* who is quoted as saying recently that Melbourne would have featured much higher on his list of desirable cities in which to live were it not for the endless talk of football (and which school you had attended when growing up), but for those of us who do believe, and are passionate, and never stop yarn-ing and spinning tales of footballers, and their alleged deeds, and misdeeds, this novel is a welcome addition to the not-very-long shelf of fictional works which take that endless conversation from the pubs and hairdressing salons to the printed page...

Robert Pascoe is the Dean of Arts at Victoria University.

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